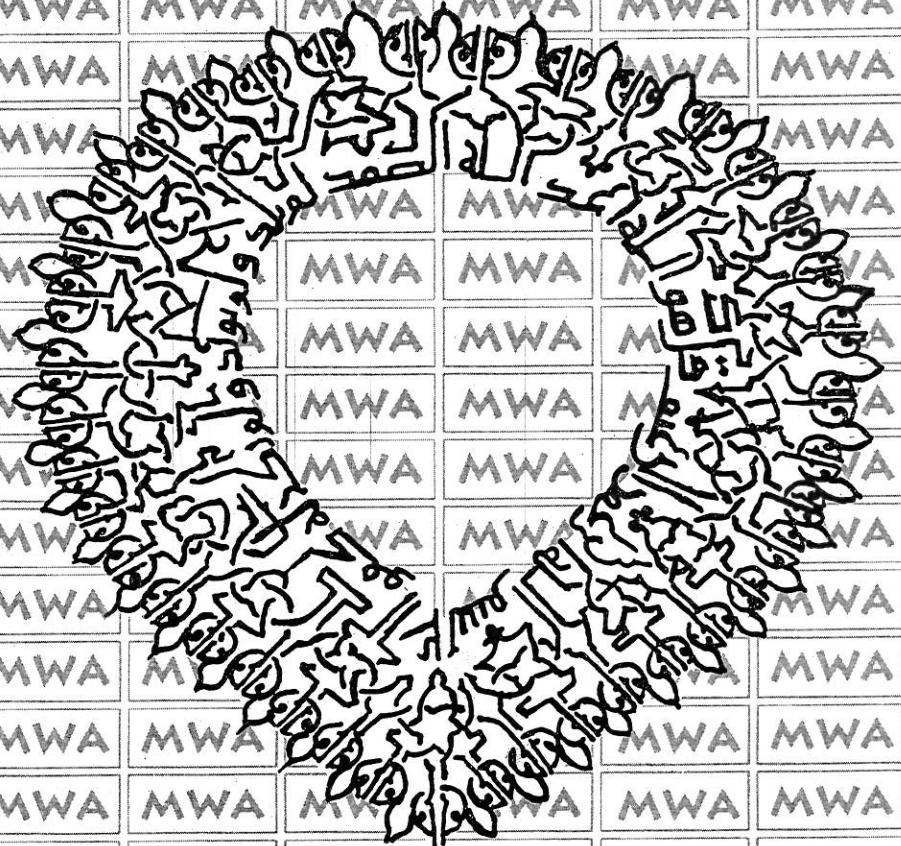


The Muslim Woman

The MUSLIM WOMAN

VOLUME XIV-No.2

February 1994 - Sha'ban/Ramadan 1414



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**THE MUSLIM WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION
WISHES ALL MUSLIMS
A BLESSED
RAMADAN**

رمضان كريم

Meetings of the MWA take place on the second Sunday of each month

WHY FAST ?

All civilizations of old, all religions have enjoined upon its adherent some days of fasting every year. Why did they do so? Was that a mere superstition, or had it some utility? We are living in an age when education is available to every citizen, rich or poor, and when there is no compulsion on the part of our governments to practice any of our spiritual duties therefore it may be worthwhile to study whether this antique duty of fasting is still in the interest of society. Such an objective study is particularly incumbent on a Muslim, since not only reason requires it, but even the Qur'an - the basis of Islam - enjoins it. In fact there is not a single spiritual duty imposed by the Qur'an which is not accompanied by an appeal to reason, to meditate, to think, to ponder in order to get the certainty that it is in man's own interest. Again and again the Qur'an exhorts not to follow blindly the customs of forefathers, but to think independently, so that one may rightfully be able individually and personally to be responsible for one's acts. Man must not act merely on instinct as ordinary animals, but deliberately, befitting the Reason which God has given him to the exclusion of other animals. Man must also not make puzzling mysteries, separating reason from religion and believing merely for the sake of believing with no real conviction.



No doubt there are differences of temperament among individuals, and all men do not aspire to the same thing. The worldly-wise before embarking on an enterprise, ascertain whether there is any material utility in the object. A pious hermit, on the other hand, seeks only the spiritual benefits and salvation in the Hereafter, giving up the material gain without the least compulsion on the part of anybody. The number of extremists of both these categories is however very limited: the over-whelming majority of human beings in any part of the world aspires to well-being simultaneously in the Hereafter as well as in the present worldly life. Islam is conspicuous in catering for the needs of man in this double need, and the Qur'an (2:201) praises those who pray to God "Give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter", as if such is the ideal which Islam inculcates. Since, fasting as a duty is imposed by the same Qur'an, it is up to us to seek and find out what is this-worldly good and what is other-worldly good in this institution.

More so, because man is composed neither of body solely, nor of spirit solely, but of both simultaneously; and any one-sided pursuit will upset the equilibrium, whereas the real interest of man requires a harmonious blending of body and soul and a

co-ordination between the two. If we work wholly and solely for the benefit of the spirit, we may become angels and even surpass them; but God has already created angels, and He has no need to add to their numbers. Similarly if our entire energy is spent for the material welfare and selfish interest, we may become beasts and devils and even surpass them; God has already created other beings for that purpose, and by our becoming beasts and devils we are only undoing the purpose of the creation of human beings who have been endowed with capacities for both spiritual and material achievements, and also with reason to distinguish and discriminate between good and evil. Let man, therefore, develop and harmoniously co-ordinate all the talents God has given him.

Before trying to find out the underlying principles of fasting, let us know the precise terms of the Qur'an in which this order has been promulgated:

This is what the Qur'an says about the fast:

"O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you - haply you may ward off evil - for a certain number of days. And for him who is sick among you, or on a journey, a similar number of other days; and for those who can afford it there is a ransom: the feeding of a man in need; but who does good of his own accord, it is better for him: and that ye fast is better for you if ye did but know. The month of Ramadan, in which was revealed the Qur'an as a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of guidance, and the Criterion (of right and wrong) And whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, (let him fast the same) number of other days. God desireth for you, ease; He desireth not hardship for you; and (He desireth) that ye should complete the period, and that ye should magnify God for having guided you, and that peradventure ye may be thankful. (2:183-5)".

Why Fast? Dr Muhammad Hamidullah, English edition, Switzerland 1961.

Continued from page 5

2) Optional fasting

This includes all voluntary fasts. It should be borne in mind that the Prophet asked Muslims not to fast for long periods, saying: "you have duties to fulfil even with regard to yourself".

3) Days on which it is forbidden to fast

Prophet Muhammad forbade fasting on the two Ids (*Id ul-Fitr* عيد الفطر) and (*Id ul-Adha* عيد الاضحى) and on the three days following *Id-ul Adha*. These are days of thanksgiving, joy and happiness, while fasting involves hardship.

Excerpts from:

Islam for Younger People, Ghulam Sarwar, The Muslim Educational Trust, London, 1986.
Why Fast? Dr Muhammad Hamidullah, English edition, Switzerland 1961.

Juniors' Corner

BASICS OF FASTING

Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is a religious obligation for Muslims. Fasting in this case means not eating nor drinking during the daytime, from dawn to sunset, during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month of the lunar calendar. The daily fast begins with the formulation of the intent of the act of abstinence. Minors and the infirm are exempt from fasting. The sick and the traveller are allowed to postpone the fast until they are well again or respectively are no longer travelling. Women must not fast during menstruation. The missed days they have to replace afterwards.

During the night, between sun-set and dawn, there is no limit on Muslims' normal activities, needs and desires. The recommendation of Prophet Muhammad has been that one should take a normal dinner (*iftar* افطار) at sun-set, and another light meal just before dawn (*sahur* سحر). Just as for beginning the fast, an intention is to be formulated for breaking it at sun-set. It is reported that Prophet Muhammad said upon breaking his fast: "O God, for Thee have I fasted, in Thee have I believed, and with Thy nourishment do I break the fast. Accept if from me, O Lord." Normally the fast should not affect the daily routine, and it should not be a pretext for neglecting any duties. Islam never approves - much less demands - of keeping vigil during the whole night and passing the day after in sleep and indolence. Fast means a greater effort, to perform all the usual duties and something more - prayers and more charity, and all this in the absence of food and drink.

What else is special about the month of Ramadan? *Tarawih* (تراويح) prayers are said after '*ishā*' (عشاء). Also, there is a night which is better than a thousand months. This night is called '*lailat ul-qadr*' (ليلة القدر) or the Night of Power. It falls within the last ten days of the month of Ramadan. In most Muslim countries the night of the 27th day of Ramadan is observed. This night is in commemoration of the first revelation of the Qur'an sent down to Prophet Muhammad. The festival after the month of Ramadan is called *Id ul-fitr*. This is a day of thanksgiving to Allah. It is a happy occasion for Muslims. It is also a religious duty of the Muslims to provide food for the poor. The idea is to encourage charity, which should in no way be ostentatious.

Says God: "for every act of charity I have prescribed a reward (according to the sincerity in its accomplishment) from ten to seven-hundred times its worth, fasting excepted, which is for me and I shall recompense it Myself, since one gives up his desire and food for only My sake."

O Allah, help us to fast in Ramadan.

Besides the obligatory fast as discussed above, there are other kinds of fasting.

1) Supererogatory or Additional fasting days

This includes fasts on specific days of the year, such as any six days of the month of *Shawwāl* (شوال); the ninth, tenth and eleventh day of the month of *Muharram* (محرم) the fifteenth day of the month of *Sha'bān* (شعبان), etc. These fasting days were recommended and practiced by the Prophet but are not obligatory.

Continued on page 4

HEALTH TALK

BETTER THAN BUTTER?

For years we have been seduced by the 'low in saturates, high in polyunsaturates' argument into accepting that the multiplicity of spreads (as against hard margarines) are better for us than butter, which is, apart from water, wholly saturated fat.

The appeal to those with rheumatoid arthritis can be doubly strong, since saturates can be bad news for this condition.

But word is getting around that these low fat spreads are not all they are said to be. Close to a rip-off, really, in health terms. To be fair, most of the argument against them is fairly new but what it amounts to is that as far as cholesterol is concerned, you may as well eat butter.

Let me explain. The trouble lies in the process which turns the healthy unsaturated vegetable oils into something spreadable: a hardening process called hydrogenation. This introduces trans fat, an unnatural chemically-produced substance. It is not known yet how well the body copes with this but far as cholesterol is concerned, the hydrogenated spreads deposit fat plaques in the arteries just as saturates do. End of the healthy hear claim.

There are now a few unhydrogenated spreads on the market, but as yet they are only available in health food shops. And with one exception they are just about double the price of the others. With a texture more akin to a cream or a gel, they spread so easily and thinly, you may use less of them. Of the ones I have tested, Suma is far and away the least expensive at 82p per 500 g, about half the price of the others, but its sunflower oil is not cold-pressed, thereby losing some of the nutrients. In Whole Earth's Superspread, cold-pressed soya oil combined with soya protein means chemical hardening is not necessary. Nor in the harder vegetable oils - palm and coconut - employed in some other unhydrogenated spreads. The saturate percentage here is the lowest I have found, about 10% (All oils contain some saturates which our bodies actually need - a diet very high in polyunsaturates may not be good for us).

Vitaquell Extra comes close in saturates at 15%, considered to be the maximum to meet the low-saturate claim. Cholesterol-free, it is also cold-pressed sunflower oil. The hardening is achieved by the addition of a little palm oil, a saturated vegetable oil.

None of them taste very good: a bit flat, no doubt due to being low in salt. Superspread is perhaps the most acceptable.

AND WHICH IS THE BEST OIL TO US?

What kind of oil are you using? Vegetable, of course. Yes, but what kind? it is a case of look at the label again.

Some cheaper 'vegetable oils' are a blend, and may include palm oil which is a saturated oil. In oils, you are looking for mono-unsaturates as well as poly-unsaturates.

Olive oil has been hailed the finest but rapeseed comes within a whisker for monos, and is a great deal cheaper - cheapest of all, in fact. So do hazelnut (costly, though) and the branded blended oils ('Spry', 'Crisp'n Dry', etc). If you are using olive oil for flavour do not waste the expensive 'Extra Virgin', and 'Virgin' on cooking, as much of the beautiful, fruity flavour will be lost. Keep them for dressings.

A word about frying; when oxygen comes into contact with very hot oil it can produce oxidised fatty acids. A recent issue of Which? suggests that these may increase the formation of chemicals in our bodies; enough of them might damage body cells, possibly contributing to coronary heart disease and premature ageing.

Until we know how much oxidised fat we can safely eat, be cautious about frying: do not re-use oil for deep frying more than four or five times, do not re-use it for shallow frying at all, and store cooking oils in the dark, away from sunlight. That is mine in the cupboard and off the worktop!

When I was young, I used olive oil with a dash of vinegar as a sun lotion. It gave a lovely tan and was useful for the beach picnic salad. No screening factor, of course - we did not know about that then. A lot of things we still do not but I am keeping an eye on them for you.

Monounsaturates - highest first:

- 1) Rapeseed (also the cheapest, corn, safflower and sunflower, branded vegetable)
- 2) Hazelnut, grapeseed and walnut oils also rate very well, but are very expensive for everyday use.

Bobby Freeman 'Activities News, Number 59, Winter 1993.

POETRY

HE IS, AND THERE IS WITH HIM NO AFTER
 NOR BEFORE, NOR ABOVE NOR BELOW, NOR FAR
 NOR NEAR, NOR UNION NOR DIVISION, NOR
 HOW NOR WHERE NOR WHEN, NO TIME NOR
 MOMENT NOR AGE, NOR BEING NOR PLACE.
 AND HE IS NOW AS HE WAS. HE IS THE ONE
 WITHOUT ONENESS AND THE SINGLE WITHOUT
 SINGLENESSE. HE IS NOT COMPOSED OF NAME
 AND NAMED, FOR HIS NAME IS HE AND HIS
 NAMED IS HE.

From Muḥī al-Dīn Ibn Arabī, Risālat al-Aḥadiyyah (thirteenth century), in Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (1901), p. 809. See also The Sense of Unity, Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, Chicago, 1973.

KITCHEN TALK



RAMADAN DIET

DISHES FROM NORTH YEMEN

During the month of Ramadan the diet varies a little from the ordinary in many Muslim countries. In North Yemen one may find the following dishes on the menu:

shufūt	- bread dish	salātah	- salat
hāmiḍah	- fenugreek sauce	shūrbah	- savoury porridge
qushrī	- horse-radish	muhallabiyya	- pudding

Al-Shufūt

The staple food of Yemen is bread. It is eaten in three different ways. Either it is dipped in a relish, eaten dry after a meal, or eaten toasted with coffee.

Al-Shufūt consists of fermented bread (sorghum flour), the shape and consistency of a pancake (lahūh). Over the bread is poured butter-milk containing crushed leeks, mint and spices. This dish is eaten with salad made of lettuce, tomatoes, red onions and (raisin) vinegar.

Al-Hāmiḍah

Al-hāmiḍah is a sauce made of fenugreek (seeds or flour), salt, sugar, and (raisin) vinegar. The sauce is eaten by dipping horse-radish into it.

Al-Shūrbah

Al-shūrbah is made of coarsely ground wheat or rice flour, skimmed sour milk, spring onions, water, salt, pepper and butter-fat (ghee). This dish is eaten during Ramadan instead of fūl (beans), because beans are rather heavy to digest.

ADVANCE NOTICE

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE MARCH MEETING WILL NOT TAKE PLACE
DUE TO THE HOLIDAY OF ID AL-FITR AL-MUBARAK

ID DINNER

WILL BE HELD ON SUNDAY 10TH APRIL

AT

THE ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTRE
146 PARK ROAD, LONDON NW8 7RG

(Details to follow)

دَار لِرْعَايَةِ اَطْفَالِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

دَار لِرْعَايَةِ اَطْفَالِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فِي بَرِيطَانِيَا

بمناسبة شهر رمضان الكريم
تعلن جمعية المرأة المسلمة أنها تعتزم شراء دار جديدة لرعاية
اطفال المسلمين في بريطانيا. والجدير بالإشارة ان الدار الحالية
المعروفة بـ "مدينة هاوس" قد اشترت في عام ١٩٨٠ وهي لا تفي
بالحاجة المستجدة. واننا نأمل بعون الله تعالى وتعاونكم جمع
بمبلغ ٣٠٠٠ ر. ٢٠٠ جنيه استرليني

تحويل الدار القديمة لتغطية النفقات

كما تقرر تحويل الدار القديمة الى شقق سكن للايجار لتغطية
نفقات الدار الجديدة لرعاية الاطفال المسلمين. وعليه فاننا
نحتاج الى مبلغ ١٠٠٠ ر. ١٠٠ جنيه استرليني

واننا إذ نهيب كافة المسلمين لتقديم التبرعات في هذا الشهر
الكريم. والله في عون العبد مادام العبد في عون أخيه.

ترسل الشيكات بأسم جمعية المرأة المسلمة إلى

MUSLIM WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION
Madina House, 146 Gloucester Place, London NW1 6DT

أو إلى الحساب في البنك مباشرة

The National Westminster Bank,
Royal Garden Branch, Kensington High Street,
London W8 5EQ

(Acc. no. 25941364; Sort Number 50-30-10).

وماجزاء الاكسان إلا الاكسان

APPEAL

NEW PREMISES

Please donate generously for the Madina House Project, started by the Muslim Women's Association (Reg. Charity No: 264608), in 1980. We hope (insha-Allah) to raise at least £300,000 to buy a new home for children in need. The present house is inadequate for the needs of the youngsters.

CONVERSION

We propose to convert the present premises into flats for letting as a future income for Madina House. For the conversion and refurbishment of the house we need to raise funds in the region of £100,000.

Please support this important project of the MWA by sending your donations, however small or big.

Cheques should be made payable to "The Muslim Women's Association (U.K.)" and should be crossed "Account Madina House". Please send it either to

Madina House,
146 Gloucester Place, London NW1 6DT

or to

The National Westminster Bank,
Royal Garden Branch, Kensington High Street, London
W8 5EQ

(Acc. no. 25941364; Sort Number 50-30-10).
May Allah reward you. Amīn.

MWA BUSINESS - January 1994

Nisa Ali

The January meeting was opened with the recitation of Al-Fatiha by Dr. Zubeda Osman, who also recited sura seventy-four (Muddathhir - "One Wrapped Up"). Members joined in the discussion, giving their views on how they understood certain verses and what they feel by these verses. "Nay verily; By the moon, and by the Night as it retreateth, and the Dawn as it shineth forth, ... this is but one of the mighty (portents)".

Apologies were received from: Mrs Gul Amīn, Mrs M Badawi, Mrs L El-Droubie, Mrs A Rekhi.

Abroad are: Mrs Q Bashir, Mrs S Gaffar, Mrs S. Sherif, Mrs S Youssef.

Business: It was decided to have the Id Dinner on April the 10th at the Islamic Cultural Centre, 146 Park Road, NW8 7RG. The next issue of "The Muslim Woman" will be an Eid publication in March.

One of our members, Mrs Samina Hasan, took us on a journey to Makka, sharing with us her experience at being in Makka and Madina, and the performing of Umra. Our congratulations to you and May Allah accept your supplications.

Some members shared their experiences comparing several years ago with present-day changes.

Samina also shared her different feelings of Jeddah to the way she felt in Pakistan.

We thank you for sharing your experience with us.

News: Our President Mrs Khanam Hassan represented the MWA at the Women's Council Bazaar which was held in London on January the 10th. The President also represented the MWA at The Arab Women's Bazaar which was held on 3rd February at the Islamic Cultural Centre.

Congratulations: To Laila and Mushtaq on the birth of their second daughter. Also to the proud grandparents Dr and Mrs Z Badawi.