



How Does Ramadan Work? A Beginner's Guide

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In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

Introduction

Fasting Ramadan for the first time as a new Muslim, or a Muslim renewing their practice, can seem like an intimidating task. To many, refraining from food, drink, and intimacy with one's spouse during daylight hours sounds exhausting and even painful. Fortunately, Ramadan is a communal event involving everyone in the Muslim community. Not only will you have brothers and sisters in Islam to help you, but over time, as your body adjusts to periods of fasting, you will find it becomes easier and easier. This is especially true as you harvest the spiritual fruits of fasting, closeness to Allah, an affinity for the community, and demonstrable improvements in your life when you exit Ramadan as a better person than when you started, by the grace of Allah.

Ramadan is a lunar month on the Islamic calendar. It does not coincide with the solar Gregorian calendar used throughout the world, since the lunar year is slightly shorter than the solar year. The lunar calendar also starts the next calendar day at sunset, rather than at 12 AM. All important days in Islam, including the Hajj pilgrimage, are based on the [Islamic lunar calendar](#). These heavenly bodies are signs of Allah's creative power and purpose. Indeed, as Allah said:

He is the One who made the sun a radiant source and the moon a reflected light, with precisely ordained phases, so that you may know the number of years and calculation [of time]. Allah did not create all this except for a purpose. He makes the signs clear for people of knowledge.¹

That being the case, Ramadan is announced by local Muslim authorities based on the sightings of the new moon. It can be a challenge for Muslims who live in countries where Ramadan is not a recognized holiday, but Allah only asks that you do the best you can in the place He has put you.

¹ Qur'an 10:5, trans. Dr. Mustafa Khattab.

This article serves as a guide for new Muslims, newly practicing Muslims, and in fact, all Muslims who may benefit from its reminders, for “reminder benefits the believers.”² You will learn about the virtues of fasting in general, the spirit of the practice, why we fast, and what moral, psychological, and spiritual outcomes are desired. Fasting is a pillar of Islam during Ramadan and beyond, so you will learn about days you may voluntarily fast to reap enormous rewards. You will learn about the virtues of Ramadan and the additional acts of worship encouraged during it, such as reading the Qur’an and generously giving in charity. You will learn about the last ten nights of Ramadan, the home stretch when good deeds are greatly multiplied, and the ‘Night of Decree’ (*Laylat al-Qadr*), in which worship for a single night is rewarded as if it were for a thousand months. You will learn how the good habits you develop during this month can extend beyond Ramadan, bettering yourself as a Muslim believer and bringing you nearer to your beloved Lord. And finally, you will learn about the etiquette of the Feast of Breaking the Fast (*Īd al-Fitr*), the first of two major Islamic holidays in which the community celebrates the end of fasting and prays for Allah to accept all of the good deeds we have done during this blessed month.

The spirit of fasting

Human desires can be our worst enemy if they are not tempered by the lights of faith and reason. To save yourself from your *self*, so to speak, Allah has commanded us to fast for His sake. Fasting (*ṣiyām* or *ṣawm*) comes from the root word meaning “to abstain.” In the Islamic context, fasting is to abstain from food, drink, and sexual activity during the daylight hours, between the dawn (*Fajr*) and sunset (*Mahgrib*) prayers, while being especially careful to avoid all sins, both major and minor. Allah explained the purpose of fasting, saying:

O you who have faith, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you that you may become righteous.³

² Qur’an 51:55, trans. Sahih International.

³ Qur’an 2:183, author’s translation.

The previous prophets taught their nations to fast, too, which is why many Jews, Christians, and adherents of other religions still practice some form of fasting to this day.

In Islam, the point of fasting is to develop righteousness or “Godfearingness” (*taqwā*) in the heart. *Taqwā* comes from the root word meaning “to protect” or “to shield.” Specifically, it is the quality of one who fears to disobey Allah, as they are protecting themselves from His punishment. This is a healthy type of fear—a reverential fear that should not lead to crippling anxiety or panic because it is always balanced by hope. Our whims and impulsive behaviors can lead us to disobey Allah, but it is Godfearingness that helps us to control ourselves. Allah said, “As for one who feared to stand before their Lord and restrained themselves from their whims, Paradise is their refuge.”⁴ Fasting trains us to delay the most fundamental human urges, eating and drinking, thereby making it easier for us to resist sinful temptations overall.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ described the greatness of fasting this way:

Allah said, “Every deed of the son of Adam is for him, except for fasting. It is for Me and I will reward it.” Fasting is a shield, so when one of you fasts, he may not be obscene or boisterous. If someone insults him or fights him, let him say, “Indeed, I am fasting.” By the One in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, the breath coming from the mouth of a fasting person is more pleasant to Allah than the scent of musk.⁵

When Allah says fasting is for Him, it highlights the exceptional nature of this act of worship. Other people can see you praying, giving charity, and performing the pilgrimage, but no one truly knows if you are *really* fasting or not. It is a secret between you and your Lord; thus, it requires a lot of sincerity. When one of the Companions asked, “O Messenger of Allah, tell me a deed to do,” the Prophet ﷺ replied, “You must fast, for there is nothing equal to it.”⁶ Genuine fasting,

⁴ Qur’an 79:40–41, author’s translation.

⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1904; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1151.

⁶ *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, no. 2223; deemed authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-targhīb wa al-tarhīb*, 3 vol. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma’ārif, 2000), no. 986.

which produces *taqwā*, ends up as a solid barrier between you and sin, or as the Prophet said, “Fasting is a shield from the Hellfire, just like a shield of yours in battle.”⁷

Fasting strengthens your ability to control your impulses, but it is similarly important to control your tongue (speech) while fasting. The Prophet ﷺ once told his Companions, “Fasting is a shield as long as you do not damage it.” They asked, “How does one damage it?” The Prophet said, “By dishonesty or backbiting.”⁸ We need to be on special guard from saying anything false or mean-spirited while fasting. The Prophet said, “Truly, fasting is not only from eating and drinking. Rather, fasting is from vanity and obscenity. If someone abuses you or acts foolishly against you, then say, ‘Indeed, I am fasting.’”⁹ And he said, “When one of you wakes up in the morning for fasting, then he should not use obscene language or behave foolishly.”¹⁰ And he said, “Do not insult anyone while you are fasting. If anyone insults you, then say, ‘Indeed, I am fasting.’ If you are standing, then sit down.”¹¹ The Righteous Caliph ‘Umar (rA, r. 13-23/634-644) confirmed this understanding, saying, “Fasting is not merely from food and drink alone. Rather, it is from lies, falsehood, vain talk, and swearing.”¹²

You cannot neglect this most important purpose of fasting, just like you cannot ignore the intended results of prayer; otherwise it runs the risk of becoming another empty ritual. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever does not leave evil words and deeds while fasting, Allah does not need him to leave food and drink.”¹³ And he warned, “One might fast but he gets nothing from his fast except hunger. One

⁷ *Sunan Ibn Māja*, no. 1639; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Shaykh al-Albānī in his edition of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ wa ziyādātih*, 2 vols., ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1969), no. 3879.

⁸ Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-awṣaṭ*, ed. Ṭāriq ibn ‘Awaḍ Allāh ibn Muḥammad (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 1995), no. 4536; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Imam Muḥammad Jār Allāh al-Ṣa‘dī in *al-Nawāfiḥ al-‘aṭira fī al-aḥādīth al-musṭahira*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1992), 184.

⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān*, no. 3479; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmi‘*, no. 5376.

¹⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1151.

¹¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzaymah*, no. 1994; deemed fair (*ḥasan*) by Shaykh al-Albānī in his edition of ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Mundhirī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-tarḥīb wa al-tarḥīb*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Albānī and Mashhūr al-Salmān (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif, 1421/2000) no. 1082.

¹² ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, ed. Sa‘ad ibn ‘Abd Allāh Āl Humayyid, Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Luḥīdān, and Ḥamad ibn ‘Abd Allāh Jum‘ah (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2004), no. 8882.

¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1903.

might pray at night but he gets nothing from his prayer except fatigue.”¹⁴ Backbiting, or talking badly about people in their absence, is one of the most dangerous sins because gossiping can be an easy habit to fall into. In fact, Imam Ibrāhīm al-Nakha‘ī warns, “The righteous predecessors used to say that dishonesty will break the fast.”¹⁵ Telling a lie may not ‘break’ the fast in an outward sense, but it certainly spoils its spirit. The key to quality prayer and fasting is sincerity, the *inward* component matched by the outward movements. Since whatever comes out of the tongue reflects what is in the heart, we can protect our fasting by carefully watching what we say. For this reason, the righteous successor (*tābi‘ī*), or member of the generation that followed and knew one of the Companions, Mujāhid (d. 104/722) would say, “Whoever is safe from two characteristics will secure his fasting: backbiting and falsehood.” Imam al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), who recorded this narration, added, “Just as one guards his fasting from what is not befitting, one must guard himself in the month of Ramadan to obey Allah as much as possible.”¹⁶

Fasting days are days of uniquely high alert, when we should be extra careful about doing our best and avoiding even apparently minor shortcomings. It is difficult to be extra vigilant all the time, of course, so we focus our attention more during our fasts. It is like performing an extended prayer throughout the day, as the righteous *tābi‘ī* Abū al-‘Āliya Rufay‘ al-Riyāhī (d. 93/711) said, “The fasting person is engaged in an act of worship as long as he does not backbite anyone, even if he is sleeping on his bed.”¹⁷ Put differently, a fasting day should not feel like a normal day. The Companion Jabir ibn ‘Abdullāh (rA) gave us this advice:

When you fast, then let your hearing, seeing, and tongue fast as well from falsehood and sins, and avoid harming your servants. Rather, you must have dignity and calmness on the day of your fasting. Do not make days you do not fast and days you fast as if they were the same.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Sunan Ibn Māja*, no. 1690; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmi‘*, no. 3488.

¹⁵ *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah*, no. 8888.

¹⁶ Al-Bayhaqī, *Faḍā‘il al-awqāt*, ed. ‘Adnān ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Majīd al-Qaysī (Mecca: Maktabat al-Manāra, 1990), no. 65.

¹⁷ Hannād ibn al-Sarī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbar al-Firīwānī (Kuwait: Dār al-Khulafā’ li-l-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 1985), 2:572.

¹⁸ *Muṣannaf Ibn Abī Shaybah*, no. 8880.

Beyond yourself, another important point is that fasting is meant to remind us what it feels like to be hungry and impoverished. Some of the righteous predecessors were asked, “Why has fasting been instituted?” They replied, “So that the rich will taste hunger and thus will not forget the hungry.”¹⁹ And when the Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 197-218/813-833) was asked similarly, he answered:

Allah Almighty knows what the impoverished endure of severe hunger, so He made the rich perform fasting so that by necessity they might taste the flavor of hunger, such that they do not forget the severe hunger of the impoverished.²⁰

Many people all over the world live with food or water insecurity; that is, they are hungry but not by choice. When you and I feel the pangs of hunger while fasting, it should remind us of the suffering these people endure and motivate us to donate to their cause. Fasting should instill compassion within us!

The month of Ramadan is generally the only time Muslims are obligated to fast, but the Prophet ﷺ would fast at various times throughout the year. He advised his Companions, depending on their capability, to fast three days a month. The Prophet said to one of his Companions, “O Abū Dharr, if you are going to fast three days of the month, then fast on the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth days.”²¹ And he said, “Shall I tell you about what will rid the heart of impurities? Fasting three days of every month.”²² It is also the Sunnah, or prophetic practice, to fast every Monday and Thursday, if you can, as the Prophet said, “Deeds are presented [to Allah] on Monday and Thursday. Thus, I love for my deeds to be presented while I am fasting.”²³ The Prophet's wife, 'Aisha (rA, d. 58/678), said he was eager to fast on Mondays and Thursdays.²⁴

There are other times during the year, besides Ramadan, that we are recommended, but not obligated, to fast. Ashura is the ninth day of the month of Muharram, which is the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is recommended to perform extra

¹⁹ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Laṭā'if al-ma'ārif* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazm li-l-Ṭibā'a wal-Nashr wal-Tawzī', 2004), 168.

²⁰ 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Tabṣira*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1986), 2:74.

²¹ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 761; deemed *ḥasan* by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

²² *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, no. 2385; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, no. 2608.

²³ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 747; deemed *ḥasan* by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

²⁴ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 745; deemed *ḥasan* by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

fasting during this whole month. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The best fast after the month of Ramadan is fasting in the month of Allah, Muharram.”²⁵ The day of Ashura is the day when Allah saved Moses and his people from Pharaoh, so he fasted that day to give thanks.²⁶ The Prophet announced, “Verily, Ashura is a day among the days of Allah. Whoever wishes to fast may do so, and whoever wishes to break his fast may do so.”²⁷ The Companion Ibn ‘Abbās (rA, d. 68/687) reported, “I did not see the Prophet as eager to fast a day and preferring it over others except for this day of Ashura, and this month of Ramadan.”²⁸

It is likewise recommended to fast the day of ‘Arafa, which is the culmination of the Hajj pilgrimage, as long as you are not a pilgrim yourself. The Prophet ﷺ was asked about fasting on the day of ‘Arafa and he replied, “It will expiate the sins of the previous and upcoming years.” Then, he was asked about fasting on the day of Ashura and he answered, “It will expiate the sins of the past year.”²⁹ Notably, this refers to minor sins, not major ones!

Keep in mind that moderation is the key to successful worship habits. The most you should fast (with the exception of Ramadan) is every other day, taking a day of rest in between. This was the practice of the Prophet David (Dāwūd, AS). The Messenger of Allah ﷺ explained:

Verily, the most beloved fasting to Allah is the fasting of David, and the most beloved prayer to Allah is the prayer of David, upon him be peace. He would sleep half of the night, stand in prayer for a third of it, and then sleep for a sixth of it. He would fast every other day.³⁰

This shows us that we might be overdoing it if our voluntary worship makes us sick or suffer, or it causes us to neglect other essential matters in our livelihood. The Sunnah is to establish a balanced habit of extracurricular worship that we can maintain and build upon. The Prophet ﷺ sometimes told his Companions to focus on three days of fasting a month, or one voluntary prayer a day, depending

²⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1163.

²⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2004; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1130.

²⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1126.

²⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1902; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1132.

²⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1162.

³⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3420; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1159.

on their ability. You know yourself better than anyone else (except Allah), so it is up to you to forge your winning worship routine!

Fasting has an upper limit on the outside, as you see, but it also has its highest peak on the inside. This is called the true fasting of the heart and the mind. Eminent Muslim theologian and scholar Abū Ḥāmid Imam al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) details the various levels of fasting:

Know that there are three degrees of fasting: the fasting of the common people, the fasting of the elite, and the fasting of the elite of the elite. As for the fasting of the common people, it involves restraining the stomach from fulfilling its desires, as has been mentioned. As for the fasting of the elite, it involves restraining one's hearing, sight, tongue, hands, feet, and all limbs from sin. As for the fasting of the elite of the elite, it involves the fasting of the heart from unworthy concerns and worldly thoughts and restraining it entirely from everything besides Allah Almighty.³¹

Some early Muslims described pure *taqwā* like this, “A man does not reach the peak of righteousness until it is such that, were he to place what is in his heart on a plate and go around the market with it, he would not be ashamed of anything on it.”³² What a lofty goal to work towards over the years! Now, do not be discouraged if the highest level seems out of reach. Most people cannot control their thoughts to the extent they think *only* about Allah while they are fasting. Your fasting is still valid and acceptable even without this. Indeed, the righteous scholar and judge Maymūn ibn Mahrān (d. 117/735), who is considered one of the pious first three generations of Muslims (*salaf*), used to say, “The easiest part of fasting is leaving food and drink!”³³ So, start with the basics, as we all do, by abstaining from food and drink and trying to be on your best behavior during the month of Ramadan.

³¹ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1980), 1:234.

³² Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa al-bayān 'an tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Ibn 'Āshūr, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2002), 1:144.

³³ Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-īmān*, ed. 'Abd al-'Alī 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥāmid and Mukhtār Aḥmad Nadawī, 13 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd li-l-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 2003), 5:249, no. 3380; the narrators are reliable (*thiqāt*, sing. *thiqa*) according to the editors.

Beginning Ramadan

Ramadan is one of the most important times of the year for you and all Muslims. During this month, we fast from food, drink, and sexual activity from dawn to sunset prayers each day. The community will gather in the mosque each night to perform the Ramadan congregational night prayer (*Tarāwīh*) prayers, which are voluntary but still highly recommended, and renew their relationship with the Qur'an, much of which was revealed during Ramadan. The Prophet ﷺ himself would review everything Allah had revealed to him during this month. Ramadan is full of numerous blessings for us to take advantage of!

Allah said:

The month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was revealed as guidance for people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. Whoever reaches the month, let him fast during it. Whoever is ill or on a journey, then fast an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship, and He intends for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that to which He has guided you, that perhaps you will be grateful.³⁴

Most of the previous scriptures were revealed during Ramadan as well, the Prophet ﷺ told us:

The scriptures of Abraham, upon him be peace, were revealed on the first night of Ramadan. The Torah was revealed after six nights of Ramadan had passed, the Gospel was revealed after thirteen nights of Ramadan had passed, and the Qur'an was revealed after twenty-four nights of Ramadan had passed.³⁵

Of course, just as fasting generally has its own set of etiquette and good practices, Ramadan also has guidelines for success. Imam Ibn al-Jawzī explains:

³⁴ Qur'an 2:185, author's translation.

³⁵ *Musnad Ahmad*, no. 16984; deemed fair by Shaykh al-Albānī in his *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥa*, 7 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1996), 4:104, no. 1575.

Fasting has etiquette which can be summarized as guarding the outward limbs and keeping watch over inward thoughts. One should receive Ramadan in a state of sincere repentance and corresponding determination. One should precede it with intention, which is required every night (before fasting), and one must necessarily be silent from speaking evil words and from backbiting, for he is not fasting who continues to eat the flesh of people.³⁶ One should restrain his gaze from looking upon the unlawful, and he must be cautious about returning his sight again and again, even if it is lawful.³⁷

Adhering to the etiquette of Ramadan, let alone abstaining from food and drink, requires a lot of patience. In fact, the Prophet ﷺ called Ramadan “the month of patience.”³⁸ This is a core virtue you want to keep in your mind throughout the month. Remember there is rest and relief coming at the end. One of the pious *salaf*, Mālik ibn Dīnār (d. 130/748), reminds us, “There is no good deed but that an obstacle is in front of it. If one is patient, he will break through to rest, but if he is intimidated, he will turn back.”³⁹ So, keep moving forward no matter what because the joy of accomplishment is not far off, just as the Prophet said, “The fasting person has two moments of relief he enjoys: when he breaks his fast he is joyful, and when he meets his Lord he is joyful for his fasting.”⁴⁰

Since Ramadan is on the Islamic lunar calendar, the community typically gathers at the end of the previous month of Shaban to witness the new moon, whether the following day will be the first of Ramadan or the day after. The Prophet ﷺ would pray when he confirmed the new moon, “O Allah, bring it over us with blessings and faith, safety and Islam. My Lord and your Lord is Allah.”⁴¹ However, the moon might appear in some regions but not in others. In the time of the Companions, the residents of Syria saw the new moon after Ramadan while the residents of Medina did not, so they celebrated *‘Īd al-Fiṭr* on different days.⁴² As

³⁶ This is a metaphor for backbiting, or speaking badly about people in their absence, which shows how ugly this deed can be. Allah said, “Do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it!” Qur’an 49:12.

³⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Tabṣira*, 1:74.

³⁸ *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*, no. 2408; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmi’*, no. 3718.

³⁹ Abū Nu’aym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba’at al-Sa’āda, 1974), 2:371.

⁴⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1904; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1151.

⁴¹ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3451; deemed *ḥasan* by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

⁴² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1087.

hadith master Imam al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) stated, the scholars agreed that “the people of every land have their own moon-sighting.”⁴³ So wherever you are, keep in touch with your local Muslim organizations who will announce the beginning and ending of Ramadan in your region. You may see some Muslims argue about this because they do not know, but do not let it discourage you.

The Prophet ﷺ liked to fast during the month of Shaban in preparation for Ramadan.⁴⁴ In Shaban, the Companions would make up any Ramadan fasts they had to skip the previous year due to illness or other legitimate excuses.⁴⁵ The Prophet also encouraged us during Shaban to rid ourselves of any grudges we might have towards our families, friends, and brothers and sisters in Islam, saying, “Allah looks down at His creation on the middle night of Shaban, and He forgives all of His creatures, except for an idolater or one filled with malice.”⁴⁶ Malice (*ḥiqd*) enters our hearts when we nurture our anger to the point that we desire to harm others instead of forgiving them. According to the eminent Māliki jurist and judge Abū Bakr ibn ‘Arabī (d. 543/1148), our hearts are not clean until we empty them of any malice towards others, “The heart cannot be pure if it holds malice, envy, pride, and arrogance. The Prophet made it a requirement of faith that one love for his brother what he loves for himself.”⁴⁷ Such a noxious disease of the heart can really drag us down if we are still holding on to it during Ramadan!

Some of the righteous predecessors, but not all of them, would single out the 15th night of Shaban for voluntary prayers that they would perform individually or in small congregations.⁴⁸ Imam al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820), the founder of one of the four juristic schools of Sunni Islam, for instance, recommended increasing our supplications to Allah on the 15th night of Shaban.⁴⁹ However, later Muslims

⁴³ Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1998), 2:71, no. 693.

⁴⁴ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 2431; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmi‘*, no. 4628

⁴⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1950; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1146.

⁴⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, no. 5665; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* due to external corroborative evidence (*ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrih*) by Shaykh Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūtī in al-Amīr ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Fārisī, *al-Iḥsān fī taqrīb Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā‘ūtī, 16 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1988), 12:481, no. 5665.

⁴⁷ Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Atā, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 3:459, verse 26:89.

⁴⁸ Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Ibn Qāsim and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Ibn Qāsim, 35 vols. (Medina: Majma‘ al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā‘at al-Muṣṣhaf al-Sharīf, 1995), 23:132.

⁴⁹ Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm li-l-Shāfi‘ī*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1990), 1:264.

invented acts of worship that do not have any precedent from the Prophet ﷺ, his Companions, or the righteous predecessors, such as performing or even obligating a ritual prayer of a hundred units in the mosque. Eminent Shāfi'ī jurist and hadith scholar, Imam Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī (676/1277), rightly calls these types of novel practices “reprehensible innovations.”⁵⁰ This is because the Prophet said, “Whoever performs a deed that is not in accordance with our matter, it will be rejected.”⁵¹ The rule is that specific acts of ritual worship must be *proven* to be part of the religion. We are not allowed to make up our own rituals. This is different from social customs, which are permissible by default unless they contain something sinful.⁵²

When Ramadan began after sighting the new moon, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would announce the blessings of this month:

On the first night of the month of Ramadan, the devils are chained, the jinn are restrained, and the gates of Hellfire are closed, and none of its gates are opened. The gates of Paradise are opened, and none of its gates are closed. A heavenly caller announces, “O seeker of good, come near! O seeker of evil, stop short!” Allah will save them from the Hellfire, and that is during every night of Ramadan.⁵³

You, like many other Muslims, may notice a huge boost in energy and motivation to worship once the month begins. That is because the devils have been restrained, and you have been given an advantage over them. Evil temptations are not totally gone, but they have been drastically reduced. Scholars have said this is because Muslims are less inclined to give in to their immature desires since they are reciting the Qur'an and praying more often, among other interpretations.⁵⁴ This is a matter of the Unseen, so only Allah truly knows ‘how’ the devils are chained, but we still know it is true and can experience its effects.

⁵⁰ Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *al-Majmū' sharḥ al-Muhadhab*, 9 vols. (Cairo: Maṭab'at al-Taḍāmūn al-Akhawī, 1929), 4:56.

⁵¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1718.

⁵² Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 29:16–17.

⁵³ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 682; deemed *ḥasan* by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, no. 759.

⁵⁴ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī and Muḥibb al-Dīn Khaṭīb, 13 vols. (Egypt: al-Maktabat al-Salafīyya, 1970), 4:114.

The month of fasting

Fasting begins shortly after the call to prayer is announced for the dawn (*Fajr*) prayer. It is highly recommended to eat the pre-fasting meal called *Suḥūr*. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Eat the pre-fasting meal, for surely there are blessings in it.”⁵⁵ He would invite his Companions to eat in the early morning, saying, “Onward to the blessed meal!”⁵⁶ He warned us not to abandon it, even if we only eat a morsel or drink a sip of water, as he said, “The pre-fasting meal is a blessed meal, so do not abandon it even if you only take a sip of water. Verily, Allah and His angels send blessings upon those who take the pre-fasting meal.”⁵⁷ One can infer, in general, that it is recommended to eat at least two meals a day, since even on fasting days we should eat a small breakfast. Everyone's body is different, of course, so people may need a different routine, especially for unusual health issues.

When the first call to prayer at dawn is heard, you can keep eating until you finish your portion. The Prophet ﷺ said, “When one of you hears the call to prayer while eating the pre-fasting meal and his vessel is in his hand, let him not put it down until he fulfills his needs.”⁵⁸ The senior Companion, Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 63/683), used to eat the pre-fasting meal with the Prophet, so he was asked, “How long was it between the two calls to prayer?” Zayd said, “It was time enough to recite fifty verses from the Qur'an.”⁵⁹ This means you can keep eating and drinking for a little less than ten minutes after you hear the first call to prayer. The great imams like Al-Shāfi'ī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (241/855), and Ishāq ibn Rāhawayh (d. 238/853) encouraged taking advantage of this brief window of opportunity.⁶⁰ Once the second call to prayer is given, which announces the commencement of prayer, it is definitely time to stop. If you are in a place where you cannot hear the call to prayer, you may follow the timings estimated by local Muslim organizations.

⁵⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* no. 1923; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1095.

⁵⁶ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 2344; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, no. 7043.

⁵⁷ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 11086; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Shaykh al-Arnā'ūtī in *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arnā'ūtī and 'Ādil Murshid, 45 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 2001), 17:150, no. 11086.

⁵⁸ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 2350; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, no. 607.

⁵⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1921; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1097.

⁶⁰ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 2:78, no. 704.

You can resume eating, drinking, and having intimate relations with your spouse after the first call to prayer at sunset. The meal to break your fast at sunset is called *Iftār*. There is no extra reward for fasting longer than Allah has obligated. In fact, you are rewarded more for breaking the fast as soon as you are allowed! The Prophet ﷺ said, “My nation will continue in goodness so long as they hasten to break their fast and prolong the pre-fasting meal.”⁶¹ Muslims customarily eat *Iftār* together in the mosque or in gatherings at home. It is a great time for the community to grow closer together. Some mosques will even choose different nights to feature various cuisines from around the Muslim world.

An easy mistake to make is to overdo it at either *Suḥūr* or *Iftār* by eating too much, too quickly, or too heavily. After fasting all day, your stomach shrinks a little bit, so piling it full of food can make you feel sick. A good rule of thumb is to fill one third of your stomach with food, one third with water, and leave the rest empty, as the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

The son of Adam cannot fill a vessel worse than his stomach, as it is enough for him to take a few bites to straighten his back. If he cannot do it, then he may fill it with a third of food, a third of drink, and a third of air.⁶²

If you follow this rule during Ramadan and throughout the year, you will be healthier, stronger, leaner, and feel better. Another important consideration is that if you drink a lot of caffeinated beverages like tea or coffee, you should try to cut back a month or so before Ramadan. Some newcomers get severe headaches while fasting not because they lack food or drink, but because they lack caffeine!

Food, drink, and sexual activity during the daytime will break your fast, so unless you have a valid excuse, you will need to make it up later or pay an amount in charity, depending on your situation. You do not need to make it up or compensate if you unintentionally break your fast due to forgetfulness, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever eats or drinks forgetfully while he is fasting, let him complete his fast, for Allah has fed him and given him drink.”⁶³ It is permissible to break your

⁶¹ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 21312; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, no. 7284.

⁶² *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2380; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

⁶³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1933; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1155.

fast due to illness or travel.⁶⁴ While fasting, the Prophet used to kiss his wives without lust, like a peck on the cheek, so that is allowed too.⁶⁵ All of these concessions are based on Allah's words, "Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship."⁶⁶ Children may fast as well if they are able, but it is only required for adults.⁶⁷ It is a good idea to have children fast for at least some days, since this will make it easier for them as they grow up.

Ramadan is your best opportunity to get a clean record with Allah, as fasting and prayers will make amends for previous sins and shortcomings. The Prophet ﷺ said, "The five prayers, Friday to Friday, and Ramadan to Ramadan will be expiation for the sins between them, so long as major sins are avoided."⁶⁸ And he said, "Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan due to faith and seeking reward, his previous sins will be forgiven."⁶⁹ Every day of Ramadan is a chance to achieve salvation, as the Prophet said, "Verily, Allah has people He redeems at the time of breaking fast, and that is during every night."⁷⁰ At the time of breaking fast, a prayer of yours will surely be answered, as he told us, "Verily, Allah has people He redeems in every day and night of Ramadan. Every servant among them has a supplication that will be answered."⁷¹

Tarāwīh prayers

The voluntary *Tarāwīh* prayers that occur each night during the month of Ramadan are greatly emphasized for their redeeming value, as the Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever stands in prayer during Ramadan due to faith and seeking reward, his previous sins will be forgiven."⁷² They are customarily performed in congregation in the mosque, but you can also pray them at home. The scholars disagreed over whether it is better to perform *Tarāwīh* in the mosque or at home, but perhaps it

⁶⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1845; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1118.

⁶⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1826; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1106.

⁶⁶ Qur'an 2:185, trans. Sahih International.

⁶⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1859; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1136.

⁶⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 233.

⁶⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 760.

⁷⁰ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 1643; deemed *ḥasan* by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, no. 2170.

⁷¹ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 7450; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Arnā'ūt in *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 12:420, no. 7450.

⁷² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2009; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 759.

depends upon an individual's situation.⁷³ It may be better to perform them in the mosque if the support of the congregation makes it easier for you, or it may be better to pray them at home if you feel tempted to “show off” your worship, which can be detrimental to your sincerity, or if you have other obligations that make leaving home difficult.

The scholars likewise disagreed over how many units of prayer (*raka'āt*, sing. *rak'a*) the *Tarāwīḥ* consist of, some of them preferring between eleven longer units or up to thirty-six shorter units. However, all of these are valid options according to Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya:

As for night prayer in Ramadan, if it is prayed according to the school of Abū Ḥanīfah, al-Shāfi'ī, and Aḥmad with twenty units, or according to the school of Mālik with thirty-six units, or with thirteen or eleven units, then he has done well as mentioned by Imam Aḥmad for there is no reason against it. So whether to increase or decrease the units depends upon their length.⁷⁴

The reason scholars disagreed was explained by Imam Aḥmad, “It has been reported in various ways, and the Prophet ﷺ did not fix any number for it.”⁷⁵ As a result, it is entirely valid for you to do whatever is customary in the mosque you attend. Like the moon-sighting issue, you might see Muslims argue about how many units they should pray, but again, do not be discouraged.

It is not necessary for you to stay for the entire *Tarāwīḥ* if you get tired. It is optional, remember. Even attending them briefly is highly meritorious. But there is an *enormous* reward for completing the prayers with the imam. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Verily, whoever stands for prayer in Ramadan with the imam until he is finished, it will be recorded as if he prayed the entire night.”⁷⁶ Imagine, you can pray for an hour and be rewarded as if you prayed all the way until morning!

⁷³ Al-Nawawī, *al-Majmū'*, 4:31.

⁷⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad 'Aṭā and Muṣṭafā 'Aṭā, 6 vols. (N.p.: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987), 5:343.

⁷⁵ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 2:158, no. 806.

⁷⁶ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 806; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

Practicing Ramadan, in letter and spirit, can put you in the same righteous category as a martyr, someone who gives up their life to serve Allah. A man once came to the Prophet ﷺ and he said, “O Messenger of Allah, what do you think if I testify there is no God but Allah and you are the Messenger of Allah, I perform the five prayers, I pay the obligatory alms, and I fast the month of Ramadan and stand for prayer in it. Among whom will I be?” The Prophet said, “Among the truthful and the martyrs.”⁷⁷ On another occasion, the senior Companion Ṭalḥa ibn ‘Ubayid Allāh (d. 36/656) (rA) told the story about two brothers who had converted to Islam. One of them was martyred in a battle and the other lived for another year. Ṭalḥah said, “I had a dream of Paradise and I saw the one who lived longer enter Paradise before the martyr. I was amazed by that so when I woke up, I mentioned it to the Prophet.” The Prophet replied, “Did he not fast the month of Ramadan after him? And he performed six thousand or so bowings in prayer throughout the year?”⁷⁸ The second brother had a degree over his martyred brother because he had lived to pray more and fast another Ramadan! Although true martyrdom, not simply wishing death for yourself, is a huge virtue in itself, it is always better for a believer to live longer. The Prophet was asked, “O Messenger of Allah, who are the best people?” The Prophet answered, “One whose life is long and his deeds are good.”⁷⁹ And he said, “Let none of you wish for death, nor call for it before its time comes. When one of you dies, his deeds come to an end. Verily, the life of a believer only increases in good.”⁸⁰

The month of the Qur’an

Ramadan is the month of the Qur’an, since it was this month in which most of it was revealed. The Companion Abū Hurayrah (rA, d. 58/678) reported, “The Prophet ﷺ would review the Qur’an once every year in Ramadan, and he reviewed it twice in the year he passed away.”⁸¹ For this reason, many Muslims will recite the entire Qur’an from cover-to-cover once, twice, or many times more

⁷⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān*, no. 3438; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Arnā’ūtī in *Al-Iḥsān fī Taqrīb Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān*, 8:224, no. 3438.

⁷⁸ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 8399; deemed fair by Shaykh al-Arnā’ūtī in *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 14:127, no. 8399.

⁷⁹ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2330; deemed authentic by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

⁸⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2682.

⁸¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4998.

this month. It is also a typical practice in mosques for the imams to complete the entire Qur'an during the *Tarāwīḥ* prayers. Reciting the Qur'an aloud is part of the ritual prayer, but it is also an essential act of worship outside of the prayer. The scholars have said that reciting the Qur'an is the greatest single deed to remember Allah.⁸² In other words, reciting the Qur'an is the best voluntary act of worship, even more so than remembering Allah with the simple, informal prayers you may have learned. That is because the Qur'an not only contains those prayers, but so much more!

The Qur'an is our lifeline to Allah and the primary means of staying in a good relationship with Him. Not only that, devotion to the Qur'an helps the Muslim community stay together and puts our petty differences in perspective. Allah said:

Hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you—when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided.⁸³

These words are the direct speech of Allah, specifically to you. It is as if Allah is addressing you personally. When you recite the Qur'an, you are communicating with your Lord and Creator like nothing else. The Book of Allah is so tremendous that even the mountains would fall down before it, as He said, “If We had sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and coming apart from fear of Allah. And these examples We present to the people that perhaps they will give thought.”⁸⁴ Likewise, our hearts fall down before Allah, in reverence and awe of Him, when we read His words in their original language with all its depth and power.

For this reason, sticking to the Book is the characteristic of the best of believers. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The best of you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach

⁸² Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *al-Tibyān fī ādāb ḥamalāt al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥajjār (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1994), 24.

⁸³ Qur'an 3:103.

⁸⁴ Qur'an 59:21.

it.”⁸⁵ And he once said to his companions, “Verily, Allah has His own people among humanity.” They asked, “O Messenger of Allah, who are they?” The Prophet replied, “They are the people of the Qur’an, the people of Allah and His chosen ones.”⁸⁶ This does not only refer to the professional reciters who teach, but to anyone with the capacity to share the wisdom of Islam. As the Prophet said, “Convey from me, even a single verse.”⁸⁷ One single verse can have an enormous impact on us and those who hear it.

Being a new Muslim, it is likely that you will need to learn Arabic from scratch in order to memorize some of the Qur’an for your prayers. There is nothing wrong with reading from a quality translation, as Allah said, “We did not send any messenger but in the language of his people, to clarify for them.”⁸⁸ Learning Arabic can certainly be a challenge, but do not be discouraged. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

The example of one who recites the Qur’an and memorizes it is that of one with the “righteous and noble scribes.”⁸⁹ The example of one who recites the Qur’an and is committed to it, although it is difficult for him, is that of one with a double reward.⁹⁰

If you struggle to learn the Qur’an’s language, rest assured that you are being rewarded *twice*. First, for learning the Book of Allah, an incredible virtue in itself. Second, for putting in the *effort* to learn the Book of Allah. Such people are among the “righteous and noble scribes,” meaning the angels in heaven. Over time, the struggle will become easier until the words pass fluently over your tongue, as Allah said, “We have certainly made the Qur’an easy for remembrance, so is there anyone who will remember?”⁹¹ Hundreds of thousands of Muslims, even millions, have memorized the entire Qur’an by heart, cover-to-cover, demonstrating yet another miraculous sign in Allah’s words. Surely, you can and will succeed on your memorization journey with His help!

⁸⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5027.

⁸⁶ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 215; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi‘*, no. 2165.

⁸⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 3461.

⁸⁸ Qur’an 14:4.

⁸⁹ Qur’an 80:15.

⁹⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 4937; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 798.

⁹¹ Qur’an 54:17.

To motivate you further, be aware of the many rewards awaiting the sincere reciters, both in this life and in the Hereafter. You will be credited with ten good deeds for every letter you recite, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever recites a letter from the Book of Allah, he will receive one good deed as ten good deeds like it. I do not say that *Alif Lām Mīm* is one letter, but rather *Alif* is a letter, *Lām* is a letter, and *Mīm* is a letter.”⁹² You could amass thousands of good deeds by merely committing ten minutes of recitation every day! Moreover, the angels will visit you and pray for you, sending peace and calm upon you. The Messenger of Allah said:

People do not gather in the houses of Allah, reciting the book of Allah and studying it together, but that tranquility will descend upon them, mercy will cover them, angels will surround them, and Allah will mention them to those near Him.⁹³

And the Prophet ﷺ said, “You must recite the Qur’an and remember Allah Almighty, for you will be mentioned in heaven and you will have light upon earth.”⁹⁴ Besides being praised in this life by the inhabitants of the heavens, you will level up in Paradise for every verse you commit to memory. The Prophet said, “It will be said to the companion of the Qur’an: Recite and ascend as you recited in the world! Verily, your rank is determined by the last verse you recite.”⁹⁵ This is the reward of the companion of the Qur’an, someone who spent a lot of time with it. There are verses to read in the morning, after prayer, before we go to bed, and at any time. You would, ideally, have the Qur’an with you all throughout the day.

The month of charity

Charity and generous giving are also strongly encouraged during Ramadan. The Companion Ibn ‘Abbās (rA, d. 68/687) said:

⁹² *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2910; deemed authentic by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

⁹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2699.

⁹⁴ Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-īmān li-l-Bayhaqī*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Alī ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥāmid and Mukhtar Aḥmad Nadawī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd li-l-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 2003), no. 4592; deemed authentic due to external evidence by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb*, no. 2868.

⁹⁵ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2914; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was the most generous of people and he was even more generous in Ramadan when Gabriel would meet him. He would meet him every night of Ramadan to study the Qur'an. Thus, the Prophet would be more generous than a refreshing wind.⁹⁶

Charity does not merely refer to the monetary component. Allah gives us many other blessings like health, time, and energy, which we can “spend” on others for His sake. Every time we spend something we have in the name of Islam, Allah will “spend” upon us with rewards in this life and, more importantly, in the Hereafter. As Allah said, “O you who have faith, spend from that which We have provided for you before there comes a Day in which there is no exchange, no friendship, and no intercession.”⁹⁷ And as the Prophet ﷺ said in the sacred tradition, “Allah said, ‘Spend in charity, O son of Adam, and I will spend on you.’”⁹⁸ As such, it is better to give than to receive, as the Prophet also said, “The upper hand is better than the lower hand. The upper hand is one that gives and the lower hand is one that takes.”⁹⁹ However, you must be moderate in your spending and not let your zealotry drive you into poverty. It is possible to spend too much on charity if it ruins you or your family. Allah said, “They are those who, when they spend, do so not excessively or sparingly, but are ever between that.”¹⁰⁰ And the Messenger of Allah said:

O son of Adam, to offer your surplus in charity is better for you, and to withhold it is evil for you, yet there is no blame to keep what is needed. Begin by giving to your dependents, for the upper hand is better than the lower hand.¹⁰¹

So you have something to give, even if you have no money! This is why the Prophet ﷺ said, “Every good deed is charity. Verily, it is a good deed to meet your brother with a cheerful face, and to pour what is left from your bucket into the vessel of your brother.”¹⁰² Some of the poorer companions came to the Prophet one day and they said, “O Messenger of Allah, the rich have taken all the rewards.

⁹⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1902; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2308.

⁹⁷ Qur'an 2:254.

⁹⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5352; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 993.

⁹⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1429; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1033.

¹⁰⁰ Qur'an 25:67.

¹⁰¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1036.

¹⁰² *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 1970; deemed authentic by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

They pray as we pray, they fast as we fast, and they give charity from their extra wealth!” The Prophet said:

Has Allah not made ways for you to give charity? In every glorification of Allah is charity, in every declaration of His greatness is charity, in every praise of Him is charity, in every declaration of His Oneness is charity, enjoining good is charity and forbidding evil is charity, and in a man's intimate relations with his wife is charity.

Then, they asked, “O Messenger of Allah, is there a reward for one who satisfies his passions?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “You see that if he were to satisfy his passions with the unlawful, it would be a burden of sin upon him? Likewise, if he were to satisfy himself with the lawful, he will have a reward.”¹⁰³

Every time you mention Allah around other Muslims, you have reminded them of Allah and thus given them charity! For this reason, the Prophet ﷺ asked them, “Shall I not tell you about the best of you?” They said, “Of course!” The Prophet replied, “Those who, if they are seen, they remind you of Allah.”¹⁰⁴ Even keeping your behavior within the bounds of the lawful, such as staying faithful to your spouse, is an act of charity. Taking care of your family and household, a basic duty, is an act of charity, as the Prophet said, “What you feed yourself is your charity, what you feed your children is your charity, what you feed your wife is your charity, and what you feed your servant is your charity.”¹⁰⁵ Even taking care of yourself to avoid poverty, disease, and dependence on others is charity, as the Messenger of Allah said:

When a man earns wealth from what is lawful and he feeds himself, or clothes another among the creation of Allah, it will be regarded as charity for him. When a Muslim man is without means to give in charity, he should say, “O Allah, send blessings upon Muhammad, Your servant and Messenger, and send blessings upon the believing

¹⁰³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1006.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-mufrad li-l-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī and Samīr ibn Amīn Zahīrī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma‘ārif l-il-Nashr wal-Tawzī‘, 1998), no. 323; deemed *ḥasan* by Shaykh al-Albānī in his comments.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-mufrad*, no. 82; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Shaykh al-Albānī in his comments.

men and women and the Muslim men and women.” If he says this, it will be regarded as charity for him.¹⁰⁶

There are many other types of charity that have nothing to do with money. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever is pleased for Allah to save him from distress on the Day of Resurrection, let him relieve one in hardship or lift his burden.”¹⁰⁷ And he said, “Politeness with people is charity.”¹⁰⁸ The Prophet told us about a man who entered Paradise for a simple act, “I have seen a man enjoying himself in Paradise due to a tree in the road he cut down that used to harm people.”¹⁰⁹ Even just not doing bad deeds is charity, as he said, “Refrain from harming people, for it is your charity due upon yourself.”¹¹⁰

Keep this broader concept of charity in mind as part of the spirit of Ramadan. *Anything* good you do during this month is multiplied in its reward, as Imam al-Nawawī explained:

Our scholars said that being generous and performing favors are highly recommended during Ramadan, specifically during the last ten nights. By doing so, we emulate the example of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ as well as our predecessors. This month is honored and good deeds performed in this month are more blessed than they are at any other time.¹¹¹

Last ten nights and *Laylat al-Qadr*

The last ten days and nights of Ramadan are the most special. The Prophet's wife, ‘Āisha (rA), reported, “When the last ten days of Ramadan arrived, the Prophet

¹⁰⁶ Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-īmān*, no. 1176; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Imam al-Suyūṭī as mentioned in *al-Tanwīr sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Ishāq Muḥammad Ibrāhīm (Riyadh: Muḥammad Ishāq Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, 2011), no. 2935, 4:426.

¹⁰⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1563.

¹⁰⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān*, no. 471; deemed fair by Imam Ibn Mufliḥ in *al-Ādāb al-shar'īyya wa minah al-mar'īyya* (Riyadh: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, n.d), 3:469.

¹⁰⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1914.

¹¹⁰ Ibn Abī Dunyā, *al-Ṣamt wa ādāb al-lisān*, ed. Abū Ishāq al-Huwaynī Atharī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1990), no. 68; deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, no. 4490.

¹¹¹ Al-Nawawī, *al-Majmū'*, 6:377.

صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم would tighten his belt, spend the night in worship, and awaken his family.”¹¹² And she said, “The Prophet would exert himself in worship during the last ten nights more than at any other time.”¹¹³ Essentially, this is the time to sprint to the finish line!

The last of these ten nights that is of greatest significance is called *Laylat al-Qadr*, translated as the Night of Decree or the Night of Power. Good deeds in this single night are counted as if they were done for a thousand months! Allah said:

Verily, We sent the Qur'an down during the Night of Decree. What will make you know what the Night of Decree is? The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter. Peace is therein until the emergence of dawn.¹¹⁴

And the Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم said:

The month of Ramadan has come, a blessed month in which Allah Almighty has obligated you to fast. In it the gates of the heavens are opened, the gates of Hellfire are closed, the devils are chained, and in it is a night that is better than a thousand months. Thus, whoever is deprived of its good is truly deprived.¹¹⁵

He صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم also said, “Verily, this month has presented itself to you. There is a night within it that is better than a thousand months. Whoever is deprived of it has been deprived of all good. No one is deprived of its good but that he is truly deprived.”¹¹⁶ If there is one night to push yourself to the limit, this is it!

Yet, the exact calendar date of the Night of Decree is unknown to us. The righteous predecessor Abū Qilāba al-Jarmī (d. 104/723) used to say, “The Night of Decree moves each year during the last ten nights of Ramadan.”¹¹⁷ Some scholars believe

¹¹² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2024; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1174.

¹¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1175.

¹¹⁴ Qur'an 97:1–5, trans. Sahih International.

¹¹⁵ *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 7148; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Arnā'ūt in *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, 12:59, no. 7148.

¹¹⁶ *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 1644; deemed fair by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, no. 2247.

¹¹⁷ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 2:150, no. 792.

it is a specific night each month like the 27th, but al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) reports that many great imams like Mālik (d. 179/795), al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), and Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal agreed it changes each year.¹¹⁸ The Prophet ﷺ once came out to inform people about the Night of Decree, but two Muslim men were insulting each other. The Prophet declared:

Verily, I had come out to tell you about the Night of Decree, but two men were insulting each other. Thus, its knowledge was taken away and perhaps it is better for you. Look for it during the seventh, ninth, or fifth night of the last ten nights.¹¹⁹

Ultimately, we do not know when *Laylat al-Qadr* will occur, except that it is one of the odd-numbered of the last ten nights. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Search for the Night of Decree in the odd nights among the last ten nights of Ramadan.”¹²⁰ Take note that the Islamic lunar calendar turns over at sunset, so an even-numbered day will be followed by an odd-numbered night the same evening. The wisdom behind this knowledge being hidden from us, and Allah knows best, is that we must strive in all of the last odd-numbered nights of Ramadan if we want to benefit from the Night of Decree. If we had already known it beforehand, we might slack off the rest of the month!

As the month draws to an end, you might understandably feel exhausted and overwhelmed during the last ten nights. In that case, try to single out the last seven odd-numbered nights, as the Prophet ﷺ said, “Look for the Night of Decree in the last ten nights, but if one of you is weak or frustrated, then do not be overcome during the remaining seven nights.”¹²¹ The best thing to do is to perform the *Tarāwīḥ* prayers in the mosque or at home, as he said, “Whoever stands in prayer during the Night of Decree due to faith and seeking reward, his previous sins will be forgiven.”¹²² If you are fortunate enough to engage in worship on the Night of Decree, you will experience an atypical sense of tranquility and peace after

¹¹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998), 8:432.

¹¹⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 49.

¹²⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2017; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1169.

¹²¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1165.

¹²² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1901.

worshiping through the night. The Prophet said, “It is a calm night, neither hot nor cold, and the sun rises upon its day red and faint.”¹²³

During the last ten nights, if you feel you have the energy to do more and your personal circumstances permit, you can perform a spiritual retreat in the mosque called *i'tikāf*. This involves staying in the mosque for worship and not leaving except for unavoidable tasks. ‘Aisha (rA) told us, “The Prophet ﷺ would seek a retreat in the mosque during the last ten nights of Ramadan, until Allah Almighty caused him to pass away. His wives continued to perform the retreat after him.”¹²⁴ Imam al-Shāfi‘ī explained how to start it:

Whoever desires to follow the example of the Prophet ﷺ in practicing spiritual retreat in the mosque during the last ten nights of Ramadan, he should enter the mosque before the setting of the sun on the twenty-first night.¹²⁵

The purpose of everything we do in Ramadan is to earn Allah’s forgiveness and build up our record of good deeds. Hence, we should be asking Allah for forgiveness throughout the month and especially while seeking the Night of Decree. ‘Aisha (rA) once asked, “O Messenger of Allah, if I know which night is the Night of Decree, what should I say during it?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Say, ‘O Allah, You are pardoning. You love to forgive, so forgive me!’”¹²⁶ In Arabic, this prayer is *Allāhumma innaka ‘ufuwun tuḥibb al-‘afw fa-a’fu ‘annī*.

For more details on the virtues and scholarly discussions around the Night of Decree, see the articles [Why Laylatul Qadr? The Significance & Virtues of the Most Important Night of the Year](#),¹²⁷ and [On The Timing and Virtues of the Night of Power: The Heart’s Joy in Remembering Laylat al-Qadr by Ibn al-‘Irāqī](#).¹²⁸

¹²³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzaymah*, no. 2192; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi‘*, no. 5475.

¹²⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 2026; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1172.

¹²⁵ Al-Nawawī, *al-Majmū‘*, 6:475.

¹²⁶ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3513; deemed authentic by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

¹²⁷ Nazir Khan, Ibrahim Hindy, and Omar Suleiman, “Why Laylatul Qadr? The Significance and Virtues of the Most Important Night of the Year,” *Yaqeen*, June 4, 2018, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/why-laylatul-qadr-the-significance-virtues-of-the-most-important-night-of-the-year>.

¹²⁸ Yousef Wahb, “On The Timing and Virtues of the Night of Power: The Heart’s Joy in Remembering Laylat al-Qadr by Ibn al-‘Irāqī,” *Yaqeen*, April 12, 2023,

Zakāt al-Fiṭr

One of the final acts of Ramadan is to donate a special charity called *Zakāt al-Fiṭr*. This deed is related to the third pillar of Islam, *Zakāt*, which comes from the root meaning “to grow” or “to purify.” Helping the poor causes us to grow in faith just as it causes the Muslim society to grow stronger. Likewise, it purifies our hearts and rids us of the spiritual disease of greed. As Allah said, “Take charity from their wealth by which you purify them and cause them to increase.”¹²⁹ And Allah said, “But the righteous will avoid Hellfire, who gives from his wealth to purify himself.”¹³⁰ The Prophet ﷺ said, “Charity extinguishes sins as water extinguishes fire.”¹³¹ And the Prophet said, “Whoever pays *Zakāt* on his wealth, his evil will depart from him.”¹³² In fact, it is one of the delights of faith to derive pleasure from giving charity, as the Prophet said, “Whoever does three deeds will taste the sweetness of faith: one who worships Allah alone, who declares there is no God but Allah, and who gives *Zakāt* from his wealth each year with a cheerful and earnest soul.”¹³³

Zakāt al-Fiṭr is given directly to the needy as a *ṣā'*, which is about three kilograms, of staple foodstuffs. The Companion ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Umar (rA, d. 73/693) reported:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ obligated payment of charity at the end of Ramadan, a portion of dates or barley, upon slave and freeman, male and female, young and old among the Muslims. The Prophet ordered it to be given before people go out for *‘Īd* prayer.¹³⁴

The Companion Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī (rA, d. 73/693) added, “We would bring for *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* a portion of food, or a portion of barley, or a portion of dates, or a

<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/on-the-timing-and-virtues-of-the-night-of-power-the-hearts-joy-in-remembering-laylat-al-qadr-by-ibn-al-iraqi>

¹²⁹ Qur’an 9:103.

¹³⁰ Qur’an 92:18.

¹³¹ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2616.

¹³² *Al-Mu‘jam al-Awṣaṭ*, no. 1579.

¹³³ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 1582.

¹³⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1503; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 986.

portion of cheese, or a portion of raisins.”¹³⁵ Since the word *Zakāt* implies purification, this particular charity is an expiation for our slip-ups during this month, as the Companion Ibn ‘Abbās said:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ obligated *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* as purification of the fasting person from vain talk and misbehavior, as food for the poor. Whoever pays it before the ‘*Īd* prayer, it is accepted as zakat. Whoever pays it after the ‘*Īd* prayer, it is part of voluntary charity.¹³⁶

Wakī‘ ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812), the teacher of the great Imam Aḥmad, offered this comparison, “*Zakāt al-Fiṭr* is to the month of Ramadan like the prostration of forgetfulness is to prayer. It makes up for deficiencies in fasting just as the prostration makes up for deficiencies in prayer.”¹³⁷ If we make a minor mistake in prayer, as we all do, we can compensate by offering the prostration of forgetfulness. Similarly, we can atone for some of our misdeeds during Ramadan by offering *Zakāt al-Fiṭr*.

You should try to offer *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* to the needy as directly as possible, even by hand at your mosque. However, according to Imam al-Nawawī, it is permissible to donate to Muslim authorities (if you are living in a Muslim country) or to credible Muslim charities who will distribute it properly, but “giving it out himself is better than all of that.”¹³⁸ Imam Ibn Qudāmah clarifies that it is recommended “to give it out in the country in which it became obligatory,”¹³⁹ in other words, wherever you happen to be at the end of Ramadan. Muslims should be supportive of their local communities, so prepare ahead to pay your *Zakāt al-Fiṭr* one or two days before the ‘*Īd* prayer.

‘*Īd al-Fiṭr*

¹³⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1435; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 985.

¹³⁶ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 1609; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi‘*, no. 3570.

¹³⁷ Al-Nawawī, *al-Majmū‘*, 6:140.

¹³⁸ Al-Nawawī, *al-Majmū‘*, 6:139.

¹³⁹ ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī li-Ibn Qudāmah*, ed. Ṭāhā Muḥammad Zaynī, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1968), 2:502.

You have just finished fasting the month of Ramadan, so now it is time to party! In a halal way, of course. The celebration at the end of Ramadan is called *‘Īd al-Fiṭr*. The word *fiṭr* means breaking your fast, just like the word *iftār*. The celebration at the end of Hajj is called *‘Īd al-Adḥā*, the word *adḥā* meaning ‘sacrifice’ because animals are humanely slaughtered and their meat is distributed to the poor, who often cannot afford the luxury of eating meat.¹⁴⁰ You are actually forbidden from fasting on these days because it is time to rest and relax! The Prophet ﷺ described these days as “celebrations for the people of Islam, so they are days of eating and drinking.”¹⁴¹

The only religious holidays that the Prophet ﷺ acknowledged are *‘Īd al-Fiṭr* and *‘Īd al-Adḥā*. When the Prophet arrived in Medina, he found the people celebrating two days, so he asked, “What are these two days?” They said, “We would celebrate these two days in the time of ignorance.” The Prophet said, “Verily, Allah has replaced these two days with two better days: the day of *al-Adḥā* and the day of *al-Fiṭr*.”¹⁴² Cultural or non-religious holidays can be a gray area, and Muslims will often disagree on whether to participate or not. However, it is certain that there are no other holidays except the two feasts that have been legitimately recognized in the Prophet’s Sunnah.

The morning of *‘Īd* begins with a special prayer in the mosque, shortly after the dawn prayer, followed by a brief but optional sermon. On the day after Ramadan, the Prophet ﷺ would not go to the mosque for this prayer until he had eaten something, usually dates.¹⁴³ It is recommended to wear your best clothes to the mosque and other *‘Īd* gatherings.¹⁴⁴ For instance, the Prophet used to wear a red-striped cloak on the day of *‘Īd*.¹⁴⁵ The Companion Ibn ‘Umar would likewise wear his best clothes on the two *‘Īds*.¹⁴⁶ You should also be clean and well-presented, as these are not just ordinary days. Ibn ‘Umar would perform a

¹⁴⁰ For more details about the Hajj, see: yaqeeninstitute.org/what-islam-says-about/hajj-and-umrah.

¹⁴¹ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 773; deemed authentic by Imam al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

¹⁴² *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 1134; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥa*, no. 2021.

¹⁴³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 953.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Nawawī, *al-Majmū‘*, 5:8.

¹⁴⁵ *Al-Mu‘jam al-Awṣaṭ li-l-Ṭabarānī*, no. 7609; deemed very good (*jayyid*) by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥah*, no. 1279.

¹⁴⁶ *Al-Sunan al-kubrā li-l-Bayhaqī*, no. 6143; deemed authentic by Imam Ibn Ḥajar in *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, 2:439.

ritual bath, or *ghusl*, on 'Īd before he left to pray in the mosque.¹⁴⁷ The scholars still recommend that you take a bath even if you cannot attend the 'Īd prayer.¹⁴⁸

When walking to the mosque and while inside it, the congregation is encouraged to repeat the exaltation of Allah, or *takbīr* (i.e., saying *Allāh Akbar*), as Allah said, “that you exalt Allah for that to which He has guided you, for perhaps you will be grateful.”¹⁴⁹ Ibn 'Umar raised his voice in these prayers of remembrance on his way to the prayer and until the imam arrived.¹⁵⁰ He was known to be especially strict with regard to the Sunnah, so his actions of this nature are often considered to be directly based on prophetic teachings. The traditional formula by which Allah is exalted is the following: *Allāh Akbar, Allāh Akbar, Allāh Akbar, lā ilāha illā Allāh, Allāh Akbar, Allāh Akbar, wa li-Allāhi al-ḥamd*, which means, “Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest, there is no God but Allah, Allah is the greatest, and for Allah is all praise.”

It is recommended for men, women, and children to attend the 'Īd prayer, even if women are menstruating. The female Companion, Umm 'Aṭīyya, reported:

We were ordered to come out on the day of Eid, even the young girls and menstruating women from their houses. We would stand behind the men and declare the greatness of Allah along with them, and supplicate to Allah along with them, hoping for the blessings of that day and its purification from sin.¹⁵¹

Scholars disagree over whether the 'Īd prayer is a firm individual obligation, a collective obligation, or an emphasized but voluntary recommendation. Nevertheless, it is part of the Sunnah, so you should attend unless you have a good reason not to. It is, after all, a day of blessings and hope, so do not miss out!

After the sermon, Muslims will congratulate one another and ask Allah to accept the good deeds everyone did throughout Ramadan. The Companion Abū Umāma

¹⁴⁷ Mālik ibn Anas, *Muwaṭṭa' al-Imām Mālik*, Riwāyat al-Shaybānī, p. 48, no. 70; deemed authentic by Imam al-Nawawī in *al-Majmū'*, 5:6.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Nawawī, *al-Majmū'*, 5:7.

¹⁴⁹ Qur'an 2:185, author's translation.

¹⁵⁰ *Al-Sunan al-kubrā li-l-Bayhaqī*, no. 6129; deemed authentic by Imam Bayhaqī in his comments.

¹⁵¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 971; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 890.

(rA, d. 81/700) and others used to say to each other, “May Allah accept good deeds from us and from you.”¹⁵² Although the Prophet ﷺ himself is not reported to have said this or prescribed it, it was practiced by the Companions and accepted by prominent scholars such as Imam Aḥmad.¹⁵³

Lastly, the Prophet ﷺ would use different routes to go to the mosque for *‘Īd* prayer and come back to his home.¹⁵⁴ It is not stated clearly by any of the Companions exactly why he would do this, although it is certain to contain many points of wisdom. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) surveys all the scholarly opinions about this practice:

It is said that the reason he did this was to greet the people with peace who lived on both fairways, or so that the blessings of his passing would reach both areas, or to fulfill the needs of those among them. It is said that he did so to establish the symbols of Islam in the various roads and paths. Another reason given is that he did so to frustrate the hypocrites when they witnessed the might of Islam and its people. It is said that he did so in order for the various areas to testify to his obedience to Allah. Surely, whoever walks to the mosque and the place of prayer will earn this virtue: one step raises him a degree, and another erases a sin until he returns home. It is also said, and this is the correct opinion, that all the reasons mentioned here are possible, as well as other unknown wisdom that always accompanied his actions.¹⁵⁵

We can infer from the Prophet's action that he wanted to greet or visit more people on *‘Īd*, so it is advisable that you also attend the different gatherings of your brothers and sisters in Islam. Indeed, more people will pray for you, and you will pray for more people, so get out there and have some halal fun while you are at it!

Post-Ramadan improvements

¹⁵² Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 2:296; deemed very good (*jayyid*) by Imam Aḥmad in his comments.

¹⁵³ Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, 2:295.

¹⁵⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 986.

¹⁵⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya, *Zād al-ma’ād fī hady khayr al-‘ibād*, ed. Muḥammad Adīb Jādir, 5 vol. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1994), 1:432–33.

When Ramadan is over, pay attention to how your habits fare in the following months. The idea is that Ramadan should be transformative; we should come out as better Muslims than we were at the beginning. To keep up the good habits, it is recommended to fast some days during the following month of Shawwal. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan and then follows it with six days of fasting in the month of Shawwal, it will be as if he fasted for the entire year.”¹⁵⁶ The reason fasting six days of Shawwal after Ramadan is like fasting for a year is because Allah multiplies good deeds by ten. The Prophet clarified in another narration, “Fasting the month of Ramadan is like ten months of fasting and fasting six days of Shawwal is like two months of fasting. Thus, they are like fasting for a year.”¹⁵⁷

Now that you have acclimated yourself to the habit of fasting, take advantage of fasting in Shawwal to establish a sustainable habit. Recall that the Sunnah is to fast three days a month, or every Monday and Thursday, or every other day at most. Although you may not be able to make all six days of Shawwal in a row or at intervals, any voluntary fasting you can do is excellent. If you fast only three days each month as a new post-Ramadan routine, it is rewarded as if you fasted every day you were alive! The Prophet ﷺ said, “Fasting three days of every month, and Ramadan after Ramadan, is like fasting for a lifetime.”¹⁵⁸ Whatever you decide to do, consistency is more important than quantity, as the Prophet said, “Know that the most beloved deed to Allah is that which is done regularly, even if it is small.”¹⁵⁹ Move at your own pace, slow and steady, onward and upward!

The cumulative practices of Ramadan should instill within us devotion to Allah, humility, generosity, and compassion for the poor. It is a time to exert our utmost, seeking the pleasure of Allah and His ultimate reward, and a time to renew our faith through good deeds. While there are a whole host of practices that we are encouraged to do during this month, remember that every individual is different and Allah has blessed us all with various strengths. It might be easier for someone to pray at night, while others find it easier to recite the Qur'an or to generously donate their time, money, and effort in service of others. As long as you fulfill the

¹⁵⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1164.

¹⁵⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzayma*, no. 2115; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi'*, no. 3851.

¹⁵⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1162.

¹⁵⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6464; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2818.

basic obligations of Ramadan, you are free to focus on those recommended deeds that Allah has made personally easy for you, but still try to do a little bit of everything. There is only one Straight Path to Allah by worshiping Him alone, but many gates to enter Paradise. With so many opportunities to acquire treasures in Heaven this month, the Prophet ﷺ exclaimed in exasperation, “May he be humbled, who enters the month of Ramadan and it passes before he is forgiven!”¹⁶⁰

We ask Allah to bless you and your family this Ramadan, in this life, and in the Hereafter!

Success comes from Allah, and Allah knows best.

¹⁶⁰ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, no. 3545; deemed authentic by Shaykh al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi‘*, no. 3510.