

4.1 Fasting

OBJECTIVES

WE WILL:

- Recognize the many physical and spiritual benefits of fasting.
- Examine the different levels of fasting.
- Identify what invalidates the fast.

AL-MARZŪQ:

full of sustenance

MIDMĀR:

a special training period for a great competition

THE MONTH OF RAMAḌĀN

The month of RamaḌān is a very sacred and special month in Islam. In it, we have the honor of fasting in obedience to Allah ﷻ, and gaining the treasures of self-control and self-restraint for the pleasure of Allah. We seek to attain God-consciousness (*taqwā*) at a higher level. The month of RamaḌān is full of blessings and mercy, where even our sleep and breathing is considered as worship and glorification for us.

During the lifetime of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, the blessed month of RamaḌān was given the title of *al-Marzūq*, which means ‘full of sustenance’ due to the abundance of the blessings of Allah ﷻ during this month. It is also known as *Midmār*, which means ‘a special training period for a great competition.’ The month of RamaḌān is also a catalyst for burning away sins, abandoning bad habits, and implementing good practices. Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said:

“The month of RamaḌān was named so because it burns away (*yarmiḍu*) the sins”¹



QUR'ĀNIC CONNECTION

RamaḌān رمضان (The 9th month of the Islamic calendar)

- Arabic Root Word: رم ض r-m-ḍ
- Root Meaning: Intense heat; scorching; burning
- Occurrences in the Noble Qur'ān: 1 time
- Reference: Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), Verse 185.



STOP AND REFLECT: How does the meaning of the word *RamaḌān* relate to the sacred month of RamaḌān?

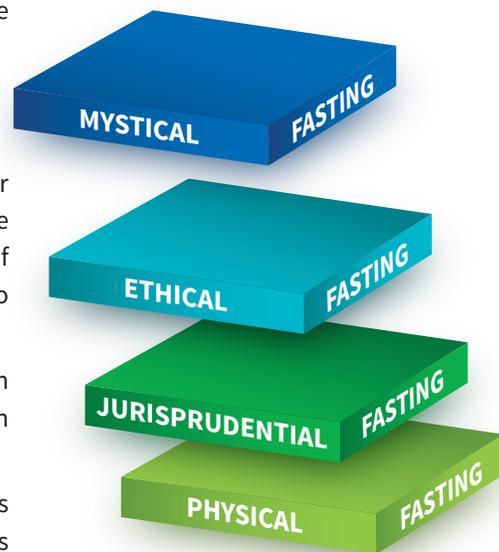
¹ Muttaqī Hindī, *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, Ḥadīth #23688.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF FASTING

As we refrain from food and water during the month of Ramaḍān, all of our organs should also join in by refraining from any kinds of sins. Imām Aṣ-Ṣādiq عليه السلام said: “When you fast, let your hearing and your vision abstain with you from anything unlawful and everything ugly—leave aside hypocrisy, and do not harm those who serve you. Instead, adorn yourself with the dignity of a fast, and do not make your fasting day the same as a day when you are not fasting.”²

This *ḥadīth* hints at the idea that there are different levels of fasting:

- 1. Physical Fasting:** This is where a person follows a certain diet so they do not eat or drink certain things; it can also include practices such as intermittent fasting. There are no benefits in the Hereafter for doing this unless someone has the intention of fasting this way to keep their body healthy because it is a trust from Allah ﷻ, and so they can serve Him better.
- 2. Jurisprudential Fasting:** This is fasting as prescribed by the laws of Islam, in which a person avoids certain things such as drinking and eating, etc. from dawn until *Maghrib*.
- 3. Ethical Fasting:** This is a higher level where a person not only avoids the things which break the fast from a jurisprudential point of view, but also avoids any sins with every organ of one’s body. We should make it our aim and goal at the beginning of every month of Ramaḍān that our fast will not only be a jurisprudential fast, but also an ethical fast.
- 4. Mystical Fasting:** This is the highest form of fasting where a person abstains from everything other than being in the presence and remembrance of Allah ﷻ.



STOP AND REFLECT: What are some practical things we can do to achieve the ethical level of fasting?

In addition to fasting, because of the special rewards in the month of Ramaḍān, there are a few additional actions that are highly recommended and very rewarding to perform, such as:

- Reciting the Noble Qur’ān more often (every single verse that a person recites in the month of Ramaḍān will be given the reward of having recited the entire Qur’ān in any other month of the year).
- Worshiping (e.g., reciting *mustahāb* prayers, *du’ās*, etc.), especially during the nights.
- Avoiding all forms of sins (e.g., swearing, being rude to parents, etc.).
- Spending more time in Islamic centers and *masājid*, and in the company of pious people.
- Refraining from wasting any time.



² ‘Allāmah Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, Vol. 94, P. 351.

Activity 4.1a: Ethical Fasting Worksheet

In an effort to prepare for the month of Ramaḍān, Fatima makes a list of common sins that are often committed by different body parts which she aims to avoid. Help her fill in the chart below.

BODY PART	COMMON SINS	ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS
Eyes		
Ears	Listening to forbidden music	
Mouth	Backbiting	Defend the person who is being talked about; or change the topic; or leave the gathering/conversation
Stomach	Overeating	
Brain/Thoughts		

BENEFITS OF FASTING

Fasting has many benefits for us. We will look at some of them here.

1. God-consciousness (*Taqwā*)

Taqwā is being conscious and careful of our duties toward Allah ﷻ, and protecting ourselves against those things that harm our soul. One of the main goals of fasting, according to the Qurʾān, is that it should help us attain *taqwā*. When we fast, we are controlling some of our biggest desires, such as hunger and thirst. We cannot live without food and water as they are very precious to us. In this special month, however, we train ourselves to temporarily keep away from that which we like and is permissible for us. This action strengthens our soul, and helps us to refrain from doing those things which are forbidden for us.

2. Self-Building

Most of us find it very difficult to change our bad habits. The month of Ramaḍān is a great opportunity to make positive changes in our lives and daily routines. When we fast, our eating, drinking, and sleeping habits already change, so it can be a great catalyst for making other positive changes in our lives as well.

3. Health Benefits

The Prophet ﷺ said: “Fast, and you will be healthy.”³ There is a lot of medical literature that confirms the physical health benefits of fasting. In recent years, we have come to learn more about the benefits of fasting, and it has even become a health trend. While this should not be the sole intention for fasting, it is definitely one of the benefits of it.⁴

4. Sharing and Caring

Imām Ḥasan Al-ʿAskarī ؑ explained one of the wisdoms behind fasting as: “So that the rich person may feel the pain of hunger, and due to this, be compassionate to the poor.”⁵

When we are fasting, we become aware about some of the possible extravagances in our consumption, and feel the sufferings of other people. This should hopefully encourage us to change our spending habits, and help others who are in need.



THE INTENTION TO FAST

Fasting, in the Islamic sense, means that a person abstains from certain actions—which will be mentioned later on—from the time of *Fajr* prayer (dawn) until *Maghrib*. An important part of fasting is to make the intention to fast. Before we fast, we have to know in our minds that we are keeping an obligatory fast, during the month of Ramaḍān, and we are doing this in obedience to the command of Allah ﷻ.

The time for this intention of an obligatory fast is specific. We can make our intention at two possible times:

1. Before the beginning of *Fajr*, every morning we are fasting.
2. At the beginning of the month of Ramaḍān, when we make the intention to fast every day during this month.

The way we know that the month of Ramaḍān has started is by sighting the crescent moon for the month of Ramaḍān the night before, or when 30 days in the month of Shaʿbān are complete. We determine the end of the month of Ramaḍān and the day of Eid by sighting the crescent moon for the month of Shawwāl, or when 30 days in the month of Ramaḍān have passed.

3 Muḥaddith Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, Vol. 7, P. 502.

4 Taylor, M. (2020, August 12), *9 reasons fasting is actually good for you*. Greatist. Retrieved December 18, 2022, from <https://greatist.com/health/benefits-of-fasting#weight-loss>

5 Rayshahrī, Muḥammad, *Mizān Al-Ḥikmah*, Ḥadīth #10915.

INVALIDATORS OF THE FAST

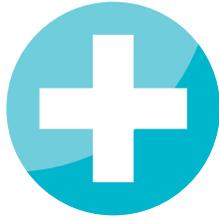
There are certain things which invalidate or break our fast. The table below lists some of the common actions that we come across in our everyday lives.



ACTION	If Done on Purpose (Intentionally)	If Done by Accident (Unintentionally)	NOTES
Eating or drinking	✗	✓	If one accidentally swallows any food particles that remain between the teeth, then the fast is valid; but if one does so on purpose, then the fast will become void.
Brushing your teeth	✓	✓	One must not swallow any external water, toothpaste, or saliva that has been mixed with the toothpaste, otherwise the fast will become invalidated.
Rinsing mouth with water	✓	✓	One must not swallow any water deliberately.
Inhalers	✓	✓	
Using eye drops, ear drops, or nose sprays	✓	✓	It is not permissible to apply medicine, or put water, or any other substance through the nose or in the eyes if you know that the substance will reach the throat. If it reaches the throat, then the fast will become void. Āyatullāh Khamenei: It is <i>makrūh</i> to apply medicine through the nose (e.g. nasal sprays) when fasting.
Throwing up	✗	✓	Intentionally vomiting (for example, if someone has a queasy stomach and they make themselves throw up), then their fast will become invalidated. Also, stomach acid or food that comes up when belching should not be swallowed intentionally.
Inhaling thick smoke	✗ according to obligatory precaution (iḥtiyāt wājib)	✓	Examples of thick smoke: • Smoke from cigarettes or tobacco • Smoke from a fire, or from the exhaust of a truck We are allowed to inhale steam, but if it condenses in the mouth and turns into water, then if you swallow it on purpose, your fast will become void.
Swallowing thick dust	✗ according to obligatory precaution (iḥtiyāt wājib)	✗	An example of thick dust is dusty air from sweeping a dusty ground. If the dust reaches the throat, then it breaks one's fast. Allowing thin dust in the air to reach the throat will not invalidate one's fast. If thick dust is whipped up by the wind, and a person notices it, but is not careful to avoid it and allows the dust to reach one's throat, then the fast will become void on the basis of obligatory precaution.
Attributing a lie to Allah ﷻ or one of the Ma'sūmīn ﷺ	✗ according to obligatory precaution (iḥtiyāt wājib)	✓	If you want to quote a <i>ḥadīth</i> or Qur'ān while you are fasting, then be accurate and give the reference. If you are not sure, then report it in such a way that it is not directly attributed to the Prophet ﷺ or the Imāms ﷺ. For example, one can say: "It has been narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said..." Quotes that are often attributed to the Prophet ﷺ or Imāms ﷺ on social media are sometimes inaccurate, and often do not include a reference. Be careful about forwarding/reposting these quotes, especially when one is fasting.

Below are some rulings of various actions that vary according to two of the *marāji*:

ACTION	ĀYATULLĀH SĪSTĀNĪ	ĀYATULLĀH KHAMENEI
<p>Swallowing phlegm or mucus that comes up into your mouth</p> 	<p>It is okay to swallow it if it has not entered the cavity of the mouth. If it has entered the cavity of the mouth, then the recommended precaution (<i>iḥtiyāṭ mustaḥab</i>) is not to swallow it.</p>	<p>It is okay to swallow it if it has not entered the cavity of the mouth. If it has entered the cavity of the mouth and you swallow it intentionally, then your fast will become void.</p> <p><i>NOTE: Swallowing saliva does not invalidate the fast.</i></p>
<p>Submerging your head underwater</p> 	<p>Immersing the entire head in water does not invalidate the fast, but it is highly disapproved (<i>makrūh</i>), and it is a recommended precaution (<i>iḥtiyāṭ mustaḥab</i>) to avoid this.</p>	<p>According to obligatory precaution (<i>iḥtiyāṭ wājib</i>), the fast will become invalidated if someone intentionally submerges their entire head under water when fasting.</p> <p><i>NOTE: This rule does not apply to showering.</i></p> <p><i>This rule applies to swimming, unless a person can manage to make sure that one's entire head does not go under water at a particular time. Therefore, swimming while fasting is not advisable.</i></p>
<p>Injections or IV</p> 	<p>Injections and intravenous (IV) drips do not invalidate a fast even if the former is an energy injection and the latter a glucose-saline drip.</p>	<p>The fast is valid if it is injected into the muscles and is for treatment or preventative purposes (not for nutrition). Intravenous injections (IV) (injected into the veins) that are for nutritional purposes invalidate the fast.</p>



INDIVIDUALS EXEMPT FROM FASTING

Due to certain circumstances, various people are exempt from fasting:

- Someone who has a condition in which fasting would significantly harm their health (*One of the ways of knowing whether fasting is harmful for a person's health or not, is if it is confirmed by a qualified health professional, and the person is satisfied by this opinion.*)
- A pregnant woman for whom fasting may be harmful for her or her unborn child.
- A woman who is breastfeeding if fasting affects her milk supply.
- A person who finds it impossible or excessively difficult to fast due to old age.
- A traveler who is traveling out of town a specified distance (approximately 28 miles/44 km roundtrip) from the border of their hometown, if certain other conditions are met.

FASTING AND SICKNESS

The laws that Allah ﷻ sets for us are out of His mercy. They are not meant to cause us intolerable difficulty or harm. Therefore, there are exceptions for fasting if someone is sick:

- If a person knows or has a reasonable fear that they will get sick or be harmed by fasting, then they should not fast, in fact, their fast will be invalid if they still fast.⁶
- If a person is sick and knows or has a reasonable fear that fasting will (1) make them more sick, (2) increase their pain, or (3) delay their recovery, then they should not fast, and if they do still fast, their fast will not be valid.
- If a person is sick, but fasting is not harmful to their health, then their fast will be valid.

Sickness does not include normally acceptable or bearable levels of hunger, thirst, weariness, headaches, and other difficulties that go away within a couple of hours after *iftār*. Such things are normally considered tolerable by rational people.

MISSED FASTS

If a person misses a fast due to a valid reason, such as an illness or travel, then they need to make up that fast. Making up a missed fast should be done with the intention of *qaḍā'*. In some cases, in addition to the *qaḍā'* (for example, if they did not make up the *qaḍā'* fast before the next month of Ramaḍān), then one must also pay a compensation called *fiḍyah*—which means that one has to feed a poor believer 750g of staple food for each missed day. There are other cases where *fiḍyah* becomes obligatory as well, one can refer to the books of Jurisprudence for more detailed information in regards to this.

If someone misses or breaks a fast without a valid reason, then they must make up that fast, and offer a *kaffārah*—which is a penalty that we will learn about later on.

⁶ A doctor's opinion can be the source of fear of harm or sickness, but if a person is certain that fasting will not cause them any harm despite what the doctor says, then they must fast.

Activity 4.1b: Review Questions

- Ethical fasting refers to:
 - Avoiding sins with all organs of our body during the month of Ramaḍān
 - Being nice to people during the month of Ramaḍān
 - Going on an intermittent fasting diet during the month of Ramaḍān
- We must make the intention to fast:
 - On the day we are fasting
 - Before we begin to fast
 - Anytime we want
- Reciting the Noble Qurʾān:
 - Is highly recommended during the month of Ramaḍān
 - Is the same as reciting any other time of the year
 - Is not recommended during the month of Ramaḍān
- Brushing your teeth without swallowing anything is:
 - Not allowed when you are fasting
 - Allowed when one is fasting
 - Obligatory when you are fasting
- If a person is walking somewhere and the wind blows up a thick dust, then they:
 - Have no obligation to cover their mouth or avoid the dust
 - Should cover their mouth and avoid the dust in order to keep their fast valid
 - Should cough
- Hasan is a follower (*muqallīd*) of Āyatullāh Khamenei. He has swimming class during the month of Ramaḍān, so he must:
 - Avoid swimming all together
 - Can swim as long as he does not submerge his entire head (although it is better for him not to swim)
 - Can swim as he usual does
- Sukaina is getting a slight headache near the end of fast, but still thinks she can make it to the end of the fast, so what should she do in this case:
 - She must continue her fast
 - She can break her fast if she would like to
 - She should ask her parents if she should finish the fast or not
- Husayn is taking a day trip to see his sister who lives downtown in the month of Ramaḍān. His home is within the city limits, but is more than a 28 mile round-trip from downtown. Is Husayn's fast valid?
 - Yes
 - No