

## ***Ramadan and Fasting brochure***

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### **The Month of Ramadan**

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, may be 29 or 30 days long. An Islamic month begins with the sighting of the new crescent in the western horizon, immediately after sunset. Muslims look toward the western horizon for the new moon on the 29th day of Sha'ban, the eighth month. If the new moon is sighted, Ramadan has begun with the sunset but fasting begins with the next dawn. If the new moon is not sighted on this 29th day, Muslims complete 30 days of Sha'ban and Ramadan begins the following day.

### **The Significance of Ramadan and Fasting**

Allah says in the Qur'an: ***“ O You who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain God-consciousness”*** (Qur'an 2:183).

***“ In the month of Ramadan the Qur'an was revealed, a book of guidance with proofs of guidance distinguishing right from wrong. Therefore whoever of you is present in that month let him fast. But who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on. Allah desires your well-being, not your discomfort. He***

*desires you to fast the whole month so that you may magnify Him and render thanks to Him for giving you His guidance” (Qur'an 2:185).*

Accordingly, the month of Ramadan is called the month of the Qur'an, therefore, Muslims have tradition of reciting Qur'an frequently in this month.

### **Sawm or Fasting**

Sawm means a fast that begins with dawn and ends with sunset. Muslims rise before dawn, eat Sahur (pre-dawn meal) and drink liquids for the preparation of sawm (fasting). Eating and drinking stops at dawn. During the day no eating, drinking or sexual activity is allowed. In addition, a Muslim must adhere to the moral code of Islam very strictly as failure violates the requirements of fasting.

Fasting in the month of Ramadan is one of the deeds of worship required of all Muslims who have attained puberty. Women who are having their menstrual period or who have not fully recovered from childbirth postpone the fast until they are completely out of their special conditions. In addition, those who are ill or in travel may choose to postpone their fast.

Muslims fast because Allah has commanded them to do so. However, they may also think about the benefits of fasting which may include developing control over hunger, thirst and sexual urges, training to be a good moral person and testing sincerity to the Creator. During the fast, Muslims may conduct their business as usual. However, in the Muslim countries working hours are shortened by a couple of hours a day and the hours are changed to make the work comfortable.

The fast is broken immediately after sunset by, usually, eating dates and drinking water or juice. However, any lawful food or drink may be used to break the fast. This is followed by the Maghrib salah (after sunset prayer) which is followed by a complete meal. After a brief rest, Muslims go to the mosque to offer the 'Isha salah (night prayer) and then a special night prayer, called Taraweeh.

### **Taraweeh**

This nightly congregational salah (prayer) is performed after the

'Isha salah. Traditionally, a Hafiz of the Qur'an, a person who has memorized the whole Qur'an which is in Arabic, leads the prayer. He recites the Qur'an in small portions, in proper sequence, every night and completes the recitation of the whole Qur'an before the end of the month of Ramadan. Every Muslim who attends such prayers regularly gets the opportunity of listening to the whole Qur'an in a month. If a Hafiz of the Qur'an is not available, the Muslim who has memorized the most in a group leads the prayer and recites according to his ability. In the absence of a Hafiz some Muslims hold the Qur'an in the hand during their salah and read from it. Many Islamic scholars cite the sunnah (way) of the Prophet (peace and pleassings of Allah be upon him) that he always prayed during the night alone in his apartment whether it was Ramadan or not and same was the habit of many of his great companions.

### **Ramadan Generosity**

The month of Ramadan brings many blessings multiplied manifold for those who do good. During this month people are more generous, more cordial, more friendly and more ready than other times of the year to do good work. The poor and the needy receive food, clothing and money from the well-to-do in the community. Many people go to the mosque in the neighborhood for fast breaking and meals. People in the neighborhood send fruit, food and drinks to the mosque - the atmosphere is that of a friendly pot luck dinner every evening of the month.

Well-known philanthropists of the Muslim community find themselves surrounded by the needy people and Islamic workers for donations. Zakat, a wealth purifying tax, and donations are given at this time of the year since many Muslims wish to take the opportunity of multiplied rewards from Allah.

### **Laylat Aal-Qadr**

This is the night of the Qadr. The term Al-Qadr has been frequently translated as "the power". A better translation may be "the value" or "the decree" because Allah says the value of this night is better than one thousand months, a life time of over eighty-three years. Allah sends His decrees in this night. This is the night when the Qur'an was revealed. Allah says in the Qur'an: ***"We have indeed revealed this (the Qur'an) in the Night of Value (or Measure). And what will explain to you what the Night of Value is? The Night of Value is better than a thousand***

***months. Therein come down angels and the Spirit (the angel Gabriel) by Allah's permission with all decrees. (That night is) Peace until the rising of the dawn” (Qur'an 97:1-5).***

The night of value is a gift to mankind from Allah. However, it is not clear which night is Laylat al-Qadr. Some reports by companions of the Prophet (peace and pleassings of Allah be upon him) allude it to be the 27th night of the month of Ramadan, but many more sayings point to any of the odd date nights during the last third of the month of Ramadan. According to authentic teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and pleassings of Allah be upon him) Muslims are advised to spend the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th and 29th nights of Ramadan in worship and doing good works to assure finding Laylat al-Qadr. A portion of the Muslims stay up all night in prayers and good works, however, the Prophet (peace and pleassings of Allah be upon him) and his companions used to sleep at least one-third of the night.

In Muslim countries, the 27th of Ramadan is a holiday to enable people to rest during the day after all night of worship. Schools are closed from the 27th of Ramadan through the 2nd of Shawwal (5 to 6 days) to combine Laylat al-Qadr and 'Eid al-Fitr observances.

### **I'tekaf or Seclusion**

The practice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and pleassings of Allah be upon him) was to spend the last ten days and nights of Ramadan in the masjid (mosque). Following his practice, it is considered a community duty that some people go in I'tekaf (seclusion) in a neighborhood masjid. The people in I'tekaf spend their time in various forms of Dhikr (remembrance of Allah), such as doing extra salah, recitation and study of the Qur'an, study of the Hadith, repetition of some phrases of praise and glory to Allah, exhorting each other to be good through obeying Allah and His Messenger (peace and pleassings of Allah be upon him). Since people in I'tekaf are not permitted to go outside the masjid except for emergencies, they sleep in the masjid and use available facilities of the masjid.

The food for the people in I'tekaf is provided either by their own families or people in the community. I'tekaf is terminated, generally, at the declaration of sighting of the moon or the end of the month of Ramadan. For busy people a shorter version of I'tekaf is allowed, such as one night, one day or a few days.

## **Sadaqat al-Fitr**

In general, any material help extended to the poor, needy and to those who ask and are deserving is called Sadaqah. Sadaqat al-Fitr, which is also called Zakat al-Fitr is the obligatory material help extended to the poor of the society before the 'Eid prayers, preferably to be given early enough for the poor to prepare for the celebration. In North America, the estimated amount is \$5 to \$8 to be given on behalf of each member of the donor's family, including infants.

## **'Eid al-Fitr**

The end of the fasting month is celebrated on the first of Shawwal, the 10th month, which follows Ramadan. Traditionally, on the 29th of Ramadan after sunset, people go out in the open looking for a new crescent in the western horizon where the sun sets. If the crescent is sighted, the end of Ramadan and 'Eid are declared. If the crescent is not sighted, Ramadan is extended by one day.

On the day of 'Eid, people take a bath or shower in the early morning, eat breakfast, wear their best clothes, apply perfume and proceed to the place of 'Eid congregation while pronouncing takbeerat, saying, "Allah is the Greatest, there is no deity but Allah and all praise belongs to Allah." Muslims pronounce takbeerat in their homes, in the street and at the place of congregation while waiting for the leader, Imam. It was the practice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and pleassings of Allah be upon him) to hold 'Eid prayer congregations in open grounds. Following the practice of the Prophet (peace and pleassings of Allah be upon him) Muslims are advised to hold 'Eid prayers in open grounds. In the Muslim countries with warm climate there are designated 'Eid prayer grounds. However, in North America Muslims rent halls at convention centers or major hotels.

The Imam rises at the appointed time, leads the prayers and delivers a khutbah, sermon. At the end of the sermon, people supplicate, greet, embrace and congratulate each other for the successful completion of Ramadan and ask Allah for the acceptance of their efforts in His obedience.

During the day, people visit each other and children may receive gifts. In some countries, people go for picnics and other gatherings. In addition, special 'Eid celebrations may be arranged at work or in social settings. Essentially, 'Eid is a day of thanks to Allah, and also a gathering of family and friends.

## 'Umrah or Minor Hajj in Ramadan

There is a report from Prophet Muhammad (peace and pleassings of Allah be upon him) saying that performing 'Umrah in the month of Ramadan is equal to performing a major or complete Hajj. Hajj is a pilgrimage to Makkah (commonly mis-spelled as Mecca). Hajj is the enactment of some of the trials and tribulations of Prophet Abraham(A), his wife Hajirah (Hagger) and his oldest son, Isma'il(A) (Ishmael). Hajj includes the sacrifice of Ishmael, represented by the sacrifice of an animal, such as, ram, goat, sheep, cow or a camel. Complete Hajj lasts for five days but 'Umrah is completed in a couple of hours. 'Umrah is only a small part of the Hajj. An animal sacrifice may be offered at the completion of 'Umrah. 'Umrah may be performed anytime during the year but it has special significance in Ramadan. Hajj is performed only during the 8th and 13th days of Dhu al-Hijjah, the twelveth month of the Islamic calendar.

**M. Amir Ali, Ph.D**

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