

Ramaḍān etiquette at the time of opening the Fast

The holy month of Ramaḍān is a Divine banquet. He has invited His servants to this banquet and kept open His hand of giving and bestowing. We need to acquire maximum benefits from all the bounties laid out by the Most Generous One. According to the sermon in which the Holy Prophet (s), welcomed the month of Ramaḍān, he said that the days of Ramaḍān are the best of the days (compared to days of other months); its nights are the best of the nights and its hours are the best of the hours.¹ Additionally, the reward of fasting is so great that in Prophetic Hadith, we are told that “Allah says, ‘Fasting is for Me, and I (alone) will compensate for it.’”² It has also come in Hadith that the Almighty frees a million souls from hellfire at the time of Ift̄ār; and when the eve of Friday and the day of Friday enter, He frees a million souls every hour.³ Therefore fasting in the month of Ramaḍān undoubtedly carries a huge reward which is beyond our imagination.

A devout servant after fasting for the entire day in obedience to the command of his Lord and Master is eager to achieve these rewards. The foremost of these rewards is the acceptance of the fast by the Master. It is unlikely that the all-Merciful God will reject the efforts of a person who has fasted during month of Ramaḍān for the sole purpose of achieving His great pleasure. However, to achieve the rewards and His pleasure one needs to prepare for that moment when Divine bounties are being distributed. This is similar to preparing for the graduation day after working for a degree over several years. The Holy Ma‘šūmīn (a) have taught us certain etiquette (*ādāb*) at the time of Ift̄ār, i.e. when we open our fast. Some of these etiquettes are elaborated here.

1. Give *ṣadaqah* (charity) and feed those who are fasting.⁴ It is said that charity wards off evil consequences. Having fasted the entire day, if there are any shortcomings in our efforts, the charity will help us purify our fast. Moreover it is also rewarding. Imam Ali al-Riḍā (a) advised, “One who gives charity of one loaf of bread to a destitute at the time of ift̄ār, Allah forgives his sins, and records for him the reward of freeing a slave from the progeny of [Prophet] Ismā‘īl.”⁵ As for feeding those who are fasting there are numerous Hadiths that encourage this noble act. Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (a) said, “When a believer feeds a (fellow) believer in Ramaḍān, Allah records for him the reward of freeing thirty believing slaves, and he has with Allah a prayer that is answered.”⁶
2. Precede prayers over ift̄ār.⁷ Where possible say your prayers (i.e. Maghrib ṣalāt and its *nāfilah*)⁸ before opening your fast. Of course, if someone cannot extend the fast beyond Maghrib time on account of feeling hunger, thirst, and tiredness then it is better to

¹ Muḥammad Raysharī, *Shahrullāh fī al-kitāb wa al-sunnah*, p. 101, Shaykh Abbās Qummī, *Mafātīh al-Jinān*, p.312

² *Shahrullāh* p. 19

³ Shaykh al-Mufid, *Al-Amaali*, p.219

⁴ *Mafātīh* p.320

⁵ *Shahrullāh* p. 175

⁶ *Mafātīh*, p. 320

⁷ Raysharī mentions in *Shahrullāh* . . . (pp. 172 & 173) that one should hasten to open the fast (*ta‘jīl al-ift̄ār*).

However, majority of Hadith quoted by him are from Sunni sources.

⁸ Some scholars have suggested opening fasts after ‘Ishā ṣalāt, presumably when one combines the two prayers. See *Islamic Laws* of Ayt Sayyid Ali Seestani and *Mafātīhul*, p. 319.

open the fast and then say prayers. The same is the case if others (e.g. family members) are waiting for you to open the fast first, then you should not delay in doing ifṭār. [*Mafātiḥ* p. 319] Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (a) said, “Precede the ṣalāt over ifṭār; provided if you are with a community that begins with ifṭār, in that case then do not oppose them and join them in ifṭār. Otherwise, begin with ṣalāt because it is better (*afdhal*) than ifṭār, and it is more beloved to me that your prayers are recorded whilst you are in the state of fasting.” [*Shahrullāh* p. 173]

3. Do not say your prayers so fast that you no longer feel the pleasure of worshipping the Almighty at the end of the fasting day. The Holy Prophet (s) advised Muslims in his famous sermon welcoming Ramaḍān, “O people . . . your backs have been burdened on account of your sins and disobedience, so lighten them through lengthening your prostrations. And know that Allah, the Exalted, does not punish those who say their prayers (well) and prostrate (for long).”⁹
4. Do not forsake *nāfilah* prayers in Ramaḍān, especially the *nāfilah* after Maghrib and ‘Ishā ṣalāt. So important are the *nāfilah* prayers after the Maghrib that in a Hadith from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) we have been advised not to abandon them whilst traveling and when at home.¹⁰ As for the *nāfilah* of ‘Ishā, Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (a) has said that whoever performs this prayer and dies that night, he will be included amongst those who performed ṣalāt of *witr* in the last part of the night.¹¹ In the sermon of Ramaḍān, the Prophet said, “One who performs a recommended prayer [in Ramaḍān,] an acquisition from the hellfire is written for him.”

Question: If I’m attending *jamā‘at* (congregational) prayers in a masjid/center where attendants are not given enough time between Maghrib and ‘Ishā to say the *nāfilah*, then what is the best course of action?

Answer: You should say your ‘Ishā prayers in *jamā‘at* with rest of the participants and say the missed *nāfilah* of Maghrib after ‘Ishā prayers with the intention of *rajā’* (hoping that the Almighty will accept your prayers said a little late). In a Hadith, Angel Jibra‘il said to the Prophet Muhammad (s), “The (first) *takbīr* that a believer performs with the Imam (of congregational prayer) is better than performing 60,000 Ḥajj and ‘Umrah and better than 70,000 times what is in this world. For every *rak‘ah* that a believer prays in congregation is better than 100,000 dinār (gold coins) given in charity to the poor. For every *sajdah* that a believer performs in congregational prayer is better than freeing 1,000 slaves.”¹²

5. Open your fast with ḥalāl food.¹³ These are food items that are: free from any illegal or doubtful earning, are ṭāhir (ritually pure) and if made from meat then the animal should have been slaughtered according to Islamic guidelines.

⁹ It is unfortunate to see that a number of Islamic centers rush through Maghrib and ‘Ishā prayers so as to open the fast soon. We humbly suggest that lukewarm water and dates be made readily available at the time of Maghrib and thereafter for those who cannot wait to open the fast, instead of rushing through maghribayn ṣalāt.

¹⁰ M J Mughniyyah, *Fiqh al-Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq*, 1:242

¹¹ Academy for Learning Islam, *ṣalāt of Tahjjud*, p.11

¹² S. M. Kāzim Yazdī, *Al-‘Urwah al-Wuthqā*, 2:236, Manshūrāt Maytham Tammār, Qum, 1428 AH

¹³ *Mafātiḥ*, p. 320.

6. It is recommended to open your fast with dates, or something sweet & lukewarm water. Opening fast with ḥalāl dates increases the reward of one’s payers manifold.¹⁴ Imam al-Ṣādiq (a) has suggested that when a person breaks his fast with lukewarm water, it cleans his liver, washes away his sins from the heart, and strengthens one’s eyesight and eye-pupil.¹⁵
7. Recite Sūrat al-Qadr, i.e. chapter 97 of the Holy Qur’an. Imam Ali Zaynul ‘Ābidīn (a) said, “One who recites *innā anzalnāhu fī laylatil qadr* at the time of opening and closing of fast, he is between these two occasions like the one who is stranded with his blood for the sake of Allah.”¹⁶
8. Plead to the Almighty for forgiveness. The Holy Prophet (s) advised in his sermon, “O people, your souls have been mortgaged by your deeds, so free them through your *istighfār*.” Having fasted for the entire day, this is the best time for us to plead for forgiveness. The Holy Prophet (s) has suggested following when taking the first morsel.

<p><i>Bismillāh Hirraḥmānir Raḥīm,</i> <i>Yā wāsi‘al maghfīrah, ighfīrli</i> In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. O, He Who is great in forgiving, forgive me.</p>	<p>بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ، يَا وَاسِعَ الْمَغْفِرَةِ اغْفِرْ لِي</p>
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9. Recite some of the recommended Du‘ās. The Holy Prophet (s) said, “Supplication of a fasting person at the time of iftār is answered.”¹⁷ Following Du‘ās are from *Mafātīh*.

<p><i>Allāhumma laka ṣumtu, wa ‘alā rizqika aftarṭu,</i> <i>wa ‘alayka tawakkaltu</i> O Allah, I have fasted for You, opened my fast from Your sustenance, and I have relied upon You.</p>	<p>اللَّهُمَّ لَكَ صُمْتُ، وَعَلَى رِزْقِكَ أَفْطَرْتُ، وَعَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْتُ</p>
<p><i>Bismillāhi, Allāhumma laka ṣumnā, wa ‘alā rizqika aftarṭanā, fataqabbalhu minnā, innaka antas samī‘ul ‘alīm.</i> In the name of Allah. O Allah, we have fasted for You, opened our fast from Your sustenance. So accept it from us; surely You are all-Hearing, all-Knowing.</p>	<p>بِسْمِ اللَّهِ، اللَّهُمَّ لَكَ صُمْنَا، وَعَلَى رِزْقِكَ أَفْطَرْنَا، فَتَقَبَّلْهُ مِنَّا، إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ</p>

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 [Please send your comments/suggestions to director@academyofislam.com; or
alioutreach@gmail.com. Ramaḍān 15, 1431/ August 26, 2010, Toronto, Canada]

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Al-Kāfi, 4:152, quoted in Muhammad Khalfan, “Utilizing the great opportunity of Shahrū Ramaḍān,” 2009.

¹⁶ *Shahrullāh* p. 175

¹⁷ *Shahrullāh* p. 176