Ramadan

What Is It?

A period of fasting, introspection, charity, communal prayer and reading of the Quran during the 9th month of the Lunar Calendar. The purpose of Ramadan is for Muslims to focus on being thankful to Allah, strengthen their ability to abstain from things they desire, show obedience to Allah and increase their compassion for those who have less.

What Does It Entail?

Eating, drinking, and smoking is only permissible after evening prayers, until the first light in the morning. Before dawn, the family eats a breakfast-like meal (*Suhur*) and performs morning prayers. At sunset, the fast is broken with a few dates, water, and depending on the culture, other light foods *(Iftar*). Sunset prayers are performed, followed by dinner.

Does Everyone Fast?

No. Adults who could not physically cope with fasting due to illness, age, pregnancy etc. are not required to, though they must make up for this by fasting at another time or by giving to the poor in a variety of ways. Children are not typically required to fast until around 13 years of age, however can begin earlier if they want to.

Mosque Activities

Many mosques host daily community dinners where Muslims can break their fast together as well as inviting friends and neighbours of other faiths to join them.

The Night of Power (*Lailat al-Qadr*), is widely observed on the 27th night of Ramadan. It is considered the most blessed night in Ramadan because it is believed to be the night in which the Quran was first revealed. Many Muslims will pray all night and most Mosques will remain open.

At the end of Ramadan, Muslims celebrate one of their major holidays- The Festival of the Breaking of the Fast (*Eid al-Fitr*). This occurs over three days, and children traditionally receive new clothes, money or gifts. A special prayer and sermon are held the morning of Eid day, followed by a community celebration. It is a time of socializing, eating and sharing food, games and presents. The graves of relatives are often visited.

Things To Keep In Mind When Visiting Muslim Friends

If you are visiting during the day, you will still be offered hospitality and hot drinks etc. though your hosts will not eat or drink alongside you, so use your discretion as to whether or not you take them on the offer. Celebrating Iftar at sunset is a special time when the fast is broken. If visiting at that time of day, it could be nice to take along some juice, packets of dates, milk, yoghurt or sweets.

Most Muslims are happy to share about their faith and answer questions. If you have questions about Ramadan and have a good relationship with an individual, ask if you can share your questions. This can be an opportunity for increasing your understanding and demonstrating respect.

Be aware, that as the Mosque Attacks only occurred 6 weeks ago, that Ramadan this year may be a period of extra significance and sacredness. Emotions may still be acutely raw, and events may be cancelled due to security concerns. However, many may also feel that the opportunity to come together and celebrate should continue as normal. Support your friends, in whatever way their grief and healing journey needs.

For former refugee families or new migrant families, this may be the first time they have celebrated Ramadan in a Western culture which will be a new and possibly very different experience for them.

SWBC Community Resource

If you have any questions, feel free to email them to kkingsthwaite@swbc.org.nz or come along to the Q and A night, Tuesday May 14, 7.30pm @ Cobham St Hall.