

Fasting



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The meaning of fasting and the wisdom behind it

In its religious sense, the word fasting denotes abstinence from all fast-invalidating matters (eating, drinking and sexual intercourse) from dawn till sunset, as a devotional ritual that has with it the intention of fasting.

There is great wisdom behind fasting in Islam, and all perfect praise is due to Allaah for He The Exalted never prescribes any act of worship unless there is wisdom behind it, although some may have been veiled from the truth and others may have not. The fact that we do not know the wisdom behind an act of worship does not indicate that there is no wisdom behind it; rather, it proves that we cannot comprehend the wisdom of Allaah The Almighty; He Says (what means): ***{...And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little.}*** [Quran 17:85]

The greatest wisdom behind fasting is cultivating in the hearts of Muslims *Taqwa* (piety and righteousness). Allaah The Exalted Says (what means): ***{O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.}*** [Quran 2:183]

Taqwa (piety and righteousness) is the commandment of Allaah The Exalted to all mankind, - the former and the latter. *Ibn Mas'ood* رضي الله عنه defined *Taqwa* as, *"...The right of Allaah The Exalted to be obeyed and never disobeyed; to be remembered and never forgotten; and to be thanked and not shown ingratitude."*

Talq Ibn Habeeb رضي الله عنه defined Taqwa as, "...To act in obedience to Allaah The Exalted, with a light from Him, hoping for His reward and to avoid and give up disobeying Allaah The Almighty with a light from Him, fearing His punishment."

Fasting is one of the greatest acts of worship. It instills piety and righteousness in the heart and the soul, urging one to comply with the divine commands and avoid prohibitions. Fasting cultivates in man a vigilant and sound conscience. In fasting, especially, there is no mundane authority to check man's behavior or compel him to observe fasting.

In this regard, in a *Hadeeth Qudsi* (Sacred *Hadeeth*) narrated by *Abu Hurayrah* رضي الله عنه the Prophet ﷺ said that Allaah The Exalted Says: ***"Every deed of the human being is for himself except for fasting, it is for Me and I reward it. (then he ﷺ said) Fasting is a shield (from the Fire and from committing sins). If one of you is fasting, he should avoid sexual relations with his wife and quarreling, and if somebody should fight or quarrel with him, he should say, 'I am fasting, I am fasting.' By Him in whose hand the soul of Muhammad is, the unpleasant smell coming out from the mouth of a fasting person is better in the sight of Allaah than the scent of musk. There are two pleasures for the fasting person: one at the time of breaking his fast, and the other at the time when he will meet his Lord; then he will be delighted because of (reward he attained for) his fasting."*** [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

Fasting enables man to master the art of self-discipline and self-restraint. It

teaches man to curb the desires and discipline the ego so that one can become submissive to the truth and kind and thoughtful towards all creatures.



Fasting also establishes in man the real spirit of solidarity; it imbues rich people, who are showered with the blessings of Allaah, with the genuine virtue of identifying with their fellow Muslims who are less fortunate and who are hungry not only during the days of *Ramadhaan*, but all year long, and some of them may even die of starvation! This cultivates in tender-hearted souls the spirit of charity and giving.




Moreover, the health benefits of fasting are no secret. How great is the wisdom of Allaah The Exalted! Allaah The Exalted Says (what means): *{Does He who created not know, while He is the Subtle, the Acquainted?}* [Quran 67:14]






The pillars of fasting:


The first pillar: intention

Intention is a pillar of all acts of worship in Islam and the abode of the intention is the heart; Allaah The Exalted Says (what means): *{And they were not commanded except to worship Allaah, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth, and to establish prayer and to give Zakaah [obligatory charity]. And that is the correct religion.}* [Quran 98:5]

'Umar Ibn Al-Khattaab  reported that the Prophet  said: ***"Indeed, actions are (rewarded) by intentions, and every person is judged according to what he intended..."*** [Al-Bukhaari]

The majority of Muslim jurists believe that a fasting person should have the intention to fast from the preceding night in case of obligatory fasting. Making the intention at night to fast the following day means to have the intention to fast in one's heart during the night preceding the fasting day, i.e. after sunset and before the dawn of the following day. Abu Daawood, An-Nasaa'i, At-Tirmithi and Ibn Maajah  reported on the authority of Hafsaah Bint 'Umar  with a Saheeh (authentic) chain of narrators that the Prophet  said: ***"Whoever does not resolve on fasting before dawn, his fasting is invalid."*** [Abu Daawood]

However, this pertains to obligatory fasting. It is not mandatory to have the intention during at preceding night for the voluntary fast. It is permissible for a fasting person to intend voluntary fasting in the morning (after the fast has begun) if he has not yet consumed anything. To support this, we have 'Aa'ishah  who said that one day the Prophet  visited her and asked: ***"Do you have anything (to eat)?"*** When she replied in the negative, he said: ***"Then, I will be fasting."*** Then 'Aa'ishah  said that he  came another day and she said, ***"Messenger of Allaah, Hays (a mixture of dates, ghee and dried curd) has been offered to us as a gift."*** Thereupon, he  said: ***"Show it to me; I had been fasting since morning."*** He then ate it. [Muslim]

The first Hadeeth shows that the Prophet  woke up without having the intention to fast then made the intention during the day. This ruling only applies to voluntary fasting, though.

A question arises in this respect as to whether making the intention on the first day of *Ramadhaan* is enough for fasting the whole month or whether one should renew his intention daily. The answer is that Muslim scholars hold two different opinions in this regard:

I: The *Maaliki* scholars believe that one intention is sufficient for the whole of *Ramadhaan*.

II: The second view is the preponderant opinion, and Allaah knows best. This is the opinion of the majority of scholars: (*Hanafi, Hanbali and Shaafi'i*). When a person wants to fast in *Ramadhaan*, he should make an independent intention for each day (on the night preceding it).

Another aspect of the mercy of Allaah The Exalted is that one is not obliged to articulate one's intention. The heart is the abode of intention. In fact, eating the *Suhoor* (pre-dawn meal) is considered making the intention of fasting, and all perfect praise is due to Allaah The Exalted for His grace and for facilitating this.

Intention is, therefore, the first pillar of fasting.

The second pillar: abstinence from all fast-invalidating matters (eating, drinking and sexual relations) from dawn till sunset.

Allaah The Exalted Says (what means): ***{...And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night] at dawn.}*** [Quran 2:187]

In a *Hadeeth* on the authority of ‘Adiyy Ibn Haatim رضي الله عنه he said, “When the verse in which Allaah The Almighty Says (what means): **{And eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night] at dawn}** [Quran 2:187] was revealed, I took two strings, one black and the other white, and kept them under my pillow and went on looking at them throughout the night but could not make anything out of it. So, the next morning I went to the Messenger of Allaah ﷺ and told him the whole story. The Prophet ﷺ smiled and said: **‘Then your pillow is extremely wide if the white thread (of dawn) and the black thread (of the night) are underneath your pillow! The verse refers to the darkness of the night and the whiteness of the dawn!’**” [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

There is no doubt that the third pillar is related to the fasting person; he\she should be a sane adult Muslim and physically able to fast, and this is something very obvious to all.

Nullifiers of fasting









Let us begin with the gravest of them:

First: Having sexual intercourse:

According to the Quran, the *Sunnah*, and the consensus of scholars, engaging in sexual intercourse invalidates the fast. If a fasting person has sexual intercourse during the fast day, his \ her fast becomes null and void. In such a case the fasting person is obliged to make up for that day and strict expiation is due, which is to free a believing slave; failing that, he should observe fasting for two

consecutive months without interruption except for a valid reason under the *Sharee'ah*, such as illness, or because it is intervened by the days of 'Eed. If he breaks his fast without a valid reason even for a day, he\she has to restart the 60-day fasting once more in order to maintain the element of successiveness. If he fails to fast for two consecutive months, he should feed sixty poor people [a *Mudd* (a quarter *Saa'*) for each of them]. Note: A *Saa'* measures four *Mudds*. The *Mudd* measures two middle-sized handfuls, which equals about 3 kilograms

Muslim jurists hold different opinions with regards to the above expiation, whether the mentioned order of options should be followed or the fasting person is entitled to choose whichever he\she wishes from these three options. The preponderant opinion is that expiation should be implemented in the mentioned order of options respectively, and this is the opinion of the majority of Muslim scholars.

The evidence that support this opinion is the words of *Abu Hurayrah*  when he said, "While we were sitting with the Prophet  a man came to him and said, 'O Messenger of Allaah, I am ruined!' The Prophet  asked: '**What is the matter?**' He replied, 'I had sexual intercourse with my wife while fasting.' The Messenger  asked him, '**Can you afford to free a slave?**' He replied in the negative. The Prophet  asked him: '**Can you fast for two successive months?**' He also replied in the negative. The Prophet  asked him: '**Can you afford to feed sixty poor persons?**' He replied in the negative. After a while, some dates were brought to the Prophet  and he asked: '**Where is the questioner?**' He replied, 'I (am here).' The Prophet  said (to him): '**Take these (dates) and give them in charity.**' The man then said, 'Is there a person

poorer than me that I can give them to? By Allaah, there is no family between its two mountains (i.e., in Madeenah) who is poorer than mine.' The Prophet ﷺ smiled till his pre-molar teeth were visible, and said: 'Feed them to your family.'" [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

Muslim jurists hold three different opinions with regards to the ruling of a woman whose husband forces her to have sexual intercourse with him during the day in *Ramadhaan*.

The preponderant opinion is that she should make up for that day and no expiation is due; as her husband forced her to do what she did. There is no religious text [authentic evidence] indicating the obligation of expiation in such a case.



Second: The emission of semen in wakefulness (because of touching, kissing, or caressing one's spouse, or masturbation using the hand, and the like):

This invalidates the fast and one is obliged to make up the fast; as all this is included in the meaning of sexual desire that must be avoided in order for the fast to be valid as stated in a *Hadeeth Qudsi*: "*(Allaah The Exalted Says about the fasting person), 'He has left his food, drink and sexual desire for My sake...'*" [Al-Bukhaari]



*The release of semen (or sexual vaginal secretions in the case of women) as a result of sexual arousal during the daytime in *Ramadhaan* invalidates fasting and the fasting person should make up for that day. There is no evidence stating

that expiation is due except in the case of engaging in full sexual intercourse and there is no valid argument for those who say otherwise. Allaah knows best.

* The emission of semen (or sexual vaginal secretions in the case of women) as a result of a wet dream does not invalidate the fast because it happens involuntarily. If the fasting person has a wet dream and then wakes up to realize the discharging of semen (or sexual vaginal secretions in the case of women), let him/her perform the due *Ghusl* (ritual bath) and complete the fast. The fast is valid in such a case and there is no blame upon the fasting person.



* If a fasting person kisses, hugs or fondles his\her spouse during the day in *Ramadhaan* without ejaculation, there is no harm in that and his\her fast is valid. ‘Aa’ishah  reported, “The Prophet  would kiss and embrace [his wives] while fasting, but his ability to control his desires was greater than any of yours.” [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

* An important question arises in this regard: What is the ruling on having sexual intercourse with one's spouse at night and then sleeping without performing *Ghusl* until the *Athaan* (call) for the *Fajr* (dawn) prayer?


It is narrated by ‘Aa’ishah and *Umm Salamah*  that the Messenger of Allaah  was sometimes overtaken by dawn while he would be in a state of *Janaabah* (post sexual-intercourse impurity) after having sexual intercourse with his wives; he would then perform *Ghusl* and observe [his] fast.” [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

Third: Intentional eating or drinking:

Eating, drinking, and consuming anything that is nutritious invalidates fasting, if it is intentional. Allaah The Exalted Says (what means): *{And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night].}* [Quraan 2:187]


As for those who eat or drink during the day in *Ramadhaan* out of forgetfulness, their fast is valid. *Abu Hurayrah*  reported that Prophet  said: *"Whoever forgets he is fasting, and eats or drinks is to complete his fast, as it is Allaah Who fed him and gave him something to drink."* [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

Fourth: Intentional vomiting:

This means forcing oneself to bring food up from the stomach and out of the mouth. Intentional vomiting invalidates the fast and one should make up for that day. However, if a fasting person throws up unintentionally, his fasting is valid and he should resume fasting. The Prophet  said: *"Whoever is overcome by vomiting is not to make up the day. Whoever vomits intentionally must make up the day."* [Ahmad, At-Tirmithi & Abu Daawood] [Al-Haakim in *Al-Mustadrak: Saheeh*] [Ibn Taymiyyah in *Haqeeqat As-Siyaam: Saheeh* (Authentic)]

Fifth: Menstruation and post-partum bleeding for women:

Whenever a Muslim woman sees menstrual blood or post-partum bleeding, her fasting is invalidated, whether it is in the beginning or the end of the day and even if it is a few moments before sunset. She is obliged to make up for these fast days afterwards.

'Aa'ishah  was asked about the menstruating woman making up for the missed fast days, and she said, "We used to experience this and we were ordered to make up for the missed fasting but we were not ordered to make up for the missed prayers." [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]



This was a very brief account of the most famous invalidators of fasting.

Concessions and etiquettes of fasting

There are many concessions that Allaah grants His slaves to relieve them from any embarrassment and discomfort, including:

1 – The traveller and the sick person are allowed to not fast in *Ramadhaan* if fasting is difficult to be endured:

Allaah The Exalted Says (what means): *{... And whoever is ill or on a journey – then [fast] an equal number of other days. Allaah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship ...}* [Quraan 2:185]

2 – It is permissible for a fasting person to use a *Siwaak* (traditional cleaning stick for teeth) at any time during the fast day. This is the correct opinion. However, some scholars prove the impermissibility of using *Siwaak* while fasting relying on the *Hadeeth* that was reported by 'Ali  which reads, "When you fast, use *Siwaak* in the morning but do not use it in the afternoon." [Marfoo' (Attributed to the Prophet )] This is a very weak narration that was narrated by *Al-Bayhaqi* and *Ad-Daaraqutni*.

A fasting person is allowed to use *Siwaak* at all times, especially at the following six times about which there is a religious text:

- Prayer
- Ablution
- Entering the home
- Waking up
- Reciting the Quran
- When the odor of the mouth changes

3 – Among the concessions given to fasting people in the month of *Ramadhaan* is rinsing one's mouth and nose without exaggeration so that water would not reach the throat and invalidate the fasting. *Laqeet Ibn Sabrah* رضي الله عنه reported that the Prophet ﷺ said to him: "**Exaggerate when rinsing your mouth and nose unless you are fasting.**" [Abu Daawood, At-Tirmithi, An-Nasaa'i, & Ahmad]

4 – Fasting women are allowed to taste the food with the tip of the tongue during cooking but should spit out what remains on the tongue and make sure that it does not reach the throat.

5 – It is also permissible for a fasting person to relieve himself/herself from extreme heat and thirst by taking a shower or cooling one's body with cold water while fasting; *Abu Bakr Ibn 'Abdur-Rahmaan* رضي الله عنه reported on the authority of one of the Companions رضي الله عنه that he said, "*I saw the Prophet* ﷺ

pouring water over his head while he was fasting because of thirst or because of heat." [Abu Daawood]

6 - It is permissible for a fasting person to use ear or eye drops if necessary, even if he finds their taste in his\her throat. This is because it is not nutritious and nor is it similar to food and drink [constitutes nutrition for the body] according to the words of *Shaykhul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah* رحمته.

Moreover, it is permissible for a person who is asthmatic and fasting to use an inhaler for breathing problems and he\she should resume the fast. His\her fasting is valid in such a case; as the inhaler is neither nutritious, nor is it like food and drink. All perfect praise and gratitude is due to Allaah.



Etiquettes of fasting:

1. Having *Suhoor* (the pre-dawn meal):

It is recommended to eat a pre-dawn meal and there is no sin upon one who does not do so. The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ said: ***"Eat a pre-dawn meal, for there are blessings in it."*** [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]


Suhoor is fulfilled by eating a small quantity of food or even a sip of water. It is recommended to delay it (that is, as close to dawn as possible). Anas رضي الله عنه reported on the authority of *Zayd Ibn Thaabit* رضي الله عنه that he said, *"We ate the pre-dawn meal with the Messenger of Allaah and then we got up for the prayer. I (Anas) asked him: 'What was the amount of time between the two?' He replied: 'The time it would take to recite fifty verses.'"* [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

2. Hastening to break the fast:

It is preferred for the fasting person to hasten to break the fast when the sun has set. *Sahl Ibn Sa'd*  reported that the Prophet  said: ***"People will continue to be upon virtue so long as they hasten to break the fast."*** [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

It is recommended to break the fast by eating an odd number of ripe dates, dried dates or, if that is not available, then by drinking some water.

3. Supplication upon breaking the fast:

The supplication of a fasting person when he is breaking his fast is not rejected. It is confirmed that the Prophet  would say upon breaking his fast: ***"Thahaba Ath-thama' wabtallat Al-'urooq wa thabata Al-Ajr in shaa' Allaah"*** (which means: the thirst has gone, the veins are moistened and, Allaah willing, the reward is confirmed). [Abu Daawood]

4. Refraining from performing any actions that do not benefit fasting:

The fasting person must be on guard against any act that may cause him to lose the benefits of his fast. A fasting person should not abstain merely from eating and drinking, but also from backbiting, tale-bearing, false speech, and all sins and misdeeds.

I supplicate to Allaah The Exalted to render you and me among those who listen to the speech and follow the best of it.

Finally, mistakes in fasting:

There is no doubt that the fasting people are among the best servants of Allaah The Exalted but there are some errors that are made by some of those who fast, such as:

1 - Some fasting people show commendable diligence in performing acts of worship at the start of *Ramadhaan*; adhering to (performing) congregational prayers in the mosque, showing keenness on reciting the Quran, remembering Allaah The Exalted, seeking His forgiveness, and showing keenness on performing *Taraaweeh* prayers (the congregation night prayers in *Ramadhaan*). However, as the first days of the month pass by, they then become lazy and too occupied to continue performing these acts of worship.

Dear readers, let us remember the words of the Prophet ﷺ as he said: *"The most beloved deeds to Allaah are the incessant ones even if they are few ..."* [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

He ﷺ also said: *"Indeed, the (rewards of) deeds depend upon the last of them."* [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

2 – Another grave mistake that is made by some people during *Ramadhaan* is yielding to cruelty, harshness, and ill-treatment while dealing with others under the pretext that they are fasting! Does fasting call for aggressive acts? Does fasting justify such aggressive acts or induce fasting people to use foul language or yield to cruelty and vulgarity? Indeed, no! Fasting is a great spiritual school that instills refined virtues and morals in fasting people.

Dear readers, let us always remember the will of the Prophet ﷺ when he said: *"... Fasting is a shield (or protection from the Fire and from committing sins). If one of you is fasting, he should avoid sexual relations with his wife and quarreling, and if somebody should fight or quarrel with him, he should say, 'Indeed, I am fasting; indeed, I am fasting.'"* [Al-Bukhaari]

3 – Some fasting people spend the days of *Ramadhaan* sleeping, rendering it a month of sleep, laziness and lethargy. Some may sleep the whole day, delaying prayers, Allaah forbid, and then be awake all night long! Perhaps they rely upon the narration that reads: "The sleep of the fasting person is (an act of) worship," But Shaykh Al-Albaani رحمته stated that this is a weak Hadeeth.

4 – Incidents of wasting food increases during *Ramadhaan* when some people cook as much food as they can and then throw away large quantities of surplus food. This is blameworthy and forbidden extravagance. This, undoubtedly, contradicts the wisdom of fasting for which it has been prescribed in the first place; it is against the spirit of fasting and the philosophy behind it.

May Allaah bless he who said, *"You eat great amounts of food, drink large quantities of drinks, and sleep all night long, and still label yourselves as pious!"*

Our intention here is to advise Muslims to be moderate without denying them what Allaah has deemed lawful for them.

We ask Allaah The Almighty, Lord of the Throne, to accept our fasting, prayers, and *Zakaah* (obligatory charity); He is able to do that and He alone is worthy of this entreaty.

