

# INTERCEDE

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## Ramadan: Conquering the Darkness of the Soul?

by Dale Fagerland

Salifou shuffles through the deserted streets of his village in the dead of night echoing over and over the summons, “Get up, O faithful believers! Arise, for this is the blessed fast of Ramadan. Get out of bed and cook, eat and pray — for prayer is better than sleep.”

The 3:00 a.m. ‘caller’ implores the faithful, shouting through his tattered megaphone, “Eat and drink now before the sun comes up. Dine and drink now, then exercise discipline and self-control during daylight hours.”

Salifou continues to beckon his fellow Muslims, “Abstain from eating and drinking for Allah’s sake. Arise, abstain, be victorious and receive forgiveness of sins. Get up, O faithful believers! Arise and conquer the darkness of your soul. Purify yourselves through self-restraint and good deeds. This is the blessed fast of Ramadan.”

Ramadan is intended to be one of the most sacred and spiritually renewing of all Islamic practices. This month-long fasting ritual takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. All Muslims are mandated to abstain from such pleasures and necessities as food, drinking, smoking and even marital sex during daylight hours.

Ramadan is the month in which Islamic tradition states that God began to reveal the Qur’an to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. Participating Muslims are not to eat or drink anything from dawn until after sunset. While voluntary fasting is recommended for Muslims at other times, it becomes obligatory during Ramadan. In some strict Islamic nations, publicly breaking of the fast is a criminal offense punishable by a prison term. Sexual intercourse during daylight hours is a serious breach, unless it is done ‘forgetfully’ according to the *Hadith* — a collection of Muhammad’s sayings and actions —

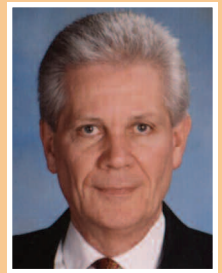
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# Until All Have Heard

*How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14*

Jim Bennett  
Center for  
Ministry to Muslims



**T**he Muslim month of Ramadan will last from Aug. 21 through Sept. 19. According to Islamic tradition, “Whoever observes night prayer in Ramadan as an expression of his faith and to seek reward from Allah, his previous sins will be blotted out.” Thus, for many Muslims the Ramadan nightly prayer, after a day of fasting, serves the purpose of eradicating sin. All men everywhere who have not embraced the Lord Jesus Christ are hopeless in the sense of having no recourse to the problem of sin. Fasting, charitable works, good intentions – and even prayer – are not enough. During this month of Muslim fasting, join us as an intercessor and help break through the veil that blinds the spiritual eyes of 1.3 billion Muslims.

CMM now partners with Institutes of Islamic Studies programs in nine international locations. Two more will be added in 2010: India and Argentina. IIS programs are sometimes referred to as Muslim Evangelism Training Schools. The fruit of these programs never ceases to amaze me. Church planters, evangelists and other workers are trained to take the gospel to Muslim contexts. The following story comes from a recent IIS program:

Yusuf (pseudonym) was born and raised as a Muslim. He was led to Jesus by the patient witness of a fellow IIS student in Indonesia. Months ago, Yusuf accepted Jesus, was faithfully discipled, and was soon ready for water baptism. However, the spiritual progress of Yusuf’s wife, also from a Muslim background, was not as rapid. Yusuf patiently waited until his wife was ready – so they could be baptized together.

Yusuf and his wife recently attended the first day of IIS. During classes the Holy Spirit confirmed the biblical teaching they had been receiving. That night, the couple began a discussion about spiritual matters that lasted until 3:00 a.m. the following morning. In that early hour, the cautious spouse decided she was ready to surrender completely to Jesus and follow Him in water baptism. Yusuf immediately called his friend and mentor – and the happy couple were baptized at 4:00 a.m.

This is a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in calling and preparing people to work among Muslims. While Yusuf is not his real name, please do remember to pray for this young convert and his wife.





# Muslim World News



## Somalia

### ISLAMISTS BEHEAD TWO SONS OF CHRISTIAN LEADER

Islamic extremists have beheaded two young boys in Somalia because their Christian father refused to divulge information about a church leader. Before taking his Somali family to a Kenyan refugee camp, 55-year-old Musa Mohammed Yusuf was the leader of an underground church in Yoday. Militants from the Islamic extremist group al Shabaab entered Yoday village on Feb. 20, and interrogated him about Salat Mberwa, leader of a fellowship of 66 Somalis. Yusuf fled, and the next day the militants showed up at his home in Yoday. Batula Ali Arbow, Yusuf's wife, said the extremists took hold of three of her sons – 11-year-old Abdi Rahaman Musa Yusuf, 12-year-old Hussein Musa Yusuf and Abdulahi Musa Yusuf, 7. "I watched my three boys dragged away helplessly as my youngest boy was crying," Arbow said. "I knew they were going to be slaughtered." — *Compass*

## Zanzibar

### TWO CHURCH BUILDINGS BURNED IN ZANZIBAR

Two church buildings were razed June 28, on the island of Zanzibar after worship services. Suspected radical Muslims set the church buildings on fire on the outskirts of Unguja Township, on the Tanzanian island off the coast of East Africa, in what church leaders called the latest incidents of a rising tide of religious intolerance. With Christian movements making inroads in the Muslim-dominated area, the Evangelical Assemblies of God in Tanzania (EAGT) church and a Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship in Africa church building a few miles away were burned down as a fierce warning, church leaders said. "We don't want churches on our street," stated a flier dropped at the door of Charles Odilo, who had donated the plot of land on which the EAGT building once stood. "Today we are going to burn the church, and if you continue we are going to burn your house also." — *Compass*

## Bangladesh

### MUSLIM VILLAGERS BEAT EVANGELISTS

Months after Muslim villagers in Southeastern Bangladesh furiously beat two evangelists for showing the "Jesus Film," one of the Christians is still receiving treatment for nerve damage. Injuries Christian Life Bangladesh worker Edward Biswas sustained from the attack led to neurological complications in his hip. Biswas said he and Dolonmoy Tripura first showed the film in Chandpur. The next evening, some villagers told them to show the film again. Suspecting a trap, the evangelists resisted. "They took us to a schoolyard, where we showed the 'Jesus Film' under tremendous compulsion," Biswas said. "After showing 20 minutes of the first reel of the film, Muslim villagers again started beating us as we were lying on the ground. They punched and kicked us." While 15 to 20 Muslims struck them, approximately 200 others looked on, he said. — *Compass*

# Ramadan: Conquering th

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which are separate from the Qur'an. The guilty must fast for 60 days, feed 60 people the equivalent of one meal each, or give charity equal to a meal for 60 persons. Eating or drinking unintentionally is forgivable, but the transgressor is expected to fast one additional day to make up for each day of lapse. Where Muslims are a small minority, there is less pressure to adhere strictly to the prohibitions.

Travelers may postpone fasting so no undue hardship is experienced. Exempt from fasting are the elderly and seriously ill. If affordable, however, even the elderly and ill should give a meal to a needy person for each day of missed fasting. Insane persons are exempt, as well as small children, nursing mothers and pregnant women. A woman is considered physically impure and spiritually unfit during her menstrual cycle and is not to participate in the intensely religious rituals of prayer and fasting.

The Qur'an commands the practice of the fast of Ramadan, "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed to those before you [Christians], that ye may (learn) self-restraint ... fast till the night appears ..." (Surah 2:183-187)

The much-anticipated start of the month is based on a combination of physical sightings of the new moon and astronomical calculations. The practice varies from place to place, some relying heavily on sighting reports and

others totally on calculations. In the United States, most Muslim communities follow the decision of the Islamic Society of North America, which accepts sightings of the new moon anywhere in the United States as the start of the new month. The Qur'an and *Hadith* indicate the precise moment of the fast each evening is to begin when one cannot distinguish the difference between a white and a black thread.

The Islamic lunar calendar is usually 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar, so Ramadan migrates closer throughout the seasons. Thus, since Ramadan is expected to be Aug. 21 – Sept. 19, 2009, next year it will begin Aug. 11. The entire cycle takes around 35 years.

***Id ul-Fitr*** (Feast of breaking the fast). The end of Ramadan is marked by a three-day celebration involving visiting family and friends, gift-exchanging, singing and feasting, and celebrating the conclusion of the fasting period. In many countries, Muslims break the fast by eating a few dates, as the prophet Muhammad was known to do. This is followed by the sunset prayer and dinner. Ramadan emphasizes community, and since everyone eats dinner at the same time, Muslims often invite one another to share in the Ramadan evening meal. It usually involves three full days of dressing up, visiting family and friends, gift-exchanging, singing, feasting and celebrating the conclusion of Ramadan. Muslims around the world

# The Darkness of the Soul?

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prepare their favorite foods during this month and sometimes share their hospitality with Christians. Well-wishers greet one another during *Id ul-Fitr* with such expressions as, *Id mubarak* (a blessed festival), “May you be well throughout the year,” or “Congratulations on the occasion of Ramadan.”

Orthodox Muslims cite many lofty and noble intentions for Ramadan:

**Time of discipline:** Such a stringent exercise of abstinence requires great discipline. Very early in the day the body craves liquids, especially in extreme climates. Praying five times each day and keeping the fast are mental, physical and spiritual disciplines that test one’s endurance. Many devout Muslims go beyond the demands of the law and refrain from even swallowing their saliva while fasting. Such discipline is believed to be an exercise of submission to the will of Allah.

**Time of spiritual growth:** Orthodox Muslims explain that to fast is to hold back, to refrain from, or to abstain. These limitations are imposed in order to rise beyond, or move past former limits. Devout followers believe that God will bestow spiritual and material blessings upon those who seek the fast with sincerity and knowledge.

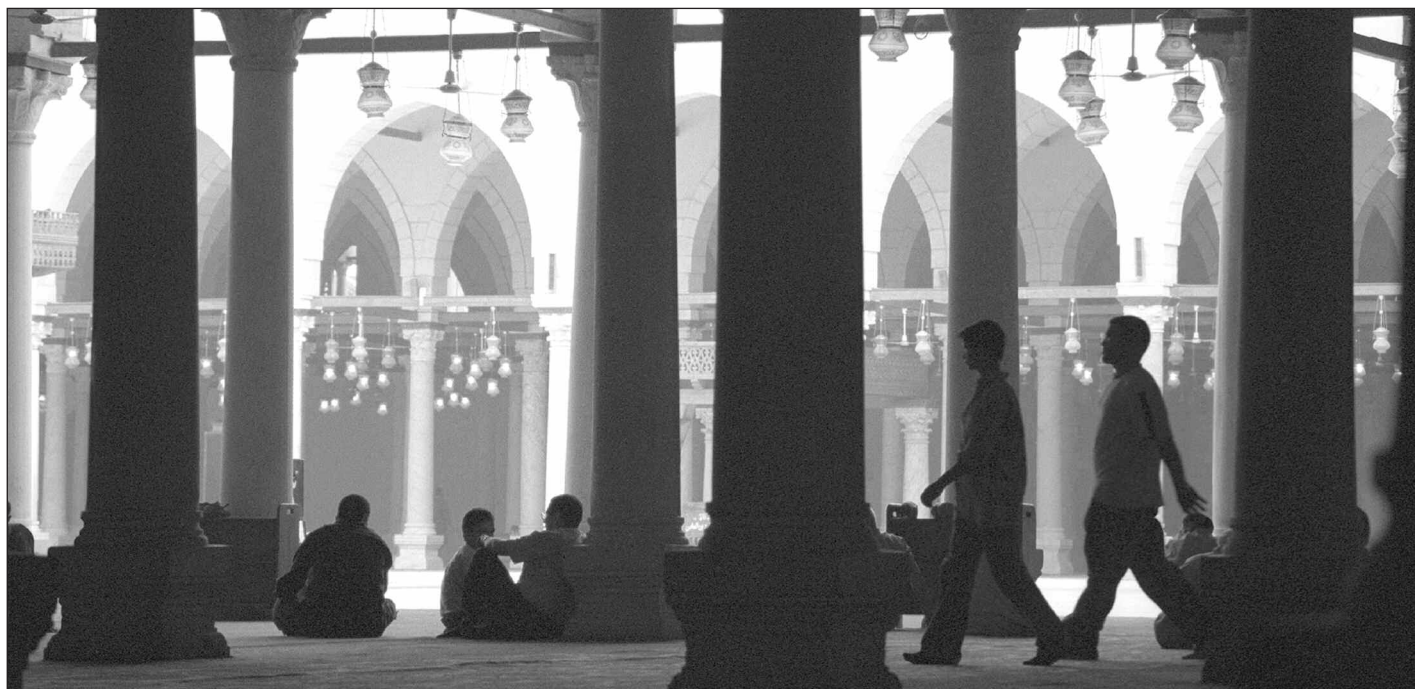
**Time of struggle:** Moderate Muslims equate the fast of

Ramadan with *jihad*, the Arabic word for “struggle.” Many claim that this rigorous spiritual struggle of discipline, submission and resisting temptation is *jihad akbar* or “the greatest struggle.” Muslims believe that abstaining from the necessities and pleasures of life during Ramadan represents a moral struggle to attain a higher spirituality.

**Time of self-control:** During Ramadan, every part of the body is to be restrained. The tongue must be kept in check from backbiting and gossip, and the eyes must restrain themselves from looking at unlawful things. The hand must not touch or take anything that does not belong to it; the ears must refrain from listening to idle talk or obscene words; and the feet must be curbed from going to sinful places. Ideally, every part of the body is to observe the fast, thereby exercising self-control, patience, sacrifice and humility. To control the love of comfort, hunger and sex is to behave as Allah’s servant.

However, reality reveals quite different results since human nature tends to be more irritable and short-tempered when deprived of food and drink. There is often more anger and quarreling during Ramadan than at other times of the year. Extremists use this “holy” month to ramp up their radical activities. Widespread participation in the fast usually results in the pace of life slowing and productivity decreasing. Emotions run high, absenteeism

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increases, and government offices, schools and businesses have shorter work days.

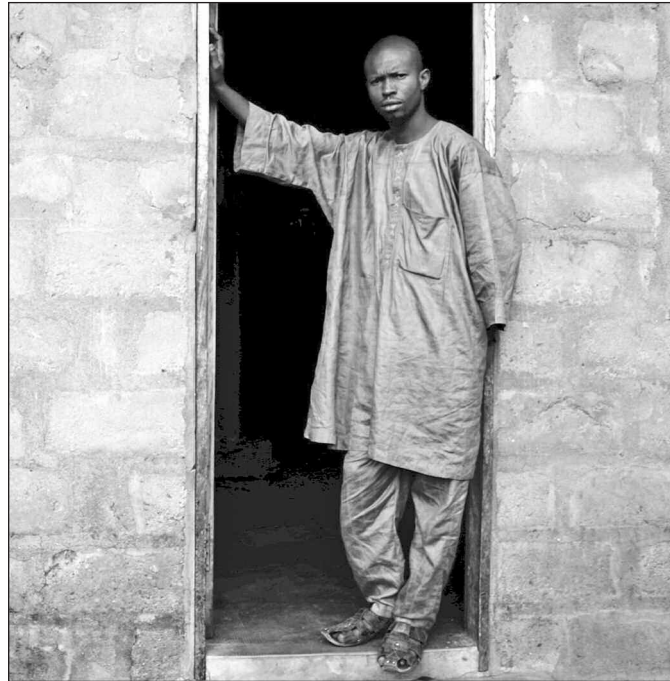
**Time of devotion:** Many Muslims consider the fast of Ramadan as a kind of tune-up for their spiritual lives. Muslims believe they will receive special *baraka* (blessings) from God throughout the year if they read the entire Qur'an during Ramadan. Others will spend part of their day listening to the recitation of the Qur'an in a mosque, beseeching God's pleasure and forgiveness.

**Time of reflection:** Keeping the fast of Ramadan is supposed to foster appreciation for the bounties and blessings of God, which man is so apt to take for granted in the midst of plenty. The aim of abstinence is to instill in man a spirit of gratitude and devotion to God, causing the Muslim to be deeply conscious of the pangs of hunger and discomfort suffered by the less privileged. Identifying with the poor is supposed to result in a spirit of sympathy and sacrifice leading to charity toward the less fortunate.

**Time of solidarity:** Our Muslim friends take great pride and satisfaction in belonging to the *ummah* — the worldwide Islamic community. This camaraderie finds its highest expression in the dual rituals of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and the annual fast of Ramadan. There is great pressure on Muslims to conform to the demands of ritual, and many nominal Muslims feel pressured to participate in the month-long fast.

**Time of forgiveness and rewards:** Numerous *Hadith* indicate that keeping the fast of Ramadan and saying prayers faithfully will result in the forgiveness of past sins. These alleged quotes of the prophet Muhammad state that when the month of Ramadan starts, the gates of paradise are opened and the gates of hell are closed, and the devils are chained. However, Islamic theology teaches

that more than fasting is involved in the forgiveness of all past sins. Islam presents a wide range of legalistic works that must be accomplished in order to have one's sins forgiven. Fasting is only one of these works — even then our Muslim friends make absolutely no claim that all their good works will make them acceptable to God on Judgment Day.



**Time of power:** For Muslims, the “Night of Power” (*Lailat al-Qadr*) is considered the holiest night of the year. It is the night in which Muslims believe Muhammad received his first revelation from God through the angel Gabriel.

The Qur'an states: “*We have indeed revealed this (message) in the Night of Power ... The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Therein come down the Angels and the*

*Spirit by God's permission, on every errand: Peace! This until the rise of Morn!*” (Surah 97).

Although there are different traditions regarding the exact night, most regard the Night of Power to be the 27th of Ramadan. Because they believe this is a sacred night in which God sends out thousands of angels to bestow favors on the faithful, Muslims often spend the entire night in lengthy prayers, chanting the name of God and recitations of the Qur'an. During the last 10 days of Ramadan, some men seclude themselves in the mosque for several days and nights in spiritual retreat and vigil.

How desperately Muslims are striving to gain forgiveness of sins and favor with God through self-denial and good works. The good news to Muslims is that by simple faith in Jesus they can be forgiven by God. Just as Salifou walks the streets of his Muslim village calling, “Arise, be victorious and receive forgiveness of sins ... Arise and conquer the darkness of your soul,” may we as followers of Jesus announce to Muslims everywhere the resurrection power of Jesus to truly conquer the darkness of the soul.





# JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Praying for Muslims  
Around the World.*



**Friday, September 4, 2009. Please pray**

*...for the planting of healthy, sustainable churches across the Muslim world.*

*...that second generation Christian youths in the Muslim world* will have a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ and not simply become part of a religious minority.

*...for indigenous Christian pastors* across the Muslim world. Pray that the Lord would be with them, despite the most difficult of circumstances.

**Friday, September 11, 2009. Please pray**

*...for MBBs (Muslim Background Believers) in the Middle East*, where the threat of persecution and death is genuine.

*...for two Christian bloggers arrested in Iran*. They have reportedly been tortured and their location is unknown.

*...for continued opportunity in Jordan*. Pray that despite pressure and legal repercussions, Muslims would continue to come to know Jesus Christ.

**Friday, September 18, 2009. Please pray**

*...for Christians in Kazakhstan*. They face abuse, reduced salaries, and unemployment due to faith in Jesus.

*...for increasing numbers of Muslims* to hunger for spiritual truth and the possibility of knowing God personally, being assured of salvation, and having sins forgiven.

*...for the people of Tajikistan*. The president signed a law imposing state censorship of religious literature and control of religious education.

**Friday, September 25, 2009. Please pray**

*...for freedom across the Muslim world to worship Jesus in Spirit and truth.*

*...for Christian workers in the U.S. and Canada*. Pray they would seize opportunities to witness to Muslims that might not otherwise hear about the love of Jesus.

*...for MBBs in Egypt*. The largest church body in Egypt has issued an official certificate of conversion to an MBB for the first time.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND  
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. – 1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



# JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Praying for Muslims  
Around the World.*



**Friday, October 2, 2009. Please pray**

*...for MBBs (Muslim Background Believers) in the Middle East.* Legal recognition of conversion is almost impossible, although the number of challenges to these sharia-inspired laws is growing.

*...for Christians in Uzbekistan.* They continue to be harassed and fined while trying to exercise their faith in Jesus.

*...for the gospel of Jesus to be heard in Albania.* New mosques continue to be built at a rapid pace, with funds pouring in from the Middle East.

**Friday, October 9, 2009. Please pray**

*...for house churches in the Arabian Gulf.* Pray the Lord would continue to keep his hand on these diligent believers.

*...for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be heard by Muslims in Gaza.*

*...for MBBs and Christians in Pakistan's Swat Valley.* It is a Taliban stronghold where Sharia rules.

**Friday, October 16, 2009. Please pray**

*...for protection of the Church in Nigeria.* Violence between Muslims and Christians continues.

*...for the Christian community of Iraq.* Persecution continues unabated, with kidnappings and murders of Christians.

*...for radio and satellite broadcasts reaching Muslims.* Pray for a genuine move of the Lord through this medium.

**Friday, October 23, 2009. Please pray**

*...for the people of Zanzibar.* Pray for Muslims on this Tanzanian island. Islamic resistance to the gospel has increased, with two churches recently burnt down.

*...for MBBs across the Muslim world.* They face court battles, threats of violence, and death as they testify about Jesus.

*...for Christian workers in the U.S. and Canada.* Pray they would seize opportunities to witness to Muslims that might not otherwise hear about the love of Jesus.

**Friday, October 30, 2009. Please pray**

*...for an untold number of MBBs being persecuted across Bangladesh.*

*...for the millions of Muslims attending mosques today.* Pray that the Lord would reveal his love in miraculous ways.

*...for four Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) imprisoned and tortured in Libya.* Pray for God's hope and protection for them.

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