

RAMADAN IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

BBSI GUIDANCE FOR RAMADAN

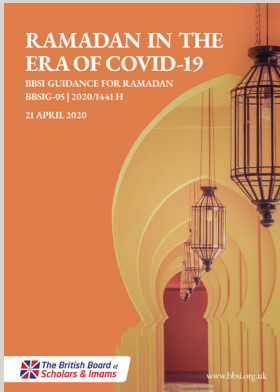
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**Muslim
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The British Board of Scholars & Imams (BBSI)

The BBSI is an apolitical national assembly of imams, traditional scholars and islamically literate academics formed to facilitate scholarly intra-Muslim research and dialogue, and to provide authoritative ethico-theological guidance and leadership on matters relevant to Muslims, whilst promoting wider community welfare.

Vision

Empower Imams & Scholars in order that they might contribute to equity, social cohesion, and the common good in the UK.

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Executive Summary

1. The month of Ramadan – notwithstanding the highly individual nature of fasting – is deeply associated with collective practices such as gathering nightly in mosques, coming together to break the fast, and other communal activities.
2. Many of these are likely to be profoundly affected by the lockdown and social distancing measures required to maintain public health, slow the transmission of COVID-19 and help reduce the strain on the NHS.
3. The shari'a provides explicit exemptions for those suffering with illness to either break or be exempted from their fast, if it is reasonably feared that fasting will lead to a significant harm. Whether one qualifies for this is determined through consultation with medical professionals and religious scholars.
4. There is no automatic exemption to fasting simply by contracting COVID-19, and no evidence that fasting predisposes one to more severe manifestations of it. It should therefore be considered as any other acute illness would be and judged on an individual basis in accordance with its risks and degree of symptoms.
5. Healthcare workers, especially given the pressurised conditions and the constraints of working in PPE, need to reflect on their ability to maintain their own health and perform their duties effectively whilst fasting. There is similarly no blanket exemption from fasting for them, and guidelines have been provided about individual cases based on practitioners' experiences.
6. Tarawih and I'tikaf should be performed within the home, and a variety of alternatives to the recitation of the full Quran during the communal prayer have been considered.
7. Special attention should be paid to alternative approaches to socialisation and building community spirit during lockdown, including the use of high- and low-technology (such as community radio stations) and remembering the vulnerable and isolated, especially connecting at the time of iftar.
8. One should bear in mind one's responsibility to give charity, including the

obligatory Zakat and especially to those in need locally, during this period. One should also remember to support one's local mosque during this period.

9. The opportunity to perform the 'Eid prayer in congregation will depend on circumstances and guidance from Public Health England at the end of Ramadan. Measures to prevent spread of COVID-19 and maintain public health should be taken seriously.
10. Ultimately, Muslims should remember that this month is one in which to restore their connection to God, the community, and their true selves. The inability to perform certain traditional acts of worship – whether individual or collective – does not mean an inability to connect to Allah, for, “He is with you wherever you are”. (Q, 57:4)

1. Introduction

The BBSI is an apolitical national assembly of imams, traditional scholars and Islamically-literate Muslim academics formed to facilitate scholarly intra-Muslim research and dialogue. Our aim is to provide authoritative ethico-theological guidance and leadership on matters relevant to Muslims, whilst promoting wider community welfare. It primarily seeks to do this by developing theological leadership that can authentically represent the rich scholarly inheritance of Islam, whilst responding flexibly to the context of modern times. Its ultimate aim is to both serve and represent the Muslim community in an ethical, inclusive, professional and scholar-led way. The BBSI especially takes seriously the responsibility to provide theologically grounded, practically focussed, holistic and – above all – cool-headed and far-sighted guidance to the community in times of generalised anxiety and panic.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in consultation with community organisations, health and medical experts, the BBSI has been providing ethico-religious guidance to the community. Muslim health workers and professionals, religious and community leaders, and institutions have been requesting the BBSI to communicate a comprehensive yet non-exhaustive guidance for the month of Ramadan and fasting. The BBSI is acutely aware that the Muslim community will likely not be able to perform some of the communal activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as attending the mosques

and arranging large *iftar* (fast-breaking) gatherings with friends and family.

Given this, the BBSI would like to remind all Muslims that Allah – the All-Merciful and Generous – has promised that He will reward us for simply having the intention to do good, even if we are unable to perform what we intend due to forces beyond our control. We take solace from this and exert our efforts to fulfil our duties and responsibilities as best as we can. ‘Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity’. (Q, 2:286)

2. General counsel about Ramadan

Fasting in the Month of Ramadan (the 9th month in the Islamic lunar calendar) is the third pillar of practice of Islam. It is the direct order from Allah in the Qur’an to all Muslims who are able to fast that they must fast this month. ‘O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed upon you as it has been upon those who came before you, so that you may be God-conscious’ (Q, 2:183). Ramadan is the month of discipline and self-restraint, patience, noble character, worship and spirituality, awareness of Allah, and a heightened sense of community. These are traits that Ramadan helps us to develop, if Ramadan is lived the way it ought to be. As such, observing Ramadan can be a transformative act of worship, fulfilling part of the greater purpose of our creation: to come to know – and through knowing, lovingly surrender – to God.

The special nature of the month of Ramadan is not simply in that Muslims fast together worldwide and fulfil one of their religious duties. It is a month in which they recharge their spiritual batteries, drawing closer to Allah spiritually; a month in which good deeds are multiplied, and a month of mercy, generosity and guidance. This is the case even if one is *not* able to observe one or more of the common acts of worship, such as fasting, tarawih or charity. The month has a blessedness in and of itself, which the acts of worship only enhance.

Fasting begins each day at dawn, when the Fajr prayer time begins, and continues until the end of sunset, which is the commencement time of the Maghrib prayer. As such governed by the natural cycles of the seasons, the day of fasting is longer when Ramadan occurs in the summer and shorter in the winter. During the time of fasting, food, drink, and sexual intercourse cause the fast to become invalid; if perpetrated deliberately, they are considered sinful, though not if done accidentally. If any of these acts are done in a state

of forgetfulness, they do not invalidate the fast.

The nights of Ramadan are to be spent in (optional) prayer and contemplation, particularly the tarawih, which is traditionally performed in mosques and during which the entire Quran is recited to the congregation over the course of the month. This is a unique religious practice that many Muslims look forward to, and is usually the responsibility of those few honoured members of the community who have made the tremendous effort to memorise the entire scripture. It is unlikely, especially in the first part of the month, that this act of communal worship will be able performed in the traditional way. Options and alternatives are discussed in the relevant section.

It is important for Muslims to hold themselves to a higher standard of moral conduct during this period, and so especially avoid acts of disobedience to Allah, vain conversation, and disputes during this month, in order that the objective of Ramadan can be attained. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘He who does not leave false speech, acting upon it, and ignorant, boorish behaviour, then Allah has no need for him to leave his food and drink.’ (Bukhari)

It is from the mercy of God upon us that the Qur’an explicitly decrees an exemption from fasting for those who are travelling or ill. Included in those who are ill are all those who are likely to be harmed, or reasonably fear being harmed, by fasting. After making mention of these exemptions, the Qur’an says, ‘Allah wants ease for you and does not want hardship for you’, (Q, 2:185). Those who are exempt from the obligation of fasting – both generally and given the current circumstance – are detailed in the relevant section below.

3. Fasting

The obligation to fast

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam mentioned by the Prophet (s). The obligation to fast is a definitively-established injunction from Allah, as explained above. It is therefore impermissible for a Muslim to forego fasting without a valid excuse. In fact, doing so would be a grave sin according to the agreed-upon consensus of Muslim scholars. Based on this, all those who are healthy, not travelling between cities, women who are not observing their menstrual cycles or post-natal cycles, are obliged to

fast once they have reached the age of puberty. Being at work, university, or school, even for examinations, does not automatically exempt one from fasting, although these may in some circumstances be a reason to allow one to break the fast on an individual basis. This is further detailed below.

The current pandemic has led to questions being asked about whether there is a general exemption from fasting because of COVID-19. Following detailed evaluation of the research and in-depth medical consultation, the BBSI can say that there is no evidence to suggest that the Ramadan fast reduces immunity, or increases the likelihood of contracting the virus or delays recovery from it. Despite this being a novel virus about which little is known, enough is known about the physiological changes that occur during Ramadan – which is a form of ‘intermittent fasting’ – to be clear about this.

Otherwise healthy Muslims replenish their energy reserves adequately during non-fasting hours, and the human body recuperates normally during that time. Indeed, there is some medical evidence to suggest that fasting of this nature is likely to **increase** immunity. Therefore, fasting remains obligatory upon every responsible Muslim during the spread of the coronavirus, unless some other valid reasons for exemption exist. Simply fearing that one may be more likely to contract the virus if they fast is not a sufficient reason, as there is no basis for this suspicion without a medical diagnosis to suggest otherwise.

Exemptions from the fast

Keeping in mind the importance of this pillar of the religion, our faith also insists on relieving people of hardship and difficulty. The exemptions from fasting take a variety of forms, and will be discussed here under regular, COVID-19 related, and those relating specifically to healthcare workers.

Regular Exemptions

As most Muslims are aware, a woman on her menses or post-natal lochia is neither expected nor permitted to fast or pray – she would make up the missed fasts after Ramadan but not the prayers. Thereafter, it should be noted that, from within the paradigm of the shari’a, there are regular exemptions from the fast that exist. In all cases of exemption mentioned in the scholarly tradition, some form of alternate to fasting in Ramadan is required (such

as delayed performance or compensatory charity) and there are slight differences about the details. In addition to consulting medical professionals about the details of one's condition, a reliable local scholar should be consulted about the details relating to the juristic aspects. Common exemptions include:

- i. **The traveller** (as determined by the legal schools), especially if the journey is considered a hardship. According to most scholars, this exemption applies only if they leave before the time of the morning prayer, and – according to some – only the trip is made for lawful purposes. For details, please consult a local scholar (though it is unlikely that many such journeys will occur during lockdown).
- ii. **The elderly**, for whom it is deeply risky to their health to fast due to frailty; as this is a condition that is highly unlikely to change, they would give compensatory charity (*fidya*) if they can afford to do so in lieu of making up the fast.
- iii. **The acutely unwell** person – for whom it is reasonably feared that fasting will worsen their condition, delay their recovery (including if they cannot take the medicine while fasting), or cause significant harm. Classical scholarship on this issue differs on whether it is permissible, recommended, or obligatory for such a person to break their fast (or avoid commencing it) – generally depending on the degree of fear and the extent of possible harm that might be caused.
- iv. **The chronically unwell** – someone with a chronic health condition, such as diabetes, that requires medication that cannot be delayed to the night, as per professional medical advice; they are exempted from the fast, and should either make up the fast at a more appropriate time (such as the winter months) or offer the *fidya*.
- v. **A pregnant or nursing woman**; on the condition that there is a reasonable fear that fasting will harm her or the child's health.
- vi. **Specific types of labourers** for whom the fast would be difficult, due to excessive hunger or thirst. There are a number of conditions that apply: (a) their work cannot be delayed to after Ramadan; (b) they cannot change their work schedule; (c) the fast means they experience difficulty that is difficult to tolerate; (d) they make the intention to fast, and they start the day fasting, only breaking it if it

becomes intolerable; (e) and they do not intend to do their work as a way to keep away from fasting.

All of the above are clearly noted exemptions as found in classical legal texts, and all of them (except for travelling) revolve around the fast entailing a reasonable fear of significant hardship. ‘Reasonable’ and ‘significant’ are further defined by jurists in a variety of ways, but return to ‘risk of occurrence’ and ‘degree of harm’. For the majority of exemptions noted above, these two parameters should be addressed in consultation with healthcare professionals, who themselves are relying upon approved protocols and guidance based on the great deal of research that has been conducted in this field over decades.

Most classical scholars assert that make-up fasts should be performed before the next Ramadan, and if not possible, then rulings related to compensatory charity (*fidya*) apply, in addition to making up the fasts. In the Hanafi school, *fidya* is only given if one is unlikely to be able to make up the fast.

The BBSI would recommend that the recent comprehensive medical guidance on this topic – ‘Ramadan Rapid Review and Recommendations’, which provides clear protocols, stratification of medical conditions, and the relevant research related to the respective specialties – be used as a guide to assist individuals, clinicians and Imams and scholars who are concerned about this.¹

The decision to exempt oneself from fasting should only be done on an individual basis if one has repeated personal experience of individual hardship as a result of fasting (for example, a woman who has previously had unexplained miscarriages whilst fasting during Ramadan). Such decisions should be taken bearing in mind both one’s responsibility to Allah and one’s responsibility to one’s own health, which Allah Himself has commanded us to consider.

Exemptions Due to Contracting COVID-19

- i. COVID-19 should be considered a form of acute illness (like [iii] above), and judged accordingly as above. It remains the case that the majority of COVID-19 cases resolve with only mild symptoms, during which fasting should be possible. If one develops debilitating but non-serious symptoms (that do not require medical

review), such as high fever, weakness, or pain, then one is **permitted** to break the fast as per the conditions of any other acute illness.

- ii. If one develops symptoms that require medical review and management, such as difficulty breathing, or others, one would be **expected** to break the fast in order to receive treatment and hasten recovery. It should be noted that COVID-19 symptoms can develop rapidly and so need to be monitored closely.
- iii. If the condition is serious enough to warrant medication other than for symptomatic relief (like pain medication), and the advice of a physician is that missing treatment would delay one's recovery, one would be **exempted** from the fast, and it is encouraged for them to do so, in order to speed up their recovery.
- iv. If missing the treatment would, according to medical professionals, entail long-term detriment to their health or render one significantly infectious for a longer period, thus increasing the risk to others, then it is **obligatory** for them to avoid fasting.
- v. Additionally, one should abide by all the health regulations relating to social distancing and quarantine in order to avoid transmitting the virus to others, especially the vulnerable.

Exemptions due to Caring for COVID-19 Patients

Those caring for COVID-19 patients are required to fast as a general rule. However, our tradition already recognises allowances for workers for whom the fast would be difficult (see [a, vi] above), and healthcare professionals may well be considered in this category, depending on the specific nature of their work.

It is recognised, however, that with healthcare professionals, there are three additional considerations that require attention: (1) that the fast not put their professional judgement into question and impair their ability to take critical decisions, (2) long hours of work which cause exhaustion above what can normally be handled, and (3) the heavy usage of PPE causing dehydration and fatigue.

The BBSI has consulted with a number of clinicians working on the front-lines in acute

settings, such as ITU, A&E and surgery, some of whom have conducted ‘trials of fasting’ in PPE. Their feedback has provided the following factors for consideration:

- Full PPE, as required in most wards now, is quite heavy, confining and uncomfortable to wear, and can take some getting used to. One sweats a lot (and hence loses fluid) when wearing it. Once used to it, however, some find it manageable provided there is the opportunity to remove it regularly.
- The full FFP3 mask also takes some getting used to, can make one claustrophobic and can dry out the throat.
- ITU appears to be the most difficult environment to work, given the intensity of workload, criticality of decision-making, need for full PPE, and long shifts.
- Operating theatres are similarly intensive, but breaks are possible and the temperature controlled environment helps minimise fluid loss through PPE. Staff there are also more used to the conditions and able to assess their ability to perform.
- Wearing full PPE for an entire shift while fasting would be difficult given the levels of dehydration, fatigue and decrease in mental alertness. Many A&E environments have suggested that PPE only be worn for a couple of hours before a rest is taken, though this increases the risk of infection.

Given the above, a blanket ruling on this situation cannot be offered; considering the high degree of variability in the situation, it needs to be an individual, time-specific decision. Such circumstances are best judged by the clinician’s sincere and experience-based reflection on their current work, shift-patterns, and performance – past and present. Certain parameters need to be clearly explained, however:

1. If it is genuinely felt that patient care might be put at risk, then mitigating steps and other alternatives should be considered – such as swapping shifts where possible, ‘buddying up’ towards the end of the day, getting second opinions on critical decisions, and so forth.
2. If these are not possible – and we recognise that in the current climate it be quite

difficult – then it is permitted to commence the fast each day and then break it if one becomes fearful that patient care might be at risk or one’s own health suffer.

3. If this is a repeated pattern not improved by acclimatisation to fasting, then it is permissible not to commence the fast on those days that one has such a shift, on the basis of previous experience. On days when one is not on shift, or the shift pattern is such that the fasting would not be onerous, it remains obligatory to fast.
4. Given the current pressure on the NHS workforce, we would not recommend concerted attempts to swap shifts, take leave or request exemptions from frontline duties because of the fast: the duty of care to patients and sensitivity to one’s colleagues – who would be even more over-stretched as a result of one’s absence – should be given priority over the fast. Healthcare professionals are essential workers precisely because the work they are currently doing is essential to the health of the community, and Allah affords the rights of His creation priority over the rights due to Himself.
5. There is thus no general exemption for healthcare workers during COVID-19: this should be determined on both an individual and case-by-case basis, with priority given to patient care and one’s own health.

We understand that the many decisions that doctors and health workers have to make in these times are not easy. This includes the decision to break their fast or advise their patients to break their’s. However, we would like to give comfort to health workers by saying that our faith has given them the scope to make decisions based on what is best for themselves and their patients, as long as one is conscious of their religious responsibilities and sensible in their decisions. In doing so they are acting in accordance with the teachings of their faith and are in line with what Allah is pleased with. We ask Allah to abundantly reward and give strength to all those working tirelessly for their patients.

4. Tarawih prayers

The tarawih prayer is a signal feature of the month of Ramadan. Though not an obligation, it is a noble act of worship which can be performed at home or in the mosque, individually or in congregation. Since it has become a public community act of worship during Ramadan, many people are unaware that it can be prayed at home. If the condition of being prevented from the mosques continues, then Muslims should not feel that their reward is reduced in any way by praying at home. The Prophet (s) taught us that anybody who is used to partaking in a good deed and was then unable to do so for a reason beyond their control, will be rewarded exactly as they used to be when they were partaking in this act. This applies to those who would otherwise have attended the tarawih prayers had it not been for the current lockdown, as well the regular congregational and Friday prayers. Their reward is not reduced in any way, by the grace of Allah.

Moreover, the Prophet (s), in fact, encouraged us to perform some non-obligatory prayers at home, saying, ‘Pray in your homes; for the best prayer one can perform is in his home, except for the [five] obligatory prayers.’ (Bukhari/Muslim) Though this has been understood slightly differently in the legal schools, it was originally made in the context of the night prayer during Ramadan. Hence, the following matters should be noted:

- i. It is permissible to pray the tarawih prayer, or the night prayer in general, alone or in congregation at home at any time during the night after isha.
- ii. It is not necessary to recite the whole Qur’an during the night prayers in Ramadan, nor does any specific amount have to be recited. It is acceptable to recite any minimal portion of the Qur’an (as well as the Fatiha) during the prayer. For instance, if someone only memorised a few suras of the Qur’an, it is completely acceptable for them to just recite from this, even if they repeat this more than once during Ramadan.
- iii. We would encourage masjid and their huffaz to utilise existing methods of communication (such as video-conferencing or audio-broadcasting) and consider arranging nightly live recitations of portions of the Quran that their congregation can tune into.

- iv. If one wishes, within the tarawih prayers – either individually or in congregation – to recite portions of the Quran one has *not* memorised, one may follow the relied upon position of the Shafii school that one may validly recite by looking at the Quran. This may be a mushaf or via an app on a phone, tablet or computer screen. Unnecessary movement should be minimised as much as possible when doing so; the easiest way to do so is to place a tablet on a stand in front of the reciter, where one can easily follow and swipe to another page with a single motion. Hanafis considering adopting this position need to be aware that care should be taken to properly pronounce the Fatiha, including the Basmala, and should of course consult with their local scholars or fatwa board.²
- v. In arranging home-based family congregations of tarawih, one should beware of calling round others to perform mini-congregations that void the purpose of social distancing and lockdown. This would be considered reprehensible overzealousness and a transgression of one's social responsibilities to the community, given that the purpose of the lockdown is to minimise spread of COVID-19.
- vi. Although there have been some contemporary scholars (including BBSI members) who have sought to validate the following of tarawih (or other) prayers online via the internet, it should be noted that it is the position of the overwhelming majority of scholars, including the BBSI, that such a prayer would not fulfil the conditions of following the imam and is not in line with the objectives of the congregational prayer. The motivation to allow such a virtual prayer is commendable; however, our good intentions need to be commensurate with well-established teachings of Islam, especially when it concerns ritual worship. It is important to ensure one's religious obligations are fulfilled to the best of one's ability, and to avoid anything that might render this doubtful. As such, it should be avoided, and one of the options above selected instead. At the same time, one should not condemn those who choose to follow the opinion of virtual following of prayers.

5. I'tikaf (Seclusion)

It is another signal feature of the month of Ramadan that some Muslims spend the last ten days of the month in seclusion and worship. This was the continuous practice of the Prophet (s) in this period as well as prior to the first revelation. It is a highly meritorious act, and it is considered a Sunna Kifaya (communal responsibility) that one person in a specific community perform it. Given our state of lockdown, this usual feature of Ramadan is likely to be significantly curtailed. We would thus advise the following:

- In each locality, one (or at most two) people should perform the I'tikaf in one of the mosques in the area, in order to fulfil the sunna kifaya. Candidates should not be people who need to self-isolate (not symptomatic, nor have anyone with recent symptoms in their homes) or have vulnerable relatives or dependants at home. The most likely candidate would be the masjid Imam, who sometimes lives on the premises of the mosque anyway.
- It would be advisable for him to take sufficient food supplies, and then take the Hanafi position that the entire building of the mosque, not just the prayer area (ie: *fina al-masjid*) is permissible to access during I'tikaf, so that he can enter the kitchen and make food for himself. Alternatively, food can be brought in in the same manner as it might be done for anyone who is self-isolating. Social distancing measures should be followed.
- In this circumstance, the masjid is like any other private dwelling – footfall through the doors is avoided and there is no ordinary usage as a public space.
- Women may take adopt the Hanafi position and perform a 'domiciliary I'tikaf' as usual, by designating and utilising an area of their homes as a *musalla* (place of prayer) for the purpose of performing I'tikaf.
- Men may also choose to utilise their period of self-isolation to enter seclusion within their homes and devote themselves to worship and reflection there, with the intention of seclusion. This is would not be considered a formal I'tikaf, which requires that seclusion be in a masjid and is premised on 'awaiting the next congregational prayer', such that each moment spent in I'tikaf rewarded even if one is not actively engaged in worship. However, secluding oneself so

as means to concentrate and focus on one's worship during a specific period of time can (and should) be done more generally, as it is conducive to developing the sense of presence of heart in worship that is its goal – as Allah says, “establish the prayer to remember Me.” (Q, 20:14) It is hoped (and expected, given the generosity of our Lord) that Allah will reward those who would have performed the traditional I'tikaf but have been prevented from doing so by the current circumstances.

6. Iftar and Community Life

One of the things which many Muslims eagerly look forward to is the beautiful community spirit of the month of Ramadan. Iftar with family and friends is something which stands out as a highlight for many of us, particularly for children. However, the health and safety of the members of our community takes precedence. We should therefore take seriously the advice given by the government during this period, as well as medical advice provided by official bodies. As long as this is done, then it is encouraged to engage in these social activities via any alternate means that can be used to converse and to interact with family and friends.

7. Zakat & Zakat al-Fitr

Zakat is one of the most essential pillars of Islam, commonly mentioned alongside faith in Allah and establishing the prayer. It is not connected to the month of Ramadan from an Islamic legal viewpoint, but it is the practice of many Muslims to give their Zakat in the month of Ramadan. It is worth reminding that randomly selecting the month of Ramadan to pay Zakat is not the correct approach because an individual's Zakat due date may fall outside the month of Ramadan. This is established by looking at when the person became owner of sufficient wealth to pay zakat (*sahib nisab*), which may or may not fall in Ramadan.

We encourage all Muslims to take seriously the discharging of their duty to calculate and give of their Zakat, particularly given the current pandemic we are facing. We also remind UK Muslims that it is recommended first to look to one's local communities as the recipient of one's zakat. This crisis has not only devastated our health care system, but the economic ramifications of the lockdown may be equally challenging for many households up and down Britain.

As conscientious Muslims, we have an opportunity to demonstrate the transformative power of Zakat by paying it in advance. The Hanafi and other schools permit the payment of Zakat in advance of up to two years. As there are many here in the UK and abroad in great need, discharging this duty will allow a safety net for the many who are in extreme difficulty. We therefore encourage that this be taken as an opportunity to help those who are in most need in our communities.

Similarly, Zakat al-Fitr (or *fitrana*) is an obligation upon every Muslim, male or female, young or old, and it should be given by the breadwinner on behalf of his dependants. It is permissible, and even encouraged in our current circumstances, to give Zakat al-Fitr before the day of ‘Eid so that it can reach those in need as early as possible. This can be done in the form of food or money, as per the Hanafi school.

We would also strongly encourage Muslims to donate generously towards their local masjid during this month, as they would have done had they been in attendance, to ensure that they have sufficient funds to keep running and improve their services to the community.

8. ‘Eid Prayers

If the current pandemic continues, alongside the same restrictions we are currently facing, then the ‘Eid prayer shall also be generally suspended across the country – both performance in masjid or in open areas. It should be noted that, while the Hanafi school considers the performance of the ‘Eid prayer to be personally obligatory, the majority of the extant Sunni schools, namely the Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali schools, consider the individual performance of the prayer as recommended, not obligatory. One should also refer to the relevant BBSI guidance on this question (BBSIG02) on individual, communal and institutional responsibilities to maintain public health during the current pandemic.

As such, there is no sin upon those who do not pray it, particularly given the current conditions we are living in, with the threat to public health if groups gather. One should adhere to the relevant guidance where this is concerned, and if the lockdown restrictions have eased by ‘Eid, continue to take adequate infection control precautions and social distancing guidelines. It should be remembered that, despite being a key social event and communal act of worship for Muslims, it is more religiously important to perform the five daily prayers than the ‘Eid prayer in every legal school.

9. General closing counsel

We encourage Muslims everywhere to take advantage of this sacred month, each according to their capacity. It is understandable and unfortunate that the same community spirit that we feel during the month of Ramadan each year may not be felt this year to the same extent. However, by the Grace of Allah, there is plenty that we can do to ensure that we enjoy and benefit from this blessed month. We strongly encourage Muslims to use this month to develop a stronger connection with the Book of Allah, through reciting it, studying its meanings, and implementing what we recite. Those who are not proficient in the Arabic language should use the help of translations to help them understand and contemplate the meanings of the Qur'an.

We also encourage that this month of mercy and forgiveness is one in which Muslims show mercy and forgiveness to others, particularly their relatives. Use this as an opportunity to fix family ties and to reconcile between those who may hold ill feelings towards one another. We also strongly advise Muslims to always refer back to qualified experts, particularly during times of fear and confusion. Always seek the advice of senior scholars, scholarly bodies, and fatwa committees for matters of faith, and avoid circulating material without caution. Lastly, always remember that whenever Allah closes one door, He opens a better one. It may be that the masjid must remain closed, but the doors of Allah's mercy – and of paradise – during this month are flung wide open. We pray that this month is a source of blessings, openings, relief and spiritual advancement for all believers, and that – by temporarily depriving us of some of our normal practices – Allah inspire within us greater appreciation for them, that we might benefit from them all the more in years to come.

*Oh Allah, grant us guidance, taqwa, chaste
integrity ('afaf) and true independence.*

*And may peace and blessings be upon our Master
Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets, his family and followers.*

Endnotes

[1] Produced by the British Islamic Medical Association, April 2020

[2] Reading from the mushaf during tarawih is considered permissible according to the majority of the extant Sunni schools. In the Hanafi school, there is a difference of opinion, with Abu Hanifa opining that it invalidates the prayer, while Abu Yusuf and Muhammad deemed it valid and permitted, but with dislike due to excessive movement and the resemblance of the worship of Jews and Christians. The view of Abu Hanifa is generally deemed to be the relied-upon position in the Hanafi school, though some scholars today have permitted adopting the view of Abu Yusuf and Muhammad, especially in times of need, and given that both reasons for dislike can be circumvented. One should consult qualified scholars on this matter if they are unsure how to proceed.



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