



Ramadan Observance begins

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Baghdad, Iraq – Ramadan or رمضان is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and the holiest month in Islam

The word Ramadan is derived from the word "ramd" meaning "to burn." Fasting in the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. The entire month is spent fasting from dawn to dusk. The name came from the time before the Islamic calendar, when the month of Ramadan fell in the summer. Fasting during this month is often thought to figuratively burn away all sins. Muslims believe that the Quran (The Holy book of Muslims) was sent down to the earth during this month. Furthermore, Prophet Mohammad told his followers that the gates of Heaven would be open all the month and the gates of Hell would be closed. When the people feel hungry, they will suffer as the poor person suffers in order to help the poor people.

The first day of the next month after Ramadan is spent in great celebrations and rejoicings and is observed as the 'Festival of Breaking Fast' or "Eid Al-Fitur".

The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, and months begin when the first crescent of a new moon is sighted. Since the Islamic lunar calendar year is 11 to 12 days shorter than the solar year, Ramadan migrates throughout the seasons. The actual and estimated start and end dates for Ramadan in 2005-2008 were and are as follows:

1426 AH – First day: October 2, 2005; last day: November 1, 2005

1427 AH – First day: September 23, 2006; last day: October 22, 2006

1428 AH – First day: September 13, 2007; last day: October 13, 2007

1429 AH – First day: September 1, 2008; last day: September 30, 2008

When one hears that during this month Muslims who are able to fast will not eat and drink from dawn until the sun sets it sounds difficult. But fasting has benefits for battling obesity and diabetes and maintaining a healthy digestive system. Dr. Salwa Mustafa, a professor from the public health and nutrition national center for research said fasting individuals "will get rid of fat, but they have to follow what the prophet did by eating a piece of date and then eating a balanced meal consisting of vegetables and portion of salad." She added that some people break their fast by eating a lot immediately which is unhealthy.

Not all people should fast. The sick, those who are unable and travelers are excused. They can compensate any day after Ramadan, but those suffering from chronic disease do not have to fast but can give money or food to the poor.

Note: *Shahrzad is a Public Affairs Specialist with the Gulf Region Division. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit our website at www.grd.usace.army.mil.*