

This book is suitable for everyone who is curious about the purpose of fasting, the reasons Muslims love to fast, or the changing duration of fasting in Ramadhan.

If you have unasked questions for your Muslim friend, this book is a helpful tool for conversation starters.

We highly recommend this book to the non-Muslim family members of new Muslims. Ramadhan is not a season of suffering for your loved ones. Discover and better understand the blessings that Muslims seek, appreciate, and embrace in Ramadhan and in the act of fasting.

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35

FUN FACTS ABOUT RAMADHAN & FASTING



35 Fun Facts about Ramadhan & Fasting



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This book contains facts that have been compiled from several sources, including but not limited to, the internet, magazines, journals, and books. The facts have been edited and summarised for this publication, which is meant for free distribution and non-profit purposes.

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Foreword

Ramadhan comes with its own infinite blessings. As such, there is no known way to publish a complete and comprehensive manual on this month, its traditions, and its inspirations.

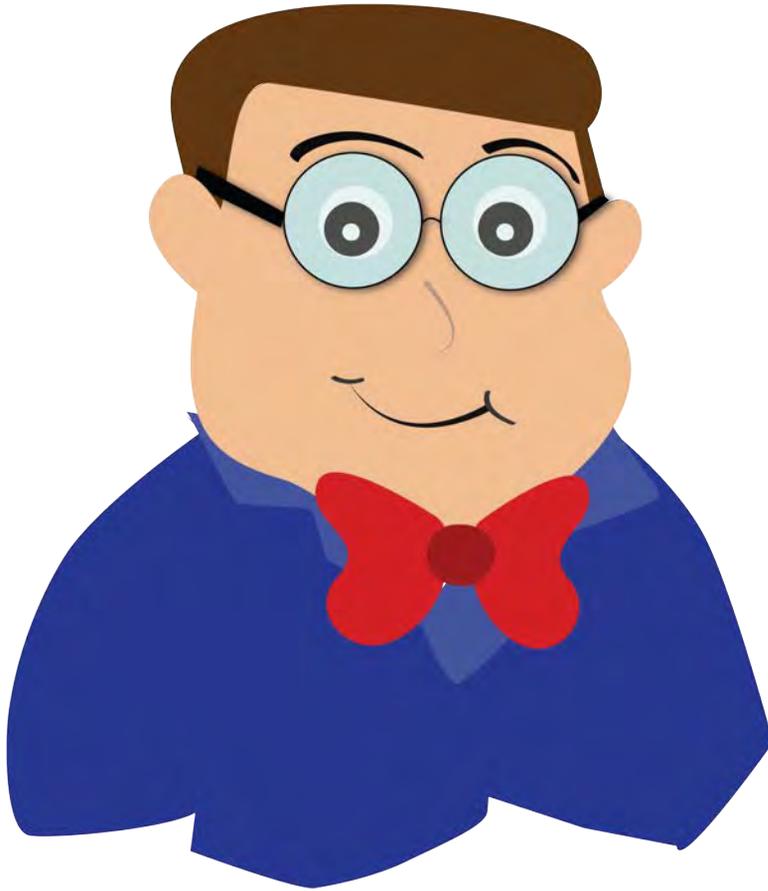
The best that this book aims to do is to bring forth 35 memorable bits about Ramadhan (and fasting) that could help to magnify the understanding of this period as a festive season of gratitude.

This book is suitable for everyone who is curious about the purpose of fasting, the reasons Muslims love to fast, or the changing duration of fasting in Ramadhan.

If you have unasked questions for your Muslim friend, this book is a helpful tool for conversation starters.

For the non-Muslim family members of new Muslims, we highly recommend this book. Ramadhan is truly not a season of suffering for your loved ones. As you read, you will discover and better understand the blessings that Muslims seek, appreciate, and embrace unconditionally.

May peace be upon you.



This is Eddy. He is the visual narrator for your entertainment in 35 Fun Facts about Ramadhan and Fasting.

Fact #1: Ramadhan is...

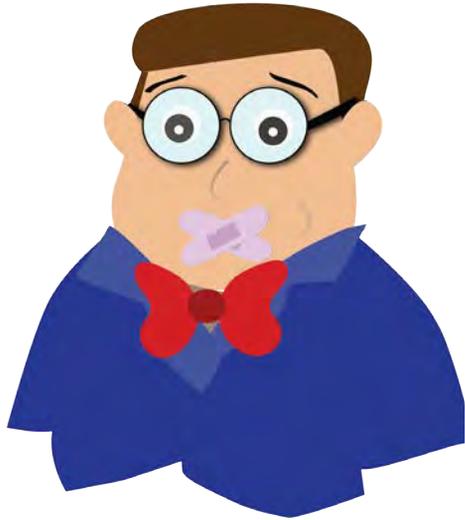
Ramadhan is the name of the 9th month in the Islamic Calendar and is the only month that Muslims celebrate by fasting daily. It was also the month in which the first verses of the Quran were revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Do you know?

Based on the lunar cycle, the Islamic Calendar existed before the counting system was applied to it. Before the Muslims started to count the years, they were naming them. For instance, Muhammad (pbuh) was born in The Year of the Elephant.

The year during which the Hijra – Muhammad's migration to Medina - occurred was eventually designated as the 1st year of the Islamic Calendar. The dates in the Islamic Calendar are denoted as *anno hegirae* (or AH) or Hijri (H). (Date: 6 June 2016CE coincides with 1 Ramadhan 1437AH/H)





Fact #2: The way a Muslim fasts...

When a Muslim fasts, they do not eat, drink, smoke, or have intimate relations. In Islam, Muslims only fast during daylight hours – from dawn until dusk. The Ramadhan fast is a festive occasion of gratitude and thanksgiving to God. Observance of the fast is commonly seen as a way of receiving pardon for past sins; it creates empathy with the plight of the hungry, and it teaches self-control and endurance of deprivation.

Do you know?

Fasting is not unique to Islam. Followers of other faiths, such as Christianity and Judaism, have been fasting too, although the way and time of fast may differ from the Muslims.

Fact #3: Ramadhan moves back by about 11 days each year.

Since the onset of the month in Islamic Calendar is based on the sighting of the new moon, the month of Ramadhan will begin and end depending on the appearance of the new moon in its next cycle (which is 29 or 30 days later).

When compared, the lunar calendar (354 days) is 11 days shorter than the solar-based Gregorian calendar (12 days when it is a leap year). It takes about 33 years and five days for Ramadhan to complete a 12-month move across the Gregorian calendar.



FASTING IS ONE OF THE FIVE DUTIES



Fact #4: Fasting in Ramadhan is one of the primary duties of a Muslim.

These primary duties are practices known as The 5 Pillars of Islam. They are:

Shahadah: This is an uttered testimony of belief in the one true God. It usually goes as follows: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his prophet and servant."

Solat: This entails praying 5 times daily.

Zakat: This is the mandatory act of giving charity to the poor, destitute, and needy.

Shaum in Ramadhan: Shaum is the Arabic word for Fast.

Hajj: This is the pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim must attempt to perform, at least once in their lifetime.

Fact #5: Muslims all over the world experience fasting in different conditions.

The origin of the name Ramadhan indicated that it was originally a summer month, since it once meant "the hot month". Ramadhan lasts for just one month and the entire world experiences it at the same time. Thus, depending on where you are, Ramadhan is experienced differently based on the climatic, seasonal and daylight-hour differences.

Do you know?

In countries where the daylight hours are shorter, the fast is shorter than the countries where the daylight hours are longer.





Fact #6: Well-wishes in Ramadhan.

“Ramadhan Mubarak” is a greeting that everyone can relay to Muslims during the month of Ramadhan. It means “Have a blessed Ramadhan.”

Another version is “Ramadhan Kareem”, which corresponds to “Have a gracious Ramadhan”.

Do you know?

Muslims would be delighted to receive the greeting, including from non-Muslim friends and family members.

Fact #7: (The month-long) Reminder to abstain from transgression.

Ramadhan is not just about “not eating”. It is a month that reminds us about spiritual discipline. While it is a lifetime commitment for Muslims to abstain from acts of transgression (such as gossiping, cursing, etc), Ramadhan is a month-long reminder that pulls them into a concerted focus upon good deeds and towards God.

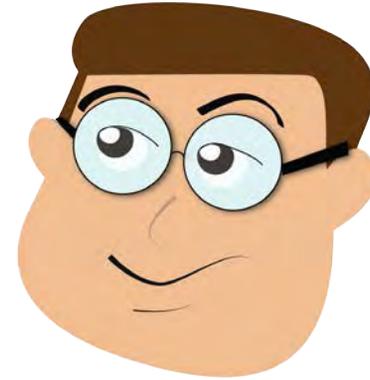
Do you know?

Some Muslims additionally withdraw from everyday stimulation that can distract them from their religious devotion in Ramadhan. This can include listening to music, watching television, and smoking.

ABSTAIN FROM ACTS OF
TRANSGRESSION



RAMADHAN IS A MONTH-LONG REMINDER



Fact #8: (The month-long) Reminder to get closer to God.

Ramadhan is a season for virtues, worship and obedience to God. How? It induces Muslims to do two good things frequently:

- 1) Benevolence
- 2) Recitation of Quran

Through benevolence, Muslims get to maximise the time for worship and reduce their mundane affairs in Ramadhan.

Many Muslims also try to read the entire Quran, and practise the recitation of the Quran and Mudarsah, (i.e. reading and hearing the Quran from one another) as modelled after the Prophet Muhammad and the Angel Gabriel (peace be upon them) in Ramadhan.

Do you know?

There are additional optional prayers that can be performed only in the nights of Ramadhan.

Fact #9: (The month-long) Reminder to be better fellow human beings.

Charity is also an important part of the fasting month of Ramadhan.

All year round, Muslims are obliged to give charity on a regular basis in the form of either Zakat (which is mandatory giving), or Sadaqa (which is voluntary and meant to go beyond the religious obligations).

Do you know?

During Ramadhan, the rewards of charity are considered greater and many Muslims will choose to give more. This can be in the form of cash donations, sharing of food with neighbours and friends (including non-Muslims), or giving dates and/or drinks to fellow strangers on the street at the break of fast.





Fact #10: The end of Ramadhan usually evokes a mix of emotions.

The completion of Ramadhan is marked by the celebration of Eid-ul Fitr. It is a time of reverence when Muslims praise God for getting them through Ramadhan, and ask for forgiveness for the sins they have committed.

While Eid-ul Fitr is celebrated, many Muslims feel a mix of happiness and sadness. The happiness is felt for the achievement in the fast of Ramadhan; the sadness is felt for Ramadhan has passed and so too are the blessings that came with it.

Do you know?

Besides having a feast to celebrate Eid-ul Fitr, Muslims also put on their best clothes, give gifts, spend time with their family, visit relatives, and contribute to charity so that the poor may also celebrate the festival.

Fact #11: Energising on the pre-dawn meal (Sahoor).

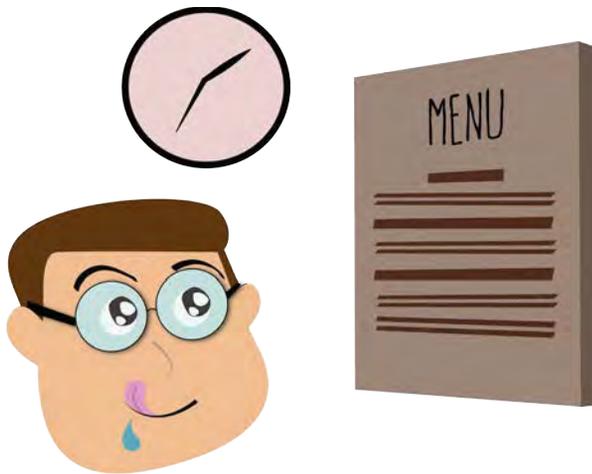
Sahoor is the meal that is eaten before dawn, or before the first light of day appears. It is a traditional part of the fast in Ramadhan. Sahoor is encouraged as it is intended to last the Muslim throughout the day.

Technically, the Sahoor can be eaten once midnight is over, but Muslims are highly encouraged to have the meal just before the morning prayer.

Do you know?

This pre-dawn meal is not mandatory, but it is important. Muslims believe that a person who abstains from Sahoor may lose out on many blessings, as Muhammad (pbuh) said, "Eat Sahoor, for there are blessings in it."





Fact #12: Recharging on the break of fast (Iftar).

Iftar is the meal served after sunset, as Muslims break the fast. During Ramadhan, two main meals are served; the Sahoor - which is served before dawn, and the Iftar - which is served after sunset.

Muslims traditionally first break their fast with dates and water. Thereafter, the normal dinner-like dishes or complete meal follows, either before or after the sunset, or maghrib, prayer, is performed.

Do you know?

Iftar is regarded as a social event that involves family and community members. It is common for people to host others, gather as a community for potluck, and to invite and share food with others especially the less fortunate.

Fact #13: Enjoying more dates.

Dates are a great way of getting the much-needed fibre that aids and improves digestion in Ramadhan. Its high levels of potassium, magnesium and B vitamins make dates as one of the healthiest fruits available.

Do you know?

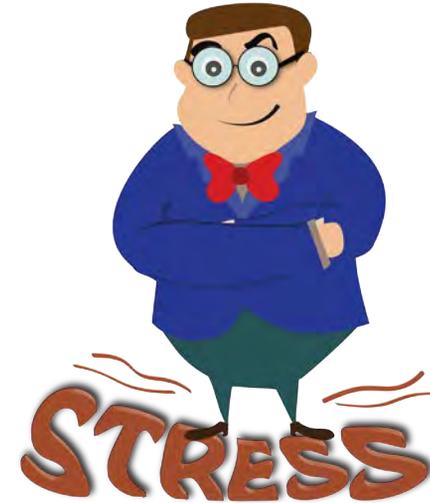
Dates are a staple fruit of the Middle East; traditionally, dates are known as the food Muhammad (pbuh) ate when he broke his fast. Today, Muslims eat three dates at the start of Iftar for spiritual reasons, following the habit of Muhammad (pbuh).



Fact #14: Boosting brain power.

Many are aware of the positive effects of fasting on the mental well-being and spiritual focus, but the brain-boosting power of Ramadhan might just blow your mind.

Fasting triggers a 'mild stress response' in the brain. And what does the brain do when it is stressed? It becomes more active. More brain cells are produced, thus improving brain function.



Fact #15: Conquering stress levels.

Stress activates the "fight or flight" response that stimulates adrenal glands and elevates blood pressure. Fasting helps to reverse this effect: it normalises the adrenal glands and reduces sodium levels (that also help to lower blood pressure). A distinct reduction in the amount of the hormone cortisol, produced by the adrenal glands, means that stress levels are greatly reduced both during and after Ramadhan.

Do you know?

In the midst of a hectic modern lifestyle, the fasting state helps to soften that agitated feeling of racing from one thing to the next, thus forcing us to slow down and smell the roses along the way.





Fact #16: Kicking bad habits.

Fasting's ability to help kick bad habits is especially effective, if applied in Ramadhan. As there is refrainment from indulging in junk foods and bad habits in Ramadhan, the bodies will gradually acclimatise to the absence of those elements, until the addiction or bad habits can be kicked for good.

Fact #17: Embracing hunger as a remedy.

The advantages of hunger as a remedy exceed those ingesting medicine several times. Fasting is an effective treatment for some psychological and emotional disorders. It helps a person to solidify their will; improve and refine their taste and manners; intensify their conviction of doing good; and avoiding controversy, irritability and rashness; all of which contribute toward a healthy personality. The benefits of fasting on health are instrumental in alleviating a number of physical diseases too, including those of the digestive system.

Do you know?

Islam exempts certain people from fasting, including the pregnant woman, nursing mother, the traveller, the sick, and the old whose health is bound to deteriorate.



Fact #18: Naturally detoxify.

Detoxification is a normal body process. It involves the elimination or neutralisation of toxins through organs such as the colon, liver, kidneys, lungs, lymph glands, and skin. When food no longer enters the body, fat reserves are used for energy. During a fast, the fat reserves release the chemicals from the fatty acids into the system, which are then eliminated through the aforementioned organs.

Do you know?

Chemicals, such as DDT that is known for its insecticidal properties, are not found in food but are absorbed from one's environment. These are stored in fat reserves that may be released during a fast too.

BEFORE

85.0



AFTER

84.9



I'M THIRSTY BUT I'M OKAY.



Fact #19: Slight dehydration is not bad.

In Ramadhan, Muslims basically take an early breakfast before sunrise, miss their lunch and snacks in between, and eat a slightly late dinner after sunset.



This intermittent dehydration for 10 to 14 hours in Ramadhan is not necessarily bad for health, combined with normal non-strenuous physical activities. As the body has its own water conservation mechanism, and when enough fluids are replenished during the non-fast hours, there are no detrimental side-effects from slight dehydration.

Do you know?

No detrimental effects on health have as yet been directly attributed to intermittent negative water balance at the levels that may be produced during Ramadhan. [taken from "Effects on health of fluid restriction during fasting in Ramadhan", European Journal of Clinical Nutrition (2003)]





Fact #20: Extending life expectancy.

Fasting helps to hasten the breakdown of degenerating tissues in the body through hunger, and it then develops new tissues through the nutrition after the break of fast. Some scientists suggest that fasting is an effective means of restoring youthfulness and longevity. A slower metabolic rate, more efficient protein production, an improved immune system, and the increased production of hormones are attributed to this long-term benefit of fasting.

Do you know?

Slight dehydration and water conservation in plant life is proven to improve their longevity.

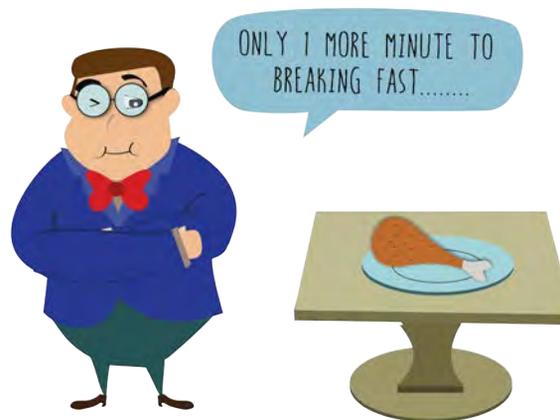
"The only reliable way to extend the lifespan of a mammal is under-nutrition without malnutrition," said James Dillard, MD, assistant clinical professor at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City.

Fact #21: Nurturing patience.

The fasting month teaches patience. People who truly understand and bear patience also earn inner bliss and peace. When faced with difficulties or disasters, people who have learned patience have firm faith in their God and remain sensibly peaceful against the disorder. Psychologists agree that people who can control their desire of hunger can also control their other desires, such as anger, happiness, etc. Hence keeping fast is a comprehensive method of learning patience.

Do you know?

If mild dehydration can alter a person's mood, energy level, and ability to think clearly, the fasting person is experiencing the optimal challenge of self-control. And if the fast is successful, it means the fasting person has overcome all negating influences, make use of his intellect, and remain steadfast in positivity.



BEFORE



AFTER



Fact #22: Refining character.

A Muslim needs to understand that this is the goal behind fasting. How can a person abstain from food and drink - though these are lawful to them at other times - and go on to slander people, spread rumours, tell lies, and/or engage in other vices (that are unlawful at all times)? Fasting has not been prescribed because God needs Muslims to do so; it has been prescribed to assist Muslims in refraining from such negativity.

Do you know?

Muhammad (pbuh) said, "Whoever does not give up false statements (i.e. telling lies), and evil deeds, and speaking bad words to others, God is not in need of his (fasting) leaving his food and drink." (Sahih Bukhari)

Fact #23: Sustaining awareness.

Muhammad (pbuh) advised to avoid eating till one feels fully satiated. Of the space in the stomach, a third should be for food, a third for water, and a third for air. Sustaining this awareness of knowing when is enough, especially at the break of fast, is a healthy habit to develop for our well-being.

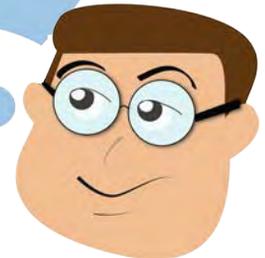
A study published in the journal *Cell*, by the University of Wisconsin, shows that the brain may react to excess food as if it was a pathogen. The resulting immune response, which occurs irrespective of weight gain, may cause cognitive deficits, such as those associated with Alzheimer.

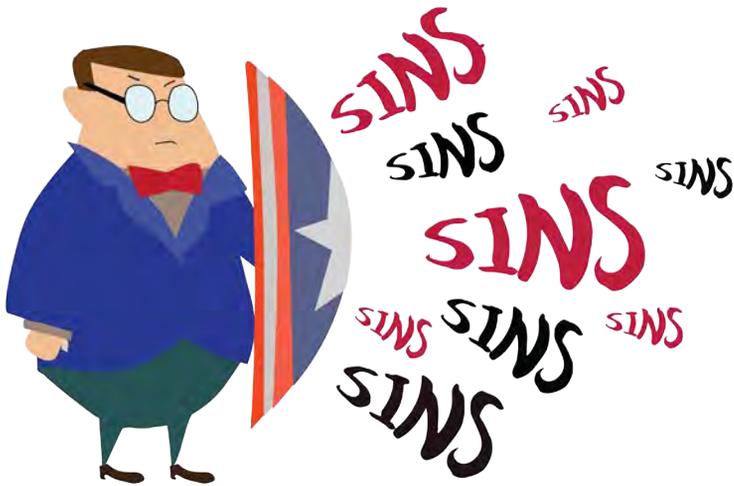
Do you know?

Food author Michael Pollan said, "It is not just what you eat but how you eat. Always leave the table a little hungry. Many cultures have rules that you stop eating before you are full."

IN JAPAN, THEY SAY,
"EAT UNTIL YOU ARE FOUR-FIFTHS FULL."

IN GERMAN CULTURE, THEY SAY,
"TIE OFF THE SACK BEFORE
IT'S FULL."





Fact #24: Guarding against other sins.

Fast acts as a shield that protects from other sins. The main purpose of fast is to suppress the vain desires. When a person fasts, he reminds himself not to eat or drink, in spite of the fact that eating and drinking are perfectly lawful at other times. As he abstains from these otherwise lawful acts, it naturally follows that he will abstain from sins, which are things that are prohibited to him at all times.

Muhammad (pbuh) pointed out that fasting keeps the compulsions in check by keeping us involved in a specific act of worship. This continuous connection with an act of worship helps to refrain from unlawful acts and inciting desires.



Fact #25: Encouraging selflessness.

When Muslims endure thirst and hunger for a month in Ramadhan, they experience the affliction that the poor and needy in the society experience the whole year. In this way, fast helps to bridge the gaps between the different groups in society through experiential learning.

While fasting, the rich and poor alike feel hunger and thirst; there is realisation of the common human frailty, and mutual reliance on kindness. There is union between the rich and the poor. This is a reminder that all are equal in the eyes of God, no matter the amount of wealth amassed or the professional and social status earned. Thus, this helps nurture the benevolence for fellow human beings and suppresses the tendency to exaggerate self-worth.





Fact #26: Reaching out with compassion.

Especially in Ramadhan, the merits and benefits of charity are multiplied. Muslims who are already generous put in more effort and compassion for their deeds in Ramadhan. The break of fast, Iftar, is one of the instances when the spirit of compassion and giving are evidently felt to emanate from Muslims. Foods are shared, donated, and bought for others to break fast. When shared with non-Muslims, the gesture is simply to share and spread the joy in the comforts of food that Muslims consider blessings from God.

Fact #27: Manifesting meekness.

The festive spirit of Ramadhan widens the door to gratitude and appreciation for the essentials in life that people tend to disremember. The basic need to eat, when tempered with 'regulated' hunger, reminds us of the human weakness, especially in oneself. No matter how much wealth or food that one can afford, the simple longing for food (that one needs to regulate during Ramadhan) could influence one's behaviour and state of mind. Since the poor and rich alike experience these effects in Ramadhan, Muslims are reminded to be modest and respectful towards one another, considering the fact that every human being, with weaknesses such as hunger and needs for compassion from God, is not a grand independent entity.





Fact #28: Learning to forgive.

Islam teaches that God has 99 names through which the Muslim learns of the attributes of God. Two of the attributes are Al-Ghafoor (“the forgiver”) and Al-Ghaffaar (“the forgiving”).

Muslims believe that God protects the believer from their own self and provides a way for them to approach God if a sin is committed. In Ramadhan, Muslims increase their practice in spirituality by emulating God through sharing forgiveness. For Muslims, there are three ways in which forgiveness is practised: (1) seeking God’s forgiveness (2) seeking forgiveness of others (3) seeking to forgive others.

While fasting, Muslims step up in seeking God’s forgiveness from all past indiscretions, and ask that they be protected against future indiscretions.

Do you know?

Forgiveness is sought by Muslims at the very presence of God, without any intermediaries.



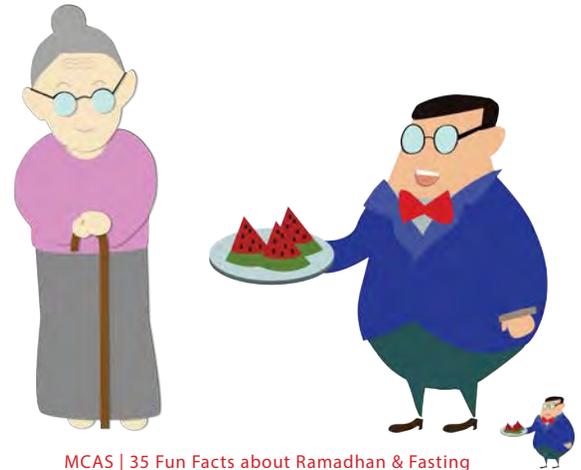
Fact #29: Sharing matters.

Ramadhan also signals the opportunity for Muslims to share their fasting experience with those who don’t fast as a norm and another opportunity for others who fast in other ways (e.g. as believers of other faiths or for diets) to learn more about Muslims and the significance of Ramadhan. The widely practised tradition of sharing foods is not the only way to spread the spirit of compassion and kindness.

As people find out and share information about the practices in Ramadhan, and as Muslims take the time to explain, discuss and elaborate on them, there is important contribution towards interfaith dialogue and bridging understanding between one another.

Do you know?

In a friendly spirit, many non-Muslims have observed the fast and other traditions of Ramadhan with their Muslim friends.



Fact #30: Healing the mind, body, and soul.

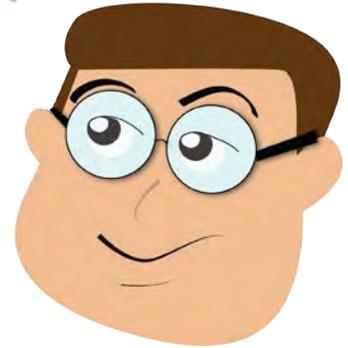
Ramadhan is the time when the healing of the mind, body and soul are synthesised. While fasting, the brain produces more cells and improves its functions, the body speeds up the replacement of decaying tissues with new healthier tissues, and the soul is nurtured towards goodness and peace.

Do you know?

During a fast, energy is diverted away from the digestive system due to its lack of use and towards the metabolism and immune system.



DEVELOP SELF-RESPECT & SELF-CONFIDENCE



Fact #31: Establish willpower.

Fasting puts willpower into practice. As one's willpower is strengthened, one is conditioned to cope with the challenges in all aspects of life.

This conditioning also primes the very quality that only successful people possess - turning desires into reality by using their skills and abilities.

Fasts in Ramadhan teach to suppress vain desires, and develop self-respect and self-confidence, which are the makings needed to establish willpower.



SPIRITUAL MEANING IN
TRUE DEVOTION



Fact #32: Strengthen devotion to God.

The Muslims' spiritual belief about the uniqueness of fasting is emphasised when they consider that all good deeds done are for themselves, except for fasting - which is done for God. Fasting conditions Muslims upon obedience and upon performing their religious duties as the servant of the one God.

Getting closer to God is one of the greatest objectives behind the fast in Ramadhan and behind all Islamic acts of devotion. As Muslims adhere to the performance of these acts of worship, they seek to have better appreciation of the spiritual meaning in true devotion and subservience to God.

Fact #33: Supporting humanity.

Ramadhan helps Muslims to focus on aspects of humanitarianism. The traditions in Ramadhan encourages Muslims to be conscious of God and to be conscious of the needs of humanity without feeling that these two objectives are in conflict.

Do you know?

Muslims consider the most spiritual of the Muslim population are not to be found in a cave or some far away sanctuary. Islam teaches that the most spiritual, and God-conscious, of Muslims are found in the very midst of civilisation working to achieve the greater goals of humanity.



Fact #34: Moderation is the way.

Fasting in Ramadhan comes with its regulations; it is not about skipping meals that are bound to harm health and stamina. Islam discourages the extension of fasting beyond the prescribed hours of daylight and forbids any continued fast without a break in between the days.

As much as Islam discourages extreme, or prolonged and harmful, withdrawal from sustenance, it also encourages good health and habit through abstaining from gluttony after the breaking of fast.

Do you know?

The Quran specifies to Muslims, "... eat and drink, but do not be excessive." (Al-A'araf, 07:31)



MODERATION ROAD



Fact #35: Life of peace and tranquillity.

In retrospect, there is peace and tranquillity experienced by those who fast during Ramadhan.

Besides seeking forgiveness and being forgiving, the fasting Muslim - in reciprocating to any hostilities - takes advice from Muhammad (pbuh) who said, "If one slanders you or aggresses against you, say I am fasting."

Ramadhan demands Muslims to look deeper within their own selves for inner peace. The spiritual awakening, or revitalisation, in fasting is an essential ingredient to having inner peace.

Do you know?

A season of fasting and prayer, Ramadhan may seem difficult to observe, but Muslims truly wish Ramadhan would never end.



About the publisher

Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore (MCAS) actively serves to bridge everyone – regardless of language, race or belief – towards the better understanding of Islam. Advocating no compulsion towards religion, this non-profit organisation is dedicated to deliver educational opportunities with free lectures, courses, introductory books on Islam and other activities that depict Islam in discussion, behaviour and spirit. For anyone seeking more, an extensive collection of Islamic literature is also available at its English Islamic Bookshop, and Al-Mawrid Resource Library, a free-for-public non-borrowing library.

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(Drop us an email to tell us about what you think of this 35 Fun Facts about Ramadhan and Fasting book :)