



Ramadan/Fasting

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Basic facts

- Ramadan refers to the ninth month in the Islamic Calendar, during which Muslims are to observe fasting (called Sawm or Siyam in Arabic). It is considered one of the so-called ‘Five Pillars of Islam’, which also include the Creed (shahada), five daily prayers (salat), alms-giving (zakat), and the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every able Muslim must perform once in a lifetime.
- In this annually returning practice, Muslims must abstain from food, drinking, smoking, sexual intercourse, and non-essential medicine from sunrise to sunset.
- Fasting during Ramadan is an obligation imposed on every Muslim who has reached puberty. Exceptions are granted to the sick, pregnant women, and travellers. It is expected that compensation is made at some other point in time.
- Because the Islamic calendar is lunar, it means that every year Ramadan occurs 10-12 days earlier when compared to the Gregorian solar calendar.
- Its start and end is determined by the visual sighting of the new moon. If weather conditions prevent this, the fasting can be extended for up to 2 days, that is: 30 instead of 28 days.
- The breaking of the daily fast at sunset is usually ritually marked by a small meal of dates and a beverage, after which the sunset prayers are said. It is recommended to do this at a mosque.
- In addition to the five obligatory daily prayers, Muslims will also say supplementary night time prayers called taraweeh.
- Another common practice is the recitation of the entire Qur’an in the course of the month of Ramadan, to that end the Qur’an is – aside from its division into 114 chapters – also divided into 30 sections, one for each night.
- The end of Ramadan heralds the beginning of one of the two Islamic feasts: Eid al-Fitr or ‘Feast of the Breaking’ (in Turkic-speaking parts of the Muslim world also called ‘Lesser Bairam’). Traditionally, it is inaugurated with the slaughter of a lamb. Usually lasting for three days, this is a time of family togetherness during which one also visits other relatives, neighbours and friends.

History

- Muslims have fasted since 624CE, two years after the Prophet Muhammad had migrated from his native city of Mecca to the northern oasis of Medina, both located in what is now Saudi Arabia. The precedent was set by the Prophet's encouragement of his followers to share food with growing numbers of poor new followers.
- For this reason, the month of Ramadan is closely associated with charitable donations; another annually returning obligation under the five pillars of Islam known as zakat, under which Muslims must donate 2.5% of their annual income as alms to the needy and those 'expending on the way of Allah'.
- The sacredness of the month of Ramadan is further enhanced, because, according to tradition, it was in this same month that the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation in 610CE, during the so-called Lailat al-Qadr or 'Night of Power' (the exact day is disputed).

Ramadan in modern times

- Ramadan has developed into a festive season not dissimilar to Christmas in terms of associations with consumerism (including 'Ramadan sales', etc.).
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/11747871/UK-retailers-braced-for-sales-jump-to-rival-Christmas-as-Ramadan-Rush-gets-under-way.html>
- Modernity has brought new challenges for Muslims observing the Ramadan in terms of having to reconcile it with work ethics that are considerably different from historical rhythms of life in traditional societies.
- In most Muslim countries working hours are shortened in order to adjust to the demands made by the practice of fasting. <http://www.comresglobal.com/are-employers-ready-for-ramadan/>
- Also contemporary phenomena like professional sports has an impact on the lives of Muslim athletes. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/sport/football/6143318/mo-salah-liverpool-roma-ramadan-fast/>

- As Muslims have migrated in large numbers from the historical Muslim world, by and large located in the tropics, to more temperate zones, this can lead to very trying conditions when Ramadan falls during the summer months with daylight lasting up to 20 hours in the Nordic countries and northern Canada. <https://gulfnews.com/guides/life/ramadan/features/where-ramadan-fasting-is-longest-and-shortest-this-year-1.2036175>

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