**Etymology of the words *“*Sawm*”* “Siyam” and “Ramadhan”**

Sawm *and* Siyam: Sawm and Siyam both mean to refrain from something, to keep away from something. But they both have a distinct meaning as well in the Qur’an.

* Siyam: Allah says in the Qur’an “Ya ayyuhal ladhina amanu kutiba ‘alaykumus Siyam” “O ye who believe, fasting is prescribed upon you”
* Sawm: Sawm is mentioned in regard to the story of Maryam giving birth to Isa. Maryam is told to tell anyone who approaches her, “innee nathartu lilrrahmani Sawma” “I have vowed to The Beneficent to abstain from speech”.

Therefore the different technical meanings used in the Qur’an are Siyam refers to the stomach and Sawm refers to speech.

However, the lexical definition of Sawm and Siyam are that Sawm is general *abstention*, and Siyam is the *act of abstaining*, or *to abstain*. So Siyam points to specific things being abstained from, and in the case of Ramadhan it is food, drink, and intimacy. Sawm is also used within the context of Siyam and refers to Ramadhan as well.

*Ramadhan*: To be burnt or parched. Some etymologists believe that when the month was given the name Ramadhan that particular month was very hot and the land was particularly parched. Others believe the name Ramadhan is directly linked to fasting since the body is parched or dry while fasting.

**Verses from the Quran regarding fasting**

{O you who believe! Observing fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become al-Muttaqoon (the pious).

Observe fasting for a fixed number of days, but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number (should be made up) from other days. And as for those who can fast with difficulty, (e.g. the elderly), they have (a choice either to fast or) to feed a Miskeen (needy person) (for every day). But whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him. And that you fast is better for you if only you know.

The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the Criterion (between right and wrong). So, whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month of Ramadan, he must observe fasting that month, and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number of days from other days. Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you. (He wants that you) must complete the same number (of days), and that you must magnify Allah for having guided you so that you may be grateful to Him

[Soorah al-Baqarah, Ayahs 183-185]

**From the benefits of the Ayahs**

1) Allah has obligated fasting upon the believers as He had obligated it upon those before them (from the Jews and the Christians) for that which exists therein of benefits in this world and the Hereafter;

2) The days of fasting are limited and do not exceed thirty (30) days;

3) It is permissible for the one who is ill and (also for) the traveler to abstain from fasting and thereby make up those days missed as a result, after Ramadan;

4) It used to be that anyone (old or young) could choose between fasting in Ramadan or paying fidyah (instead of fasting), and this was then abrogated by the revealed verses and fasting became obligatory for the young and healthy.

5) Fasting is obligatory upon whoever sights the moon for the beginning of the month of Ramadan, except for one who is ill or the traveler.

**Fasting an Obligation from the Sunnah**

The Messenger of Allah (sal-Allahu 'alayhe wa sallam) said:

“Islam is built upon five (pillars)…”

**1) “Testifying that there is no god except Allah and that Muhammad is**

**the (final) Messenger of Allah…”**

**2) “And to - establish the prayer…”**

**3) “And to give the Zakaah…”**

**4) “And to fast Ramadan…”**

**5) “And to make Hajj”**

[Narrated by Muslim]

**The excellence of Ramadan and Fasting from the Sunnah**

1) The Messenger of Allah (sal-Allahu 'alayhe wa sallam) said:

“When (the month of) Ramadan enters, the doors of heavens are flung open and the doors of Hell are shut, and the Shayaateen are chained up”. And in another narration it mentions:

“When (the month of) Ramadan arrives, the doors of Paradise are opened”.

And in yet another narration, it mentions:

“…the doors of mercy are opened”.

[The authenticity of the above narrations has been agreed upon by al-

Bukhaaree and Muslim]

2) And in the transmission of at-Tirmidhee (it mentions):

“A caller would call out: "O you who want good, proceed, and O you who

want evil, cease. Allah frees people from the fire, and this is done every night

until ramadaan is over”.

[al-Albaanee has graded it as Hasan]

3) And he (sal-Allahu 'alayhe wa sallam) said:

“(The reward for) all the actions of the son of Aadam are multiplied (from anywhere between) ten times to seven hundred times”.

And Allah (Subhaanahu wa Ta'aala) said in a hadeeth qudsee :

“…except for fasting, then it is for Me and I will give reward for it; He left off his desires and his food for My sake. For the fasting person there are two pleasures: his pleasure at the time of breaking his fast and his pleasure when he meets his Lord. And the smell emanating from the mouth of the one who is fasting is better in the Sight of Allah than the smell of musk”.

[The authenticity of all the above narrations have been agreed upon by al-

Bukhaaree and Muslim]

**What does it mean the “Shayateen are chained”?**

1.  It refers to those shayateen that try to stealthily listen to the reports of the Heavens.

2. It means that the shayateen are not able to incite the Muslims in Ramadan to the same extent they can at other times so they become “as though” they are chained.

3.  “Shayateen” here refers to some of them, namely the intensely evil ones amongst them.

4.  It means the lessening of evil during Ramadan. This is because even if all of them are chained, there will still be evil since evil has other sources e.g. immoral persons, vile traits, and evil people.

5.  It means they are chained for certain things, not everything and for certain people, not all.

(*Ibn Hajr, Fath al-Bari and Imam Nawawi, Sharh Muslim*)

**How do we know exactly what to abstain from and how long to abstain from it?**

“It has been made permissible for you the night preceding fasting to go to your wives [for intimate relations]. They are clothing for you and you are clothing for them. Allah knows that you used to deceive yourselves, so He accepted your repentance and forgave you. So now, have relations with them and seek that which Allah has decreed for you. And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night]. Then complete the fast until the sunset.” (2:187)

**Ettiquetts of Fasting**

1) Protecting the tongue from evil speech and refraining from evil actions:

The Messenger of Allah (sal-Allahu 'alayhe wa sallam) said:

“Whoever does not abandon evil speech and actions, then Allah is not in need of him leaving his food and drink” [Transmitted by al-Bukhaaree].

2) Taking the sahoor (pre-dawn meal):

The Prophet (sal Allahu alaihi wa sallam) said, “Eat suhoor for in suhoor there is blessing.” and “Verily that which separates (i.e. distinguishes) between our fast and the fasting of the People of the Book (i.e. Jews and Christians) is the eating before dawn (Suhoor).”

[Sahih al-Bukhari and Muslim]

3) Du’a at the time if breaking the fast:

The Messenger of Allah (sal-Allahu 'alayhe wa sallam) used to say:

“The thirst has gone and the veins are moistened, and the reward is confirmed, if Allah wills”,

[Hasan, transmitted by Abu Daawood];

4) Breaking the fast with dried dates:

“When any of you break your fast, then do so with dry dates, for indeed it is a blessing. And if you are unable to find dry dates, then water, for verily it is pure” [Saheeh, transmitted by at-Tirmidhee];

5) Hastening to break the fast:

And the Messenger of Allah (sal-Allahu 'alayhe wa sallam) said:

“The people will remain in good so long as they hasten to break the fast (at its appointed time”) [The authenticity of this narration has been agreed upon by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim];

6) Providing food and drink to a fasting person:

“Whoever provides (food or water) for a fasting person (to break his fast at the appointed time), then for him is the reward similar to that of his (the fasting person) without any reducing in the reward of the fasting person”,

[Saheeh, transmitted by al-Bukhaaree]

**From the Benefits of Fasting**

Allah (Subhaanahu wa Ta'aala) says: {O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may attain taqwa}, [Soorah al-Baqarah, Ayah 183]

The Messenger of Allah (sal-Allahu 'alayhe wa sallam) said: “Fasting is protection”, i.e. protection from the Fire of Hell, [The authenticity of this narration has been agreed upon by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim]

And he (sal-Allahu 'alayhe wa sallam) said: “Whoever fasts Ramadan with eemaan (faith) while believing in its obligation and being hopeful for the reward, all that has preceded of his sins shall be forgiven”, [The authenticity of this narration has been agreed upon by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim]

Know that Allah has prescribed fasting, and it is an act of worship which has many benefits, amongst them:

a) Fasting allows the body's digestive system and the stomach to rest allowing the body to recuperate and strengthen. This is beneficial for many ailments. Likewise, fasting allows the smoker to take a break from smoking and in doing so assists him in abandoning it.

b) Fasting is a purification of the soul, and accustoming it upon good, worship, patience and sincerity.

c) The fasting person feels a sense of equality with the rest of his fasting brothers (and sisters); So he fasts with them allowing for the feeling of sincere Islamic brotherhood to be nurtured.

**Recommendations during fasting**

1) Be wary of protecting your prayers: Many people who are fasting are slack in maintaining their prayers despite it being a pillar of the religion.

2) Maintain good manners: Be wary of having ill manners towards the people, particularly whilst fasting. Fasting purifies the inner self and does not lead to ill manners.

3) Do not speak unnecessarily even if you are joking, as this will reduce the reward of your fast. Take note of what the Messenger of Allah (sal-Allahu 'alahe wa sallam) said:

“If any of you are fasting, then abstain from ignorant and indecent speech that day; and if anyone curses you or strikes you, then say: I am fasting”

[The authenticity of this narration has been agreed upon by al-Bukhaaree and

Muslim]

4) Benefit from the fast by leaving off smoking, which causes cancer and ulcers; Try to maintain your willpower and leave off smoking in the evening just as you left it during the day. As a result, you will be better off in health as well as financially;

5) Be wary of divulging in excessive eating at the time of breaking the fast, as it can result in ruining the benefit of the fast and harming your health.

6) Avoid the cinema or watching television, so that you do not see that which will spoil your fast and ruin its effect.

7) Do not go to sleep too late and as a result miss out on the sahoor (predawn meal) and the Salaatul-Fajr. Try to maintain an early start to your work, The Messenger of Allah (sal-Allahu 'alayhe wa sallam) said:

“O Allah bless my Ummah in that which they maintain of an early start”

[Saheeh, transmitted by Ahmad]

8) Increase in giving in charity to your relatives and those who are needy; visit your relatives (to maintain family ties) and clear up any disputes and misunderstandings that may exist.

9) Increase in the remembrance of Allah and recite the Qur'an, listen to it and reflect upon its meaning and act according to it. Go to the masaajid to listen to beneficial talks; and performing the i'tikaaf in the masjid during the last ten days and nights of Ramadan is from the Sunnah.

10) Read about the subject of fasting so as to learn its rulings.

11) Maintain the fast of Ramadan and prepare your children to fast as soon as you feel they are capable, and beware of breaking the fast without an Islamically valid reason. Whoever intentionally breaks his fast any day then he or she is required to make up that day and repent.

12) Beware O my Muslim brothers and sisters from eating (and drinking during the day) in Ramadan, and beware of openly doing so in front of the people, for indeed doing so is tantamount to fearlessness of Allah, making a mockery of Islam and arrogance in front of the people. So know that whoever does not fast, then he has no right to celebrate the 'Eed since 'Eed is a major celebration upon the culmination of the fasting and anticipation for the acceptance of one's worship.