



Basics of the Ṣawm of Ramaḍān

Q & A in the Ḥanafī Madhhab

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Q- What is the meaning and definition of ‘Ṣawm’?

A- Ṣawm (Fast)

meaning: to abstain, to refrain or keep away from something.

definition: to abstain from food, drink and conjugal relationships with the intention of worship during daylight (from dawn ¹ till sunset ²).

Q- Upon whom is the ṣawm (fasting) of Ramaḍān obligatory (farḍ ³)?

A- The ṣawm of Ramaḍān is farḍ upon every sane and healthy Muslim person. ⁴

Q- Upon whom is such fasting not obligatory?

A- Such fasting (the ṣawm of Ramaḍān) is not farḍ upon:

- a non-Muslim,

¹ Before the rising of the second dawn (*fajr ṣādiq*).

² After the sun has completely set.

³ *farḍ*: definite obligation; that obligation, the legal qualification of which there is no doubt. An act to be performed, proven by solid evidence.

⁴ Stipulated conditions for the ṣawm to be legally binding upon someone are four: He/She must be I.Muslim, II.Sane, III.Of majority age, and IV.Must be aware of the obligation (timing, etc.) of ṣawm.

- an insane person,
 - a child who has not yet reached the age of maturity,
 - a sick person (who does not bear the strength to fast without further damaging his health),
 - a traveller (who is on a journey of a specific minimum distance),
 - one who is too old to fast (and too weak to bear the pangs of hunger),
 - a pregnant woman, a nursing woman (if they fear their fasting may cause harm to themselves or to their child, born or unborn).
- (The conditions of all of the above will be judged according to their individual circumstances and severity of any respective factor).
- A menstruating woman and a woman who is experiencing postnatal bleeding are forbidden from *ṣawm*.

Q When does the *ṣawm* of Ramaḍān become *farḍ*?

A- The *ṣawm* of Ramaḍān becomes *farḍ* at the first sighting of the moon of the month of Ramaḍān. This means that there will be a fast from the next dawn.

Q What is the Islāmic legal ruling concerning the sighting of the Ramaḍān moon?

A- It is obligatory (*wājib*⁵) upon Muslims to search for the Ramaḍān moon on the 29th of Sha‘bān.⁶ If it is seen then they shall fast the next day. If it is not seen then they shall complete all 30 days of Sha‘bān and fast after that.

If the sky is clear, the moon-sighting of a large number will be necessary for the beginning of Ramaḍān. If the sky is cloudy then the moon-sighting by a single honest person⁷ shall be sufficient and accepted. If, however, anyone witnesses the moon of Ramaḍān and his testimony is not accepted, then he alone should still fast the next day.

Q What is the Islāmic legal ruling concerning the sighting of the moon of ‘Īd al-Fiṭr ?

A- If the sky is cloudy then the sighting of the moon of ‘Īd al-Fiṭr by 2 male witnesses, or 1 male and 2 female witnesses, shall be accepted. If the sky is clear then the sighting of the moon by a large number of people⁸ shall be accepted.

⁵ *wājib* : obligation which is not proven by solid evidence, but by that in which there is an element of doubt.

⁶ It is a communal obligation.

⁷ Such person must be one of moral probity (*‘adālah*).

⁸ Their report should establish certain knowledge.

If anyone sights the moon of 'Īd al-Fiṭr by himself alone, then his testimony shall not be accepted and he shall not end his fasting, but remain fasting with the rest of the community and perform his 'Īd with them.

Q- What is 'Intention of *ṣawm*' ?

A- The 'Intention' or 'niyyah' is the will to do an act. The 'Intention of *ṣawm*' is, therefore, the will to fast. This is formed in the mind but is more proper to be verbally spoken. For the fasting of Ramaḍān, the *niyyah* can be formed at any time between the sunset of one day and just before the noon of the next day during Ramaḍān.

Q- How do we say the *niyyah*?

A- Before we answer this question, we must know that there are 2 very important timings with respect to *ṣawm*. Those 2 timings are :

- 1- the timing of beginning of *ṣawm* known as the 'Saḥūr',
- 2- the timing of the ending of *ṣawm* known as the 'Īftār'.

-The *niyyah* to begin the *ṣawm*, which is at the time of *saḥūr* is:

“ *wa-bi-ṣawmi ghadin nawaytu min shabri Ramaḍān* ”

(I made intention for the fast of tomorrow in the month of Ramaḍān.)

-The *niyyah* to end the *ṣawm*, at the time of *iftār*, is:

“ *Allāhumma innī la-Ka ṣumtu, wa-bi-Ka āmantu, wa 'alay-Ka tawakkaltu wa 'alā rizqi-Ka aḥtartu* ”

(O Allāh! I fasted for You, I put my faith in You, I relied on You and I opened my fast with subsistence provided by You.)

Q- What are the acts, etc. that invalidate the *ṣawm*?

A- If one deliberately eats, drinks, smokes or has any conjugal relationship during daylight/fasting time, then his *ṣawm* has been invalidated.

Q- What are the acts which do not invalidate the fast?

A- No act, other than those mentioned in the answer to the last question, will invalidate the fast. If any individual does any of those above-mentioned acts forgetting that he/she was in the state of *ṣawm* then his/her fast has not been invalidated.

Q- Are there any acts that do not invalidate the *ṣawm* but are disliked and should be abstained from whilst fasting?

A- Yes there are such-like acts. Some of those acts are: the unnecessary tasting of something, unnecessary chewing, the accumulation of and swallowing of saliva, the kissing of one's spouse when one is unable to control his passions, etc.

Q- What are the acts that are desirable during *ṣawm*?

A- There are many desirable acts one may do whilst fasting and after opening the fast. Some of those acts are: To hasten the opening of the fast after sunset, to open the fast with dates, to say a *du'ā'* (supplication) at the time of *iftār*, to eat the pre-dawn meal at *ṣaḥūr*, to be more philanthropic and generous to the needy and to relatives, to control one's tongue from backbiting, verbal abuse, futile talk and unnecessary gossip, etc., to spend more time in reciting the Noble Qur'ān, learning, studying, *dhikr* (remembering Allāh ﷻ) and sending blessings and salutations upon the Beloved Messenger ﷺ.

Q- What if someone intentionally breaks the *ṣawm* before the stipulated time of opening?

A- If one is to intentionally break the *ṣawm* before the time of *iftār*, then he has invalidated it. He must then prepare himself for atonement, which is:

I to free a slave, if that is not possible for him, then

II to fast continuously for 2 months, if that is not possible for him, then

III to feed 60 poor people 2 meals a day, or provide them with equal amount of sustenance.

References:

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