

Islam Question & Answer

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The month of Sha'baan

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Sha'baan is the name of the (eighth) month, and it is so called because in this month the Arabs used to disperse (*Tasha'aba*) in search of water, or it was said that they dispersed to carry out raids and forays. Or it was said that it is so called because it *Sha'aba* (branches out or emerges) i.e., it appears between the months of *Rajab* and *Ramadhaan*. The plural forms of the word *Sha'baan* are *Sha'baanaat* and *Sha'aabeen*.

Fasting in *Sha'baan*

'Aa'ishah, may Allaah be pleased with her, said: *"The Messenger, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, used to fast until we thought he would never break his fast, and not fast until we thought he would never fast. I never saw the Messenger of Allaah fasting for an entire month except in Ramadhaan, and I never saw him fast more than he did in Sha'baan."* (Reported by Al-Bukhaari, no. 1833; Muslim, no. 1956).

According to a report Reported by Muslim (no. 1957): *"He used to fast all of Sha'baan, he used to fast all but a little of Sha'baan."*

A group of scholars, including Ibn al-Mubaarak and others, may Allaah have mercy on them, thought that the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, did not fast all of *Sha'baan*, but he fasted most of it. This is supported by a report in *Saheeh Muslim* (no. 1954) narrated from 'Aa'ishah, may Allaah be pleased with her, who said: *"I never knew of him - meaning the Prophet, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam - fasting for any entire month apart from Ramadhaan."* According to another report also Reported by Muslim (no. 1955), 'Aa'ishah, may Allaah be pleased with her, said: *"I never saw him fast for any entire month from the time he came to Madeenah, apart from Ramadhaan."*

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It was reported in *al-Saheehayn* that Ibn 'Abbaas, may Allaah be pleased with them both, said: *"The Messenger of Allaah , sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, did not fast any entire month apart from Ramadhaan."* (Reported by Al-Bukhaari, no. 1971, and Muslim, no. 1157). Ibn 'Abbaas, may Allaah be pleased with them both, regarded it as *Makrooh* (disliked) to fast any entire month apart from *Ramadhaan*. Ibn Hajar, may Allaah have mercy on him, said: *"He observed more voluntary fasts in Sha'baan than in any other month, and he used to fast most of Sha'baan."*

Usaamah ibn Zayd, may Allaah be pleased with them both, said: *"I said: 'O Messenger of Allaah, I do not see you fasting in any other month like you fast in Sha'baan.'* He, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, said: **"That is a month to which people do not pay attention, between *Rajab* and *Ramadhaan*, and it is a month in which deeds are lifted up to the Lord of the worlds. I like for my deeds to be lifted up when I am fasting."** (Reported by an-Nasaa'i, see *Saheeh al-Targheeb wa'l-Tarheeb*, page 425). According to a report Reported by Abu Daawood (no. 2076) she said: *"The most beloved of months for the Messenger of Allaah, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, to fast in was Sha'baan, and his fasting in Sha'baan was continuous with his fasting in Ramadhaan."* (Classed as *Saheeh* by al-Albaani, see *Saheeh Sunan Abu Daawood*, 2/461).

Ibn Rajab, may Allaah have mercy on him, said: *"Fasting in Sha'baan is better than fasting in the Sacred Months, and the best of voluntary fasts are those that are (observed in the months) closest to Ramadhaan, before or after. The status of these fasts is like that of al-Sunan al-Rawaatib which are done before and after Fardh (obligatory prayers) and which make up for any shortfall in the number of obligatory prayers. The same applies to fasts observed before and after Ramadhaan. Just as al-Sunan ar-Rawaatib are better than other kinds of voluntary prayers, so fasts observed (in the months) before and after Ramadhaan are better than fasts at other times."*

The phrase **"*Sha'baan* is a month to which people do not pay attention, between *Rajab* and *Ramadhaan*"** indicates that because it comes between two important months, the Sacred Month of *Rajab* and the month of fasting, people are preoccupied with those two months and they

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do not pay attention to *Sha'baan*. Many people think that fasting in *Rajab* is better than fasting in *Sha'baan*, because *Rajab* is one of the Sacred Months, but this is not the case.

In the *Hadeeth* quoted above there is an indication that even though certain times, places and people may be commonly thought to possess a particular virtue, there may be others that are better than them.

It also indicates that it is *Mustahabb* (recommended) to make good use of the times when people tend to be negligent, by doing acts of worship. A group of the *Salaf* used to fill the time between *Maghrib* and '*Ishaa*' with prayer, saying that it was a time when many people were negligent. Another example is the remembrance of Allaah (*Thikr*) in the marketplace, because this means one is remembering Him in a place where people tend to be negligent and among people who are negligent. There are a number of benefits that come from making good use of times when people are often negligent, and using these times for worship, including the following:

It is more concealing of one's good works, and hiding and concealing voluntary (*Nafil*) actions is better, especially fasting, because it is a secret between a slave and his Lord. Hence it was said that there is no element of showing off in fasting. One of the *Salaf* used to fast for years without anybody knowing about it; he would go from his home to the marketplace carrying two loaves of bread, which he would give away in charity, and he would fast. His family thought that he ate the bread, whilst the people in the marketplace thought that he had eaten at home. The *Salaf* thought it was *Mustahabb* for a person who was fasting to do things that would conceal the fact that he was fasting. It was reported that Ibn Mas'ood, may Allaah be pleased with him, said: "*When you get up in the morning and you are fasting, then apply perfume.*" Qataadah, may Allaah have mercy on him, said: "*It is Mustahabb for the [man] who is fasting to apply perfume so that there will be no sign that he is fasting.*"

By the same token, doing righteous deeds at times when people are distracted and negligent is

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more difficult. One of the indications of how virtuous a deed is, is how difficult it is: if everyone is doing a certain action, it is easy, but if most people are negligent, this makes it more difficult for those who do remember Allaah. Muslim (no. 2984) narrated from the *Hadeeth* of Ma'qil ibn Yassar, may Allaah be pleased with him: “[The Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, said:] **‘Worship at times of tribulation (*Fitnah*) is like *Hijrah* to me.’**” (The phrase **“worship at times of tribulation”** refers to times of upheavals and trials, when people follow their own desires, and those who adhere to Islaam are doing something difficult.)

The scholars differed as to the reasons why the Prophet , *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, fasted so much in *Sha'baan*. Their various opinions are as follows:

1. That he had been unable to fast three days out of every month because he was travelling or for some other reason, so he made them all up together in *Sha'baan*. When the Prophet , *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, began to do some voluntary action, he would persist in it, and if he missed it, he would make it up later.
2. It was said that his wives used to make up the days that they missed of *Ramadhaan* in *Sha'baan*, so he used to fast because of that. This is the opposite of what was reported from 'Aa'ishah, may Allaah be pleased with her, that she used to delay making up days that she had missed in *Ramadhaan* until *Sha'baan* because she was too busy with the Messenger of Allaah , *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, to fast.
3. It was said that it was because this is a month which people do not pay attention to. This is the most correct view, because of the *Hadeeth* of Usaamah, may Allaah be pleased with him, quoted above, in which it says: **“That is a month to which people do not pay attention, between *Rajab* and *Ramadhaan*.”** (Reported by an-Nasaa'i, see *Saheeh at-Targheeb wat-Tarheeb*, p. 425)

When *Sha'baan* began, if the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, still had some voluntary fasts outstanding that he had not fasted, he would make them up during *Sha'baan* so that his voluntary

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fasts would be complete before *Ramadhaan* came. Similarly, if he had missed some *Sunnah* prayers or he had missed *Qiyaam al-Layl*, he would make it up. 'Aa'ishah, may Allaah be pleased with her, used to make the most of this opportunity to make up any obligatory *Ramadhaan* fasts that she had missed because of menstruation; during other months she was too busy with the Prophet , *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, to fast. We should also note here that anyone who has any missed fasts to make up has to make them up before the next *Ramadhaan* comes. It is not permissible to delay it until after the following *Ramadhaan* except in cases of necessity (such as a valid excuse that continues between the two *Ramadhaans*). Whoever is able to make them up before the (second) *Ramadhaan* and does not do so, has to make them up after the (second) *Ramadhaan* and in addition to that, he has to repent and to feed one poor person for each day that he missed. This is the view of Maalik, ash-Shaafi'i and Ahmad.

Another benefit of fasting in *Sha'baan* is that it is a kind of training for the *Ramadhaan* fast, in case a person finds it difficult to fast when *Ramadhaan* starts; if he fasts in *Sha'baan* he will have gotten used to fasting and he will feel strong and energetic when *Ramadhaan* comes. *Sha'baan* is like an introduction to *Ramadhaan* and it has some things in common with *Ramadhaan*, such as fasting, reciting Qur'aan and giving in charity. Salamah ibn Suhayl, may Allaah have mercy on him, used to say: "*The month of Sha'baan is the month of reciters (of the Qur'aan).*" Habeeb ibn Abu Thaabut, may Allaah have mercy on him, used to say, when *Sha'baan* came: "*This is the month of reciters (of the Qur'aan).*" When *Sha'baan* came, 'Amr ibn Qays al-Malaa'i, may Allaah have mercy on him, used to close his store and devote his time to reading the Qur'aan.

Fasting at the end of *Sha'baan*

It was reported in *al-Saheehayn* from 'Imraan ibn Husayn, may Allaah be pleased with him, that the Prophet , *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, said to a man: "**Have you fasted anything of the *Sirar* of this month?**" He said: "*No.*" He said: "**If you have not fasted, then fast two days.**" According to a report Reported by Al-Bukhaari: I think he meant *Ramadhaan*. According to a report

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Reported by Muslim, (the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, said: **“Have you fasted anything of the *Siraar* of *Sha'baan*?”** (Reported by Al-Bukhaari, 4/2000; Muslim, no. 1161).

There was some dispute as to the meaning of the word *Siraar*. The most well known view is that it refers to the end of the month. The end of the month is called *Siraar* because the moon is hidden (*Istisraar*) at that time. Someone may raise the point that it was reported in *as-Saheehayn* from Abu Hurayrah, may Allaah be pleased with him, that the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, said: **“Do not pre-empt *Ramadhaan* by one or two days, except for those who have the habit of fasting regularly, in which case they may fast.”** (Reported by Al-Bukhaari, no 1983; Muslim, no. 1082). How can we reconcile the *Hadeeth* which encourages fasting at this time with the *Hadeeth* which says not to fast at this time? The answer is: many of the scholars and most of those who commented on this *Hadeeth* said: this man to whom the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, addressed this question was known to have the habit of fasting regularly, or else he had made a vow, so the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, commanded him to make up his fast. There are also other points of view on this issue.

In brief we may say that there are three scenarios for fasting at the end of *Sha'baan*:

The first scenario is when a person fasts at the end of *Sha'baan* with the intention of being on the safe side and not missing the first day of *Ramadhaan*. This is forbidden.

The second scenario is when a person fasts with the intention of fulfilling a vow or of making up a day of *Ramadhaan* that he missed or as an act of expiation (*Kafaarah*), etc. This is permissible according to the majority.

The third scenario is when this is purely a voluntary fast. This is regarded as *Makrooh* by those who said that we should differentiate between *Sha'baan* and *Ramadhaan* by not fasting for a while. Among those who said this was al-Hasan, may Allaah have mercy on him. If it happens to coincide with a day when a person habitually fasts, Maalik and those who agreed with him

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permitted this, but Ash-Shaafi'i, al-'Awzaa'i, Ahmad and others made a distinction between cases where it is a fast which a person habitually observes or otherwise.

In conclusion, the *Hadeeth* of Abu Hurayrah, may Allaah be pleased with him, quoted above is what we should follow according to the majority of scholars. It is *Makrooh* to observe a voluntary fast one or two days before *Ramadhaan* for those who do not habitually fast on those days and who have not previously fasted until the end of *Sha'baan*. It may be asked: why is it Makrooh to fast just before *Ramadhaan* (for those who do not have a prior habit of fasting)? The answer is that there are a number of reasons why this is so, such as:

Firstly: lest extra days be added to the fast of *Ramadhaan* that are not part of it. Fasting on the day of 'Eed is prohibited for the same reason, lest we fall into the same trap as the People of the Book regarding fasting, as they added to their fasts because of their own whims and desires.

For the same reason it is also forbidden to fast on the "day of doubt". 'Ammar, may Allaah be pleased with him, said: "*Whoever fasts on this day has disobeyed Abu'l-Qaasim, sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam.*"

The "day of doubt" is a day when people are not sure whether it is *Ramadhaan* or not, when news of the sighting of the crescent moon comes from one whose word cannot be accepted. As for a cloudy day, some of the '*ulamaa*' said that this was also a 'day of doubt' and said that fasting was not allowed on this day. This is the view of the majority.

Secondly: to make a distinction between *Fardh* (obligatory) fasts and *Naafil* (supererogatory) fasts, because making a clear distinction between *Fardh* actions and *Naafil* actions is prescribed in Islaam. Hence it is *Haraam* to fast on the day of 'Eed, and the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, forbade following an obligatory prayer immediately with another prayer unless they are separated by saying *Salaam* or speaking, especially in the case of the *Sunnah* prayer performed just before *Fajr*. It is prescribed to make a clear separation between this prayer and the obligatory

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prayer. Hence it is prescribed to pray it at home and to lie down afterwards.

When the Prophet , *sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, saw a man praying at the time when the *Iqaamah* had been given for *Fajr*, he said to him: “*Al-Subh* is four *Rak’ahs*.” (Reported by Al-Bukhaari, no. 663).

Some ignorant people may think that the reason why we do not fast just before *Ramadhaan* is so that we can make the most of eating and have our fill of our desires before we have to deny ourselves by fasting. This is an ignorant mistake on the part of those who think this. And Allaah knows best.

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