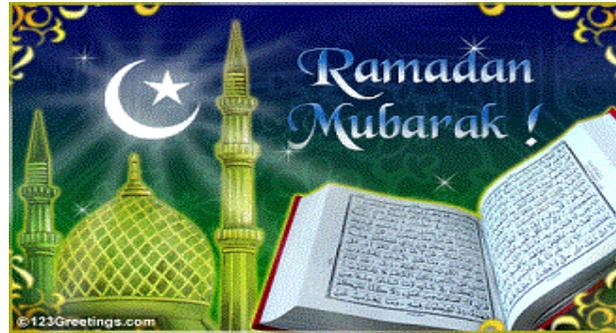


Ramadan



18 June – 17 July 2015

This leaflet has been developed to give you some basic information about Ramadan, but is not intended as a definitive guide. Sources of advice and contact details are given at the end if you need information about specific issues.

When is Ramadan?

Ramadan, the month of fasting, is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and lasts either 29 or 30 days. During this time Muslims fast during daylight hours.

As Muslims follow a lunar calendar, the official beginning occurs 10 days earlier each year. Throughout a Muslim's lifetime, Ramadan will fall during both the winter months (when the days are shorter) and the summer months (when the days are longer and the fast more difficult).

Ramadan is seen as a great blessing and Muslims congratulate each other on its arrival. This year, Ramadan begins on Saturday 28 June. Timetables are used to check prayer times and are specific to each city.

Why do Muslims fast?

Around 610 A.D., the Angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet Muhammad and told him he had been chosen to receive the word of God. He received revelations until his death twenty years later and it is these revelations that form the Quran, the sacred book of Islam. For Muslims, the Quran is God's literal speech, transmitted through mankind via the Prophet Muhammad, the last of a chain of Prophets that included Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus.

Fasting is one of the Five Pillars (obligations) of Islam. The Quran says that the main reason behind fasting is to attain *taqwa*, or God-consciousness. Although Muslims fast during other times of the year, Ramadan is the only time when this is obligatory during the entire month for every able person.

What does fasting achieve?

During Ramadan, Muslims go through a period of intense reflection and devotion, seeking guidance and forgiveness. *Sawm*, or fasting, is practiced during the entire month, during which time eating, drinking (including water) and all bodily pleasures are forbidden during the hours of daylight.

It is an opportunity to practice self-control and to cleanse the body and mind. Perhaps the greatest benefit is the annual lesson in self-restraint and discipline that can carry forward to other aspects of a Muslim's life.

There is an increased compassion for those in need of the basic necessities of life, a sense of self-purification and reflection and a renewed focus on spirituality. Muslims also appreciate the feeling of togetherness shared by family and friends throughout the month.

So what's involved?

The day begins whilst it is still dark and families will wake early for *suhoor*, a meal eaten before the sun rises. After sunset, the fast is ended with a meal known as *iftar* which traditionally includes dates, water, fresh fruits, appetizers, beverages and dinner.

Other duties include the obligatory five daily prayers as well as the recitation of the *tarawih* prayer (night prayer). At mosques during Ramadan, about one-thirtieth of the Quran is recited every night as part of the *tarawih* prayers. By the end of Ramadan, the entire Quran will have been recited.

Some Muslims may decide to go into retreat for the last ten days. They spend their time in prayer and spiritual reflect and do not communicate with anyone until the end of Ramadan.

Who is expected to fast?

More than 1 billion Muslims worldwide celebrate Ramadan, including more than 1.5 million in the UK. Fasting is compulsory for those who are mentally and physically fit, past the age of puberty, in a settled situation (i.e. not travelling) and are sure that fasting is unlikely to cause any real physical or mental injury. From about the age of 12, all Muslim children are encouraged to fast. However, there are some exceptions:

- people who are mentally incapacitated or not responsible for their actions
- the elderly
- the sick
- people who are travelling
- pregnant women
- nursing mothers
- women who are menstruating

Those temporarily unable to fast must make up the missed days another time or feed the poor.

For those wanting to fast there is advice on fasting while on medication and good health during fasting.

What happens at the end of Ramadan?

Ramadan ends with the festival of Eid ul-Fitr, the precise timing of which depends on the sighting of the new moon. Literally the "Festival of Breaking the Fast," this is one of the two most important Islamic celebrations (the other occurs after the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca).

At Eid ul-Fitr people dress in their finest clothes, decorate their homes with lights and decorations, give treats to children, and enjoy visits with friends and family. At the end of Ramadan, Muslims give *Zakat ul Fitr*, a monetary contribution to the poor or their mosques.

How can non-Muslim colleagues and friends help?

Employers, colleagues and fellow students can help by understanding the significance of Ramadan and by showing a willingness to make some allowances for its physical demands. This is particularly pertinent when Ramadan falls over the summer months with its longer period of daylight.

Special consideration should be given to such things as requests for time off, the need for flexible early morning or evening work schedules. It is also important that Muslim staff and students be given time to attend Eid prayers at the end of Ramadan. Many Muslims will want to celebrate Eid with family and friends, some needing to travel to do so.

Consideration should be given to the timings of breakfast/ lunch meetings, away days and celebrations, as it will be difficult for Muslims to participate fully.

It is not necessary for individuals that are not fasting to abstain from eating or drinking in the presence of Muslims who are. However, if you ask to be excused for eating whilst your colleague(s) is fasting this would be appreciated.

Fasting alongside Muslim colleagues and friends, even for part of a day, is a good way to enhance understanding. It may be that you can get together with Muslim colleagues and friends for Iftar. You could also offer felicitations for the end of Ramadan and to celebrate Eid.

Further information

- Look out for details of Iftar and Eid ul-Fitr celebrations at the University
- [Multi Faith Chaplaincy](#) Team – Revd Mick Williams and Imam Riaz Hafiz Ahmad
- Prayer Rooms:
 - Stoke – Faith House (behind Dwight)
 - Stafford – Multi Faith Chaplaincy, Beacon D Block.
- General information:
 - Official Ramadan 2014 website - www.ramadan.co.uk
 - BBC Religion and Ethics – [Ramadan](#)
- [Equality and Diversity – Religion and Belief](#)