

## **The Objectives of Fasting (Maqâsid as-Sawm)**

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Translated by Abû Rumaysah

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### **The obligation of fasting**

Allâh, Exalted is He says,

"O you who have faith! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you – so that hopefully you will have taqwâ." [al-Baqarah (2): 183]

Meaning that hopefully you can safeguard yourselves from the Fire through fasting; fasting is a means to the forgiveness of sins, and sins lead one to the Fire.

The Two Sahîhs record the hadîth in which the Prophet (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"Islâm is built upon five: that you worship Allâh and reject the worship of anything else, to establish the prayer, the giving of zakât, performing pilgrimage to the House and fasting the month of Ramadân." [This is a wording of Muslim, Bukhârî has the first sentence as 'that you testify that none has the right to be worshipped save Allâh']

### **The virtues of fasting**

Fasting carries with it a number of benefits, amongst which are: the elevation of ones rank, the expiation of sins, the breaking of ones desires and lusts, the increase of charity, the multiplication of actions of obedience to Allâh, giving thanks to the One who knows the hidden matters, and preventing oneself from even contemplating the committing of sin.

### **The elevation of rank**

With regards the elevation of rank, the Messenger of Allâh (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"When Ramadân comes, the gates of Paradise are opened, the gates of Hellfire are locked and the devils are chained." [Bukhârî]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) also said, relating from His Lord, Mighty and Magnificent,

"All of the actions of the son of Adam are for him except the fast for that is for Me and I will reward it. Fasting is protecting shield, so when it is the day when one of you are fasting, let him not behave or speak indecently; if someone tries to abuse or fight him, let him say, 'I am fasting'. By the One in whose hand is the

soul of Muhammad, the smell emanating from the mouth of the one fasting is better with Allâh than the smell of musk. The one fasting has two times of joy, when he breaks his fast he is happy and when He meets his Lord he will rejoice at his fasting." [Bukhârî and Muslim]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) also said,

"Every action that the son of Adam does, [its reward] will be multiplied, a good deed will be increased tenfold up to seven-hundred fold. Allâh, Mighty and Magnificent, says, 'except for the fast, for that is for Me and I will reward it for he left his desires and food for My sake.' " [Muslim]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"In paradise there is a gate which is called ar-Rayyân through which the people who fasted will enter on the Day of Judgment, and no one else shall enter alongside them. It will be asked, 'where are those who fasted?' and they will walk through it, and upon the entry of the last of them, it will be locked, and no one else will walk through it." [Bukhârî and Muslim]

In another version the wording is,

"There is in Paradise a gate that is called ar-Rayyân, those who fasted will be summoned to it and whoever fasted will enter through it, and whoever enters it will never again experience thirst." [at-Tirmidhî and an-Nasâ'î]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"When people eat in the presence of a fasting person, the Angels invoke blessings upon him, until they finish." [Ahmad and at-Tirmidhî]

With regards the 'opening of the gates of Paradise', this is a phrase that points to the increase of actions of obedience that in turn lead to the opening of the gates of Paradise. 'Locking the gates of the Fire' is a phrase that points to the decrease, and lack of therewith, of sins which in turn leads to the locking of the gates of the Fire. 'The chaining of the devils' is a phrase that points to the termination of their whisperings, and temptations, to those who are fasting because they give up hope of receiving a favorable response.

His saying, " All of the actions of the son of Adam are for him except the fast for that is for Me and I will reward it," fasting has been specifically adjoined to Him in order to honour it because the hidden nature of fasting prevents ostentation entering it, and moreover, hunger and thirst are not used as means to draw closer to any king of this world nor any idol.

His saying, " And I will reward it," even though He rewards all actions of obedience, this phrase points to the greatness of the reward of fasting.

His saying, " Fasting is a protecting shield " means that fasting serves as barrier erected between the person and the punishment of Allâh.

His saying, " let him say, 'I am fasting,' " means let him remind himself that he is fasting so that this would serve to prevent him from repaying like with like.

His saying, " The smell emanating from the mouth of the one fasting is better with Allâh than the smell of musk," meaning that the reward for the smell emanating from the mouth of the fasting person is better with Allâh than the smell of musk. [This explanation is a point of some difference and was the cause of a famous debate between ibn as-Salâh and the author, may Allâh have mercy on both.]

As for the two times of joy, the first is because the one fasting has been granted the divine accord to complete this act of worship and the second is because of the reward he will attain when Allâh rewards him.

His saying, " He left his desires and food for My sake " meaning that he chose the obedience of his Lord over the obedience of the call of his soul, whoever chooses Allâh, Allâh chooses him. This is why when someone desires to commit a sin, then leaves committing it for fear of Allâh, He says to the recording Angels, 'Record it as a good deed, for he only left giving in to his lusts for My sake.'

With regards their being specified to enter Paradise through the gate of ar-Rayyân, this specification is because of the greatness of this act of fasting and its unique character.

With regards the Angels invoking blessings upon the one fasting, in whose presence food is eaten, this is because on such an occasion he has to exert himself more in fighting his desire to eat. Their invoking blessings upon him is a phrase denoting their asking for his forgiveness and mercy to be bestowed him.

### **The expiation of sins**

With regards the expiation of sins, the Messenger of Allâh (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"One Ramadân to the next serves as an expiation for what is done between them, so long as the major sins are avoided." [Muslim]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) also said,

"Whoever fasts the month of Ramadân, out of faith and expectant of reward, his previous sins will be forgiven him." [Bukhârî and Muslim]

### **The breaking of ones desires and lusts**

Hunger and thirst break the desire to commit sin, it is authentically reported from him (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) that he said,

"O gathering of youth! Whoever can afford it, let him marry for this is better in aiding one to lower his gaze and preserving the private parts. Whoever is not

able, let him fast for this will diminish his desire." [Bukhârî and Muslim]

It is mentioned in a hadîth,

“Satan flows through the son of Ādam as does his blood”

so constrain the passages of Satan through hunger.[Bukhârî and Muslim. The last sentence is the statement of one of the narrators of the hadîth mistakenly added into the main text.]

### **Increase of charity**

When the one fasting feels the pangs of hunger, he takes this as a reminder to feed others who are hungry, 'for the only one who feels compassion towards the lovers is one who has loved.' It has reached us that Sulaymân, or Yûsuf ('alayhis-salâm) would not eat until all his dependants had first eaten and when asked why this was so, he said, 'I fear that I would become full and so forget the hungry.'

### **Increase of actions of obedience**

The one fasting will be reminded of the hunger and thirst that the denizens of Hell will experience and this will encourage him to obey Allâh so as to be saved from that fate.

### **Giving thanks to the One who knows the hidden matters**

The one fasting comes to truly appreciate the favours of Allâh, it is only through knowing hunger and thirst that one truly appreciates satiation and the quenching of that thirst; it is only when blessings are absent that one appreciates them more.

### **Preventing oneself from contemplating sin**

When one is full, the soul craves sin and looks longingly at all sorts of transgression, but when one is hungry, the soul craves food and drink, and this is the better of the two without doubt. It is for this reason that one of the Salaf thought fasting to be the best of all actions of worship and when asked why he replied,

'That Allâh look to me in a state where my soul is fighting me for food and drink is more beloved to me than Allâh looking at me in a state where my soul is full and fighting me for sin.'

Fasting has many more benefits, such as refining the mind and strengthening the body, it is mentioned in a hadîth, " Fast for you will become healthy." [at-Tabarânî and its isnâd is da'îf]

From the greatness of fasting is that the whoever cause a fasting person to open fast, he has the same reward as the one who fasted. He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"Whoever provides food for a person to open the fast, he will have the likes of

his reward, without the reward of the fasting person decreasing in the slightest."  
[Ahmad and at-Tirmidhî]

So whoever provides food for thirty six fasting people in one year, it will be as if he fasted for the whole year. And whoever provides food for many fasting people with this intention, Allâh will record for him the fasting of many years. [Because a good deed is multiplied ten-fold]

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### **The mannerisms of fasting**

They are six:

1. Restraining the tongue and limbs from all that opposes the Divine Law (Sharî'ah).

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) saying,

"whoever does not leave false speech and acting upon it, Allâh has no need of his leaving food and drink."  
[Bukhârî]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) also said,

"it is possible that one standing [in prayer] only attain weariness from his standing and the one fasting only attain hunger and thirst from his fasting."  
[Ahmad, al-'Irâqî said the isnâd was hasan.]

2. If one is invited to eat while he is fasting, let him say, 'I am fasting'

The Messenger of Allâh (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"if one of you is invited to eat while fasting, let him say, 'I am fasting' "  
[Muslim]

3. What should be said when one breaks the fast.

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) used to say upon breaking fast,

"the thirst has gone, the veins are moistened and the reward is certain if Allâh wills."  
[Abû Dâwûd and ad-Dâruqutnî said its isnâd was hasan].

Dhahaba adh-Dhama'u wa-btallati-l-'uruq wa thabata al-ajru inshaAllâh

It is also reported that he said,

"O Allâh! It is for you that I have fasted, and it is with your provision that I have broken fast."

[Abû Dâwûd with a weak isnâd, however A. al-Arna'ut, Jami' al-Usul, said that it has witnesses that strengthen it.]

In another hadîth, it is reported that he said,

"all praise and thanks are due to Allâh who gave me the strength to fast and who gave me the provisions with which to break fast."

[al-Bayhaqî with a weak isnâd but it has witnesses that strengthen it.]

4. What the fast should be broken with.

The fast should be broken with fresh dates, or slightly older, drier, dates, or water. It is reported that he (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would break fast with

"fresh dates before praying; and if not then with older, drier, dates; and if not with dates then with some mouthfuls of water."

[Abû Dawûd with a hasan isnâd]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"if one of you is fasting then let him break fast with dates, if he does not find any then with water for it is pure and purifying."

[Abû Dâwûd with a sahîh isnâd]

5, 6. Hastening the iftâr (breaking of fast) and delaying the suhûr (pre-dawn meal)

The Messenger of Allâh (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"take the meal of suhûr for indeed in the suhûr lies blessings."

[Bukhârî and Muslim]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"the people will not cease to be upon good so long as they hasten in breaking the fast."

[Bukhârî and Muslim]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"Allâh, Mighty and Magnificent, says, 'the most beloved of My servants are those who are quickest in breaking fast.' "

[Ahmad with a weak isnâd but it has witnesses that strengthen in, Jami' al-Usûl]

He (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said,

"this religion will remain good and pure so long as the people hasten in breaking the fast for the Jews and Christians would delay it."

[Abû Dâwûd with a sahîh isnâd]

'Amr bin Maymûn said,

'the Companions of the Messenger of Allâh (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would be the quickest of people in breaking the fast and the slowest of them in taking the pre-dawn meal.'

[al-Bayhaqî]

The suhûr is delayed so as to strengthen one more while he is fasting so that he can perform more actions of obedience, the gap between the Messenger of Allâh (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) taking the suhûr and his prayer would be an interval allowing fifty verses of the Qur'ân to be recited.

[Bukhârî and Muslim]

The iftâr was hastened because it is possible that some physical harm arise from hunger and thirst, hence there is no need to put the soul through such difficulty in a time [after the time of breaking fast] in which hunger and thirst is no longer an action that would draw one closer to Allâh. One of the wealthier people amongst the Salaf was seen eating in the market place and when asked why he replied [by quoting the hadîth],

'the delay of the rich is oppression.'

[Bukhârî and Muslim]

## **What should be avoided while fasting**

### 1. Continuous fasting.

Abû Hurayrah said,

'the Messenger of Allâh (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) prohibited continuous fasting whereupon one of the Muslims asked him, "but you do it O Messenger of Allâh!" He replied, "who amongst you is like me? I spend the night with my Lord, He giving me food and drink." But when the people persisted in fasting continuously, he fasted continuously with them for a day, followed by another until they saw the new moon upon which he said, "if the moon had delayed in appearing I would have made you fast more." This was a punishment for them because they refused to stop continuously fasting.'

[Bukhârî and Muslim]

Continuous fasting was prohibited because it weakens the person and emaciates his body by reason of something other than worship. As for the Messenger of Allâh (sallAllâhu 'alayhi wa sallam) then if it is literally true that his food and drink was with his Lord, he cannot be said to have fasted continuously; but if 'food and drink' is a phrase used to denote the strength of his closeness and communion (uns) with his Lord and the joy he felt at this closeness, then this takes the place of food and drink in revitalizing his strength, indeed this uns is better than food and drink in this respect,

Indeed I fasted from worldly pleasures my entire life  
And the Day that I meet you will be its breaking

For surely I find the delight of fasting for You within my soul  
And not in the satisfaction of eating or drinking

## 2. Kissing

'Īshah (radiyAllāhu 'anhâ) said,

'The Messenger of Allāh (sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would kiss and embrace while fasting but he was more able than you in restraining his desires.'

[Bukhârî and Muslim]

Therefore whoever is old, able to control his desires and hence not ruin his fast, there is no harm in his kissing. If one is young and not sure that he can control his desires, it is disliked for him to kiss due to his subjecting his action of worship to the danger of something that could break it.

## 3. Cupping

It is authentically reported that the Messenger of Allāh (sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) was cupped while fasting. [Bukhârî] Anas was asked,

'did you consider cupping to be disliked for the one fasting?' He replied, 'no, [we only considered it disliked] if it caused weakness.'

[Bukhârî]

Hence whoever is physically weakened by cupping, it is disliked for him to do so, because in his weakened state he is more likely to break fast or find the action of fasting extremely difficult for him and hence become averse to it.

## 4. Applying Kohl.

Anas would apply Kohl while fasting.

[Abû Dâwûd and ibn Hajr said the isnâd had no fault.]

al-A'mash said,

'I never saw any of our companions disliking the application of Kohl for the one fasting.' Ibrâhîm [an-Nakha'î] would allow the one fasting to apply aloes to his eyes.

[Abû Dâwûd]

Having said this, it is safer not to apply it so as to steer clear of the difference that the scholars have concerning this issue.

## 5. Snuffing the nose during ablution

The Messenger of Allāh (sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said to Laqîṭ bin Sabrah,

"perform the ablution well, wipe between the fingers and exert yourself in snuffing the nose, unless you are fasting."  
[Abû Dâwûd]

So he prohibited from exertion when snuffing the nose while fasting, the reason for this is that through exertion one puts his fast to risk [because the water could reach the back of the throat].

Allāh knows best.

[Actions which nullify the fast are eating and drinking deliberately; making oneself vomit; menstruation and post-natal bleeding and sexual intercourse.]

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## **Laylatu-l-Qadr**

Laylatu-l-Qadr is a blessed night, Allāh blessed it over one thousand months that do not contain it. It is called Laylatu-l-Qadr either because of its excellence and great status or because provisions and life-spans for the following year are decreed therein. The Angels and the Spirit descend in that night and greet those who pray by night with the salām; the scholars differ as to whether they extend the salām to them of their own accord or they convey the salām of their Lord.

A night in which the Lord of the worlds sends salām to His servants is a night that is indeed worthy of being better than a thousand months, it is a night worthy of being sought after and searched for. This is why the Messenger of Allāh (sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would search for it along with his Companions and the righteous who came after them.

This night occurs in the last ten days of Ramadān, and is most likely to occur in the odd nights rather than the even nights. It seems clear that it occurs on the twenty-first night; this is because the Messenger of Allāh saw this night in a dream but was made to forget it, however he remembered that in the morning following it, he would prostrate in mud and water. It is authentically reported that it rained on the night of the twenty-first and the Masjid leaked water, [when the Prophet (sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) prayed therein, traces of mud and water were seen on his forehead and nose.

[Bukhārī]

Moreover he (sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) informed us that on the night of Laylatu-l-Qadr the moon would look like half a plate and the moon never looks like this unless it be in its seventh night or twenty-first night.

[Trans: this is the opinion of the author, may Allāh have mercy upon him, other opinions have been mentioned such as the opinion that Laylatu-l-Qadr falls on

different nights every year, an opinion that was preferred by a group of scholars amongst whom was ibn Hajr]

From the excellent qualities of this night is that whoever prays during it out of faith and seeking reward, will have his previous sins forgiven him. The evidence for what we have mentioned lies in his (sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) sayings,

“I was shown Laylatu-l-Qadr, then one of my wives awoke me and I was made to forget it, so search for it in the last ten nights.”

[Muslim]

“Seek Laylatu-l-Qadr in the odd nights of the last ten nights of Ramadān”

[Bukhārī and Muslim]

Abū Hurayrah said, ‘we were discussing Laylatu-l-Qadr in the presence of the Messenger of Allāh (sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) and he said, “which of you remembers the night when the moon arose and it was like half a plate?”

[Muslim]

“Whoever prays the night of Laylatu-l-Qadr out of faith and seeking reward will have his previous sins forgiven.”

[Bukhārī]

It is recommended for whoever finds it to increasing in praising Allāh and invoking Him, and he should frequently supplicate with this supplication, “O Allāh! You are the One who pardons greatly, You Love to pardon so pardon me.”

[at-Tirmidhī]

If a person was to suffice with praising Allāh, this would be better due to the hadīth in which it is reported that the Prophet (sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, “Whoever is diverted by making dhikr of Me from asking of Me, I would grant him the best of what I grant those asking.”

[Trans: at-Tirmidhī [#2926] on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī with a daʿīf isnād; refer to al-Albānī, ad-Daʿīfah [#1335]. Ahādīth with similar meaning have been reported on the authority of ‘Umar in al-Bayhaqī, Shuʿab al-Īmān [#573] and as-Suyūṭī, al-Lālī’ [2/288] said that al-Hāfidh ibn Hajr declared it hasan; Jābir in al-Bayhaqī [#574]; Hudhayfah in Abū Nuʿāym [7/313] and indicated as hasan by al-Albānī; and Mālik bin al-ḥārithah in al-Bayhaqī [#575].]

Umayyah said,

Should I mention my need or should your  
Gifts suffice me, for sure giving gifts is part of your disposition  
If a person was to praise you one day  
The one who he is praising would suffice him

[Trans: Dīwān Umayyah [p. 333] in praise ibn Jud'ān. Sufyān bin 'Uyaynah was asked about his (SAW) saying, "The most superior supplication on the Day of 'Arafah is, 'none has the right to be worshipped save Allāh, the One Who has no partner, to Him belongs the dominion, to Him belongs all praise and He is Omnipotent over all things" and [in explanation to the fact that a direct request is not mentioned therein] he mentioned the previous hadīth and these verses and proceeded to say, 'this is an object of creation saying of another that it is sufficient to praise him [to get what he desires] rather than directly ask him, what then of the Creator, Blessed and Exalted is He?' Recorded by al-Hāfidh ibn 'Abdu-l-Barr, at-Tamhīd [2/680] and al-Bayhaqī [#575]]

## **I'tikāf, generosity and reciting the Qur'ān in Ramadān**

Allāh, Exalted is He, says,

“Purify My House for those who perform tawāf,  
for those who stay there for worship and those who  
bow and prostrate [in prayer]” [al-Baqarah (2):  
125]

“...and do not have relations with them as long as  
you are staying for worship in the Mosques.” [al-  
Baqarah (2): 187]

I'tikāf is to visit Allāh in one of His houses and to seclude oneself with Him, it is duty upon the host to honour his guest. It is mentioned in an authentic hadīth that the Prophet ( sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, “each time someone goes to, and comes from, a Mosque, Allāh prepares for him a feast in Paradise.” [Bukhārī and Muslim]

It is recommended to perform I'tikāf in the last ten days of Ramadān so that a person can seek after Laylatu-l-Qadr, this was when the Prophet ( sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would perform I'tikāf towards the end of his life. 'A'ishah said, 'the Prophet ( sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would perform I'tikāf in the last ten days of Ramadān until Allāh caused him to pass away, then his wives after him would similarly perform I'tikāf.' [Bukhārī and Muslim]

She also said, 'when the last ten days came, he ( sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would spend the night in worship, awake his family, exert himself in worship and tighten his waist-wrapper' [Bukhārī and Muslim]

in another report, 'the Messenger of Allāh ( sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would exert himself in worship in the last ten nights in a way that he never did in any other night' [Muslim]

The meaning of 'tighten his waist-wrapper' is that he would not take pleasure with his wives or that he would exert and devote himself to worship.

In this month, it is recommended to increase in the recitation of the Qur'ān and to be

generous, for both the one performing I'tikāf and the one who is not. Ibn 'Abbās said, 'the Prophet ( sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) was the most generous of people, and he was most generous in Ramadān when Jibrīl met him. Jibrīl would meet him in every night of Ramadān until he passed away, and he ( sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would recite the Qur'ān to him. When Jibril met him, he would be more generous than the strong wind.'

[Bukhārī and Muslim]

The meaning of 'strong wind' here is a reference to its wide reach and its swiftness.

It is authentically reported that the Prophet ( sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) would recite the Qur'ān to Jibrīl every Ramadān once, but in the year in which he passed away, he recited the Qur'ān to him twice.

[Bukhārī and Muslim]

### **Fasting Six Days of Shawwāl**

It is authentically reported that the Messenger of Allāh ( sallAllāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said, "whoever fasts the month of Ramadān and then follows this with six days of Shawwāl, it will be as if he fasted the whole year"

[Muslim]

The reason for this is that a good deed is multiplied tenfold, hence every fast is like ten fasts.

[Trans: hence a total of 36 fasts will be equivalent to 360 fasts]