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The History of Fasting

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عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا أَنَّ قُرَيْشًا كَانَتْ تَصُومُ يَوْمَ عَاشُورَاءَ فِي
 الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ ثُمَّ أَمَرَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِصِيَامِهِ حَتَّى
 فُرِضَ رَمَضَانُ وَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
 مَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَنْ شَاءَ أَفْطَرَ¹

‘Ā’ishah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا narrates that the Quraysh used to fast on the day
 of ‘Āshūrā in the Pre-Islamic period, and then Rasūlullāh
 صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ordered (Muslims) to fast on it till the fasting in the
 month of Ramaḍān was prescribed; whereupon Rasūlullāh
 صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said, “Whoever wishes may fast on it (‘Āshūrā), and
 whoever wishes, may not fast.”

¹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1893

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Introduction

Allāh ﷻ has given the believers a variety of ways to worship Him. And one such way is to abstain from eating, drinking and having intimate relations during the daylight hours with an intention to fulfil a religious obligation for Allāh ﷻ. This is known as fasting. Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islām.

In Arabic, the word used for fasting is:

صَوْمٌ

The word which is commonly used by people from the Asian subcontinent 'Roza' has its origin in the Persian language.

Allāh ﷻ did not command the believers to fast in the month of Ramaḍān at the beginning of the Prophethood of Rasūlullāh ﷺ or even during the Makkan period of his life which was 13 years. Allāh ﷻ introduced fasting in Ramaḍān at precisely the correct time after the migration according to His infinite wisdom.

The Ramaḍān fasts in the beginning were different to what they became later in certain aspects. Allāh ﷻ through His infinite mercy prepared the Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ gradually so

when fasting for the entire month became obligatory, they were ready and able to keep the fasts.

Before and during the month of Ramaḍān, we learn about many aspects of the blessed month, however many of us do not know about the history of fasting in Islām. I delivered a short talk on the subject a couple of years ago and found it very interesting and well as intriguing. Hence, I have prepared this short booklet to share this information with yourselves. The main references I have used are the famous books of Tafsīr, Ma‘āriful Qur’ān, Tafsīr ibn Kathīr and Tafsīr Qurṭubī.

I pray that by reading this booklet, we can better understand the way Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** works and comprehend His Mercy upon us. We can also use the lessons learnt from this subject in our lives and understand how spiritual progression is achieved gradually, building step by step to maintain consistency and longevity.

May Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** enable all of us to gain the maximum benefit and reward in the month of Ramaḍān, make it a month of forgiveness for the entire Ummah and a means of sending down His Mercy and blessings upon us all.

Ebrahim ibn Faruk Noor – 29th Sha‘bān 1447 (17th February 2026)

The Revelation for Fasting in Ramaḍān

The command for obligatory fasting in the month of Ramaḍān was Revealed in the 2nd year of Hijri in the month of Sha‘bān, which precedes the month of Ramaḍān. Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى starts by telling us:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ
مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ²

“O you who believe, the fasts have been enjoined upon you as they were enjoined upon those before you, so that you may be God-fearing.”

Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى tells us that fasting has been made obligatory upon the Ummah of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ just as it was obligatory on the people before.

This Verse is informing us of the similarity between our fasts and the fasts of the people before, in their obligatory nature. It is not meant to tell us that they are completely the same, i.e. the number of fasts, the type of fasts etc.

² Sūrah al-Baqarah Verse 183

The Verses which were sent down by Allāh ﷻ regarding fasting in the month of Ramaḍān were not all sent down together at once. Some of the Verses, or even parts of Verses were Revealed to clarify certain rulings.

In the Musnad of Imām Aḥmad³, there is a lengthy Ḥadīth narrated by Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ which describes three changes that came in Ṣalāh and also three changes that came in fasting during the Madani period, meaning after Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ had migrated to the blessed city. The following chapters will explain the changes related to fasting.



³ Musnad Imām Aḥmad 22123

Fasting before the month of Ramaḍān

When Rasūlullāh ﷺ came to Madīnah, he used to fast 3 days each month and also on the day of ʿĀshūrā, which is the 10th of Muḥarram. He had arrived in the month of Rabīʿ al-Awwal, so this continued for 18 months until the Ramaḍān on the 2nd year.

The day of ʿĀshūrā was commemorated by the Jews in Madīnah during the time of Rasūlullāh ﷺ. The Ḥadīth below details what happened when Rasūlullāh ﷺ enquired about this day:

عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ قَدِمَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الْمَدِينَةَ فَرَأَى الْيَهُودَ تَصُومُ يَوْمَ عَاشُورَاءَ فَقَالَ مَا هَذَا .
 قَالُوا هَذَا يَوْمٌ صَالِحٌ هَذَا يَوْمٌ نَجَّى اللَّهُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ عَدُوِّهِمْ
 فَصَامَهُ مُوسَى . قَالَ " فَأَنَا أَحَقُّ بِمُوسَى مِنْكُمْ "

فَصَامَهُ وَأَمَرَ بِصِيَامِهِ ⁴

Ibn ʿAbbās رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates, when Rasūlullāh ﷺ came to Madīnah he saw the Jews fasting on the day of ʿĀshūrā. He said,

⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 2004

“What is this”. They said, “This is a good day, this is the day when Allāh ﺳُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى rescued the Banū Isrā’īl from their enemies, so Mūsā ﺻَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ fasted on this day”. Rasūlullāh ﺻَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said, “I have more right over Mūsā ﺻَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ than you.” So Rasūlullāh ﺻَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ fasted on this day and commanded (The Muslims) to fast on it as well.

We can see from the Ḥadīth above that Rasūlullāh ﺻَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ fasted on this day and also commanded the believers to also fast. This continued until Allāh ﺳُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى sent Revelation to fast in the month of Ramaḍān. The ruling for the fast on the day of ‘Āshūrā now changed from being obligatory to optional as can be seen in the Ḥadīth below:

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهَا أَنَّ قُرَيْشًا كَانَتْ تَصُومُ يَوْمَ عَاشُورَاءَ فِي
الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ ثُمَّ أَمَرَ رَسُولُ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِصِيَامِهِ حَتَّى
فُرِضَ رَمَضَانُ وَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ
مَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُصُمْهُ وَمَنْ شَاءَ أَفْطَرَ⁵

⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1893

‘Ā’ishah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهَا narrates, the Quraysh used to fast on the day of ‘Āshūrā in the Pre-Islamic period, and then Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ordered (Muslims) to fast on it till the fasting in the month of Ramaḍān was prescribed; whereupon Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said, “Whoever wishes may fast on it (‘Āshūrā), and whoever wishes, may not fast.”

Mufti Sa‘īd Ahmed Palanpuri رَحِمَهُ اللهُ mentions, when the obligatory fasts of Ramaḍān arrived, the obligatory nature of the fast of ‘Āshūrā came to an end. The principle is, that ruling which becomes abrogated due to reduction, even after abrogation its desirability remains. And the obligatory nature of fasting on ‘Āshūrā came to an end for ease, as having two periods of obligatory fasting in one year would be difficult for the Ummah, hence the desirability (of fasting on the day of ‘Āshūrā) remains and there is consensus upon this. ⁶

The first change in fasting was, only the fasts in the month of Ramaḍān would be obligatory from now on.

عَاشُورَاءُ

⁶ Tuḥfatul Alma‘ī Volume 3 Page 127

The Choice of Fasting or Paying Fidyah

In the beginning when the command came for fasting, people were not used to fasting. Hence they were given ease from Sharī‘ah and given a choice.

Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى says:

وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ و فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ
خَيْرٌ لَهُ و وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ⁷

“And those who have the strength, (still, they do not opt for fasting,) on them there is a fidyah (compensation), that is, the feeding of a poor person. Then whoever does good voluntarily, that is better for him. However, that you fast is better for you, if you only knew.”

If the Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ wished to fast they could fast, but if they did not wish to fast, they could give ‘fidyah’. This meant to give a poor person the equivalent of Ṣadaqāt al-Fiṭr as Ṣadaqah for each fast they did not keep. If they chose to give more than the normal amount of fidyah, this would be better. However, the preference was given to fasting.

⁷ Sūrah al-Baqarah Verse 184

This choice was not limited to people who were ill or old, but for everyone, so even those people who had the strength to fast had the option to give fidyah instead of fasting. This can be seen in the Ḥadīth below:

عَنْ سَلَمَةَ بْنِ الْأَكْوَعِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ لَمَّا نَزَلَتْ هَذِهِ الْآيَةُ

وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ

كَانَ مَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُفْطِرَ وَيَفْتَدِيَ حَتَّى نَزَلَتِ الْآيَةُ الَّتِي بَعْدَهَا

فَنَسَخَتْهَا⁸

Salamah ibn al-Akwā رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates, when this Verse was Revealed, “And those who have the strength, on them there is a fidyah, that is, the feeding of a poor person”, the person who intended not to keep the fast would give fidyah, until the Verse after it was Revealed which abrogated it.

Once people became used to fasting, Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى now sent down the following Verse:

فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ⁹

⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1145a

“So those of you who witness the month must fast in it.”

This meant all people (apart from those exempt) must fast in all cases, they would not be allowed to give fidyah anymore. The next part of the Verse then tells us about the exemptions.

وَمَنْ كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ

“But the one who is sick or is on a journey (should fast) as much from other days (as he missed).”

So if a person is ill, and they are not able to fast in Ramaḍān, they have the option to not fast and make them up on other days when they are better. ¹⁰

This is also an option for a person who is classed in Sharīʿah as being a traveller. If they do not fast on those days, they can make them up at a later time. These rulings are still in effect today.

The second change in fasting was to remove the option given to those who had the strength to give fidyah, and ordained fasting for them.

⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah Verse 185

¹⁰ For those who have permanent medical conditions which prevent them from fasting altogether, they will give fidyah

The Timing of the Fast

When fasting became obligatory, after Iftār time, permission to eat, drink and have marital intimacy was only allowed until a person slept. Sleeping would be seen as an indicator to the beginning of the next fast. Hence if a person slept even a short while after Iftār, they would now be classified as a fasting person.

Eating & Drinking

This proved to be difficult for some of the Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ as we can see from the narrations. The first issue was not being able to eat or drink. This Ḥadīth from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī tells us about once such incident.

عَنِ الْبَرَاءِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ كَانَ أَصْحَابُ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِذَا كَانَ الرَّجُلُ صَائِمًا فَحَضَرَ الْإِفْطَارُ فَنَامَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُفْطِرَ لَمْ يَأْكُلْ لَيْلَتَهُ وَلَا يَوْمَهُ حَتَّى يُمِيسِيَ¹¹

Al Barā رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates, it was the custom of the Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ, if a man was fasting and the food for Iftār was presented,

¹¹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1915

and if they had slept before they ate, they would not eat that night and the following day until sunset.

وَإِنَّ قَيْسَ بْنَ صِرْمَةَ الْأَنْصَارِيَّ كَانَ صَائِمًا
فَلَمَّا حَضَرَ الْإِفْطَارُ أَتَى امْرَأَتَهُ فَقَالَ لَهَا أَعِنْدِكَ طَعَامٌ قَالَتْ لَا
وَلَكِنْ أَنْطَلِقُ فَأَطْلُبُ لَكَ

Qais ibn Şirmah al-Anşārī رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ was fasting and came to his wife at the time of Iftār (and asked her whether she had anything to eat. She replied, “No, but I will go and bring some for you.”

وَكَانَ يَوْمَهُ يَعْمَلُ فَعَلَبَتْهُ عَيْنَاهُ فَجَاءَتْهُ امْرَأَتُهُ فَلَمَّا رَأَتْهُ قَالَتْ
حَايِبَةٌ لَكَ

Qais ibn Şirmah al-Anşārī رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ used to do hard work during the day, so he was overwhelmed by sleep and slept. When his wife came and saw him, she said, “Disappointment for you.”

فَلَمَّا انْتَصَفَ النَّهَارُ غَشِيَ عَلَيْهِ فَذُكِرَ ذَلِكَ لِلنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ فَنَزَلَتْ هَذِهِ الْآيَةُ

أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلَى نِسَائِكُمْ

فَقَرِحُوا بِهَا فَرَحًا شَدِيدًا وَنَزَلَتْ

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ

مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ¹²

When it was midday on the following day, he fainted, and the Prophet ﷺ was informed about the whole matter and the following was Revealed:

“It is made lawful for you, in the nights of fasts, to have intimate relations with your women”

They (The Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ) became very happy and then the following was Revealed:

“Eat and drink until the white thread (of the dawn) becomes distinct from the black thread;”¹³

So now the Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ could eat and drink even after they slept, so they would no longer have this issue.

¹² Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1915

¹³ Sūrah al-Baqarah Verse 187

The Beginning Time of the Fast

The Verse had been Revealed that the fast did not begin until the white thread becomes distinct from the black thread. This led to some confusion among the Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ as to what time this actually meant, which can be seen from the following Hadith.

عَنِ الشَّعْبِيِّ عَنْ عَدِيِّ قَالَ أَخَذَ عَدِيٌّ عِقَالاً أبيضَ وَعِقَالاً أَسْوَدَ حَتَّى كَانَ بَعْضُ اللَّيْلِ نَظَرَ فَلَمْ يَسْتَبِينَا فَلَمَّا أَصْبَحَ قَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ جَعَلْتُ تَحْتِ وَسَادَتِي. قَالَ إِنَّ وَسَادَكَ إِذَا لَعَرِيضٌ أَنْ كَانَ الْحَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ وَالْأَسْوَدُ تَحْتِ وَسَادَتِكَ ¹⁴

Al-Sha‘bī narrates that ‘Adiy رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ took a white rope (or thread) and a black rope until some part of the night passed. He then looked at them and could not differentiate between the two. When the morning came, he said, ‘O Rasūlullāh, I placed them under my pillow’. Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said, ‘Indeed your pillow is then too wide if your white thread and black (thread) are under your pillow!’.

¹⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 4509

عَنْ سَهْلِ بْنِ سَعْدٍ قَالَ أَنْزِلْتُ

وَكُلُّوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ

وَلَمْ يَنْزِلْ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ فَكَانَ رِجَالٌ إِذَا أَرَادُوا الصَّوْمَ رَبَطَ أَحَدُهُمْ فِي

رِجْلِهِ الْخَيْطَ الْأَبْيَضَ وَالْخَيْطَ

الْأَسْوَدَ وَلَمْ يَزَلْ يَأْكُلُ حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُ رُؤْيُهُمَا فَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ

مِنَ الْفَجْرِ

فَعَلِمُوا أَنَّهُ إِنَّمَا يَعْنِي اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ¹⁵

Sahl ibn Sa‘ad رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ narrates, when the following was Revealed: “Eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct from the black thread” and ‘of dawn’ was not Revealed, some people who intended to fast, tied black and white threads to their feet and they would continue eating until they could differentiate between the two. Allāh then Revealed the words, “Minal Fajr” (of dawn), and it became clear that meant night and day.

The words ‘Minal Fajr’ are the shortest Revelation in the Qur’ān.

¹⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1917

Marital Relations

The other issue the Companions رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ had was not being able to have marital relations with their spouses after they had slept after Iftār.

عَنْ أَبِي إِسْحَاقَ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ الْبَرَاءَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ لَمَّا نَزَلَ صَوْمُ
رَمَضَانَ كَانُوا لَا يَقْرَبُونَ النِّسَاءَ رَمَضَانَ كُلَّهُ وَكَانَ رِجَالٌ يُخُونُونَ
أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ

عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا
عَنْكُمْ¹⁶

Abū Ishāq narrates, I heard Al-Barā رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ say, “When the order of compulsory fasting was Revealed, the people did not go near their wives (to have marital relations) for the whole of Ramaḍān. Some men betrayed themselves (by violating the restriction). So Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى Revealed, “Allāh knows that you have been betraying yourselves, so He relented towards you and pardoned you.””

¹⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 4508

In Tafsīr Qurṭubī¹⁷, it mentions, that ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ returned from the company of Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ and he had been talking to him till late at night. He found that his wife had already slept (hence her fast had begun) and when he told her he intended to fulfil his natural inclinations, she said that she had already slept. ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ said that she had not slept and completed his intentions with her.

A similar incident also occurred with Ubay ibn Ka‘ab رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ. ‘Umar رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ went to Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ and informed him of what he had done. Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى then sent down the following Verse.

عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا
عَنْكُمْ فَالْآنَ بَاشِرُوهُنَّ¹⁸

“Allāh knows that you have been betraying yourselves, so He relented towards you and pardoned you. So now you can intimate relations with”

¹⁷ Tafsīr Qurṭubī Volume 1 Page 692

¹⁸ Sūrah al-Baqarah Verse 187

The third change in fasting now came into effect. Permission was now given that up until dawn, believers were allowed to eat, drink and have intimate relations with their spouse. The fast started from that time as well, whether a person had slept before then or not.



Summary

Initially, Allāh ﷻ had only made the fast of ‘Āshūrā compulsory. Then after the migration of Rasūlullāh ﷺ to Madīnah, in the second year, after Revelation, fasting in the month of Ramaḍān now became obligatory in place of the fast of ‘Āshūrā.

There were exceptions to the rule, so those people who were ill or travelling were excused from fasting and allowed to make them up on other days.

The Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ were able to learn how to fast before the monthly obligation. Furthermore, an Islamic society had now been established in Madīnah enabling the practise to become easier.

When fasting in Ramaḍān became obligatory, there was an option to give fidyah instead of fasting, even for those who were able to fast. The preference was given to fasting. Those Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ who wished to fast, kept the fasts and those who wanted to give the fidyah, gave the compensation.



This again was an opportunity for the Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ to keep as many fasts as they wanted. And those who did not fast, the compensation would benefit the poor. Once the Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ became used to fasting, Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى removed the option of giving fidyah for those who were able to fast.

Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى then through His infinite Mercy, allowed the Muslims to eat, drink and have marital relations all the way throughout the night until dawn. Initially as soon as anyone slept after Iftār time, their fast for the following day would begin and this caused some difficulty. Through Revelation, Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى made the duration of the fast now clear and granted ease for the believers.

Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** intends ease for us and not difficulty

There are many lessons which can be learnt from this period as follows:

Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** tells us:

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ¹⁹

“Allāh intends (to provide) ease for you and does not intend (to create) hardship for you.”

Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** also tells us:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا²⁰

“Allāh does not obligate anyone beyond his capacity.”

Every act of worship which Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** has made compulsory upon us is within our capability. If a person is not capable of carrying out this act, whether this is partially or completely, then Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** had given us ease. We take the example of a person who cannot pray Ṣalāh standing, Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** gives

¹⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah Verse 185

²⁰ Sūrah al-Baqarah Verse 286

them the option to pray sitting. If they cannot perform Ṣalāh sitting, then it can be performed in a lying down position.

When it comes to discharging Zakāh, it is only obligatory on those people who are Nisāb holders, and even then, it is only those who have had a positive balance for an entire Islamic year.

When it comes to Ḥajj, again it is only obligatory on those people who can afford to and physically able to make the journey.

When it comes to fasting in Ramaḍān, Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** has given exemptions to those who are ill and travelling. They can make up the fasts which are missed on a later date. The women who are on their monthly cycles and experiencing Nifās – post natal bleeding are also excused from fasting and allowed to make them up later on. For those who have permanent health conditions and cannot fast at all, they are allowed to give fidyah.

We can see from all the examples how Merciful Allāh **سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى** is. We can all easily complete all our religious obligations along with our necessities. We should never think of the acts of worship as a burden upon us and rather think that Allāh



سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى has a right to every single second of our lives. He is the One who has granted us time on this earth so can demand we spend it as He commands. However we are given the vast majority of our time to spend in fulfilling our personal obligations, like working and fulfilling the rights of others.

In the month of Ramaḍān, we again witness the way Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى works. Praying our 5 times daily Ṣalāh, 20 Rak‘ah Tarāwih at night, reciting the Qur’ān daily and giving regular charity. This is all done whilst fasting during the daylight hours and Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى makes it easy for us. We need to maintain this momentum in the other months of the year.



Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى is the Sustainer and looks after His Creation

From all the creation of Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى, human beings are the only ones who have to work for a living. We earn a wage and then use the money to support ourselves and our families. If we think of all the other creations, Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى provides for all of them.



When it comes to humans, there will be some from all parts of society. Some will be rich and some will be poor. Some will be so poor that they cannot even sustain themselves for a day. Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى has made Islām such a religion where a society is established to look after everyone. Consider the following:

- Zakāt is transferred from those who are legible to pay, to a specific set of people mentioned in the Qur’ān.²¹
- The fidyah which was given in the beginning as an option instead of fasting was given to the poor
- The fidyah which is given by those who cannot fast is given to the poor

²¹ Sūrah at-Tawbah Verse 60

- Some of the options for Kaffārah (atonement) involve freeing a slave or feeding poor people
- The Ṣadaqāt al-Fiṭr is given to the poor on the day of Eid
- It is recommended to give part of the meat from the Uḍḥiyah (animal sacrifice) to the poor

Giving in charity is greatly encouraged in Islām with many Aḥādīth detailing the immense reward. The benefit of charity is not only the reward for the person who has donated but a tangible benefit to the recipient and society itself.

Zakāt is the best example where Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى transfers ownership of wealth from those who are legible to pay Zakāt, to those who are legible to receive. By becoming owners of the wealth, the recipients are free to do with it as they wish. The money could be used to invest and take them out of poverty.

زكاة

We must remember that Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى has already determined what Rizq – sustenance is written for us all. The money that we give in charity has already been written for the recipient, so we are not at any loss at all.

With this system Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى has created, we can see how many poor people will benefit in the month of Ramaḍān, not only through the Zakāt that is donated, but also the fidyah that will be given by those who cannot fast.



We need to understand that Islām is the solution to all issues in society, including poverty and every one of us is part of this society, We need to ensure we understand what our obligations are and discharge our duties accordingly. This will Inshā Allāh create a more balanced, fair and harmonious place for us all.

Teaching our children the obligations from an early age

The command to fast in Ramaḍān was not Revealed in the beginning of Islām but approximately 15 years later once the Islamic Society had been established in Madīnah. The Companions رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ were then eased into this to ensure they would be able to fast for an entire month before the option of fidyah was removed for those who were able to fast.

This is a lesson for us as well. We should train our younger children how to fast before it becomes obligatory upon them. Let them fast on weekends or maybe keep half a fast. Gradually work their way up, so ideally by the time they start secondary school, they should be able to keep all their fasts. When the time comes and fasting becomes obligatory upon them, they will see no changeover and it will be normal for them to fast, hence easier.



The same could be done for Ṣalāh. Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ mentions in a Ḥadīth to teach our children how to read Ṣalāh from the age of seven.²²

²² Sunan Abū Dāwūd 495

By the age of seven, the child will be able to read Arabic, memorise the Sūrah's and supplications required within Ṣalāh and also learn the postures.

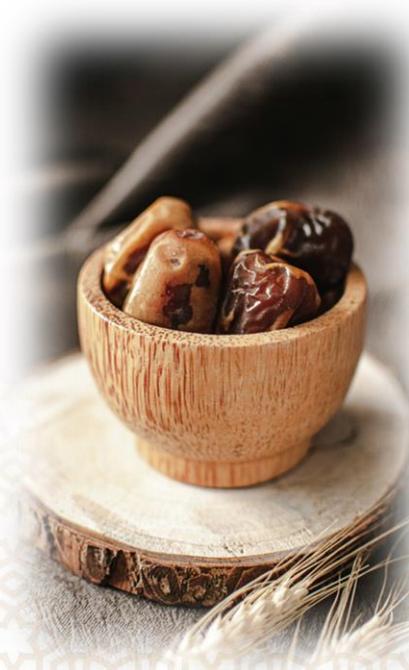
Whilst the child is learning how to pray Ṣalāh, they can also start praying with older family members to understand the frequency and timing of Ṣalāh. The children can start praying on weekends, then move on to praying once a day, twice, thrice etc. Over a period of 3 years, the child will be able to gradually learn how to pray Ṣalāh properly and also pray 5 times a day. Again in the same way as fasting, once the time comes when Ṣalāh becomes obligatory upon them, they will already be used to praying 5 times a day so will not find it difficult Inshā Allāh.

Islām is so vast that we could spend our entire lives learning about this beautiful religion of ours. The more we learn, the more we can understand the way Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى works. We can understand the reason behind the obligations and learn how to carry them out correctly. We can also learn about the rewards and warning for those who do and do not carry them out.

During our journey of seeking knowledge, we will become closer to Allāh سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى and our love for Him will increase as well as our love for Rasūlullāh صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ. This in turn will make us

more eager to please Him and carry out our obligations to the best of our ability.

Our time on this earth is very limited, and we do not know which Ramaḍān will be our last. We must endeavour to cherish each moment and make it a means of great reward. Ramaḍān is also a month of community so help those who are less fortunate than us, donate to useful causes and spend time with your families. Include the younger ones in your activities and do not forget our elders. Remember all those who are no longer with us and use this blessed month to reassess and realign our lives in accordance with the Will of Allāh **سُبْحَانَہٗ وَتَعَالَى**.



The History of Fasting