

Why I Observe Ramadan

Transpersonal coach **Cyntha Gonzalez** remembers how her initiation into Ramadan came 18 years ago, when a Moroccan family invited her to Marrakech to participate in this fasting ritual directly. These warm people not only opened their home and table to her, but most importantly, they opened their hearts as they undertook one of the most demanding physical, emotional and spiritual disciplines she had ever witnessed.

As I approach my 18th Ramadan season, I ask "Will I renew the personal vow I took with myself to observe Ramadan yearly, although I am not a Muslim". The answer continues to be yes. I will once again join this collective mass of Muslims and observing non-Muslims worldwide, who from sunrise to sundown for the entire lunar month will say no to food, drink, sexuality, cigarettes or alcohol and as I have also learned, will also desist from uttering words of scorn.

Physical Detox

For many, the onset of Ramadan is met with the challenge of a caffeine-withdrawal headache or an annoying sluggishness. The first three days tend to be the most challenging. Stored toxins in the liver begin to release themselves, circulating in the blood stream until their evacuation a few days later. Once toxins are no longer ingested, the body can rest and begin the process of elimination, rather than just work to maintain the status quo. Once the initial discomfort subsides, a wonderful, crystal-clear lucidity takes over one's thoughts, a tonicity permeates the physical body and the eyes become luminous.

If one eats so little as the Prophet did - his one date and cup of *labneh* - how is sustenance ensured? My experience has shown me that instead of eating food, I need to ingest 'God'. This may be in the form of prayer;



meditation, the reading of spiritual texts, or communing with like-minded souls - whatever it is that nourishes me and takes me to a direct contact with my own Divine nature. With this extraordinary opportunity for an entire month to practice dominion over the physical instincts - sometimes gruellingly moment to moment - I reach a sublime relationship to that part of me that is beyond my more worldly, personality identity. I return to the spiritual Source.

Emotional Detox

It is similar in the emotional department. As one continues to pass the day with only prayer, contemplation and rest as

nourishment, those unresolved, niggling inter-personal conflicts demand to be reckoned with. Food, caffeine, drink and cigarettes are no longer there to keep down these inner, nagging, unanswered emotional issues. The unfinished business begs to be faced. However, without the internal work of forgiveness, self-examination and feeling the feelings, one is unequipped emotionally to deal with such challenges.

Regardless of the social and festive aspect, Ramadan remains to be a most demanding practice that escapes no one. For Ramadan to be genuinely observed, one needs to have a basic foundation of self-awareness and an understanding of one's emotional inner life. Many are criticized for sleeping all-day and Ramadan-tenting all night. Such evasion simply reveals how truly emotionally demanding this holy month is. I find everyone does the best they can, with whatever emotional tools they have.

It is required to abstain from sexual activity from sunrise to sunset. Why? Many use sex for a variety of reasons, beyond the expression of love for their partner. They can use sex as a form of power, emotional blackmail, a bargaining tool, a release,

Fasting

The Koran mandates fasting during the month of Ramadan

The month of Ramadan is that in which the Koran was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the distinction; therefore whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast therein, and whoever is sick or upon a journey, then (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days... (sura 2.185, known as The Cow)

Fasting, or *sawm*, during the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Why fast?

- to develop patience and self-control
- to learn sympathy for the deprived
- to cleanse the body and mind
- to gain appreciation for Allah's bounty (PBUH)
- to demonstrate the depth of one's commitment
- to protect against sin.

a proof of being loved or a needy fix to feel connected.

Aside from abstaining from sexual relations during daylight hours, women are encouraged as well to be more modest and humble in their dress. Anne Wilson-Schaeff, in *Escape from Intimacy*, names our mild or full-blown sex addictions as being more than an escape to food, alcohol and cigarettes, but also to seduction. By letting go of seduction and more ego-based sex, we are challenged with the knowledge of accepting that we are lovable just as we are. The invitation is to go to Source, rather than feed these dependencies otherwise.

Spiritual Detox

This means cleansing the psyche of those fears that inevitably come with being human; the fear of no control, of death and the dread of suffering. Fasting takes away any avoidance of such realities. One is then brought face to face with the inevitable *angst* that comes with this existential territory. Prayer and silent meditation are vehicles that can be supportive in this spiritual challenge.

How is the fast broken? Is food gobbled down instead of mindfully savoured? Is there overeating? Is food being squirreled away, in the panic that there won't be enough later? Surrender and trust in Source to provide the means to go beyond these fears.

Zakat, a form of charity, is also an example of spiritual detox. Aside from the compassionate sharing with those in need, *Zakat* also offers the opportunity to give even if one does not have much. Trust is needed to believe that Source will provide.

Personally, when I am in the thralls of fasting, struggling to hang on another two hours, I feel a strong connection to the Muslim people all over this planet, as I know they are earnestly fasting and practicing this high form of spiritual discipline that I have come to know in my way. This gives me a direct, experiential *camaraderie* with



them, especially during these times when great misunderstandings, fears and tensions continue to run high in regards to Islam.

This year will be especially demanding as Ramadan falls during the hottest period of the Northern Hemisphere. I will be obliged to slow down even more as I use stillness, pray and meditation to nourish and hydrate myself in the greater challenge of the high temperatures.

However, the benefits are so satisfying; that at the end of each period of Ramadan, I marvel at the refined connection I have to

Spirit and to myself. I observe an increase in my physical, emotional and spiritual stamina that not only gives me a greater quality of life for the rest of the year, but also allows me to better share my distinct gifts with the world.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and the most sacred of the twelve months. The name Ramadan derives from the Arabic word for intense heat and sun-scorched ground. A number of reasons have been advanced to explain the linguistic connection

- It refers to the hot, dry sensation of thirst during this month of fasting
- Ramadan scorches out evil like the sun scorches the earth
- Just as heat shapes and influences all matter — organic and inorganic — so does Ramadan shape and influence the believer

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