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Sawm: Fasting

Introduction

The noble Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) gave an impressive sermon welcoming the month of Ramadhan. He said:

"O people! The month of Allah with its blessings, mercy and forgiveness has come upon you. It is the most preferred of all the months with Allah; its days are the best of days, its nights are the best of nights, and its hours are the best of hours. It is a month in which you have been invited as guests of Allah and have been placed among those honoured by Allah. Your breathing in it is [like] an act of praising [Allah], your sleep an act of worship; your good deeds are accepted, and your prayers answered. Therefore, ask Allah with sincere intentions and pure hearts to help you in fasting and recitating His Book during this [month]. Indeed damned is he who is deprived of Allah's forgiveness during this august month.

"O people! The gates of Paradise are wide open during this month; therefore, ask your Lord not to close them in your face and the gates of Hell-Fire are locked; therefore, ask your Lord not to open them for you. Satans are chained; therefore, ask your Lord not to unfetter them upon you.

"O people! Whosoever among you improves his character during this month, he shall have the pass [to cross] over the Bridge (*sirat*) on the day when [people's] feet shall slip. Whosoever is lenient with his slaves during this month, Allah will be lenient with him in the reckoning of his [deeds on the Day of Judgement]. Whosoever checks his evil deeds during this month, Allah shall withhold His anger from him on the day he meets Him. Whosoever honours an orphan during this month, Allah shall honour him on the day he meets Him. Whosoever maintains, during this month, contact with his relations, Allah will maintain His mercy for him on the day he meets Him. Whosoever recites a verse from the Qur'an during this month, his reward will be like one who has completed the recitation of the Qur'an during the other months."

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said, "There are some who fast but will gain nothing from their fasting except thirst; and there are some who pray but will gain nothing from their prayer except tiredness."

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said, “When you fast, your ears, eyes, hair, skin, and all your limbs should also fast.” He also said, “Fasting is not only [abstaining] from food and drink alone. When you fast, protect your tongue from lying; lower your eye-glances from what Allah has forbidden [you to see]; do not fight with one another; do not be jealous of one another; do not backbite one another; do not abuse one another; and do not be unjust to one another.

Refrain from false accusation, lying, fighting, suspicion, backbiting, and slandering. Be those who look forward to the hereafter, and wait for your days, waiting for what Allah has promised for those who have prepared to meet Allah. You must have tranquility, sobriety, humility, servility, and submissiveness of a slave who fears his master; and be fearful [of Allah’s chastisement] as well as hopeful [in His forgiveness].”[1]

General Rules

It is appropriate now to explain some rules of fasting, and append to them the specific questions and answers concerning this important Islamic ritual.

103. Among the acts that invalidate fasting is intentionally **eating and drinking**. So, if a person who is fasting eats or drinks by mistake (e.g., he forgot that he was fasting) and not intentionally, his fasting is in order and there is no penalty upon him.

104. Among the acts that invalidate fasting of Ramdhan is intentionally staying in a state of ***janabat*** until the beginning of true dawn. So if such a person intentionally remains in that state without performing major ablution (*ghusl*) until the beginning of the true dawn in the month of Ramadhan, then it is obligatory upon him to refrain from the forbidden things for the remaining of the day.

(As a matter of obligatory precaution one should abstain with the intention of “*ma fidh dhimma* — what is expected of him”.) They should also make up this fast some other day [after Ramadhan] with the intention of “*ma fidh dhimma*” and also incur the penalty, based on obligatory precaution. If a person is sick and cannot perform *ghusl* because of his sickness, he should do *tayammum* before true dawn; thereafter, they will be considered to be in a state of ritual purity. Thus, they will be able to fast.

105. Among the acts that invalidate fasting in the month of Ramadhan is for a woman to remain until true dawn in a state of ritual impurity caused by menstruation (***hayz***) or post-natal bleeding(*nifas*) after it had stopped and while it was possible for her to do major ablution (*ghusl*). So if she stays without *ghusl* till the beginning of true dawn, her situation will be the same as that of the person in *janabat* as mentioned above. If performing *ghusl* was not possible for her, she should take to *tayammum.*

106. It is preferable for the fasting person not to swallow **phlegm** that has reached the mouth, although it is permissible for him to swallow it. Similarly, it is permissible for him to swallow the**saliva** that has gathered in the mouth, even in large quantities.

107. Discharge of **semen** during daytime does not invalidate the fast; and the person should perform *ghusl* for *janabat* for his *salat*. So discharge of semen [during daytime] does not invalidate fasting.

108. Washing the teeth with **brush and toothpaste** does not invalidate the fast as long as the person does not swallow the saliva that has mixed with the toothpaste. However, the lingering flavour or taste of the paste that mixes with the saliva does not affect the fasting.

109. If a Muslim lives in a city that has daylight for six months and night for six months [e.g., the **northern part of Europe or Canada**], it is obligatory for him to move during the month of Ramadhan to a city with 'normal' day and night so that he can start fasting, if not, he should move after that month to fast as *qadha* (making up the missed fast). However, if it is not possible for him to move, then he has to pay compensation (*fidya*) instead of fasting; that means giving 750 grams of food [rice or flour] to a poor person per day.

110. If a Muslim lives in a city where daylight in some seasons is for 23 hours and the night is only for one hour or vice versa, it is still obligatory on him to fast, if he has the ability to do so. But if he is not able to fast, the obligation is forfieted. If it is possible for him to do *qadha* later on [e.g., in other seasons or] by moving to another city, it is wajib for him to do the *qadha*. If he is unable even to do the *qadha*, it is obligatory on him to pay *fidya* in lieu of fasting.

Questions and Answers

111. **Question:** Some people come to a city with the intention of residing therein for some years for a specific purpose [e.g., education] During this time, they do not leave their own home-towns for good. When the specific purpose is accomplished, they leave that city and go to wherever they like. How should they do their *salat* and how should they fast [in that city]?

Answer: They shall pray fully; they can fast after having lived in that city for a month just as they do in their own home-towns.

112. **Question:** Is it permissible to rely on the European observatories [i.e., non-Muslim experts] for determining the timings of true dawn, sunrise, noon, and sunset for the whole year, including the month of Ramadhan, knowing well that it is scientific and very precise to the minutes and seconds?

Answer: If one is sure of the correctness of their timings, it is permissible to act upon it. However, one should know that there are some differences in determining the true dawn especially in some of the cities in [northern] Europe [and Canada]; therefore, it is necessary to ascertain that it is based on the proper view.

113. **Question:** In some cities, the sun does not rise at all for days or does not set at all for days or even more. How should we pray and fast?

Answer: As for *salat*, one should, as a matter of obligatory precaution, observe the closest place that has night and day in a twenty-four hour period, then say *salat* according to its timings with the intention of *mutlaqa* [i.e., just *qurbatan ilal lah* without specifying whether it is *ada* (on time) or *qadha* (after time)].

As for fasting, it is obligatory upon you to move during the month of Ramadhan to another city where you can observe fasting of this holy month, or move to that city after that month to perform it *qadha*.

114. **Question:** Can a person who is fasting in the holy month of Ramadhan serve food to non-Muslims?

Answer: By looking at the issue on its own merit, there is no problem in it.

115. **Question:** Would use of a **nozzle spray** that facilitates breathing invalidate the fast?

Answer: If the spray that comes out of the nozzle enters the respiratory tract and not the passage of food and drink, it does not invalidate fast.

116. **Question:** Does the nutrition given, **intravenously** invalidate fast irrespective of whether or not it was absolutely necessary for the patient?

Answer: In both the cases, it does not invalidate the fasting.

117. **Question:** Does **masturbating** during daytime of Ramadhan invalidate the fast, regardless of whether or not it leads to ejaculation? What is the penalty that should be incurred by one who does so? What is the ruling for a woman who engages in masturbation during daytime of Ramadhan, irrespective of whether or not it leads to discharge?

Answer: If a person masturbates with the intention of ejaculating and actually ejaculates, his fast is rendered invalid and he must make it up by way of *qadha* as well as pay the penalty(*kaffara*) which is fasting for two successive months or feeding sixty poor people. If he masturbates with the intention of ejaculating but does not ejaculate, he must complete the fast with the intention of pleasing the Almighty and then do it *qadha.*

If he masturbates without the intention of ejaculating and he does not normally ejaculate, knowing that discharge is probable and it actually happens —he has to do *qadha* without the penalty. However, if such a person was confident that no discharge would take place and it actually happens — no *qadha* is required. In all these cases, there is no difference between a man and a woman.

118. **Question:** A believer fasts but does not know that intentionally getting into **state of *janabat*** invalidates fasting—what should he do [when he finds out]?

Answer: It is obligatory on him to make up those fasts; however, there is no penalty on him as long as he was [erroneously] convinced that being in a state of *janabat* does not invalidate fast or was unaware

of that ruling.

119. **Question:** According to some jurists, a person who intentionally invalidates his fast during the month of Ramadhan by committing a sin has to pay **all three kinds** of penalty [that is, fasting for sixty days, feeding sixty poor people, and emancipating a slave]. What should a person therefore do during our time when emancipating a slave is impossible since there are virtually no slaves?

Answer: The penalty of emancipating a slave is waived when it is no more possible. It should, however, be clarified that in our view, it is not obligatory to pay all three kinds of penalty for invalidating a fast during Ramadhan by committing a sin. And Allah knows the best.

120. **Question:** If the **new moon** is sighted in the East, does it apply to us also in the West? And if it is sighted in America, does it apply to Europe also?

Answer: If the new moon is sighted in the East, it also applies to the West as long as the latitude of the two locations are not greatly further away from one another. If the new moon is sighted in the West, it does not apply to the East unless it is proven—even by the moon staying on the first [Western] horizon for the length of time that is longer than the difference between the sunset of the two locations. [For example, if the sunset in the Eastern city was half an hour before the Western city where the moon was sighted, and the moon stays on the horizon longer than half an hour —the Eastern city can follow the moon sighted in the Western city.]

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In *Minhaju 's-Saliheen,* it says: "The new moon is proven through the knowledge acquired by sighting or recurring reports etc., and through credible reports of its sighting, etc." In ruling No. 1044, it says: "If the new moon is sighted in a city, it is sufficient for other cities, provided they share the same horizon, in the sense that the actual sighting in the first city would necessarily be followed with the sighting in the second city if there were no barriers like clouds, fog, mountains, etc."

In the light of what has been quoted, the following questions arise:

121. **Question:** Would the sighting of the new moon in cities in the East like Iran, Ahsa', Qatif [both in Arabia], other countries in the Gulf, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon necessarily be followed by its sighting in Western countries like England, France and Germany if there were no barriers like clouds and fog?

Answer: Yes, the sighting of the new moon in an area would necessarily be followed —provided there were no barriers— in places which are located to its west as long as they are not far apart on the latitude lines.

122. **Question:** If the answer to the previous question is positive, would the occurrence of the sighting of the new moon in the view of some religious scholars in Eastern countries be a sufficient evidence for one who is residing in Western countries even though the sighting of the new moon did not occur in

those places for lack of clear skies?

Answer: It will not be a sufficient evidence for him or for others. However, if the occurrence of the sighting from the view point of those religious scholars attracts trustworthiness in that person that the moon was actually sighted or proof was established about the sighting without any counter proof —even in the form of a ruling— that person can act on what he believes is true.

123. **Question:** During certain months, it is declared that the sighting has been proven according to some religious scholars in some Eastern countries. This is based on the testemony of those who have sighted the new moon. Such declarations are usually coupled with the following facts:

1. The witnesses who sighted the moon and who number around thirty, for example, are scattered in various cities such as 2 in Isfahan, 3 in Qum, 2 in Yazd, 4 in Kuwait, 5 in Bahrain, 2 in Ahsa', and 6 in Syria, etc.

2. The sky was clear in a number of cities in the West, and the believers went out in the attempt to sight the moon; and there was nothing preventing the sighting.

3. The observatories in England announced that it was impossible to sight the new moon that evening in England except by using a telescope; and that its sighting with the naked eye would be possible only in the following night. So, what is the ruling in such a case? Please guide us, may Allah reward you.

Answer: The criterion is the satisfaction of the individual himself [1] about the actual sighting [of the new moon] or [2] the proof of sighting without any counter claim.

In the case mentioned above, satisfaction is not normally achieved concerning the appearance of the new moon on the horizon in such a way that it could have been sighted by the naked eye. On the contrary, one is satisfied that it was not sighted and that the testimony [of sightings in the Eastern cities] is based on illusion and error in sight. And Allah knows the best.

1. For these and other similar ahadith in the books of hadith and in Mafatihu 'l-Jinan of 'Abbas al-Qummi, p. 235-237.

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