

I'tikāf in the masjid for the Last Ten days of Ramadan

Man, constantly involved in worldly affairs, social problems and personal commitments, easily forgets the actual purpose of his noble creation. Evil thoughts capture his heart and mind to such an extent that he becomes unable to think positively and even going to the Masjid and fasting does not bring about any changes. As a result, his salah is full of worldly thoughts and his fasting is wasted in useless discussions. This creates a disheartening and deplorable condition for the Muslim community in general and for the pious people in particular.

The only way to avoid the wrath of Allah (SWA) the Almighty Lord, and to be benefited by His mercy is to be present oneself in His house with full commitment, zeal and submission. This spirit of love, hope and begging for more mercy is found in i'tikāf.

I'tikāf is a sunnah muakkadah 'ala l'kifayah. This means it is not obligatory on every Muslim but if at least one person from the community performs it, the rest can be saved from the sin of discarding the sunnah. However, this shar'i ruling does not affect its significance or benefits. It is a great mercy of Allah that it is not mandatory for every Muslim. Otherwise, it would have been very difficult. Rather it is a sunnah, keeping the necessities and ease of the common Muslims in mind, while the true seekers of the nearness of Allah can benefit from this great 'ibādah.

The fact of the matter is that the real blessings of the most valuable moments of Ramadan can only be attained in i'tikāf. Regardless of how enthusiastic a person is, he gets tired after sometime and the consistency of 'ibādah stops. However, i'tikāf is such an 'ibādah that even if a person is not praying or engaged in any type of zhikr while in the masjid, he is still considered to be in 'ibādah. Therefore, not a single moment of his time is wasted and he gets the reward of good deeds while simply sitting in the masjid. Therefore, Abdullah bin Abbas narrates from the Messenger of Allah.

“The mu'takif (person performing i'tikāf) is safe from sins and he is indeed given the same reward as those who do righteous deeds (in spite of not having done these deeds) as a result of being secluded in the masjid”. (Ibn Maajah)

In another hadith the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Whoever observes i'tikāf for one day seeking Allah's pleasure, Allah creates between him and the fire of Hell, three trenches, the width of each greater than the distance between the heaven and the earth” (al-Mustadrak and at-Tabarani).

It is also proven that the Messenger of Allah did not miss i'tikāf his lifetime ever since the command for it was revealed. In another hadith, it is stated, “Whoever observes i'tikāf for ten days of Ramadan, gets a reward equivalent to two Umrahs” (al-Baihaqi).

There is a considerable spiritual refreshment and uplifting that comes due to spending a few days in this environment. The increased strength in iman is clearly felt. In reality, one is fortunate enough to perform ‘ibadah in Lailatul Qadr, or the Night of Power, due to his i’tikāf.

Unfortunately, even though it has so many virtues and benefits, the practice of i’tikāf is gradually diminishing from society. Although Muslims make special arrangements in the month of Ramadan for salah in congregation and the nightly Taraweeh prayer, the interest towards i’tikāf according to the Sunnah is much less. Seemingly, the reason is that there is much time spent in preparation for Eid so that no wishes remain unfulfilled. Many are so preoccupied with their businesses and worldly pursuits, they cannot spare even ten days for this significant ‘ibadah. This is indeed is a major loss.

The purpose is not to i’tikāf compulsory upon every Muslim, rather at least one person from every Muslim family should make an arrangement for it. Thus, the significance of this Ibadah will be revived among the Muslim communities and its positive effects will be felt by one and all, inshaa-Allah.

Youngsters should especially make an intention to perform i’tikāf because it will keep them away from many societal evils and will provide them an environment of a proper upbringing according to the Deen.

Therefore, before the start of the last last ten days of Ramadan, all masajid should make special arrangements for this vital ‘ibadah, so that the awareness develops among Muslim communities and all masajid are filled up with performers of i’tikāf.

May Allah guide us all and help us in such pursuits, āmīn!

Question and Answer about I'tikaf

Q: What is the masnoon (sunnat) i'tikaf?

A: The masnoon i'tikaf is to remain inside the masjid for the purpose of 'ibadah with the intention of masnoon i'tikaf for the last ten days and nights of Ramadan al-Mubarak.

Q: When does the masnoon i'tikaf start?

A: The mu'takif (one performing i'tikaf) must enter the masjid before maghrib of the 21st night of Ramadan. (Note: the night comes before the day, thus the 20th iftar will be in the masjid) The mu'takif may not leave the masjid area except for a valid reason.

Q: Where should men perform i'tikaf?

A: The following are the best places to perform i'tikaf, in order of virtue: (1) Masjidul Haraam (2) Masjid Nabawi (3) Masjid al-Aqsa (4) the Jaame' masjid (5) a masjid where the congregation is big (6) one's local masjid.

Q: What should I do and not do during i'tikaf?

A: There is no specific 'amal for i'tikaf. It is mustahab (preferable) to recite the Quran as much as possible, send extensive durud (salawat 'alan Nabi ﷺ), offer nafl salah in addition to fardh (like Tahajjud, Ishraq, Awwabeen, Salat ut Tasbeeh, etc.), make dua excessively, especially at iftar time, perform as much ibadaat as possible in search of Lailatul Qadr on the odd nights, and to read authentic books of the Deen. The mu'takif must refrain from backbiting, falsehood, lying, controversies, and verbal disputes.

Q: Can I change my clothes, wear perfume or apply oil during i'tikaf?

A: Yes, but caution should be taken not to dirty the masjid in any way.

Q: What if a mu'takif falls sick?

A: It is best to treat the sickness while staying inside the masjid. However, if the treatment is not sufficient, he may leave the masjid. In such a case, his i'tikaf will break, without any sin. He must however make up (qadha) the i'tikaf later on.

Q: What are the valid reasons to exit the masjid shar'i area during i'tikaf?

A: Valid reasons can be due to physical needs or a shar'i requirement. For example, the mu'takif is allowed to leave the masjid area to use the bathroom, perform necessary wudu, fardh ghusl or if Jum'ah is not held in his masjid of i'tikaf, he may go to the nearest Jum'ah salah. Any valid reason for which he steps out must be fulfilled as soon as possible and he must return without delay.

Q: What if I step outside of the masjid area without a valid reason?

A: The i'tikaf breaks in such a situation. Doing so intentionally during a masnoon i'tikaf is sinful.

Q: If I break my masnoon i'tikaf, do I have to make it up (qadha) after Ramadan?

A: You must make up one day of i'tikaf after Ramadan only for the day in which you broke the i'tikaf. You must also fast on the make-up day. It is better to make up the entire ten days of i'tikaf (with fasting) after Ramadan

Q: Is it okay for those performing i'tikaf to gather and converse with each other about worldly affairs?

A: A mu'takif should avoid all unnecessary conversations. It diminishes his reward. Those performing i'tikaf should not gather to converse, even if it is not sinful talk, except for a Deen related purpose. They should spend their time inside their own designated spaces remaining busy in tilawah, nafl salah, zikr, durood, studying the Deen, etc.

Q: Can I go outside the masjid to meet friends or relatives?

A: No, the i'tikaf will break.

Q: Can I go outside the masjid to get water?

A: If there is no one else to get the water and there is no water available inside the masjid, the mu'takif may go outside to get it but he must return immediately afterwards.

Q: The masjid I am performing i'tikaf in has three floors of prayer space. Can I do i'tikaf on any of the floors?

A: It is permissible to perform i'tikaf on any floor of the masjid.

Q: Can a woman perform masnoon i'tikaf?

A: I'tikaf is also sunnah for women, with prior permission from the husband.

Q: Where does the woman perform i'tikaf?

A: woman should perform masnoon i'tikaf in her regular place of salah in her home. If she has no regular place of salah inside the house, she may newly designate a regular place for salah in her home and perform i'tikaf there

Q: Can a woman perform i'tikaf in her home during her period?

A: No

AND ONLY ALLAH KNOWS BEST!