

# ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ON ISLAM



## SIYAM “FASTING”



## INTRODUCTION

Siyam<sup>1</sup> is one of the main pillars of Islam. It is mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah.<sup>2</sup> In the Qur'an we read:

*"O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you that you may (learn) self restraint..."* (Al Qur'an 2:183)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)<sup>3</sup> said:

*"(The superstructure of) Islam is raised on five (pillars), the Oneness of Allah, the establishment of Prayer, payment of Zakah, the fast of Ramadhan and the Pilgrimage (to Makkah)."* (Muslim)

Based upon the Qur'an and Sunnah, it has been the consensus of Muslims throughout history that a Muslim who rejects the legitimacy of Siyam rejects Islam as well. The Prophet (PBUH) said: *"Whoever breaks the fast of one day of Ramadhan, without a valid excuse or (not due to) illness, fasting forever will not make up for it (i.e., the missed day) even if he/she did fast it."* (al Bukhari)

He (PBUH) has also said about the significance of Siyam: *"A great month, a blessed month, containing a night which is better than a thousand months has approached you people. Allah has appointed the observance of fasting during it as an obligatory duty, and the passing of (a part of) its nights in prayer as voluntary practice. If someone draws near to Allah during it with some good act, he will be (in reward) like one who fulfils an obligatory duty in another month, and he who fulfils an obligatory duty in it will be like one who fulfils seventy obligatory duties in another month. It is the month of endurance and the reward of endurance is paradise... It is a month whose beginning is mercy, whose middle is forgiveness and whose end is freedom from hell".* (al Bayhaqi)

In another Hadeeth Abu Hurairah reported the messenger of Allah as saying: *"He who fasts during Ramadhan with faith and seeking his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven; he who prays*

*1. For footnotes please see page number 17 - 21*

*during the night in Ramadhan with faith and seeking his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven; and he who passes Lailat al Qadr in prayer with faith and seeking his reward from Allah will have his past sins forgiven.” (al Bukhari & Muslim)*

Throughout the centuries during this blessed month Allah (SWT)<sup>4</sup> enabled sincere Muslims to achieve major victories.

They include:

- 1 The Battle of Badr (year 2 Hijri).
- 2 The Return to and Conquest of Makkah. (year 8 Hijri).
- 3 The Opening Conquest of Rhodes. (year 53 Hijri).
- 4 Muslims’ successful landing on the Coast of Spain. (year 91 Hijri).
- 5 Muslims’ victory under Tariq Ibn Ziyaad against the King of Spain. (year 92 Hijri).
- 6 Salahuddin’s victory against the invading Crusaders (year 584 Hijri).
- 7 Muslims’ victory against the invading French army led by Louis IX who was taken as a war prisoner in Mansoura, Egypt. (year 647 Hijri).
- 8 Mamluks’ victory against the invading Tartars in the battle of Ain Jaloot (year 658 Hijri).

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF RAMADHAN**

Like other injunctions of Islam, the benefits of Ramadhan are not limited purely to either “spiritual” or “temporal” elements of life. In Islam, the spiritual, social, economic, political and psychological all intermingle in a consistent and cohesive whole. For convenience of presentation, however the significance of Siyam is discussed

under four sub headings, spiritual and moral, psychological, and physical and medical.

Spiritual and moral elements:

1. Fasting above all is an act of obedience and submission to Allah. This submission and commitment is based upon the love of Allah and the earnest effort to gain His pleasure and to avoid His displeasure. If this is the only reason for fasting, it surely suffices.
2. Fasting is an act of acknowledgement of Allah (S.W.T) as the Only Master and Sustainer of the Universe. It is only through His bounties that we derive our existence and our sustenance.
3. Fasting is an act of atonement for our errors and mistakes. As the Prophet (PBUH)says: "Whoever fasts (the month of) Ramadhan on the basis of Iman and seeking the Pleasure of Allah), his past errors are forgiven." (Ahmad)
4. Fasting trains the believer in Taqwa (God consciousness). If one volunteers to refrain from lawful food and intimate marital relationship he/she will be in better position to avoid the unlawful things and acts.
5. Fasting trains the believer in sincerity. Unlike other acts of "worship" it is entirely based on self-restraint. Others can never know for sure if the person is fasting or if he/she broke the fast in secret. It is this self restraint which requires a high degree of sincerity and faithfulness.
6. Fasting teaches other virtues. Fasting does not exclusively mean refraining from food and drink. Essentially, it means refraining from all vice and evils. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "If one does not abandon falsehood in words and deeds, Allah has no need for his abandoning of his food and drink." (al Bukhari)



7. The spirit of Ramadhan with its nightly voluntary prayer (called Salat ul Qiyam or Salat ut Taraweeh) and frequent recitation and study of the Qur'an provides a chance for spiritual revival (a kind of annual spiritual overhaul).
8. Fasting is a form of Jihad (Struggling in the path of Allah). It teaches self discipline and enhances one's ability to master his/her needs and desires rather than being enslaved by them.

### **Psychological elements:**

- 1 It enhances the feelings of inner peace, contentment and optimism. These feelings result from the realisation of Allah's pleasure.
- 2 It teaches patience and perseverance and enhances the feeling of moral accomplishment.
- 3 Voluntary abstinence of lawful appetites leads one to appreciate the bounties of Allah, which are usually taken for granted (until they are missed).
- 4 For a whole month every year, Muslims go through a different and exciting experience, which breaks the normal routine of life. Not only can this be refreshing, but it also teaches the person to adapt to varying conditions and circumstances in his/her life.

### **Social elements:**

- 1 Fasting promotes the spirit of unity and belonging within the Muslim Ummah. Millions of Muslims all over the world fast during the same month following the same rules and observances.
- 2 Fasting promotes the spirit of human equality before Allah (S.W.T.). All the Muslims, male and female, rich and poor from all ethnic backgrounds go through the same experience of deprivation with no special privileges or favours for any group or class.

- 3 Fasting promotes the spirit of charity and sympathy towards the poor and needy. A rich person may be able to “imagine” the suffering of the poor or “think” about hunger. Yet one cannot fully appreciate suffering or hunger until he/she actually “experiences” or “feels” them. This may explain, in part, why Ramadhan is also known as the month of charity and generosity.
- 4 Fasting promotes Islamic sociability. Muslims are urged to invite others to break the fast with them at sunset and to gather for Qur’anic study, prayer and visitations. This provides a better chance for socialisation in a brotherly and spiritual atmosphere.<sup>5</sup>

### **Physical and medical elements:**

A great deal has been written about the medical and health benefits of fasting, both by Muslim and non Muslim scientists. These benefits include the elimination of harmful fatty substances from the blood, helping the cure of certain types of intestinal and stomach ailments and the renewal of body tissues. Needless to say that some ailments may be aggravated by fasting in which case the person is exempted from fasting. For those who may be engaged in Islamically (and medically) undesirable habits such as over eating or smoking, the self control and discipline exercised in Ramadhan provide an excellent beginning to “kick out” these bad habits. In a sense, fasting is an annual physical overhaul of the body.<sup>6</sup>

It should be reiterated, however, that the main motive behind fasting is to obey Allah (SWT) and to seek His pleasure.

### **DETERMINATION OF THE BEGINNING AND END OF RAMADHAN**

The beginning of the month of Siyam (Ramadhan) is determined by the sighting<sup>7</sup> of the new moon (for Ramadhan) or by the completion of the 30th day of the<sup>8</sup> month of Sha’ban.



Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

*“Fast when you see it (the new moon for Ramadhan) and break your fast when you see it (the new moon for Shawwal)<sup>9</sup> and if the weather is cloudy calculate it (the month of Sha’ban) as thirty days.”* (al Bukhari, Muslim)

The end of Siyam is determined by the sighting of the new moon of Shawwal or by the completion of the 30th day of Siyam (in Ramadhan). Is the sighting of the new moon in one locality binding on all Muslims? Muslim Jurists gave two different interpretations:

- a) Some Jurists contended that if the new moon is sighted anywhere, fasting becomes mandatory for all Muslims who have access to this information. They base their interpretation on the fact that the above cited Hadeeth addresses Muslims in general regardless of where they reside. This enhances Muslim unity.
- b) Other Jurists especially the Hanafites contended, however, that the sighting of the new moon in one locality or area is binding only on the residents of that area (and its surroundings). They base their interpretation on the report of Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) that this was the Prophet’s instructions.

*“Kurayb (RA) reported that he saw the new moon (of Ramadhan) in Syria on Thursday night. When he arrived at Madinah, he learned from Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) that the new moon was sighted in Madinah on Friday night and that residents of Madinah intended to base their calculations upon their own sighting of the new moon. Upon hearing this, Kurayb (RA) asked Ibn ‘Abbas (RA), “Don’t you consider as sufficient the sighting of Mu’aawiyah (RA) and his fasting (in Syria)?” Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) answered, “This is how the Messenger of Allah instructed us.”* (Muslim, at Tirmidhi & Ahmad).

## WHO SHOULD FAST?

Siyam is mandatory on every Muslim who is sane, adult, able and resident. An additional condition in the case of women is freedom

from menstruation and post childbirth confinement periods.

### **EXEMPTIONS FROM FASTING**

- 1 The insane.
- 2 Children who are not yet adolescent.<sup>10</sup>
3. The elderly and the chronically ill for whom fasting is unreasonably strenuous. A person, in this category, however, is required to feed one poor person for every day of Ramadhan in which he/she misses fasting.<sup>11</sup>
- 4 Pregnant women and nursing mothers who fear that fasting may endanger their lives or health or those of their foetuses or infants.<sup>12</sup> According to Imam Malik, she is treated like those in category (3) above. According to Imam Abu Hanifah, she should make up for the missed days of fasting by fasting equivalent number of days when she is able to.<sup>13</sup>
- 5 Those who are ill or travelling provided that they make up for the missed days of fasting when they are well. Allah (SWT) says:- "... But if anyone is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later. Allah intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties.. ." <sup>14</sup> (Al-Qur'an 2:185)
6. Women during the period of menstruation or of post childbirth confinement.<sup>15</sup> Fasting during these periods is not permitted and it should be made up for later, a day for a day.

### **DURATION OF FASTING**

Fasting starts, every day in Ramadhan at Fajr time (Adhan) and ends soon after sunset. If one doubts whether it is Fajr time yet, he may continue to eat and drink until he is certain. It is certainty that counts not doubt. Allah says:

*"And eat and drink, until the white thread of dawn appear to you distinct from its black thread; then complete your fast till the night appears, ..."* (Al Qur'an 2:187)





## REQUIREMENTS FOR THE VALIDITY OF FASTING

- 1 Abstaining from food, drink, smoking and intimate marital relationship between dawn and sunset for each day in Ramadhan.
- 2 The intention to fast before dawn every day . The intention need not be in words and is valid at any time after sunset (for the following day). According to some Jurists, the intention can be made only once for the whole month (i.e. in the night preceding the first day of Ramadhan)<sup>16</sup>.

## DESIRABLE THINGS IN FASTING

1. To take a night meal (called Suhoor as close to Fajr time as possible. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says: “Partake Suhoor for there is blessing in Suhoor. (Bukhari & Muslim). The blessings of Suhoor include strengthening the fasting person, enabling him/her to continue to be active during the day and making fasting tolerable.<sup>17</sup>
2. To break the fast as soon as one is sure that the sun has set. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “If any of you was fasting, let him break the fast with dates. If he can’t find dates let him break the fast with water for water is wholesome.”<sup>18</sup> (at Tirmidhi)
3. When breaking the fast, it is recommended to make Du’aa (prayer). Following are two versions of the Prophet’s Du’aa:

**ALLAHUMMA LAKA SUMTU WA ‘ALA RIZQIKA AFTARTU**  
**“O Allah! For You did I fast and with Your bounties did I break the fast.” (Abu Dawood)**

**DHA HABADH DHAMA’U WAB TALLATIL UROOQ U WA**  
**THABATAL AJRU IN SHA ALLAH**  
**“Gone is the thirst and moisturised are the veins and achieved is the reward by the will of Allah.” (Abu Dawood)**

4. To avoid any act, which is contradictory to fasting, the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Fasting is not (mere) refraining from food and drink. Fasting is refraining from vain talk and indecency. And if one slanders you or aggresses against you, say I am fasting, I am fasting." (al Hakim).
5. To be more generous especially to the poor and to spend more time studying the Qur'an.

Also to have more voluntary Salah (prayer) especially in the last ten days of Ramadhan.

During Ramadhan, this voluntary Salah is called (Taraweeh Prayer). Several authentic Ahadeeth show that the Prophet (PBUH) prayed only eight Rak'ah plus three Witr for a total of eleven Rak'ah. (al Bukhari)

Some early Muslims used to pray twenty Rak'ah instead of eight. Taraweeh prayer can be said individually or in a group (which is better, especially in the Masjid).

### **THINGS WHICH DO NOT INVALIDATE FASTING**

During fasting, the following things are permissible:

- 1 Bathing. The Prophet (PBUH) was reported to have poured water over his head while he was fasting either because of thirst or heat. (Ahmad, Malik & Abu Dawood). If water is swallowed involuntarily, it does not invalidate fasting.
- 2 The use of al Kuhl (eye powder). Anas (RA) reported that the Prophet (PBUH) used to use al Kuhl while fasting.<sup>19</sup>
- 3 Kissing one's husband or wife provided that one is able to control himself/ herself; Aa'isha (RA) reported that the Prophet (PBUH) used to kiss while fasting and touch while fasting (but) he Was the most (able) of you in controlling himself.<sup>20</sup>

- 4 Rinsing the mouth or nostrils with water provided that it is not overdone (so as to avoid swallowing water).<sup>21</sup>
- 5 Swallowing things which are not possible to avoid such as one's own secretions (e.g. saliva) or street dust etc.
- 6 Tasting the food being purchased (or cooked) with the tip of the tongue. (This was reported by Ibn'Abbas (RA)).
- 7 Taking injections (of any type).
- 8 Smelling flowers or wearing perfumes, etc.
- 9 One may continue his/her fast even if he/she is Junub, (the state after intercourse or night discharge and before bathing). Likewise, women at the end of the periods of menstruation or post childbirth confinement periods may start fasting if bleeding stops at night (any time before dawn). In all of the above cases, bathing may be delayed until the following morning and the fast is valid.
10. If one forgets that he/she is fasting and he/she eats or drinks, provided that one should stop eating or drinking as soon as he/she remembers. The same rule applies to those who are involuntarily forced to break the fast. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "If anyone forgets that he/she is fasting and eats or drinks he/she should complete his fast, for it is only Allah who has fed him/her and given him her drink." (Muslim, al Bukhari).
11. Involuntary throw up. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "If anyone involuntarily vomits (while fasting), he does not have to make up (for that day). But if anyone deliberately causes himself to vomit, he must make up (for that day)." (Ahmad, Abu-Dawood, at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah) In either case, the person must continue to fast for the rest of the day.

## THINGS WHICH INVALIDATE THE FAST

### A. Those which invalidate fasting and require Qada' only (making up for the missed day or days, a day for a day).

#### This category includes:

- 1 Eating and/or drinking deliberately (including partaking non nourishing items by the mouth).
- 2 Deliberately causing oneself to vomit.
- 3 The beginning of menstruation or post childbirth bleeding even in the last moment before sunset.
- 4 Ejaculation due to kissing or hugging one's wife.<sup>22</sup>
5. Eating, drinking, smoking or having intimate marital relationship after Fajr (dawn) on the mistaken assumption that it is not Fajr time yet. Similarly, engaging in these acts before Maghrib (sunset) on the mistaken assumption that it is already Maghrib time.<sup>23</sup>

### B. An Act which Invalidates Fasting and Requires Qada' and Kaffarah (an act of atonement).

Intimate marital relationship during the period of fast (dawn to sunset) not only invalidates the fast but involves an additional penalty as well. The penalty is to set a slave free. If this is not available or possible, one must fast an additional period of 60 continuous days. If one is not able to, then he must feed sixty poor persons one average meal each.<sup>24</sup>

*Abu Hurairah (RA) reported that a man broke the fast in Ramadhan (deliberately). The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) instructed him to atone for this by setting a slave free or to fast two continuous months or to feed sixty poor persons. (Muslim)*

The majority of jurists make no distinction between men and women in the applicability of the above penalty provided that both deliberately engaged in intimate marital relationship during the day (dawn to sunset in Ramadhan).

If both forgot that they were fasting, or did not intend to fast, (e. g. due to illness or travel), or were fasting before or after the month of Ramadhan, the penalty does not apply. If the wife was forced into intercourse by her husband (during the day in Ramadhan) or if she was not fasting for a legitimate reason, then the penalty applies to the husband only. Imam Ash-Shafi'i, however, believes that the wife is not penalised even if she accepts to engage in sexual intercourse with her husband. She is required only to make up for the missed day (a day for day). One version attributed to Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal concurs with this.

### **WHEN TO MAKEUP FOR MISSED FASTING (ALSO FOR THE PENALTY)**

The Qur'an does not specify any time limit during which one must make up for fasting missed in Ramadhan<sup>25</sup>. "...*But if any of you is ill or on a journey, the prescribed number(should be made up) from days later...*" (Al Qur'an 2:184)

### **DEATH BEFORE MAKING UP FOR MISSED FASTING**

The majority of jurists believe that the "guardian" of the deceased is only required to give in charity a certain amount of food.<sup>26</sup> According to Imam Ibn Hambal and one version of Imam Ash Shafi'i, it is better for the guardian to make up for the missed days of fasting (of the deceased) by fasting equivalent number of days on his/her behalf. Ibn 'Abbas (RA) reported that a man came to the Prophet (PBUH) and he said: "O Messenger of Allah! My mother has died and due from her is Siyam (fast) of a month. Should I complete them on her behalf? There upon (the Prophet PBUH) said: *Would you not pay the debt if your mother had died (without paying it)?* He said: "Yes!" (The Prophet PBUH) said: *"The debt of Allah are of priority to be paid."* (Muslim,Ahmad).

## **FASTING IN PLACES WHERE THE DAY OR NIGHT ARE UNUSUALLY LONG**

In some areas like Scandinavia and the Poles, the day (or night) sometimes lasts for several weeks. How can the residents of such areas determine the duration of fasting? Some jurists concluded that such residents might fast a number of hours similar to the dawn to sunset period in Makkah or Madinah. Others concluded that they may fast a number of hours similar to the dawn to sunset period in the nearest “moderate” place to them.

## **ZAKATUL FITR**

An essential thing which relates to fasting is the mandatory Zakah at the end of Ramadhan. It is different from and is in addition to the Zakat ul Mal. It is the due on every adult Muslim who possesses an amount of food in excess of his needs and those of his family for 24 hours. If the person is a provider for others, Zakatul Fitr is also due on him on behalf of his dependants (e. g. wife, children, servants, or other dependent relatives).

Most jurists indicated that it could be paid one or two days before the end of Ramadhan. They agreed, however, that it should be paid before ‘Eid prayer. This gives the poor a chance to enjoy the ‘Eid day. If Zakah is not paid before ‘Eid prayer, one is not exempt from it. It should be paid in the first day of ‘Eid. Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) reported that “The Prophet (PBUH) prescribed Zakatul Fitr as a purification for the fasting person from vain and indecent talk and as a provision for the needy. Whoever pays it before Salah (Eid prayer), it is an acceptable Zakah and whoever pays it after Salah, then it is (regarded only as a) charity.” (Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah) The minimum amount due is the equivalent of about 5.5 pounds of flour, wheat, barley or rice for each person in the household (the head of the household and each dependent even if the dependent does not reside in the same house). About £2.00 is a safe estimate for those residing in the U.K.

Recipients of Zakatul Fitr are the same like those entitled to the

Zakatul Mal. According to the Qur'an: *"Alms are for the poor, the needy, those employed to administer (the funds), those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth), those in bondage, those in debt (due to a calamity), in the cause of Allah for the wayfarer: (thus it is) ordained by Allah and Allah is All-Knower, Wise"*. (Al Qur'an 9:60).

The most deserving of Zakah are the pious and poor Muslims.

According to Imam Abu Hanifah, and others, Zakatul Fitr can be paid as well to the poor among Jews or Christians (if there is no needy Muslim in the area).<sup>27</sup>

### **SALATUL 'EID ('EID PRAYER)**

On 'Eid day it is recommended to have *Ghusl* (bath), put on the best clothes, eat a few dates, and gather for 'Eid prayer after sunrise, Prayer is composed of two Rak'as (units) with no *Adhan* or *Iqamah* (call for prayer). Seven additional *Takbeerahs* (*Allah Akbar*) are added to the first Rak'ah and five additional takbeerat in the second Rak'ah. The rest of the *Salah* is identical to *Fajr* Prayer. After *Salah*, the Imam (leader) delivers a *Khutbah* (talk) similar to the Friday *Khutbah*. Some Jurists, however, say that the *Eid Khutbah* need not be broken into two portions, it can be delivered all in one continuous period. Exchange of gifts and visits are commendable acts on this day, especially among relatives.

### **OTHER TYPES OF FASTING**

In addition to the mandatory fasting in Ramadhan, two other types should be mentioned briefly:

#### **Forbidden Fasting:**

Fasting on certain days is forbidden. They include the following:

- 1 Fasting on the first day of Eidul Fitr (Feast of Breaking the Fast) or the first day of Eid-ul-adh-ha (Feast of sacrifice).

- 2 Fasting on the second, third or fourth days of Eid-ul-Adh-ha.
- 3 Singling out Friday for voluntary fasting unless one is fasting one day before it or one day after it.
- 4 Fasting on the day when there is doubt as to whether the month of Ramadhan has begun or not.<sup>28</sup>
- 5 Fasting continuously (all year).
- 6 The wife's voluntary fasting in the presence of her husband without his consent.

**Desirable Fasting:**

In addition to the mandatory fasting in Ramadhan, the following fasts are Sunnah (desirable and encouraged). They include:

- 1 Fasting six days during the month of Shawwal (the month following Ramadhan). They may be fasted consecutively or separately (after the first day of Eidul Fitr).
- 2 Fasting the 9th day of the month of Dhil Hijjah (the day before Eidul Adhha) provided that the person is not performing Hajj (pilgrimage) that year.
- 3 Fasting during the month of al Muharram especially the 10th day (Aashuraa') and if possible the 9th and the 11th of the same month.
- 4 Fasting as many days as possible during the month of Sha`baan (but not the whole month).
- 5 Fasting during the months of Rajab, Dhul Qa'dah, and Dhul Hijjah.
- 6 Fasting Mondays and Thursdays (at least 3 days per month).



A person in any of the above six categories may decide to break the fast without any penalty.

## **OTHER ASPECTS OF RAMADHAN**

A. *Lailatul Qadr* (the Night of Honour and Excellence) This is the night in which the first passage of the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Sincere worship and devotion in that night is better in value than 1000 months of worship. Angel Gabriel and other angels descend to the earth in that night invoking blessings on those who are worshipping Allah (S.W.T.).

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says:

*"Whoever stood (in prayer) in the night of Qadr, on the basis of Imaan (faith) and seeking the reward (from Allah), Allah will forgive his previous sins."*

(al Bukhari)

This night is not specifically known to us. However the Prophet (PBUH) said: *"Look for the night of Qadr in the last ten days of Ramadhan"*.

(al Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad)

In another *Hadeeth*, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) especially recommended the odd numbered nights of the last ten days of *Ramadhan*. (al Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad)

The least thing that should be done in that night is to pray 'Ishaa' and Fajr in Jamaah (collectively). Prayer, recitation of the Qur'an and supplication are highly recommended acts of devotion. One of the recommended Du'aa in that night is to say:

**ALLHUMMA INNAKA 'AFU WON TUHIBBUL 'AFWAFU 'ANNEE**

*"OAllah! You are Forgiver Who loves to forgive so forgive me."* (al Tirmidhi)

B. *I'tikaaf* 'Aishah (RA) reported that “the Prophet (PBUH) used to be in *I'tikaaf* during the last ten days of *Ramadhan*.” (al Bukhari, Muslim)

*I'tikaaf* means devoting a specific time to be spent in the *Masjid* (Mosque) with the intention of worship. It can be done at anytime for any duration. One may go out for his essential needs, or to bring food, but he should not get too involved in other worldly affairs. The period of *I'tikaaf* is spent in prayer, supplication, recitation of the Qur'an or study of Islam.

### C. Zakatul Maal

It was indicated earlier that good deeds are specially and generously rewarded if done during *Ramadhan*. As such, it is desirable (but not mandatory) to pay *Zakatul Maal* during *Ramadhan* as well.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Siyam means literally to refrain from. However, the term siyam is used here to refer to refraining from food, drink, smoking and intimate marital relationship between dawn and sunset. Siyam was prescribed in the second of Sha'ban, in the second year of Hijra (the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) emigration from Makkah to Madinah).
2. Sunnah refers to the sayings, deeds or consent of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
3. PBUH = Peace be upon him.
4. SWT = Subhanahu wa ta'ala (Glory be to Him, Most High).
5. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) indicated on, more than one occasion that inviting a fasting person to break his fast (after sunset) is an act which is highly rewarded by Allah (SWT) (e.g. at Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah).



6. The Prophet (PBUH) recommended to break the fast with dates. Physicians point out that breaking the fast on such a sweet food helps remove the symptoms of weakness felt at the end of fast since sugar is immediately absorbed by the body. Similarly, one should not overeat so as to destroy some of the benefits of fasting.
7. Sighting refers to night sighting (after sunset) by one or more trustworthy Muslim witness(es).
8. The month preceding Ramadan.
9. The month following Ramadhan
10. It is desirable, however, to train the child to fast so that he/she may get used to it gradually. This should be done through motivation and encouragement and with flexibility. For example, a parent may encourage a seven year old child to fast only part of the day or a few days, which may increase as he/she grows up.
11. This rule is based upon the following Qur'anic injunction: "For those who can do it (with hardship), is a ransom, the feeding of one that is indigent but he that will give more, of his own free will, it is better for him and it is better for you that you fast, if you only knew." (Al-Qur'an 2:184)
12. Probable harm to life or health is determined on the basis of the advice of a trustworthy physician or on the basis of reasonable expectation of harm.
13. Imam Malik and Imam ash-Shafi'i, however, make a distinction between two cases: (a) If the woman fears harm to her foetus or infant only, she is not required to fast, but should make up for the missed days (by fasting at a later time), as well as the feeding of a poor for each missed day of fasting. (b) If

the woman fears harm to herself alone or to both herself and her foetus or infant, she should only make up for the missed days when she is able to.

14. The above text does not specify the nature of illness or travel. Most jurists agree, however, that illness refers to the ailment, which is aggravated or prolonged by fasting. It may also include the reasonable expectation of illness or death if the person observes fasting. Allah says: "...Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves; for verily Allah has been to you Most merciful!" (Al-Qur'an 4:29) " And strive in His cause, as you ought to strive (with sincerity and under discipline). He has chosen you, and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion;..." (Al-Qur'an 22:78) As to the nature of travel, it follows the same rules as those applicable to the Qasr (shortening of Salah). Persons in this category may fast, however, if they prefer and tolerate it. Some Jurists defined travel as that which requires 2 or 3 days (using older methods of transportation).
15. Some women may at times continue to menstruate long after their usual menstruation period (usually with a "lighter" blood). In these cases, jurists estimated different maximum of days, which are regarded as the "usual" menstruation periods. These estimates included 10days, 13 days and 15days. Another interpretation is to establish the maximum period of menstruation in the above cases on the basis of the "usual period" for any individual woman before the occurrence of the irregularity. As to post childbirth confinement, it ends with the cessation of bleeding. Its maximum is forty days after delivery.
16. One such interpretation is attributed to the Hanbalite Jurists. A similar interpretation is attributed to the Mahkite Jurists. See Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait, Mo`jam al Fiqh al Hanbali, 1973, vol. 2, p. 623. A similar interpretation is attributed to the Malikite Jurists. See Abdur Rahman al Juzayri et.al. Kitabul Fiqh alal Madhabib al arba'ah, Ministry of Awqaf, Egypt, 1950, p. 430.

17. In Suhoor, it is advisable to avoid the type of food, which may cause severe thirst to the individual during the day (e.g. salty or seasoned food). To avoid the premature feeling of hunger, high protein food and oils or butter are particularly useful.
18. According to Anas (RA), the Prophet (PBUH) used to take fresh dates, if not available he would take dry dates. This Hadeeth shows that one should break the fast first, perform Salah (Maghrib), then partake his meal. If food is ready, however, one may delay Maghrib. (alBukhari & Muslim)
19. According to Sayyid Sabiq, eye-drops do not invalidate fasting even if one feels its taste in his throat since the eye is not a (normal) entrance to the stomach.
20. 'Omar (RA) also reported that one day he kissed while fasting. When he asked the Prophet (PBUH), the Prophet said to him, "What if you rinse your mouth with water while fasting?" `Omar answered that he sees nothing wrong in that."The Prophet (PBUH) replied "Why then (do you ask)?" According to the Hanafites and Shafi'ites, however, the kiss is Makrooh (discouraged) during the fast where the person(s) involved are likely to be sexually stimulated.
21. If water is involuntarily swallowed, the fast is valid according to some jurists. Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifah, however, consider the fasting as invalidated since the persons should have been cautious (knowing that he is fasting).
22. If ejaculation is involuntary (e. g. a wet dream) fasting is not invalidated.
23. Even though this is the opinion of most jurists, others like Ishaq, Ibn Hazm, Dawood and Mujahid consider the fast to be valid. They base this interpretation on the facts that there is no intention to break the fast, that error is forgiven according

to the Qur'an and Sunnah; that similar errors occurred during the life times of the Prophet (PBUH) and Omar (RA). There is no evidence, however, that Muslims were asked to make up for these days, In fact, Omar (RA) explicitly indicated that there is no reason to make up for these days.

24. The majority of jurists require the penalty in that order of priority. According to Imam Malik and another version attributed to Imam Ibn Hanbal, one may choose between any of the above three forms of penalties.
25. This is the interpretation of Imam Abu Hanifah and al Hassan al Basri. Others like Imam Malik, Imam Ahmad and Imam Ash shafi'i, believe that one should make up for the missed days before the following Ramadan. According to Sayyid Sabiq, the former interpretation is more accurate since there is no text to support the restrictions suggested by the latter interpretation. Itissafer, however, to make up for missed days as soon as possible.
26. Estimated at 12/ Saa' (about 2 handfuls) of wheat or one Saa' of other food grain (about 4 handfuls). The Saa' is estimated also to weigh about 5.5 pounds.
27. Some Muslim organizations collect Zakatul fitr and undertake its distribution according to Islamic injunctions. This is an alternative channel which may be used.
28. According to Ibn Taymiyahin Haqiqatul Siyam (Reality of Fasting), pp. 8789, Muslim Jurists presented three main interpretations about fasting the day of doubt. (a) That its fasting is forbidden (some said it is only Makrooh or discouraged). This is the opinion of Imam Malik, Imam Ash Shafi'i and one version attributed to Imam Ahmad. (b) that its fasting is desirable for caution. In fact some companions of the Prophet (PBUH) were reported to do so (Omar, Ali, Abu Hurairah, Ibn Omar, Mu'awiyah, Aaishah, Asmaa' and others). (c) that its fasting is permissible (if



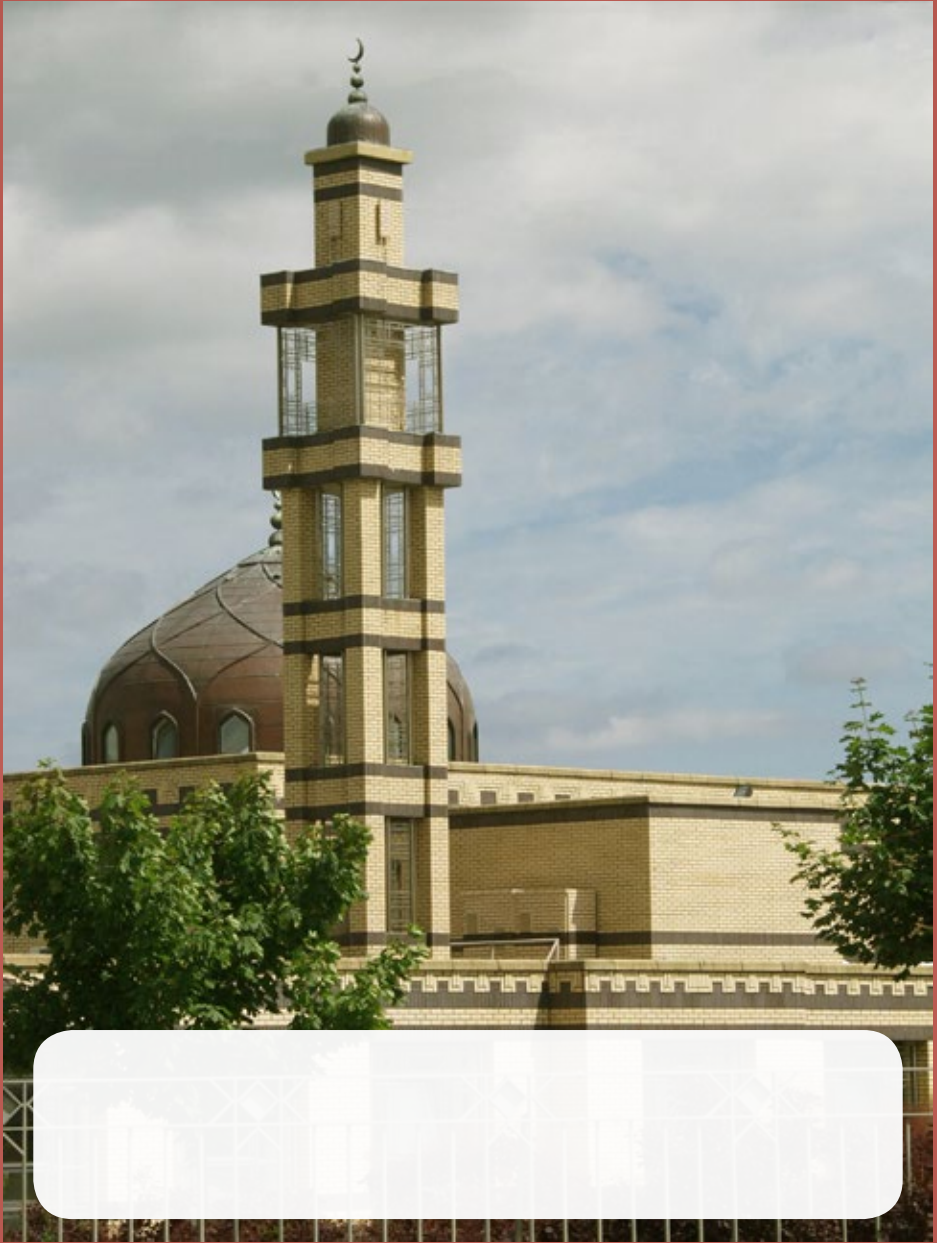
one chooses to). This is the opinion of Imam Abu Hanifah, also the verified version of Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal and many other companions. Ibn Taimiyah adds to this that caution "taking the safe side" according to Shari'ah is neither mandatory nor Haraam (absolutely forbidden). According to Imam Abu Hanifah, one may intend to fast the day of doubt with the understanding that if the day did not prove to be the first of Ramadhan, then the fast is regarded as voluntary. It should be added here that according to the Shafi'ites, an astronomer and whoever believes him may fast (on the basis of his calculations) but other Muslims are not required to accept such calculations. See *Al Fiqh Ala al Mathahib al Arba`ah* (Fiqh in accordance with the four schools of interpretation), p. 434.

## REFERENCES

In addition to the Qur'an and Hadeeth as documented, the main reference on the rules of fasting which was used extensively is : Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqhus Sunnah*, (the comprehension of Sunnah), the volumes on Fasting, Prayer and Zakah.

In addition to the above the following references were consulted: Abdur Rahman al Juzairi et.al., *Kitabul Fiqh alal-Madhahib al Arba`ah*, Ministry of Awqaaf, Egypt, 1950.

Ibn Taymiyah, *Haqiqat us Siyam* (the Reality of Fasting), under "Questions and Answers. Ministry of Awqaaf and Islamic Affairs, Kuwait, Mo jam al Fiqh al Hanbali, 1973. Avariety of other books and articles were used in compiling the section on "Significance of Fasting."



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# ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ON ISLAM



## SIYAM “FASTING”

