

Ramadan — The Month of Fasting

Fasting during the Islamic month of Ramadan is known as the fourth pillar of Islam. I fasted during Ramadan even before I became Muslim. I loved the way that my stomach growling and realizing that I was thirsty made me think of God.

I was quite upset when I was told that I could not fast on the days that I had my period.... Yes, it was another “bull of inequity.”

They tried to placate me by telling me that it was like I was sick, and God was making it easier for me. But my male friends were fasting even when they had colds. There was no equality there.

Eventually I found out that the Quran does not restrict women from fasting at any time during Ramadan.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the practice, Ramadan is one of the lunar months of the Islamic calendar. During this lunar month, Muslims do not eat or drink from the earliest light of dawn until sunset. As you can imagine, the evening meal is usually quite festive.

Here is the major Quranic passage on fasting.

*O you who believe, fasting is decreed for you, as it was decreed for those before you, that you may attain salvation.
Specific days (are designated for fasting);
if one is ill or traveling, an equal number of other days
may be substituted. Those who can fast, but with great difficulty,
may substitute feeding one poor person for each day of breaking
the fast. If one volunteers (more righteous works), it is better.
But fasting is the best for you, if you only knew.
Ramadan is the month during which the Quran was revealed,
providing guidance for the people,*

*clear teachings, and the statute book.
Those of you who witness this month shall fast therein.
Those who are ill or traveling may substitute the same number
of other days. God wishes for you convenience, not hardship,
that you may fulfill your obligations, and to glorify God
for guiding you, and to express your appreciation.
(Quran: The Final Testament 2:183-5)*

Though it may sound strange, God makes it easy to fast. There is something that happens during Ramadan that is inexplicable except to say that God makes it possible. We see in these verses that if you are ill or traveling, or if it really is a hardship to fast, you may feed the poor instead. *"But fasting is the best for you, if you only knew."* Thus, even if you say that a woman who is menstruating is "ill," it is still better for her to fast.

There are situations where fasting is not a good idea, so God gives a way to substitute righteous work for fasting. However, for most natural situations, like menstruation and even pregnancy, fasting is not a problem if you are careful to eat and drink enough during the night. Many of my friends have fasted during their pregnancies, and none with adverse effects. Of course they were in consultation with their obstetricians. In situations deemed unsafe, they have not fasted.

Fasting during Ramadan is a Muslim practice that should never be denied to women just because their bodies are doing what God has designed them to do.

Fasting is another religious practice that Christians, Jews and Muslims have in common. The Day of Atonement is a day of fasting for Jews, and many Christians have practices of fasting. Lent may well be derived from the original fasting practice given to Abraham. In both the Jewish scripture and the Gospels we are given directions on the proper attitude for fasting. Isaiah shows us how not to fast:

*...on your fast day
You see to your business*

*And oppress all your laborers!
...you fast in strife and contention,
And you strike with a wicked fist!
Your fasting today is not such
As to make your voice heard on high.
(Isaiah 58:3-4 - Tanakh: A New Translation...)*

Jesus taught that we should not make a public display of our fasting:

*"When you fast, you are not to look glum as the hypocrites do. They change the appearance of their faces so that others may see they are fasting. I assure you, they are already repaid."
(Matthew 6:16 - New American Bible)*

In Muslim communities Ramadan is often a very social time. Because it is assumed that everyone is fasting, restaurants, tea houses, etc. are closed during the day. Most businesses shut down for part of the day. When evening comes and it is time to break the fast, the community comes alive again. Guests are often invited to break the fast and for many Muslims, evenings are spent socializing. It is often known as the time of "fasting and feasting."



As we just mentioned, Ramadan is often a very social time. People often visit one another. Here is the tale of one such visit. The story that follows it is the personal sharing of one who can teach us all about Ramadan and trusting in God.

Muslims fast during Ramadan; they usually wake up before dawn to eat something, so that they can fast during the day. Knowing this, here is the story of a Muslim born man who visited during Ramadan with a family that practiced the religion.

The host asked his guest, "Will you study the Quran with us?"

"I don't have time!" he replied.

They asked, "Would you like to observe the contact prayer with us?"

"I am not used to observing it," he said.

They asked, "Do you give to charity?"

"I can't afford it!"

They said, "Do you fast?"

"I can't stand it," he replied.

The host said, "So, we shall not wake you up for the meal before dawn."

"But I am a Muslim, I am a Muslim!"

(As told by Irandokht, Iran)



Ramadan

"You're Muslim—that means you don't eat pork, right?" "Isn't Allah the one you pray to?" "Are you married to an Arab or something?" These are all questions that I am asked when it is "revealed" that I am a Muslim. "Aren't you supposed to wrap your head up and wear a veil?" Well-meaning, but misinformed people ask these questions routinely. As a modern, American career woman and believer and worshiper of God alone, most people do a "double take" when it is unavoidable and I must share with them that I won't be eating. All I do is smile, perhaps giggle a bit, and tell them more....

Ramadan is the most special time of the year for me. It is a time when I am keenly aware that God is omnipresent in my life. It is actually the time when it is easiest for me to be the best believer in God that I can be. God commanded that for a month

we not eat or drink from dawn until sunset. For everybody around me this is the most difficult thing that anyone can imagine. For me it is the one and only time of the year that I can actually resist the urge to put food into my mouth. I believe God makes this time special and especially easy just for me!

I am hypoglycemic and have been so for about 12 years. Every day I suffer from having to eat on a schedule to avoid having low blood sugar. Having hypoglycemia means constantly having to think about food and having to have food near me. Not just any food, but the right amount of protein and carbohydrates so as to avoid a miserable headache, grouchiness, blurred vision, impaired judgment and other side effects. It also means craving sugar and sweets! I must eat breakfast and I must eat again before noon or I get quite ill. In a perfect world, this would be easy, but daily I seek out sweets like some sort of sugar addict and fight my pancreas for control of the situation!

Ramadan is truly a miracle for me. Each and every day during this special time I eat only at night. I have found that if I eat also in the morning before the sun rises that it is actually more difficult to keep my blood sugar high enough to avoid those inevitable lows that are so common during the year. I have a nice meal and dessert(!) in the evening; as well as lots of water and I have no symptoms of hypoglycemia the following day and every day during Ramadan. The day before Ramadan starts and the day after Ramadan ends I must eat, eat, eat and again the cycle starts. I'm sure there is a physiological reason why during this month and this month alone my blood sugar is adequately controlled, but I prefer to give all of the credit to God for making this a wonderful time. I even fasted for Ramadan during both of my pregnancies and my children (praise God) were both born big, beautiful and healthy. People who know me well just marvel at how I don't even act hungry during Ramadan. This is simply because I'm not! God makes this month so easy for me that I can hardly believe it.

I know we should always be grateful when putting food into our mouths. Ramadan is God's reminder that food should

never be taken for granted. There are people all over the world less fortunate than ourselves; people who don't have enough to eat. I believe that this is God's way of reminding us of just this fact. Having enough to eat is a blessing from God. He has created so many beautiful foods to eat and pure water for us to drink. Let us rejoice and be glad!

– *Lourdes, U.S.A.*