

2 June 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

RAMADHAN 2017 – The Islamic Month of Fasting (Approximately 28 May 2017 – 28 June 2017)

Our organisation – the S.I.Madressa is a religious Sunday school that teaches circa 865 students aged 4 – 16. Our students are primarily from the London Borough of Harrow, Brent, Hillingdon and Hertfordshire – with some even farther afield.

As you may be aware, Muslims around the world will be fasting every day from dawn to dusk between the 28th May 2017 – 28th June 2017 for the holy month of Ramadhan. We would like to take this opportunity of writing to you to inform you about what some of your pupils may be undertaking over this month and to provide some useful information about why Muslims fast.

Why do Muslims fast?

Muslims fast in order in obedience to the command of God; however, in fulfilling their act of obedience they can benefit by endeavouring to attain the necessary characteristics required to live a successful life. Some of the qualities that are aimed to be elicited and indeed strengthened through fasting are: patience, perseverance, humility, charity and self-control.

Fasting is of course not a practice unique to Islam. Rather, it is to be found in all major religions around the world, albeit with subtle differences. Members of the Jewish faith observe the fast on the Day of Atonement, whilst members of the Christian faith observe a fast for forty days prior to Easter. Although the reason for fasting may be different in each case, the objectives are similar.

All Muslims are obliged to carry out the fast subject to having the capacity and ability to do so and are also of a mature age.

What is the fast?

There are two important facets to the fast:

- The **physical** element of the fast requires Muslims to abstain from food and drink, as well as smoking and any other activity that may involve the ingestion of food or drink.
- The **spiritual** element of the fast which plays a significantly greater role and encourages all Muslims to try and attain spiritual peace and perfection. It allows one to strengthen their will power and resolve enabling them to meet the challenges so many young people face with greater determination and sincerity.

Fasting may impact a student's ordinary routine in some manner; however, many students will continue to participate in all their regular activities providing it does not pose them risks to their health in which case they can be obligated to either break their fast or try and change their schedule.

What is the reasoning behind fasting?

The benefits of fasting are numerous and broadly will also fit into two distinct categories:

1. The **physiological benefits** are numerous and mentioned by physicians and in journals worldwide: Detoxification, Autolysis (breaking down of fat stores in the body) and increased protein synthesis leading to a stronger immune system, healthier cells, organs and tissue.
2. The **spiritual benefits** are entirely subjective depending on the individual's own internal resolve during this month, but there is much encouragement to reform oneself during this month through: Giving charity; reminding oneself of those less fortunate; Treating elders and peers with respect and those younger with compassion.

Fasting in this month also honours the revelation of God's word, the Qur'an, which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him and his family) in this month.

We felt that by writing to you directly, we could provide you and your colleagues with a better understanding of the commitments being undertaken by some of the students within your institution. To this end, please find below a small fact sheet containing details of common questions and answers regarding the month of Ramadhan.

I'm sure you will understand that at playtime or during PE, students who are fasting may be slightly less energetic and possibly more tired than usual and I hope that you will be accommodating if short breaks and time-outs are required. Naturally during lunchtime, students will not be eating and in order to avoid confusion from other pupils, I would appreciate it if you could explain very simply to the class the significance of Ramadhan and fasting.

As you will appreciate, fasting is a process of learning and adjustment for mind, body and spirit and so I would like to thank you in advance for your support and understanding in helping students through this process.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,



Sajjad Govani

Principal – S.I.Madressa

Q: What is Ramadhan?

A: Ramadhan is the ninth (9th) month of the Islamic calendar. In this month Muslims, all over the world fast from dawn to dusk.

Q: When does Ramadhan begin?

A: Muslims follow the Islamic Lunar calendar which is about eleven (11) days shorter than the Georgian calendar. The beginning of the Islamic lunar months depends on the actual sighting of the new moon; thus Ramadhan begins on a different day each year.

Q: Is it not an inconvenience to begin the fasting period at different times during a year?

A: On the contrary, the lunar calendar gives us a chance of fasting during different seasons of the year. Throughout a Muslim's lifetime, Ramadhan will fall both during fall and winter months, when the days are short, as well as spring and summer months, when the days are long and the fast is little more difficult. In this way, the difficulty of the fast is evenly distributed between Muslim's living in the northern and southern hemispheres.

Q: What kinds of things are forbidden during fasting?

A: Some of things that are forbidden are:

- (i) Eating & drinking during daylight hours
- (ii) Intentionally inhaling smoke or thick dust
- (iii) Submerging the head completely into the water

Q: What should Muslims gain from fasting?

A: The main intended benefits are an increase in compassion for those who go all year round without the basic necessities of life. Additionally, self-purification and reflection, as well as a renewed focus on spirituality is highly emphasised. Muslim's also make more of an effort to break their fast together as a family & community to enhance their feelings of togetherness and to foster unity.

Q: Do all Muslims fast in Ramadhan?

A: Fasting is compulsory for all Muslim's who are mentally and physically fit, past the age of puberty, in a settled situation (not travelling), and are sure that fasting is unlikely to cause real physical or mental injury.

Q: Who is exempted from fasting?

A: The following people are exempted from fasting during Ramadan:

- (i). An elderly person for whom fasting would cause great difficulty
- (ii). A pregnant or a nursing woman, if fasting would harm her or the child
- (iii). A traveller
- (iv). Any ill person whose medical condition does not allow him/her to stay thirsty (for example, a diabetic)

Q: What about children, can they fast voluntarily?

A: Muslim children under the age of puberty can fast with the permission and supervision of their parents. Parents will help them develop the practice of fasting gradually so that when the children reach the age of puberty they are mentally and physically prepared to fast in Ramadhan. If a child cannot or does not feel like continuing the fast, he/she is allowed to break the fast before dusk.

Q: What are the traditional practices for the month of Ramadhan?

A: Many practices can be seen in various cultures and ethnically groups. However, the following four practices are universal among all Muslims:

- (i). Waking up before dawn to eat something before the commencement of the fast.
- (ii). Breaking the daily fast with a drink of water, a pinch of salt or dates at dusk.
- (iii). Most Muslims recite a portion of the Holy Qur'an every night so as to complete reciting the entire Holy Qur'an during the month.
- (iv). Social visits to the elderly and the sick in hospitals, as well as giving of alms and charity are highly recommended during this month.

Q: Are there any special events during Ramadhan?

A: The most important event is the celebration of Laylatul Qadr (the Nights of Decrees) which mark the anniversary of the night on which the Prophet Muhammed (Peace be upon him) received the Revelation of the Quran from God, through the angel Gabriel.

An entire chapter in the Qur'an deals with this night: *"Surely, We have sent it (the Qur'an) down in the night of Qadr. What will make you know what the night of Qadr is? The night of Qadr is better than a thousand months. The angels and the (holy) spirit descend in it, with the permission of their Lord, with (decrees) for every affair. Peace, until the break of dawn."* (Quran, Chapter 97)

There is also Eid al-Fitr, which is the Festival of Fast-Breaking. Celebrations at the end of Ramadhan begin with special morning prayers on the first day after Ramadhan. During Eid, Muslims greet each other with the phrase *"Eid Mubarak"* (Eed moo-bar-ak), meaning *"Blessed Eid."* Some also say *"May God accept your deeds [performed during Ramadhan]."*