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RAMADAN



one reason

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You are probably reading this because you have been invited to “ShareRamadan”, or someone has challenged you to try to fast for a day or even more!

The purpose of this booklet is to explain a little about the month of Ramadan, fasting and what it all means.

If you have accepted the challenge, it will explain the rules you need to follow in order for it to count as a proper fast.

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Good intentions

The first, and one of the most important matters, is to think about what our motivations are for fasting.

A key objective of fasting is the development of self-control, and learning self-control demands that one is aware of what we are thinking and why we do or do not do certain things. This is why we start with what is called “niyah” in Arabic and is usually translated as “intention”. Intention is the firm resolve and decision to commit to something, which, in this case, is to fast. For a Muslim, the key objective is to try to make the intention for the fast to be an act of worship seeking to please Allah, or God, alone and not for any worldly goal, such as the praise and admiration of others. This is called “ikhlas” in Arabic, or purity of intention. Actually, to do an act of worship with the intention of showing off to others is considered one of the most serious sins and can spoil the value of a good action altogether. Fasting is therefore considered to be one of the easiest acts of worship in which to achieve sincerity because you can never really know if a person is fasting or not. Of course a person could pretend to be fasting while secretly eating, and even if they ate or drank openly, one could claim it was out for forgetfulness. This is because if you eat or drink by mistake your fast still counts! It is only when you break the fast intentionally does it become invalid. In fact, even firmly deciding to break the fast will break it according to some scholars, even if you do not actually eat or drink.

Of course you may not be fasting as an act of worship to God alone (although we recommend you try it!) but the issue of intention is still important. You could be fasting to challenge yourself and push your limits and see what you are actually capable of, or because you want to have some understanding of what your Muslim brothers and sisters in humanity are going through during the month of Ramadan. You may choose to fast for the numerous mental and physical benefits, or to help nurture empathy for those less well off than yourself. Whatever the reason, understanding your motivations and focusing on them will help provide the motivation to complete the fast.

The Rules

A fast in Islam entails abstaining from food and drink and sexual intercourse from dawn until sunset.

Taking in any type of nutrition or stimulant is not allowed, which includes smoking and injections. If a person is travelling, sick, old or very young and if fasting might damage their health, then they should not fast. In addition, women who are pregnant or breast-feeding can choose to fast or not, but should ensure they are not harming the child.

You are allowed to shower, bath or refresh yourself with water and rinse out your mouth. None of these things break the fast. You can rest and sleep. Gathering spittle together and swallowing it intentionally, swallowing mucus, tasting food for a need without swallowing, and swallowing blood from bleeding gums unintentionally, all do not break the fast.

However, vomiting intentionally or intentionally inflaming one's sexual desire to the point of ejaculation does break the fast. As for the one who is sleeping and has wet dreams, this does not break the fast, and kissing and acts of affection are fine between the husband and wife, but are not recommended for those who are youthful and more likely to be tempted to take it further.

This fast takes place throughout the whole of month of Ramadan. The months were measured by the ancients using the moon and the Islamic calendar continues to follow this method, with the sighting of the new moon ending the previous month and ushering in the new one. This is why the issue of sighting the new moon or not can cause much discussion and sometimes differences among Muslims in respect to the beginning and end of the fasting month.

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functioning of the Muslim nation, since it means adherence to God's guidance, leaving what He has prohibited and doing what He has ordered, with the hope of reward and fear of punishment, all the time being guided by the Quran and noble example of the Prophet Mohammed (May Allah's peace be upon him).

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As the Quran states:

“Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain taqwa.” 2:183

Of course obeying God and following His guidance is not always easy. It may entail giving up things we love and doing things we would rather not do, and this needs self awareness and self control, as well as constant reminders of what it actually is that God wants from us. So the purpose of fasting in Islam is not necessarily to feel hungry, thirsty and tired, but it is in fact to acquire good manners, attitudes and behaviours.

This is why the Prophet Mohammed (may Allah's peace be upon him) taught that, “Allah does not need a person to give up eating and drinking if they fail to give up evil in their speech and action.” (Narrated by Bukhari) Therefore, indulging in backbiting, slander, tale carrying, evil or even useless talk, oppressing and mistreating others does not technically break the fast, but it defeats the spirit of it. Rather, there is great emphasis in Ramadan of not only increasing the acts of devotion to God, such as prayers and visiting the mosques, but also giving attention to equally important acts of kindness and compassion towards fellow human beings, such as charity, feeding others, encouraging good and forbidding evil.

Ramadan is a month where Muslims, following the example of the Prophet Mohammad, give more generously and many Muslim charities rely heavily on the donations that come in this month:

It has been narrated that, **“Allah’s Messenger was the most generous of all the people, and he used to reach the peak in generosity in the month of Ramadan when Gabriel met him. Gabriel used to meet him every night of Ramadan to teach him the Qur’an. Allah’s Messenger was the most generous person, even more generous than the fair rain bringing winds.”**

(Narrated by Bukhari)

In fact, having compassion and empathy, especially for those who are deprived of food and drink, is another beneficial consequence of fasting.

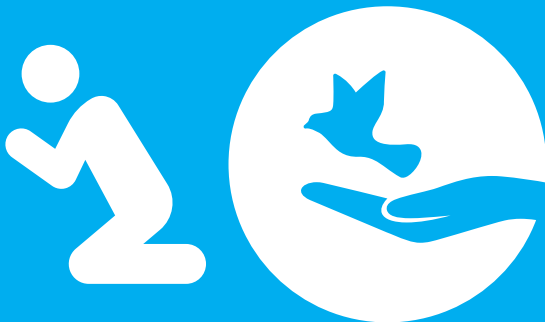
Another special quality that is particular to the fast of Ramadan is the communal breaking of the fast known as iftar. Although this meal can often be very lavish, there is a natural limit to how much one can eat and drink after a whole day of fasting since it shrinks the stomach! The communal breaking of fast is something many compete with to provide for others due to the great blessings and rewards for those who feed the fasting person. It is also a time when everyone shares in the joy and happiness of appreciating food and drink at the end of a day of abstinence.

It really makes one appreciate these bounties that the Creator has provided, whereas we often find ourselves eating and drinking mindlessly out of habit;

A Time For Peace

This state of fasting brings about a profound enhanced feeling of both inner and communal peace.

This peace is a result of being in a state of remembering God, which gives life to the heart and is in fact the very purpose for which we humans have been created. The Quran teaches that recognition of God, His Oneness and Uniqueness and that He alone is worthy of worship, is in fact something innate within us and that we are mentally and spiritually primed for it, but our worldly life distracts us and takes us away from that natural state. In Ramadan, we return to our inner natures where this conflict lessens and peace ensues.



The Health Benefits

In addition to the individual, mental, spiritual, as well and communal benefits of Ramadan, intermittent fasting has many widely recognised health benefits.

Ramadan is a form of intermittent fasting of which health benefits have been well documented, ranging from changes at the cellular level to the effects that are seen in animal models and studies in humans.

The changes that take place inside the body in response to fasting depend on the length of the fast. Technically the body enters into a fasting state around eight hours after the last meal, when the gut has finished absorbing nutrients from food.

The changes that take place inside the body in response to fasting depend on the length of the fast. Technically, the body enters into a fasting state around eight hours after the last meal, when the gut has finished absorbing nutrients from food. In the normal state, glucose is the body's main source of energy and it is stored in the liver and muscles. During a fast, the body first uses its glucose stores to provide energy. Once the glucose stores run out, stored fat becomes the next energy source. If a person observes a prolonged continuous fast, lasting several days to weeks, the body enters into a state of starvation and it starts to break down muscle to use protein for energy. This is clearly an unhealthy situation and is the reason why people who starve look emaciated and become very weak. This does not occur during intermittent fasting such as that observed in Ramadan, because the Ramadan fast only extends from dawn till dusk, providing ample opportunity to replenish energy stores at the pre-dawn and dusk meals.

This regimen allows a gentle, progressive transition from using glucose to fat as the main source of energy, and prevents the breakdown of muscle for protein.

Breakdown of fat for energy helps weight loss, which subsequently preserves muscle. The subsequent long-term effects of weight loss include reduced cholesterol levels, improved control of diabetes and reduced blood pressure, as well as protection from certain cancers and other chronic diseases.

An important beneficial effect of fasting is the effect upon glucose metabolism. When food is consumed, the pancreas releases a hormone called insulin, which promotes storage of excess glucose in the liver and muscle cells in the form of glycogen, and also as fat beneath the skin and around the organs.

During the fasting period, insulin is not released and stored glycogen and fat are broken down to provide energy.

The reduction in insulin release counteracts the process of insulin resistance, which is one of the main underlying mechanism by which diabetes occurs later in life, particularly amongst overweight or obese individuals. In addition, a detoxification process also seems to occur, as any toxins stored in the body's fat are dissolved and removed from the body.

After a few days of intermittent fasting, there are higher levels of certain hormones in the blood, such as endorphins, and this leads to a better level of alertness and an overall feeling of general mental well being.

In terms of continuously improving one's health, this can be achieved by accompanying the fast with a healthy balanced diet and adequate fluid intake during the non-fasting hours. It is very important to replenish fluids during the time an individual is not fasting each day. To prevent muscle breakdown, meals must contain adequate levels of 'energy food' such as carbohydrates and some fat. The diet should therefore be simple and not too different from a person's normal everyday diet. It should contain foods from all the major food groups (fruit and vegetables, carbohydrates, meat and fish, dairy products, fats and sugars) and the right amount of nutrients, salts and water to see the beneficial health effects of fasting.

Some excellent foods to have during Ramadan should include complex carbohydrates and foods rich in fibre. Complex carbohydrates are foods that will help release energy slowly during the long hours of fasting.

They can be found in grains and seeds, such as barley, wheat, oats, beans, lentils, wholemeal flour and rice. Fibre-rich foods are also digested slowly and include cereals, whole wheat, grains and seeds, vegetables and fruit. As for the types of foods that one should try to avoid, these include heavily processed, fast-burning foods that contain refined carbohydrates, as well as foods with a high fat content.

To summarise, some of the beneficial effects of fasting include reduced body fat and body weight, improved glucose metabolism, enhanced insulin sensitivity, reduced prevalence of diabetes, metabolic syndrome and reduced blood pressure (5-11).

Furthermore, intermittent fasting has been shown to improve mental wellbeing through improvement in mood and reported reduction in tension and anger (12-13).

There is also evidence indicating that fasting has a beneficial effect on chronic inflammatory diseases, including reduced clinical symptoms of asthma (14), reduced inflammation and pain in patients with rheumatoid arthritis (15) and reduced oxidative stress and inflammation in overweight women at risk of breast cancer (8).

Raised circulating levels of insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1) are associated with an increased risk of developing certain cancers (16-17); yet fasting for three days or more can lead to reduced circulating levels of insulin, glucose and insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1) which is the major growth factor in mammals associated with accelerated aging and cancer (18).

Five days of fasting leads to a 60% reduction in IGF-1 and a five-fold increase in IGF-BPI, which is one of the major IGF-1 inhibiting proteins (19).

Fasting may also protect against cancer and chronic diseases, including chronic inflammatory conditions, the aging process and neurodegenerative disorders, by reducing cellular and DNA damage, enhancing the death of pre-cancerous cells and by enhancing the immune system and reducing the inflammatory status of the body (1-3, 20-21).

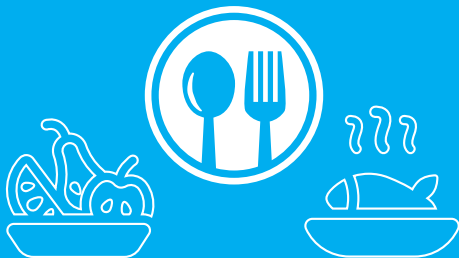
Pre-fast meal

One of things highly encourage by the Prophet Mohammad (may Allah's peace be upon him) was to take the pre-dawn meal or suhoor.

Having the right type of food and making sure one is properly hydrated is very helpful in maintaining the fast.

Try to avoid spicy, salty and fatty foods that will make one thirstier, and lots of caffeine, which encouraged water loss. There is an excellent article on BuzzFeed.com with great suggestions on what you might eat for suhoor entitled:

27 Foods To Eat At Suhoor That Release Energy Throughout The Day During Ramadan
(<http://www.buzzfeed.com/emofly/foods-to-eat-at-suhoor-that-release-energy-throughout-the#.msDaPmyg2>)



Some sayings about fasting

“The fast of the elite is the fast of the heart from bad thoughts, worldly worries and anything else that may divert from anything but thoughts of Allah.”

Mu ammad al-Ghazālī, *Ihya' ulum al-din* ("Revival of Religious Sciences")

Fasting is a shield; so when one of you is Fasting he should not use foul or foolish talk. If someone attacks him or insults him, let him say: “I am Fasting, I am Fasting!”

Prophet Muhammad
(Narrated by Bukhari)

“..during a fast, the digestive system gets an increasing rest. About ten hours after a meal, the contractions stop and the feeling of hunger disappears; five or six hours later the glucose stops coming directly from the intestines and begins to produce itself from the reserve of glycogen contained in the liver. From then on, the body works on itself in a closed circuit, becoming itself the source of the energy it uses. Instead of destroying an appropriating to himself nourishment taken from outside, man enters a state of nonviolence and detachment relative to the outside world.”

Adalbert de Vogüé, *Aimer Le Jeune: L'Experience Monastique*

“Everyone can perform magic, everyone can reach his goals, if he is able to think, if he is able to wait, if he is able to fast.”

Hermann Hesse,
Siddhartha

“Fasting of the body is food for the soul.”

John Chrysostom

“All the deeds of Adam's sons (people) are for them, except fasting which is for Me, and I will give the reward for it.' Fasting is a shield or protection from the fire and from committing sins. If one of you is fasting, he should avoid sexual relation with his wife and quarreling, and if somebody should fight or quarrel with him, he should say, 'I am fasting.' By Him in Whose Hands my soul is' The unpleasant smell coming out from the mouth of a fasting person is better in the sight of Allah than the smell of musk. There are two pleasures for the fasting person, one at the time of breaking his fast, and the other at the time when he will meet his Lord; then he will be pleased because of his fasting.”

Prophet Muhammad (Narrated by Bukhari)

“If thou wouldst preserve a sound body, use fasting and walking; if a healthful soul, fasting and praying; walking exercises the body, praying exercises the soul, fasting cleanses both.”

Francis Quarles

“Everyone can perform magic, everyone can reach his goals, if he is able to think, if he is able to wait, if he is able to fast.”

Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha

“Fasting cures diseases, dries up bodily humors, puts demons to flight, gets rid of impure thoughts, makes the mind clearer and the heart purer, the body sanctified, and raises man to the throne of God.”

Athenaeus of Naucratis

“Fasting today makes the food good tomorrow.”

German Proverb

“Fasting strengthens control over our appetites, thus contributing to self-mastery.”

George Romney

“I fast for greater physical and mental efficiency.”

-Plato

Abu Umamah, may Allah be pleased with him, asked the Messenger of Allah, upon whom be peace, to tell him of an action by which he may enter Paradise. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said:

"Take to fasting, there is nothing like it."

(Narrated by An-Nisa'i, Ibn Hibban and al-Hakim)

“To lengthen thy life, lessen thy meals.”

Benjamin Franklin

“He who eats until he is sick must fast until he is well.”

English Proverb

"Whoever does not give up forged speech and evil actions, Allah is not in need of his leaving his food and drink"

Prophet Muhammad
(Narrated by Bukhari)



“The light of the world will illuminate within you when you fast and purify yourself.”

Mahatma Gandhi

“If you want to ascend like the Prophet to the sky of immortality, know this very well: Fasting is your Arabian stallion.”

Rumi, translated by Nevt O. Ergin

“Fasting cleanses the soul, raises the mind, subjects one’s flesh to the spirit, renders the heart contrite and humble, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, quenches the fire of lust, and kindles the true light of chastity. Enter again into yourself.”

Augustine of Hippo

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