

Ramadan in Nigeria

My name is Zainab Zakari I come from the northern part of Nigeria which is predominantly Muslims from a tribe called Hausa. The excitement starts to show two days before the moon is sighted, you hear people talking about it and getting ready for the holy month of Ramadan, women going to the market to buy foodstuffs that will be used, men buying fresh fruits for their families. This is so because the type of food we consume in Nigeria every day differs from the type we eat during Ramadan. It mostly contains fruits and liquid generally soft foods.

The Muslim leader here in Nigeria who we call Sarkin Musulmia is in charge of telling the Muslim ummah if the moon is sighted in any part of the country and he makes a national broadcast to the Muslim ummah that the moon has been sighted and that fasting which we call AZUMI will start the following day. Who ever sees the moon call his local imam and the imams convey it to Sarkin Musulmia. People wake up at around 4:30 am to eat their sahur before fajr sets in, after the sahur you either go back to bed or wait until fajr prayers or you don't go back at all.

In the morning you go about your activities which are allowed during Ramadan and after ashr prayers we go to tafsir which lasts till 30 minutes to the time to break our fast. We break our fast depending on the time the sun sets with dates or fruits. We perform magrib prayers. Then seat down to eat properly which consist of different types of foods and after like an hour we perform isha prayers and tarawee prayers. The men either go to the mosque or stay with their family and lead them in prayers. This goes on and on until the last ten days of Ramadan Ramadan which we start praying at around 1am to 4 am.

Ramadan time in Nigeria is full of holiness you can feel it in the air that there is something special about the month of Ramadan. The preaching of the words of Allah and the feeling that you can get your aljanna by doing good deeds in the month of Ramadan. As I have said I come from the northern part of Nigeria may be the way Ramadan is done here differs from other parts. If you disagree with anything or you notice a mistake please don't hesitate to correct me. may Allah subhanna wa taala protect and guide us all amin.

Wa salam Zainab Zakari Nigeria

Ramadan between the Cape and the North

By Gabeba Baderoon, islamonline.net

When I was growing up in Cape Town, Ramadan was a time of aromas in the neighbourhood as boeka, or breaking of the fast (iftar in Arabic), approached. It was the duty of young children to take plates of cookies and daltjies (pea-flour balls with spinach and spices) to the neighbours.

My formative experiences are the patterns of family and community traditions during Ramadan in Cape Town.

Islam has a long and fascinating history in Cape Town. Muslims first arrived more than 300 years ago, and though most were slaves who were brought by the Dutch from India, South East Asia and other parts of Africa, Islam flourished in the Cape. In addition to the slaves and political exiles, Islam also grew rapidly through conversion, both among indigenous people and non-Muslim slaves. At one point during the colonial era, slaves formed the majority of the population in Cape Town.

Ramadan is known in Cape Town as the Pwasa or the Fast, and `Eid

(Arabic for an Islamic public celebration) is called Labarang. The morning meal before soeboeg (dawn), which is called sahur in Arabic, is known as sower, and the Arabic iftar--the breaking of the fast--is known as boeka. The use of these terms shows traces of the Bahasa Melayu language in South Africa, as it was the lingua franca for people from the Indian Ocean region where most slaves originated.

Today the Muslim community in South Africa, while still a minority, is well established and integrated into the wider population. Cape Town, with its many different religions, has numerous mosques and Muslim educational institutions. Halal food is widely available in the supermarkets. From my mother's house, we could hear the Adhan from three neighbourhood mosques.

For me, the Fast is both a time to abstain from certain aspects of life and, on the other hand, to increase awareness of, and even celebrate other aspects. Of course, the dominant element of Ramadan is to abstain from food and drink after Soeboeg and until sunset. As I was growing up, my parents and madrassa (Islamic educational institute) teachers explained the Pwasa to me as a time to focus on the spirit. To heighten this aspect, people undertake a khatam, or complete reading of the Qur'an.

The Fast is also a time to empathize with those who have little food--charity and generosity being a central part of behaviour during the Fast. On the `Eid, food is cooked in huge pots and thousands of meals distributed to those less privileged. My mother being a doctor regards the Fast as an ideal time to advise her patients that bad habits such as smoking can be given up completely, rather than just during the day.

Growing up, the aspects of life that enjoyed great attention were neighbourliness and family. Cooking and baking played a special role in this. The whole of the Pwasa was marked by special foods. Every night, as the breaking of the fast, or boeka time, approached, Muslim households in our neighbourhood would send little plates of whatever they would be eating that night--usually samosas, mince pies, daltjies, or biscuits--to the neighbours. It was the role of the children of the house to take these plates around. As we went on our rounds, my sisters and I would see other children in their scarves, walking down the street carrying plates of boeka treats. I remember for a long period during my childhood, the Fast took place during winter, so in my memory, dates, soup, daltjies and samosas are strongly associated with Ramadan.

There have been many changes over the years in Cape Town. More people are buying ready made the biscuits, pies and special foods that characterize the evening meal, rather than baking at home. This is good because it provides a source of income, especially for Muslim women who have established cottage industries as cooks and caterers. On the other hand, as fewer people learn to cook or bake, knowledge about these special foods is no longer passed along within families as before, and people rely these days on recipe books rather than knowledge inherited across generations.

Labarang

Generally, women are responsible for most of the cooking during the Pwasa. However, the special briyanis and curries at Labarang would often be made by men, who tended to cook for large numbers of people--500, 1000 or even more. On Labarang day people visit family and friends, and to welcome them the tables are laid with a festive abundance of cakes. The inventive and delicious biscuits of Cape Town are famous throughout the country. Flavoured with cinnamon, cardamom, ginger and nutmeg, with names like saboeratjies, karamonk scraps and hertzoggies, each biscuit has a story attached to it, and makes a favourite gift for non-Muslim friends the day after `Eid. Often families bake for days in a row before the feast. Houses are thoroughly cleaned and new curtains or paint might be evident.

When I was young, local tailors and dressmakers would make our Labarang clothing. We would choose our own fabric and pattern, and there would be many fittings before the big day when a tailor-made dress

or suit would be collected. Today, sadly, that tradition is passing, as people tend to buy their clothing at department stores.

On Labarang day, people go to the mosque for salah (ritual Prayer) in the morning, and, after Prayers, it is a tradition that they are served in the mosque with freshly baked bread. Once they return from the mosque, families go round to greet the neighbours and then go to visit family. Though this day is not an official public holiday, it is generally accepted that Muslims will take the day off work. As one drives to visit family in other neighbourhoods, one can recognize other Muslims by the fezzes and scarves. The day is characterized by great hospitality, and families gather for large shared meals with favourite dishes like crayfish curry, kabobs and oven frikkadel. The next day one usually takes Labarang treats to one's colleagues.

Ramadan in the North

I grew up with a very communal understanding of Ramadan, so when I moved to the UK to study, and now in the US, I make certain that I am in regular contact with friends and family. Telephone calls, letters and the internet are very important ways to keep in touch. I find that as Ramadan approaches, I tend to cook the familiar 'Ramadan foods', and regularly exchange recipes and cookbooks with my mother and sisters.

The emphasis on neighbourliness and charity in the Fast, especially in the form of giving food, has always created a good point of connection with my neighbours in the UK and US, both Muslim and non-Muslim. We regularly exchange home-baked food and flowers during the year, and so it is easy to continue this at Ramadan. It helps that Americans are now much more aware of the Muslim festivals, an unexpected benefit of the extensive attention Islam enjoys in the media these days! Since the Fast will occur during winter in the North, in some ways I will be recreating my childhood memories by making soup and daltjies to go with dates when we break our fast this year.

Singapore Muslims Plan Meaningful Ramadan

Muslims in Singapore will launch a nationwide campaign during the holy fasting month of Ramadan, catering for the needy and the poor, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) organizes this year's campaign under the title "Illuminating Hope of Fellow Beings," Singapore's The Straits Times reported Sunday, October 10.

During the month-long campaign, mosque volunteers will distribute food to needy families, including non-Muslims, in their neighborhood and clean their homes.

MUIS Spokesman Zainul Abidin Ibrahim told the paper several mosques, like Al-Khair mosque in Choa Chu Kang, have also taken the initiative and started distributing bread and leaflets to 2,000 Muslim and non-Muslim families.

University undergraduate Marlina Mohd Isa, 22, is one of those who hope to have a chance to help. "Serving everyone who needs help is my way of making Ramadan meaningful, not just to Muslims but also to non-Muslims," she told the paper. She added that she was "happy to bring joy" to families that need it most.

"Helping others is a guiding principle of our religion, and that's what I try to do in order to be a good Muslim," added nurse Predah Anam Hashim, 50, who has done community service for 21 years.

Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim said Islam is a “social religion that teaches believers to reach out and help people from all communities”. “Islam is a religion that cares for the welfare and needs of those who are less fortunate, irrespective of religious and racial background,” the paper quoted him as saying.

Ramadan will fall Friday, October 15, in Singapore. Muslims make up around 15 percent of Singapore’s four million population. Some 51 percent of the population practices Buddhism and Taoism.

Ramadan in Thailand

Muslims in Thailand form one-third of the Thai people. Because of the huge manifestations of celebrating the month of Ramadan, a Thai citizen feels as if the number of Muslims doubles everyday. During Ramadan, a new mosque is inaugurated mostly in every city and in every village. All the year round, Muslims of each city collect money for establishing the new mosque which is usually opened in the month of Ramadan. People here are keen on working by themselves in building these mosques. Memorizers of the Ever-Glorious Qur’an are happily carried on shoulders to be examples for the rest of Muslims and to encourage the youngsters to memorize the Glorious Qur’an as well.

In the first day of Ramadan, each Thai Muslim family even the poor families are keen on slaughtering in commemoration with the coming of this blessed month. Obviously, slaughtering in the first day of fasting is a Thai habit that has been witnessed and still a long time ago.

Among the beautiful manifestations of this month is that people, here, used to have the meal of breaking the fast in groups; the matter which is considered to be a kind of good treatment and sincere love. The Thai Muslims incline towards having large amounts of fruits during this month. Interestingly enough, spending the month of Ramadan in their country is normally among the habits of the Thai Muslims. Thus, most travelers, overseas workers and even students who study abroad usually come back to spend the month of Ramadan with their families.

Ramadan in Burma

The Muslims of Burma welcome the blessed month of Ramadan with esteem, joy and happiness. The sighting of the crescent is a great thing, as all of them go to high places to see the crescent for themselves. In the month of Ramadan, people gather in the mosque to recite the Qur’an in the day and for Tarawih and Tahajud (late night) Prayers in the night. Most people in Burma also do ‘T tikaf (seclusion in the mosque during the last ten days of Ramadan).

In the nights of Ramadan, the markets and shops are closed because everybody is busy with their worship. In Burma, people sleep immediately after Tarawih Prayer and do not stay awake until Fajr time. After the Fajr Prayer they set forth to their work.

Muslims first break their fast with dates and water. And they break it in a marvelous way such as reading poems of different kinds. Their foods are many. Local foods include lury fera, a special dish of bread, rice and chicken.

Their way of celebrating the `Eid is no different from that of other countries because it is an Islamic occasion. Thus it is celebrated according to the Prophetic tradition. There is no culture or custom that goes against the Islamic practice.

Ramadan in Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the greatest Muslim countries. The Malaysian Muslims receive the month of Ramadan with great joy and unequalled happiness. They change their style of living during this honorable month. Reciting the Ever-Glorious Qur'an, remembering Allah and staying at mosques are their main concern. On the few last days of Sha`ban, Muslims of Malaysia prepare themselves for receiving Ramadan. They prepare mosques for prayer and buy their necessities of food. On the 29th night of Sha`ban, the Ministry of Religious Affairs tries to sight the new moon. When the sighting is established, the ministry declares it via mass media. Muslims exchange congratulations due to the advent of Ramadan. On this great occasion, the local authorities sprinkle streets with water, clean yards and public squares and hang electric lamps in the main streets.

As for the way of receiving Ramadan in the countryside, Muslims there celebrate the occasion through gathering at mosques and congratulating one another. Also, they exchange meals of breaking the fast.

The rich and well-to-do traders normally establish feasts for providing meals of the breaking of the fast at mosques and in the streets. Truly, the Malaysian community is distinguished with special kinds of meals.

Mostly, all family members attend prayer in the mosque regularly. Schools for teaching the Qur'an are widespread all over the country. The government encourages these schools which intensify their courses during this month. They teach Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), Tafsir (Exegesis of the Qur'an), the Islamic Creed, the Arabic language besides the Ever-Glorious Qur'an. The Malaysians conclude the month of Ramadan with completing reciting the Honorable Qur'an in mosques, schools, TV, Radio, etc. Then, they make other celebrations for receiving the blessed `Eid Al-Fitr.

<http://nur-ar-ramadan.tripod.com/id34.html>