

Ramadan Information Sheet

Introduction

The month of Ramadan is the holiest time of the year for Muslims since the Holy Quran was revealed in this month. Celebrating the revelation of the Qur'an, Muslims fast from food, drink, and sexual intimacy during the sunlit hours as a means of learning self-control, gratitude, and compassion for those less fortunate. Ramadan is a month of intense spiritual transformation with an increased focus on devotion during which Muslims spend extra time on reading the Qur'an and performing special prayers. Those unable to fast because of pregnancy, nursery, sickness, and travel along with elders and children are exempt from fasting.

When does Ramadan take place?

Ramadan is the 9th month of lunar calendar. Because it is 11 days shorter than the solar year, each lunar month moves 11 days earlier each year. It takes 33 solar years for the lunar months to complete a full cycle and return to the same season. In 2020, the month long fast of Ramadan begins on April 24th. The month begins and ends based on the sighting of the first crescent of the new moon. Starting on April 22nd, Muslims in the World will begin to search the sky for the new crescent, and in most cases, they will follow astronomical calculation to start fasting.

The Length and Purpose of Fasting

Muslims start fasting at pre-dawn and break their fasts on sunset everyday throughout the month of Ramadan. It is an opportunity for Muslims to have physical and spiritual training by means of fasting from food and drink, and avoiding sinful acts such as gossiping, backbiting, lying, arguing and all other actions may harm humans and all creations: Neglecting this essential part of Ramadan, as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) warned believers, fasting is nothing more than keeping your stomach hungry whole day; therefore, all those elements are inseparable from fasting.

Who Fasts

All Muslims who have reached puberty are obliged to fast. However, for people in situations where fasting would be a hardship, they are exempted from fasting. This includes anyone who is sick or traveling; women who are pregnant, nursing, or on their menses; or older people who are too weak or ill to fast. Anyone who is exempted must make up the fast later, except for those who cannot fast due to age or chronic illness. Instead, they can feed a poor person for every day of fasting they miss.

Children

While children are not required to fast until they reach puberty, it is customary for children beginning around seven years of age to perform limited or symbolic fasting such as fasting half days or on weekends. This trains them gradually and helps to engender a sense of inclusion during the month-long observance. Muslim families often give special recognition to children who are fasting their first full day of Ramadan.

Family Routines

A Muslim family usually wakes up about one hour before the first of dawn and eats a modest, breakfast-like meal called *suhur* which is not required but a tradition. After the meal, the family

performs the morning prayer, and depending on the circumstances, the family goes back to bed or begins the day. Particularly during the long summer months, people often take a nap in the late afternoon after work or school. At sunset, family members break the fast with a few dates and water, and depending on the culture, other light foods such as soup, appetizers or fruit. This is referred to as **iftar** which means “breaking the fast.” After performing the sunset prayers, the family eats dinner. Inviting guests to break the fast or going to someone else’s house for fast-breaking, **iftar**, dinners is very common in Ramadan. Many families then go to the mosque for the night prayer and a special Ramadan prayer called **taraweeh**. After completing their prayers, the families return home around 11:45 p.m. All of these times vary depending on the time of year and geographical location of places, with shorter days in the winter and longer days in the summer.

Special Activities

Many mosques host daily community dinners where Muslims can break their fast together. This is a great service for students, the poor and anyone who desires a break from cooking. Almost all mosques also host a community dinner on the weekends.

Special Ramadan prayers called **taraweeh** are held in most mosques after the night prayer. During **taraweeh**, the prayer leader recites at least one thirtieth of the Qur’an so that by the end of the month the entire Qur’an will have been recited.

Since Ramadan is a time for Muslims to be especially charitable and fasting helps Muslims feel compassion for the hungry and less fortunate, many mosques hold food drives or fundraisers for charity during Ramadan. Many mosques also host open houses for their friends and neighbors of other faiths to join them for their fast-breaking dinner or iftar at the end of the fasting day.

The Night of Power known as Lailat al-Qadr, is believed to fall on one of the odd nights during the last ten days of Ramadan, but is most widely observed on the 27th night of Ramadan. It is considered the most blessed night in Ramadan because it is believed to be the night in which the Qur’an was first revealed. Mosques are open all night as Muslims hold vigils in prayer, Qur’anic recitation, and contemplation.

Special Foods

Breaking the fast with dates is the only strictly traditional culinary custom associated with Ramadan. It is interesting to note the suitability of dates for this purpose as they are a concentrated source of energy and easily digestible. Different Muslim-populated countries have a variety of special dishes and desserts for Ramadan.

Benefits of Fasting

Doctors agree that fasting is extremely beneficial for lowering cholesterol levels and for other health benefits. Fasting is a means of purifying the body as well as the spirit, as it gives the body a rest from the continuous task of digesting food.

Eid al-Fitr

At the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate one of their major holidays called Eid al-Fitr or the “Festival of Fast-Breaking”. Children traditionally get new clothes, money or gifts from parents, relatives and friends. A special prayer and sermon are held the morning of Eid day, followed by a

community celebration. Food, games and presents for children are important parts of the festivities, as friends and family spend the day eating, socializing and reunion.