

Fasting & Ramadan

Fasting is an exercise in self-control designed to bring a Muslim closer to Allah. It involves refraining from food, drink, and intercourse throughout the day.

Muslims are required to fast in the month of Ramaḍān because it was the month in which the Qur'an was first revealed, making it the best time of the year. There are other fasts which are recommended throughout the year on certain days as well. Fasting is an act of worship like prayer and can be performed at almost any time of the year. It has also been prescribed as a penalty in order to make up for certain acts that a Muslim might perform, such as when breaking a vow.

Who Must Fast in Ramaḍān

Fasting must be performed by all Muslims who meet the following conditions:

- **Maturity:** Whoever is not obligated to pray does not need to fast either. However, children should be taught how to fast and be encouraged to do so by the age of seven, and their parents must make sure they are fasting by the age of ten.
- **Sanity:** Whoever is not obligated to pray due to a mental illness or defect is not required to fast either. However, they may still be taught how to fast and encouraged to do so.
- **Free from illness:** Someone suffering from an illness where fasting will probably either cause harm to their body, increase their illness, or delay their recovery is excused from fasting. The severity of their illness can be determined by consulting an expert or someone with knowledge about that condition. Pregnant and breast feeding women are also exempted if fasting may harm them or their child.¹ However, these fasts must be made up once they have recovered.
- **Free from chronic inability:** People who suffer from a chronic illness or are very old such that fasting will cause them harm do not have to fast. However, since this situation will persist they must feed a poor person, two average meals, for every day of fasting they miss. In that way, they have earned the reward of fasting despite their inability.
- **Not traveling:** A person who is traveling is excused from fasting due to the difficulties and inconveniences associated with a journey. However, if there will be little difficulty, then it is better to fast. The fasts that are missed must be made up after returning from the journey.
- **Free from menstruation and lochia:** Women who do not pray due to their period are also exempted from fasting. However, since Ramadan only occurs once a year, they are required to make up these missed fasts.

Determining the Month of Ramaḍān

Precisely determining the beginning and end of Ramaḍān is very important because it determines when to start and stop fasting. If the new moon crescent is visible on the twenty-ninth day of Sha'bān it means

¹ A woman who is unable to fast throughout the year due to continuous pregnancy/breastfeeding may be classified as a person with a chronic inability as described in the next section, even if it is known that she will recover after a year. This would apply to a woman who was unable to fast from one Ramaḍān to the next.

that the month is over and Ramaḍān has entered. However, if it is not visible it means that the month of Sha'bān consists of thirty days and Ramaḍān will begin the following day.²

Muslims must have a system in place to determine when the month of Ramaḍān begins. People must report sightings of the moon to a trusted and recognized Muslim authority [like a council of scholars] who will determine whether or not to announce the start of Ramaḍān. When the moon is sighted anywhere in a land where Muslims are present, the month of Ramadan will begin for every Muslim in the entire world.³

The end of the month is determined by establishing that the new moon crescent is visible on the twenty-ninth of Ramadan. If it is then Ramaḍān will consist of only twenty-nine days and the following day is the month of Shawwāl. However, if it is not visible it means that the month of Ramaḍān consists of thirty days and the month of Shawwāl will begin after that.

Requirements for Fasting

Since fasting is an act of worship, one must have the intention to fast in order for it to be valid. For example, if one had the intention of dieting and abstained from food and drink throughout the day, it would not count as a fast. For the month of Ramaḍān, it is sufficient to make a general intention that you plan to fast the entire month. If anything causes that intention to change, such as illness or travel, then the intention to continue fasting in Ramaḍān must be made again before starting.

What Breaks the Fast

A person must refrain from doing anything which breaks the fast, from dawn until sunset. The things which break the fast are:

- Eating or drinking. This includes any substance intentionally entering the body through the mouth which resembles food or drink. It also includes anything which enters the body from another place and results in nourishment, such as a glucose drip.
- Intercourse. Other forms of foreplay are allowed but should not be done to the point that one is tempted to have intercourse. This will vary from person to person. Intentionally masturbating will also break the fast. However, unintentionally having a wet dream will not.
- Vomiting a mouthful intentionally. Unintentionally throwing up does not affect the fast.

² The Islamic lunar calendar consists of twelve months and is not linked with the seasons like the solar calendar. The year consists of 354.37 days while the mean time between new moons is 29.53 days. This means that every month will be either twenty-nine or thirty days long, depending on when the moon is sighted. The lunar phase is based on the sunlit portion of the moon as seen from Earth and varies according to the changing positions of the Sun, Moon, and Earth.

³ Another way to aid in the 'sighting' of the moon is to use astronomical data either to reject a purported sighting or to establish the month when there is a possibility of the moon being visible in a certain region, as long as that data is highly reliable. Determining which method to use, sighting or astronomical data, is something that should be decided by local councils of scholars and leaders. It is better to try and achieve unity in one locality by following the opinion of those trusted councils.

What Does Not Break the Fast

If any of the actions which break the fast are performed forgetfully, the fast will not break and no makeup is necessary.⁴ However, the person must immediately cease doing that act as soon as they remember.

The following common actions also do not break the fast:

- Tasting food without swallowing any of it. This is disliked without a good reason. For example, someone working as a chef in a restaurant may taste the food while cooking and then spit it out.
- Chewing food without swallowing it. This is disliked without a good reason. For example, having to chew the food for your child when no one else is available to chew it for them is a good reason. Chewing flavorless gum is not a good reason.
- Using eye drops, ear drops, nose drops, or enemas. This is because the medicine does not reach the stomach.
- A medicinal injection, whether intramuscular or intravenous, because it neither reaches the stomach nor enters the body through the mouth.
- Medicinal patches because the substance neither reaches the stomach nor enters the body through the mouth.
- Brushing the teeth with a wet brush or with toothpaste as long as nothing is swallowed. However, one must be careful when brushing near the back of the mouth.
- Swallowing small bits of food [like sesame seeds] that are stuck in one's teeth involuntarily because it is usually done unmindfully.
- Giving blood, although it is disliked if it will weaken the person very much and make their fast more difficult.
- Using an asthma inhaler since it only goes into the lungs.
- Inhaling incense smoke or perfume because it does not reach the stomach.⁵
- Rinsing the mouth with water or taking a bath in order to cool down.

Changing From One State to Another

There are special rules to be observed if a person was not required to fast but then became required during the day, or vice versa. If a woman begins her period of menstruation or lochia during the day, she must break her fast and is allowed to eat, but must make up that day later. If the excuse for not fasting goes away during the day [e.g. a woman's period ends, a traveler becomes a resident, or a sick person is cured], that person must fast the rest of the day, but will still have to make that day up since they did not fast the whole day.

⁴ Some scholars have indicated that there is a difference between forgetfulness and making a mistake. For example, a person who keeps eating past dawn or who breaks the fast before sunset has made a mistake and must make up that fast. However, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah disagrees and sees no difference between the two, so the fast is still valid.

⁵ The majority of scholars have stated that smoking cigarettes or hookah breaks the fast. Given the fact that both are prohibited for Muslims, Ramaḍān is an excellent time to quit.

Whoever is excused from fasting should try to eat in private around other people so as to not give the illusion that they are violating the sanctity of the month of Ramaḍān.

Recommended For Fasting

It is recommended to wake up before dawn to eat something before beginning the fast. This will help the person remain strong and healthy throughout the day. It is better to delay this until right before the fast begins. It is also recommended to begin fasting about five to ten minutes before the actual time of dawn so that no one accidentally keeps on eating and drinking beyond the time of fasting.

When the sun sets, it is recommended to break the fast immediately to show that you are following the prescribed way of fasting. It is also recommended to break the fast with an odd number of dates, or with water. When breaking the fast, it is recommended to recite the following supplication:

ذهب الظمأ وابتلت العروق وثبت الأجر إن شاء الله

“The thirst is gone, the veins are moist, and the reward is affirmed, if Allah wills”

If you are performing an optional fast and are invited to a meal, it is best to break that fast if it would offend the person or if they have put effort into preparing the food.

Making up Missed Fasts

Whoever misses a fast and needs to make it up may do so at their leisure before the next Ramadan. However, it is recommended to not delay without a reason. Whoever has missed more than one fast may either make up those fasts consecutively or intermittently, but consecutively is better. Whoever has not made it up until the following Ramadan still must make it up, but will be held accountable without an excuse.

Penalty for Violating the Sanctity of Ramaḍān

Whoever intentionally breaks their fast without any excuse by eating, drinking, or having intercourse⁶ during the month of Ramaḍān will not only have to make up that fast but will also be subject to a penalty for violating the sanctity of the month of Ramaḍān. This is to emphasize the idea that every eligible Muslim must take fasting in Ramaḍān very seriously.

The penalty is to free a slave [either Muslim or non-Muslim, if there is one to free]. If one is unable to do this, then they must fast for sixty consecutive days.⁷ If they are unable to do this, then they must feed sixty poor people for a day with two average meals. It is also allowed to feed one poor person for sixty days or give the monetary equivalent of the food. Anyone who intentionally broke their fast more than once in Ramaḍān will still perform only one penalty.

The following will break the fast but not require any penalty:

⁶ Intentional masturbation falls in the same category as intercourse with regard to the penalty.

⁷ Anyone who encounters an excuse from fasting such as illness, menstruation, etc. may only skip those days in order to fulfill the requirement of being consecutive.

- Eating something which is not normally eaten by people such as a stone or dirt
- Ejaculation resulting from foreplay
- Vomiting more than a mouthful intentionally

Tarāwīh Prayer

In the month of Ramaḍān, it is highly recommended to pray twenty units after 'ishā' prayer but prior to witr. These units should be performed as two unit prayers. It is recommended to take a break and rest after every four units. It is also recommended that these prayers be prayed in a group, out loud, but may also be performed individually. When these prayers are over, it is recommended to pray the witr prayer in a group, out loud.

Seclusion in the Mosque [I'tikāf]

It is a highly recommended act of worship to seclude oneself in the mosque⁸ during the last ten nights of Ramadan [or as many as possible].

Requirements of I'tikāf

The following requirements must be observed in order for a person to be considered in a state of i'tikāf:

- They must stay inside the mosque and not leave without a good reason. This would include: going to another mosque for Friday prayer if it is not held in the current location, going out to get food, helping someone in an emergency situation, using the toilet, etc. It is only allowed to leave for the amount of time that would be necessary to perform the required task. If someone leaves the mosque for more than half a day without a valid excuse, their i'tikāf is invalidated.
- Neither intimacy nor intercourse is allowed during i'tikāf since seclusion is a continuous act of worship.

Etiquettes of I'tikāf

While a person is inside the mosque, they should focus on prayer, worship, and reflection. It is allowed to perform worldly activities such as business transactions like buying food for the stay. It is also disliked to remain quiet because that is how people of other faiths engage in seclusion.

ʿĪd [Eid] Prayer

The day after Ramaḍān is known as ʿĪd al-Fiṭr [the festival of breaking fast] and is a day of celebration. It is recommended to take a bath, to eat something before leaving to attend the prayer, wear perfume and dress in your best clothes.

It is recommended for different mosques to assemble together in a large area and pray together. When a person leaves his house to attend the prayer, he should praise Allah on the way there by saying:

allāhu akbar, allāhu akbar, lā ilāha illallāh, allāhu akbar, allāhu akbar, wa lillāhi l-ḥamd

⁸ A mosque is defined by the intention of the people who started it. One of the conditions is that it is available to be prayed in five times a day.

God is great, God is great, there is no god besides Allah, God is great, God is great, praise belongs to him

When arriving at the gathering place there are no extra prayers recommended nor is there a call to prayer [adhān] or commence [iqāmah]. The person should continue praising Allah until the prayer starts.

The 'Īd prayer is identical to the fajr prayer except that extra takbīrs are added while standing. The imam begins the prayer as usual and recites the opening supplication inaudibly with his hands folded. Then he raises his hands like at the beginning of prayer, says takbīr and then lowers his hands to his sides. This is done a total of seven times in the first unit, so that there was one initial takbīr to start the prayer and seven additional ones after that. After the final takbīr, he folds his hands and then the recitation begins as usual. It is recommended to recite sūrah al-a'lā in the first unit.

When the imām stands for the second unit he adds an extra five takbīrs while raising his hands as he did in the first unit. Then he continues the prayer as normal. It is recommended to recite sūrah al-ghāshiyah in the second unit.

When the prayer is finished, the imām will stand and deliver two sermons like on Friday.

The timing for the 'Īd prayer begins fifteen minutes after sunrise and last until zuhr. If someone misses the prayer, it cannot be made up. In case the imām omits the additional takbīrs, he may perform two error prostrations to make up for it.

Ṣadaqah al-Fiṭr/Fiṭrah

Ṣadaqah al-Fiṭr [*lit.* the charity of breaking fast] is a charity that is paid at the end of Ramaḍān. It gives the needy an opportunity to enjoy the day of Eid [festival after Ramaḍān] without having to worry about working for their livelihood on that day.

Conditions

Paying the Fiṭrah is an obligation on every Muslim who possesses the minimum amount [niṣāb] to pay zakāh on the day of Eid. A man is to pay on behalf of himself and his minor children, while a woman must pay for herself. The obligation begins at dawn on the day of Eid al-Fiṭr, so whoever possesses the amount at that time must pay the Fiṭrah.

Payment

The Fiṭrah must be paid before the Eid prayer begins. However, if one delays payment, the obligation remains and must still be fulfilled. It is recommended to be paid earlier so that it may be properly distributed to those in need. It is allowed to pay it in advance from the first day of Ramaḍān.

The amount to be paid has been measured in foodstuffs. It is four double handfuls of dates, barley, or raisins. It is recommended to pay the value in cash if it would be more helpful to the poor so they can purchase other food or clothes.⁹

⁹ Consult your local Muslim charity organization or mosque for current prices. These organizations usually collect and distribute the fiṭrah.

Distribution

Ṣadaqah al-Fiṭr, like Zakāh, must only be given to the poor and needy who do not possess the minimum amount [niṣāb] of wealth.

Fasting Beyond Ramaḍān

It is highly recommended to fast on the tenth of Muḥarram [known as the day of ‘Āshūrā’] and encouraged to also fast either the day before or after when doing so.

It is also highly recommended to fast six days of the month of Shawwāl because they serve as a completion of Ramaḍān. Since good deeds are rewarded at least ten times, fasting Ramaḍān is like fasting ten months. By fasting six more days, it is like fasting sixty more days, making a total of 12 months, so it is as if the person has fasted the entire year. The fasts of Shawwāl do not have to be done in order and may be performed on any day of the month.

It is also recommended to fast three days every month, preferably the 13th, 14th, and 15th of any given month. These are known as the white days because the moon is at its largest size. It is also recommended to fast every Monday or Thursday, or both, because that was the habit of the Prophet.

One may fast on almost any day as an act of worship. However there are some days on which it is disliked to fast and others on which it is prohibited. It is disliked to fast on a Friday or Saturday unless it coincides with a habit or another day before or after is added. It is prohibited to fast on the day of Eid al-Fiṭr, Eid al-Aḍḥā, and on the 11th, 12th, and 13th of Dhul Ḥijjah.

It is also prohibited to fast every day with the intention to continue throughout your life because that will weaken a person and will make them accustomed to fasting and thus lose its purpose. It is also prohibited to fast for two days straight without breaking the fast in between.

‘Īd [Eid] al-Aḍḥā

The tenth day of the month of Dhul Ḥijjah is known as ‘Īd al-Aḍḥā [the festival of sacrifice] and is a day of celebration. The ‘Īd prayers on this day are identical to the day of ‘Īd al-Fiṭr with the following exceptions:

- It is not recommended to eat prior to leaving the house
- Praising Allah on the way to prayer is mandatory for a number of days. Beginning on the ninth of Dhul Ḥijjah after fajr, the takbīr must be said at least once audibly. It is recommended to say it three times. If praying in a group, everyone may say it together in unison. This is done after every one of the five prayers until ‘aṣr prayer on the thirteenth of Dhul Ḥijjah.