

Ramadhān is a month in the Islāmic calendar. It is the ninth month to be precise, lying between the months of Shabān and Shawāl. It is the most blessed month in the year.



Why is it so special?

Ramadhān is the month in which the Holy Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. The Qur'ān is a Guide and a Light, not just for Muslims but for the whole of mankind. It is the book revealed by Allāh to His creation, to direct them and enable them to differentiate between right and wrong.



Without this revelation, we would be scrambling around in darkness, living in utter ignorance of our Creator, of our duties towards Him and of the rewards or punishments for adhering or failing to adhere to His commands. This great event, the revelation of the Qur'ān, is a major reason for the significance of Ramadhān. Allāh says,

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ ۚ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ ۗ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ ۗ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُم وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

Ramadhān is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'ān as a guide to mankind also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So, every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting but if anyone is ill or on a journey the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later. Allāh intends every facility for you He does not want to put you to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance you shall be grateful.

Sūrah al Baqarah, 2:185



How do Muslims mark this special month?

It is a month in which Muslims all over Allāh's earth become preoccupied in His remembrance, reassessing their behaviour and engaging themselves continuously in acts of worship. The most significant of these acts is *Sawm Ramadhān*.



What is *Sawm Ramadhān*?

Siyām is an Arabic word, meaning to keep away from something. In its general and most popular use as an Islāmic term, *siyām* means to fast, to abstain from food, drink and sexual relations, between dawn and sunset with the intention only of pleasing Allāh. *Sawm Ramadhān* is to perform the act of *siyām* during the entire month

of Ramadhān. It is one of the five Pillars of Islām, five compulsory actions that are required to be performed by all Muslims.



That seems tough!

It seems tough but in fact, it is easy. It is easy for those who have *ēmān*, who love Allāh and fear Him, who are prepared to follow His commands and obey His Messenger, Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. For such people, the twenty-nine or thirty days of worship in the form of *siyām*, pass very quickly.



You mention ‘commands.’ Was *sawm Ramadhān* something commanded by Allāh?

Yes. The previously mentioned *ayah* of the Qur’ān demonstrates this:

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ ۚ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ
فَلْيَصُمْهُ ۗ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ

Ramadhān is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur’ān as a guide to mankind also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So, every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting but if anyone is ill or on a journey the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later.

Sūrah al Baqarah, 2:185

Also

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you that you may become God-Conscious.

Sūrah al Baqarah, 2:183

As we mentioned in our discussion of *salāh*, regardless of its many benefits, as a commandment, *sawm Ramadhān* is there to be followed. We perform it because we fear and love Allāh.



In English, ‘fast’ is the general word for someone leaving his or her food and drink. Is this an acceptable translation of *siyām*?

As a general word to use, day to day, for example with Non-Muslims, it’s OK. However, *siyām* is a better and more accurate word to use. *Siyām* carries an entirely different implication altogether. Other religions are known for their ‘fasts’ also. For example, Catholics fast during lent, sometimes by simply giving up certain foods only. Hindus fast for entire twenty-four-hour periods, any time in the year, abstaining from all foods except fruit. *Siyām* is something completely different. As mentioned earlier, it involves:

1. abstaining from food and drink;
2. also abstaining from sexual relations;
3. doing so only between the period of dawn and sunset;
4. doing so on certain permitted days only, including the days of Ramadhān;
5. doing so only with the *niyyah* (intention) of pleasing Allāh.

If any of these aspects are not present in the ‘fast’ that you are doing, then it is not *siyām* as recognised in Islām and therefore not acceptable as a form of worship to Allāh.



So, the word ‘*siyām*’ relates to a precisely defined act?

Yes. ‘Fasting’ is a very general word. *Siyām*, on the other hand, has specific conditions attached to it and is governed by a host of rules and regulations. Insha’Allāh, we will discuss some of these rules in a later chapter. For now, it is sufficient to know that *sawm Ramadhān* is a compulsory action and one that results in great rewards for believers.



Allāh mentions in the *ayah* quoted above that *siyām* is prescribed to make us ‘God-Conscious.’ What does this mean?

Allāh states that through fasting we can become *muttaqīn*, i.e. those who have *taqwa*. *Taqwa* is variously translated as ‘piety’ or ‘God-Consciousness.’ A person who has *taqwa* is aware every second that Allāh سبحانه وتعالى is a witness to all his actions and that He will be called to account for them one day.

Siyām helps to build our *ēmān* and our *taqwa*. While we are fasting, we naturally incline towards doing good. It also acts as a shield against the performance of evil. To cite one hadīth:

Abu Huraira رضي الله عنه narrates that Allāh's Apostle صلى الله عليه وسلم said, "Fasting is a shield (or a screen or a shelter). So, the person observing fasting should avoid sexual relations with his spouse and should not behave foolishly and impudently, and if somebody fights with him or abuses him, he should tell him twice, 'I am fasting'." The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم added, "By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, the smell coming out from the mouth of a fasting person is better in the sight of Allāh than the smell of musk. (Allāh says about the fasting person), 'He has left his food, drink and desires for My sake. The fast is for Me. So, I will reward (the fasting person) for it and the reward of good deeds is multiplied ten times."

Bukhari



Ramadhān seems like a very blessed month.

It is indeed a blessed month and one that presents all Muslims with NOT TO BE MISSED opportunities.

Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said, as narrated by Abu Huraira, 'When the month of Ramadhān starts, the gates of the Heaven are opened and the gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained.'

Bukhari

Such a state of affairs in the heavens and earth is very precious and should not be squandered. Ramadhān comes only once a year. It is a month in which we should maximise our efforts for the sake of Allāh and initiate life-changing reforms.



In addition to fasting, what kinds of acts should we strive to do during the month of Ramadhān?

Read as much Qur’ān as possible

Reading the Qur’ān in Arabic at any time is a meritorious act of worship. However, doing so in Ramadhān is something particularly encouraged. We should try to recite as much of the Qur’ān as possible in this month, doing so sweetly and with *tajwīd* (technically correct pronunciation). Also, try to study it and understand its meaning.

Fasting and recitation of Qur'ān are two very significant acts of worship in Ramadhān and are both acts that will represent us, by the Permission of Allāh, on *Yawm al Qiyāmah* (the Day of Resurrection). The Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

Fasting and the Qur'ān intercede for the servant on the Day of Resurrection. Fasting will say: "Oh my Lord, I prevented him from food and desires so accept my intercession for him", and the Qur'ān will say: "I prevented him from sleep at night, so accept my intercession for him", so their intercession will be accepted.

Narrated by Abdullah Ibn Amr رضي الله عنه in Ahmad

Increase self restraint and *sabr* (patience and fortitude)

- Show self-restraint in all your actions;
- Especially be careful about the way you interact with other people;
- Train yourself to maintain discipline in all situations and always carry impeccable manners.

Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه narrates that the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'Whoever does not give up forged speech and evil actions, Allāh is not in need of his leaving his food and drink'

Bukhari

Also display self-restraint towards your food and drink outside *siyām* hours. Ramadhān nights should not be opportunities for excessive eating and entertainment. They should ideally be spent in worship.

Try to reform and improve yourself

Ramadhān provides an excellent opportunity for sinners to ask forgiveness from Allāh and to reform themselves, and for the already faithful to increase their levels of *īmān*.

- Try to change things in your life for the better, even the smallest thing;
- Make a point of carefully examining your life and your worship of Allāh;
- You should enter this month in one state, and leave it in a better state, with more *taqwa* and improved behaviour;
- Whatever betterment you achieve, make sure it is not a temporary phenomenon, only for Ramadhān. Make sure it lasts a lifetime.

Give *sadaqah*, as much as you are able, to the poor and needy.

Siyām is one of the most effective ways to remember those who are less fortunate than us. Alhamdulillah, our *iftār* (breaking of the fast) comes at *Maghrib*. For many around the world, there is no promise of food. Many people are perpetually hungry.

Ibn `Abbas رضي الله عنه narrates that the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was the most generous amongst the people, and he used to be more so in the month of Ramadhān when Gabriel visited him, and Gabriel used to meet him on every night of Ramadhān till the end of the month. The Prophet used to recite the Holy Qur'ān to Gabriel, and when Gabriel met him, he used to be more generous than a fast wind (which causes rain and welfare).

Bukhārī

Narrates Ibn `Abbas رضي الله عنه Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'He who gives food for a fasting person to break his fast will receive the same reward as him, with nothing being reduced from the fasting person's reward.'

Tirmidhi

Perform *umrah* if you are able.

An *umrah* performed in Ramadhān is equivalent to Hajj performed WITH the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. He said,

‘Perform *umrah* in the month of Ramadhān, as it is equivalent to Hajj or Hajj with me (in reward).’

Reported by Ibn `Abbas in Sahih Bukhāri

Spend time with your family and with relatives.

- Make family events out of *suhūr* (the meal commencing the fast) and *iftār*, with all of you gathered around the mat or table;
- If anybody invites you to *iftār*, you should try your best to accept;
- Try to visit relatives and rejuvenate the ties with them;
- Parents should prepare their children for *siyām*. If they are young but ready, train them by making them perform a day or so.



Ask Allāh's forgiveness of sins

Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه narrates that Allāh's Apostle صلى الله عليه وسلم said, ‘Whoever observes fasts during the month of Ramadhān out of sincere faith, and hoping to attain Allāh's rewards, then all his past sins will be forgiven.’

Bukhāri

Abu Hurairah رضي الله عنه narrates Allāh's Apostle said: ‘Whoever establishes prayers during the nights of Ramadhān faithfully out of sincere faith and hoping to attain Allāh's rewards (not for showing off), all his past sins will be forgiven.’

Bukhāri

Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said, ‘Every son of Ādam sins, and the best of the sinners are those who repent’

Ibn Mājah

DhikrAllāh

Remember Allāh constantly, sitting, standing or lying. It was the practice of the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم to spend the last ten nights of Ramadhān in *i`tikāf* (seclusion) engaged completely, in the remembrance and worship of Allāh.

Generally, maximise good deeds and minimise bad deeds.

- Immerse yourself in worship and maximise the performance of good deeds;
- Keep yourself away from temptations that may lead to sin;
- Avoid the futile distractions of the world;
- Evening *salāh* at the masjid – IN. Hanging out at the local mall – OUT!

Insh`Allāh, in the next chapter we will discuss the rules surrounding fasting.

Fasting in Ramadhān (Sawm Ramadhān) (part a)

Questions

1. What is *Sawm Ramadhān*?
2. What single event from the past makes Ramadhān so special?
3. what does the word *ēmān* mean?
4. The word 'fast' is often used to describe *siyām* in Ramadhān. Is this an acceptable translation?
5. What five things does *siyām* in Ramadhān involve?
6. Why do we fast? What is the reason given by Allāh?
7. What does '*taqwa*' mean?
8. What do we call a person who has *taqwā*?
9. What happens to the gates of *Jannah* and *Jahannam* during Ramadhān?

Islām around the world



Straight path, Durres, Albania