

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Fasting in Islam

By Qazi Fazlullah

Fasting in the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is mandatory for every Muslim adult, either male or female, and for all who do not possess an allowable excuse to abstain from fasting. Fasting has been a known practice in every divine religion although there have been differences in the nature and timing of the fasts. Fasting in Islam became an obligation on Sha'ban 10th in the second year after Hijra, and after the change in Qibla from Baitul Maqdas to Baitullah.

The advantages of fasting are:

1. Definition of fasting: Fasting is defined by the jurists to “Abstain from three things; eating, drinking, and sexual pleasure, for the entire day when there is an intention of fasting.
2. Wisdom and philosophy: The basic philosophy behind any commandment and prohibition is obedience and submission, for that is the meaning of Islam. But every prescribed action in Islam also has an under laying philosophy and certain advantages. The advantages of fasting are:
 - a) It establishes discipline and further enhances a person’s strength of will, patience, and stability.
 - b) It instills a sense of equality within the Muslims across all economic stratifications, for every Muslim adult is bound to fast, in exactly the same way, regardless of whether they are rich or poor.
 - c) It strengthens a Muslims belief in Allah (SWT) by abstaining from food and drink, even in solitude, having a firm belief that Allah (SWT) is All-Seeing and All-Hearing.

- d) It regulates and disciplines our schedule of eating and drinking.
- e) It instills a sense of empathy and compassion for other Muslims, for it allows us to feel the pain of deprivation, hunger and thirst experienced by suffering people.
- f) It teaches self-control against our own physical lusts and desires.
- g) It is a means for promoting mental peace, relaxation, and satisfaction.
- h) The regulation of food intake during fasting has tremendous physical benefits to the body, whereby after a month of fasting the body feels invigorated, renewed and energized.
- i) It teaches one how to face adversity and hardships. As Rasoolullah (SAS) said, “Fasting is a shield.” He also said “One who fasted and prayed during the night in the month of Ramadan with stern belief and with full sincerity, his past sins are pardoned.”

In another Hadith it is said, “Fasting in Ramadan wipes out small sins when one avoids the major sins.”

How Ramadan starts:

Islamic calendar and Islamic rules pertaining to dates are based upon the lunar calendar. The start of a lunar month is based upon sighting of the moon, or when 30 days have elapsed since the start of the previous month. Regarding moon sighting we need a testamentary statement from two just Muslims or at least one just, honest, integrated Muslim. But the possibility of sighting according to astronomers is a pre-requisite. When the moon is sighted in one region, it is deemed sufficient for all people located to the west of that region, provided that the Qazi or Waali of the Muslims

endorses that decision. Since the age of the moon, and consequently its brightness and size will increase for all areas lying westward from any given location where the initial sighting took place.

Conditions for fasting:

The basic conditions for fasting are: Islam, intention, puberty, sanity, and capability. Capability implies being of health and for women not to be menstruating or bleeding following childbirth. Regarding intention Imam Shafi (RA) and Imam Ahmed (RA) said that it must be made at night before dawn break for every single day. Imam Malik (RA) says that it may be made during the night but also it is allowed until before sunset every day. Imam Abu Haneefa (RA) takes a very logical view and has said that as Ramadan is one single unit so the intention once at the beginning of Ramadan is enough for the entire month.

What is recommended in fasting:

1. Sahoor: To wake up at night and to eat and drink before dawn break. This is just like wudu for prayer. While wudu is fard for prayer, sahoor is recommended for fasting.
2. Not to delay iftar but to break ones fast right with sunset.
3. To make dua when breaking fast.
4. To arrange iftar for others.
5. To take a shower from janabat before daybreak or from menses, or bleeding from childbirth provided it stopped during the night so that the Muslim person can start

the fast in a pure and clean state. However, if for some reason it was not possible to do so, then it is still acceptable to start the fast.

6. To avoid vain talk and vain actions.
7. To be generous towards ones family as well as the poor and needy.
8. To spend much time in recitation of the Quran and in the remembrance of Allah (SWT), and learning Islam.
9. To make itikaf (retreat/seclusion) on the last ten days and nights at the Masjid for men and at home in her prayer place for women.

Disliked practices during fasting:

1. During nafl fasting or optional fasting not to fast as sawmul wisal, which means not to eat or drink for two consecutive days.
2. To gather saliva in the month intentionally and swallowing it. But swallowing saliva as a normal body reflex action is okay.
3. To taste something unless it is for the sake of utmost necessity.
4. To refrain from kissing spouse to preclude the likelihood of enticing further passion.

Acceptable excuses not to fast or break a fast:

1. Traveling: Even though it is permissible not to fast while traveling, it is recommended that one continues his fast.
2. Sickness: When a pious Muslim physician recommends a patient not to fast for fear of aggravating their illness or condition.

3. Pregnancy or nursing: A pregnant woman or a woman while nursing a baby fears for the health of her child or her own health.
4. Decrepitude due to old age: When a person becomes so old that the body has become weak and that fasting would endanger the health or life of the person.
5. Medical emergencies: If a person has become dehydrated or weakened due to any reason that a Muslim physician feels that the person's life is in danger, then breaking a fast under such dire circumstances would be permissible.
6. Threat or force: In a circumstance where a person is threatened or forced to break his or her fast, then it is permissible.
7. Other emergencies: If a person has to break his or her fast in order to rescue somebody from drowning or from a fire than that is acceptable.

What are the things that cause breaking of a fast but require Qada only? In general there are only three kinds of circumstances that are applicable to this.

1. Eating, drinking or taking medicine all with some acceptable excuse. For example mistakenly swallowing water while making wudu.
2. Eating or drinking something which is neither food nor medicine, nor the nature requires it to be eaten, for example eating clay or something inorganic.
3. Sexual discharge but without sexual intercourse.

In all of the above cases there is a Qada but no Kaffarah (expiation/atonement) due.

Things which entail both Qada and Kaffarah. There are two primary actions that would necessitate this:

1. To consume food or drink or medicine even without a valid excuse or need.
2. To satisfy oneself sexually while fasting.

In these two circumstances a person is bound to do Qada as well as Kaffarah.

Things that do not break the fast:

1. Eating or drinking by mistake or through thoughtlessness, not deliberately.
2. Using of a toothbrush. But toothpaste may be avoided since some trace amount of the toothpaste can be swallowed.
3. An injection, either intramuscular or intravenous does not break the fast. However, an enema does since the intestine is connected to the stomach.
4. Vomiting does not break the fast. However if the person vomits to the amount of a mouthful intentionally and swallows back a little bit, then according to Imam Abu Haneefa it does break the fast.

Taraweeh:

Taraweeh is a special prayer only offered in Ramadan after salat-e-isha and before salat-e-witr every night. Taraweeh is sunnah and it consists of 20 rakat. Ibni Abbas said that Rasoolullah used to offer 20 rakats during taraweeh. All of the Sahabah, Tabieen, Mufasireen, Muhaddaseen, all of the four Imams, all of the Fuqaha, and the entire Muslim ummah for the last 14 centuries agree upon these 20 rakats. As farad rakats of

all the five prayers every day along with the three witr wajib adds up to 20 rakats, so in Ramadan an extra 20 rakats are recommended as a sunnah.

Itikaf (Seclusion):

Human beings by nature need to crave spiritual satisfaction. One of the ways to achieve this is through seclusion where one completely disconnects oneself from the business of this world. And this is the reason that Itikaf is recommended for all men to stay at the Masjid from the 21st night of Ramadan until the night before eid when its announcement is made. However, to stay until eid prayer is recommended.

Rasoolullah (SAS) never missed Itikaf in Ramadan. Women can perform their itikaf as well at home in the place fixed for their prayer.

Virtues of Ramadan:

There are many ahadith regarding the virtues of Ramadan. Here we will select only one hadith and provide some commentary.

Salman Al Farsi (RAA) reported that Rasoolullah (SAS) addressed us in the last day of the month of Sha'ban and he said, "O People! There came upon you a great blessed month, a month where in there is a night that is better than a thousand months. The fasting during this month is an obligation and the extra prayer at night is recommended. Anyone who comes close to Allah with good deeds in this month is as if he performed an obligatory duty during a time other than Ramadan. And he who fulfills an obligation during this month will be like he performed 70 obligatory duties in another month. It is a month of patience, and the reward of patience is paradise. It is the month

of sympathies (with the poor, sick and the needy) so as to share their sorrows. It is a month where the sustenance of a believer increases for whoever feeds a fasting person in order to break the fast for him. There shall be forgiveness of his sins and emancipation from the fire of hell, and for him his reward will not be diminished in the least.” We said O Messenger of Allah, not all of us can provide such things to a fasting person. The Messenger replied, “Allah grants this same reward to him who gives a single date or a drink of water or a sip of milk. This is a month, the first of which brings Allah’s mercy, the middle brings his forgiveness, and the last part of which brings emancipation from the fire of hell. Whosoever lessens the burden of his slave (servant) in this month, Allah will forgive him from the fire. And in this month four things you should increase/endeavor to perform in great number. Two of which will please your Lord, while the other two shall be those without which you cannot make do. The former two are Kalima Tayeba and Istighfar, while the latter two are that you should ask Allah for entrance into Paradise and seek refuge in Him from the Fire of Jahannam. And whoever gives a person who fasted water to drink, Allah shall grant that giver to drink from My fountain, such a drink where after he shall never feel thirsty until he enters Jannah.” (Ibni Khuzaimah's Sahih).

Laitul Qadr & Eidul Fitr:

Rasoolullah (SAS) said, “Seek and search for the blessed night in the last ten nights from the month of Ramadan.” And this is also another philosophy behind itikaf as well. It is not essential for someone to recognize that night, but if he has performed ibadah in that night without the knowledge that it is Lailatul Qadr, he will get the reward.

On the night before eid Allah (SWT) boasts about the fasting Muslims to the Angels. “O My Angels! What is the reward of the worker who has done his job very well? They reply: O Lord, His reward should be given in full. To this Allah replies, “O My Angels, verily my servants have duly performed their duty there for they set forth to the Eid prayer ground, raising their voices in prayer to Me. I swear by My Honor, by My Grandeur, by My Grace and by My Exalted position that I shall surely forgive him.”