

Fasting is a shield

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It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Fasting is a shield. So the fasting person should avoid obscene speech and should not behave foolishly and ignorantly, and if somebody fights with him or insults him, he should tell him twice, 'I am fasting.' By the One in Whose hand is my soul, the smell that comes from the mouth of a fasting person is better in the sight of Allah than the scent of musk. (Allaah says about the fasting person), 'He has given up his food, drink and desires for My sake. The fast is for Me and I will reward (the fasting person) for it and the reward of good deeds is multiplied ten times.'"

Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 1894; Muslim, 1151

This hadeeth indicates that the fasting person is required to guard his fast by adopting a good attitude and avoiding a bad one, so that fasting will produce the expected results and thus he will earn the forgiveness that is promised in return.

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Fasting does not just mean giving up food and drink, rather fasting means giving up idle speech and obscene conduct. If anyone insults you or treats you in an ignorant manner, then say, 'I am fasting, I am fasting.'"

And it was also narrated that he (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah

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(peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever does not give up false speech and acting in accordance with it and acting in an ignorant manner, Allaah has no need of him giving up his food and drink.”

Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 6057.

This hadeeth and those quoted above indicate that the fasting person should be keen to ensure that his fast is sound and free of the things mentioned.

The things mentioned are even worse when one is fasting, hence they are mentioned here. The hadeeth also indicates that the true Islamic fast is one in which all the faculties fast. Fasting in the sense of abstaining from food and drink is something that anyone can do, and it is easy.

The words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) – “fasting is a shield” – mean that it is something that screens and protects you from what you fear.

What is meant is that fasting screens a person and protects him from falling into sin which is the cause of punishment. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Fasting is a shield against the Fire like the shield of any one of you in battle.” This clearly points to the virtue of fasting.

The words translated here as “should avoid obscene speech” (*laa yarfath*) may refer to obscene speech or to intercourse and touching with desire. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“It is made lawful for you to have sexual relations [al-rafth] with your wives on the night of As-Sawm (the fasts)”

[al-Baqarah 2:187]

Many of the scholars said that what is meant in this hadeeth is obscene speech. And Allaah knows best.

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The words “and do not behave foolishly” (laa yaskhab) refer to yelling, arguing and raising one's voice, as ignorant people do.

“... and ignorantly” means behaving in a manner that is the opposite of patience and forbearance. This word (ignorance) is usually used to refer to the opposite of knowledge.

“let him say ‘I am fasting’” means if someone argues with him or tries to pick a fight or insults him, let him not retaliate in kind, rather let him say, “I am fasting,” in the hope that his opponent will desist because he realizes that he will not fight back because he is fasting.

Should he say this out loud?

There are several points of view.

Some say that he should say it out loud, which is what Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) thought most likely to be correct.

And it was said that he should say it to himself.

And it was said that if he is observing an obligatory fast he should say it out loud, and if he is observing a naafil fast he should say it to himself.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said: The correct view is that he should say it out loud, as indicated by the hadeeth, because the word used here in Arabic (fa yaqul - let him say) refers to speaking out loud.

So the kind of speaking referred to here is speech that can be heard, so if a person says out loud, “I am fasting” he states his reason for not responding, and this is a more effective rebuke to the one who tried to start a fight.

Manhaaj al-Sunnah, 5/197.

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The fast that is truly accepted is the fast in which all the faculties refrain from sin, when the tongue refrains from lying and immoral talk, and the stomach refrains from food and drink, and the private parts refrain from obscenity and intimacy with women.

Fasting is like a school that teaches forbearance, patience and sincerity. It promotes good attitudes and virtuous words and actions. The fasting person does not behave in a foolish manner, go to extremes or get angry; he does not tell lies or utter false speech, he does not break his promise or delay work, rather his speech is dhikr and his silence is thought. The time of the fasting person is too precious to be wasted in these things that doom one to Hell and affect the reward of the fast. And Allaah knows best.

See *Ahkaam al-Siyaam* by al-Fawzaan, p. 51

O Allaah, accept this (worship) from us, for You are the All-Hearing, All-Knowing, and accept our repentance for You are the Acceptor of repentance, the Most Merciful.

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