

Fasting Challenges During Ramadan

When Experiencing Homelessness and or During a Pandemic like COVID19

Ramadan is an exceptional month for the Islamic community. It is a special time for every Muslim to make extra efforts to: be respectful in both thought and actions, perform acts of worship, make personal sacrifices while always being charitable. Ramadan is the one month of the Islamic calendar (that runs ten days earlier every year) where individuals gather nightly to 'break-fast', pray and read Quran together. There is an added emphasis on the importance of being with community during this holy month of fasting, of spiritual cleansing.

I spent one Ramadan in a homeless shelter. I had to arise before sunrise to eat and had to save my dinners to eat after sunset to follow Islamic fasting criteria that also includes: no water or food during the day, and no transgressions against anyone, anytime. Ramadan was April 24th-May24th this 2020 year. The holy month arrived during a peak of our COVID19 crisis. Fasting can be challenging in the long days of Spring, though the loss of the nightly community worship gatherings added insult to injury, the injury being the virus that affected us all.

Experiencing Ramadan alone this year reminded me of the year where I spent the month in a shelter while awaiting housing. I was and felt alone, with no one else fasting in the shelter I was staying in. I was not able to break the days fast nor worship in nightly gatherings with my Islamic community. It was a sad though contemplative experience. I heard this year from many Muslims who felt this very same way, even depressed, because of the social isolation caused by the virus, not because they were unhoused. Many expressed feelings of loneliness even though they were with their families, as Ramadan custom is about sharing food and prayer space during the evenings, where the norm is to participate in community. They, we, were not able to pray together, where usually we are standing shoulder to shoulder, feet to feet in worship. I was reminded of my Ramadan in shelter where I felt alone unable to a part of the larger whole.

I am thankful to this day for the kind young staff person who had I had met with, during the first days of Ramadan that year in shelter. She took the time to ask if I needed anything to be able to fulfill my Ramadan fast. I had asked to have access to keep food in the fridge and to be able to shower earlier than others so I could eat and pray before sunrise. Taking time to inquire about my well-being and health was appreciated. I will never forget her simple act of asking, of caring, I will always remember her name. My small business is named after her, 'Hassanah' and this means 'good deeds' in Arabic. We can all be reminded that small kindnesses can make a huge difference in the lives of others.