

# Welcoming the blessed month of Ramadan

## Fasting during the Month of Ramadan

Muslims choose to fast during the month of Ramadan because it is one of the five pillars of Islam. The Qur'an tells us that this blessed month prepares us to better accept God's guidance and to grow in *taqwa* (God-consciousness):

*"The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion (of right and wrong)."* (Qur'an 2:185)

Ramadan, therefore, is not simply about abstaining from food and drink. It is about obedience, trust, and submission to our All-Knowing, All-Wise, and All-Powerful *Rabb* (Lord), who knows what is best for us. It is this conscious trust, along with the recognition of our state of *'ajz* (human weakness and dependence), that places us in a better position to receive divine guidance.

Fasting, however, is not unique to Islam, nor is it confined to one historical period or religious tradition. Across human history, fasting has been practiced by many cultures as a means of spiritual preparation, purification, and reflection. Indigenous traditions, including those of Native American communities, incorporated fasting into vision quests, rites of passage, healing practices, and periods of deep contemplation. In these contexts, fasting was understood as a way of quieting the physical body so that the heart and mind could become more receptive to wisdom, insight, and guidance. This historical continuity reminds us that fasting is a deeply human practice, transcending culture and geography, and rooted in humanity's enduring search for meaning and connection with the sacred.

At its core, fasting also has a profound spiritual dimension connected to free will and conscious choice. Unlike other creatures, who may experience hunger due to circumstances beyond their control, human beings alone can *choose* to refrain from eating and drinking for a higher purpose. This deliberate restraint reflects the uniquely human capacity to rise above instinct and immediate desire. In Islam, fasting becomes an expression of free will aligned with divine guidance — a voluntary act of submission that strengthens the soul. By choosing not to eat despite the availability of food, we exercise intention (*niyyah*), self-discipline, and moral agency. It is this conscious choice that transforms fasting from mere deprivation into an act of worship.

Although obeying Allah brings rewards in both this world and the next, it is important to remember that Muslims do not fast for material or health benefits alone. Nevertheless, we trust that whatever Allah commands must ultimately be in our best interest. Through the experience of fasting, we learn self-discipline. Even when food is right in front of us, we choose not to eat. We adapt to a new routine, and although at first everything may feel disrupted, we gradually become stronger and more resilient in the face of change.

Through experiencing hunger, we also learn empathy for those who go hungry every day and have no *iftar* to look forward to. Just as we learn to control our hunger, we learn to control our tongue and behaviour. Ramadan offers us the opportunity to show kindness, generosity, and warmth to others without expecting anything in return. It allows us to draw closer to Allah through reading the Qur'an, reflection, and directly asking Him for guidance. The benefits of this month are numerous.

Islam also teaches that fasting should not cause harm. The Qur'an makes clear that those who are sick, elderly, pregnant, travelling, or children who have not yet reached adolescence are exempt from fasting if it causes difficulty, as Allah does not wish hardship for His servants:

*"And whoever among you is present, let him fast the month; and whoever is sick or on a journey, then (let him fast) the same number of other days. Allah desires ease for you; He does not desire hardship for you... so that you may be grateful."* (Qur'an 2:185)

### **Helpful Hints for Fasting during the Month of Ramadan**

1. If you are dependent on caffeine, begin reducing tea or coffee intake before Ramadan to avoid withdrawal symptoms such as headaches or migraines.
2. Start planning your Ramadan routine early, including sleep, healthy meals, and a study timetable.
3. Light exercise is fine, but avoid heavy or excessive exercise, particularly on hot days.
4. If you have any medical condition, consult a doctor before Ramadan to ensure that fasting is safe for you.
5. Do not miss *suhoor*. Choose slow-releasing energy foods such as porridge, eggs on wholemeal bread, fruit, and drink plenty of water.
6. At *iftar*, eat gradually: begin with dates and water, juice, or milk, followed by nutritious food. Aim to sip water gradually throughout the evening, ideally reaching around eight glasses by bedtime.
7. You are welcome to attend *Taraweeh* prayers in the prayer room.
8. If you feel dizzy, faint, disoriented, or produce very little or no urine, you may be dehydrated. In such cases, you must stop fasting and drink water immediately. Islam does not permit harming the body.
9. Remind yourself that your body has sufficient food and fluid reserves to last until *iftar*; cravings are often psychological rather than physical.
10. If you are fasting during exams, begin in the name of Allah (*Bismillah*). Many students find that lighter digestion improves mental clarity. If you have concerns about fasting and exams, please contact your college. I am also here to offer support.

All the best to you.

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