

Fasting in Ramadan¹

What is Fasting?

In Islam, the Arabic word صِيَام (ṣiyām) means to fast: to not eat or drink during the day just to make Allah happy. Allah told us in the Quran:

﴿ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ ﴾

Then complete the fast (ṣiyām) until the nighttime.²

Why is Fasting Good for Us?

1. One of prophet Muhammad's friends named Abū Hurayrah said he heard the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) say that Allah said:

« كُلُّ عَمَلٍ ابْنِ آدَمَ لَهُ إِلَّا الصِّيَامَ، هُوَ لِي وَأَنَا أَجْزِي بِهِ. فَوَالَّذِي نَفْسُ مُحَمَّدٍ بِيَدِهِ لَخُلْفَةٌ فَمِ الصَّائِمِ أَطْيَبُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ رِيحِ الْمِسْكِ »

“Every good deed that a person does is for himself except fasting – it is for me and I will reward it myself.” (The prophet said) I swear by Allah, the bad breath of someone fasting is better to Allah than the smell of perfume.³

And in another ḥadīth, prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

¹ This article contains translations in very simple English and thus is intended for younger readers or anyone simply wanting a smooth reading article. For this, it is important to understand that the ḥadīth are not translated literally, rather the general meaning is translated so that the reader will grasp the main meaning and benefit of the ḥadīth.

² The Quran, Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:187.

³ This ḥadīth is recorded by Muslim (no. 1151).

« إِنَّ لِلصَّائِمِ فَرَحَتَيْنِ إِذَا أَفْطَرَ فَرِحَ، وَإِذَا لَقِيَ اللَّهَ فَرِحَ »

There are two special times that a fasting person is happy: when he breaks his fast, he is happy and when he meets Allah, he is happy.⁴

The last messenger of Allah, Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), also said in a ḥadīth:

« فِتْنَةُ الرَّجُلِ فِي أَهْلِهِ وَمَالِهِ وَنَفْسِهِ وَوَلَدِهِ وَجَارِهِ، يُكْفَرُهَا الصِّيَامُ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالْأَمْرُ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَالنَّهْيُ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ »

A person has problems with his family, his money, even in himself, and in his children and his neighbors. All of those problems are forgiven or removed by fasting, praying, and telling people to do good deeds and telling people not to do bad deeds.⁵

2. Allah's messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also said:

« الصِّيَامُ جُنَّةٌ، فَلَا يَرْفُثُ وَلَا يَجْهَلُ، وَإِنْ أَمْرٌ قَاتَلَهُ أَوْ شَاتَمَهُ فَلْيَقُلْ: إِنِّي صَائِمٌ –
مَرَّتَيْنِ -. وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ لَخُلُوفُ فَمِ الصَّائِمِ أَطِيبُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ رِيحِ الْمِسْكِ،
يَتْرُكُ طَعَامَهُ وَشَرَابَهُ وَشَهْوَتَهُ مِنْ أَجْلِي، الصِّيَامُ لِي وَأَنَا أَجْزِي بِهِ، وَالْحَسَنَةُ بَعِشْرُ
أَمْثَالِهَا »

Fasting is a way that a person can protect himself, so he should not say bad things or act bad. If someone tries to fight with him or say mean things to him,

⁴ Recorded by Muslim (no. 1151).

⁵ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1895) and Muslim (no. 144).

then he should say, “I am fasting, I am fasting.” I swear by Allah, the smell of a fasting person’s mouth is better to Allah than the smell of perfume. (Allah says) “He leaves his food, his drink, and what he wants to do just for me. Fasting is just for me and I will reward it myself, and one good deed is worth ten times more reward.”⁶

Prophet Muhammad’s cousin was named ‘Alī and he said, “Fasting is not only to stop eating and stop drinking, but fasting is also to not lie and to not say mean or rude things.”⁷

Another one of prophet Muhammad’s friends was ‘Abdullah al-Anṣārī and he said, “When you fast, let your ears, your eyes, and your tongue also fast from lying and doing bad things with them. Do not make problems for your neighbor. You should be respectful and calm while you fast. And do not let the day you fast be the same as the day you do not fast.”⁸

3. The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

« مَنْ صَامَ يَوْمًا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بَعَدَ اللَّهُ وَجْهَهُ عَنِ النَّارِ سَبْعِينَ خَرِيفًا »

Anyone who fasts a single day just to make Allah happy, Allah will keep his face seventy years away from the fire.⁹

4. In another ḥadīth, prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

⁶ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1894) and Muslim (no. 1151).

⁷ See “Kitāb al-Ṣiyām” in “al-Muṣannaf” of Ibn Abī Shaybah.

⁸ “Kitāb al-Ṣiyām” in “al-Muṣannaf” of Ibn Abī Shaybah.

⁹ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 2840) and Muslim (no. 1153).

« مَنْ صَامَ يَوْمًا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ، خَعَلَ اللَّهُ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ النَّارِ خَنْدَقًا كَمَا بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ
وَالْأَرْضِ »

Whoever fasts a single day just to make Allah happy, Allah will put between him and the fire a space as far as the space between the heavens and the earth.¹⁰

5. The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

« إِنَّ فِي الْجَنَّةِ بَابًا يُقَالُ لَهُ الرَّيَّانُ، يَدْخُلُ مِنْهُ الصَّائِمُونَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ، لَا يَدْجُلُ مِنْهُ أَحَدٌ غَيْرُهُمْ، يُقَالُ : أَيْنَ الصَّائِمُونَ؟ فَيَقُومُونَ، لَا يَدْجُلُ مِنْهُ أَحَدٌ غَيْرُهُمْ، فَإِذَا دَخَلُوا أُغْلِقَ، فَلَا يَدْجُلُ مِنْهُ أَحَدٌ »

There is a gate leading into paradise called “al-Rayyān.”¹¹ The people who fast a lot will go through that gate to get to paradise on the day Allah brings us back to life and no one else will go through that gate. Someone (either Allah or an angel) will ask, “Where are the fasting people?” So they will stand up. No one else will go through that gate except them. And when they all pass through the gate of al-Rayyān, it will be locked and then no one else will go through it again.¹²

6. The messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also said:

¹⁰ Recorded by al-Tirmidhī (see al-Albānī’s “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī,” no. 1325) and by al-Albānī in “al-Ṣaḥīḥah,” no. 563.

¹¹ al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar said, “al-Rayyān is the proper name of one of the gates of paradise specifically through which the those who fast often will enter. The name is appropriate in its wording and its meaning because it is derived from the Arabic word الرَّيِّ (al-Rayy) which means the quenching of thirst. So it is appropriate to the condition of the fasting people...or because it (thirst) is harder upon the fasting person than hunger.”

¹² Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1896) and Muslim (no. 1152).

« عَلَيْكَ بِالصَّوْمِ فَإِنَّهُ لَا مِثْلَ لَهُ، عَلَيْكَ بِالسُّجُودِ فَإِنَّكَ لَا تَسْجُدُ لِلَّهِ سَجْدَةً إِلَّا رَفَعَكَ اللَّهُ بِهَا دَرَجَةً، وَحَطَّ عَنْكَ بِهَا خَطِيئَةٌ »

You should fast because there is nothing like it (in reward), and you should bow down because if you bow down to Allah just once, Allah will raise you up a level and will remove a sin from you.¹³

7. The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

« الصِّيَامُ وَالْقُرْآنُ يَشْفَعَانِ لِلْعَبْدِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ. يَقُولُ الصِّيَامُ: أَيْ رَبِّ: مَنْعْتَهُ الطَّعَامَ وَالشَّهْوَةَ، فَشَفِّعْنِي فِيهِ، وَيَقُولُ الْقُرْآنُ: مَنْعْتَهُ النَّوْمَ بِاللَّيْلِ، فَشَفِّعْنِي فِيهِ، قَالَ: فَيُشَفَّعَانِ »

Fasting and the Quran will both ask Allah to forgive the Muslim on the day Allah brings us back to life. Fasting will say, “Oh my lord, I stopped him from food and doing what he wants so let me ask you to forgive him.” And the Quran will say, “I kept him from sleeping at night so let me ask you to forgive him.” So they will both be allowed to ask Allah for forgiveness.^{14 15}

¹³ Recorded by al-Nasā'ī (see al-Albānī's "Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Nasā'ī," no. 2100) and by al-Albānī in "al-Ṣaḥīḥah," no. 1937.

¹⁴ al-Albānī says in "Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb" (1/483):

The meaning here is that Allah will allow them to intercede for the person and enter him into paradise. al-Mannānī said, "This statement is to be taken upon its actual meaning in that the person will find the reward of both (fasting and reading the Quran) and Allah will create speech for them both since Allah is capable of doing anything. So it is understood that this is an example of metaphorical likeness."

I (al-Albānī) say, the first part (of al-Mannānī's statement) is correct and that is how we must understand the meaning here and in other ḥadīth like it in which deeds are described in terms of having physical forms and characteristics...And changing the apparent meaning of such texts is not the way of the Salaf. Rather, it is the way of the Mu'tazilah and others like them. And such misinterpretations negate one of the basic, core principles of faith mentioned in the verse (in Sūrah al-Baqarah), "Those who believe in the unseen." So beware of following their example and thus become misguided and ruined.

¹⁵ Recorded by Ahmad and al-Ṭabarānī in "al-Kabīr." And al-Albānī says it is authentic in "Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb" (no. 969).

8. The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also said:

« الطَّاعِمُ الشَّاكِرُ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الصَّائِمِ الصَّابِرِ »

Someone who eats and is thankful (for the food) is just like someone who fasts and is patient (without food).¹⁶

Fasting in Ramadan

Fasting in Ramadan is something a Muslim has to do since it is one of the pillars of the religion. We know this because Allah says in the Quran:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴾

Oh you who believe, fasting is a command for you just like it was a command for those people before you so that you may become righteous.¹⁷

Ibn 'Umar was one of prophet Muhammad's friends and his follower. We also know that fasting in Ramadan is something we have to do because Ibn 'Umar said that prophet Muhammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

« بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ : شَهَادَةِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللهُ، وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللهِ، وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ، وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ، وَحَجِّ الْبَيْتِ، وَصَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ »

¹⁶ Recorded by al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah (see al-Albānī's "Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah," no. 1427) and by al-Albānī in "al-Ṣaḥīḥah," no. 655.

¹⁷ The Quran, Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:183.

Islam is built on five pillars:

1. Truly believing and saying that nothing should ever be worshipped except Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah
2. Praying
3. Giving charity
4. Making the pilgrimage
5. Fasting in Ramadan.¹⁸

Once a Bedouin with messy hair came up to the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and said to him, “Oh messenger of Allah, tell me how much Allah says I have to pray.” So the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) answered:

« الصَّلَوَاتُ الْخَمْسُ إِلَّا أَنْ تُطَوِّعَ شَيْئًا »

Only the five prayers unless you want to do more.

The man then said, “Tell me how much Allah says I have to fast.” The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

« شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ إِلَّا أَنْ تُطَوِّعَ شَيْئًا »

Only the month of Ramadan unless you want to do more.

The man then said, “Tell me how much charity Allah says I have to give.” So Allah’s messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) told him about all the main rules of Islam. The Bedouin then said, “I swear by Allah who has honored you, I will not do anything more, and I will not

¹⁸ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 8) and Muslim (no. 16).

do anything less than what Allah says I have to do.” After hearing the man say that, prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

« أَفْلَحَ إِنْ صَدَقَ - أَوْ دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِنْ صَدَقَ - »

He will be successful if he is telling the truth – or he said – He will go to paradise if he is telling the truth.¹⁹

Why is Fasting in Ramadan Good for Us?

1. The messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said in a ḥadīth:

« مَنْ صَامَ رَمَضَانَ إِيمَانًا وَاحْتِسَابًا غُفِرَ لَهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِهِ »

Whoever fasts in Ramadan just because he believes Allah says he has to fast and because he hopes for the reward from Allah for fasting, then Allah will forgive all his past sins.²⁰

2. A man once came to the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and asked him, “Oh messenger of Allah, if I truly believe and say that nothing should be worshipped except Allah and that you are the messenger of Allah, and I pray the five prayers, I give charity, and I fast in Ramadan, what kind of person will I be?” The prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) answered him:

« مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ »

You will be one of the truthful people and the martyrs.²¹

¹⁹ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1891) and Muslim (no. 11).

²⁰ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1901) and Muslim (no. 760).

3. The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also said:

« أَتَاكُمْ رَمَضَانُ شَهْرٌ مُبَارَكٌ، فَرَضَ اللهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ صِيَامَهُ، تُفْتَحُ فِيهِ أَبْوَابُ السَّمَاءِ، وَتُغْلَقُ فِيهَا أَبْوَابُ الْجَحِيمِ وَتُغْلَقُ فِيهِ مَرَدَّةُ الشَّيَاطِينِ، لَلَّهِ فِيهِ لَيْلَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ، مَنْ حُرِمَ خَيْرُهَا فَقَدْ حُرِمَ »

Ramadan has come to you and it is a month that Allah has blessed. Allah says you must fast during the month. In Ramadan, the gates leading to heaven are open and the gates leading to the fire are closed. The strongest and meanest devils are chained up during Ramadan. There is a night in the month that is special to Allah and doing good deeds in that night is better than doing good deeds for a thousand months. Whoever does not get the good blessings of that night has for sure lost a lot of good blessings.²²

4. Prophet Muhammad's friend, Abū Hurayrah, said that the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

« إِذَا كَانَ أَوَّلُ لَيْلَةٍ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ صَفَّدَتِ الشَّيَاطِينُ وَمَرَدَّةُ الْجِنِّ، وَغُلِّقَتْ أَبْوَابُ النَّيِّرَانِ فَلَمْ يَفْتَحْ مِنْهَا بَابٌ، وَفُتِّحَتْ أَبْوَابُ الْجَنَّةِ فَلَمْ يُغْلَقْ مِنْهَا بَابٌ، وَيُنَادِي مُنَادٍ: يَا بَاغِيَ الْخَيْرِ أَقْبِلْ، وَيَا بَاغِيَ الشَّرِّ أَقْصِرْ. وَلِلَّهِ عِتْقَاءُ مِنَ النَّارِ، وَذَلِكَ كُلُّ لَيْلَةٍ »

On the first night of the month of Ramadan, the devils are chained up and so are the strongest, meanest of the Jinn. The gates leading to the fire are closed and

²¹ Recorded by al-Bazzār and Ibn Ḥibbān, and al-Albānī says it is authentic in “Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb” (no. 989).

²² Recorded by Ahmad and al-Nasā’ī (see al-Albānī’s “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Nasā’ī,” no. 1992) and by al-Albānī in “Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb” (no. 985).

not one of its gates will be opened. The gates leading into paradise are opened and not one of them will be closed. A caller (either Allah or an angel) will call out in Ramadan, “Anyone who wants to do good, come forward. And anyone who wants to do bad, stop.” Allah frees people from the fire, and that happens every night in Ramadan.²³

5. The messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

« الصَّلَوَاتُ الْخَمْسُ وَالْجُمُعَةُ إِلَى الْجُمُعَةِ وَرَمَضَانُ إِلَى رَمَضَانَ مُكَفِّرَاتٌ مَا بَيْنَهُنَّ إِذَا اجْتَنِبْتَ الْكَبَائِرَ »

Between each of the five prayers, and between one Friday to another Friday, and between one Ramadan to another Ramadan, Allah forgives whatever sins a person does between them as long as the person keeps away from the major sins.²⁴

²³ Recorded by al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah. See al-Albānī's “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī” (no. 549).

²⁴ Recorded by Muslim (no. 233).