

Q) Describe the philosophy of fasting in Islam. Describe its social, moral and spiritual impacts. Explain how it can help in purity of self (Tazkia-e-Nafs)

1) What is fasting:

Fast is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word, faest, which means firm or fixed. In Islam, fasting refers to the practice of abstaining from food and drink for a definite period of time. The underlying purpose of fasting is to develop spiritual discipline and self control in a person. Fasting in Ramadan has been made obligatory on Muslims. Fasting is a really important religious obligation and also a pillar of Islam. The Holy Quran says in this regard:

"O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may learn self-restraint"
[Surah Al-Baqara: 183]

2) How is a Fast Observed:

During fast, Muslims are prohibited from eating or drinking between the prescribed time from dawn (fajr) to dusk (maghrib). The Muslims start their fast upon the Azan [ie call to prayer] at fajr time, after having suhoor, which is also a sunnah of Prophet ^{Pbuh}. The fast is then opened at the Azan of maghrib, usually with dates as this was done by the

Prophet ^{Pbuh} himself.

3) Conditions for Fasting:

Fasting is made compulsory of all the muslims who are deemed physically fit, however there are certain cases where the individual is exempted from fasting.

3.2) People exempted from fasting:

Certain individual are exempted from fasting. These include travellers, the sick, pregnant woman and those women who are undergoing menstrual bleeding.

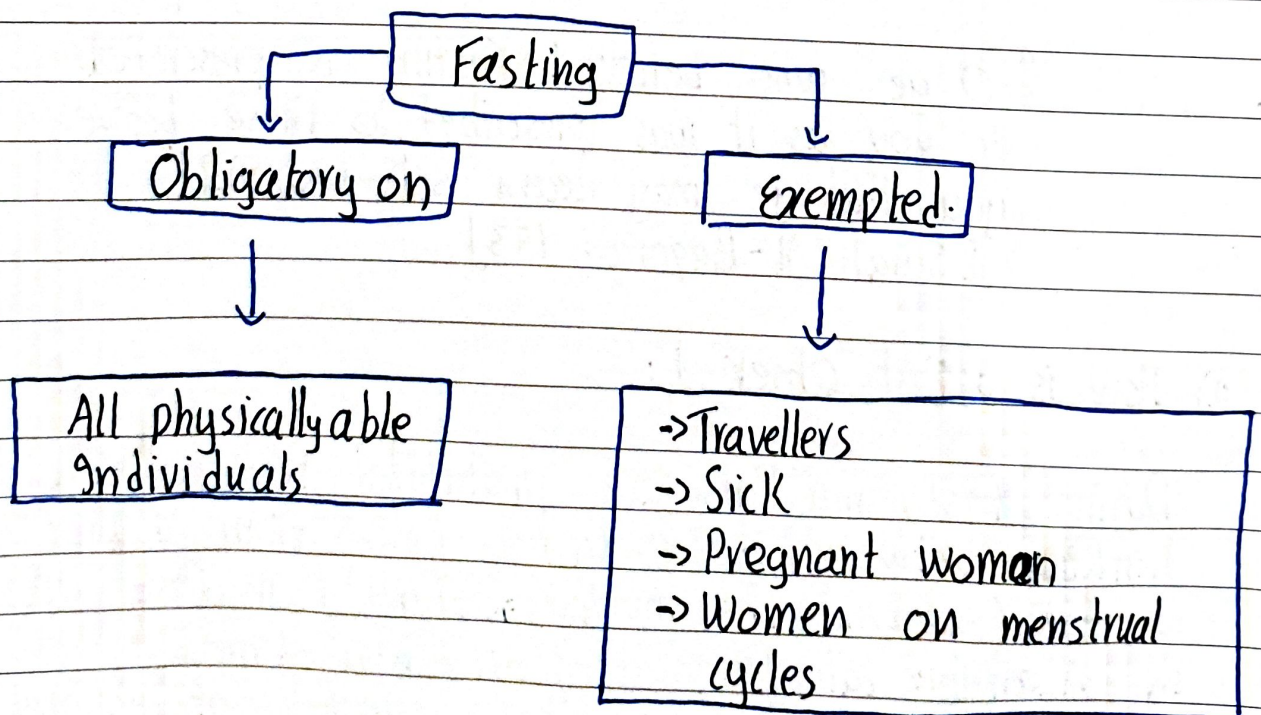


Figure: an overview of exemptions from fasting

The Quran says:

"The month of Ramadan is the one in which the Quran was revealed as guidance for mankind, and as clear signs that the right way and distinguish between right and wrong. So those who witness the month must fast in it. But the one who is sick, or is on a journey (should fast) as much as from other days (as he missed). Allah intends ease for you and does not intend (to create) hardships for you. All this is so that you may complete the number (of fasts prescribed) and proclaim the Takbir of Allah for having guided you, and (so) that you may be grateful" [Surah Al-Baqarah: 185]

The cited verse emphasises on the significance of fasting and also indicates that certain people ~~are~~ are exempted since Allah the Almighty does not wish to create hardships for people. These people, however, have to compensate for the fasts, by fasting on other days.

4) Impacts:

Fasting creates a huge impact on the life of an individual and also on the collective lives of a community

4.2) Moral Impacts:

Fasting is not just associated with

abstaining from food and drink as many believe, but the true purpose of fasting lies elsewhere. Many Muslims overlook the intended purpose, which is to promote righteousness that is the progressive ~~and~~ cultivation of spiritual values. The prophet Muhammad ^{Pbuh}, revealed the core reason for fasting in the following words:

"he who abstains from food or drink during the the period of fasting but does not strive to abstain and safeguard himself against moral lapses, starves for no purpose"

The mentioned hadith manifests and reinforces the true principles behind fasting, that is to build self-restraint in individuals and elevate their moral status. This practice of self-restraint, not only from food, but by shunning other other immoral activities that one previously indulged, helps them to enhance their moral values.

4.3 Social impacts :

The collective abstaining from food and drink and thereafter opening the fast together, creates a sense of unity. Muslims ^{start} believe that they are a part of something bigger. Moreover, the recommended act of opening fast with friends or family rather than alone, and praying the

congregation tarawih prayer, opens the opportunity to interact and with new people, strengthening the notion of brotherhood between muslims. Additionally, muslims are also instructed to be compassionate and forgiving towards others, as the prophet ^{Pbuh} stated:

"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".

Such practices alleviates the futile arguments and disputes among a society, eventually paving way for a better and peaceful environment.

Moreover, the practise of fasting, where an individual undergoes starvation and thirst, instills a feeling of gratitude towards Allah, and a sense of sympathy towards the less fortunate, who have to endure such difficulties on daily basis. As a result many muslims end up inclined towards helping the poor.

4.4 Spiritual Impacts:

The impacts of fasting extend all the way over to the spiritual realm. It is a

source of motivation that empowers one to pursue the path of good. When an individual forsakes immorality, solely for the purpose of Allah's pleasure, it strengthens their connection with the Almighty, eventually bringing them closer to the creator of worlds. Fasting also enhances the faith in Allah. When a fasting individual shuns evil and practice self restraint, they somewhat develop a habit of resisting evil, which ultimately relieves them of worldly desires, bringing them closer to Allah Almighty.

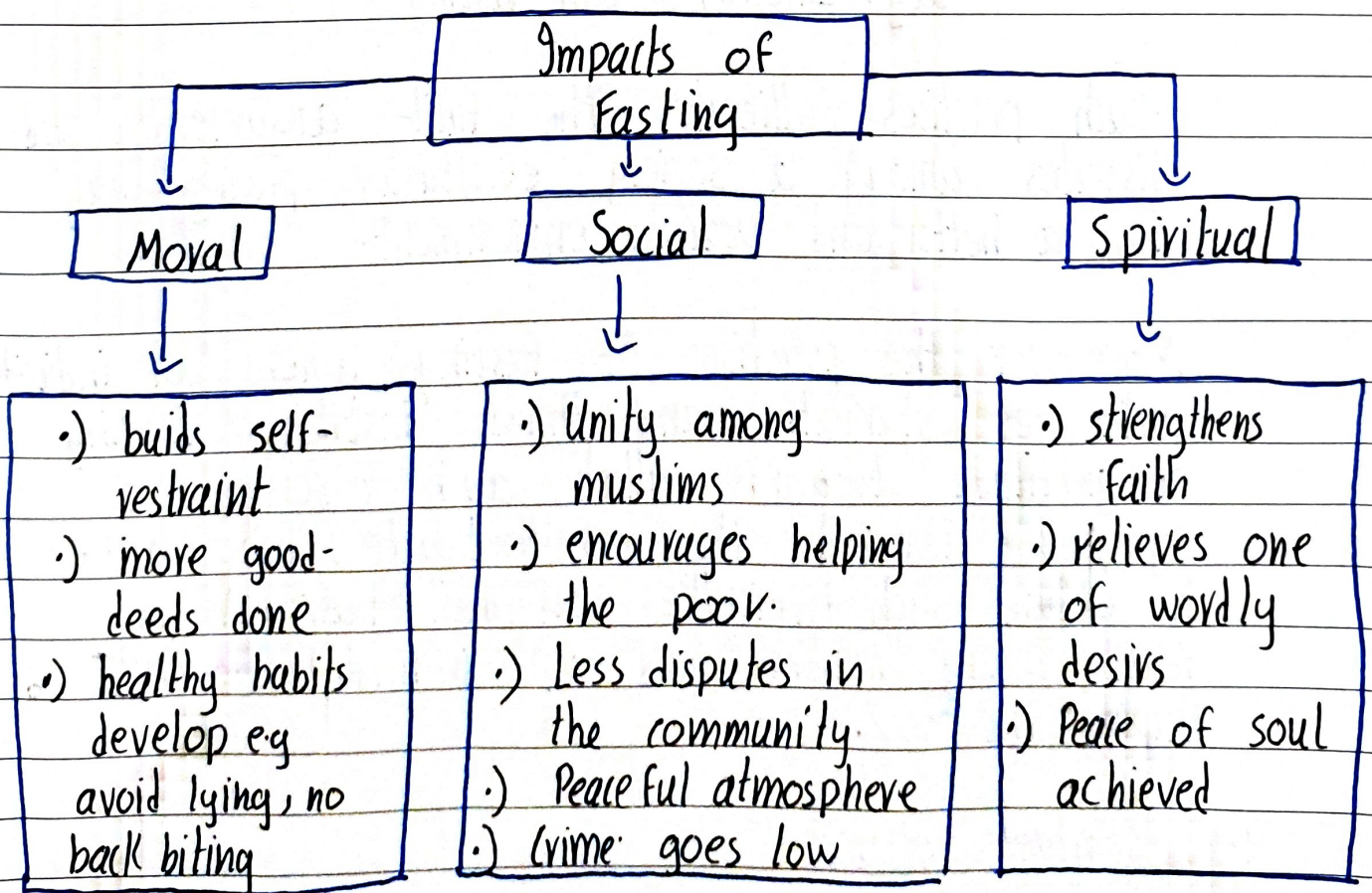


figure : overview of impacts of fasting

5) Tazkia-e-Nafs:

The nafs is the component of an individual that compels them in immoral desires. Each individual is responsible in controlling their own nafs. The weaker the nafs, the easier it is to overcome it. Imam Ghazali writes that physical easements are the source of strength for nafs, this includes food and drink. Therefore, the logical conclusion derived from this is to deprive the human body from food and drink, in order to weaken the nafs. Hence, fasting is plays a crucial role in Tazkia-e-Nafs, by not only restraining one to consume food but also by enhancing their spirituality.

6) Conclusion:

To sum up, Fasting is a pillar of Islam and a major obligation. Fasting has numerous benefits in our daily lives and helps to establish a strong connection between an individual and Almighty Allah. Hence, one should try their utmost to uphold this religious obligation and practice it the way it is intended to do so.