

The Fast of Ramadan

By Harry Morin



Meet Mary and Nasima, two fictional characters whose dialogue will introduce us to the Muslim fast of Ramadan. The women work side-by-side at a homeless shelter. Mary, a devoted Christian, is a longtime employee, but Nasima has been on staff only for three months. Though Nasima looks outdated with her headscarf and long, modest outfits, Mary takes a liking to Nasima. Nasima is compassionate, reliable, and quite religious. Soon Mary discovers that Nasima is a Muslim. She immigrated to the U.S. two years ago with her family. One day Mary struck up a conversation with Nasima.

“Hey Nasima, how about joining me for lunch? We can go to the deli by Jane’s Boutique.”

“Oh Mary, I am so sorry, but if you would be so kind, please excuse me today.”

“Nasima, I’m worried about you. I’ve noticed that for the last few days, you have not been bringing your lunch with you. And besides that, you’ve been looking very tired. Is anything wrong?”

“Oh no, please do not worry; I am quite fine.”

“No, Nasima, something is not right. Please tell me if you are sick.”

“No, it’s not that, Mary. Do not worry. It’s just that for Muslims, we are in the month of fasting.”

“You are fasting? I know Christians sometimes fast, but I never knew that Muslims fast.”

“Yes, Mary. To be good Muslims, we must all fast as a community. It is our religious duty.”

“Well tell me about it. How long do you have to fast? And why do you fast in the first place?”

“Well you see, Mary, according to our religion,

continued on page 4

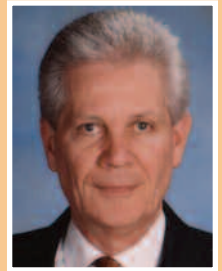


Until All Have Heard

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

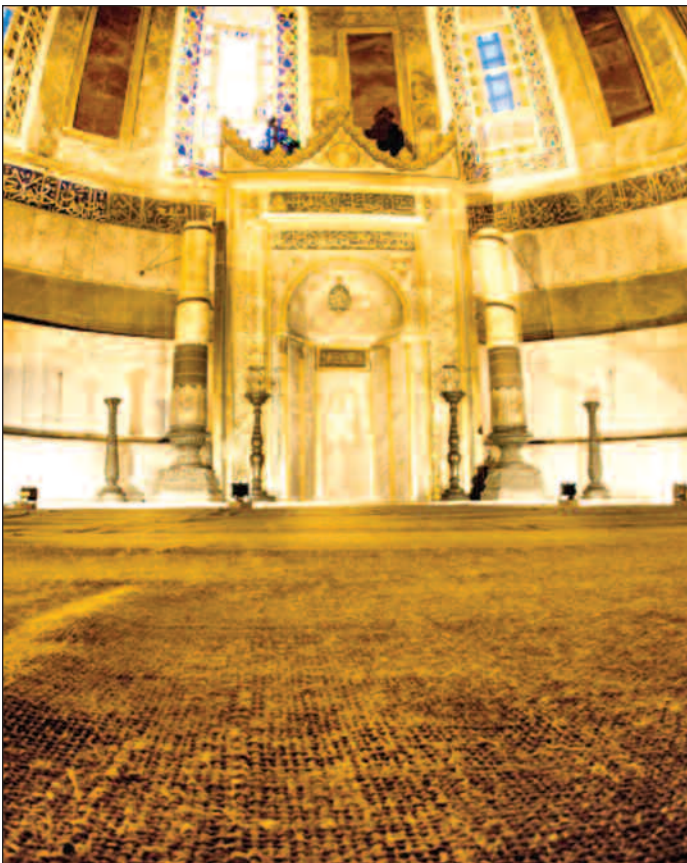
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Reaching Muslim Peoples



Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims are expected to fast from dawn until sunset for the entire 30 days. Each Muslim country has its own customs and rites associated with Ramadan. Some customs that are observed by most Muslims include the following:

- Recitation of the entire Qur'an, in imitation of Muhammad. This is usually organized by local mosques and often televised or heard on radio. Families may get together for their own recitation.
- Observance of special prayers in the late evening or middle of the night called *tarawih*.
- Withdrawing to the mosque during the last 10 nights of Ramadan for prayer and Qur'an recitation, which is called *itikaf*, meaning "seclusion."
- Special emphasis on the "Night of Power" which first occurred on the 27th of Ramadan, A.D. 610 —




the date of Muhammad's initial revelation via the angel Gabriel.

During the "Night of Power" some Muslims participate in *dhikr* (remembering) during which the name of Allah is repeated or remembered for the entire night. According to a strong tradition (al-Bhukari), Muhammad said, "Whoever prays during the night of *Qadr* [power] with faith and hoping for its reward will have all of his previous sins forgiven."

The dawn to sunset fast requires a Muslim to refrain from food, drink and sexual relations. The fast is broken each evening with a meal called *iftar* — meaning "breaking the fast." The last meal before dawn is called *suhur* — meaning "morning meal."

The fast is obligatory for all adult Muslims. Persons who are ill do not have to fast if it would further damage their health; however, they should make up the missed fasts later when they become well again. Children who have not yet reached puberty are not required to fast. Travelers may also break their fast if they feel that keeping it would harm them. Soldiers on guard duty for whom maximum readiness is a must may break their fast.

A special holiday called Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan. Eid al-Fitr means "Feast of the Fast-breaking". It takes place on the first day of the month that follows Ramadan. Most communities have a variety of festive celebrations and meals to specially mark the day.

Muslims believe Muhammad had his destiny fulfilled by receiving the first revelation of the Qur'an on the 27th night of Ramadan — and thus alternately refer to the "Night of Power" as the "Night of Destiny". Many Muslims think this is a special night when God not only forgives their sins, but gives heed to their requests. Often they are open to dreams and visions as they seek guidance and revelation. Would you pray that our Lord and Savior would be revealed to Muslims during the month of Ramadan, especially during the Night of Power/Destiny? 



Muslim World News

Iran

Pastor tortured in prison

An Assyrian pastor the Iranian government accused of “converting Muslims” is being tortured in prison and threatened with execution.

State security agents on Feb. 2 arrested Rev. Wilson Issavi, 65, shortly after he finished a house meeting at a friend’s home in Isfahan. A city of more than 1.5 million people, Isfahan is located 208 miles south of Tehran. According to Farsi Christian News Network, Issavi’s wife, Medline Nazanin, recently visited her husband in prison, where she saw that he had obvious signs of torture and was in poor condition. Iranian intelligence officials told Nazanin that her husband might be executed for his alleged activities.

Issavi is the pastor of The Evangelical Church of Kermanshah in Isfahan, a 50-year-old church body affiliated with the Assemblies of God that caters to the Assyrian population. Issavi is in an unmarked prison, according to FCNN. — *Compass*

Indonesia

Christian center burned

Hundreds of people calling themselves the Muslim Community of the Puncak Route burned buildings under construction belonging to Christians in West Java Province.

Believing that a church or school building was being built, the mob set fire to the Penabur Christian Education Foundation’s unfinished guest house buildings in Cibereum village of Cisarua sub-district, Bogor Regency, on April 27. They also burned a watchman’s hut and at least two cars belonging to directors.

A leader of the mob told *Compass* that local residents did not want a Christian worship center or Christian school in the predominantly Muslim area known as Kongsu.

“We found that there is an effort to Christianize through the construction of a school and a Christian place of worship.” He claimed that the foundation had broken a promise to build only a guest house, not a school and a place of worship. — *Compass*

Saudi Arabia

Christian blogger released

In a surprise move, a Saudi Christian arrested for describing his conversion from Islam and criticizing the kingdom’s judiciary on his blog site was released with the stipulation that he not travel outside of Saudi Arabia or appear on media.

Hamoud Al-Amri, 28, attributed his release to the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI). Gamal Eid, director of ANHRI, told *Compass* he believed his ANHRI had nothing to do with Al-Amri’s release. Rather, he believes officials were loath to keep a person of questionable mental stability in prison. “He is mentally not stable, because he had the courage to say in his blog that he is a Christian. Anyone in his right mind in Saudi Arabia wouldn’t do that.”

The country’s penalty for apostasy is death, although in recent years there have been no known cases of kingdom citizens formally convicted and sentenced with capital punishment for the offense. — *Compass*

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many centuries ago, our prophet began to receive his first revelations from God during the month called Ramadan. And these revelations, which continued for many more years, make up our holy book, the Qur'an.

"Ramadan? I have never heard of it. What month is that on our calendar?"

"Allow me to explain. Aside from your calendar here in the U.S., we Muslims have our own religious calendar. But it's a lunar calendar, unlike your solar calendar. Each month lasts from one new moon to the next, and the lunar year is shorter than the solar year by about 11 days. The month of Ramadan happens to be the ninth month of our calendar. But you see, Ramadan does not fall on the same date of the solar calendar every year. For example, next year, Ramadan will begin about 11 days earlier than it did this year."

"But what does this month called Ramadan have to do with fasting?"

"I will tell you. Because this is the month our prophet first began to receive revelations, this is regarded as a very holy month. And so it is written in our holy book that God has prescribed this month for fasting."

"You mean you're supposed to go a whole month without eating!"

"No, no! Not exactly. Yes, we must fast for the whole month, but we fast each day from dawn until sunset. So tonight, after our sunset prayer, I will eat with my family."

"But Nasima, how can you survive on just one meal a day?"

"Oh no! It is not like that. We can eat as much as we want from sunset until dawn. And so what we do is this. I get up at 3 a.m., and prepare a big breakfast for my husband. The children do not have to fast. Just me and my husband — we do this."

"Wow! Now I see why you're looking tired. And even though you have this early breakfast, how can you go all day without eating or drinking for a whole month? And what if you're sick during this time?"



f Ramadan

from page 1

“Oh, that is not a problem. Anyone who is sick, or pregnant, or on a difficult journey, they are excused, as long as they make up the days at some other time.”

“Nasima, this fasting sounds like such a difficult thing. Why do Muslims fast?”

“Well, I must be honest. Many Muslims do not keep the entire fast. They may observe it for a few days. It is really the very religious who try to keep the full fast. Because my husband is very orthodox, I try my best to please him, but I too cannot always fully comply.”

“But what’s the purpose?”

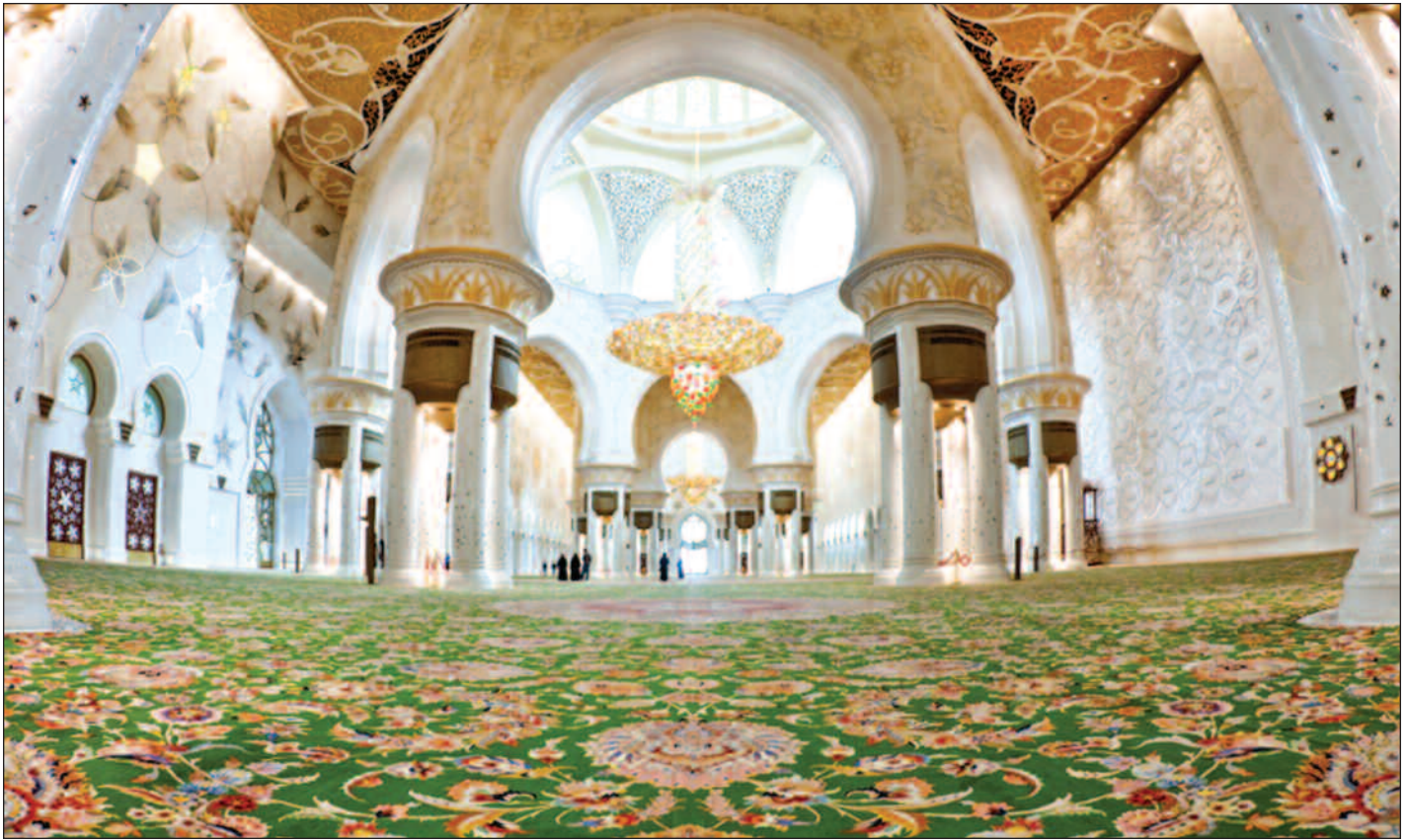
“Well, according to what our Muslim teachers tell us, there are several reasons. First, it is to help us develop self-restraint so that when temptations come our way, we will have the strength to say no. Also, it is a time for us to meditate, glorify God, and thank Him for His guidance that is in our holy book, the Qur’an. In fact, we Muslims are supposed to read through the whole Qur’an during this month, but I just don’t have the time. My hus-

continued on page 6



The Fast of Ramadan

continued from page 5



band, he goes to the mosque at nights, and there our religious leaders read the Qur'an to the congregation. You see, Mary, this month of fasting is a very religious time for us. It is a time when we are supposed to feel near to God. Mary, you are looking serious. Did I say something wrong?"

"No, no, Nasima. I just did not know this about Muslims."

"Mary, you must come over to my house for Eid al-Fitr!"

"Eid what?"

"Eid al-Fitr! It is our happiest holiday. It is the celebration for marking the end of the fast of Ramadan! It is like your Christmas. We dress in new clothes; give presents to the children; visit friends. And we prepare special foods. Yes, you must come so I can introduce you to my friends and family. Mary, I am so excited! You are the first Christian to ask me sincerely about my religion. And you have been such a caring friend."

Mary was delighted and accepted the invitation. Yet deep down, she felt somewhat troubled. She had just learned that Muslims fast a whole month, hoping to get near to God. "But what about Christians?" she thought. "Didn't Jesus teach his followers about fasting? Didn't he fast for 40 days?" Mary decided she would seriously consider the biblical teaching on fasting. She would fast and pray for her friend Nasima, that she would truly find the way to get near to God, the one and only way — the one and only name. What better time to fast and pray for her Muslim friend than during Ramadan?

This year Ramadan will fall from about Aug. 12 to Sept. 9, depending on the sighting of the new moon. Global Initiative would like to encourage you to engage in fervent prayer each day of Ramadan for some specific need related to ministry to Muslims. Some challenges in the work of God are extremely difficult. Ministry to Muslims is one of them. It requires the fervent intercession of those who are willing to help — with prayer and fasting! Thank you for joining us.



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Praying for Muslims
Around the World.*



Friday, July 2, 2010. Please pray

...for Muslims in Nigeria. Pray that despite violence and radicalism, Muslims would hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.
...for the continent of Africa. Oil money from the Arabian Gulf continues to fund mosques and schools at a rapid pace.
...for Albania. Since the fall of communism in 1990, Muslim missionaries have swarmed into Albania, building mosques and offering a variety of financial aid. Pray that Albanian believers would be strong witnesses to their Muslim neighbors.

Friday, July 9, 2010. Please pray

...for Muslims in Iran. Iran has 66 million people and two-thirds of the population is below the age of 30.
...for MBBs (Muslim Background Believers) across the Muslim world. Pray they would receive true shepherding and encouragement from fellow Christians.
...for Christian witness in Sudan. Despite U.N. efforts, stability is lacking in this ravaged country.

Friday, July 16, 2010. Please pray

...for the Muslims of Russia. By itself, Moscow is home to 3 million Muslims, most without official registration.
...for Macedonia and Kosovo. Arabian Gulf oil money is driving a resurgence of mosque building.
...against the fear that often grips Muslims and hinders many from making a commitment to Jesus Christ — as they are fully aware of the consequences of conversion to Christianity.

Friday, July 23, 2010. Please pray

...for Muslims in the U.K. In 1970, only a few thousand Muslims lived in the U.K.; now there are over 2 million.
...for the Muslims of Central Asia. Christian witness to Muslims continues to be difficult, with governments keeping a tight watch over unregistered religious activity.
...for Muslims in Bulgaria, which has a higher percentage of Muslim population than any EU country.

Friday, July 30, 2010. Please pray

...for Muslims in Mauritania. Islam is the state religion and Al-Qaeda has grown in strength, with little opportunity for Christian witness.
...for Muslims in the Maldives. Located in the Indian Ocean, the Maldives remains one of the least evangelized nations on earth. There is a legal ban on any religion except Sunni Islam.
...for Muslims in Algeria. Since 2007, laws have stipulated that religious meetings must take place in registered buildings, and also banned distribution of Christian literature.

***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, August 6, 2010. Please pray

...for Christians in Yemen. One of the world's poorest nations, Yemen officially guarantees religious freedom — but declares Islam to be the state religion.

...for the country of Morocco. Relative tolerance for Christian activity appears to be slowly drying up, with government crackdowns in many places.

...for an MBB in Jordan placed under house arrest by his family, as they pressure him to return to Islam.

Friday, August 13, 2010. Please pray

...for Muslims during the month of Ramadan. Pray that as Muslims seek God during this fasting period, they would receive a true revelation of the love of Jesus Christ.

...that through dreams, visions, literature, or Christian witness, Muslims would have opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ during the month of Ramadan.

...for persecuted Christians in Somalia, officially only 1 percent of the population.

Friday, August 20, 2010. Please pray

...for Muslims in Bangladesh. Please pray that through Christian witness, dreams and visions, Bangladeshi Muslims would receive a true revelation of Jesus Christ.

...for secret believers in Oman. Many risk betrayal or death from their own families and kin.

...for Muslims in Egypt. Pray that the Gospel would reach the hearts of so many hungry people.

Friday, August 27, 2010. Please pray

...for Sufi Muslims throughout the Islamic world. Pray that through Christian witness, dreams and visions, Sufis would receive a true revelation of Jesus Christ.

...for the country of Malaysia. Freedom for the Christian community is growing even more restricted.

...for the Muslims of Africa. With over 1 billion people on the continent, and 3,500 ethnic groups — the population percentage of Muslims is approximately 45 percent and increasing.