

What Fasting in Ramaḍān means to Muslims

The fourth pillar of Islam is fasting (in Arabic: *ṣiyām*). It is to fast throughout the month of Ramaḍān (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar). This is an act of worship that draws the Muslim closer to Allah (God), as the Qurān stated, **“Fasting has been prescribed upon you as it was prescribed upon those who came before you so that you may attain piety.”** (Qurān 2:183) In this month the Muslim pushes himself physically and spiritually in order to come closer to Allah.

Fasting from a spiritual aspect means that every Muslim should:

- Focus on getting closer to Allah
- Study and recite the Qur’an plentifully
- Improve obedience to Allah
- Give in charity
- Pray the night prayers
- Show kindness and generosity
- Seek forgiveness for sins

Fasting as a physical activity means:

- A Muslim has no food, drink or sexual relations from dawn till sunset.
- Immoral behaviour is not permitted at any time in the life of the believer and prohibited even more in Ramaḍān such as lying, deceiving others, carrying tales and scandal among the people, back-biting, etc.

In Muslim countries, life continues as normal but cafés, restaurants and work-place canteens close during the day because no one is eating or drinking. A Muslim takes a pre-dawn meal (*sahoor*) as the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) commanded before the morning prayer. Throughout this month people spend more time in reading and reciting the Qurān (which is the Book of God) and remembering Allah with words of praise and glorification (*dhikr*). Hundreds of millions of

Muslims look forward to Ramaḍān each year.

At dusk (sunset) everything changes. The Muslim begins by breaking the fast with some dates and water. He then prays the *Maghrib* prayer after the sun has set, after which he returns to his family to share in a well-prepared meal. Even at this stage, a Muslim is commanded not to go to excess in filling his belly. The Muslims should eat food they love that is wholesome and in moderation. Within two hours the Muslim returns to the Mosque and prays the obligatory night prayer (*‘Ishā’*) followed by quite a lengthy optional night prayer for which there is a huge reward from Allah. In non-Muslim countries like Britain, withholding from food provides added challenges:

1. If Ramaḍān falls into the summer, the daylight hours are very long, 16-18 hours sometimes, which makes fasting difficult. Nevertheless, it is still obligatory to fast.
2. People eat, drink and snack throughout the day in non-Muslim societies—so, some [weaker] Muslims may be tempted not to fast.

It should be noted that fasting is not obligatory upon everyone. Some people are exempt, such as children under the age of puberty who have not yet reached adulthood. Adulthood is known by whichever of the following takes place first:

1. Coarse hair in the private area.
2. Sexual discharge due to desire.
3. Reaching the age of fifteen.

For a female there is an additional sign: the onset of the menstrual cycle. Children can be encouraged to fast, but not forced. Some adults are also exempt due to their particular situation:

- Travellers upon a journey.
- The sick who are likely to recover.
- Menstruating women.
- Post-natal bleeding women (for up to 40 days).

These people are allowed to miss fasts but must make them up after Ramaḍān. There is yet another group who are exempt:

- Those permanently sick who are not expected to recover.
- Elderly people who cannot fast due to their age.
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women who fear for their babies if they were to fast.

These people must feed a poor person for each day missed.

Ramaḍān is known as the month of the Qurān because it was during this month that the Qurān was first revealed, and continued to be revealed by Allah to the angel Gabriel who would bring verses to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as and when events requiring guidance took place over the next twenty three years, until his death. God (the Mighty and Majestic) stated in the Qurān, **“The month of Ramaḍān is that in which was revealed the Qurān, a guidance for the people, and clear proofs of guidance and a criterion between truth and falsehood. So whoever sights the new moon of the month, let him fast it—and whoever is ill or on a journey, then an equal number of other days must be made up. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and He wants for you to complete the period, and to glorify Allah for that to which He has guided you, and so perhaps you will be grateful.”** (*Al-Baqarah* 2:185)

Many Muslims set themselves targets and really want to benefit in Ramaḍān and want to please Allah:

- They want piety, and fasting leads to piety and awareness of the Lord of creation whom they serve.
- Many Muslims try to complete the reading Qurān during this month by reading it daily.
- Many attend the Mosque every night and pray the night prayer (*Taraweeh*) behind the *Imām*. Women are also welcome to attend.

- Many want to change their lives for the better, so Ramaḍān gives them an ideal opportunity. They cease boyfriend and girlfriend relationships, they stop bad habits such as lying, deceiving, back-biting, smoking, drinking, listening to music, and watching movies.
- A lot of Muslims fall short in their behaviour throughout the year, but they know that Ramaḍān is a month of forgiveness and mercy, so they obey Allah and the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and do good deeds with the intention to carry on after the month in the same manner. So, they seek Allah's Mercy, Forgiveness and Guidance daily.
- They try to understand the message of the Qurān and *Sunnah* (the Prophet's Path) by sitting with knowledgeable teachers who teach them from reliable sources thus avoiding misguided ideologies. Every Muslim knows that the best understanding of the Religion is taken from the first three or four generations of Muslims, known as the *Salaf Aṣ-Ṣālih* (the Righteous Predecessors).
- All Muslims (male and female) should learn Islam and thereby protect themselves from falling into extremism, and from neglecting the obligations of the Religion.
- In Ramaḍān, Muslim communities become closer and stronger—people show mercy to one another, they are kind, charitable and generous, especially to their parents, close family and relatives.
- Fasting in Ramaḍān leads one to reflect upon the bounties of Allah such as the gift of life, happiness and security, the provision of food and drink, the blessing of good health and so on.
- When Muslims go hungry and thirsty, they are more likely to understand the plight of those who are poor and needy—so they give thanks to Allah for His Generosity. They readily help those less

fortunate than themselves. They feel sympathy for the poor and so they give in charity, thereby receiving more reward from Allah.

- Ramaḍān teaches Muslims self-control and reminds them that serving Allah must take priority over their own desires.

Devout Muslims exert themselves harder in prayer, recitation and glorification of Allah in the last ten nights of Ramaḍān because in these nights there is the **Night of Power and Decree** (*Lailatul-Qadr*) which is better than a thousand months of worship as Allah has said in the Qurān! Muslims were taught by the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to seek out the beginning of Ramaḍān by looking out for the new moon of the month. It is not correct to use pre-determined calculations for the beginning and end of Ramaḍān since that opposes the instruction of the Prophet. In fact he (ﷺ) said: **“When you see it (the crescent moon) fast, and when you see it again, cease fasting—and if there is cloud-cover then complete thirty days.”**

Finally, non-Muslims should know that Muslims worship only one God, and He is Allah, the Lord of all creation. He is the God of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and all the Prophets (peace and blessings be upon them all). So, if you wish to become a Muslim, pray, fast, and have your sins forgiven, and gain entry to Paradise, all it takes is for you to say:

Ash-hadu an lā ilāha illallāh wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadan ‘abduhu wa rasooluhu

‘I testify that none has the right to be worshipped except Allāh and I testify that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.’ With this testimony, a person enters the fold of Islam.

This short leaflet was compiled by Abu Khadeejah Abdul-Wāhid for Salafi Publications, Birmingham, UK © 2024. Please listen in to SalafiSounds.com throughout Ramaḍān.

WHAT FASTING IN THE MONTH OF RAMADĀN MEANS TO MUSLIMS

In light of the Qurān and Prophetic Tradition

An excellent guide for beginners and non-Muslims



@SalafiPubs
@CCDawah
@AbuKhadeejahSP
SalafiSounds.com
SalafiBookstore.com
AbuKhadeejah.com