

## **Your Turn: What Ramadan is all about**

**Dr. Najeeb Rehman**

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*(Photo: Provided photo)*

“O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those who were before you, in order that you may learn self-restraint / piety (Taqwa).” (The Qur’an, 2:183)

Fasting that has been prescribed in Islam is in essence similar to that previously prescribed in other faith traditions. It is mentioned in the Bible (in the Old and New Testament), in the Qur’an, in the Hindu Mahabharata and Upanishads.

The principle of self-denial is not new in Islam. Rabbinical and Biblical literature also stresses upon the fasting on certain days, for specified period, as a means of worship, prayer, repentance, meditation, confession and atonement. In Biblical accounts, Moses (peace and blessings be upon him) fasted for 40 days and 40 nights while he was on the mountain with God (Allah), and similarly Jesus (peace and blessings be upon him) is said to have fasted for 40 days and 40 nights while in the Judaeen desert, prior to the three temptations.

The Arabic word used for piety is Taqwa, which is actually an amalgam of righteousness with the all ever consciousness to please Allah (God) and fear His wrath. Fasting teaches us endurance and fortitude, and thus one can attain the higher degree of piety. Fasting is considered to train our bodies and minds with better self-control, and to train us to rise above the carnal desires. It is viewed as a means of releasing the human spirit from the clutches of desires, thus allowing moderation to prevail in the carnal self. It is believed to be a means of weakening the bestial rudiments and reinforcing the angelic elements in human beings.

Ramadan is the ninth month of Islamic lunar calendar and is specified for fasting. This year, Ramadan began on May 15. Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is therefore an important act of worship, purely for the sake and pleasure of Allah (God). Ramadan fasting is obligatory upon every Muslim, male or female, who is adult and sane, and who is not sick or on a journey. Nursing mothers and menstruating females are also exempted from fasting.

From early dawn until sunset, every healthy adult Muslim is expected to refrain from any kind of food, drink and sex. While fasting, one is also expected to restrain the tongue, control the temper, confine the lusts and limit worldly engagements. Such restraints enable one to direct attention toward higher goals through prayer, reflection, contemplation and acts of charity.

In addition to spiritual and moral benefits, fasting also has physical rewards. The temporary abstention from food and drinks does have salutary effects, as shown by some scientific studies. There is no malnutrition during Ramadan fasting. Our bodies quickly acclimatize physiologically to this temporary change.

Such an exercise gives one an opportunity to first-hand experience the gut-wrenching hunger pangs and also to appreciate and realize one's provisions. Thus, it fosters compassion with the unfortunate hungry ones. Fasting is therefore also a way to thank the Creator and be grateful to the Him for one's sustenance.

The Muslims are also encouraged to generously give charity, both optional and obligatory, during this blessed month of Ramadan.

*Dr. Najeeb Rehman is a Horseheads resident.*

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