

# MSA West

## *How your MSA can educate your campus about Ramadan*

In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful

Ramadan is a time for self-reflection, an opportunity to purify your soul from all the worldly desires and distractions that build up during the course of the year. Our beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) commented on the reward that comes with Ramadan when he said, “Each breath you take glorifies him; your sleep is worship, your deeds are accepted and your supplications are answered.”

Ramadan is also a social month as well. It is a month in which the Muslims are in constant contact with each other as see they break fast together, perform the prayers together, and make supplication to Allah together. Thus, along with our self-purification comes the opportunity to purify our communities from the character flaws that we have developed over the year.

This month also provides a wonderful opportunity to educate the general campus population about Islam. As more and more people begin to realize that they are ignorant about the faith of more than one billion people around the world, the need for outreach by the Muslim community is especially important now. It is on this vein that MSA West has briefly developed a list of activities and events that your MSA can organize in order to educate your campus about Ramadan.

### **Educating the General Campus about Ramadan**

a. Talk to your newspaper about printing a special article on the coming of Ramadan and the effects that this will have on campus. Be sure to mention the fact that Muslims on campus will be coming together to break their fast, to pray together, and that this is an opportunity by the general campus population to learn about the rich Islamic faith, and interact with the Muslim community on campus. \* Attached to this manual is an article developed by MSA West that we encourage you to present your newspaper and ensure that they print out.

b. Develop Ramadan stickers to be passed out on campus letting people know in a nice way that its Ramadan. These stickers can often be a good way to spark up conversation about Ramadan, to answer questions people may have about Islam, and to create a more compassionate view about Islam amongst non-Muslims. Recommended slogans for this sticker include:

- “Smile it’s Ramadan!”
- “I Love Ramadan”
- “Be Kind it’s Ramadan”

There are countless other slogans that can be used so fire up your creative minds. These stickers can be made at any local print shop, and it should not cost more than \$100 to print out 2,000 circle-shaped stickers.

c. Start a “Ramadan Challenge” on your campus. This is a challenge to people on campus to fast for a day, a week, or for the rest of the month along with the Muslims. Those who sign up should be invited to iftar with the Muslims, to watch the Muslims in prayer, and to attend Salat-ul-Jumu’ah (if it is held on campus). Past “Ramadan Challenges,” when advertised properly, have received a surprisingly high number of people signing up in the past.

d. Pass out kufis and hijabs to be held in solidarity with the Muslim community. This can be done to show solidarity with the Muslim community against any hate crimes that may have come about, to show solidarity with the Muslims during Ramadan, or to show solidarity with the dying people of Afghanistan. The reason ultimately depends on the way your MSA wishes to advertise this, and also depending on the vibe on campus.

e. Organize a program about Ramadan that deals with the various aspects of the month. Topics include the nutritional and spiritual benefits of fasting, the historical importance of Ramadan, the global pattern of worldwide hunger and malnutrition that humanity is in, and the beauty of the Islamic character. You can couple this along with a big iftar to be held, or you can present the teach-in to various classrooms, student groups, or community organizations.

These are simply a brief list of events that your MSA can do in order to engage your campus, and educate them about the beauty of Ramadan. This is merely a guide to get started on the issue. Those with more ideas are highly encouraged to share them with other MSA’s. You can do this by sending any new ideas to [msawest\\_action@egroups.com](mailto:msawest_action@egroups.com)

For more information on MSA West, this Action Manual, or if you are having any kinds of problems at your local MSA, please contact us at [msawest\\_officers@egroups.com](mailto:msawest_officers@egroups.com), visiting our website at [www.msawest.org](http://www.msawest.org), by calling one of our chapters, the MSA at UCLA at (310) 206-8763.

May Allah increase our taqwa during his blessed month, may he purify our hearts and shield it from wordly desires, may he unify his Ummah in a unified submission to his call, may he give us the capacity to ease the suffering of the oppressed of this world, and may he lessen the hardships that the Muslim may be facing throughout this month.

Ameen.

Jazaakum Allahu Khayr  
Was-Salaamu `Alaykum  
Your sisters and brothers at MSA West

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MSA West is a progressive coalition of MSA's across the West Coast committed to empowering the Muslim Student voice through grassroots activism and community building.

Would you like to subscribe to the MSA West e-mail list? Send an e-mail to [msawest\\_officers@egroups.com](mailto:msawest_officers@egroups.com) asking to be subscribed to the MSA West E-mail list.

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**(MSA-West Northern CA, 11/16/00)** - On **November 16, 2000**,\* the Muslim community in America and around the world begun a month-long fasting of Ramadan (rom-a-don). **Ramadan** is the ninth month on the Islamic lunar calendar during which Muslims abstain from food, drink and other sensual pleasures from break of dawn to sunset.

**Fasting** (along with the declaration of faith, daily prayers, charity, and pilgrimage to Mecca) is one of the “five pillars” of Islam. Because Ramadan is a lunar month, it begins about eleven days earlier each year. The end of Ramadan will be marked by communal prayers called “Eid ul-Fitr,” or Feast of the Fast-Breaking.

### **Who Must Fast?**

- Fasting is compulsory for those who are mentally and physically fit, past the age of puberty, in a settled situation (not traveling), and are sure fasting is unlikely to cause real physical or mental injury.

### **Exemptions from Fasting** (some exemptions are optional)

- Children under the age of puberty (Young children are encouraged to fast as much as they are able.)
- People who are mentally incapacitated or not responsible for their actions
- The sick
- Travelers who are on journeys of more than about fifty miles
- Pregnant women and nursing mothers (who fear harm on their children if they fast.)
- Women who are menstruating

### **Was fasting ever part of another religion?**

Islam is not the first religion that has fasting as a form of worship in it. The western religions (Christianity and Judaism) had fasting in it as a form of worship. God says in the holy Quran “Oh you believe, fasting has been prescribed upon you, Just as it was prescribed on the people before you, so you may attain piety.” From this verse

we can see clearly that the previous religions had fasting as a main part of their religion.

### **What is the Purpose of Fasting?**

The purpose of fasting is listed in the above quoted verse. Islam came to purify the human being from all sorts of sins to get them closer to their lord. Fasting is an important element the human being needs to purify his/her soul wishing to attain the level of the pious people.

### **Benefits of Ramadan:**

There are many things that can be learned by fasting through the month of Ramadan such as learn discipline, self-restraint and generosity, while obeying God's commandments.

One of the main lessons that can be learned from fasting is controlling self-desire. The two major strong desires we humans have are the desire of the stomach and the sexual desire. Ramadan comes and enables us through fasting to control our stomach of when to eat and what to eat.

One major thing fasting cultivates in the Muslim person is having a feeling with the poor people all over the world. By abstaining from food for a period of time, it gives you the chance to feel with the rest of the people who are suffering throughout the world. Such feelings can't be felt without going through some sort of similar experiences. When you have such feelings you will feel the amount of bounties God has bestowed upon you, and you will get to appreciate all things God has given you.

### **What is the Significance of Ramadan?**

Ramadan is a very special month for the Muslims. During this month the Holy Quran was revealed. God Says. "We have revealed it during the night of power." Meaning that the Quran was revealed during a special night in Ramadan that is called the night of power.

During Ramadan many good things happened for the Muslims throughout the history, and especially at the time of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him.) Muslims won their first battle ever during the month of Ramadan, which lead to expand this religion throughout the world.

In a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, "The beginning of Ramadan is Mercy, and the middle of it is Forgiveness, and the end of it is freedom from hell fire."

### **Special Events**

- Special prayers, called *taraweeh*, are performed after the daily nighttime prayer.
- *Lailat ul-Qadr* (“Night of Power” or “Night of Destiny”) marks the anniversary of the night on which the Prophet Muhammad first began receiving revelations from God, through the angel Gabriel. Muslims believe *Lailat ul-Qadr* is one of the last odd-numbered nights of Ramadan.

### **Traditional Practices**

- Eating before dawn time, to strengthen the person who fasts during the day.
- Breaking the daily fast with a drink of water and dates
- Reading the entire Quran during Ramadan
- Social visits are encouraged between families and friends.

### **Eid ul-Fitr (“Festival of Fast-Breaking”) Prayers at the End of Ramadan**

- Eid begins with special morning prayers on the first day of Shawwal, the month following Ramadan on the Islamic lunar calendar.
- It is forbidden to perform an optional fast during Eid because it is a time for relaxation.
- During Eid Muslims greet each other with the phrase “taqabbalallah ta’atakum,” or “may God accept your deeds” and “Eid Mubarak” (eed-moo-bar-ak), meaning “blessed Eid.”

### **RAMADAN Q&A**

#### **Q: How did the fast during Ramadan become obligatory for Muslims?**

**A:** The revelations from God to the Prophet Muhammad that would eventually be compiled as the Quran began during Ramadan in the year 610, but the fast of Ramadan did not become a religious obligation for Muslims until the year 624. The obligation to fast is explained in the second chapter of the Quran:

*“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint...Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting...”* (Chapter 2, verses 183 and 185)

#### **Q: What do Muslims believe they gain from fasting?**

**A:** One of the main benefits of Ramadan are an increased compassion for those in need of the necessities of life, a sense of self-purification and reflection and a renewed focus on spirituality. Muslims also appreciate the feeling of togetherness shared by family and friends throughout the month. Perhaps the greatest practical benefit is the yearly lesson in self-restraint and discipline that can carry forward to other aspects of a Muslim’s life such as work and education.

**Q: Why does Ramadan begin on a different day each year?**

**A:** Because Ramadan is a lunar month, it begins about eleven days earlier each year. Throughout a Muslim's lifetime, Ramadan will fall both during winter months, when the days are short, and summer months, when the days are long and the fast is more difficult. In this way, the difficulty of the fast is evenly distributed between Muslims living in the northern and southern hemispheres.

**Q: What is *Lailat ul-Qadr*?**

**A:** *Lailat ul-Qadr* ("Night of Power") marks the anniversary of the night on which the Prophet Muhammad first began receiving revelations from God, through the angel Gabriel. An entire chapter in the Quran deals with this night: "*We have indeed revealed this (Message) in the Night of Power: and what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by God's permission, on every errand. Peace!...This until the rise of morn.*" (Chapter 97) Muslims believe *Lailat ul-Qadr* is one of the last odd-numbered nights of Ramadan.

**Q: Is it difficult to perform the fast in America?**

**A:** In many ways, fasting in American society is easier than fasting in areas where the climate is extremely hot. This year at least, the number of daylight hours will be less than when Ramadan occurs during the spring or summer. In Muslim countries, most people are observing the fast, so there are fewer temptations such as luncheon meetings, daytime celebrations and offers of food from friends. Many American Muslims would prefer a daytime work shift during Ramadan so that they may break the fast with their families and attend evening prayers.

**Q: How can non-Muslim classmates, co-workers, and friends help someone who is fasting?**

**A:** Employers, co-workers and teachers can help by understanding the significance of Ramadan and by showing a willingness to make minor allowances for its physical demands. Special consideration can be given to such things as requests for vacation time, the need for flexible early morning or evening work schedules and lighter homework assignments. It is also very important that Muslim workers and students be given time to attend Eid prayers at the end of Ramadan. Eid is as important to Muslims as Christmas and Yom Kippur are to Christians and Jews. A small token such as a card (there are Eid cards available from Muslim bookstores) or baked goods given to a Muslim co-worker during *Eid ul-Fitr* would also be greatly appreciated. Hospital workers should be aware that injections and oral medications might break the fast. Patients should be given the opportunity to decide whether or not their condition exempts them from fasting.

**Q: Do people normally lose weight during Ramadan?**

**A:** Some people do lose weight, but others may not. It is recommended that meals eaten during Ramadan be light, but most people can't resist sampling special sweets and foods associated with Ramadan.