

Ramadan Basics

What does the Word Ramadan mean? *Ramadan* (**rah**-muh-dahn, ninth month) is the name of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The literal meaning of the Arabic word is scorching heat.

Dates of Ramadan: Since the Islamic calendar is based on the cycles of the moon, the dates for *Ramadan* vary from year to year. The observance of fasting coincides with the sighting of the new crescent moon. Usually, an *imam* (ee-**mahm**, Muslim holy man) declares the official start of *Ramadan*. The period of *Ramadan* continues until the next new moon, about 29-30 days.

Religious Significance: According to the *Qur 'an* (kohr-**ahn**, Muslim holy book), the month of *Ramadan* has special significance – it is the time when Allah began to reveal his instructions for mankind to his prophet, Muhammad. Fasting during *Ramadan* is one of the 5 pillars, or essential parts, of Islam. Muslims consider fasting an expression of their faith, a form of worship, and a way to please their god, Allah. Writings in the *Hadith* (hah-**deeth**, a record of sayings or actions attributed to the prophet Muhammad) give more weight to good deeds performed during the month of *Ramadan* and even say that if one fasts with a sincere heart, his sins will be forgiven. The Night of Power falls towards the end of the month of *Ramadan*. Muslims believe this is a special night when Allah pays special attention to their requests and many pray fervently on this night. Often they are open to dreams and visions as they seek Allah's guidance and revelation.

Social Significance: Fasting allows Muslims to gain an appreciation for what the poor and hungry in their community experience. Muslims are encouraged to donate to and serve the needy during *Ramadan* and believe that Allah will reward them for doing so. As Muslims across the world participate together in the month-long observance of fasting, they demonstrate their unity.

Fasting: During *Ramadan*, Muslims begin fasting on the morning following the sighting of the new crescent moon. Muslims fast every day from the time it begins to get light until sunset. Typically, families get up before daylight and share a meal together. During the daytime, Muslims work or go to school as usual. They must refrain from eating or drinking – even water. In addition, they pray, read or listen to passages from the *Qur 'an*, and attend services at the mosque. At sunset, Muslims are permitted to eat again. Often, friends and families gather in the evening to enjoy huge feasts.

What About Children? When children reach puberty, they participate fully in fasting. Fasting is not mandatory for young children, but many observe some aspects of *Ramadan*. They may go without food for part of a day or on one day of the weekend. Boys and girls may also participate in collecting money or items to donate to the needy, preparing the special meals, and listening as parents read portions of the *Qur 'an* in the evening.

After Ramadan: Muslims mark the end of *Ramadan* with a holiday called *Eid al-Fitr*, (eed ahl-**fooh**-tahr, festival of breaking the fast). Schools and businesses close for the day. Families, many wearing new clothes, go to the mosque in the morning and offer prayers of thanks. Then they continue the celebration by visiting friends and relatives, exchanging gifts, and preparing special dishes to enjoy together.

What Does the Bible Say?

Read Romans 3:20-21, Hebrews 11:6, and Colossians 1:27. Then meditate on these questions:

1. Can the good things we do assure us a place in heaven?
2. What is needed to please God?