

Key concepts

- Ramadan is the month of fasting which shapes religious identity for Muslims with a range of practices which encourage devotion, including special meals, the efforts made to fast, reading the Qur'an, marking the Night of Power and for some, seclusion.
 - Id-ul-Fitr is the festival at the end of Ramadan to celebrate the achievement of completing the fast and bring families and communities together. The rituals and social activities practiced at Id-ul-Fitr are also some of the most well-known and looked forward to in the year for Muslims.
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- Ramadan is the lunar month of 29 or 30 days during which Muslims fast from the first light before dawn until sunset. There are exemptions for travellers and the ill who may pay to feed a community instead or make up missed fasts later. For Muslims in northern lands, such as the UK, adjustments to timings might be made in the summer months of long daylight hours.
 - Muslims abstain from food, drink, sex, swearing and telling untruths strictly during daylight hours. They make extra effort to complete the five prayers and make intention (niyyah) before fasting, then give thanks to God for food before eating again.
 - Sehri, the pre-dawn meal, is a time when families get together, as is iftar, when the fast is 'opened', and often Muslims join others in mosques in community meals.
 - At night special prayers called tarawih are held to recite the whole Qur'an. Around the 27th night the Night of Power, when the first revelation was given, is commemorated and Muslims stay up to pray. Some enter seclusion in the mosque for the final 10 days of Ramadan (I'tikaf).
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- Id-ul-Fitr begins with the sighting of the new moon. There are different opinions about calculating or sighting this, be it locally or anywhere world-wide, leading to different days for Id-ul-Fitr marked by different groups of Muslims.
 - Muslims wash and wear new clothes to attend the Id-ul-Fitr prayers. They hug each other and celebrate with the words 'Id Mubarak'.
 - They give Id-ul-Fitr money or presents to children; share family meals; some visit graveyards to remember lost loved ones (though some Muslims disapprove of this); and celebrate with social activities.

Key quotes

'Eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black' (The Qur'an, Sura 2:187, Yusuf Ali).

'Fasting, with its implicit attack on man's animal appetites and carnal cravings, is seen as another way of purifying the self and bringing the recalcitrant soul into line.' (Turner)

'A Muslim community would not exist within the Arctic Circle without breaking the laws of salat and sawm'. (Horrie and Chippindale)

'In Islam the discipline of the Ramadan fast is intended to stimulate reflection on human frailty and dependence on Allah, focus on spiritual goals and values, and identification with and response to the less fortunate.' (Esposito)

'To describe a typical Ramadan fast day would be impossible, as all communities differ, at least in the detail.' (Turner)

Key words

Taqat	Fitrana	Id Mubarak	Id-ul-Fitr
Laylat al-qadr	I'tikaf	Tarawih	Saum /sawm

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key questions, arguments, and debates

1. The extent to which fasting benefits the individual more than the community.
To fast, a Muslim must make intention (niyyah) and that is personal. They may gain reward for having fasted for God on the Day of Judgment. Muslims cannot fast on behalf of anyone else. This suggests the benefits are personal. But 'benefits' can be interpreted in different ways. Strengthening the community can benefit those in need and inspire many individuals to become more committed to their faith. Charity collections can be made, and mosques supported. This issue depends upon the definition and discussion of 'benefits'.
2. Whether Id-ul-Fitr is treated as a religious celebration or social occasion.
It may be assumed that everything in Islam is religious, but as a whole way of life many Muslims see the religion, culture and social occasions are not only inter-mingled but inseparable. So any discussion of this issue might look at the distinction between religious and social. An evaluation could be made of each activity and how far it is religious, how far social, including the Id prayers, visits to graves, family meals and social celebrations. Different Muslims may think of Id in different ways; it depends upon their individual experience.