

FASTING (AS-SAUM)

As-Siyaam (fasting) in the month of Ramadhan is the fourth of the pillars of Islam, after Testimony, prayer and Alms giving.

Every year in the month of Ramadhan, Muslims fast from dawn until sundown, abstaining from food, drink and sexual relations.

In Islamic perspective, therefore, Fasting is the keeping away or abstaining completely from food, drinks, intimate sexual intercourse and all pleasure during the day time from dawn to sundown in order to achieve total piety of God.

Fasting is observed from dawn until sunset; and the month in which Muslims are commanded to fast is called **Ramadhan**. Ramadhan is the ninth month of the Islamic (Hijrah) calendar.

During the fasting period, Muslims have to avoid the performing of all evils; but this does not mean to repeat them after the completion of the exercise.

FASTING IN HISTORY

Fasting did not come with the advent of Islam; rather it was done by previous nations. This is in agreement to **Q 2: 183** which says:-

“O, you who believe, fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may attain piety.”

The nations that observed fasting before the advent of Islam included the Jews or the Followers of Prophet Moses (Musa) who used to fast on Monday and Fridays in remembrance of Musa who went to Mount Sinai and came back with the Ten Commandments.

The Jews also used to fast the tenth day of the first month (Muharran) to show their gratitude to God for having been relieved them from bondage in Egypt. This tenth day is called Yaum al- Ashura.

The Christians fast forty (40) days in emulation of the forty (40) days which Prophet Isah (Jesus) spent in the wilderness.

Three years after the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medinah, fasting was prescribed to all Muslim believers.

IMPORTANCE OF FASTING

1. Fasting teaches sincere love Muslims have towards their Creator; since they do it out of the deep love for God.
2. Fasting trains man to be sincere and faithful. This is so because one fasts only and only for the sake of Allah and not for fear of other people's opinions.
3. Fasting offers Muslims a special training to those who fast such that if they become bankrupt and do not have food, they are already used to the situation.
4. Fasting strengthens a sense of hope in man. This is because when one fasts, he hopes to get rewards from God.
5. Fasting trains endurance in that when one fasts, he feels the pain of hunger but endures patiently until the end of the day.
6. Economically, man acquires a new way of budgeting by adopting wise saving and spending – normally he eats less food and spends less.
7. Fasting creates unity and a sense of social belongingness within the Muslim community. While fasting, people become friendly and united since they share one activity in common.
8. Fasting is good for one's health in that if one is over weight, he or she may be able to lose some weight during fasting.
9. Fasting helps man to master the art of mature adaptation. As fasting makes one to change the entire course of his daily life, they naturally adapt to satisfy the new course of life.
10. Fasting is one of the ways of showing mankind that they are equal before God. This is so in the sense that whether one eats nicely or not, by the end of the day, they will be feeling hungry.

11. Fasting encourages a sense responsibility whereby the person leaves his wants and desires for the sake of putting what Allah wants first, avoiding what is evil and doing what is right.
12. Because of fasting, the rich come to appreciate the problems the poor go through or which they experience as a result of hunger.
13. By cutting oneself off from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person gains true sympathy with those who go hungry.
14. Fasting emphasizes the equality of mankind and thus going along towards creating love and brotherhood. This is so for all Muslims, irrespective of their status, must fast during the same month.
15. Fasting is a way of spiritual purification. The spirit of patience that fasting for the whole month of Ramadhan inculcates in Muslims helps them strength their faith.
16. Fasting is a sign of victory to Muslims. This is so because it was in the month of Ramadhan that the famous Islamic battles like the Battle of Badr were fought which Muslims won and becoming a stepping stone for subsequent victories.
17. The month of Ramadhan, which is the Muslim month of fasting, is significant to the Muslim Community because the Holy Qur'an was revealed in it as guidance to mankind. **Q2: 185** says:
"Ramadhan is the month in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed as guidance to mankind."
18. Fasting is an act of worship that testifies to total submission and obedience with the noble objective of attaining Allah's pleasure and the great reward in the Hereafter.
19. Fasting helps the faithful develop a strong personality and character. It refines the manners of Muslims, teaches self-restraint and setting their behaviours aright.
20. Fasting also distinguishes a believer from a non-believer. This is so because non-believers do not fast in whatever case.

21. Fasting creates unity and a sense of brotherhood in the Muslim community. It brings the poor and the rich in one bracket of fasting.
22. When a person fasts, he/she gets a lot of rewards because whatever a person does during fasting is rewarded twice as much as what he/she gets when it is not a fasting season.

TYPES OF FASTING

There are two types of fasting

- Obligatory fasting
- Optional fasting

1. OBLIGATORY (FARADHA) FASTING

This is the kind of fasting which was commanded by God and written to every Muslim who has attained the age of maturity.

Obligatory fasting is further subdivided into the following:

(i) FASTING THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADHAN

Fasting the Holy Month of Ramadhan is the fourth Pillar of Islam. Whoever fasts this month, gets rewards from God and whoso fails to observe it without a genuine reason, a sin is written upon him/her and awaits punishment from God.

Ramadhan is the ninth month on the Islamic calendar and is regarded as a fasting month.

HOW FASTING IS PERFORMED

Fasting the Holy Month of Ramadhan was prescribed by God in the Qur'an
Q2:185

“Ramadhan is the month in which the Qur'an was revealed.... And whoever of you is at home, let him/her fast the month.

The Month of Ramadhan comprises of 29 or 30 days and it starts as soon as the moon is sighted and it ends with the sighting of the new moon. The Prophet said.

“Fast when you have sighted the Crescent and end the fast when you have seen it again.”

(Bukhari and Muslims)

However, if a new moon is not sighted because of a given circumstance, fasting may begin by hearing the announcement from the governing body or from a trustworthy person or by counting the passage of the 30 days of the month of Sha'abaa (the eighth month)

Daily fasting begins with the daybreak at dawn (with the appearance of the red cloud in the morning) and ends immediately when the sun sets at dusk.

A person who is going to fast must have the intention of fasting before going ahead to fast a particular day or the whole month if the fasting is to be accepted by Allah.

A fasting person must abstain from all evils or those acts which nullify fasting like eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, to mention but a few.

Muslims are recommended to take a light meal before the break of dawn. The meal is called Sahur, However, one should take precautions not to over eat.

Muslims are supposed to increasingly read the Qur'an even more than usual. The first revelation took place in this month in one night called Lailat al-Qadr (the Night of Power) which is better than a thousand month.

Muslims are enjoined always to be humble and good mannered. This is because the devils are chained during this month. Therefore no one can claim being tempted by Satan to commit evil.

It is also recommended that day's fasting should be concluded by one performing the night prayer known as Salat al-Tarawiih soon after salat al-Isha, and if possible waking up in the middle of the night to pray night prayer called Tahajjud prayer.

In the last ten days of the fasting period, Muslims are advised to perform It'qaaf and also observe the night of Lailat al Qadr by sitting throughout those days and reciting the Qur'an very much.

Itkaaf is seeking retirement in the mosque during the last ten days of the fast of Ramadhan, during which period; the worshipper does not leave the mosque except for absolutely necessary purposes.

The fasting period of the Holy month of Ramadhan is concluded with the celebration of Idd al-Fitr. However, before Idd al-Fitr is performed; Muslims are required to pay Zakat at-Fitr, which is intended to purify one's fasting from lapses.

Muslims are supposed to involve themselves in remembering Allah, supplicating Him and seeking His forgiveness. Fasting provides a golden opportunity for the faithful to increase remembrance of Allah and supplicate Him especially during specified times when invocation are answered. These times include:-

- Upon breaking the fasting, since the fasting person supplication are not rejected.
- During the last third of the night
- Just before dawn
- Between Asr and Maghrib prayer on Friday.

IMPORTANCE OF RAMADHAN

1. Ramadhan is the month in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed.

2. The Qur'an as revealed in the month of Ramadhan provides a complete guidance for human beings by moulding and regulating their lives in accordance to its teachings. Q2:185 says:
"Ramadhan is the month in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed as guidance to mankind"
3. In the month of Ramadhan there is the night of Power (Lailat al-Qadr) and if observed in the remembrance of Allah, one gets rewards worthy 100 months or 83 years.
4. It is during the month of Ramadhan that God forgives the faithful believers of their sins.
5. Allah saves the faithful believers from Hell fire during the month of Ramadhan
6. The gates or doors of Paradise are opened while those of Hell are locked during the month of Ramadhan.
7. It is during the month of Ramadhan that the Angels ask Allah's forgiveness for those fasting until they break their fast.
8. The devils are reported to be chained during the month of Ramadhan. Therefore, man's actions during Ramadhan are not influenced by Satan.
9. The believers avail themselves to the service of Allah during Ramadhan and spend their time performing beneficial deeds.
10. Ramadhan is a sign of obedience and belief for those who fast.

(ii) QADHA

This is a kind of fasting where a person compensates the days of fasting he/she missed for some genuine reasons.

It is allowed for those persons who are seriously sick, the travelers and women during their menses to break their fast but make for them when their conditions improve.

(iii) FASTING OF FULFILLING A VOW (NADIR)

This is another type of obligatory fasting performed to fulfill a vow or an oath. If one takes an oath that if such and such happen, he/she would fast such and such a number of days, then it becomes obligatory to fulfill that vow if what pledged for becomes a reality.

(iv) THE FAST OF EXPIATION (KAFFARAH)

This is the kind of obligatory fasting performed as a compensation for breaking certain religious laws like; eating or having sex intentionally during a fasting day.

In order to compensate for a violation, fasting becomes obligatory for one who has committed a sin as follows:

- If one breaks his fast intentionally he must compensate it by fasting for two consecutive days.
- If one has sexual intercourse during the day of fast, he has to fast sixty (60) days consecutively, or he must feed 60 poor people or feed one poor person for 60 days.

2. VOLUNTARY (SUNNAH) FASTING

This is the kind of fasting which was always performed and practised by Prophet Muhammad. Although they are optional, they are highly recommended and therefore if one fasts such days, he is rewarded by God. However if one doesn't observe such days no sin is written on him

Voluntary fasting includes:

(i) SIX DAYS OF THE MONTH OF SHAWWAL (SITAT)

Every after the month of Ramadhan, Muslims are recommended to fast six more days in the month of Shawwal. Muslims should fast these days after performing Idd al-Fitr. These days are called Sitat Shawwal. One may fast these days consecutively or scattering them throughout the month of Shawwal.

The Prophet said:

“One who fasts the month of Ramadhan and accompanies it with the six days of Shawwal gets rewards equivalent to one who has fasted for full year.”

(ii) FASTING THE FIRST TEN DAYS OF DHUL –HIJJA

Muslims who are not performing pilgrimage are enjoined to fast the first ten days in month of Dhul-Hijja.

(iii) FASTING DURING THE MONTH OF MUHARRAM

This is a voluntary fasting performed on the tenth day in the month of Muharam or a day immediately following it. This day is called the day of Ashurah and it is observed by fasting in remembrance of the day the Israelites were rescued from bondage in Egypt

(iv) FASTING MOST OF THE MONTH OF SH’ABAAN.

This is the month which comes before Ramadhan. The Prophet used to fast most of the days during the month of Sh’abaan

(v) FASTING DURING THE FORBIDDEN MONTHS.

The forbidden months are those in which killing of anything is forbidden. These include Dhul-Qadah, Dhul –Hijjah, Muharram and Rajab.

(vi) FASTING ON MONDAYS AND THURSDAYS

These days were fasted by the Prophet to commemorate the days he was born and when he received revelation.

DAYS ON WHICH MUSLIMS SHOULD NOT FAST.

1. The day of Idd- al- Fitr should not be fasted because it is the day of breaking fasting of the Holy month of Ramadhan.
2. Muslims do not fast on the day of Idd al-Adhuha because it is the day of sacrifice and so people should spend them eating.
3. The doubtful days where one is not certain whether it is the first day of Ramadhan.
4. The three days after Idd al-Adhuha in the month of Dhu-Hijja are not fasted because Muslims, in these days, are still sacrificing their animals and everybody is supposed to eat and drink. These days are called Ayyaam Tashriiq.
5. It is also not allowed to fast on Fridays because it is an Idd for Muslims as Sundays are for Christians.

6. It is also not allowed to fast on the seventh day of the week because it is the day for the Christians.
7. Muslims are also forbidden to fast every day of the year. Fasting every day of the year makes fasting to lose meaning.
8. However, if Friday or the seventh day of the week fall on the 13th, 14th or 15th day of the month, then one can fast.

PEOPLE EXEMPTED FROM FASTING

1. The children under the age of puberty
2. Insane or mad people who are out of their minds and therefore cannot be countable for their deeds.
3. Sick people whose life is likely to be affected when they fast.
4. People traveling or who are on a very long journey.
5. One having chronic diseases are also not supposed to fast.
6. Elderly people are also supposed to break fast because there will be too much hardships on them.
7. Those who are performing hard work under harsh conditions.
8. Expectant women and mothers nursing children if fasting is likely to endanger their lives and that of the young ones should not fast.
9. Women in menstruation periods are also not supposed to fast because they are in a state of impurity.
10. Women confined due to childbirth should postpone fast until when they recover.
11. Non- Muslims are exempted from fasting because fasting is a duty for Muslims only.

WHO SHOULD FAST

1. A person must observe fasting if she/he is a believing male or female who has attained the age of maturity.

2. Fasting is prescribed on every Muslim male or female who is mentally and physically fit. The disabled must, however, fast.
3. An able-bodied Muslims settled at his/her permanent home must fast hence a traveler should not fast.
4. A Muslim must fast if he/she is fairly certain that fasting will not cause any harm to him.

ACTS THAT NULLIFY FASTING

1. Eating or drinking anything during the day of fasting before sundown.
2. Playing sex or involving oneself in sexual activities during the day of fasting even if the couple involved in the act is legally married.
3. Intentional vomiting especially to those who over eat during Sahur.
4. Smoking or allowing something to enter the mouth or nose into the inner parts of the body intentionally
5. Ejaculation done or caused by intetional or intimate hugging or masturbation.
6. Fasting is considered null and void if one doesn't abstain from profanity.
7. Taking in anything that has the same effect as eating and drinking invalidates fast. For example any injection which nourishes the body and acts like food would break one's fast.

However, other types of injections that are not used for nourishment do not invalidate the fast even if they are taken through the veins.

8. Intention is one of the pillars of fasting. If one has the intention to break his fast before sunset, he has broken his fast. This applies even if one has not actually eaten anything, after having the intention to break his fast.
9. Appearance of menstruation or postpartum bleeding nullifies the fast even if it begins just a few minutes before sunset.

10. If a person did not intend to fast, spending the whole day without eating or drinking does not make him fast.

ACTS THAT ARE PERMISSIBLE DURING FASTING.

These are acts which when done will not nullify or invalidate one's fast. They include:-

1. Pouring water on oneself; bathing or swimming are allowed when one is fasting.
2. Rinsing the mouth and the nostrils while performing ablution does not invalidate fast; however; if one is fasting he is commanded not to exaggerate the act.
3. Injections in case of sickness should be administered to treat sickness or injuries. However, injection must not nourish the body.
4. Swallowing of saliva is allowed on the day of fasting because it is a natural process and one cannot survive without it.
5. Kissing and romancing are allowed during daytime to those who are married; however couples should control their emotions.
6. A fasting person is allowed to eat, drink or have sexual intercourse provided it is not daytime.
7. A state of Janaba or sexual impurities do not break one's fast.
8. If one stops bleeding (menstruation) in the night, she can delay Ghusul until when preparing for morning prayers when fasting has already started.
9. Moving under rain does not invalidate one's fast; however, precautions have to be taken not to swallow water.
10. Wet dreams do not invalidate the fast because it is an involuntary act. A person who has a wet dream in Ramadhan should take a bath in case of ejaculation.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ISLAMIC FASTING AND CHRISTIAN FASTING

Although both Muslims and Christians observe fasting, their ways of fasting are different in the following ways:-

1. Muslims fast for 29 or 30 days while Christians fast for 40 days.
2. Fasting is prescribed to every Muslims; fasting to Christians on the other hand is optional.
3. Muslims fasting takes place in the month of Ramadhan while Christian fasting takes place in the lent period.
4. Muslims fasting is a pillar of Islam while Christian fasting is not a pillar; in fact there are no pillars of Christianity
5. Failure to observe fasting on the side of Muslims is punishable by God. A Christian who does not observe fasting is not punished but blamed by fellow Christians.
6. Christians may choose to abstain from some kinds of food and eat others. Muslims must fast without eating or drinking anything until sunset.
7. Muslims fasting proceed the rising of the moon during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Christians do not consider the rising of the moon in order of fast.
8. Muslims perform the Tarawiih prayer very evening during fasting. Christians have no prayer related to their fasting.

