

Fasting in Ramadan

What is Fasting?

The word صِيَامٌ (ṣiyām) or صَوْمٌ (ṣawm) linguistically means to abstain or stop doing something.

An example of this meaning is in the statement of Allah:

﴿ إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا ﴾

I have certainly vowed to the Most Merciful abstention (ṣawm).

[Sūrah Maryam, 19:26]

In this verse, the word صَوْمٌ (ṣawm) means “silence” or to abstain from speech.

In the religion however, the word means to fast: to abstain from food, drink, and intimate relations – with a sincere intention to please Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) – during all hours of the day. This is based on His command:

﴿ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ ﴾

Then complete the fast (ṣiyām) until the night.

[Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:187]

The Virtues of Fasting in General

1. Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) said that he heard the messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) say that Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) said:

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

“Every deed of the Son of Adam is for himself except fasting – it is for me and I will personally reward it.” I swear by the one in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, the breath in the mouth of a fasting person is better to Allah than the smell of perfume.¹

And in another narration of the same ḥadīth, there is the wording:

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

There are two times of happiness for the fasting person: when he breaks his fast, he is happy and when he meets Allah, he is happy.²

Ḥudhayfah (رضي الله عنه) said that he heard the messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) say:

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

A man’s tribulations and problems can occur within his family, his wealth, himself, his children, and his neighbors. All of those are forgiven or removed by fasting, praying, and enjoining good and forbidding evil.³

2. Ḥudhayfah (رضي الله عنه) said that Allah’s messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

¹ This ḥadīth is recorded by Muslim (no. 1151).

² Recorded by Muslim (no. 1151).

³ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1895) and Muslim (no. 144).

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

Fasting is a means of protection, so the person should not speak badly or act rudely. And if someone fights him or insults him, let him say twice, "I am fasting." I swear by the one in whose hand is my soul, the smell of a fasting person's mouth is better to Allah than the scent of perfume. (Allah says) "He leaves his food, his drink, and his desire just for Me. Fasting is just for Me and I will reward it, and a good deed is worth ten like it."⁴

It is also reported that 'Alī (رضي الله عنه) said, "Fasting is not only abstaining from food and drink; rather fasting is also from lying and evil and obscene speech."⁵

It is reported that Jābir Ibn 'Abdullah al-Anṣārī (رضي الله عنه) said, "When you fast, let your hearing, your sight, and your tongue also fast from lying and sinning. Do not harm your neighbor. You must have dignity and calmness. And do not let the day you fast be the same as the day you eat."⁶

3. Sa'īd al-Khudrī (رضي الله عنه) said that he heard the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) say:

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

Whoever fasts a single day for the sake of Allah, Allah will distance his face seventy years away from the fire.⁷

⁴ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1894) and Muslim (no. 1151).

⁵ See "Kitāb al-Ṣiyām" in "al-Muṣannaf" of Ibn Abī Shaybah.

⁶ "Kitāb al-Ṣiyām" in "al-Muṣannaf" of Ibn Abī Shaybah.

⁷ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 2840) and Muslim (no. 1153).

4. Abū Umāmah (رضي الله عنه) reported that the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

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

Whoever fasts a single day for the sake of Allah, Allah will make between him and the fire a trench like the distance between the heavens and the earth.⁸

5. Sahl Ibn Sa'd (رضي الله عنه) reported that the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

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

In paradise, there is a gate called “al-Rayyān.”⁹ The fasting people will enter through it on the Day of Resurrection; no one other than they will enter through it. It will be said, “Where are the fasting people?” So they will stand. No one but they will enter through it. And when they all pass through it, it will be locked and then no one else will enter through it.¹⁰

6. Abū Umāmah (رضي الله عنه) also narrated that the messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

⁸ Recorded by al-Tirmidhī (see al-Albānī’s “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī,” no. 1325) and by al-Albānī in “al-Ṣaḥīḥah,” no. 563.

⁹ al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar said, “al-Rayyān is the proper name of one of the gates of paradise specifically through which the those who fast often will enter. The name is appropriate in its wording and its meaning because it is derived from the Arabic word الرَّيِّ (al-Rayy) which means the quenching of thirst. So it is appropriate to the condition of the fasting people...or because it (thirst) is harder upon the fasting person than hunger.”

¹⁰ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1896) and Muslim (no. 1152).

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

You must make the migration because there is nothing like it (in reward). You must fast because there is nothing like it, and you must bow down (prostrate) because if you bow down to Allah just once, Allah will raise you up a level and will remove a sin from you.¹¹

7. ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Amr (رضي الله عنهما) reported that Allah’s messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

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

Fasting and the Quran will both intercede for the worshipper on the Day of Resurrection. Fasting will say, “Oh lord, I prevented him from food and desire so let me intercede (ask for forgiveness) for him.” And the Quran will say, “I prevented him from sleeping at night so let me intercede for him.” So they will both be allowed to intercede.^{12 13}

8. Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

¹¹ Recorded by al-Nasā’ī (see al-Albānī’s “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Nasā’ī,” no. 2100) and by al-Albānī in “al-Ṣaḥīḥah,” no. 1937.

¹² al-Albānī says in “Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb” (1/483):

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

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

¹³ Recorded by Ahmad and al-Ṭabarānī in “al-Kabīr.” And al-Albānī says it is authentic in “Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb” (no. 969).

« الطَّاعِمُ الشَّاكِرُ يَمْنَزِلَةُ الصَّائِمِ الصَّابِرِ »

The one eats and is thankful is at the level of the one who fasts and is patient.¹⁴

Fasting in Ramadan

Fasting in Ramadan is an obligation since it is one of the pillars of the religion. Allah (تعالى) says in the Quran:

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

Oh you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you like it was prescribed for those before you so that you may become righteous.

[Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:183]

Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنهما) said that the messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

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

Islam is built on five (pillars): testifying that nothing deserves worship but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, establishing prayer, giving charity, performing the pilgrimage, and fasting in Ramadan.¹⁵

Ṭalḥah Ibn ‘Ubaydullah (رضي الله عنه) said that a Bedouin with messy hair came to the messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and said, “Oh messenger of Allah, tell me what Allah has commanded me to do as far as prayer.” So he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) answered:

¹⁴ Recorded by al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah (see al-Albānī’s “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah,” no. 1427) and by al-Albānī in “al-Ṣaḥīḥah,” no. 655.

¹⁵ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 8) and Muslim (no. 16).

« الصَّلَوَاتُ الْخَمْسَ إِلَّا أَنْ تُطَوِّعَ شَيْئًا »

The five prayers unless you want to do more.

The man said, “Tell me what Allah has commanded me to do as far as fasting.” He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ) (وَسَلَّمَ) replied:

« شَهْرَ رَمَضَانَ إِلَّا أَنْ تُطَوِّعَ شَيْئًا »

The month of Ramadan unless you want to do more.

The man further said, “Tell me what Allah has commanded me to do as far as charity.” So Allah’s messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) informed him about all the laws of Islam. The Bedouin then said, “I swear by the one who has honored you, I will neither do anything more, nor will I do anything less than what Allah has commanded me to do.” To this, the messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

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

He will be successful if he is truthful – or he said – He will enter paradise if he is truthful.¹⁶

The Virtues of Fasting in Ramadan

1. Abū Hurayrah (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said that the messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

¹⁶ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1891) and Muslim (no. 11).

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

Whoever fasts Ramadan out of faith and hope for reward, his past sins will be forgiven.¹⁷

2. ‘Amr Ibn Murrah al-Juhaniyy (رضي الله عنه) said that a man came to the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ) and asked, “Oh messenger of Allah, if I testify that nothing deserves worship but Allah and that you are the messenger of Allah, and I pray the five prayers, give charity, and fast Ramadan, what kind of people will I be from?” He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) answered:

« مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ »

From the truthful and martyrs.¹⁸

3. Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) said that the Allah’s messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

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

Ramadan has come to you, a blessed month. Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) has obligated fasting for you during it. During the month, the gates of heaven are open and the gates of Hell are closed. The strongest, most arrogant devils are chained during it. Allah has in it a night that is better than a thousand months; whoever is prevented from obtaining the good of that night is certainly prevented (from much good).¹⁹

¹⁷ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1901) and Muslim (no. 760).

¹⁸ Recorded by al-Bazzār and Ibn Ḥibbān, and al-Albānī says it is authentic in “Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb” (no. 989).

¹⁹ Recorded by Ahmad and al-Nasā’ī (see al-Albānī’s “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Nasā’ī,” no. 1992) and by al-Albānī in “Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb” (no. 985).

4. It is reported that Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) also said that the messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه) said:

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

On the first night of the month of Ramadan, the devils are chained as well as the strongest, most arrogant of the *Jinn*. The gates of the fire are closed and not one of its gates will be opened. The gates of paradise are opened and not one of them will be closed. A caller will call out, “Oh seeker of good, come forward. And oh seeker of evil, refrain.” Allah frees people from the fire, and that happens every night.²⁰

5. Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

« الصَّلَوَاتُ الْخَمْسُ وَالْجُمُعَةُ إِلَى الْجُمُعَةِ وَرَمَضَانُ إِلَى رَمَضَانَ مُكَفِّرَاتٌ مَا بَيْنَهُنَّ إِذَا اجْتَنِبَتْ الْكَبَائِرُ »

The five prayers, one Friday to another Friday, and one Ramadan to another Ramadan expiate whatever sins are committed between them as long as the major sins are avoided.²¹

²⁰ Recorded by al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah. See al-Albānī's “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī” (no. 549).

²¹ Recorded by Muslim (no. 233).