

Ramadan — The Month of Fasting

Fasting during the Islamic month of Ramadan is known as the fourth pillar of Islam. I fasted during Ramadan even before I became Muslim. I loved the way that my stomach growling and realizing that I was thirsty made me think of God.

I was quite upset when I was told that I could not fast on the days that I had my period.... Yes, it was another “bull of inequity.”

They tried to placate me by telling me that it was like I was sick, and God was making it easier for me. But my male friends were fasting even when they had colds. There was no equality here.

Eventually I found out that the Quran does not restrict women from fasting at any time during Ramadan.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the practice, Ramadan is one of the lunar months of the Islamic calendar. During this lunar month, Muslims do not eat or drink from the earliest light of dawn until sunset. As you can imagine, the evening meal is usually quite festive.

Here is the major Quranic passage on fasting.

*O you who believe, fasting is decreed for you,
as it was decreed for those before you,
that you may attain salvation.
Specific days (are designated for fasting);
if one is ill or traveling,
an equal number of other days
may be substituted.
Those who can fast, but with great difficulty,
may substitute feeding one poor person
for each day of breaking the fast.*

*If one volunteers (more righteous works),
it is better. But fasting is the best for you,
if you only knew.*

*Ramadan is the month during which
the Quran was revealed,
providing guidance for the people,
clear teachings, and the statute book.*

*Those of you who witness this month
shall fast therein.*

*Those who are ill or traveling
may substitute the same number of other days.*

*God wishes for you convenience,
not hardship, that you may fulfill
your obligations, and to glorify God
for guiding you, and to express
your appreciation.*

(Quran: The Final Testament 2:183-5)

Though it may sound strange, God makes it easy to fast. There is something that happens during Ramadan that is inexplicable except to say that God makes it possible. We see in these verses that if you are ill or traveling, or if it really is a hardship to fast, you may feed the poor instead. *"But fasting is the best for you, if you only knew."* Thus, even if you say that a woman who is menstruating is "ill," it is still better for her to fast.

There are situations where fasting is not a good idea, so God gives a way to substitute righteous work for fasting. However, for most natural situations, like menstruation and even pregnancy, fasting is not a problem if you are careful to eat and drink enough during the night. Many of my friends have fasted during their pregnancies, and none with adverse effects. Of course they were in consultation with their obstetricians. In situations deemed unsafe, they have not fasted.

Fasting during Ramadan is another Muslim practice that should never be denied to women just because their bodies are doing what God has designed them to do.