

Ramadan - Virtues and Obligations

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The Month of Ramadan has long ago been established as the month of fasting for Muslims. But from where does the authority and instructions for its observance come? How can we know with certainty the correct performance and acceptability with Allah the Sublime?

Wisdom of Fasting

Fasting is a great act of worship for the Muslim which he performs by neglecting his desires to please his Lord and hopes for His Reward. It just common sense that the one who would not give up desired things except that it would be for something more desirable. In this case the pleasure of Allah is the most sought after desire.

It is also a means of achieving piety and righteousness. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "He who does not give up false speech and evil actions, Allah does need his refraining from food and drink."

In other words, Allah is not going to accept this person's fasting.

The heart, through fasting, is apt to maintain its tenderness since the desires are not sought rather shunned, and tend to be more receptive to the words of Allah.

The rich will, through fasting be more appreciative of Allah's graces and bounties. He will also suffer deprivation as do the poor and needy under their everyday circumstances. So he will be more motivated to help them from what Allah has provided him. It helps depress pride of the ego and maintains humbleness. Moreover, fasting has its health advantages by virtue of decreasing the intake of food and relaxing the digestive system. Great is the Wisdom of Allah, and great are His Graces.

Virtues of Ramadan

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated; "Allah's Messenger said; 'When the month of Ramadan starts, the gates of Jannah (Paradise) are opened and the gates of Jahannam (Hell) are closed, and the shayateen (devils) are chained up.'"

The gates of Jannah (Paradise) are opened in this month because a great deal of righteous deeds are performed, and as an encouragement for those who seek Allah's reward. While the gates of Jahannam (Hell) are closed because only a few sins are committed by the believers. The shayateen (devils) will be chained that they may not have the influence on the believers by whispering to them and misguiding them, that they might ordinarily have during the other months of the year.

Allah has prescribed fasting and made it obligatory on all nations. He has said;

"O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you made aware of your duty [to Allah] (that is, learning self restraint)." [Holy Quran 2:183]

If fasting were not a great act of worship, and the reward thereof were not so great Allah would not have prescribed it on all nations.

Of the virtues of fasting is that it is a means for atonement of sins. It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) that;

"The Prophet, peace be upon him, said; "Allah has said; 'All the deeds of Adam's children (all mankind) they do for themselves, except fasting which belongs to Me and I will reward for it. Fasting is a shield (against the Hell and against the committing of sins). If one of you happens to be fasting he should avoid sexual relations with his wife and should avoid quarrelling. Should someone fight or quarrel with him, let him say, 'I am fasting'. By Him in Whose Hand is my soul (Allah), the smell of the mouth of the one who is fasting is better in the sight of Allah than musk (perfume)."

[from the collection of sayings of the Prophet by Imam Bukhari]

It is a shield because it safeguards the believer from vain talk and wrong doing and thereby protects him from the Jahannam (Hell).

Of all the good deeds, Allah has favored fasting to be greatly rewarded by Him and distinguished it with prestige, if it is observed with the pure intention of pleasing Him alone.

From other sayings of the prophet, peace be upon him, we know that:

Fasting is so highly regarded for a believer that he would have two occasions of joy, one at the time of breaking his fast, [to enjoy the bounties of Allah, because he has been favored with Allah's mercy to observe fasting while many others have been deprived of this great blessing], and the second would be when he meets his Lord [and enjoys the abundant reward for having observed fasting].

Also, that fasting intercedes with Allah on behalf other believer on the Day of Judgment.
Taken from "Virtues of Ramadan" by Sheik Muhammad bin Utheimeen
Translated by Abdullah Al-Farsi - Series on Islam #17
Prepared by Yusuf Estes

Obligations of Fasting

The Month of Ramadan has long ago been established as the month of fasting for Muslims. But from where does the authority and instructions for its observance come? How can we know with certainty the correct performance and acceptability with Allah the Sublime?

We can begin by looking into the Book of Allah, the Holy Quran for foundation and authority of this Blessed Event in Muslims traditions:

Allah has said in Surah Baqarah:

O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed for you just as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may do your duty,

on days which have been planned ahead. Any of you who is ill or on a journey [should choose] a number of other days. For those who can [scarcely] afford it, making up for it means feeding a poor man. It is even better for anyone who can volunteer some wealth; although it is better yet for you to fast, if you only knew.

The month of Ramadan is when the Quran was sent down as guidance, and as a Standard. Let any of you who is at home during the month, fast in it; while anyone who is ill or on a journey should [set an equal] number of other days. Allah wants things to be easy for you and does not want any hardship for you, so complete the number and magnify Allah because He has guided you, so that you may act grateful.

Whenever My servants ask you about Me, [it means] I am Near. I answer the appeal of the prayerful one whenever he appeals to Me. Let them respond to Me, and believe in Me so they may be directed!

It is lawful for you to have intercourse with your wives on the night of the Fast: they are garments for you while you are garments for them. Allah knows how you have been deceiving yourselves, so He has relented towards you and pardoned you. Now [feel free to] frequent them and seek what Allah has prescribed for you. Eat and drink until the white streak [of dawn] can be distinguished by you from the black thread [of night] at daybreak. Then complete the Fast until nightfall and have no dealings with women while you are secluded at your devotions in the masaajid (mosques). Such are the limits set by Allah, so do not attempt to cross them! Allah explains His signs to mankind so they may do their duty. [Holy Quran 2:183-187]

Translation of the meaning of the Holy Quran from the Original Arabic text to the English Language by T. B. Irving (Al-Hajj Ta'lim 'Ali)
Amana Books Brattleboro, Vermont - 1412 A. H. - 1992 A. D.

Performing the other acts of worship and duties is most important, and salah (ritualistic prayers) in particular, without which no other act of worship is accepted by Allah. Praying in congregation is a great aspect in our religion. Everyone should attend: it's reward is twenty seven times greater than that which is performed individually, The Prophet, peace be upon him, was just about to burn the houses of those who did not attend the congregational prayers.

Refraining from bad behavior such as lying, cheating, music, smoking, backbiting and slandering others to create animosity among them. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "No slander shall enter the Jennah (Paradise). [From the collection of Abu Daud]

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "There will exist in my ummah (followers) those who will make unlawful things into the lawful such as; fornication, silk for the men, intoxicating beverages and the playing of musical instruments." [Bukhari Volume 7 #494B]

Who should Fast?

Fasting is obligatory on the mature sane and healthy Muslim. Those who are immature (i.e. little children) are encouraged to fast. Exempted are those who suffer terminal illness, or are too old to fast. Allah does not overburden His slaves.

On the other hand, permission to abstain from fasting is granted to the travelers who do not travel for the purpose of breaking their fast. Even though it is permissible to break fast during travel, yet it is praiseworthy to fast while traveling if no hardship imposed. In any case, travelers should make up the days they missed out in Ramadan once Ramadan is over and they are back home.

As for those whose sickness does not allow them to fast, they fall into three categories:

If it is neither hard nor harmful for them, they must observe fasting.

If it is hard but not harmful for them, they are permitted to break their fast.

If it is harmful for them, then they must abstain from fasting. It is stated in the Quran:

"Do not kill yourselves" and "Do not throw yourselves into destruction." [Holy Quran 2:195]

The Prophet, peace be upon him, is reported to have said: "Cause no harm to yourselves nor cause it to others." [from the collection of sayings of the Prophet, peace be upon him, collected by Imam Muslim]

The days that happen to be missed in Ramadan must be made up once Ramadan is over.

During the monthly menstruation of women or postnatal time after giving birth, women should not fast, but they must make up these days that are missed as soon as possible in the following month(s). Pregnant or breastfeeding women whose health or the baby's health would be negatively affected by the fasting should break their fast and then make them up in the future as soon as it is not a problem for their health.

It is also recommended for those engaged in combat in the Way of Allah to break their fast. The Prophet, peace be upon him, told his companions in one of the battles: "You are going to meet your enemy in the morning, abstaining from fasting is better for your strength, so break your fast." [from the collection of sayings of the Prophet, peace be upon him, collected by Imam Muslim]

When Does Fasting Begin And End?

Fasting begins upon sighting the new moon after the ending of the month of Shaban (on the lunar calendar). Allah says:

"So everyone of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting."
[Holy Quran 2:185]

However, it is not incumbent on each person to sight the new moon. If a trustworthy Muslim testifies that he has sighted it then everyone must observe fasting. Abu Hurairah, (may Allah be pleased with him), says: "A Bedouin [dweller of the desert] came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and reported; 'O Prophet I have seen the new moon of Ramadan.' So the Prophet, peace be upon him, asked the man; 'Do you bear witness that {Ia' elaha illa Allah} There is no deity worthy of worship throughout the Creation - Only Allah, the Creator is worthy of worship?' The man said; 'I do'. Then the Prophet, peace be upon him, said; 'Do you testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah?' Then man said; "Yes." So the Prophet, peace be upon him, asked Bilal, (may Allah be pleased with him), to announce to the people to being their fast the next day."

Ibn Umar also confirmed the practice of sighting the new moon in his report: "The people were seeking the new moon. Having sighted it myself, I reported it to the Prophet, peace be upon him. He began his fast and ordered the people to being theirs too."

He who sights the new moon of Ramadan must inform those in authority in the Muslim government or community. Once the Muslim government announces the beginning of Ramadan, upon sighting the new moon, it becomes binding on the rest of the Muslims to being their fasting.

It should be kept in mind, however, that astronomical calculations must be ruled out from Sari'ah and must not be relied on for sighting the moon, as the Prophet, peace be upon him, has ruled that Muslims must begin their fast upon seeing the new moon, not upon calculating the month astronomically. It is only when it becomes hard to see the new moon, due to weather conditions, then Muslims may complete the month of Shaban, which precedes the month of Ramadan, as thirty days.

(The lunar month is either 29 or 30 days according to the sighting of the new moon. It is never more or less in number.)

Praiseworthy Etiquettes of Fasting

Taking the meal of Suhoor:

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said; "Take the meal of suhoor because there is blessing in it."

He also said; "The difference between our fasting and that of the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) is taking the meal of suhoor."

Even taking a cup of water in lieu of suhoor meal has blessings in it also.

Breaking the fast as soon as the sun sets.

Making Du'a upon breaking the fast.

Reciting as much Quran as possible during the month of Ramadan.

Fast Breakers

Sexual intercourse during the time of day for fasting. Willful violation of fast by such practice requires the fast of sixty consecutive days in order to make up for the day in which the intercourse took place.

Intentionally ejaculating. Unintentional ejaculations do not break the fast.

Eating, drinking, smoking or taking any food substitutes such as receiving blood, glucose, or I.V. substances by intention while knowing you should be fasting. If done without remembering you are fasting, then it would not count as breaking the fast. If such an act was prescribed for an essential reason, the fast would be consider broken but would only require one day for each day missed.

Vomiting on purpose without necessity.

Menstrual bleeding.

Days in which the above practices (2 through 5) are to be make up a day for a day once Ramadan is over.

On the other hand, the application of khol, eye, ear, or nose drops or brushing the teeth or gargling with water do not break the fast. As long as there is no intention of taking any nourishment internally.

Wearing perfumes, using siwak or toothbrush without toothpaste do not break fast since it has been reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, practiced that. One can also take the shower or a bath while fasting. However, it is incumbent to make intention of fasting before dawn. Such intention is to be made in the mind only. Pronouncing certain words for that intention is a bid'ah (innovation) neither the Prophet, peace be upon him, nor his companions ever were reported to have composed certain words for the intention.

Qiyam or Taraweeh Prayers

[Join the Taraweeh Prayers in Makkah Any Day You Like]

Rebroadcast of TV - in Makkah 24/7 at: <http://FastRamadan.com/goodies/>

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