

THE PROPHET'S RAMADAN

Hafiz Ather Hussain al-Azhari



IN THE NAME OF ALLAH.
MOST MERCIFUL AND COMPASSIONATE.



INTRODUCTION

Success and salvation lie in following Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. In the Holy Qurʾān, we are informed that he is a beautiful example for us (33:21), whose flawless character is an inspiration for all people of all times.

Certainly, the Prophet's ﷺ example in worship is worthy of our close attention. No one was closer to Allāh than Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and no one worshipped Allāh more than him.¹ If we can replicate his outward and inward actions in our worships, then Allāh will open His doors of mercy for us.

Ultimately, this is the purpose of this paper; to show how exactly the Prophet ﷺ fasted during the month of Ramadān so that we too can follow his beautiful example.



Fasting became obligatory in the second year of hijra (migration) in the city of al-Madīna al-Munawwara. In total therefore, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ experienced nine Ramadāns when fasting was also prescribed.² All of these Ramadāns occurred in the summer months, which itself is a reminder of the

1 This fact is apparent even in his blessed name of Ahmad. This is the noun of exaggeration (*ism tafdīl*). In short, it means the 'one who praises [Allāh] most.' All prophets and messengers praised Allāh in abundance, but it is our Prophet ﷺ who is the greatest praiser of our Lord (*Tafsir al-Qurtubī*, XVIII: 55).

Angels have lived longer than him and do nothing but praise Allāh, but he ﷺ is still 'Ahmad'. This name is also a reminder of the Day of Judgement, when prior to his request for intercession to be accepted, he will prostrate and praise Allāh 'like no one has ever done before.' He will also hold the Staff of Praise (Lawā al-Hamd) as a reflection of this fact (*Al-Mawāhib al-Laduniyya bi'l minah al-Muhamaddiya*. Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Qastalānī (d. 923 AH/1517 CE), I: 370).

2 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 9.

physical and spiritual strength of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his devoted Companions.³

Although fasting was made compulsory in the second year of Hijra, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had a love and attachment for Ramadān throughout his blessed life. He would seek seclusion during this blessed month, before and after the public announcement of *nubuwwa*. The Qur'ān was first revealed in the blessed month of Ramadān. In short, he had a sustained and unparalleled love for Ramadān.

BEFORE RAMADĀN APPEARED

The Prophet's ﷺ love for Ramadān is highlighted in how he would prepare for it. As early as Rajab, he ﷺ would pray to Allāh for blessings in the period leading up to it, and for Allāh to ensure he reached the blessed month. He would frequently supplicate:

اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ لَنَا فِي رَجَبٍ وَشَعْبَانَ وَبَلِّغْنَا رَمَضَانَ

O Allāh! Provide us blessings in Rajab and Sha'bān and enable us to reach Ramadān!⁴

Though he fasted regularly throughout the year, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would fast more in the run up to Ramadān.⁵ However, he did not fast in the final days of Sha'bān, nor did he encourage his followers to do so.⁶

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would prepare his Companions for Ramadān too. Prior to the appearance of this month, he would explain the virtues, rulings and benefits of this blessed month. For example, in a lengthy sermon (reported by Salmān al-Fārisī)⁷ delivered just before Ramadān, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ informed his Companions that:

- Ramadān is a 'blessed month', *Shahr Mubārak*. This is one of the reasons why Muslims today say '*Ramadān Mubarak*' to one another.
- The month has a night in it which is better than a thousand months.
- When a Muslim performs an optional act (*nafl*) in this month, he is rewarded as if he has performed an obligatory act (*fard*). When he

3 Ibid., 64.

4 *Mishkāt al-Masābīh*, Book of Prayers.

5 *Al-Wafā bi Ahwāl al-Mustafā*. Abū'l Faraj Abd al-Rahmān ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH/1200 CE), p. 516.

6 *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Book of Fasts.

7 *Mishkāt al-Masābīh*, Book of Fasts.

performs an obligatory act (*fard*), then Allāh duplicates the reward seventy times more.

- The key feature of this month is *sabr* (patience) and the reward of patience is nothing but Paradise.
- Ramadān is a time of leniency, softness and compassion.
- It is a time when the provisions (*rizq*) of a Muslim increases.
- Providing *iftār* to others leads to the forgiveness of one's sins, freedom from the fire of hell and the entire reward of the person he provided *iftār* to.
- Ramadān is divided into three themes; the first ten days are about mercy, the middle ten about forgiveness and the final ten are about emancipation from the fire of Hell.

From this we learn that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ valued the month of Ramadān, and even before its appearance, he wanted everyone to know about its precious nature.

THE MONTH OF RAMADĀN - THE PROPHET'S ﷺ SUHŪR

Suhūr is the act of eating at pre-dawn for a fast. *Sahūr* is the actual food consumed at that time. We learn that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ attached great importance to this meal and asked Muslims never to miss it.

The Prophet's ﷺ own *sahūr* consisted of two dates and some water. He had a very simple pre-dawn meal and it certainly cannot be described as lavish. How did the Prophet ﷺ keep a fast on such a simple *sahūr*?

There are three primary reasons:

1. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was physically strong, in fact the most perfect being ever to have existed. He did not require food. He would perform *sawm wisāl* often, which means keeping fasts for several days without food and water. Sayyidunā Anas—may Allāh be pleased with him—reports that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ kept continuous fasts (*wisāl*), which led to some Muslims doing the same. He [prohibited them] and remarked:

اني لست مثلكم اني اظل يطعمني ربي ويسقيني

I am not like you. Indeed my Lord provides me with food and water.⁸

2. Dates are excellent for fasts. They are the ideal food for Ramadān, for both *sahūr* and *iftār*. They are low in fat and high in fibre and protein. They contain magnesium, which helps to fight many illnesses. They also contain calcium, which are good for teeth and bones. They are rich in fibre, which provides strength throughout the day.
3. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ consumed his *sahūr* with others. He loved eating with others. This, as he explained, brings *baraka* (blessings) in the food.⁹ Sayyidunā Anas—may Allāh be pleased with him—reports that when the *sahūr* was brought to him, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would say ‘See if there is anyone who will eat with me.’ Anas states that on one occasion, he called Zayd ibn Thābit, who pleaded, ‘O Messenger of Allāh! I have already eaten and made the intention to fast.’ Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, ‘we too are going to fast’ and so Zayd joined in too.’¹⁰

Time and time again, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described *suhūr* as a blessed meal, full of *baraka*. *Baraka* basically means means getting more than expected. When people eat together, Allāh places *baraka* in it, and no matter how small the amount of food seems, it satiates all. When people eat alone, there is no satisfaction or satiation. The proof is this hadīth:

عن وحشي بن حرب رضي الله عنه ان اصحاب رسول الله ﷺ قالوا يا رسول الله انا نأكل ولا نشبع قال فلعلكم تفترون قالوا نعم قال فاجتمعوا علي طعامكم واذكروا اسم الله يبارك لكم فيه

The Companions remarked, O Messenger of Allāh! We eat but we are not satiated.’ He replied, ‘Perhaps you eat dispersed. They replied ‘yes’. He advised ‘Eat collectively and remember Allāh when you eat, Allāh will place *baraka* in it.’¹¹

8 Al-Wafā bi Ahwāl al-Mustafā. Abū'l Faraj Abd al-Rahmān ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH/1200 CE), p. 516.

9 Mishkāt al-Masābīh, Book of Fasts.

10 The Prophet's Ramadān, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 28.

11 Sunan Abū Dāwūd, Book of Foods.

In terms of the timing of *suhūr*, the Prophet ﷺ delayed it as much as possible, just before the time of dawn.¹² He encouraged Muslims to do the same. In one report, we are informed that the gap between *suhūr* and *azān* (for fajr) was the time it took to recite fifty verses.¹³ The fact that he delayed *suhūr* shows two things. Firstly, he was showing ease on his Ummah, for he did not want their fasts to be longer than required (by eating too early in the morning). Secondly, he did not want Muslims to miss the fajr prayer.

HIS ﷺ ACTS DURING THE DAY

- Qur'ānic recitation

During the month of Ramadān, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would increase his Qur'ān recitation.

In his *salāh*, he would recite more from the Holy Qur'ān. In one report we are told he recited *Sūrah al-Baqara* in its entirety in one unit of *salāh*.¹⁴ At night, he would recite the Qur'ān in abundance.

Not only would he recite it himself, but he would listen to the recitation of his Companions. In one famous account, he ﷺ asked Sayyidunā Ibn Mas'ūd—may Allāh be pleased with him—to recite the Qur'ān to him. His recitation left the Prophet ﷺ in tears.

Sayyidunā Ibn Mas'ūd—may Allāh be pleased with him—was also fortunate to hear the entire the Qur'ān from the Prophet ﷺ. Each Ramadān, he ﷺ would recite it to him in its entirety.¹⁵

Furthermore, we are informed that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would revise the Qur'ān in the month of Ramadān with Jibrīl—peace be upon him.¹⁶ In his final year on earth, they revised the Qur'ān twice over.

- Generosity

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was the most generous being ever to have existed. His kindness knew no bounds. Even his worse enemies admitted that no one was more generous and benevolent than Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. As the report of Sayyida Khadija—may Allāh be pleased with her—clearly

12 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 32.

13 *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Book of Fasts.

14 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 35.

15 *Ibid.*, 36.

16 *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Book of Fasts.

indicates, he was the most generous man of Makka even before the public announcement of *nubuwwa*.¹⁷ Safwān ibn Umayya was once a staunch enemy of Islam. He himself admits that the Prophet ﷺ gave him so much that he fell in love with him and Islam. On three separate occasions, the Prophet ﷺ gave Safwān one hundred camels.¹⁸ (*The Prophet's Ramadān*, 38).

Yet, in the month of Ramadān, this generosity increased even more, like 'the sweeping wind.'¹⁹ He helped the poor and needy. He helped at home. He would free prisoners of war in this blessed month. His kindness extended even to the animal kingdom.

- *Miswāk*

Miswāk is a chewing stick traditionally used by the Arabs to clean their mouths. The most common form is *Salvadora Persica*, a small tree or shrub with a crooked trunk. The stems and the roots of the plant are spongy and can be easily be squeezed by the teeth.

During his fast, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ still used the *miswāk* to clean his blessed mouth.²⁰ The scholars state that using the *miswāk* during a fast does not invalidate it.

In a hadith sharif, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said that a *salāh* performed with *miswāk* is seventy times better than one performed without.²¹ The *miswāk* pleases Allāh. Sayyida Ā'isha—may Allāh be pleased with her—reports that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

السواك مَظْهَرَةٌ لِلْفَمِ مَرْضَاةٌ لِلرَّبِّ

The *miswāk* purifies the mouth and pleases the Lord.²²

- Cooling down

If he felt the need to, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would do things to cool himself down during the fast.²³ For example, he would pour water over his blessed head, or cool himself with a wet cloth.

17 *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Book of Revelation.

18 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 38.

19 *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Book of Revelation.

20 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 41.

21 *Shu'ab al-Īmān*; cited in *The Prophetic Sunna*, M Shakir Noorie, 375.

22 *The Prophetic Sunna*, M Shakir Noorie, 372.

23 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 43.

We are informed that the Prophet ﷺ would regularly have a bath after maghrib during the month of Ramadān.

- Fasting whilst travelling

The Qur'ān is clear that those who are travelling do not need to fast during the blessed month of Ramadān, and can instead make up the fasts later. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did travel in the month of Ramadān during his blessed life. For instance:

For the Battle of Badr, in 2 AH.

For the Conquest of Makka, in 8 AH.

For the Battle of Tabūk, in 9 AH.

At times, he would keep the fast, and at times, he did not.²⁴ Again, this act shows his compassion and mercy towards his Ummah. He never wanted Islam to be a burden for us.

THE PROPHET'S ﷺ IFTĀR

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would appoint someone to stand at a high place in al-Madīna to watch the sun go down. As soon as it did, he would break his fast.²⁵ In other words, there was little delay. He consumed the *iftār* meal first and then he would lead maghrib *salāh*. Never did he perform maghrib without *iftār*, even if it was mere water.²⁶ In fact, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ warned about delaying the *iftār*. In one hadith, he explained that 'the people will remain on good as long as they remain swift in *iftār*.²⁷

His *iftār* was always done with a sincere supplication. Of the many times and places he encouraged Muslims to perform a *duʿā*, the time of *iftār* was certainly one of them. He would also recite the special *duʿā* for the time of *iftār*:

اللَّهُمَّ لَكَ صُمْتُ وَعَلَى رِزْقِكَ أَفْطَرْتُ

Most reports suggest that he would eat something and then read this *duʿā*.

24 *Mishkāt al-Masābīh*, Book of Fasts.

25 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 57.

26 *Ibid.*, 60.

27 *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Book of Fasts.

Like his *sahūr*, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ shared his *iftār* with others and encouraged others to do so.²⁸ Most of the time, he would have a date and then some water for *iftār*.²⁹ Medically speaking, there are many benefits of eating dates at the time of *iftār*. It is at the end of the fast that the glucose level is at the lowest. Dates are brilliant at getting glucose to the body quickly and harmlessly. Fatty food takes time to digest and so it does not make you feel better straight away after the fast. Dates are much quicker. Dates are a brilliant source of potassium. At the end of a fast, we are dehydrated and tired. *Iftār* is the time when Muslims need to hydrate themselves. Because they contain potassium (64% more than a banana), the body hydrates much quicker.³⁰

Importantly, the Prophet ﷺ would drink water slowly at the time of *iftār*. He would also drink milk on occasions.³¹

SALĀH AL-TARĀWĪH

Performing *salāh al-tarāwīh* in the month of Ramadān is a stressed sunna of the Prophet ﷺ. He only left it on occasions, purely so that it would not become obligatory upon his Ummah. On occasions, he read this prayer with his Companions and sometimes in solitude. In terms of the number of *rak'ats*, the majority of the scholars are unanimous that he performed twenty *rak'ats* of *salāh al-tarāwīh*.³²

For us, *salāh al-tarāwīh* has immeasurable spiritual benefits, as well as health benefits. In a month when Muslims are already required to fast for long periods of time, one might ask why Allāh has decreed a prolonged prayer in the form of *salāh al-tarāwīh* during this month too. After *iftār*, the blood glucose level continues to rise from the food taken in. Just before the *iftār*, the blood glucose and insulin levels are at their lowest level. So *salāh al-tarāwīh* is instrumental (because of the light body movement) in ensuring balance once again. In the calendar year, we perhaps eat most at the time of *iftār* in Ramadān. Eating a huge amount and then lying down (or

28 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 60.

29 *Ibid.*, 62-3.

30 See <https://abulnoor.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Excellent-Benefits-of-Dates.pdf> for a detailed article on dates.

31 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 62.

32 See <https://abulnoor.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-number-of-Rakats-in-Tarawih.pdf> for a detailed article on the number of *rak'ats* in *tarāwīh* prayers.

not moving) is very harmful for the body. *Salāh al-tarāwīh* stops this from happening.

THE FINAL TEN DAYS OF RAMADĀN

During the final days of Ramadān, the Prophet ﷺ would “tie his back tightly.”³³ This is an expression to mean his efforts increased in terms of his worship to Allāh. He would often stay awake the entire night in worship, and ask his family members to do the same.

- I’tikāf

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ performed *i’tikāf* in the month of Ramadān for the last ten days.³⁴ In the final year of his blessed life, he performed *i’tikāf* for twenty days.³⁵ Though his accommodation was part of the mosque, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not occupy that area during his *i’tikāf*. Rather, he performed inside the mosque, in the area of the *Rawda*.³⁶ Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not adopt silence in *i’tikāf*. He would converse with his Companions when required, like, for example, telling them about *Layla al-Qadr*.³⁷ He would consume his sahūr and iftār in the same place.

- Layla al-Qadr

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ stressed the importance of this night, that falls in the last ten days of Ramadān. He would remind the Companions of its value and provide them with signs of its occurrence. He would also encourage them to increase their supplications on this night, with particular stress to this *du‘ā*:

اللَّهُمَّ أَنْكَ عَفُو تَحِبُّ الْعَفْوَ فَاعْفُ عَنِّي

‘O Allāh! Indeed You are the Forgiving, you love forgiving; so please forgive me!’³⁸

33 *Al-Wafā bi Ahwāl al-Mustafā*. Abū’l Faraj Abd al-Rahmān ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH/1200 CE), p. 518.

34 Ibid.

35 *The Prophet’s Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 88.

36 Ibid., 89.

37 Ibid., 93.

38 *Sunan Ibn Maja*, Book of Dua’s

- The night of Eid al-Fitr

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ ended the month of Ramadān with excessive worship and supplications. In short, he would ask Allāh to accept his efforts in Ramadān, so that it would be a sunna for us. In one report, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said that the Ummah is forgiven at the end of Ramadān. A Companion asked, ‘is this on *Layla al-Qadr*?’ He replied, ‘No, the worker is only paid after completing the work.’³⁹

39 *The Prophet's Ramadān*, Mufti M Khan Qadiri (Trans. by Sajid Younis), 122.