Introduction

Ramadan (Ar., Ramadân; Per., Ramazân) is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. As the Islamic calendar is lunar-based, the month moves through the solar year. This year Ramadan extends (approximately) from April 13 to May 13 – depending on the sighting of the New Moon. According to Muslim belief, it was during the month of Ramadan that the Holy Qur’an was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the year 610 CE in Mecca. It was then that the first five verses of the Qur’an were revealed to him:

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\text{In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful: Recite! In the name of your Lord who created, created humanity from a clot. Recite! And your Lord is Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught humanity what they knew not. (al-‘Alaq 96.1-5)}
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The remainder of the Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad over the next twenty-two years of his life, a few verses at a time. The Qur’an is considered by Muslims to be the final book of divine revelation. It is memorized in part or in its entirety by Muslims who recite passages from the Qur’an in each of the five daily prayers. Muslims respect and revere the Qur’an as God’s Eternal Word. During Ramadan special lanterns (Ar., fanoos) are hung in public places to symbolize the light of truth conveyed by the Qur’an.

Fasting (sawm)

The month of Ramadan is marked by a daily fast during which adults abstain from all eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset. The fast of Ramadan is the one of the five essential practices, or pillars, of Islam. Fasting is intended to help turn one’s attention to God (Allâh) as the source of all life, and to foster gratitude. As it is written in the Qur’an:

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\text{It is the month of Ramadan in which the Qur’an was revealed, as a guide to humanity, and clear proofs for guidance and distinguishing right from wrong. And whoever among you is present, they should fast in the month; and whoever is sick or on a journey, should fast on other days. God wants ease for you and does not want hardship for you; but to complete the period of fasting, and to glorify God for having guided you; and so that you might be grateful. (al-Baqara 2.185)}
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When the evening prayer (maghreb) is called, the daily fast is broken, traditionally with a few dates and some water, and then a meal (iftar) is shared with family, friends, and members of the community. While the days of fasting can be rigorous indeed, especially when Ramadan falls during the long, hot summer days, the nighttime may be filled with feasting.

**Prayer (ṣalāt)**

Prayer is an essential part of Muslim observance throughout the year, but is performed with greater frequency and fervency during Ramadan. In addition to the five prayers required each day, Muslims will perform additional prayers at night during Ramadan called taraweeh. This includes reciting one of the thirty parts of the Qur’an each night so that by end of the month, the entire Scripture is read.

**Almsgiving (zakāt)**

Ramadan is closely associated with another pillar of Islam: almsgiving, or zakāt. Muslims are required to give a portion of their annual income (minimally 2.5%) in charity to the poor, the hungry, and the orphaned. Many Muslims around the world choose the month of Ramadan to make their charitable donations. In addition to financial donations, Muslims may also provide an iftar to which the community is invited – friends and strangers alike.

The generosity of God – expressed in the revelation of the Qur’an – and the generosity people show to others is the true spirit of Ramadan. For this reason, Muslims will greet one another during the month with: Ramadan Kareem! (May you have) A Generous Ramadan!

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