

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Celebrating Ramadan: obligation and opportunity

By Dr. Aly Mageed

The first verses of the Quran were revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) during the lunar month of Ramadan, indicating the significance of this holy month for Muslims worldwide. Ramadan offers Muslims special opportunities to strengthen our spirituality, remember those who have less, build self-confidence and discipline, increase time for critical self-reflection and restore devotion to God and our communities. Voluntarily abstaining from lawful activities such as eating and drinking from dawn until dusk — especially during the long summer days of this year's Ramadan, in which we'll be fasting from about 4 a.m. until 9:30 p.m. — requires considerable internal strength and self-

restraint. This kind of "spiritual boot camp" serves to instill in us the stamina, patience and fortitude necessary to go through life's difficult obstacles and also refrain from activities Muslims consider unlawful, such as lying, stealing, back-stabbing, drinking alcohol, engaging in premarital sex, eating pork, etc.

The prophet said that if humanity were to truly understand the magnitude of the blessings of Ramadan, we would wish the month lasted all year long. During this month, the rewards of good deeds are multiplied, and misdeeds can especially be forgiven through sincere fasting and repentance, while the devil is said to be chained, and the gates of Paradise and forgiveness are widely opened.

Secluded reflection is a forgotten act of worship that



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we tend to lose focus on our long-term objectives and diminish our sense of purpose. Extra time to contemplate and re-evaluate one's actions can be essential to preventing regrets, when the days, months and years go by and one finds that his or her ambitions and truly valuable divine-to-human and human-to-human connections were lost in the repetition of daily matters.

What these benefits signify is a larger lesson our faith teaches us: Certain obligations mandated by the divine might initially seem

is frequently underemphasized and is a meaningful component of fasting. When we get absorbed into cyclical daily routines,

burdensome, but they are in reality pure acts of mercy that are well designed and chosen in order to help us restore our compass and direction.

For my family and me, Ramadan provides us with an opportunity to come closer together and enjoy each other's company. Breaking the day's fast (Iftar) is typically done as a family and usually is accompanied with thoughtful discussions. We also wake up early before dawn to have another meal and perform the dawn prayer together. In addition, we frequent the mosque more. American mosques have re-established the unique role the early mosques of Islam once had in acting as religious and social institutions. We offer sunset prayers, then have a communal dinner with about 200 other community members,

followed by the prescribed night prayer and a special, late-night prayer called Taraweeh. The change of pace, direction and lifestyle that Ramadan brings is an excellent opportunity to start life anew. We ultimately hope it reflects in broader community action with common goals of self-improvement and cooperation. To that end, we would welcome broader community participation in visits and Iftar. If interested, email the masjid (mosque) at info@grmasjid.com.

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