

Ramadan Conference Calls July 31 and August 2 2011

Notes

Prior to the call, people were encouraged to take a look at the Ramadan resources available on the AFS wiki at: http://www.afswiki.org/index.php/Ramadan_Facts. Where the following resources can be found:

- Islamic Dietary Practices (from Today's Dietitian)
- Healthy Eating During Ramadan by MIDAN
- CECF Ramadan Packet for Students, Host Families and Coordinators
- Notes Ramadan Calls 2011
- Tips for assisting a student during Ramadan
- Feedback on Ramadan from 2009-10 participants, coordinators, and host families
- Advice from a YES Alumna
- 2011 Letter from CECF to school administrators about Ramadan
- Ramadan Facts (PDF)
- Ramadan Around the World
- Ramadan Recipes
- Ramadan Lesson Plans
- More Ramadan Lesson Plans
- Introducing Ramadan to Non-Muslims

Thank you to all who made time to attend this call and ask questions. A special thank you to our speakers!

Speakers: Imam Mohammed Bashar Arafat- CECF

Roberta Duyff, St Louis area volunteer, AT Chair, Sponsored Programs cultural coach, host mom and nutritionist.

Habiba Ramadan, YES Alumni Intern from Egypt

Rustam Kocher- Portland OR Cluster Coordinator.

Facilitator: Roberta Duyff

Organizer: Sanaa Nelson, *YES Programs Specialist, Sponsored Programs*

Attendees: AFS volunteers and YES/FLEX host families around the country.

Please note that the notes below reflect the two Ramadan calls as speakers shared the same insights during both calls. Those calls were also recorded. For more information regarding how to access the recordings, go to the end of the call notes.

Imam Arafat

Imam Arafat is the founder of CECF (Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation)

Website: www.cecf-net.org

Email: cecf1@aol.com

Phone: 410-944-6077

This is one of the first times that the students will be away from home. This combined with being away during a very important holiday makes it very important for host families and volunteers to understand Ramadan.

CECF and Imam's role with YES and AFS – Imam Arafat has worked with the YES program and students since 2003. He is here to help with the student's adjustment especially during Ramadan.

Greetings during Ramadan – Ramadan Mubarak
Greetings for Eid Eid Kareem
Eid Mubarak

Logistics of Ramadan- Start and end dates, Fasting window, What is fasting? No water either, How to find out about the time of fasting.

Ramadan is the month in the year when the Muslim community comes together to increase its relationship with the almighty God. This is not just about when to eat and not eat, but about worshiping together and giving back to the community. It is a time to repair one's relationship with God, and to grow closer to God. This is a time for forgiveness, a time when people try to settle disputes. People help each other and think about how to better all aspects of life. During the month of Ramadan deeds are worth a higher value in the almighty God's eyes as mentioned in the Koran.

Timing of Ramadan: Muslims fast not from "sunrise to sunset" but from dawn, which is a bit before sunrise to sunset. That means that Muslims do not eat nor drink, not even water, during the fasting period of the day. To find out when a student should start fasting during the day and when to end the fast, go to www.islamicfinder.com and plug in your zip code. It will show you the times the fast starts and ends.

This year Ramadan started August 1 and is due to end on August 29th.

Prayer and Spirituality of the month – Ramadan is a month of celebration. Muslims celebrate the first revelation of the Koran. It is a time of religious observance. Christianity and Judaism share much of the concepts of fasting combined with the concept of giving and helping those who are in need. During Ramadan there is an encompassing sense of community. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims all over the world spend extra time reading the Koran, chanting and praying. Some students (not every Muslim practices in the same way) spend a lot of time in the afternoon in their room reading the Koran. This practice might be misunderstood and perceived as antisocial behavior. Imam Arafat will advise students to spend time with their host families and explain to their families what they are doing if they need to go pray or read the Koran. When one is praying, one cannot answer the door or the phone so host families should be aware that the student will not answer their call while praying.

Sports and fasting- Students should be careful to take care of their health. Health always takes priority over fasting or worship. If playing sports, students should take it easy. To break the fast to play a sport in general is questionable. You break the fast because you are a traveler or are not feeling well, but not to be on a sports team. After you are past an adjustment period (following travel), then you would resume your fasting. Sports are not a reason to break the fast, as fasting takes priority and are considered a form of worship. Host families may talk to the school about excusing their student from the more rigorous sports that might lead them to sweat too much and be dehydrated.

Host families experiencing Ramadan – Imam advises students to be considerate and respectful when waking up early as their host family might not join them for the Sohor meal (the pre-dawn meal). Imam would encourage host families to join their student at a Mosque or Islamic center so that they can share that communal experience together of breaking the fast. This also furthers the mission of the YES and FLEX programs as well as the mission of AFS to promote peace and understanding of another culture.

The importance of access to a mosque during that time of year- Ramadan is a month when Muslims go to Mosque. It is a month spent with friends and family as people bring good wishes to one another. Even those who do not go regularly to Mosque during the year are likely to want to go during Ramadan. Imam Arafat will explain to students that host families might not be able to take them to mosque regularly especially as there may not be a mosque locally in the host community. If students don't have access to a mosque, they can come together to pray and break the fast together. It's important for the students to have a sense of community. However, Imam would encourage host families and coordinators to locate a nearby mosque or Islamic Center as it will offer a network of support to the student. Coordinators could organize for students who are fasting to get together at the beginning of Ramadan and suggest they share contact info and organize themselves to support each other during the month.

Eid Al Fitr (Joy and Celebration) - Ramadan is a joyous time in the Muslim world. Eid al Fitr is the celebration at the end of Ramadan. This holiday is similar to Christmas in America in that this is a time that is spent with close family and friends. Students may ask to go to the mosque on this day to mark the celebration. The students are advised to explain these celebrations to their host families and school, in case they would wish to observe in the local Muslim community. Prayer is in the morning of Eid. Eid is the countries the students come from span three days however in the US Eid is traditionally celebrated the first day only. Eid this year will be on August 30. Eid is also a time of gift exchange. Eid and Fitr and Edi Al Adha are the two most important holidays for Muslims.

Roberta Duyff

Roberta aka Bonnie is the host mother of two YES students, one from Indonesia and one from Saudi Arabia. She is also a nutritionist. So she is happy to lead the call and provide the perspective of a host mother as well as that of a dietician.

Some tips!

- It is important that students remain hydrated during Ramadan. Dehydration can be an issue so host parents should ensure that students are hydrating when they break the fast.
- Students need to eat well in the evening.
- Avoid foods with high amounts of sodium
- Eat foods high in protein and fiber to have a feeling of fullness (less carbohydrates)
- Have foods available for the student so they can get it themselves early in the morning or even prepare a plate with the student that could be re-heated in the early morning. Host parents can ask students what they might like (dates are an example of a traditional food to have on hand).
- Try not to have high calories foods on hand (to prevent rapid weight gain)
- Students may experience constipation
- You could plan to have dinner at the time of the break of the fast (Maghrib prayer time) with your student so he/she doesn't eat alone later in the evening.
- Participate in Ramadan as a family! This can be a wonderful time to build the relationship with the student and help the host family better understand what the student may be feeling. AFS Volunteers in Missouri are planning a dessert picnic to break the fast.
- Typical foods during Ramadan - since students are coming from very diverse parts of the world, this is a wonderful opportunity to talk with the students and learn what their favorite foods are.

If a student is sick or traveling, then fasting is not something that the students will have to follow. Imam explained that however, some students may come from an area/community where breaking the fast is a sort of taboo - leaders tell them never to break the fast. Imam urges the students to reconsider and to listen to what God is saying, as he wants people to be comfortable and healthy. Imam Arafat, when he meets the students at the arrival orientation, will explain to students that if they feel uncomfortable during travelling or if they are ill, they have the right to break the fast, and make up the day sometime before Ramadan the next year. A traveler is considered to be "travelling" for up to 15 days and distances considered travel in the US are 50 miles and above.

Habiba Ramadan

Habiba is a YES Egyptian Alumna who was hosted in Indiana in 2006-07. Ramadan took place in September and it was already cold at the time. Habiba explained how Ramadan has a very important social aspect: extended families gather every evening or even in the morning for the pre-dawn meal of Sohor, streets are decorated. Habiba explained that she needed assistance from her host mom in choosing food. Her host mom tried to fast for a few days with her (no food but drank water and coffee) during the month of Ramadan and Habiba really appreciated that. She also appreciated her host dad asking her questions about Ramadan.

It was hard for Habiba to respond to the negative comments she heard about Ramadan while she was an exchange student, such as “why are you starving yourself.” Fasting during Ramadan gives you a sense of how poor people who cannot afford food feel. Fasting gave Habiba a stronger sense of appreciation for what she had (including for example coffee in the morning when it is not Ramadan).

Habiba had a hard time explaining to the school why she would not want to be in the cafeteria during lunch time (with help from school counselor and host family). The solution was to spend that time in the library. Ramadan is actually a good time for the host family and the student to really get to know each other. What the student may be missing the most is the family aspect of the holiday – similar in line to students being far from home during, for example, Christmas for the first time. Students will be homesick because they are missing the joyous and communal feeling of Ramadan back home so host families should not judge their student based on the student’s behavior during Ramadan.

Habiba put together some tips that are posted on the Ramadan section of the wiki.

Rustam Kocher

Rustam was an AFS student to Indonesia 1988. He is now living in Portland, OR where he is a volunteer Cluster Coordinator for YES and other sponsored students hosted in that area.

Rustam suggests asking students about Ramadan in their home country. It might also be an opportunity for the host family to try to fast for a day to see how that feels like and to bring oneself closer to one’s student.

Rustam recommends getting students involved in the local Muslim community as quickly as possible. He does it for his cluster every year. It can be hard to find information on the local mosques and the mosques might question at first the host families’ interest but will warmly welcome the students and host families once they learn about the YES program.

Good resources to go to are the Islamic Society of N. America (INSA) and the Islamic finder (www.islamicfinder.com).

When planning a local orientation that is inclusive of fasting students, Rustam recommends to have a picnic/meal that breaks the fast so all can take part in the event.

Naomi, cluster coordinator in the New York City area, also sent Sanaa Nelson an email after the first Ramadan call to share some of her experience: When looking for a mosque it is more effective to go physically to the mosque to speak to someone rather than calling. The first time the coordinator went to the mosque, she took her students with her and visited a number of Mosques until they found one that the students felt comfortable at. (all mosques are not alike). The coordinator also noted that because the community donates food or raises money to pay for the Iftaar food, she always made a personal donation to the mosques she visited with her cluster - as a gesture of goodwill. (thanks Naomi for these extra tips!)

Questions and Answers

Can one sightsee during fasting?

Fasting should not restrict the family from their everyday activities. Students can bring some dates (for example) with them in case the break of the fast as sunset (maghrib prayer time) occurs while they are out so the student can eat. Also ensure the student has water. Host families can also keep a bottle of water and a prayer rug in the back of the car in case the students need it during outings during the day.

How is prayer handled in conjunction with the school schedule?

The students are advised to explain to the teacher or counselor that they would like to have a place to pray.

How many of the YES students find that they cannot complete the fast and do students feel guilty if they break the fast?

Imam explains to the students that God wants ease and not difficulties especially when it comes to fasting during sickness or traveling. Students may need an extra time to adjust from traveling. In this case, it is OK to break the fast and students can make up the days after Ramadan is over.

Are their signs to look out in the students (stress)?

If students are dehydrated or appear sick – they should be encouraged to break the fast as their health is very important (as it says in the Koran and in this case, this is not a sin). Sickness should be to an extent that prevents a person from performing their duties.

As sunrise/sunset in Alaska times are so different, what times should the students go by? The day is much longer than in the rest of the world.

Imam has a section on Alaska to his booklet on Ramadan. In Alaska the day is almost 20 hours, which is too long of a fasting period. Students can follow prayer and fasting times in San Francisco. One coordinator mentioned that in the past her students in Alaska followed Mecca times.

How will people at a mosque feel if a non-Muslim host parent is taking his host daughter or son to mosque for prayer and hanging around the mosque while the exchange student is praying?

Host families are always welcome at the mosque of course. It would be nice to make a phone call to the mosque to explain that the student will be coming with his host family. Some mosques are bigger than others with more or less lobby-space where the host family can wait.

Additional questions asked after the call:

If we take our students to the mosque are we able to enter and observe as a non-Muslim?

Yes, you can, but please make a phone call before you come so the community representatives will escort you to the appropriate location. They will show you the entrance that women use and provide you with an explanation and answers to your questions. Normally, they ask women to wear long sleeves, pants or a long skirt/dress and bring a scarf with them, in order to enter the prayer area. If you don't have a scarf let them know and they will provide you with one.

If we want to schedule a celebration for the end of Ramadan would that typically be after sunset on Monday, August 29th or the evening of Tuesday, August 30th?

It will be ok to start from the evening of the 29th, if that works best for the family, but the actual celebration will take place the whole day of the 30th. The prayers at the mosques will take place in the morning and then everyone visits each other, goes to a picnic, or out to lunch. Everyone also gives gifts to the children.

Prayer Schedule August / 2011							
Date	Day	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghrib	Isha
2	Tue	4:52	6:20	1:32	5:28	8:43	10:13
3	Wed	4:53	6:21	1:32	5:27	8:42	10:11
4	Thu	4:54	6:22	1:32	5:27	8:40	10:10
5	Fri	4:56	6:23	1:32	5:27	8:39	10:08
6	Sat	4:57	6:24	1:32	5:26	8:38	10:07
7	Sun	4:59	6:25	1:32	5:26	8:37	10:05
8	Mon	5:00	6:26	1:32	5:25	8:35	10:03

Based on this chart does our student have to be done eating by 4:52 or 6:20 on August 2nd? And I assume not eat again until 8:43.

You are correct, the student will stop eating by "Fajr or Dawn" which will be 4:52 AM and continue the fast until 8:43 PM.

Our Yes student is very excited about playing club soccer and will be trying out for a team upon arrival. The normal practices for his team will be from 8-930PM and so he will be able to break his fast shortly after practice begins, and may be able to attend practice late for the first few weeks during Ramadan I am wondering though, how he will be able to survive try-outs . They will be on a Saturday afternoon – it is generally 98degrees & 98% humidity here during the day and rarely gets below 75 degrees with high humidity until October. Can he break his fast for one day and then return to fasting?

In Islam, the fast during Ramadan is considered "Faridah: Religious Obligation." Playing any kind of sport is ok, but it could not be used as a "legitimate" excuse to break the fast.

People still practice all kinds of sports while they are fasting, but it is a decision that every individual has to make as they decide whether they can push themselves really hard. For some, fasting is not too difficult and for others, it is. I will leave it up to your student to decide how he feels about it.

Listening to the call

Playback via the Internet

1. Click on the link below or paste the entire URL into your browser:

July 31 call: <http://www2.teleconferencingcenter.com/moderator/presentation/Playback?id=3dc90260-5f13-4e67-8998-f1848ed5470a.rpm>

Aug 2 call: <http://www2.teleconferencingcenter.com/moderator/presentation/Playback?id=fb7d4bae-c1ca-42d3-805d-0cffc9a38fbf.rpm>

2. At the prompt, enter your name and email address.

3. Click "Submit". The playback will begin

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1. To access the conference specified above, dial the phone number shown below according to your locale.

US/Canada - 888-899-7904

International/Local - 706-679-5560

2. At the prompt, enter the Playback ID shown above followed by the pound sign (#).

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For the **July 31st** conference call, the playback ID is 114302212

For the **Aug 2**, conference call, the playback ID is 118201214

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- 3 Fast forward 30 seconds
- 7 Rewind 30 seconds
- # Pause/Resume playback
- * Exit playback