

Name: _____

Ramadan



The Month of Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and one of the most important months for the religion of Islam. It is observed by Muslims worldwide as a holy month of fasting, prayer, and good works.

During the month of Ramadan, it is customary for Muslims to decorate their homes with lanterns, and the Ramadan Lantern, called a *Fanoos*, has become a popular symbol of Ramadan.



The dates of Ramadan change every year. This is because Islam uses a lunar calendar based on the cycles of the Moon, whereas we use a solar calendar based on earth's revolutions around the sun. This year Ramadan starts on the evening of April 2 at the first sighting of the crescent moon.

The Religion of Islam

The religion of Islam was founded (started) over 1,400 years ago in Arabia by a man named *Muhammad*. Today, Islam is the second largest religion in the world. (Christianity is the largest.)

The word '*Islam*' in Arabic means submission (obedience) to the will of God. Followers of Islam are called *Muslims*. (The word 'Muslim' means 'one who obeys God.') Muslims believe that there is only one true God '*Allah*' (the Arabic word for God.) and that the *Muhammad* was his prophet (special messenger). Muhammad is so respected by Muslims that it is customary for them to say '*peace be upon him*' whenever they mention his name.



The Muslim holy book is called the *Qur'an*. The Qur'an teaches Muslims how to live a righteous life in obedience to Allah's laws. Muslims believe that the words of the Quran were dictated (spoken) to Mohammed by Allah through the angel Gabriel.

Importance of Ramadan

Ramadan is important to Muslims because they believe that it was during the month of Ramadan that Allah (God) revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad.

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Laylat Al Qadr

The actual night when the Qur'an was revealed is known as *Laylut al-Qadr* ('The Night of Power'). Laylat Al Qadr is considered the holiest night of the year for Muslims and is traditionally celebrated on the 27th day of Ramadan. This year it fell on the night of April 28.

Ramadan Observances

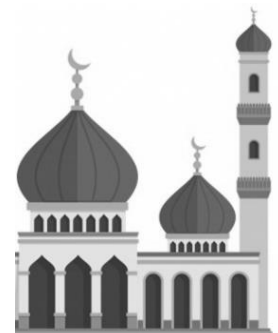
Most Muslims fast (go without food and drink) during the daytime for the entire month of Ramadan. They usually will have one meal (known as the *suhoor*) just before sunrise and not eat (or drink) again until the sun sets. Directly after sunset, family and friends get together for a large feast (called the *iftar*). This feast traditionally begins with the eating of dates.



Almost all Muslims try to give up bad habits during Ramadan and devote themselves to prayer and good deeds. It is customary for Muslims to try to read the whole of the Qur'an at least once during Ramadan or to attend prayer services at which the Qur'an is read.

Muslim prayer services are held in buildings called *mosques*. Most mosques have rules like washing face, hands and feet, leaving shoes outside, and dressing modestly.

Prayer is an important part of Muslim life. Devout (very religious) Muslims pray 5 times a day. Muslims pray in Arabic (the language of the Qur'an), and they always face Mecca (Mohammed's birthplace) in Saudi Arabia when they pray.



Most Muslim men wear a small cap called a *taqiyah* during prayer, and many pray on a small prayer rug (or mat) called a *sajadah*.

Some Muslims also use a string of prayer beads, called a *misbaha*, to keep count while repeating certain prayers.

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Eid al-Fitr

The end of Ramadan (and the beginning of the Islamic month of Shawwal) is marked by a holiday called *Eid al-Fitr* (the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast). This year Eid al-Fitr falls on May 3.

Muslims celebrate the holiday by decorating their homes, dressing in their finest clothes, spending time with friends, and sending gifts of money and food to the poor. Mosques hold special prayer services, and a special feast is eaten during the daytime (the first daytime meal after a month of daytime fasting).

