

The month of Sha'baan

Sha'baan is the name of the (eighth) month, and it is so called because in this month the Arabs used to disperse (*tasha'aba*) in search of water, or it was said that they dispersed to carry out raids and forays. Or it was said that it is so called because it *sha'aba* (branches out or emerges) i.e., it appears between the months of Rajab and Ramadaan. The plural forms of the word Sha'baan are *Sha'baanaat* and *Sha'aabeen*.

Fasting in Sha'baan

'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: "The Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to fast until we thought he would never break his fast, and not fast until we thought he would never fast. I never saw the Messenger of Allaah fasting for an entire month except in Ramadaan, and I never saw him fast more than he did in Sha'baan." (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, no. 1833; Muslim, no. 1956).

According to a report narrated by Muslim (no. 1957), "He used to fast all of Sha'baan, he used to fast all but a little of Sha'baan."

A group of scholars, including Ibn al-Mubaarak and others, thought that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not fast all of Sha'baan, but he fasted most of it. This is supported by a report in *Saheeh Muslim* (no. 1954) narrated from 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her), who said: "I never knew of him – meaning the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) – fasting for any entire month apart from Ramadaan." According to another report also narrated by Muslim (no. 1955), 'Aa'ishah said: "I never saw him fast for any entire month from the time he came to Madeenah, apart from Ramadaan."

It was reported in *al-Saheehayn* that Ibn 'Abbaas said: "The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not fast any entire month apart from Ramadaan." (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, no. 1971, and Muslim, no. 1157). Ibn 'Abbaas regarded it as makrooh to fast any entire month apart from Ramadaan. Ibn Hajar (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "He observed more voluntary fasts in Sha'baan than in any other month, and he used to fast most of Sha'baan."

Usaamah ibn Zayd (may Allaah be pleased with them both) said: "I said, 'O Messenger of Allaah, I do not see you fasting in any other month like you fast in Sha'baan.' He said, 'That is a month to which people do not pay attention, between Rajab and Ramadaan, and it is a month in which deeds are lifted up to the Lord of the Worlds. I like for my deeds to be lifted up when I am fasting.'" (Narrated by al-Nasaa'i, see *Saheeh al-Targheeb wa'l-Tarheeb*, page 425). According to a report narrated by Abu Dawood (no. 2076) she said: "The most beloved of months for the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) to fast in was Sha'baan, and his fasting in Sha'baan was continuous with his

fasting in Ramadaan.” (Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani, see *Saheeh Sunan Abi Dawood*, 2/461).

Ibn Rajab (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: “Fasting in Sha’baan is better than fasting in the Sacred Months, and the best of voluntary fasts are those that are (observed in the months) closest to Ramadaan, before or after. The status of these fasts is like that of *al-Sunan al-Rawaatib* which are done before and after fard (prayers) and which make up for any shortfall in the number of obligatory prayers. The same applies to fasts observed before and after Ramadaan. Just as *al-Sunan al-Rawaatib* are better than other kinds of voluntary prayers, so fasts observed (in the months) before and after Ramadaan are better than fasts at other times.

The phrase “Sha’baan is a month to which people do not pay attention, between Rajab and Ramadaan” indicates that because it comes between two important months, the Sacred Month of Rajab and the month of fasting, people are preoccupied with those two months and they do not pay attention to Sha’baan. Many people think that fasting in Rajab is better than fasting in Sha’baan, because Rajab is one of the Sacred Months, but this is not the case.

In the hadeeth quoted above there is an indication that even though certain times, places and people may be commonly thought to possess a particular virtue, there may be others that are better than them.

It also indicates that it is mustahabb to make good use of the times when people tend to be negligent, by doing acts of worship. A group of the Salaf used to fill the time between Maghrib and ‘Isha’ with prayer, saying that it was a time when many people were negligent. Another example is the remembrance of Allaah (dhikr) in the marketplace, because this means one is remembering Him in a place where people tend to be negligent and among people who are negligent. There are a number of benefits that come from making good use of times when people are often negligent, and using these times for worship, including the following:

It is more concealing of one's good works, and hiding and concealing naafil actions is better, especially fasting, because it is a secret between a slave and his Lord. Hence it was said that there is no element of showing off in fasting. One of the Salaf used to fast for years without anybody knowing about it; he would go from his home to the marketplace carrying two loaves of bread, which he would give away in charity, and he would fast. His family thought that he ate the bread, whilst the people in the marketplace thought that he had eaten at home. The Salaf thought it was mustahabb for a person who was fasting to do things that would conceal the fact that he was fasting. It was reported that Ibn Mas’ood said: “When you get up in the morning and you are fasting, then apply perfume.” Qutaadah said: “It is mustahabb for the [man] who is fasting to apply perfume so that there will be no sign that he is fasting.”

By the same token, doing righteous deeds at times when people are distracted and negligent is more difficult. One of the indications of how virtuous a deed is, is how difficult it is: if everyone is doing a certain action, it is easy, but if most people are

negligent, this makes it more difficult for those who do remember Allaah. Muslim (no. 2984) narrated from the hadeeth of Ma'qil ibn Yassaar: “[The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said:] ‘Worship at times of tribulation (fitnah) is like Hijrah to me.’” (The phrase “worship at times of tribulation” refers to times of upheavals and trials, when people follow their own desires, and those who adhere to Islam are doing something difficult.)

The scholars differed as to the reasons why the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) fasted so much in Sha’baan. Their various opinions were as follows:

1. That he had been unable to fast three days out of every month because he was travelling or for some other reason, so he made them all up together in Sha’baan. When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) began to do some naafil action, he would persist in it, and if he missed it, he would make it up later.
2. It was said that his wives used to make up the days that they missed of Ramadaan in Sha’baan, so he used to fast because of that. This is the opposite of what was reported from ‘Aa’ishah, that she used to delay making up days that she had missed in Ramadaan until Sha’baan because she was too busy with the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) to fast.
3. It was said that it was because this is a month which people do not pay attention to. This is the most correct view, because of the hadeeth of Usaamah quoted above, in which it says: “That is a month to which people do not pay attention, between Rajab and Ramadaan.” (Narrated by al-Nasaa’i, see *Saheeh al-Targheeb wa’l-Tarheeb*, p. 425)

When Sha’baan began, if the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) still had some voluntary fasts outstanding that he had not fasted, he would make them up during Sha’baan so that his naafil fasts would be complete before Ramadaan came. Similarly, if he had missed some Sunnah prayers or he had missed Qiyaam al-Layl, he would make it up. ‘Aa’ishah used to make the most of this opportunity to make up any obligatory Ramadaan fasts that she had missed because of menstruation; during other months she was too busy with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) to fast. We should also note here that anyone who has any missed fasts to make up has to make them up before the next Ramadaan comes. It is not permissible to delay it until after the following Ramadaan except in cases of necessity (such as a valid excuse that continues between the two Ramadaans). Whoever is able to make them up before the (second) Ramadaan and does not do so, has to make them up after the (second) Ramadaan and in addition to that, he has to repent and to feed one poor person for each day that he missed. This is the view of Maalik, al-Shaafa’i and Ahmad.

Another benefit of fasting in Sha’baan is that it is a kind of training for the Ramadaan fast, in case a person finds it difficult to fast when Ramadaan starts; if he fasts in Sha’baan he will have gotten used to fasting and he will feel strong and energetic when Ramadaan comes. Sha’baan is like an introduction to Ramadaan and it has some things in common with Ramadaan, such as fasting, reciting Qur’aan and giving in charity. Salamah ibn Suhayl used to say: “The month of Sha’baan is the month of reciters (of the Qur’aan).” Habeeb ibn Abi Thaabit used to say, when Sha’baan came, “This is the month of reciters

(of the Qur'aan)." When Sha'baan came, 'Amr ibn Qays al-Malaa'i used to close his store and devote his time to reading the Qur'aan.

Fasting at the end of Sha'baan

It was reported in *al-Saheehayn* from 'Imraan ibn Husayn (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to a man, "Have you fasted anything of the *sirar* of this month?" He said, "No." He said: "If you have not fasted, then fast two days." According to a report narrated by al-Bukhaari: I think he meant Ramadaan. According to a report narrated by Muslim, (the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)) said: "Have you fasted anything of the *sirar* of Sha'baan?" (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 4/2000; Muslim, no. 1161).

There was some dispute as to the meaning of the word *siraar*. The most well known view is that it refers to the end of the month. The end of the month is called *siraar* because the moon is hidden (*istisraar*) at that time. Someone may raise the point that it was reported in *al-Saheehayn* from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Do not pre-empt Ramadaan by one or two days, except for those who have the habit of fasting regularly, in which case they may fast." (Reported by al-Bukhaari, no 1983; Muslim, no. 1082). How can we reconcile the hadeeth which encourages fasting at this time with the hadeeth which says not to fast at this time? The answer is: many of the scholars and most of those who commented on this hadeeth said: this man to whom the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) addressed this question was known to have the habit of fasting regularly, or else he had made a vow, so the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) commanded him to make up his fast. There are also other points of view on this issue. In brief we may say that there are three scenarios for fasting at the end of Sha'baan.

The first scenario is when a person fasts at the end of Sha'baan with the intention of being on the safe side and not missing the first day of Ramadaan. This is forbidden.

The second scenario is when a person fasts with the intention of fulfilling a vow or of making up a day of Ramadaan that he missed or as an act of expiation (*kafaarah*), etc. This is permissible according to the majority.

The third scenario is when this is purely a voluntary fast. This is regarded as *makrooh* by those who said that we should differentiate between Sha'baan and Ramadaan by not fasting for a while. Among those who said this was al-Hasan. If it happens to coincide with a day when a person habitually fasts, Maalik and those who agreed with him permitted this, but al-Shaafa'i, al-'Oozaa'i, Ahmad and others made a distinction between cases where it is a fast which a person habitually observes or otherwise.

In conclusion, the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah quoted above is what we should follow according to the majority of scholars. It is *makrooh* to observe a voluntary fast one or two days before Ramadaan for those who do not habitually fast on those days and who have not previously fasted until the end of Sha'baan. It may be asked: why is it *makrooh* to fast

just before Ramadaan (for those who do not have a prior habit of fasting)? The answer is that there are a number of reasons why this is so, such as:

Firstly: lest extra days be added to the fast of Ramadaan that are not part of it. Fasting on the day of Eid is prohibited for the same reason, lest we fall into the same trap as the People of the Book with regard to fasting, as they added to their fasts because of their own whims and desires.

For the same reason it is also forbidden to fast on the “day of doubt”. ‘Ammar said: whoever fasts on this day has disobeyed Abu’l-Qasim (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

The “day of doubt” is a day when people are not sure whether it is Ramadaan or not, when news of the sighting of the crescent moon comes from one whose word cannot be accepted. As for a cloudy day, some of the ‘ulamaa’ said that this was also a ‘day of doubt’ and said that fasting was not allowed on this day. This is the view of the majority.

Secondly: to make a distinction between fard (obligatory) fasts and naafil (supererogatory) fasts, because making a clear distinction between fard actions and naafil actions is prescribed in Islam. Hence it is haraam to fast on the day of Eid, and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forbade following an obligatory prayer immediately with another prayer unless they are separated by saying salaam or speaking, especially in the case of the Sunnah prayer performed just before Fajr. It is prescribed to make a clear separation between this prayer and the obligatory prayer. Hence it is prescribed to pray it at home and to lie down afterwards.

When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) saw a man praying at the time when the iqamah had been given for Fajr, he said to him: “*Al-Subh* is four rak’ahs.” (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, no. 663).

Some ignorant people may think that the reason why we do not fast just before Ramadaan is so that we can make the most of eating and have our fill of our desires before we have to deny ourselves by fasting. This is an ignorant mistake on the part of those who think this. And Allaah knows best.

References:

Lataa’if al-Ma’arif fima li Mawaasim al-‘Aam min al-Wazaa’if, by Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali

Al-Ilmaan bi shay’in min Ahkaam al-Siyaam, by ‘Abd al-‘Azeez al-Raajih

And Allaah is the Source of strength
