SAMPLE

Fasting: The Door of Nearness

Sawm (صَوْم) in the Quran

Aira Aurora

Free sample: Introduction & Chapter 1

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Introduction

Fasting (sawm) is one of the five pillars of Islam — the foundational acts that define a Muslim's relationship with Allah. The Quran presents fasting not as a burden but as a path to nearness: "O you who believe, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you, that you may become righteous" (2:183). The purpose is clear: righteousness (taqwa). The means is old: "as it was decreed upon those before you." Fasting is not a new commandment; it is an ancient practice, restored and refined in the final revelation.

This book — the first in the Guidance from the Qur'an series — explores fasting as the Quran presents it: the obligation, the month of Ramadan, the spiritual significance, the exemptions, the practice of the Night of Power (Laylat al-Qadr), the social dimensions, and the lessons that fasting teaches the believer. The Guidance series covers one topic per book, tracing each through the Quran with depth and focus.

The NurOne repository now hosts four series: NurOne (the prophets, 27 books), The Honored Ones (honored individuals, 1 book), Nations and Peoples of the Quran (the nations, 1 book), and now Guidance from the Qur'an (Quranic guidance, beginning with this book). The four series approach the Quran from four angles: the messengers, the honored, the recipients, and the guidance. Together, they form a comprehensive exploration of the Quranic worldview.

This book on fasting begins with the obligation (2:183-185), traces the details of the fast (the dawn-to-dusk abstention, the exemptions for the sick and the traveler, the feeding of the poor as an alternative), explores the month of Ramadan (the revelation of the Quran, the Night of Power), and reflects on the lessons: self-discipline, empathy, gratitude, and nearness to Allah. Fasting is the door of nearness — the act that brings the believer closest to the state of the angels, who neither eat nor drink.

The Quranic treatment of fasting is concise but profound. The core verses are in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:183-187) — a passage of only five verses that establishes the obligation, the timing, the exemptions, the permissions, and the spiritual significance of the fast. The brevity is the Quran's way: the essential is stated, the details are left to the Prophet's example (Sunnah) and the community's practice. The Quran provides the principle; the Sunnah provides the practice; the community provides the tradition. The three together — Quran, Sunnah, and community — constitute the living reality of fasting in Islam.

This book draws primarily from the Quran, with Hadith clearly marked where referenced. The approach is the same as the NurOne series: the Quran is the primary source, the Hadith is supplementary, and the distinction is always clear. The goal is to present fasting as the Quran presents it — not as a set of rules to be followed mechanically but as a spiritual practice to be lived deeply. The rules are the frame; the spirit is the picture. The frame without the picture is empty; the picture without the frame is uncontained. The two together — rules and spirit — are the complete fast.

Chapter 1: The Obligation — As Decreed Upon Those Before You

The Quran introduces fasting in Surah Al-Baqarah:

"O you who believe, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you, that you may become righteous" (2:183).

The verse is the foundation of fasting in Islam. It contains four elements: the address ("O you who believe"), the decree ("decreed upon you is fasting"), the precedent ("as it was decreed upon those before you"), and the purpose ("that you may become righteous").

The verse addresses "those who believe" — not humanity in general, but the believers specifically. Fasting is an act of faith; it is not a dietary practice or a health regimen. The person who fasts is the person who believes — the person who accepts the decree of Allah and acts upon it. The address establishes the frame: fasting is an act of worship, not an act of culture or custom.

The Quran explicitly states that fasting was decreed upon previous communities. Fasting is not unique to Islam — it is a universal practice, found in Judaism (Yom Kippur, fasting on Tisha B'Av), Christianity (Lent, fasting before Easter), and many other religious traditions. The Quran's acknowledgment of the precedent places fasting in the continuity of prophetic guidance: the God who decreed fasting upon the Jews and the Christians is the same God who decreed it upon the Muslims.

The precedent teaches a lesson: the practices of Islam are not innovations; they are restorations. The fasting of Ramadan is the continuation of a practice that stretches back to the earliest communities of faith. The Muslim who fasts joins a tradition that includes the prophets and their followers across history. The continuity is the connection: the person who fasts in Ramadan is connected to every person who has ever fasted for the sake of God.

The stated purpose of fasting is taqwa — righteousness, God- consciousness, piety. Fasting is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end. The end is taqwa — the state of being conscious of Allah in every moment, the state of choosing what pleases Allah over what pleases the self.

The connection between fasting and taqwa is direct: the person who can abstain from what is lawful (food, drink, marital relations during the day) for the sake of Allah is the person who can abstain from what is unlawful (sin, transgression) for the sake of Allah. The training in abstention from the lawful is the training that enables abstention from the unlawful. The person who

cannot control their appetite for food cannot control their appetite for sin. The fast is the gym for the will — the place where the muscle of self-control is exercised.

The purpose of fasting — taqwa — is universal. Every believer, in every time and place, needs taqwa. The fasting of Ramadan is the annual training — the refresher course that renews the believer's commitment to consciousness of Allah. The universality of the purpose explains the universality of the practice: fasting is found in every religion because every religion's followers need taqwa. The forms differ (the days, the durations, the rules); the purpose is the same: to bring the believer closer to God through the discipline of the body.

In our own lives, the lesson is the lesson of purpose. The person who fasts without understanding the purpose — who fasts because it is expected, because the community fasts, because the family fasts — is the person who misses the point. The person who fasts for taqwa — who uses the fast as a tool to develop God-consciousness — is the person who fulfills the purpose. The fast is the means; the taqwa is the end.

The Arabic word used for the decree of fasting is kutiba — "written." The word implies that fasting was written — prescribed, ordained, established — by Allah. The writing is the permanence: the decree that is written is the decree that is fixed. Fasting is not optional; it is not a recommendation; it is a written decree. The believer who fasts fulfills a written obligation; the believer who does not fast (without exemption) violates a written decree.

The word kutiba is the same root used for other obligations in the Quran: "Prescribed [written] for you, when death approaches one of you, if he leaves wealth, is that he bequeath to the parents and near relatives" (2:180). The writing is the language of obligation — the decree that is recorded, that is fixed, that is not subject to change. The fasting that is "written" is the fasting that is permanent — as permanent as the revelation that decreed it.

The decree of fasting is not a new decree; it is a continuation of an old one. The Quran says fasting was decreed upon "those before you" — the communities that received prophets before Muhammad. The continuity teaches a lesson: the obligations of Islam are not innovations; they are restorations. The God who required fasting from the Jews and the Christians requires it from the Muslims. The form may differ (the days, the rules, the methods), but the principle is the same: the believer fasts for the sake of God.

The continuity also teaches a lesson about the unity of the prophetic message. The prophets did not bring different religions; they brought the same religion in different forms. The fasting of Musa, the fasting of Isa, the fasting of

Muhammad — these are not three different practices; they are three expressions of the same principle: the believer abstains for the sake of God. The person who fasts in Ramadan joins a tradition that includes every prophet and every community that ever fasted.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aira Aurora is an independent researcher and writer specializing in Quranic studies. Her work focuses on close reading of the Quranic text, exploring its themes, narratives, and moral framework with attention to both the original Arabic and the broader human context.

The NurOne master series is her primary project -- a multi-sub-series exploration of the Quran covering prophets, people, places, events, lessons, commands, signs, the unseen, the hereafter, and everyday life. Each book is a close reading of the Quranic verses on a specific topic, presented in clear, accessible language.

Her work is published under the pen name Aira Aurora.

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