

Introduction

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1. Introduction

Fasting (*sawm*) is abstention from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse during the day whilst having made niyyat (intention) of fasting. The fasting day commences before sunrise and ends after sunset. The Quran states:and eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appear to you distinct from its black thread; then complete your fast till the night appears....(2:187).

"Fasting is called *sawm* in the Qur'an. The word *sawm* literally means "to abstain". According to Shari'ah (Islamic law), the word *sawm* means to abstain from all those things that are forbidden during fasting from the break of dawn to the sunset, and to do this with the intention of fasting." (Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, President of the Fiqh Council of North America)¹.

2. Fasting is obligatory

In the second year of Hijrah, Muslims were commanded to fast in the month of Ramadan every year. The Qur'an states, "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those who were before you, in order that you may learn *taqwa* (piety)." (al-Baqarah: 183). "The month of Ramadan is that in which was revealed the Qur'an, wherein is guidance for mankind and the clear signs of guidance and distinction. Thus whosoever among you witness the month must fast...." (al-Baqarah: 184).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him (PBUH)) stated that fasting in the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islamic belief. Narrated Ibn Umar: Allah's Apostle (PBUH) said: "Islam is based on (the following) five (principles):

- a) to testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and Muhammad (PBUH) is Allah's Apostle;
- b) to offer the (compulsory congregational) prayers dutifully and perfectly;
- c) to pay zakat (i.e. obligatory charity);
- d) to perform Hajj (i.e. Pilgrimage to Mecca);
- e) to observe fast during the month of Ramadan."

(Bukari, volume 1, Hadith number: 7).

The Prophet (PBUH) also said, "There is zakaat applicable to everything, and the zakat of the body is fasting." (Mishkat).

3. Purpose of fasting

Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, President of the Fiqh Council of North America explains the purpose of fasting:

"The Qur'an says: (O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those who were before you, in order that you may learn **taqwa**.) (al-Baqarah 2: 183)

"*Taqwa* is a very important spiritual and ethical term of the Qur'an. It is the sum total of all Islamic spirituality and ethics. It is a quality in a believer's life that keeps him/her aware of Allah all the time. A person who has *taqwa* loves to do good and to avoid evil for the sake of Allah. *Taqwa* is piety, righteousness and consciousness of Allah. *Taqwa* requires patience and perseverance. Fasting teaches patience, and with patience one can rise to the high position of *taqwa*.

"The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said that fasting is a shield. It protects a person from sin and lustful desires. When the disciples of Jesus asked him how to cast the evil spirits away, he is reported to have said, "But this kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:21). According to Imam al-Ghazali (d. 1111 C.E.), fasting produces a semblance of divine quality of *samadiyyah* (freedom from want) in a human being. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1350 C.E.), viewed fasting as a means of releasing the human spirit from the clutches of desire, thus allowing moderation to prevail in the carnal self. Imam Shah Waliullah Dahlawi (d. 1762 C.E.) viewed fasting as a means of weakening the bestial and reinforcing the angelic elements in human beings. Maulana Mawdudi (d. 1979 C.E.) emphasized that fasting for a full month every year trains a person individually and the Muslim community as a whole, in piety and self restraint."

4. Benefits of fasting

Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, member of the Fiqh Council of North America states²: "Fasting is very pleasing to Allah. Allah loves the person who fasts. Allah loves a fasting person because he/she becomes more aware of Allah, becomes a better human being. The purpose of fasting is not to make us hungry and thirsty and to deprive us some of our comfort and conveniences. The real purpose of fasting is that we learn *taqwa* (piety)."

The Almighty has stated that all the good deeds you do whilst alive are for your benefit except fasting. You fast for the Almighty and the Almighty will reward you. Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "(Allah said), "Every good deed of Adam's son is for him except fasting; it is for Me, and I shall reward (the fasting person) for it. Verily, the smell of the mouth of a fasting person is better to Allah than the smell of Musk." (Bukhari, volume 7, Hadith number 811).

There are many other hadith exalting the virtues of fasting.

Narrated Abu Said: I heard the Prophet (PBUH) saying, "Indeed, anyone who fasts for one day for Allah's pleasure, Allah will keep his face away from the (Hell) fire for (a distance covered by a journey of) seventy years. (Bukhari, volume 4, Hadith number 93).

Narrated Sahl bin Sad: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Paradise has eight gates, and one of them is called Ar-Raiyan through which none will enter but those who observe fasting." (Bukhari, volume 4, Hadith number 479).

5. Your behaviour whilst fasting

Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Dean of the University of Qatar states: "Valid fasting is that which purifies one's soul and imbues goodness and righteousness into one's heart, so that one may ward off evil, as conveyed in the words of Allah, Exalted be He, Who says: **“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off (evil).”** (Al-Baqarah: 183)

"Thus, whoever fasts in Ramadan is obliged to refrain from saying or doing anything that is contradictory to the elevated manners expected from a fasting Muslim so as not to lose Allah's reward for fasting and gain nothing but hunger, thirst, and deprivation, as explained in the Hadith: **"Fasting is a kind of protection. So, when anyone of you gets up in the morning in the state of fasting, he should neither use obscene language nor do any act of ignorance. And if anyone insults him or quarrels with him, he should say, 'I am fasting, I am fasting.'"** (Reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.)

"Allah's Messenger (PBUH) is reported to have said: **"Many a one who fasts obtains nothing from his fasting but hunger and thirst, and many a one who prays during the night obtains nothing from his night prayers but wakefulness."** (Reported by Al Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, and Al-Hakim, and is said to be authentic on the condition of Al-Bukhari.)

"The Prophet (PBUH) is also reported to have said: **"Whoever does not give up false speech (telling lies and the like) and acting upon it, Allah is not in need of his leaving his food and drink (i.e. Allah will not accept his fasting)."** (Reported by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad, and others.)

"Jabir `Abdullah Al-Ansari said: "When you fast, your eyes, ears, and tongue should abstain from falsehood and sins. You should avoid hurting your servant. Refrain from anything demoralizing, and portray a picture of tranquility while fasting for the day, your behaviour on the day you are fasting should be better than other days." "

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¹ Fasting: Meaning & Rules – Islamonline – 27 October 2003

² What Kind of Fasting Is Pleasing to Allah? – Islamonline – 10 November 2003