

Review Article

al-Siam al-Tibbi (Medical Fasting) and *al-Siam al-Diyniu* (Religious Fasting): Role in Medical and Religious Practices

Iqbal Akhtar Khan*

Independent Scholar, Pakistan

*Corresponding author

Iqbal Akhtar Khan, Independent Scholar, Lahore -54792, Pakistan

Submitted: 24 March 2023

Accepted: 25 April 2023

Published: 27 April 2023

Copyright

© 2023 Khan IA.

ISSN: 2573-1300

OPEN ACCESS

Keywords

- Medical fasting
- Religious fasting
- Intermittent fasting
- Spiritual cleansing

Abstract

The Fasting, since pre-history, has been a part of human custom across the globe for health, ritualistic, mental and spiritual rejuvenation. Many of the notable physicians of ancient times recommended it as an integral component of curative and preventive strategies. Recent work on the usefulness of fasting has revealed that it is, undoubtedly, the most effective biological method of treatment. In addition to its significant role in the management of certain chronic diseases, it can arguably be suggested as a complementary therapy to immunization, to boost up immunity.

Intermittent fasting (IF), the history of which is traced to Gautama Buddha, is an umbrella term for various eating patterns or cycles that switches between fasting and eating on a regular schedule. In addition to its use in clinical practice, IF is also used in certain religious practices with significant beneficial effects on health, notably a month-long period of Ramadan: fasting from “dawn to dusk”. The resultant “metabolic switching” protects bodily organs against chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, age-related neurodegenerative disorders, even inflammatory bowel disease and many cancers.

The fasting, an ancient ritual of worship, disciplines the body and soul and has existed in various forms in almost all the religions. The practice is mentioned in the Bible, the Qur'an, the Mahabharata, and the Upanishads. It is much more than usually thought abstinence from food and drinks. The fasting, created by divine wisdom, is an effective tool in setting boundaries for self-restraint. It aims at compliance with the divine command while keeping away from His prohibitions, developing self-discipline, forbearance, and righteousness. It should not be practiced just “going hungry” or a “dieting program”. It needs to be accompanied by repentance, supplicant prayers and developing sense of empathy for those under-privileged.

INTRODUCTION

“Fasting is not merely a commandment from God but a godly gift, a grace, and a blessing. God the creator of our body and soul knows of our need to fast for its benefit for our spiritual life, development, and our eternity. Through fasting, we prepare ourselves to receive every blessing that God offers us”.

Pope Shenouda III of Alexandria —Author of “Spirituality of Fasting” [1]

Fasting refers to the act of willingly abstaining from the consumption of food and/or fluids, for a period of time. A fast may be total or partial, and may vary in duration and frequency [2] Since pre-history, it has been a part of human custom, across the globe, for health, ritualistic, mental and spiritual rejuvenation. Fasting for special purposes or before or during special sacred times remains a characteristic of major religions of the world. The tradition has been well described in the Bible, the Quran, the Mahabharata, and the Upanishads.

It was among the fundamental religious doctrine,

amongst the ancient Egyptians, who used to fast for 30 days a year. The objective was to train the human spirit to exercise self-restraint, by controlling the desire for food, drink and sex, for a specified duration. The objective of fasting in the Hellenistic mystery religions (e.g., the healing cult of the god Asclepius) of Ancient Greece (323 BC —33 BC), was to receive blessings, through prophecies and dreams, by approaching the deities. Amongst the pre-Columbian Peruvian inhabitants, the fasting was one of the requirements for penance after an individual had confessed sins before a holy man. Jeûne genevois (Geneva Fasting) is an example of special fasting. The people of Geneva traditionally fast on the first Thursday after the Sunday in September every year. The first fast was observed in October 1567, following the repression of Protestants from Lyon. Since 1640, it has become an annual practice, as a moral and religious act, expressing humility and solidarity with the poorest members of society. [3]

Medical Fasting

Although the history of fasting, as one of the oldest therapies in medicine, dates back to pre-history, it

has been mentioned in almost all spots of globe, cultures and religious beliefs. Many of the notable physicians of ancient times recommended it, as an integral component of curative and preventive strategies. Whereas Guelpa and Marie, in 1911, formally documented the effectiveness of fasting in the treatment of epilepsy [4], the ancient Greek physicians had already made a note that periods of fasting resulted in reduction of frequency and severity of seizures in epileptics [5].

ومقام العدل في الأكل رفع اليد مع بقاء شيء من الشهوة ، فلا يحس المتناول بجوع ولا شبع ، فحينئذ يصح البدن ، وتنتعج الهمة ، ويصفو الفكر ، ويمتنع زاد في الأكل وأورثه كثرة النوم ، وبلادة الذهن ، ويجلب أمراضاً أخرى

"And the state of justice whilst eating, is to withhold the hand while there is still a bit of desire left. So, the one who eats does not feel hunger or fullness. It is then that the body will be healthy, the energy will be gathered, and thinking will be clear. And when he overeats, it causes excessive sleep, dullness of the mind, and brings about other diseases."

Imam al-Ghazali (c. 1058-1111 AD), a Persian Polymath

In ancient Egypt, ancient India and ancient Greece the curative and preventive role of fasting was well recognised as well as for strengthening the spirit. Beego (meaning no eating food for a period), a traditional Chinese practice since the Qin Dynasty (221 BC- 207 BC) , is a complete water-only fasting. It was originally practiced by Taoists for spiritual purposes but, later on, extended to both physical and mental fitness [6]. Fasting is said to provide rest to digestive organs and stimulate the destruction of metabolic toxins which are known to be the cause of major illnesses. According to Luqman: The Wise Sage (Luqmanal-Hakeem) "*When the stomach is full, the intellect begins to sleep. Wisdom becomes mute and the parts of the body restrain from acts of righteousness.*" Hippocrates (c460-c 370 BC), the Father of Medicine as a Rational Science, believed fasting enabled the body to heal itself. "*To eat when you are sick, is to feed your illness*" was his motto. Swiss physician Paracelsus (1493-1541) remarked: "*The fasting is the greatest remedy, the physician within.*" To many, the fasting is considered "Nature's Restorer," nature's ancient, universal "remedy" for many ailments. Edward Hooker Dewey (1837-1904): the pioneer of therapeutic fasting and the inventor of "No Breakfast Plan" believed that "*Every disease that afflicts mankind develops from more or less habitual eating in excess of the supply of gastric juices*" [7]. Otto Buchinger (1878-1966 AD), well remembered for his work on medical fasting says: "*Fasting is, without any doubt, the most effective biological method of treatment..... it is the 'operation without surgery'..... it is a cure involving exudation, reattunement, redirection, loosening up and purified relaxation*". He had successfully treated his infected joint rheumatism by fasting, an unconventional medicinal approach. To Joel Fuhrman (1953—), known for advocacy of "micronutrient-rich diet," *the job of fasting is to supply the body with the ideal environment to accomplish its work of healing.*"

Japanese cell biologist Yoshinori Ohsumi (Nobel Laureate 2016), was the pioneer of research on how cells recycle and renew their content, a process called autophagy. Fasting activates autophagy with positive impact on cell renewal, resulting in slowing down the aging process [8] and targeting metabolic

conditions, neurodegenerative diseases, cancers and infectious diseases [9]. With the passage of time, medical fasting has gained wider recognition and, at present, many spas and treatment centers, in Europe and North America run medically supervised fasting programs.

Medical fasting could be for diagnostic purpose (blood work-up), procedure (pre-operative), therapeutic (in chronic diseases notably diabetes, dyslipidemia, obesity, rheumatoid arthritis) and preventive (to increase overall vitality, boost-up immunity, detoxification). In the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, interesting role of fasting has been identified. In an observational cohort from the INSPIRE registry, routine periodic fasting was associated with a lower risk of hospitalization or mortality in patients with COVID-19. Fasting has been suggested to be a complementary therapy to vaccination that could provide immune support [10].

Intermittent fasting: Induction of Medical and Divine Therapy

زهی حلاوت بنهادر این خلای شکم
مثالی چنگ بود آدمی، نه پیش و نه کم

چنگدگر شکم چنگ پُر شود مثلاً
نه ناله آید از آن چنگدگر نه زور و نه بیم

اگر ز روزه پیسوزد دماغ و الشکم نی
ز سوز ناله برآید ز سینهاست هر دم

هزار پرده پیسوزی به هر دمی زان سوز
هزار پایه برآری به همت و به قدم

"There's hidden sweetness in the stomach's emptiness. We are lutes, no more, no less. If the soundbox is stuffed full of anything, no music comes from that harp. If the brain and belly are burning clean with fasting, every moment a new song comes out of the fire. The fog clears, and new energy makes you run up the steps in front of you".

A poem by [Jelaluddin Rumi](#) (1207 – 1273 AD), a Persian poet and theologian [11, 12]

Amongst the three main types of fasting; continuous energy restriction (CER), nutrient restriction and seasonal eating, the third one, commonly known as "intermittent fasting (IF)", is gaining more recognition.

The IF is an umbrella term for various eating patterns or cycles that switches between fasting and eating on a regular schedule. Its history is traced to Gautama Buddha (623 BC-c544BC) who advised it for health benefits. It is not a diet plan but a timing schedule. Whereas many diets focus on what to eat, the exact locus of IF is when to eat. Common time allocation methods are 16/8 (16 hours fasting, 8 hours free eating), 18/6 (18 hours fasting, 6 hours free eating), and 20/4 (20 hours fasting, 4 hours free eating) [13]. It has much better compliance and tolerance because, unlike Mediterranean diet or CER, it does not restrict caloric intake during the ad libitum period (as much as often as necessary or as desired). Renowned neuroscientist Prof. Mark Mattson, on the basis of his extensive work on IF, concludes that after hours without food, the body exhausts its sugar stores and starts burning fat, a process referred as "metabolic switching" "which can protect bodily organs against chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, age-related neurodegenerative disorders, even inflammatory bowel disease and many cancers"

[14]. The IF is the area of interest at various research centers. In one randomized Non-inferiority Trial, at the University of South Australia, on patients with Type 2 Diabetes, IF significantly reduced HbA1c and improved glycemic control [15]. In a prospective observational trial, registered at the German register of clinical trials, on patients with and without type 2 diabetes, IF was found to improve fatty liver index, a proxy for non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), significantly and rapidly [16]

With the background that the problems of adherence to energy restriction in humans are well known, a randomized controlled trial was designed to compare the feasibility and effectiveness of IF with caloric restriction for weight loss, insulin sensitivity and other metabolic disease risk marker, on premenopausal women, observed over a period of 6 months. Both IF and caloric restriction were equally effective with regard to weight loss, insulin sensitivity and other health biomarkers [17]. The IF may safely be offered as an alternative equivalent to caloric restriction for weight loss and reducing disease risk.

In addition to its use in clinical practice, IF is also used in certain religious practices, notably a month-long period of Ramadan [18]. With fasting from “dawn to dusk,” it can last 11-18 hours/day, depending on the geographic location and season of the year during which the Muslims abstain from ingesting food and liquids, making their intake exclusively nocturnal.

Whereas the Ramadan fast is a form of IF practiced by millions of adult Muslims globally for a whole month [19], its common consequences are reduction in body weight, relative fat mass (FM) and resting basal metabolic rate (BMR) [18, 20]. Moreover, the IF, related caloric restriction decreases total cholesterol, low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and fasting plasma glucose (FPG) levels [20]. Of note, the catabolic state, which is related to protein loss, was not triggered during Ramadan IF, in an Indonesian study [21].

In a before-after study paired sample T-test illustrated a significant decrease in Insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF-1) and interleukin-2 (IL-2) levels after Ramadan fasting compared to before Ramadan. The concentration of total cholesterol (TC), total glycerides (TG), low density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) levels underwent significant decreases over the period of the study. However, there was no significant change in high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C) levels [22].

In a Jordanian study, conducted on healthy subjects fasting in Ramadan, the results indicated that IF attenuates inflammatory status of the body by suppressing proinflammatory cytokine expression and decreasing body fat and circulating levels of leukocytes [23].

The Purpose and Wisdom of Religious Fasting

Like the Salah (Prayers) and Zakat (Divinely Prescribed Just Economic Order), the Saum (fast, self-restraint) is also an ancient ritual of worship. It trains and disciplines the soul and has existed in various forms in almost all the religions. The

Arabic word “*Saum*” literally means “*to abstain from something*” and “*to give up something*”. Whereas creating an ideal society requires discipline and self-restraint among the individuals, the verse means that you may comply with commands of Almighty, by attaining piety and fearfulness, and keep away from His prohibitions.

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

“O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you—as it was for those before you—so perhaps you will become mindful of Allah” The Holy Quran {Al-Baqarah 2: 183}

According to the Holy Bible (Genesis 2:16-17) and the Holy Quran {2:35}, our ancestor Prophet Adam and his wife, while in paradise, were commanded to refrain from eating the fruit of a particular tree but permitted to eat from the rest. As inferred by the Pope Shenouda III of Alexandria, in his book “The Spirituality of Fasting”, certain limits were set for the human body beyond which it should not go [1]. Thus, from very beginning, man has had to control his inclination towards certain things. The divine command could be interpreted, as setting boundaries for self-restraint. It needs to be understood that the doctrine of fasting does not mean merely abstinence from food and drink; it is much more than that. The two Reported Sayings of the Last Messenger exemplify such boundaries, as following:

إِنَّ الصِّيَامَ لَيْسَ مِنَ الْأَكْلِ وَالشَّرْبِ فَقَطْ إِنَّمَا الصِّيَامُ مِنَ الْغَرِّ وَالرَّفَثِ فَإِنْ سَأَلْتَهُ أَخَذَ أَوْ جَهَلَ عَلَيْكَ فَقُلْ إِنِّي صَائِمٌ

“Verily, fasting is not only from eating and drinking. Rather, fasting is from vanity and obscenity. If someone abuses you or acts foolish against you, then say: Indeed, I am fasting.” (#3561: Sahih Ibn Hibban)

And

مَنْ لَمْ يَدَعْ قَوْلَ الزُّورِ وَالْعَمَلَ بِهِ وَالْجَهْلَ فَلَيْسَ بِهَ حَاجَةٍ أَنْ يَدَعَ طَعَامَهُ وَشَرَابَهُ

“Whoever does not give up false statements (i.e., telling lies), and evil deeds, and speaking bad words to others, Allah is not in need of his (fasting) leaving his food and drink.” (# 6057 Sahih al-Bokhari)

In fact, the fasting, created by divine wisdom, is not only a part of worship but effectively instrumental in developing self-discipline.

The Quranic verse referred above {2 :183} makes it clear that the purpose of fasting is attainment of “*Taqwa*”, which means “*forbearance, fear and abstinence*”. This comprehensive word incorporates compliance with the commands of God Almighty and keeping away from His prohibitions. The worldly religions believe that the fasting is a shield that safeguards against bad deeds and forbidden acts and cultivates personal discipline and spiritual energy.

The exercise of fasting, according to the Book of Hebrews (12:7-11), is to discipline the believers, by God Almighty, for our good, in order that we may share in His Holiness. This discipline produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

In response to a question *"What is the Purpose of Fasting?"*, The Aish Rabbi Replied *"A distinctive feature of Judaism is its philosophy of integrating the spiritual with the physical. We use the physical as a doorway through which we access the spiritual"*. Haredi Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov (1912-1976), in his book *"The Book of Our Heritage"*, states that *"the one who fasts and spends the day idly without repentance, misses the point. That person is emphasizing the fasting, which is secondary, and de-emphasizing the repentance which is primary"*.

Elder Joseph Wirthlin in his presentation "The Law of the Fast" at General Conference April 2001 of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. said *"Without prayer, fasting is not complete fasting; it is simply going hungry"*. In fact, the fasting coupled with mighty prayer, is powerful. It can fill our minds with the revelations of the Spirit and can strengthen us against times of temptation. *"Truly speaking, the fasting always accompanied by a suppliant prayer, serves to express humility before God (Lev 16:31). Such fasting is equivalent to "humiliating one's soul."*

Fasting is not only confined to individuals, but also for whole nations. The most outstanding examples were the one during reign of Queen Esther (Esther4:3,16), in response to call from Ezra, the priest (8:21,23) together with Nehemiah (Nehemiah 9:1) and that of people of Nineveh (Jon 3:5) fasting in lamentation and dressed in sackcloth with ashes on their heads seeking God's mercy. They believed that, through true fasting man can soften God's heart. True fasting is a spiritual act primarily taking place inside the heart. In fact, the fasting, a sacred and idealistic worship is from Him, through Him and to Him.

Practice of Fasting in Various Religions

Zoroastrianism

"In the Zoroastrian calendar of 365 days, there is not a single day of fasting from food".

Noshir H. Dadrawala— Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy

Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest surviving religions, 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 only fast that is traditionally observed is fast from eating meat throughout the month of Bahman (11th and penultimate month of the Solar Hijra Calendar). In Zoroastrian calendar, the 2nd day of every month and the whole month of Bahman are dedicated to Bahman Amshapand [24].

Hinduism

"Complete dissociation from sinful acts, association of virtuousness and/or good qualities or person of good qualities should be known as upavasa, not the emaciation of the body".

Charak Samhita Sutra sthna, 1/6- (TheNumber 1 Authority Book on Ayurveda)

In Hinduism, fasting is not an obligation, but a moral and spiritual act negating the physical demands of body, purpose

being purifying the body and soul for spiritual gains. It is a window to escape sins [25].

The Sanskrit word for fasting is 'Upavasa.' 'Upa' means "near" and 'Vasa' means "to stay". The term meaning "to sit or stay near (the Lord)" and "to keep the Lord close to your heart and mind," is an integral induction of the divine therapy. Fasting is a major advocate of Upavasa which is among all Daivavyapashraya (spiritual) therapies and one among ten Langhana (that which produces lightness of the body) therapies [26].

Fasting during religious festivals is also very common, examples being Maha Shivaratri or the nine days of Navratri (just before Diwali), Ekadasi (the 11th day of the fortnight) and Purnima(full moon). Certain days of the week are also marked for fasting, depending on individual choices and on one's favorite god and goddess. In Northern India, Karwa Chauth (a form of fasting) is undertaken by married women for the well-being, prosperity, and longevity of their husbands. Thursday fasting is also common among the Hindus of that area whereas in West Bengal fast on Ashtami (the eighth day of the festival of Durga Puja) is well known.

Buddhism

"I do not eat in the evening and thus am free from illness and affliction and enjoy health, strength and ease."

Siddhartha Gautama —Founder of Buddhism

The Buddha Diet is characterized by time-restricted eating, which is at present, a kind of intermittent fasting. The diet emphasizes people focusing on *when* they eat versus *what* they eat. To begin with people, restrict their calories intake by 13 hours a day, reducing it gradually to 9 hours a day.

Fasting in Buddhism is not mandatory for anyone. It is recommended for monks and nuns only, but many Buddhist followers observe fasting [27]. It is an initial stage of self-discipline to acquire self-control. The Buddha held that practicing mindfulness of eating/food could lead to weight loss and better health. In the sutras he states, *"when a person is mindful and thus knows moderation in eating, his ailments diminish, he ages gently and he protects his life"* (S.I,81-2)

Jainism

A disciple asked, "What does the soul achieve from austerity?" Mahavir Bhagwant replied, "Through penance, the soul eradicates previously acquired KARMAS and achieves purification. With the help of external and internal Tapa, a person elevates himself individually, morally as well as mentally".

Mahavira Bhagwant (Vardhamana)(c599-c527 BCE)— Supreme Preacher of Jainism [28]

According to the Tattvartha Sutra (the earliest, most authoritative, and comprehensive summary of their religion, recognized by all four Jaina traditions), the purpose of fasting is to

strengthen and purify the soul by shedding or weakening the karma attached to it. In Jainism the fasting is one of the 12 types of penance, the real fasting being more about relinquishing the desire for taste and attachment to the choice of food. There are many types of fasting in Jainism. One is called Chauvihar Upwas, in which no food or water is consumed until sunrise the next day. Another is called Tivihar Upwas, in which only boiled water is allowed. Fasting is usually done during Paryushana (the most important holy event of forgiveness) but many Jains do fast at special times such as birthdays and anniversaries.

Sikhism

"Fasting, daily rituals, and austere self-discipline - those who keep the practice of these, are rewarded with less than a shell."

Sri Guru Granth Sahib (The Sikh Holy Scripture—SGGS 216)

Sikhism is probably the only major organized world religion that does not promote fasting except for medical reasons. The Sikh Gurus discouraged the devotee from engaging in fasting as it allegedly *"brings no spiritual benefit to the person."* Therefore, in general, Sikhs do not undertake fasting [29].

Judaism

"Every Yom Kippur, Jewish tradition requires a strict spiritual inventory. You aren't supposed to just sit around feeling guilty, but to take action in the real world to set things right"—

Naomi Rebekah Wolf (1962-.)—American Feminist Author

Fasting in Judaism is defined as total cessation from all food and drink. A full day fast begins with sunset in the evening and continues through darkness of the next day [30]. The act of fasting is believed to result in the spiritual transformation of the individual or the community. Whereas the fast is an act of spiritual cleansing, both at individual and community level, it reflects expression of repentance and the hunger for divine forgiveness.

In Judaism there are six days of fasting throughout the year. Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) as the "Sabbath of the Sabbaths," is the only fast day which is explicitly stated in the Torah. Fasting as a means of repentance, on this most important day of the Jewish year, is mandatory for every Jewish male above the age of bar mitzvah (13 years) and every Jewish female above the age of bat mitzvah (12 years).

The second major day of fasting is Tisha B'Av, the day in 70 AD on which the Romans destroyed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and the Jews were exiled from their homeland. The purpose of this fasting is mourning. The remaining four fasts are considered minor. It is customary for a bride and groom to fast on their wedding day before the ceremony as the day represents a personal Yom Kippur. On Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), according to Jewish belief, God makes judgment for each one, and on Yom Kippur, "judgement is sealed". Fasting, always accompanied by a suppliant prayer, serves to express humility before God: fasting is equivalent to "humiliating one's soul".

Christianity

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your father who is in secret; and your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you".

Matthew 6 :16-18

In this sermon, Jesus Christ uses phrases like: "When you give," "When you pray" and "When you fast." He expects that his audience will give, will pray, and will fast which is neither an option nor an oddity. Fasting is a given.

Fasting, according to the Bible, means to voluntarily reduce or eliminate intake of food for a specific time and purpose. In the biblical context, humans abstain from eating for a whole day (Judge 20:26) and, on being hungered, fed with manna (a unique food unknown to them and their ancestors) (Deuteronomy 8:3). This deprivation is a religious act. Jesus Christ himself fasted during his victory over temptation. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up, he was hungry. Luke 4:2 (Msg).

The fasting is neither simply going hungry nor a practice of dieting. It should be for a specific objective. It must be accompanied by prayers. In fact, fasting is part of a group of spiritual disciplines that, include prayer, mortification of the passions, practicing humility, almsgiving, controlling the tongue, [30].

According to Daniel 9:3 *"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes"*. This is returning to the Lord in an attitude of dependence and total abandonment. Same is the situation described in Judges 20:26 when all people humbled before the Lord in extremely distressed situation.

Islam

"The fast is to say 'Dear God, I love food, I love drink, I love to fulfill my desire. But I love you more, So I give up what I love for what you love."

Yasmin Mogahed (born 1980) - Author of "Reclaim your Heart"

Fasting, one of the pillars of Islam, is a practice of resistance and a spiritual readiness in self-development. It is an obligatory practice during the holy month of Ramadan, from fajr (dawn), until maghrib (sunset). The Muslims are prohibited from eating, drinking, smoking, and engaging in sexual activity while fasting. By fasting, the Muslims draw closer to God by abandoning the things they enjoy, such as food and drink. This makes the sincerity of their faith and their devotion to God all the more evident. The Quran states that fasting was prescribed for those before them (i.e., the Jews and the Christians) and that

by fasting a Muslim gains taqwa, which can be described as the care taken by a person to do everything God has commanded and to keep away from everything that He has forbidden. Muslims believe that fasting is more than abstaining from food and drink. It also includes abstaining from any falsehood in speech and action, from any ignorant and indecent speech, and from arguing and fighting, and lustful thoughts. Therefore, fasting helps develop good behavior. Fasting also inculcates a sense of fraternity and solidarity, as Muslims feel and experience what their needy and hungry brothers and sisters feel [2]. However, even the poor, needy, and hungry participate in the fast. Moreover, Ramadan is a month of giving charity and sharing meals to break the fast together. When Imam Sadegh was asked for the philosophy of fasting, the reply was: *"Indeed, God obliged fasting to equalize between the poor and the rich"*. The response to a similar question from Imam Askari was *"God has made fasting compulsory so that the rich shall find the pain of hunger, so they have a mercy upon the poor."*

There are also other days in the Islamic calendar on which fasting is recommended but not compulsory. These include the first and last Thursday of each month, Mondays, 13th, 14th and 15th day of each month, six days after end of Ramadan, first 10 days of Dhul-Hijjah (12th Month of Islamic Calendar).

CONCLUSION

"What would happen if the principles of fast day and the fast offering were observed throughout the world? The hungry would be fed, the naked clothed, the homeless sheltered. ... A new measure of concern and unselfishness would grow in the hearts of people everywhere."

Gordon Bitner Hinckley (1910-2008)

15th President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [31].

Fasting, an ancient ritual of worship, disciplines the body and soul and has existed in various forms in all religions. This divine command is an effective tool in setting boundaries for self-restraint. It is much more than usually thought abstinence from edibles; rather *"When you fast, your ears, eyes, hair, skin, and all your limbs should also fast."* It aims in compliance with the commands of God Almighty while keeping away from His prohibitions, developing self-discipline, forbearance, and righteousness. The fasting created by divine wisdom should not be practiced just "going hungry," rather it should be accompanied by repentance, supplicant prayers and developing sense of empathy for those under-privileged. The commitment in making positive change in the personality and purification of body and soul harmonize the inner and outer spheres of an individual.

"The hidden sweetness in the stomach's emptiness," as one of the oldest therapeutic strategies, is well known to the health carers since pre-history. Later on the fasting was recognized as *"the greatest remedy, the physician within," "nature's*

restorer," "the operation without surgery". With the advancement of our understanding of cell biology, the effective role of fasting through autophagy was highlighted. Most recently, fasting has been suggested to be complementary therapy to immunization, for boosting immunity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses great appreciation to Dr. Abdul Wajid Siddiqui for his insightful suggestions and stimulating discussions, throughout the conduct of this study.

Dr. Murad Ahmad Khan deserves special thanks for his constructive critiques for the enhancement of manuscript quality.

Competing Interests

The author declares that he has no direct and indirect financial, commercial, personal/career affiliation with the article, counting any individually held viewpoint that are relevant to his work, to disclose.

REFERENCES

1. Botros SM. The Spirituality of Fasting" by HH Pope Shenouda HH III—Dar El Tebaa El Kawmia Press -Revised Edition 1997
2. New World Encyclopedia- Fasting.
3. Jeûne genevois. Geneva through ages. 2023.
4. Guelpa G, Marie econtrol'epilepsieparladesintoxicationetparlareductionaltime ntaire. Rev Ther Med Chir. 1911; 78; 8-13.
5. Kim JM. Ketogenic Diet: Old Treatment, New Beginning. Clin. Neurophysiol. Pract. 2017; 2: 161-162.
6. Fang Y, Gu Y, Zhao C, Yagi LV, Qian J, Zhu L, et al. Impact of supervised beego, a traditional Chinese water-only fasting, on thrombosis and haemostasis. BMJ Nutrition. Prevention & Health. 2021; 0.
7. Dewey EH. The True Science of Living: The New Gospel of Health, Practical and Physiological"—Norwich Conn, The Henry Bill Publishing Company London, England 1895.
8. Sedwick C, Yoshinori Ohsumi. Autophagy from Beginning to End- J Cell Biol. 2012; 197: 164-165
9. Bagherniya M, Butler AE, Barreto GE, Sahebkar A. The effect of fasting or calorie restriction on autophagy induction: a review of the literature. Ageing Res Rev. 2018; 47: 183-197.
10. Horne BD, May HT, Muhlestein JB, Le VT, Bair TL, Knowlton KU, et al. Association of periodic fasting with lower severity of COVID-19 outcomes in the SARS-CoV-2 prevaccine era: an observational cohort from the INSPIRE registry. BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health 2022; 0: e000462.
11. Dewan eShams— Ganjoor : Moulana : Ghazaliat in " Ghazal" issue 1739
12. Poetry Chaikhana | Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi – Fasting. 2023.
13. Malinowski B, Zalewska K, Węsierska A, Sokołowska MM, Socha M, Licznar G, et al. Intermittent Fasting in Cardiovascular Disorders-An Overview. Nutrients. 2019; 11: 673.
14. Mattson MP, Longo VD, Harvie M. Impact of intermittent fasting on health and disease processes. Ageing Res Rev. 2017; 39: 46-58.
15. Carter S, Clifton PM, Keogh JB. Effect of intermittent compared with continuous energy restricted diet on glycemic control in patients with type 2 diabetes: a randomized noninferiority trial. JAMA Netw Open. 2018; 1: e180756.

16. Drinda S, Grundler F, Neumann T. Effects of periodic fasting on fatty liver index—a prospective observational study. *Nutrients*. 2019; 11: E2601.
17. Harvie MN, Pegington M, Mattson MP, Frystyk J, Dillon B, Evans G, et al. The effects of intermittent or continuous energy restriction on weight loss and metabolic disease risk markers: a randomized trial in young overweight women. *Int J Obes (Lond)*. 2011; 35: 714-727.
18. Salehi M, Neghab M. Effects of fasting and a medium calorie balanced diet during the holy month Ramadan on weight, BMI and some blood parameters of overweight males. *Pak J Biol Sci*. 2007; 10: 968-971.
19. Lesson N, Ali. Energy Metabolism and Intermittent Fasting: The Ramadan Perspective-*Nutrients*. 2019; 11: 1192.
20. Hajek P, Myers K, Dhanji AR, West O, McRobbie H. Weight change during and after Ramadan fasting. *J Public Health (Oxf)*. 2012; 34: 377-381.
21. Fahrial Syam A, Suryani Sobur C, Abdullah M, Makmun D. Ramadan Fasting Decreases Body Fat but Not Protein Mass. *Int J Endocrinol Metab*. 2016; 14: e29687.
22. Rahbar AR, Safavi E, Rooholamini M, Jaafari F, Darvishi S, Rahbar A. Effects of Intermittent Fasting during Ramadan on Insulin-like Growth Factor-1, Interleukin 2, and Lipid Profile in Healthy Muslims. *Int J Prev Med*. 2019; 10: 7.
23. Faris "M'A-I"E, Kacimic S, Al-Kurd RA, Fararjehd MA, Bustanjic YK, Mohammad MK. Intermittent fasting during Ramadan attenuates proinflammatory cytokines and immune cells in healthy subjects. *Nutr Res*. 2012,
24. Joshi AS,Varthakavi PK, Bhagwat NM, Chadha MD, Parmar G. Fasts, feasts, and festivals in diabetes: Glycemic management during Parsi rituals- *Indian J Endocrinol Metab*. 2015; 19: 680-682.
25. Home Office (Official)—Hindu fasting in the workplace: An awareness guide for staff and managers- at hinduconnection@homeoffice.gov.uk.
26. Gangele P, Paliwal M. Upavasa (fasting) for health & longevity: an overview- *CellMed*. 2020; 10: 1-5
27. Gaikwad ST. Apprehending Concept, Canons and Types of Fasting in Buddhism- *Int J Innovative Res Creative Technology*- 2017; 2: 164-168.
28. Front Desk.Why do the Jains fast? 2023.
29. Sikhiwiki – Why is Guruji against fasting? 2023.
30. Corn K(Editor) – “Fasting in the Jewish Tradition” in “Fasting and Feasting in Three Traditions:Judaism, Christianity, Islam: Interfaith Conversations” Booklet 1–University of Indianapolis. 2006: 5-6.
31. Hinckley GB. “The State of the Church. 2023.