



I'tikāf: Alone with the One

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Since the heart's rectitude and probity upon the path of wayfaring to Allah depends on its being focused on Allah and totally dedicated to Him. And since the heart's diseases cannot be remedied save by being truly devoted to Allah - excess of food and drink; socializing; speaking; and sleeping being from those things that increase its diseases and disorders, throw it into confusion, sever it from journeying to Allah; or else weaken it, divert it, or put a stop to it. Because of this - and from the mercy of [Allah] the August, the All-Merciful, to His servants - fasting was legislated for them in order to [help them] reduce their intake of food and drink, and empty their hearts of those desires that impede their journey to Allah, Exalted is He. He legislated fasting in accordance with their welfare, in that it would serve to benefit a person in this world and the other, and not harm or stifle their immediate or other-worldly interests.

He [also] prescribed *i'tikāf*¹ for them. Its purpose and spirit being for the heart to be completely dedicated to Allah, Exalted is He: devoted to Him; alone with Him; cut-off from being preoccupied with creation; attentive only to Him, Transcendent is He. In this way, remembering Him, loving Him, and devotion to Him takes the place of all the heart's anxieties and worries so that he is able to overcome them. Thus all his concerns are for Allah. His thoughts directed at remembering Him, how to gain His good pleasure and how to draw near to Him. This leads him to feel intimate with Allah rather than with people. This intimacy, in turn, prepares him for the day of utter loneliness in the grave, when there shall be none to grant companionship nor solace save Him. This being the greater goal of *i'tikāf*.



FOOTNOTES

* *Zād al-Ma'ād fi Hadyi Khayr al-'Ibād* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1998), 2:82-3; trans. Abu Aaliyah.

1. *i'tikāf*: lit. "to cling devotedly to something." The Qur'an says [7:138]: *And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea; whereupon they came upon a people who clung devotedly (ya'kufūn) to some idols of theirs.* In its religious sense, it refers to clinging or confining oneself to a mosque so as to devote oneself to Allah's remembrance and worship; even if it be a for a short period of the day or night. This act of *i'tikāf*, or spiritual seclusion, is recommended (*sunnah*), moreso during the last ten nights of Ramadan wherein occurs *laylat al-qadr*: a night better than a thousand months.

Cf. 'Uthmān ibn Jāmi' al-Ḥanbalī, *al-Fawā'id al-Muntakhabāt fi Sharḥ Akḥṣar al-Mukhtaṣarāt* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 2003), 1:510.