



**The Islamic Cultural Centre &
The London Central Mosque**

Introduction to Fasting

Dr Khalifa Ezzat

What Is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar and the month in which the Qur'an was revealed. Ramadan is the month of worship, the month of helping the needy through charity and the month of compulsory fasting. Fasting Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam and became obligatory on Muslims during the 2nd year after the Hijrah [migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah]. Therefore, the Prophet fasted nine Ramadans in his lifetime. The command to fast was revealed in the month of Sha'ban [the month immediately preceding Ramadan].

Sighting of the Moon

It is a collective duty on the Muslims to make an effort to sight the moon of Ramadan on the 28th of Sha'ban. Muslims should depend on sighting the moon based on the naked-eye or astronomic calculation. The Prophet [pbuh] himself instructed, *'Begin the fast on the sighting of the moon and break the fast likewise, but if the sky is cloudy [on the 29th of Sha'ban], then estimate it [by completing] 30 days of Sha'ban'* [Muslim].

Muslim scholars and scholars of astronomy agreed that astronomic calculation is a science that is based on observation of the position of the sun and the moon; a scientific basis, not on *Tanjīm* [astrology]. Muslim scholars also agree that sighting the moon with the naked-eye is the fundamental basic criteria and there is no need for astronomic calculation if the moon is seen clearly. If sighting with naked-eye is not certain or in conflict with calculation, then decision by means of sighting solely with the naked-eye will not be acceptable and calculation should be taken into consideration.

What Is the Definition of Fasting?

The literal meaning of fasting [*Ṣawm*] is to restrain oneself from something. The technical meaning is to abstain from all those things that are forbidden during the time of fasting which is from the break of dawn to the sunset and to do this with the intention of fasting. Fasting in Islam involves abstaining from all bodily pleasures between dawn and sunset. It also includes abstaining from doing bad deeds, evil actions and bad manners. Fasting is not unique to Muslims. It has been practiced for centuries by Christians, Jews, Confucianists, Hindus, Taoists, and Jains. God states this fact in the Qur'an: *'O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may develop God-consciousness'* [2:183].

Intention [*Niyyah*]

The intention [*Niyyah*] for fasting is **imperative**. If a person stays away from all those things that break one's fast but without *Niyyah*, the fast will not be valid. It is not necessary to express the *Niyyah* verbally, as *Niyyah* means to intend. Thus, making intention in the heart will suffice. However, it is better to express the *Niyyah* verbally, also. The intention can be made every night with *Suhūr* [the meal shortly before the start of the time of fasting] and it can be done once for the whole month. All are permissible.

Why Muslims Fast?

Fasting in Ramadan aims to achieve:

- Piety and righteousness
- Discipline
- Renewal of a devotional Life
- Renewal of contact with the Qur'an
- Renewal of identity with the Ummah
- A renewed sense of care and sympathy
- Striving, challenge, and struggle
- Patience
- Self-control
- Abstaining from the halal in order to make it easier to abstain from haram after Ramadan.

What are the Virtues of Ramadan?

Fasting helps Muslims develop self-control, gain a better understanding of God's gifts and attain a greater compassion towards the deprived.

- This blessed month is a great occasion for goodness, blessing, worship and obedience of God
- It is a month in which rewards for good deeds are multiplied
- It is a great opportunity for one to do deeds that could bring him/her closer to Paradise
- It provides protection from evil for those who sincerely fast
- God gives a special reward for the one who fasts faithfully
- Perhaps the greatest and most unique merit of Ramadan lies in the fact that the Qur'an was revealed during this month
- When the month of Ramadan starts, the gates of Paradise are opened, the gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained up
- It is a means for atonement of sins. It is a shield because it safeguards the believer from vain talk and wrong doing and thereby protects him from the Hell.
- 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 God, because he has been favoured with God's mercy to observe fasting while many others have been deprived of this great blessing]

- The second would be when he meets his Lord [and enjoys the abundant reward for having observed fasting]
- Fasting intercedes with God on behalf the believer on the Day of Judgment

How Muslims Should Prepare for Ramadan?

- We should prepare for Ramadan by recognising our shortcomings and our duties
- We should set ourselves straight so that in Ramadan we will have a higher degree of faith; for faith increases and decreases. Faith increases through obedience to God and faith decreases through disobedience and sin.
- We should welcome Ramadan by asking for forgiveness and making sincere repentance
- Everyone should prepare for Ramadan by learning the rules and etiquette of Ramadan:
 - learning the meaning and purpose of fasting
 - understanding who must fast, who must not and who is allowed to break the fast

What are the Levels of Fasting?

Fasting is of three levels:

1. Fasting of common people [*Ṣawm al-'awām*]: this refers to what the common people do i.e. abstaining from food, drink and sexual desire. Fasting in this way allows you to fulfil your obligation but this category of fasting does not earn the blessings and benefit of Ramadan.

2. Fasting of the Special [*Ṣawm Khawāṣ*]: this involves fasting of the organs from committing sins. Therefore, your eye fasts from looking at anything forbidden, your hands fast from touching anything forbidden [such as stealing, hitting, harming] and your tongue fasts from uttering bad words [such as lying, backbiting], etc.

3. Very Special Fasting [*Ṣawm Khawāṣ al-Khawāṣ*]: this involves fasting from everything apart from God. It is as if you are on hold for God in this month. You might be at work, but your heart is with God. You might be cooking, but your heart and thoughts are with God. We should all try to attain this level, at least some of the days of Ramadan, if not all.

What Is the Proper Way of Good Fasting?

The best way to fast is to do it according to the Sunnah. Fasting according to the Sunnah means to do the following, **in addition** to that which is obligatory in order for the fast to be valid:

- Abstaining from eating, drinking, intimacy and to have the intention for fasting.
- Avoid doing bad deeds or behaviours
- Have the pre-dawn meal [*Suhūr*] late, shortly before Fajr
- To break the fasting as soon as possible at the time of Maghrib
- To make Du'a
- To increase in doing good acts; such as prayers, giving charity, reading the Qur'an, praying tahajjud [night prayers], making dhikr, etc.

What are the Types of Fasting?

There are numerous categories of fasting:

- 1. Compulsory [Fard]:** this includes fasting Ramadan or fasting due to vow. By vow means that if you missed fasting Ramadan due to a genuine reason, it is imperative to observe the fast later. [Except when excused from fasting with legal excuse and instead pay *Fidyah* – see ‘ General Rulings and Guidelines’].
- 2. Recommended [Sunnah]:** The fast which Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] himself observed or urged his followers to observe, such as Ashura [the day of ‘Arafah on ninth of Dhul-Hijjah] and fasting the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth of every lunar month
- 3. Permissible [Nafl]:** such as six fasts in the month of Shawwal and fasting every Monday and Thursday
- 4. Disliked [Makruh]:** fasting on Friday only or Saturday only, fasting day 29 of Sha’ban [day of doubt] and fasting without a break
- 5. Forbidden [Haram]:** fasting on the day of Eid al-Fiṭr, on the day of Eid Aḍḥa and in the tashrīq days [eleventh to thirteenth of Dhul-Hijjah]

What Are the Conditions for Fasting?

- To be Muslim
- To have reached puberty, however, with young children it is recommended to encourage them to fast in order for them to get used to it at an early age
- To be sane or conscious
- To be physically sound and able
- To be a resident, not a traveller
- To be free from menstrual cycle, for women

What are the things that Invalidate Fasting?

The things which invalidate fast are of two kinds. Invalidating the fast by the first kind requires *Qaḍā* [only making up the missed days]. The second kind requires both *Qaḍā* and also *Kaffārah* [expiation].

The following things require making up [*Qaḍā*] only:

- Intentionally eating or drinking
- Deliberately causing oneself to vomit
- The beginning of menstruation or post childbirth bleeding even in the last moment before sunset
- Deliberate ejaculation for reasons other than sexual intercourse
- Intending to break the fasting before sunset even if one changes his mind
- Eating, drinking or having intercourse after dawn on the mistaken assumption that it is not dawn yet. Similarly, engaging in these acts before Maghrib on the mistaken assumption that it is already sunset.

Things that not only require *Qaḍā* [Making up] but also *Kaffārah* [expiation] are:

- Sexual intercourse during fasting. The penalty is to fast an additional period of 60 continuous days. If one is not able to do so then he must feed sixty poor people one average meal each.

General Rulings and Guidelines

- One should make a sincere intention to fast for the sake of God every day before dawn. It is also allowed to have one intention for the whole month and does not have to be done every day.
- If someone forgot they were fasting and drank or ate during fasting, he or she should carry on fasting.
- The elderly, whether man or woman, are allowed to break fasting and give *Fidyah* or *Şadaqah* [charity] instead. The *Fidyah* is, for the poor and needy and should be given for every day of the fast [at least 6 pounds for each day]. There is no need to make up the fast.
- Those who have long term sickness such as cancer or diabetes are allowed to break fasting and give *Fidyah* or *Şadaqah* instead. They should give the *Fidyah* to the poor and needy and it should be given for every day of the fast [at least 6 pounds for each day]. There is no need to make up the fast.
- Those who have sickness such as fever, or severe flu or cough are allowed to break fasting and make up later.
- The traveller is allowed to break fasting and make up later.
- The pregnant and breast-feeding women can break fasting if they feel it would harm her or the baby and make up later.
- A menstruating woman must not pray or fast. Prayers need not be made up, while fasting must be made up later.
- Some people are allowed to break fasting because of the nature of their job such as doctors who need full concentration when they make a sensitive operation.
- People who find it very difficult to fast or are certain that fasting will affect their health badly, or might get fainted are also allowed to break fasting.
- Students who find it very hard to concentrate and are certain that fasting would affect their studies and exam can break fasting and make up later.
- It is not allowed to break fasting on the *assumption* that your health might get badly affected. You break fasting only when you are **certain** that it would be dangerous to fast. This can be known through experience or doctor's advice.
- It is not permissible to follow the timetable of another country such as Makkah or others to break your fasting with the excuse that it is a long day. This can only be done in countries where sometimes it is always daytime or always night. In countries where there is daytime and night like Britain, you cannot follow another country's time. However, if you are unable to fast the whole day because of an extreme difficulty that it will cause, then you can break your fasting and make it up later. In the Qur'an it says: '*God does not burden a person more than he can bear*' [2:286].

According to the International Islamic Academy of Fiqh, during fasting, the following things are permissible and would not break your fast:

- Unintentionally eating, drinking or smoking
- Unintentional vomiting
- Swallowing things which are not possible to avoid, such as; one's saliva, street dust, smoke etc.
- Injection or intravenous which is solely medical and not nutritional
- Taking a bath or shower. If water is swallowed involuntarily it will not invalidate the fast.

- Using perfumes, wearing contact lenses or using eye drops
- Taking injections or having a blood test
- Using tooth stick or using tooth brush [with tooth paste] and rinsing the mouth and nostrils with water
- General medical examinations which do not give energy or food
- If one sleeps during the day and has a wet dream it does not break one's fast
- If one has intercourse during the night and was not able to make ghusl [bathe] before dawn, he/she can begin the fast and make ghusl later
- Kissing between husband and wife is permissible during the fast if they can both control themselves
- The person who has diabetes has the choice to fast if he/she is able or to break the fasting if he has to take medicine during the day. It depends on the level of diabetes. He/she should consult the doctor.

What Is Pre-Dawn Meal [*Suhūr*]?

The pre-dawn meal [*Suhūr*] is one of the main meals during the blessed month of Ramadan. Doctors have confirmed that it is more important than the meal with which one breaks his fasting [Iftār], because it helps the person persevere through the difficulties of fasting. This is the reason why Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] advised us to eat even a small portion and encouraged us not to abandon it in many texts. He said: "Eat *Suhūr*; Indeed, there is a blessing in *Suhūr*." [Al-Bukhari]. *Suhūr* does not have to be a full meal. It is preferable that this meal include vegetables that contain a high level of fluids such as lettuce and cucumber, because this helps the body maintain fluids for a long period of time and thus reduces the feeling of thirst and prevents dehydration. Additionally, these types of vegetables are a good source for vitamins and minerals.

It is also recommended to have beans with olive oil, cheese and eggs as a part of this meal. This is because it takes the body 7-9 hours to digest these types of foods and thus one's hunger would be delayed. Also, these types of food supply the body with the required energy throughout the day. Do not consume large quantities of sugar or salt, because sugar triggers hunger, while salt triggers thirst.

This blessed *Suhūr* meal has many health benefits for the fasting person, such as:

- Preventing the loss of body cells
- Preventing fatigue and headaches during the daytime
- Preventing the fasting person from feeling lazy, sluggish or in need of sleep
- It reduces extreme hunger and thirst
- It energizes and stimulates the digestive system
- It helps the body maintain its sugar levels while fasting
- It spiritually assists the believer to fulfil fasting as an act of worship

What Is My Plan in Ramadan?

Every Muslim should take the opportunity of this great month and make a plan which will help him or her to achieve success in Ramadan. This plan should include the following categories:

1. You and the prayer: Make sure you do the five prayers on time as much as possible. Perform other optional prayers such as Tarāwīḥ, Tahajjud or Qiyām al-Layl, etc.

- 2. You and the Qur'an:** Make sure you have a timetable for the portion you can read every day; how many pages, or juz', etc. Also, make sure you contemplate the meaning of the Qur'an. Each letter of the Qur'an that you read you get a minimum of 10 rewards up to 700 and multiplied by 70 in Ramadan. Imagine the reward from reading one juz'! The Prophet [pbuh] used to recite the Qur'an to Jibrīl when Jibrīl met him..." [Al-Bukhari].
- 3. You and Charity:** Every Muslim both male and female should be generous, especially in Ramadan. Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] was the most generous amongst the people and he used to be more so in the month of Ramadan. Remember Zakat al-Fiṭr which is equivalent to 6 pounds for each person in the family at the end of Ramadan.
- 4. You and Tarāwīḥ:** Remember not to miss praying Tarāwīḥ every night in the masjid or at home or anywhere else.
- 5. You and your Ties of Kinship:** Remember to have good ties with your kinships and relatives. The Prophet [pbuh] said that a person who severs the ties of kinship would not enter Paradise.
- 6. You and Da'wah:** Try as much as possible to guide a non-practising friend to the guidance of Islam, or give out books about Islam during the month, etc.
- 7. You and Du'a [supplication]:** Maintain du'a in Ramadan and ask God for what you need. The Prophet [pbuh] said, "the supplication of a fasting person upon breaking his fast will not be rejected.'

In the end, I ask God, the Almighty, to help us all, to guide us all, and to help us to fast, pray and to do acts of worship and to avoid doing evil.

Sh. Khalifa Ezzat

Chief Imam and Head of Religious Affairs

The Islamic Cultural Centre &

The London Central Mosque

www.iccuk.org