

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

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*.

ادى

1. اِدَى, aor. َ , inf. n. اِدَى, (T, M, Mṣb, K,) in [some of] the copies of the K written اِدَا, and so by IB, (TA,) and اِدَا, (CK, [but not found by me in any MS. copy of the K nor in any other lexicon,]) and, accord. to IB, اِدَا and اِدَى, (TA,) or these two are simple subst.; (M, K;) and تَادَى; (T, S, M, Mṣb, K;) [He was, or became, annoyed, molested, harmed, or hurt:] he experienced, or suffered, slight evil, [i. e., annoyance, molestation, harm, or hurt,] less than what is termed ضرر; (El-Khattābee;) or he experienced, or suffered, what was disagreeable, or hateful, or evil, (Mṣb, K,) in a small degree; (K;) بِهِ [by him, or it]; (T, S, M, K;) [and مِنْهُ from him, or it:] تَادَى signifies the being affected by what is termed اِدَى [i. e. what annoys, molests, harms, or hurts, one]: and also the showing the effect thereof; which is forbidden by the saying of 'Omar, اِدَى بِالنَّاسِ [Avoid thou, or beware thou of, showing the being annoyed, molested, harmed, or hurt, by men]; for this is what is within one's power. (Mgh.) — Also, aor. and inf. n. as above, It (a thing) was unclean, dirty, or filthy. (Mṣb.)

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..."



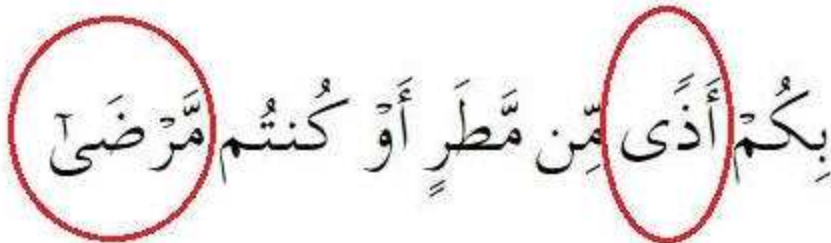
Adha

Maridan

Illustration - Joseph Islam

004:102 (part)

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



Marda

Adhan

Illustration - Joseph Islam

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

[1] LANE. E.W, *Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 1, Page 44*

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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