



“Reflecting Ramadan”

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Ramadan During Quarantine

Ramadan is a month in the Islamic lunar calendar where Muslims worldwide celebrate by abstaining from food and drink from dawn to sunset. In Islamic tradition, Ramadan is the “month of Mercy,” meant to bring one’s heart closer to their creator and His book the Quran.

It is said also that Ramadan is the month of the Quran, where the Prophet Muhammed (Peace be Upon Him) first received revelation. This is important in our current context of isolation. The Prophet Muhammed made a habit throughout his life of seeking isolation to ponder the world, to query about his creator and sit in stillness contemplating the world and universe around us. It was in this state of meditation that he first received revelation from the Angel Gabriel. The story goes that the Angel revealed himself to the Prophet in the cave when he was 40 years old, squeezed him with his wings and said, “Read”. He said he could not read, as the Prophet (PBUH) is known as the unlettered Prophet who before this time had never read or written. The Angel squeezed him again and said “read”. The Prophet said the same. On the third time, the Prophet then was able to recite the first divine revelation which goes, “Read in the name of your Lord who created, He created man from a clot, Read and your Lord is Most Honorable, Who taught to write with the pen, Taught man what he knew not...”(Sura Alaq, Verse 1-5).

As we go along this journey of quarantine and isolation, my sense of Ramadan is turned on its head. In normal circumstances, Mosques would be full of communal gatherings. Many would hold **Iftar** gatherings where the community feeds congregants the evening break-the-fast meal shared in communal presence. The coming together is encouraged by the saying of the Prophet (PBUH, “Whoever helps break the fast of a fasting person, they will have the same reward as them without decreasing anything from the reward of the fasting person.”)

Late evenings could be spent at the Mosque observing the **Taraweeh** prayer. This is a special set of prayers where the community will gather nightly to listen to the recitation of the Quran from start to finish over the course of 29-30 nights late into the evening. Standing for the Taraweeh prayer on a nightly basis is a shared spirituality that is hard to describe. It takes endurance to stand in stillness for long hours listening to an Arabic recitation with focus on the divine. When one completes all the Taraweeh prayer in congregation at the end of the month, there is communal joy in having completed the recitations; there is a sense of endured accomplishment that will be seen favorable in the eyes of our Creator.

None of these acts of worship are obligatory, but they provide an enhanced sense of shared spirituality that could be said is the essence of the Muslim community during Ramadan.

Today, however, we are all home. Even in the Holy Land in Mecca, which would normally be host to millions of pilgrims seeking closeness to Allah, the floors are empty.

But we forge onward to find peace and celebrate the blessings of Ramadan. In our homes, we are creating our own sense of shared spirituality and connectedness to our Creator while using technology to shorten the distance to our loved ones and community. Most communities have created an online presence with content to engage congregants, and we are able to engage on a daily basis. Daily spiritual reminders are online and after our family iftar we watch and reflect together. Our family is also able to perform the 5 daily prayers as a small congregation. This blessing is one that is simply not possible in normal life.

Personally, not having the communal activities at the Mosque has created more time for me to make deeper connections with the Quran. I spend various parts of the day—especially the ones when all is still in the house—reading the Quran’s Arabic prose and translations, then finding meaning and purpose as it relates to my life and family. The stillness and silence are inviting. In some small way, the time in isolation is giving me a chance to have a deeper connection to the holy book’s words. The silver lining in this upside-down world we are experiencing is that there is a powerful sense of peace and mindfulness that is achievable with our time in quarantine. Through the solitude and quiet, God comes to those who seek Him. As Allah says, “Take one step towards me, and I will take ten steps towards you. Walk toward me, I will run towards you.”