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quote probably hasn't been referred to as much as when it's used during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Living in a culture known for its overindulgence, most can't fathom the thought of voluntarily giving up sustenance from the breaking of dawn to the setting of the sun each day – abstaining from food, drink, contact with the opposite sex and all deeds considered unlawful – during fasting hours for an entire month. Monday kicked off the holy month of Ramadan. Throughout this month, billions of Muslims worldwide will uphold this religious duty.

So what exactly is Ramadan? Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic lunar calendar and is believed to be the month the Holy Qu'ran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) by the angel Gabriel. In honor of this historical and divine event, the month of Ramadan is set aside for fasting and reading, reciting and memorizing the Qu'ran. During Ramadan, Muslims divert their attention from daily living to focusing on their faith. Muslims observe strict rules, especially during the daylight hours, which are meant to instill discipline, teach patience and humility. Ramadan is a month of remembrance – remembrance of God and the deeds one should be performing year round to come closer to Him as well as remembrance of those less fortunate who don't have the convenience of indulging in food at any given time of the day.

By cutting oneself off from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person gains true sympathy with those who go hungry as well as growth in one's spiritual life. It is also a time of reflection of past deeds as well as a time to seek guidance and assistance to become a better Muslim through intensive worship, alms giving and self-control.

Muslims think of Ramadan as a spiritual tune-up for the soul and as a means to enter paradise based on words and practices of Prophet Muhammad called Hadiths as well as verses stated in the Qu'ran. One Hadith states, Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] said: "Fasting and the Qu'ran intercede for a servant on the Day of Resurrection. Fasting will say: 'O my Lord I prevented him from food and desires so accept my intercession for him' and the Qu'ran will say: 'I prevented him from sleep at night, so accept my intercession for him.' So their intercessions will be accepted." [Ahmad]

The Qu'ran also states in reference to fasting that "Ramadan is the month in which was sent down The Qu'ran as a guide to mankind, also clear signs for guidance and judgment between right and wrong. So every one of you who is present at his home during that month should spend it in fasting, but if anyone is ill or on a journey the prescribed period should be made up by days later. Allah intends every facility for you. He does not want to put you to difficulties. He wants you to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him in that He has guided you. And, perchance ye shall be grateful." Qu'ran 2:185

Those who are sick, elderly, or on a journey and women who are pregnant or nursing are exempt from the fast, should they choose to take advantage of this opportunity. But, an equal number of days should be made up as soon as possible. If some, like the sick or the elderly, are physically unable to fast, they must feed a needy person for every day missed. The fasting during Ramadan is regarded principally as a method of self purification.

The fast is broken at the end of the day with prayer and a meal called the Iftar. The next morning, after eating Suhur (the meal before dawn) and before the dawn prayer (Fajr), the fast is resumed.

During Ramadan, many Muslims go to the mosque and devote several hours to prayer.

A special prayer called the Taraweeh (night-time prayer) is recited in addition to the usual five daily obligatory prayers performed by Muslims and is usually twice as long as the daily prayers.

Some dedicated Muslims are known to pray all-night. On the 27th night of the month of Ramadan, the Laylat-al-Qadar (Night of Power), it is believed that on this night the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) first received the revelation of the Holy Qu’ran.

According to the Qu’ran, this is when Allah (God) determines His will for the upcoming year. The Prophet [PBUH] said: “O Muslims! A noble and generous month has come to you. A month in which a night is better than one thousand months and this month is the month of charity, patience and mercy. In this month the gates of Paradise become wide open and the gates of Hell are shut, and the devils are chained…” [Nasa’i]

When Ramadan ends, on the first day of the following month (the 10th month of the Islamic calendar called Shawwal), a three-day celebration takes place called Eid-al Fitr (The Feast of Fast Breaking) where friends, family and mosques come together to pray, celebrate, exchange gifts and feast.