

A Summary of Guidelines Pertaining to the Bahá'í Fast...

1. Bahá'ís fifteen years of age or older are to observe a yearly fast by completely abstaining from food and drink from sunrise till sunset for nineteen days beginning on or around March 2nd and ending on or around March 20th.¹ (The dates of the fast vary year to year, depending on the exact date of the spring equinox.)
2. The Bahá'í Fast can only be kept by fasting during the month set aside for that purpose.²
3. "If one eats unconsciously during the fasting hours, this is not breaking the Fast as it is an accident."³
4. In the extreme northern and southern regions of the earth, where the duration of days and nights varies markedly, time for fasting may be determined by the clock instead of the actual sunrise and sunset. Believers living in these regions should refer to their National Spiritual Assembly for further guidance on this matter.⁴
5. There is no known text in the Writings specifically prohibiting marital sexual relations during the Fast.⁵
6. Pertaining to the fast, Bahá'u'lláh has written: "*It is not for anyone to exceed the limits laid down by God and His law, nor should anyone follow his own idle imaginings.*"⁶
7. **EXEMPTIONS FROM FASTING:** "The Universal House of Justice has clarified that the provisions in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* granting exemptions from certain duties and responsibilities are, as the word indicates, exemptions and not prohibitions. Any believer is, therefore, free to avail themselves of an applicable exemption if they so wish. However, the House of Justice counsels that, in deciding whether to do so or not, the believer should use wisdom and realize that Bahá'u'lláh has granted these exemptions for good reason."⁷
 - A. **Traveling:** Believers traveling during the fasting period are exempt from fasting during the entire time of travel, provided their journey exceeds nine hours or two hours if traveling on foot. One remains exempt from fasting if, while traveling, one stops and anticipates staying somewhere away from home for less than nineteen days. If the stay is for nineteen days or more, one is exempt only for the first three days upon arrival. Those travelers who return home during the fasting period must commence fasting from the day of their arrival.⁸
 - B. **Age:** Those believers who have attained the age of seventy do not have to fast; however, if one desires to fast after the age limit is passed and is strong enough, one is free to do so.⁹
 - C. **Illness:** Believers are exempt from fasting "*In clear cases of weakness, illness, or injury...*"¹⁰ Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "*In truth, I say that obligatory prayer and fasting occupy an exalted station in the sight of God. It is, however, in a state of health that their virtue can be realized. In time of ill-health, it is not permissible to observe these obligations; such hath been the bidding of the Lord, exalted be His glory, at all times.*"¹¹ Shoghi Effendi has noted through his secretary: "If during the Fast period a person falls ill and is unable to fast, but recovers before the Fast period is over, he can start to fast again and continue until the end."¹²
 - D. **Pregnancy or Nursing:** Women who are pregnant or nursing are exempt from fasting.¹³
 - E. **Special Times:** Bahá'u'lláh wrote: "*God hath exempted women who are in their courses [menstrual period] from obligatory prayer and fasting. Let them, instead, after performance of their ablutions, give praise unto God, repeating ninety-five times between the noon of one day and the next 'Glorified be God, the Lord of Splendour and Beauty'.*"¹⁴ The prescribed ablutions consist of washing the hands and the face with water in preparation for prayer.¹⁵
 - F. **Heavy Labor:** Believers engaged in hard labor are exempt from fasting. Bahá'u'lláh has stated: "*Such people are excused from fasting; however, in order to show respect to the law of God and for the exalted station of the Fast, it is most commendable and fitting to eat with frugality and in private.*"¹⁶ The types of work that would exempt believers from the Fast will be defined in the future by the Universal House of Justice.¹⁷

KA = *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992).

DG = *Directives from the Guardian*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973).

IOPF = *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2000).

¹ KA, pp. 22, 25; DG, p. 28

² KA, pp. 127-28; DG, p. 29

³ DG, p. 29

⁴ KA, p. 172

⁵ UHJ email to the Author, 17

April 2000

⁶ IOPF, no. XIII, p. 4.

⁷ KA, pp. 173-74

⁸ KA, pp. 114, 129, 148-49

⁹ KA, p. 177; DG, p. 29

¹⁰ IOPF, no. XX, p. 6.

¹¹ KA, p. 134

¹² DG, p. 29

¹³ KA, p. 179

¹⁴ KA, pp. 23-24

¹⁵ KA, pp. 180-81

¹⁶ KA, p. 129

¹⁷ KA, p. 179