



Core Curriculum

3 Foundations of Islam - Obligatory Acts

3.10 **Fasting in Islam, its Purpose, Dos and Don'ts**

INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel! In our previous lesson, we saw how the salat is the most important practice in the entirety of Islam. This is so because it is the crux of one's relationship with God. Without it, there is no proper relationship with God. Without it, there can be no Islam.

If there is a practice which we may deem as the “second most important” practice in Islam, it is siyām or fasting. In this lesson, we will look into the purpose of fasting in Islam in the furū‘ al-dīn, its how-to and some practical advice for those who are not used to fasting, at least in the way that it is practiced in Islam.

BODY OF TEXT

O you who have believed, ordained for you is fasting as it was ordained for those before you so that you may remain conscious of God; [fasting] for a number of days. whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew. (Chapter 2, verses 183-184 from the Holy Qur'an)

When we speak about fasting in Islam, we are primarily speaking about the obligatory fast during the Holy month of Ramadan. The verse we just read contains within it the ultimate purpose of fasting. The ultimate purpose of fasting is to instill God consciousness (taqwā) in human beings.

We have two kinds of desires, those that are produced by our physical bodies and those that are produced by our minds and imagination. With most human beings in the world, these two desires are intertwined with each other.

The body has a number of urges and desires, and the mind creates images that it associates with them.

As if the bodily desires were not enough, the kinds of images, attachments and covetous states that the mind produces makes these bodily desires much more intense.

The body has its base cravings, but generally speaking, it is in the mind where addictions and compulsive behaviors are born. These include, among other things, addictions to food, drinking, smoking, drugs, intense love of money and so on and so forth.

It is in the mind where we become slaves to our desires. What does it mean to be a slave of one's desires? It means to not be able to say no to them!

One cannot both be a slave of one's desires and a slave of God. We have

to choose who we want to serve.

The purpose of fasting is to reduce our mental attachments to our daily habits and desires. By helping us psychologically detach ourselves from our desires, fasting is meant to strengthen our will and help us submit to God instead.

Fasting also has a social value. Fasting helps us not only appreciate what God has given us in terms of food, drink and other things, but it helps us empathize with the poor. Without empathy, it is difficult to give charity to the poor.

The obligatory fast during the month of Ramadan is usually 30 days. It begins at dawn and ends at sunset or sundown depending on how one interprets maghrib time. One must abstain from food, drink, intimate relations, smoking, as well as other forbidding things like gossiping, lying, cheating, backbiting etc.

Failure to observe the rules of the fast will break one's fast. Of course, if one eats or drinks accidentally, then one's fast will not be broken. In fact, according to Islamic tradition, absentmindedly eating or drinking during Ramadan is considered a mercy from God.

Only sane adults are required to fast. Those who are very advanced in age, or are sick, pregnant, under-aged, or have jobs that do not allow them to fast (like intense farm work in hot summers) are not required to fast. People who are usually eligible to fast but cannot do so due to special circumstances are required to make up for their fast at some later time. If they cannot, then they need to compensate for the fast by feeding the poor.

The Eid al-Fitr is the festival which marks the end of fasting during the month of Ramadan. There is a special prayer associated with it that is generally prayed in the morning before noon. After this a Muslim breaks his or her fast and resumes normal eating and drinking hours again.

The month of Ramadan is the month that the Qur'an was first revealed

to the Prophet Muhammad (s). According to the Prophet (s), the month of Ramadan is where the demons or shayātīn are restrained and Muslims are allowed to grow spiritually at an accelerated rate. It is where sins are forgiven, and prayers receive more rewards than they usually do.

Fasting during the month of Ramadan must begin with the intention or niyya of fasting. Before dawn, one wakes up for suhūr or the predawn breakfast. This ensures that a person can function during the day. Iftār on the other hand is when a Muslim breaks his or her fast at sundown or sunset.

Fasting is recommended on most days of the year when desires become overwhelming. Fasting helps tame these desires.

One cannot fast anytime one wants. There are times when fasting is prohibited. Fasting is prohibited when it seriously endangers a person's health, or when a person travels or when it is the Day of Ashura.