

FASTING IN RAMADĀN

Fasting is a pillar of Islām obligated by Allāh. Hundreds of millions of Muslims fast every year.

Read about the rulings of fasting and its tremendous virtues.



FASTING IN RAMADĀN IS A PILLAR OF ISLĀM

Allāh obligated fasting upon the Ummah of Muḥammad ﷺ just as He obligated it upon the previous nations, "O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed for you just as it was prescribed upon those who came before you so that you may become pious." (Qur'ān 2:183) It was obligated upon the Muslims in the second year after their migration from Makkah to Madīnah. The Messenger ﷺ fasted nine Ramadans before he passed away. The religious meaning of the term **fast** (*ṣiyām*) is to withhold **physically**—with a sincere intention—from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse—and to withhold from moral violations—and that is done by avoiding sins such as backbiting, rumour-mongering, speaking ignorantly, cursing, lying, using foul language, listening to and looking at what Allāh has prohibited. The fasting day starts at the beginning of the true dawn (**Fajr**) and lasts until sunset (**Maghrib**). If a person withholds from these matters but without having the intention to fast for Allāh's sake, then he has not fasted. The Prophet ﷺ said: **"Indeed actions are but by intentions and for each person there is only what he intended."** So if a person withholds from food and drink from the true dawn until sunset but did not intend that for Allāh's pleasure, then he has not fasted in the Islamic sense. A person must also withhold from the spiritual violations as mentioned above because they reduce the reward of the fast or one may even lose all the reward because he is so utterly immersed in sin and transgression. The Prophet ﷺ said, **"Whoever does not give up false speech and acting upon it, and give up ignorant behaviour, then Allāh has no need for him to abstain from food and drink."** (Bukhārī, no. 6057) He also stated, **"Fasting is not only from food and drink rather it is withholding from evil speech and sexual relations."** (Al-Ḥākim, 1/430, authentic). So the person who withholds from food, drink and sexual relations (the physical things that break his fast) yet he does not withhold from the spiritual violations such as backbiting, tale-carrying and other sins then he has not truly fasted the fast that is demanded from him by his Lord. So it is possible that he receives little or even no reward for his fast.

The fast begins at the onset of the second Fajr (true dawn) being mindful of the fact that the first Fajr (false dawn) does not forbid a person from eating, drinking or sexual relations with his wife because the fast does not begin at the false dawn, nor is the Fajr prayer permitted at the false dawn. The false dawn is recognised by a vertical light that appears in the horizon that is followed by darkness. As for the second Fajr, which is the true dawn, then it is a horizontally spreading whiteness in the horizon, and there is no darkness after it, only an increasing

brightness in the sky. It is at this point one stops eating and drinking, and prepares to pray the Fajr prayer. Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى stated, "Eat and drink until the white thread (of light in the horizon) becomes distinct from the black thread at the onset of Fajr. Then complete the fast until the night." (Qur'an 2:187) The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ strongly encouraged the Muslims to take the pre-dawn meal (ṣaḥūr) and not to leave it. Many Muslims today neglect the pre-dawn meal and have thus abandoned an important part of the sunnah of fasting.

"Whoever does not give up false speech and acting upon it, and give up ignorant behaviour, then Allāh has no need for him to abstain from food and drink."

- Bukhārī, no. 6057

So, one fasts until the night which refers to the setting of the sun. If the sun has set and darkness has appeared in the east, the fast of the Muslim has ended, just as the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said, "When the night arrives from over here, the day ends from over there, and the sun has set, the fasting person breaks his fast." (Bukhārī, no. 1954) And he صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ encouraged his Ummah to hasten to break the fast and not to delay, "The people will not cease to remain upon goodness so long as they hasten with the breaking of the fast." (Bukhārī, no. 1957) The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ would break his fast with fresh dates, and if he could not find any, then with drier dates and if he could not find any, he would take some mouthfuls of water. It is better to have a light meal (iftār) with dates and water, and then pray Maghrib, just as the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ would do. Over-eating and filling the stomach with various assortments of food and drink at iftār time is in opposition to the Sunnah—Muslims are commanded to eat in moderation.

The wisdom behind the prescription of fasting is clear as Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى stated, "So that you may become pious." That is because fasting does not allow the soul to fulfill its desires with eating, drinking and sexual relations which are things that can,

if not tempered, lead to ingratitude, transgression and being negligent of the remembrance of Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى**. So when a person is fasting, his desires are weaker and the fast constricts the avenues for the Shayṭān, because the Shayṭān flows through the children of Ādam just like the flowing blood as occurs in a ḥadīth.

So fasting weakens the pathways of Shayṭān to the human, weakens the desires and breaks the vigour, so that the heart becomes soft. It is for this reason that Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** said, **"So that you may become pious."** So through fasting one achieves piety and becomes acutely aware of his weakness in front of Allāh and his utter reliance upon Him **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى**. He is likewise reminded of the favours of Allāh upon him, the blessing of food and drink. He is reminded also of those in need—so when he suffers from hunger and thirst, he remembers the less fortunate and the needy, and he feels compassion towards them. It is a month wherein the gates of Paradise are opened and not a single one locked, and the gates of Hellfire are locked and not a single one is left open—it is the month of forgiveness wherein the devils are restrained. (Tirmidhī, no. 682)

Fasting has tremendous benefits and immense wisdom. The Prophet **صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ** stated, **"Every good deed of the son of Ādam will be multiplied manifold. A good deed will be multiplied ten times up to as many as seven hundred, or as much as Allāh wills. Allāh said: 'Except for fasting, that is for Me and I shall reward it. A person gives up his desires and his food for My sake.' The fasting person has two times of joy, one when he breaks his fast and another when he meets his Lord. The smell that comes from the mouth of a fasting person is better with Allāh than the fragrance of musk."** (Ibn Mājah, no. 1638). This shows the excellence of fasting over the rest of the deeds. Allāh has obligated fasting for the whole of the month of Ramaḍān. He **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** stated, **"The month of Ramaḍān in which was revealed the Qur'ān, a guidance for mankind and a clear proof for guidance and a criterion (between right and wrong). So whoever from you sights (the crescent of the first night of) the month, he must observe the fasts. And whoever is ill or upon a journey then the same number of days must be made up later."** (Qur'ān 2:185) Allāh obligated fasting in this month for the healthy and resident; and He made an allowance for the sick and the traveller, that he may break his fast and make up what he has missed after Ramaḍān. So fasting is an obligation upon every sane, adult Muslim either by fulfilling its obligation in Ramaḍān or by making up the days later (if they were sick, or a woman was menstruating or they were on a journey in Ramaḍān).

“Whoever fasts Ramaḍān with true faith and hoping for reward, then his previous sins will be forgiven.”

- Bukhārī and Muslim

Allāh's Messenger ﷺ said, "When you see it (the crescent on the first night of the month) start fasting, and when you see it again cease fasting, and if there is cloud-cover then complete thirty days." (Bukhārī and Muslim) This ḥadīth proves that the month begins and ends with the sighting of the crescent moon, a sighting by at least one trustworthy Muslim—and if it is not sighted then the thirty days of the month leading up to Ramaḍān are counted in full. The Muslims should strive to sight the moon on the night before the thirtieth fast, and if it is not sighted, they must fast the full thirty days. We see that the Messenger ﷺ attached fasting to the visual sighting of the moon and not to calculations. Pre-determined calculations, timetables and predictions for the start and finish of Ramaḍān are not permitted. It is a deviation and an innovation in the Religion never practised by the Prophet ﷺ, nor his Companions or the early scholars. The Muslims have been fasting since the time of the Prophet ﷺ and they have always relied upon moon sightings with one's eyes. Now there have appeared people who claim that the unity of the Muslims lies in a united start and finish to Ramaḍān! In reality however, the unity of the Muslims is in holding fast to a united belief ('aqīdah), the belief that Allāh alone is to be worshipped, and following the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and the path of his Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ and to abandon innovated religious practices. That is the basis of unity. Instead, we find people formulating their own opinions and each group having its own beliefs—unity will not be achieved like this. And, for the sake of argument, if they all fasted together on the same day and stopped fasting on the same day, they still will not have achieved unification of the Muslims! Ibn 'Umar رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا alone sighted the moon of Ramaḍān; then he informed the Prophet ﷺ of that, and he in turn commanded the people to fast. (Reported by Abū Dāwūd, no. 2342) This tradition remains till this day, and all praise is due to Allāh.¹ The Pious Predecessors of the Ummah (al-Salaf al-Ṣālih) would pay special attention to this tremendous month by exerting themselves in the recitation of the Qur'ān, plentiful remembrance (ẓikr) and refraining

from acts of disobedience. Fasting is not merely to refrain from eating and drinking, it is also to refrain from all those affairs that Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** hates from sin and disobedience to Him. So the early generations would strive in the obedience of Allāh **عَزَّوَجَلَّ** and they would be sincere to Allāh in this pious act of fasting. It has been narrated from Imām Mālik (died 179 AH **رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ**) that he would teach the people throughout the year but when the month of Ramaḍān would arrive, he would devote his time to fasting and the recital of the Qur'ān. So you should give importance to the recitation of the Qur'ān in this month alongside pondering and reflecting over it, taking its admonitions, refraining from its prohibitions, understanding the permissible affairs and those that are forbidden, and understanding the threats of punishment and the promises of reward.²

Allāh's Messenger **صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ** said: **"Whoever fasts Ramaḍān with true faith and hoping for reward, then his previous sins will be forgiven."** (Bukhārī and Muslim) The reward for fasting is immense and without measure—and fasting requires patience upon the obedience of Allāh, patience in abstaining from His prohibitions, patience upon the decrees of Allāh that cause distress and hardship such as hunger, thirst, weakness in body and soul. So fasting gathers together these three types of patience. And when all three are adhered to, the fasting person is considered amongst the patient worshippers just as Allāh has stated: **"Only those who are patient shall receive their reward in full without measure."** (Qur'ān 39:10) My brothers and sisters, the virtues of Ramaḍān are not attained until one fasts in the correct manner. So strive in perfecting your fasts and staying within the limits, and repent to Allāh for your shortcomings.³ Fill your days with obedience and piety, and your nights with prayer, recitation and supplication.

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References:

- (1) See Tashīl al-Ilmām of Shaykh Sāliḥ al-Fawzān, vol. 3, pp. 193-210.
- (2) Shaykh Rabī' ibn Hādī Al-Madkhalī, see rabee.net.
- (3) Majālis Shahr Ramaḍān of Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Sāliḥ Al-'Uthaymīn.

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