

## The Holy Month of Ramadan



The month of Ramadan occurs at a slightly earlier season each year because the Islamic calendar is based on cycles of the moon, not the sun. A “side benefit” is that the true meaning of the occasion is not lost by being connected with “springtime” or “harvest” festivals.

Ramadan is a month of prayer and fasting, so it has sometimes been called “the Muslim Lent.” Ramadan has its own unique character, however. Even though it requires great discipline, most Muslims do not see it as a time of hardship or sorrow. It is a yearly opportunity to re-focus both the mind and the body on our true ground of existence – God. In fact, Ramadan often has a joyful, almost festive atmosphere.

In addition to refraining from food, drink, and other pleasures, during daylight hours from Muslims will spend extra time in prayers. Some take the opportunity to read the entire Qur’an in 30 parts – one each day. As the month progresses, the fasting begins to take on its own natural rhythm, and the spiritual part of the discipline becomes more intense. Many people will begin to spend more and more time at the mosque for individual or group prayers. This is also a time when many Muslims fulfill their obligation to give charity to the poor.

One night during the last week of Ramadan is considered the “Night of Power” or the “Night of Destiny” – the anniversary of the first time that the angel Gabriel brought down God’s revelation so that humans could begin to hear it. On this night many mosques will hold prayers all night long, often reciting the entire Qur’an in one night.

The month of fasting ends with “Eid al-Fitr,” a 3-day festival of feasting and celebrating friendships with visits and sharing of refreshments together. It is a time when the brother-hood and sister-hood of believers feels powerfully sweet.

## The Struggle of Good vs. Evil — Jihād



All three faiths in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition recognize that evil is present in the world, even though God created good. All three teach that an important part of a life of faith is for each believer to actively resist what is evil and support what is good. (Christians may compare with 1 Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians chapter 6 and similar texts.)

Islam teaches that when believers witness an act of evil they must try to stop it from happening, if possible. If they do not have the power to stop the evil, they must speak out against it. If circumstances prevent even speaking out against the evil, then the least believers can do is to make firm resolve in their heart against that evil.

Yet the Judeo-Christian-Muslim faiths also teach that evil is skilled at disguising itself to appear good, and that our own selfish motives can often deceive us. For that reason, the struggle for the good must be waged – not just against the evil around us – but also against the evil which is within our own hearts. (Compare Romans 7:21ff.)

In Islam, the struggle of good vs. evil is called Jihād – “striving for the good.” Muslims often remind us of two jihāds mentioned in the Qur’an, a Greater Jihād, and a Lesser Jihād, one of them against evil in the world around us and the other against evil within us. Surprisingly (or not), the struggle against evil in the world around us is the Lesser Jihād, while the Greater Jihād is the struggle between good and evil which we wage in our own hearts. It is the inner struggle which is most difficult and also most important, for unless we recognize and combat the evil within us, we will never successfully resist the evil around us.

Both Christians and Muslims must take care not to be misled by anyone who uses the language of spiritual warfare as an excuse to commit acts of violence on other human beings. Repel evil with that which is better – Qur’an 23:9; 41:34. Jihād is a struggle for the healing of creation, not its destruction.