



FASTING II. IN SUNNI AND SHI'ITE ISLAM.

Fasting (Ar. *s āawmor ṣāam*, Per. *rūza*) is mentioned in several verses in the Qur'ān. The prescription for fasting in the month of Ramaẓān and several of its regulations are outlined in Qur'ān 2:183-85 and 2:187, while other verses prescribe fasting as an alternative penance for certain offenses (4:92; 5:89, 95; 58:4) or as a substitute for specific pilgrimage rites (2:196). Together with the Hadith (e.g., Bokārī, I, pp. 472-98; Ḥorr 'Āmelī, X, pp. 1-556), these verses form the basis for the legal regulations governing Islamic fasting. *Ṣā'emūn* and *ṣā'emāt* (men and women who fast) are mentioned in the Qur'ān (33:35) as two of many epithets of those who will be forgiven and rewarded by God. According to Qur'ān 19:26, the Virgin Mary (Maryam) is told to take a vow of silence that is described as a fast: "And if you see anyone, say: I have made a vow of *ṣawm* to the Merciful One, and I will speak to no one on this day," apparently in recognition of the Christian practice of observing silence when fasting (Berg, p. 94).

According to both Sunnite and Shi'ite jurisprudence (*feqh*, q.v.), fasting requires abstinence (*emsāk*) from the following actions: ingesting food or drink (whether by mouth or injection), sexual intercourse, and smoking. Shi'ites must also be careful not to attribute false statements to God, the Prophet, and the Imams, or being in a state of major ritual impurity (*janāba*) during the fasting hours. The fast is considered broken when the above acts are done intentionally; however, some Shi'ite scholars also specify that even



unintentionally being in *janāba* during Ramaẓān invalidates the fast (e.g., Komeynī, I, p. 282).

Fasting begins at dawn and continues until night (Qur'ān 2:187). Sunnite *feqh* recommends that the faster hasten to break his fast as soon as the sun has set, while according to a well-known opinion in Shi'ite *feqh*, the faster must wait until all redness disappears from the eastern half of the sky (Ḥellī, I, p. 61). It is preferable that the meal breaking the fast (*foṭūr* or *eftār*) begin with an odd number of dates in accordance with the Sunna, and that the pre-fast meal (*soḥūr*) be taken as late as possible in the second half of the night (Jazīrī, I, p. 577).

Sunnite and Shi'ite *feqh* recognize several types of fasting: Ramaẓān, *kaffāra* (compensation), *qazā* (making up), *e'tekāf* (seclusion in the mosque), and *mandūr* (vowed fasts). For each, the faster must make a special formulation of his intention (*nīya*). Fasting in the month of Ramaẓān is one of the pillars of Islam and is obligatory on Muslims who are mature (*bāleḡ*), sane (*āqel*), and physically able.

Kaffāra fasts are imposed when one is unable to pay the compensation normally required in cases of accidental killing (Qur'ān 4:92), breaking an oath (Qur'ān 5:89), hunting during pilgrimage (Qur'ān 5:95), and resuming a marriage dissolved by pronouncing the *ḡehār* formula (Qur'ān 58:4), combining the major (*ḡajj*) and minor (*'omra*), or prematurely shaving the head during the pilgrimage (Qur'ān 2:196). *Kaffāra* is required for intentionally breaking a Ramaẓān fast and consists of either freeing a slave, feeding sixty needy people, or fasting for two consecutive months. Shafi'ites impose *kaffāra* only when the fast is broken by sexual intercourse; Hanafites and Shi'ites include ingesting food or drink; and Shi'ites add remaining in *janāba*. Shi'ite *feqh* also requires that those who break the fast with a prohibited substance (such as alcohol) must undertake all three of the Ramaẓān *kaffārāt* (Maḡnīya, pp. 154-55).

Qazā' fasts are required from those who break an obligatory fast or who are excused from part of all of the Ramaẓān fast. The latter include travelers, those who are ill, pregnant or nursing women, women experiencing menstruation or post-partum bleeding, the elderly, and any others for whom fasting is a hardship or impossible. The number of days missed during a given Ramaẓān must be made up before the subsequent Ramaẓān; those unable to do so (e.g., the chronically ill and the elderly) may feed a needy person for each day



missed (Qur'ān 2:184).

Voluntary fasts may be undertaken when all obligatory fasts have been fulfilled. A specific *nīya* is not necessary, and if the fast is broken, it does not need to be made up. Certain days are recommended (*mandūb*) for fasting, such as three days of every month, particularly the “white days” (13, 14, and 15) and the two months preceding Ramaẓān (i.e., Rajab and Ša'bān). Shi'ites add their particular sacred days, such as Ġadīr (q.v.) and Mobāhala (Ḥellī, I, p. 208; Schmucker, p. 276) .

All types of Fasting are proscribed (*ḥarām*) for women experiencing menstruation or post-partum bleeding, and for all Muslims on the Feast of Breaking the Fast (Īd al-feṭr) which marks the end of Ramaẓān; the Feast of Sacrifice (Īd al-aẓḥā); and the the three days after the Īd al-aẓḥā (*ayyām al-tašrīk*). In addition, a woman may not undertake a voluntary fast without the permission of her husband (Maġnīya, pp. 160-61.)

Fasting is valued as a method of increasing self-restraint and willpower, as well as an experience which generates feelings of compassion for the poor (Ṭabbāra, pp. 165-67). The communal nature of the Ramaẓān fast very likely makes it the most widely observed pillar of Islam (Gardet, p. 127).

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