

Fast 4: Fasting — The month of Ramadan

- The Holy Quran says:

“The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to people and clear proofs of guidance and the Criterion. So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast in it, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you” (2:185).

شَهْرَ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى
لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَنْ
شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَنْ كَانَ
مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ
اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ

- This particular month has been chosen for fasting because it is the month in which the Quran was revealed. It is well-known that the Quran was revealed in portions during a period of twenty-three years; therefore by its revelation in the month of Ramadan is meant that its revelation first took place in that month.
- The first revelation came to the Holy Prophet during one of the nights towards the end of the month of Ramadan when he was in the cave of Hira. The month which witnessed the greatest spiritual experience of the Holy Prophet was thus considered to be the most suitable month for the spiritual discipline of the Muslim community, which was to be effected through fasting.
- If a particular time had not been specified the discipline would have lost all its value. It is due to the choice of a particular month that with its advent the whole Muslim world is, as it were, moved by one current from one end to the other. All sections of Muslim society, from one end of the earth to the other, suddenly change the course of their lives when Ramadan begins.
- People who are exempted from fasting are specially mentioned either in the Holy Quran or in the Hadith. The Quran mentions the sick and those on journey in the above verse, and also in the preceding verse as follows:

“But whoever among you is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. And those who find it extremely hard may effect

فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُم مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ
أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ

redemption by feeding a poor one.”

(2:184)

طَعَامُ مَسْكِينٍ

The sick person and the traveller are required to fast afterwards, when the sickness has gone or when the journey ends, and to complete the missed fasts after Ramadan, but there may be cases of protracted illness or constant journeying, and such people are allowed to effect a redemption by feeding a poor person for every fast missed. According to Hadith, the old, pregnant women, and women suckling a child, are exempt from fasting and should feed a poor person instead. Those who cannot afford to feed a poor person can perform some other act of charity, such as helping someone in need in some other way. People engaged in hard manual labour, as in gathering the harvest, may postpone fasting to a time when it is possible for them to fast.

- The sick person and the traveller have the option of keeping the fast if they do not find it hard, since if the fasts are broken the number of days must be completed afterwards when the sickness or the journey is over. The permissive nature of the words of the Quran is reflected in many of the most reliable Hadith reports. There are reports showing that the Holy Prophet himself kept a fast while on a journey. In one hadith it is stated that on a certain journey on a very hot day, only the Prophet and one other man kept the fast. When questioned by a person whether he should or should not break the fast when on a journey, his own inclination being for fasting, the Holy Prophet replied: “Keep the fast if you like, and break it if you like”.
- When people travelled with the Holy Prophet, those who kept the fast did not find fault with those who broke it, nor did those who broke the fast find fault with those who kept it. There is no doubt a saying of the Holy Prophet to the effect that “it is not a virtue to fast when journeying,” but these words were spoken to a person who was in severe distress on account of the fast, and around whom people had gathered to provide shade for him from the heat.
- In all cases in which fasts have to be recovered, a person is at liberty to do it when he or she likes, before the coming of the next Ramadan.