

## **Fasting in Christianity**

The subject of fasting in Christianity is very difficult to discuss, simply because Christianity as a whole is very short on religious laws. Besides, there is fundamental disagreement among the scholars to whether Jesus (saas) commanded fasting. Fasting in Christianity seems to have evolved with time and is affected by social, political, and economic factors.

Jesus (saas) fasted 40 days before starting his mission. It is possible that he fasted on the Day of Atonement, which was an established tradition in Judaism. By the 4th century, there was no sign of 40 days of fasting in Christianity. There are traditions of fasting which differ greatly according to the country in which Christians live. The fast in Rome is different from the fast in Alexandria. Some abstain from meat, while others from fish and birds. Some will not eat fruits and eggs; some just fast on white bread. Some will abstain from all the above. Certain days had been made for fasting in later centuries to commemorate some events, such as the life of Jesus. There was a fast for three days in English law. During the time of Edward VI, James I, and the Elizabethan period, meat was prohibited during the fast, and James justified that saying:

“The fishing industry and maritime commerce must become encouraged and it must be profitable.” (Arkanul Arba'ah by Abul Hasan Nadwi)

This is why when Allah prescribed fasting, He says:

**“O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may (learn) self restraint.”**

(Al-Qur'an, 2:184)

# Bidding the Month Farewell

Allah (SWT) has mandated on us three acts to observe at the end of Ramadan.

*Zakatul-Fitr, Takbeer, and 'Eid Prayer*

## **Takbeer**

Allah has ordained upon the believers the utterance of *takbeer*, “Allah is the Greatest,” at the conclusion of the month, Ramadan. Takbeer should start on the eve of 'Eid at sunset, and it continues until the time of 'Eid prayer. Allah (SWT) said:

**“...And complete the prescribed period and glorify Allah in that He has guided you and perchance you shall be grateful.”**

(Al-Qur`an, 2:185)

The takbeer, Allah is the Greatest, is a superlative form indicating there is nothing in the creation that is bigger or greater than Allah. Everything in creation, things, ideas, institutions and planes, etc., pale into insignificance in the sight of Allah. This utterance is the believer's victory and national anthem upon the forces of evil, low desires, and our faith affirmation, song of obedience, and gratitude to Allah (SWT). Takbeer is always said when a Muslim reaches the summit, physical or spiritual, as in the completion of fast at the end of Ramadan. It takes greatness and remarkable inner strength to win one against the forces of evil, and the greatness goes to Allah.

## **The Formula for Takbeer**

*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar La illaha illa llah Allahu Akbar Allahu Akbar Wa lillahil hamd.*

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest. There is no deity worthy of worship but Allah, and Allah is greatest. Allah is the Greatest and all praise is due to Allah.

It is recommended for men to say the takbeer loud in the Masjid, homes, and market places as a sign of glorification of Allah, and expression of our gratitude and worship to Him. Women, however, should say it silently. Wouldn't it be excellent to see that the Muslim environment is charged with the glorification of Allah? Instead of neon lights, and outdoor decorations, and honking the horns of cars, Takbeer is our outward sign of the festivity.

The 'Eidul - Fitr is another important obligation after Ramadan and Sunnah of the Prophet. The details of this Eid can be found in the book "*The Prescribed Prayer Made Simple.*"

# The Battle of Badr

Ramadan is a source of spiritual as well as physical inspiration for Muslims. Physically, no month in our history has been more charitable and generous with victories than the month of Ramadan. One of the more remarkable examples is the Badr campaign (Battle of Badr). This was a battle in which the forces of truth, numbering 300 men against all odds, defeated an army three times their size. Badr is the name of a rural city about 150 miles from Madinah.

The day of the battle was named the Day of Criterion, *Yawmul Furqaan*, for Allah set apart the distinction between truth and falsehood by aiding His Messenger and the believers against all odds, and abandoning the unbelievers. All this took place in the month of Ramadan, in the second year of Hijrah. The reason for this encounter was purely coincidental. The Messenger of Allah (saas) was informed that his old antagonist and leader of the Quraysh, Abu Sufyan, was returning from Shaam (Northern Arabia) to Makkah with many camels in a large caravan.

The Messenger called upon his companions to intercept and confiscate the caravan which contained merchandise for Quraysh businessmen and women. The reason was because the Quraysh were in a state of war with the new ummah in Madinah, and because the Quraish had appropriated the wealth of the companions who were forced to flee Makkah because of their faith in Islam and suffer merciless persecution at the hand of Makkans. Furthermore, there was no treaty of nonbelligerence between the two parties.

Undoubtedly, the Muslims had every right to seize the contents of the caravan. Thus, the Messenger and the companions marched out of Madinah with 310 men with two horses and the 70 camels. Seventy of the men were *muhajireen* (immigrants

from Makkah), and the rest were *ansaar* (the helpers from Madinah). Their objective was to capture the caravan. They did not intend to fight. But Allah, in His own will and wisdom determined otherwise, Allah (SWT) stated

**“That Allah might accomplish a matter already enacted.”**

(Al-Qur`an, 8:44)

Abu Sufyan knew that he was being tailed so he dispatched a messenger to Makkah to inform them of the impending doom of their caravan, and urged them to swift action. Meanwhile, he drove the caravan off the desert's main highway and took a safer but longer coastal route instead, and escaped. The Quraysh, on the other hand, upon receiving this alarming news called for a general declaration of war.

The Quraysh were mighty and heavily prepared. Immediately, 1000 strong men were enlisted, including their warlords and generals. They amassed 100 horses and 700 camels. Their objective was to show off. Allah (SWT) stated:

**“And be not like those who started from their homes insolently and to be seen by men and to hinder (people) from the path of Allah...”**

(Al-Qur`an, 8: 47)

The army included singers to sing ill of the Muslims and dance at their defeat. When Abu Sufyan knew of their setting out, he sent them a message that the caravan had escaped, and that there was no need for the Quraysh to continue the journey, and urged them to return to Makkah and not to fight. The war-mongers of the Quraysh refused to heed Abu Sufyan's call and insisted on continuing. The head of the pack, Abu Jahl (the Father of Ignorance), was reported as saying:

“By Allah, we will not return until we reach Badr, spend three days there, slaughter camels, eat and drink wine and

liquor, and let the Arabs hear about us so they will continue to fear us forever.”

As for the Messenger (saas), when he learned that the Quraysh were heading towards Madinah, gathered his companions and sought their counsel in this grave matter. He told them,

**“Allah has promised me one of two groups, either the caravan or the army.”**

Al-Miqdad bin Aswad (raa) stood up to represent the *muhajireen*, and said:

**“O Messenger of Allah, proceed with what Allah (SWT) commanded you. By Allah, we will not say to you what the Israelites said to their Prophet Musa: ‘Go thou and thy lord and fight ye two while we sit here and watch.’ Instead we will fight on your right, on your left, in your front and on your rear.”**

The head of Al-Aws, Sad bin Mu`aadh (raa), spoke on behalf of the ansaar, saying:

**“O Messenger of Allah, I hope you are not afraid that ansaar will not see it incumbent upon them to join you unless the enemy is in their homes. I would like to say on behalf of the ansaar: ‘Go wherever you wish, connect the rope of whoever you wish, break the rope of whoever you wish, take from our wealth whatever you desire, give us out of it whatever you wish, whatever you take from us is better for us than what you left, whatever you command of us we shall obey you. By Allah, if you decide to travel and take us with you until you reach the pool of Ghamdan, we will travel with you. If you ask us to cross a sea and you cross it we will cross it with you. We are not afraid to meet the enemy tomorrow. We are patient in war, truthful in the battlefield.**

**Perhaps Allah will show you in us what will please your eyes.’ ”**

The Messenger of Allah (saas) was delighted with what he heard from both the *muhajireen* and *ansaar* (raa). He said,

**“Go delightfully forward. By Allah, it is as if I am looking at the death places of the people.”**

The Messenger of Allah (saas) proceeded with the army of the Most Gracious until they camped at a well among the wells of Badr. When they were about to settle down, Al-Hubab bin Al-Mindhir Bin `Amru bin Jamuh (raa) asked:

**“O Messenger of Allah, this place we settled in, is it a place Allah commanded us to camp in whereby we can not leave it? Or is it your idea of war strategy and tactics?”**

The Messenger replied,

**“It is my own idea of war strategy and tactics.”**

He counselled

**“O Messenger of Allah, this is not a suitable place. Let us move to the well nearest to our enemy and settle down there while we cover up all the wells behind us with sand and palm trunks. We then should build on it a trough and fill it with our drinking water and they will not have any to drink.”**

The Messenger liked the idea; he moved to the lower side with the city of Medinah at their back, and the Quraysh took the side that faced Makkah.

On the eve of the battle, Allah sent a mysterious rain. On the side of the Quraish it fell heavily. It soaked everything and created very slippery muddy conditions, making it difficult for the enemy's army to move forward. Whereas on the side of the

Muslims, it was a light drizzle that refreshed them and cemented the sand and stabilized their movement.

The believers built a war booth on a hill overlooking the battlefield for their commander in chief, the Messenger of Allah (saas). He came down from the booth to straighten the lines of his companions and as he walked over the field he pinpointed the death spots of the enemy soldiers, he prophesied:

**“This is where so and so will fall, Allah willing; this is where so and so will fall.”**

When the battle was over none of these people missed where they were supposed to fall and die, as the Messenger had pointed out before the war.

The Messenger then looked at his companions and at the Quraysh and said:

**“O Allah the Quraysh came with their vain glory, and boasting, and horses daring You, belying Your Messenger. O Allah, grant me Your assistance that You promised me. O Allah, accomplish for me that which You promised me. O Allah, I remind You of Your promise and Your decree. O Allah, if You willed You would never be worshipped. O Allah, If this army is defeated today You will never be worshipped.”**

Muslims sought help from Allah and He answered them, as He stated:

**“Remember thy Lord inspired the angels (with the message): ‘I am with you, give firmness to the believers I will instill terror into the hearts of the unbelievers, smite ye all their fingers-tips off them. This because they contended against Allah and His Apostle. If any contend against Allah and His apostle, Allah is strict in punishment.’ ”**



(Al-Qur`an, 8: 12-13)

The two armies met in a fierce battle. The fighting intensified and went on and on. The Messenger was in his war camp and with him was Abu Bakr and Sa`ad bin Mu`aadh guiding him. The Messenger in the meantime, was praying Allah for help and victory. He napped for a little while and woke up to encourage the Muslims and to promise:

**“Nay, the hour of Judgement is the time promised them, for their Hour will be Most grievous and most bitter.”**

(Al-Qur`an, 54: 46)

He encouraged his companions to fight, and said:

**“I swear by the One in whose hand Muhammad's soul is, any man who fights them today and is killed while he is patient in the ordeal and seeks the pleasure of Allah, going forward and not backing off, Allah will enter him into Paradise.”**

`Umair bin Himaam Al-Ansaari (raa) stood up with a few dates in his hand and was about to eat them, and asked:

**“O Messenger of Allah, a paradise whose width is like the width of heavens and earth?” The Messenger responded: “Yes.” `Umair said: ‘Bakhin! Bakhin! (indicating strong appreciation and acceptance) O Messenger of Allah, there is nothing between me and paradise except to be killed by these people. If I live to eat these dates that will be a long life.”**

Then he threw the dates away and fought until he was killed.

The Messenger (saas) took a handful of sand or stones and threw them at the enemy soldiers and no one was hit by this sand but blinded them and or it preoccupied them. This was a divine intervention from Allah. The enemy soldiers could not

fight after that and they were defeated. The remaining soldiers flew from the battlefield in all directions and the Muslims went after them. Seventy of them were killed and seventy were taken as prisoners of war.

Twenty four of the dead were the warlords of the Quraysh whom, the Messenger ordered to be thrown into a well. They included the arch-infidel, Abu Jahl, Ahaibah bin Rabee`ah and his brother `Utbah and his son Al-Waleed bin `Utbah. Abdullah bin Mas`ud (raa) reported that the Messenger (saas) faced the Ka`abah and prayed over these four and said:

**“I bear witness that I saw them dead. The sun has changed their appearance because it was a hot day.”**

After the war the Messenger (saas) stayed at Badr for three days, and as he was riding his horse, on the third day, he pulled away where he came to the edge of a well. He stood and started to call the dead among the enemies by their full names and the names of their fathers.

**“O so and so, the son of such and such, are you happy that you have disobeyed Allah and His Messenger, for we found what Allah promised us in truth have you found what Allah promised you in truth?”. `Umar (raa) and many companions, inquired in astonishment, “O Messenger of Allah, why do you speak to bodies that have no souls?”** The Messenger replied: **“I swear by the One in whose hand Muhammad's soul is, you do not hear what I say more than they do.”**

As for the prisoners of war, the Messenger asked his companions their opinions. Sa`ad bin Mu`aadh (raa) commented:

**“This is the first defeat for the polytheists. I would have preferred the continuation of the battle than to have taken men as prisoners of war.”** `Umar bin Khattab (raa) said: **“I think that it would have been better to allow us**