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Studies in Legal Hadith

By

Hiroyuki Yanagihashi

Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi Kütüphanesi	
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CHAPTER 3

Fasting While Traveling

1 Introduction

Fasting (*sawm*, *ṣiyām*) is defined as "abstaining from eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse." There are many kinds of fast; indeed, the Ḥanafī jurist 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Samarqandī enumerates 14 distinct types.¹ Among them, the fast during the month of Ramadan is incumbent in principle on every Muslim who is adult and sane, and it is considered the fourth pillar of Islam. Q. 2:185 reads:

The month of Ramadan, wherein the Koran was sent down to be a guidance to the people, and as clear signs of the Guidance and the Salvation. So let those of you, who are present at the month, fast it; and if any of you be sick, or if he be on a journey, then a number of other days; God desires ease for you, and desires not hardship for you; and that you fulfil the number, and magnify God that He has guided you, and haply you will be thankful.²

This verse indicates that fasting is not obligatory for a sick person or a person who is on a journey, because to do so would cause him hardship.³ In relation to this verse, exegetes and jurists refer to the legal nature of the fast or the breaking of fast while traveling in general. Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd writes that there are three opinions: (i) Mālik, Abū Ḥanīfa, and others are of the opinion that observing the fast while traveling has a greater merit; (ii) Ibn Ḥanbal and others hold that breaking the fast is better; (iii) yet others hold that one is free to choose whether to fast or not to fast, neither option being better than the other.⁴

1 Samarqandī, *Tuhfa*, 1:341–342.

2 Translated by Arberry.

3 The majority of Sunni jurists hold that "journey" (*safar*) in this context means only so long a journey that it is permitted (according to non-Ḥanafīs) or obligatory (according to Ḥanafīs) to reduce the prayers of *zuhr*, *ʿaṣr*, and *ishā'* to two *rak'as*. Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd, *Bidāya*, 1:196; Kāsānī, *Badā'ī*, 2:94; Māwardī, *Hāwī*, 3:445; Juwaynī, *Nihāya*, 4:50. This is to say, journey of more than 16 *farsakhs* or three days' distance, i.e., approximately 80 km. G. Monnot, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, s.v. "*Ṣalāt*"; Ibn Qudāma, *Mughnī*, 2:47–49, no. 1230.

4 Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd, *Bidāya*, 1:296; cf. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath*, 4:183; Shaybānī, *Hujja*, 1:378; Ibn Qudāma, *Mughnī*, 3:42–43, no. 2094.