**FASTING**



O you who believe! Prescribed for you is the Fast, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may deserve God's protection (against the temptations of your carnal soul) and attain piety.[[1]](#endnote-2)



(Fasting is for) a fixed number of days. If any of you is so ill that he cannot fast, or on a journey, he must fast the same number of other days. But for those who can no longer manage to fast, there is a redemption (penance) by feeding a person in destitution (for each day missed, or giving him the same amount in money). Yet better it is for him who volunteers greater good (by either giving more, or fasting in case of recovery), and that you should fast (when you are able to) is better for you, if you but knew (the worth of fasting).[[2]](#endnote-3)------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The Messenger of Allah (saw) addressed his companions on the last day of Sha`ban, saying, "Oh people! A great month has come over you; a blessed month; a month in which is a night better than a thousand months; month in which Allah has made it compulsory upon you to fast by day, and voluntary to pray by night. Whoever draws nearer (to Allah) by performing any of the (optional) good deeds in (this month) shall receive the same reward as performing an obligatory deed at any other time, and whoever discharges an obligatory deed in (this month) shall receive the reward of performing seventy obligations at any other time. It is the month of patience, and the reward of patience is Heaven. It is the month of charity, and a month in which a believer's sustenance is increased. Whoever gives food to a fasting person to break his fast, shall have his sins forgiven, and he will be saved from the Fire of Hell, and he shall have the same reward as the fasting person, without his reward being diminished at all." [[3]](#endnote-4)

`Abdullah ibn `Amr reported that the Messenger of Allah (saw), said: "The fast and the Qur'an are two intercessors for the servant of Allah on the Day of Resurrection. The fast will say: 'O Lord, I prevented him from his food and desires during the day. Let me intercede for him.' The Qur'an will say: 'I prevented him from sleeping at night. Let me intercede for him.' And their intercession will be accepted."[[4]](#endnote-5)

SahlibnSa'd reported that the Messenger of Allah (saw): "There is a gate to Paradise that is called ar-Rayyan. On the Day of Resurrection it will say: 'Where are those who fasted?' When the last [one] has passed through the gate, it will be locked."[[5]](#endnote-6)

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What is fasting? What is the purpose of fasting?

Fasting, or *sawm* in Arabic, is abstaining from the cravings of the carnal soul during the period beginning before the break of dawn and until sunset with the aim of disciplining the desires by consciously refraining from eating, drinking, and sexual relations. Fasting during the month of Ramadan, which is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, is one of the five pillars of Islam deemed obligatory upon the Muslims in this verse of Qur’ân: *“O you who believe! Prescribed for you is the Fast, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may deserve God’s protection (against the temptations of your carnal soul) and attain piety”* (Baqarah 2:183).

God Almighty has made the reward for fasting greater than the reward for any other form of worship. The following Hadith Qudsi highlights the true value of fasting in the eyes of God and the greatness of the reward that awaits those who fast: “Every good deed will be rewarded from ten to seven hundred times, except fasting. Fasting is for Me, and I shall reward it (without measure).”

Performing any form of worship consciously is obviously crucial for the soundness of belief, but is also very important for us to maintain our faith. As in the case of all forms of worship, there are various reasons for the fast of Ramadan being prescribed compulsory upon the Muslims. The purpose of fasting is not to make people endure hunger; the aim of fasting is restraining from evil actions, maintaining spiritual discipline, and controlling the soul’s desires for God’s sake. Fasting is the means of disciplining our bodies, our souls, and our emotions and, therefore, encourages Muslims to become virtuous, mature, charitable, kind, and compassionate humans.

What are the advantages of fasting?

Committing a sin or mistake is a constant source of concern for any devoted believer. In this sense, fasting is a great blessing for a Muslim, a form of spiritual purification which relieves apprehension and fills the heart with tranquility. The Prophet said, “Whoever fasts during Ramadan with faith and seeking his reward from God will have his past sins forgiven.” Fasting is a shield that prevents us from sinning and protects us against evil actions. On one hand, the joy of forgiveness for past sins, and on the other, the fear of the alleviation of rewards due to sin obviously makes those who fast even more apprehensive and more sensitive to avoiding sin. In other words, fasting enhances the character of a Muslim. Fasting is the means of salvation and forgiveness, a spiritual reminder that we are in the presence of God at all times. Those who fast are embraced in a constant emotion of worship, the spiritual bond drawing us closer to the Creator and protecting us in everything we do. As the Prophet said, “Fasting is a shield.” And the constant feeling of worship arouses our awareness of being in the presence of the Creator. All of us appreciate the blessings bestowed by God, but we tend to display our duty of gratitude for these blessings greater at the time of hunger and thirst. By abstaining from the blessings God prescribed lawful during the period which He forbids, we are reminded that our duty is to abide by God’s commands; therefore, we become more aware of our servitude and our duties as Muslims. Fasting teaches us patience, for we abstain from eating and drinking not by force, but by our own willpower. As the Prophet said, “Fasting is one half of patience, and patience is one half of faith.”

How should a fasting Muslim act?

Fasting is not only abstaining from eating and drinking, or abandoning specific worldly pleasures, it also entails avoiding any kind of sin and bad behavior. Just as a fasting person refrains from the pleasures of eating and drinking, he must also protect the tongue from lying, slander, and gossip; the hands from unlawful or evil actions; the ears from heeding to anything sinful; the feet from straying towards sin; and the heart and mind from evil thoughts and intentions. Of course, a fasting person who refrains from the lawful pleasures of his own home with total sincerity, and awareness of the fast, will most certainly abstain from sin or that which is prescribed unlawful. As the Prophet said, “The best of the believers is the one who, when you look at him, you remember God.”

Who is obliged to fast during the month of Ramadan?

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is compulsory for every male and female who:

1 – Are Muslims

2 – Are sane and conscious of their actions

3 – Have reached puberty

What are the conditions of the fast’s validity?

1 – The intention of fasting.

2 - Women not being in the state of menstruation or postnatal bleeding.

What are the times of fasting?

The fast begins just before dawn (*imsâk*) and continues until sunset. The beginning of the fast, called *imsâk*, is the time when the morning prayer begins. *Imsâk* marks the end of the time for having the predawn meal (*sahûr*) just before the first light of dawn. *Iftâr* is when the fast ends at sunset, when the time for the evening prayer begins. Those who abstain from food and drink the whole day break the fast at sunset, and they may continue to eat and drink until the beginning of the morning prayer. The meal eaten in the evening to break the fast is called *iftâr* and those who complete the fast feel a sense of pleasure and contentment of fulfilling their duty to God. But the greatest pleasure of all is when Muslims go before the Lord on the Day of Judgment to receive their rewards for fasting. The Prophet said, “The one who fasts has two occasions of joy, one at the time of breaking their fast, and the other at the time when they will meet their Lord; then they will be pleased because of their fasting.”

Those who intend to fast eat a meal before the first light of dawn known as the *sahûr* meal. The Prophet told us, “Get up (and eat) at *sahûr*, for there is blessing in *sahûr*.” Indeed, the *sahûr* time is blessed and fruitful in many ways: The person who has the *sahûr* meal observes the tradition of the Prophet and attains enough energy and strength for the fast and other forms of worship throughout the day ahead. *Sahûr* is the best time to supplicate, to perform prayers, to glorify God, and to recite the Qur’ân because good deeds observed at that hour of the night have been reported to be more welcome than the rest of the day. Indeed, it is a time when all supplications made to God are accepted.

Though it is more virtuous to make the intention for the fast at night following the pre-dawn meal, the intention can be made at any time from sunset right after having the *iftâr* dinner until forty five minutes before noon prayer the following day. However, the intention for the fast can only be made after dawn if the individual has not eaten or drunk anything nor done anything that invalidates fasting since the time of *imsâk*, or the break of the dawn. As every day of Ramadan is classified as an independent worship, the intention for fasting must be renewed daily.

Under what conditions can the fast be delayed?

A person is permitted to delay the fast until a later date due to any of the conditions listed below:

1. A serious illness.

2. Travelling on a journey of ninety kilometers or more.

3. When fasting may cause a threat to a person’s life.

4. If a woman is pregnant or breastfeeding.

5. If hunger or thirst is so the extreme that it may cause damage to the health.

6. The elderly who are too weak or sick to endure the fast.

What should those unable to fast during Ramadan do?

A person unable to fast during the month of Ramadan due to any of the reasons stated above must compensate for every day of the fast missed when the hindrance no longer applies. Those who are exempt from fasting due to incurable health problems or those too old and frail to fast must compensate for every day of the fast missed by providing a needy person with either food or money sufficient to satisfy a human from morning until night. However, if this person recovers at a later time, these fasts must be compensated for by fasting one day for each of the missed fasts.

Is abandoning the fast punishable?

Abandoning the fast with no valid excuse is a great sin. Every day of the fast that was abandoned after fasting has begun must be compensated (*qadâ’*), and expiation (*kaffârah*) for the fast is also necessary for those who deliberately eat and drink while observing the fast of Ramadan.

What are qadâ’ and kaffârah?

Certain conditions that invalidate the fast only require compensation of the fast, whereas other conditions require both *qadâ’* and *kaffârah* (expiation). Compensation for the fasts which were not held or were forced to abandon for a valid reason must be performed day for day after the month of Ramadan. Kaffârah is a fast of expiation for intentionally or voluntarily breaking the fast with no valid excuse, a penalty of fasting that must be executed with no intervals for two consecutive months, and one day must also be held in compensation for the abandoned fast.

What are the conditions that invalidate the fast and require both qadâ’ and kaffârah?

Doing one of the following with no valid excuse or under no compulsion or intentionally requires both a sixty-day *kaffârah* and a make-up day (*qadâ’*):

1. Eating, drinking or swallowing any kind of medicine.

2. Sexual relations or masturbation.

3. Intentionally swallowing rain, snow or hail that entered the mouth by accident.

4. Smoking cigarettes, cigars, water pipes, or inhaling the intoxicating smoke of any other herb.

5. Taking anything, even as small as a sesame seed into the mouth and then swallow it, including swallowing a small amount of salt.

A person who does any of the things mentioned above with no valid excuse, must fast for two consecutive months as a punishment for intentionally breaking the fast, and also compensate by fasting for the missed day.

What are the conditions that invalidate the fast but only require a make-up day (qadâ’)?

1. Eating things that are not normally eaten by or that do not appeal to human beings, such as eating things like paper, stone, soil, iron, gold, and silver, swallowing an empty walnut or eating an olive pip that is not usually eaten (eating pips that are usually eaten requires *kaffârah*), or eating a large amount of salt at one time.

2. Swallowing saliva that has changed color due to the dye from cotton placed in the mouth.

3. Unintentionally swallowing rain or snow which entered the mouth by accident.

4. Breaking the fast under severe physical torture or force.

5. Swallowing the remains of food no larger than a chickpea that was stuck between the teeth.

6. If water is swallowed accidently when taking water into the mouth and nostrils while performing ablutions.

7. Eating or drinking after assuming that the fast is invalid after forgetfully eating and drinking.

8. Vomiting intentionally; even if the vomit is less than a mouthful, the fast is invalid.

9. Swallowing a mouthful of vomit, or that which was intentionally vomited.

10. Intentionally breathing in smoke, but the fast is not invalid if breathed in unintentionally. (*Kaffârah*, or expiation of the fast, is necessary if the smoke breathed in intentionally is the smoke from a cigarette, cigar, or water pipe).

11. Eating or drinking under the assumption that the sun had set before it actually did.

12. Eating or drinking in the early morning wrongly assuming that there was still time until the fast began.

13. Breaking a fast other than the fasts of Ramadan. Only compensating for the particular day is necessary if a fast, other than the fasts of Ramadan, is abandoned.

14. If a person eats and drinks but did not make the intention of fasting on a day during Ramadan. If the intention for the fast is made, and the individual eats and drinks intentionally, then expiation (*kaffârah*) for the fast is necessary. However, if an individual eats and drinks but did not make the intention of fasting, only compensating for that particular fast is necessary.

15. Using medicine, suppositories, or an injection administered for health reasons.

16. If medication or any substance applied to a wound enters the body.

17. Inhaling medication through the nostrils.

18. If any water that is taken in the mouth or the nostrils enters the throat or nasal passage by accident.

What does not invalidate the fast?

1. If a person forgets he is fasting and eats or drinks. The Prophet said, “If a person eats or drinks due to forgetfulness, he should continue the fast for it was God who fed him and gave him the drink.” A person who eats or drinks due to forgetfulness should empty the food or drink from the mouth, rinse the mouth with water as soon as he remembers that he is fasting, and then continue the fast as usual.

2. If smoke dust, or flies enters the mouth accidently.

3. If a person vomits unintentionally.

4. Becoming spiritually impure while sleeping (due to wet dreams) or due to the thought or sight of something.

5. If a person becomes spiritually impure at night, but does not perform the *ghusl* until after dawn.

6. If the head is submerged in water, and water enters the ears. Therefore, the water that leaks into the ears when bathing does not invalidate the fast.

7. Swallowing a piece of food smaller than a chickpea which remained between the teeth from the pre-dawn (*sahûr*) meal.

8. Swallowing one’s own saliva or inhaling mucus; however, swallowing saliva removed from the mouth invalidates the fast.

9. Swallowing phlegm.

10. Putting eye drops in the eyes.

11. Giving blood.

12. Applying kohl to the eyes.

13. Applying medicine, cream or ointment to the outer body (even if substances are absorbed into the body by the pores of the skin, provided that the substance applied to a wound does not enter the body). Similarly, water that is used for cleaning and washing up does not invalidate the fast either, for these are all absorbed through pores of the skin, not the mouth or nose.

Establish the Prayer, and pay the Zakâh (the Prescribed Purifying Alms). (6)

(Baqarah 2:43) Charity

**What is the Wisdom in Fasting?[[6]](#endnote-7)**

The hawk's swooping contributes to the sparrow's alertness and agility. Although rain, electricity, or fire sometimes harms people, no one curses them. Fasting may be difficult, but it provides the body with energy, activity, and resistance. A child's immune system usually gains strength through illness. Gymnastics are not easy, but they are almost essential to bodily health and strength. People's spirits are refined through worship and meditation as well as through illness, suffering, and hardship. These allow them to acquire Paradise, for God gives a large reward for a little sacrifice. Hardships and sufferings promote people to higher spiritual degrees, and will be returned manifold in the other world. This is why all Messengers experienced the most grievous hardships and sufferings.

Hardship, suffering, and calamity cause believers' sins to be forgiven, warn them away from sins and the seductions of Satan and the carnal self, help them appreciate God's blessings, and open the way to gratitude. Also, they urge the rich and healthy to be concerned about the ill and the poor and to help them. Those who have never suffered cannot understand the condition of those who are hungry, sick, or stricken with a calamity. In addition, these afflictions may help establish closer relations between different social sectors.

**The role of intention in fasting**

Intention has a prominent place in our actions, for God's Messenger told us that our actions are judged according to our intentions. Intention is the spirit of our actions, for without it there is no reward. If you remain hungry and thirsty from daybreak to sunset without intending to fast, God does not consider it a fast. If you fast without intending to obtain God's good pleasure, you receive no reward. So whatever one intends, one gets the reward thereof. Those who have a firm belief in God, the other pillars of faith, and the intention to believe in them will be rewarded with eternal felicity in Paradise. But those who are determined not to believe, who have removed the inborn tendency to believe from their hearts, will be victims of their eternal determination and deserve eternal punishment. As for those with deeply ingrained unbelief and who have lost the capacity to believe, we read in the Qur'an: *As for the unbelievers, it is the same whether you warn them or warn them not. They will not believe. God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes there is a covering* (Baqara 2:6-7).

**Favoring the Heart as Opposed to the Flesh**

Human life is a composite of two distinct powers: the spirit and the flesh. Although they sometimes act in harmony, conflict is more usual—conflict in which one defeats the other. If bodily lusts are indulged, the spirit grows more powerless as it becomes more obedient to those lusts. If one can control the desires of the flesh, place the heart (the seat of spiritual intellect) over reason, and oppose bodily lusts, he or she acquires eternity.

Compared with previous centuries, people may well be wealthier and enjoy more convenience and comfort. However, they are trapped in greed, infatuation, addiction, need, and fantasy much more than ever before. The more they gratify their animal appetites, the more crazed they become to gratify those appetites; the more they drink, the thirstier they get; the more they eat, the hungrier they get. They enter into evil speculations to feed their greed to earn still more, and sell their spirits to Satan for the most banal advantages. And so they break with true human values a little more each day.

To sacrifice one's enjoyment of worldly pleasures has the same significance for human progress as roots have for a tree's growth. Just as a tree grows sound and strong in direct relation to its roots' soundness and strength, people grow to perfection whose striving to free themselves from selfishness so that they can live for others.

**Spiritual practices during Ramadan**

**Muhasaba (Self-Criticism or Self-Interrogation)**

Self-criticism may be described as seeking and discovering one's inner and spiritual depth, and exerting the necessary spiritual and intellectual effort to acquire true human values and to develop the sentiments that encourage and nourish them. This is how one distinguishes between good and bad, beneficial and harmful, and how one maintains an upright heart. Furthermore, it enables a believer to evaluate the present and prepare for the future. Again, self-criticism enables a believer to make amends for past mistakes and be absolved in the sight of God, for it provides a constant realization of self-renewal in one's inner world. Such a condition enables one to achieve a steady relationship with God, for this relationship depends on a believer's ability to live a spiritual life and remain aware of what takes place in his or her inner world. Success results in the preservation of one's celestial nature as a true human being, as well as the continual regeneration of one's inner senses and feelings.

**Tafakkur (Reflection)**

Reflection is a vital step in becoming aware of what is going on around us and of drawing conclusions from it. It is a golden key to open the door of experience, a seedbed where the trees of truth are planted, and the opening of the pupil of the heart's eye. Due to this, the greatest representative of humanity, the foremost in reflection and all other virtues states: "No act of worship is as meritorious as reflection. So reflect on God's bounties and the works of His Power, but do not try to reflect on His Essence, for you will never be able to do that."[1] By these words, in addition to pointing out the merit of reflection, the glory of humankind determines the limits of reflection and reminds us of our limits.

**Shukr (Thankfulness)**

True thankfulness in one's heart is manifested through the conviction and acknowledgment that all bounties are from God, and then ordering one's life accordingly. One can thank God verbally and through one's daily life only if personally convinced, and if one willingly acknowledges that his or her existence, life, body, physical appearance, and all abilities and accomplishments are from God, as are all of the bounties obtained and consumed. This is stated in: *Do you not see that God has made serviceable unto you whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the earth, and has loaded you with His bounties seen or unseen?* (Luqman 31:20), and: *He gives you of all that you ask Him; and if you reckon the bounties of God, you can never count them* (Ibrahim 14:34).

Of course, one should try to increase in all virtues during Ramadan, as this is the best time of year to do so. (7)

**References**

1. **2:183/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal** [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. **2:184/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal** [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. **Narrated by IbnKhuzaymah** [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. **Imam Ahmad** [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. **Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim**

**(6) The Young Person’s Guide to Living Islam, Asli Kaplan, Tughrabooks** [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. **FethullahGülen** [↑](#endnote-ref-7)