





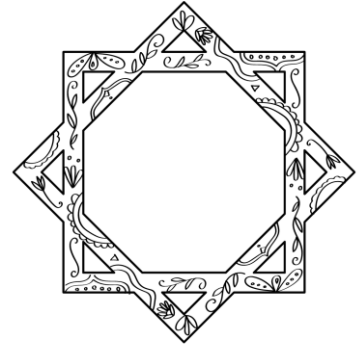
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DAY 3

“LEVELS OF FASTING PART II- LEVEL THREE”



Shaykh Muhammad continues to describe the levels of Fasting based on Imaam Al Ghazali’s (RA) classification system. As explained in Part I, Islam as a whole is based on three dimensions—Islam, Imaan, and Ihsaan. In today’s message, Shaykh Muhammad discusses the third level as it relates to Fasting.

(Opening Du’a)

As Salaamu ‘Alaykum wa Rahmatullahi Ta’aala wa Barakaatuh. I once again greet all of you with the greetings of Islam. We Praise and Thank Allah (SWT) that, once again, He has given us an opportunity to share what we wish to share.

We are following from our previous topic where we spoke about the first two levels of Fasting as per Imaam Al Ghazali’s (RA) classification of the Three Levels of Fasting which are related to the Stations of the Deen. (SOURCE 1)

So, before we carry on with that last portion of the third level, or the third degree, which is also referred to as the highest form or the highest level of Fasting, I would like to just reiterate the tradition of the Prophet (SAW) from the Hadith of Jibra’il (AS), which is a Hadith Al Qudsi, concerning the three Stations of Islam: the first being **[1]** the Station of Islam and the second being **[2]** the Station of Imaan. So, today we just want to focus on the third Station, **[3]** the Station of Ihsaan. So, we will look at the Fasting regarding how it is related to the Station of Ihsaan.

So, Rasulullah (SAW) was asked by Jibra’il (AS) in this tradition, “Inform me about Ihsaan.” So, Rasulullah (SAW) said:

It is to worship Allah as though you see Him, and if you are unable to worship Him like that, then at least know that He is seeing you. (Sahih Al Bukhari and Sahih Muslim)

So now, this is the Station of Ihsaan, which is also referred to as Excellence. It is also referred to as the Station of Muraaqabah (Observation) because the Maqaam, or the Station, of Ihsaan entails three Levels, as per the teaching of Shaykh Al Islam, Shaykh Ibrahim (RA). Shaykh Ibrahim (RA) has mentioned in his book Sa’aadat Al Anam (SOURCE 2) that the Station of Ihsaan, has also got three Manaazil, Stations or Degrees, itself. And the first of these is the Station of **[1]** Muraaqabah, which literally means To Observe. This is followed by the next higher Station which is **[2]** Mushaahadah, which literally means To Witness. This is followed by the last Manzil (Station) of that Degree of Ihsaan, which is **[3]** Ma’arifatun Billaahi, meaning the Knowledge of Allah. Meaning the Knowledge that enables one to have the full awareness of Allah. Allah mentions this Knowledge in the Holy Qur’an:

Ask those that are Aware (people who possess the knowledge of Him) concerning Him. (Qur'an 25:59)

So, this is the domain of what is termed Tasawwuf (Sufism. A science within Islam concerned with Purification of the Nafs and Experiential Knowledge of Allah), and that's why we wish to single it out as a separate topic so that we can discuss it only on that level. But of course, there is nothing in Tasawwuf that is outside the circle of Qur'an and Sunnah. So, all of this is based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. So, that is really related to the concept of Divine Witnessing or to Witness the manifestations of Allah. Sayyiduna Shaykh Ahmad Tijani (RA) is quoted in the book the Jawahir Al Ma'aani (Source 3) when explaining the Hadith Al Qudsi where Rasulullah (SAW) said that Allah (SWT) said:

I am in the thought of My Slave. (Sahih Al Bukhari)

So, speaking on that, Shaykh Tijani (RA) is saying, the use of this language in this particular instance, to say that Allah is in the thought of a Slave, it is as if Allah is inside the thought of a Slave. But that is not really what is intended by that. But rather, this belongs to the category of expressions that are generally, according to the Ulamaa' of Mutakalimeen (Scholars of Speculative Theology), indirect Divine Expressions. Which, as Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, no one really understands these types of expressions,

...except Allah and those that are Deeply Rooted in Knowledge. (Qur'an 3:7)

I know that there is a difference of opinion among the Ulamaa' concerning this Aayah of the Holy Qur'an because, unfortunately, in the Qur'ans that we are reading, particularly here in South Africa and I know also in other Qur'ans that are printed in other regions particularly in Saudi, when you reach that Aayah in question that we talking about here, you will find that there is a comma that is placed right after the Name Allah. This Aayah is a very famous Aayah. This Aayah is very important in understanding the Divine Permission that is granted to those individuals who are termed by Allah himself as Ar Raskhuna fi Al 'Ilm, Those Who are Deeply Rooted in Knowledge. So, [going back a few lines], Allah explains that:

He is the One that has revealed upon you (meaning Oh Muhammad) the Book. And in it are Aayahs (which are very) clear. (Qur'an 3:7)

And these verses are known as Umm Al Kitaab, the Mother of the Book. But then there's other verses within this Book that the meanings are not as clear as the other category of the other Aayahs. Then you find those people with disease in their Hearts, then they follow the verses that they are not as clear as the other ones, seeking to make Fitna (Confusion) with them, and seeking to apply some Tawil, Interpretation. So, Allah recognises that not everyone is capable of interpreting these, because after that then He says:

Nobody knows the true interpretation of this, except Allah... (Qur'an 3:7)

Now, there is a difference of opinion when you read the history of this Aayah. The Mufasssirin (Scholars of Exegesis, who explain the Qur'an) are not in agreement with regards to why the comma is placed here in this Aayah. Among the Ulamaa', Shaykh Ibrahim (RA) discusses this point in It'haaf As Saami wa Ar Raawi (Source 4), which is a collection of Shaykh Ibrahim's (RA) Fataawaa (Islamic legal rulings, plural of Fatwa) and responses to questions that [his grandson and current Chief Imaam of the Grand Mosque of Medina Baye Kaolack, Senegal] Imaam Shaykh Tijani Cisse (RA) has compiled. Shaykh Ibrahim (RA) quotes various Ulamaa'

and says that this comma actually distorts the meaning of the Aayah. He says that there is no comma after the Divine Name Allah. That it should be translated “Nobody knows the true interpretation of this except Allah and those that are Deeply Rooted in Knowledge.”

So, I will just pause there on this Aayah, because I don't want to go into the academic debates about what the scholars of Kalaam (Speech), and the Muhaqiqeen (Knowers of Reality, literally Verifiers of Truth), and the Mutazilites (a sect within Islam which emphasized rationality), and all the different other groups within Islam had to say with regards to the Attributes of Allah (SWT). But this is just what I wanted to highlight. So, that's just the background in any case.

So, to witness Allah is something that is possible. But of course, it is not the witnessing as in with the eye of the flesh, but it's rather with the Heart or the spiritual witnessing. And this is what Imaam Al Ghazali (RA) refers to here in this section. That this Fasting is the Fasting of the Special Ones among the Special Ones. So, these ones are the Outstrippers who really go beyond what anyone can go beyond. So, they are at the level of Ihsaan, the level that the Prophet (SAW) referred to as to worship Allah as though you see Him and if you cannot see Him at least worship Him knowing that He sees you.

Now, when you look at the word Muraaqabah, which means To Observe in the Arabic language, this word is actually coming from a third base [in the scales of Arabic verbs] and all Arabic words that are derived from third base have a connotation and the meaning of indicating an action that comes from two sides. So, Muqatalah, or To Fight someone, or Muraaqabah, meaning To Observe. So, when you're observing Allah, also Allah observes you, and that's why the Rasul (SAW) says Ihsaan is to worship Allah as though you see Him. Meaning, try to observe Allah in your worship. Try to worship Allah and observe Him in your worship. And if you are unable to observe Him while you are worshipping Him, then you should know that He's already observing you. So, it is a two-way action. Now that is the meaning of the word Muraaqabah.

Now, of course, when someone is worshipping Allah on that level, then what it means is that you will try to do your best. It's like when you are writing a homework or a classwork in front of a teacher. How would you write? How would you behave yourself in your class when your teacher is watching you? Then, also, even when you are watching the teacher, you will even still behave very well because either he's watching you or you are watching the teacher. It will make you do that action in the best way possible. So, if you worship Allah witnessing Him at the same time, then your worship will be the best. And even when you are not able to see Him but if you are aware that He is seeing you, also it will be the best. Because, either way, you are still within the Station of Ihsaan. And that's why the Prophet (SAW) said it is to worship Allah as if you see Him and if you cannot do it, at least know that He sees you.

Now on to the next Station that I would like to mention. Shaykh Ibrahim (RA) in the Kashful Ilbaas, he quotes various statements of Ulamaa' among which is the statement that there are three types of people or, I would say, Believers. The first category is **[1]** the Anbiyaa' (Prophets) (ASWS) and the Awliyaa' of Allah (RAA). They see Allah before they see anything, meaning before they can witness anything they already see Allah before it. And then **[2]** the Saaliheen, the Pious people, which is the category lower than the Anbiyaa' (ASWS) and Awliyaa' (RAA) but also a Praiseworthy category of people, they see Allah in everything. Meaning whenever they see anything, already, they see Allah there, so they know that Allah is behind whatever they see. Then, the **[3]** Mu'mineen (Believers, plural of Mu'min), the General Populace among

the Muslims they see Allah after everything. Meaning they first see a thing, and then after that, they realize that, by the way, this is from Allah. Whereas the Saaliheen, at the time of whatever they see, they already witness Allah in it. And the Anbiyaa' (ASWS) and the Awliyaa' (RAA), before they even see anything, already they see Allah.

It's a very high Station to be in when you're always connected in the Presence of Allah. That's why Rasulullah (SAW) was also always described as "present and absent at the same time." He was present with the people, but at the same time, he was absent from them because he was already in the Presence of Allah. So, that is a very high Station to reach.

About Nabiy Ibrahim (AS) (the Prophet Abraham), in the Holy Qur'an Allah says:

We showed Ibrahim (AS) the signs of the Heavens and the Earth so that he may become from among those that have full conviction. (Qur'an 6:75)

Then Allah says, when Ibrahim saw a star he said, "This is my Lord." When the star set he said, "I do not like things that set." And then when he saw the moon with full brightness, he said "Now this is my Lord." And when it set, he said, "Oh, unless my Lord guides me, surely, I shall be among the people who are misguided." But then when he saw the sun he said, "This is my Lord and this one is the big one." (Paraphrased from Qur'an 6:76-78)

So anyway, it's an Aayah that is mentioned in Surah Al An'am. Allah talks about Nabiy Ibrahim (AS). Now the Awliyaa' (RAA) recognise this Aayah as one of those Aayahs in which Ibrahim (AS) was in this Station. Allah was exposing Ibrahim (AS) as being in the Station where, everywhere he turned he would see nothing but Allah. He would witness Allah. And it is possible. Yes, as we mentioned earlier on, it is possible to witness that, as confirmed by the Prophetic Hadith to worship Allah as though you see Him.

Even Allah Himself in the Holy Qur'an in Surah Al Baqarah, He says:

To Allah belongs the East and the West. Any direction you turn you will see nothing but the Face of Allah... (Qur'an 2:115)

Again, the word Face in this Aayah doesn't literally mean that Allah has a face like us because:

...Nothing is like unto Him... (Qur'an 42:11)

Nothing is like Allah. Allah has full Knowledge of everything. It's merely an indirect expression that contains certain meanings that is to be understood by Allah Himself alone and those people who are deeply rooted, they know exactly what this means.

And so, another example about the Awliyaa' is that of Khidr (AS) with Musa (AS) in the Holy Qur'an. Their encounter is also much to do with this Divine Manifestation being witnessed by a Waliy (Friend, singular form of Awliyaa') of Allah. Here Musa (AS) is asked to seek Khidr (AS) to learn from him because Khidr (AS) was from among those people who, before they see anything, they already see Allah, they already deal with Allah. He is not a Nabiy, he's just a normal Slave of Allah. But because of his Closeness and Nearness (Qurbah) to Allah (SWT), Allah even sent a prophet that is from among the Ulu Al Azm (The Great Prophets literally "The Possessors of Greatness") to go and learn from him some information, some Knowledge that he directly received from Allah.

So, Khidr (AS), as we know the story, if you're not familiar with the story you can revisit it in the Surah Al Kahf. In the last portion of the last half of Surah Al Kahf, Allah speaks about the great encounter between Musa (AS) and Khidr (AS). Where they rode on the boat. And, then Khidr (AS) broke a portion of the boat and Musa (AS) became upset at him for breaking someone else's property without any right. And then he also took away the life of a young boy and Musa (AS) was also upset at Khidr (AS). And then, ultimately, Khidr (AS) also built a wall which was falling apart after the people refused to give them hospitality, and Musa (AS) was also very upset at Khidr (AS) that they used their own resources they have for a people who denied hospitality when they sought some shelter when the night came.

So, Khidr's (AS) response to Musa (AS) indicates that he was somebody who was very much connected with Allah and who was also in the Presence of Allah all the time. Look at the different responses that he gives. In the first instance he says: "Aradtu, I Intended" to save the people of the boat from a king that was seizing boats." In the second instance, he says: "Aradna, we have Intended" [to prevent the youth that he had killed from growing up to become an impious person and leading his parents into Kufr (Disbelief) due to their love for him]. So, what does he mean when he says "we have Intended" because that was his sole decision that he was making? Then, in the third instance about building the wall and he says "Araada Rabbuka, your Lord Intended." Now, it becomes very clear about this person Who is actually Intending. The first one is Aradtu, the second one is Aradna, the third one is Araada Rabbuka. It has always been Allah, but it is presented in various different Stations or Maqaamaat. So, then it becomes very clear, he says "and your Lord Intended" that the wealth must be kept for this orphan for whom it was hidden by their late parents under the wall that was now about to fall down. As Allah mentions in the Holy Qur'an, the orphan's parents were people who were pious. So, he wished to preserve the wealth for the orphan as their parents had asked Allah to do it for the boy [before their death].

So just to view this from another perspective, let's look at Shaykh Ibrahim's (RA) Tafseer (Explanation of the Qur'an) of the beginning of Surah Al Baqarah where Allah mentions that one of the Qualities of the Believers that they are those people

Who Believe in the unseen... (Qur'an 2:3)

Shaykh Ibrahim (RA) says "As for the unseen it is of two kinds. The unseen that it is absent from you. And then the other one is the unseen that you are absent from it." (SOURCE 5). So, these are the two kinds of the unseen worlds. One is that of the Malaa'ikah, we know that they are there, and the Akhirah (Hereafter), we know that it is there, but we cannot see it because it has displayed itself from a perspective where we are unable to witness it. But as for the unseen that is there, but you are the one that is absent from it, that is the presence of Allah which is everywhere, but because you are absent from it so you cannot see it.

And Allah makes this very clear in the Holy Qur'an when He says in Surah Al Waaqi'a referring to a person who is dying:

We are closer to him than you...

Meaning "you" people that are seated around the person whose soul is departing, We are closer to him than you:

...but you cannot see. (Qur'an 56:85)

When you look at the word used here for see, Basara, it is a physical seeing. So, Allah does not say “but you do not know,” as if you should know that He is there. No, He said you do not “see.” meaning that “you should be seeing Me, but you are not seeing because you are absent from My Presence.” And so that Aayah makes it very clear as well, just to speak about that.

So, I thought that I would just mention these concepts before we go into the text of Imaam Al Ghazali’s (RA) Ihyaa’ ‘Ulum Ad Deen when he mentions about the third Station of Fasting, which is the Fasting of the Special Ones among the Special Ones. So, it’s not an ordinary Station of Fasting. But I hope that this will give some sort of background as to why Imaam Al Ghazali (RA) actually mentions this as the Fasting of the Special Ones among the Special Ones.

So, when he begins that section he says, that is the Fasting of the Heart from all the low ambitions and all the thoughts that are of this world. And to thoroughly prevent it from anything that is other than Allah (AWJ) in its totality. Meaning, you completely remove your thoughts and empty your Mind from any form of anything that is low or anything that is of Dunyaa (the World) except only Allah (AWJ). So, you empty your Heart, you empty your Mind, you only stay connected with the Presence of Allah (AWJ).

So, he says the breaking of this type of Fasting will occur as soon as a thought that is other than Allah enters a person's Mind, a person's Heart. As well as, as soon as you lose focus on the life hereafter. Meaning, your existence should always be focused on what is coming after, not focused on the life of this world. But what is coming after? Of course, what is coming after, the hereafter, is Paradise. But what is greater than that even, it is Allah (AWJ) Himself. Because that is what people await for the most.

And also, any form of thought that is of the Dunyaa will break the Fast of that person, except if it was connected with that which is of the Dunyaa which will be aiding you in your Deen or make you return back to your Deen. Because that is from among the provisions of the Akhirah if you have a thought like that, however it will not be from the Dunyaa, to an extent.

But even with that, Imaam Al Ghazali (RA) says that the people who are really masters of this Science of the Heart caution about the one who's Himma (Determination/Aspiration) drives him to move out and about during the day in order that he plans with his movement that at the end of the day, ultimately, he will be able to break his Fast. So, he engages his Himma to things that he knows that, ultimately, by the end of the day, he will manage to get whatever he gets from his movements during the day so that he may break his Fast. Imaam Al Ghazali (RA) says, a sin will even be recorded for such a person.

Of course, this refers to the Maqaam of Khassatil Khassati, the Special ones from among the Special Ones. Because this indicates lack of complete reliance on Allah, because it means you were then slightly divorced away from your Master, and so you did not rely upon Him. Of course, this does not mean that one should sit around and not do anything and expect that Allah will just send provision for him. No, you still carry on with your provisions, but to not make the provisions the end of everything whereby it even means to sacrifice yourself, or to sell your soul, or to sell out Islam or Allah (AWJ), or by any means necessary, even if it means disobeying Allah, then you achieve your end. No, no, no, no. You still have to put in the effort. So, that is not to be understood in that light.

And then he says, this will also indicate the lack of certainty with the sustenance that Allah (SWT) has already promised every creature. So, they must have full Yaqeen (Certainty). A person in this Maqaam can never be thought of as somebody who doesn't have Yaqeen.

Now, Yaqeen, as is known by the people of this science, is of three kinds. It is **[1]** the 'Ilm Al Yaqeen, the Knowledge of Certainty, and **[2]** the 'Ain Al Yaqeen, the Witnessing of Certainty, and **[3]** the Haqq Al Yaqeen, the Experiential Knowledge of Certainty. So, one is required to have that Yaqeen. Yaqeen is basically Knowledge of Surety. It's like 'abantu abakholwa ngokubona,' the [isiZulu] saying, "seeing is believing" Allah describes these people in the beginning of Surah Al Baqarah. He says:

And concerning the Akhirah, they have full Yaqeen... (Qur'an 2:4)

So, it's like they know Akhirah as if they've been there before, that is how much certainty they have.

Shaykh Baye (HA) always explains the Yaqeen in this fashion. He says, it's like you hear somebody talking about a place called Johannesburg. And then everybody that you come across, they always talk about Johannesburg. That would be referred to as the 'Ilm Al Yaqeen, because you have met the people who talk about Johannesburg. Meaning they have been there. But then you decided that, no, just to know about it from people is not enough. So, let me just take a journey and go to Johannesburg. As you go to Johannesburg, you see Johannesburg from afar. Then that knowledge of 'Ilm Al Yaqeen becomes "Ayn Al Yaqeen because now you're witnessing Johannesburg. But your witnessing this knowledge of Yaqeen is still lower because you have not experienced what Johannesburg is like. You are seeing it, but you are not there yet. So, that is 'Ayn Al Yaqeen. And Haqq Al Yaqeen is when you actually arrive in Johannesburg, and you start seeing Johannesburg, and you experience Johannesburg itself. Now that is Haqq Al Yaqeen.

So, that is the level of Yaqeen that is desired from people in this Station. People of witnessing. People who know things for sure. Imaam Al Ghazali (RA) says this is the Station of Anbiyaa'. And of the Siddeeqeen, the Testifiers of Truth. This is the highest Maqaam, just one Rank below Nubuwwah (Prophethood). So, these are the Awliyaa' that really outstrip everybody else in the domain of Wilayah (Friendship with Allah). They are the people who are the real Siddeeqs (singular of Siddeeqeen). They have witnessed to whatever level required to witness the Truth until they are referred to as the Siddeeqeen. And the Muqarrabeen, the people who are very close to Allah (SWT).

Imaam Al Ghazali (RA) says, that they are turning all their Himmah with full force and their full might upon Allah (SWT) and nothing else but Him. And they are turning away from anything that is other than Allah (SWT) and thus living up to the meaning of this Aayah of the Holy Qur'an:

Say, "Allah," then leave them in their vain talks and amusement. (6:91)

You know, entertaining themselves. Just only say "Allah." Meaning only Allah, nothing else but Allah.

So, with this, I would like to conclude with the statement of Shaykh Ibrahim (RA) in one of his letters (SOURCE 5) he advises the Seekers and he says, "I advise you by connecting your Hearts with Allah, with the rest of all your movement, and all your stillness." It is an Arabic

expression that means in whatever condition you find yourself in, always be connected with Allah (SWT). Then he said, *“Be for Allah. He who is for Allah, Allah is for him.”*

If you be for Allah, Allah will be for you. So, that is a Station of the people who are the Special Ones among the Special Ones. If with whatever you have, you do it for the sake of Allah. Then Allah will be behind you with all that which He has, which is a very great exchange and a powerful one.

And then Shaykh Ibrahim (RA) says, “Remove entirely, all of creation from all of your dealings for Allah.” Just be for the sake of Allah. And then he says, clarifying that, in case if you didn't get that right, he says, “And know that even your own self is part of creation itself.” So, even remove yourself from everything. And then quotes the Aayah of the Qur'an where Allah says:

Say, Allah, then leave them in their vain talks and amusement. (Repeat Qur'an 6:91)

Or leave them in these things that really don't mean anything, because only Allah is the Reality.

So, we ask Allah (SWT) to give us the Fasting of the Special Ones among the Special Ones, over and above the staying away from food and drink and fulfilling our sexual desires with our spouses. And also, not just only to stay away from all these other things that we spoke about in the second level of Fasting, which is to Fast with all the “limbs” of our bodies, like the eyes, the seeing, the ears, the hearing, the hands, the feet, and the tongue. And using all of these only for the good things and to avoid to do those things that are blameworthy. Not just only those things, but to be in the Presence of Allah all the time, and to deal with Allah and only deal with Him. And to do everything for Him all the time and not even for our own selves, but we should do things only for the sake of Allah. And be for Allah all the time.

We ask Allah (SWT) to help us in this Journey, and place us in the category of this group of people. It's not an easy one but it's always good to try and attain to that Station. And to try to find somebody who can help us to reach it. As Allah (SWT) said in the Holy Qur'an:

Follow the Path of him who has turned himself to Me. (Qur'an 31:15)

So, that means go and seek somebody who has reached Allah already, as Allah confirmed in this Aayah, and follow that person. Because if you follow that person, definitely you will reach the destination, as he has already reached the destination.

(Closing Du'a and Greeting)

SOURCES

The Holy Qur'an

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SOURCE 2-Sa'aadat Al Anam, Shaykh Al Islam Ibrahim ibn Al Hajj 'Abdullahi Niasse

SOURCE 3-Jawahir Al Ma'aani (Collected Teachings of Shaykh Abu Al 'Abbaas Ahmad Tijani), by Shaykh 'Ali Harazim ibn Al 'Arabi Barraadah Al-Fasi

SOURCE 4-It'haaf As Saami wa Ar Raawi, by Imaam Shaykh Ahmad Tijani Ali Cisse

SOURCE 5-Jawahir Ar Rasa'il, by Shaykh Al Islam Ibrahim ibn Al Hajj 'Abdullahi Niasse