

# Ramadan

## By Fareeha Tahir

Every year Muslims around the world celebrate Ramadan – one of the pillars in Islam, amongst four others. Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar and it begins upon the sighting of the moon. It is not a month-long festival, rather a celebration of revelation of the Holy Quran. The reason Muslims celebrate this is because the Quran contains every detail of how a person must live his/her life, in the way which it will benefit them the most. Since Muslims use a lunar calendar, Ramadan falls at different times every year. This year Ramadan began in the middle of June and will continue until the middle of July. During Ramadan, Muslims fast every day for 30 days from dawn to dusk. The reason behind this is so they are able to learn self-restraint. It is also a means to improve their moral character while having an opportunity for spiritual renewal.

Ramadan teaches Muslims many things among which are to be selfless and give charity to those in need, to be patient and control our anger, to forgive our enemies and make peace, to establish the difference between our needs and desires, to abstain from forbidden deeds and spend time cleansing our soul, all through self-control and great acts of faith.

Ramadan is a very special and exciting part of the year in my family. A normal day of Ramadan begins at dawn. At this time we wake up to eat our first meal which will help us get through the rest of the day. Immediately after breakfast we pray in obedience and to thank God for giving us the opportunity to participate in this holy month. At this time, it is still very early in the morning so we go back to sleep in order to catch up on our rest. Our next prayer is around early afternoon followed by another later in the evening. In between these prayers, we commit acts of faith such as reading the Quran, whether from memory or reading directly.

Along with these activities we continue with the rest of the day as some of us are headed to work, others to school and so on. Also, during the day, we become very conscious of our actions making sure we don't accidentally or purposely break our fast by committing wrongful deeds such as speaking to someone in an angry tone of voice or causing someone harm. As time reaches closer to sundown, the ladies in the family begin to cook the meal so the family is able to open their fast. Some traditional dishes that are made on a daily basis at my house are pakoras (fritters), samosas, spring rolls, flat bread, fruit salad, aloo chanay (potato and chick pea dish), and yogurt. For drinks, we usually make Lassi (a water-based drink mixed with yogurt), milkshake, or pop.

When it is time to open the fast, we sit as a family and start again by thanking God through a verbal prayer and traditionally by eating a date fruit. The reason for this is because firstly, our prophet did the same, and secondly, because this fruit is known to be extremely healthy and contains nutrients that will help us contain energy throughout the day. It is also very sweet, and believed to help release anger and tension in a person and help them be calmer. After this we continue to eat the rest of the foods to fill our hunger. During Ramadan we also invite family, neighbors, and friends over so we can open our fast together. This practice is common between many Muslims as it is considered a highly great act of faith to help another Muslim open their fast. It is also common between my family and friends to exchange sweets as a form of gift to one another over the course of the month.

After dinner, we pray once again and rest before our nightly trip to the mosque. During the night, Muslims in the community come together to the local mosque in order to pray. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder as we follow the prayer led by the respected religious leader. At the end of the prayer, we meet our friends and neighbors in the mosque and head home. When we arrive home we usually stay awake and spend time together before dawn when we must eat again to begin another day of fasting and repeat the process. Lastly, closer to the end of the month, all Muslims give charity in order to ensure that those in need are taken care of. This is the charity of fast breaking also known as sadqah-al-fitr.

The month of Ramadan ends as it started with the sighting of the moon, as Muslims all around the world celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr, a three-day long celebration. In my family, Eid starts off early in the morning. Everyone gets dressed in their nicest traditional clothing and we start our day by eating a sweet dish called kheer, also known as rice pudding. Followed by this sweet morning, we head out to meet our other family, friends and neighbors to wish them a happy Eid, usually with the phrase "Eid Mubarak." At this time, Muslims in the community all gather, to once again, stand shoulder-to-shoulder and pray together. This prayer is a very important part of the Eid morning. After this prayer, we visit the rest of our family and friends and exchange gifts. Also, the children are usually given money in form of their gifts to teach them about the love of giving.

On the second day of Eid, my family usually organizes a gathering in a hall inviting our friends and family to get together for dinner in order to celebrate. As the meal is the main part of this event, each guest usually brings one dish of their choice to the party. Some of the main foods at this gathering involve, rice, naan, roti, various chicken and lamb dishes, yogurt, light snacks such as bite size samosas, spring rolls, and cookies, and cupcakes for the children. For dessert, we usually have ice cream, kheer (rice pudding), and rasmalai. Lastly, our South Asian heritage has convinced us we cannot end a day without tea, biscuits and some laughs with friends. The last day of Eid is also followed by relevant festivities.

I am very glad to say that these events have always had a positive influence on my life, and I am very grateful to be a part of it all.