14046 - When Does I`tikaf Start and End?

the question

I want to observe I`tikaf during the last ten days of Ramadan. I would like to know when I should enter the mosque and when I should exit therefrom.

Summary of answer

The majority of scholars agree that one should enter his place of I`tikaf before the sun sets on the night of the twenty-first and come out when the sun sets on the last day of Ramadan.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

When Does Itikaf Begin?

With regard to entering the place of I`tikaf , the majority of scholars (including the four imams Abu Hanifah, Malik, Ash-Shafi`i and Ahmad, may Allah have mercy on them) are of the view that the one who wants to observe I`tikaf during the last ten days of Ramadan should enter his place of I`tikaf before the sun sets on the night of the twenty-first.

They quoted several texts as evidence, including the following:

- It was proven that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to observe I`tikaf during the last ten nights of Ramadan , Agreed upon. This indicates that the period of I`tikaf is counted by the nights, not the days. And Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And by the ten nights.} [Al-Fajr 89:2]

The last ten nights start with the twenty-first .

Based on this, he should enter the mosque before the sun sets on the night of the twenty-first.

- They (the scholars) said that one of the greatest aims of I`tikaf is to seek Laylat Al-Qadr, and the night of the twenty-first is one of the odd-numbered nights in the last ten nights of Ramadan, so it may possibly be Laylat Al-Qadr , so he should be observing I`tikaf on that night. This was stated by As-Sindi in Hashiyat An-Nasa'i. (Also see: Al-Mughni, 4/489)

But Al-Bukhari (2041) and Muslim (1173) narrated that `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: When the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) wanted to observe I`tikaf, he would pray Fajr then enter his place of I`tikaf .

Because of the apparent meaning of this Hadith, some of the Salaf were of the view that he would enter his place of I`tikaf after Fajr prayer. This view was followed by the scholars of the Standing Committee (10/114) and Shaykh Ibn Baz (15/442).

But the majority of scholars responded to this Hadith in one of two ways:

1. That the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had started I`tikaf before the sun set, but he did not enter the place for I`tikaf until after Fajr prayer

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: " When he wanted to observe I`tikaf, he would pray Fajr then enter his place of I`tikaf" - this was quoted as evidence by those who say that I`tikaf should be started at the beginning of the day. This is the view of Al-Awza'i and Ath-Thawri, and of Al-Layth in one of his two opinions. Malik, Abu Hanifah, Ash-Shafi`i and Ahmad said: he should enter (I`tikaf) before the sun sets if he wants to observe I`tikaf for a month or for ten days. They interpreted the Hadith as meaning that he entered the place of I`tikaf in order to be alone there after he prayed Fajr, not that this is the time when he began I`tikaf; rather he was in I`tikaf from before Maghrib and stayed in the mosque, and when he had prayed Fajr he withdrew to be by himself." (End quote)

1. Al-Qadi Abu Ya`la, one of the Hanbalis, responded by interpreting the Hadith as meaning that he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to do that on the twentieth.

As-Sindi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “This response is more likely to be correct.” (End quote)

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked in Fatawa As-Siyam (p. 501): When does I`tikaf begin?

He replied:

“The majority of scholars are of the view that I`tikaf should begin on the night of the twenty first, not from Fajr of the twenty-first, although some of the scholars are of the view that I`tikaf should begin from Fajr of the twenty-first, based on the Hadith of `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that was narrated by Al-Bukhari: “When he had prayed Fajr he entered his place of I`tikaf”.

But the majority of scholars responded by stating that the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) withdrew from people in the morning, but the intention to observe I`tikaf was formed at the beginning of the night, because the last ten nights start when the sun sets on the twentieth.”

He also said (p. 503):

“Entering the place of I`tikaf for the last ten nights of Ramadan may be done when the sun sets on the night of the twenty-first, because that is the time when the last ten nights begin. This is not contradicted by the Hadith of `Aishah because the wording is different, so it should be understood according to what the language indicates. This is what was narrated by Al-Bukhari (2041) from `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) observed I`tikaf every Ramadan and when he had prayed Fajr he would enter the place where he observed I`tikaf.

Her words “and when he had prayed Fajr he would enter the place where he observed I`tikaf” indicate that he was already staying in the mosque, meaning that he was in the mosque before he entered he place of I`tikaf.” (End quote)

When Does Itikaf End?

With regard to coming out of I`tikaf, he should come out when the sun sets on the last day of Ramadan.

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked: When should a person come out of I`tikaf? Is it after the sun sets on the night of Eid or after Fajr on the day of Eid?

He replied:

“He should come out of I`tikaf when Ramadan ends. Ramadan ends when the sun sets on the night of Eid.” (End quote from Fatawa As-Siyam, p. 502)

It says in Fatawa Al-Lajnah Al-Da’imah, (10/441):

“The period of I`tikaf during the (last) ten nights of Ramadan ends when the sun sets on the last day of the month.” (End quote)

If he chooses to stay until he has prayed Fajr and then depart from his place of I`tikaf to the Eid prayer, there is nothing wrong with that. Some of the scholars regarded that as recommended.

Imam Malik (may Allah have mercy on him) said that he saw that some of the scholars who had observed I`tikaf during the last ten nights of Ramadan did not go back to their families until they had attended the (prayer of Eid) Al-Fitr with the people. Malik said: I heard that from the righteous people who have passed on, and this is the dearest to me of what I have heard about that.

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Al-Majmu` (6/323):

“Ash-Shafi`i and his companions said: Whoever would like to follow the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in observing I`tikaf during the last ten nights of Ramadan should enter the mosque before the sun sets on the night of the twenty-first, so that he will not miss any of it, and he should come out after the sun sets on the night of `Eid, whether the month is twenty-nine days or thirty. It is better for him to stay in the mosque on the night of `Eid

so that he can offer the Eid prayer there, or go out to the Eid prayer-place if they pray `Eid there.

If he goes directly from I`tikaf to the `Eid prayer, it is recommended for him to do Ghusl and make himself look good before going out, because this is one of the Sunnahs of `Eid .” (End quote)

And Allah knows best.