

Continuous Voluntary (Nafl) Fasting in Islam? Parental Permission For Children's Nafl Fasts?

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(Dawateislami)

Question

What do the scholars of Islam say regarding the following matters:

1. If a person wishes to keep voluntary (nafl) fasts consecutively for 2 months, such as in Rabi' al-Awwal and Rabi' al-Thānī, what does Islamic law say about this? A person says fasting consecutively has been prohibited in a hadith, so please provide guidance in this regard.
2. Is it necessary for children to seek permission from their parents to keep voluntary (nafl) fasts?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْجَوَابُ بِعَوْنِ الْمَلِكِ الْوَهَّابِ اللَّهُمَّ هِدَايَةَ الْحَقِّ وَالصَّوَابِ

1. Alongside obligatory (*farḍ*) and necessary (*wājib*) actions, performing an abundance of voluntary (*nafl*) worship is certainly a means of attaining blessings, and an excellent way of gaining closeness to Allah. Fasting is particularly distinguished in this regard, as Allah Himself shall grant its reward.

It is also established that the final Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ would keep abundant voluntary fasts, especially in the months of Rajab and Sha'ban. Other pious personalities were also reported to continuously fast voluntarily.

If a person today possesses strength to do so, there is no harm in him keeping consecutive voluntary fasts. Yet, this must not have a negative impact on him fulfilling his necessary and recommended rights (such as offering salah, earning lawful income, serving his parents, raising children, preserving his health, maintaining ties of kinship, etc.), and he must not fast during the days in which fasting is forbidden (such as the two 'Eids and the days of Tashrīq).

Fasting consecutively can sometimes lead to some people falling sick or becoming weak, and this illness or weakness becomes an obstacle in fulfilling other rights. Such people should instead fast in the manner of Prophet Dāwūd عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام (fasting one day, missing the next, then repeating). By doing this they can attain the virtue of performing voluntary worship, as well as maintaining their necessary and recommended rights.

When the final Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ received news that his Companion, 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ was keeping many fasts, he drew the Companion's attention to simultaneously observing his other rights. To stop him becoming physically weakened, the Prophet صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ also encouraged him to adopt the fasting method of Prophet Dāwūd عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام, instead of fasting continuously.

The virtues of fasting, along with how the Prophet ﷺ and pious elders fasted

A hadith qudsī related in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* regarding voluntary fasts: Allah said, لا يزال عبدي يتقرب الي بالنوافل حتى احببته - “My bondsman continuously draws near to me through voluntary actions, until I make him My beloved.”¹

The final Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ declared:

كل عمل ابن آدم يضاعف الحسنة عشر امثالها الى سبعمائة ضعف، قال الله عز وجل: الا الصوم، فانه لي وانا اجزي به، يدع شهوته وطعامه من اجلي، للصائم فرحتان: فرحة عند فطرته، وفرحة عند لقاء ربه

The reward for every deed of Ādam’s offspring is given from ten to seven hundred times over. Allah said, “Except for the fast, as this is for Me and I shall grant its reward. A person leaves his desires and food for My sake.” The fasting person has two joys: one at the time of ifṭār and one when he meets his Lord.²

The final Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ announced:

ان في الجنة غرفا يرى ظاهرها من باطنها وباطنهما من ظاهرها اعدتها الله لمن الان الكلام واطعم الطعام وتابع الصيام وصلّى بالليل والناس نيام

Indeed, there are chambers in Paradise whose interior can be seen from outside, and whose exterior can be seen from inside. Allah has prepared them for those who speak gently, feed others, fast continuously, and offer salah at night whilst people sleep.³

Relating the Prophet’s sacred actions regarding voluntary fasts, the Companion ‘Uthmān b. Ḥakīm رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ explains:

سالت سعيدين جبير عن صوم رجب ونحن يومئذ في رجب فقال: سمعت ابن عباس رضي الله عنهما يقول: كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يصوم حتى نقول: لا يفطر، ويفطر حتى نقول: لا يصوم

I asked Sa‘īd b. Jubayr about the fasts of Rajab, as we were in the month of Rajab at that time. He replied, “I heard Ibn ‘Abbās saying that the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ kept fasts to the extent we said he would not perform ifṭār ‘again’, and he would not fast to the extent we said he will never fast ‘again’.”⁴

Hazrat ‘Ā’ishah رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهَا conveys:

لم يكن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يصوم شهرا اكثر من شعبان، فإنه كان يصوم شعبان كله

The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ did not keep more fasts in any month than in Sha‘bān; (it seemed as though) he fasted the entire month.⁵

Fasting continuously is also established from *Sahaba* and *Tābi‘īn* (their successors).

يارسول الله، اني رجل اسرد الصوم، افاصوم في السفر؟ قال: صم ان شئت، وافطر ان شئت

¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Riqāq, Bāb al-Tawāḍu‘, vol. 2, p. 963, published in Karachi*

² *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, Bāb Faḍl al-Ṣiyām, vol. 1, p. 363, published in Karachi*

³ *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ, Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, Bāb al-Taḥrīq ‘alā qiyām al-layl, vol. 1, p. 112, published in Lahore*

⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, vol. 2, p. 811, Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, Beirut*

⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, Bāb ṣawm Sha‘bān, vol. 1, p. 264, published in Karachi*

The Companion Ḥamzah b. ‘Amr al-Aslamī رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ once asked, “O Allah’s Messenger! I am someone who continuously fasts. Can I also fast whilst travelling?” The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ replied by saying, “Fast if you wish, or leave it if you wish.”⁶

In *Nuzhat al-Qārī*:

Some Companions would fast continuously, such as Abū Ṭalḥah al-Ansārī and Ḥamzah b. ‘Amr al-Aslamī رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا. The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ did not forbid them from this. Likewise, keeping consecutive fasts is also proven from many of the Ṭābi‘īn and saints.⁷

The hadith of prohibition; its Arabic text and translation

The Companion ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ narrates:

بلغ النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، اني اسرد الصوم، واصلي الليل، فاما ارسل الي واما لقيته، فقال: الم اخبر انك تصوم ولا تفطر وتصلني؟ فصم وافطر، وقم ونم، فان لعينك عليك حظا، وان لنفسك واهلك عليك حظا، قال: اني لا قوى لذلك، قال: فصم صيام داود عليه السلام، قال: وكيف؟ قال: كان يصوم يوما ويفطر يوما

News reached the Messenger of Allah صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ that I fast continuously and stand at night ‘in worship’. He either sent me a message or I happened to meet him; he said, “O ‘Abdullāh! Was I not informed that you fast without break and then offer salah? Fast and take a break. Offer salah and sleep. Indeed, your eyes have right over you, and your soul and family have right over you.” I said, “I find myself having greater ability than this.” “Then keep the fasts of Dāwūd”, he ordained. When I asked how, he explained, “Fast one day and leave the next.”⁸

Application of this hadith

Jurists and hadith experts mention two causes for the prohibition of fasting continuously. Fasting continuously is forbidden when this entails fasting on the prohibited days (‘Ēid al-Fiṭr, ‘Ēid al-Aḍḥā, and the days of Tashrīq; the latter is the 11th, 12th and 13th of Dhū al-Hijjah).

There is risk of developing physical weakness, which leads to falling short in fulfilling other necessary and recommended rights. The Companion ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ was prohibited from fasting continuously, due to the possibility of bodily loss of strength.

These principles are explained in order below:

1. The forbiddance of fasting on specific days

Imam Abū ‘Isā al-Tirmidhī رَحِمَهُ اللهُ عَلَيْهِ writes regarding this hadith:

وقد كره قوم من اهل العلم صيام الدهر وقالوا: انما يكون صيام الدهر اذا لم يفطر يوم الفطر ويوم الاضحى وايام التشريق، فمن افطر هذه الايام، فقد خرج من حد الكراهية ولا يكون قد صام الدهر كله

Some people of knowledge deem continuous fasting to be disliked. Scholars say this is disliked only when one fasts on ‘Ēid al-Fiṭr, ‘Ēid al-Aḍḥā and the days of Tashrīq. Fasting

⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, Bab al-Takhyīr fī al-ṣawm wa al-fiṭr, vol.1, p. 357, published in Karachi*

⁷ *Nuzhat al-Qārī, vol. 3, p. 386, Fareed Book Stall, Lahore*

⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, Bāb ḥaqq al-ahl fī al-ṣawm, vol. 1, p. 265, published in Karachi*

continuously is not disliked for someone who does not fast these aforementioned days, as he is then not considered someone who fasts indefinitely.⁹

The scholar Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ elucidates, ذهب -- العلماء فيه، -- “Scholars differ upon continuous fasts, but the majority opine it is permissible if one does not fast on the prohibited days, such as the two ‘Eids and the days of Tashrīq.”¹⁰

2. Forbiddance stems from danger of one becoming weak, which would adversely affect one’s fulfilling of both the rights of Allah and people.

The renowned hadith expert, ‘Alī al-Qārī رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ says, ان العلة في نهي صوم الدهر هو الضعف فيكون -- المعنى انه ان اطاقه احد فلا باس، فهو افضل -- “The reason for the prohibition of continuous fasting is weakness. This implies whoever has strength for it may fast without break. There is no harm in this; in fact, it is preferred to do so.”¹¹

He also writes:

ان صوم الدهر من شأنه ان يفتر الهمة عن القيام بحقوق الله وحقوق عباده، فلذا كرهه وامان لم يؤثر فيه، فانه لا يكره له صومه، بل يستحب له ذلك

The matter concerning fasting continually is how it may decrease a person’s strength in fulfilling the rights of Allah and people, which is why it is disliked. Yet, if a person is not affected in these matters, then it is not disliked, but recommended for him.¹²

The exegete of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Mawlana Sharīf al-Ḥaqq Amjadī رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ said:

Continuous fasting is disliked or non-optimal for those who have predominant assumption this will cause them to become weak, to the extent they are unable to fulfil the rights that are necessary upon them, be they religious or worldly, such as salah, religious struggle, or earning in order to raise children.

The same applies if they have predominant assumption that they will be able to fulfil the necessary rights, but unable to maintain the rights that are not necessary.

As for those who have predominant assumption that despite fasting continuously, they will still be able to properly fulfil rights that are necessary, sunnah and recommended for them; it is not disliked for them at all.¹³

In *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr* and *Imdād al-Fattāḥ*, ويكره صوم الدهر لانه يضعفه -- “Fasting continuously is disliked, as this weakens a person.”¹⁴

The Companion ‘Abdullah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ being specifically prohibited from fasting continuously due to potential bodily fatigue

After relaying a hadith discussing the permissibility of continuous fasting, the scholar Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ adds:

⁹ Jāmi ‘ Tirmidhī, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, Bāb mā jā’ a fi ṣawm al-dahr, vol. 1, p. 159, published in Karachi

¹⁰ ‘Umdat al-Qārī, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, Bāb ḥaqq al-ahl fi al-ṣawm, vol. 8, p. 196, published in Multan

¹¹ Mirqāt al-Mafāṭīḥ, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, Bāb ṣiyām al-taṭawwu’, vol. 4, published in Quetta

¹² Ibid, p. 489

¹³ Nuzhat al-Qārī, vol. 3, p. 386, Farid Book Stall, Lahore

¹⁴ Faṭḥ al-Qadīr, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, vol. 2, p. 372, published in Quetta

فان قلت: يعارضه نهيه صلى الله عليه وسلم عبد الله بن عمرو بن العاص، قلت: يحتمل نهيه على ضعف عبد الله عن ذلك

If you say that this opposes the Prophet's prohibiting of 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr b. al-Āṣ, then I say the Companion being forbidden was due to his physical fatigue.¹⁵

Answering the second question asked at the beginning of this article, Islamic law does not require one to seek permission from their parents to keep voluntary (*nafl*) fasts. If said parents prevent their children from keeping voluntary fasts out of fear that they will fall ill, the latter should obey the former.

In *Bahār-i-Sharī'at*:

There is no need for a girl to seek permission from her father, or a mother from her son, or a sister from her brother. If parents stop their son from keeping a voluntary fast because there is chance of him falling sick, he should obey them.¹⁶

وَاللّٰهُ اَعْلَمُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ وَرَسُوْلُهُ اَعْلَمُ صَلَّى اللّٰهُ تَعَالٰى عَلَيْهِ وَاٰلِهٖ وَسَلَّمَ

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¹⁵ Umdat al-Qārī, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, vol. 8, p. 134, published in Multan

¹⁶ Bahār-i-Sharī'at, part 5, p. 1008, Maktabat al-Madina, Karachi