

In the name of God,
the Compassionate, the Merciful

WHAT IS RAMADAN?

Ramadan is the name of the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar. It is an important month in the Islamic calendar and culture. Each day during the month of Ramadan, Muslims around the world observe the sacred month by fasting during daylight hours (from dawn to sunset), performing nightly prayers in addition to the daily obligatory prayers, and concluding each day's fast over food with family and friends. At the end of the month is a three-day holiday that celebrates the conclusion of the month with *Eid al-Fitr* and prepares individuals to return to their regular daily routine.

WHEN DOES RAMADAN OCCUR?

Most Muslim countries today use the solar or common calendar for government and business purposes. However, the traditional Muslim calendar (called the *Hijri* calendar) and the dates of holidays follow the lunar cycle. The lunar calendar is based on the moon's orbit of the earth of 29 days. Twelve lunar months make a lunar year, which is 354 days long. Because the lunar year is approximately 11 days shorter than the solar year, Ramadan and other Islamic holidays take place at different times during the solar calendar year. This means that the month of Ramadan may occur in the winter during some years, while in the summer during others. The start of the month of Ramadan traditionally occurs when the thinnest crescent moon is visible. The new crescent, which looks like a backward "c," indicates the beginning of a new month. The middle of the month is marked by a full moon.



RAMADAN

The Month of Fasting

OBJECTIVE OF FASTING

The main objective of fasting is to achieve piety and righteousness. This implies becoming conscious of our Creator, increasing our awareness of His Majesty, exalting and glorifying His names and attributes, appreciating His greatness, recalling His blessings upon us, and being grateful and thankful for His guidance. “*O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, so you may remain conscious of God.*” [Qur’an, 2:183]

WHAT DOES FASTING IMPLY?

The term in Arabic for fasting is called *sawm*, which literally means “to abstain from something.” Mary, Jesus’ mother, upon returning back to the town with her infant child Jesus replied to her clan, “*I have vowed to the Merciful to fast (abstain, i.e. from speaking).*” [Qur’an, 19:26] Fasting in Ramadan requires one to abstain from food,



drink, and marital relations from dawn to dusk, with the explicit intention of doing so for the sake of God, i.e., to seek His pleasure.

THE WISDOM OF FASTING

Abstaining from food has great ramifications on the person observing the fast, physical as well as spiritual. It is an exercise to discipline and control the baser self. One learns how to restrain one’s urges and desires. Fasting frees the person from the bondage of lusts and desires. Abstaining from intakes also reminds us of the less fortunate ones, the poor and the destitute. Fasting gives us a general sense of how they feel.

It boosts the morale of the poor by knowing that even kings have to go hungry for a while. Fasting makes the rich realize and understand what the poor go through day after day. Fasting also purifies one’s heart and tongue.

One is urged to control oneself and learn how to abstain from vain talk, lying, and cheating. Although fasting is beneficial to health, it is mainly a method of self-purification and self-restraint. By cutting oneself from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person focuses on his or her purpose in life by constantly being aware of the presence of God.

FASTING IS ONE OF THE PILLARS OF ISLAM

“*Ramadan is the month in which the Qur’an was sent down...Whoever of you witnesses that month should fast.*” [Qur’an, 2:185]

Fasting is compulsory upon every sane, healthy, adult Muslim male who is not traveling at that time. As for a Muslim female, she must not be menstruating or having post-childbirth bleeding. People who are insane, minors, traveling, menstruating, going through post-childbirth bleeding, elderly, breast-feeding, or pregnant do not need to observe the fast.

IFTAR (MEAL AFTER SUNSET)

During Ramadan, when individuals abstain from food and drink during daylight hours, they get together over food with families and friends in the evenings. The meal with which the fast is broken is called *iftar*, which usually consists of dates and water followed by a simple nourishing meal.



SUHR (MEAL BEFORE DAWN)

It is preferred and highly encouraged to eat a pre-dawn meal (*suhur*), but there is no sin upon one who does not do so. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “Eat a pre-dawn meal, for there are blessings in it.” He also said, “You should eat this pre-dawn meal for it is blessed nourishment.” It is a blessing because it strengthens the fasting person, makes one more energetic, and makes the fast easier on him or her. Generally, Muslims emulate this prophetic practice.



EXEMPTIONS FROM FASTING

There are those who may not fast but have to make up the missed days of fasting at a later date. These include those who are ill (not chronically) and travelers. *“And (for) him who is sick among you or on a journey, (the same) number of other days.”* [Qur’an, 2:184] Elderly men and women are exempted from fasting, so are the chronically ill and those who have to perform difficult jobs under harsh circumstances with no other means to support themselves. They are not obliged to make up the days they missed, but in turn are obliged to feed one poor person a day (for every day of fasting that they do not perform). Pregnant and breast-feeding women who fear for themselves or for their babies may not fast. They, however, have to feed one poor person for every day they miss and make up the missed days at a later time. Women who are constantly pregnant or breast-feeding are not obliged to make up the days. Though the young are not required to fast, it is proper for their parents or guardians to encourage them to fast so they will become accustomed to it at an early age. They may fast as long as they are able to.

EID AL-FITR

As the end of Ramadan approaches, Muslims prepare for *Eid al-Fitr* (end of fasting celebration), which draws Ramadan to a close. In countries where there are significant Muslim communities, commercial and government activities may come to a halt. Schools and businesses often close for three days. *Eid* is a time of exchanging gifts, sharing food, socializing, and taking a holiday.



RAMADAN, THE MONTH OF THE HOLY QUR’AN

The month of Ramadan is not only the month of fasting. It is also the month of the Qur’an. The Qur’an is the Muslim Scripture.

“Ramadan is the month in which the Qur’an was sent down, as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and the differentiation (between right and wrong).”
[Qur’an, 2 :185]

According to a prophetic tradition, it is believed that all Abrahamic Scriptures, including the Scrolls of Abraham, the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms of David, and the Qur’an, were revealed in the month of Ramadan.

“RAMADAN MUBARAK”



TARAWIH - NIGHTLY PRAYERS IN RAMADAN

Muslims congregate at mosques observing the nightly prayers (*tarawih*) that start after the last prayer of the day, about an hour and a half after sunset. The nightly prayers usually last for nearly an hour. Every night, the Imam (leader in prayer) recites an equal portion of the Qur'an so that by the 27th or the 29th night of Ramadan the entire Qur'an has been recited by the Imam from his memory. Reciting the Qur'an not only brings one nearer to God, but also rejuvenates one's spirit and soul. Reciting the Qur'an, reflecting upon the divine words, and acting upon the divine teachings are central to Ramadan.



“BLESSED RAMADAN”



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