

RAMADHAN

Blessings of Ramadhan & Fasting

Ramadhan is the ninth month in the Islamic Calendar and it is the most meritorious month of the whole year. Ramadhan is greatly blessed as the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) has been reported to have said: *“When Ramadhan begins, the gates of Paradise are opened, the gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained”*. It is a spiritual harvest for us to reap the many benefits that Allah has stored for us, as the rewards of good deeds are multiplied 70 times in this blessed month. Ramadhan is such a blessed month that the first 10 days of this month is a source of mercy, the second 10 days is a source of forgiveness and the last 10 days is a source of relief from the fire of Hell.

Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam, therefore fasting in the month of Ramadhan is obligatory on adult Muslims from dawn to sunset, during which time they are forbidden to eat, drink or indulge in marital relations. Fasting has a special connection with Allah, as He says: *“Fasting is for me and I myself will give its reward”*. Although all practices of worship are for Allah only, Allah singles out fasting because it cannot be practiced for the sake of showing off, as no one else can know whether one is observing the fast or not, except Allah. Therefore fasting is a pure act that cannot be blemished with any traces of hypocrisy.

The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) has also said: *“My Ummah has been given five things in regards to Ramadhan which has not been given to any other ummah before them:*

(1) The smell of a fasting person’s breath is more sweeter to Allah, than the fragrance of musk. (2) The angels continuously seek forgiveness for the person fasting, until they end their fast. (3) Allah, the Mighty and Magnificent, everyday adorns His Heaven and then says to it, “The time is near when My pious servants shall be freed from difficulties and provisions and they will come to You”. (4)The Shaytan will be shackled and restrained from performing the mischief that they can perform outside Ramadhan. (5) The fasting person will be forgiven on the last night of Ramadhan”. It was asked *“O Prophet of Allah! Is that the night of Qadr”* The Messenger replied: *“No, (i.e. the night of Qadr is additional to all this). But it is that a worker should get his reward upon the work’s completion”*.

Fasting is an act which symbolises abstinence from sins and willingness to sacrifice even the lawful things for the sake of Allah. When a person gives up food and drink he realizes how much he is in need of Allah’s provision (rizq) on which his existence depends and which is often taken for granted. It is an opportunity for the slave to be grateful to his Lord for these and many other countless blessings. At the same time one will sympathize with the poor and needy and it will encourage one to help them.

Fasting is a synonym for patience (sabr) as it develops self-restraint and strong willpower. The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) described Ramadhan as the *“Month of Patience”*. Fasting is called patience because it restrains the soul from eating, drinking, conjugal relations and sexual desires”.

Starting the Fast - Sehri

It is compulsory to make an intention (niyyat) of fasting every night and must be made before dawn as the Prophet (S.A.W) said: *“He who does not make his intention before dawn, his intention of fasting is not credited with it”*. It is Sunnah to do Sehri, even if it is a sip of water, as it distinguishes from the fasting of the Jews and Christians. The Prophet (S.A.W) said: *“Take the Sehri because there is blessings in it”*. Niyyat for sehri is below:

اللَّهُمَّ أَصُومُ غَدًا لَكَ فَاعْفِرْ لِي مَا قَدَّمْتُ وَمَا أَخَّرْتُ

Breaking the Fast - Iftaar

It is recommended to break the fast at sunset without delay as the Prophet (S.A.W) said: *“The religion will not cease to be uppermost as long as the people hasten to break the fast, since the Jews and Christians delay it”*. It was the Prophet’s practice to break the fast before praying Salat Al-Maghrib with dates or water and he is also reported to have said: *“If any of you is fasting, let him break his fast with dates. If he can’t find dates, then let him break the fast with water as it is pure”*. It is recommended to provide Iftaar to a fasting person as the Prophet (S.A.W) said: *“He who gives food to a fasting person to break his fast, he will get the same reward as the fasting person without the latter losing rewards for his fasting”*. Muslims are also enjoined to make dua at the time of breaking the fast as the Prophet (S.A.W) said: *“Indeed there is for the fasting person, when he breaks the fast, a supplication which is not rejected”*. Dua when breaking the fast (Iftaar) is below:

اللَّهُمَّ لَكَ صُيِّمْتُ وَبِكَ آمَنْتُ وَعَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْتُ
وَعَلَى رِزْقِكَ أَفْطَرْتُ فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي

Things that Break the Fast

Among things that break the fast are deliberate eating, drinking, smoking, having marital relations, masturbation, deliberate vomiting, using toothpaste whilst brushing, ear and nose drops, menstruation, use of nasal sprays, deliberate swallowing of water whilst making wuzu and anything deliberately entering the body.

Things that do not Break the Fast

Among things that do not break the fast include swallowing saliva, using miswaak, washing the mouth, bathing (but care should be taken to ensure water does not penetrate the body), giving blood or having an injection (that is not used as a substitute for food), applying eye drops, to apply Itr or surma, vomiting unintentionally. In the same way, a person who wakes up from sleep in a state of sexual impurity (janabat) should still continue fasting. If the husband of the women is very strict and endangers the women to get shouted then she is allowed to taste the food (e.g. to check the amount of salt) when they are cooking with the tip of their tongue, provided that the food does not reach the throat. If a fasting person eats or drinks accidentally, then it does not break the fast and the person should continue fasting as the Prophet (S.A.W) said: *“If one forgets when he is fasting and eats or drinks he should complete his fast, for it is only Allah who has fed him and given him drink”*.

People Exempt from Fasting

Certain people are exempt from fasting, such as those who are very ill, elderly people who do not have the strength and capacity to fast, long-distance travellers, menstruating women, pregnant and suckling women who fear for themselves or of their child that the amount of milk may decrease and the child may feel uneasy. With the exception of the chronically ill and the frail, they can give fidyah (feeding a poor person for each day of missed fast) in lieu of fasting. Others who miss the obligatory fasting have to make atonement (qaza) of fasting at a later date. Although fasting is obligatory from puberty, muslims are however urged to advise their children to fast from an earlier age to get them into the habit.

Legitimate Reasons for Breaking the Fast

It is permissible for certain legitimate reasons to break the fast:

- Suddenly if one becomes so critically ill that there is fear of death, e.g. a sudden pain in the stomach or chest causing severe restlessness.
- Having being bit by a harmful animal that one may die as a result.
- Severe thirst overcomes that one may die as a result.
- A pregnant woman suddenly develops a complication that may result in her or the baby's death.

Qaza

A person who has missed a fast of Ramadhan is liable to compensate it with a fast after the month of Ramadhan and this is called Qaza. The Qaza fast may be observed any day during the year except for 1st of Shawaal (Eid-ul-Fitr), 10th of Zul-Hijjah (Eid-ul-Adha) and 11th, 12th, 13th of Zul-Hijjah. These fasts can be kept continuously or alternately however it is specially advised to keep them as soon as possible.

Kaffarah

A person, who has deliberately broken a fast in the month of Ramadhan, is due to compensate it with both Qaza and Kaffarah (penalty). The Kaffarah may be given in any of the three following ways.

- 1) To continuously fast for 60 days without a break in between. If perchance there occurs a break of even one day in between, then fasting of another continuous 60 days fast is required.
- 2) To feed 60 poor people to their fill in the morning and evening or give cash or grains to the poor of its value.
- 3) To free a slave. (However since slavery in this day and age has come to an end, only the above two mentioned ways should be adopted).

Recommended Deeds During Ramadhan

Reciting the Holy Qur'aan

Almighty Allah chose to commence His final revelation during the holy month of Ramadhan. It is stated in the Qur'aan: *“Ramadhan is the month in which the Qur'aan was sent down as a guidance for mankind and as a clear criterion to judge between right and wrong. So whoever is present in this month must fast”*. (Surah 2 Ayat 185) The Prophet's beloved daughter Fatimah (R.A) relates that Jibraeel (A.S) would rehearse the Qur'aan with Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) once every year in Ramadhan. Hence it is strongly enjoined on all Muslims to be deeply engrossed with the Qur'aan during Ramadhan and it is recommended to finish reading or at least listen to the whole Qur'aan during the Taraweeh prayers in Ramadhan. The Prophet (S.A.W) has been reported to have said: *“Fasting and the Qur'aan will intercede for a person on the Day of Judgment. Fasting will say: ‘O Lord! I prevented him from food and desires, so let me intercede for him’. The Qur'an will say: ‘I deprived him from sleep at night, so let me intercede for him’. So they will both intercede”*.

Salaah

To offer 5 Daily prayers with Jamaat (men) in a Masjid. To offer optional Nafl prayers such as Salaah of Tahajjud in the middle of the night before Sehri, Nafl Ishraq Salaah after Sunrise, Nafl Duha Salaah after Ishraq but before noon and Nafl Awwabin after Maghrib.

Salaat-Al-Taraweeh

One of the unique characteristics of Ramadhan is performing Salat-al-Taraweeh in congregation immediately after the Isha prayers. Salaat-al-Taraweeh consists of twenty rakaats and is Sunnatul Muakkadah (repeatedly emphasized) therefore should not be missed. Regarding the virtue of Salaat-al-Taraweeh, the Prophet (S.A.W) said: *“Whoever stands in Prayer during the nights of Ramadhan with sincere belief and with the hope of receiving rewards from Allah, then Allah will forgive his previous (minor) sins”*. Taraweeh can be performed individually or in congregation (though the latter is more preferable).

Sadaqah

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) used to pay special attention in Ramadhan to look after the poor and to help them financially. Therefore one should give as much money in Sadaqah as he can afford.

Making Supplications (Dua)

Muslims have been encouraged to supplicate to Allah in the blessed month of Ramadhan. The Prophet (S.A.W) has said: *“In every day and night of Ramadhan there are those to whom Allah grants freedom from the fire of Hell and there is for every Muslim a supplication which he can make and it will be granted”*.

Remembrance of Allah (Zikr)

Do the following four things abundantly in this month:

- 1) Recite the Holy Kalimah
- 2) Ask for forgiveness of sins
- 3) Beg for Paradise
- 4) Seek protection from the fire of Hell

I'tikaaf

Another unique form of worship in this month is I'tikaaf in which a person gives up all his activities, abandons his attachments, associations and routines and enters the mosque for a specific period for the pleasure of Allah. The person sitting in I'tikaaf separates himself from the normal routine of worldly activities and sits in seclusion, devoting his heart and soul for pure spiritual acts of worship. Although this mode of worship can be done anytime in the year, however it has been declared as a Sunnatul Muakkadah (repeatedly emphasized) in the last ten days of Ramadhan. It is recommended for Muslims to do I'tikaaf during the last ten days of Ramadhan, in imitation of the Prophet's Sunnah and especially to search for Laylatul Qadr as the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) said: *"The best days of this world are the (last) ten days (of Ramadhan)"*. This is because they contain within it Laylatul Qadr which Allah Ta'aala has Himself described as *"better than a thousand months"*. There are many benefits of this spiritual retreat such as being close to Allah wholeheartedly without worldly distractions. Also being a guest of Allah in His house with the angels as his companions and exerting efforts in worship in maximizing the chances of finding Laylatul Qadr. He can surely benefit from these infinite merits, because even if he is sleeping in the night of Laylatul Qadr, while he is in I'tikaaf, it will be credited to his account as worship in Laylatul Qadr. Each and every second in the state of I'tikaaf is Ibaadah, even if one is eating, drinking or sleeping. This extraordinary privilege cannot be attained in one's home. That is why Aishah (R.A) relates that *"The Prophet (S.A.W) used to do I'tikaaf in the last ten days of Ramadhan and he continued this practice to the end of his life"*.

Rules of I'tikaaf

- I'tikaaf in the last ten days of Ramadhan is Sunnah-al-Kifayah. It means that in each mosque, at least one person should sit in I'tikaaf. If he does so, the requirement of Sunnah is fulfilled for the whole locality.
- The time of I'tikaaf commences immediately after the sunset of the twentieth day of Ramadhan. Therefore, a person who wants to sit in I'tikaaf, must enter the mosque before sunset on that day, so that sunset takes place whilst he is in the mosque.
- It is advised that a person performing I'tikaaf avoids all unnecessary activities and spends the most of his time in the acts of worship, like Salaah, recitation of Holy Qur'aan or making Zikr or tasbeeh. However it is makrooh to remain silent.
- The main requirement for a valid I'tikaaf is that one remains in the *limits of the mosque* throughout the period of I'tikaaf and never comes out of it, except for the necessities like attending the call of nature (toilet).
- For the purpose of I'tikaaf the *limits of the mosque* are restricted to the places meant for offering Salaah. Therefore, the places such as the place of ablution, toilets etc are not included in the *limits of the mosque* for the purpose of I'tikaaf. As a result if a person enters these places without the aforesaid necessities his I'tikaaf will terminate.
- One can go out of the *limits of the mosque* during I'tikaaf only for the following:
 - To answer the call of nature i.e. toilet.
 - To make obligatory Ghusl, i.e. in the state of impurity (janabat).
 - To bring food, but only if there is no other person available to bring it.
 - To offer Jumuah prayer, but only if no Jumuah prayer is offered in the same mosque in which he is sitting in I'tikaaf.
 - To move to another mosque in the event of a serious danger to one's life or property.

Acts which Terminates I'tikaaf

- To leave the *limits of the mosque* set for the purpose of I'tikaaf without the aforesaid needs.
- To remain outside of the *limits of the mosque* set for the purpose of I'tikaaf without the aforesaid needs.
- To have sexual intercourse or emission through some other intentional acts like kissing, cuddling etc; which are totally prohibited in I'tikaaf.
- Any acts which breaks one's fast, like eating, drinking etc. As fasting is pre-condition for any valid I'tikaaf and by breaking a fast will automatically also terminate the I'tikaaf.

Abandoning bad actions

Ramadhan is an ideal opportunity for character building as it is a month of harvesting good deeds through self-improvement. A day in a fasting person's life should be very different from the day when he is not fasting. A fasting person should particularly abstain from vain talk, lying, backbiting, swearing or using bad language, harming or insulting anyone, listening to music, gazing at unlawful things and being argumentative. One should also control oneself so that one does not react to provocation as the Prophet (S.A.W) said: *"Fasting is not only abstaining from eating and drinking, but it also includes abstaining from vain and obscene talk"*. The Prophet (S.A.W) advised Muslims who are fasting not to react to provocation, but to be patient. So if someone insults you or wrongs you in any way say: *"I am fasting, I am fasting"*. The Prophet (S.A.W) said: *"Five things destroy fasting: falsehood, back-biting, slander, perjury and sight with sexual passion"*.

- To restrain eye-sight from evil and from things which divert attention from Allah's remembrance.
- To restrain the tongue from useless talks, false-speaking, back-biting, slander, abusive speech, obscenity, hypocrisy, enmity and instead adopt silence and to keep the tongue busy with the remembrance of Allah and reciting the Qur'aan. The Prophet (S.A.W) said: *"There are many fasting men who do not gain by fasting except hunger and thirst"*. On being asked the reason he said: *"He refrains from eating lawful food and breaks fast by eating human flesh by back-biting"*.
- To restrain the ear from hearing evil talks because what is unlawful to utter is also unlawful to hear. For this reason, Allah placed the person who eats unlawful food and the hearer of unlawful words on the same level.
- To save ones hand, feet and other organs of the body from evil deeds and to save the stomach from doubtful things at the time of breaking fast. There is no meaning of fasting if it is kept with lawful food and broken with unlawful food.