

Fasting in Ramadan

In the true fast of Ramadan, every part of the body observes the fast.

Fasting in Ramadan is one of the five “pillars” of Islam. Muslims fast from first light until sunset during this ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

“O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may attain piety.”

[The Qur'an 2:183]

This Arabic word for this prescription is sawm or ‘abstaining from everything that invalidates the fast.’

Muslims abstain from food, drink and sex.

Amongst those exempted are sick persons, menstruating women, and travellers. They are required to replace the missed days.

Muslims take a small meal (suhoor) and then make the firm intention or niyyah to fast for the sake of Allah. The niyyah distinguishes sawm from just starving under a diet plan!

Muslims break their fast (Iftar) at the call to the evening (Maghrib) prayer.

Ramadan: The Month of The Qur'an “Break your fast with dates or water.” **[Bukhari]**



The ‘illness’ that sawm treats is the harm we do to ourselves when we deviate from the guidance in The Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (may Allah exalt his mention).

The desires of the flesh overpower and cause harm to our lives in many ways.

Diet fads, rehabilitation programmes, and counselling are well-known ways to treat the symptoms of the harm we do to ourselves. These are often unsuccessful. The majority relapse into the earlier wrong ways.

Islam's cure starts with defining the problem as a spiritual identity crisis. It seeks to treat the root cause: weakening of faith.

Failure to “renew our faith” leads the infection of our soul by the virus of disobedience to Allah.

*“Faith wears out in your heart as clothes wear out, so ask Allah to renew the faith in your hearts.” **[Tabarani]***

A deviated soul succumbs to satanic whispers and takes to evil ways.

*The Way of Islam is to purify the soul and curb the desires from within. “Truly he succeeds who purifies the soul.” **[91:9]***

No one abstains from natural and permissible acts. Being hungry and abstaining from pleasure is no pleasure in itself except when we do them with the firm belief that Allah intends only good for His slaves. **[2:216]**

*“Fasting is a shield with which the servant protects himself from the Fire.” **[Ahmad]***

When the soul deprives itself of the basic needs from dawn to sunset for one month each year, for the pleasure of Allah, it strengthens itself to resist the lower desires.

Sawm differs from prayer (salah). One may pray just to appear to be praying, but not really, pray!

One cannot suffer hunger as a show-off. The hunger in sawm is real and can be “seen” only by Allah.

*Fasting is a ‘secret’ between Allah and His slave; hence, Allah connects fasting to Him. “Every deed of the son of Adam is for him except fasting which is for Me and I shall reward it.” **[Bukhari]***

During the hours of fasting, Muslims carry on with their normal duties but with greater awareness that fasting is more than just abstaining from food, water and sex.

*“Whoever did not give up lying and practising falsehood, Allah is in no need of his giving up food and water.” **[Bukhari]***

Ramadan is also the Month of The Qur'an, and the Month of Forgiveness and Mercy.

Ramadan: The Month of The Qur'an

It was in Ramadan that the first verses of The Qur'an were revealed to Prophet Muhammad (may Allah exalt his mention). The Believers make extra efforts in Ramadan to strengthen their bond with The Qur'an. Many complete the recitation of The Qur'an at least once in the month of Ramadan.

The most important night in Ramadan is Laylatul Qadr (The Night of Power), the night when The Qur'an descended to the lowest heaven in preparation for its revelation to the Prophet (may Allah exalt his mention).

The exact date of this Night is a divine secret. The Prophet (may Allah exalt his mention) told the Believers to "seek it on the odd numbered nights of the last ten days of Ramadan." [Bukhari] ★

Allah describes Laylatul Qadr as "better than a thousand months." [97:1-5] The Believers stay up all the final ten nights seeking Allah's forgiveness and guidance.



When asked what to do if one knew which night is Laylatul Qadr, the Prophet's (may Allah exalt his mention) instruction was to supplicate, "O Allah, You are forgiving, You love forgiveness, so forgive me." [Ahmad]

Allah blessed the month of Ramadan with this special Mercy: "the gates of Heaven are opened, the gates of Hell are closed, and the devils are chained." [Bukhari]

This enables the Believers to 'see' the state of their real selves, as they will not be able to blame the influence of Satan for any evil thought and action in this month.

This special Mercy motivates the Believers to increase their good deeds. While these deeds earn divine rewards at all times, the rewards for the same acts are manifold during this Month of Mercy. Thus, Ramadan is also a month of increase in acts of charity to seek the pleasure of Allah.

The Believers view fasting as a holistic exercise: their tongues do not backbite; their eyes do not look at unlawful things; their hands do not take things that do not belong to them; their ears do not listen to idle talk; and their feet do not go to sinful places. Thus, every part of the body observes the fast.

This is the true fast of Ramadan. It does not stop with the end of Ramadan. One who has tasted the sweetness of Ramadan would long for the whole year to be like the blessed month of Ramadan.

"There are two pleasures for the fasting person: one at the time of breaking the fast, and the other at the time when he will meet his Lord, then he will be pleased because of his fasting." [Bukhari]

There is nothing like the holistic training of Ramadan in any other religion for attaining self-discipline. It elevates the Believer to be in constant awareness of Allah in all of his actions and affairs. This is taqwa or piety, the goal of fasting in Ramadan.

Embrace Islam. Experience Ramadan. Earn the pleasure of Allah.

Allah knows best.

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Sahl ibn Sa'd reported that the Prophet SAW said, "There is a gate in the Garden called ar-Rayyan which those who fast will enter on the Day of Rising, and none but they will enter it."

