

## The Role of Hunger in Gaining Mystical Dignities

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**Abstract:** Hunger is assigned as a kind of deliberate starvation in and in condition of fitting to states and conditions of mystic; it has on increasing effect on his body and soul. For achieve meaning to high mystical dignity, severe and continued effort is necessary that in the mind of mystics, hunger is from the main elements of jihad and struggle to carnal soul and also abstinence but the hunger should not be mandatory or compulsory and it is completely optional and the seeker must fight against the demands of carnal soul and he must avoid from eating various and delicious foods that are desirable for carnal soul. From the advantages and properties of hunger is that it causes purity of heart and sympathy and makes heart ready for endurance of a thought that achieves to knowledge and a concrete light appears to him and it is narrated from holy prophet that: "someone who keeps himself hungry, his thought and idea become great". "Hunger" has always been considered as one of icons on the ethnics of asceticism and mysticism and all great men of Sufism agree on the necessity of "hunger" as one of the fundamental elements of conduct. In semantics of "Hunger", a group translated it as "eating enough" and some other defined it as "fasting" and another group defined it as "not eating except in the time of necessity". The present study endeavors to examine semantics of hunger and several viewpoints in this relation by relying on Qur'an and narratives and comparing these viewpoints specifies the meaning of hunger, virtue, wisdom and their benefits and Limitations.

**Key words:** Hunger, observation, sufi, fasting, mysticism

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### INTRODUCTION

In the way of achievement to happiness and welfare, smoothing way by using the methods and recommendations of great Sages is an essential matter; because ways of releasing from bondages of veils; in particular, moral vices and sins that most of humans have been caught by them and they cannot be free of them easily are not clear to everyone.

There upon, many efforts in this area have done by great mystics and have represented recommendations for eagers of conduct in order to help spiritual seekers to release from the bondage of carnal soul by applying these methods and to achieve to perfection. The spiritual seeker (way farer) is obliged to perform certain actions in the conduct while nurturing soul to control. His spiritual and physical and to be able to overcome sensual temptations. "hunger" is one kind of austerity and practice of asceticism to control individual powers of wayfarer.

The first step of conduct is with drawl of carnal soul. Sheikhs considered whatever soul enjoys of gaining it as an obstacle of way and advised this mentors to quit it; therefore, hunger are known as the most basic

abstinences of Sufis. Sages advised their mentors to putout the flames of passion to food and to shed sources of knowledge and wisdom toward himself by bearing hunger. Hunger in literal sense and infinitive form means being hungry and in gerund form means starvation (Beihaghi, 1955). Tajavaee means to keep oneself hungry deliberately (Firoozabadi, 1991).

It has been mentioned that hunger is the first stage of sextet stage of human's requirement to food and nutrition. Furthermore, in literal meaning "hunger" is opposite to amplitude and fullness of food and the intention from it, is the suffer age that human bears because of emptiness of stomachs. Therefore, it seems that some considered emptiness of stomach from food as the factor of hunger and used it as the meaning of hunger (Beihaghi, 1955). Hunger, a term in mysticism and mystical ethnics means deliberate starvation.

In infinitive form, hunger literally means being hungry and in gerund form, it means starvation (Beihaghi, 1955). Muslims from the outset had a particular interest in two religious acts, prayer and fasting by resorting to religious teaching and religious commandments and following holy prophet and even today, more than all other rules and

commandments of religion, play role in displaying Muslim's magnificence. "Fasting" is expressive of changing the attention of a Muslim from thinking of body (physical) to contemplation about soul that is a manifestation of human's struggle to devil of carnal soul and overcoming on carnal desires.

In addition to fasting, prophet's style in tending to anorexia based on specific reasons led to form an excessive tendency of hunger and to digress from its main channel moderation in eating food is the best way to achieve to a state of controlling carnal soul and piety and the person should not overeat and to saturate his stomach. Holy prophet stated that: "We are a nation who do not eat food till we are not hungry and we stop eating before being full" If a man has lust to food and wants to keep his stomach always full, he should be aware that this lust causes lots of physical and spiritual pains and suffer ages in this world and hereafter.

The central question of this study is which of the concepts of hunger is accepted by Islam. In other words, the concept of good hunger equals to which concepts of anorexia, not eating and eating enough.

For understanding the main concept of this idiom, existing viewpoints in this field have been examined that are: surveying the concept and meaning of hunger in Islam and narratives; surveying mystics' outlook in mystical texts and surveying outlook of Sufis and Ibn-e-Arabi about hunger and its limits.

**Hunger in Qur'an and narratives:** The word "hunger" has been repeated in holy Qur'an for several times that in one or two cases has noteworthy meaning. The food which does not make fat and does not make fat and does not resolve the problem of hunger (Ghosheiry). Starvation is a punishment and suffering for ungrateful people that in the world or hereafter they would have and in 155th verse of Baghareh Sura, besides hunger, fear and loss of property is a kind examination. Fazl Ibn Hassan Tabarsi (Tabarsi first volume).

Considers the reality of hunger as dominant passion for food and he has mentioned that the reason of hunger in the content of this verse, is that they were engaged in jihads of God's way and they couldn't earn their living. He has expressed also that the intention of hunger in this verse is starvation or fasting in Ramadan month. Furthermore, based on the tenor of verse, he made a connection between hunger and patience (Imam Ali, first volume). By considering these points, this can be said that hunger in this verse has the closest meaning to hunger in the mind of mystics.

World "Hunger" is repeated in holy Qur'an for three times as a none and it is used in 118th verse of "Taha"

chapter as verb. this word means severe hunger and specific torture of hereafter and also as a trial for patient men that seems it is expressive of a kind of involuntary hunger in 7th verse of Sura and 112th verse of Nahl chapter a but if we seek to understand and Qur'an's outlook about the extent of eating and drinking, we have to look a verse which is pre-eminent of all ethical, behavioral and even medical guide lines. In 31st verse of Al Araf chapter, God has ordered us to a moderation in eating and drinking as God stated: "Eat and drink and do not waste".

In holy Qur'an God states: we invite Muslims to patience and persistence against disasters and hard events like death of a loved person, losing property and happening event that may fill hearts of fear and to bring hunger and poverty. As a whole, patience is a factor for any evolution that may happen in individual or social life of human.

In 153rd verse of baghareh chapter, "hunger" is known as a divine events. The addresses of this verse are patient people and the type of expectation is the tolerance of group for divine examinations and its climax is hunger but who are patient people and who is the intention from patience. In 153rd verse of Baghareh Sura, God says to believers: "hey believers, get help of patience". Some commentators have translated patience in this verse and other verses as "fasting" and they translated the verse as this: "get help from prayer and patience".

In comprehensive commentary, patience is translated as fasting (Boroojerdi, 1922). Due to the important role that patience has in human's growth and excellence, holy prophets and Imams talked about it a lot and considered patience as one of substantial elements of faith and sometimes equal to the whole faith. For instance, prophet states: "faith has two sides, one half is patience and another one is thanking" (Harrani, 1956).

Due to the significant role of patience in conduct, Sufis, know it as one of the important mystical stages. In commentary of Taaref, it is mentioned: "Patience is a sublime stage and God ordered holy prophet to have patience" (Mostamli Bokhari, third volume). As a mother of fact, 155th verse of Baghareh chapter invites believers to be patient against hunger but patience against hunger is not anything except "fasting" regarding to previous verse. Therefore, it seems that in the second stage, the address of hunger is believers and means fasting.

We encounter two to opposite groups about hunger in narratives: the first group are people who blame hunger, but the number of these narratives against the second group who praise hunger is not much. For instance, in a narrative of holy prophet, it is quoted that: "God, I take refuge from hunger to you and also it is narrated from

Imam Ali: "prophet eat in the early hours of night, Do not quit it; since quitting dinner causes erosion of body's potency".

In these two narratives that their addressees are ordinary people, the emphasis is on quitting and keeping moderation at the same time. In another narrative that was mentioned previously, Imam Ali in popular his letter to Osman (1939) IbnHanif stated: "Be aware that your Imam is content in this world only with two old clothes and two loaves' of bread" (Seyyed, 1959) and he implies to his piety and abstinence as the Imam of Muslims. This is ascetic feature of Imam Ali.

This is the ultimate of his enjoyment from material world but he never recommends his followers to live in such way; since he knows that it is not possible for everyone. He continues: "you can never live in this way and do not have the power to do it".

But, there are numerous narratives in praising hunger and ascetic lifestyle of holy prophet and Imam. In a Ghodsi narrative, God says to holy prophet: "Hey Mohammad, I never had a dish like full stomach of enemy. Hunger is not allowed to the extent of killing the person. "It means that he must eat the amount that keeps him alive; because hunger in its own place is desirable for our worldly and hereafter's affairs". Imam Ali says: "A small amount of food is good for soul and health, everyone who eats less, his mind is purified, what a delicious food is hunger. What a good reminder is hunger in striking on self and breaking its habit" (Sheikh, 1994).

In the hadith of Ascension, in replying to prophet's question about advantages of hunger, it is mentioned: "Holy prophet said: God What are the advantages of hunger God said: Wisdom and achieving to realities and keeping away heart from" devilish temptations, closure to me, permanent grief and surviving from empty happiness's and joys, parsimony among people manifesting God's speeches, releasing from the worry of earning living" and it is narrated from holy prophet that hunger is the light of hunger and gluttony is separation from God. Do not eat to the extent that you become full that the light of wisdom will disappear.

By surveying in the life style of great man of religion, it is concluded: "If someone does not see the beauty of life in hunger, he is not wayfarer yet and he cannot start the journey in the way which takes him to the achievement of God. The people who have reached their goal are people who have used to hunger in their life long, they did not eat to become full, they ate to keep living".

## **HUNGER IN MYSTICAL TEXTS**

If we consider "hunger" a kind of ascetic practice of Sufis, regarding to the history of Sufism and what orators

expressed the practical, excessive approach in asceticism and abstinence is from the features of primary centuries of Sufism history, naturally hunger as one of these icons is not empty of excessive attitude. Several samples of these excessive attitudes about hunger have been found in primary mystical texts. In the words of Abo Nasr Sarraj the owner of *Alloma Fi Tosavof* book, the oldest mystical written work about Sahl Ibn Abdullah, writes: "whenever Sahl Ibn Abdullah was hungry, he became energetic and power full and whenever he ate food, he became weak" (Sarraj, 1962) and there were times that he didn't eat food for twenty and more days, he didn't quit food but food escaped from him.

These excessive trends are seen in *KashfAlmahjoob* and *Ghosheiriyeh* treatise more than Al-Allamee. Hojviri, the owner of *KashfAlmahjoob* book, for proving Sufis' "hunger", he expresses his statement by an evident of Qur'an, 155th verse of *Baghareh Sura* and after quoting numerous narratives in documentaries of this subject from holy prophet and Imams, he states his absolute opinion. He considers eating much as the action of animals, the hunger as the remedy of men and the cause for driving Adam out of paradise, food.

In Hojviri's mind, "heart" is the center of attention of God and wisdom and passion are placed on the entrance of human's heart, soul helps wisdom and carnal soul helps passion. However human eats more, the carnal soul becomes power full and diverse veil appears in human. Yet, if the seeker quits the food, his carnal soul becomes weaker and his mind becomes more power full. He quoted a narrative from Abo Abbas Ghassab to prove his acclaim: "My prayer and sin are in two groups. When I eat, I find the source of all sins in myself and when I leave it, I found the basis of worship and prayer in myself" Ghazzali in *KimiyayeSaadat* has discussed about "hunger" in details. He considered stomach as the basis of all vices. He knew stomach as the pool of body that vessels like streams flow from stomach to seven parts of body.

Stomach is the source of all lusts; because when the stomach becomes filled, the lust of sex increases and for satisfying the lust, there is no choice but attending to the lust of wealth. About advantages of hunger, he outlined ten main points that are: purity of heart, permission to enter to paradise not forgetting the hungry, sleeping little, addressing the science and practice and health.

The another of Allamee book by quoting a narrative of Sahl Ibn Abdullah, a person who didn't eat food for twenty and more days, stated that: Sahl says: "when you are full, seek for hunger and when you become hungry, seek for fullness" (Sarraj, 1962). The same meaning exists in the words of Hojviri who tried to stabilize the concept of "hunger" by verbal, Qur'anic and narrative causes

(reasons) in a more complete and precise form. He believes that hunger should not be desirable for way farer, since the goal of human is "observation" and if by fullness, the person can achieve to the aim, he should leave hunger. Therefore, fullness with observation is better than hunger with devotion.

Perhaps, the question that if we can achieve to observation by observation what is the reason of praising hung can be answered that most of people have no way except choosing hunger as the tool of devotion; there up on, they have to traverse the conduct stage in this kind of abstinence. on the other side, BayazidBastami answered this question in another way. He believes that" if pharaoh was not full, he didn't claim that he is greater than god and if Korah was not hungry, he never became lawless and rebel".

The result is that hunger is mysticism is assigned as a kind of deliberate hunger and in the condition of fitting to the conditions and requirements of way farer; there will be increasing effects on his body and soul. However, hunger and fasting have noteworthy similarities and advantages of fast includes hunger based on the speeches of Sufis.

**Hunger to sufis:** Hunger in the mind of Sufis is eating less in a way that causes the feeling of hunger or at least not having the feeling of fullness.

They consider eating less a part of conduct conditions and they granted spiritual results for it. Word hunger gradually applied among Pioneer Sufis and primary texts in the sense of deliberate hunger and took conductive importance. There are several hadith in this field in mystical books that hunger has a positive connotation in them and instead of recommending that: refuge from hunger it is advised to refuge to hunger for achievement to God as holy prophet quoted that knock the door of heaven by constant hunger (Hamedani, 1964).

It seems that Sufis considered hunger as synonym of fasting or as a subdivision of fasting and on this basis, they knew hunger as the method of prophets that is desirable regarding to religion and intellect has been praised in all nations and religions. It means that the narratives that mystics quoted from holy prophet about avoiding hunger (Abutaleb, 1995). Sufis considered hunger as morals or elements of devotion. Shaghhigh Balkhi in *AdabAlebadat* treatise translated hunger as the first step of the fourth steps of mystics and explained the way of eating food proportionate to hunger. In his mind, hunger is the entrance of asceticism and practical method of taking place of spirituality of asceticism in seeker's

heart. Furthermore, Solami knew being thankful to hunger from the mores of Sufism. Ghazzali examines the subject of hunger against gluttony and has quoted from sahle Tostari that there are four principles: staying away from people (Isolation), silence, hunger and vigil (Ghazzali, 1992).

### **HUNGER IN THE MIND OF IBN-E-ARABI**

In Ibn-e-Arabi's stand point, hunger is the third element of divine conduct elements and includes the fourth element which is vigil as isolation guarantee's silence; he believes that hunger has two types: Hunger of way farers and hunger of researchers (great men).

Ibn-e-Arabi the hunger of spiritual way farers is deliberate hunger that its limit is fasting but the hunger of researchers and great men is necessary. The intention of Ibn-e-Arabi from emergency hunger is a status that seekers achieve to it and that is a sensual queen that never disappear neither in fullness nor in hunger. Seekers never turn to hunger because of the task and force, if they are in familiarity status, their food is little and if they are in fear status, their nutrition is much. Ibn (1947), seekers do not starve themselves but if they are in intimacy status, they eat less and if they are in fear position, they eat much Anorexia of seekers is the reason of accuracy of their discourse and dialogue with God that causes Observation. Indulgent dining of way farers is the reason of their separation of good and their exclusion from the port of good and also the sign of domination of sensual and brutish soul.

Sheikh Akbar in 106th chapter of "fotoohat e Makiyeh" in introducing favorable hunger says: "hunger is the ornament of way farers and the intention from it is habitual hunger and that is white death". Thus, favorable hunger in the conduct of wayfarers is deliberate hunger for decreasing the desires of carnal soul and providing not moving toward need or wish. The extent of hunger is daily fasting and if he wants to increase it, hecan increase till dawn, this hunger voluntary legitimate self-starvation, we never step except in legitimate way and if God didn't consider this limit for ordinary people good, he never recommended it.

Thus, human in increasing the certain amount of fasting and about the advantages of hunger is not more aware than his creator (God). This is the extreme rudeness but the hunger of sages is necessary hunger. It is good for a way farer to not increase the limit of God's rule in order to follow religion. Because quitting an action for following religion is better than doing something for innovation. Therefore, mentor should not transgress from

a limitation of religion! Hey mentor! do not keep yourself hungry except for fasting. Because hunger except for fasting is not lawful.

### **THE VIRTUE OF HUNGER IN SUFISM OUTLOOK**

In Sufism texts, there are many speeches about the importance and virtue of hunger. It has been mentioned that hunger is a mystery of divine mysteries. God determined ignorance and sin in fullness and knowledge and wisdom in hunger. They also said: Hunger is light and gluttony is hell (fire), the key of here after is hunger, dignity is in hunger and humiliation is in gluttony (Sarraj, 1962).

### **BENEFITS AND IMPACTS OF HUNGER**

Divine mystics stated about the quality of conduct as this: Traversing the way to God after allegiance to the aware Sheikh who passed the annihilation stage and has achieved to perpetuity stage and is informant of all affairs is done by guidelines of him. His journey depends on some factors that all of them should be observed in its most complete form and one of them is hunger and anorexia. Since, hunger causes shining of soul and thought can fly in the time of hunger.

Hunger makes carnal soul modest and one benefits of hunger is observation. Ghazzali counts ten cases for hunger advantages that are: visionary thinking; lenity that way farer perceives the pleasure of prayer because of it and recitation becomes effective; abjection of carnal soul that causes ignorance and outburst (rebellion) of carnal soul; Not forgetting God's punishment, since a person whose stomach is full forgets hunger and the hungry; weakening lust and strength which are the source of all sins; disposal of sleep and durability of wake fullness; easier permanence of worship, because removing hunger needs consuming time while time and life is a capital that seeker trades spiritual business by it and consequently, the times of buying, washing and cooking are used for worship and prayer; health of body and staying away from diseases; low cost, since a person who eats less, needs less wealth and his greed to world becomes less (Ghazzali, 1992). In Ibn-e-Arabi outlook, the philosophy of hunger is decreasing indulgence of carnal soul and decreasing requirement in sublime levels is demanding God's needlessly attribute (Ibn, 1947).

He considers stages for hunger: the states of wayfarers' hunger, Modesty and humiliation of body members but the stage of hunger is the stage of needlessly from people (Ibn, 1947).

**Philosophy of hunger:** Philosophy of hunger to Sufis has a psychological and physical interpretation proportionate to ancient medicine.

To Shaghigh, depravity of person from meeting his necessary needs like eating causes his spirit to not find essential freedom for engagement to unnecessary lusts or vage wishes. SahlTostari, blood de creases' believes that if you oblige your soul to bear hunger, blood decreases and bad idea (thought) leaves the heart. Moreover, Ghazzali in a completely physical interpretation, expanded this point and mentioned that hunger decreases blood of heart, makes it luminous and causes to lose heart's fat, as a result heart's blood is diluted and this dilution is the key of discovery.

On the other side, if heart's blood becomes less, enemy's penetration to heart becomes impossible. He also knows hunger as the cause of mind unity, since he believes fullness creates lots of gases in moods like drunkenness. Holy prophet states: "God commands: (I hid five things in five things but people look for them in other five things and they do not find: I put knowledge in hunger and effort, as people seek for it in fullness and comfort. Therefore, they do not find it)". In Ghoraralhekam, Imam Ali said: "What a good help is hunger for rebellion of carnal soul and breaking its habit".

**Harms of spiritual hunger:** Emphasis on advantages and conductive functions of hunger is like a way for achievement to mystical states or self-purification, created some loses among amateurs Sufis and aroused criticism of some Sufis. AbonasrSarrajFasli wrote Allame for mentioning faults and misunderstandings of amateur seekers. Hareth Mohasebi breaks up the hunger that person impose on himself from the hunger that God orders criticized the first one (Sarraj, 1962).

By criticizing people who know hunger as a method or tool for achievement to asceticism, he said: Modesty resulted from such hunger is artificial and by removing this hunger, Modesty disappear and this is the sign of lack of originality. In a avoiding self-imposed starvation, he recommends patience to Godly hunger, because according to a hadith, a person who eats food as he is thankful equals to one who tolerates hunger with patience. This attitude is completely in opposite to Hojviri's attitude while the owner of hunger status leaves food.

### **CONCLUSION**

Hunger as one of substantial actions in training all humans and as a specific action in practical spiritual conduct can be considered in three dimensions based on

Qur'an, narratives and mystical texts that these three are supplementary for each other. In ancient Sufism texts, the main point is that almost all of them consider "hunger" equivalent to "not eating".

As much as possible, at the same time, it should not be assumed that hunger had natural value to them. From the advantages of hunger is breaking the severity of lusts and powers which cause the great sins, as the source of most of the great sins is the lust of speech, lust of sex and break of this lust, causes to survive the person and from the benefits of hunger is removal of sleep that sleep spoil the life time that is the capital of human's here after trade and hunger is permanence of wake and wake is the seed of every goodness and help for vigil that causes to reach to prophet's status (dignity) and from it advantages is possibility of all prayers. Stomach is the house of diseases and anorexia is the best medicine. God chooses hunger for receiving his guest that is no better and more sublime gift than closure and hunger is the nearest tool to reach it.

Hunger in mysticism is assigned as deliberate hunger and in the condition of fitting to seeker's states and requirements, it has increasing effect on his body and soul never the less, hunger and fast have significant similarities and fasting includes the advantages of hunger.

Conduct and achievement to mystical dignities is not anything except obeying God and his orders and commands; anyone who is successful in this way, he passes mystical. Degrees proportion to it and has achieved to God's closure. God did not create any creature (body) without requirement to water and food and every one does this, he macerates his body and a cruel one cannot reach to happiness. The person should respect body's right and the best lawful abstinence in this way hunger that is fasting and its limit is to from morning to the izan of sunset, unless there isn't any world in Qur'an or narratives about bearing hunger for one

week or 40 days. Although, in some quotation, there are statements about prophet's fast for three days and also based on the verses of Insan chapter, Imam Ali, Hazrat Fatimah, Imam Hassan and Hossain fasted for healing Imam Hassan and Hossain for three days and their dinner to poor people and they broke their fast only by water. Thus, since human's happiness is achievement to paradise, the prayers and abstinences should be religious in order to approach God.

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