

Review paper

Glimpse on Fundamental Wings of Fasting (SAWM): A Wake-up Call

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ABSTRACT: Fasting, or Sawm in Arabic, is a fundamental component of Islam. Every Muslim is required to fast during the month of Ramadan, according to the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Muslim scholars' consensus. As we will see in this paper, the fundamental goal or reason behind the institution of fasting in Islam is to instill discipline and God consciousness in the lives of every Muslim believer.

Keywords: Glimpse, fundamental, fasting and a wake-up call

INTRODUCTION

Fasting in Islam entails abstaining from eating, drink, smoking, and sexual activity from dawn to sunset in order to draw closer to Allah and seek His pleasure.

Fasting is the fourth pillar of Islam, and it is mandatory according to the Qur'an, Sunnah, and consensus during

Again

*"The month of Ramadan, in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of guidance and the criterion (of right and wrong), whoever of you is present, let him fast the month, and whoever is sick or on a journey, let him fast the same number of other days, Allah desires for you ease; He desire not hardship for you, and He desire that you should complete the period, and should magnify Allah for having guided you and that you may be thankful"*¹

From the *Sunnah*, the Prophet (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) said:

"Islam is built on five (pillars): testifying that there no deity worthy of worship except Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the establishment of Salah (prayer), the payment of Zakaat (poor-due), the Sawm

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The Qur'an says:

*"O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may learn self restraints (or be god-fearing) (Fast of Ramadan) and the Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah)"*²

Failure to observe the fast on any day, without a valid reason, during the month of Ramadan is a great sin and the violator should be sincerely repentant and make up that fast later on. Abu Hurairah reports that the Prophet (SAW) said:

*"Anyone who does not, without illness or any other valid excuse, keep fast on a single day during the month of Ramadan will not succeed in making amends for it even if he were to fast daily throughout his life in atonement"*⁴

Fasting is not something new and is found in other religions. The Muslim fast, however differs in the number of days, its manners, duration and motive.

MANNERS AND DURATION

From sunrise to sunset, abstain from everything that invalidates the fast (food, drink, smoking, sexual intercourse, and immoral activities). The Qur'an says:

"...and eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread of the dawn. Then strictly observe the fast till nightfall."

OBJECTIVE OR MOTIVE

The main motives of fasting are:

1. To become God-conscious. The Qur'an says:

"... so that you may learn self restraints (or be god-fearing).

2. To be grateful. Thankfulness (Shukr) is stated in the fasting verses. Being appreciative is a duty that mankind owes to God. We thank God for guiding us and for all the blessings He has bestowed upon us.

The Qur'an says:

...and should magnify Allah for having guided you and that you may be thankful.

TYPES OF FASTING

There are two types of fasting. They are obligatory and voluntary fasting.

The obligatory fasting (FARD):

1. Fasting in the month of Ramadan.
2. Fasting of Atonement or expiation of sin (Kaffarah).

These are fasting taken to atone for an error or mistake or breaking certain commandments. This includes:

- a.) To fast for two consecutive months if one kills another Muslim accidentally and one is not able to set a slave free.
- b.) To fast three days as atonement for false swearing, in case one cannot feed ten poor persons or cannot free a slave.
- c.) To fast for two consecutive months in case of *Zihar* i.e. when a man tells his wife that he considers her like his mother (meaning that he will not have sexual intercourse with her). If he wants to resume his right as a husband, he should fast for two consecutive months if he cannot free a slave.
- d.) If one had sexual intercourse with his wife during daytime in Ramadan, he is required to fast two consecutive months in atonement if he is not able to

emancipate or free a slave.

e.) To fast for three days, if anyone for one reason or the other does a prohibited act, when in a state of *ihraam* for Hajj or 'Umrah; like shaving the head, clipping nails, covering head with anything that touch it by men, wearing sewn clothes by men, using perfume, if such person could not afford to sacrifice a sheep or feed six poor persons; providing each poor person with a *Mudd* of food.

f.) To fast ten days, three days during pilgrimage and seven days after returning from pilgrimage, for the person who chooses either *Hajj Tamattu'* or Hajj Qiran, in case he cannot offer a sacrifice.

i. Fasting of Vowing (Nadhr)

If a Muslim gives a vow that he will fast a number of days if a certain lawful matter takes place such as success, or if he overcomes some trouble. Once the purpose for which the vow is given is achieved, fasting becomes an obligation.

The voluntary fasting

The Voluntary fast is not obligatory. It is observed voluntarily out of one's willingness to get closer to Allah and as an act of following the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

The Voluntary fast includes the following:

Fasting on Monday and Thursday

The Prophet used to fast on Mondays and Thursdays. Abu Hurairah relates that he was asked about that and he said: "A man's deeds are, reported on Mondays and Thursdays and I prefer that I should be observing the fast when my deeds are reported."

Abu Qatadah relates that the Holy Prophet was asked about observing the fast on Monday and he said: "That is the day on which I was born and the day on which I received the call (or the day on which I received revelation"

Fasting for three days on days of full moon, which are known as "white days" (13th, 14th, 15th) of every lunar month

The Prophet (SAW) said: *"It is like fasting the whole year."*

This is because a good deed is multiplied ten times.

To fast a day and give up fasting for a day

Ahmad related from 'Abdallah Ibn 'Amr that the Prophet (SAW), said: "The fast most loved by Allah is the fast of David (Prophet Daud), and the most loved prayer is the prayer of David. He would sleep half thenight; pray for a third of the night, and sleep during the last sixth of the night, he would also fast one day and then eat on the next"

Fasting the greater part of month of Sha'ban

Aishah said: *"I never saw the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, fast a complete month save for Ramadan and I have never seen him fast more in a month than he did in Sha'ban."*

Fasting for six days during the month of Shawwal

Abu Ayyub Al-Ansari relates that the Prophet (SAW) said: *"Whoever fasts during the month of Ramadan and then follows it with six days of Shawwal will be (rewarded) as if he had fasted throughout the year"* -

According to Ahmad, one may fast on these days consecutively or non-consecutively, as neither practice is preferred over the other.

vi. Fasting on the day of Tasu'ah i.e. 9th of Muharram.

Ibn Abbas relates that the Holy Prophet said: *"If I survive till the next year I shall fast on the ninth of Muharram."*

Fasting on the day of Ashurah i.e. 10th of Muharram

Ibn Abbas reported that: *"The Prophet (SAW) came to Madinah and found the Jews fasting on the day of 'Ashurah'. He said to them: 'What is this fast?' They said: 'A great day, Allah saved Moses and the tribes of Israel from their enemies on this day and therefore, Moses fasted on this day.' The Prophet said: 'We have more right to Moses than you,' so he fasted on that day also and ordered the people to fast on that day."*

"Fasting on the day of Ashurah is an expiation for the year preceding it." Related by

Fasting on the day of Arafat (for Non-Pilgrims only).

Qatadah reports that the Messenger of Allah said: *"Fasting on the day of 'Arafah is an expiation for two years, the year preceding it and the year following it." Fasting in the First Ten Days of Dhul Hijjah.*

Ibn Abbas relates that the Holy Prophet said: *"There are no days during which righteous action is as pleasing to Allah as righteous action in these days (meaning the first ten days of Dhul-Hijjah)." He was asked: "Messenger of Allah, not even striving in the cause of Allah?" He answered: "Not even striving in the cause of Allah except in the case of one who goes forth with his life and his property and does not come back with either."*

Forbidden fasting

1. Fasting is prohibited on the doubtful day i.e. the day

preceding the month of Ramadan, 29th of Sha'ban except for a man who was fasting his regular fast.

2. The two days of *Eid* (Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha).
3. The Days of *Tashriq* (the three days following the day of sacrifice, 11th, 12th, 13th, of month of Dhul-Hijjah) for pilgrims. The Prophet said: *"Do not fast these days, for they are days during which you eat, drink and remember Allah."*
4. Friday should not be singled out for voluntary fasting except one fast a day before or a day after it. The Prophet said: *"Verily Friday is an Eid for you, so do not fast on it unless you fast the day before or after it."*
5. To fast everyday of the year is forbidden.
6. Voluntary fast is forbidden for a woman without the permission of her husband.
7. Women are not permitted to fast on days they are still in their menses and post delivery bleeding.
8. Fasting two or more days without breaking the Fast is discouraged.

Virtues of fasting

Fasting is an act of worship and it has several virtues, such as:

1. "Allah said: 'Every (good) deed of the son of Adam belongs to him, except fasting, for it is done solely for My sake and I give reward for it.'"
2. "Every good deed of the son of Adam is multiplied in reward 10 to 700 times except for fasting, for it is for Me and I will grant the reward for it, he leaves his passion and his food for My sake. The fasting person has two moments of happiness. One moment when he ends his fasting for the day (*Iftar*) and the other when he meets his Lord..."
3. "Fasting is a shield from the Fire just as one of you would use a shield in battle."
4. "Fasting is like a shield ..." (Muslim). Fasting is a protection from committing evil by shielding the senses and limbs from wrongdoing.
5. "Whoever fast for a day for the sake of Allah, Allah removes the hell-fire seventy years further away from his face."
6. "There is a gate in Paradise called *Ar-Rayyan*, from which only those who fast will enter on the Day of Judgement, and no one else will enter from it. When they all entered, it will be locked and no one else will enter through it again."
7. "The Fast and the Qur'an are two intercessors for the servant of Allah on the Day of Resurrection. -The fast will say: 'O Lord, I prevent him from his food and desires during the day. Let me intercede for him.'¹ The Qur'an will say: 'I prevented him from sleeping at night. Let me intercede for him. And their intercession will be accepted.'"
8. The Prophet (SAW) said: *"By the One in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, the odour emanating from the mouth of the one who is fasting is more pleasant to Allah*

than the sweet smell of musk (fragrance)"

9. The Du'aa' (Prayer) of the fasting person will not be refused.

Also, Tirmidhi reported:

"Three people will not have their supplications rejected: a fasting person until he breaks his fast, a just ruler and an oppressed person."

Virtues of Ramadan

1. "When the first night of Ramadan approaches, the satans and the rebellious jinns are chained; the gates of Hell are closed down and the gates of Paradise are thrown open, then a crier (appointed by Allah) cries: 'O seeker after righteousness! Get forward; and O seeker after sin and evil! Restrain yourself!' Then many a sinner is released from Hell by Allah's command and this happens during every night of Ramadan."

2. "The first part of this month is Allah's mercy, the middle part forgiveness, and the last part is salvation and release from the fire of Hell."

3. "Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan with faith, seeking Allah's, pleasure and reward will have his past sins forgiven."

4. "Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan then follows it with six days of Shawwal will be like the one who fasts the whole year."

5. "During the Ramadan the provisions of the Believers are increased."

6. "Whoever offers the voluntary prayers (at night) in Ramadan with faith and seeking Allah's pleasure and reward will have his past sins forgiven." (Agreed upon)

7. "The Five Daily Prayers, the Friday Prayer to the next Friday Prayer and Ramadan to the next Ramadan are erasers (or removers) for what occur between them, as long as the major sins are avoided."

8. "Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet (SAW) said: "The blessed month has come to you. Allah has made fasting during it obligatory upon you. During it, the gates to Paradise are opened and the gates to hellfire are locked, and devils are chained. There is a night (during this month), which is better than a thousand months. Whoever is deprived of its good is really deprived (of something great)."

Benefits of fasting

1. Fasting in Islam is primarily a spiritual discipline

for the self. A person refrains not only from food and drinks but from all kind of evil, he is getting used to good deeds, discipline, patience and sincerity.

2. Through fasting man is able to rule his desires instead of being the slaves of his appetites and desires.

3. Fasting is beneficial for one's health. It gives the digestive system rest and helps the body to get rid of accumulated wastes, which are detrimental to health.

4. It awakens sympathy for the poor in the hearts of the rich as he experiences the pangs of hunger.

5. The fasting person feels his equality with his fasting brethren and experience general Islamic unity as he joins the whole Muslim world in observing the same duty in the same manner at the same time for the same motives,

6. Fasting also provides a great opportunity for those who are calling others to Allah, In this month the hearts of people turn to Allah and many people come to the mosque.

Conditions governing the validity of the obligatory fast of Ramadan

1. ISLAM - Incumbent on Muslims only.

2. SANITY - Not incumbent on insane person.

3. MATURITY - Not compulsory on children

4. PURITY:-; Purity from menstruation and Childbirth blood in women

5. TIME - During the month of Ramadan

Beginning and ending of Ramadan

Allah's Messenger (SAW) said:

"Fast when the moon (of Ramadan) is sighted and break your fast when moon (that is crescent of Shawwal) is sighted."

"If you were not able to see it (the crescent of Shawwal), then complete the month (Ramadan) thirty days".

There are two methods of deciding the beginning of the month of Ramadan

1. Sighting the new moon on the 29th day of Sha'ban, fasting becomes obligatory on the following day from dawn to sunset.

2. If the new moon cannot be sighted on the 29th day of Sha'ban, the thirty days of Sha'ban will be completed and in this case the following day will be the first day of Ramadan.

The witness, of one righteous Muslim is sufficient to decide the beginning: of the month of Ramadan, while the witness of Two Muslims is warranted for breaking the fast on the start of the month of Shawwal.

Who is required to fast?

Fasting in the month of Ramadan is compulsory upon every Muslim, male or female who has the following qualifications:

1. **Maturity:** Fasting is obligatory upon every Muslim (male or female) who has reached age of puberty; children should be encouraged to do so in order to accustom themselves to fasting.

2. One has to be mentally sane and physically fit.

3. To be present at one's permanent settlement, home town, farm, business premises etc. This means that those

traveling have the option either to fast or to defer the fast. In the case of the latter, one must compensate for any missed days at a later time.

4. One has to be sure that the fast will not cause him/her any harm, physical or mental, other than the normal reactions to hunger, thirst etc.

Those exempted from fasting

1. Children who have not attained the age of puberty. .
2. Insane adults are exempted from fasting and no compensation is enjoined on them.
3. Men and women who are too old and feeble to bear its hardship are exempted from fasting but must feed one needy person with one average meal per missed day.
4. Sick people whose health is likely to be severely affected' by the observance of fast. They may postpone the fast, as long as they are sick, to a later date and make up for it, a day for a day.
5. Pregnant or breast-feeding women are allowed to defer the fasting if they fear that it will endanger their health or that of their infants. However, they are required to make up missed days after Ramadan.
6. Menstruating women and mothers with post childbirth bleeding cannot fast but must compensate later on a day-per-day basis for any day missed.
7. Those who have to perform difficult jobs under harsh circumstances and could not find any other means to support themselves. However they are obliged to feed one poor person, a day for every day of fasting that they do not perform.

The obligatory steps or pillars of fasting

1. **Niyyah or Intention:** For the fast to be valid, it is compulsory to make intention (in the heart) for the fasting days of Ramadan as soon as the moon is sighted or anytime before dawn (*al-fajr*). It is necessary to renew the intention everyday of fasting preferably before dawn. As for voluntary fast, one is allowed to intend to fast at any time during the day, provided he or she did not eat, drink or have sexual intercourse.

2 Abstaining from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset.

The sunnah steps of fasting

1 *Sahur*, Delaying *Sahur*. *Sahur* is a light, pre-dawn meal, recommended before commencing the fast. The *sahur* is a blessing and hence recommended but it is not a sin for one - who does not do so. Any consumption of food or drink is expected to be stopped at least 10-20 minutes before the onset of dawn. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"The pre-dawn meal is blessed, so do not neglect it even if you only take a sip of water. Verily, God and the Angels

bless those who have pre-dawn meals"

2. *Iftar*: To break the fast immediately after sunset. The Prophet

(SAW) said:

"The people will always be with the good as long as they hasten the breaking of the fast and delay the taking of the morning meal."

Conclusion

Fasting is a fundamental pillar in Islam, denying it is rejecting Islam. The main aim of the institution of fasting in the religion of Islam is to create discipline and God consciousness in the life of each and every Muslim in the Islamic society. It is also shows the symbol of equality among the Muslims since it is compulsory upon everyone rich, poor, black and white.

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