

## Fasting and Breaking Fast

Some devoted believers may wish to fast forever, oblivious to hardship in their life, not to mention the fact that this type of fasting is not in harmony with the spirit of Al-Islam. When reports of Abdullah Bin `Amru's continuous fasting reached the Messenger of Allah (saas), Abdullah related later:

**“The Messenger told me, ‘I have been informed that you observe night prayer and a daily fast.’ Ibn Amru answered, Yes! O Messenger of Allah.’ The Messenger advised, him: ‘Fast a day and break a day. Pray at night and sleep. For your body has rights over you, your wife has rights over you, and your guest has rights over you. Indeed, it will perfectly suffice you to fast three days in every month.’ Amru strongly pointed out that he was capable of observing the fast in the fashion he was doing. But the Messenger advised against it. Ibn 'Amru said, ‘Then I explained to him that I have the strength to do it.’ The Messenger of Allah (saas) then said: ‘Observe three days fasting starting from Friday (and then break).’ Ibn 'Amru said: ‘I strongly stressed to him that I could, and he vigorously said I should not.’ The Messenger of Allah then instructed, ‘Observe your fast as the Prophet of Allah, Dawud, (David, as), used to observe and do not exceed it.’ ‘How did he fast?’ 'Amru asked. The Prophet (saas) said: ‘Prophet Dawud (as) used to fast a day and break the next.’ ” (Ahmad)**

This hadith is instructing and revealing that the objectives in the command to fast are not to unduly injure, or deny the body the natural way of living. It also indicates the caring side of this Messenger of mercy as he tried to convince Amru that his decision to spend the rest of his life in fasting was not in harmony with Islam. With continuous fasts one loses the physical and spiritual benefits. Physically, because it becomes a routine and

the body loses the benefits of the way the fast is structured. Spiritually, one feels the numbness, and boredom of the heart. The spouses' right to marital association is denied as the continuous fasting decreases the sexual desire.

The soul is affected only by what intrudes upon it, not by what it is accustomed to. Do you not see that the doctors will advise a person not to take a drug, as a matter of routine, unless the body needs it, lest the same drug will be ineffective when the person gets sick.

The hadith indicates that no one has the right to use his or her body exclusively in the way they desire. In every undertaking, one should bear in mind the other legal rights. The responsibilities of a person are multiple. For while you may think you are worshipping Allah, you may well be violating Allah's rules, because you lose the balance in worship by infringing on the rights of your body when you overly deny it the element of survival.

If you fail to fulfill the marital covenant towards your wife or husband, you may be making her or him vulnerable and susceptible to unlawful, immoral acts. The Hadith also reveals and indicates the beautiful relationship between the teacher and the student, and how the Messenger was very patient with a companion who had unlimited energy, and did not mind spending it in fasting. It reveals how the Prophet (saas) encouraged the believers to express their opinions and ask questions while observing the etiquette of respect to the Messenger of Allah (saas) who said:

**“The best (voluntary fast in the sight of Allah) is the fast of Prophet Dawud, and the best nightly voluntary prayer is the prayer of Prophet Dawud.”**

The Messenger explained,

**“He used to sleep half of the night then pray one-third of the night, then sleep one sixth of the night. In fasting, he used to fast a day and break the next.” (Ahmed)**

It is a mercy from Allah (SWT) that our Prophet Muhammad (saas) is in tune with all the previous revelations' as we see in Al-Qur'an and the Sunnah. It is rich spiritual information made available through him (saas) to this Ummah.

## Permission Regarding Voluntary Fast

The observer of voluntary fasting is his own leader. That is why he is permitted, if he so desires, to abort the fast. This is the verdict of many scholars relying on the evidence of the following citations.

Umm Hanee (raa) related that,

**“The Messenger of Allah entered into my quarters the day that Makkah was conquered. He was offered water to drink. He drank and passed it to me. I told him I was fasting! The Messenger (saas) instructed. ‘The observer of a voluntary fast is the leader of his own self. If he wishes, he can continue the fast, and if he wants he can break.’ ” (Ahmad)**

Elsewhere, Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudri (raa) said,

**“I invited the Messenger of Allah (saas). He came with his companions. When the food was brought, a man refused to eat. He said, ‘I am fasting.’ The Messenger of Allah (saas) commented: ‘Your brother invited you and he has taken the trouble and incurred the cost for your sake. Break your fast and make it up with another day if you want.’ ” (Bayhaqi)**

These two ahadiths are evidence that the voluntary fast is different from the mandatory fast in that the observer is allowed with or without a valid reason to abort the obligation of fasting. However, the second report shows also that it is desired to make up the aborted day.

## **Rules of Fasting (*Adab as-Siyam*)**

In Islam, for any act of worship to be valid and acceptable, it must be observed in accordance with the instruction of Allah (SWT) and the practice of the Messenger of Allah (saas). Obviously, we did not know about the fasting until we were told about it. It would be unwise to just decide to fast in the way one wishes. That is why there are in Islamic Law (Shari'ah) rules of fasting (*Adab As-Siyam*). Observation of these rules helps the devotee maximize the physical as well as spiritual benefits of fasting. They are:

# *Sahuur*

This is a light meal taken shortly before the break of dawn. There is consensus that this meal is a highly recommended Sunnah.

In reports by Bukhari and Muslim, Anas (raa) related that the Messenger of Allah said:

**“Take your early morning meal for in that is a blessing.”**

In another report by Miqdam bin Ma'a Diyikarib (raa) the Messenger of Allah (saas) said:

**“Take this early morning meal for it is a blessed meal.”**

In both ahadiths the statement underscores the importance of *sahuur*, and to caution anyone from thinking they can just stay without a meal all night and continue with fasting. This may explain why the statement came as a command. Although it is not mandatory to eat *sahuur*, it is highly encouraged so that anyone intending to fast will make an effort to take *sahuur*.

The crux of the matter is not to show how strong you are, but how obedient you are. *Sahuur*, above all, ensures that the devotee has the energy he or she will need during the course of the day, and it makes the fast easier.

## **What Constitutes *Sahuur*?**

*Sahuur* can be achieved by a large meal, a small meal, or even by a sip of water or soup. In a report by Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudri (raa) the Messenger of Allah (saas) said,

**“*Sahuur* is a blessed meal, do not neglect it even if it is a mouthful of drink. For Allah and the Angels bless those who observe it.”** (Ahmed)

You see, what reaches Allah is the intent that you have made a genuine effort to obey Allah in fasting. This is why it is recommended to make intention with the *sahuur*, to emulate the Prophet, and to eat the food to gain strength and energy during fasting, so as to get the reward from Allah. The hadith also contains the information that during the course of this meal the faster receives a special blessing that cannot be found elsewhere: that Allah (SWT) blesses your meal and that the angels seek on your behalf forgiveness for you during *sahuur*. Thus, with *sahuur* you receive both physical and spiritual blessings.

### **Time of *Sahuur***

The time for *sahuur* begins from midnight until the break of dawn. It is recommended, however, to delay it till shortly before the time of *Subh* (morning) prayer.

In a hadith by Zaid bin Thabit (raa) he related that:

**“We ate *sahuur* with the Messenger of Allah (saas) then we went to pray *Subh*. I asked the Messenger ‘What was the time period between sahur and prayer?’ He responded ‘The time period between them is the equivalent of the time it takes to recite fifty verses in Al-Qur’an.’ ”** (Bukhari and Muslim)

This citation is instructive in that it settles the question of whether one should stop eating before morning prayer (*Subh/Fajr*), or before sunrise, as we see in certain prayer times tables showing the so-called *shuruq* (the sunrise, which some think is the time to stop eating). The hadith is explicit. The recommendation to delay *Sahuur* is only to the hour or so before (*Subh*). The mentioning of the period of recitation of fifty

verses (ayats) is a cushion or a grace period in which food or drink should not be taken. All the reports that recommend delay of *Sahuur* must be understood in this way.

During the time of the Messenger of Allah (saas), the tradition of two *adhans* (or call to prayer) was established, and it has continued up until now in some Muslim countries. The first *adhan* is to indicate the beginning of *sahuur*: the *adhan* of Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum (raa). The second is the *adhan* of Bilal Ibn Rabah (raa): the *adhan* of *Salaah*, a morning prayer.

However, if you hear the second *adhan* while you are eating or drinking, you should immediately stop eating in preparation for fasting.

## Doubt in the Break of Dawn

Even in the age of watches and alarm clocks, sometimes we doubt whether it is time to stop eating. In this event, one should eat and drink until he is certain and no longer in doubt about the break of dawn. No decision on Islamic deeds should be based on doubt. Allah (SWT) made the determining factor in every affair certainty. He (SWT) says:

**“And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from its black thread.”**

(Al-Qur'an 2:184)

As I mentioned earlier, by “White thread” is meant the light of the day. And “black thread” is meant darkness of the night. Hence, the verse is explicit in that eating and drinking are permitted until the doubt and uncertainty are removed from your mind.

A man told Ibn Abbas, (raa), that he observed *Sahuur* and he only stopped when he doubted about the break of dawn. Ibn Abbas (raa) instructed him to eat as long as he doubted until he doubts no more. Similar reports are attributed to many companions and scholars inferring from the above verse.

With the advance in time keeping technology, proliferation of wrist watches, and alarm clocks, the possibility of uncertainty is minimized, at least in the case of a believer who has a time keeping device. These time pieces can be set, not only to sound an alarm, but to call *Al Adhan*, recite some verse, or simply just tell you to get up for *sahuur*.

In the heartland of the Muslim world, the states take the responsibility for public announcements with the firing of can-

nons, or radio, or television announcements. There has evolved a special culture of Ramadan in many countries.

Working hours in some Muslim countries during Ramadan are changed to night, virtually changing or shifting daytime activities to night. In some countries, the governments are not involved in public announcements, but some families and volunteers over the years have taken the duty of wake-up calls by going door to door, in groups and individually in an attempt to wake up the city for Sahur.

It would be excellent if Muslims in non-Muslim countries try to adjust their annual vacations during Ramadan, so as to allow themselves the maximum use of the blessed month.