

What Should Be Said at the Sighting of the Crescent

It is recommended that whoever sights the crescent (Hilal) of Ramadan, or any other month for that matter, or being informed about new crescent, should say:

“Allahu Akbar, Allahumma ahillahu 'alaina bil yumni wa Iman, Was Salaamata wal Islam, Ribbi wa rabbika illah.”
(Tirmidhi)

Meaning: **“Allah is Greatest. O Allah, make it the beginning, the beginning of prosperity, faith, peace, and total submission to Allah. Your Lord and mine is Allah.”**

Also, it has been reported from Ali bin Abi Talib (raa) that the Messenger said:

“If you witness the crescent of the new month, say: ‘Al-lahu Akbar (three times) Al-hamdu Lillah. Alladhi Khalaqani wa Khalaqaka, wa qaddara laka manajil wa ja'alaka ayatna lil 'alameen.’” (Naylul Awataar)

Meaning: **“Allah is Greatest. (three times) praise be to Allah who created me and you and decreed for you the phases and made you a sign for the universe.”**

Basic Elements of Fasting

There are two basic elements that constitute the essence of Islamic fasting. The observation of these elements makes one's fasting acceptable.

The first element of fasting is abstinence of fast breakers from the break of dawn (*fajr*) until sunset. For the fast breakers, the Lawgiver, in no uncertain terms and free from any ambiguity and confusion, meant abstinence from food and drink and sexual relations. Any nourishment taken by mouth or nose, or drink of any sort, water, juices, milk, etc., should be avoided. Also, sexual intercourse during daytime is prohibited.

In this element, the period of observance is daily. It is not Islamic fasting when fasting takes place at night. Indeed, we are encouraged to break the fast without any delay as soon as the sun goes down. The proof for this first element is the saying of the Most High:

“...And now associate with them and seek what Allah has ordained for you and eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from its black thread.”

(Al-Qur`an 2:187)

This verse defines the time limits in which the worshiper is obligated to exercise abstinence. The first part of the verse is an indication of Allah's mercy upon the worshipers by making it easy for them during night hours in their relations with their spouses. For when verse (2:185) was revealed, it restricted daily as well as nightly relations with spouses. It was obviously difficult for the believers.

Imam Al-Qurtabi and others reported: 'Umar bin Al-Khataab (raa) returned home late at night after visiting the Prophet

(saas). When he came home, he felt the urge for his wife, so he slept with his wife, breaking the rule. Early in the morning he went to the Prophet (saas) and informed him about the incident. He said, **“I seek pardon from Allah and you. My soul tempted me to have relations with my wife. Can you find a permission for me in this offense?”** The Prophet, (saas), asked whether he really was serious about this. 'Umar (raa) replied, **“Yes.”** The Prophet (saas) did not have an answer for him, but told him Allah has to decide on this.

By the grace of Allah, before 'Umar arrived home, Allah (SWT) revealed verse (2:187), permitting believers to enjoy their wives during the night. So this is what the verse is referring to. It sets the limit of abstinence. It does so in metaphorical language draped with flair and beauty, as it describes the starting and the ending time of fast. Eat and drink until the white thread, i.e., the first rays of light finds its way through the horizon, the black thread. At that time, one must stop eating and start the observance of fasting.'

The second element of fasting is *niyyah* (intention). In Islamic practices, *niyyah* is highly rated. This remarkable element is not unique to fasting; it permeates every ounce of the believer's undertakings from *Salaat*, to *Zakaat*, to *Hajj*. It is the difference between whether the actions are religious or irreligious. For instance, fasting for political reasons, or as a weapon of passive resistance, or hunger strikes, or starving for dietary reasons, or weight control, or even on medical advice - all of these are not proper Islamic fasting, because they lack one main component: that is, the *niyyah*. This is why *niyyah* for fasting is to worship Allah by abstaining from fast-breakers from the break of dawn to sunset.

The act of abstinence is not meant to starve you; it is an act of worship, like *Salaat*. It is the lack of intention that makes ones acts non-Islamic. Interestingly, you can pursue your regular activities, which have nothing to do with religion, such as

maintaining your livelihood and earn a religious reward by the intention. The Prophet (saas) told the believers that by declaring *niyyah*, their relations with their spouses would become charity. The companions asked how would that be a charity (*sadaqah*)? The Prophet responded, **“Don't you know that if he does it in an unlawful way it will be a sin on him?”** They said, **“Yes.”** **“The same,”** he said, **“When he does it in a legal way, it is charity.”** (Muslim)

The evidence for intention, *niyyah*, is mentioned in Al-Qur'an and Sunnah. Allah (SWT) states:

“And they have been commanded no more than to worship Allah, offering Him sincere devotion.”

(Al-Qur'an, 98:5)

“They” in this verse refers to the People of the Book, indicating that intention was part of their religious belief, or that they were commanded as the believers were through Prophet Muhammad (saas) to worship Allah sincerely. The structure of this verse is instructive. It did not mention who commanded. Of course, it is Allah. But, you see, this form is used, mentioning Allah indirectly, to indicate that the acts of worship are difficult, and He did not want us to think of them as a burden for the sake of it. He commanded us to fast because he knows we cannot do without this acts of worship.

We see the same use when Allah speaks of fasting:

“...Fasting is prescribed to you...”

(Al-Qur'an, 2: 183)

Also,

“The law of equality is prescribed to you.”

(Al-Qur'an, 2: 178)

In both verses, it did not say “who” the subject is. It is not directly mentioned, whereas or when Allah speaks of His *rahman*, mercy, He mentions Himself as if He is informing us that Your Lord has inscribed for Himself mercy. This is like a father or guardian instructing his minor, “You ought to do this and that” instead of telling him “To do this.” Or perhaps Allah (SWT) did not mention His name directly to indicate that He (SWT) is not the only One who commands you to worship Him. Your intellect and reasoning also command you to worship your Creator, for He has endowed you with His mercy.

Liya'abudu (to worship) - generally means to humble - but has become a name for every type of worship rendered with humbleness and utmost respect to Allah (SWT). However, the key word is *mukhliseen*, purely intending in their hearts for the pleasure of Allah (SWT) the worship Allah alone. One should declare in his heart that the act he or she is about to undertake is intended for Allah (SWT). It is not for eye service (*riya*), ear service (*sum'ah*), saying to be heard, or for any other reasons. The most important thing in Islam is not the quantity of worship (*'abadah*) but the quality. By quality is meant that it is intended for none but Allah. On the other hand, Allah is telling the believer and humanity, you know that I have created everything in creation just for you, that is all of creation. Not half one-third, one quarter, or a fifth of it, but all of it.

“It is He who has created for you all things that are on earth.”

(Al-Qur'an 2:29)

If that is the case, you should not intend with your acts but for Allah alone. Do not intend in your deeds half for Allah and the rest for someone else. You cannot fast three-fourths of a day for Allah and one-fourth for someone else. Nor can you sacrifice two sheep, one for Allah and the other for the ruler. Allah would never accept that. That is the proof of *niyyah* in Al-Qur'an.

In a hadith related by `Umar bin Al-Khattab (raa), he said:

“I heard the Messenger of Allah (saas), saying: ‘Deeds are but by intention, and every man shall have all but that which he intended. Thus, he whose migration was for Allah and His Messenger, his migration was for Allah and His Messenger, and he whose migration was to achieve some worldly benefit or to take some woman in marriage, his migration was for that for which he migrated.’ ” (Bukhari/Muslim)

This hadith pronounced by the Prophet (saas) explains, in effect, the above verse and attempts to educate the believers before they embark on a course of action. At the outset, as the persecution of the believers reached its peak, the Prophet and the believers were ordered to emigrate to Abyssinia, then finally to Medina, where the Prophet and the believers settled. Migration was, and still is, a sign of faith and a great honor in the sight of Allah. He (SWT) described those men and women who endured that experience as *“Al-Muhajirun,”* declared in Surah 2: 218.

“Those who believe and adopted exile and fought (and strove and struggled) in the path of Allah....”

So every person who has an ulterior motive claims he is emigrating to Medinah, to please Allah. But the Prophet (saas) made it clear to the believers that *Hijrah* is not the pain and hardship of traveling and missing the loved ones, but the intent behind it. The hadith defines what constitutes Allah's perception of the deeds of the believer.

Hence, the elements of fasting are two: to worship Allah (SWT) by abstaining from fast - breakers, combined with intention.

The Seat of the Niyyah

There is near consensus among the scholars that the seat of *Niyyah*, or intention, is the heart. What you want to do for what reason and for the sake of whom will be known by none but you and the All-Knower, Allah (SWT). Thus, you do not need to utter it with your tongue, “I want to pray, fast, give alms, etc.” The exception is on *Hajj*, where verbal utterance of *Talbiyah* is mandated.

In the case of *Sawm* (fasting), You intend in your heart that the abstinence from fast-breakers is meant to be a worship for Allah alone in order to seek His pleasure. If you observe *sahuur* (the last meal before beginning fasting) with this above intent, you will have achieved the requirement of *niyyah*. If you restrain from fast-breakers during daylight hours, with the above intent, you have achieved the requirements of *niyyah*, even if you did not eat *sahuur*.

Hafsah, the Prophet's wife (raa,) related the Prophet (saas) said:

“Whoever does not make *niyyah* (intention for fasting) before dawn, would not have fasted.” (Ahmed/Ibn Khuzaimah)

However, many scholars said this is for obligatory fasting, like Ramadan, but when the fasting is non-essential, one can make *niyyah* during daytime, if he has not eaten anything. The Prophet's wife reported that the Prophet (saas) visited his wives and asked, **“Do you have something to eat?”** She said, **“They replied ‘No.’ ”** He then said, **“I am fasting.”** (Muslim)

This hadith indicates the believer can have a valid fast, even if he decides after 10:00 a.m. or 4:00 p.m. to hold fast, provided he did not eat or drink anything before the time he makes his decision.

For Whom is Fasting Mandatory?

The obligation of fasting is mandatory on a person who has fulfilled these requirements: He or she must be a Muslim, sane, must have reached puberty, must be healthy, and not in a state of travel; and for women, they must be in a state of purity (clean from menstruation and post childbirth bleeding). If a person fulfills the above prerequisites, fasting becomes valid and mandatory. Inferring from this definition, if one of these conditions is missing, the fast will be invalid. Indeed, it may be better to analyze each category of the definition.

Non-Muslim (Kafir)

Fasting is not obligatory on a non-Muslim because he is not commanded to fast and even if he decides to fast and follows all the regulations, it will not be accepted by Allah (SWT). If he or she wants to fast the Islamic fast, he has to declare the *Kalimah* first, and only then will the fast be accepted. Similarly, the non-Muslim (*Kafir*) is not obligated to perform any Islamic duties. If he converts to Islam during the month of Ramadan, for instance, in the middle of the month, it becomes incumbent upon him to fast the remaining days. There will be no making up the days he missed before becoming Muslim. Allah (SWT) states:

“Say to the unbelievers, if they desist from unbelief, their past would be forgiven of them...”

(Al-Qur'an 8:38)

If one converts to Islam during the daytime in Ramadan, say 10:00 a.m. in the morning, he or she should observe the rest of the day in fasting. That is, from 10:00 a.m. until sunset, he should not break his fast.

Insane (Majnun)

The insane or retarded person is not obligated to keep his fast because he is deprived of sanity, a key component on which religious duties depend. In a hadith related by Ali Bin Abi Talib (raa), the Messenger of Allah (saas) said:

“The Pen that records the deeds has been lifted from three people; the insane person, until he recovers; the sleeping person, until he wakes up; and the minor, until he dreams (i.e., has wet dreams.)” (Ahmed)

This hadith indicates the fast of the insane person, for instance, is not valid because he cannot comprehend the worship, and he cannot meaningfully declare intention (*niyyah*), without which the acts are invalid. If he has mental relapses whereby he is healthy, and then on occasion is sick, the fast is mandatory upon him during the days and times he is healthy but not when he is unhealthy.

If he intends to fast in the morning, and he falls ill during this time, his fast is good as if he fainted as a result of illness, because he knows that he may experience an attack at certain times. If he gets well during the daytime in Ramadan, he should observe the fast the rest of the day because he is obligated to fast. However, he does not have to make up the day because his case is like that of unbeliever who becomes Muslim time or a minor he reached puberty during the day.

Minor (Sabiyy)

Similarly, the minor person is not obligated to observe fast (*Sawm*), because of the previous hadith related by Ali bin Abi Talib,

“... And the minor until he dreams.”

However, it is imperative that the parents or the guardians of the juveniles or adolescents encourage and urge them to fast so they will get used to it. It will be vital training for them in their worship, because they will not have any chance for training as soon as they reach puberty.

In a hadith reported by Rubayyiah Bint Mau'awwidh (raa), the Prophet (saas) sent a messenger to the village of Ansar on the morning of Ashura to inform them:

“Whoever wakes in fasting should continue his fasting, whoever wakes up without fasting should complete his day in fasting. So we used to fast, let our young children fast, and go to the Masjid with them. When one of the children cried for food, we would make toys from wool and give them to the children until it was time to break the fast.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

This hadith indicates that training minor boys and girls is highly recommended early in life, from about seven years of age for the spiritual, educational, and cultural upbringing of Muslim youth. It is the most powerful symbol of our religion.

Puberty - Boys

Puberty is known in Islamic law as *al-bulugh*, or *Tamyeez*, (coming of age as a man and woman). There are three signs of puberty (*bulugh*):

1. Discharging semen as a result of wet dreams, known as *in-zaalul-manyyi*. Allah (SWT) states:

“But when the children among you come of age, let them also ask for permission, as do those senior to them in age...”

(Al-Qur'an, 24-59)

In a hadith, the Messenger of Allah (saas) said: