

# RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF FASTING

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يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ  
تَتَّقُونَ

“O ye who believe! fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil.” (Al Quran 2:184)

Talking about this verse, in the Friday sermon of June 10, 1983 Khalifatul Masih IV, Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad said, “In this verse *مِن قَبْلِكُمْ* ‘those before you’ implies that there is no religion in which fasting was not prescribed, and this is mentioned and recorded in historical records. Therefore, Encyclopedia Britannica writes that all the religions of the world mention fasting. There is not even one religion that is without the concept of fasting. Even though such a research is easy in this day and age as the historical records are freely available in the book form. But when this verse was revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, he did not have any access to the information about majority of the world’s religions. Therefore, the first issue that this verse diverts our attention to is that what a marvelous prophet and what a spectacular book is being revealed to him, that he makes a claim about the whole world, a claim for which there is no apparently logical secular reason present; yet, he with great confidence makes an assertion and it is proven to be true over time. So, what the man of this age is finding to be the case after major academic pursuits had been revealed 1400 years ago.”<sup>1</sup>

According to eleventh edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica (1911) under the heading of ‘fasting,’ “Fasting is of special interest when considered as a discipline voluntarily submitted to for moral and religious ends. As such it is very widely diffused. Its modes and motives vary considerably according to climate, race, civilization and other circumstances; but it would be difficult to name any religious system of any description in which it is wholly unrecognized.”

According to Wikipedia:

“Fasting for religious and spiritual reasons has been a part of human custom since pre-history. It is mentioned in the Bible, in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Qur'an, the Mahabharata, and the Upanishads. Fasting is also practiced in many other religious traditions and spiritual practices.”

According to present day Encyclopedia Britannica online, "Fasting has been practiced from antiquity worldwide by the founders and followers of many religions,

.....

In the religions of ancient peoples and civilizations, fasting was a practice to prepare persons, especially priests and priestesses, to approach the deities. In the Hellenistic mystery religions (e.g., the healing cult of the god Asclepius), the gods were thought to reveal their divine teachings in dreams and visions only after a fast that required the total dedication of the devotees. Among the pre-Columbian peoples of Peru, fasting often was one of the requirements for penance after an individual had confessed sins before a priest. In many cultures the practice was considered a means to assuage an angered deity or to aid in resurrecting a deity who was believed to have died (e.g., a god of vegetation). In the religions of traditional or preliterate peoples, fasting is often practiced before and during a vision quest (e.g., among the North American Indian peoples of the Great Plains and the Pacific Northwest). Among the Evenk (also called Evenki, formerly Tungus) of Siberia, shamans (religious personages thought to have the power to heal and to communicate psychically) often receive their initial visions not with a quest but rather after an unexplained illness; after the initial vision, however, they fast and train themselves to see further visions and to control spirits. Priestly societies among the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest fast during retreats before major ceremonies connected with seasonal changes.

Fasting for special purposes or before or during special sacred times is a characteristic of the major religions of the world. In Jainism, for example, fasting according to certain prescribed rules and practicing certain types of meditation leads to trances that enable individuals to disassociate themselves from the world and reach a transcendent state. Buddhist monks of the Theravāda school fast on certain holy days (uposatha) of the month. In China prior to 1949, it was customary to observe a fixed period of fasting and abstinence before the sacrifice during the night of the winter solstice, a time when the heavenly Yang (positive energy) principle was believed to begin its new cycle. In India, Hindu sadhus (holy men) are admired for their frequent personal fasts for various reasons.

Among the Western religions, only Zoroastrianism prohibits fasting, because of its belief that such a form of asceticism will not aid in strengthening the faithful in their struggle against evil. The other Western religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islām—emphasize fasting during certain periods. Judaism, which developed many dietary laws and customs, observes several annual fast days, primarily on days of penitence (such as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement) or mourning. Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, has observed a 40-day fast period during Lent, a spring period of penitence before Easter, and

during Advent, a penitential period before Christmas. Among Roman Catholics the observance has been modified since the second Vatican Council (1962–65) to allow greater individual choice, with mandatory fasting only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday during Lent. Protestant churches generally leave the decision to fast to individual church members. The month of Ramadan in Islām is a period of penitence and total fasting from dawn to dusk.”<sup>2</sup>

So, the present day Encyclopedia Britannica online has mentioned numerous religions including several religions among the aborigines of North and South America that carry the institution of fasting. However, it has also mentioned one exception and that is Zoroastrianism or Parsee religion. Their claim about Zoroastrianism may be misinformation. For example, It is mentioned in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay By Asiatic Society of Bombay, Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland Bombay Branch, in the Centenary Memorial volume, “The Desatir, of which we have spoken above, and which is considered to be a semi-Zoroastrian book by some, refers to fasting as a good institution.” The full volume of this book is available on Google in the books section. The authors then try to explain away the fact, but as is said, ‘cat is out of the bag.’ According to Wikipedia, “The Dasatir-i-Asmani is an old Persian work related to Zoroastrian. ... It contains fifteen sections which are said to have been revealed to fifteen successive prophets, the first of whom is Mahabad and the last Sasan. At the end of each section, with the exception of the last one, there is a prophecy about the next prophet. It is thought to have influenced Dabestan-e Mazaheb. A translation of it into the old Dari dialect of Persian language is supposed to have been discovered in Persia early in the 19th century, and was edited by Mulla Firuz of Bombay. The dating of the Dari translation is held to be the time of Khosrau II (590-628 A.D.). The scholars are divided over its authenticity, some consider it to be a work by Azar Kayvan in the period of the Mughal ruler Akbar.”

As Parsees are fast disappearing from the world, by attrition, in India and Iran, it will be worthwhile to do more detailed research into their original religious scriptures and other sources in a timely fashion.

Ahmadi Muslims believe that all ancient religions were from the same God so we can find common theme in all of them if we go to their very roots. So, fasting is no exception and this institution is present in all religions.

### **ZOROASTRIANISM**

Zoroastrianism is a major ancient and pre-Islamic religion of Iran. For over a thousand years, from around 549 BCE to 652 CE, the religion taught by Zarathushtra flourished as the state religion of three mighty Iranian empires. Amongst the many subjects of the Achaemenian Empire were the Jews, who adopted some of the prophet's main teachings and transmitted them in due course to Christianity.

Zoroastrianism is a religion founded in ancient times by the prophet Zarathushtra, known to the Greeks as Zoroaster. "Arising out of the polytheistic traditions of ancient India and Iran, he was one of the early monotheists in the recorded human history. Zarathushtra preached that there was one God, whom he called Ahura Mazda. Ahura means "Lord," and Mazda means "Wise," so Zoroastrians call God the "Wise Lord." No one knows exactly when Zarathushtra lived. The modern estimate of Zarathushtra's date is anywhere from 1500 to 1000 BC.

Desatir or the Sacred Writings of the Ancient Persian Prophets in the original tongue with commentary of the fifth Sasan by Mulla Firuz Bin Kaus, is a scarce book which is a collection of the writings of the different Persian prophets who flourished from the time of Mahabad to the time of fifth Sasan. In the chapter named, *The book of Shet Sasan the First*, we read, "Sekander during his reign translated into Yunani this Great Book, and afterwards other Books: and I have here given an extract from it that the young student might understand it, and know his God (Dadar) by proofs deduced from reason. Let him afterwards, with God's assistance, go onto the large commentary which I have written on the respected Desatir, and draw all his knowledge from it: after which let him, with the grace of Ized devote himself to the worship of Yezdan and **by means of seclusion and watchfulness, and fasting and meditation on Yezdan, let him see Yezdan** and those who are nigh onto the Most Just (Dadar)."

### **CONFUCIANISM**

According to Khalifatul Masih IV, in his epic making book *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth*, "Although many Chinese consider it to be a religion on the pattern of other Divinely revealed religions of the world, there are others among them who view it as a mere philosophy." He adds, "From an in-depth study of classical Confucian literature, it is not difficult to prove that Confucianism is not a man-made philosophy at its origin. It did embrace the idea of one immortal God, from Whom its teachings originated and Who is believed to govern the universe. "Heaven" is a manifestation of that God, and as such sometimes He Himself is referred to as Heaven."

According to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Book X of the *Analects* consists of personal observations of how Confucius comported himself as a thinker, teacher, and official. Some have argued that these passages were originally more general prescriptions on how a gentleman should dress and behave that were relabeled as descriptions of Confucius. Traditionally, Book X has been regarded as providing an intimate portrait of Confucius and has been read as a biographical sketch. The following passages provide a few examples.

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When fasting in preparation for sacrifice he must wear the Bright Robe, and it must be of linen. He must change his food and also the place where he commonly sits. He does not object to his rice being thoroughly cleaned, nor to his meat being finely minced. (*Lunyu* 10.7, 10.8)<sup>3</sup>

According to *The Analects*, attributed to Confucius, 551-479 BCE, “Confucius, in his village, looked simple and sincere, and as if he were not able to speak.

.....

On the first day of the month he put on his court robes, and presented himself at court. When fasting, he thought it necessary to have his clothes brightly clean and made of linen cloth. When fasting, he thought it necessary to change his food, and also to change the place where he commonly sat in the apartment.<sup>4</sup>

### **BUDDHISM**

Prior to attaining Buddhahood, prince Siddhartha (Buddha) practiced a regime of four years of strict austerity during which he consumed very little food. The two major Sanskrit works on the life of Buddha that mention this are *Lalitavistara* and *Buddhacharita*.

Buddhist monks and nuns following the Vinaya rules commonly do not eat each day after the noon meal. This is not considered a fast, but rather a disciplined regimen aiding in meditation. Fasting is not practiced by lay Buddhists because it is seen as a deviation from the Middle Path.

According to *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Fasting* by Eve Adamson and Linda Horning, “Buddhism has many different branches, but most of them include fasting in their spiritual practices. For some, fasting occurs on full moon days or Buddhist holidays. On these days they abstain from all solid foods. ... Buddhists fast for several reasons. ... Some Buddhists fast to help free the mind from the world of the senses so it can more easily comprehend ultimate truth. In this way, fasting becomes a partner in meditation.”

### **CHRISTIANITY AND BIBLICAL DESCRIPTION OF FASTING**

The fasts of Jesus Christ before his receiving the heavenly Call are mentioned in the Bible. (Matt 4:2)

Lent in the Christian church is a period of penitential preparation for Easter. In Western churches it begins on Ash Wednesday, 6 1/2 weeks before Easter, and provides for a 40-day fast (Sundays are excluded), in imitation of Jesus Christ's fasting in the wilderness. In Eastern churches Lent begins on the Monday of the seventh week before Easter and ends on the Friday that is 9 days before Easter. This 40-day “Great Lent” includes Saturdays and Sundays as relaxed fast days.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica online, “Lent is since apostolic times a period of preparation and fasting that has been observed before the Easter festival. It was a time of preparation of candidates for baptism and a time of penance for sinners. In the early centuries fasting rules were strict, as they still are in Eastern churches. One meal a day was allowed in the evening, and meat, fish, eggs, and butter were forbidden. The Eastern church also restricts the use of wine, oil, and dairy products. In the West these fasting rules have gradually

been relaxed. The strict law of fasting among Roman Catholics was dispensed during World War II, and only Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are now kept as Lenten fast days. However, the emphasis on penitential practice remains.”<sup>5</sup>

There are several mentions of fasting in the Bible. On three occasions in the Bible, people fasted for forty days. This is not a prescribed practice; these were very unusual circumstances. The first occasion was when Moses received the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:28) The next occasion was when Elijah encountered God before the anointing of Elisha. (1 Kings 19:8) The third occasion for such a fast was when Jesus was in the wilderness. (Matthew 4:2)

Abstaining from food is the typical kind of fast. (Daniel 6:18) There are occasions when people abstain from both food and drink, though this is not common. (Ezra 10:6) Typically, fasts are one day in length. (Judges 20:26) Sometimes, they are three days (Esther 4:16), or even seven days; “And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days. (1 Samuel 31:13)

Distressing or difficult times are reasons for fasting. Fasting is a way of communicating feelings of fear, anxiety, distress or grief to God. Self-denial is one way of expressing genuineness or sincerity. It’s also a way of making a spiritual contribution to relieving the situation, a way of showing God a willingness to do our part and asking Him to make up the difference. (See Esther 4:3) Fasting is sometimes used as a sacrifice when asking God to intervene in a situation. “But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.” (Psalms 35:13)

Bereavement was once a common reason for fasting, though it is not so much anymore. The fasting may have been incidental in some cases but was often a way to feel closer to God during a particularly difficult time. “And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven” (Nehemiah 1:4)

Fasting can also be a way of expressing sorrow or regret for sin. God doesn’t ask us for this sacrifice but He is pleased by it. “And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, we have sinned against the LORD...” (1 Samuel 7:6) When this kind of sacrifice is made as a sincere gesture of sorrow or penitence, it is accepted by God.

When Christians seek guidance from God fasting may be an action that is helpful. The idea is to use the time we spend on food to spend with God instead. It provides extra time to spend in prayer, worship and listening. It is also a way of preparing for a spiritual event or change. It’s an act of submission, a way to get our desire out of the way in order to allow the spirit to work. (Acts 13:1-3)

Fasting can be a form of worship. “And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.” (Luke 2:37) Surrendering comfort as an act of worship is not necessary but it is pleasing to God if it is sincere. It is much like saying, “Thank you God for giving Your Son for me. Let me be a little uncomfortable for Your sake.” Here again fasting is an act of sacrifice.

Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights while he was on the mountain with God. (Exodus 34:28)

The people of Nineveh in response to Jonah's prophecy, fasted to avert the judgement of God (Jonah 3:7).

The Jews of Persia, following Mordechai's example, fasted due to the genocidal decree of Haman. Queen Esther declared a three-day fast for all the Jews prior to risking her life in visiting King Ahasuerus uninvited (Esther 4).

The Pharisees in Jesus' time fasted regularly, and asked Jesus why his disciples did not. Jesus answered them using a parable (Luke 5:33-39, Matthew 9:14-15, Mark 2:18-20, see also Mark 2).

Jesus also warned against fasting to gain favor from men. He warned his followers that they should fast in private, not letting others know they were fasting (Matthew 6:16–18).

## ***JUDAISM***

The Prophet Moses fasted prior to receiving the Ten Commandments. (Exod 34:28 and Deut 9:9)

Fasting for Jews means completely abstaining from food and drink, including water. Brushing teeth is forbidden on the major fast days of Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av (See below), but permitted on minor fast days. Taking medications is generally not permitted, except where a doctor's orders would forbid abstaining. Observant Jews fast on up to six days of the year. With the exception of Yom Kippur, fasting is never permitted on Shabbat, for the commandment of keeping Shabbat is biblically ordained and overrides the later rabbinically-instituted fast days. Yom Kippur is the only fast day which is ordained in the Torah.

Yom Kippur is considered to be the most important day of the Jewish year and fasting as a means of repentance is expected of every Jewish man and boy above the age of bar mitzvah and every Jewish woman and girl above the age of bat mitzvah. It is so important to fast on this day, that only those who would be put in danger by fasting are exempt, such as the ill, elderly, or pregnant or nursing women, as endangering one's life is against a core principle of Judaism. Those that do eat on this day are encouraged to eat as little as possible at a time

and to avoid a full meal. For some, fasting on Yom Kippur is considered more important than the prayers of this holy day. If one fasts, even if one is at home in bed, one is considered as having participated in the full religious service. In addition to fasting and prayer, Yom Kippur -- as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths" -- has the same restrictions regarding work as the Sabbath, such as striking a fire, carrying objects outside the home, using tools, and so on. Traditionally, leather shoes are not worn on this day.

It is traditional for a bride and groom to fast on their wedding day before the ceremony as the day represents a personal Yom Kippur. In some congregations, repentance prayers that from the Yom Kippur service are included by the bride and groom in the service before the ceremony.

The second major day of fasting is Tisha B'Av, the day nearly 2000 years ago on which the Romans destroyed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and the Jews were banished from their homeland. Tisha B'Av ends a three-week mourning period beginning with the fast of the 17th of Tammuz. Unlike the fast of Yom Kippur, there are no restrictions on activities, although one should try to avoid doing regular work the first part of the day, sit in a low chair or on the floor, and wear no leather shoes. This is also the day when observant Jews remember the many tragedies which have befallen the Jewish people, including the Holocaust. The atmosphere of this holiday is serious and deeply sad.

Both of these holy days are considered major fasts and are observed from sunset to sunset the following day by both men and women. The remaining four fasts are considered minor and fasting is only observed from sunrise to sunset. Men are expected to observe them, and women should observe them, but a rabbi may often give dispensations if the fast represents too much of a hardship to a sick or weak person.

On the two major fast days sexual relations are also forbidden.

Aside from these official days of fasting, Jews may take upon themselves personal or communal fasts, often to seek repentance in the face of tragedy or some impending calamity. For example, a fast is sometimes observed if the scrolls of the Torah are dropped. The length of the fast varies, and some Jews will reduce the length of the fast through tzedakah, or charitable acts.

There are several references to fasting in the Old Testament including, Isaiah, 58:1-13; Joel, 2:12-18; Leviticus, 23:27,29,32; Numbers, 29:7; Leviticus, 26:14-41; Esther, 4:3,16; Jonah, 3:7 and Isaiah 66:10.

## ***HINDUISM***

In Hinduism fasting is commonly practiced on New Moon days and during festivals such as Shivaratri, Saraswati Puja, and Durga Puja (also known as

Navaratri). Women in North India also fast on the day of Karva Chauth. The style and intensity of fasting depends on the individual. Fasting may involve 24 hours of complete abstinence from any food or drink, but is more often an elimination of solid foods, with an occasional drink of milk or water.

According to Wikipedia:

“Fasting is a very integral part of the Hindu religion. Individuals observe different kinds of fasts based on personal beliefs and local customs. Some are listed below.

Some Hindus fast on certain days of the month such as Ekadasi or Purnima. Certain days of the week are also set aside for fasting depending on personal belief and favorite deity. For example, devotees of Shiva tend to fast on Mondays, while devotees of Vishnu tend to fast on Fridays or Saturdays. Thursday fasting is very common among the Hindus of northern India. On Thursdays devotees listen to a story before breaking their fast. On the Thursday fasters also worship Vrihaspati Mahadeva. They wear yellow clothes, and meals with yellow color are preferred. Women worship the banana tree and water it. Food items are made with yellow-colored ghee.

Fasting during religious festivals is also very common. Common examples are Maha Shivaratri or the 9 days of Navratri (which occurs twice a year in the months of April and October/November during Vijayadashami just before Diwali, as per the Hindu calendar). Karva Chauth is a form of fasting unique to the northern part of India where married women undertake a fast for the well-being, prosperity, and longevity of their husbands. The fast is broken after the wife views the moon through a sieve after sunset.

In the state of Andhra Pradesh, the month of Kaarthika, which begins with the day after Deepavali is often a period of frequent (though not necessarily continuous) fasting for some people, especially women. Common occasions for fasting during this month include Mondays (for Lord Shiva), the full-moon day of Karthika and the occasion of Naagula Chaviti.

Methods of fasting also vary widely and cover a broad spectrum. If followed strictly, the person fasting does not partake any food or water from the previous day's sunset until 48 minutes after the following day's sunrise. Fasting can also mean limiting oneself to one meal during the day and/or abstaining from eating certain food types and/or eating only certain food types. In any case, even if the fasting Hindu is non-vegetarian, he/she is not supposed to eat or even touch any animal products (i.e. meat, eggs) on a day of fasting. (Milk is an exception for animal products).”

## **JAINISM**

According to Wikipedia:

There are many types of fasting in Jainism. One is called Chauvihar Upwas, in which no food or water may be consumed until sunrise the next day. Another is called Tivihar Upwas, in which no food may be consumed, but boiled water is allowed. The main goal of any type of Fasting in Jainism is to achieve complete Non-Violence (दया, ahimsa) during that period. Fasting is usually done during Paryushana but can be done during other times. If one fasts for the eight days of Paryushana, it is called Atthai, and when it is for One Month, it is known as Maskhamana. Also, it is common for Jains not to fast but only to limit their intake of food. When a person only eats lentils and tasteless food with salt and pepper as the only spices, the person is said to do Ayambil. This is supposed to decrease desire and passion.

Self-starvation by fasting is known as Sallekhana and is supposed to help shed karma according to Jain philosophy.

## **NATIVE AMERICANS AND AUSTRALIANS**

According to *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Fasting* by Eve Adamson and Linda Horning, "In North America the Native Americans have traditionally used fasting as a sacred ritual. Young boys sent off on their vision quests in the wilderness alone would fast, and fasting was a part of other ceremonies and observations. Other native cultures around the globe have also used fasting as a way to purify the body, prepare it for visions, or to honor the creator."

According to present day Encyclopedia Britannica online:

"Among the pre-Columbian peoples of Peru, fasting often was one of the requirements for penance after an individual had confessed sins before a priest. In many cultures the practice was considered a means to assuage an angered deity or to aid in resurrecting a deity who was believed to have died (e.g., a god of vegetation).

In the religions of traditional or preliterate peoples, fasting is often practiced before and during a vision quest (e.g., among the North American Indian peoples of the Great Plains and the Pacific Northwest). Among the Evenk (also called Evenki, formerly Tungus) of Siberia, shamans (religious personages thought to have the power to heal and to communicate psychically) often receive their initial visions not with a quest but rather after an unexplained illness; after the initial vision, however, they fast and train themselves to see further visions and to control spirits. Priestly societies among the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest fast during retreats before major ceremonies connected with seasonal changes."<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Indeed, We have sent thee (Muhammad) with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and as a Warner; and there is no people on earth in any age who did not receive a Warner from God. (Al Quran, 35:25)

As all prophets, be they Buddha, Krishna, Ram, Zoroaster, Confucius, Jesus, Moses or the prophets in North and South America or Australia are from God, so it is possible to trace a common thread between all religions at their sources. However, the details of worship may differ to some degree, as is mentioned in the Holy Quran, "*For every people We have appointed ways of worship which they observe; so let them not dispute with thee in the matter of the Islamic way of worship; and call thou the people to thy Lord, for, surely, thou art on the right guidance.*" (Al Quran, 22:68)

According to Khalifatul Masih IV, in his epic making book *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth*, in the chapter, *The Concept of God among the Aborigines of Australia*:

"Australia is a continent whose culture, social and religious history can be traced back to at least twenty-five thousand years. Many scholars extend it to forty thousand years or beyond. According to some researchers, however, this period could extend even to a past as remote as one hundred and thirty thousand years of unbroken, unadulterated and undisturbed growth of religion.

The Australian continent is not only unique in having been completely broken off from the rest of the world, it is also unique in containing within it hundreds of social islands, each comprising tribes that remained entirely isolated from each other. It is known that between five hundred to six hundred such tribal units had their own independent history of social and religious development, throughout an age of twenty-five to forty thousand years, in complete isolation from each other except for occasional marginal contacts at the boundaries of their territories."

So, the diversity of Australia provides a very fertile area of research for us on the topic under discussion and the related subjects, especially on the subject of there being only one God and not three!

Stressing other aspects of the main verse under discussion, in the Friday sermon of October 7, 2005, Khalifatul Masih V, Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad highlighted our responsibilities in Ramadhan, and how it should inculcate fear of God in our lives. He said:

"In this Ramadhan we should reflect upon whether we have maintained the spiritual development we attained during the previous Ramadhan or not. We need to analyze if we have drifted away from the gains made in goodness in the

previous year. If we have lost the gains of the previous Ramadhan then where is the advantage? What can we hope to achieve from this or any future Ramadhans? Whereas, Allah has said that He has prescribed fasting, so that we can grow in piety and righteousness and come closer to Him; but, what is this that we have not progressed in morality and spirituality? Allah's claim cannot be wrong the fault lies with man! So, the fact of the matter is that vulnerability is ours. Either we did not benefit from the Ramadhans that have passed away or earned only temporary benefit and over the year drifted back to square one. What is expected of a believer is that whatever stations of piety and *Taqwa* he achieved in the previous Ramadhan the next Ramadhan should incrementally take him to a higher station of morality, piety and *Taqwa*."

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.alislam.org/archives/>

<sup>2</sup> "fasting." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2008. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. 22 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/202347/fasting>>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/confucius/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.international.ucla.edu/eas/documents/lunyuCh10.htm>

<sup>5</sup> "Lent." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2008. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. 26 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/336104/Lent>>.

<sup>6</sup> "fasting." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2008. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. 22 Aug. 2008 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/202347/fasting>>.