

# All You Need to Know About Fasting in Ramadan

*By Imam Khalid Shahu*

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious the most Merciful, and peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah, his Wives, Family, Progeny and all Companions to the day of Judgment.

The following pages are aimed to educate ourselves about a great action of worship “*Fasting in Ramadan*”. Their main objective is to know how was the fasting of our great Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him), so that we can follow his model. So, What is fasting? What are the practices (sunan) of our beloved prophet in fasting? What are some of the issues that may arise while fasting and which may affect our fasting? And how can we deal with them properly?

## I. Definition & Purpose

Linguistically speaking, the Arabic word ‘sawm’ is used for fasting. The verb ‘to fast’ means ‘to refrain’ (i.e. absolute abstention and self-restraint). From an Islamic legalistic perspective, fasting means abstention from drinking, eating and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset. Allah the Most High said:

*“Eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread of the dawn. Then strictly observe the fast until nightfall”* (Al-Baqarah: 187)

Even though Muslims abstain from food, drink and all sensual pleasures, from dawn to sunset, that doesn’t mean that food, drinks or sexual relations are entirely out of the picture. Two main

meals are taken each day of fasting, including Ramadan: The Suhoor (pre-dawn meal) and the Iftar (meal taken after sunset). A man can also practice sexual intercourse with his wife before dawn and after sunset.

Now, although the definition indicates restraining the stomach and private parts from whatever nullifies the fasting, other body parts such as tongue, eyes, ears, etc. are equally obligated to be restrained. The most significant aspect of fasting is the development of Allah’s consciousness and piety in the heart and the soul of a fasting person. One must abstain from immoral behavior and attitude as well. Refraining from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse is essential during fasting but it is not sufficient. This is indicated in the Hadith narrated by Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him), Allah’s Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) said:

*“He who does not desist from obscene language and acting obscenely (during the period of fasting), Allah has no need that he did not eat or drink.”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

For instance, if the faster wants to gain the total rewards of fasting, he/she must avoid backbiting, slander, and lies; the eyes should avoid looking into things that are considered unlawful; the ears must stop from listening to conversations, words, etc. that injures the fasting, and the heart and mind must be restrained from being concerned with things that spoil the spirit of fasting.

## II. Prophetic Practices in Fasting

### 1. Merits of the Pre-Dawn Meal (Suhoor)

*“The Suhoor is a blessed meal, so do not leave it, even if one of you just takes drops of water, since Allah sends mercy and His Angels seek*

*forgiveness for those who take the Suhoor”*  
(Ahmad)

*“We took Suhoor with the Messenger of Allah and then we stood up for prayer. I said: How long was the interval between the Athan and Suhoor? He replied: The time required for the recitation of fifty verses”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

*Amr Ibn Al Aass (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Allah’s Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) said: “The difference between our observance of fasting and that of the People of the Book is the eating of Suhoor”*  
(Muslim)

## *2. Breaking the Fasting Hastily*

*Sahl Ibn Sad (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Allah’s Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) said: “My people will continue doing fine as long as they hasten in breaking the fasting”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

*Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him) said: ““Allah the Most High says: from amongst my slaves, the Quicker the one is in breaking the fast, the dearer is he to me”* (At-Tirmidhi)

*Abu Atiyah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Masruq and he visited Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) and said: “There are two of the Messenger’s companions and neither of them holds back from doing good acts: One of them hastens to break the fasting and hastens to pray while the other delays breaking the fasting and delays praying the Maghrib. She asked: which of them hastens to break the fasting and hastens to pray? We told her that it was Abdullah Ibn Masood. She said that Allah’s Messenger does so”* (Muslim)

## *3. Breaking the Fasting with Fresh/Dry Dates or Water*

*Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him) used to break his fasting before offering prayers with some fresh dates, but if there were no fresh dates, he would take a few dry dates, and if there were no dry dates he would take a few drops of water”* (Tirmidhi)

## *4. Supplication at the Time of Breaking the Fasting*

The Messenger of Allah used to say the following recommended supplication at the time of breaking the fasting:

*[Allah humma laka sumna, wa 'ala rizqika aftarna. Dahaba Dama', wabtallati al-uruk, wa thabata al-ajru in chaa Allahu ta'ala]*

*“O Allah for you we have fasted And on Your provision we have broken the fasting. The thirst is gone, the veins are wet, and the reward is confirmed by Your Grace”* (Abu Dawood)

## *5. Abstaining from Falsehood and Indecent Actions*

*The Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) Said: “If one does not abandon falsehood and indecent actions Allah has no need that he should abstain from his food and his drink”* (Al-Bukhari)

*He (peace & blessings be upon him) also said: “It may be that a fasting person attains nothing but hunger and thirst from his fasting”* (Ahmad, Ibn Majah & Al-Bayhaki)

## *6. Not Being Excessive in Food & Drink*

Allah the Most High says: *“Eat and drink and do not be excessive. Verily Allah does not love those who are excessive”* (Al-A'araf: 31)

*The Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) said: “Satan (evil) runs in the circulatory system of the son of Adam in the same way blood circulates in our system; so tighten his passages with hunger”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

## **III. Permissible Actions While Fasting**

### *1. Brushing Teeth*

It is permissible to brush the teeth particularly using branches of a certain tree (Siwak), which is even desirable during fasting.

### *2. Taking a Bath or Cooling Oneself*

*with Water, Air Conditioning, etc.*

Abu Bakr ibn Abdurrahman (may Allah be pleased with him) reported from a number of companions that they had seen Allah's Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) pouring water over his head while he was fasting, due to thirst or extreme heat. (Ahmad and Abu Dawud).

### *3. Washing Mouth or Nose with water*

There is no harm to wash the mouth with water, without gargling, or using mouth spray, as long as it contains lawful ingredients. However, it is disliked to exaggerate gargling of water into the mouth or the nose while performing ablution.

*Ibn Habrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: O Messenger of Allah! Tell me about ablution. Allah's Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) said: "Perform the ablution well. Clean the base of your fingers and sniff water into the nose but be careful when you are observing fasting" (At-Termithi)*

### *4. Using Perfumes*

There is also no harm of applying perfumes on the head or the body during fasting.

### *5. Bloodletting or Donation for Medical Purposes*

It is permissible to have blood test or to donate blood without causing hardship.

*Ibn Abbas said: "The Prophet cupped while he was in the state of Ihram, and also while he was observing a fast." (Bukhari)*

*Anas Ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked whether they disliked the cupping for a fasting person. He replied in the negative and said, "Only if it causes weakness." (Bukhari)*

### *6. Taking Injections or Medicine Containing no Food*

It is allowed to take injections which have no food value irrespective of their taste being felt in the mouth or not. Similarly, using mouth inhaler if necessary because it is neither food nor beverage substitute.

### *7. Tasting Food on the Condition that it does not Reach the Throat*

*Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) Said: "There is no harm for a person to taste vinegar or anything whilst he is fasting as long as it does not enter his throat" (Bukhari)*

### *8. Dental Filing, Extracting or Scaling Teeth*

It is permissible to have dental filing or teeth extraction during fasting, however, such a patient should avoid swallowing medicine or blood.

### *9. Kissing and Hugging Your Wife*

In the Hadith reported by Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her):

*"The Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) would kiss and embrace (his wives) while he was fasting, for he had the most control of all of you over his desires" (Bukhari & Muslim)*

Omar Ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) asked the Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him):

*"Should someone, observing the fasting, kiss his wife? The Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him) said to him: Ask her (Ummu Salamah). She informed him that the Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him) did that, whereupon he said: Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him), Allah pardoned you all your sins, the previous and the later ones. Upon this the Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him) said: By Allah,*

*I am the most God-conscious among you and I fear Him most among you” (Muslim)*

However, young men or women are discouraged to kiss, fondle, touch skin to skin or have foreplay while fasting, as it may lead to loss of control. This is indicated in the Hadith narrated by Abdullah Ibn Amr Ibn al-Aass:

*“We were With the Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) when a youth came and said: ‘May I kiss my wife while I am fasting? The Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) said: ‘No’. Then an old man came and said: ‘May I kiss my wife while I am fasting? He (peace & blessings be upon him) said: ‘Yes’. So we began looking at one another, so Allah’s Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) said: “The old man is able to control his desires” (Ahmad)*

#### *10. Swallowing Things that Are Not Possible to avoid*

There is no harm for the person who observes fast to swallow his/her saliva, the dust of the road, sifting flour, smoke and so on. All these unprotected things are all overlooked.

#### *11. Having Food in the Mouth When Fajr is Beginning*

It is recommended that when Fajr starts if a person has food in his mouth, he should finish eating.

#### *12. Eating or Drinking Something Unknowingly or Being Forced to Do So*

If anyone, through forgetfulness, does something that would ordinarily break the fasting (i.e. eat, drink, etc.) his/her fast remains intact, provided he/she abandons the act as soon as he/she remembers that he/she is fasting. Allah the Most Merciful says:

*“Our Lord! Punish us not if we forget or fall into error” (Al Baqarah: 286)*

The prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) said:

*“Allah has pardoned for my Ummah the mistake, forgetfulness and that which was done under compulsion” (Ad-Darakutni and Others)*

This is also indicated in the Hadith reported by Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him), in which Allah’s Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) said:

*“Whoever forgets while he was fasting and eats or drinks let him complete his fast because Allah has fed him and given him to drink” (Bukhari & Muslim)*

#### *13. Discharge of Semen (as a result of thinking, or a wet dream)*

Though this does not nullify the fasting, it requires a bath. However, it is permissible for the fasting person to be Junub (having had intercourse or a wet dream) at the time of Fajr.

*Umm Salama (may Allah be pleased with her) narrated that Abu Bakr ibn Abdurrahman (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Marwan sent him to Umm Salamah to ask whether a person - who is in a state of janaba and the dawn breaks upon him - should observe fasting. She said that the Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him) was at times junub on account of intercourse and not due to sexual dream, and the dawn broke upon him, but he neither broke the fast nor recompensed” (Muslim)*

#### *14. Unintentional Vomiting*

This is evident by the Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) saying:

*“Whoever has an attack of vomiting while he is fasting, then no atonement is required of him, but whoever vomits intentionally then let him fast another day in its place” (Abu Dawood, At-Tirmithe & Others)*

### ***IV. Those Permitted to Break Fasting (But who must pay a “fidyah” for not fasting)***

## 1. The Elderly Person

When elderly men or women reach an age that weakens them from fasting, they do not have to fast but are required to feed a needy person for every day in Ramadan for which he or she has missed fasting. Allah the Most High said:

*“And as for those who can fast (with difficulty) they have (a choice either to fast or) to feed a poor person for every day”* (Al-Baqarah: 184)

## 2. Physical Disability

When an old person is mentally sound but physically weak, and observation of the fast would further weaken his body, he/ she does not have to fast but should feed a needy person for everyday missed. The aim of this religion is not to burden people to a point that they will be incapable physically of carrying out the duties enjoined by Allah the Almighty. This is evident in Allah’s words:

*“So fear Allah as much as you can”* (At-Taghabun: 16)

*“Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope”* (Al-Baqarah: 286)

## V. Those Permitted to Break Fasting (But who must make up the days for not fasting)

### 1. A traveller

It has been pointed out that a traveller has the option during a journey to fast or to compensate for it later on. This is clearly explained in many ahadith:

*Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) reported that Hamzah Ibn Amr Al-Aslami (may Allah be pleased with him) asked: “O Messenger of Allah! I am a person who fasts often, so should I fast while travelling? Allah’s Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) replied: Fast if you wish and refrain from fasting if you wish”*

(Bukhari & Muslim)

*Anas Ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) Said: “I travelled with the Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him) in Ramadan, and a fasting person would not criticize the one not fasting, nor the one not fasting criticize the fasting person* (Bukhari & Muslim)

However there is no disagreement amongst the scholars that: If fasting on a journey brings hardship upon a person, then it is better and more beloved to Allah that he breaks the fasting. This is based on the hadith narrated by Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him) who said:

*“The Messenger of Allah (peace & blessings be upon him) saw a person in a shade. He asked about him. The companions replied that he was fasting. Allah’s Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) said: “It is not righteous that you fast on a journey”* (Bukhari & Muslim)

However, if fasting on a journey does not produce hardship for a person, then it is better to fast.

### 2. Women During Period and in the Post Childbirth State

Fasting for women during the period of menstruation or of post childbirth state is forbidden and should be made up later, a day for a day. The Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) said:

*“During her monthly cycle she neither prays nor fasts”* (Bukhari)

Such a woman is considered like the sick, so she is permitted to break her fasting and must compensate the days she missed afterwards. This is indicated in Allah’s words:

*“Observing Saum (fasting) for a fixed number of days, but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number should be made up from other days”* (Al-Baqarah: 184)



### 3. The Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women

If a pregnant woman or breastfeeding mother feels that fasting may endanger their life and harm the unborn or newly born, Allah the Almighty gives them permission to break fasting. They will have to make it up at any time after Ramadan. However according to one opinion of scholars, they can break the fasting and pay the fidyah (ransom). They do not have to make up the days missed. The Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) said to one of his companions:

*“Come, I shall inform you about the fasting. Allah, the Blessed and Most High, remitted half the prayer for the traveller, and fasting for the pregnant and breastfeeding”* (At-Tirmithi, Ibn Majah, Abu Dawud & An-Nasae)

### 4. A Person Having a Sudden Illness

When a person has a sudden illness and his prognosis indicates a serious condition, which when fasting causes harm or affects his/her health, he/she is granted permission to break the fasting till recovery and should compensate for it. This is explained in the following verse in which Allah has allowed the sick person to refrain from fasting as a mercy for Him:

*“So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan i.e. is present at his home), he must fast that month, and whoever is ill or on a journey; the same number (of days which one did not fast must be compensated) from other days. Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you\* (Al- Baqarah: 185)

\* Note (1):

If a sick person or a traveller fast and withstand the hardships of the fasting, and continue to fast while feeling the

hardship, their fast will be valid but disliked, for they did not accept the concession that Allah gave them. The Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) said:

*“Allah loves to give allowances just as He hates that you commit sins” and in another narration “just as He loves to give His obligations”* (Ibn Hibban)

He also said: *“It is not righteousness to fast during a journey”*. (Bukhari & Muslim)

## VI. Actions that Nullify the Fasting with Atonement (Making up what was missed)

Things, which invalidate fast, are of two kinds. The first one requires atonement (only making up missed days), the other one not only requires atonement but also Kaffarah (a penalty). The following are the things that require atonement only:

### 1. Deliberate vomiting

This is indicated in the saying of the Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him)

*“Whoever has an attack of vomiting while he is fasting, then no atonement is required of him, but whoever vomits intentionally then let him fast another day in its place”* (Abu- Dawud, At-Tirmithi and Others)

### 2. Bleeding of Menstruation or After Childbirth

The beginning of menstruation or post-childbirth bleeding, even in the last moment before sunset.

*It is reported from Abu Hurairah and Ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with them) that Allah’s Messenger (peace & blessings be upon him) said: “Is it not if she menstruates then she does not pray, nor fast? We said: Yes indeed. He said: Then that is the deficiency in her Deen”* (Muslim)

Such woman should fast for the rest of the day, and she must compensate that day after Ramadan.

### *3. Taking Injections or Drugs that are Used Instead of Food (i.e. vitamin pills)*

Intentional intake of any thing that has the same effect as eating or drinking invalidates the fasting. For example, any injection that has nourishment in it and acts like food would break one's fasting. Similar is the use of drips containing glucose. These injections are meant to give nourishment to the sick person.

### *4. Letting Anything in the Mouth Intentionally*

The intake of any kind of food or drink that reaches the stomach invalidates the fasting. Similarly, intentional intake of any thing to the stomach, whether beneficial or harmful (such as a stone or a coin or a string etc.), nullifies the fasting.

### *5. Ejaculation of Sperm*

Indulging in intentional excretion of semen by masturbation or caressing or kissing or hugging etc. nullifies the fasting. It has also been stated by Muslim scholars that such a person needs a sincere repentance to Allah and asking for forgiveness and to make up the day(s) missed as well. If the fasting person knows that if he starts kissing his wife, he may not be able to control himself and it may lead to ejaculation, then it becomes unlawful for him to kiss her.

### *6. Breaking of Fasting Under Exceptional Conditions*

Muslims are permitted to break the fasting of Ramadan when there is danger

to their health or when forced to eat or drink. The fasting person should not be acting against his free will. In this situation he/she should make up his/her fasting later, at any other time of the year.

**\*\*Note (2):** Eating, drinking or having intercourse after dawn on the mistaken assumption that it is not dawn yet, would nullify fasting however, a person should complete the fasting and compensate the day. Similarly, engaging in these acts before Maghrib on the mistaken assumption that it is already sunset.

Although, obviously it is better to hasten in compensating the missed days of Ramadan than to delay them, it is not obligatory to compensate them immediately afterwards. It could be delayed whether due to excuse or not, due to what is reported from Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her):

*"It used to be that I had days to make up for Ramadan and I would not be able to do so except in Shaban"* (Bukhari & Muslim)

## ***VII. Actions that Nullify the Fasting with Expiation (Kaffara)***

Things that not only require atonement but also expiation are the following:

### *Sexual Interaction*

There is no disagreement among Muslim scholars that having sexual intercourse during Ramadan breaks the fasting and it requires both an expiation and making up the day(s). Just like eating and drinking, Allah the Most High has forbidden sexual interaction during fasting:

*It is made lawful for you to have sexual relations with your wives on the night of As-Saum (the fast). They are Libas [i.e. body cover; or screen,*

*or Sakan, (i.e. you enjoy the pleasure of living with her), for you, and you are the same for them. Allah knows that you used to deceive yourselves, so He turned to you (accepted your repentance) and forgave you. So now have sexual relations with them and seek that which Allah has ordained for you (offspring), and eat and drink until the white thread (light) of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread (darkness of night), then complete your Saum (fast) till the night fall. And do not have sexual relations with them (your wives) while you are in Itikaf (i.e. confining oneself in a mosque for prayers and invocations leaving the worldly activities) in the mosques. These are the limits (set) by Allah, so approach them not. Thus does Allah make clear His Ayat (proofs, evidences, lessons, signs, revelations, verses, laws, legal and illegal things, Allah's set limits, orders, etc.) to mankind that they may become Al- Muttaqun (the pious)\*. (Al-Baqarah: 187)*

The penalty of practicing sexual intercourse while fasting is (a) to free a slave, if one is not able to do so then (b) to fast an additional period of 60 continuous days, if one is not able to do so then (c) he must feed sixty poor people-one average meal each. This is also indicated in the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him):

*"A man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and said: "O Messenger of Allah! I am destroyed. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked: And what has destroyed you? He said: I cohabited with my wife in Ramadan. He said: "Are you able to free a slave? He said: ' No. He said: Are you able to fast two months consecutively? He said: No. He said: Are you able to feed sixty poor people? He said: No. He said: Then sit. So the man sat down. Then a large basket of palm leaves containing dates was brought to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and he said 'Give this in charity. The man said: There is no one between its two lava-plains poorer than us. So, the Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) smiled until his molar teeth became visible and said: 'Take it and feed it to your family" (Bukhari & Muslim)*

So, whoever breaks fasting with sexual

intercourse then he/she must make it up with another day and also give expiation - no disagreement is known concerning this.

\*\*\*Note (3):

According to Abu Hanifa and Malik (may Allah be pleased with them) eating or drinking without clear excuse needs expiation. This is due to what is reported by Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him):

*"A man came to the Prophet (peace & blessings be upon him) and said: "I broke fast a day in Ramadan deliberately. Allah's Messenger said: free a slave or fast two months consecutively or feed sixty poor people" (Malik)*

However, according to other schools of thoughts, eating or drinking deliberately while fasting nullifies the fasting and it is actually considered as a sin, but the person needs only to make up the day(s) he/she missed and seek Allah's forgiveness.

I hope that the readers of these pages find in them the guidance needed for a proper fasting. Finally, I ask Allah the Almighty to make this effort for His sake and to make it a permanent charity for my Parents, my Sheikh (Imam Yassine) and for all those whose companionship benefited me and is continuing to do so.