

Ramadan Information Sheet

Introduction

Ramadan is considered one of the holiest months of the year for Muslims. In Ramadan, Muslims commemorate the revelation of the Qur'an, and fast from food and drink during the sunlit hours as a means of learning self-control, gratitude, and compassion for those less fortunate.

When does Ramadan take place?

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar, which is based on a 12 month lunar year of approximately 354 days. Because the lunar year 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.

The Length and Purpose of Fasting

Muslims fast from pre-dawn to sunset, a fast of between 11-16 hours depending on the time of year for a period of 29-30 days. The fast of Ramadan entails forgoing food and drink, and intercourse during the fasting hours. For Muslims, Ramadan is a time to train themselves both physically and spiritually by avoiding any negative acts such as gossiping, backbiting, lying or arguing. Muslims welcome Ramadan as an opportunity for self-reflection, and spiritual improvement. Ramadan is also a highly social time as Muslims invite each other to break fast together and meet for prayers at the mosque.

The ultimate goal of fasting is gaining greater God-consciousness, in Arabic, *taqwa*, signifying a state of constant awareness of God. From this awareness a person should gain discipline, self-restraint and a greater incentive to do good and avoid wrong.

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.

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.

Family Routines

A Muslim family usually rises about 5:00 a.m. before the first of dawn and eats a modest, breakfast-like meal called *suhur*. After the meal, the family performs the morning prayer, and

depending on the circumstances, the family goes back to bed or begins the day. 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. Many families then go to the mosque for the night prayer and a special Ramadan prayer called *taraweeh*.

Special Activities

- Many mosques host daily community dinners where Muslims can break their fast together.
- Special Ramadan prayers called *taraweeh* are held in most mosques after the night prayer..
- 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.
- 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 Qu’ran was first revealed.

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 the Breaking of the Fast.” Children traditionally receive 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 usually in a park or large hall. Food, games and presents for children are important parts of the festivities, as friends and family spend the day socializing, eating and reuniting with old acquaintances.

The History of Fasting During Ramadan Become Obligatory for Muslims?

A: The revelations from God to the Prophet Muhammad that would eventually be compiled as the Quran began during Ramadan in the year 610, but the fast of Ramadan did not become a religious obligation for Muslims until the year 624. The obligation to fast is explained in the second chapter of the Quran: “O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint... Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting...” (Chapter 2, verses 183 and 185)