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Empathy: Ramadan's Quiet Gift

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Resilient Ramadan

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Ramadan: A Call for Reflection and Charity

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History of Ramadan



# COMPASSIONATE AND GRATEFUL RAMADAN



Empathy is one of the great gifts of Ramadan. Let us embrace it and keep it within ourselves. And let us go forward all year in the empathetic spirit of Ramadan all year."



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# Muslim World League

## Recent Activities in Review



**March 15**

On the second anniversary of the attacks in Christchurch, the MWL issued a statement to reaffirm its condemnation of all forms of terrorism, intolerance and hatred. The MWL shared the story of Daoud Nabi, whose final words "Hello, brother," directed at the attacker are an everlasting reminder of the Islamic values of peace and harmony.

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa met with Martina Strong, Charge d'Affaires for the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh. They discussed issues of common interest and ways to increase cooperation between the MWL and the U.S. government.



**March 15**



**March 16**

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa welcomed the State Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, HE Md. Shahriar Alam, along with his accompanying delegation. The MWL renewed its commitment to provide humanitarian aid to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa welcomed the Honorable President of the Islamic Commission of Spain, Dr. Dr Aiman Adlbi to the MWL offices in Riyadh. After a bilateral discussion the Dr. Adlbi joined the MWL Secretary General, Dr. Al-Issa, for a signing ceremony of a Memorandum of Understanding that seeks to increase MWL activities in Spain.

The Muslim World League recognized the International Day for the Elimination of Racism by sharing an important message from the Secretary General of the MWL. "Hateful rhetoric inevitably leads to violence. As representatives of a global, faith-based community, we seek every day to eliminate racism, prejudice and discrimination."



March 21

On World Water Day, the Muslim World League celebrated its successful programs around the world that deliver clean, reliable water to rural communities. In Ghana in 2019, the MWL sixty-nine solar-powered mechanized boreholes and adjacent ten-seater water-closet toilets in various communities across the country's eleven provinces. Water is necessary for health and sanitation and the MWL is proud to have provided this essential human right for more than 300 residents in these communities for the past two years.



March 22

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa welcomed the Minister of Foreign Affairs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dr. Bisera Turković. After visiting the site of the Srebrenica genocide last year, the Muslim World League has continued to build a strong relationship with the Bosnian government to support interreligious dialogue in the country.



March 22



The Muslim World launched the #RejectHate campaign calling on social media companies to enact policies that more acutely address Islamophobic content and other forms of hate speech that are pervasive online. The campaign kicked off with a video message from the Secretary General and has generated more than 5,000 signatures on the change.org petition.

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa welcomed the Ambassador from the United Arab Emirates, H.E. Sheikh Shakhbout bin Nahyan Al Nahyan, to the MWL offices in Riyadh. They discussed issues of common interest.



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H.E. Dr. Al-Issa received the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Engineer Walid bin Abdulkarim Al-Khurajji, and His Excellency the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy, Professor Fahd Asaad Abu Al-Nasr at the MWL offices in Riyadh. They discussed topics of common concern.





H.E. Dr. Al-Issa welcomed the Malaysian Minister of Islamic Affairs, Dr. Zulkifl Muhammad Al-Bakri and a high-level delegation to the MWL offices in Riyadh. The delegation discussed issues of common interest in the Muslim community in Malaysia and around the world. The MWL Secretary General and Dr. Al-Bakri signed an MOU to combat terrorism and promote peaceful relations between Muslim countries. The agreement includes incorporating the principles outlined in the Charter of Makkah into educational materials in Malaysia, as well as a series of conferences, seminars and events to promote Arabic language and culture and the values of moderate Islam.

The Muslim World League marked the beginning of Ramadan with a message from the Secretary General:

“I congratulate you on the advent of the blessed month of Ramadan. May Allah accept our good deeds, and I wish you a year full benevolence.”





This issue heralds the coming of the holy month of Ramadan, the when Muslims rededicate themselves to their faith. Fasting, prayer and acts of charity throughout the month allow Muslims to depart from the routines they follow daily throughout the year and remember the blessings that God bestows and the life He has commanded us to lead. Ramadan takes beyond piety and prayer, although piety and prayer are certainly a large part of it. It also calls for us to direct our energies and resources toward our fellow human beings, through acts of charity and by coming together with family and friends in the evening to break the daily fast together. Ramadan is a time of both individual reflection and sacrifice and community worship and fellowship.

Ramadan is different again this year because of the restrictions we have imposed on ourselves to fight the coronavirus pandemic. The iftars again will be smaller and a bit less joyous, and we will carry the general sadness that many of us feel because of this unaccustomed isolation we have been living. But vaccines are being developed and administered, and we have the end in sight. That is cause for great hope, if not yet outright joy. So, if Ramadan 2020 was a month of uncertainty and confusion, Ramadan 2021 is a month of optimism.

This year, Ramadan follows on the heels of the great Jewish and Christian religious celebrations of Passover and Easter. Of course, Passover and Easter always fall close to each other because their dates are linked to the spring full moon. Jesus's Last Supper, celebrated on the Thursday before Easter Sunday, was a Passover seder, after all. Despite the difficulties of managing lunar calendars in a world that functions on the Gregorian calendar, Jewish and Orthodox leaders have found ways (perhaps the subject of another essay) to keep those celebrations in the spring. Passover falls on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nisan, which is always a full

moon, and Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. Since Ramadan follows a strict lunar calendar, it only coincides with Passover and Easter a few times in each century.

That will happen in 2022, when Ramadan begins on April 2 and ends on May 1, and Passover and Easter will fall entirely within the month of Ramadan. Passover will be celebrated from April 15-22, and Easter will fall on April 17 for Western Christians and April 24 for Orthodox Christians. This offers people of the three great Abrahamic faiths a rare opportunity to join in an ecumenical recommitment to faith, tolerance and understanding. By next spring, we most likely will have reclaimed our normal lives from the virus that has forced us to remain indoors and separate ourselves from our fellow human beings. We have a chance at rebirth, and that our great faiths can lead that rebirth through a month-long show of solidarity, understanding and mutual respect that is both global and local and brings all people of the world closer together.

- The Editors





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Dr. Al-Issa delivers sermon at one of the biggest mosques in Europe.

Empathy:

## Ramadan's Quiet Gift

It is especially satisfying when Ramadan comes in the spring. Spring is a time of rebirth, a time when plants come to life and flower after the winter. It is a time when animals are born, when the sun warms the earth once again and the days grow longer. For Muslims this year, the rebirth that occurs in spring coincides beautifully with the spiritual rebirth of Ramadan, from April 12 to May 12.

Many people with only a superficial knowledge of Islam associate Ramadan with fasting, because they observe their Muslim friends and neighbors observing their duty to fast during this holy period. But daily fasting is only one element of Islam, which is a time that calls Muslims to come out of themselves, to break from the routine of their daily lives and focus on their relationship with God and their fellow human beings.

Fasting reminds Muslims of the presence of God in their lives, but every day we gather together

with our neighbors, family and friends to break the fast. It is a joyous time in which Muslims can enjoy the company of those closest to them, invite new acquaintances into their lives and share a love of God and life. Many non-Muslims cherish the invitations they receive to join iftar with their Muslim friends. They may not fast themselves, but they can feast in the opportunity for fellowship that fasting has created.



We celebrate holy days like Ramadan, Easter, Passover and Diwali to remember divine works and teachings, but also to re-center us on what is important and good."

Likewise, it is during Ramadan that Muslims redouble their duty to perform acts of charity. Charity is one of the five pillars of Islam, and it is especially important during Ramadan, when a special call to aid the needy sharpens the empathy that Muslims feel toward those less fortunate than themselves.

Empathy, in fact, is one of the great gifts of Ramadan. It is a mistake to think of this period as an inward expression of faith. Of course, every person of faith looks inward at their own behavior and their own relationship with God. But God calls on us not to shut ourselves off in prayer, but to be in the world. Prayer should give us the kind of peace of mind to make us better people, kinder people and more tolerant and forgiving people. God admonishes us not to sin, but He knows we are imperfect, and He is forgiving. We can be no less so.

This Ramadan, Muslims and non-Muslims alike should rededicate themselves to the idea of tolerance and acceptance. That does not mean that we compromise our beliefs. It means that we show respect for the beliefs of others, that we try to understand, and that we leave final judgment to God.

The Muslim world League has dedicated itself to carrying this spirit of Ramadan forward in all we do—in our charity and development work, in our worldwide effort to create understanding and mutual respect among people of different faiths, and in our campaign to reject extrem-

ism and violence. Empathy calls for us to feel the suffering of others and join in their sorrow, which is why we serve the poor and comfort all victims of sectarian violence. It is why we made a pilgrimage to Auschwitz with Jewish and Christian leaders, where we could understand in stark terms the unspeakable suffering that took place there and in the other Nazi camps.



The Muslim world League has dedicated itself to carrying this spirit of Ramadan forward in all we do—in our charity and development work, in our worldwide effort to create understanding and mutual respect among people of different faiths, and in our campaign to reject extremism and violence.”

The holocaust was a product of the rejection of empathy and its replacement with dehumanization. Once we lose the ability to love our fellow human beings at some level and refuse to validate their experience and their beliefs, we set out on a downhill path that starts with suspicion and descends to scapegoating, hatred and violence. Harmonious relations among people of different faiths and different races and ethnicities begins when we try to understand their experience and respect their ways.

We celebrate holy days like Ramadan, Easter, Passover and Diwali to remember divine works and teachings, but also to re-center us on what is important and good. Ramadan, like the holy days of the other major faiths, reminds us of the difference between good and evil, of our duty to worship God and obey His laws, and of our responsibility to show kindness and respect to each other.

Empathy is one of the great gifts of Ramadan. Let us embrace it and keep it within ourselves. And let us go forward all year in the empathetic spirit of Ramadan all year.



Muslim family celebrating Ramadan.

## Resilient Ramadan

Ramadan is a time for spiritual reflection, self-improvement and worship. Ramadan has always been a time of devotion, a time to pray, reflect and celebrate together as a community and with families. Muslims are expected to make a bigger effort into the teachings of Islam during this holiday. This year, Muslims will celebrate the holy month of Ramadan from April 13 through May 12. Ramadan is more than a religious obligation. It helps define national cultures and form a common bond among Muslims anywhere in the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented challenges to leaders around the world. Many face difficult times in providing healthcare to their citizens and managing overwhelmed systems and facilities while trying to sustain local economies

in the face of social distancing. Many challenges remain, and religious practices is one of them.

This year marks the second year that Muslims across the world will be celebrating Ramadan during a global pandemic. It's a different kind of celebration. We have learned much about the virus since those early days. People are being vaccinated, and there is now great hope, but many remain isolated. Nonetheless, Muslims have learned to adapt and have remained steadfast despite the global health challenges they face on year two.

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic continues to present challenges for Ramadan's worship and celebrations, as many mosques remain closed, and religious leaders want to safeguard the

health of their communities by following the advice of local authorities and medical experts to and taking the necessary steps to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

Most Muslims are used to the dawn-to-dusk fasting required during the celebration of Ramadan, but this year is different. There are no nightly gatherings in large groups of family and friends to break the fast and they have to do it alone at home.

Muslims are resilient and have found new ways to adjust and express their faith in God and celebrate life with their families and communities. To overcome the challenges during isolation, Muslims have been able to connect with their communities via social media through broadcasts and virtual gatherings, and they even continue to cook for their neighbors and communities to keep with their traditions. Muslim families around the world have prayed from home rather than attending communal prayers at mosques to help mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.

*Iftar*, the evening meal that breaks daily fasting, used to be held at home with immediate family



**Muslim men reading Quran during Ramadan.**

members and friends. Technology has been very useful in maintaining that bond. Muslims continue to cook at home and have been able to spend time with family members and community virtually. They have been able to share recipes and interact with others online to maintain a sense of community and togetherness that at times seems far away. Technology has helped households replaced big family gatherings with video conferences so Muslims can remain together while being apart.

Charity is big part of Ramadan, and Muslims continue to fulfill this obligation online by setting up online fundraises and food banks. Some have even set up drive-through iftars for those people who depend on the mosque to provide their daily meals. Muslims continue to show solidarity despite separation by continuing the spirit of Ramadan in the face of unprecedented challenges.

Coronavirus has been a challenge to everyone, but with every challenge come new ways to overcome it, and Ramadan worship is no different. Preserving human health is one of the highest values in Islam, and Muslims are working together to protect each other and their loved ones by avoiding social contact.

It is important to note that Ramadan is not just a sacred observance, it is a time for Muslims to strengthen their bonds within their families and enjoy the close company of their loved ones. Many families get together to prepare meals and carry out chores together to be able to spend more time together. This can be done in many ways, such as preparing the iftar meal, setting up the table or cleaning dishes and spaces after the meals.

This year, the pandemic has made food donations and other necessities even more important. The Muslim World League has continued its tradition of providing Ramadan food baskets to communities in need, a demonstration of the MWL's enduring commitment to humanitarian aid.



Children posing for a photo at festival hosted by the MWL in Ghana.

Ramadan:

## A Call for Reflection and Charity

“You will never attain piety until you spend out of what you hold dear, and whatever you may spend on anything, Allah indeed knows it,” the Quran teaches.

“Be steadfast in prayer and regular in charity. Whatever good you send forth for your souls before you, you shall find it with Allah. For Allah sees well all that you do,” the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) instructs Muslims.

Zakat, also known as charity, is the Third Pillar of Islam and a foundational element rooted in the teachings of the Quran. It is mentioned through-

out the Quran many times and is often referred to as “regular charity,” demonstrating that it should not be merely performed on special occasions and holidays, but a constant and ongoing act.

The Quran teaches us to have empathy, understanding and love for all people. It instructs us to reject hatred, violence and divisiveness in all its forms. And it also calls on us to show gratitude for our blessings by giving to those most in need.

Muslims use the holy month of Ramadan as a time for reflection and a renewal of their faith and belief in these very ideals. As one of the most



**Dr. Al-Issa delivering food aid in Senegal.**

sacred Islamic customs, and one of the Five Pillars of Islam, this 30-day observance represents much more than fasting from sunrise to sunset. It is a call for spiritual purification and self-discipline. It is a chance to gain a deeper awareness of the suffering many people face. And it is time for one to strengthen their connection with Allah and show genuine concern for the less fortunate, especially after the immense pain caused by the global coronavirus pandemic.

This is why zakat is such an important aspect of Ramadan. For Muslims, it is an opportunity to be generous and give back to vulnerable communities around the world. During Ramadan, Muslims are encouraged to be charitable if they have the means to do so. Many Muslims and Muslim organizations donate their time and resources to philanthropic endeavors. They also participate in Zakat al-Fitr at the end of

Ramadan, which involves feeding others on the morning of Eid.

Charitable and humanitarian work has been at the heart of the Muslim World League's (MWL) mission since its establishment in 1962. The MWL provides assistance to the less fortunate through a variety of initiatives, from distributing food baskets to supporting orphanages to developing basic infrastructure in rural communities to providing emergency relief.

Every year during the sacred month of Ramadan, the MWL delivers food aid and other essential items to vulnerable communities, including the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe. In the past year, the Muslim World League sent Ramadan food baskets and medical tools and supplies to Senegal, Sudan, South Africa, Nigeria, Somalia, Malawi and other



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**The MWL delivering iftar meals during Ramadan.**

countries. And in 2019, the MWL distributed more than 500,000 Ramadan food packages in 28 countries.

But the MWL does not just give back during Ramadan. The MWL practices 'regular charity' as instructed by the Quran, which is in accordance to its founding principles. As the coronavirus pandemic swept across the world, the MWL extended a helping hand to governments and people who were suffering, regardless of their faith, nationality, gender or ethnicity. The MWL distributed urgent relief to more than 20 countries, including critical food aid, medical supplies, protective equipment, health kits, financial support, and educational materials to help in the fight against the coronavirus.

This past year has resulted in unprecedented human suffering, loss and pain. It has tested the

global community's resolve and fortitude. It has shown us how misconceptions can lead to hate, distrust and violence. But it has also shown the world that we can only overcome the current challenges by working together and giving back to those we cannot support themselves.

A core tenet of Islam is thawab, which means a person will be rewarded for good deeds performed out of the goodness of one's heart, not for personal gain.

With this year's Ramadan, the MWL will continue to provide support to people suffering around the world. And whether it be providing a meal to someone in need or volunteering at a local food or soup kitchen, Muslims and Muslim organizations are encouraged to do the same – not for recognition or profit, but with the understanding that "Allah sees all that you do."

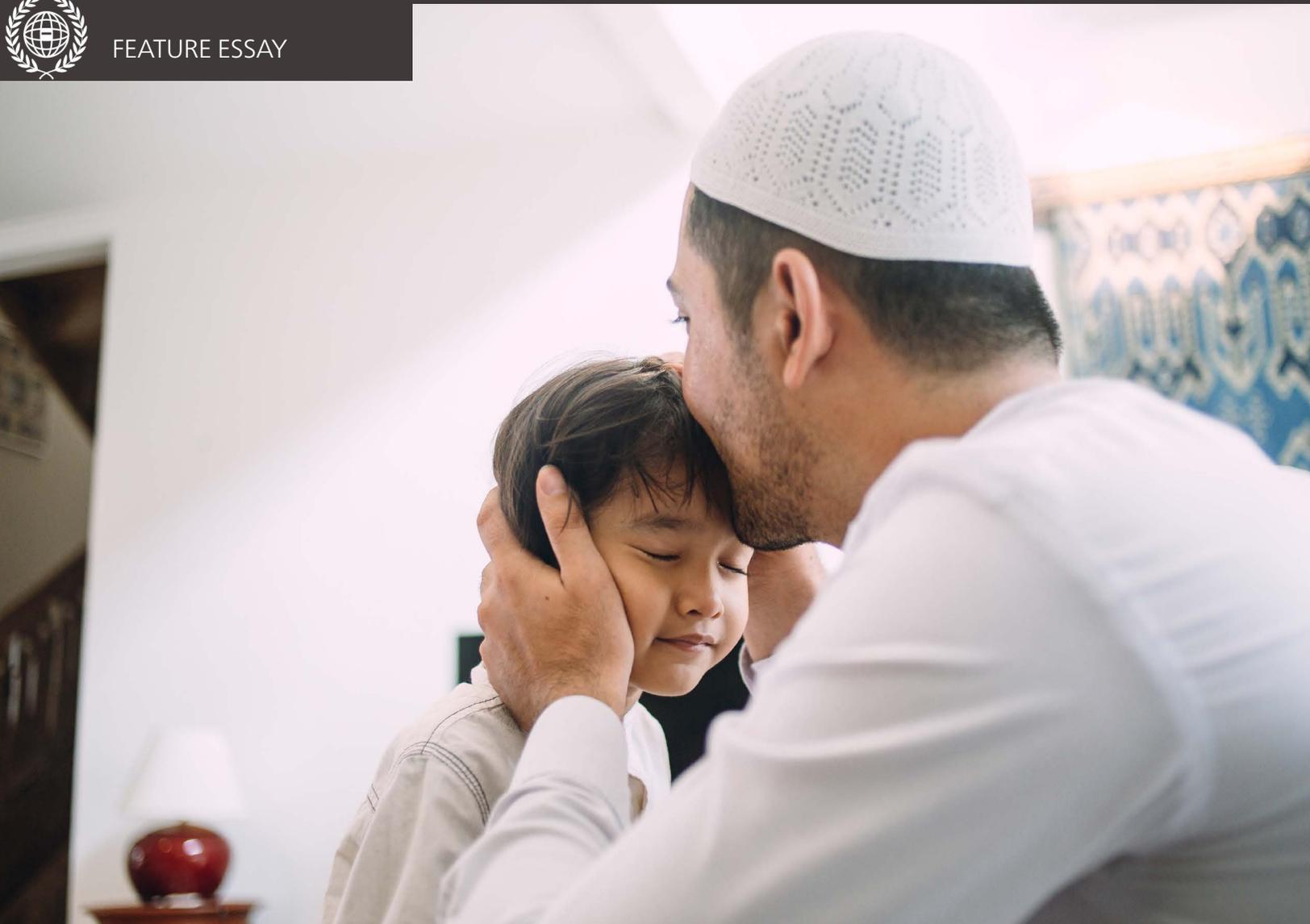
## ADAPTING RAMADAN CELEBRATIONS

It has been more than a year since the world adopted measures to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, marking the second time that Muslims experience a holy month of Ramadan celebrated largely in private. This can be stressful and difficult to coordinate – Ramadan in years past has always been a communal event, where members pray and celebrate together. However, Muslim families have now learned to adapt their Ramadan strategies to the pandemic's various trials through several ways, including:

- **Friday prayers broadcast via social media:** Due to many countries' strict quarantine lockdown rules, Muslims are not allowed to gather in mosques to participate in prayer. Therefore, imams either prerecord or broadcast their Friday prayers and sermons to various social media outlets. Not only does this let the imam's community continue to participate in the holy month, but it allows guests to learn more about Muslims, the community, and its practices.
- **Community Cooking:** Many Muslims have iftar with members of the community at the mosque after evening prayers. Since many mosques continue to be closed, members of the community have taken it upon themselves to continue to prepare meals for their neighborhoods. Mosque goers then pick up the iftar meals after concluding their prayers at home.
- **Virtual Gatherings:** Since many countries' health authorities have advised against travel and congregating in large groups, Muslims have struggled with the tradition of returning to one's home and family in the evening. However, the rise in the use of social media and videoconference apps such as Zoom makes it easier for Muslims to meet with family and members of their community to participate in Ramadan activities.



Muslim devotees gather to collect their respective tiffin boxes at Bang Aw mosque premises in Bangkok.



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**A Family Celebrates Eid.**

The Ultimate Act of Generosity This Ramadan:

## Vaccinating

Ramadan, the holiest month of the Islamic calendar, is a time for the more than 1.9 billion practicing Muslims to reflect spiritually, offer prayer, do good deeds, and, of course, fast. The period spent fasting, which goes from dawn to dusk, is an integral part of Ramadan and allows those practicing to devote themselves to their faith and become closer to Allah. Fasting during Ramadan, or *z*, is also one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Around the world, those preparing for this holiday knew that this Ramadan would look different than year's past because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. While many made plans to adjust how their families would come together safely for iftar to break their fast, some began to wonder what the availability of vaccine during this holy month would mean for them.

Worldwide scholars of Islamic law and medical experts were consulted on whether receiving a Covid-19 vaccine during Ramadan would break one's fast. Overwhelmingly, these leaders were in agreement and reassured the Muslim community that the vaccine is permissible and does not invalidate the fast.



“We need to tackle and address early concerns raised by Muslim communities who may be offered their vaccinations whilst fasting and working in frontline and supporting roles. There is no reason why a first- or second-dose vaccine cannot be administered during Ramadan. The content is halal, and receiving it will not invalidate the Ramadan fast, as per the opinion of Islamic scholars,”

-Dr. Habib Naqvi

### A Contribution to Society

Global leaders have urged the Muslim community to accept the vaccine as soon as it becomes available to them, not only for their own health, but for the greater good of society. It is an Islamic

duty to preserve life, and vaccinating yourself is one of the most effective ways of preventing Covid-19 from taking any more lives than it already has. Creating a community of vaccinated people will protect those who are most vulnerable from the illness and halt or reduce the spread of the virus during Ramadan.

Ibn Sina made Islamic culture synonymous with scientific progress. The couple who synthesized the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine are of Muslim origin. Those practicing Ramadan can continue this good work by inspirational Muslims through *fard kifaya*, a collective obligation.

### Expert Advice

Basharat Saleem, the executive director of the Islamic Society of North America, said that the vaccine injection “will not invalidate the fast because it has no nutritional value and it is injected into the muscle.”

“We need to tackle and address early concerns raised by Muslim communities who may be offered their vaccinations whilst fasting and working in frontline and supporting roles. There is no reason why a first- or second-dose vaccine cannot be administered during Ramadan. The content is halal, and receiving it will not invalidate the Ramadan fast, as per the opinion of Islamic scholars,” said Dr. Habib Naqvi, director of the Race and Health Observatory of the United Kingdom's National Health Service.

Dr. Hina Shahid, chair of the Muslim Doctors Association, said “This has been a unique time globally, with festivals of Ramadan and Eid occurring during the peak of Covid-19. Muslims and other faith communities have met these challenges head on; it was inspiring to see the community using technology for prayer and sharing images of iftar with family and friends at the start of the pandemic. . . Vaccination is one of our biggest tools to make sure we can go back to



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### **A Muslim Woman receives A Vaccine.**

normal soon, including celebrating festivals with our loved ones when it is safe to do so. I encourage everyone to get vaccinated when they get called, including during Ramadan, and to discuss any concerns with their GP.”

More so, the Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines have received approval from the British Islamic Medical Association, the Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America and the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia.

### **Having a Healthy Ramadan**

For those worried about health risk and additional side effects of receiving a vaccine while fasting,

medical experts confirmed that it is perfectly safe to receive the doses on an empty stomach.

Dr. Gunjan Mahajan, a specialist clinical pathologist at the Medeor Hospital Laboratory in Abu Dhabi, said, “The priority is to take the vaccine, both the first and second dose, and people need not change their appointment because of the fasting hours. In the majority of cases, the only side effect that the vaccine manifests is a sore arm, some dizziness or headache, and that too kicks in a day after the vaccination.

“Our bodies are perfectly strong to deal with an inactivated virus even when we are fasting. In fact, the body is in a state of rest when we are



### Muslim Female Doctors Examine A Vaccine.

fasting and does not have to deal with anabolic, catabolic or metabolic chores, and the immune system is highly effective when we are fasting.”

The head of laboratories at the Fakeeh University Hospital in Dubai, Dr. Palat Menon, said that in general, vaccines actually were more efficacious when people were fasting.

It is recommended to get plenty of rest during the day and to eat foods of nutritional value when breaking fasts, foods containing macronutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins and fats and micronutrients such as Vitamin C and iron.

### Assalamualaikum and Ramadan Mubarak

The science is clear. Reducing transmission helps save lives, and one of the best ways to

do this is by becoming inoculated against the virus. The efforts to fight Covid-19 that have been made by so many doctors, researchers, scientists, and frontline workers will not be in vain during Ramadan. The Islamic community will not allow progress to halt during this holy month, but instead join together to create a safer and healthier world.





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Ramadan Lanterns are created specifically for the Holy Month.

## The History of Ramadan

Originally occurring during the scorching summer months in Saudi Arabia, Ramadan literally means “intense heat.” It is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar and occurs approximately one day after the new moon. The beginning of Ramadan is declared by the Judicial High Court based on the testimony of local moon sighters. According to Muslim faith, it is during this month that the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

The Quran states that Ramadan is “a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the criterion (of right and wrong). And whosoever of you is present, let him fast the

month, and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, a number of other days. Allah desires for you ease; He desires not hardship for you; and that you should complete the period, and that you should magnify Allah for having guided you, and that perhaps you may be thankful.” [2:185]

Following this guidance, the common practice is to fast between the dawn meal (*suhur*) and the sunset meal (*iftar*). Because the month is meant to focus on spiritual reflection and self-improvement, abstaining is meant to redirect the heart away from worldly activities. It is also a test of self-discipline, self-control, and sacrifice meant to inspire compassion and generosity toward



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**Dates are a traditional part of the dawn meal, Suhur.**

the less fortunate. The length of the fast depends on each individual's location, but generally ranges from 11 to 19 hours. Practicing Muslims also abstain from drinking, smoking, and sex during these hours. But fasting alone is not enough, according to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who said, "If a person does not avoid false talk and false conduct during the fast, then God does not care if he abstains from food and drink." In the 21st century almost one quarter of the world's population observe the fast.

The primary traditions of Ramadan have remained unchanged since their introduction in 622. However, as Islam has spread over borders and to other continents, the celebrations have grown and evolved. In Egypt, the *midfa al-iftar*, or "ftar cannon, is fired to signal the breaking of the fast. In Turkey, drummers rouse the town for their morning meal. The tradition of charity has also adapted to current times. Originally, the "alms of the breaking of the fast" was mandatory for all Muslims and consisted of giving a

portion of dates or barley directly to the less fortunate. These days, a monetary donation to a mosque or charity is more standard.

The month builds towards *Laylat al-Qadr*, also known as the "Night of Power," "Night of Decree," or "Night of Destiny," which is the night when the Quran was first sent down from heaven, according to the Muslim faith. It is believed to be the holiest night of the year. According to the Quran, this evening of worship is better than worship of a thousand months.

The 29 or 30 days of Ramadan come to an end on Eid al-Fitr, a day of community and celebration. The name literally means "festival of breaking the fast," but the convention of beginning the day with the taste of dates or something else sweet has led to the nickname "Sweet Festival."

Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam, along with the declaration of faith, daily prayers, charity, and the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.



Wearing traditional dress, Turkish drummers wander the streets waking residents for suhoor.

## Ramadan across Cultures

Ramadan is known as a period of prayer and fasting, as Muslims across the world reflect on their faith. It is also a period of celebration and community. The Islamic faith unites many peoples and societies across the world, each with their own traditions and cultural practices to mark this holy month.

The traditional daylight fasting of Ramadan helps Muslims to focus on spiritual reflection and the purification of the soul. For the people of Java, in Indonesia, this process starts the day before Ramadan begins. Across the island Muslims participate in *Padusan*, a cleansing in which people submerge themselves from head to toe in springs, believing the ritual will wash away filth before the Holy Month begins.

Traditionally, local elders and religious leaders would identify sacred springs where people would undergo *Padusan*. In modern times it is

more common for people to go to nearby lakes, swimming pools, or the sea. Some even complete the ritual in their own bathtubs.

Catching *suhoor*, that early morning meal before the sun rises, is essential to many Muslims if they are to endure the day-long fast. Fortunately for people in Turkey, it is quite easy to know it is time to eat. Since the days of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims have been awakened by the roar of more than 2,000 drummers across the country sounding the start of the day. These drummers dress in traditional Ottoman costumes and beat the *davul*, a double-headed drum. The drummers rely on the generosity of ordinary people, with many Muslims believing that they will receive good luck in return for their contribution.

A similar tradition has emerged in the Indian city of Delhi to ensure that people rise for *suhoor*. The *seheriwalas* of Old Delhi walk the streets of the

city in the small hours of the morning, chanting the name of Allah and the Prophet. They start as early as 2:30 a.m. and wander the streets with sticks or canes, knocking on doors and walls to awaken Muslims for *suhoor*.

Just as that first meal before dawn is essential, after a long day of fasting many Muslims are understandably enthusiastic for their first meal after sundown. No tradition better captures this excitement than *midfa al iftar*, when cannons are fired at sunset to signal the breaking of the Ramadan fast.

This tradition is said to have started accidentally. More than 200 years ago in Cairo, the Ottoman ruler *Kohosh Qadam* was testing a new cannon at sunset when he accidentally fired it. Many

of the city's residents took this as a sign that it was time to eat. The tradition spread across the Ottoman Empire, including to Lebanon, where it continues to this day.

Some nations use fewer explosive methods to signal the end of the fast. In Albania, the Roma Muslim community announces the beginning and end of fasting with traditional songs. Each day of Ramadan, people march through the streets beating the *lodra*, a double-ended drum. Families will often invite the musicians into their homes to play these songs as a celebration of the start of iftar.

Traditional songs are also essential to the recognition of Ramadan in Senegal. At night the Senegalese will sing religious songs through the evening, with locals often competing amongst themselves.

Many countries bring the traditions of their cultural heritage to the fore when celebrating Ramadan. In Azerbaijan, horse races are customarily staged to show happiness, and many are organized to celebrate the holy month. Azeri Muslims also partake heavily in a tradition of giving. They exchange gifts with neighbors and prepare extra dishes for meals in case of unexpected guests. The Azeri people also seek to fulfill vows during Ramadan. Those who have taken vows in the name of God during the year will seek to realize those vows through prayer, charity and fasting for several days after Ramadan is complete.

The Islamic community is a fabulous tapestry of societies that span the world. United by their faith in Allah, they nonetheless represent different histories, cultural origins, and geographic realities. The beautiful fusion of religious adherence and local practices adds a different vibrancy to Ramadan celebrations in whichever corner of the globe you visit.



- A seheriwala wanders the streets of Old Delhi, chanting to Allah.
- People in Java gather to participate in the padusan to mark the start of Ramadan.

## RAMADAN IN A PANDEMIC: THEN AND NOW

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Nearly 500 million people around the world were infected when the Spanish influenza plagued the world in 1918 and 1919, and between 50 and 100 million people perished. It was so virulent that in the Arabian Peninsula, historians of the period, and surviving folk memories, describe that time as the “year of compassion” (*sanat al-rahma*) or “Year of fever” (*sanat al-sakhna*).

In 1918, Spanish Flu coincided with Ramadan, which fell during June-July. The cases peaked in September-October and subsided in November. Records show that it was one of the few times that mosques were shut down for brief periods coinciding with Ramadan.

This was the case again in 2020, as the world’s nearly 2 billion Muslims experienced their holy month very differently amid the coronavirus pandemic. Saudi Arabia implemented bold measures to fight the outbreak, gradually closing Mecca and Medina. Cities throughout the Arab world also shuttered mosques and suspended religious educational programs and Friday sermons.

Nevertheless, amidst the difficulty and tragedy surrounding this type of global health crisis, there

are positive parallels to be drawn. Just over one hundred years after the Spanish Flu, as the world battles Covid-19, we have seen common themes emerge despite very different circumstances, and advances in medicine and technology.

These revolve around displays of community and selfless acts of service. Similar to our continued social distancing in 2021, the fight against the influenza pandemic of 1918 was mainly based on isolating patients in homes and places outside the town or the walls of the city. Not unlike our modern-day frontline workers and medical personnel, Muslims during the Spanish Flu took care of their brothers and sisters by caring for the ailing and the deceased, volunteering to distribute vaccines and medicine, and cooking community meals.

As a testament to the best elements of humanity, we have seen Muslims honor the essence of Ramadan through reflection and upholding the spirit of community. Through multiple global pandemics, Muslims have been able to shine, and come out stronger on the other side.



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Riyadh, 2 years before the 1919 Spanish influenza pandemic.



Dr. Al-Issa speaking during the online seminar

## Let's Make The World A Peaceful Place, Says Dr. Al-Issa

by **Mohammad Nasir Jawed**

“ Sheikhs Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League (MWL), said that cooperation agreements have been signed with several organizations – both religious and intellectual – to achieve common goals, spread peace and coexistence in human societies, and confront advocates of hatred and racism.

Dr. Al-Issa was speaking at an online seminar organized by the Los Angeles World Affairs Council and Town Hall (LAWACTH), USA, on Feb. 23. The webinar was attended by more than a thousand scholars on intellectual and political issues on the relationship between followers of religions and cultures.

World Affairs Council President Kim McCleary Blue praised the global role that Dr. Al-Issa was playing through the MWL in promoting a culture of dialogue and cooperation between followers of different religions and cultures. According to the LAWACTH chief, the MWL was playing an important role in confronting hatred and intolerance and working toward global coexistence among diverse societies.

Earlier, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, the Associate Dean, Director, Global Social Action of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, welcomed Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa and acknowledged his global efforts in making peace with other communities.

Dr. Al-Issa thanked the organizers of the webinar and praised the city of Los Angeles as a place "rich in diversity," and took note of the global influence of the center.

"Racism, hatred and the domination of material interests at the expense of justice and values are considered the greatest threat to the peace of our world and the harmony of our societies," said the MWL Secretary General.

These are evils that, if not checked, set "dangerous trends that disturb social and political equilibrium on national and international levels. It sows mistrust among followers of different civilizations and cultures and undermine efforts to create harmony between them." This creates societal division and may lead to violence within national societies, especially those of diversity, he said.



## The aim of the MWL is to end unnecessary differences between communities

Citing the adoption of the Charter of Makkah in 2019, Dr. Al-Issa said the aim of the MWL is to end unnecessary differences between communities.

The Charter of Makkah is a document which was approved by 1200 scholars from 139 countries representing 27 Islamic sects.

All legislations on national or global level need to take into account the circumstances of each country, and that these legislations must be strong and effective that address their general and detailed crises while constantly monitoring their developments, he said.

The Secretary General stressed the need to promote dialogue between the East and the West to bridge the gap between different communities, cultures and civilizations.

He also stressed the importance of understanding the inevitability of religious, intellectual and civilizational diversity as an important pillar in accepting 'the other' and the success of dialogue and exchanging with it.

The MWL Secretary General blamed the trust deficit between different communities for violence. He explained the Islamic concept of moderation and its importance to promote global peace and harmony.



## Civilizational clashes are extremely dangerous and can bring about dangerous consequences

The civilizational clashes are extremely dangerous and can bring about dangerous consequences, he said and stressed we should take all the necessary steps to check such narratives and build on a value system. This value system should conform to the characteristics and needs of different societies and should involve family bonds, education and making stronger our all relevant civil institutions, foremost among them is the national integration institutions in the countries of pluralistic and diverse culture.

He cautioned that the real dilemma of these institutions is not often in the efficiency of their legislations, but in the efficiency of their executive tools that are capable of spreading patriotism and humanity in them. He noted that division is a broad concept that affects friendship and harmony between nations and peoples in general, as well as within national states in particular, affirming that sincerity and integration between international and national institutions are the cornerstone in avoiding and resolving international or national division.

### Women

Dr. Al-Issa stressed on fighting the wrong ideas about women propagated by extremist elements and underlined the need to combat the extremist narrative using intellectual means to root it out from the world.

Regarding women in Islam, he said, the Muslim women have always enjoyed a prominent position since the beginning of Islam and any violation of their rights are against the basic teachings of the religion.

He made it clear that religious extremism is based on false ideas and their falsehood must be explained, stressing that the military confrontation with terrorism, despite its great importance, is not sufficient on its own. Rather, it must be confronted intellectually to expose the falsehood of the theses on which it feeds.

Dr. Al-Issa highlighted the efforts of the MWL in forging ties with several religious organizations around the world to spread its message of peace and coexistence.

Dr. Al-Issa underlined the importance of dialogue between East and West, as also the importance of dialogue within a community between national diversity, based on its commonalities, whether they are national, humanitarian or related to moral values in general.

The MWL Secretary General took the opportunity to explain the concept of moderation in Islam and how it can spread peace and harmony among all, warning against the attempt by extremists of any religion, thought or ideology to spread hatred and the resulting repercussions.

He discussed the deep relations that the MWL had established with various international institutions and personalities – both religious and otherwise – which prepared them to go to Sri Lanka to heal the wounded in the terrorist operation in 2019, and to visit the Auschwitz camp in Poland at the head of an Islamic delegation of senior Muslim scholars from various Islamic countries, and from various sects.

He touched upon the peace and solidarity agreement signed by the leaders of the three

religions in France with their various sects, which was called by the MWL and was signed in Paris in 2019, affirming that the agreement contains operational programs and bilateral meetings to promote common values between the followers of the three religions.

The MWL is not a political party, the sheikh affirmed and said that it believes that every state has sovereign rights to take decisions, and opposes interference in the internal affairs of states, explaining that countries are bound by an international organization, which is the United Nations, which has its international charters, treaties and international.

Dr. Al-Issa appeared keen on cooperating with the religious leaders and organizations based on mutual respect to their respective cultures and civilizational values. Citing his experience of meeting hundreds of youths in the world, the MWL chief expressed his willingness to have communications with the younger generation.

Dr. Al-Issa stressed significance of the power of the youth in terms of their influential role in the society and also in terms of their being a vital key in shaping the future of their societies and the humanity in general.

“We met hundreds of youths – both Muslims and non-Muslims – in Indonesia, and those who came from the neighboring countries, to participated in a meeting before the Corona pandemic had started. It was a very wonderful and inspiring meeting with them; and this was just one of such several summits where I noticed that most of those youths – many of them celebrities – later took to social media to share and discuss our discussions in a positive manner,” he said.

“The corona pandemic has taught us the importance of remaining united while facing such threats that put us all at risk; epidemics like terrorism know no international borders and do



Division is a broad concept that affects friendship and harmony between nations and peoples

not offer any immunity to any religion, race or belief. Our victory therefore depends on cooperation between us. Together, we must build a safer and more prosperous world for future generations – a world in which individuals are not killed in their mosques, churches or temples; a world that embraces diversity; and a world in which our contributions are valued.”

He said our world cannot overcome evil or ignorance that wants to divide us and wants to make our religious and cultural diversity a tool for conflict and clash. It cannot overcome this except through effective dialogue and real comprehension of the great divine way which dictates the inevitability of difference and diversity among human beings, and that the logic of justice in all its meanings and connotations is a pillar of



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“  
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human happiness.

“The Holy Qur’an supports all these human values explicitly in more than one verse, but extremists are not moved by these verses and try to distort its meaning. In most cases, it prefers not to go through them,” he said.

“If we need to strengthen our presence in the group of the righteous, the wise, the reformers and the peacemakers, we should be honest with ourselves and with others, truly comprehending the wisdom of our diversity, and how this should support our unity as one human family, and then reinforce our love and tolerance for one another, and these common human values are the way to deliver our world from the evils of hatred, racism, extremism, violence and terrorism, whatever its identity,” he added and said that they must teach “our children these values to inculcate natural behavioral traits in their personality coming from their pure conscience and their normal mind.”

He explained that the lack of awareness represents a great dilemma around the world, pointing out that education devoid of knowledge and effective educational programs does not enhance intellectual and behavioral awareness, hence family and education are important in promoting awareness, which benefits national states and relations between nations and peoples in general.

After that, the dialogue opened with Dr. Al-Issa, which dealt with a number of issues related to the themes of the meeting.





Dr. Al-Issa at the interfaith summit in Sri Lanka

## Sri Lanka responds to Secretary General's calls in recognition of MWL global standing

**Nizar Abdulbagi Ahmed**

“ During the past years, since its foundation, the Muslim World League has played a major role in clarifying the true image of Islam, and has made appreciative efforts to convey the pure message of Islam to the whole world, in fulfillment of its duty as a global popular Islamic organization. It paid careful attention to refuting the suspicions that some predators try to attach to the image of Islam, linking it to terrorism, and describing it as extremism and violence.



Dr. Al-Issa being decorated with the highest Malaysian award



### Dr. Al-Issa pays great attention to the issues of minorities in Western societies, Asia and Africa

Since its foundation, the Muslim World League (MWL) has played a major role in clarifying the true image of Islam, and has made great efforts to convey the pure message of Islam to the whole world as part of its duty, being a global Islamic organization. It paid careful attention to refuting the suspicions that some try to attach to the image of Islam, linking it to terrorism, and describing it as extremism and violence.

Since His Excellency Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa took over the MWL leadership, he has followed a civilized and practical approach based on concern for addressing the other, expanding the umbrella of dialogue, and listening to others' views even if they were doubts and ac-

cusations, then refuting and responding to them in a practical manner supported by evidence and proofs from the Quran and Sunnah. Dr. Al-Issa also pays great attention to the issues of minorities in Western societies and in the countries of Asia and Africa. In order to overcome the difficulties facing them, he made many tours that required a lot of effort, speaking on their behalf to the officials in their countries, seeking to solve the problems and difficulties encountering them.

#### Unique niche

The MWL Secretary General benefited from the prestigious position that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia enjoys in most countries of the world and the great acceptance that it finds among others, thanks to its balanced and rational policy as well as its wide contributions to help other countries and its intensive human efforts. Dr. Al-Issa used all these advantages for the benefit of Muslim minorities in different countries of the world and met their leaders and officials to find solutions to the crises that stand in the way of Muslims in those countries.



**Dr. Al-Issa receiving an award in UAE for promoting tolerance**

### Huge effort

As a result of these hardworking, the MWL position has been cemented and enhanced among many governments and countries of the world. The MWL has held myriad international conferences in various states across the globe, in which Al-Issa spoke about Islam’s vision of what the world should be in terms of coexistence and brotherhood. He also emphasized that Islam does not force people to convert. Rather Islam calls for cooperation between the followers of different civilizations, religions and cultures. Indeed, the leaders of Muslims were keen during periods of the spread of Islam in the world to grant the indigenous people the right to keep their religion, if they want, with no confiscation of their money or prejudice to their churches and places of worship or restrictions on them in their own rituals.

### Tolerance of Islam

Al-Issa affirmed in many forums that Islam is innocent and has nothing to do with terrorist



MWL has played a key role in dispelling misconceptions about Islam

acts, pointing out that terrorism has no religion or homeland and that Muslims are the ones most affected by it. He made clear that the majority of Muslims are moderate and that the percentage of terrorists in Islamic countries does not exceed one to 200 thousand people.

Those efforts were received with wide global satisfaction and so many countries of the world invited Dr. Al-Issa to participate in international conferences, symposiums and forums, in which he delivered his clear words and conveyed the message of moderate Islam to the entire world. Countries expressed their gratitude and appreciation



**Dr. Al-Issa receiving World's Religious Peace Award from John Duke Anthony, the founding president of National Council of US-Arab Relations**



Dr. Al-Issa drew attention to the fact that Islamophobia is the main reason for the survival of terrorist organizations

to him and presented to him numerous international awards in recognition of his great effort, which portrayed him as a symbol of a personality that advocates moderation, dialogue and cooperation between people of different civilizations, religions and cultures.

### Immediate response

The latest efforts of the MWL Secretary General were manifested in his proposal to the Sri Lankan government not to burn the dead bodies of

Muslims who die of covid-19 and which Sri Lanka approved. It was decided that the Muslim victims of coronavirus would be buried as per the Islamic teachings.

His Excellency received a phone call from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Dinesh Gunawardena, in which he confirmed his country's response to the MWL's demands, indicating that this would strengthen the close relationship between both parties.

### Worldwide appreciation

The head of the European Commission for Islamic Centers, Muhajiri Zian, indicates that the response of the State of Sri Lanka to the Secretary General of the Muslim World League to stop burning the dead bodies of Muslims expresses the global appreciation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a pivotal country in the world enjoying good relations with all countries. The response also reflects appreciation for the efforts the MWL exerts, especially its calls for dialogue and civilized communication in a way that constitutes a solid ground for achieving common goals.

He added, "This quick response indicates the position the MWL enjoys around the world being a global reference for Islamic peoples, calling for coexistence, tolerance, communication and good relations. We hope that there will be a similar response regarding the other issues the MWL argues and defends in the service of Islam, Muslims and humanity".

### Solidarity and sympathy

In 2019, the MWL held a summit on interfaith harmony in the capital Colombo, in the presence of Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisna and with the participation of the Vatican, and a number of religious leaders from all Islamic, Christian, Judaism, Buddhist and Hindu religions. Over 2,000 international leading figures attended the

event including scholars, politicians, thought leaders and media figures. The summit began with multiple cultural performances that reflected the importance of harmony and coexistence among the followers of religions and cultures.

The Sri Lankan President delivered his opening speech thanking the Muslim World League for holding the conference and donating five million dollars to support the families of victims of terrorist acts. He said "It is important to us now that the language of hatred stops among the sects of the people. Sri Lanka throughout the ages has enjoyed safety, peace and harmony among citizens who belong to different religions. The terrorist organization that carried out this crime does not believe in dialogue and does not represent Islam. Muslims have suffered after the bombings". Then he presented the Supreme Medal of Sri Lanka to His Excellency for his role in promoting peace between religions.

### Repeated attacks

Dr. Al-Issa pointed out that the historic summit comes against the backdrop of a painful catastrophe that occurred in Sri Lanka. He said, "The crime was committed by the hand of terrorist treachery in a horrific way that affected a place of worship. Before that, and in the same year, the city of Christchurch, New Zealand, was subjected to heinous terrorist attacks on two Muslim mosques while a synagogue in California was targeted, which witnessed a brutal terrorist attack. This summit clarifies the truth of religions calling for love, peace and harmony. Religion is a bridge to achieve this principle. It is our duty as leaders, references and religious figures to confront all kinds of terrorism."

### Broad activity

In addition to the summit, Dr. Al-Issa was keen to visit all influential Sri Lankan events. He met with the Prime Minister, the leader of Parliament and a number of senior Islamic, Christian, Buddhist



Dr. Al-Issa has received numerous global prestigious awards for promoting interfaith dialogue



The MWL Secretary General's efforts to promote dialogue between followers of religions were highly appreciated globally

and Hindu leaders, who agreed that the timing of the Secretary General's visit was very important. Dr. Al-Issa also visited the Sri Lankan Cardinal of the church that was bombed in Colombo, offering his condolences and sympathy. The Cardinal praised the visit, stressing that Islam is innocent of these actions and those terrorists do not represent Islam. He noted, "Muslims in Sri Lanka are our friends and we share with them feelings of appreciation, love, and continuous cooperation". The Cardinal appreciated the visit of many Islamic figures in Sri Lanka to the church



## The majority of Muslims are moderate and that the percentage of terrorists in Islamic countries does not exceed one to 200 thousand people

immediately after the terrorist acts occurred, as Muslims rushed to give aid to the victims and provided food, clothing and other types of material and moral support, which had the greatest impact on the victims.

### Awards and accolades

Many countries in the world have honored Dr. Al-Issa with many awards and medals, in appreciation of his great efforts in encouraging dialogue between followers of religions, and warning against extremism and terrorism. Dr. Al-Issa drew attention in the West to the fact that the counter-extremism, known as the phenomenon of Islamophobia, is the main reason for the survival of terrorist organizations that benefit from the acts of hatred towards Islam, as they exploit it to recruit fighters and deceive them by saying that what they are doing is in support of Islam. Al-Issa called on Western media and decision-making centers to confront this phenomenon with full force and to help Muslims to integrate positively into their societies, and also stop all manifestations of discrimination against them.

### Galileo Prize

In France, the International Galileo Foundation gave, in July 2018, its award to the Secretary General as a result of his excellence in the field of promoting dialogue between followers of religions, and promoting peace and religious and civil harmony worldwide, in addition to working on the common human values shared among all, in a way that reduces the danger of clash of civi-

lizations and promotes dialogue, understanding and cooperation.

The foundation said that His Excellency received the award for his achievements at the international level.

### Official document

In the same context, the European Parliament adopted the speech delivered by Dr. Al-Issa to the members of Parliament in March 2017, as an important document. The Parliament said in an official statement that this decision is due to that it contained correct solutions of problems facing the world today such as the spread of the scourge of terrorism, which represents a global threat.

Many speakers indicated that the world adopted a logical analysis and put solutions to complex problems that caused a number of errors in diagnosis and treatment and identified very accurate points. In another way it carries a tolerant and moderate discourse and represents the truth of Islam that has dealt with everyone for more than 1,400 years.

### Royal Medal of Honor

In April 2017, the Kingdom of Malaysia granted its highest honor to Dr. Al-Issa, the Royal Order of Honor called (Knight of the State), which is granted to persons who have made historic efforts and it confers on its holder exceptional appreciation and full immunity within the Malaysian lands for life. This honor carries the official Malaysian feeling towards the scholars of the Kingdom, who were known for their keenness on the values of moderation, harmony, coexistence and civilization.

Al-Issa was honored in many conferences held in the United States, Britain, Italy, Austria, France, Japan, Switzerland, Singapore, South Africa, Mauritania, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ghana and other countries of the world.



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**Dr. Bahauddeen Muhammed Nadwi**

## Muslims Need Strengthen the Commitment to the Fundamentals of the Religion and Take Lessons from the Past

**By K.M Alavudheen Hudawi**

“ K.M Alavudheen Hudawi Puthanazhi, Scholar and Academician from Kerala India, conducted an exclusive interview with Dr. Bahauddeen Muhammed Nadwi, vice chancellor of Darul Huda Islamic University and the prominent scholar, intellectual, writer and Muslim leader from India. Dr. Nadawi invited the attention of the Muslim world to some of the important issues concerning Muslim life and culture the world over and called the Muslim Ummah for the inculcation of the optimistic attitude in the face of current challenges.



## The presence of Muslim World League is of great benefit for the Muslim Ummah

Excerpts from the interview:

At this point of your life, who are the prominent personalities, you think, to have played a major role in shaping you and what are the important lessons you have taken from them?

Throughout my life, I have been inspired and influenced by many personalities from different walks of life and I have tried to model myself on them in my career. Dr. Muhammad Sayed Tantawi, the former Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Dr. Ali Jumaa Muhammad, the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, Abul Hassan Ali al-Hasani Nadwi, Muhammad Rabey al-Hasani Nadwi, president of All India Muslim Personal Law Board and Saeed al-Rahman al-Azami who were my teachers in India and abroad are some of these personalities who have left an indelible mark on me. They were the beacons who shed light on my path to the repository of Islamic sciences and literature.

In Kerala, my home state, the persons to whom I felt deep admiration and respect the most were Shamsul Ulama EK Abu Bakr Musliyar, CH Aida-roos Musliyar and Abu Bakr Musliyar Kottumala whose scholastic and leadership services to the Muslims there were unique. My mother, with her life replicating her father who was a famous spiritual scholar and preacher, has left a great impact on me since my childhood as well as my father who enlightened me with the Islamic culture, religious teachings and elementary educational books.

My days at Al-Azhar were a turning point in my life as they helped me form a wider perspective on global Islamic issues and advance my experience in the path of educational research. I have benefited greatly from my association with the Indian scholars at Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama and Aligarh Muslim University. The period of study that I spent in the Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama played a vital role in developing my skill in Arabic language and literature whereas my close relationship with the scholars in Kerala helped me to form and refine my personality with their guidance and direction.

It is learned that you have been to Al-Azhar University. How do you value your experience at Al-Azhar? What is your position on the modern universities?

Alhamdulillah, I have been to Al-Azhar University several times during the thirty years. Every journey I made to it added new milestones in my path of knowledge as I used to attend educational courses there and listen to the lectures of learned scholars. In particular, I was able to participate in training courses for Imams and preachers for which I have received the certificate too. By the help of Allah the Almighty, I could participate in several international conferences and visit various places in this timeless country of Egypt.

The companionship of famous scholars in Al-Azhar and other scholars knowledgeable in various sciences there turned to be of great benefit for me. While in Egypt, I was fortunate enough to translate the famous book al-Adab al-Mufrad to my mother tongue, as I used to devote my free times to this task. I would like to remember here that my first trip to Egypt was for conducting discussions with the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar and the likes on topics related to the prosperity, development and advancement of our Darul Huda Islamic University.

The modern universities are the beacons of hope and centers of valuable education. Every university has its own approach to education, research and academic interactions. They all function effectively in pursuit of the noble goals imparting educational values and mastery in several fields. The need of hour is the cooperation among these universities in sharing the latest instructional methods and contributing in the expansion of the world of research. In particular, the Islamic universities around the world may join hands to raise a vigilant generation in line with the needs of modern society and the necessities of the new world.

The focus of the news spread among the Muslims across the world about their brothers in India is the assaults in the name of religion and communal violence. Given your coexistence with the conditions of Muslims in the country, how do you see the future of Islam and Islamic propagation there?

Islam in India is the second largest religion and the Muslims are the largest minority. Muslims constitute above 15% of its citizens. Muslims in India are vigilant and enthusiastic about public matters. Their contributions and services in favor of the country and for the advancement of society are evident. They perform religious duties and activities in most of the areas. However, Muslims in some places live in utter poverty and ignorance and are subject to the persecution of extremists more often. However, they are aware of the various problems they face in the country and take into account the values that govern the country such as democracy and secularism.

Islam has become a faster-growing and more accepted religion in India. One of the main elements that helped in this growth is the religious activities and various other events. It is remarkable that, centered in mosques, schools, colleges and universities, all these initiatives take place in an organized and systematic manner.



## In Kerala, due attention is paid towards the education of women in the community

The role of Islamic colleges and universities in India in the formation of a generation interested in the Islamic propagation in the country and outside is commendable. There are many educational institutions which aim to create powerful generation that works for the prosperity and growth of the country, preserving its cultural and religious principles and values and making efforts to spread them so that the people coexist in the country with peace and fearlessness.

However, I do not deny the fact that Muslims in India, these days, are living the most difficult times, triggered by the prejudice formed by the wrong messages spread about them and in the wake of new legislations that go against the soul of India, tearing apart the fabric of peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

You mentioned the role played by the educational institutions and Islamic centers in educating people for the advancement of life. How do these institutions perform this role? How do you assess its achievements?

Educational institutions and Islamic centers in India play a prominent role in improving the status of life and instilling awareness in the public. Muslims have established mosques, institutes, schools and centers in all the parts. However, I would like to propose Kerala as a model in this field. In Kerala, the students going to Islamic schools daily has become a regular view. The students from the age of five onwards attend those institutions

known as madrasas for two hours at least daily and receive the learnings in Islamic sciences from its basics with the instructions and directives of skilled teachers. This system has been running here since many years under the leadership of Samastha Kerala Jam'iyathul Ulama which has, through its wise leadership and various activities realized many achievements in order to guide the Ummah to the straight path.

This organization widely known as Samastha runs its educational institutions since kindergarten. There are more than ten thousand madrasas functioning under this organization, divided into primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. The curriculum of these madrasas includes the subjects of Qur'an, Hadith, jurisprudence, beliefs, Islamic history, ethics, and the Arabic language. The organization also supervises Islamic colleges and universities, all of which are non-governmental and privately run by the fund raised from the public. Also, there are other institutes and colleges under this association, which follow the curriculum put forth by government bodies.

On the completion of certain years in such madrasas, the students have opportunities to enroll in private Islamic colleges and continue higher studies in both religious and material subjects together. Darul Huda Islamic University was the first to provide Kerala Muslims with this model of education and now it has extended its services to other Indian states, educating students there by establishing schools and colleges in different villages in those states, supervised by graduates of Darul Huda.

It is worth mentioning that, in Kerala, due attention is paid towards the education of women in the community. There are higher education institutions with Islamic framework functioning for women exclusively, facilitating their higher studies in Islamic and material sciences together, such as Fatima Zahra Islamic College of Darul Huda Islamic University, Wafiyya Arabic Colleges



Muslims in India, these days, are living the most difficult times, triggered by the prejudice formed by the wrong messages spread about them

affiliated to the Coordination of Islamic Colleges and colleges functioning under the Samastha Kerala Jami'yathul Ulama directly.

Alhamdulillah, as we have indicated, the great impact is felt in the society and its sustainable advancement as a result of the initiatives carried out by these educational centers and hopefully, they will bring about a renaissance in the Muslims in India.

What is the most important message conveyed by Darul Huda Islamic University and what are the major responsibilities priorities it has?

Darul Huda Islamic University is an independent private university following a curriculum that combines Shari'ah sciences and modern disciplines along with acquisition of English, Arabic and local languages to enable the students to propagate Islam in line with modern requirements.

The most prominent responsibility undertaken by our university is derived from 'Invite to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching'. It aims at enabling the Muslim Ummah to address the contemporary issues in a successful and effective manner. Alhamdulillah, many scholars have graduated from our university and are now providing valuable educational services around the world.



## Educational institutions and Islamic centers in India play a prominent role in improving the status of life and instilling awareness in the public

With the experience and lessons learned, Darul Huda has initiated the expansion of its projects to other states in India and to other countries also.

**What is your message for the Muslims of India who coexist with followers of different religions?**

Distinguished by the cultural pluralism and the secular system, India is a state that encourages the religious and social harmony and peaceful coexistence of people. Hence, the Muslims in India shall coexist with followers of other religions in peace and harmony just as it is necessary for all to coexist peacefully with each other.

A true Muslim is the one who presents a good model for everyone, so that all his brothers, friends and neighbors get influenced. He shall communicate the message of Islam and Shari'ah to all without coercion or bringing damage to the social fabric of the Indian society. The Muslims in India and everywhere as well shall abide by humanity and brotherhood and ensure everyone his right without any prejudice or negligence.

**You have had many academic and cultural visits to Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia. How do you look at these visits?**

With the grace Allah the Almighty, I got chances to visit most of the Arab countries. The reasons for the visits were different. However, I often

received invitations to participate and give lectures in conferences and seminars. I visited these countries to sign memoranda of understanding between Darul Huda Islamic University and other universities. Every journey to the Arab countries provided me with many religious and cultural experiences, strengthening bilateral relations with scholars and officials and sharing our thoughts and perspectives on issues concerning the Muslim Ummah and its future.

Personally, I have a close relationship with the scholars of Saudi Arabia and with the Muslim World League. My last visit to it was a year and a half ago when it hosted the conference of the Association of Islamic Universities in Makkah. Here, I would like to use this opportunity to appreciate the valued efforts of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the King of Saudi Arabia in the service of Islam and Muslims. I would like to appreciate the efforts of Muslims World League, its secretary and the head of the Association of Islamic Universities Dr. Mohammed bin Abdul Kareem al Esi as well.

**In general, how do you see the state of the Muslim Ummah in light of the issues and crises faced by the Islamic world?**

The Muslim Ummah has been facing challenges, from its inception to our era, starting with the most severe torture of the polytheists in Makkah and passing through painful events in Islamic history. Nowadays, Muslims are experiencing crises and problems of different magnitude in different regions and countries. What a Muslim is expected to do in such conditions is to trust in Allah the Almighty, not lose faith in Him and be patient with all, for the Lord will reward him accordingly. Our beloved prophet taught us: "There shall come upon the people a time in which the one who is patient upon his religion will be like the one holding onto a burning ember." A Muslim must not deviate an inch from the implementation of God's commands and

conveying the messages of religion. We shall be reminded of the words of Imam Al-Shafi'i in this regard: "Do not be afraid of the event of the nights, because the events of the world will not remain there forever."

We in the Islamic world must be vigilant always, make every effort for the sake of unity and help the believers. If our relations are cut apart and our bonds are not strengthened, then we will not have a future. We should remain tall and united in achieving our dreams. Let's stand with patience before the calamities and crises that arise and be reminded of the sayings of the Prophet: "How wonderful is the case of a believer; there is good for him in everything and this applies only to a believer. If prosperity attends him, he expresses gratitude to Allah and that is good for him; and if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is better for him". Surely, Allah will show us the truth as a truth and bless us to follow it and the falsehood as false and enable us to avoid it.

**How do you see the efforts of the Muslim World League at the present time?**

Undoubtedly, the presence of Muslim World League is of great benefit for the Muslim Ummah, as evidenced through its lofty goals, noble efforts, multiple activities and various services, especially its services in emergency, relief and educational fields. Its interaction with international bodies in addressing the Islamophobia in its various forms is commendable. That the League strives to raise the problems of the persecuted around the world to international platforms and concerned governments urging them to take action with human consideration and fair treatment is appreciated by all. It is undeniable that the League has doing its best in protecting the Ummah from being attracted to the extremist and terrorist activities, and in combating the exclusion, discrimination, racism and terrible marginal perspectives. These all, together with other

services and activities have earned the League the trust of the Ummah in it.

**What is your final message to the Muslims in India in particular and the rest of the world in general?**

Muslims must strengthen their commitment to the fundamentals of their religion, the Qur'an, and the Sunnah of their Prophet so that they deserve the divine help: "For it is Our duty to help the believers" (Surat Alroom, Verse: 47) They should be assured of confronting their issues with strength and faith: "Do not falter or grieve, for you will have the upper hand, if you are true believers." (Surat Al-Imran, Verse: 139). They need to show patience and perseverance as they learned from the histories of their ancestors who



**A true Muslim is the one who presents a good model for everyone, so that all his brothers, friends and neighbors get influenced.**

"were afflicted with suffering and adversity and were so violently shaken that even the Messenger and the believers with him cried out, "When will Allah's help come?" Indeed, Allah's help is always near." (Surat Al-Baqarah, Verse: 214). They shall keep on seeking the assistance of God, because the victory will come from him only. Let's recall these words:

'If Allah doesn't help you in what you need, no one from the creatures can do it. If He hasn't guided you in a way, you would go astray, for sure.'



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Dates are a good source of different vitamins

## Ramadan health makeover

**By Dr. Fatima Taneem**

“ The Blessed month of Ramadan ushers in the obligatory fasting from dawn to sunset for millions of Muslims across the globe. The Noble Qur’an states, ‘O you who believe! Observing As-Saum (the fast) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqeen (the pious)’. (Surat Al-Baqarah, Verse 183).



## Ramadan helps us to foster a better and closer relationship with Allah and give us tangible physical benefits

Ramadan is, indeed, a month of spiritual goodness, with a heightened spirit of worship and charity showcased by Muslims throughout the world. It has also become a time of festivity and extravaganza within different Muslim communities, who have unfortunately dampened its true spirit. Sadly, during this month, we prioritize our physical nourishment much more than our spiritual one, with the result that excessive eating is done more during Ramadan than any other time of the year.

The true goal of Ramadan and its fasting can be rediscovered within our homes, both in solitude and amidst our families as this month will still provide ample opportunities to benefit us holistically with fasting and other deeds aiding us to foster a better and a closer relationship with Allah and also giving us tangible physical benefits along the way. Thus, allowing us a healthy make-over this Ramadan.

Here we highlight the significance of fasting and the importance of healthy eating habits during Ramadan.

Fasting during Ramadan is an obligatory duty incumbent on every abled Muslim. It forms one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam.

The Arabic word 'Saum' for fasting literally means 'to abstain'. However, technically 'Saum' refers to fasting or abstaining from food and drinks and sexual intercourse from dawn till sunset.

The essence of fasting during Ramadan is spiritual, done solely for the sake of Almighty Allah to earn His pleasure. A person not only refrains from his physical needs but also restrains from other foul acts of backbiting, telling lies, etc. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "If a person does not avoid false talk and false conduct during fasting, then Allah does not care if he abstains from food and drink." (Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim).

The month-long practice of restraining ourselves helps us to nurture the qualities of self-discipline, morality, patience, and empathy along with deepening our consciousness of the Almighty Allah and thus, this annual spiritual training should ideally extend beyond Ramadan and stay throughout the year.

### Healthy benefits

In addition to the spiritual advantages of fasting, numerous physical and mental benefits are also seen.

Fasting can regulate digestion, promote healthy bowel function and improve metabolism as well.

It allows the digestive tract to cleanse itself and take a rest, mobilizing the detoxification mechanism by facilitating the release of hormones that stimulate the immune system.

Moreover, as the digestive tract rests, this energizes metabolism to burn through calories more efficiently. However, if digestion is poor, it affects the body's ability to metabolize food and burn fat.

It helps in preventing health problems such as high cholesterol, heart disease, obesity along with improving mental health and well-being provided we ensure intake of nutrients in a balanced manner and in moderate quantities along with changes in lifestyle.

Throughout the world, in many different Muslim homes, the Ramadan meals are a diverse and delicious affair with a touch of tradition and modernity imbibed in its culinary delights. These are, indeed, immense blessings from the Almighty Allah. Ramadan offers us an excellent opportunity to renew our appreciation of such blessings and thank our Lord sincerely for the sustenance that He has provided us with. Yet, our food intake should not be improper nor excessive such that it prevents us from adequately discharging our duties to Almighty Allah, ourselves and to each other.

The Noble Quran states, '... and eat and drink but waste not by extravagance, certainly He (Allah) likes not Al-Musrifeen (those who waste by extravagance)'. (Surah Al-A'raf, Verse 31).

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "The son of Adam cannot fill a vessel worse than his stomach, as it is enough for him to take a few bites to straighten his back. If he cannot do it, then he may fill it with a third of his food, a third of his drink, and a third of his breath". (Sunan Al-Tirmidhi, Musnad Ahmad).

The pious scholars of Islam discouraged excessive eating as it prevents sincere and focused worship of Almighty Allah. They gave multiple benefits of eating in moderation. Some are mentioned below:

1. Keeps the body healthy and light
2. Increases memory
3. Weakens desire
4. Keeps the heart soft and focused
5. Disciplines the soul

The modern medical researchers and doctors have documented several health disorders



The month-long practice of restraining ourselves helps us to nurture the qualities of self-discipline, morality, and patience



caused by excessive and incorrect eating habits such as indigestion, constipation, lethargy, etc. Therefore, it is imperative that we should always eat in moderation and especially during Ramadan in order to reap the benefits and blessings of fasting.

## RAMADAN MEALS

Ramadan meals across different Muslim cultures and communities are a vast assortment of foods, which range from simple traditional 'comfort foods' to exotic mouth-watering region-specific delicacies. Some of these dishes are served exclusively during the month of Ramadan.

The two main meals of Ramadan are the pre-dawn meal called 'Suhoor' and the post-sunset meal



Fasting can regulate digestion,  
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and improve metabolism



called 'Iftar' in the Arabic language. Generally, the former are simple meals while the latter are more diverse and elaborate. Both these meals should be balanced so as to provide enough sustenance for an individual to stay fit and carry out all the routine work as well as the acts of worship the entire day. These meals should ideally incorporate foods from all the major five food groups that would be served at both of the meal times. The five major food groups are-

1. Carbohydrates: bread, cereals, rice, potatoes
2. Proteins: meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, beans
3. Dairy Products: milk, yoghurt, cheese

#### 4. Fruits and Vegetables

##### Pre-dawn Meal

The pre-dawn meal should be a healthy, light, filling breakfast. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Eat Suhoor. Surely, there is blessing in Suhoor." (Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim).

The pre-dawn meal is the first meal of the day and should not be omitted as it provides the adequate nutrients required to the body to sustain the food and water withdrawal. Such include foods with rich protein, complex carbohydrates and high fiber.

The Protein-rich foods with less fat content are very filling and delay the hunger pangs while providing sufficient energy for the entire day. These include beans, lentils, fish, eggs, cottage cheese, etc.

The Complex Carbohydrates foods are slow-energy releasing foods and include rice, oats, beans and whole wheat-based items like brown bread, brown pasta, etc.

The high-fiber foods are rich in fiber and digested slowly. They include vegetables and fruits and help alleviate constipation.

To stay well-hydrated for the day ahead and maintain electrolyte balance, the water intake should be ample and coupled with fluid-rich foods such as soup, stew, fruits and vegetables.

Spicy and salty foods increase thirst and should be avoided. Caffeine and cold drinks should be avoided too as they act as diuretics promoting faster water loss by urination.

Thus, a pre-dawn meal should encompass energy-boosting foods and fluid-rich foods to provide sustainable energy and help curb the feeling of



## The pious scholars of Islam discouraged excessive eating as it prevents sincere and focused worship of Almighty Allah

hunger and thirst during the day.

### Post-sunset meal

Traditionally, Muslims break their fasts with dates and water based on the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah). Anas bin Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) would break his fast with fresh dates before praying. If there were no fresh dates, then with dry dates. If there were no dry dates, then with some sips of water. (Sunan Al-Tirmidhi)

This Sunnah act is beneficial physiologically as it helps to quickly restore the sugar and salt levels in the body and rehydrate the body as well. Scientific studies have also found that the physiological benefits of fasting can be undone by sudden intake of lots of food. The prayer interval before the dinner meal gives the necessary time for the body to absorb the Iftar meal before the start of dinner.

Dates are highly nutritious food containing natural sugars, fiber, minerals, protein and fats. They act as 'energy boosters' - helping to quickly normalize the blood sugar levels.

The traditional Iftar meals consist of a variety of foods making it an enjoyable experience. However, it is vital to have a balanced Iftar meal replenishing the energy stores and hydrating well and help sustain the fast the following day.

It is important to rehydrate the body which has fasted for several hours with water and other refreshing tender coconut water, fruit juices and milk beverages as well as soups which are traditional starters for Iftar.

Vegetables in the form of salads and snacks are healthy choices with the more colorful ones giving more health benefits. Salads provide a feeling of fullness, ensuring that the main dish is consumed less.

The Iftar meal should contain complex carbohydrate foods (like brown rice, potatoes) providing stable and sustainable energy in addition to fiber and minerals.

High quality proteins, like eggs, beans, dairy products with their essential amino acids have to be eaten during dinner as the body requires them to build and maintain muscle mass. The lean proteins with less saturated fats are preferred such as fish.

As the body has been deprived of food for several hours, the meal should be eaten slowly along with chewing properly as overloading can lead to indigestion and other digestive problems.

Therefore, the Ramadan meals should be well-balanced in nutrients so that the needs of the body are appropriately met during the whole month of fasting.

Hence, in conclusion, although it is widely acknowledged that in terms of food culture, the variety and abundance of foods available during the month of Ramadan whets the appetite and makes one indulge in the tantalizing delicacies. At the same time, it is imperative to restrain ourselves and get on the track of eating healthy, both for spiritual and physical wellness. Ramadan presents us a golden opportunity to eat well and stay healthy.



Hail's historic mosque after restoration

## Saudi Arabia's historic Hail mosque reopens to worshippers

### Hail - MWL

HAIL - Several famous mosques in the Hail region, including the Qafar Mosque, have been rehabilitated as part of the Muhammad bin Salman Project for Historical Mosques Renovation, through which 30 religious sites in 10 regions will be restored.

The construction of the Qafar Mosque dates back to 1334 H when Ruqayya bint Abdullah founded the site following the death of her husband. It was renovated in 1385 H.

The mosque used to host Friday prayers when worshippers traveled from neighboring villages to pray. A modern prayer house was built inside the mosque's campus in 1412 H. Today, the mosque is open to worshippers for the five daily prayers and

Friday prayer.

Qafar Mosque is located in the old town of Qafar near the road linking Hail and AlUla, about 20 kilometers southwest of Hail. The building's unique style originates in its construction from mud and stone, with a wooden roof built from tamarix and palm fronds.

Qafar mosque covers an area of 687 square meters and can accommodate 170 worshippers. The mosque features the Al-Saha courtyard, which houses two depots and a rectangular eight-meter minaret.

After the mosque's restoration, it now contains a prayer house, the upgraded Al-Saha courtyard, a prayer area for women, toilets and ablution facilities for both men and women. It can now house more than 400 worshippers.



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