

What to do when fasts are broken or missed

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1. Implications of missing a fast or breaking a fast

Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, an author and prominent Muslim scholar, states¹: "It is generally known that no days are equivalent to the days of Ramadan except the days of another Ramadan. At the same time, all days of Ramadan are originally fast-days, so that one can never make up the missed fast-days of Ramadan during another Ramadan. That is why Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, said: "**Whoever did not observe fast for one day of Ramadan for no legal excuse or on account of a disease can never make it up later.**" (Narrated on the authority of Abu Hurairah, by Al-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, An-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, Ibn Khuzaimah, and Al-Bayhaqi, and the quoted version is At-Tirmidhi's.) However, one of its narrators is weak.

"It was also narrated, on the authority of Abu Hurairah, that a man did not observe fast in Ramadan deliberately with no legal excuses. Hence, Abu Hurairah said: "**Even if he fasts for a whole year, he will still not have made up for that day.**" It was also narrated, on the authority of Ibn Masu'd, that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "**If anyone breaks his fast one day in Ramadan without a concession granted to him by Allah, a perpetual fast will not atone for it.**"

"Whoever breaks his or her fast for one day of Ramadan deliberately without any legal concession, then even if he observed fast for life, it would not compensate for that day." Abu Bakr and `Ali Ibn Abi Talib were also reported to have said words with the same meaning.

"Therefore, a Muslim must fear Allah and keep from deviating from the right path by observing the fast of Ramadan. He must have the ability to resist his desires, for whoever is defeated by hunger can never be victorious."

If a person either breaks or misses a fast for a valid reason, then a fast in lieu of the one broken or missed must be kept. Similarly if a person breaks his/her fast by mistake, then a fast in lieu of the one broken must be kept.

Scholars summarise the following circumstances in which a fast can be broken:

- The need to take medicine failing which the person will be harmed.
- A pregnant woman fearing for either her safety or the safety of her child.
- If the milk of a woman who is breast feeding dries up.

- If a person's life is endangered if the fast is not broken.
- A person experiences severe hunger or thirst.

2. How to re-perform a fast or make up for a fast missed

The fasts in lieu of those missed can be kept at any time after Ramadan. One fast needs to be kept per fast missed. Scholars are of the opinion that any nawafil (voluntary) fasts should only be kept once all the Ramadan fasts missed have been made up.

According to the Hanafi school, the missed fasts can be made up intermittently or consecutively.

If a person did not fast in lieu of fasts missed and the next Ramadan has commenced, then the person should fast the new month of Ramadan. Ibrahim said: "If somebody did not fast in lieu of the missed days of Ramadan till the next Ramadan came, then he should fast the present Ramadan and then the missed days of the previous Ramadan." (Bukhari, volume 3, Hadith number 40).

3. Implications of deliberately breaking a fast

The Prophet (PBUH) stated that kaffarah should be performed if a fast is broken deliberately through a sexual act.

Under Hanafi law, kaffarah becomes wajib under the following circumstances:

- Deliberately breaking a fast by eating (without a valid reason);
- Breaking a fast by a sexual act; and
- Missing a fast without a good reason (not accepted by all Hanafi scholars).

If the fast is broken through sexual activity, both parties need to perform kaffarah.

Performance of kaffarah is based upon the following Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH).

Narrated Abu Huraira: While we were sitting with the Prophet (PBUH) a man came and said, "O Allah's Apostle (PBUH)! I have been ruined." Allah's Apostle (PBUH) asked him what was the matter with him. He replied, "I had sexual intercourse with my wife while I was fasting." Allah's Apostle (PBUH) asked him, "Can you afford to manumit a slave?" He replied in the negative. Allah's Apostle (PBUH) asked him, "Can you fast for two successive months?" He replied in the negative. The Prophet (PBUH) asked him, "Can you afford to feed sixty poor persons?" He replied in the negative. The Prophet (PBUH) kept silent and while we were in that state, a big basket full of dates was brought to the Prophet. He asked, "Where is the questioner?" He replied, "I (am here)." The Prophet (PBUH) said (to him), "Take this (basket of dates) and give it in charity." (Bukhari, volume three, Hadith number 157).

Based on the above hadith, kaffarah is performed as follows:

- A slave must be freed. This does not apply in today's society.
- Fast for sixty consecutive days without missing any day in between. If a day is missed then the fasts kept to date will be invalid and the entire process recommenced. Under Hanafi law an exception is made for a woman in her menstrual cycle. Should a day be missed, the entire two month cycle must be re-started.
- If a person is unable to fast due to old age or ill health, the person should feed 60 poor persons.

If a person opts to feed a poor person for 60 consecutive days and in that period the reason for being unable to fast is resolved, then the person should start the fast for 60 consecutive days. Any payments and feeding to date will be viewed as voluntary charity.

According to Imam Hanifa, if a person deliberately does not fast, that person is not required to make kaffarah. Imams Abu Yusuf and Mohammed (Hanafi jurists) were of the opinion that kaffarah was wajib in such a case.

Under Hanafi law, “A distinction will have to be made between the two acts necessitating kaffarah. If the kaffarah became wajib a number of times and it was due to sex, then a new kaffarah has to be given every time the sex act is committed. But if the act which necessitated a kaffarah was due to eating intentionally, then the number of kaffarahs do not increase, but one kaffarah will suffice.”²

A person who breaks his Qazaa fast (fast in lieu of missed/broken fasts in Ramadan) for any reason identified in this section need not perform kaffarah. The person should fast in lieu of the broken fast. Imam Malik states:

“I have heard people of knowledge saying that the kaffarah specified by the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, for a man who has intercourse with his wife during the day in Ramadan is not due from someone who, on a day when he is making up the fast of Ramadan, breaks his fast by having intercourse with his wife, or whatever. He only has to make up for that day.” (Al-Muwatta, page 116). The Hanafi school is of the same opinion.

4. What to do if you cannot fast (due to illness)

The Holy Quran states: **For those who can do it (with hardship) is a ransom the feeding of one that is indigent.**

Those who due to old age, permanent disabilities or ill health who cannot fast must feed the poor for each fast not kept.

The fidiya amount for each compulsory fast not kept is the same as Sadaqah Fitir (refer to the section on broken and missed fasts), its cash equivalent or the feeding of a poor person for one day (two meals).

A person who has not paid fidiya, should include a clause in their will stating that all outstanding fidiya should be paid. If it is not so included, the payment can only be made from the one-third portion of the estate that qualifies not to be subject to Quranic allocations.

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¹ Breaking Some Fast-days of Ramadan without Justification – Islamonline – 2 November 2003

² Shaybanee: *Thahirur Ruwa-yah* (clear traditions of Imam Hanifa), as quoted by: Sallie: The Book on Fasting, page 118.