



The Month of Ramadan

By Hadhrat Mufti Taqi Usmani

RULES OF FASTING

Fasting in the days of Ramadan is obligatory (Fard) on every Muslim. The one who does not believe it to be obligatory is not a Muslim, and the one who, without a valid excuse, does not fast in a day of Ramadan is a sinner.

"Fast" means "to refrain from eating, drinking and having sexual intercourse throughout the day, right from the break of dawn up to sunset, with a clear intention of seeking the pleasure of Allah." If somebody refrains from food, drink and sex for any reason other than seeking the pleasure of Allah, it cannot be called a "fast" in the terminology of the Shari'ah. It is thus necessary that there should be an intention which is called the "Niyah"

For the fasts of Ramadan it is advisable that the "niyyah" be made in the night i.e. before the commencement of the fast. However, if a person had no intention of keeping fast before dawn, he can also make "niyyah" in the morning at any time before midday, i.e. about 1 1/2 hours before Zawal (noon). But this rule is applicable only for the fast of Ramadan and for the Nafl (optional) fasts. As for fasts of qada it is always necessary to make niyyah before dawn. Since the niyyah means intention, it is an act performed by one's heart. It need not be pronounced in words. However, it is also permissible to express this intention in spoken words, but those who take it as 'necessary' to pronounce the words of "niyyah" are not correct.

Acts nullifying the fast

Acts nullifying the fast are of two kinds. In the first place there are some acts which not only nullify the fast, but also make one liable to both qada' and kaffarah. The number of these acts is only three, namely:

- (a) Eating something.
- (b) Drinking something.
- (c) Having sexual intercourse.

These three acts are liable to kaffarah when they are committed deliberately after one has started a fast, provided that the person committing them knows that they render the fast broken.

In such cases both qada' and kaffarah are obligatory on him. Qada' means to keep another fast in lieu of the broken one. And kaffarah means to perform an act to expiate the sin of having broken the fast. Kaffarah may be given in the following three ways respectively:

- (a) Freeing a slave.
- (b) Fasting for two months constantly without a break.
- (c) Giving food to sixty persons.

Since slavery has come to an end in our days, only the latter two ways can be adopted today. But the person who has strength enough to fast for two months constantly has been bound to fast. He cannot adopt the third way, i.e. giving food to sixty persons. If he is too weak to fast for such a large number of days, he can give kaffarah by giving food to sixty persons.

In the second place there are some acts which nullify the fast, but do not make the relevant person liable to kaffarah. In such cases only qada' is obligatory.

These acts are:

- (i) Eating or drinking unintentionally. For example, while making wudu, if a drop of water slips into the throat unintentionally, the fast stands broken, but only the qada' will be enough to compensate for the mistake.
- (ii) Dropping medicine or anything else in the nose.
- (iii) Smoking.
- (iv) Emission of semen while touching, kissing or caressing a woman.
- (v) Eating or drinking under the wrong impression that the dawn has not yet broken, or the sun has set, while otherwise was true.
- (vi) If someone eats or drinks while he does not remember that he is in a state of fasting, his fast is not broken. He should continue with his fast after he remembers. However, if he eats or drinks after he remembers, his fast will stand broken, and if this eating or drinking was due to his wrong impression that his fast stood broken by his first eating or drinking, he will be liable to qada only.

Acts rendering the fast makrooh

The following acts do not nullify the fast, but render it makrooh in the sense that they lessen the reward of the fast. Hence it is not advisable to indulge in any of the following acts when one is in the state of fast:

- (i) Chewing something or tasting it with the tongue without eating it.
- (ii) Using tooth paste or tooth powder. However, cleaning teeth with a miswak or a brush (without paste or powder) is allowed.
- (iii) Remaining in the state of Janabah (major impurity) for the whole day.
- (iv) Giving blood to anyone.
- (v) Quarrelling with someone or abusing him.
- (vi) Gheebah i.e., to abuse or to blame someone in his absence.
- (vii) Telling a lie.

The latter three acts are absolutely prohibited even when one is not in the state of fasting, but they become all the more prohibited when one keeps fast.

Acts which are allowed

The following acts are allowed in the state of fasting:

- (i) Cleaning teeth using a miswak or a brush and ears with cotton swabs.
- (ii) Applying oil or henna or colour to the hair.
- (iii) Using eye-drops or kohl (surma/kajal).
- (iv) Wearing perfume or feeling it, or using lipstick or chopstick.
- (v) Taking a shower.
- (vi) Using medicine through injection.
- (vii) Vomiting unintentionally.
- (viii) Entrance of smoke or dust into the throat unintentionally.
- (ix) Ejaculation while dreaming.
- (x) Bleeding from the teeth unless blood slips in to the throat.
- (xi) Delaying the ghusl of janabah upto the sunrise.

Cases in which fasting is not obligatory

In the following cases it is allowed for a Muslim to avoid fasting in Ramadan and compensate it by fasting on some other days:

- (i) If a person suffers from a disease which has rendered him unable to fast, or a competent doctor has expressed his apprehension that fasting may increase the disease, he can avoid fasting until when it is clear that fasting is no more injurious to his health. But after recovery he is under an obligation to perform qada' of all the fasts he has missed due to his sickness.
- (ii) If a woman is pregnant, and it is seriously feared that fasting may harm her or her baby, she can postpone fasting in Ramadan and may fast after delivery as qada'.
- (iii) If a woman breast-feeds her baby, and it is seriously feared that, in case she fasts, she cannot feed her baby or her fasting may harm her or her baby, she can avoid fasting in Ramadan and perform qada'.

Fasting in journey:

- (iv) The one who travels to a distance of at least 48 miles from his hometown can also postpone fasting during his journey. But if he resolves to stay in a town for more than 14 days, he is not treated as a traveller for this purpose and he is obligated to fast in the days of Ramadan. However, if he has not made up his mind to stay in a place for more than 14 days, and he is doubtful whether he will stay for 14 days or less than that, he can also avail of the concession, unless he decides to stay for the prescribed period, i.e.. more than 14 days. If he remained uncertain about his stay but stayed at a place for even more than 14 days in this state of uncertainty, he will remain entitled to this concession until he resolves positively to stay for another 15 days.

Although this concession is available to every traveller who leaves his hometown to a distance of at least 48 miles, yet if the journey is comfortable and fasting is not very burdensome on him, it is more advisable for him to fast for two reasons. Firstly, because such a traveller gets more thawab

(reward) in case he fasts during his journey, and secondly, because if he avoids fasting while on travel, he will have to fast after Ramadan which can be more difficult for him.

But if the journey is a difficult one, and it is much burdensome to fast in such a difficult journey, then, it is more advisable for him to avoid fasting, but if fasting seems to be nearly unbearable for him, it is not lawful to keep fast in such a journey.

If someone has started fasting, then he had to travel during the day, he cannot avail of the concession during that day, rather he will have to complete his fast unto the sunset. However, if his journey continues on to the next day, he can benefit from the concession the next day.

Conversely, if someone was on travel in the beginning of a day, and he did not keep fast for that reason and began to eat and drink but he reached his hometown during the day, he must avoid eating or drinking after reaching his hometown unto the sunset. This abstinence from eating and drinking will not be counted as a fast, and he will have to perform qada' of that day also, but he is directed to abstain from eating and drinking only to honour that part of the day of Ramadan which he has passed in his hometown.

(v) Fasting is prohibited for women during their monthly periods (menstruation) and during partition (i.e. normal bleeding after childbirth), but they have to perform qada' for the fasts they have missed in such a state.

(vi) Those who are allowed a concession (of not fasting) in Ramadan can eat and drink during the day, but they should honour the days of Ramadan and should not eat or drink as far as possible at a public place or before other Muslims who are in the state of fasting.

Those who can break their fast during the day

It is major sin to break a fast during the day without a valid excuse. It makes one liable to kaffarah as explained earlier. However, there are situations where it becomes lawful to break a fast. These situations are as under:

Concession given to a sick person

(a) Where a person is attacked by a severe disease, and a competent doctor opines that, if he continues with his fast, it will bring a serious danger to his life. In such a situation breaking of the fast is not only allowed, but it is obligatory.

(b) A person feels such an extreme hunger or thirst that further abstinence from eating or drinking may endanger his life. In this situation also, breaking of the fast is obligatory.

(c) In any situation where refraining from eating or drinking may create a serious danger to one's life, it becomes lawful to break the fast.

In all these cases, the person breaking the fast is not liable to kaffarah, but he has to perform qada' whenever the danger is removed.

Suhoor or Sehri

'Suhoor' is the meal one takes in the last hours of the night before the commencement of a fast. It is a Sunnah to have 'Suhoor'. If someone has no appetite at that time, it is advisable for him to have something light. Even by having a few sips of water the sunnah of suhoor can be fulfilled.

Although the 'Suhoor' can be had any time after midnight, but it is more advisable to have it in the last hour of the night immediately before the break of dawn.

The 'Suhoor' can be continued upto the break of dawn. But in order to be on the safe side, it is advisable to refrain from eating or drinking a few minutes earlier than the break of dawn. Eating or drinking after the dawn even for a single minute renders the fast void.

If one is doubtful whether the dawn has broken or not, he should refrain from eating or drinking. However, if he eats or drinks in this state of uncertainty, his fast is valid unless it is proved later that he had eaten or drunk after the break of dawn, in which case, he will have to observe another fast.

Iftar

Iftar means to conclude a fast after sunset by eating or drinking something. It is also a sunnah to make iftar soon after sunset, and it is makrooh to delay Iftar after sunset without a valid excuse. However, if someone is doubtful whether the sun has set or not, he should not make iftar until he is sure about it, because if it is proved at any time that he had made iftar even half a minute earlier than the sunset actually took place on his horizon, his fast will be rendered nullified and void. Similarly, if the weather is cloudy, it is advisable to delay iftar for a few minutes after the time of sunset.

No particular meal is prescribed for iftar but it is advisable to make iftar using dates because the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم generally used dates for iftar.

It is also sunnah to recite the following du 'a (prayer) while making iftar:

اللَّهُمَّ لَكَ صُمْتُ وَبِكَ آمَنْتُ وَعَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَعَلَى رِزْقِكَ أَفْطَرْتُ

“O' Allah, for you I have fasted, and in you I have believed and in You I have placed my trust and with Your provision I make my Iftar.”

and after having and drinking water, it is advisable to say,

ذَهَبَ الطَّمَأُ وَابْتَلَّتِ الْعُرُوقُ وَتَبَّتِ الْأَجْرُ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ

Thirst has gone; veins have become wet and the reward (of the fast) has, God willing, been established.

Fast of Qada'

Whoever has missed a fast of Ramadan is liable to compensate it with fasting after Ramadan. This fast is called 'the fast of Qada''. Fast of qada may be observed any day during the year except for the following days:

- (a) First of Shawwal (Eidul-fitr).
- (b) Tenth of Zulhijjah (Eidul-adha).
- (c) Eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth of Zulhijjah.

On these days fasting is strictly prohibited, so the fast of Qada' cannot be observed, on these days.

Fast of qada' should be observed as soon as possible after one has missed a fast of Ramadan.

Delaying the performance of qada' without a valid reason is not desirable. If some one has missed more than one fast, he can perform qada' for all of them continuously, or with intervals. But the fasts of kaffarah should necessarily be continuous - without any interval. Any interval makes the previous fasts nullified for the purpose of kaffarah, and one has to begin the fasts all over again.

Unlike the fast of Ramadan and optional (Nafil) fasts, in the fast of Qada' it is necessary to make niyyah before the dawn.

If a person has an obligation to keep a large number of the fasts of qada', he should write down the exact number of the fasts due on him. He should also make a will that if he could not fast in his life time, his heirs should pay fidyah (redemption from obligation not carried out) from his left over property. The amount of fidyah for one fast is one kilo and six hundred sixty two grams of wheat or its price. If the amount of fidyah can be paid from one-third property of a deceased person who has made a will to pay fidyah, the heirs are bound to pay it from his left over property. But if the deceased made no will to pay fidyah, the heirs are not bound to pay it from his property. Similarly, if the amount of fidyah exceeds one-third of the property left by the deceased, the heirs are not liable to pay the excess, unless they wish to do so by their free will.

Tarawih

Another important feature of the month of Ramadan is Tarawih. It is a special Salah (prayer) consisting of 20 rak'at which is performed immediately after the 'Isha' prayer. This Salah is Sunnah mu'akkadah (repeatedly emphasized), and should not be missed. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, "Allah has made fasting in Ramadan obligatory, and I have made the special prayer of Ramadan (i.e. the Tarawih) a Sunnah"

It is a Sunnah Mu'akkadah 'alal-kifayah to perform Tarawih in jama'ah. It means that it is a Sunnah mu'akkadah, for the people of every mosque to arrange for the jama'at of the Tarawih. If a person after being sure that the jama'ah of Tarawih is being held in his mosque, performs the Tarawih in his home without jama'ah, the sunnah of the Tarawih is discharged, but he will be deprived of the great thawab (reward) of praying with jama'ah. So, one should perform the Tarawih in the mosque as far as possible.

It is also a Sunnah to complete the recitation of the whole Quran in Tarawih in Ramadan. It is thus advisable to request a hafiz (one who has memorized the Holy Quran by heart) to lead the prayer of Tarawih. However, paying any fee to the hafiz for this purpose is not allowed. If no such hafiz is available, the Tarawih should be led by any Imam, and he can recite in it whatever Surahs of the Holy Qur'an he remembers.

As a general practice, the Holy Qur'an is completed in most of the mosques a few days before the end of Ramadan, on the 27th night or even earlier. In such a case, Tarawih should be continued till the last night of Ramadan with recitation of different surahs. Those who leave Tarawih after the completion of the Holy Qur'an are not correct, because Sunnah of the Tarawih remains unchanged unto the last night.

The time of Tarawih begins after the performance of the obligatory (Fard) prayer of 'Isha. Therefore, the one who has not performed the Fard prayer of Isha cannot join the prayer of Tarawih. He should perform the Fard of 'Isha first, then join the Tarawih. If he missed some rak'at of Tarawih, he can complete it after the witr. For example, a person came to the mosque when the Imam has performed four rak'at of Tarawih. He should perform the Fard of 'Isha first, then join the jama'ah for Tarawih. If he has missed 4 or 6 rak'at of Tarawih, he should also perform the witr prayer with the Imam, then pray the four or six rak'at he has missed on his own, individually.

Laylatulqadr: ليلة القدر

One of the most meritorious aspects of the month of Ramadan is that it contains Laylatulqadr, the most blessed night of the year. It is the night which Allah Almighty chose to reveal the Holy Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an has mentioned that this night is better than one thousand months. It means that the worship performed in this night brings more reward than the worship performed in one thousand months. The authentic Traditions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم mention that, in this night, Allah Almighty directs His special mercy towards the people of the earth, accepts the supplications made by His slaves and forgives a large number of people who repent and pray.

Laylatulqadr falls in one of the last five odd nights of Ramadan i.e. 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th and 29th. According to authentic sources, Laylatulqadr falls in any one of these night alternately. The purpose of this alternation is that one should spend all the five nights in worship and prayers, so that he may find laylatulqadr with certainty.

No special form of worship is prescribed for Laylatulqadr. The night should be spent by offering as much nafl prayers as one can offer, in recitation of the Holy Qur'an, in dhikr and Tasbeeh, in supplications and in making sadaqah (charity).

It is not advisable in this night to hold ceremonies or meetings or delivering long lectures or illuminating the mosques. This is a night meant for developing a special connection with one's Creator, for offering acts of worship in solitude and seclusion, for having constant and exclusive contact with his Lord who is the Lord of the universe, for minimizing the diversity of thoughts and actions and for devoting oneself to Allah Almighty with his heart and soul.

This purpose can seldom be achieved in congregations and assemblies. That is why the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم never tended to celebrate this night by lectures, meetings, illumination or even by offering prayers in jama'ah. Instead, he used to perform acts of worship individually, and in solitude.

Sayyidah 'Aishah رضي الله عنها once asked the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as to what du'a (supplication) she should recite in the Laylatulqadr. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم taught her the following du'a:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّكَ عَفُورٌ تُجِيبُ الْعُفُورَ فَاعْفُ عَنِّي

“Allah, You are surely most forgiving and You like forgiving, so, forgive me.”

The best way to benefit from the blessings of this night is to keep awake for the whole night and spend it in worship and prayers. But people who cannot do so for any reason should spare at least a considerable part of the night for acts of worship. At least 8 rak'at should be prayed after midnight as tahajjud, some part from the Holy Qur'an should be recited and the supplications of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم should be offered. Any Dhikr or Tasbeeh should be constantly recited, specially the following dhikr has numerous merits:

سبحان الله والحمد لله ولا إله إلا الله والله أكبر ولا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله العلي العظيم

Even when one is not in the state of wudu, the Dhikr and Tasbeeh may be recited. Similarly, the dhikr may also be performed during other states, when walking or in bed.

I'tikaf

Another unique form of worship in this month is "i'tikaf" in which a person gives up all his activities, abandons his attachments, associations and routines and enters the mosque for a specific period.

Islam does not approve monasticism which is based on the concept that Allah's pleasure cannot be attained without abandoning all worldly activities for ever. The Holy Qur'an has expressly condemned this concept. Islam has, instead, emphasized on earning one's livelihood through permissible means, on one's mingling with his family members and on discharging all the obligations toward his wife, children, relatives, neighbours and other acquaintants. But at the same time, as explained earlier in more detail, sometimes one's deep involvement in these activities slows down his spiritual progress. In order to repair this loss, a Muslim is required to spare a time in which he separates himself from the normal routine of worldly activities and to sit in seclusion, devoting his heart and soul for pure spiritual acts. I'tikaf is a beautiful way to carry out this objective. In I'tikaf one leaves his home and family and undertakes to remain in the mosque for a limited period. This unique mode of worship can be done any time in the year. However, it has been declared as a 'Sunnah mu'akkadah' in the last ten days of Ramadan, because Ramadan is the most suitable time to carry out this worship. Moreover, the last ten days of Ramadan are the days in which 'Lailat-ul-Qadr' normally occurs and as explained earlier, its definite time is unknown. It may occur in any of the odd nights of these days. When one is in the state of i'tikaf for the last ten days of Ramadan, he can surely benefit from its infinite merits, because even if he is sleeping in the 'Lailat-ul-Qadr', while he is in the State of i'tikaf, it will be credited to his account as 'worship' in the 'Lailat-ul-Qadr', because each and every second in the state of I'tikaf is 'ibadah, even if one is eating, drinking or sleeping. This extraordinary privilege cannot be attained in one's home. That is why the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم used to perform i'tikaf every year in Ramadan.

The detailed injunctions and regulations of i'tikaf are explained in my book 'The Rules of I'tikaf ' and it is not proper to reproduce all of them here. However, some fundamental rules of I'tikaf are summarized here:

Some Rules of I'tikaf

1. I'tikaf in the last ten days of Ramadan is sun-nah `alal kifayah. It means that in each mosque, at last one person should sit in I'tikaf. If he does so, the requirement of Sunnah is fulfilled for the whole locality. However, if no person performs i'tikaf, the whole locality is responsible for not observing the sunnah. Therefore, the residents of a locality should make sure that some person is performing i'tikaf in their mosque. If no such person is available, they should prepare someone to do so.
2. The time of this i'tikaf commences immediately after the sunset of the twentieth day of Ramadan. Therefore, a person who wants to sit in i'tikaf, must enter the mosque before sunset on that day, so that sunset takes place while he is in the mosque.
3. The main requirement for a valid i'tikaf is that one remains in the limits of the mosque throughout the period of I'tikaf and never comes out of it, except for the necessities like easing oneself by attending the call of nature.
4. The "limits of the mosque" for the purpose of i'tikaf are restricted to the places meant for offering salah and determined as such by the founders of the mosque or by its administration. Therefore, the places like the place of ablution, toilets etc. are not included in the "limits of a mosque" for the purpose of i'tikaf. Therefore, if a person enters these places without the aforesaid necessity, his i'tikaf shall terminate.
5. One can go out of the mosque during I'tikaf only for the following needs:
 - (i) to answer the call of nature
 - (ii) to make obligatory ghusl, i.e. in the state of impurity (janabah) (It should be remembered that it is not allowed during i'tikaf to go out of the mosque for having a non-obligatory bath, like the bath of Friday etc.)
 - (iv) to bring food where no other person is available to bring it. In this case it is allowed either to bring food to the mosque or to have food elsewhere outside the mosque.
 - (v) to offer the jum'ah prayer, if no jum'ah prayer is offered in the same mosque in which he is sitting in i'tikaf.
 - (vi) To move to another mosque in the event of a serious danger to one's life or property.
6. It is advisable that a person performing I'tikaf avoids all unnecessary activities and spends the most of his time in the acts of worship, like salah, recitation of the Holy Qur'an or making dhikr or tasbih. However, it is makruh to remain silent totally.
7. The following acts result in terminating the I'tikaf:
 - (i) To leave the mosque even for a moment without the aforesaid needs
 - (ii) To remain outside the mosque after fulfilling the aforesaid needs.
 - (iii) To have sexual intercourse, or emission through some other intentional acts like kissing, cuddling etc. which are totally prohibited in i'tikaf.

(iv) Any act which breaks one's fast, like eating, drinking etc. (Since fasting is a pre-condition for a valid masnun I'tikaf, the I'tikaf is automatically terminated by breaking of the fast).

8. If the I'tikaf is terminated for any reason, it becomes obligatory on the relevant person that he makes qada' of the i'tikaf for one day only (He need not to perform i'tikaf for ten days). For example, A started a masnan i'tikaf on 21st night of Ramadan with intention to sit in i'tikaf for ten days, but on 25th of Ramadan he came out of the mosque mistakenly or unconsciously. His i'tikaf is thus terminated. Now, he has to make qada' of one day only. He needs not to repeat the i'tikaf for ten days, nor for five days. He is required to make qada' only for one day. Therefore, he can discharge this obligation by starting i'tikaf for one day, either in the same Ramadan, or after Ramadan by keeping a nafl fast, or in the next Ramadan. If he elects to perform qada' in the same Ramadan, he can sit in i'tikaf before the sunset of 25th Ramadan (in which his i'tikaf was terminated) and observe i'tikaf upto the sunset of 26th. His obligation will be discharged. Then, he is at liberty either to go home or to continue his i'tikaf as nafl (and not as a sunnah or wajib)

Source:

http://www.muftitaqiusmani.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67:the-month-of-ramadan-part-2&catid=7:islamic-months&Itemid=16