

History of Ramadan



Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The Islamic calendar is based on the 28 day lunar cycle, so dates differ each year as compared to the solar calendar that western countries commonly use. It is believed that during this month the first words of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. In the course of this month, devout Muslims try to read the entire Qur'an – the most sacred text of the Islamic tradition.

Every day during the month of Ramadan, Muslims rise before dawn to eat Sahur prior to performing a morning call to prayer. They fast (no food or drink) and abstain from sexual activity and any worldly temptation during the day. At sunset prayer time, they break their fast with a meal called Iftar. Muslims may continue to eat and drink after the sun has set and until the following morning call to prayer.

Ramadan is most importantly a time of prayer and personal renewal. The act of fasting is said to redirect the heart away from worldly activities, its purpose being to cleanse the inner soul and bring it closer to spiritual awareness. It also teaches Muslims to practice self-discipline, self-control, sacrifice and empathy for those who are less fortunate; thus encouraging actions of generosity and charity.

Ramadan is also a festival of giving and sharing. Muslims prepare special foods and buy gifts for their family and friends and give to the poor and needy who cannot afford it. Getting together with friends and family for nightly feasting, social renewal and support is important to most practicing Muslims.

Muslims begin observing the fasting ritual at puberty so long as they are healthy and have no disabilities or illnesses. The elderly and those who are chronically or terminally ill are exempt from fasting. They can pay the cost of Iftar (evening feast) for a person who can't afford it, or host such as a person in their home as a way of repaying for the days they are not able to fast.

If you are serving a Muslim family, be sensitive to the spiritual meaning of this month and honor the intent of spiritual enrichment. Christianity, Judaism and Islam share the same spiritual roots tracing back to the Biblical character Abraham. Sadly, all faiths have extreme elements that have committed atrocities in the name of a religion. The true roots of this faith and so many others can also lead to peace, justice and care of the poor. In a world of over-indulgence, contentious politics and violence, the month of Ramadan is a pledge on the part of devout Muslims to consume less, seek forgiveness, intensify prayer and provide for the poor.



References

Arsenault T. Director of Spiritual Care, Suncoast Hospice (2010) from email entitled Ramadan.

Fasting in the summer for Ramadan, BBC press. (2010) retrieved on 8.11.10 from http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/northampton/hi/people_and_places/newsid_

Marquit, J. (2005) The heart of what Ramadan is really all about. Retrieved on 8/11/10 from

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/10910/the_true_meaning_of_ramadan.html

Fasting in the summer for Ramadan, BBC press. (2010) retrieved on 8.11.10 from

http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/northampton/hi/people_and_places/newsid_

Robinson, Neal (1999) Islam: A concise introduction. Washington: Georgetown University Press. ISBN 0878402241.

