

RAMADAN IN A NUTSHELL

What Every Muslim Should Know about Fasting

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VIRTUES OF THE MONTH OF RAMADAN

Fasting the month of Ramadan is the fourth pillar of Islam, which Allah made obligatory on Muslims in the second year of the Prophet's migration (Hijrah) to Madinah with the statement: **"O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may gain Taqwa (piety)"** (2: 183)

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: **"He who fasts during Ramadan with faith and seeking reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven."** (Bukhari) Ramadan is a unique opportunity for Muslims to seek forgiveness and repentance from Allah. It is also a month of opportunity for enormous reward. Allah says: **"Fasting is Mine and I shall reward for it (as I wish). A Muslim gives up his (sexual) pleasure, food and drink for My sake. Fasting is a shield. He who fasts has two joys: a joy when he breaks his fast and a joy when he meets his Lord. The change in the breath of the mouth of he who fasts is sweeter to Allah than the smell of musk."**

DEFINITION AND PILLARS OF FASTING

Fasting in the context of Islam refers to abstaining from all the things that invalidate it from the break of dawn (Fajr) till sunset (Maghreb), coupled with the intention of doing so as an act of worship. Fasting the month of Ramadan is obligatory (Fard) on every Muslim who has reached the age of puberty, who is sane, and is able to fast without it being hazardous to his health due to illness.

The first pillar of fasting is the intention, and the place of the intention is the heart, hence uttering the intention verbally is something which is not legislated. It is mandatory to have the intention at night, that is, before the break of dawn (Fajr). Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: **"Whoever does not intend fasting prior to Fajr, then there is no fasting for him."**

The second pillar of fasting is to abstain from the things that break a person's fast from the break of dawn till sunset, along with a continued intention between these two periods. If a person makes an intention to break their fast, but does not come across anything to break their fast with from food or drink until sunset, then they must make up that day after Ramadan. This is because maintaining the intention between Fajr and Maghreb is from amongst the pillars of fasting.

The third pillar of fasting is that a person must fast during the days of Ramadan and not during the nights. Fasting the nights instead of the days is not acceptable because Allah says: **"...and eat and drink until the white thread (light) of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread (of night), then complete your fast till the nightfall..."** (2:187)

NULLIFIERS OF FASTING

Eating and drinking deliberately

Any Muslim who eats or drinks intentionally has broken their fast. Whoever does this must repent to Allah, asking Him for forgiveness. Many of the Muslim scholars are of the opinion that this day should be made up for before the next Ramadan. Imam Abu Hanifah holds the opinion that in addition to repenting and making up for the day, he must also feed a poor or needy person. This view is also held by Imam Malik.

Induced vomiting

The soundest view amongst the scholars of Islam is that as long as vomiting is unintentional then the fasting remains valid. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: **"If someone had a sudden attack of vomiting, no atonement is required of him, but if he vomits intentionally he must make atonement."** If any vomit is accidentally swallowed, the fast is not affected.

Menstruation and Post-Natal Bleeding

A woman who bleeds due to any one of these two reasons has broken her fast, even if she gets her period only seconds before sunset. This is the opinion of the majority of scholars. The number of fasting days missed must be made up for prior to the next Ramadan.

Ejaculation

Any deliberate action a fasting person takes which results in seminal ejaculation nullifies the fast. This is the opinion of the majority of the Muslim scholars. The days missed as a result of this, must be made up for before the next Ramadan.

Sexual Intercourse

If a fasting person has sexual intercourse during the day of Ramadan, irrespective of whether ejaculation takes place or not, the fast has been broken. In this case a person must repent, seek forgiveness from Allah, and make up for this day. Furthermore, two consecutive months of fasting must be done prior to the next Ramadan. If fasting two consecutive months is detrimental to one's health then he must feed sixty poor or needy people.

Supplements, Nutritional Injections and Drips

These dietary intakes also break the fast as they defeat one of the main objectives of fasting, namely, to undergo thirst and hunger, and hence break the fast. The days in which the fast was broken must be up for before the next Ramadan.

Apostasy

If a fasting person becomes a disbeliever, then their fasting becomes void, as Allah Most High says: **"If you commit shirk (associate others in worship with Allah), then surely (all) your deeds will be in vain..."**

WHO IS EXEMPT FROM FASTING?

Non- Muslims

For fasting to be accepted a person must firmly believe that Allah is the only one God worthy of worship, and that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His final Messenger. Furthermore, they must believe in the 6 articles of faith, and act upon the five pillars of Islam.

The Sick

Those who are sick but are able to fast must do so. However, if fasting is detrimental to a person's health, due to illness, then this person is not required to fast. Those who have no hope of recovery are to compensate by paying *Fidyah* – The feeding of a needy person for every day missed. Those who are temporarily ill are to make up the missed days after their recovery before the next Ramadan.

Travelers

A traveler who will face no difficulty in fasting may choose not to fast, but fasting in this case is preferable. If however, fasting will cause a traveler hardships, then it is advised to take up the favor and concession of Allah granted to him and break the fast. The missed days must be made up for before the next Ramadan.

Children

Fasting is not required of children until they reach the age of puberty. The signs of puberty are: the growth of pubic hair, the occurrence of wet dreams, and in the case of a female, the menstrual period. If a person turns the age of fifteen and none of these signs have appeared, then they are considered to have reached the age of puberty. Although children are not obligated to fast prior to puberty, they should be encouraged to fast if there is no fear of it harming them, as this will train them to fast.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Unintentionally Eating or Drinking after the Break of Dawn or before Sunset

The correct opinion concerning a person who eats or drinks believing that the break of dawn has not commenced, or that the sun has set when it actually hasn't taken place, is that this person does not need to make up for that day. During the leadership of 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) some people broke their fast and some moments later the sun appeared. They asked whether they should make up this day, at which 'Umar responded by saying: "No, by Allah, we did not have any inclination towards a wrongful action." In addition, we have the incident whereby Asmaa' (may Allah be pleased with her) said: "We broke our fast on a cloudy day during Ramadan at the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), then the sun appeared." (Bukhari) Ibn Taymiyyah said: "This suggests it is not obligatory to make up for the day, for if the Prophet (peace be upon him) had ordered them to make up for that day, this would have been widely known, just as the news of the breaking of their fast was widely circulated.

Use of Nose Drops, Eye Drops, Intravenous Injections and Perfume

The scholars of Islam differed about the use of these things during fasting. The correct opinion - and Allah knows best - is that these things do not nullify fasting, and that no compensation is required if used, even if the nose or eye drops pass through the throat. This is the opinion of Ibn 'Umar, Anas ibn Malik, Abu Hanifah, ash-Shaafi, and Ibn Taymiyyah. There is nothing authentically mentioned by the Prophet (peace be upon him) prohibiting their use.

Water Entering the Stomach Accidentally

Water that enters into the stomach as a result of sniffing or rinsing out of the mouth has also caused controversy amongst scholars. The correct opinion is that the fast is not broken, as this has occurred unintentionally. Although sniffing water up the nostrils during wudu is desirable, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) advised that it should be avoided during fasting. Bathing and showering are permissible actions when fasting. Swimming is also permissible as long as care is taken not to swallow water. If however a person knows from past experience that they may swallow water whilst swimming, then it is not permitted to swim whilst fasting.

Use of Puffers

According to a number of scholars, the use of puffers for asthma does not break the fast. This is because the puffer is considered as compressed gas that goes to the lungs, and does in no way nourish or quench the thirst.

Pregnant and Breast Feeding Women

Women who are pregnant or breast feeding are allowed to break their fast if they fear for their health or the health of their infant or foetus. The respected scholars of Islam differed concerning how a woman who is pregnant or breast-feeding must compensate for her missed days. The first opinion is that of the companions Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn 'Umar, (may Allah be pleased with them) who said that she only needs to feed a needy person for each missed day. The second opinion is that of Abu Hanifah who said she needs to make up for the days missed day only. Imam Ash-Shafi and Imam Ahmad hold the opinion that she must both feed a needy person and make up for the days.

According to Imam Malik, a pregnant woman must make up for the day only, and that one who was breastfeeding must feed and make up for the days. The correct opinion - and Allah knows best - is that she only needs to feed a poor or needy person for each missed day. This is because we do not have any reports from any of the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) opposing Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn 'Umar's verdict - Two of Islam's most learned men concerning the Qur'an and Prophetic Sunnah.

RAMADAN: THE MONTH OF QUR'AN RECITATION

Ramadan is the month Allah chose in which to reveal the final scripture - The Qur'an. One the greatest ways a Muslim honours the Qur'an is by reading it. Angel Jibreel would visit Muhammad (peace be upon him) every Ramadan and revise the Qur'an with him. Many of the pious Muslims of the past would close all books and focus on reading the Qur'an only this month. A Muslim should strive to read the Qur'an in Arabic at least once during this month. The Qur'an consists of approximately 604 pages. This means a person can read the entire Qur'an by the last day of Ramadan from cover to cover by simply reading 4 pages after every prayer (salat).

SUHOOR - THE PRE-DAWN MEAL

The Prophet (peace be upon him) encouraged waking up moments before the Fajr and eating a light meal. He (peace be upon him) said: "**Take up your suhoor, for verily in the suhoor, there is a blessing.**" (Bukhari) At the very least a Muslim should wake up and drink some water in order to fulfill the Sunnah, and reap the blessing.

THE PROPHETIC WAY TO BREAK THE FAST

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "**My people will continue to be in good shape for as long as they hasten in breaking their fast...**" (Ahmad) The Sunnah is to break your fast on an odd number of fresh dates, if they are available, otherwise dry dates will suffice. If there are no dates at hand then the Sunnah is to drink water. (Abu Dawud)

The Du'a (supplication) to say at the time of breaking the fast consists of four phrases: "**Thahabathama', wabtallatil 'Urooq, wa thabatal Ajru, in Shaa-Allah.**" This means: "The thirst has been quenched, the veins have been nourished, and the reward has been fixed, by the will of Allah."

FASTING FROM PROHIBITED ACTIONS

Not only must a fasting person abstain from food, drink, and intercourse, the eyes must also fast from looking at unlawful things. The ears must fast from listening to music, and vain language. The tongue must fast from backbiting, slander, swearing and other similar types of speech. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "**Whoever does not abandon evil speech and acting upon it, then Allah is in no need for him to leave off his food and drink.**" (Agreed upon) This means that such people will receive no reward from Ramadan except hunger and thirst. The hands must fast from striking and abusing others. And the feet must fast from

going to places that bring about sin and lead to transgression. The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught us that if someone gets you angry to say: "**I am fasting, I am fasting.**"

TARAWEEH - NIGHT PRAYERS

Ramadan is the month of drawing nearer to Allah through Taraweeh prayers, which are an integral part of Ramadan. These prayers can be offered at home, however, they are best performed at the mosque. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "**Whoever stands up in night prayers during Ramadan out of faith, and seeking reward from Allah, his previous sins will be forgiven.**" (Muslim)

LAST 10 DAYS OF RAMADAN

Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) would engage in a greater deal of worship during the last ten days of Ramadan than the other days. One of the reasons for this is because of *Laylatul Qadar* (The Eve of Decree), which falls on one of the evenings of the odd days of the last ten days of Ramadan. Muslims should increase their reading of the Quran, night prayer, *thikr* (words of remembrance), charity, and other virtuous deeds.

The reward on this night is especially great, Allah says: "**Laylatul Qadr is better than one thousand months.**" One thousand months is equivalent to the reward of 83.3 years of worship! The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught us to say the following du'a as much as you can during this great night: **Allahumma innaka 'Afuwwoon, tuhjibbul 'afwa f 'afoo 'annii.**" This means "O Allah, You are forgiving; You love to forgive, so forgive me."

One of the best actions a Muslim can observe during these blessed days is to detach one's self from worldly affairs by spending all their time in the mosque, engaging in the different forms of worship. This form of worship is known as *'Itikaaf*. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to practice *'Itikaaf* in the last ten days of Ramadan until he died. (Bukhari)

CONCLUDING ADVICE

Perhaps this Ramadan will be your last, and you do not live until the next Ramadan. So ask Allah to make you a better Muslim, to bless you and your Muslim brothers and sisters around the world with His enumerable blessings and bounties, both in this life and in the Hereafter.

The joy of Eid (Islamic Celebration) and the following months until the next Ramadan, should not allow one to forget the purpose of Ramadan, namely, to gain *Taqwa* (piety or God-consciousness). The real test of success in Ramadan is whether or not one carries on the good deeds he did during Ramadan, throughout the rest of the year!

For more information about Ramadan: Events, lessons, Iftars and Taraweeh prayers, visit: www.ramadan.com.au