

# Ramadan

## Introduction

All religions have times of the year or days that they consider to be particularly holy. For example, Easter and Christmas are special periods for Christians, Yom Kippur and Hanukah are important for Jews, Diwali is a time of celebration for Hindus, Vaisakhi is a special day for Sikhs and Wesak is a Buddhist festival. Religious people 'observe' these times by behaving in a different way during them. For Muslims, Ramadan is the most holy month of the year. Ramadan is when Muslims complete one of the Five Pillars of Islam: *Sawm* (fasting)

## What is Ramadan?



Muslims believe that Ramadan is the month when Allah (God) revealed the Qur'an (the Muslim holy book) to the Prophet Muhammad by sending the Angel Gabriel to speak to him. The observance of Ramadan goes back hundreds of years to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. During Ramadan, Muslims 'fast' from sunrise to sunset (to 'fast' means to not eat or drink).

## Does every Muslim have to fast?

Fasting is not supposed to be easy, but it is also not supposed to be cruel or to harm people's health. For this reason, some people are exempt from fasting (they do not need to do it). Muslim children do not usually begin to fast until they are seven years old, and they do not fast as much during Ramadan as an adult does, until they are about twelve. This is because small children do not have the self-control not to eat or drink and they are not old enough to understand why fasting is important. For some adults, such as people with diabetes or women who are pregnant, fasting would be dangerous, so they are also exempt from it.



## **When is Ramadan?**

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. As the months in the Islamic calendar are shorter than the months in the Gregorian calendar, the time of year that Ramadan falls in in the Gregorian calendar changes over the years, so Ramadan might be in January, May, August or any other month!

## **How long does a Muslim have to fast for each day?**

In temperate countries (those with four clear seasons), Muslims have to fast for much longer each day in summer than in winter, as the sun rises much earlier and sets much later in summer than it does in winter. Most Muslims in the world live in places near the equator (the imaginary line around the middle of the Earth), which do not have such a difference in the length of the days as places that are further from the equator do. However places near the equator are hot, so not drinking all day is hard.

## **Why do Muslims fast during Ramadan?**

For Muslims, fasting is a sign that they have submitted to the will of Allah (that they are doing what God wants them to). Hunger feels the same for everyone, no matter who you are, so fasting also reminds Muslims that everyone is the same in Allah's eyes. Fasting also teaches you to have self-control and to think of the less fortunate people in the world who never have enough food to eat.

## **What else do Muslims do during Ramadan, apart from fasting?**

Muslims try to live especially holy lives during Ramadan. In addition to fasting, many Muslims spend more time reading the Qur'an than they normally would. They also try even harder not to lie, break promises or gossip than they normally do. Some Muslims go on a 'retreat' (a holy holiday) for the last ten days of Ramadan, where they stay in a mosque and live simple, religious lives.



## **Summary**

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is the most holy month of the year for Muslims. They believe it is when the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. During Ramadan, Muslims fast, pray more than usual and try to live especially holy lives. Fasting is a way of showing that they submit to the will of Allah and it teaches self-control and empathy (thinking about other people's needs). While most Muslims do fast, some do not because they are too young or because it could harm their health.

## **References**

What Do We Know About Islam? by Sharukh Husain

World Beliefs and Cultures: Islam by Sue Penney

## **Source of images**

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