

Ramadan and Fasting

The word Ramadan comes from the noun Ramad, which refers to **“the heat of the stones arising from the intense heat of the sun.”** The ninth month was named Ramadan because when the Arabs changed the names of the months from the ancient language, they named them according to the seasons in which they happen to fall.

This month, which used to be called Natiq, fell during the summer, the time of extreme heat.[1]

The Merits of Ramadan

a) The Prophet (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) was reported to have said that **“When Ramadan comes, the gates of Paradise are opened.”** [2] The month of Ramadan is a great opportunity for one to do the deeds that could bring him/her closer to Paradise.

b) Fasting in Ramadan is also an opportunity to atone for one’s sins. Aboo Hurayrah quoted the Prophet (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) as saying, **“Who ever fasts during the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith and hoping for a reward from Allaah will have all of his previous sins forgiven.”** [3]

c) Fasting also provides protection from evil for those who sincerely fast. Allah’s Messenger (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) was reported to have said, **“Fasting is a shield.”**[4]

d) Allaah has a special reward which He personally gives one who fasts faithfully. Abu Hurayrah related that the Prophet (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) quoted Allaah as saying, **“Every act of Adam’s descendants is for themselves, except fasting. It is meant for Me alone, and I alone will give the reward for it.”**[5]

e) Perhaps the greatest and most unique merit of Ramadan lies in the fact that the Qur’aan, which is the last and only unchanged book of Divine Guidance remaining in the world, was revealed during this month. Allaah states, **“The month of Ramadan is the one in which the Qur’aan was sent down as a (pure source of) guidance for mankind. In it are clear teachings showing the Right Way and the Criterion (for judging truth and falsehood).”** (Surah al-Baqarah (2): 185)

This act of revelation represents the greatest blessing from Almighty Allaah to mankind, who had become steeped in darkness and ignorance since the time of the prior revelation. Without this supreme act of mercy, the weakening glimmer of guidance would have gone out completely and oppression would have reigned in all corners of the globe.

Sighting of the Moon

It is fard kifaayah (a collective duty) on the Muslims to make an effort to sight the moon of Ramadan on the 29th of Sha'baan. It is wrong to depend solely on the calendar and other astronomical calculations to begin the fast, as the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) himself instructed, **"Begin the fast on the sighting of the moon and break the fast likewise, but if the sky is cloudy (on the 29th of Sha'baan), then estimate it (by completing) 30days of Sha'baan."**[6]

Definition of Sawm or Siyaam (Fasting)

The literal meaning of sawm is to restrain oneself from something. For example, Allaah tells us in al-Qur'aan that Maryam said, **"Surely I have vowed to ar-Rahmaan (The Most Merciful, Allaah) to fast (sawm)."** (Surah Maryam (19): 26)

The fast here means to be silent, that is, to abstain from speaking. Islamically, Sawm means to abstain from food, drink and sexual relation between dawn and sunset.

Classification of Sawm

Sawm is waajib (compulsory) on Muslims, according to the Qur'aan and Sunnah [tradition of the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam)], during the ninth month of the Hijree calendar, called Ramadan, every year. Allaah said in the Qur'aan,

"The month of Ramadan: in it was sent down the Qur'aan, guidance to mankind and a self-evident proof of that guidance and the standard for distinguishing between right and wrong. Whosoever of you witnesses the month should fast it..." (Surah al-Baqarah (2): 185)

Ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) stated, **"Islam is built on five (pillars): ...fasting in Ramadan."**[7]

Talhah ibn 'Ubaydillah reported that a man with his hair in disarray came to the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) and said, "O Allah's Messenger, inform me of what Allaah has made fard (obligatory) on me concerning fasting." He (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "The month of Ramadan." So he asked, "Is there anything other than that on me?" He (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "No, except what you do voluntarily." He then said, "Tell me what Allaah has made fard on me concerning Zakaah, "So he (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) informed him of the rites of Islam. He then said, "By He Who ennobled you, I won't voluntarily do anything (extra) nor will I decrease in any way what Allaah has made obligatory on me." The Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) then said, "He will succeed if he spoke the truth (or, he will enter Paradise if he was truthful).[8]

The Purpose of Fasting

The ultimate goal of the fast is to develop taqwa (consciousness of God) in people, as Allaah said in Surah al-Baqarah (2), verse 183, "...so that it may produce Taqwa in you." Taqwa is among the highest moral qualities that a Muslim can attain. It is produced by placing a shield between one's self and Allah's wrath, as the root meaning of the word implies (i.e. taqwa comes from the verb waqaa, which means "to safeguard"). This is achieved by being conscious of Allaah and all His commandments at all times, which means avoiding the Haraam (prohibited) as well as the makrooh (undesirable) and even some of the halaal (permissible) wherever doubt arises.

Conditions for Being Required to Fast

1. To be Muslim.
2. To have reached puberty.

However, with young children it was the practice of the Prophet's companions to encourage them to fast in order for them to get used to it at an early age.[9]

3. To be sane.

'Alee ibn Abee Talib and 'Aa'ishah both reported that Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "The pen is raised from (the book) of three (individuals): the sleeper until he awakes, the child until he reaches puberty, and the insane until he regains his sanity." [10]

4. To be physically able.

5. To be a resident, not a traveler.

A menstruating woman does not pray or fast. Prayers need not be made up, but fasting must be made up later when her menses are finished. Allaah has permitted Muslims who are sick or physically unable to fast or are traveling during Ramadan to break their fasts and make up the missed days of Ramadan. Allaah says in the Qur'aan, "...and whoever is ill or journeying, for him is the like number of other days. Allaah desires for you ease and does not desire for you hardship; so you should complete the number and magnify Allaah for His having guided you, that perhaps you may give thanks." (Surah al-Baqarah (2): 185)

The Benefits of Fasting

1. Fasting gives the individual a real taste of hunger and thirst which helps him to realize the experience of the poor. This experience should instill a desire to want to help those who are less fortunate by sharing food and wealth with them.
2. It is required that the individual give up not only food, drink and sexual relations, but also that he restrain from all forms of lying (e.g. backbiting, slander, etc.). This is confirmed by the Prophet's (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) statement, "Allaah has no need for the hunger and the thirst of the person who does not restrain from telling lies and acting on them even while observing the fast." [11] He also said, "When one of you is fasting, he should abstain from indecent acts and unnecessary talk, and if someone begins an obscene conversation or tries to pick an argument, he should simply tell him, 'I am fasting'." [12] So, if one observes the fast according to the above principles, it should improve his moral character, making him more truthful and more careful about what he says and does.
3. It has also been noted by medical experts that fasting improves the physical health in numerous ways. For example, during the fast the body uses up stored cholesterol (fats) which are often deposited in the blood system, as well as in other fatty areas of the body. Thus, it helps to keep the body firm and minimizes the danger of heart attacks.
4. Fasting trains the individual for Jihad (fighting in the way of Allaah) by giving him a good course in self-control. During war the desires of the stomach and the private parts often lead soldiers of war to either commit excesses or to unnecessarily expose themselves to danger.

Exemption from Fasting Ramadaan

1. Journey (Safar):

It is allowable for the traveler to break his fast while traveling, whether he is subjected to rigors and hardships during his travels or not.[13]

2. Sickness (Marad):

If one has an illness that would be worsened by fasting, or fasting would delay the cure, the fast may be abandoned. For example, a person with diabetes may have to eat every few hours to maintain his blood sugar level, or an epileptic may have to take his medicine at regular intervals to prevent a seizure.[14]

3. Pregnancy (Haml):

If a woman feels that if she fasts, the fetus will be harmed or she herself will be weakened dangerously, she is permitted to leave the fast.[15]

4. Breast-feeding (Ridaa'ah):

If a breast-feeding mother or wet-nurse feels that fasting would be harmful to the baby or herself she is allowed to abandon the fast.

5. Weakness (Da'f) or Old Age (Kibar as-Sinn):

(a) If a person is convalescing (regaining his strength) after an illness and fears that the fast would make him sick again, he is allowed to defer fasting.

(b) If a person has become extremely weak due to old age, he is allowed to abandon fasting.[16]

6. Jihad (War):

(a) If a person is about to participate in jihad and fears that the fasting would weaken him, he may defer the fast.

(b) If jihad is in progress, participants are allowed to postpone the fast.

Kaffaarah (Atonement)

Kaffaarah is the punishment as a compensation for a sin one has committed or for an obligatory deed that one was unable to do or the intentional breaking of the fast in Ramadan. The Kaffaarah for breaking the fast of Ramadan is as follows:

- 1. If the fast of Ramadan is invalidated intentionally by intercourse, its expiation (Compensation) is fasting for two months consecutively. If one is unable to fast sixty days, he must feed sixty poor persons or one person for sixty days.[18] It should be noted, however, that even these acts do not make up for the lost day(s) of fasting.[18]**
- 2. A person who has become extremely weak due to old age or disease and has no hope of an early recovery and is unable to fast, is required by Sharee'ah to feed an indigent person for every missed day. One can give it in the form of food or one can make someone else an agent, giving him the money to buy the food and give it to the poor. This feeding of the poor in lieu of fasting is called fidyah (redemption).**
- 3. A woman who breaks her fast due to menses (hayd), bleeding after child birth (nifaas), pregnancy, suckling (ridaa'ah) or the like is only required to make up the days which she missed before the next Ramadan.[19]**

Permissible Acts While Fasting

- a) Cleaning the teeth with the siwaak (tooth-stick) or its modern substitute, the toothbrush, is allowed, as the Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) used to use the siwaak often while fasting.[20] It is better to avoid the use of toothpaste during fasting hours.**
- b) Donating blood or unintentional vomiting do not break the fast.[21]**
- c) Kissing one's wife while fasting does not break the fast, as long as moderation is observed.[22]**
- d) Taking medicine by way of injection, nasal sprays or eye drops does not break the fast, as they are not a form of eating.[23]**
- e) Eating or drinking accidentally or out of forgetfulness does not break the fast.[24]**

f) Bathing, swimming, or sitting in water to cool off while fasting is permissible.[25]

g) For someone to rinse out the mouth or to taste food or drink which is being prepared, spitting it all back out without swallowing any of the food or drink, is also permissible.[26]

h) Swallowing one's saliva does not break the fast.[27]

FUNDAMENTALS OF FASTING

Niyyah (Intention)

For the compulsory fast of Ramadan to be accepted, the intention to fast must be made before Fajr each day. The Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) was reported by Hafsah to have said, **"Whoever does not intend to fast before Fajr will have no fast."**[28] As with Salaah, there is no verbal formula one says to mark one's intention. To wake up for the pre-dawn meal is an expression of the intention to fast. Even if one didn't wake up for suhoor, to simply make up one's mind before sleeping that one will be fasting the next day is sufficient.

Suhoor (Pre-Dawn Meal)

The fast begins with a light meal known as suhoor, which is taken just before the break of dawn. The Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam encouraged his followers to take this meal, even if it is only a drink of water. Anas ibn Maalik said that Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, **"Take suhoor for surely there is barakah (blessing) in it."**[29] When the athaan of Fajr is sounded, this signals the beginning of the fast and one should not begin to eat anything at this point. If one has in his hand food or drink when the athaan is called, he should finish eating what he wants from it before putting it down. Abu Hurayrah reported that Allah's Messenger (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, **"If one of you hears the athaan and a vessel remains in his hand, he should not put it down until he has had what he desires from it."**[30]

Iftaar (Breaking Fast)

It is highly recommended that the fast be broken as soon as Maghrib (setting of the sun) occurs. The Prophet (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, **"People will remain happy and prosperous as long as they hasten to break the fast."**[31] It is also recommended that the fast be broken with dates and water if available.

Anas ibn Maalik said, **“The Prophet (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) used to break his fast with a few dates just before the beginning of Salaatul-Maghrib. If fresh dates were not available he would break his fast by drinking a little water.”**[32]

Du’aa for Breaking the Fast

(Thahabath-tham’u wab-tallatil-’urooqu wa thabatal-ajru inshaa’ Allah.)

“The thirst has gone, the arteries are moist, and the reward set, Allah willing.”[33]

[1] E.W. Lane, Lane’s Lexicon, vol. 1, pp. 1156-7.

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[2] Collected by al-Bukhaari (Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp. 64-5, no. 115).

[3] Collected by al-Bukhaari (Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp. 69-70, no. 125)

[4] Collected by Muslim (Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol.2, p.554, no. 2565)

[5] Collected by Muslim (Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol.2, p.559, no. 2566)

[6] Collected by al-Bukhaari (Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, p.69, no.124) and Muslim (Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol.2, p.524-5, no.2363)

[7] Collected by al-Bukhari (Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol. 1, p. 17, no. 7) and Muslim (Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol. 1, pp.9-10, no. 18)

[8] Collected by al-Bukhari (Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol. 3, pp. 64-65, no. 115)

[9] See Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol. 2, pp. 552-3, nos. 2531-2.

[10] Collected by Aboo Daawood (Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.), vol.3, pp. 1226-7, nos. 4384 and 4389), Ibn Maajah, and at-Tirmidhi, and authenticated by al-Albaani in Sahih Sunan at-Tirmidhi, vol.2, p.64, no.1150.

[11] Reported by Aboo Hurayrah and collected by al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp.70-1, no.127) and Aboo Dawood (Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.), vol.2, p.648, no. 2355).

[12] Reported by Aboo Hurayrah and collected by al-Bukhaari (Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, p.71, 125), Muslim (English Trans.), vol.2, p.558, no. 2563) and Aboo Daawood (Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.) vol.2, p. 648, no. 2356)

[13] See Surah al-Baqarah (2): 185; Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, p.93, no.164; See also pp. 94, nos. 167, and Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol. 2, p.546, no.2487.

[14] See Surah al-Baqarah (2): 185.

[15] Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.), vol.2, p 633, no. 2310 and authenticated in Sahih Sunan Abee Daawood, vol. 2, p. 441, no. 2032

- [16] Surah al-Baqarah (2): 184, Sahih Al-Bukhari, vol. 6, pp26-7, no. 32
- [17] Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, p.89, no.157; Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol.2, p. 540, no.2457. The Hadith mentions this compensation in the case of intercourse during the daytime of Ramadan. The Shaafi'ee and Hanbalee mathhabs restrict the ruling to this cause. The Hanafees and Maalikees extend it to eating and drinking as well, arguing by analogy. The other school denies the validity of the analogy here, saying there is a difference in kind between the enormity of breaking the fast by intercourse and breaking it by eating or drinking
- [18] Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp. 87-8, Ch. 29
- [19] This is the majority position. It should however be noted, that if a woman breastfeeds for two years, she may miss upto three Ramadaans if she also gave up fasting in her pregnancy. And perhaps she will be pregnant again after the two years of breast-feeding. For this reason, perhaps, Ibn 'Abbaas instructed a pregnant or breast feeding woman to feed a poor person for each day of fasting she missed in Ramadan. (Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.) vol.2, p.633, nos.2310-1)
- [20] Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp. 85-6, Chapter. (27)
- [21] Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp. 90, Chapter. (32)
- [22] Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp. 82-3, no.150; Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol.2, p.537, no.2436
- [23] Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, p.87, Chapter (28).
- [24] Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol.2, p.567, no.2575.
- [25] Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, p.83-4, Chapter (25).
- [26] Ibid.
- [27] Ibid.
- [28] Collected by Aboo Daawood (Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.), vol.2, p.675, no.2448), at-Tirmidhi and an-Nasaa'ee.
- [29] Collected by al-Bukhaari (Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp. 80, no.146) and Muslim (Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol.2, p.533, no.2412).
- [30] Collected by Aboo Dawood (Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.), vol.2, p. 645, no.2343) and authenticated by al-Albaani in Sahih Sunan Abee Daawood, vol.2, p. 447, no. 2060. This statement has been generally interpreted in reference to the pre-dawn Athaan of Bilaal and not the Athaan of Ibn Umm Maktoom (see Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp.78-9, no.142).
- [31] Collected by al-Bukhaari (Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp. 102, no.178) and Muslim (Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol.2, p.533, no.2417). See also Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.) vol.2, p. 646, no. 2346).
- [32] Collected by Aboo Daawood (Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.), vol.2, p. 646-7, no. 2349) and at-Tirmidhi.
- [33] Collected by Aboo Daawood (Sunan Abu Dawud (English Trans.), vol.2, p.647, no. 2350) and authenticated in Sahih Sunan Abee Daawood, vol.2, p.449, no.2066, with a rating of hasan. As for the commonly used du'aa, "Allaahumma laka sumtu wa 'alaa rizqika aftart" (O Allaah, for You I fasted

and with Your provision I have broken it), it is rated as da'eef by al-Albaani in Irwaa' al-Ghaleel, vol, 4 p.38, no.919.