



ISLAMIC COMMUNITY CENTER OF TEMPE

131 East 6th Street
P.O. BOX 1313
Tempe, Arizona 85281
Phone (480) 894-6070
Fax (480) 894-6243

To Our Non-Muslim neighbors,

Peace be upon you all,

Muslims in America and around the globe anticipate the arrival of the month-long fast Ramadan (rom-a-don) on August 1st.

Ramadan is the holiest and ninth month on the Islamic lunar calendar during which Muslims abstain from food, drink and other sensual pleasures from break of dawn to sunset. The fast is performed to learn discipline, self-restrain and generosity, while obeying God's commandments. Fasting (along with declaration of faith, daily prayers, charity, and pilgrimage to Mecca) is one of the "five pillars" of Islam.

Islam is one of the fastest religions in this country and around the world. There are an estimated more than 6 million Muslims in America and some 1.8 billion world-wide.

Who Must Fast?

Fasting is obligatory on those who are mentally and physically fit, past the age of puberty, in a settled situation (not traveling), and are sure fasting is unlikely to cause real physical or mental injury.

Exemptions from Fasting

- Children under the age of puberty (Young children are encouraged to fast as much as they are able).
- People who are mentally incapacitated or not responsible for their actions
- Those who are too old to fast
- The sick
- Travelers who are on journeys for more than about fifty miles
- Pregnant women and nursing mother if causing harm to the mother
- Women who are menstruating
- Those who are temporarily unable to fast must make up the missed days at another time after Ramadan if they can

Special Events

- Special prayers, called Taraweeh, are performed after the daily nighttime prayer. Lailat ul-Qadr ("The Night of Power" or "Night of Destiny") marks the anniversary of the night on which Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) first began receiving revelations from God, through the angel Gabriel. Muslims believe Lailat ul-Qadr is one of the odd-numbered of the last ten nights of Ramadan.

Traditional Practices by Muslims during Ramadan

- Breaking the daily fast with water and dates

- Reading the entire Qur'an during Ramadan (For this purpose, the Qur'an is divided into 30 units)
- Social visits are encouraged.

Eid ul-Fitr (“Feast of Fast-Breaking”) Prayers at the End of Ramadan

- Eid begins with special morning prayers on the first day of Shawwal, the month following Ramadan on the Islamic lunar calendar, and lasts for three days.
- It is forbidden to fast during Eid.
- Muslims celebrate by exchanging gifts, visiting families and friends.
- During Eid Muslims greet each other with the phrases:
 - “*Eid Mubarak*” (eed-mo-bar-ak), meaning “*Blessed Eid*”
 - “*Taqabbal Allah ta'atakum*”, or “*May God accept our deeds*”

Ramadan Questions & Answers

Q: How did the fast during Ramadan become obligatory for Muslims?

A: The revelation from God to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that would eventually be compiled as the Qur'an began during Ramadan in the year 610, but the fast of Ramadan did not become a religious obligation for Muslims until the year 624 (on the second year after migration of Prophet Muhammad and his companions from Mecca to Al-Medina). The obligation to fast is explained in the second chapter of the Qur'an:

“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-resistant...Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting...” (Chapter 2, verses 183-185)

Q: Why does Ramadan begin on a different day each year?

A: Because Ramadan is a lunar month, it begins about eleven days earlier each year. Because the beginning of Islamic lunar months depend on the actual sighting of the new moon, the start and end dates for Ramadan may vary.

Throughout a Muslim's lifetime, Ramadan will fall both during winter months, when the days are short, and summer months, when the days are long and the fast is more difficult. In this way, the difficulty of the fast is evenly distributed between Muslims living in the northern and southern hemisphere.

Q: What do Muslims believe they gain from fasting?

A: The main benefits in Ramadan are an increased compassion for those in need of necessities of life, a sense of self-purification and reflection and a renewed focus on spiritually. Muslims also appreciate the feeling of togetherness shared by family and friends throughout the month. Perhaps the greatest practical benefit is the yearly lesson in self-restraint and discipline that can carry forward to other aspects of a Muslim's life such as work and education.

Q: Do people normally lose weight during Ramadan?

A: Some people do lose weight, but others may not. It is recommended that meals eaten during Ramadan be light, but most people can't resist sampling special sweets and foods associated with Ramadan.

Q: What is Lailat ul-Qadr?

A: Lailat ul-Qadr ("The Night of Power") marks the anniversary of the night on which Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) first began receiving revelations from God, through the angel Gabriel. And according to the Qur'an, this is when God determines the course of the world for the following year.

An entire chapter in the Holy Quran deals with this night: "*We have indeed revealed this (Message) in the Night of Power: and what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Therein come down the angels and the Spirit of God's permission, on every errand. Peace...This until the rise of morn.*" (Chapter 97)

Muslims believe Lailat ul-Qadr is one of the odd-numbered of the last ten nights of Ramadan.

Q: Isn't it difficult to perform the fast in America?

A: In many ways, fasting in American society is easier than fasting in areas where the climate is extremely hot. In Muslim countries, most people are observing the fast, so there are fewer temptations such as luncheon meetings. Muslims would prefer a daytime work shift during Ramadan so that they may break the fast with their families and attend evening prayers.

Q: How can Non-Muslim co-workers and friends help someone who is fasting?

A: Employers, co-workers and teachers can help by understanding the significance of Ramadan and by showing a willingness to make minor allowances for its physical demands. Special consideration can be given to such things as request for vacation time, the need for flexible early morning or evening work schedules and lighter homework assignments. It is also very important that Muslim workers and students be given time to attend Eid prayers at the end of Ramadan. Eid is as important to Muslims as Christmas and Yom Kippur are to Christians and Jews. A small token such as a card (there are Eid cards available from Muslim bookstores) or baked goods given to a Muslim co-worker during Eid ul-Fitr would also be greatly appreciated. Hospital workers should be aware that injections and oral medications may break the fast. Patients should be given the opportunity to decide where or not their condition exempts them from fasting.

Your neighbors at Islamic Community Center of Tempe