

Fasting in Ramadhan

*a simple guide to
ritual, social & spiritual dimensions*

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The Prophet's Sermon Welcoming the Month of Ramadhān

“O people, indeed the month of Allāh has approached you with blessings, mercy and forgiveness. In the eyes of Allāh, it is the best of all months, its days are best of all days, its nights are best of all nights, and its hours are best of all hours.

“It is a month in which you have been invited to be guests of Allāh, and you have been made in it the people who have honour of Allāh. Your breathing in it is *tasbīḥ* (singing the praise of God), your sleep in it is an act of *‘ibādat* (worship), your deeds are accepted, and your prayers are answered to. Therefore, ask your Lord with sincere intentions and pure hearts to help you in fasting during this month and in reciting His Book. For the most unfortunate is one who is deprived of Allāh’s forgiveness in this great month.

“By your thirst and hunger, remember the hunger of the day of judgement and its thirst. Give charity to the poor and needy among you; lower your glances from what is not permissible for you to see, and refrain [from hearing] what is not permissible for you to hear. Show sympathy to the orphans of the people, and sympathy will be shown to your orphans. Repent for your sins, and raise your hands in supplications at the time of your prayers for that is the best of times in which Allāh looks towards His servants with mercy, answers them what they whisper to Him, responds to them when they call upon Him, gives to them when they ask Him, and accepts their prayers when they pray to Him.

“O people, your souls are dependent on your deeds, therefore release them [from Hell-Fire] by asking for forgiveness. Your backs are burdened with your weight [of sins], so lighten their burden by lengthening the *sajdahs* (prostrations); and He shall not threaten with Fire when people will stand [in prayers] for the Lord of the Universe.

“O people, whosoever among you gives *iftār* (meal to break the fast) to a believer who is fasting during this month, his rewards with Allāh will be the releasing of his neck [from the Hell-Fire] and forgiveness for his past sins.”

Someone asked, “O Messenger of Allāh, not all of us have the ability to do that.” He said, “Fear the Fire! Even by breaking a date. Fear the Fire! Even by drink of a water!”

“O people, whosoever among you improves his character (*khulq*) during this month, he shall have the pass for going over the *sirāt* (the bridge) on the day (of judgment) when the feet shall slip. Whosoever lessens the burden [of work] from his slave (and subordinates), Allāh shall lessen his reckoning (of his deeds) for him.

Whosoever prevents his evil (from people), Allāh shall prevent His anger from him on the day he shall meet Him. Whosoever severs the link with his relations in this month, Allāh shall sever His mercy from him on the day he shall meet Him.

“Whosoever fulfills a duty in this month, his rewards will be multiplied seventy times compared to the same deed done during other months. Whosoever increases the salawāt on me during this month, Allāh shall lighten his burden [of sins] on the day when He shall be lightening the burdens [of other good doers]. Whosoever recites a verse of the Qur’ān during this month, he shall have the reward of one who has completed the recitation of the entire Qur’ān during the other months.

“O people, the doors of Paradise are open during this month, so ask your Lord not to close them on you; and the doors of Hell are closed, so ask your Lord not to open them up for you. The satans are in chains, so ask Allāh not to impose them upon you.”

* * *

Imām ‘Alī stood up and said, “O the Messenger of Allāh, what is the best of deeds during this month?” The Prophet said, “O Abu ‘l-Hasan! The best of deeds during this month is to refrain from what Allāh has prohibited.”

Then the Prophet cried. ‘Ali asked, “O messenger of Allāh, what made you cry?”

The Prophet said, “O ‘Ali, I am crying for the injustice that will be done against you in this month. It is as if I see you that while you are praying to your Lord, the most wretched of the mankind...struck you [with his sword] on your head so that its blood coloured your beard.” ‘Ali asked, “O Messenger of Allāh, will this happen while I am at peace with my faith?”

The Prophet replied, “You will be at peace with your faith. O ‘Ali, whoever kills you is as if he has killed me, whoever hates you is as if he hates me, whoever curses you is as if he has cursed me because you are to me like my own soul, your soul is from my soul and your nature is from my nature. Verily Almighty Allāh created me and you, then He selected me and you, and chose me for prophethood and chose you for imāmat; so whoever rejects your imāmat, he has indeed rejected my prophethood. O ‘Ali, you are my heir, the father of my descendants, the husband of my daughter, and my successor to my community in my life as well as in my death; your command is my command and your prohibition is my prohibition. I swear by the One who raised me as the Prophet and made me the best of creation, you indeed are the proof of Allāh upon His creation, trustee of His secret and His vicegerent towards His servants.”

(Translated by SM Rizvi from Shaykh as-Saduq’s *‘Uyūn Akhbārī ‘r-Rida*, vol. 2, p. 265.)

Fasting in Islam: An Overview

The Tradition of Fasting

Fasting during the month of Ramadhan is one of the pillars of Islamic teachings. Almighty Allah says: “O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it had been prescribed for those (communities) who came before you. So that you may guard yourself (against displeasing Allah).” (2:183)

According to this verse, the tradition of fasting is not unique to Islam; even the Christians and the Jews are familiar with this tradition. For example, the Jewish people observe fasting in connection with the Day of Atonement; and there is the Christian tradition of Lent which refers to the period of forty days, excluding Sundays, from Ash Wednesday to Easter, which was until recent past observed annually as a season of fasting.

How do the Muslims Fast?

Fasting for Muslims means that all physically fit and mature Muslims have to totally and completely abstain from food, drink, smoking and sexual activity. This abstinence has to be exercised every day from dawn to dusk.

The Qur'an says: “It is made lawful for you to have sexual relations with your wives during the night of the fast.” (2:187) The same verse further says: “Eat and drink until the ‘white thread’ (i.e., dawn twilight) becomes visible from the ‘black thread’ (i.e., darkness below the horizon); and then complete the fast till night time...”

So during the month of Ramadhan, the daily schedule of a Muslim family changes. They get up while it is still night time to have their pre-dawn meal; and then go without food, drink or smoking for the entire day until the night. That is when they break their fast. The Qur'an is very clear that the fasting starts from dawn and ends after the night has set in – “then complete the fast till night” – and that is why the Shī'a Muslims, in following the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt, emphasize that one has to wait for some time after the sunset to break the fast because in their view sunset (*al-ghurub*) and night (*al-layl*) are not the same.

The length of the days of Ramadhan depends on the season in which that month occurs. The Islamic calendar is based on the lunar system, it is ten days shorter than the common calendar. An Islamic month begins with sighting of the new moon, and ends upon the sighting of the next new moon. When Ramadhan occurs in winter, the days are shorter; and it is easier to fast. But when Ramadhan occurs in summer, the days are longer, and it is not that easy to fast. This is one example of the justice and fairness by Allah so that all people may fast through various seasons; and that is why the lunar system of calendar is preferable for the religious rituals.

Is Anyone Exempted from Fasting?

Of course, Islam is a practical religion. The elderly, the sick, those who are traveling, the pregnant woman, and the nursing mother – all such people are exempted from fasting during the month of Ramadhan. Some of those people have to make up the days they have missed

when their situation returns to normal, while others are exempted entirely. As the Qur'an says, "Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire for you difficulty." (2:185)

The Philosophy of Fasting

You may be wondering why your Muslim neighbour, friend or co-worker has to fast the entire month of Ramadhan? There are many reasons and benefits to fasting. Some are spiritual and some are of a social nature.

(a) Spiritual Dimension:

The fasting during the month of Ramadhan is not for atonement or repentance. It is not a sort of punishment; it is a religious ritual for a positive purpose. In the verse quoted earlier which makes fasting an obligation on Muslims, Almighty Allah says, "so that hopefully you may guard yourself (against displeasing God)." This is also translated as "...you may become pious or more aware of God." This points to the spiritual purpose of fasting.

Let me now explain the spiritual dimension of fasting. As we all know, God has created various powers within us: On the one hand, we have soul, the conscience, the spiritual dimension; and, on the other hand, God has also created the elements of anger and desire in us. "Anger" is the power that repels whatever we think to be harmful to ourselves, and "desire" is the element within us which attracts whatever we perceive to be beneficial to us. There is a constant struggle between the soul, the conscience and reason, on the one hand, and the powers of anger and physical desire on the other hand. All our emotions and physical desires can be classified under "anger" and "desire".

These dimensions of human life are important for our survival in this world. However, Islam says that a successful human being is a person who controls the powers of "anger" and "desire" by the means of his soul, conscience or reason. Only by controlling – not totally suppressing– anger and desire, can an individual attain a balanced personality. Islam wants its followers to be in control of their lives, and not become slaves of their desires. This is, indeed, the major jihad, in Islam. By "major jihad," we mean the spiritual struggle which goes on within each one of us.

The month of Ramadhan is an annual training program for Muslims to strengthen their soul and spirit; to energize themselves spiritually by strengthening their will power. Fasting is a spiritual program by which one can bring the powers of anger and desire in control of one's soul and reason.

How does the fasting of Ramadhan help us in this way? By totally abstaining from food, drink, and sexual activity –the strongest of desires that God has created within us– for 29 or 30 days will surely strengthen our spirit and soul. We will gain more willpower, and hold more control of ourselves, rather be slaves of our desires.

At the end of the month, a Muslim hopes to have become spiritually a stronger person, in control of his own life. In this sense, it is indeed God's blessing to us that we have the fasting of the month of Ramadhan every year.

Of course, there are many other days in the Islamic calendar when fasting is recommended, but not obligatory.

- ◆ A partial list of some highly recommended days of fasting besides Ramadhan:
- ◆ 1st & last Thursday of each Islamic month.
- ◆ 1st Wednesday after the 10th of each month.
- ◆ 13th, 14th and 15th of each month.
- ◆ 4th to 9th Shawwal.
- ◆ 25th & 29th of Dhul Qa'dah.
- ◆ Dhul Hijjah: 1st to 9th; 18th (Ghadir); 24th (Mubahalah).
- ◆ 1st, 3rd, 7th Muharram.
- ◆ 17th Rabī'u 'l-Awwal (Miladu 'n-Nabi).
- ◆ 27th Rajab (Bi'that and Mi'raj).

(b) The Social Dimension

The month of Ramadhan also has a distinct social dimension. When Muslims fast during the daytime of that month, they are hungry and thirsty. And during that period of hunger and thirst, they can relate more to the suffering of the hungry and poor people in the community, and around the world. Those who fast during the daytime know that after sunset, there will be a meal on their dining table; but they also realize, or should realize, that there are many people who fast even when it is not Ramadhan, and they fast without the assurance of having a meal on their table at the end of the day! They fast simply because they don't have anything to eat!

This realization stimulates the element of charity and sharing in us. In this sense, the month of Ramadhan is also a month of sharing and charity. At end of the fasting month, Muslims have a major feast known as 'Idu 'l-Fitr when they gather in the mosques for special prayers and celebrations. However, before Muslims go for the special prayers, they are required to pay 'zakatu 'l-fitr' which is a special charity. This is like a first step which God is helping us to take on the path of charity and sharing with the hope that Muslims will continue to share what God has given to them, with the less fortunate members of society.

The Qur'an & Prayers

The month of Ramadhan is also the month of the Qur'an and prayers (du'as). Almighty Allah says, "The month of Ramadhan is that in which the Qur'an was revealed as a guidance for people and as clear proofs of the guidance; and as means of separating the right from the wrong." (2:185) Muslims are encouraged to read the Qur'an at all times; but during the month of Ramadhan, the Qur'an recitation becomes much more focused. Imam Muhammad at-Baqir, the fifth Shi'a Imam, said, "Everything has a spring season for itself; and the spring season for the Qur'an is the month of Ramadhan."

The holy Qur'an is divided into thirty equal parts which are known as *juz* (in Arabic and Persian) or *para* (in Urdu). This division has been done so that a Muslim may be able to complete the recitation of the entire Qur'an during the thirty days of the month of Ramadhan. This is why it is said that the holy Qur'an is the most read book in the world!

Mosques and Islamic centres organize special programs for the recitation of the Qur'an; they sit in circles and, by rotation, each person recites certain verses or pages of the Qur'an while others follow the reciter.

The month of Ramadhan is also the month of *du'a*—praying to Allah. In the same section dealing with fasting, Almighty Allah, says: “When My servants ask you concerning Me, (then say) I am indeed very close (to them), I answer the prayer of one who prays when he calls on Me.” (2:186) Although Muslims pray and do *du'a* on a daily basis; but their prayers and *du'as* increase during the month of Ramadhan. The Shī'a Muslim Centres around the world organize special prayers during the Ramadhan nights with the ritual and special prayers like *Du'a Iftitah* and *Du'a-e Kumayl* as taught by Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.).

There are also recommended (*sunnat*) ritual prayers for this month. However, such *sunnat* prayers should be done individually, not in *jama'at* (congregational) form.¹

The Special Nafila Prayers in Ramadhan

- 1st to 20th day ➔ 20 rak'at (2 rak'at each prayer x 10) each night.
- 19th, 21st & 23rd ➔ 100 rak'at (2 rak'at each prayer x 50) each of the 3 eves.
- 21st to 30th ➔ 30 rak'at (2 rak'at each prayer x 15) last 10 nights.

These prayers are 2 rak'ats each like Fajr prayer.
(You may omit the 2nd surah in both rak'ats.)

The total number of the special nawafil of Ramadhan comes to 1000 raka'at.

Conclusion

I would like to emphasize to my fellow Muslim sisters and brothers that fasting is not just abstaining from food, drink, smoking and sexual activities. While we are fasting, we should also try our best to reform our behaviour and attitude towards others. There are many things which will not legally, technically, invalidate our fasting but they surely are against the spirit and purpose of fasting. For example, the Prophet said that lying, back-biting, and lustful glances destroy the spirit of fasting. Hunger and thirst should not become an excuse to be angry and discourteous in our behaviour – this goes completely against the purpose of fasting itself. Let us not be those who gain nothing out of fasting but hunger and thirst!

(Published in *The Right Path*, Oct-Dec 1997 issue)

1. Al-Bukhari, in his *Sabīh*, tells us that the *sunnat* prayers of Ramadhan were said individually during the days of the Prophet and even during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. The congregational form of those prayers was the second caliph's innovation (*bid'ah*).

Things Forbidden in Fasting

(A) Related to Head & Mouth:

1. Eating.
2. Drinking.
3. Intentionally letting the thick dust or smoke enter the throat.

Therefore, smoking invalidates the fast.

What about nicotine patch?

Since this is not administered through the mouth, it does not harm the fast.

4. Vomiting intentionally (even if it is for a medical purpose).
5. Submerging the head completely into the water.¹

(B) Related to Private Parts:

6. Sexual intercourse.
7. Intentionally remaining in state of *janābat* ² till the time of *fajr* (dawn).

A person becomes *junub* & then goes to sleep without doing the ghusl:

a) with intention of not doing *ghusl* before dawn = fast is invalid.

b) with intention of doing *ghusl* before dawn:

i. but did not wake up before dawn = fast is okay.

ii. woke up once & went back to sleep till *fajr* = fast + do qazā. ³

iii. woke up twice & went back to sleep till *fajr*

= fast + do qazā + it is recommended to pay kaffāra.⁴

Similarly, intentionally remaining in state of hayz (period) for a woman whose bleeding has stopped and has enough time to do *ghusl* or *tayammum* before *fajr*.

8. Doing anything that would cause discharge of semen.
9. Using liquid enema.

(C) Moral/Ethical:

10. *Kiẓb* (lying) of the highest type —falsely attributing a statement to Allāh, the Prophets, and the Imams— makes the fast invalid.

Remember that these actions only make the fast invalid (batil) if they are done knowingly and intentionally. But if it is done unknowingly or by mistake, then the fast is still valid.

¹ According to Ayatullah Sistani, submerging the head into the water is strongly disliked but not forbidden.

² Junub means the person on whom ghusl-e janabah becomes obligatory.

³ Qaza means to make up the fast during other days after Ramadhan.

⁴ Kaffara means penalty. See the chart of “Qaza, Fidyā & Kaffara.”

Those Exempted From Fasting

1. **Elderly persons** who cannot fast at all. There is no qaza for them either.
2. **Elderly persons** who can fast but with great difficulty. There is no qazā for them; however, they have to pay *fidya*.
Question: Who decides whether it is easy or difficulty to fast? The doctor or you?
Answer: It is your judgement.
3. **Temporary illness:** those who cannot fast due to a temporary illness (e.g., fever, severe cold, infection, etc.). Such persons are exempted from fasting; however, they have to do qaza before next Ramadhan.
4. **Long-term illness:** those who cannot fast due to a long-term illness (e.g., diabetics, etc.). Such persons are exempted from fasting; there is no qaza for them either; however, they have to pay *fidya* for each day of fasting.
5. **A pregnant or a nursing woman:** if fasting would harm her or the child's health, then she is exempted from fasting. However, she has to do qaza after pregnancy or weaning the child, and also pay *fidya* for each day of fasting.

Question: What if someone is overcome with thirst in summer?

Answer: If a person is overcome by extreme thirst because of fasting in summer to the extent that he cannot continue the fast, then he is allowed to drink water only to sustain himself but his fast will become invalid. He will have to do qaza later on; of course, there is no kaffarah in such a case.

Similarly, for a person who works outside and fasting in summer is not possible for him because of the heat, and he has no other comparable job, then he also is allowed to drink water only to sustain himself but his fast will become invalid. He will have to do qaza later on; of course there is no kaffarah in such a case.

In such cases, the person has to do the niyyat to fast and keep the fast as long as possible until he is not able to bear it any more – only then he can drink or eat to sustain himself.

Question: What should one do in the Europe's northern hemisphere where days are abnormally long?

Answer: For *salat*, they should follow the timings of the city that is closest to them which has normal day and night..

For *fasting*, either travel to the southern area in Ramadhan or after Ramadhan; and if that is not possible, then he just has to pay the *fidya* instead of doing the fast.

Chart of Qaza & Fidya & Kaffara

Reason For Not fasting	Qaza ?	Fidya ?	Kaffara ?
Old Age (cannot fast at all)	x	x	x
Old Age (can fast but with difficulty)	x	✓	x
Temporary illness (e.g., fever, severe cold, infection, etc.)	✓ Within a year	+✓ If after a year	x
Long-term illness (e.g, diabetics, etc)	x	✓	x
Pregnancy	✓	✓	x
Nursing a Child	✓	✓	x
Travelling:*			
1. starting before zuhr	✓	x	x
2. starting after zuhr	Fast normally	n/a	n/a
3. staying at destination less than 10 days	✓	x	x
4. staying at destination 10 or more days	Fast normally	n/a	n/a
5. “frequent traveler”	Fast normally	n/a	n/a
Negligence**	✓	x	✓

Fidya (compensation): 750 grams rice or flour **per day** for the poor. It is better to give 1.5 kg.

Kaffarah (fine): 750gr. rice or flour for **60** poor people **per day**. That makes it 45kg *per day*.

Note: Fidya and kaffarah has to be paid to the poor and needy in kind, not cash.

* **Travelling** to a distance **beyond 22 km** (in the case of a round trip) or **44 km** (on a one way trip) from the city boundary. When you travel, then you are permitted to eat and drink once you reach “hadd-e tarakkhus — the point of permissibility” and this is defined, in our context, as a point from where you can’t see the last homes of that city. This distance is not fixed because it varies from city to city depending on different urban layouts, terrains, population distribution, and other unique factors.

(**Toronto & its suburbs** constitute a single mega city including Whitby in the east, Milton in the west, Lake Ontario in the south and New Market in the north.)

** **“Negligence”** means knowingly not fulfilling the obligation. However, if the fasts were missed in the early years of bulugh due to ignorance, then the person is exempted from kaffarah but he/she still has to do the qaza fast.

Traveling in Ramadhan

- ♦ If you travel **before zuhr** from your hometown, then you can't fast. You have to do qazā later on; there is no kaffarah for missing the fast due to traveling.
- ♦ If you travel **after zuhr** from your hometown, then you fast normally on that day.
- ♦ While **returning** from a journey, if you reach your hometown before zuhr, then you can fast on that day provided you did not eat or drink anything on the return trip. In this case, you will do the niyyat after arriving in your city.
- ♦ If you **stay at the destination** *less* than 10 days, then you can't fast. You have to do qazā later on and, remember, there is no kaffara in this case.
- ♦ If you stay at the destination 10 days continuously, then you should fast normally.
- ♦ If the continuity of ten days is interrupted by a side trip, then you cannot fast; you will have to do qazā later on; and, remember, there is no kaffara in this case.
- ♦ If you are a **"frequent traveler,"** then you should fast normally even while travelling. "Frequent traveler" means a person:
 1. whose work itself is travelling (e.g., driver, pilot)
 2. whose work involves regularly travelling (e.g., salesperson, consultant)
 3. whose work place is more than 24 miles from the city limits of the home-town

Use of Medicine While Fasting

medicine administered	
<i>through the mouth</i>	<i>through other routes</i>
= the fast becomes invalid.	= feeding tube x
	= liquid enema x
(The use of a puffer is okay since the spray enters the respiratory tract and not the passage of food and drink.)	= IV drip ✓
	= nasal/eye-drop ✓
	= injection ✓

Question: It is permissible to take a blood test while fasting?

Answer: Going for a blood test while fasting is okay; it doesn't harm the fast. Similarly, donating blood while fasting is also permissible. In both cases, you are not putting anything into your body; rather you are taking blood out!

Levels of Fasting

A Peek into the Spiritual Dimension

Why do we stay thirsty and hungry for 30 days? Why do we go through this hardship?

Well, yes there is a physical benefit in fasting. According to a June 2014 report published by the scientists at the University of Southern California, “fasting for as little as three days can regenerate the entire immune system, even among the elderly.” They said that this discovery could be particularly beneficial for people suffering from damaged immune systems, such as cancer patients on chemotherapy.

On a social level, fasting of Ramadhan softens our hearts to be more charitable towards the less fortunate ones in the society. It decreases the gap between the poor and the rich.

However, the main purpose of the fasting as stated by Almighty Allah Himself is the spiritual dimension: *“O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it had been prescribed for those (communities) who came before you. So that you may exercise taqwa.”* (2:183)

“Taqwa” can be translated as piety, as guarding oneself (against displeasing God) or God-consciousness. It is a spiritual power by which a person refrains from doing things that will displease Allāh – and this thought or feeling is based on the love that a person has for Allāh.

Imamu 'l-Muttaqin, 'Ali bin Abi Tālib (a.s.), has beautifully described the various levels of fasting:

صوم القلب خير من صيام اللسان، و صيام اللسان خير من صيام البطن.

**“Fasting of the heart is better than the fasting of the tongue;
and fasting of the tongue is better than the fasting of the stomach.”**

Based on this, the scholars of ethics as well as the spiritual masters, have divided the fasting into three levels.

The Basic Level

The basic level of fasting is **the fasting of the stomach**. Stomach here is symbol for physical desires of all types: food, drink and sexual desires.

This is a level where the person refrains from the things mentioned in the list of “muftirāt – things that are forbidden while fasting, things that invalidate the fast.”

By maintaining this level of fasting, people fulfill the duty of observing the fast and protect themselves from the Hell-fire.

This is the level which has been described in the famous hadith as: “Many are those for whom fasting was nothing but hunger and thirst.”

The Moral Level

This is a level above the basic level. In this level, the person does not only refrain from the things forbidden in the list of muftirāt, he or she also refrains from misuse or wrong use of the other faculties of the body such as the tongue, the eyes, the hands, the feet, etc. In words of Imam ‘Ali, this is **the fasting of the tongue and other limbs**.

When a person elevates his fast to the moral level, he has not only protected the self from punishment but also attained the reward (thawāb) promised by Allāh.

Look at the ten items in the list of muftirāt. Nine of them are related to physical desires or the bodily aspects of our being. One of them deals with the speech: falsely ascribing a statement to Allāh and the Infallibles. This last and unusual item is worth our consideration: ascribing a false statement to Allāh and the Infallible Ones is not only forbidden (harām), lying and uttering a false statement is harām in general. But only the former invalidates the fast while the latter does not! This is a window from the ritual/basic level of fasting into the moral level.

Referring to this level of fasting, Imam Ja‘far as-Sādiq (a.s.) said: “Fasting is not only about food and drink that a person refrains from eating or drinking. In reality, when you fast, then your ears, your eyes, your tongue, your stomach and your private parts must also fast. Restrain your hand and your private parts (from harām), and mostly maintain silence except for something good, and be lenient towards your servant.”

Another example that shows the difference between the basic level and the moral level of fasting is that of *ghibat*, back-biting. We know that back-biting is harām, a prohibition greatly abhorred by Almighty Allāh, but ghibat is not in list of the muftirāt. Yet the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) said: “The person who is fasting is in the state of worship (‘ibādah) even when he is sleeping on his bed – as long he has not back-bitted a Muslim.”

What this Prophetic statement says is that if you backbite a Muslim while fasting, your fast is technically still valid—you will not have to redo it or pay fidya or kaffarah or be punished for missing the fast. However, by backbiting a Muslim, you have lost the extra benefit of the moral level wherein even your state of sleep was considered an act of worship and your breathing was glorification (*tasbih*) of Allah!

The Spiritual Level

This is the level of the exceptional people (*khāsul khass*), this is **the fasting of the heart** in which one focuses only on Almighty Allāh and refrains from focusing on mundane issues of this world.

Those who elevate their fast to this level have been described by the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) as “the guests of Allah” and “those who have the honour (*karāmah*) of Allāh.” In his famous sermon, he said:

“It is the month in which you have been invited to be guests of Allāh, and you have been made in it the people who have the honour of Allāh.”

Let us end with Du'a no. 44 of *as-Sahifah as-Sajjadiya* of the Prince of the Worshippers, Imam 'Ali ibnul Husayn (peace be upon him):

O Allah, bless Muhammad and his Family.

Inspire us with knowledge of its (Ramadhan's) virtue, veneration of its sanctity, and protection from what You have forbidden within it.

And help us to fast in it by restraining our limbs from disobeying You and by employing them in that which pleases You so that we lend not our ears to idle talk and we don't let our eyes easily glance towards (haram) diversion, and so that we stretch not our hands towards the forbidden (things) and stride not with our feet towards the prohibited (places), and so that our bellies hold only what You have made lawful and our tongues speak only what You have exemplified, and so that we undertake nothing but what brings us close to Your reward and pursue nothing but what protects us from Your punishment!

Then rid all (of those good points) from the false show of the false-showers and the fame seeking of the fame-seekers, lest we associate therein anything with You or seek therein any object of desire but You!

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ،

وَ أَهْلِمْنَا مَعْرِفَةَ فَضْلِهِ وَ إِجْلَالَ حُرْمَتِهِ، وَ
التَّحْفُظَ مِمَّا حَظَرْتَ فِيهِ.

وَ أَعِنَّا عَلَى صِيَامِهِ بِكَفِّ الْجَوَارِحِ عَنْ
مَعَاصِيكَ، وَ اسْتِعْمَالِهَا فِيهِ بِمَا يُرْضِيكَ حَتَّى
لَا نُضْغِي بِأَسْمَاعِنَا إِلَى لَغْوٍ، وَ لَا نُسْرِعَ
بِأَبْصَارِنَا إِلَى هَوٍ وَ حَتَّى لَا نَبْسُطَ أَيْدِينَا إِلَى
مَحْظُورٍ، وَ لَا نَخْطُو بِأَقْدَامِنَا إِلَى مَحْجُورٍ، وَ
حَتَّى لَا تَعِيَ بُطُونُنَا إِلَّا مَا أَحَلَلْتَ، وَ لَا
تَنْطِقَ أَلْسِنَتُنَا إِلَّا بِمَا مَثَلْتَ، وَ لَا نَتَكَلَّفَ
إِلَّا مَا يُدْنِي مِنْ ثَوَابِكَ، وَ لَا نَتَعَاطَى إِلَّا
الَّذِي يَقِي مِنْ عِقَابِكَ.

ثُمَّ خَلِّصْ ذَلِكَ كُلَّهُ مِنْ رِئَاءِ الْمُرَائِينَ، وَ
سُمْعَةِ الْمُسْمِعِينَ، لَا نُشْرِكُ فِيهِ أَحَدًا دُونَكَ،
وَ لَا نَبْتَغِي فِيهِ مُرَادًا سِوَاكَ.

Simple Resolutions for Ramadhan

As Muslims living in the West, we follow two calendars: hijri calendar for our religious activities, and the common calendar for business and vacation.

But we do not always fix the first month of the year (January or Muharram) as the beginning of all our activities. We divide our lives in different ways: For example, our academic year starts with September and ends in June. Similarly, in the Islamic calendar, our spiritual year starts with the month of Rajab and reached to its peak during the month of Ramadhān.

Ramadhān is the month of fasting; and so our emotions are calm, hearts are open, and there is a kind of tranquility in minds. And, therefore, this is the appropriate time to evaluate ourselves spiritually and make some resolutions for the following spiritual year.

1. The first resolution should be to see **the level of consciousness of God** in your life. How important is Prophet Muhammad (a.s.) in your life? How much importance you give to the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet and his sincere and devoted companions?

“Once the prayer has ended, then spread out in the earth and seek the blessings of Allah, and remember Allah often so that you may gain salvation.” (62:10)

Once you have evaluated yourself in this way, then make the resolution to increase the level of consciousness of God’s presence in your life, and consider the Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt as the first role-models for yourself.

2. The second resolution should be to evaluate **your life with your family**. At times, people take their near ones for granted, and unknowingly tend to ignore their rights. Islam gives great importance to *silatu ’r-rahām* (maintaining ties with the relatives): your wife and children, your parents, your brothers and sisters, and other relatives. Strengthen the ties with them and be concern for their spiritual as well as material well-being.

See how you can improve your attitude towards your wife or husband: as a husband, are you appreciate of what your wife does for you at home? Have you ever thanked her for doing the small things that you take for granted? Have you expressed your love and appreciation for her? As a wife, are you supportive of your husband in the struggles of life? After all, you are his partner of life.

Moving to your other relations, see if there is someone with whom you have not talked for a long time? Is there a relative of yours who is upset with you? Then this is the appropriate time for you to take the first and courageous step to mend that relationship.

3. Look at your children and see how you can increase **the spirituality in your home** environment? Is the holy Qur’ān being recited on a daily or, at least, a weekly basis? Have you provided them with the means of studying the Qur’ān and getting in touch the Holy Scripture? The Qur’ān is now available in all medias: print, audio cassette, CD, ipod—your child’s electronic gadget have the Qur’ān in it?

What about the sayings of the Prophet and the Ahlul Bayt? Is it possible to discuss one hadīth of the Prophet on a monthly basis, and ask them to memorize it?

Have you encouraged your children to give charity? Do them participate in the local food banks, especially the Muslim Food Bank? Have you discussed with them how they can volunteer in their Islamic centers?

Ramadhan is indeed the time of searching yourself and reforming your life to become a better Muslim. May Allāh bless you in this holy month and grant you success. Amin.

(Based on a talk given in “Islam in Focus” TV program Ramadhan 1420/Dec 1999)