

## RAMADAN FASTING FOSTERS OPTIMISM

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ONE OF the Muslim's best-known religious duties is fasting in the month of Ramadan. During this month, which began this week, Muslims all over the world are supposed to abstain completely from eating, drinking, smoking and sex from dawn until sunset in order to have spiritual and social happiness.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar year, which has 355 days, making it shorter than the solar year by approximately 10 days. The lunar year consists of 12 months, each 29 or 30 days, depending on the moon's positions. Thus the month of Ramadan will fall in all of the natural seasons every 33 solar years.

Ramadan begins with the new moon, and ends on the first day of the next new moon.

The fasting of Ramadan is a compulsory religious duty upon every Muslim male or female who is mentally and physically well. Travelers, elderly and nursing and pregnant women may keep the fast only if no undue hardship is experienced. Otherwise they should break the fast and make it up later, a day for a day. As for the very old, if they can't make it up later, they must feed one needy Muslim a full meal for each day they didn't fast.

Fasting offers positive impacts on the self, community, and society: Fasting fosters hope and an optimistic outlook on life and the future. Fasting creates a sense of true equality of human beings.

When men and women, rich and poor, black and white, fast during the same period and practice similar religious activities, this action reflects the equality of them all. Fasting fills the Muslim community with love, cleanliness, righteousness and purity. Friends, relatives, and extended families meet for food, spiritual gathering and entertainment.

Fasting enhances awareness of one's dependence on God and one's similarity to other humans, especially the poor and hungry. Toward the end of Ramadan, the head of each household must give to the poor a portion of food as an act of piety.

Retail and food businesses flourish during the month of Ramadan very much like holiday seasons in this country. The increase in business has an obvious impact on the local community and on society in general.

During fasting, the digestive system of the body rests.

The fasting ends with a great feast called Eid Al-Fitr, one of two festivals in the Islamic year. On this day Muslims assemble in their congregations just after sunrise for the Eid prayer, then rejoice, visit each other and exchange embraces.

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