

19 Ramadan — The Month of Fasting

Muslims call fasting during the Islamic month of Ramadan the fourth pillar of Islam. I fasted during Ramadan even before I became Muslim. I loved how my stomach growling and feeling thirst made me think of God.

My friends told me I could not fast on the days I had my menstrual period. That upset me and it became another issue to deal with. They tried to placate me by telling me God made it easier for me because our periods make women feel ill. But my male friends fasted even when they experienced minor illness. Besides, I rarely felt badly during my periods. I saw no equality in this restriction.

Eventually I found out the Quran does not restrict women from fasting at any time during Ramadan.

Most people probably know Ramadan is one of the lunar months of the Islamic calendar. During this month Muslims do not eat or drink from the earliest light of dawn until sunset (2:187). As you can imagine the evening meal often becomes quite festive.

The major Quranic passage on fasting follows:

O you who believe, fasting is decreed for you, as it was decreed for those before you, that you may attain salvation. Specific days (are designated for fasting); if one is ill or traveling, an equal number of other days may be substituted. Those who can fast, but with great difficulty, may substitute feeding one poor person for each day of breaking the fast. If one volunteers (more righteous works), it is better. But fasting is the best for you, if you only knew. Ramadan is the month during which the Quran was revealed, providing guidance for the people, clear teachings, and the statute book. Those of you who witness this month shall fast therein. Those who are ill or traveling may substitute the same number of other days. God wishes for you convenience, not hardship, that you may fulfill your obligations, and to glorify God for guiding you, and to express your appreciation. (Quran: The Final Testament 2:183-5)

Though this may sound strange, God makes it easy for me to fast. Something happens during Ramadan I cannot explain except to say God makes fasting possible and even enjoyable. We saw in the above verses if you become ill or must travel or if fasting really becomes a hardship, you may feed the poor instead. “*But fasting is the best for you, if you only knew.*” Thus even if you say a woman who menstruates feels ill, God says fasting is best for her. And who knows better than the One who created her?

Certain situations exist where fasting can hurt our bodies, so God says we can substitute righteous work for fasting if necessary. For most natural situations like menstruation and even normal pregnancy, fasting should not present a problem if you take care to eat and drink enough during the night. Many of my friends fasted during their pregnancies and none had adverse reactions. Of course they consulted their obstetricians first. In situations deemed unsafe they did not fast.

God decreed fasting for Muslims during Ramadan and no one should deny it to women just because their bodies do what God has designed them to do.

Fasting provides another religious practice that Jews, Christians, and Muslims have in common. The Day of Atonement, a day of fasting for Jews, seems similar to a Ramadan day, though it continues for 24 hours. Many Christians also have practices of fasting. Lent may well come from the original fasting given to Abraham.

In both the Jewish scripture and the Gospels we see directions on the proper attitude for fasting. Isaiah shows us how not to fast:

*...on your fast day
You see to your business
And oppress all your laborers!
...you fast in strife and contention,
And you strike with a wicked fist!
Your fasting today is not such
As to make your voice heard on high.
(Isaiah 58:3-4 - Tanakh: A New Translation...)*

Jesus taught we should not make a public display of our fasting:

*“When you fast, you are not to look glum as the hypocrites do. They change the appearance of their faces so that others may see they are fasting. I assure you, they are already repaid.”
(Matthew 6:16 - New American Bible)*

In Muslim communities Ramadan often becomes a very social time. Since people in Muslim societies assume everyone fasts, restaurants, teahouses, etc. usually close during the day. Most businesses shut down for part of the day. When evening comes and with it the breaking of the fast, the community comes alive again. Inviting guests to break the fast remains common and many Muslims spend their evenings socializing. People often call Ramadan the time of “fasting and feasting”.

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As we just mentioned, most Muslims become quite social during Ramadan and people often visit one another. Here a sister tells the tale of one such visit.

Muslims fast during Ramadan; they usually wake up before dawn to eat something, so that they can fast during the day. Knowing this, here is the story of a Muslim born man who visited during Ramadan with a family that practiced the religion.

The host asked his guest, “Will you study the Quran with us?”

“I don’t have time!” he replied.

They asked, “Would you like to observe the contact prayer with us?”

“I am not used to observing it,” he said. They asked, “Do you give to charity?”

“I can’t afford it!” They said, “Do you fast?”

“I can’t stand it,” he replied.

The host said, “So, we shall not wake you up for the meal before dawn.”

“But I am a Muslim, I am a Muslim!”

(As told by Irandokht, Iran)

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Sister Lourdes tells us her story and gives us the personal sharing of one who can teach us a great deal about Ramadan and trust in God.

Ramadan

“You’re Muslim—that means you don’t eat pork, right?” “Isn’t Allah the one you pray to?” “Are you married to an Arab or something?” These are all questions that I am asked when it is “revealed” that I am a Muslim. “Aren’t you supposed to wrap your head up and wear a veil?” Well-meaning, but misinformed people ask these questions routinely. As a modern, American career woman and believer and worshiper of God alone, most people do a “double take” when it is unavoidable and I must share with them that I won’t be eating. All I do is smile, perhaps giggle a bit, and tell them more...

Ramadan is the most special time of the year for me. It is a time when I am keenly aware that God is omnipresent in my life. It is actually the time when it is easiest for me to be the best believer in God that I can be. God commanded that for a month we not eat or drink from dawn until sunset. For everybody around me this is the most difficult thing that anyone can imagine. For me it is the one and only time of the year that I can actually resist the urge to put food into my mouth. I believe God makes this time special and especially easy just for me!

I am hypoglycemic and have been so for about 12 years. Every day I suffer from having to eat on a schedule to avoid having low blood sugar. Having hypoglycemia means constantly having to think about food and having to have food near me. Not just any food, but the right amount of protein and carbohydrates so as to avoid a miserable headache, grouchiness, blurred vision, impaired judgment and other side effects. It also means craving sugar and sweets! I must eat breakfast and I must eat again before noon or I get quite ill. In a perfect world, this would be easy, but daily I seek out sweets like some sort of sugar addict and fight my pancreas for control of the situation!

Ramadan is truly a miracle for me. Each and every day during this special time I eat only at night. I have found that if I eat also in the morning before the sun rises¹ that it is actually more difficult to keep my blood sugar high enough to avoid those inevitable lows that are so common during the year. I have a nice meal and dessert (!) in the evening; as well as lots of water and I have no symptoms of hypoglycemia the following

¹ *Editor’s note:* In verse [2:187](#) the Quran specifies that the fast begin each day at the earliest morning light.

day and every day during Ramadan. The day before Ramadan starts and the day after Ramadan ends I must eat, eat, eat and again the cycle starts. I'm sure there is a physiological reason why during this month and this month alone my blood sugar is adequately controlled, but I prefer to give all of the credit to God for making this a wonderful time. I even fasted for Ramadan during both of my pregnancies and my children (praise God) were both born big, beautiful and healthy. People who know me well just marvel at how I don't even act hungry during Ramadan. This is simply because I'm not! God makes this month so easy for me that I can hardly believe it.

I know we should always be grateful when putting food into our mouths. Ramadan is God's reminder that food should never be taken for granted. There are people all over the world less fortunate than ourselves; people who don't have enough to eat. I believe that this is God's way of reminding us of just this fact. Having enough to eat is a blessing from God. He has created so many beautiful foods to eat and pure water for us to drink. Let us rejoice and be glad!

—*Lourdes, U.S.A.*

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God tells us to refrain from food and drink from the earliest light of dawn until sunset during the lunar month of Ramadan. I have found that during my fast something else also happens—a different kind of fast takes place at the same time. Perhaps I can describe it as a fast from my normal daily nonsense.

During this time my racing brain tends to calm down and I am drawn to more peaceful and simple activities. I seldom look at TV or get caught up with current affairs in this period. My focus centers more on God, nature, and the Quran. I commemorate God more and become more appreciative of all of the blessings He provides. I often find myself tearing up from the beauty and joy of His presence in my life.

These things become more pronounced if I am able to participate in the retreat to the mosque during the last ten nights of Ramadan as mentioned in the Quran in 2:187. God has blessed me to do this retreat most years and it feels to me like the delicious “dessert” of Ramadan.

I learned to practice this retreat many years ago. The focus of those last ten nights as I learned it should be commemorating God as much as possible, studying the Quran with the others in the retreat, staying away from the vanities of the world including arguments, handling money, and worrying about being stylish while still maintaining one's hygiene. Also, as much as possible, everyone in the retreat should try to do things together and remain as a group.

Sometimes something comes up and we cannot maintain all of these things. Since God does not state any of them clearly in the Quran if we must adjust them, I don't worry about it but just enjoy what can happen. At those times I remember that God doesn't want the religion to be difficult for us (Verse 5:6).

Whether I am able to retreat at the end of the month or not, Ramadan always gives me a time of peace and joy. Sister Fari’s lovely poem *Ramadan* describes it beautifully: “A blessed month/ A month of abundance / A time of glorification....”²

² Fari’s entire poem can be found in the June, 2016, *Submitter’s Perspective* on the Masjid Tucson [website](#) with the signature of “FF”.