

Ramadan, ninth month of the Islamic calendar starts on April 12th at the sunset and the first day of fasting is on April 13th.

My fondest memory of Ramadan is from my childhood. It happened in the wee hours of the night, an hour or so before the crack of dawn. I slowly became conscious listening to a beautiful recitation of the Quran and smelling the aroma of cooking.

My parents didn't have to nudge me. The delightful smell was from the cooking of "Suhoor". This before dawn meal started the ritual of Ramadan, the season of fasting in the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

While my mother cooked, my father tuned the radio to a Suhoor program of quranic recitation. Suhoor must be finished before there is enough daylight to distinguish between a white thread and a black one. This distinction, literally meaning "dawn," is explained in a Hadith of Prophet Muhammed. It refers to the appearance of a white line on the eastern horizon before sunrise.

We Muslims, all over the world, fast during the month of Ramadan. We refrain from all food and drink and sexual activities from dawn to dusk.

Fasting during Ramadan is a symbol of ultimate obedience to our Creator whom we refer to as Allah (God). This month serves as a revival of spirituality for all Muslims as we engage in special prayers each night.

As children in the Taufique family, our training began with our fasting a few hours on weekends. Adults fasted for the required time from dawn to sunset each day.

My siblings and I competed to see who could fast the longest. When we reached the age of 9, we fasted the entire 29 or 30 days. Fasting is obligatory once a child reaches the age of puberty.

In the beginning, fasting was a family affair. As we got older the concepts of spirituality, religious dedication, and community were added.

Getting to fast as an adult brought the feeling "I am grown up now." It also brought a strong sense of responsibility. Awareness of regulations and, more importantly, increasing spirituality was a major change in fasting as an adult.

For 25 years, I observed the Ramadan fast in a land where Muslims were in the majority. When I came to the United States where Muslims are in the minority, fasting seemed strange at first. Sometimes, we were confronted with eye-rolling comments such as "Not even water?"

During lunch at school or at work, not even the aroma of Chinese food and other delicacies altered our resolve to continue fasting. Sometimes, we were ridiculed but mostly reverence was shown for our commitment.

A few months after moving to Birmingham in 1989, I was faced with the challenge of my lifetime. I was diagnosed with a kidney disease and had a kidney transplant in 1994.

A high protein diet was necessary. It was Ramadan. What was I to do about fasting? Many Muslims struggle, as I did, deciding whether to refrain from fasting for health reasons.

Feeling left out of the bounties of fasting and a questioning conscience were at the center of my struggle. Islamic Law provides exemption to those who cannot fast because of medical reasons.

Once the true spirit of this freedom is taken as a gift from Almighty God, the decision presumably becomes easier. How could one refuse a gift from our Lord?

Fortunately, my nephrologist was understanding and sensitive to my indecision. He prescribed the high protein diet for Suhoor.

Then he ordered regular blood tests to be sure there were no ill effects from my fasting. Thank God, there were none.

At the end of each day, there is a symbolic breaking of the fast consisting of a cup of cool water and fresh dates. A special evening prayer follows.

Fellowship among Muslims is enhanced by a communal meal held at the Mosque every evening during Ramadan.

The spirit of fasting for Ramadan continues to impact my life through its primary purpose of promoting God consciousness.

*“O you who have believed, decreed upon you
is fasting as it was decreed upon those
before you that you may become
God Conscious.” ---Quran 2-183*

Ramadan comes to an end after 29 or 30 days. The next day is the first day of the following month. It is a day of feasting—a gift from God for having followed His edicts of fasting during Ramadan. This day, called “Eid,” starts with a special congregational prayer. **Eid, this year will be on May 13, 2021.**