

IQRA TRUST

A BOOKLET OF FASTING (SAWM)

*'O ye who believe,
enter into peace wholeheartedly'
(Qur'an 2:208)*

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1 FASTING

Definition

Fasting means complete abstinence from food, drink and sexual intercourse during daytime, from the break of the dawn till sunset, during the month of Ramadan which is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, provided that observing the fast in this way does not cause any harm to the health of the fasting person.

Religious Basis of Fasting

Allah the Almighty states in the Holy Qur'an:
'Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was revealed as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and distinction (between truth and falsehood). So every one of you who is present during the month should spend it in fasting.'

(2:183)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:
'Islam was founded on five bases. These are: *shahadah* (declaration of faith), *salah* (prayer), fasting during the month of Ramadan, paying of *zakah* and *hajj* (pilgrimage).

The verse and the saying of the Prophet (pbuh) quoted above show the basis on which the obligation of fasting in Ramadan is founded.

Determination of the start of Ramadan

The start of Ramadan is marked by seeing the new moon of the month or by completion of the days of the previous month (Shaban) to 30 days, in case it becomes impossible to sight the new moon due to weather conditions.

The new moon must be seen by two trustworthy Muslims.

The fast starts before the break of dawn. Muslims are allowed to eat and drink at any time throughout the night and stop at dawn.

A special meal before dawn, termed *sahour*, is recommended to be taken so as to provide the fasting person with energy during the day.

Benefits of Fasting

Fasting has many benefits, some of which are felt here in this life; others will be enjoyed in the Hereafter.

(A) Benefits of Fasting in this life

- (i) Health advantages achieved through fasting:
Fasting in Ramadan relieves the digestive system during the daytime. Diseases associated with overstuffing the stomach with

food will be cured due to reduction of the amount of food eaten in Ramadan.

Reduction in food results in reduction of calories taken. This consequently leads to weight loss for those who usually eat too much, putting on more weight through the year. Hence fasting in Ramadan offers people a good opportunity to diet.

- (ii) Benefits for the individual personality:
The patience experienced in restraining bodily demands trains the fasting person to encounter the hardships of life. It reinforces willpower and courage. It also trains the individual to be wise, truthful, self-restrained and to be able to control their desires and actions. All this helps to build a sound and strong personality.

Moreover the Prophet (peace be upon him) taught his companions the morale and the attitude that a fasting person should observe. He said:

'If one does not abandon falsehood in words and deeds, Allah has no need for his abandoning his food and drink.'

(Hadith: Bukhari and Muslim)

'There are many who fast during the day and pray all night, but they gain nothing but hunger and suffering due to sleeplessness.'

(Hadith: Darimi)

Also he asked them not to spoil the reward for their fasting by misconduct.

- (iii) **Spiritual and moral benefits:**
Abstaining from food and bodily desires during fasting inculcates love in human hearts towards their Creator. That is because Muslims fast in response to His Divine order to do so. Following this order by ceasing to eat and drink whether in private or in public is intended to make them more aware of Allah's nearness. This should help to bring all their actions under control, so that they will not go against any of Allah's commands. Moreover, restraining oneself from satisfying one's natural lawful desires should result in abstinence from all acts declared by Allah to be unlawful.

- (iv) **Social benefits of fasting**
The Islamic calendar follows the lunar year, which is about 11 days shorter than the solar year, and the month of Ramadan (and all other Islamic festivals) fall about 11 days earlier

every year. This means that Ramadan gradually moves from season to season, falling sometimes in the hottest or longest days and at other times in the colder or shorter days. Thus Muslims in all parts of the world learn to fast in all weathers and no nation is obliged to fast always in its hottest season of the year. In that sense it makes every Muslim experience the reality of hunger and thirst whether in winter or summer, and thereby increases their sympathy and care for each other and particularly for those in need.

Ramadan is in fact a major element in bringing all Muslims together. At the end of the month of Shaban, the month before Ramadan, all Muslims observe the skies to sight the appearance of the new moon of Ramadan. After that, Muslims start to fast, feeling that they are participating in a collective act of worship carried out simultaneously by all Muslims throughout the world. The same feeling occurs when breaking fast (iftar) and on the Eid festival at the end of Ramadan. This cultivates in the individual the feeling of being part of a greater society, so that they seek to form wider connections with their fellow

Muslims, to share their happiness and offer assistance if a calamity befalls any part of their wider community.

The special charity paid to the needy at the end of Ramadan by every Muslim reflects their care towards society.

In addition, fasting reflects the equality between all people before the law. When Ramadan comes, all Muslims have to fast, there is no difference between rich and poor, rulers or subjects.

(B) Benefits of fasting in the Hereafter

- (i) Fasting is a protection against Hell fire. The Prophet (pbuh) said, 'Hell fire is surrounded with desires'.

Restraining the body from its essential desires like food and drink, during the days of Ramadan gives it valuable practice in restraining all of its desires and lusts.

This makes it easy for Muslims to refrain from committing what is declared by Allah to be unlawful. In this regard, fasting is considered as a shield against Hell fire.

- (ii) Fasting paves the way to Paradise
The Prophet (pbuh) said:
'Allah, the Exalted and Majestic, says: 'Every act of the son of Adam is for him, except fasting. It is exclusively meant for Me and I alone will reward it.'
It was reported that one of the Prophet's (pbuh) Companions asked: 'O Messenger of Allah, show me an act that may cause me to enter Paradise.' He answered, 'Keep fasting, there is nothing to match it.'

Conditions for a valid fast

There are two conditions for a fast to be acceptable:

1. Making the intention of fasting before dawn, specifying the intended fast. That means, for the fast of Ramadan to be valid one has to make one's intention clearly the evening before the first day of the month that one intends to fast the month of Ramadan as a fulfilment of the obligation of fasting. This intention must be renewed if fasting is interrupted for any reason during the month.
2. Abstinence from all things that break the fast, like eating, drinking, etc.

What invalidates the fast?

The fast may be rendered invalid by any of the following:

1. Anything that enters the abdomen, whether through the mouth, nostrils, ears or by any other means. This includes food, drinks, smoke snuff and injections.
2. Vomiting, if it was caused deliberately and some of re-entered the stomach. But if the vomiting was involuntary and impossible to control, the fast remains valid, provided it is continued afterwards.
3. Sexual intercourse, if it happens deliberately, without coercion or forgetfulness, when the individuals know that it invalidates the fast.
4. Emission of semen by any other means such as masturbation, prolonged contemplation and the like.

2 THOSE WHO SHOULD OBSERVE FASTING

Fasting in Ramadan is an obligation upon every Muslim, both male and female, providing that they meet the following qualifications:

- Having attained puberty
- Having a sound mind
- Being physically able to bear the fast.

In the case of a female:

- She is not undergoing menstruation or post-natal bleeding.

Those who observe the fast but miss out some days are divided into two groups as follows:

- 1. People exempted but required to make up for the missed days:**
 - 1.1 The sick:** A Muslim is not required to fast if he/she is ill and this illness may become worse by reason of fasting, or fasting might delay their recovery, or if it is necessary for them to take medicine during the daytime.
 - 1.2 Travellers:** People who are travelling are exempted from fasting during their journey, provided that the distance of the journey is not less than 50 miles, but it is best for them to observe the fast.
 - 1.3 Pregnant or breast-feeding women** if they fear that fasting might affect their own or their children's health.
 - 1.4 Women in the normal period of menstruation or having post-natal bleeding.**

- 2. People exempted but not required to make up for missed days:**

2.1 The elderly who cannot stand the hardships of fasting

2.2 Chronically ill people who are not likely to recover.

Reparation for a spoiled fast

There are two ways for atonement depending on the nature of the action that spoiled the fast:

- (i) Making up the missed days of the fast, day for day.

This is required when the fast is nullified by committing one of the actions that invalidates the fast, by accident or under coercion or due to ignorance, i.e. not knowing that the action would invalidate the fast.

- (ii) Expiation (Kafarah):

A fast to make up the missed day is required when the rules for fasting are deliberately broken, and the individual is fully aware that the action will make the fast invalid and is not under any coercion to do it. Any day, when the fast of Ramadan is deliberately violated must be made up either by fasting two months consecutively or by feeding 60 poor people for each day violated in Ramadan. On top of this, fasting for a day in place of the violated one is required.

Breaking the Fast

Immediately after sunset a fasting person breaks his fast, preferably with dates and water before taking his meal. It is recommended to say the following supplication at breaking the fast.

'O Allah, for your sake I have fasted and I am breaking my fast with food You have provided.'

3 TARAWIH PRAYER

Tarawih is a congregational prayer performed during Ramadan after Isha prayer. It consists of twenty *rak'ahs* followed by *witr*. It is recommended to do tarawih in the mosque. However, one may also perform it individually at home, or where convenient.

4 LAYLAT AL-QADR

Laylat al-Qadr occurs in one of the last ten days of Ramadan. Ibn Omar, the Companion of the Prophet (pbuh) reported that the Prophet (pbuh) said, 'Look out

for Laylat al-Qadr in the last ten nights of Ramadan.’ So it was recommended to spend these nights in worship and recitation of the Qur’an. The Qur’an states that this night is ‘better than a thousand months’, meaning that acts of devotion done on this night are rated higher than those done through a time span of a thousand months, because it was the night of revelation of the Holy Qur’an.

5 ZAKAT AL-FITR

(Charity Paid at the End of Ramadan)

Payment of *Zakat al-Fitr*, on behalf of oneself and one’s dependants, is incumbent upon every Muslim, provided that he has in his possession the required amount of *zakah* in excess of his needs and the needs of his dependents..

The amount of *Zakat al-Fitr* has been determined by Muslim scholars as 2.5 litres of the staple food at the place where the payer lives (i.e. wheat, corn, rice, etc.)

It should be paid at the end of Ramadan and should not be delayed by any means beyond the day of Eid, so that nobody spends the Eid unsatisfied or unhappy.

6 EID AL-FITR

(The Festival of Accomplishment of The Fast)

Eid al-Fitr is the festival marking the end of the Ramadan fast. On the night of 29th Ramadan, people watch the sky for the new moon of the following month. As soon as it is sighted, an announcement is made: 'The moon has been seen at such-and-such a place' and people at once start their final preparations to celebrate *Eid al-Fitr* on the following day.

Eid Prayer is a confirmed *Sunnah* (highly recommended by the Prophet). It is a congregational prayer consisting of two *rak'ahs* and a sermon given by the Imam after the prayer, where the Imam sits down half-way through the sermon and then rises again.

The time for the Eid prayer begins at early morning, shortly after sunrise. The time available for the prayer actually starts at about 20 minutes after sunrise and continues until noon, when midday prayer (*dhuhr*) becomes due.

On the morning of *Eid al-Fitr* people bath or shower, put on their new or best clothes, eat breakfast and go out early to the *Eid* praying ground. It may be a large mosque or a wide, open space, since many thousands of

people are likely to be there. Women are encouraged to attend. Everywhere people exchange greetings such as *Eid Mubarak* (May the Eid be blessed).

The religiously important aspects of Eid al-Fitr are the giving of the zakat al-fitr to the poor (which is essential for all who have the means) and the attendance at the Eid prayer.

Other aspects of the festival are merely customary, and may vary slightly from one country to another. For example, in some Muslim countries, a visit is paid to the graveyards during the Eid festival, while in some other Muslim countries this practice is unknown. What is common to all Muslim communities and the reason why the Eid al-Fitr is such a popular festival, is the joyful feeling of having completed the fast.

7 FASTING OUTSIDE RAMADAN

There are two types of fasting other than Ramadan fast, either obligatory or voluntary as follows:

(A) Obligatory Fasting

There is no obligatory fast in Islam other than Ramadan.

However it becomes incumbent on a person to observe the fast under the following conditions:

(1) Expiation of an unfulfilled oath

Allah Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an: 'Allah will not take you to task for that which is unintentional in your oaths, but he will take you to task for the oaths which ye swear in earnest. The expiation thereof is the feeding of ten of the needy with the average of that with which ye feed your own folk, or clothing of them, or the liberation of a slave, and for him who findeth not the (wherewithal to do so), then a three-day fast. This is the expiation of your oaths when you have sworn, so keep your oaths. Thus Allah expoundeth unto you His revelations in order that ye may give thanks.'

(2) Making up for missed days

When a person who is required to observe fasting deliberately invalidates his fast during the days of Ramadan, it will become incumbent on him to expiate for each of the invalidated days by fasting two months continuously or by feeding sixty persons.

(3) Nadhr (Vow)

Fasting on some days may become incumbent on a person if he solemnly vowed to fast. If anyone has

made a vow to do a specific act of worship such as prayer, fasting or the like it becomes obligatory on them to fulfil their vow.

A vow usually takes the form of saying, for example, 'It will become obligatory for me to fast three days if so and so happens.' If the mentioned thing happens, then the fulfilment of the vow becomes obligatory.

(4) Fasting in relation to Hajj and Umrah

- (i) If a Muslim performs Umrah during the months of Hajj, i.e. the months of Sawal, Dhu al-Qaida and the first ten days of Dhu al-Hijjah, they will be required to offer an animal to be slaughtered and distribute its meat among the poor of Makkah. If they cannot afford that, they may then fast for three days during the Hajj days and seven days when they return home.
- (ii) Expiation for breaching the requirements of Ihram of Hajj or Umrah.

(B) Voluntary Fasting

It is recommended to fast some special days such as:

1. The first six days of Shawal immediately after the day of Eid. The Prophet (pbuh) said: 'If anyone

observes the fast of Ramadan with a six day fast in the month of Shawal, it will be as if he had fasted perpetually.' (Narrated by Muslim).

2. Ninth and 10th days of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar);
3. Thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth days of each lunar month.
4. The Mondays and Thursdays of each week;
5. The first nine days of Dhu al-Hijjah, especially the day of Arafah, for those who are not performing the *Hajj*;
6. The Prophet (pbuh) said:
'The one who observes three days fast every month and that of Ramadan every year is perpetually fasting. I seek from Allah that fasting on the day of Arafah may atone for the sins of the past and the coming years, and I seek from Allah that fasting on the day of Ashura (10th Muharram) may atone for the sins of the past years.'

NB.

Every effort has been made to ensure that this text is accurate and contains the basic information required to carry out the fast. Further details may be obtained directly from your imam.

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