ISLAMIC LIFE AND EDUCATION

ISLAMIC FASTING

An Easy Guide to Ramadaan and the Rules of Saum

Adapted and Organised from the Teachings of
Heavenly Ornaments (Behishti Zewar)

Written by

Islamic Life and Education

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An Easy Guide to Ramadaan and the Rules of Saum

First Edition

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This book has been adapted and arranged for classroom and self-study use. It is based on the teachings in Heavenly Ornaments (Behishti Zewar). We have tried our best to present the source material accurately. If you want a clear ruling on any matter of Islamic law or belief, please ask a qualified scholar directly.

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To every student who is learning the discipline and reward of fasting for the sake of Allah, and to the scholars, past and present, whose teaching this book simply tries to organise and pass on.

How to Use This Book

Read this book in order, because later chapters build on words and ideas that were explained earlier. This is especially true of the words fard, wajib, sunnah, mustahab, and makruh. They tell us how important a rule is. They are explained more fully in the companion book Islamic Prayer. Every chapter in this book follows the same pattern, described below, so you always know what to expect.

- Headings and subheadings break each chapter into clear topics.
- Bullet lists are used when a group of related things is easier to read as a list than as a paragraph. An example is the different reasons a fast might be excused.
- “Did You Know?” boxes appear in several chapters. Each one shares a short extra fact connected to what you just read.
- Diagrams are placed where a picture helps you see how ideas fit together.
- Every chapter ends with a Chapter Summary, a list of Key Terms, and a few Review Questions. You can use them to study on your own or to talk about in class.

A Glossary at the end of the book lists every key term used in the book, so you can look words up quickly while you read or revise.

Preface

This book, **Islamic Fasting**, explains the rules of **Saum**: fasting, especially in the month of Ramadaan. It is an easy textbook for students who learn in class or on their own. The lessons are taken and arranged from classical Islamic books, especially the section on fasting in Heavenly Ornaments (Behishti Zewar), a well-known book of Islamic knowledge.

The book has **four parts**:

- **Part One** covers the basics: why Muslims fast, the different kinds of fasts, and how the start of Ramadaan is confirmed by sighting the moon.
- **Part Two** looks at other kinds of fasts besides the fasts of Ramadaan itself: fasts that are made up later, fasts promised to Allah, and fasts kept simply by choice.
- **Part Three** covers how to keep a fast correctly day to day: what breaks it, what does not, and the times of Sehri and Iftaar.
- **Part Four** covers the exemptions built into the rules of fasting: who is allowed to skip a fast, what must be done instead, and the special practice of I'tikaaf.

Each chapter follows the same pattern. It explains an idea, gives an example, and then ends with a chapter summary and a short list of key terms to help you remember what you learned. Diagrams are included wherever a picture explains something better than words.

A note about how far this book goes: fiqh (Islamic law) has very detailed rulings for rare or complicated situations. This book focuses on the rules a student needs for everyday life. For anything unusual or difficult that is not covered here, always ask a qualified scholar.

— Islamic Life and Education

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PART ONE

UNDERSTANDING FASTING

CHAPTER 1

Why We Fast: Virtues and Basic Rules

The Reward of Fasting

Islamic teaching says that fasting carries enormous reward. Here are some hadith about it:

- One hadith says that a person who fasts through Ramadaan sincerely, seeking only Allah's pleasure, has all his or her past minor sins forgiven.
- Another hadith says that the change in the breath of a fasting person is more pleasing to Allah than the finest perfume.
- A further hadith describes a special table that is set up for those who fasted. They will eat and drink at it on the Day of Judgment, while everyone else is still waiting to be judged.

Fasting is described as one of the great pillars of Islam. Deliberately not fasting in Ramadaan, without a genuine reason, is treated as a major sin. It is said to leave a person's faith noticeably weaker.

Fasting is also described as a shield that protects a person from Hellfire. In a hadith from the Prophet (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam), Allah says about every good deed: “Every good deed is rewarded ten to seven hundred times, except fasting. Fasting is for Me, and I alone will reward it.”

Fasting is also described as half of patience, and as the charity of the body, just as wealth has its own charity.

A fasting person is said to have two special moments of joy. One is when he or she breaks the fast each evening. The other is when he or she meets Allah in the next life. On the Day of Judgment, both the fast and the Quran will speak up for a believer who kept them. They will ask Allah to forgive that believer.

Five Special Blessings of Ramadaan

Islamic teaching describes five blessings that are given especially to this Ummah (community) during Ramadaan:

1. Fish in the sea pray for the forgiveness of those who are fasting.
2. Paradise is decorated every day throughout the month, in expectation of the righteous arriving.
3. The devils are chained. This makes it easier for people to avoid evil and do good.
4. Each night, an unseen call goes out: “O seeker of good, come forward; O seeker of evil, stop.” And 600,000 people are freed from Hellfire every night, with even more freed on the very last night.
5. On that final night, Allah grants forgiveness to those who worshipped sincerely through the month. It is like a worker who is paid in full once his or her work is complete.

The Purpose of Fasting

Fasting is not simply about staying hungry. Its real purpose is to build self-discipline and character. It protects the body and soul, controls harmful desires, strengthens the heart, and helps a person resist sin. The Quran connects this purpose directly to the command to fast: “O believers, fasting has been made obligatory upon you, just as it was made obligatory upon those before you, so that you may develop self-control” (2:183).

Who Must Fast

Fasting in Ramadaan is fard on every Muslim who is sane and has reached puberty. It is not fard on a person who is not of sound mind, or on a child who has not yet reached puberty. But, as with prayer, parents are expected to start encouraging children to fast as they get close to that age. In this way, the habit is already familiar by the time it becomes obligatory.

The Ramadaan fast became fard in the second year after the Prophet's (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) migration to Madinah. At first, Muslims were given a choice between fasting and feeding a poor person. Later, fasting was made mandatory for every eligible Muslim. About children:

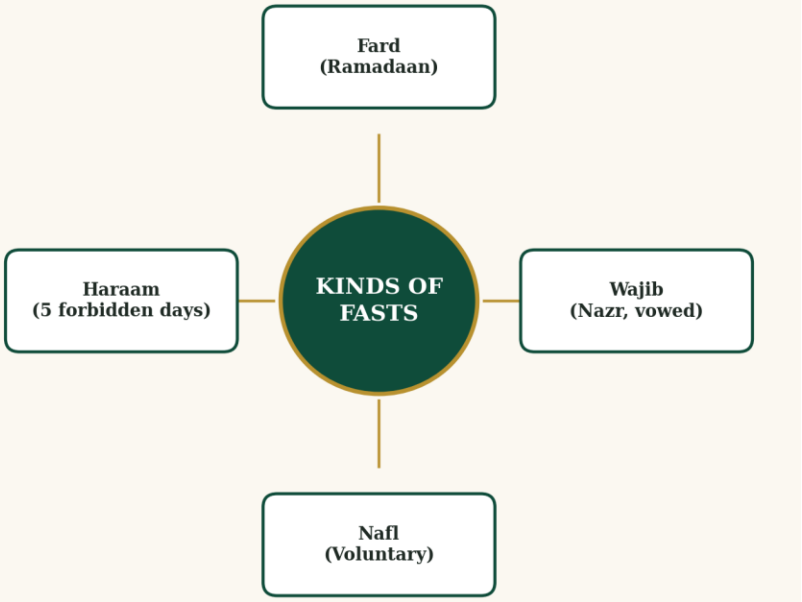
- A child under ten may be allowed to fast if the child is genuinely strong enough. But the child should never be forced, because the child's health always comes first.
- A child of ten can be gently encouraged, and corrected if careless. But the child's fasting should not turn into a public show.

Besides the Ramadaan fast, two other kinds of fasts are also fard:

- a fast that a person has promised to Allah (covered in Chapter 5)
- a fast kept to make up (qada) a missed obligatory fast (covered in Chapter 4)

Every other fast is nafl. It is voluntary. It is rewarded if kept, and there is no sin for leaving it out. There is one clear exception: fasting on the two days of Eid, and on the three days after Eid-ul-Adha, is not permitted at all.

Figure 1.1 — The Different Kinds of Fasts



What a Fast Actually Is

In the Shariah, fasting means making the intention to fast, and then completely staying away from food, drink, and marital relations from the approach of dawn until sunset.

The intention does not need to be spoken aloud. Simply deciding in the heart, "Today I am fasting," is enough.

Suppose a person goes a whole day without eating or drinking, but never actually intended to fast. Maybe the person was simply not hungry, or never had the chance to eat. This does not count as a valid fast at all.

Did You Know? *Because the intention is what makes a fast count, it makes no difference in Islamic law whether a person says the words of intention aloud in Arabic, aloud in English, or not at all. What matters is the sincere decision made in the heart.*

Did You Know? *The angel Jibreel is reported to have prayed against three kinds of people during Ramadaan: someone who goes through the month without being forgiven, someone who hears the Prophet's name and does not send blessings on him, and someone who is disrespectful to his or her elderly parents. The Prophet (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) said "Ameen" to each one.*

Chapter Summary

- Fasting carries great reward in Islamic teaching. Deliberately missing a Ramadaan fast without a reason is a major sin.
- Fasting in Ramadaan is fard on every sane adult Muslim. Two other kinds of fasts are also fard: qada fasts and vowed (nazr) fasts.
- All other fasts are nafl. The exception is fasting on the two Eid days and the three days after Eid-ul-Adha, which is never permitted.
- A valid fast needs a sincere intention, and staying away from food, drink, and marital relations from dawn until sunset.

Key Terms: Saum · Ramadaan · Niyyah

Review Questions

1. According to the hadith in this chapter, what happens to the past minor sins of a sincere fasting person?
2. On whom is fasting in Ramadaan fard, and on whom is it not?
3. Name the two other kinds of fasts, besides Ramadaan, that are also fard.
4. What makes a day of not eating or drinking count as a valid fast in Islamic law?

CHAPTER 2

The Fasts of Ramadaan

Making the Intention

For an ordinary fast of Ramadaan, a simple intention is enough: “I am fasting today.” It can be thought or said either the night before or before dawn. It is not even necessary to say that it is a Ramadaan fast and not some other fard fast. The intention is still valid either way.

Each day of Ramadaan needs its own fresh intention. But simply eating suhur with the general aim to fast that day is enough to count as making it.

If the intention is not made before dawn, it can still be made any time until midday, and the fast remains valid. The Quran itself ties the obligation directly to the month: “Whoever witnesses the month must fast it” (2:185).

During Ramadaan, any intention a person makes for that day is treated as the Ramadaan fast, whatever the person actually intended. Suppose someone tries to use a day in Ramadaan to make up a missed fast from a previous year, or to keep a vowed fast, or even tries to avoid the Ramadaan fast by intending something else. In every case, the fast of Ramadaan is what counts. The other intention simply does not take effect. The other fast must still be made up separately, after Ramadaan.

When the Moon Is Not Sighted

Suppose the new moon of Ramadaan is not sighted on the 29th of Sha'baan, whether because of clouds or any other reason. Then fasting should not begin the next day. Instead, Sha'baan is completed to its full thirty days, and Ramadaan begins the day after that.

On this uncertain day, it is best not to keep any fast at all, including qada, kaffarah, or vowed fasts, because the status of the day is not yet settled.

There is one exception. A person who already has a habit of fasting on that day of the week, such as every Monday, may continue as usual. If news later confirms that the moon was sighted, that fast even counts as his or her Ramadaan fast.

Chapter Summary

- A simple intention, without any details, is enough for an ordinary Ramadaan fast.
- Any intention made during Ramadaan is treated as the Ramadaan fast. Trying to use that day for a different fast does not work, and the other fast must be kept separately later.

- If the moon is not sighted on the 29th of Sha'baan, Sha'baan is completed to thirty days before Ramadaan begins. It is best not to keep any fast on that uncertain day.

Key Terms: Sha'baan

Review Questions

1. What is the smallest intention needed for an ordinary fast of Ramadaan?
2. If someone intends a qada fast during Ramadaan instead of the Ramadaan fast, which fast actually counts?
3. What should happen if the moon of Ramadaan is not sighted on the 29th of Sha'baan?

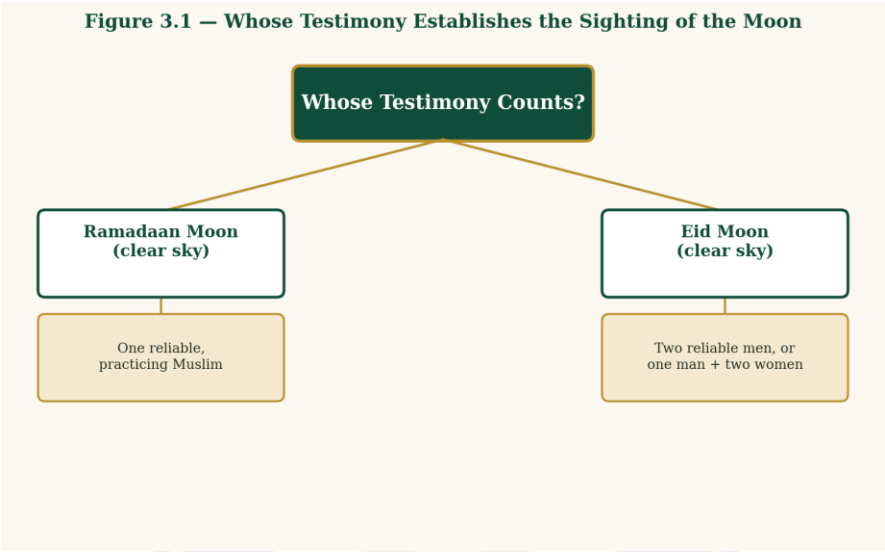
CHAPTER 3

The Sighting of the Moon

Whose Testimony Counts

The Islamic calendar follows the moon. So confirming the start of Ramadaan and the two Eids depends on reliable testimony that the new moon has actually been sighted. The standard for this testimony is different in different circumstances.

Figure 3.1 — Whose Testimony Establishes the Sighting of the Moon



If clouds or dust really hide the sky:

- **For the start of Ramadaan:** the testimony of one reliable, practising Muslim is enough.
- **For the Eid moon:** a stronger standard applies. Either two reliable men, or one reliable man together with two reliable women, must testify.

The testimony of a person who does not take his or her own religious duties seriously is not accepted. Examples are someone who openly neglects prayer or fasting, or who is known for dishonesty. It is not accepted however many oaths the person offers, and however many such people repeat the same claim.

When the Sky Is Clear

If the sky is completely clear on the 29th, ordinary testimony is not enough at all. A clear sky means everyone should have been able to see the moon themselves, if it were really visible. The only exception is if so many people report sighting it that it becomes practically impossible to imagine they are all mistaken or lying.

Did You Know? *The source of this book specifically warns against two popular habits that are not reliable. One is judging the moon's age by how "big" it looks. The other is relying on a fixed date pattern (for example, assuming that Ramadaan always starts a set number of days after a certain date in Rajab) instead of an actual, verified sighting.*

Who Decides, and What If Testimony Is Rejected

Here is how the start of the month is decided:

- In a Muslim-majority country, the announcement of the government or an official moon-sighting committee is binding, and individuals should follow it.
- In a non-Muslim country, trusted local Islamic scholars or committees decide for their own region.
- Nearby regions generally follow a single sighting, while distant regions may differ. The only fixed rule is that a lunar month can never be shorter than 29 days or longer than 30.
- An announcement of a confirmed sighting from a recognised Islamic authority over radio or television is valid, and people should act on it.

Suppose a person really sights the moon himself or herself, but the authorities reject the testimony. Ramadaan and the two Eids are not treated in the same way:

- **Ramadaan:** the person should still fast privately. If the person had not already been fasting, he or she makes qada afterward.
- **Eid:** the person must not celebrate alone, even if this means that his or her own count of fasting days reaches 31.

Chapter Summary

- Confirming Ramadaan or Eid depends on reliable testimony that the moon has been sighted. A higher standard of witnesses is needed for Eid than for Ramadaan.
- The testimony of a person who does not take his or her religious duties seriously is not accepted, however many times it is repeated.
- If the sky is completely clear, testimony is not accepted unless an overwhelming number of people report the same sighting.

Key Terms: Hilaal

Review Questions

1. How many witnesses are needed to confirm the start of Ramadaan under cloudy skies? How many are needed for Eid?
2. Why is the testimony of someone who openly neglects his or her prayers not accepted, even under oath?
3. Why does a completely clear sky need a higher standard of testimony than a cloudy one?

PART TWO

OTHER KINDS OF FASTS

CHAPTER 4

The Qada or Missed Fasts

Making Up a Missed Fast

A fast that was missed for any reason should be made up (qada) as soon as reasonably possible after Ramadaan ends. Delaying it without a good reason is itself a sin. When making the intention for a qada fast, it is enough to intend “a missed fast,” without naming the exact date. The exception is a person who owes qada for more than one year's Ramadaan. That person should name the specific year in the intention.

Unlike an ordinary Ramadaan fast, the intention for a qada fast must be made the night before, before dawn. An intention made only after dawn is not valid for qada. That day's fast would count as a voluntary (nafl) fast instead, and the missed fast would still have to be made up separately.

Order and Timing

Missed fasts may be made up on consecutive days or spread out. It is entirely the person's choice. Suppose a person still has fasts to make up when the next Ramadaan arrives. Then the person simply fasts the new Ramadaan as normal, and completes the earlier qada afterward. But letting it reach that point is not a good habit.

Unconsciousness and Loss of Sanity

Suppose a person becomes unconscious during Ramadaan, and it lasts for more than one day. Then the person must make qada for every day of unconsciousness except the very first one. This is because the person's original intention to fast on that first day still stood.

Suppose someone loses his or her sanity for a whole month of Ramadaan. Then no qada is owed for that month at all. But if the person's sanity comes back partway through, qada is owed only for the days after he or she lost it.

Chapter Summary

- A missed fast should be made up as soon as reasonably possible. Delaying it without a reason is a sin.
- The intention for a qada fast must be made the night before, unlike an ordinary Ramadaan fast.
- Missed fasts can be made up in any order and at any pace, even if this goes past the next Ramadaan.
- Long unconsciousness generally means the missed days must be made up. A whole month of lost sanity does not.

Key Terms: Qada

Review Questions

1. How is the intention for a qada fast different from the intention for an ordinary Ramadaan fast?
2. Can qada fasts be spread out over time, or must they be kept on consecutive days?
3. What is the difference in the qada duty between someone who is unconscious for part of Ramadaan and someone who loses his or her sanity for the whole month?

CHAPTER 5

The Nazr or Vowed Fasts

Making a Vow to Fast

A nazr is a vow made to Allah. For example, a person may promise to fast if a hoped-for outcome comes about. Once such a vow is made, fulfilling it becomes fard, and neglecting it is a sin.

A vow to fast can take two forms:

- **A vow that names a specific day.** For example: "If this matter of mine is resolved, I will fast tomorrow," or "I will fast next Friday." For this kind of vow, the intention to fast on that day can be made either the night before or any time until an hour before midday.
- **A vow that does not name a day.** For example: "I will fast," or "I will keep five fasts." For this kind of vow, the intention to begin one of those fasts must be made the night before. If the intention is made only after dawn, that day counts as a voluntary fast instead, and the vow is still not fulfilled.

Keeping the Vow on the Right Day

Suppose a person vowed to fast on a particular Friday. When Friday comes, the person simply intends "a fast," without saying it is for the vow, or even intends a nafl fast. The vow is still fulfilled, because the vow was tied to that specific day.

But suppose the person uses that Friday for a qada fast instead, whether on purpose or by forgetting. Then the qada fast is what counts, and the vowed fast must still be kept on another day.

Chapter Summary

- A nazr is a vow to fast. Once it is made, fulfilling it becomes fard.
- For a vow that names a specific day, the intention can be made any time until an hour before midday. For a vow that does not name a day, the intention must be made the night before.
- Using a vowed day for a different kind of fast, such as qada, means the vow is not fulfilled and must be kept on another day.

Key Terms: Nazr

Review Questions

1. What is a nazr? What happens if a person neglects to fulfil one?
2. Explain the difference in the timing of the intention between a vow tied to a specific day and one that is not.

3. Suppose a person vowed to fast on a Friday, but keeps a qada fast that day instead. Is the vow fulfilled? Explain your answer.

CHAPTER 6

The Nafl or Optional Fasts

Fasting by Choice

Outside Ramadaan, a Muslim may fast as often as he or she wishes. The more a person fasts, the more the reward grows. The only exception is the five days on which fasting is never permitted: the two days of Eid, and the three days after Eid-ul-Adha.

The intention for a nafl fast is simple: “I am keeping a fast” is enough. It may be made any time until about an hour before midday, as long as nothing has been eaten or drunk yet that day.

Once a person genuinely begins a nafl fast, even without having planned it in advance, it becomes wajib to complete that day's fast. If the person breaks it afterward without a valid reason, he or she must make up that one day later.

Days With Special Reward

- The 10th of Muharram, ideally together with the 9th or 11th, carries the promise that the sins of the past year will be forgiven.
- The 9th of Dhul-Hijjah (the Day of Arafah) carries the promise of forgiveness for both the past year and the year to come.
- The 15th of Sha'baan, and the six days after Eid-ul-Fitr, are considered especially virtuous nafl fasts.
- Fasting on the 13th, 14th, and 15th of every lunar month, or regularly on Mondays and Thursdays, is described as carrying a reward like fasting the whole year.

A Few Practical Notes

- A wife should not keep a nafl fast without her husband's permission if he is at home. If he asks her to break it, she may do so. She makes up that fast once he permits her to.
- It is permitted to break a nafl fast so as not to truly upset a host or a guest over a shared meal. There is no need to make it up.
- Suppose someone unknowingly begins a nafl fast on one of the five forbidden days. That fast should still be broken, and no qada is owed for it.

Chapter Summary

- A Muslim may keep nafl fasts freely outside Ramadaan, except on the five days when fasting is never permitted.

- Once a nafl fast is genuinely begun, it becomes wajib to complete it. Breaking it without a reason requires qada.
- Some days, such as the 10th of Muharram, the 9th of Dhul-Hijjah, and Mondays and Thursdays, carry special extra reward.

Key Terms: Nafl

Review Questions

1. What is the simplest valid intention for a nafl fast, and how late in the day can it be made?
2. Once a nafl fast is genuinely begun, what duty does a person take on?
3. Name two days that carry special reward for fasting, according to this chapter.

PART THREE

KEEPING A FAST CORRECTLY

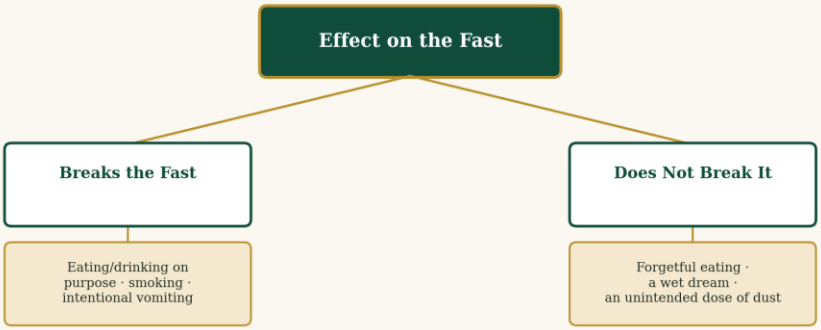
CHAPTER 7

Acts That Break or Do Not Break the Fast

The General Principle

A fast is centred on a deliberate choice to stay away from food, drink, and marital relations. Because of this, many things that happen by accident, or without real choice, do not break a fast. But the same act done on purpose usually does.

Figure 7.1 — Two Kinds of Everyday Situations During a Fast



Situations That Do Not Break a Fast

- Eating or drinking, or forgetting oneself and having marital relations, by a genuine mistake. Even a full meal eaten by forgetting does not break the fast.
- Having a wet dream during the day.
- Dust, smoke, or a small insect entering the throat entirely by accident.
- Applying kohl, oil, or a fragrance without smoke, at any time of day.
- Swallowing one's own saliva, in any amount.
- Vomiting without meaning to, in any amount. But deliberately making oneself vomit a full mouthful does break the fast.

Situations That Do Break a Fast

- Eating or drinking on purpose. This includes something as small as a food particle that was taken out of the mouth and then deliberately swallowed.

- Deliberately breathing in smoke, such as from smoking or incense.
- Marital relations during the hours of fasting. This also brings kaffarah, which is covered in a later chapter.
- Taking medicine by injection, enema, through the nose, or through the ear. This brings qada without kaffarah, unlike the situation above.
- Blood from a nosebleed that reaches the mouth and is swallowed down the throat.
- Water accidentally reaching the throat while rinsing the mouth, as in wudu. This breaks the fast and needs qada without kaffarah, but only if the person remembered at that moment that he or she was fasting. If the person had genuinely forgotten, it does not break the fast.
- Being forced against one's will to eat or drink. This brings qada without kaffarah. Only that one day must be made up.

Did You Know? *Some modern doctors point out that the ear is not directly connected to the stomach. So some present-day scholars say that ear drops may not break a fast. But most classical scholars still advise avoiding them during fasting hours, just to be safe.*

Did You Know? *Tasting food while cooking, and then spitting it out without swallowing, does not break a fast. Even so, it is best avoided unless there is a genuine need, such as making sure a dish is seasoned properly for someone who is waiting to eat it.*

Good Conduct While Fasting

Lying, using abusive language, and harming others do not technically break a fast. Yet they weaken it in spirit all the same.

The Prophet (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) said, “If someone does not give up lying and evil behaviour, Allah has no need for him to give up his food and drink.”

A fasting person who is insulted or provoked should simply reply, “I am fasting,” and not answer in the same way. Backbiting needs special care. The Prophet said that “the one who backbites has not truly fasted.”

Chapter Summary

- Genuine mistakes, such as forgetful eating, a wet dream, or a particle that enters the throat by accident, generally do not break a fast.
- Deliberate eating, drinking, smoking, and marital relations during fasting hours all break the fast.
- Marital relations during a fast bring an extra duty, kaffarah, unlike most other ways a fast can break.

Key Terms: Kaffarah

Review Questions

1. Why does eating a full meal by genuine forgetfulness not break a fast?

2. Give two examples of things that do not break a fast, and two that do.
3. What extra duty applies specifically to a fast broken through marital relations?

CHAPTER 8

Sehri and Iftaar

Sehri: The Pre-Dawn Meal

Eating Sehri before dawn is sunnah. It has its own reward, even if only a few dates or a sip of water are taken. The Prophet (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) said, “Eat suhur, for there is blessing in it.”

It is best to delay Sehri as late as reasonably possible, right up to just before the time of Fajr begins. But it should not be so late that real doubt appears about whether dawn has already arrived.

Suppose a household simply oversleeps and misses Sehri completely. The fast should still be kept as usual. Skipping the day's fast because of missing Sehri is treated as a serious lapse.

Suppose a person eats after dawn has really begun, believing there was still time left. Then that day's fast is not valid. It must be made up later, but there is no kaffarah. The person should still stay away from food and drink for the rest of that day, out of respect for the fast.

Iftaar: Breaking the Fast

It is mustahab to break the fast promptly, the moment sunset is genuinely confirmed. It is disliked to delay it without need. The Prophet (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) said, “People will remain good as long as they hasten to break their fast.”

On a cloudy day, the exact moment of sunset is less certain. Then it is better to wait a little longer, until the heart is truly satisfied that the sun has set. Do not rely only on a clock or on a distant Adhaan, which may itself be slightly early.

On breaking the fast, it is recommended to say, “Dhahaba al-zama'u wabtalatil-'urooqu wa thabatal-ajru inshaa Allah” (“The thirst has gone, the veins are refreshed, and the reward is confirmed, if Allah wills”). It is said that the dua of a fasting person is not rejected, especially at this very moment of breaking the fast.

The recommended order for breaking the fast is:

1. Dates.
2. If there are no dates, any other sweet food.
3. If nothing else is at hand, water.

Did You Know? *The source of this book corrects a popular but mistaken custom of breaking a fast with plain, rough salt, as if it carried special reward. This has no real basis. Dates, something sweet, or water are the recommended choices.*

Chapter Summary

- Sehri is sunnah and is best delayed until close to dawn. Missing it by oversleeping does not excuse skipping that day's fast.
- Eating after the true start of dawn, while believing there was still time, makes that day's fast invalid. It needs qada without kaffarah.
- Iftaar is best done promptly once sunset is genuinely confirmed, ideally with dates, something else sweet, or water.

Key Terms: Sehri · Iftaar

Review Questions

1. Why is it considered good practice to delay Sehri, but not too close to the very edge of dawn?
2. What should a household do if they oversleep and miss Sehri completely?
3. What is recommended for breaking a fast, in order of preference?

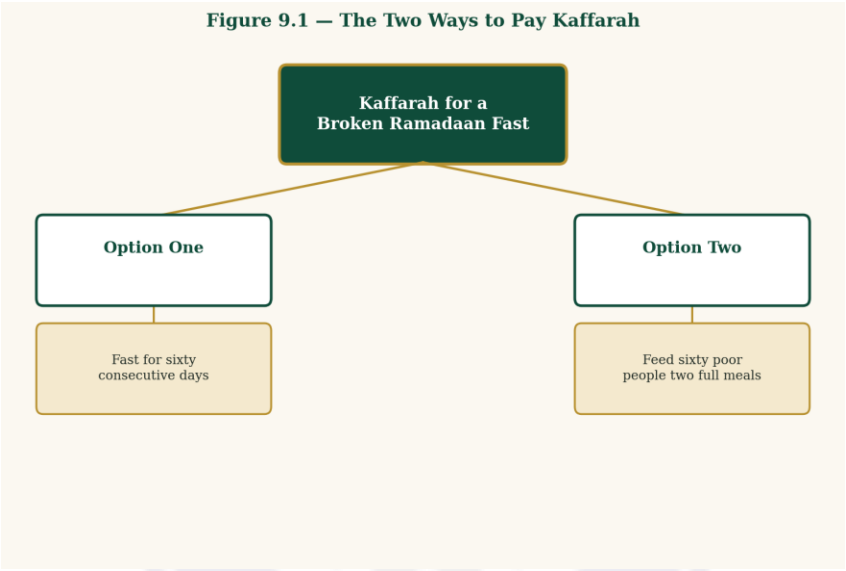
CHAPTER 9

Kaffarah

When Kaffarah Applies

Kaffarah is a serious, formal act of compensation. It becomes necessary in only one situation: when a fast of Ramadaan itself is deliberately broken by someone who had genuinely intended to fast that day. It does not apply to a broken nafl, qada, or vowed fast, however that fast was broken.

Figure 9.1 — The Two Ways to Pay Kaffarah



Fasting Sixty Consecutive Days

The first option is to fast for sixty days in a row, without a real gap. If even one or two days in the middle are missed for an ordinary reason, the sixty days must generally be started again from the beginning.

There is one exception. If a woman's sequence is interrupted by her monthly period, those days do not break the sequence. She simply continues as soon as she is able.

Feeding Sixty Poor People

A person who cannot manage sixty days of fasting in a row may instead do one of these:

- Feed sixty poor people two full, satisfying meals each.
- Give each of the sixty poor people a fixed amount of grain (or its equal value in money). The amount is the same as the amount set for Sadaqatul Fitr.

This may be done for sixty different people, or for one person over sixty separate days. But giving sixty days' worth of food to one person all at once, on a single day, only counts as one day's kaffarah, not sixty.

If several separate fasts are broken within the same Ramadaan, only one kaffarah is owed in total for all of them. But if fasts are broken in the Ramadaans of two different years, a separate kaffarah is needed for each year.

Chapter Summary

- Kaffarah applies only to a deliberately broken fast of Ramadaan, not to nafl, qada, or vowed fasts.
- The two options are fasting sixty days in a row, or feeding sixty poor people two full meals each (or giving an equal amount of grain or money).
- A woman's monthly period does not break the sequence of sixty fasting days. Other interruptions generally do.
- Breaking several fasts within one Ramadaan needs only one kaffarah. Breaking fasts in two different years needs a kaffarah for each year.

Key Terms: Kaffarah · Sadaqatul Fitr

Review Questions

1. To which specific situation does kaffarah apply?
2. Describe the two options for paying kaffarah.
3. Why does a woman's monthly period not break the sequence of sixty fasting days, while other interruptions generally do?

PART FOUR

EXEMPTIONS AND I'TIKAAF

CHAPTER 10

Conditions That Permit Breaking a Fast

Sudden, Genuine Emergencies

A fast that has already begun may be broken if a sudden and genuine emergency arises during the day. Examples are:

- a sudden serious illness
- being bitten by a snake
- thirst or hunger so strong that it truly threatens a person's life or health

The same applies to a pregnant woman who develops a genuine fear for her own life, or her child's life, during the day.

This is a narrow allowance for real, sudden danger. It is not for everyday tiredness or small discomfort. Suppose a woman wears herself out by doing hard work that was not needed, and becomes extremely thirsty as a result. She may still break her fast if her life is truly at risk. But she is responsible for having brought that difficulty on herself.

Chapter Summary

- A fast already in progress may be broken in a genuine emergency: a sudden serious illness, real danger to life, or extreme, life-threatening thirst or hunger.
- This allowance is for real emergencies, not ordinary discomfort. The fast may still be broken even if the difficulty was brought on by the person himself or herself.

Key Terms: Rukhsah

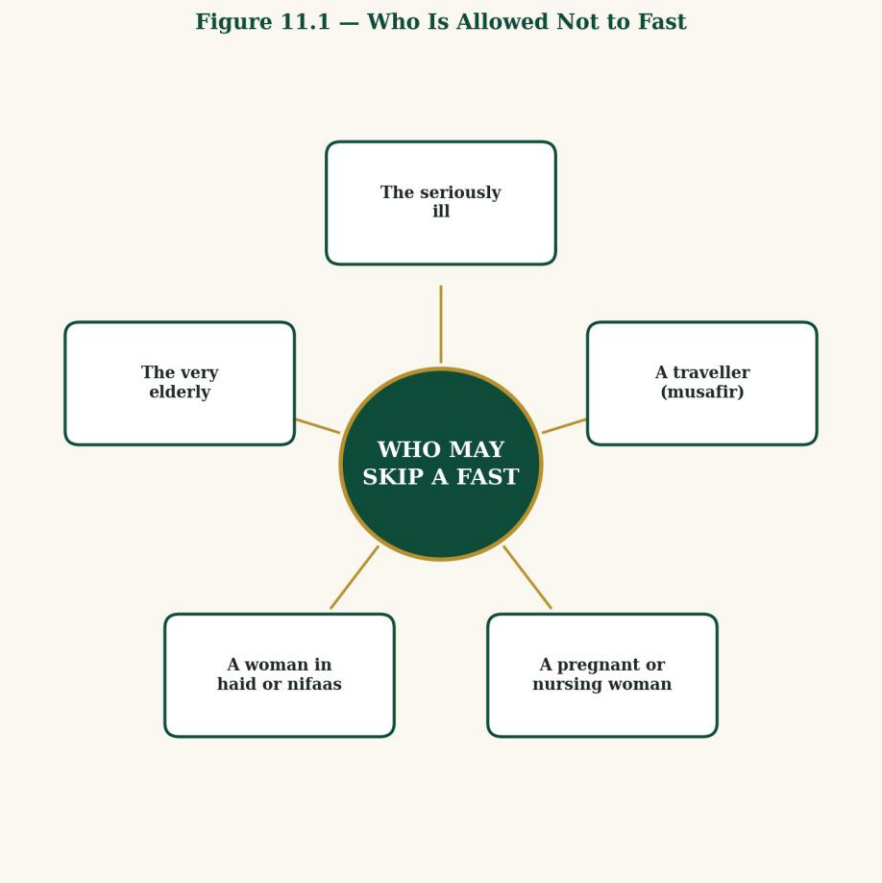
Review Questions

1. Give two examples of a genuine emergency that permits breaking a fast already in progress.
2. Does this allowance apply to ordinary tiredness or mild hunger? Explain your answer.

CHAPTER 11

Conditions That Permit Not Fasting At All

Illness



A person may skip a fast if he or she has a genuine illness that fasting would make worse, or that would seriously delay recovery. This should not be based on personal guesswork alone. Usually it should rest on the advice of a knowledgeable, practising Muslim doctor, or on the person's own clear past experience with the same condition. Missed fasts of this kind must be made up once the person recovers.

Travel

A musafir is someone travelling a distance of about 77 kilometres or more, as explained in the companion book on Salaah. A musafir is permitted not to fast, and makes up the missed fasts later. If the journey itself will not cause real difficulty, it is actually better to fast anyway. But there is no sin either way for a genuine traveller.

Pregnancy and Nursing

A pregnant or nursing woman may skip a fast if she fears for her own health or her child's health. If the family can truly afford to hire a wet nurse (a woman who feeds another woman's baby), this allowance for nursing does not automatically apply. The exception is when the child will only accept feeding from his or her own mother.

Haid and Nifaas

A woman in her monthly period (haid), or in the period after childbirth (nifaas), is not permitted to fast during that time at all. She makes up the missed days afterward.

- If she becomes pure during the night, she should still plan to fast the coming day, even if she has not yet bathed.
- If she becomes pure only after dawn has already broken, she may not begin that day's fast. She spends the rest of that day staying away from food and drink, like a fasting person. But this does not count as a fast.

A Death After Missing Fasts

Suppose a person never had a real chance to make up fasts that were missed because of illness or travel. For example, the person died while still travelling or still unwell. Then he or she is not held accountable for those days.

Suppose a person did have a real chance to make up the missed fasts, but did not. Then he or she is expected to arrange, before death, for fidyah to be paid on his or her behalf. This is covered fully in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

- A person who is truly ill, a traveller, and a pregnant or nursing woman who truly fears for her own or her child's health may all skip a fast and make it up later.
- A woman in haid or nifaas may not fast during that time at all. She makes up the missed days afterward.
- A person who never truly had the chance to make up missed fasts before passing away is not held accountable for those days.

Key Terms: Haid · Nifaas · Musafir

Review Questions

1. On whose advice should a decision to skip a fast because of illness normally rest?
2. What distance defines a musafir, and what must a musafir do about the fasts missed while travelling?
3. What happens if a woman becomes pure from haid only after dawn has already broken that day?

CHAPTER 12

Fidyah

Who Pays Fidyah

Fidyah applies to two specific groups of people. In both cases, the situation is permanent, not temporary:

- someone who is extremely elderly, with no real strength left to fast
- someone who is chronically ill (ill for a long time), with no real hope of getting well enough to fast

In place of every fast they cannot keep, they may do one of these:

- give a poor person a fixed amount of grain, the same amount as set for Sadaqatul Fitr
- feed one poor person two full meals
- give the cash value instead

This may be spread across several different poor people. It does not have to be given to only one.

Suppose a person in this position unexpectedly regains strength or recovers. Then the missed fasts must be made up as qada after all. But the fidyah already given still counts for its own separate reward.

Fidyah After Death

If a person dies still owing qada fasts, it is important that he or she arranges beforehand for fidyah to be paid from the estate (the things the person leaves behind). This becomes the duty of the heirs. It is taken from up to one third of what remains of the estate after funeral costs and debts are paid. But this is only if the person actually left instructions for it.

Heirs may still choose to pay it willingly, even without such instructions. But it cannot be taken directly from the estate without either those instructions or the willing agreement of every adult heir.

> ***Did You Know?*** *The very same fidyah rules in this chapter also apply to prayers that a person leaves unmade at death. Fidyah is counted across six daily prayers (the five obligatory prayers, plus Witr), not per missed fast.*

Chapter Summary

- Fidyah applies to people who are permanently elderly or chronically ill. It takes the place of fasts that they have no real hope of ever fasting or making up.
- It is given as grain, a full meal, or its cash value, for each missed fast. It may be spread across several poor people.

- If a person recovers after paying fidyah, the missed fasts must then be made up as qada too.
- Fidyah owed at death should be paid from the estate, ideally following the person's own instructions.

Key Terms: Fidyah

Review Questions

1. To which two groups of people does fidyah apply?
2. What are the different ways fidyah can be given?
3. What happens if a person who has been paying fidyah later unexpectedly gets well or regains strength?

CHAPTER 13

I'tikaaf

Laylat al-Qadr (The Night of Power)

Somewhere among the last ten nights of Ramadaan is Laylat al-Qadr, the Night of Power. Worship on this one night is better than a thousand months. The Prophet (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) increased his own worship throughout this time. He stayed awake at night, prayed hard, and encouraged his family to do the same. Muslims are advised not to waste these precious nights on entertainment or errands.

What I'tikaaf Is

I'tikaaf means withdrawing for devoted worship during the last ten days of Ramadaan. It should ideally begin before the 20th day and continue until the moon of Eid-ul-Fitr is sighted.

- **For men:** it means staying inside a masjid where the five daily prayers are held in congregation.
- **For women:** it means staying in the place set aside for prayer in their own home.

Once a woman begins her I'tikaaf, she should not leave that spot, except to use the toilet, or for food and drink if there is truly no one else who can bring it to her. She also stays there to sleep. It is best to spend the time actively in worship, by reciting the Quran, praying voluntary prayers, and remembering Allah, and not to pass the time idly.

Interruptions to I'tikaaf

If a woman's period begins, or she enters nifaas, during I'tikaaf, she must stop straight away. I'tikaaf is not valid in that state. When she is pure again, she makes up only the day on which this happened.

If that make-up day falls after Ramadaan has ended, she must fast that day specially for this purpose. But if she makes it up while still within Ramadaan, the Ramadaan fast she is already keeping that day covers it too.

During I'tikaaf, marital relations are not permitted. Even simple physical affection, such as embracing, is not permitted.

A Closing Thought

This chapter closes both the last part of the book and the whole book. I'tikaaf brings together everything discussed in the earlier chapters: fasting, devoted worship, and deliberately stepping away from everyday distractions. All of this comes together in one focused practice at the very end of Ramadaan. In this way,

the month that begins with the discipline of an empty stomach ends with the discipline of a focused heart. The many detailed rules in this book all point toward the same purpose: drawing a believer closer to Allah.

Chapter Summary

- I'tikaaf is a time of devoted withdrawal in the last ten days of Ramadaan. Men do it in a masjid, and women do it at home.
- Once I'tikaaf has begun, a person should not leave the place of I'tikaaf, except for real necessity.
- If a woman's period or nifaas begins during I'tikaaf, she must stop. Later she makes up only the day it happened.
- Marital relations and physical affection are not permitted during I'tikaaf.

Key Terms: I'tikaaf

Review Questions

1. Where does a man do I'tikaaf, and where does a woman do it?
2. In what circumstances may a person in I'tikaaf leave the place of I'tikaaf?
3. What must a woman do if her monthly period begins during I'tikaaf? How does she make up for it afterward?

Glossary of Terms

This glossary lists the key Arabic and Islamic terms used in this book, for quick reference.

Fard — A compulsory act. If it is left out, the whole act of worship is not valid.

Fidyah — A payment, usually of food or its value, given in place of a fast that a person has no real hope of ever being able to keep or make up.

Haid — A woman's monthly bleeding, during which fasting is not permitted.

Hilaal — The new crescent moon. Seeing it marks the start of a new Islamic month.

Iftaar — The breaking of a fast at sunset.

I'tikaaf — A period of devoted withdrawal in the masjid or at home, especially in the last ten days of Ramadaan.

Kaffarah — A serious act of compensation owed for deliberately breaking a fast of Ramadaan.

Laylat al-Qadr — The Night of Power in the last ten nights of Ramadaan. It is better than a thousand months of worship.

Makruh — Discouraged in Islamic teaching, though not sinful to do.

Musafir — A traveller, under the rules of Islamic law.

Mustahab — A good, recommended practice. It is rewarded if done, but not sinful if left out.

Nafl — A voluntary act of worship, beyond what is obligatory or sunnah.

Nazr — A vow made to Allah, which becomes binding once it is made.

Nifaas — Bleeding after childbirth, during which fasting is not permitted.

Niyyah — Intention; the decision in the heart to do a specific act of worship.

Qada — Making up a missed fast or prayer.

Ramadaan — The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, in which fasting is fard.

Rukhsah — A concession or allowance in Islamic law. It permits an easier option in real hardship.

Sadaqatul Fitr — A fixed charitable amount, used as the basis for working out fidyah and kaffarah payments.

Sehri — The meal eaten before dawn, before beginning a fast.

Sha'baan — The eighth month of the Islamic calendar, right before Ramadaan.

Saum — Fasting.

Sunnah — A strongly encouraged practice, following the example of the Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam).

Wajib — A necessary act, close to fard in importance.