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## Fasting

One of the most significant devotional acts, fasting (*sawm*) has been ordained in the Holy Qur'an. On one occasion, it reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ

***O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you. (2: 183)***

This holy verse entails that fasting, as a devotional act, has a historical root that began with the Divine missions.

Another holy verse states:

وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ

***Seek assistance through patience and prayer. (2:45)***

Exegetes of the Holy Qur'an have interpreted patience to be fasting. However, fasting can be obligatory, recommended, and sometimes forbidden. The Ahl al-Bayt ('a) have paid exceptional attention to this devotional act whose details are reported from them through hundreds of traditions.

### Obligatory Fasting

Obligatory fasting is observed during the month of Ramadhan, and it is also the most favorable sort of fasting.

Fasting for two consecutive months is obligatory as a *kaffarah* (reparation; expiation from a violation of a

religious duty) upon those who commit a murder while a three-day fasting is obligatory as a *kaffarah* for those who break their oaths.

As for the performers of the ritual *Hajj* pilgrimage who cannot find any animal to offer as a sacrifice, it is obligatory upon them to fast for ten days: three during *Hajj* and seven when they return home.

Other forms of **obligatory fasting** are the fasting of those who **vow or pledge to observe fasting** and those who fast on behalf of dead people.

Some jurists deem it obligatory upon those who sleep until the next morning without performing the obligatory early night prayer to observe fasting the following day.

It is obligatory upon a *mu'takif* (one who practices *i'tikaf*; confinement to a holy place for practicing devotional acts) who has spent two days of *i'tikaf* to observe fasting on the third day because he is required to complete the duration of *i'tikaf*, which is three days.

The details of the laws of obligatory fasting are cited in books on practical laws of Islam; it is therefore necessary to refer to these books to acquaint oneself with these details.

## Forbidden Fasting

Fasting is forbidden on the two '«d days (i.e. 'Id al-Fitr, the first of Shawwal, and 'Id al-Adhha, the tenth of Dhu'l-Hijjah), on the *Tashriq* Days (the 11th, 12th, and 13th of Dhu'l-Hijjah), and on 'Ashura' (the tenth of Muharram) as a day of blessings and delight. It is also forbidden to fast for two continuous days (without breaking the fast at the end of the first day and with one intention of fasting for both the days).

## Recommended Fasting

There are special occasions on which fasting is highly recommended because it is connected to certain characteristics that necessitate it. These occasions can be summed up in the following points:

1. Traditions hold that fasting during the summertime is more preferable and more rewardable. Some of these traditions have expressed that fasting in the hot weather is a sort of *jihad* or even the best sort of *jihad*.<sup>1</sup>
2. Youths who cannot afford the requirements of marriage are recommended to fast because it would then hinder and restrain their sexual desires. In this connection, the Holy Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

مَنْ اسْتَطَاعَ مِنْكُمُ الْبَاهُ فَلْيَتَزَوَّجْ، وَمَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَلْيَصُمْ؛ فَإِنَّ الصَّوْمَ وَجَاؤُهُ

*Whoever can afford marriage expenses should marry, but whoever cannot, should observe fasting because fasting is a restraint for him.*

He (S) is also reported to have said to ‘Uthman ibn Maz’un who suggested castration:

لَا تَفْعَلْ فَإِنَّ إِخْتِصَاءَ أُمَّتِي الصِّيَامُ

*Do not do it. The castration of my people is fasting.*

Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) is reported to have said:

قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ: صُمْ صَوْمًا يَفْطَعُ شَهْوَتَكَ، وَلَا تَصُمْ صِيَامًا يَمْنَعُكَ مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ، فَإِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ أَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ تَعَالَى مِنَ الصَّوْمِ.

*Luqman, the wise, said to his son: Observe fasting such that it cuts off your sexual desire, but do not observe fasting such that it prevents you from offering prayers, for prayers are preferred by Almighty Allah to fasting.*[2](#)

3. Some validly reported traditions have laid emphasis on fasting on Wednesdays for the reason that Hellfire, or divine chastisement, falls on such a day; therefore, to fast on Wednesdays protects against Hellfire. However, it is not improbable that Wednesdays that fall in the middle of the months are the only ones intended, as is indicated by some of these traditions.[3](#)

4. Some other traditions hold the recommendation of fasting on Fridays, provided that fasting on the Wednesdays and/or Thursdays that precede these Fridays is also observed. It is also probable that these traditions only intend to declare the legality of fasting on such days and deny that fasting on Fridays is forbidden because they are feast days.[4](#) This could also mean to declare that such discommendation, if found, is cancelled out when fasting on Fridays becomes a continuation of a two or three day fast (beginning with Wednesday or Thursday).

5. Other traditions recommend fasting during misfortunes, tribulations, catastrophes, hardships, adversities, and natural disasters like earthquakes. On such occasions, it is highly advised to fast on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. On the last day, it is likewise advisable to pray to Almighty Allah for rescue from such catastrophes. In addition, it is clear that when almsgiving is attached to fasting, the result will be removal of tribulations.[5](#)

6. Fasting during confinement in mosques (*i'tikaf*) is highly recommended. *I'tikaf* is a devotional practice that is attached to fasting under a vow of spending three days and two nights (that come in-between these days) at least in a mosque. During this period of confinement, abstaining from some legal pleasures is practiced, such as sexual pleasures and using perfumes, as well as other matters the

details of which are mentioned in the books on practical laws of Islam.

The best time for practicing *i'tikaf* is the month of Ramadhan and specifically the last ten days of the month. It is also preferable to practice it in famous mosques, such as the Sacred Mosque of Makkah, the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, the Great Mosque of Kufah, the Great Mosque of Basrah, or the great mosques of one's hometown. Further details can be found in books on jurisprudence.

Finally, let us conclude this part by mentioning a number of points with regard to recommended fasting:

**First:** It is better to conceal fasting and avoid showing it. Shaykh al-Kulayni has reported through a famous chain of authority that Imam al-Sadiq ('a) said:

مَنْ كَتَمَ صَوْمَهُ قَالَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لِمَلَائِكَتِهِ: عَبْدِي إِسْتَجَارَ مِنْ عَذَابِي فَأَجِيرُوهُ. وَوَكَّلَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مَلَائِكَتَهُ بِالدُّعَاءِ لِلصَّائِمِينَ، وَلَمْ يَأْمُرْهُمْ بِالدُّعَاءِ لِأَحَدٍ إِلَّا إِسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ فِيهِ.

*About one who conceals his fasting, Almighty Allah will order His angels, saying, "My servant has sought My protection against My chastisement; therefore, grant him protection." He, the Almighty and Majestic, will also commission His angels to pray to Him for the one fasting. Unquestionably, these prayers will be responded to by Him.* [6](#)

**Second:** When a faithful believer who is fasting is invited to a meal by one of his brothers-in-faith to whom he is paying a visit, it is highly recommended that he share that meal with his host, winning the highest reward of fasting. According to other traditions, it is advisable for one who is fasting not to tell his brother-in-faith that he is fasting; lest, the latter might feel that he has done him a favor by serving him with food to break his fast. [7](#)

**Third:** According to a set of traditions, the voluntary fasting of wives is not admissible unless they obtain the permission of their husbands. According to other traditions, even the voluntary fasting of sons and guests is not advisable without the permission of their fathers or hosts. [8](#) Such laws embrace certain social, moral, and organizational significance.

[1.](#) – Sayyid al-Borujerdi, Jami` Ahadith al-Shi`ah 9:381, H. 16, 17 et al.

[2.](#) – Sayyid al-Borujerdi, Jami` Ahadith al-Shi`ah 9:386-387, H. 6, 4, & 7.

[3.](#) – Sayyid al-Borujerdi, Jami` Ahadith al-Shi`ah 9:413, H. 3.

[4.](#) – This implication can be understood from the tradition mentioned by Shaykh al-Tusi in Tahdhib al-Ahkam and quoted by Sayyid al-Borujerdi in Jami` Ahadiih al-Shi`ah 9:414, H. 2.

[5.](#) – Sayyid al-Borujerdi, Jami` Ahadith al-Shi`ah 9:482, S. 21.

[6.](#) – Sayyid al-Borujerdi, Jami` Ahadith al-Shi`ah 9:483, H. 1.

[7.](#) – Sayyid al-Borujerdi, Jami` Ahadith al-Shi`ah 9:488, S. 24.

[8.](#) – Sayyid al-Borujerdi, Jami` Ahadith al-Shi`ah 9:488, S. 23.

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