



# **A Beginner's Guide to Ramadan**

"Adapted from A Beginners Guide to Ramadan" by LNM 2010

"Oh you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous." (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:186)

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## 1. Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord and Creator of the worlds. To Him we turn in repentance and ask for guidance. Upon Him we rely and to Him we will return. Oh Allah, bless Muhammad Your Messenger and Prophet, his family, his Companions and all who follow Your guidance.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Fasting (*Sawm* in Arabic) during this month is one of the five fundamental Pillars of Islam, as mentioned in a Hadith narrated by Ibn `Umar:

Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: "Islam is based on five (principles):

1. To testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah; and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.
2. To establish the (obligatory) prayers (dutifully and perfectly).
3. To pay *Zakat* (i.e. obligatory charity).
4. To observe the fast during the month of Ramadan.
5. To perform Hajj. (i.e. pilgrimage to Makkah)

*(Sahih al-Bukhari Volume 1, Book 2, Number 7)*

Ramadan is a blessed month, which is of great benefit to us in both this life and the next. It is the month of fasting, prayer, reflection and remembrance of Allah, the Exalted. It is a chance for us to draw close to Him and re-discover the purpose for our existence. Anyone who fasts the whole of the month of Ramadan sincerely and correctly will have their previous wrongs forgiven.

## 2. Beginning of the month and its duration

As the Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, the months are determined by the cycles of the moon and every new moon represents a new month. The fasting of Ramadan becomes obligatory by either the completion of the thirty days of Sha'ban (the previous month) or by the sighting of the crescent by a trustworthy man. And, if the crescent is sighted in one district but not another and two districts are in the same region, the ruling holds for both.

With the advancement of science in the modern era, methods for sighting and calculating the birth of the new moon have become more sophisticated, leading Muslim scholars to have different opinions on the correct way to decide when the new month has arrived. As a result, the community sometimes differs about which days to start and end the fast and this may also may cause *`Eid* (the festival at the end of Ramadan) to be celebrated on different days in different mosques. This can cause confusion for new Muslims (and even for not-so-new Muslims). It is however

allowed for a Muslim to follow their local mosque in these matters and in that way to consider their fasts as valid and complete.

### 3. The obligation to fast during Ramadan

Every person who has reached the age of puberty, is of sound mind, is Muslim, is capable of fasting and who knows that the month of Ramadan has started is obliged to fast.

Children should be encouraged to fast from the age of seven and admonished if they don't do it from the age of ten, if they are physically able to fast.

### 4. Those exempt from fasting

There are two types of exceptions from fasting; those who are not allowed to fast and those who have permission to not fast.

The following people are not allowed to fast: anyone who is menstruating; bleeding following childbirth; too weak or ill to fast, to the extent that it is feared that they will die if they do not break the fast; and pregnant or nursing women, who fear that they or their babies will be harmed if they fast .

Those who have permission not to fast are: people who are travelling a lengthy distance (unless the journey starts after dawn); those who are sick, pregnant, or breast-feeding and have reason to believe it may harm themselves or the child; those who are overwhelmed by hunger or thirst and those who have to take medicine between *Fajr* and *Maghrib* and cannot avoid doing so.

Anyone who breaks their fast – whether or not for a valid reason - has to make up the fast when they are able to, except for children, the insane and someone who was not a Muslim at the time of the fast. It is recommended to perform the make-up fasts in succession and as soon as possible.

If a fast is broken without a legitimate reason, it is obligatory to make the days up after the end of Ramadan. Depending on the reason, the person may have to free a slave, fast for two months in a row or feed 60 poor people.

### 5. Description of fasting

'Fasting' means to not eating, drinking or having sexual relations from the beginning of the time for the *Fajr* prayer until the beginning of the time for the *Maghrib* prayer. In other words from the first light of dawn until sunset.

As with all acts of worship, it should be done with the correct intention. You should make the intention to fast the obligatory fast of Ramadan every day in your heart, before you start to fast.

If you do any of the following during the time for fasting, you will have broken your fast: eating or drinking intentionally, sexual intercourse, smoking, taking medicine or chewing flavoured gum. No substance should enter the body through any orifice (mouth, nose, ear, anus, vagina or penis) other than saliva and air.

Wilful ejaculation and vomiting also break the fast.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) continued to clean his teeth while fasting. So you may also do so as long as it is without excessive rinsing of the mouth, because if you swallow some of the water it would break your fast.

If you eat or drink a little or a lot out of forgetfulness or ignorance, your fast isn't broken.

The times of the fast and prayers can be found at the [Sheffield New Muslim Project website](http://sheffieldnewmuslims.co.uk/NMPTimetable.pdf) (<http://sheffieldnewmuslims.co.uk/NMPTimetable.pdf>)

## **6. Adab (Etiquettes) of fasting**

Fasting is more than just abstaining from eating, drinking and sexual relations. It is a process that should help you to discipline yourself and enable your mind to be in control of your body. This will help you to become a better Muslim and ultimately closer to Allah. A person who is fasting should try to avoid all sins – both minor and major. Of course, sins should always be avoided, but it is especially important during Ramadan, if more than just hunger and thirst are to be the result of this blessed month.

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said,

"Fasting is a shield (or a screen or a shelter). So, a person observing fasting should avoid sexual relations and should not behave foolishly and impudently, and if somebody fights with him or abuses him, he should tell him twice, 'I am fasting.' The Prophet (peace be upon him) added, 'By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, the smell coming from the mouth of a fasting person is better in the sight of Allah than the smell of musk. (Allah says about the fasting person), 'He has left his food, drink and desires for My sake. The fast is for Me. So I will reward (the fasting person) for it and the reward of good deeds is multiplied ten times.'"

*(Sahih Muslim Volume 3, Book 31, Number 118)*

## **7. Suhoor and Iftar**

*Suhoor* is the meal taken before the beginning of the fast in the morning before the *Fajr* prayer. It is recommended to delay *Suhoor* to the latest time possible, close to

dawn, as long as eating does not continue past the beginning of the time for the *Fajr* prayer. Scholars advocate to abstain from eating several minutes before *Fajr* time to allow the mouth to clear of any food remnants. This meal was emphasised as important by the Prophet (peace be upon him), due to its blessings. It does not invalidate your fast if you miss *Suhoor*.

*Iftar* is the breaking of the fast, which is done at the beginning of the time for the *Maghrib* prayer. It is strongly recommended to eat something as soon as the time for the prayer starts (at sunset). It is *Sunnah* (the practice of the Prophet, peace be upon him) to eat an odd number of dates and/or to drink water at this time, before praying the *Maghrib* prayer. But any food or drink that is *Halal* is acceptable. Missing or delaying this meal does not invalidate the fast, but it is strongly disliked to do so. It is also recommended to provide *Iftar* for other fasting people and to eat with them.

## 8. Good deeds in Ramadan

Good deeds in Ramadan are multiplied in reward many times over. As mentioned in the above *Hadith* (a report about the Prophet, peace be upon him), the fast is for Allah alone. Most people have time during their day when no-one can see them, when no-one would know if they ate or not. Whatever they do is witnessed in full by Allah.

Our Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "It is the month of patience, and the reward of patience is Paradise."

He (peace be upon him) used to give more charity in Ramadan than any other month and gave the most during the last ten days. It is recommended to be extra generous to your family in Ramadan and to be good to relatives and neighbours.

It is a good time to read more Qur'an and to increase your *Dhikr* (remembrance of Allah). That can be done in a number of ways, such as reciting the Qur'an, reflecting upon the meaning of the Qur'an and Allah's Names, Attributes and creation, reading supplications and performing optional prayers.

It is important to not overburden yourself with extra deeds. Thirty days is a long time and it is useful to plan ahead and think about your limits. The best advice is to try and slowly increase your extra deeds as the month goes on, so by the end you achieve the target you set yourself. It is too easy to get carried away at the beginning and 'burn out' before the end.

You should refrain from lying and backbiting whilst fasting, and this is emphasized.

Kissing is also disliked, and it becomes unlawful if it is possible that it may lead to ejaculation or sexual intercourse.

## 9. Taraweh

*Taraweh* is a voluntary prayer that is performed every night after the *Isha* prayer in mosques during Ramadan. It is not an obligation to attend a mosque to perform it as it can also be performed at home. Most mosques try to complete one Juz' (one 30<sup>th</sup>) of the Qur'an every night, so by the end of Ramadan they aim to have completed a recitation of the whole Book. It is prayed in slightly different ways from mosque to mosque, some pray 23 *Rak'ahs* (units of prayer, i.e. 20 *Rak'ahs* of prayer + 3 *Rak'ahs* of *Witr*) and others 11 *Rak'ahs* (8 *Rak'ahs* + 3 *Rak'ahs* of *Witr*), but is always done in sets of two *Rak'ahs* and usually lasts about an hour.

Many Muslims place a lot of emphasis on attending this prayer to the point it may be perceived as an obligation, but that is not the case, it is completely optional; although highly recommended.

## 10. The Night of Power

The Night of Power (*Laylat-ul-Qadr* in Arabic) is the night on which Allah sent down the Qur'an in its entirety to the lowest heaven and it is also the night when the first revelations were received by the Prophet (peace be upon him) from the angel Jibra'il (Gabriel, peace be upon him).

No-one knows the exact date, but many believe that it is the 27th night. Others believe it is one of odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan, others one of the even nights, some believe it can be any night of Ramadan and others believe it changes year to year.

On this night many mosques have extra programmes of *Dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) and prayer. It is believed that a good deed is rewarded at least 1,000 times more than usual on this night, as Allah states in the Qur'an that it is '...better than a thousand months.' (Surah Al-Qadr 97:3). Thus it is important for one to make extra efforts in Ramadan in an attempt to secure this night.

It is important to remember that the Islamic day starts at sunset of the night before and not at midnight.

## 11. `Itikaf (seclusion in the mosque)

*`Itikaf* is performed by those who are able, in the last ten days of Ramadan. It is not obligatory, but is recommended and was the practice of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them all). Many mosques will provide facilities for *`Itikaf*. This entails staying in the mosque for a minimum of one full day, with the intention of doing it to get closer to Allah. You may of course leave the mosque to go to the bathroom or for other urgent matters. Those in *`Itikaf*

should be engaged in remembrance of Allah (*Dhikr*), do extra *Salah*, recite and study the Qur'an, etc.

## 12. `Eid-ul-Fitr

`Eid-ul-Fitr is the festival on the first day of the month after Ramadan (known as *Shawwal*). It is not permissible to fast on this day. Early in the morning after sunrise, a prayer is performed in the mosques and it is recommended that everyone should attend, men and women (even menstruating women, if the mosque provides a place for them). Everyone should wear their best clean clothes (remaining within the Islamic clothing guidelines) and men should wear perfume. Before attending the prayer it is advised to have *Ghusl* (a ritual bath) and clean your teeth.

## 13. Zakat-ul-Fitr

This is an obligatory charitable payment, which must be paid before the `Eid prayer and is mainly used to feed the poor. Ask your local mosque for details of how to pay it and how much it is (as the rate varies each year, but is a small amount roughly equivalent to the amount needed to feed a person a normal meal). It has to be paid on behalf of each member of the household, young and old. It should be paid by the man responsible for the household, but if there isn't a man responsible for the household, the women have to pay their own *Zakat –ul-Fitr*.

## 14. Advice about food during Ramadan

It is very important to eat a healthy diet during Ramadan that can sustain you. Fasting can be very good for your health if done properly, but eating junk or poor quality food can make the fast harder and be bad for your health. The NHS have issued a booklet containing advice on what to eat and how to stay healthy during Ramadan. This can be found at the following website:

<http://tinyurl.com/ramadanhealthguide>

## 15. Du`a (prayer) at the time of breaking the fast

The following *Du`a* is advised to be said just before breaking the fast:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي لَكَ صُمْتُ وَبِكَ آمَنْتُ وَعَلَيْكَ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَعَلَى رِزْقِكَ أَفْطَرْتُ

(*Allahumma inee laka Sumtu wa bika aamantu wa `alika tawakkaltu wa `alaa rizqika afTartu.*)

“Oh Allah, indeed for You I have fasted and in You I have believed and upon You I have relied and with Your provision I have broken my fast”.



## Glossary

*Adab* - manners or etiquette.

*Dhikr* - Remembrance of Allah

*`Eid* – Festival. There are only two main festivals in the Islamic calendar, the first at the end of Ramadan (which is called *`Eid-ul-Fitr*) and the second to celebrate the Hajj (which is called *`Eid-ul-Adha*).

*Hadith* - Report about the Prophet (peace be upon him), which could be a report about his actions or his words or his tacit approval of something. This is the main source used by scholars to understand the Prophet's *Sunnah* (what he did) and it is the second source of knowledge about Islam after the Qur'an.

*Imam* – Literally: a leader; but commonly referring to someone who is appointed to lead the prayers in the mosque. It is also a term that can be used for anyone leading prayers or a respected scholar.

*`Itikaf* - seclusion (see section 10)

Jibra'il - The angel Gabriel

*Laylat-ul-Qadr* - The Night of Power (see section 9)

*Sahih al-Bukhari* - The most reliable collection of Hadith according to the majority of Muslim scholars.

*Sahih Muslim* - The second most reliable collect of Hadith.

*Sawm* – Fasting

*Taraweh* - The prayers done in the mosque after the night prayer during Ramadan (see section 8)

## About the Sheffield New Muslim Project

The Sheffield New Muslim Project (NMP) was founded in 2005 by converts as a not-for-profit organization, run by volunteers, with the aim of supporting New Muslims and those with an interest in Islam in Sheffield and its surrounding areas.

Since that time the Sheffield NMP has witnessed many *Shahadahs* (Testimony of Faith) and continues to provide support and guidance to converts and their families, as well as offering a wider range of mentoring and social activities to integrate converts into the wider Muslim community.

Our services are mainly focused on new converts, but we also welcome more seasoned converts. Due to the large number of students in Sheffield, the project also includes people from a wide range of both local and international backgrounds and all ages.

Since the Sheffield NMP was set up many people have benefited from the services and mentorship from the project. We plan to continue the great work being achieved by the project to help many more converts learn, develop and become positive role models for the many people who are looking into Islam.

We rely on donations from our community to sustain our activities. Donations are accepted either by cash, cheque or standing order.

If you'd like to make a direct debit or one-off payment, our bank account details are:

HSBC

Sort code: 40-41-18

Account Number: 21751352

Please make cheques payable to Sheffield New Muslim Project and send to: Sheffield New Muslim Project, PO Box 4649, Sheffield S10 9EG

We also have a *Zakat* fund which we are happy to manage for people, as we do get occasional requests from the convert community for financial support in dire situations. Our bank details for the *Zakat* account are:

HSBC

Sort code: 40-41-57

Account Number: 40247731



## Sheffield New Muslim Project

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