



# FASTING

## الصوم

### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Review the importance of fasting as one of the major obligations in Islam and that it has special reward because it is a 'secret worship'
- Discuss the different levels of fasting:
- Discuss basic rules of intention and its timing
- Know the nine invalidators of fasting
- Know some specific rules related to the invalidators they are likely to come across on an everyday basis
- Know the rules of qada', Kaffarah, and related situations
- Know the rules for those exempt from fasting
- Learn about the lunar calendar
- Learn about the rules of knowing the beginning and end of the month of fasting

### JURISPRUDENCE

### SENIOR LEVEL

## Lesson 1: Introduction to Fasting

Fasting is one of the most important acts of worship in Islam. It is obligatory during the month of Ramaḍān. It is one of the best ways of coming closer to Allah (SWT). As we will see, fasting is not just keeping away from food and drink; rather it is the most sincere acts of worship which has degrees and levels.

### TYPES OF FASTING

As we have learnt in the previous years, there are different levels of fasting:

- 1- Natural fasting: This is like keeping a diet. There are no benefits in the Hereafter whatsoever
- 2- Jurisprudential Fasting: This is the fasting prescribed by the laws of Islam, in which one avoids nine things from dawn till dusk.
- 3- Ethical Fasting: This is not only avoiding the things that break the fast from a jurisprudential point of view, but also avoiding sins with all organs of the body. We must make it our aim at the beginning of every Ramaḍān that our fast be at least an ethical fast, and not just a jurisprudential fast. Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) says:  
  
"When you fast, you should safeguard your tongues, lower your gaze, and you should neither dispute with nor envy one another"<sup>i</sup>
- 4- Mystical fasting: This is the highest form of fasting where one abstains from everything other than the Almighty Allah (SWT).

## **FASTING IN THE MONTH OF RAMADĀN**

According to one of his numerous traditions, Prophet Muḥammad (saw) is quoted as saying:

"The month of Ramaḍān was named so because it tends to burn (yarmiḍu) the sins."

The righteous people at the dawn of Islam used to call it al-miḍmār, meaning something that destroys the excesses of evils and sins. During the lifetime of the Prophet (saw), the blessed month of Ramaḍān used to be called al-marzūq, (full of sustenance), due to the abundance of the blessings of Allah during this month.<sup>ii</sup>

Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) has said:

"When you fast, let your hearing and vision abstain with you from anything unlawful, against everything ugly, and leave hypocrisy aside, and do not harm those who serve you. Rather, adorn yourself with the dignity of the fast, and do not make your fasting day the same as the day when you do not fast."<sup>iii</sup>

The above clearly shows us the significance of the month of Ramaḍān; it is a month full of blessings and Mercy, it is a catalyst for changing bad habits such that each month of Ramaḍān, one should improve more than the previous year. Every Ramaḍān we are expected to get rid of one bad habit at a time, whether it is the sin of lying, eating too much, envy, gossip etc. At the same time, we should not make fasting an excuse to get out of work, to get more attention or to feast at night.

Because of the special rewards in the holy month of Ramaḍān, there are a few additional things that are highly recommended and highly rewarding to do such as:

- Reciting the Holy Qurʾān more often
- Worshiping (such as prayers, duʿāʾ) in the night especially
- Avoiding all forms of sins (like swearing, being rude to parents etc.)
- Spending more time at Islamic centres and around pious people
- Avoiding wasting time

Before we can practice the higher forms of fasting, we must understand and follow the rulings regarding the

jurisprudential fasting. The next three lessons shall focus on just that.

### **THE INTENTION TO FAST**

An important part of fasting is the intention to fast. Before we fast, we have to know in our mind that we are fasting an obligatory fast for the month of Ramaḍān, and that we are doing this for the sake of Allah (SWT).

The time for the intention of the obligatory fast is specific. One can make the intention either:

1. Before the beginning of fajr for every morning that they are fasting.
2. At the beginning of the month of Ramaḍān at which time we can make the intention to fast for every single day of the upcoming month.

### **WHY IS SO MUCH ATTENTION GIVEN TO MAKING THE INTENTION?**

The act of fasting is almost completely based on the intention. This is because fasting could be described as the most sincere act of worshipping. When we compare fasting with other acts of worship we begin to see the sincerity within it. Look at prayer. When we pray, there could be some ulterior motives to impress the people around us (God forbid). However, when someone is fasting, no one knows if you are in fact fasting. Especially when living in a non-Muslim country, someone can pretend to be fasting, while secretly eating. However, the one who fasts and completes it has a special status in the eyes of Allah (SWT), because he is doing it completely for the sake of God.

It is for this reason that in a Hadith Qudsi it is narrated that Allah (SWT) says:

"For every good deed that you do there is an allocated reward, as for fasting, I am the reward for it."

The reward with Allah (SWT) is something that we cannot even begin to imagine.

### **Review Questions**

#### **Q1. Ethical fasting refers to:**

- a. Avoiding sins with all organs of our body during the month of Ramaḍān
- b. Being nice to people during the month of Ramaḍān
- c. Going on a diet during the month of Ramaḍān

## Q2. We must make the intention to fast:

- During the day we are fasting
- Before we begin fasting
- Any time we want

## Q3. Reciting the Holy Qur'ān:

- Is highly recommended during the month of Ramaḍān
- Is the same as reciting any other time of the year
- Is not recommended during the month of Ramaḍān

## Lesson 2: The Invalidators of Fasting

There are nine acts which invalidate or break the fast. Below is a list of the invalidators followed by an explanation of the one that we will come across most commonly in our everyday lives

- Eating and drinking
- Swallowing thick dust
- Immersing one's head completely in water
- Ascribing false things to Almighty Allah, or to his Prophet or to the successors of the Holy Prophet
- Sexual intercourse
- Masturbation (istimnā') which results in ejaculation
- Remaining in janābah, hayḍ or nifas deliberately until fajr
- Liquid enemas
- Vomiting intentionally

## EATING AND DRINKING

If a person eats or drinks intentionally, their fast is void. Let us turn our attention to some commonly faced questions related to this rule:

### a. Can I brush my teeth?

Yes you can brush when you're fasting as long as you don't swallow the toothpaste or the water. We have to remember though that if one intentionally swallows food particles that remained between the teeth, the fast is invalid.

### b. Can I take injections, anaesthetics and drips (e.g. in the hospital)?

There is no objection to an injection which anaesthetises one's limb or is used for some other purpose being given to a person, who is observing fast, but it is better that the injections which are given as medicine or food are avoided.

### c. Can I swallow my saliva and phlegm?

Swallowing saliva does not invalidate the fast. Also, there is no harm in swallowing one's phlegm or mucous from head and chest as long as it does not come up to one's mouth. However, if it reaches one's mouth, the obligatory precaution is that one should not swallow it.

## SWALLOWING THICK DUST

This does not include normal dust in the air but if it is really thick and heavy like smoke from the exhaust of a truck and it reaches the throat, then it breaks the fast. Allowing thin dust in the air to reach the throat does not invalidate the fast.

- If thick dust is whipped up by the wind and if a person does not take care in spite of taking notice of it, allowing the dust to reach his throat, his fast becomes void on the basis of obligatory precaution.

## IMMERSING THE HEAD IN WATER

With the exception of Syed Sistani who rules that it is only makrūh, most other marajī' rule that intentionally immersing the head completely in water invalidates the fast. Below are some specific rules:

- This rule does not apply to showering.
- This rule does apply to swimming, unless one can manage to make sure their entire head does not go under water at any one time. Therefore, swimming whilst fasting is not advisable

## MASTURBATION

This act is ḥarām in all situations. When one is fasting, masturbation voids the fast and the person who performed it must pay kaffarah.

## REMAINING IN A STATE JANĀBAH OR HAYD

If a person enters a state of Janābah during the night, they must make sure to perform Ghusl before Fajr. If they fail to do so deliberately, their fast is void, and they need to pay a kaffarah.

Similarly, if a woman is in a state of ḥayḍ, but in the evening she becomes ready to perform Ghusl and start fasting again, she must perform Ghusl before fajr time.

## Review Questions

### Q1. Brushing the teeth without swallowing anything is:

- Not allowed one is fasting
- Is allowed when one is fasting
- Should not be done when one is fasting

### Q2. If a person is walking somewhere and the wind blows up a thick dust, the person:

- Has no obligation to cover their mouth or avoid the dust
- Should cover their mouth and avoid the dust to keep their fast in order
- Thick dust does not break the fast

### Q3. A person woke up two hours before Fajr and found that they had had a wet dream while sleeping. They should:

- Go back to sleep even if they are not sure they will wake up again before Fajr
- Make sure they perform Ghusl before Fajr
- Perform Ghusl when they wake up again, even if it is after Fajr

## Lesson 3: Qaḍā' and Kaffarah

Allah, the Almighty, has prescribed fasting as a means of purification and worship so that we may get closer to Him. As we have learnt in the last few lessons, there are certain things that break the fast. If a person misses a day of fasting, they have to either:

- Make up that day- we call this qaḍā'
- Make up that day and offer something else as a type of compensation. This is called Kaffarah, and we will learn its rules later.

## RULES OF KAFFARAH

There are two ways of paying compensation for missing a fast deliberately. As we said, this is called Kaffarah. The two types of Kaffarah are:

- Feeding 60 poor believers
- Fasting for 60 days (of which 1 month and 1 day should be consecutive)

As we have learnt in previous years, under certain conditions, kaffarah is necessary if one misses a fast. Kaffarah only applies if a person does one of the four following things deliberately, voluntarily and knowing they break the fast:

- Eating
- Drinking
- Sexual intercourse
- Staying in the state of Janābah till the time for Fajr prayers
- Attributing a lie to Allah (SWT) or the Holy Prophet or Imams (as)

So if a person does any of the above unintentionally or because they were forced, or because they had a valid excuse (e.g. they were ill and had to drink) then they do not need to offer Kaffarah.

Remember that even if a person offers Kaffarah, they still need to offer qaḍā' as well.

If we are ever in a situation where we have to pay offer Kaffarah, we should seek the advice of our local scholar. They can give us advice about how we can feed the sixty poor people, or if we choose to fast 60 days, they can give us advice on the rules for this kind of fasting.

## RULES OF QAḌĀ' AND KAFFARAH

Now that we have learnt the rules for qaḍā' and Kaffarah, let us do a quick quiz and see whether we can figure out if the people in the following situations need to offer Kaffarah or only perform qaḍā'.

QUESTION	Answer
John converted to become Muslim when he was 21 years old. What should he do about the years of fasting he missed while he was a non-Muslim?	
Muhammad, whilst fasting did not know that he was not allowed to immerse his head into water but realized afterwards. What does he need to do?	
Nour deliberately drank a whole glass of juice in the month of Ramaḍān, whilst fasting so that she fits in with all her friends at a restaurant	

Husain was certain that if he slept till after Fajr in the state of Janābah, his fast would be ok. He did this in the Holy month of Ramaḍān and only later did he find out that it was not acceptable	
Zaynab had her monthly period in the middle of Ramaḍān, and she was unable to fast for 8 days of the month	

## RULES OF QAḌĀ FASTS

We have learnt in the previous years about some of the rules of qaḍā' fasts. What we shall discuss here is when we need to perform these Qaḍā fasts. As a general rule, one must offer their qaḍā' fasts before the commencement of the next Ramaḍān. If one fails to do so then they must fulfil the qaḍā and additionally pay something called a '*fiḍyah*' which equates to  $\frac{3}{4}$  kg of food (this is equivalent to around \$3) per fast. This fiḍyah is not necessary when the person is a new revert to Islam.

As we learnt above, there are a number of situations where only qaḍā' fasts become compulsory, not the kaffarah. Let us review these:

- 1- If someone does not think it is Fajr yet (and does not investigate) and does something that breaks the fast and later finds out Fajr has come.
- 2- When a person is certain that Maghrib has set in, and breaks his fast accordingly, and later he learns that it was not Maghrib, he must give qaḍā'.
- 3- If one forgets to offer Ghusl Janābah during the Month of Ramaḍān and fasts for one or more days in that state
- 4- When one rinses his mouth with water because it is dry and some goes uncontrollably down the throat.

## THOSE EXEMPTED FROM FASTING

In our course so far, we have seen numerous examples of the merciful laws of Islam, whether it be in performing wuḍū', offering daily prayers, eating etc. Similarly, Allah, the Most Kind and Merciful, has also exempted some people from fasting. The following are the people exempted from fasting:

Those who are sick (or who suffer extreme hardship from fasting): such people usually have to offer qaḍā'

later. Pregnant women who are in the later stages of pregnancy do not need to fast, but they must offer qaḍā'.

The Elderly: the elderly are not required to fast nor do they have to offer qaḍā' or fasts they have missed. As a recommended precaution though, if they become capable of fasting later, they should offer Qaḍā'.

Travellers: We have discussed in details under the lesson of 'Prayers of the Traveller', who is considered a traveller and who is not. As a general rule, any traveller who prays qaṣr prayers is not obliged to fast but must offer the qaḍā' later. We shall discuss more detailed rules in the following years.

## Review Questions:

### Q1. A person needs to pay Kaffarah if:

- a) They do anything that breaks their fast
- b) If they do certain things that break the fast deliberately and voluntarily and without an excuse
- c) They eat on purpose only

### Q2. A person who is ill during the month of Ramaḍān and fasting would harm them should:

- a) a-Not fast, and make up their fast later when they recover
- b) b-Not fast, and they do not need to ever make it up
- c) c-Fast anyway

### Q3. A Kaffarah can be offered:

- a) a-by feeding 60 poor Muslims
- b) b-Fasting 60 days
- c) c-Either of the above

## Lesson 4: The moon of the month of Ramaḍān

As we have learnt previously, the Islamic calendar system is based on the cycle of the moon. The solar calendar that has fixed lengths of months was introduced by Pope Gregory XIII, after whom the calendar was named, by a decree signed on 24 February 1582 with the months named after pagan (Greek) gods. The Gregorian solar calendar is an arithmetical calendar. It counts days as the basic unit of time, grouping them into years of 365 or 366 days and was initially based

around the Christian holidays of Easter and lent<sup>iv</sup>. The lunar Islamic calendar on the other hand is not an arbitrary arithmetic derivation of lengths of the months but is based on the cycle of the moon.

## **THE LUNAR CALENDAR**

The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, that is, it is based on the sighting of the moon. The first day of the Islamic month, as we have learnt in previous years, is when the crescent moon is sighted. The length of the cycle of the moon from one crescent to the next is approximately 27-29 days (depending on the sighting of the crescent).

It is also very important to remember that in the Islamic calendar, because the moon can only be seen at night, the night comes before the day. This means that the 24 hour day begins from the time of Maghrib and finishes at the time of Maghrib the next day, unlike how we normally consider the day to begin and finish at midnight. Therefore, you may have noted that Islamically speaking 'Friday Evening' is on Thursday night, not Friday night.

All this may seem more confusing at first, but we have to appreciate that the Islamic Calendar and timings for the acts of worship cater perfectly for people in all parts of the world, even if they have no calendar, clock or other equipment. All a person needs to do is to look in the sky and they can know exactly what the date is or what the time is (for prayers for instance)! This also means that there is no need for 'daylight savings time' in an Islamic system as the length of 'day' and 'night' is determined not by clocks but by the rising and setting of the sun!

The Almighty Allah states:

"They ask you about the new moons. Say: these are signs to mark fixed periods of time for mankind and for the pilgrimage." [2:189]

It is narrated from the Prophet of Islam (saw) that 'the fixed period of time' is for observing the fasting of Ramaḍān and breaking of the fast at the end of the month as well as for observation of the Ḥajj dates.

Therefore, when we want to know whether the month of fasting (Ramaḍān, which is the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic calendar) has begun, we should go outside and look at the sky and look for the new thin crescent moon.

Similarly, when we want to know if the month of fasting has ended, we go outside and see if the new thin crescent moon for the next month is visible.

It is very important for Muslims to know the days of the Islamic months so that we can follow the occasions that have taken place throughout the lives of the Prophet and Ahlul Bayt (such as births and deaths). By doing this we may be able to *"be happy when our Imams are happy and sad when they are sad"* depending on the event. Hence, it is highly recommended to search for the new crescent moon.

## **Practical activity**

It is advised that the teacher arranges a moon sighting excursion sometime in the year and demonstrate the direction to look for the moon.

- Go out each evening following the day of the new moon.
- Find a westerly facing spot with a clear view of the horizon.
- Wait for the Sun to set, then look for the crescent moon in that part of the sky.
- Don't look directly at the sun using your naked eye, binoculars or a telescope.
- Can you see the crescent moon? Are you sure? Is it a cloud or a vapour trail?
- Make a note of where you were, the date and time of your observation, the weather conditions and whether you saw the Moon or not

Jābir narrated from Imam Bāqir (a.s): "When the Messenger of Allah (saw) was sighting the crescent moon of Ramaḍān he would stand towards the Qiblah whilst raising his hands saying:

"O Allah! Welcome the new month for us with security and faith and safety and Islam and good health and abundant sustenance and keeping away of diseases. O Allah! Grant us the opportunity to fast (during the days) in this month and the opportunity stand for prayer (at night) and recite the Qur'ān in it. O Allah! Protect Ramaḍān for us and protect us for it and protect us in it."<sup>v</sup>

## **DIFFERENCES ABOUT MOON SIGHTING**

Sometimes, Muslims begin and finish fasting on different days. This is usually because they refer to different scholars, who have slightly different opinions on the rules for moon sighting.

We should understand that just because there are differences, this does not mean anyone is 'wrong'. Each scholar has done their research and given the ruling according to their best ability before God, and the people who refer to that scholar are also doing the right thing by referring to the appropriate marja'.

Therefore, in cases like these, we should agree to disagree on dates, and we should try to remain as united as possible. It is very important to respect each other and to not use these small differences as a reason to cause problems between Muslims.

## **METHODS OF ASCERTAINING THE FIRST DAY OF THE ISLAMIC MONTH**

According to the rules of Islam, there are four ways to know that the new moon is visible and that therefore the new month has started:

1. If a person himself sights the moon
2. If a number of persons confirm to have sighted the moon and their words assure or satisfy a person. Similarly, every other thing which assures or satisfies him about the moon having being sighted can be taken to determine the beginning of the month.
3. If two just (ādil) people say they have sighted the moon that night. There are more particular rules about this we will learn later.
4. If 30 days have passed of the month, then the next day will be the first of the next month.

We have to remember additionally that if a person does not know whether it is the last day of Ramaḍān or the first day of Shawwal, he should observe fast on that day, and if he comes to know during the day that it is the first of Shawwal, he should break the fast.

## **Review Questions**

### **Q1. The Islamic calendar is a:**

- a. Lunar calendar
- b. Solar Calendar
- c. Gregorian Calendar

### **Q2. The way to find out whether an Islamic month has begun is to:**

- a. See or become sure that the new crescent moon of that month can be sighted
- b. See or become sure that the full moon of that month can be sighted
- c. Look it up in an online calendar

### **Q3. The month of fasting is the:**

- a. 7<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic calendar
- b. The 3<sup>rd</sup> month
- c. The 9<sup>th</sup> month

---

<sup>i</sup> Fast of the Month of Ramadhan by Yasin T. Al-Jibouri

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Biharul Anwar Vol 94 p 351

<sup>iv</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian\\_calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian_calendar)

<sup>v</sup> Al-Kolayni, al-Kafi vol.4 p.65