



# Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. It is during this month that Muslims observe the Fast of Ramadan. The Month of Ramadan is also when it is believed the Qur'an "was sent down from heaven, a guidance unto men, a declaration of direction, and a means of salvation." Ramadan is a time for inner reflection, devotion to God, and self-control. Muslims think of it as a kind of tune-up for their spiritual lives. Ramadan is a time when Muslims concentrate on their faith and spend less time on the concerns of their everyday lives. It is a time of worship and contemplation.

During the Fast of Ramadan strict restraints are placed on the daily lives of Muslims. They are not allowed to eat or drink during the daylight hours. Smoking and sexual relations are also forbidden during fasting. At the end of the day the fast is broken with prayer and a meal called the *iftar*. In the evening following the *iftar* it is customary for Muslims to go out visiting family and friends. The fast is resumed the next morning.

According to the Qur'an:

*One may eat and drink at any time during the night "until you can plainly distinguish a white thread from a black thread by the daylight: then keep the fast until night"*

Fasting is third "pillar" or religious obligation that all Muslims are asked to believe in and practice. Fasting has many special benefits. Among these, the most important is that it is a means of learning self-control. Ramadan is also a time of intensive worship, reading of the Qur'an, giving to charity, purifying one's behavior, and doing good deeds.

As a secondary goal, fasting is a way of experiencing hunger and developing sympathy for the less fortunate and learning thankfulness and appreciation for all of God's gifts. Fasting is also beneficial to the health and provides a break in the cycle of rigid habits or overindulgence.

While voluntary fasting is recommended for Muslims throughout the year, during Ramadan fasting becomes obligatory. Sick people, travelers, and women in certain conditions are exempted from the fast but must make it up as they are able. Perhaps fasting in Ramadan is the most widely practiced of all the Muslim forms of worship.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Since the Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar where Ramadan falls on the Gregorian calendar changes every year. The much-anticipated start of the month is based on a combination of physical sightings of the moon and astronomical calculations. According to the Islamic Society of North America the first day of fasting for Ramadan 2006 is expected to be September 23rd. The end of the month, marked by the celebration of *'Eid-al-Fitr*, is similarly determined.

During Ramadan, it is common for Muslims to go to the Masjid (Mosque) and spend several hours praying and studying the Qur'an. In addition to the five daily prayers, during Ramadan Muslims recite a special prayer called the *Taraweeh* prayer (Night Prayer). The length of this prayer is usually 2-3 times as long as the daily prayers. Some Muslims spend the entire night in prayer

On the evening of the 27th day of the month, Muslims celebrate the *Laylat-al-Qadr* (the Night of Power). It is believed that on this night Muhammad first received the revelation of the Qur'an. And according to the Qur'an, this is when God determines the course of the world for the following year.

When the fast ends (the first day of the month of Shawwal) it is celebrated for three days in a holiday called *'Eid-al-Fitr* (the Feast of Fast Breaking). Gifts are exchanged. Friends and family gather to pray and eat a large meal. In some cities fairs are held to celebrate the end of the Fast of Ramadan.

## The Islamic Faith

Islam began in Arabia when the Prophet Muhammad (Mohammad, Mohammed) heard the word of God. Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570AD. Muslims believe that when he was 40 Muhammed was called to become God's messenger. At a time when the Arabs had many beliefs and gods, Muhammad taught that there was only one god - Allah (which is God in Arabic).

Muslims believe that the Angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad and taught him the verses of the Qur'an (Koran), the Holy Book of Islam

The most important message of the Qur'an is that God is the creator of the world and controls everything in it. Muslims are called upon to surrender to the will of God. They must live according to the rules of the Holy Qur'an and perform the five main duties of Islam - called the Five Pillars of Faith

The word Muslim (Moslem) means "one who gives himself to God" in Arabic. Islam means "submission or obedience to God"

Islam gives guidance to all aspects of life. Muslims cannot eat pork. Other meats must be *halal* (allowed), meaning that the animals are slaughtered in a way that gives the least pain, and "In the name of God" is recited before it is killed. Muslims should not drink alcohol. They should not fight except for Islam. They must not gamble. Muslims should give to the poor and less fortunate and must be kind to strangers.

## The Five Pillars of Faith

As part of their religion Muslims have 5 duties they must perform, called the Five Pillars of Faith

1. ***Shahada*** (affirmation)

The duty to recite the creed:

"There is nothing worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah"

2. ***Salat*** (prayer)

The duty to worship the One God in prayer five times each day

3. ***Zakat*** (almsgiving)

The duty to distribute alms and to help the needy

4. ***Siyam*** (fasting)

The duty to keep the Fast of Ramadan

5. ***Hajj*** (pilgrimage)

The duty to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime