

THEREIN DESCEND ANGELS AND THE SPIRIT BY THE
COMMAND OF THEIR LORD — WITH EVERY MATTER
IT IS ALL PEACE TILL
THE RISING OF THE DAWN. (97:5-6)

ITIKAAF

FAQ'S

National Tarbiyyat Department USA

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Itikaaf FAQ's

Contents

1. What are the rewards of Itikaaf? (pg3)
2. What Does Itikaaf Mean? (pg3)
3. When Can I Sit For Itikaaf? (pg3)
4. When Does Itikaaf Begin? (pg4)
5. Where Should I Do Itikaaf? (pg4)
6. If Circumstances do not allow one to offer it at the mosque, can it be done elsewhere? (Pg4)
7. Can Women Offer Itikaaf? (pg4)
8. What Happens If A Woman's Menstrual Cycle Begins During Itikaaf? (pg5)
9. Intentions For Itikaaf? (pg5)
10. What if I cannot do Itikaaf for all 10 days? (pg6)
11. Can I come out of my room during Itikaaf? (pg6)
12. Can We Leave The Place Of Itikaaf? (pg6)
13. When Should I Search for Lailatul Qadr? (pg7)
14. What Should I pray at the time of Lailatul Qadr? (pg8)
15. Can you recommend some things that should be done during Itikaaf to reap maximum benefits? (pg8)

1. What are the rewards of Itikaaf?

The following Hadith shed light on the blessings of Itikaaf:

“Whoever stands in prayer during the nights of Ramadhan out of faith and seeking reward shall have their previous sins forgiven.” [Bukhari & Muslim]

“Whoever observes Itikaaf for even one day, seeking thereby Divine nearness, Allah will place between him and the Fire three ditches wider than the distance between the east and the west.”

“Whoso engages in Itikaaf is protected from every sin and also earns the rewards of righteous deeds which were being done prior to Itikaaf as if they are still being done.” [Ibn Majah]

“One who secludes himself for Itikaaf in true faith and hope (for the reward of Allah), shall have all of his previous sins forgiven.” [Kanzul Ummal]

2. What Does Itikaaf Mean?

The definition of the word, Itikaaf, is to isolate oneself or remain attached to something. According to Islamic terminology, Itikaaf means to seclude oneself in the mosque with the intention of observing Itikaaf while keeping a fast. Itikaaf, like the institution of fasting, is found in other religions. For instance, the Holy Quran states (2:126):

وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَا الْبَيْتَ مَثَابَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَمْنًا ۖ وَاتَّخِذُوا مِن مَّقَامِ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ مُصَلًّٰى ۖ وَعَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ أَن طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْعَاكِفِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ﴿١٢٦﴾

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And remember the time when We made the House a resort for mankind and a place of security; and take ye the station of Abraham as a place of Prayer. And We commanded Abraham and Ishmael, saying, 'Purify My House for those who perform the circuit and those who remain therein for devotion and those who bow down and fall prostrate in Prayer.'

3. When Can I Sit For Itikaaf?

A person may observe an Itikaaf whenever one desires, however, to sit Itikaaf during the last ten days of Ramadhan is the Sunnah (practice) of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

Hadhrat Aisha (ra) reports:

“The Messenger of Allah (saw) used to observe Itikaaf in the last ten days of Ramadhan till he died, then his wives used to observe Itikaaf after he passed away.” (Bukhari)

4. When Does Itikaaf Begin?

Itikaaf should be started on the morning of the 20th day of Ramadan after Fajr. It is well established that the Holy Prophet ﷺ would sit Itikaaf for 10 days. 10 days can only be completed if one starts on the morning of the 20th day.

“Whenever the Holy Prophet ﷺ made the intention to do Itikaaf, he would offer the Fajr prayer, and then enter his area set for Itikaaf.” (Muslim)

5. Where Should I Do Itikaaf?

The ideal and preferred place to observe Itikaaf is a Jami’ mosque, i.e., a central mosque in which Jum’ah Prayers are held so that one may offer the five daily prayers in congregation and may attend Jum’ah service without having to leave the mosque.

The Holy Quran enjoins to observe Itikaaf *“while you remain in the mosques”* (2:188) because mosques are places specially designated for the remembrance and worship of Allah, and the traditions also substantiate observing Itikaaf in the mosque.

6. If Circumstances do not allow one to offer it at the mosque, can it be done elsewhere?

Hazrat Musleh Maud (ra) states:

“Itikaaf can be offered outside the mosque, but it will not carry the same blessings as the one offered at the mosque.”

Allah knows and understands compelling conditions. He will reward us and judge us based on our intentions.

7. Can Women Offer Itikaaf?

Women may also observe Itikaaf in a mosque but it is better that they observe it at home in a place designated for prayers. The Hanafi book of Jurisprudence, ‘Al-Hidaya’, states: “A woman should do Itikaaf in the “prayer area” of her home.” Every home should have a ‘Masjid-ul-Bait’ (prayer area designated in the house) where during hardships one can go and pray. This brings many blessings and was the way of the Companions^{ra} of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Women should offer prayer there and men should offer their voluntary (Nawafil) and Sunnah prayers there. In exceptional circumstances when there is no other mosque nearby, a man may also observe Itikaaf in this place.

8. What Happens If A Woman's Menstrual Cycle Begins During Itikaaf?

If a woman's menstrual cycle starts during Itikaaf, she must discontinue the Itikaaf since it is improper to remain in the mosque in that state and she is not liable and able to fast.

9. Intentions For Itikaaf?

One should begin the Itikaaf with a pure intention, for:

"Actions are judged by the intentions they are done with". (Bukhari)

Here is how the Holy Prophet ﷺ would supplicate going to the Mosque:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِحَقِّ السَّائِلِينَ عَلَيْكَ وَبِحَقِّ مُمْشَايَ هَذَا. فَإِنِّي لَمْ
أَخْرُجْ أَشْرًا وَلَا بَطْرًا وَلَا رِيَاءً وَلَا سُمْعَةً خَرَجْتُ هَرْبًا وَفِرَارًا مِنْ
دُنُوبِي إِلَيْكَ خَرَجْتُ إِتِّقَاءً سُخْطِكَ وَابْتِغَاءً مَرْضَاتِكَ. فَاسْأَلْكَ
أَنْ تُعِينَنِي مِنَ النَّارِ وَأَنْ تَغْفِرَ لِي دُنُوبِي.⁵⁴

"O Allah! I ask You by the right of supplicants who pray to You and by my own right due to coming on foot for prayer. I did not leave my house owing to any kind of pride, or desire to boast or be seen, or gain a better reputation. Rather, I approach You fleeing from my sins and shortcomings, and fearing Your Wrath, and seeking Your Pleasure. So I beg You to protect me from the Fire and forgive my sins. Surely, there is none to forgive sins except You." (Ibn-e-Maja)

There are no prescribed words of Niyyat for starting the Itikaaf. A person who wishes to observe a 'Masnun Itikaaf' (Itikaaf done by Holy Prophet ﷺ) should have a firm intention to stay in the mosque for ten days, barring any unforeseen circumstances, and should submit his entire being at the threshold of Almighty Allah, saying:

"O Allah, I swear I will not go from here until you have mercy upon me."

10. What if I cannot do Itikaaf for all 10 days?

It will not be considered a 'Masnun Itikaaf'. However, The general principle of Islamic Jurisprudence ('fiqh') is that, *"even if something cannot be done completely, it should not be left entirely."* Therefore, if one cannot do everything according to the 'Masnun Itikaaf' then one can lessen some things. For instance, one can reduce the number of days if unable to observe it for ten days.

Regarding the fast of Ramadhan, which is obligatory, Allah grants many concessions to believers who are *"sick or on a journey"* and states that He desires *"to give you facility and ease...not hardship"* (2:186). So for Itikaaf, which is a voluntary act of worship, He surely would appreciate and reward someone for making an effort to undertake this seclusion, even if not to the full extent owing to extenuating circumstances.

Those individuals who cannot stay for even one entire day but strive to find as much opportunity as possible to remember Allah in the mosque will earn a reward. Therefore, if one cannot fast, but tries to spend time in the mosque and remember Allah, he can get the reward of Itikaaf. In the past, Imams of Jurisprudence have mentioned these situations and have preferred leniency in order to foster the zeal to observe Itikaaf. Hence, whoever cannot observe Itikaaf in the ideal manner can do so at a lower stage and strive to earn rewards for that level of worship.

11. Can I come out of my room during Itikaaf?

The Promised Messiah (as), addressing two companions who were doing Itikaaf, stated:

"It's not necessary that in Itikaaf you only stay inside. You can go on to the roof where due to the sunlight it's warmer. In the rooms down here it's cold. You can also speak about essential matters. One should be mindful of what's important. Every action of a believer (if done with the right intention and bearing the sanctity of Itikaaf in mind) is a form of worship." (Fiqhul Masih pg 220)

This is a very befitting guiding principle: some become too restrictive with themselves. However, others may take this and become too lenient. It's best to take the middle path and constantly assess ourselves.

"The Holy Prophet ﷺ used to exert himself in devotion during the last ten nights to a greater extent than at any other time." (Muslim)

12. Can We Leave The Place Of Itikaaf?

To observe Itikaaf at the highest level, one should not leave the Mosque for any reason other than to take care of pressing needs and demands.

In general, according to Hadhrat Aisha^{ra}, *"the Holy Prophet ﷺ never used to leave the mosque and enter his residence except to relieve himself."* Therefore, going out to use restroom facilities is a valid necessity. One may

also exit to attend the Jumua prayer service, if it isn't being held where one is staying. Likewise, if no proper arrangements are available, one may go home to shower or to the marketplace to eat. In circumstances such as these, one may go a far distance but should return immediately after fulfilling the need.

Authentic narrations show that one can leave the mosque for certain other reasons as well. For example, once Hadhrat Safiyya^{ra} went to the mosque to visit the Holy Prophet ﷺ while he was observing Itikaaf. When it was time for her to depart, the Holy Prophet ﷺ left the mosque and escorted her home. Normally, even in that situation while moving about in public, the Holy Prophet ﷺ limited his social interactions with people he met. Hadhrat Aisha^{ra} relates that the Holy Prophet ﷺ would enquire about the sick while walking along, instead of stopping, and he did not alter his course for that purpose. [Abu Dawud]

13. When Should I Search for Lailatul Qadr?

During the last ten days of Ramadan, there occurs a particular night among the odd nights of this period which is known as Lailatul Qadr in Islamic terms. It may fall on the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th of Ramadan.

Hadhrat Abu Saeed Khudri^{ra} was asked, *"Did you hear Allah's Messenger ﷺ talking about the Night of Destiny (Lailatul Qadr)?"* He replied:

"Once we were sitting Itikaaf with the Holy Prophet ﷺ in the middle ten days (of Ramadhan) and we ceased observing it on the morning of the twentieth. The Holy Prophet ﷺ came and delivered a sermon on that morning and said, 'I was informed (of the time) of Lailatul Qadr (in my dream) but I was caused to forget it; so search for it in the odd nights of the last ten nights of the month of Ramadhan. I saw myself prostrating in mud and water on that night (as a sign of Lailatul Qadr). So, whoever had been in Itikaaf with me (i.e., the Holy Prophet ﷺ) should resume it.' The people then returned to the mosque (for Itikaaf). There was no sign of clouds in the sky but all of a sudden a cloud came and it rained. Then Prayer was offered and the Holy Prophet ﷺ prostrated in mud and water and I saw the traces of mud on the forehead and nose of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. [Sahih Bukhari]

Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II^{ra} said:

"You begin Itikaaf in the mosque on the morning of the 20th day. Sometimes (the period of Itikaaf) lasts ten days and sometimes it's eleven days. On one occasion, the Holy Prophet ﷺ went outside to tell his Companions about the specific time for the acceptance of prayer when he saw two people quarrelling with one another. He said that it caused him to forget the time but said that it can be found in the last ten days of Ramadhan. Sufis have written that this time can come on days other than these as well, but generally during the last days of Ramadhan there is a special time for the acceptance of prayer. The Promised Messiah^{as} stated through his experience that this moment comes on the 27th night of Ramadhan."

14. What Should I pray at the time of Lailatul Qadr?

Hadhrat 'A'ishah^{ra} once asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ, "What should I supplicate, if I happen to know the night that is Lailatul Qadr?" The Holy Prophet ﷺ said, pray:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّكَ عَفُوٌّ تُحِبُّ الْعَفْوَ فَاعْفُ عَنِّي

Allahumma innaka 'afuwwun tu hibul 'afwa fa 'fu 'anni

O Allah! You are the Great Pardoner, You love to pardon. Hence I seek Your pardon (Ibn Maja)

15. Can you recommend some things that should be done during Itikaaf to reap maximum benefits?

"With the start of the last ten days of Ramadhan, the Holy Prophet ﷺ used to tighten his waist belt (i.e., mentally and spiritually prepare for a strenuous effort) and pray the entire night and keep his family awake for the prayers." [Bukhari]

We should follow this in spirit, but realize we are all at different levels, and we should approach Allah according to our abilities.

Do what you can:

"What are the most beloved deeds in the sight of Allah? The Holy Prophet ﷺ replied: "the ones that are done regularly, even though they may be few. He further adds: "Don't take upon yourselves anything except the deeds which are within your ability." [Bukhari]

- Read the Holy Quran in depth: with translation and select portions of commentary.
- Learn and study the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ
- Learn and study the life of the Promised Messiah (as)
- Read portions of Ahadith
- Learn the meaning and translation of Salat
- Reading Islamic and Jama'at books and literature, particularly the life of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the writings of the Promised Messiah^{as} and his Khulafaa.
- Offer Nawafil.
- Strive to remove bad habits: backbiting, gossip, laziness in praying on time, etc.
- Strive to add good habits: offering nawafil, more focus to the Holy Quran, patience, etc.