

I'TEKAF OR SECLUSION

The practice of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was to spend the last ten days and nights of Ramadan in the *Masjeed* (mosque). Following his practice, it is considered a community duty that some people go into *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 Quran, study of the Hadith, repetition of some phrases of praise and glory to Allah, and exhorting each other to be good through obeying Allah and His Messenger (SAW). Since people in *I'tekaf* are not permitted to go outside the Masjeed except for emergencies, they sleep in the Masjeed and use available facilities of the Masjeed.

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 the 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 deserve 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 travel 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, the *Imam*. It was the practice of the Prophet Muhammad(SAW) to hold 'Eid prayer congregations in open grounds. Following the practice of the Prophet (SAW) Muslims are advised to hold 'Eid prayers in open grounds. In the Muslim countries where there is 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 (SAW) said that performing 'Umrah in the month of Ramadan is equal to performing a major or complete Hajj. Hajj is a pilgrimage to Makkah. Hajj is the enactment of some of the trials and tribulations of Prophet Abraham (SAW), his wife Hagar and his oldest son, Isma'il or Ishmael (SAW). Hajj re-erects the sacrifice of Ishmael, which is represented by the sacrifice of an animal such as a 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 through 13th days of Dhul Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.

For more information contact

Discover Islam

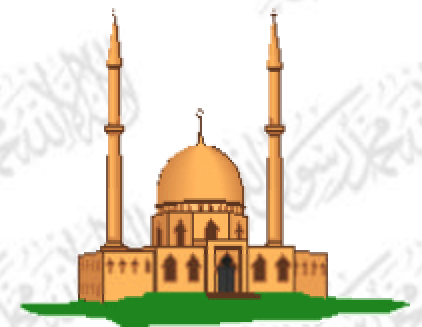
A project by
The Islamic Education & Services Institute

www.2discoverislam.com

P.O.Box 28143
Chattanooga, TN 37421

IESI Brochures Series
Discover Islam Brochures Series
No. 17

RAMADAN & FASTING



Discover Islam

A project by
The Islamic Education & Services Institute
www.2discoverislam.com

P.O.Box 28143
Chattanooga, TN 37421

IN THE NAME OF GOD, MOST GRACIOUS,
MOST MERCIFUL

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 lunar month. If the new moon is sighted, Ramadan begins with the sunset and 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 Quran: *O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain God-consciousness. In the month of Ramadan the Quran 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. (2:183-185)*

Accordingly, the month of Ramadan is called the month of the Quran. Therefore, Muslims have a tradition of reciting The Quran 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*. 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 to do so 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 traveling 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, work 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, usually by 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* (sunset prayer) and then a complete meal. After a brief rest, Muslims go to the Masjeed to offer the *'Isha salah* (night prayer) followed by a special night prayer called *taraweeh*.

TARAWEEH

This nightly congregational *salah* (prayer) is performed after the *'Isha salah*. Traditionally, a *Hafiz* of the Quran, a person who has

memorized the whole Quran (in Arabic), leads the prayer. He recites the Quran in small portions, in proper sequence, every night and completes the recitation of the whole Quran before the end of the month of Ramadan. Every Muslim who attends such prayers regularly gets the opportunity to listen to the whole Quran in a month. If a *Hafiz* of the Quran is not available, a Muslim who has memorized most of the Quran in a group leads the prayer and recites according to his ability. In the absence of a *Hafiz*, some Muslims hold the Quran in their hands during their *salah* and read from it. Many Islamic scholars cite the *sunnah* (way) of the Prophet (SAW) that he always prayed during the night, alone in his apartment, whether it was Ramadan or not, and many of his great companions had the same habit.

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, friendlier, and more ready than in 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 Masjeed in the neighborhood for fast-breaking and meals. People in the neighborhood send fruit, food, and drinks to the Masjeed – 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 AL-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 lifetime of over eighty-three years. Allah sends His decrees in this night. This is the night when the Quran was revealed. Allah says in the Quran:

We have indeed revealed this (the Quran) 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. (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 (SAW) allude it to be the 27th night of the month of Ramadan, but many more reports point to any of the odd dated nights during the last third of the month of Ramadan. According to authentic teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), 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 (SAW) 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 worshiping all night. 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.