



**Everything you wanted to know,  
but didn't know who to ask.**

# QUESTION TIME - 'MY RAMADAN'

## Ramadan, what does this mean?

Ramadan, one of the pillars of Islam, is the 9th month of the Islamic Calendar. It is when Muslims all over the world spend 29/30 days fasting and bettering themselves in the practices of their faith.

## Why do Muslims Fast?

Fasting is intended to help teach Muslims self-discipline, self-restraint and generosity. It also reminds them of the suffering of the poor, who may rarely get to eat well.

Ramadan is seen by Muslims as an opportunity to spiritually purify themselves allowing them to work on becoming closer to God, it also allows them to work towards getting past sins forgiven.

## Why is it a pillar of Islam?

The five pillars of Islam define the basic identity of Muslims - their faith, beliefs and practices - and bind together a worldwide community of believers into a fellowship of shared values and concerns. Muslims believe fasting in the month of Ramadan was ordained in their holy book, The Qur'an and that to fast is to perform an act of deep personal worship in which Muslims seek a richer perception of God.

### **Did you know?**

In Oman, they have 6 hour working days during Ramadan for everyone, and anyone who works more is paid overtime, or forced to take time off at a later point.

## What's the Significance of Sunrise and Sunset?

“You may eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinguishable to you from the dark thread at dawn. Then you shall maintain the fast until the night.” (2:187). From these words from the Qur ‘an, abstaining from food and drink should start at the first thread of light at dawn (between an hour and 2 hours before sunrise, depending on the time of year), and maintained till night. There are some differences between denominations in how you define the night, is it when the sun starts to set (Sunni) or when the sun has fully set (Shia)

## When and how did fasting become obligatory for Muslims, and what was the social and historical context at that time?

Fasting the month of Ramadan was made obligatory (wajib) during the month of Sha’ban (8th Month), in the second year after the Muslims migrated from Makkah to Medina (624 AD). There were a huge number of people that migrated from Makkah to Medina. So the population of Medina swelled and a lot of the people that came to Medina left everything behind.

*The ordainment for fasting was in three stages:*

**The First Stage:** The Muslims were ordered to fast on the day of Ashura, Ashura is significant to Muslims as it is believed to be the day which God saved Moses and his followers from the pharaoh.

**The Second Stage:** The Muslims were given the option of either fasting during the month of Ramadan or feeding a poor person for each day they did not fast, with preference for fasting over feeding.

**The Third Stage:** Fasting the month of Ramadan became obligatory without choice and fasting on the day of Ashura became optional.

### **What does fasting entail, is it just not eating and drinking?**

Fasting is not only about not eating and drinking, for Muslims it is also about becoming closer to God through increasing prayers, reading more of the Quran, learning more about Islam and also abstaining from bad habits that one may have.

### **Why Ramadan and not any other month?**

Muslims believe Ramadan is a blessed month ordained by God. It is the month in which the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet. It is also the month, in which Satan and his minions are said to be locked away in Hell to prevent them from misleading and deceiving the believers.

This doesn't mean that they don't believe that sin and bad deeds will completely disappear for a month but it will mean that if bad deeds are done and sins committed, they will be from the hearts of people alone and the devil cannot be blamed.

God has also promised people that the reward for good deeds and actions during the holy month will be multiplied greater than usual and this encourages many to increase their level of worship and prayer. Although, this also applies to sins, so any bad action only invites greater punishment than usual.

### **What does iftari and sehri mean?**

Iftaari/Iftar is the evening meal, in which Muslims break their fast. (Sunset) Sehri/Suhoor is the early morning meal in which Muslims start their fast (Sunrise)

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## **When is Ramadan?**

Ramadan changes date each year and this year will start on the 18th of June, though the date is dependent on the sighting of the moon and will last for either 29 or 30 days.

## **The significance of eating Dates?**

Around 7.5 million tonnes of dates are produced each year; dates also have a special place in Islam. In fact they were one of the Prophet Muhammad's most frequently consumed food. Breaking the fast with dates is a Ramadan tradition. Breaking one's fast with dates, as well as praying before iftar, are both mentioned in the Hadith (early Islamic literature):

“The Messenger of Allah would break his fast with ripe dates before he would pray.

If those were not available, he would eat dried dates. If those were not available, he would drink some water.”

Breaking fast by eating dates helps avoid overeating of food after the fast is finished. When the body begins to absorb the high nutritional value of the dates, feelings of hunger are pacified. It can also significantly boost energy levels in people within half an hour of consuming them.

### **Did you know?**

The longest day of the year is the 21st of June and this year for the first time since 1984 Ramadan will fall on that day, which means Muslims will be fasting from 2:28AM to 10:02PM give or take 5 mins. So for nearly 20 hours Muslims will not eat or drink.

# PART 2

## What impact does Ramadan have on the economy from the Middle East to local supermarkets?

There is a study which suggests that longer Ramadan fasting has a negative effect on output growth in Muslim countries, although it increases well-being among Muslims. So people are happier, but they're producing less; and with the Middle East's growing influence, this does have an effect on the world economy.

For local supermarkets and shops, all over the world (including the UK) business is booming before and during Ramadan, Muslims will come and stock up for the month and many shops have seen there is a profit to be made as a direct effect of Ramadan so they too have special offers on food. More mainly Muslim restaurants offer Iftaar (at sunset) meals and buffets (including the UK).

## Why does Ramadan change date every year?

The exact date of Ramadan changes every year because Islam uses a lunar calendar, which means that each month begins with the sighting of a new moon. Because lunar months are shorter than the solar months used elsewhere, Islamic holidays begin on different days each year.

### Did you know?

During Ramadan we see relationships between the different religions strengthen; in some instances churches in the UK have opened their doors for Muslims when there is an overflow at the mosque, so that the extra people that do go to the mosque are accommodated for. Also many mosques and organisations have open Iftaars in which they invite people from the community to join them and this helps bring people together regardless of their faith.

## **What is fasting like in the workplace/school?**

One of the main aims of Ramadan is that people should carry on as normal i.e going to school/going to work, and not use fasting as an excuse to not do something they would normally do. Muslims must carry on as normal. Undoubtedly it will be harder for them to keep the same concentration levels due to the lack of fluids and food.

## **What is the significance of Eid, and how is it celebrated?**

Eid is the festival right after Ramadan ends, it celebrates the end of Ramadan and is a day in which Muslims are not allowed to fast. At Eid al-Fitr people dress in their finest clothes, adorn their homes with lights and decorations, give treats to children, and enjoy visits with friends and family. And most importantly they feast!

## **How do addicts fast? (Smokers & Coffee etc...)**

Some people go cold turkey for the month, some people just smoke or drink during the hours in which eating/drinking is allowed. Others use the month to try to quit.



## **Muslims donate during Ramadan more than any other month, why do they do this?**

A lot of Muslims think about the poor during this time so tend to give more, also with rewards for good deeds being multiplied during this month; people tend to give their Zakat during this month as well. Zakat is another pillar of Islam which says that one must give 2.5% of their wealth to charity every year.

## **What are Taraweeh prayers and why do people pray them during Ramadan only?**

Taraweeh refers to extra prayers performed by most Muslims at night in the Islamic month of Ramadan. Contrary to popular belief, they are not compulsory. However, many Muslims pray these prayers in the night during Ramadan in order to get closer to God. Certain denominations pray taraweeh differently and Shia's do not pray taraweeh at all.

## **What is the night of power?**

Laylatul Qadr (Night of Power) falls within Ramadan and is believed by Muslims to be when the Quran was revealed to the prophet Muhammad for the very first time. As such it is considered to be one of the holiest dates in the Islamic calendar, however no one really knows when that date is. Sunni's believe it is on one of the last five odd nights in Ramadan and Shia's believe it is on one of the last 10 odd nights in Ramadan.

## What are the main health benefits of fasting ?

According to the American Physiological Society fasting:

- Helps Weight Loss
- Improves Insulin Sensitivity
- Speeds Up The Metabolism
- Fasting Improves Your Brain Function
- Improves Your Immune System

## Itikaaf, what is it – why do some people spend 10 days in seclusion?

Itikaaf is when someone spends 10 days in seclusion inside a mosque (nowadays at home too). It usually takes place in the last ten days of Ramadan. The idea is you increase the amount of prayers in an attempt to become closer to God. It is also what the prophet did every Ramadan.

### **Did you know?**

The reason why this holy month is called “Ramadan” is because Muslims believe they are ‘burning their sins’ away. A person that is fasting endures heat whilst hungry and thirsty.

# PART 3

## Who has to fast, do all Muslims do it – What is the age range?

Every Muslim is obligated to fast in the month of Ramadan. With the exception of:

- Children (under 13)
- Those suffering from mental illness.
- Those who are physically unable to fast, due to old age, severe or long-term illness.
- People who travel a walking distance of two days (about 80 miles)
- Women who are either menstruating, has postpartum bleeding, are pregnant or breast feeding.

## Who came up with Ramadan? – Is it in the Quran?

Muslims believe fasting in the month of Ramadan is a command from God, which can be found in the Quran in surah Bakarah (2:183-185, translation below)

“O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.

[Fasting for] a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew

The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion

So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful”

### **Are there other holy dates when Muslims fast?**

There are many other days in which Muslims fast, however these fasts are not considered to be obligatory, as Ramadan is.

- 1) Six days of the month of Shawwaal (10th month of Islamic Calendar).
- 2) The first nine days of Thul-Hijjah (12th month of Islamic Calendar) the 10th day of this month is the second Eid.
- 3) The day of ‘Arafah for those who are not performing Hajj (9th of Thul-Hijjah).
- 4) Fasting during the month of Al-Muharram (1st Month of Islamic Calendar). Also the day of Ashura takes place in this month; it is on the 10th of the Month.
- 5) Fasting most of the month of Sha’baan (8th Month of Islamic Calendar).
- 6) Fasting three days of every lunar month. (Normally is the 13th, 14th and 15th of each month)
- 7) Fasting on Monday and Thursday, as Muslims believed the prophets Muhammad did.

#### **Did you know?**

Many muslims use a Miswak during Ramadan, to abstain from using toothpaste during Ramadan.

A miswak is a teeth cleaning twig made from the *Salvadora persica* tree (known as arak in Arabic). A traditional alternative to the modern toothbrush, it has a long, well-documented history and is reputed for its medicinal benefits.

## **What about the six fasts after Ramadan that people do; what are they and why do they do it?**

Some people fast for six days after Eid, although it is not obligatory. Many people do this to become closer to God, and follow in the example of the Prophet.

Ayoob Al-Ansari a Sahabi (a companion of The Prophet) said: "Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan and then follows it with six days of Shawwaal will be rewarded as the one who fasts the entire year."

## **What about athletes who may be taking part in a sporting event, footballers, cricketers and boxers are very good examples of this. Can they skip fasting?**

There are some different schools of thought on this but nowadays most scholars agree that Ramadan should be the priority, if they can do both then great. But some scholars have said that this is permissible for you to skip fasts for sportin events etc, provided they make up for it later on.

## **What happens if you break a fast, intentionally or unintentionally? What if you miss it?**

If someone unintentionally eats or drinks during their fast in Ramadan, they should continue and complete their fast, as this does not invalidate or break the fast. This is regardless of how much they have consumed. However if they intentionally break a fast by eating, the penalty is they must fast for two consecutive months [60 days]. If they are unable to do this, then they must feed sixty poor people for a day with two full meals. Anyone who intentionally broke their fast more than once in Ramadan will still perform only one penalty.

## **What other faiths fast? Are there any similarities to Ramadan?**

In Christianity, Lent is the main period of fasting which is a 40 day fast in which meat, dairy and eggs are prohibited.

In Judaism Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement is the best-known fast day. The Jewish calendar has six other fast days as well, including Tisha B'av, the day on which the destruction of the Jewish Temple took place.

In Hinduism fasting is commonly practiced on New Moon days and during festivals such as Shivaratri, Sarasvati Puja, and Durga Puja (also known as Navaratri).

A point to note is that the method of fasting is different within all these faiths.

## **What about people in the Northern Hemisphere who would have to fast for days on end?**

In places like Sweden where the sun doesn't set in the summer months the Muslims would follow the closest country where the sun does set. Although it may seem unfair, in a few years' time Ramadan will fall in winter where the Northern Hemispheres have the shortest days of the year. However it will be the opposite for people in the Southern Hemisphere.

### **Did you know?**

To Muslims, The Qur'an is the word of God sent down to the Prophet Muhammad through the Angel (Gabriel), in its precise wording.

Hadith, on the other hand, refers to the Prophet's sayings, acts and his physical and moral character.