

Simple and Concise Explanation of the Rulings of Fasting in Islam

This is a simple and concise explanation of the concept of fasting in Islam. For more information, proofs, details etc please refer to Ustadh Huzaifah's classes on the masjid's YouTube channel.

It is important for every Muslim to know these rulings as it is obligatory upon Muslims to fast during Ramadan, in fact, fasting in the month of Ramadan is the 4th pillar of Islam. We will also include rulings pertaining to fasts outside of the month of Ramadan.

Meaning of fasting

The Scholars define fasting as: **The intention to abstain from certain things, with the intention of worship, from sunrise to sunset.**

What is meant by "certain things" is food, drink, marital relations, and the other nullifiers of fasting, which will be discussed shortly.

What is meant by "with the intention of worship" is if a person goes through the whole day without eating and drinking, then after sunset realises this, then he will not be rewarded, and it will not count as an Islamic fast as there was no intention.

Q: When does the intention need to be made?

A: It depends on the type of fast:

- If it is an obligatory fast, then the intention must be made at night, i.e. before sunrise.
- If it is a recommend fast, then the intention can be made anytime during the day, as long as no nullifiers of fasting have been performed.

Proof of its legislation

The proofs for its legislation can be found in the Quran, Sunnah and Ijma' (consensus). One proof from each will be mentioned:

As for the **Quran**, Allah سبحانه وتعالى said:

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

O you who believe, fasting has been made obligatory upon you just as it has been made obligatory upon those before you, so you may be from those who possess Taqwa.¹

As for the **sunnah**, the Prophet ﷺ said:

“Islam is built upon five (pillars): Testifying there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, establishing the prayer, paying the charity, pilgrimage of the house (of Allah) and fasting in the month of Ramadan.”²

As for **Ijma'**, then the Muslims have all agreed upon its legislation and that it is obligatory in the month of Ramadan.³

Virtues of fasting

The virtues and rewards of fasting are numerous. It would be difficult to gather them all here, therefore, only a couple will be mentioned showing its high station in Islam:

- The Prophet ﷺ said:
“Every (good) deed of the son of Adam would be multiplied, a good deed receiving a tenfold to seven hundredfold reward. Allah, the Exalted and Majestic, has said: With the exception of fasting, for it is done for Me and I will give a reward for it, for one abandons his passion and food for My sake. There are two occasions of joy for one who fasts, joy when he breaks it, and joy when he meets his Lord, and the breath (of an observer of fast) is sweeter to Allah than the fragrance of musk.”⁴
- The Prophet ﷺ said:
“There is a gate in Paradise called Ar-Raiyan, and those who observe fasts will enter through it on the Day of Resurrection and none except them will enter through it. It will be said, 'Where are those who used to observe fasts?' They will get up, and none except them will enter through

¹ Surah Al-Baqarah (2:183)

² Narrated by Al-Bukhari (8) and Muslim (16)

³ Maraatib Al-'ijmaa' (pg 39), Badaai' As-Snaai' (2/75), Al-Mughni (3/3), Al-Majmoo' (6/252), Bidaayatul Mujtahid (1/283), Ash-Sharh Al-Kabeer (3/13), Kashaaf Al-Qinaa' (2/300), Al-Fawaakih Ad-Dawaanee (1/465), Kifaayatut-Taalib Ma'a Haashiyatil-'Adawee (1/553)

⁴ Narrated by Muslim (1151e)

it. After their entry the gate will be closed and nobody will enter through it.”⁵

The wisdom of fasting

To know the wisdom of anything, we must firstly, turn back to the legislator to see if He has mentioned it. In regards to the wisdom of fasting, Allah has mentioned it in the aforementioned verse: Allah سبحانه وتعالى said:

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

O you who believe, fasting has been made obligatory upon you just as it has been made obligatory upon those before you, so you may be from those who possess Taqwa.⁶

Therefore, **the primary objective of fasting is** to become closer to Allah and gain Taqwa. Taqwa, in simple terms, to be conscious of Allah during every action you do and every step that you take, whilst fearing his punishment; therefore that fear acts like a shield protecting you from falling into anything which displeases Allah and urges you to perform those actions which are pleasing to him.

During fasting, a Muslim abstains from eating, drinking, and marital relations, which are normally permissible. Therefore, this trains him, to stay away then also from things which are worse, i.e. that which is impermissible. Thereby, become closer to Allah.

There are also many **secondary benefits of fasting**, from them:

- Remembering the poor; as a Muslim acknowledges the blessing of provisions
- Bringing communities together; as they feed each other at sunset, and gather in the mosques
- Improving mannerisms; as people are more conscious of Allah, whilst wanting their worship to be accepted. Islam has also instructed the fasting person to control his anger and to reply to anybody who may have cursed him or been rude towards him with just saying “I am fasting.”⁷

⁵ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (1896) and Muslim (1152)

⁶ Surah Al-Baqarah (2:183)

⁷ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (1904) and Muslim (1151d)

- Lowering sexual desires; this has been advised by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ⁸
- Control over one's desires and an increase in patience
- Separation from this materialistic world and focus on the hereafter
- Health benefits
- Many others

Conditions for the obligation of Fasting

- 1) **Islam**; if a non-Muslim fasts then it will not be accepted from him. This is by consensus.⁹
- 2) **Puberty**; it is only obligatory upon a child to fast once he has reached the age of puberty. This is by consensus.¹⁰ However, the parents should still encourage him to fast before then so he becomes used to it. A child reaches puberty via the following signs:
 - a. They have a wet dream
 - b. Pubic hair starts to grow
 - c. Reaching 15 years in the Hijri calendar (lunar year)
 - d. Have a menstrual cycle. This is specific to girls.
- 3) **Intellect**; if a person without intellect fasts, e.g. somebody crazy, somebody who has a mind of a child and doesn't understand normal speech etc fasts, then it is not accepted from them, nor obligatory upon them, as they cannot have an intention. This is also by consensus.¹¹
- 4) **Physical ability**; this is by consensus.¹² More details will come shortly regarding the one who is not able to physically fast.
Note: Exams and work is not an eligible excuse as the companions part took in battles whilst fasting.
- 5) **Residency**; it is not obligatory upon the one travelling to fast, as will be explained shortly.
- 6) To be **pure from menstrual cycle and post-natal bleeding**; this is only for women.

Establishing the beginning of the month of Ramadan

⁸ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (5066) and Muslim (1400)

⁹ Al-Qawaaneen Al-Fiqhiyyah (pg 86), Ash-Sharh Al-Kabeer (3/12) and Al-Mubdi' (3/11)

¹⁰ Maraatib Al-Ijmaa' (pg 39), Bidaayatul Mujtahid (1/283), Al-Mughni (4/513) and Ash-Sharh Al-Kabeer (3/13)

¹¹ Maraatib Al-Ijmaa' (pg 39), Al-Iqnaa' Fee Masaail Al-Ijmaa' (1/126), Bidaayatul Mujtahid (1/283), Al-Majmoo' (6/254), Majmoo' Al-Fataawaa (11/191), Ash-Sharh Al-Kabeer (3/13) and Al-Mubdi' (3/11)

¹² Maraatib Al-Ijmaa' (pg 39), Bidaayatul Mujtahid (1/283), Ash-Sharh Al-Kabeer (3/13) and Al-Mubdi' (3/11)

It is established by 2 ways:

- 1) **Seeing the new moon** by somebody reliable and trustworthy
- 2) If it is not seen, then the month of **Sha'baan** (the month before Ramadan) is completed **30 days**, then the following day is Ramadan.

Those who are exempt from fasting

The religion has not come to make life hard for the people, but rather to rectify their affairs. Therefore, the religion never burdens somebody with more than what they can bare. Allah سبحانه وتعالى said:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

Allah burdens not a person beyond his ability¹³

Therefore, to remove difficulty from the people, the religion has given concessions to certain individuals by removing the obligation of fasting from them. However, they must make up those days they've missed later, before next year's Ramadan, if possible, otherwise pay an expiation. Those details will come shortly. Those who are exempt are:

- 1) **The traveller:** It is not obligatory upon the one travelling to fast, however the traveller has different states:
 - a. If both options of fasting and not fasting are equal to him, then it is better for him to fast, even though it is permissible for him not to. This is due to the difficulty not being present, and it being easier for him to fast as he's already in the routine of fasting in this month and other Muslims are also fasting with him, otherwise trying to fast after the month of Ramadan by himself may be more difficult.
 - b. If one option is easier, then he should take the easier option
 - c. If there is difficulty in fasting but it does not harm him, then it is disliked for him to fast, as he should take the concession given to him by Allah.
 - d. If it harms him, such as worsening his health, then it is impermissible to fast.

- 2) **The ill;** the one who is ill has different states also:

¹³ Surah Al-Baqarah (2:286)

- a. If he is not harmed by the travel, then it is better for him to fast, even though it is permissible for him not to. This is due to the difficulty not being present, and it being easier for him to fast as he's already in the routine of fasting in this month and other Muslims are also fasting with him, otherwise trying to fast after the month of Ramadan by himself may be more difficult.
 - b. If there is difficulty in fasting but it does not harm him, then it is disliked for him to fast, as he should take the concession given to him by Allah.
 - c. If it harms him, such as worsening his health, then it is impermissible to fast.
- 3) **The women on her menstrual cycle**; she does not have to fast whilst on her cycle but will have to make it up later.
 - 4) **The pregnant and breastfeeding woman**; if they fear harm for themselves or the child, it is not obligatory upon them to fast, but they should make it up later.

How to make up missed fasts

There are 2 scenarios:

- 1) If a person missed a fast due to a **temporary reason which is hoped to be removed shortly**, then they make it up when they can, before next Ramadan.
- 2) If it is due to a **reason where it is not hoped to be removed**, such as a terminal illness or old age, then they have feed a poor person for every day they have missed.

Ruling of the one who passes away and he still has fasts to make up

There are 2 situations:

- 1) A person who is **excused**. If a person did not fast due to a temporary reason, and the passes away before he has the ability to fast, then they are excused and nothing is upon that person. An example of this is a person who is ill and dies in that illness, or a traveller who passes away during that travel, or a woman who dies during her menstrual cycle.

- 2) A person who is **not excused**. If a person's excuse is removed and they have the ability to fast, but did not do so and then passed away, then his inheritors should fast on his behalf. It is also permissible for a non-inheritor to fast on their behalf.

Nullifier's of fasting

That which nullifies a person's fast, are the following:

- 1) Food
- 2) Drink
- 3) Anything which takes the ruling of food and drink, such as nutritional injections
- 4) Vomiting intentionally
- 5) Cupping; scholars differ in this regard, but it is safer to avoid and do it at night if necessary.
- 6) Ejaculation; this is of two types:
 - a. Through sexual intercourse; this takes place as soon as the head of the man's private parts disappear inside of the women. This is a major sin, therefore it is obligatory upon the person who does this to:
 - i. Repent
 - ii. Make up that fast
 - iii. Pay the heavy expiation, which is the following 3 points, in order, i.e. they can not go to the next option unless they are not able to fulfil the first:
 1. Free a slave
 2. If not then fast for 2 consecutive months, i.e. 60 consecutive days
 3. If then then feed 60 poor people, this is the last option if the first two are not possible.
 - b. Through other than intercourse, such as masturbation. In this case a person needs to repent for the sin of masturbation and breaking their fast, and then make it up later.

Miscellaneous and contemporary issues which do not break the fast:

- Smelling or applying perfume or incense as long as you do not ingest or inhale the incense
- Bleeding from the mouth or nose. Swallowing blood should be avoided
- Using an inhaler
- Removing a tooth
- Undergoing a blood test, unless the extraction of blood equates the same amount of blood extracted from cupping
- Nose drops, unless the taste of the drops reaches the throat or stomach)
- Tasting food if needed, using only the tip of the tongue whilst taking precaution not to swallow anything
- Lying, swearing and use foul speech, but it will reduce the reward of fasting
- Wet dreams or waking up in a state of major impurity (*Janabah*)
- Using toothpaste or mouth wash, but it is preferable to avoid using strong toothpaste or mouthwash as they may reach the throat)
- Kissing and hugging. This is only allowed if it does not lead to sexual arousal. The emission of prostatic fluid does not break the fast unless resulted in ejaculation.
- Cutting hair or trimming the nails
- Having a shower or bath. If the person swallows water unintentionally, the fast is still valid and he doesn't have to make it up
- Swimming or diving into water. But it is disliked whilst fasting as water can enter the mouth
- Applying henna
- Taking anaesthetic injections
- Using cosmetics or make-up. But it is still impermissible for women to show their beauty to men who are not their *mahram*.
- Eye drops. They don't break the fast even if the taste of the drops reaches the throat

Different actions during fasting

Obligatory actions during fasting

- Sincerity
- Intention of fasting at night

- To stay away from anything which tarnishes the sanctity of fasting. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever does not give up forged speech and evil actions, Allah is not in need of his leaving his food and drink.”¹⁴

Recommended actions during fasting

- To eat the *Suhoor* (pre-dawn meal) and *Iftaar* (post-dusk meal)
- To delay the suhoor until approximately 15 minutes before Fajr starts
- To hasten in eating the Iftaar as soon as maghrib starts
- To break the fast (Iftaar) upon wet and fresh dates (*Rutab*). If not possible, then upon normal dates. If that isn't possible either, then upon water. It is also sunnah to eat an odd number of dates.
- To increase in giving charity
- To increase in reciting the Quran and pondering over its meaning
- To feed others at the time of Iftaar
- To pray the night prayer, especially in the last 10 nights
- To perform 'Umrah if possible
- To reply with “I am fasting” when one curses you
- To increase in acts of worship
- To perform 'Itikaaf (staying in the mosque) during the last ten days of Ramadan.

Permissible actions during fasting

All normal actions which are permissible, except for the nullifiers.

Disliked actions during fasting

- To not be excessive in rinsing the mouth and nose, out of fear of water reaching the throat
- Kissing for the one who's desires maybe aroused
- Ponder about desires
- To be near anything which may break ones fast, such as swimming
- Anything which turns a person away from the hereafter, such as indulging in worldly affairs.

¹⁴ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (1903)

- Swallowing phlegm

Impermissible actions during fasting

- All actions which are impermissible normally. But their impermissibility increases due to the sanctity of the act of worship which is fasting.
- All the nullifiers

These are the simple rulings pertaining to fasting. We ask Allah سبحانه وتعالى to grant us beneficial knowledge of the religion, and to accept our fasting.

وصلى الله على نبيينا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين

Different types of fasts

Fasting is not restricted to just Ramadan, but there are many other types of fasting also prescribed for the believer during the year. Fasting in Ramadan is obligatory, rather it is the 4th pillar of Islam. As for the other fasts, then they have different rulings:

Recommended days of fasting

- Fasting the first 9 days of Dhul Hijjah¹⁵
- Fasting the month of Muharram, especially the day of 'Aashoora, which is the 10th of Muharram. A person should fast the day of 'Aashoora and the day before or after it also.¹⁶
- Fasting a day and missing a day; this was the fast of Prophet Dawood عليه السلام.¹⁷
- Fasting on Mondays and Thursdays; this was the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.¹⁸

¹⁵ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (969)

¹⁶ Narrated by Muslim (1163, 1134)

¹⁷ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (1976) and Muslim (1159)

¹⁸ Narrated by Muslim (1162b), Ahmad (21246) and others.

- Fasting 6 days in the month of Shawwaal after fasting Ramadan completely.¹⁹
- Fasting any 3 days from each Month (in the lunar calendar). It is also permissible to specify the 13th, 14th and 15th of each month, as it comes in some narrations.
- Fasting the month of Sha'baan²⁰

Impermissible days of fasting

- The two days of Eid; Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adhaa. This is by consensus.²¹
- The days of At-Tashreeq; which is the 11th, 12th and 13th of the month of Dhul-Hijjah.²²
- The day of doubt; which is the 30th of Sha'baan if the moon was not seen, unless its one's habit such as fasting Mondays and Thursdays.

Disliked days of fasting

- Specifying the day of Jum'ah (Friday) for a fast,²³ unless you fast with it a day before or after, or it is a habit of a person which lands on that day, such as a person who fasts the fast of Dawood عليه السلام i.e. fasts one day and misses one day.²⁴

¹⁹ Narrated by Muslim (1164)

²⁰ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (1969) and Muslim (1156)

²¹ Maraatib Al-Ijmaa' (pg 40), Sharh Ma'aanee Al-Aathaar (2/246), Sharh As-Sunnah (6/349), Bidaayah Al-Mujtahid (1/309), Al-Mughni (3/97), Al-Majmoo' (6/440), Adh-Dhakeerah (2/319), Fath Al-Baree (4/243), (11/591), Al-Furoo' (3/127), Al-Mubdi' (3/56), Al-'Ilaam BiFawaaid 'Umdah Al-Ahkaam (5/375), Ma'aarif As-Sunan (5/461).

²² Narrated by Muslim (1141)

²³ Narrated by Al-Bukhari (1985) and Muslim (1144)

²⁴ Narrated by Muslim (1144)