



Fasting in Islam

احكام الصوم



Saheeh International

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Allah, the Exalted, has addressed all Muslim believers, saying:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ.

O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.¹

In this verse the Creator states that He had enjoined fasting in some form upon the followers of earlier prophets. And He mentions the purpose behind it: "that you may become righteous." So fasting is a means to attain righteousness, piety and consciousness of Allah (taqwā).

Fasting is a form of worship that is neither action nor speech. The Arabic words "ṣaum" and "ṣiyām" literally mean abstention, as shown in the Qur'ānic verse where Maryam, the mother of Prophet 'Eesā, is told:

فَإِذَا تَرَيْنَ مِنَ الْبَشَرِ أَحَدًا فَقُولِي إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا فَلَنْ أُكَلِّمَ الْيَوْمَ إِنْسِيًّا.

"And if you see from among humanity anyone, say, 'Indeed, I have vowed to the Most Merciful abstention (ṣaum), so I will not speak today to [any] person.'"²

In Islamic terminology, "fasting" means abstention from food, drink and marital intercourse from the break of dawn until sunset³ with the specific intention of earning reward from Allah. While abstention might appear to be something negative, it is in fact positive in Islam, for it is done with the intention to obey Allah, come closer to Him and earn His approval and reward.

In a ḥadith qudsi, Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) disclosed that Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, has said, "Fasting is for Me, and I [alone] reward for it." (Narrated by al-Bukhārī)

That is because Allah alone knows who fasts sincerely, seeking only His acceptance – neither cheating when the opportunity arises nor merely abstaining due to custom or because people expect it of him. Thus, the correct intention to do it for no other reason than to please Allah is an essential pillar of the fast, as it is for all forms of worship, without which the act of worship is unacceptable and invalid.

Another aspect of this ḥadith is the indication that Allah's reward is far beyond what can be expected from any human being, and is possibly unlimited in nature. As He states in the Qur'ān:

إِنَّمَا يُوفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

Indeed, those who are patient will be given their reward without enumeration.⁴

¹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:183.

² Sūrah Maryam, 19:26.

³ In addition to the abovementioned, which are normally permissible but prohibited during fasting, all acts prohibited or disliked generally at other times should obviously be avoided as well.

⁴ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:10.

Out of the collection of authentic narrations from the Prophet (ﷺ) there are several that mention benefits of fasting in the life to come, among them:

- *"No servant fasts one day in the way of Allah but that Allah puts between his face and the Hellfire a distance of seventy years."* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)
- *"Fasting and the Qur'ān intercede for a servant on the Day of Resurrection (Qiyāmah). The fast says, 'O my Lord, I prevented him from food and desires by day, so let me intercede.' And the Qur'ān says, 'I prevented him from sleep by night, so let me intercede.' So they are allowed to intercede."* (Aḥmad)
- *"By the One in whose hand is the soul of Muḥammad, the breath of a fasting person is sweeter to Allah on the Day of Resurrection than the smell of musk. And the fasting person has two joys: when he breaks his fast he rejoices for that and when he meets his Lord he rejoices for his fasting."* (Aḥmad and Muslim)
- *"Paradise has a door called 'ar-Rayyān'. On the Day of Resurrection it will be said, 'Where are those who fasted?' And when the last of them has entered the door will be closed."* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

As for the life of this world, fasting has been shown medically to be beneficial to both bodily and mental health. But humans are more than physical beings simply requiring nourishment from substances of the earth. Fasting provides nourishment for the soul and has the effect of softening hearts. It teaches patience, self-control and appreciation of the provisions and pleasures often taken for granted. It produces compassion and generosity toward those less fortunate who cannot always relieve pains of hunger at the end of the day. Thus, it points one toward many other beneficial acts of worship in the form of assistance to others.

While physical and moral benefits are definitely among the positive results of fasting, they should not be the cause or incentive for it. One's primary objective must be to fulfill his obligation to Allah, to show servitude to Him and obey His command. The obligatory fast is the right of the Creator upon His creation and of the Lord upon His servants. As in all types of worship, it consists of whole-hearted obedience motivated by a combination of love for Allah and fear of His displeasure. The performance of righteous deeds is not an end in itself, but reflects and is part of one's servitude to Allah, and this motivates the believer toward honesty and precision in everything he does.

Categories of Fasting

There are two general categories of fasting: obligatory and voluntary. Voluntary fasting can be done at almost any time, with a few exceptions and conditions. It will be dealt with later in a separate section.

Obligatory fasting includes:

- 1) The month of Ramadhān and making up days missed during it
- 2) Days of fasting required as expiation for certain kinds of sins, accidental killing or the breaking of an oath (kaffārah)

3) Fasting as ransom (fidyah) for a violation during Ḥajj or 'Umrah or in place of the sacrificial animal (hadi) required of those performing the tamattu' and qirān type of Ḥajj⁵

4) The fulfillment of a vow to Allah (nadhr) by fasting as was specified therein, for example, at a particular time or for a particular number of days⁶

Although the same general rulings apply to all of these, not all of them will be required of every Muslim during his lifetime. The obligatory fast of Ramadhān, however, is among the pillars of Islam, and so is of great importance to all Muslims and affects their societies. Hence, the rulings for obligatory fasting are customarily mentioned under this topic.

Ṣaum Ramadhān

The fast of Ramadhān is a religious obligation (fardh) by authority of the Qur'ān, the Sunnah and a consensus of Muslim scholars.

- The Qur'ān conveys the commands of Allah, the Almighty:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ.

O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you.⁷

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ

The month of Ramadhān [is that] in which was revealed the Qur'ān, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever is present [at his place of residence] during the month,⁸ let him fast it.

- The Sunnah confirms it with the following ḥadith:

Islam is built upon five [pillars]: testimony that there is no [true] deity but Allah and that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah, the establishment of prayer, giving zakāh, pilgrimage (ḥajj) to the House and the fast of Ramadhān. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

- And all Muslim scholars are in agreement that fasting Ramadhān is one of the pillars of Islam and that denial of this obligation removes one from the religion. It

⁵ Both are described in the Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:196.

⁶ Scholars have pointed out that making vows is disliked. While it is obligatory to fulfill them, it could put a person in a position in unforeseen difficulty. The Prophet (ﷺ) told people not to make vows and said, "They do not avert anything and only serve to get something [i.e., worship] out of a stingy person." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) Additionally, it is disliked for a person to "bargain" with Allah by saying, "If You do something for me I will fast, give charity, perform 'umrah, etc." Allah, the Exalted, has no need of our deeds in exchange for His favors. It is far more befitting to supplicate Him humbly for one's needs and then show gratitude by increasing righteousness and worship on a permanent basis.

⁷ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:183.

⁸ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:185. These words may also mean: "So whoever has witnessed [the crescent of] the month, let him fast it."

became obligatory on Monday, the 2nd of Sha'bān in the second year after the Hijrah.

One might wonder why Allah has made fasting a month out of every year obligatory or why has He required from us certain acts of worship in view of the fact that He is self-sufficient and not in need of anything from His servants.

The answer is that every obligation imposed by Allah has wisdom and benefit behind it. We may or may not comprehend it; or we may perceive part of it while much more is concealed from us. The merciful Creator certainly did not ordain fasting to make people suffer, as He stated in the Qur'ān:

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ.

Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship.⁹

مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَكِنْ يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُنِيبَكُمْ وَإِلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ.

Allah does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you and complete His favor upon you that you may be grateful.¹⁰

Actually, the purpose of fasting has been stated along with the command; it is to promote taqwā and refine the soul. The fasting person is training himself to constantly remember Allah and remember that He is aware of his every action, word, thought and feeling. Fasting reminds one of his subservience to Allah and demonstrates submission to Him. Although one has the ability to indulge his physical desires, he refrains out of willing obedience, which helps him to develop an attitude of indifference toward the present world and a preference for the Hereafter. Fasting strengthens the will and conditions a person to cope with difficulties in all aspects of his life. And it helps to develop the qualities that successful people possess: willpower, strength and capability.

Abū Umāmah reported that he said to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), "Order me to do a deed which will allow me to enter Paradise." He replied, "*Fast, for there is no equivalent to it.*" (Aḥmad and an-Nasā'i)

Allah, the Most Merciful, is especially attentive to one who is fasting. The Prophet (ﷺ) affirmed, "*There are three whose supplication is not rejected - that of a fasting person until he breaks his fast, that of a just leader and that of someone oppressed.*" (At-Tirmidhi, Aḥmad and Ibn Majah - ṣaḥeeḥ)

The month of Ramadhān provides an opportunity for earning forgiveness from Allah and release from the burden of one's sins. It is the month of fasting and prayer. It is the month for performing good deeds and giving charity. It is the month when the gates of the heavens are opened and the rewards for deeds are increased many times over. It is the month wherein earnest supplication is answered and the status of the worshipper is elevated.

⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:185.

¹⁰ Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 5:6.

And besides being the month of fasting and good deeds, Ramadhān is the month of Qur'ān. The Book of Allah was sent down therein from the eternal register containing Allah's decrees¹¹ to the lowest heaven. From there it was then revealed in portions during the 23 years of Muḥammad's prophethood through the angel, Jibreel. Each year during Ramadhān, the Prophet (ﷺ) reviewed all that had been revealed to him to date with Jibreel, and in the year before his death he did so twice. Muslims are encouraged to practice the sunnah of additional recitation and study of the Qur'ān during Ramadhān, as well as increased worship of all kinds.

Fasting is a test imposed upon the believer by his Lord, and Ramadhān is similar to a training course for believers, who share an experience therein which brings them closer together. During this month, they put aside most of their worldly concerns and fill their time with deeds of righteousness. For them it is not a retreat from life but a supplement to it, offering a program not only of fasting and patience, but of self-discipline, good manners and worship through additional prayer and supplication, through reading and studying the Qur'ān, and through righteous deeds of all kinds, especially the charities that assist others. Believers prove their capability of overcoming physical desires when necessary, so they feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment at the end of the month and wish that the atmosphere of Ramadhān would continue throughout the year.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) mentioned additional benefits of Ramadhān:

A blessed month has come. Allah has required you to fast it. During it the doors of Paradise are opened, the doors of Hell are closed and devils are chained.¹² Therein is a night better than a thousand months.¹³ Whoever misses its benefit has surely been deprived. (Aḥmad and an-Nasā'i)

Whoever fasts Ramadhān with faith and seeking [Allah's] reward will have whatever preceded of his sin forgiven. (Aḥmad)

The five prayers, Friday [prayer] to Friday and Ramadhān to Ramadhān are expiation for what is between them when the major sins are avoided. (Muslim)

An 'umrah during Ramadhān is equal [in reward] to a ḥajj.¹⁴ (Aḥmad and al-Bukhāri)

Preparing for Ramadhān

All sincere Muslim believers can begin to prepare for this blessed month by doing the following:

- Acknowledging their weaknesses and deficiencies in the practice of religion and striving earnestly to correct these shortcomings and fulfill their duties. Sincere repentance is obligatory at all times, but with the approach of Ramadhān it is even more important to

¹¹ Al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūth.

¹² Aḥmad and an-Nasā'i. If it is asked why sins are still committed in Ramadhān, the answer is that some of the devils are chained (the rebellious ones among the jinn) but not all of them. Moreover, there are other causes for sin, such as evil souls, bad habits and the influence of devils among mankind. Another interpretation is that evil is reduced by those who observe the conditions and etiquette of fasting, which frustrates the devils and restricts their activity.

¹³ i.e., Laylatal-Qadr.

¹⁴ However, it does not substitute for the obligatory Ḥajj.

repent from sins. Then, when the month actually begins the Muslim can devote himself to worship with a pure heart and peace of mind. Faith increases through obedience to Allah and decreases through disobedience, so repentance from sin is a primary obligation for every Muslim and is an act of obedience. Allah has said in the Qur'an:

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا أَوْ يَظْلِمْ نَفْسَهُ ثُمَّ يَسْتَغْفِرِ اللَّهَ يَجِدِ اللَّهَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا.

And whoever does a wrong or wrongs himself but then seeks forgiveness of Allah will find Allah Forgiving and Merciful.¹⁵

- Learning the Islamic rulings pertaining to fasting in order to apply them correctly and inform others.
- Making up any days remaining of obligatory fasts or, if there are none, fasting voluntarily some days starting from the first half of Sha'bān, which is a sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ).¹⁶
- Planning ahead and organizing activities to enable one to do the maximum amount of righteous deeds in Ramadhān. For example, one can buy as much as possible of what will be needed throughout the month as well as for 'Eid, so that he has more time for worship during Ramadhān.

Moonsighting

The beginning of the month is confirmed by sight of the new moon. It is sufficient that it be seen by one knowledgeable and trustworthy Muslim during the night following the 29th of Sha'bān.¹⁷ Ibn 'Umar reported: "People were looking for the new moon, and when I told the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) that I had seen it, he fasted and ordered the people to fast." (Abū Dāwūd, al-Ḥākim, and Ibn Ḥibbān - ṣaḥeeh)

If the crescent is not sighted, the preceding month of Sha'bān is assumed to have thirty days. The Prophet (ﷺ) instructed: "Fast when you see it [the crescent] and end the fast [of Ramadhān] when you see it. But if it is obscured from you, then complete the term of Sha'bān as thirty days."¹⁸ (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

The evidence of one person is acceptable to determine the beginning of Ramadhān. But to end the fast, the new moon of Shawwāl must be confirmed by at least two just witnesses according to the majority of scholars.

In recent times, Muslims in lands distant from Makkah and Madinah have fallen into dispute over whether to fast when the moon is sighted in Makkah or when it is sighted in their own region. The scholars themselves differ concerning this matter. There are two points of view and each is based on evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah.¹⁹ The stronger opinion is that

¹⁵ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:110.

¹⁶ For more on this subject see the section on voluntary fasting.

¹⁷ According to the lunar calendar, the new day begins at sunset, and hence, the new month as well.

¹⁸ This ḥadīth eliminates permissibility of relying on computer calculations to begin or end the month. However, they may be used to indicate the times that it would not be possible to sight a new moon.

¹⁹ This issue is one in which there is room for ijtihād. It is a type of difference which is accepted and reasonable, where the one who is correct will have two rewards and the one who is incorrect will still be rewarded for his ijtihād. However, when it comes to implementation, the community must be united. Whoever rejects the majority decision and divides the community is committing sin.

every country should rely upon its own sighting. However, Muslims must follow the scholars of their region in whichever of these views they believe to be more correct, and one should not begin or end the fast on his own.

Each country may choose whichever opinion it prefers according to the suggestions of its trustworthy scholars because both views are based on evidence. But most important is that Muslims in the same locality cease to be divided on the issue, which has regrettably been the case in many Muslim communities within non-Muslim lands. It is imperative and legally obligatory for the scholars of a given country and their followers to be in agreement about how to determine the beginning of the month. There is no excuse for different communities within the same region to begin Ramadhān or celebrate 'Eid on different days. Therefore, even if one disagrees with the decision reached by the scholars of his country, he must abide by it for the sake of Muslim unity.

For those traveling from one land to another, these differences can occasionally result in a person fasting 31 days or in his ending the fast before the minimum term of 29 days. In the first case, he should continue to fast with the people but consider the extra day as a supererogatory (nāfilah) fast. In the second case, he should end his fast with the people but make up the missing day sometime after the 'Eid. And Allah knows best.

Who Must Fast Ramadhān and Who Is Exempted

Fasting is obligatory upon every Muslim who is adult, mentally sound, healthy, and not traveling.

A child is not required to fast but ought to be encouraged to do so by his guardian before the age of puberty in order to accustom him to it and to allow him to share in the spirit of Ramadhān. He might be able to fast on certain days or for a part of each day, and his efforts should be appreciated and praised. Fasting is more difficult for some children than for others. A child should not be pressured into fasting or shamed if he does not, but must be made aware that when he reaches puberty he will be responsible for his religious obligations as an adult.²⁰ Many young children will ask to be allowed fast as it makes them feel grown up, and Ramadhān is an opportune time to train them to be regular in their prayers.

The mentally deficient do not have to fast nor do elderly persons suffering from dementia. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "*The pen has been lifted²¹ for three: the insane²² until he becomes sane, the sleeping person until he awakens and the child until he reaches puberty.*" (Ahmad, Abu Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi) Accountability is in direct proportion to one's knowledge and capabilities.

Non-believers do not fast and they do not have to compensate for past years when they embrace Islam. Allah stated in the Qur'ān:

²⁰ Our righteous predecessors trained their children to fast in a gentle manner. Ar-Rabee' bint Mu'awwadh reported: "We fasted and had our children fast. We would go to the masjid and make them a toy from wool. When one of them cried for food, we would give it to him until it was time to break the fast. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

²¹ i.e., does not register, meaning that the person is not held accountable for his deeds.

²² This includes the mentally retarded.

قُلْ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنْ يَتَّهَمُوا يُغْفَرْ لَهُمْ مَا قَدْ سَلَفَ

Say to those who disbelieved, if they cease [disbelief], their past will be forgiven.²³

Muslims suffering from chronic illness without hope of recovery as well as very elderly people who have become physically weak are not required to fast but should feed a needy person for every day missed if they can afford it. The ruling applies also to those who are compelled to work the year round at hard labor or under severe conditions which make fasting extremely difficult.²⁴ This is based on Allah's words:

وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ

And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day].²⁵

Ibn 'Abbās explained: "It refers to the old man or old woman who are not able to fast, so for each day they should feed one poor person." (Al-Bukhāri) One who is suffering from a chronic illness from which recovery is not expected comes under the same ruling as the frail elderly person.

Provisional Allowances

Those with temporary illnesses may break the fast if they find it difficult, but they must compensate by making up the missed days after recovery. It is a matter of juristic consensus among scholars that it is permissible for the sick person not to fast. The proof for this is in Allah's words:

فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ

So whoever among you is ill or on a journey - then [fast] an equal number of other days.²⁶

Thus, Allah has given permission for the ailing person not to fast during his illness and make up those days after Ramadhān.

An illness is defined as any condition which takes a person out of the state of good health. There are several categories of illness:

There are illnesses that make fasting unbearable. A person afflicted with such an illness can break his fast according to the opinion of all scholars, and this is backed up by a considerable amount of evidence.²⁷

²³ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:38.

²⁴ Exams are not a valid excuse for students to break their fast in Ramadhān.

²⁵ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:184.

²⁶ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:184.

²⁷ The Qur'ān states: "Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity." (2:286) "...and do not burden us with what we have not the ability to bear." (2:286) "And fear Allah as much as you are able." (64:16)

There are illnesses that do not make fasting impossible but which can be made worse by fasting. If at least one reliable Muslim doctor determines that fasting will indeed aggravate a particular ailment, then it is preferable for the person to refrain from fasting. However, if he insists upon fasting in spite of that, his fast will be valid.

A person beset by an illness that requires medication to be ingested during the day may break his fast, especially if the consequences of delaying the medication are serious.

If breaking the fast will facilitate or speed up recovery, it is permissible to do so.

One may refrain from fasting if he has a justifiable fear that fasting will make him ill, subject him to severe pain, or cause unbearable difficulties for him.

Fasting is not obligatory for a sick person as long as he remains sick. He is not obligated to fast until after he recovers. Therefore, if he should die before recovery, those days have not yet become obligatory for him. And when the fast is not an obligation upon him, it is not obligatory for anyone to feed the poor on his behalf, since feeding the poor substitutes for an obligatory fast.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) had said: *"Whoever dies with a fast obligatory upon him, then his heir should fast on his behalf."* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) The implication of this hadith is also that whoever dies without a fast being obligatory upon him does not need to have someone fast for him, and he is like someone who died before Ramadhān.

Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers may also break their fast if they find it too difficult or fear for their health or for their child, but they must compensate for those days later. The stronger opinion of the scholars is that she does not have to feed a poor person as expiation. This is based on the fact that the Prophet (ﷺ) never asked women to feed the poor or do any other kind of expiation in this situation, which means nothing is expected from them other than making up the days not fasted.

Travelers also have the option whether or not to fast during a journey. This is true for all travel, whatever the purpose. Generally, it is better for the traveler to fast unless he finds it too difficult, in which case he may break his fast. However, the person should not break his fast until he has at least departed from the area of habitation where he was residing, meaning that he should depart from its populated area and its buildings. Days not fasted during travel must be made up, as Allah has said:

فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ

So whoever among you is ill or on a journey - [fast] an equal number of other days.²⁸

Persons who need to break their fast to save the life of someone (such as from fire or drowning) should do so and compensate for the day after Ramadhān.

Women during menstruation and post-partum bleeding (nifās) may not fast and their fast is invalid if they do. They also need to compensate for these days by fasting them later.

²⁸ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:184.

The Essentials of Fasting

There are two essential conditions for the validity of the fast:

Abstention from all acts that break the fast – This is based on the words of Allah:

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتُمُوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ

"Eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night]. Then complete the fast until the night."²⁹

Intention (niyyah), for Allah has said in the Qur'ān:

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, sincere to Him in religion.³⁰

Sincere intent to do something only for the acceptance of Allah is an essential condition of worship, the other one being correctness of the act according to the Shari'ah. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Actions are only by intention,³¹ and for every person is only what he intended." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

For obligatory fasting, the intention must be made during any part of the night before fajr.³² The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "Whoever does not resolve to fast before fajr has no fast." (Ahmad - ṣaḥeeh)³³

The intention is not to be pronounced by the tongue, but is an act of the heart and mind. One intends to fast in obedience to Allah, seeking His acceptance and drawing nearer to Him.

Beginning and Ending the Fast

A person who fasts may eat, drink and have marital relations during the night hours from maghrib (sunset) to fajr (dawn). If one is engaged in any of these things at the onset of fajr he must stop immediately. Should he continue, his fast for that day will not be valid. The Qur'ānic order is explicit: "Eat and drink until the white thread of the dawn becomes distinct from the black thread [of night]."

But as long as one is in doubt about whether or not the time of fajr has come, he may continue to eat and drink until he becomes certain of it.³⁴ He should not base the beginning

²⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:187. Adiy bin Ḥātim reported: "When the words, 'Until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black' were revealed, I took a black rope and a white rope and put them under my pillow. I began looking at them during the night but they were not clear to me. In the morning I went to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and mentioned that to him, and he said: 'It is only the black of night and the white of day.'" (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

³⁰ Sūrah al-Bayyinah, 98:5.

³¹ i.e., actions are valid by intention or judged by intention.

³² The *niyyah*, or intention is achieved by mere knowledge that one will fast the coming day as long as he is able to do so without excessive hardship.

³³ The majority of scholars are of the opinion that this applies to obligatory fasting only and not voluntary fasting.

of his fast on uncertainty or speculation. And one need not stop eating some time before fajr just to be on the safe side.³⁵ Ibn 'Abbās instructed, "Continue to eat until you are certain about the time." And Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal said, "If you have some doubt about fajr, eat until you are sure it has come." Imām an-Nawawi added, "The followers of ash-Shāfi'i agree that one may eat when he is uncertain whether or not the dawn has come." However, as soon as he knows that fajr has come one must stop eating and drinking.

As for breaking the fast at maghrib, it is to be done as soon as the sun has set, i.e., when the top of the sun disappears into the horizon. It is not permissible to break the fast when one is not sure whether or not the sun has set. But if the fasting person believes the sun has set and breaks his fast, and then finds that it had not set, there is no sin on him. Evidence for this is the report by Asmā' bint Abi Bakr. She said, "We broke our fast on a cloudy day during the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), and then the sun appeared." (Al-Bukhāri)

It is clear from this narration that they did not break their fast on the basis of certain knowledge, because in that case the sun would not have reappeared. Rather, they did so thinking that most likely it had set, then the clouds dispersed and they saw the sun. If their fast had been invalidated because of that and it was necessary to make up that day, the Prophet (ﷺ) would have ordered them to do so and his companions would have known it and passed on the information.

That Which Invalidates the Fast

The fast is invalidated by any one of the following:

- ... Sexual intercourse during the day hours of Ramadhān – the expiation for this serious violation is not only to fast the day over, but also a heavy penalty: freeing a slave or, when unavailable, fasting sixty consecutive days or, if unable to do so, feeding sixty poor persons or one poor person for sixty days. This is based upon the following hadith:

Abu Hurayrah reported that a man came to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and said, "I am destroyed, O Messenger of Allah!" The Prophet (ﷺ) asked, "What destroyed you?" He said, "I had intercourse with my wife during a day of Ramadhān." The Prophet asked, "Can you free a slave?" He said, "No". He asked, "Can you fast for two months consecutively?" He said, "No." He asked, "Can you feed sixty poor people?" He said, "No," and sat down. So the Prophet brought a measure of dates and said, "Give this in charity." The man said, "To someone poorer than us? There is no one in this city who is poorer than we are!" The Prophet (ﷺ) smiled and said: "Go and feed it to your family." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)³⁶

³⁴ A principle of Islam and major axiom of Islamic Law is that legally, things are assumed to remain as they are unless and until it is established with certainty that they are otherwise. Extraneous doubts are of no consequence.

³⁵ On some of the prayer timetables is a column called "imsāk". These timetables suggest that people should stop eating ten or fifteen minutes before fajr. However, there is no basis for this in Islamic law. It was not the practice of the Prophet (ﷺ) nor of his companions or their students.

³⁶ The abovementioned order must be followed. Thus, one may only feed the poor when unable to fast for a lawful reason.

Many scholars are of the opinion that both the man and woman must offer the expiation if they intentionally have intercourse during a day in Ramadhān on which they had intended to fast. But if the woman is compelled by the man, it will be obligatory only on the man. However, the sounder view is that the expiation is obligatory only on the man in either case, and that there is nothing due from the woman. This is because in the aforementioned hadith the Prophet (ﷺ) told the man to offer expiation and not the woman, although he obviously knew she was involved.

All other invalidations require fasting one day in compensation for each day the fast was not completed, or if one is unable to do so, feeding a poor person for each day. These include:

- ... Eating, drinking or smoking deliberately, either with or without a valid reason, or ingesting anything through the mouth or nose – But if one should eat or drink forgetting that he is fasting it is excused.³⁷
- ... Injections taken for nourishment in place of food or drink. Other types of injection having no food value do not break the fast.
- ... Bleeding of menses or childbirth at any time of the day, even a moment before sunset³⁸
- ... Intentional discharge of semen – Unintentional discharge requires ghusl but does not break the fast.
- ... Vomiting intentionally – Vomiting involuntarily does not break the fast.
- ... Drawing out blood from the body deliberately through cupping or similar means according to one scholarly view – Small amounts, such as what is drawn from the finger are excused. However, there is another opinion stating that drawing any amount of blood from the body does not invalidate the fast.

That Which Does Not Invalidate the Fast

Generally, it may be said that except for the aforementioned acts, nothing else breaks or invalidates one's fast. Thus, all of the following are regarded as being permissible during fasting:

- ... Submerging oneself in water or bathing – the Prophet (ﷺ) was seen by some of his companions pouring water on his head while fasting to relieve thirst or heat. (Aḥmad and Abu Dāwūd - ṣaḥeeḥ) It is permissible for one who requires ghusl³⁹ and could not perform it before fajr to do so after the adhān as long as he/she does not miss the fajr prayer.

³⁷ The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whoever forgets while he is fasting and eats or drinks should complete his fast, for Allah has fed him and given him drink." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

³⁸ The Prophet's wife, 'Ā'ishah reported: "We used to menstruate during the time of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) and he would order us to make up the fast but not the prayer." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) The woman whose fast is broken near the end of the day does not lose the reward of the time she fasted. She must make up the day only because it was incomplete.

³⁹ Due either to sexual impurity or the cessation of menstruation or post-partum bleeding during the night. If the woman's bleeding continues after fajr the day is not complete for her and will have to be made up.

- ... Using kohl, eye drops or ointments, even if the taste is found in the throat⁴⁰ – Some of the companions used kohl while fasting.
- ... Using and smelling perfume
- ... Smelling and tasting food as long as none is swallowed
- ... Kissing or hugging the spouse as long as it does not lead to ejaculation, in which case it is considered a deliberate act, invalidating the day's fast for the husband – The Prophet (ﷺ) used to kiss his wives while fasting. (Aḥmad, al-Bukhāri and Muslim)
- ... Vomiting without inducement
- ... Unintentional discharge of semen⁴¹
- ... Bleeding from the nose, from a wound or during extraction of a tooth
- ... Cleaning the teeth – The Prophet (ﷺ) used to use the tooth stick (siwāk) at any time of day while fasting, and said, *"The siwāk purifies the mouth and is pleasing to the Lord."* (An-Nasā'i - ṣaḥeeḥ)⁴²
- ... Whatever enters the body through the skin in the form of oil, cream or ointment
- ... Medication applied externally to wounds, even those inside the head or stomach
- ... Enema, the purpose of which is to remove impurities from the body and not to nourish it
- ... That which cannot be avoided, such as swallowing saliva and inhaling dust or smoke that is present in the air

All of these were known at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), and the fact that he did not mention any of them is proof that they are permitted during fasting. Ibn Taymiyyah explained: "Fasting is part of the religion of Islam. Both the layman and the specialist require knowledge about it. If such things were forbidden by Allah and His Messenger during the fast and invalidated it, the Messenger would have had to clarify it. And if he had mentioned any of them his companions would have known that and would have conveyed it to the Muslim ummah as they did for all other religious matters. So when nothing has been reported from the Prophet (ﷺ) through an authentic or even a weak ḥadīth, it is understood that he did not disapprove of any of these things."

Similarly, contemporary scholars have stated that injections having no food value do not break the fast irrespective of whether they are intramuscular or intravenous even when their taste is found in the throat.

⁴⁰ The eye is not normally considered to be a passageway to the stomach.

⁴¹ However, ghusl (a complete bath) is required.

⁴² Some people assume that brushing the teeth while fasting is discouraged on the basis of the ḥadīth in which the Prophet (ﷺ) said: *"I swear by Him in whose hand is my soul, the khalūf of a fasting person is more pleasant to Allah than the scent of musk."* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) The assumption is incorrect because *khalūf* refers to the smell emanating from the stomach when it is empty and not from the mouth. In addition, the narration in Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim includes the words: *"on the Day of Judgment"* so brushing the teeth has no effect on that. In fact, it is in itself a deed pleasing to Allah.

Inhalers used by asthma patients are permitted in cases of necessity. Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz bin Bāz said: "It is allowed for a fasting person to use an inhaler if needed because Allah says:

وَقَدْ فَصَّلَ لَكُمْ مَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِلَّا مَا اضْطُرُّرْتُمْ إِلَيْهِ

He has explained in detail to you what He has forbidden you, excepting that to which you are compelled.⁴³

Breaking the Fast at Sunset

At sunset, that which was forbidden to the fasting person during daylight hours becomes permissible. The sunnah⁴⁴ is for a fasting person to break his fast as soon as he knows the sun has set. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said: "My community remains in a good state as long as they hasten to break their fast." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

Anas bin Mālik reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) used to break his fast before praying by eating fresh dates, and if there were no fresh dates he would eat dried dates; if there were no dried dates, he would have a few sips of water. (Abu Dāwūd - ṣaḥeeḥ) This shows that it is preferred to hasten to break the fast by eating a few bites to appease one's hunger, then pray the maghrib prayer and then, if he wishes, to come back and eat more. However, if one wants to complete his meal and then pray maghrib there is nothing wrong with that. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "If the dinner has been served, begin with it before the maghrib prayer and do not leave your dinner in haste." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

If the fasting person cannot find water or anything with which to break his fast, he should break his fast by intention (niyyah).⁴⁵ This means he should intend in his heart to break the fast, and that is sufficient. Thus, he will have hastened to break the fast in accordance with the Sunnah.

It is desirable for a fasting person to supplicate while fasting and when breaking the fast. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "There are three whose du'aa' will not be rejected: a just ruler, a fasting person when he breaks the fast, and one who has been wronged." (At-Tirmidhi - ṣaḥeeḥ)

When the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) broke his fast, he would say: "*Dhahabath-thama'u wabtalatil-'urooqu wa thabatal-ajru in sha' Allah.*" (Thirst has gone, the veins are refreshed and the reward is assured if Allah wills.) (Abu Dāwūd - ḥasan)⁴⁶ But in fact, when breaking the fast one may supplicate with any du'aa' of his choice from the Sunnah or a personal supplication in his own words.⁴⁷

⁴³ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:119

⁴⁴ The practice of the Prophet (ﷺ).

⁴⁵ This can also apply to one who is unable to leave or postpone some urgent matter, such as a surgeon performing an operation.

⁴⁶ The du'aa': "*Allāhumma laka ṣumtu wa 'alā rizqika aḥart*" (O Allah, for You I fasted, and on Your provision I break my fast) is based on a weak hadith related by Abu Dāwūd and al-Bayhaqī. But many scholars consider it a good supplication since it was recited by some of the Prophet's companions.

⁴⁷ When beginning to eat or drink he should say "Bismillāh". This should be done at any time, as it was enjoined by the Prophet (ﷺ).

Sharing one's *iftār*⁴⁸ is a good deed which earns additional reward. It can be done either by invitation or by supplying food, dates or water to fasting people. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: *"Whoever gives a fasting person iftār will have a reward like his, without reducing the reward of the one who fasted."* (At-Tirmidhi - ṣaḥeeḥ) This statement is general in meaning and applies to everyone who fasts, rich or poor, relatives or others.

Making Up Days of Fasting

All scholars are agreed that in order to compensate for days missed from Ramadhān fasting, one must later fast an equal number of days. This is based on the words of Allah:

فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ

So whoever among you is ill or on a journey - then [fast] an equal number of other days.⁴⁹

It is not essential that these days be uninterrupted; they can be fasted either consecutively or separately. One may fast one day each week or each month – whatever is easy for him. The evidence for this is that the verse above does not specify that the days be consecutive; rather, it stipulates only that the number of days fasted be equal to the number of days missed. One may also choose a time of the year when days are shorter and the weather is moderate. This is from Allah's mercy to His servants.

Days being made up in place of those missed in Ramadhān are fasted with the intention of completing the obligatory fast. As such, the intention must be made before fajr and it is not permissible to break this fast after beginning it without a legitimate reason, such as illness or travel.

The scholars are also in agreement that these days should be made up before the following Ramadhān when one is able. If someone delays making them up without a valid excuse until the next Ramadhān, he must repent to Allah and resolve not to repeat this mistake in the future. What remains obligatory upon him, however, is only to make up the days of fasting. If he wishes in addition to feed a poor person for each day missed, then that is also recommended by some scholars.

Expiation (Kaffārah)

As previously mentioned, there are two cases in which an expiation is required whenever it is within the means of the Muslim to offer it.

First is the penalty for marital intercourse during a day of Ramadhān,⁵⁰ normally a fast of sixty days consecutively or, if one is unable, feeding sixty poor people. In case one is himself too poor to do so he must offer a lesser ṣadaqah (charity) of some kind according to his means.

⁴⁸ The food or drink with which one breaks his fast, or a meal taken at that time.

⁴⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:184.

⁵⁰ Refer to the relevant hadith on p. 12. Most scholars are of the opinion that if it occurred more than once on the same day only one kaffārah is required, but if it occurred on two separate days, then two would be required.

Second is compensation for inability to fast. This is not due to any sin but merely to continuous inability due to chronic illness or the weakness of old age. For such people, by feeding a poor person in place of each day not fasted in Ramadhān the obligation to Allah is fulfilled. And when there is inability to do even this, Allah does not burden any soul with more than its capacity and has said:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ

Then fear Allah as much as you are able.⁵¹

Recommendations for the Fasting Person

It is recommended that those who fast observe the following:

- **Taking suḥoor** – It is preferred for those intending to fast to have a pre-dawn meal, but there is no sin upon one who does not do so. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *“Have suḥoor for in suḥoor there is blessing.”* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) This is because it serves to strengthen the person, give him more energy and make fasting easier for him. He (ﷺ) also said: *“All suḥoor is blessed, so do not neglect it even if one of you only takes a sip of water. For indeed, Allah and His angels send blessings upon those who have suḥoor.”* (Aḥmad - ḥasan) Thus, the sunnah is fulfilled by eating any quantity of food, even just a few bites or a sip of water.

The time for suḥoor is between midnight and fajr, but it is best to have it as close to fajr as possible. Zayd bin Thābit reported: *“We ate suḥoor with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), and then he got up to pray.”* Someone asked, *“How long was it between the two?”* He said: *“As long as [the recitation of] fifty verses.”* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) The Prophet's companions would be the first to break the fast and the last to have suḥoor, delaying it until just before the break of dawn.

- **Refraining from negative behavior** – Fasting was prescribed by Allah in order to purify the soul and increase piety.⁵² The fasting person must constantly be on guard against any act that may cause him to lose the benefits of his fast.

Fasting is not merely to refrain from eating and drinking, but from everything that Allah has forbidden at all times. The Prophet (ﷺ) confirmed, *“Fasting is not only abstaining from food and drink, but from empty and immoral speech. So if someone should insult you or behave badly toward you, then say, ‘I am fasting, I am fasting.’”* (Al-Ḥākim - ṣaḥeeḥ)⁵³ And he said, *“Anyone who does not refrain from making false statements and acting upon them – Allah has no need of his refraining from food and drink.”* (Al-Bukhāri)

This shows that Allah, the Exalted, does not appreciate the fast of a person who is disobeying Him in other respects.⁵⁴ And one whose heart is heedless, having no effect on his conduct while fasting, will not be counted among the sincere servants of Allah. Another

⁵¹ Sūrah at-Taghābun, 64:16.

⁵² As stated in the Qur'an, Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:183.

⁵³ In another version narrated by al-Bukhāri, the Prophet (ﷺ) said: *“Fasting is a shield. One who fasts does not use obscenities or act in an ignorant manner. If someone argues with you or insults you, say: ‘I am fasting, I am fasting.’”*

⁵⁴ Most scholars are of the opinion that the fast of one who does not pray is not accepted at all and that other sins can reduce the reward of fasting.

ḥadith states, "Possibly one who fasts gains nothing from his fast but hunger, and possibly one who stands in [night] prayer gains nothing from it but wakefulness." (Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥākim - ṣaḥeeḥ)

- **Generosity and study of the Qur'an** – Ibn 'Abbās reported: "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was the most generous of people, and he was the most generous ever during Ramadhān when [the angel] Jibreel would meet him. He would meet him every night of Ramadhān and review the Qur'an with him. Then he was more generous than a swift, far-reaching breeze." (Al-Bukhāri) Being charitable and helpful to people is prescribed at all times, as is studying the Qur'an, but both are especially emphasized during the month of Ramadhān. For those who are able it is recommended to read or recite the entire Qur'an at least once during this month.

- **Tarāweeḥ prayers** – Another sunnah practice is to attend tarāweeḥ prayers in a masjid or to perform them at home or elsewhere, either in congregation or individually. The Prophet (ﷺ) encouraged it, saying, "Whoever performs night prayers in Ramadhān out of faith and expecting reward, his previous sins will be forgiven." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) led his companions in prayer for a few nights in Ramadhān, but then he feared it might be made obligatory for them so he discontinued it and prayed privately. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) After his death when there could be no further revelation, 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb brought the people together again under one imam to restore the sunnah established by Allah's Messenger (ﷺ).

Like all voluntary night prayers, the time for tarāweeḥ is from after the 'ishā' prayer until fajr. Muslims have traditionally prayed tarāweeḥ in the masjid right after 'ishā' without delaying it. But for one who prays at home, he may pray at any time of the night.

There has been some disagreement among scholars about the ideal number of rak'ahs for tarāweeḥ prayers, some saying twenty, some thirty-six and others restricting them to eight. Each of these opinions is based on evidence. The Prophet's wife, 'Ā'ishah, said, "The Prophet (ﷺ) never prayed more than eleven rak'ahs in Ramadhān and other times. He used to pray four – and do not ask how perfect and long they were. Then he would pray four, do not ask how perfect and long they were. And then he would pray three [of witr]." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

Those who prefer twenty base it on the fact that when 'Umar gathered the people, they prayed twenty rak'ahs and many of the Prophet's companions also prayed twenty. It was never related that any of them objected to this or denied the permissibility of more than eight rak'ahs.

The general practice has been that when the imam lengthens his recitation, as did the Prophet and his companions, the number of rak'ahs is fewer, but when he recites lesser portions of the Qur'an it is preferred to increase the number of rak'ahs. In any case, tarāweeḥ is a sunnah practice for the month of Ramadhān, so if one prays two rak'ahs or more he earns reward for whatever he prays, and if he does not pray tarāweeḥ there is no sin upon him.

Thus, the length and number of rak'ahs may vary, and there is no limit to what may be prayed in tarāweeḥ because the Prophet (ﷺ) did not specify any number. He only said: "The

night prayer is two [rak'ahs] by two. If one of you fears the approach of fajr, let him pray one rak'ah of witr." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) And he said, "Whoever prays with the imam until he leaves will have the reward of praying throughout the night. (At-Tirmidhi - ṣaḥeeḥ) Therefore, it is preferred in Ramadhān – but not obligatory – to pray with the imam until he finishes the prayer, regardless of the number of rak'ahs.

- **Striving to perform as many acts of worship as possible** during the last ten days – An important sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) is an increased effort in worship throughout the last ten days and nights of Ramadhān. He would spend the nights in prayer, recitation of the Qur'ān and supplication. 'Ā'ishah reported that during the last ten days of Ramadhān, the Messenger of Allah would wake his wives up during the night and then remain apart from them. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) It meant that he would be occupied with worship. And 'Alī added, "He (ﷺ) would strive [in worship] during the last ten days of Ramadhān more than at any other time." (Muslim and at-Tirmidhi)

Acts of worship are numerous and diverse, and within the vast range of righteous deeds one may find ways and methods that are compatible with the needs of his society and with his own inclinations to serve. No specific manner of worship is preferred for everyone. One kind might be better in the case of a given individual while another might be better for someone else, according to the abilities of each and the degree that it brings him closer to Allah.

The practice of the Prophet's companions in Ramadhān was to observe days of activity, production and good deeds, nights of prayer, supplication and recitation of the Qur'ān. For them, Ramadhān was a month of obedience, righteousness and learning, of avoiding sin and seeking forgiveness from Allah. They performed additional acts of worship, especially during the last ten nights. They had simple meals and made great efforts to help the needy and the poor. They visited relatives, the ill and the distressed and they practiced patience and caution in speech, with tongues fasting from gossip and dispute, thanking and praising Allah, advising and comforting others.

This is the Prophet's sunnah for the month of Ramadhān: increased worship, generosity, kindness and good work of every kind. It provides the ideal pattern for life throughout the year and the fulfillment of the purpose of man's creation, which is to continuously worship Allah as well as possible.

- **Seeking Laylatul-Qadr**

Laylatul-Qadr⁵⁵ is the most excellent and blessed night of the year. On this night, the most important event in human history took place. By the Creator's command, His words (the Qur'ān) were sent down to the nearest heaven to be conveyed by the angel Jibreel to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). Allah confirmed:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ. وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ. لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ.

Indeed, We sent it [i.e., the Qur'ān] down during Laylatul-Qadr. And what can make you know what is Laylatul-Qadr? Laylatul-Qadr is better than a thousand months.

⁵⁵ The night of measured portions [of Allah's decree], which are destined for the coming year.

Scholars have explained that any act of worship done during that night is better than the same one done for a thousand months of ordinary nights.⁵⁶

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Whoever spends Laylatul-Qadr in prayer with faith and seeking reward will have whatever preceded of his sin forgiven." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) He would seek its blessings during the last ten nights of Ramadhān, and said, "Look for it in the odd nights of the last ten." Throughout these nights he would worship until fajr, avoid marital relations and awaken his family for prayer.

There has been much speculation about which night is Laylatul-Qadr. Some scholars assert that it is the eve of the 27th, as it is mentioned in a ḥadith narrated by Muslim, while the 23rd, 25th and 29th are mentioned in other ḥadiths.⁵⁷ However, Allah did not reveal the precise date to His Messenger (ﷺ), who only said: "Seek it in the last ten nights, in the odd nights." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) Perhaps the wisdom behind it is to allow people to benefit fully from all of the ten nights when following the Prophet's sunnah.

One should spend these nights as much as possible in prayer, supplication, recitation of the Qur'ān and remembrance of Allah. 'A'ishah inquired, "O Messenger of Allah, if I should know which night is Laylatul-Qadr, what should I say therein?" He replied, "Say: 'Allāhumma innaka 'afuwun tuḥibbul-'afwa fa'fu 'anni.'" (O Allah, You are forgiving and love forgiveness, so forgive me). (At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah - ṣaḥeeḥ)

• I'tikāf

I'tikāf means to observe a retreat in the masjid. I'tikāf is valid in any masjid in which prayers are held in congregation. It is an act of worship prescribed in Ramadhān and at other times. But observing it in Ramadhān is better than at other times. It is a means for the worshipper to purify his heart and turn wholly and exclusively to his Lord. His ordinary activities are greatly reduced and he is freed briefly from worldly obligations such as those toward his family members.

The Prophet (ﷺ) used to observe i'tikāf during the last ten days of Ramadhān until Allah took his soul, and then his wives observed it after that. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) The basic objective of the Prophet's i'tikāf was to seek and benefit from Laylatul-Qadr because of the great merit of that night.

I'tikāf is a sunnah practice for both men and women, and the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ) used to observe it with him in the masjid during his lifetime and continued to do it after he passed away. A condition of i'tikāf is that it must be observed in the masjid,⁵⁸ and a person

⁵⁶ A thousand months is equal to 83.33 years, or the average lifetime of a human being.

⁵⁷ Those who believe it is the eve of the 27th quote from Ubayy bin Ka'b: "It is the night Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) ordered us to spend in prayer. It is the eve of the 27th of Ramadhān. Its sign is that the sun will rise the morning of that day white without rays." (Related by Aḥmad and Muslim) However, this is a statement of one companion exercising his judgment (ijtihād). The majority of scholars are of the opinion that the night is not known for certain. It is possible that it may change from year to year, so it could fall on the eve of the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th. But Allah knows best.

⁵⁸ It is not valid for women to observe i'tikāf at home, for if it was permissible, the Prophet's wives would have done it at least once to demonstrate that, and the Prophet (ﷺ) would have encouraged them to do so, since generally, it is preferable for a woman to worship in her house than in the masjid.

observing it may not leave the masjid.⁵⁹ It is agreed by all Muslim scholars that leaving the masjid unnecessarily nullifies i'tikāf, while leaving it out of necessity does not.

For example, it is permissible for a person in i'tikāf to leave the masjid in order to relieve himself and perform required acts of purification for prayer: wudhū' and ghusl. If needed, it is permissible to leave the masjid in order to eat and drink, but if it is possible to have food and drink brought to him he is required to remain in the masjid. If an illness is severe enough to require someone to seek treatment, it is permissible for him to leave for this purpose and return, and it will not nullify his i'tikāf. One may also leave to attend the Jumu'ah prayer if the masjid in which he is observing i'tikāf does not hold Jumu'ah prayers.

However, leaving in order to visit someone who is sick or to attend a funeral prayer is another matter. The majority of scholars hold the view that it is not permissible for a person to leave for these reasons based on the practice of the Prophet (ﷺ).⁶⁰

With regard to the duration of i'tikāf, the majority of scholars hold the view that there is no specified extent of time. Any time spent in the masjid longer than the usual period with the intention of observing i'tikāf is considered as a valid i'tikāf, even if it is only for an hour of the day. One who is unable to observe i'tikāf for the entire period may do whatever he can.

Zakāt al-Fiṭr

Zakāt al-fiṭr is an obligatory religious duty.⁶¹ "Fiṭr" refers to the cessation of Ramadhān fasting, which is when it is due. It is an obligation for the head of every Muslim household possessing sufficient food to last for a day and night to give it on behalf of his dependents, servants and permanent guests.⁶² Ibn 'Umar reported: "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) made zakāt al-fiṭr obligatory at the end of Ramadhān – a measure of dates or barley – for the slave and the freeman, the male and the female, the young and the old among Muslims." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

Zakāt al-fiṭr becomes obligatory at sunset of the final day of Ramadhān, although it may be given a few days earlier. But it must be distributed by the morning of 'Eid al-Fiṭr before the people go out for the 'Eid prayer, and it is not permissible to delay it beyond that unless one is prevented by circumstances beyond his control, in which case it remains a debt until cleared.

Its purpose is to purify people from any minor sins or improper behavior they might have committed unconsciously while fasting, and to enable the poor to enjoy their 'Eid without having to work or search for food. Although its recipients are the same as those for zakāh of

⁵⁹ Leaving the masjid means to depart with one's entire body.

⁶⁰ Shaykh Muhammad bin Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymeen added: "It is permissible for a person observing i'tikāf to make and receive phone calls when necessary to fulfill the needs of Muslims if the phone is present in the masjid. But he may not leave the masjid in order to use the phone. If he has specific duties towards others that prevents him from remaining in the masjid, he should not be observing i'tikāf in the first place, because fulfilling the needs of Muslims is more important than observing a retreat in the masjid. Generally, that which provides benefit to others is superior to that which provides a benefit only to the self."

⁶¹ It is not to be confused with the zakāh of wealth (zakāt al-māl), whose rulings differ.

⁶² A baby born any time before the 'Eid prayer should be counted as a member of the household, while a person who died before then need not be included.

wealth, the poor and needy have the greatest right to zakāt al-fiṭr. The Prophet (ﷺ) instructed: *"Let them be satisfied on that day [of 'Eid]."* (Al-Bayhaqi)

Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri reported: "During the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), on the Day of Fiṭr, we used to give out one measure⁶³ of food, and our food was barley, raisins, dried cheese and dates." (Al-Bukhāri) Scholars today include similar staples such as rice, wheat and corn, and an increasing number of them are subscribing to the opinion that allows the price of that portion to be given instead, according to need.

'Eid al-Fiṭr

'Eid celebration was instituted soon after the hijrah of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ). When he saw the people of Madinah observing two pagan festivals, he said, *"Allah, the Exalted, has given you in place of those two something better than them: the days of al-Fiṭr and al-Adh-hā."* (Narrated by an-Nasā'i and al-Hākim - ṣaḥeeḥ)

Since it was Allah who decreed the two days of 'Eid, a Muslim is rewarded for observing them in a lawful manner and establishing 'Eid as a family tradition. 'Eid al-Fiṭr allows one to celebrate the completion of his fast and the conquest of his body, his achievement of patience and good manners, the immeasurable reward earned for his ṣadaqah, his prayer, his du'aa' and recitation of the Qur'ān - but most of all, the anticipation that he has become closer to Allah.

The Muslim should attend Ṣalāt al-'Eid with his family and instruct them to listen and benefit from the khuṭbah (sermon). As in the Jumu'ah prayer, one must not speak during the khuṭbah. Afterwards he may greet his fellow Muslims⁶⁴ and visit with them. He should strive to improve his relationship with any of his relatives or friends with whom he has had a disagreement or misunderstanding and renew ties of kinship. He should provide lawful entertainments for his family and prevent what is unlawful, remind others of righteousness and encourage them to maintain the level they achieved in Ramaḍhān. For a sign that one's worship and repentance has been accepted is that he has become a better person than he was before. And when he continues in righteousness after Ramaḍhān it is a sign that his fast has been accepted by Allah.

After Ramaḍhān

Allah, the Exalted, revealed to His Prophet (ﷺ):

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ.

Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is Allah" and then remained on a right course – the angels will descend upon them, [saying], "Do not fear and do not grieve, but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised."⁶⁵

⁶³ Sā', equivalent to approximately 2.5 kilograms.

⁶⁴ The Prophet's companions used to say, "May Allah accept your worship and obedience."

⁶⁵ Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:30-31.

Standing firm on the right course should continue from one Ramadhān to the next, because the Prophet (ﷺ) said: *"From one prayer to the next, from one Ramadhān to the next and from one Hajj to the next expiates for whatever [minor sins] were committed between them, so long as major sins are avoided."*

And Allah has said:

إِنْ تَجْتَنِبُوا كَبَائِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نَكْفُرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلْكُمْ مُدْخَلًا كَرِيمًا.

If you avoid the major sins which you are forbidden, We will remove from you your lesser sins and admit you to a noble entrance [into Paradise].⁶⁶

When a man came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said, "Advise me," he told him, "Say, 'I believe in Allah,' and then remain steadfast." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) And according to a narration by Aḥmad, he (ﷺ) said, "Say, I believe in Allah, then remain steadfast." The man said, "O Messenger of Allah, all the people say it." The Prophet (ﷺ) replied, "Some people before you said it but they did not remain steadfast." So after Ramadhān a Muslim should continue to obey Allah, avoid sin and become closer to his Lord.

Voluntary Fasting

Voluntary worship offers an abundance of rewards and opportunities. Allah has made voluntary worship a broad field of activity, an opportunity for people to benefit by performing a variety of righteous deeds. Among them is fasting additional days after the completion of Ramadhān. There are important benefits from fasting additional days, especially those recommended by the Prophet (ﷺ). Besides earning extra reward, it compensates for deficiencies in the obligatory fast in view of the fact that no one is free of shortcomings which may have a negative effect. And Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, *"He who fasts a day in the cause of Allah – Allah will remove him thereby from the Hellfire a distance of seventy years."* (Aḥmad, an-Nasā'i and at-Tirmidhi - ṣaḥeeh)

Some of the rulings for voluntary fasting differ from those for obligatory fasts. For example, most scholars are of the opinion that a person does not need to make his intention for a voluntary fast before dawn and can do so sometime in the morning as long as he has not had anything to eat or drink. This is true whether the fast is that of a particular sunnah, like the six days of Shawwāl, or any other voluntary fast that a person decides to offer. Evidence for this is in the report by 'Ā'ishah: "The Prophet (ﷺ) came to my room one day and asked, 'Do you have anything [to eat]?' We said, 'No.' So he said, 'Then I am fasting.'" (Muslim)

Additionally, it is permitted for one not to complete a voluntary fast. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, *"A person fasting voluntarily is his own commander. If he wishes he may fast, and if he wishes he may break his fast."* (At-Tirmidhi and Aḥmad - ṣaḥeeh) Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri related that he once prepared a meal for the Messenger of Allah, who came accompanied by some of his companions. When the food was placed, a man among them said, "I am fasting." The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"Your brother has invited you and gone to expense for you. Break your fast and fast another day in place of it if you wish."* (Al-Bayhaqi - ḥasan) It is not

⁶⁶ Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 4:31.

required to make up a day of voluntary fasting which was not completed. Nevertheless, some scholars are of the view that it is preferable to do so based on the Prophet's suggestion.

Scholars have differed over whether or not someone who has days to make up from Ramadhān is allowed to observe voluntary fasts before making them up. There are three opinions: that it is prohibited, that it is disliked but not prohibited, and that it is permissible.

What seems the most correct view is that it is permissible to observe those voluntary fasts that have a specific time frame (the six days of Shawwāl and the days of 'Arafah and 'Ashūrā') before making up days from Ramadhān when one is fairly certain that he will be able to make up those missed days later in the year. However, it is definitely better to first make up the days of Ramadhān whenever possible.

It is prohibited for a wife to observe a voluntary fast when her husband is present without his permission.⁶⁷ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"Let not a woman fast one day while her husband is present unless with his permission, except for Ramadhān."* (Aḥmad, al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

When the husband is ill or incapable of marital relations it is allowed for the wife to fast without permission, as it is similar to his absence. Otherwise, the husband may break his wife's fast if she fasted without permission since fulfillment of his marital right is her religious obligation and takes priority over voluntary worship. Similarly, if she fasted when he was not present and then he returned, the option is his to end her fast or allow her to complete it.

Prohibited Days

- **The two days of 'Eid**

All scholars agree that both obligatory and voluntary fasting are prohibited (ḥarām) on the two 'Eid days. 'Umar reported that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) forbade fasting the days of Fiṭr and Adh·ḥā. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) There are other sound hadiths with similar wording.

The Prophet (ﷺ) also prohibited fasting every day of the year without a break, saying, *"One who fasts always has not fasted."* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) By not fasting on the days of 'Eid and days of Tashreeq, a person has complied with this prohibition.

- **The days of tashreeq**

These are the three days following 'Eid al-Adh·ḥā, the 11th, 12th and 13th of Dhul·Ḥijjah. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"Do not fast these days, the days of tashreeq, for they are days of eating and drinking."* (Aḥmad and an-Nasā'i - saheeh) Hence, the majority of scholars have ruled that one should not fast on these days, whether it is voluntary fasting or compensation for missed days. There is evidence, however, that it is allowed to fast on the days of tashreeq for those who are unable to slaughter an animal if required during Ḥajj.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ She does not need her husband's permission for the obligatory fast.

⁶⁸ Refer to Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:196.

• Friday alone

Friday is a special day for Muslims and therefore it is disliked (but not absolutely prohibited) to fast on that day. As 'Alī said, "He who wants to fast [voluntarily] should do it on Thursday instead of Friday, for Friday is a day of eating, drinking, and remembrance."

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "*Do not fast on Friday alone.*" (Aḥmad, an-Nasa'i and al-Ḥakim - ṣaḥeeḥ) And he said, "*Do not fast on Friday except with a day before or a day after it.*" (Aḥmad - ṣaḥeeḥ) It is also related that he entered the room of his wife, Juwairiyah bint al-Ḥārith while she was fasting on a Friday and inquired, "*Did you fast yesterday?*" She said, "No." He asked, "*Are you going to fast tomorrow?*" She said, "No." So he said, "*Then break your fast.*" (Aḥmad and an-Nasa'i - ḥasan)

Therefore, if one fasts Friday along with Thursday or Saturday, it is not disliked to fast on that day. And if it is a day that one customarily fasts or it happens to coincide with a day of sunnah fasting, such as the day of 'Arafah, it is no longer disliked to fast on Friday alone. For the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Do not take Friday as a day of fasting out of other days unless it is a day that one of you normally fasts.*" (Muslim)

• Saturday alone

It is also disliked to single out Saturday as a day of fasting. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "*Do not fast Saturday unless it is an obligatory fast; even if one of you finds nothing but the twig of a grape vine or bush to chew on.*" (Aḥmad, Abu Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥakim - ṣaḥeeḥ) At-Tirmidhi commented that what is disliked is for a person to choose Saturday as a day of fasting exclusively, as it is the day honored by the Jews.

And Umm Salamah reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) often used to fast Saturdays and Sundays together, and that he said, "*They are 'Eids for the polytheists and I like to be different from them.*" (Aḥmad, al-Bayhaqi and al-Ḥakim - ṣaḥeeḥ)

• The day of doubt

This is the day following the 29th of Sha'bān, which might be either the 30th or the first day of Ramadhān. It is unlawful to fast on this day unless the new moon of Ramadhān has actually been sighted.⁶⁹ The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "*Do not begin the fast of Ramadhān a day or two before it, except for someone who has a fast to fast [for a reason], then he may fast on that day.*" (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) And 'Ammār bin Yāsir remarked, "Whoever fasts on the day of doubt has disobeyed Abul-Qāsim."⁷⁰ (Al-Bukhāri) However, the Prophet's ḥadith also confirms that a person may fast on this day if it coincides with his normal program of fasting or in order to make up a missed day from the previous Ramadhān.

⁶⁹ Most scholars (except the Ḥanafis) have ruled that if a person should begin fasting while yet uncertain about the beginning of the month, his fast is not valid. However, one may intend the previous night that he will fast if it is Ramadhān and eat if it is not, and then act accordingly.

⁷⁰ i.e., the Prophet (ﷺ).

Sunnah Days

With the exception of the prohibited days mentioned above, a Muslim may fast for additional reward at any time. However, the Prophet (ﷺ) instructed people not to place hardship upon themselves regarding worship and to undertake only what could be done without difficulty. He said, *"Take on from deeds whatever you are able, for Allah does not lose interest until you do. And indeed, the most beloved deeds to Allah are those that continue, even if they are few."* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

There are particular days recommended by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) for voluntary fasting, evidence for which is found in ṣaḥeeḥ and ḥasan ḥadiths. They are as follows:

- **Six days of Shawwāl**

Fasting six days of Shawwāl after completing the obligatory fast of Ramadhān is a recommended sunnah. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: *"Whoever fasts Ramadhān and then follows it with six days from Shawwāl – it will be as if he fasted for all time."*⁷¹ (Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, at-Tirmidhi, an-Nasā'i and Ibn Mājah) Another ḥadith states, *"Whoever fasts six days after [the day of] Fiṭr has completed the year. He who brings a good deed will have ten like it."* (Ibn Mājah and an-Nasā'i - ṣaḥeeḥ)

Scholars explained that it is like a year of fasting because the reward of each good deed is multiplied by ten. Therefore fasting the month of Ramadhān brings the reward of ten months, and fasting six additional days brings the reward of two months. This equals the fast of an entire year.⁷²

The six days of Shawwāl are voluntary fasts, and as such, the following rulings apply:⁷³

1. It is not necessary to begin fasting immediately after the day of 'Eid, as some people suppose. In fact, in the absence of textual evidence indicating otherwise, one cannot assume that doing so is preferable. The six days may be fasted consecutively or separately and at any time during the month of Shawwāl.
2. Each day of fasting has a separate intention, and it can be formulated at any time during the morning providing the person has not yet done anything that would invalidate the fast.
3. It is not a condition that all of the six days must be fasted. If one day is fasted, the reward is earned for that day. If all of them are observed the full reward for six is earned. It is incorrect to think that if one cannot fast all the six days he might as well not do any of them.
4. As in the case of other voluntary fasts, the scholars differ as to whether the missed days of Ramadhān must be made up before fasting the six days of Shawwāl. Some argue that since the Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Whoever fasts the month of Ramadhān and then follows it*

⁷¹ Assuming that one does this every year. However, it is not obligatory to do it every year.

⁷² *Sharḥ Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim*, 8/56. In other words, 36 days x 10 = 360.

⁷³ Admittedly, there is some disagreement among Islamic scholars regarding these points. However, the opinions given above are in conformity with the rulings that govern voluntary fasts. There is no distinction in the Shari'ah between a specific voluntary fast and a non-specific one.

with six ..." that the days of Ramadhān must be made up first. For it is understood that one who still owes days from Ramadhān is not regarded as having fasted it until he makes up the days he missed.⁷⁴ Other scholars disagree and have allowed that the six days can be observed before making up the missed days of Ramadhān. This ruling is easier for those who could not fast a large part of the month, and particularly women who often have many days to make up. But Allah knows best.

• The day of 'Arafah

Another confirmed sunnah fast is the ninth day of Dhul-Hijjah. The Prophet (ﷺ) used to fast on that day, and said, "*Fasting the Day of 'Arafah is expiation for [sins] of two years: the previous and the following year.*"⁷⁵ (Ahmad and Muslim) And he (ﷺ) said, "*The best of days is the day of 'Arafah.*"

However, fasting this day is for those who are not performing Hajj, and pilgrims should not fast while in 'Arafah. It has been confirmed that the Prophet (ﷺ) did not fast the day of 'Arafah when performing Hajj. When people were speculating as to whether or not he was fasting that day, Umm al-Fadhī sent him some milk and he drank it while delivering the sermon at 'Arafah. (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) This was witnessed by the people and known to them.

Among the special seasons of worship are the first ten days of Dhul-Hijjah, which Allah has preferred over the other days of the year.⁷⁶ These include the day of 'Arafah and 'Eid al-Adh-hā. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "*There are no days in which righteous deeds are more beloved to Allah than these ten days.*" (Al-Bukhāri) This indicates that all kinds of worship and righteous deeds are encouraged during them. Since fasting is one of the best of deeds, many Muslims like to fast as many of these days as possible, from the first through the ninth of the month.

• 'Ashūrā', Tāsū'ā' and the month of Muḥarram

'Ashūrā' is the tenth day of Muḥarram. Fasting this day is also a confirmed sunnah but not mandatory. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Fasting the day of 'Ashūrā' is expiation for sins of the past year.*"⁷⁷ (Muslim)

The Quraysh used to fast this day in the pre-Islamic period. When the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) migrated to Madinah he fasted 'Ashūrā' and told the people to fast. But then, after Allah made the fast of Ramadhān obligatory, he said, "*This is the day of 'Ashūrā' and fasting it is not required of you. I am fasting and whoever likes may fast and whoever likes may leave it.*" (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

⁷⁴ It is not valid to combine making up missed Ramadhān fasts with fasting the six days of Shawwāl with the intention for both, since the latter is a voluntary act of worship while the former is a religious obligation.

⁷⁵ What is meant here is minor sins and errors. It is known that major sins require sincere repentance in order to be forgiven.

⁷⁶ But the last ten nights of Ramadhān are better, because they include Laylatul-Qadr, which is better than a thousand months. Although some scholars hold that the ten nights by which Allah has sworn in Surah al-Fajr refer to these ten days, the more probable view held by others is that they are the last ten nights of Ramadhān.

⁷⁷ Refer to Footnote no. 75.

After the Prophet (ﷺ) came to Madinah, he observed the Jews fasting on the day of 'Ashūrā'. He said, "What is this?" They said, "It is the day when Allah saved Mūsā and the Children of Israel from their enemy, so Mūsā fasted on this day." He said, "I am more worthy of Mūsā than you." So he fasted that day and told [the Muslims] to fast it. (Al-Bukhāri) Later on, he heard that the Jews took the day of 'Ashūrā' as a festival, so to differ from them he said, "Then you [Muslims] should fast it." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

It is encouraged for one who fasts on 'Ashūrā' to also fast on the day preceding it, (Tāsū'ā', or the ninth). Upon being told that the Jews and Christians revere the day of 'Ashūrā', the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Next year, if Allah wills, we will [also] fast on the ninth." And in another narration: "If I remain until next year, I will certainly fast on the ninth." (Muslim) This is the sunnah.⁷⁸ However, it is permissible to fast on the tenth alone.⁷⁹

In fact, the entire month of Muḥarram is a season for fasting. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "The best fast after Ramadhān is to fast the month of Allah which they call Muḥarram." (Muslim) His words, "the month of Allah," allude to its merit. The month of Muḥarram is the first month of the Islamic year and is one of the four "sacred" months. But the Prophet (ﷺ) never fasted any month completely apart from Ramadhān. And it was reported that he used to fast more in Sha'bān.⁸⁰

• Much of the month of Sha'bān

Usāmah bin Zayd reported: "The Prophet (ﷺ) never fasted more frequently than he did in the month of Sha'bān. When I asked why, he said, "It is a month that people neglect between the months of Rajab and Ramadhān. And it is a month wherein deeds are raised up to the Lord of the worlds, and I like to have my deeds raised up while I am fasting." (Aḥmad and an-Nasā'i - hasan)

Ā'ishah added, "He used to fast until we thought that he would always fast and then he would not fast until we thought that he would never fast. But I never saw him fast in any month more than he fasted in Sha'bān. He used to fast all of Sha'bān apart from a few days." (Muslim) And she said, "I never saw the Prophet (ﷺ) fast an entire month except for the month of Ramadhān. And I never saw him fast more often in another month than he did in Sha'bān." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

There is no authentic (ṣaḥeeḥ) or acceptable (ḥasan) narration concerning the eve or the day of the fifteenth of Sha'bān. Every ḥadith mentioning it is either weak or fabricated, and thus unacceptable. There is nothing exceptional about this night, and no particular worship is prescribed for it. And it is not permissible to single out the day of the fifteenth for fasting. It

⁷⁸ Although the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) passed away before he was able to fast the 9th the following year, the intention announced by him is sufficient to make it a lawful practice.

⁷⁹ As for other customs such as preparing special dishes, spending money on one's family, slaughtering an animal, doing particular acts of worship, visiting masjids and shrines, etc... all of this is innovation (bid'ah) and has nothing to do with the Prophet's Sunnah. Even more blameworthy are the expressions of grief in the form of weeping, wailing, beating the body and reciting eulogies on that day, although such practices were specifically prohibited by the Prophet (ﷺ) in numerous authentic ḥadiths. In fact, the significance of 'Ashūrā' was established in the religion long before the regrettable martyrdom of al-Husayn, which happened to occur on the tenth of Muḥarram.

⁸⁰ Sharḥ Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim.

is well to fast it along with other days of the month provided that no particular merit is attributed to this day.

- **Three days from each month**

Fasting three days out of each lunar month was obligatory before Allah decreed the fast of Ramadhān in the second year following the Hijrah. The Messenger (ﷺ) had ordered Muslims to fast the "white" days (*ayyām al-beedh*), which are the days in mid-month when the moon is full, the 13th, 14th and 15th, and added that it was equal to fasting for all time.⁸¹ (An-Nasā'i - ḥasan) He continued to fast these days voluntarily after Ramadhān became obligatory, whether he was at home or on a journey. Ibn Mas'ūd reported that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) would fast the prime three days each month and would seldom break his fast [if one of them occurred] on Friday.⁸² (At-Tirmidhi - ḥasan) And he said, *"If you want to fast, then fast the "white" days."* (An-Nasā'i - ṣaḥeeh)

- **Mondays and Thursdays**

The Prophet (ﷺ) was also in the habit of fasting Mondays and Thursdays of each week. (Ibn Mājah - ṣaḥeeh) When asked why, he replied, *"Deeds are raised up [to Allah] on Monday and Thursday and I like my deeds to be raised up while I am fasting."* (Al-Bayhaqi - ṣaḥeeh) Another narration states: *"The gates of Paradise are opened on Mondays and Thursdays and every servant who does not associate anything with Allah is forgiven, except for a man between whom and his brother is enmity; it is said, 'Keep these two back until they reconcile.'" (Muslim)* Regarding Monday, he said, *"It is the day on which I was born and on which [the revelation] was sent down to me."* (Muslim) Another ḥadith mentions that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to do his best to fast on Mondays and Thursdays. (At-Tirmidhi and an-Nasā'i - ṣaḥeeh)

- **Alternate days**

Allah prefers consistency in worship rather than excess.⁸³ His Messenger (ﷺ) told 'Abdullāh bin 'Amr bin al-'Aaṣ, *"Fast as did Prophet Dāwūd, and no more than that. He would fast one day and break his fast one day."* 'Abdullāh said, "But I can do better than that." The Prophet replied, *"There is no fast better than that."* (Aḥmad and al-Bukhāri) He thus negated any virtue to fasting more than every other day. And he said, *"The most beloved fast to Allah is the fast of Dāwūd. He fasted one day and would break his fast one day."* (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

We ask Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, to accept our fasts and all good deeds, our efforts and intentions. O Allah, help us to remember You, be grateful to You and worship You well. And blessings and peace be upon our Prophet, Muḥammad, and on his family, his companions and sincere followers until the Day of Recompense.

⁸¹ The reward for each good deed (day of fasting) is multiplied by ten, so 3 days x 12 months x 10 = 360, or a complete year. And Allah confirmed it in the Qur'an: **Whoever comes [the Day of Judgement] with a good deed will have ten times the like thereof.** (Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:160)

⁸² There are narrations which mention the beginning of the month, so it may be concluded that one may fast other days in place of the "white" days when necessary.

⁸³ According to the ḥadith narrated by al-Bukhāri and Muslim, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"The most beloved deeds to Allah are those that continue, even if they are few."*

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