

# Significance of fasting in the month of Ramadan

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Once again, the awaited and blessed month of Ramadan is approaching. The faithful have been preparing to welcome it. Some of the preparations include optional fasts in the months of Rajab and Shabaan, arranging for charity giving, planning community Iftaars, and getting special supplications and *amaal* ready for this month. Non-essential and optional travel is postponed. People pray for good health and the ability to observe the fasts. They are looking forward to breaking their fast with their families, friends, and community members, at their homes, at the mosques, and at the religious institutions. Optional salaah and Qur'anic recitations become a daily routine.

Going without food, drink, snacks and other habitual amenities from before Sunrise to after Sunset is observed on a daily basis for the whole month. Breaking the fast after sunset is a real delight. It is a challenge not to overeat at that time.

So, why do we fast? This may sound like a very simple question. Perhaps it is, but perhaps not.

## Allah swt says in the Qur'an:

*"O' you who believe! fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard your selves (against evil.)" Surah 2, verse 183*

*"... And that fast is better for you, if you know." Surah 2, verse 184*

*"Allah desires ease for you and He desires not hardship for you; and so that you may complete the (prescribed) number (of fasts), and that you may glorify Allah for His guiding you, and so that you may be thankful to Him." Surah 2, verse 185*

*"... And fasting men and fasting women ... Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward." Surah 33, verse 35*

**Hadith Qudsi.** In one of the divinely revealed communications from Allah to the Prophet (P) is as follows: *"fasting is for my sake, and I am its reward"*

**Hadith.** It is attributed to Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (A.S.) that he said: "Your day of fasting should not be like ordinary days. When you fast, all your senses, eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and feet must fast with you."

The above hadith implies that during fasting we abstain from sinful, unbecoming acts, blameworthy speech, and even sinful thoughts.

Going back to the question, "why do we fast in the month of Ramadan?"

**One may enumerate many reasons, based upon the Qur'anic verses and hadith.**

1. In obedience to the command of Allah swt.
2. As an obligatory act (one of the pillars of Islam)
3. To earn rewards and blessings (multiplied many times) from Allah
4. To earn a special reward, yet unknown, from Allah (Hadith Qudsi)

5. To seek and receive forgiveness from Allah for our sins and shortcomings
6. To receive increased sustenance from Allah, by observing the “Night of Qadr.”
7. To guard against evil (practice taqwa)
8. To practice self-restraint

**Some of the benefits that we know from observation and experience include:**

9. An opportunity to get rid of undesirable habits
10. To inculcate and increase fortitude and patience
11. To empathize with less fortunate members of humanity who suffer from hunger due to poverty.
12. To keep Satan and his prompting away
13. To improve physical health.

**Spiritual benefits of fasting.**

14. Satan is far removed and, “his face is darkened.” (Hadith)
15. increased concentration in acts of worship, including Salaat
16. Dikr and supplications are more enjoyable.
17. Acts of worship are more accepted and better rewarded.
18. Peace of mind and tranquility occur during the entire month of fasting

**Health benefits of fasting**

19. Weight reduction
20. Improved gastrointestinal function
21. Improved eating habits. (Escape from unhealthy “munching” habits).
22. Overall feeling of physical well being

As-Saduq in Amaali quotes from sources of the Imams that Prophet (P) said, “For every thing there is Zakaat (purification), and the Zakaat of the body is fasting.”

“Over eating shortens life.” This statement is attributed to Imam Jafar as- Sadiq (A.S.)

It is well recognized that eating less, practicing hunger, and even starving at times, have been advocated from time immemorial as remedies for a variety of illnesses.

Allamah Muhammad Husayn at-Tabatabai, in his Qur’anic Tafseer “Al Mizan,” has explained in his commentary on verse 185 of Surah Al Baqarah (The Cow) in reference to fasting:

*“..., and that you may glorify Allah for His guiding you, and so that you may be **thankful** to Him.”*  
Surah 2, verse 185

He says that there is a difference between glorifying Allah by fasting and thanking Him by Fasting. He says that glorifying is mere obedience, following the command, and abstaining from things that break the Fast. He says, “it lacks the spirit.”

He says that the act of fasting in order to thank Allah occurs only when it contains the “real spirit” of the fast. The “real spirit” is to be sincere towards Allah by purifying oneself from material involvement and abstaining from the greatest desires of the heart. Thus, glorification is the “cause” and “thankfulness” is the effect, and that is why Allah has used “*La-alla*,” meaning “perhaps,” with the phrase “*thankful to Him*.” This implies that the stage of thankfulness is not automatic for the person fasting, but requires a higher level of striving in fasting.

The act of fasting is a worship that is distinct from all other acts of worship. That is why Allah says about the person who is fasting, “I am its reward.” (Some translations say, “The reward is from Me”). In any case, by fasting, a believer denies himself or herself what is ordinarily lawful and desirable. Additionally, Fasting is purely for the sake of Allah, and no one may know that a person is fasting. Thus, the reward also is exclusively for the fasting subject from his/ her Lord.

Allamah Tabatabai refers to fasting as consisting of purely negative aspect (object), for example, denying oneself food and drink, etc., while other acts of worship like Zakaat, salaah, pilgrimage etc., consist of positive aspect (object) or positive and negative mixed. Here, positive object is explained by physical and outward acts like giving out charity, physical acts of salaah, traveling to Mecca for pilgrimage etc. These acts may not be entirely pure, or free of materialistic implications, and in some cases having mixed motives, like, pleasing someone else, in addition to pleasing Allah.

This is not so in the case of fasting as stated earlier.

**In conclusion**, let us pray that our fasts are purely for the sake of Allah, free of other motives, like reward, material benefits, etc. Let our fasting be to show Allah our gratitude that He rightly deserves. A'meen.

----- (The End) -----

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## Dua'

**Recited (optional) after Wajib Salaah in this month, or in the Qunoot.**

*Allahum'maj'al siyaami fih siyamas' saameen, wa qiyami fih qiyamal qaai-meen wa nab'bih'ni fih an-naomatil ghaafileen, wa hab-li jurmi fih yaa ilaahal Aalameen, wa'fu anni yaa aafiyani anil'mujrimeen.*

O Allah, make my Fast (in this month) like those who fast (sincerely), and make my nightly prayers like those who pray (sincerely.) Awaken me from the sleep of the heedlessness. Overlook my wrongdoings, O' God of the universe; and Grant me forgiveness, O' He, who forgives the wrongdoers.

*(Al'laahum'ma Salli Alaa Muhammadin wa Aali Muhammad)*

## Dua'

*Rabbi Aziq-ni Fih Halaawata Dikrik*

My Lord, let me taste the sweetness of Your Dikr (remembrance)

## The Qur'an

*Alaa bi-Dikril-laahi tat-ma-in-nul Quloob. 13:28*

Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction (rest)