



Ramadan and its Benefits

Islamicity

The holy month of Ramadan is once again upon us. While most of us will be fasting and praying and seeking Allah's blessings in this month some would be spending even more time in extra prayers and remembrance of Allah. Every year Ramadan offers a kind of transcendental experience for many Muslims.

Fasting has many benefits for the body as well as for the mind. It gives the body some needed respite provided one does not indulge in the night. And the rigorous discipline and code of conduct that have to be observed daily as part of fasting and for as long as thirty days contribute to one's patience, tolerance, and overall wellbeing. These are by themselves great benefits of fasting.

But beyond that we should also strive for spiritual benefits. This month should bring out the best in us despite the controversy surrounding moon sighting. We should be kind to one another in our dealings, no matter what our differences. We must respect each other no matter what our status. We should try to inculcate these qualities in us during this month as much as possible so that it becomes part of our nature for the rest of the year.

Backbiting, attaching labels, insulting one another by nicknames, spreading rumours and suspicions about others are major sins in Islam (49:11-12). So, we must always try to avoid them at every level: individual, social, or political. But since in this month we are in a heightened spiritual state of God-consciousness we must be extra careful not to go near them. This is how we achieve self-purification – one of the important goals of fasting. Also, we should be aware of those who offer short cuts to Heaven in this month. According to the Qur'an there are no short cuts to Heaven (2:214). So, we must be careful of the merchants of salvation.

Life has a serious purpose. Our time is very precious. Therefore, we should not engage in trivial talk. But it is not easy to shun it. It pervades everywhere. Without realizing we get sucked into it. So, it requires deliberate conscious effort to avoid it. Fasting helps us in this direction because we are more God-conscious in this month than any other month. Fasting is not just for the stomach but also for the tongue. If someone wants to engage in loose talks one should simply point to fasting.

Islam is about giving and this month is especially about show-

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Muslim worshippers perform the evening Tarawih prayer around the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque complex in the holy city of Mecca

ing that commitment. As our duty to Islam we must help the poor and the needy, as much as we can and by all means at our disposal: by our wealth, by our knowledge, by our labour. As the Prophet (PBUH) said we should give until it hurts. If all the fortunate Muslims whom Allah has blessed sincerely practiced this pillar of Islam the poverty in the world will be greatly reduced. But our Prophet (PBUH) also established a system for this giving. No amount of giving will help in the long run until we have a unified system in place. This is a challenging task and we

must work hard towards this goal especially during this month of Ramadan.

Instead of indulging in luxurious life styles the well to do among us should follow the Sunnah of our Prophet (PBUH) by living modestly. Living comfortably does not mean excessive indulgence. Caliph Othman (R) should serve as a role model for the rich among us. We are supposed to practice the injunction of the Quran: "They ask thee how much they are to spend; Say: "What is beyond your needs. (2:219)." [Translation: Yusuf Ali]

Determining our need must be based on our capacity to use and not on our capacity to accumulate or on our capacity to fulfil socially induced desires. Following verses further amplify this situation very clearly:

Verily, (the ends) ye strive for are diverse. So he who gives and fears (Allah), And (in all sincerity) testifies to the best, - We will indeed make smooth for him the path to Bliss. But he who is a greedy miser and thinks himself self-sufficient, And gives the lie to the best, - We will indeed make smooth for him the path to Misery; Nor will his wealth prof-

it him when he falls headlong (into the Pit). Verily We take upon Ourselves to guide, And verily unto Us (belong) the End and the Beginning. Therefore do I warn you of a Fire blazing fiercely; None shall reach it but those most unfortunate ones Who give the lie to Truth and turn their backs. But those most devoted to God shall be removed far from it, - Those who spend their wealth for increase in self-purification. [Surah Al-Layl 92:4-18, Translation: Yusuf Ali]

To help check our irrational passions we should try to feel the

pain and suffering of our fellow human beings in the spirit of Caliph Abu Bakr (R) who kept his daily allowance equal to an average worker. On being asked as to why he was doing this he answered that he wanted to experience himself directly how an average worker was meeting his daily needs; and that if he (Abu Bakr (R)) were to find that it was hard to meet his daily needs then he would raise the allowance of the workers and that would automatically raise his allowance as well. He showed by this example what it means to be a true servant of Allah. What a beautiful world would be for Muslims – and a shining model for others – if our Muslim rulers were to emulate his example even partially?

This is the spirit of Ramadan. This is what Ramadan is all about: feeling directly for a month what millions of human beings are going through daily throughout the year, and trying our best to change their situation for the better in the long term. This requires that we prepare and train ourselves for this important task. The month of Ramadan is supposed to provide that training. So why not start with this Ramadan? Who knows what will happen until next Ramadan?



Muslims pray as they await the sighting of the moon that marks the start of the holy month of Ramadan on the Sea Point promenade in Cape Town



Indonesian muslim students read the Koran in their class room at the Sirajuss'adah Boarding School in Depok, West Java, Indonesia

Ramadan cooking

Makes about 15

Ingredients

1kg potatoes
oil, for frying
1/2 onion, peeled and minced
1 jalapeño, minced
1 clove garlic, peeled and minced
1/4 kg minced lamb or beef
2g mixed ground spices
salt, to taste
chopped coriander leaves, according to your preference
1 egg, beaten
breadcrumbs, for coating
oil, for frying

Catlix (stuffed potato balls)

Method

Boil the potatoes in water until they are soft. Peel and mash them with a fork till smooth, and season to taste.

Place some oil in a pan, and sautee the onion, jalapeno and garlic till fragrant. Add in the minced meat, and stir-fry lightly till cooked. Add the spices and season to taste.

Remove from the heat and stir the coriander leaves through.

Form the mashed potato into small balls. Make an indentation in the middle of each ball and fill with a little of the minced meat mixture.

Coat each ball with beaten egg, then roll in the breadcrumbs till fully-coated.

Place some oil into a heavy-bottomed saucepan or wok and deep-fry the potato balls till golden brown. Serve hot.

