CAN MENSTRUATING WOMEN FAST?

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The traditional position in the main is that women are expected not to fast whilst menstruating, but to make these fasts up at a later time. The Quranic position on this matter however, appears far more nuanced and there appears to be no explicit support for the traditional position as the article will briefly attempt to demonstrate.

The Quran's instruction on fasting is simple and provides two main situations in which the fasts can be deferred to a later date.

This is when a person is sick or on a journey.

002:185
"The month of Ramadan in which the Quran was revealed, as a guide to mankind, also clear proofs for guidance and judgment (Between right and wrong). So whoever witnesses this month amongst you, then he should fast in it and whoever is sick (marid) or on a journey then a prescribed number from other days. God desires ease for you, and He does not desire difficulty for you, and (He desires) that you should complete the number and that you should exalt the greatness of God for His having guided you and that you may give thanks"

The first point to note is that there is no explicit instruction in the above clear verse that instructs menstruating women not to fast or to defer their fast till a later date. The Arabic word for menstruation (Mahid) is known to the Quran and is used in two different verses (2:222, 65:4). However, there is no mention of this term in the above verse. The Arabic word for 'sickness' is 'marid' (plural: marda).
IS MAHID (MONTHLY COURSE) A SICKNESS?

In the clear absence of an explicit instruction, it is worth examining whether there is an *implicit instruction* which equates 'menstruation' with 'sickness' (*Arabic: marid; marda*)

In verse 2:222, the Quran describes 'menstruation' as an *'adha'*

**002:222 (Part)**

"And they ask you about menstruation (al-mahidi). Say "It is an *'adha',* so keep away from the women during their menstruation...""

*'Adha'* is a nuanced term and carries the meaning of an *annoyance, harm, hurt, suffering or something which is disagreeable or even filthy."

*Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon* [1]
However, more importantly, the Quran appears to separate illness (marid) from 'adha' in at least two verses:

002:196 (part)
"...Then whoever is sick/ill (maridan) among you or he has an ailment / condition (adha) of his head, then a ransom..."

004:102 (part)
"...But there is no blame upon you, if you are troubled (adha) by rain or are sick/ill (marda)..."

Therefore, 'adha' can be considered as a condition which can cause annoyance, trouble, is disagreeable or a hurt. However, on the strength of the above verses, it is not necessarily an illness, unless arguably, for some it becomes a source of hurt or harm. Hence, even the implicit deduction is not entirely convincing that equates menstruation (adha) with an illness (marda).
MENSTRUATION AS AN IMPURITY

Whether or not menstruation is an impurity is arguably irrelevant when it is considered in light of the requirement to fast. Fasting is not broken by defecation or urination (a natural occurrence as is menstruation) and thus it would be implicitly difficult to support an argument which prohibits women from fasting during menstruation, based on impurity alone.

In contrast, sexual intimacy does break the fast but such acts are based on clear volition and the Quran makes it explicitly clear that no intimacy should take place during the fast (2:187).

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Quran provides two main scenarios in which fasts can be deferred. These are in cases of illnesses or if one is on a journey / travel.

We noted from the above:

(1) There is no explicit instruction for women not to fast during menstruation.
(2) The implicit argument which equates menstruation as an illness is weak / inconclusive at best.
(3) The argument of impurity is equally weak.

It can therefore be argued that unless a woman becomes ill / feels pain or is generally unwell during her menstruation, that there is no clear instruction for women to abstain from fasting during their cycle. The Quran is largely silent on the matter and this silence provides a wide berth for individual judgment and assessment as to their condition and how it affects them.

REFERENCES

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

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