



Ramadan

*Itikaf*

*by Life With Deen*





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Before receiving Prophethood, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would go away from the hustle and bustle of Makkah and isolate himself in the Cave of Hira'. 'A'ishah i says, "Seclusion was made beloved to him, and there was nothing more beloved to him than being alone" (Tirmidhi). Freeing himself from the mundane day to day interaction with his people, he would go up to the mountains, and spend many days there worshipping Allah, in deep reflection. Alone and stationed high up on the mountain, he was able to have a clear perspective on his surroundings; the beautiful sky, the towering mountains, the vastness of Allah's creation — all attesting to the greatness of the One.

The long hours of solitude were essential in preparing the Prophet ﷺ for his great mission. Purifying his heart from attachment to the world, and instead attaching it to the Lord of the world, prepared him for the momentous responsibility of Prophethood.

This gift of solitude with our Creator has been bequeathed to the whole Ummah. Alhamdulillah. It is called 'itikāf' and refers to the practice of secluding and confining oneself to the masjid for the worship of Allah. Itikāf has been mentioned in the Qur'ān and is a great sunnah of our beloved Prophet ﷺ. 'A'ishah i narrated that the Prophet ﷺ used to observe itikāf during the last ten days of Ramaḍān, until his demise. Then, his wives used to observe itikāf after him (Bukhārī).



In the year in which he ﷺ passed away, he performed *itikāf* for twenty days. Ibn Hajar r mentions that this may be because he ﷺ knew that his life was coming to an end, and he wanted to teach his Ummah to try their utmost best when they reach the finishing line, in order to meet Allah in the best state. Another reason is that he ﷺ was travelling the year before, so he made up for the missed days. The above indicates the great importance the Prophet ﷺ placed on *itikāf*. *Itikāf* is a great sunnah which we should try to revive in this blessed month. The Prophet ﷺ performed *itikāf* in search for *Laylat al-Qadr*. Al-Zuhri r said, "I am astonished that the people have abandoned *itikāf*. The Prophet ﷺ would sometimes do certain things, and would sometimes omit them. But he did not omit *itikāf* until he ﷺ passed away."

### The Essence of I'tikāf

I'tikāf is one of the most noble acts when performed with sincerity (ikhlās). During i'tikāf, one distances his heart from worldly matters and hands himself over to his Lord. He is in constant service to Him and takes shelter in His fortified House.

The example of a person doing i'tikāf is like a man who stops at the door of a great person and says, 'I will not move until you fulfil my need.' The person doing i'tikāf sits in the house of Allah and says, 'I will not move until He forgives me.' - 'Atā' r

Ibn al-Qayyim r writes, 'The soundness of the heart and its ability to stay firm in its journey to Allah - is dependent on its ability to fully focus on Allah. The heart has a restlessness, which can only be removed by devoting oneself to Allah. Excessive food, drink, socialising, sleep and talking increase the restlessness of the heart. They hinder the seeker from the path in his journey to Allah, and weaken him. Through His mercy, Allah legislated fasting for His servants to purge their desire for excessive eating and drinking, and thereby their impulse for sinning; which is the greatest impediment in their journey to Allah.

And He r legislated i'tikāf for them. The purpose and spirit of i'tikāf is for the heart to become attached to Allah, to fully focus on Him, and to spend time in solitude with Him. It is to cut off from the creation and occupy oneself with

Him so much that His remembrance and love overtake the worries and thoughts of the heart. His sole concern becomes Allah. All his thoughts revolve around how he can please Allah and draw closer to Him. He begins to find comfort in the company of Allah, instead of finding comfort in the company of His creation.


Through this, he prepares himself to find comfort with Allah in the loneliness of the grave — in which nobody will have a companion or source of solace except Him. This is the greater purpose of *itikāf*. And since this purpose can only be attained in conjunction with fasting, *itikāf* was legislated in the best season of fasting i.e. the last ten days of *Ramaḍān*.

Ibn Rajab r writes, "The Prophet ﷺ would reserve a mat upon which he would seclude himself from people, not mixing with or paying attention to them. This is why Imām Ahmad r did not recommend for the person doing *itikāf* to mix with anyone; not even to teach them knowledge or make them recite the *Qur'ān*. Rather, the best thing to do is to be alone and free oneself to converse privately with one's Lord, remember Him, and ask Him.

The person doing *itikāf* restricts himself to the obedience and remembrance of Allah. He cuts himself off from every distraction and devotes himself physically and spiritually to his Lord and what will bring him close to Him. He has no concern except Allah, and what will please Allah. Thus, the meaning and reality of *itikāf* is to cut off ties from the creation in order to connect to the Creator. The

stronger one's knowledge and love for Allah, the more the individual will be able to cut himself off and focus fully on Allah. One of the righteous used to always be alone in his home, remembering his Lord. It was said to him: "Do you not feel lonely?" He replied: How can I feel lonely when He says, 'I am the Companion of the one who remembers Me?'" During *itikāf*, one is a guest of Allah in His house. If noble people are always generous to their guests and honour them in the best way, then how will the generosity of The Most Generous be with those who humbly perform *itikāf* in His house?

We are bombarded today with diversions and distractions. *Itikāf* offers us a way out, providing the perfect retreat in which to refocus on the purpose of life. *Itikāf* may seem like a short period, but if performed properly, it is an intense *ibādah bootcamp* wherein one learns to control and discipline the *nafs*. Done properly, *itikāf* is life-transforming.



Truly in the heart there is a certain loneliness  
that cannot be removed except by spending  
time with Allah in solitude. In the heart there is a  
sadness that cannot be removed except through  
the happiness of knowing Allah and being true  
to Him... In the heart there is a void that cannot  
be filled except through loving Allah, turning to  
Him constantly, always remembering Him, and  
being sincere to Him. Were a person to be given  
the entire world and everything in it,  
it would never fill this void."  
(Ibn al-Qayyim r)

*The Goals of I'tikāf*  
 To 'live' and 'breathe' 'ibādah. I'tikāf teaches us the essence of worshipping Allah: to attach our hearts completely to Allah, with utmost humility and servitude. The goal is to attain ihsān, which is, "That you worship Allah as though you are seeing Him; for if you cannot see Him, He truly sees you" (Muslim).

1 Tasting the sweetness of conversing intimately with Allah. I'tikāf is the perfect time to converse intimately with Allah, to talk to Him directly, to cry to Him, and to plead with Him. Muslim b. Yasār r said, "Seekers of pleasure find no pleasure like seclusion and intimate conversation with Allah b." Muḥammad b. Yusuf r said, "Whoever wants his blessings to be hastened for him, he should increase in intimate conversation with Allah in seclusion."

2 Deep thinking (tafakkur) and self-reflection (muḥāsabah). I'tikāf is the perfect time for deep reflection: reflecting on the Qur'ān, on Allah's creation, and on the purpose of life. It is a time to reflect on one's personal and spiritual state, and to take oneself to account. Ibn al-Jawzī r writes, "How wonderful is seclusion! If the only thing to be obtained from seclusion was reflection on the provisions for the eternal journey, and safety from the evils of socialising, it would be sufficient!"

3 Detox from the world. Our attachment to the world, and our obsession with acquiring expensive clothing, cars, gadgets and fine dining has made us heedless of Allah and of our final abode. I'tikāf is to take time out from all of

this and turn back to Him, Alone. Itikāf is the perfect time to detox from social media and our mobile phones, which has left us unable to focus on our purpose of life.

4 Purifying the soul. Itikāf is the time to nurture a pure heart; to purify it from spiritual diseases and adorn it with actions. It is the perfect time to purify oneself from the five poisons of the heart: excessive eating, excessive sleeping, excessive socialising, excessive talking and gazing at the unlawful. Ibn al-Qayyim r said, "Find your heart in three occasions: whilst listening to the Qur'ān, in gatherings of dhikr, and in moments of solitude. If you do not find it in these three occasions, then ask Allah to bless you with a heart, for you have no heart."

5 Attachment to the masjid. Acquiring the 'sweetness' of worshipping Allah in the masjid during Ramaḍān will make us more attached to the masjid during the rest of the year. By Allah's permission, we will begin to come before the adhān and spend time in it after ṣalāh. The Messenger of Allah ḡ said, "A Muslim is not regular in attending the masājid for ṣalāh and dhikr, except that Allah welcomes him happily just as people welcome their loved ones happily upon their return from a journey." (Ibn Mājah).

6 Ṣabr and maximising the best use of time. Itikāf cultivates Ṣabr (perseverance) in carrying out good deeds, as it is not easy on the nafs to continuously engage in worship. Ibn al-Jawzī r writes, "That I benefit myself by being alone is better than me benefitting others and harming myself. Persevere and remain patient with what solitude entails, for if you were to remain in solitude with your Lord, He will open

for you the door of His ma'rifah (deep awareness).<sup>7</sup> Itikāf also cultivates the second type of Ṣabr: Ṣabr on staying away from sins. Similarly, one learns to be patient and practice self-control, as one will not sleep on a bed or enjoy the usual creature comforts.

7 Sincerity. Itikāf should lead to an increase in sincerity.

Ḍhū al-Mūn r said, "I have not seen anything more conducive to attaining sincerity than solitude, because when one is alone, he only sees Allah. When he only sees Allah, he will only be spurred on by the awe of Allah. And whoever loves seclusion, he has certainly attached himself to the pillar of sincerity, and held on tight to a great pillar of honesty." Yahyā b. Mi'adh r said, "Enduring isolation is a sign of sincerity."

8 Sincere repentance. Sincere repentance should be a key goal and component of itikāf. Masrūq r said, "A man should certainly have moments in which he is alone, remembering his sins and then seeking forgiveness for them." Amongst the seven categories of people who will be granted shade on the Day of Judgement, one will be "a man who remembered Allah whilst he was alone and he cried" (Bukhārī). Al-Ḥaṣan al-Baṣrī r said, "Cry in moments of solitude — perhaps your Lord will look at you and have mercy on your tears, and you will become of the successful."

9 Finding Laylat al-Qadr. One of the aims of itikāf is to find Laylat al-Qadr and derive the most benefit from it by being in a heightened spiritual state of itikāf.

Private worship is the cornerstone of steadfastness."

- Ibn al-Qayyim r

### How to Optimise Your Itikāf

Maximise your itikāf by constantly renewing your intention for itikāf. These can include: seeking the pleasure of Allah, following the sunnah of our beloved Messenger  $\text{ﷺ}$ , increasing our love for Allah and His Messenger  $\text{ﷺ}$ , seeking Laylat al-Qadr, staying in the company of the righteous and in the house of Allah, ridding our addiction to worldly pleasures, and, ultimately, fulfilling the purpose of our existence: 'ibādah (servitude). Use itikāf as an opportunity to train yourself in maximising your niyyah (intention). Be conscious and mindful of every act that you do and have a clear intention of why you are doing that particular act, even when eating and sleeping (e.g. to gain energy for worship). Mi'āth b. Jabal  $\text{r}$  said, "Indeed I hope for reward for my sleep just as I hope for reward for standing in prayer."

Utilise itikāf to learn how to manage your time. Be strict with yourself. It is useful to make a plan beforehand. Structure your day and night with varied acts of worship, so you don't get bored or lose focus. If possible, leave your smartphone at home, and if required to do so, take a brick phone.

Think of itikāf as freedom from the fetters of this world. Value it as the ultimate spiritual retreat: a time to immerse yourself in ṣalāh, Qur'ān, dhikr, du'ā' and other acts of worship. Strive to implement every sunnah. Perform the night prayer and ṣalāh al-duḥā. Perform taḥiyyat al-wudū

and taḥiyyat al-masjid. Respond to the words of the adhān and make di'ā' in between the adhān and iqāmah. Sit in the first row behind the imām and wait for ṣalāh. Lengthen your ṣalāh and let it be different: no smartphones, no work, no worldly distractions. Focus your heart on Allah. Savour the sweetness of conversing with Him.

Fill your day with the remembrance of Allah. Follow the sunnah of our beloved Prophet ﷺ and recite the adhkar of morning and evening, before sleeping, after ṣalāh, and the adhkar of other daily actions such as the adhkar of the bathroom, dressing, when waking up etc. Perform dhikr with reflection. Open your heart and think deeply about Allah. Remember to not ruin your worship by hurting your fellow believers. In itikāf, you will be sharing space with others. All of you will have different personalities, backgrounds and preferred lifestyles, and this could sometimes lead to conflict.

Stay humble, and focus on why you are there.

If you are unable to perform itikāf for the full ten days, then try to do two days over the weekend, or even one day. Even if you can't stay for the whole day, spend as much time as possible in the masjid focusing on worshipping Allah, and striving to attain the greater goals of itikāf. For those who are unable to attend the masjid, they should do the same at home.

May Allah al-Wāḥid (The One) give us the taufiq to perform itikāf just as His beloved Prophet ﷺ did, and may we always find comfort in His company: in this temporary abode, in the grave, and ultimately in the Abode of Peace.

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Know that time is too valuable to waste even a moment of. How many hours does the human waste, missing out on so much reward? Days are like fertile soil, and it's as if the human is being told: plant one seed, and we will sprout from it a thousand plants. Would a smart person ever stop planting, or even take his time in doing so?

What helps you take advantage of your time is:

- (1) Solitude and seclusion whenever possible;
- (2) Limiting yourself to salām or important matters when you meet others;
- (3) Eating less, as excessive eating causes excessive sleep, resulting in the night being wasted.\*

(Ibn al-Jawzī r)

# Concluding Du'a and Reflections

May Your Journey Be Accepted

We pray that this guide has served as a companion on your spiritual retreat.

May Allah accept your devotion, elevate your connection, and grant you peace.  
l'tikaq Mubarak.

**Concluding Du'a for Acceptance:**  
Allahumma 'Afni Min Sharri Ma Khalaqt...  
(O Allah, grant me protection from the evil You created...).

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