

Keeping Ramadan Alive the Rest of the Year

By: [Hesham Hassaballa](#) Source: [IslamiCity](#)

Almost invariably it happens a few days after the end of Ramadan: the letdown.

Fasting is finished; the nightly prayers are over; the group gatherings to break the fast have vanished. We can eat, drink, and be merry again when the sun is shining. And that special feeling you have in your heart-the one that keeps you going despite your hunger and thirst-gradually fades away.

The spiritual high evaporates, and all you are left with are the bad habits you tried to shed during Ramadan, but mysteriously rear their ugly heads once it is over.

Ramadan is supposed to increase your faith and God-consciousness:

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن
قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾

“Believers! Fasting has been prescribed for you-as it was prescribed for those before you-so that you may be conscious of God.” (2:183).

The point is not to be an angel for Ramadan and a demon at other times. The lessons learned and spiritual benefits gained during that month are intended to carry over for the rest of the year until next Ramadan.

Yet frequently they do not. Is there anything we can do about it? Absolutely and here are five ways we can try to keep the spirit of Ramadan alive and well throughout the rest of the year.

Good Habits Kept Up

More than just denying oneself food and drink, the fast of Ramadan is a complete body-and-soul fast. Although this should be the behavior of the believer at all times, when one is fasting, he or she should take special care not to harm anyone, curse anyone, or do anything wrong. In fact, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said:

“Whoever does not give up forged speech and evil actions [while fasting], God is not in need of his leaving his food and drink.”

Well, once Ramadan is over, these good behaviors should continue.

For instance, if you took the opportunity of the month of Ramadan to try to curb talking about other people, why not continue to refrain from doing so after Ramadan is over? We should continue to go to the mosque for congregational prayers. It is so amazing to see the mosque-which was packed just a few days earlier-stand almost completely empty during Isha', or night prayers, after Ramadan. If we can go to the mosque each day during Ramadan, we can get there every day during the rest of the year. Smoking is prohibited during daylight hours during Ramadan, which makes it the perfect opportunity to quit cigarettes. Yes, the nicotine in tobacco smoke is more addictive than heroin, and it is one of the most difficult addictions to beat. But if you can go without smoking for 14-17 hours a day during Ramadan, you can go without it for the remaining 7-10 hours. Ideally, there should be no Muslims who smoke, given the fact that they have to stop doing so for most of a month every year. Sadly, the reality is quite different. Many, many Muslims smoke, and it saddens me-especially since I am a lung specialist who sees firsthand the devastation wrought by cigarette smoking-to see groups of men outside the mosque immediately light up the moment sunset arrives.

Fast Throughout the Year

I must admit that this is the most difficult one for me to follow, but I must mention it anyway. The fast of Ramadan is obligatory for every adult Muslim, but there are numerous other fasts that Muslims are encouraged to undertake throughout the year, and we should try to participate. For instance, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, encouraged Muslims to fast six days of the month of Shawwal, the month after Ramadan. The reward is equivalent to fasting the entire year. In a few months, the season of Hajj will begin, and those Muslims who do not perform the Hajj are encouraged to fast the day of Arafat, when all the pilgrims will be standing on that plain and begging God for forgiveness. We should fast that day. For Ashura, the day that commemorates the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, Muslims are encouraged to fast that day as well as the day before. (Ideally, Muslims should fast the first nine days of the month of Dhul-Hijjah, when the Hajj occurs.)

For the very ambitious, the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to fast every Monday and Thursday, and if one is able, he or she could follow this Sunnah, or tradition of the Prophet. The very, very ambitious could even fast in the tradition of the Prophet David, peace be upon him; fasting every other day. If this is too much, perhaps we can fast one, two, or three days each month. Whatever the number, we should try to fast outside of Ramadan to help keep the spirit of the month alive in our daily lives.

Qiyam Praying

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims gather together and perform the Isha, or night prayer, and then special devotional prayers, called Tarawih, in congregation (together these are called, qiyam, extra devotional night prayers). It is such a wonderful time, and it is perhaps-after actually getting to eat and drink-the best part of Ramadan. We are all together in the mosque, and we get to hear the entire Qur'an recited if we go every night of Ramadan.

Why not, at home, have your own "mini-Tarawih"? You can either read what you have already memorized, or you can read from the Qur'an itself. If you continue this throughout the year, it is

quite possible to finish reading the entire Qur'an many times over. This is an excellent way to keep the feeling and spirit of Ramadan alive.

Charity

Ramadan is also the month of charity. It was said that the Prophet, already the most generous of men, was even more generous during the month of Ramadan. Along with teaching the believer discipline and spiritual focus, the fast of Ramadan is a potent reminder that there are millions of people around the world who must forgo food and drink involuntarily, out of sheer poverty. As a result, Muslims are frequently motivated to give to the poor during Ramadan, and the reward for an act of charity-already substantial-is multiplied many times over in the month of Ramadan. Muslims often discharge their obligatory annual alms tax, the Zakah, during this month.

Yet that does not mean we should be stingy and miserly throughout the rest of the year. We should continue to be generous even when it is not Ramadan, perhaps devoting a little bit of what we earn to help the poor. You could even open a donor-directed fund or a charitable gift fund at a brokerage firm and invest your donations so you could give more. If you want to be even more ambitious, you can start your own charitable endowment, an essential aspect of the classical Islamic tradition that has unfortunately gone by the wayside in modern times. "Haven't Seen You Since Last Ramadan..."

Another beautiful aspect of Ramadan is the frequent invitation to people's homes for iftar meals after sunset. Here, Muslims gather and break their fast together. Many times, it is an opportunity to see friends (and maybe even family) they do not normally get a chance to see during the rest of the year. Well, the same theme applies: if you can do it during Ramadan, you can do it at any other time as well. Why not keep up the contacts made during Ramadan throughout the rest of the year? Have monthly gatherings at each other's homes or at a favorite restaurant. Let it not be another year when you say to a friend, "**Wow! I haven't seen you since last Ramadan!**"

For Muslims, the month of Ramadan is the most wonderful time of the year. The benefits and beauties of this month are boundless, and-even though I can once again drink my 24 oz. French-Irish-Vanilla-Choc-Crme Coffee chino in the morning-I always feel a tinge of sadness when Ramadan is over.

Yet we can keep the spirit of the month alive and well throughout the rest of the year. For that is the whole purpose of the fast, isn't it- to be conscious of God.

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