

Voice of the 'Strangers'



Islam began as something *Strange*, and it shall return to being something *Strange*, so give glad tidings to the *Strangers* - Saying of the Prophet Mohammed Pbuh (Hadith) narrated in Sahih Muslim

Islam is an Arabic word which means peace, purity, acceptance and commitment. As a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to one God.

There are five duties that every Muslim is obliged to perform. These are called the '**five pillars of Islam**' and they help Muslims put their faith into action.

1. **The declaration of faith (Shahada):** to say 'I bear witness there is one God, and I bear witness that Muhammad (Peace and blessing be upon him - PBUH) is the messenger of God' with this statement Muslims pledge to believe in the oneness of God and follow the exemplary life of the Final Prophet (messenger of the faith)
2. **Prayer (Salah):** offered 5 times a day, implying the remembrance and devotion towards the Lord. These are believed to strengthen the spiritual soul of a person and their relationship with God.
3. **Fasting (Sawm):** a month abstaining from food, drink and intimate marital relationship from dawn to sunset. It is believed that this conditions the body and soul of a person increasing patience, social conscience, willpower and unselfishness characteristics.
4. **Charity (Zakah):** is a payment of 2.5% of one's savings every year to the poor. This implies brotherhood and care to God and his creation.
5. **Pilgrimage (Hajj):** the grand mosque in Makkah (Saudi Arabia) is required to be visited once in a lifetime for those who are physically and financially able to do so. This journey is a temporary suspension from the material world and an opportunity to gain inner peace and a true personal direction in life.

The month of Ramadan is now around the corner from us, fast approaching this July. To find out what will be going on in a Muslim's life during this time please read on.

Ramadan:

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Islam uses a lunar calendar, where each month begins with the sighting of the new moon. Because the lunar calendar is about 11 days shorter than the solar calendar used elsewhere, Islamic holidays "move" each year. In 2012, Ramadan begins at sundown on the 18th or 19th of July.

For more than a billion Muslims around the world-including some 1.6 million in Britain, Ramadan is a "month of blessing" marked by prayer, fasting and charity

Why this Month?

Muslims believe that during the month of Ramadan, God revealed the first verses of the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam. Around 610 A.D. a caravan trader named Muhammad (PBUH) took to wandering the desert near Mecca (in today's Saudi Arabia) while thinking about his faith. One night a voice called to him from the night sky. It was the angel Gabriel, who told Muhammad (PBUH) he had been chosen to receive the word of God. In the days that followed Muhammad (PBUH) found himself speaking the verses that would be transcribed as the Qur'an. At many mosques during Ramadan, about one thirtieth of the Qur'an is recited each night in prayers known as *Tarawih*. In this way, by following this sequence the complete scripture will have been recited during the month.

Fasting

Muslims practice *sawm*, or fasting, for the entire month of Ramadan. This means that they do not eat or drink anything while the sun shines. Fasting is one of the *Five Pillars* (duties) of Islam. As with other Islamic duties, all able Muslims take part in *sawm* from the age of puberty (about twelve years)

During Ramadan families get up early for *suhoor*, a meal eaten before the sun rises. After the sun sets, the fast is broken with a meal known as *iftar*. Iftar usually begins with dates and sweet drinks that provide a quick energy boost.

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Fasting serves many purposes, for example, Muslims are reminded of the suffering of the poor. Fasting is also an opportunity to practice self-control and to cleanse the body and mind. Also in this most sacred month, fasting helps Muslims feel the peace that comes from spiritual devotion as well as kinship with fellow believers.

Eid al-Fitr

Ramadan ends with the festival of Eid al-Fitr, which in 2012 will be on either 17th or 18th August. Literally the "**Festival of Breaking the Fast**," Eid al-Fitr is one of the two most important Islamic celebrations (the other occurs after the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca). At Eid al-Fitr people dress in their finest clothes and start the day by attending congregational Eid prayer to glorify and thank God for the blessings he has bestowed. This is then followed by celebrations with family and friends as well as giving treats to children.

A sense of generosity and gratitude colours these festivities. Although charity and good deeds are always important in Islam, they have special significance at the end of Ramadan. As the month draws to a close, Muslims are obligated to share their blessings by feeding the poor.

Fasting and other faiths...

Fasting is not just a spiritual act confined to the Islamic faith, but is widespread amongst the major religions. Each faith has different reasons for fasting, and we will go into each of them in brief.

Christianity

Fasting in Christianity is a form of increasing spirituality, and bringing oneself closer to God. They can fast whenever they want to. The traditional time for fasting in Christianity is Lent, a period of forty days before Easter. Some fast during this time, as they believe Jesus suffered and died for them during this period.

Fasting in Christianity does not mean not eating or drinking all day. It can mean giving up something we enjoy such as watching TV or some other pleasures.

Judaism

Fasting in Judaism is defined as total cessation from all food and drink. A full-day fast begins with sunset in the evening and continues through darkness of the next day. A minor fast day begins with the dawn and concludes at darkness.

There are two major fast days and four minor fast days that are part of the Jewish year. The two major fasts, Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av last just over twenty four hours. They begin before sundown, when it is still light outside, and end after the next sundown, when it is dark outside and three stars can be seen in the sky. This fast is complete. Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, as one of the most important days of the Jewish year fasting, along with prayer, is practiced as a means of repentance.

Hinduism

Hindus fast in observance of a vow or a holy day. Hindus fast some times on a particular day of the week, on the full-moon day, during the worship of a particular God or Goddess, during a month considered auspicious, or in memory of their ancestors.

Fasting is considered as a way to enhance concentration during meditation or worship; purification for the system and sometimes considered a sacrifice

Sikhism:

Sikhism does not regard fasting as meritorious. Sikhs regard the human body as 'the temple of the soul,' which has to be nourished and cared for. Fasting as an austerity, as a ritual, as a mortification of the body by means of wilful hunger is forbidden in Sikhism

Young peoples' corner

I live in a world, where.....

I live in a world, where they stand and stare
Because of the scarf on my head and the clothes I wear

I live in a world, where they tell me I'm free
But I get judged by my looks, than my personality

I live in a world, where millions get shot
Silent prayers are the only weapons the innocent have
got

I live in a world, where there is excessive greed
For wealth, status and no compassion for those in need

I live in a world, where women are used
For pleasure, entertainment and are commercially
abused

I live in a world, where a baby is born dead
An innocent mother wails, upon her baby's death-bed

I live in a world, where a child is alone
His parents are terrorised for a reason unknown

I live in a world, where the elderly cry
Only the Lord can hear, the Lord above the sky

I live in a world, where the pious are few
A fleeting life, if only the sinners knew

I live in a world, where there is no love
The heavens and the earth plead to the God above

I live in a world, where there is suffering and pain
The innocent lose and the guilty gain

I live in a world, where there is no humanity
A sheer deception, a mere insanity

I live in a world, where all I can see
A lack of shame and no sense of dignity

I live in a world, where there is no fear
For the Day of Judgement which draws very near

I live in a world, where all I can do is pray
For guidance, justice and for Allah's help to come its
way...

By: Recharge Ur Faith :)

The Yousef Project:

The Yousef Project – Sandwell Muslim Youth Forum is a newly established group of Young Muslims that seek to represent, advocate and lobby on behalf of young Muslim people in Sandwell. The group is currently made up of primarily British Arab, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani young people but are also seeking representation from young people from other Sandwell Muslim communities.

The Yousef Project derives its name from the inspirational story of the Prophet Yousef / Joseph (Peace be upon him -pbuh). The prophet Yousef (pbuh) was a young person when God tested him through various trials and tribulations; however his conduct throughout his experience provides today's young people with a wealth of moral lessons from which they may learn from:

- The belief in the presence of God makes a man's troubles easier for him to bear, and as long as he keeps himself away from sins despite temptations, he will ultimately be successful.
- Patience in the face of hardship is the best of qualities and results in reward from God in this life and the hereafter.
- The importance of forgiving and forgetting the past
- The importance of being fair, equitable and just to ALL people.

If you are interested in contributing to the work of the Yousef Project please contact Afrah Muflihi:

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