

The Bahá'í Fast

INTRODUCTION: *Approaching the threshold...*

One of the most important spiritual disciplines for the development of one's soul is the Bahá'í annual fast. This Bahá'í law is enjoined on all believers once they attain the age of fifteen and until they reach the age of seventy. Those who are ill, pregnant, nursing, traveling, engaged in heavy labor, and some other conditions are exempt from fasting, as detailed in Bahá'u'lláh's book, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or *The Most Holy Book*.

A summary of guidelines for the Bahá'í fast can be found [here](#).



Continental Bahá'í House of Worship for Europe, near Frankfurt, in Langenhain, Germany

OBJECTIVE: *A look to the horizon...*

Facilitator

Review the following objective with the participants:

The objective of this study is to understand the fundamental verities or basic truths regarding the importance of the Bahá'í Fast.

THE STUDY PROCESS: *Attaining the water of life...*

Facilitator

Review the following study process with the participants. Then study the numbered quotations that follow, one at a time as described below.

1. **READING:** *A drink from the cup of guidance...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud in its entirety.
2. **CONFIRMING MEANING:** *A spray from the fountain of light...*

To better understand certain words used in the quotation, take turns with the following:

 - A. Each participant **choose a word** from the quotation and **state it** for the whole group to hear. (Like a fun game – pick a word!) Then...
 - B. Read out loud the sentence that contains the **word** you selected, **while substituting for that word**, its given phrase, definition, or synonym from the boxes below the quotation.
 - C. Repeat A and B above until everyone is satisfied with their understanding of the words.
3. **FINDING VALUE:** *Mining the gems of truth...*
 - A. **Read the quotation** out loud again in its entirety.
 - B. Take turns **stating each basic fact or truth** you can find in the quotation about **the Bahá'í fast**.

QUOTATIONS: *Within the meadows of Thy nearness...*

1. The fasting period, which lasts nineteen days starting as a rule from the second of March every year and ending on the twentieth of the same month, involves complete abstention from food and drink from sunrise till sunset. It is essentially a period of meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul. Its significance and purpose are, therefore, fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires.

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Cited in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), no. 775, p. 233.

abstention: voluntarily withholding oneself
abstinence: voluntarily depriving oneself or refraining
as a rule: generally (disregarding specific instances of calendar variations)
carnal: bodily, sensual, or lower nature
character: its distinguishing traits or qualities
desires: cravings for enjoyment or satisfaction
drink: any liquid taken into the mouth for swallowing; “In one of His Tablets, `Abdu'l-Bahá, after stating that fasting consists of abstinence from food and drink, further indicates that smoking is a form of ‘drink’. In Arabic the verb ‘drink’ applies equally to smoking.”—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 32, p. 179.
essentially: of its inner character or essence
fasting: “*Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sundown...*”—Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 17, p. 25.
fasting period: beginning March 1st or 2nd and lasting for nineteen days to end at sunset before the spring equinox, which varies from year to year
food: any solid material taken into the mouth for swallowing
forces: powers and strengths of influence and effectiveness
fundamentally: at its basis or foundation

inner: mental or spiritual
latent: present, but not yet active
meditation: deep reflection or contemplation on sacred matters
necessary: essential or needed
period: duration of time
prayer: “Prayer is conversation with God.” —`Abdu'l-Bahá, from the Diary of Mírzá Ahmad Sohráb, 15 March 1914, “Prayer”, cited in *Star of the West*, vol. VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41.
purpose: main aim, reason, or intention
readjustments: corrections or modifications again
recuperation: restoration and regaining of strength
refresh: supply what's necessary to restore loss of strength and liveliness
reinvigorate: bring back the energy and life to
reminder: stimulus for remembering
selfish: excessive or exclusive concern for oneself
significance: quality that makes it important
soul: immortal essence of the rational, spiritual, and emotional self
spiritual: higher, divine, or heavenly oriented
strive: devote serious energy or effort
sunrise: the time the upper portion of the sun appears above the horizon
sunset: the time the upper portion of the sun disappears below the horizon
symbolic: representative, standing for something else

2. *We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 10, p. 22.

commanded: ordered and directed
fast: abstain from food and drink [as directed in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book*]
maturity: “*The age of maturity is fifteen for both men and women.*”—Bahá'u'lláh ☞

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 20, p. 113.
ordained: established and enacted
We: used by one in authority to denote himself

3. *These are the ordinances of God that have been set down in the Books and Tablets by His Most Exalted Pen. Hold ye fast unto His statutes and commandments, and be not of those who, following their idle fancies and vain imaginings, have clung to the standards fixed by their own selves, and cast behind their backs the standards laid down by God. Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sundown, and beware lest desire deprive you of this grace that is appointed in the Book.*

—Bahá'u'lláh

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 17, p. 25.

abstain: voluntarily withhold oneself
appointed: officially established and fixed
beware: be on guard and cautious
Book(s): recorded Revelation(s) of God by His Manifestation Bahá'u'lláh
cast: thrown away
clung: held on tightly
commandments: given orders and directives
deprive: take away or withhold from
desire: strong feelings for enjoyment or satisfaction
drink: any liquid taken into the mouth for swallowing; “In one of His Tablets, `Abdu'l-Bahá, after stating that fasting consists of abstinence from food and drink, further indicates that smoking is a form of ‘drink’. In Arabic the verb ‘drink’ applies equally to smoking.”—written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), Notes no. 32, p. 179.
Exalted: highly praised, raised to an elevated state, and glorified
fast: firmly without yielding
fixed: firmly set in the mind

food: any solid material taken into the mouth for swallowing
grace: divine influence that makes you morally pure and strong, gifted out of God's loving-kindness
idle fancies: unreal and unreasonable notions invented in the mind that are incapable of worthwhile use or effect
laid down: given to record
lest: for fear that
ordinances: prescribed practices and laws
Pen: refers to the instrumentation of the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh
set down: recorded in writing
standards: established rules and models of what is proper and adequate
statutes: recorded laws
sundown: the time the upper portion of the sun disappears below the horizon
sunrise: the time the upper portion of the sun appears above the horizon
Tablets: divinely revealed Scriptures
vain imaginings: worthless and meaningless plans, schemes, or beliefs formed in the mind

4. As regards fasting, it constitutes, together with the obligatory prayers, the two pillars that sustain the revealed law of God. They act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive and purify it, and thus insure its steady development.

—Shoghi Effendi

Directives from the Guardian, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973) no. 71, p. 27.

constitutes: makes up or forms
development: gradual improvement, advancement, or growth
fasting: “*Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sundown...*”—Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 17, p. 25
insure: makes certain and guarantees
law: rules of conduct established and enforced by the authority
pillars: main supports
purify: cause to be free and cleansed from ↗

faulty, blameworthy, or sinful behavior
revive: a return to activity and life from suspension or neglect
soul: immortal essence of the rational, spiritual, and emotional self
steady: constant and uninterrupted
stimulants: agents which produce a temporary increase in vital activity
strengthen: causing added power, efficacy, or vigor
sustain: uphold and maintain the existence of

5. Fortunate are ye to have obeyed the commandment of God, and kept this fast during the holy season. For this material fast is an outer token of the spiritual fast; it is a symbol of self-restraint, the withholding of oneself from all appetites of the self, taking on the characteristics of the spirit, being carried away by the breathings of heaven and catching fire from the love of God. —`Abdu'l-Bahá

Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), no. 35, pp. 69-70.

appetites: desires or cravings for gratification
breathings: utterances and inspirations
carried away: moved, swayed, or charmed
characteristics: distinguishing traits, qualities, or properties
commandment: authoritative command or law
fire: liveliness, passion, and enthusiasm
fortunate: blessed for having received of unexpected good
heaven: “By ‘heaven’ is meant the heaven of divine Revelation...” —Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950, 1970 printing), p. 44.
holy season: Bahá'í fasting period

material: physical conduct [of the]
obeyed: carried out or submitted to the instruction or order of
outer: external or outward
self: body, mind, and soul which belongs to each individual
self-restraint: holding back or controlling oneself
spirit: divine or higher nature
spiritual: divine or heavenly oriented
symbol: behavior that stands for or is representative
token: expression given or shown as a guarantee
withholding: holding back; restraining

6. *Glory be to Thee, O Lord my God! These are the days whereon Thou hast bidden all men to observe the fast, that through it they may purify their souls and rid themselves of all attachment to any one but Thee, and that out of their hearts may ascend that which will be worthy of the court of Thy majesty and may well beseem the seat of the revelation of Thy oneness.* —Bahá'u'lláh

Prayers and Meditations, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938, 1971 printing), LVI, pp. 79.

ascend: proceed from an inferior to a more superior or noble degree
attachment: heartfelt attraction and attention
beseem: seem proper for
bidden: issued an order to
court: abode or surroundings
glory: praise, honor, and admiration
hearts: nature that becomes attracted, loves, and grows attached
majesty: supreme authority and glory
men: people

observe: conform their actions and comply with
oneness: singleness and indivisibility
purify: be free and cleansed from faulty, blameworthy, or sinful behavior (of)
revelation: disclosure and discovery
rid: remove, free, and clear
seat: place where the prevailing condition is
souls: immortal essence of the rational, spiritual, and emotional self
worthy: of sufficient value, deserving

SHARING EXERCISE: *A breath from the spirit of inspiration...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to complete the statements below. When everyone has finished, have each person share, in a round, one thing that was outstanding or inspiring and what spiritual feelings it enkindled. Please remind everyone not to remark on the comments of others.

One thing from the quotations that was outstanding or inspiring to me was _____

It made me feel _____

I felt this way because _____

SOME QUESTIONS: *A cup from the showers of confirmation...*

Facilitator

Ask the participants to answer the following questions. They can usually find answers in the quotations just studied or in the introduction. When everyone has finished, review the questions, then share and discuss the answers.

1. When does the Bahá'í Fast begin each year? _____
2. Bahá'ís are obligated to fast from the age of _____, and are exempt once they attain the age of _____.
3. The Bahá'í Fast consists of abstinence from _____ and _____ from sunrise to sunset.
4. The Bahá'í Fast lasts _____ days.
5. Prayer and _____ are the two pillars that sustain the revealed law of God.
6. Abstaining from food and drink during the Bahá'í fasting period is an outward activity that significantly affects the growth and progress of the individual's soul. The Bahá'í Fast serves to...
 - a. refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in the soul.
 - b. act as a stimulant to the soul.
 - c. take some weight off the sole.
 - d. strengthen, revive, and purify the soul.
 - e. insure the steady development of the soul.
7. Observance of the daily obligatory prayer and the Bahá'í yearly fast are two personal laws that the Creator has enjoined upon each believer. There are no persons or Bahá'í institutions that monitor or sanction individuals for their actions concerning these laws. Fasting and prayer are _____ actions that demonstrate to God, and to oneself, detachment from worldliness and obedience to His law.
 - a. outward
 - b. symbolic
 - c. idle
 - d. token
8. Conditions which exempt one from being obliged to observe the Bahá'ís Fast include illness, pregnancy, nursing, menstruating, traveling, and engaging in heavy labor as described in Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws. This book is called _____
9. Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *“The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth everyone who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.”*¹ What are the “twin duties?” _____

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), par. 1, p. 19.

APPLICATION: *Showing forth divine light...*

Facilitator

Read through #1 together and proceed as stated. Then take time for the participants to write out their individual plans for action in #2. (these are not shared) When everyone has finished, move on to the closing reading.

1. IMAGINING THE POSSIBILITIES: *Visions of radiant lights...*

Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “*It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action....*” Imagine how the Bahá'í Teachings in this study class could be translated into reality and action. Take turns sharing the possibilities. Begin your statements with: “***One could....***” Suggest as many ideas as you want.

2. DECIDING ACTION: *Mirroring forth a beam of light...*

From your experience in this study class on “The Bahá'í Fast,” describe what ***you*** are inspired to put into reality and action. ***I will make conscious efforts to...*** _____

My next step will be... _____

CLOSING MEDITATION: *A heart song...*

The following was a talk given by `Abdu'l-Bahá as recorded by Mrs. Corinne True.

The Divine wisdom in fasting is manifold. Among them is this: As during those days [i.e. the period of fasting which the followers afterward, observe] the Manifestation of the Sun of Reality, through Divine inspiration, is engaged in the descent [revealing] of Verses, the instituting of Divine Law and the arrangement of teachings, through excessive occupation and intensive attraction there remains no condition or time for eating and drinking. For example, when his holiness Moses went to Mount Tur [Sinai] and there engaged in instituting the Law of God, he fasted forty days. For the purpose of awakening and admonishing the people of Israel, fasting was enjoined upon them.

Likewise, his holiness Christ, in the beginning of instituting the Spiritual Law, the systemizing of the teachings and the arrangement of counsels, for forty days abstained from eating and drinking. In the beginning the disciples and Christians fasted. Later the assemblages of the chief Christians changed fasting into lenten observances.

Likewise the Koran having descended in the month of Ramazan, fasting during that month became a duty.

In like manner his holiness the Supreme [the Báb], in the beginning of the Manifestation through the excessive effect of descending Verses, passed days in which his nourishment was reduced to tea only.

Likewise, the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'o'lláh], when busy with instituting the Divine Teachings and during the days when the Verses [the Word of God] descended continuously, through the great effect of the Verses and the throbbing of the heart, took no food except the least amount.

The purpose is this: In order to follow the Divine Manifestations and for the purpose of admonition and the commemoration of their state, it became incumbent upon the people to fast during those days. For every sincere soul who has a beloved longs to experience that state in which his beloved is. If his beloved is in a state of sorrow, he desires sorrow; if in a state of joy, he desires joy; if in a state of rest, he desires rest; if in a state of trouble, he desires trouble.

Now, since in this Millennial Day, his holiness the Supreme [the Báb] fasted many days, and the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'ó'lláh] took but little food or drink, it becomes necessary that the friends follow that example. For thus saith He in the Tablet of Visitation: “They, the believers, have followed that which they were commanded, for love of Thee.”

This is one wisdom of the wisdoms of fasting.

The second wisdom is this: Fasting is the cause of awakening man. The heart becomes tender and the spirituality of man increases. This is produced by the fact that man's thoughts will be confined to the commemoration of God, and through this awakening and stimulation surely ideal advancements follow.

Third wisdom: Fasting is of two kinds, material and spiritual. The material fasting is abstaining from food or drink, that is, from the appetites of the body. But spiritual, ideal fasting is this, that man abstain from selfish passions, from negligence and from satanic animal traits. Therefore, material fasting is a token of the spiritual fasting. That is: “O God! as I am fasting from the appetites of the body and not occupied with eating and drinking, even so purify and make holy my heart and my life from aught else save Thy Love, and protect and preserve my soul from self-passions and animal traits. Thus may the spirit associate with the Fragrances of Holiness and fast from everything else save Thy mention.”

—`Abdu'l-Bahá

“The Divine Wisdom of Fasting”, cited in *Star of the West*, vol. IV, no. 18 (February 7, 1914), p. 305.

ANSWERS: *Affirming treasures...*

1. March 1st or 2nd, depending on the date of the spring equinox
2. fifteen; seventy
3. food; drink
4. nineteen
5. fasting
6. a, b, d, and e
7. a, b, and d
8. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* or *The Most Holy Book*
9. “*recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws*” [Bahá'u'lláh]; and “*to observe every ordinance [law] of Him Who is the Desire of the world.*”

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