

“Friday bath (*ghuslul-Jum'ah*) is mandatory upon anyone who has experienced a wet dream.” (Bukhari/Muslim)

The point in this hadith is that Islamic obligations are not incumbent on anyone until they reach the age of *bulugh*.

2. Appearance of hair around the pubic area is another sign of puberty. If a person sees that even without wet dreams, he or she has attained puberty. This may happen at the age of thirteen or fourteen, and parents should inform girls and boys about these signs.

3. Reaching 15 years of age: When the person reaches 15, he or she is a man or a woman, and anything that is obligatory on a man or woman is obligatory on him or her from that time on.

In a hadith reported by Abdullah Bin Umar (raa), he said:

“My parents brought me to the Messenger of Allah on the eve of the *Uhud* Campaign and I was fourteen years old, so the Prophet (saas) did not enlist me in fighting. But a year later in the Campaign of *Al-Khandaqq*, I was fifteen, so this time the Prophet (saas) enlisted me in combat.” (Muslim)

This hadith indicates the age of 15 is the legal age for a Muslim boy or girl to be responsible for his or her religion as well as worldly responsibilities. Some of us who reside in the western world, seem to think adulthood depends on State laws. In some states it is 18, while in others it is 19, or 21, and so on. This is a very serious mistake, as the juvenile will reach puberty (*bulugh*) and adulthood, but go on without observing his or her Islamic duties, such as Salat, fasting, or being restrained from that which is prohibited.

Puberty - Girls

Girls reach puberty and adulthood when they experience the above three signs. However, they have a fourth sign, that is, menstruation (*hayd*). Whenever a girl experiences it, she is a woman even if she is 12 years old. At that time, the *Qalam*, the pen of responsibilities, begins to flow and to record the deeds of the servant, good or bad. It is interesting that in the western world the case is the reverse. You see, when a juvenile reaches the age of puberty in Al-Islam he or she should be careful about anything he or she does or says. On the contrary, in the West when the person comes of age, he or she is allowed to do things which are detrimental to his or her well being. They are licensed to read, watch, and listen to so-called adult material, as if when one is an adult it is time to be irresponsible.

Indeed, if puberty is attained during the days of Ramadan, say at midday, and the young person is fasting, he or she should continue his or her fasting and there will be no obligation on him or her to make up the fast. If he was not fasting, it is incumbent upon him to observe the rest of the day in fasting, because he has become an adult upon whom Islamic rites are obligatory. Girls in menstruation can't observe half day, nor should they make that half day up.

Elderly People (*Al -Harim*)

When we speak of the elderly people, we are speaking of two categories: the old person who has reached the point of absent-mindedness and aimless talk, (*al-hazyaan*) the person who cannot comprehend what he or she is doing or saying. There will be no fast for these people, nor will they be required to feed the needy for the days missed, because their case is like that of a child before reaching the age of discretion, *tamyeez*. But if he or she suffers relapses, the fast is mandatory on him, while he comprehends and when he does not comprehend there will be no fast. These rules about the elderly people apply to the rest of their Islamic obligations, including Salaat, Hajj, etc.

Physical Disability (*Al-'Ajiz*)

The aim of this religion is not to burden people to a point that they will be incapable physically of carrying out the duties mandated by Allah (SWT). This is why when there is clear evidence that fasting will result in the opposite of the intended result, namely endangering the sanctity of life itself, the Law-giver (*Shaari'e*), makes room for the believer. By physical disability (*'al-'ajiz*), we mean the old person who is mentally sound but physically weak, and observation of the fast would further weaken his body. Also, at this point the fast is not mandatory upon the old person because he is unable to do so. In the case of the terminally ill, like the cancer or AIDS patient whose fasting may worsen their condition, Allah (SWT) states:

“...So fear Allah as much as you can.”

(Al-Qur'an 64:16)

Also,

“On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear...”

(Al-Qur'an 2:286).

These two verses indicate that when the body is no longer capable of executing the prescribed duties, the pen that records the deeds ceases to record. These people who have been allowed to break their fast of Ramadan, would have to compensate for each and every day that they break by feeding one indigent person.

Before the fasting of Ramadan was prescribed to the believers, everyone was given a choice between fasting or feeding. This is what Al-Qur'an refers to in chapter “*Al-Baqarah*”:

“...for those who can do it (with hardship) is a ransom, the feeding of indigent...”

(Al-Qur'an 2:184).

This verse was abrogated by the verse of Ramadan.

When a believer is incapable of fasting due to the reasons mentioned above, feeding becomes a substitute.

Feeding (*Itaam*)

For feeding, you have a choice between providing a poor person about one kilo and ten grams of wheat, rice, or any kind of staple of the best kind, or to provide a meal after the month of Ramadan, by preparing food and inviting poor people, their number equal to the number of days you missed. Or the whole amount may be given to one or two families. Imam Bukhari (raa) reported that Anas bin Malik, at an advanced age fed poor people bread and meat one or two days every year.

Pregnant And Nursing Mothers

When a pregnant woman or nursing mother eats, they do so for the health of themselves and their babies. Their decision to fast depends on how they feel. If they feel that fasting may jeopardize their life and injure the unborn or newly born, the Lawgiver gives them permission to break fast. They will have to make it up at any time after Ramadan before the next Ramadan.

The Traveler

The traveler has a choice between fasting and breaking the fast, regardless of the length of the journey: whether the journey is an emergency, for Hajj, to visit relatives, for business, or if he, the believer, is a frequent traveler like airplane pilots, bus and truck drivers, train engineers, or ship captains. As for cab drivers, if the weather is hot, they may change their working hours to nighttime until the weather is cooler. There is one condition: that they are not intending their journey as a masquerade and trick to avoid fasting. If that is the intent, breaking the fast is prohibited and fasting becomes mandatory upon him during the course of the journey.

Allah (SWT) states:

“But if any one is ill or on a journey (the pre-scribed period should be made up) by days later. Allah intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you in difficulties...”

(Al-Qur'an, 2:185)

Allah repeated this verse twice to underscore the fact that it is not abrogated with the general command to fast.

The above verse has considered the hardship encountered on a journey as equal to hardship in sickness, and thus allows those faced with either condition not to fast. Perhaps the reason can be found in the very meaning of the Arabic word *safar*, which implies exposing oneself during the course of a journey to elements of hardship in transportation, food, time and climate changes, and of cultural shocks of all sorts, or just general wear and tear.

Even in this age of jets and supersonic air travel, traveling poses a danger to the sojourner. Because of this possibility, the

Lawgiver has permitted the traveler to eat, so fasting does not add to his already difficult situation. This is why the Messenger of Allah (saas) has been reported as saying,

“The journey is a type of punishment.”

He or she, however, would have to make up the day. The permission to not fast during a journey is the same as if a person decides to fast while on a journey, he can do so and the fast is valid.

The Non-Terminally Ill

When a person becomes ill and his prognosis indicates a serious condition, but not a terminal illness, and the patient is not in a life-threatening situation, yet he is granted permission (*rukhsah*) to break his fast.

This permission does not include simple illnesses, such as a headache or stomach ache. All these do not warrant breaking the fast. If fasting becomes harmful for the patient, then it becomes mandatory for him to break his fast. Allah (SWT) said:

“Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves, for Allah has been to you Most Merciful.”

(Al-Qur'an, 4:29)

Elsewhere, He stated:

“And make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction...”

(Al-Qur'an, 2:195)

These two verses are general in everything that one may do which might undermine the integrity of life. In a Hadith reported by Bukhari, the Messenger of Allah (SWT) said:

“Your soul, indeed, has rights on you!” (Bukhari)

Among its rights is your protecting it from harm.

If one falls sick during the daytime and completing fast becomes hard on him, he is permitted to break his fast for this reason. If he is cured during the daytime, say 10:00 a.m., and he has not been fasting, his fast for that day is not valid because he was not fasting at the beginning of the day, and the fast is for all day not half of the day.