

Ramadan Information Sheet

RAMADAN INFORMATION SHEET

Joining 1.5 billion Muslims around the world,
AMERICAN-MUSLIMS TO BEGIN OBSERVANCE OF MONTH-LONG FAST OF RAMADAN Beginning
October 16th, 2004

What:

The month-long fast of Ramadan is set to begin on October 16 (Saturday). The lunar month of Ramadan - the 9th month of the Islamic Calendar -traditionally begins and ends based on the sighting of the first crescent of the new moon. Starting on Thursday, October 14, Muslims throughout America and the world will begin to search the sky for the new crescent. Many Muslims on these nights gather with great anticipation at their masjid (mosque), waiting for word on any moon sightings.

The month of Ramadan commemorates the revelation of the Qur'an (divine scripture & Islam's holy book). During the month, Muslims fast from pre-dawn until sunset, foregoing eating and drinking and avoiding all wrongdoing. The purpose of the fast is to grow in God-consciousness and moral excellence. In commemoration of the Qur'an's revelation, many Muslims gather at their masjid to hold special prayers in which the entire Qur'an is recited by month's end.

When:

October 14th, 2004, begin looking for the new moon.
October 16th, 2004, expected first day of Ramadan.

Who:

The San Francisco Bay Area Muslim communities, consisting of over 35 masajid (mosques) and Islamic Centers.

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Type of fast

Muslims fast from pre-dawn (around 6:00 a.m.) to sunset (around 5:30 p.m.) -- a fast of about 10 1/2 hours. The fast of Ramadan entails foregoing food and drink, and if married, abstaining from sex during the daytime, in an effort to train our physical aspect, as well as our spiritual, by the avoidance of wrong-doing, such as gossiping, back-biting, lying, or becoming angry. Muslims welcome Ramadan as a time for self-evaluation, spiritual improvement, and growth. Ramadan is also a highly social time of great joy and happiness as Muslims constantly visit one another to break fast together and meet one another for prayers at the masjid (mosque).

Purpose

The ultimate goal of fasting is greater God-consciousness. The Qur'anic (Arabic) word is taqwa, which literally means "being on guard" signifying a state of being constantly aware of God and what is right and wrong. From this awareness a person gains discipline, self-restraint and the ability to do good and give freely.

Ramadan is the month in which the first verses* of the Qur'an (divine scripture & Islam's holy book) were revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammed (570-633 CE).

Ramadan, therefore, is the month in which Muslims re-acquaint themselves with the Qur'an by reading the entire text and contemplating its meaning.

First revealed verses of the Qur'an:

"Recite, in the name of your Lord, who created: Who created humankind from a clot of blood. Recite, for your Lord is most generous, Who taught by the pen, Taught humankind what it did not know."

(Chapter 96:1-5, translation from the Arabic by Thomas Cleary)

Who Fasts

All Muslims who have reached puberty are obliged to fast.

Exemptions

Exempted from the fast is anyone who is sick or traveling, women who are pregnant, nursing, or on their menses, or older people who are too weak. Anyone who is exempted must make up the fast later, except for those who cannot fast due to age or a chronic illness; instead they feed a poor person for every day they missed.

Children

It is customary for children beginning around 7 years of age to perform limited or symbolic fasting - - fasting half a day or fasting on weekends. Masajid (mosques) often give special recognition to children who are fasting their first full day or first Ramadan. They are not required, however, to fast until they reach puberty.

Family Routines

The Muslim family usually rises about 5:00 a.m. before the first of dawn and eats a modest meal called suhur. After the meal, morning prayers are said and depending on the circumstances, the family goes back to bed or starts the day. Often a nap is taken in the late afternoon after work or school. At sunset (around 6:30 p.m.) a few dates and water are eaten to break the fast. Breaking the fast is called iftar. Sunset prayers are performed and then a complete meal is consumed. Having guests over to break the fast together or going to someone else's house for iftar is very common during Ramadan. The family goes to the masjid (mosque) at about 8:30 p.m. for evening prayers and the special Ramadan prayer called taraaweeh. The family will be home by about 10:30 p.m.

Special Activities

Many masjid (mosques) host daily community dinners where Muslims can break their fast together. This is a great service for students, the poor and mothers who want a break from cooking. Almost all masjid have a community dinner on the weekends.

Special Ramadan prayers called taraaweeh are held after the evening prayer. During taraaweeh the prayer leader recites at least one thirtieth (1/30) of the Qur'an so that by the end of the month the entire Qur'an will have been recited. The Qur'an is about the length of the New Testament.

As fasting helps Muslims feel compassion for the hungry and less fortunate, food drives for the poor and other charities are annual events for some masjid in Ramadan. Muslims are encouraged to be the most charitable during Ramadan. Some masjid welcome non-Muslims to join them for their daily community dinner at the end of the fasting day.

Many masjid give special recognition to new Muslims who are fasting for the first time.

The night of majesty (lailat al-qadr), which falls on the 27th night of Ramadan is the most important night in Ramadan because the Qur'an was first revealed on that night, and the earth is filled with the power of spiritual presence. Masjid are open all night as Muslims hold vigil in prayer, Qur'anic reading and contemplation.

Special Food

The eating of dates to break the fast 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. Various Muslim countries have special dishes and desserts for Ramadan.

Benefits of Fasting

Doctors agree that fasting is extremely beneficial for lowering cholesterol and fat in the blood. Fasting is a means of purifying the body as well as the spirit.

Eid al-Fitr

At the end of Ramadan, Muslims hold one of their major festivals, called Eid al-Fitr or the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast (November 14th). A special prayer and sermon are held in the morning of the Eid day. Afterwards, a community celebration takes place, which is usually held in a park and that involves food and games for children. Relatives and friends will get together to celebrate, share food and give gifts to the children.