



“SHARING RAMADAN” RESOURCE GUIDE 2011



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As-salaamu alaykum (Peace be unto you),

To more than one billion Muslims worldwide, the month of Ramadan serves as a season of spiritual renewal and gratitude for the bounties bestowed upon all human beings. It is a month in which families become closer, communities strengthen their foundations and individuals reaffirm their spiritual roots.

In a recent poll commissioned by CAIR, we found that 1-in-4 Americans has a negative perception about Islam. However, the survey also indicated that most of those who held positive views about Islam had some sort of interaction in the past with Muslims and Islamic culture.

For these reasons, CAIR is calling on local American Muslim communities to take the month of Ramadan to reach out to their neighbors of other faiths and ethnic traditions in a wonderful new nationwide initiative titled “Sharing Ramadan.”

‘Sharing Ramadan’ is an annual campaign started by CAIR for local communities to host *iftar* dinner receptions and open houses for our neighbors of other traditions. Since sharing and appreciation are essential components of Ramadan, we hope local mosques, community centers and Islamic schools will take this opportunity to invite their neighbors to join them for a meal during an *iftar*.

In this packet, your community will find some necessary tips on how to organize and publicize “Sharing Ramadan” *iftars*. Samples of press releases and other publicity materials are included and, inshallah, will help to make this initiative successful.

We suggest that each community interested in hosting a “Sharing Ramadan” *iftar* form a local committee in charge of organizing the event. This committee can be responsible for sending invitations out to local churches, synagogues and civic groups. The committee can also use the draft press release included to send to local media outlets who may want to cover the event. These are only a few of the ways that this packet can help our local communities successfully share their Ramadan.

Finally, on behalf of all of us, may you all have a blessed Ramadan. During this season, we seek a wider and deeper understanding of Islam and American Muslims by the general public.

May this month help reaffirm our spiritual commitment to our families, our communities and our world.

Your brother in Islam,

Nihad Awad
National Executive Director
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

A. Guide to Organizing an Iftar

1. Form a Committee

- Form a “Sharing Ramadan” committee in your community to help in this effort;
- Once a “Share Ramadan” committee has been formed, please email CAIR at info@cair.com so we can help keep track of all the local communities participating in this nationwide initiative and publicize your activities on our web site;

2. Utilize Sample Forms

- Copy the sample news release and invitations and fill in all bracketed items with local information;
- Feel free to add or subtract details and customize the quotes;

3. Order Brochures

- Order “Welcome to our Ramadan Fast Breaking” Brochures from CAIR by emailing the quantity of your order, address and your desired shipping method to info@cair.com;

4. Print Brochures

- Make several hundred copies of the sample brochure and place your local information on the flier;

5. Compile Invitees

- Compile a comprehensive list of invites by researching all the churches, synagogues, city and state political offices in your area;
- This may be done from previous contacts with your communities, by contacting local media outlets for addresses or even searching through the local Yellow Pages;
- It is important that for prominent politicians and religious leaders, a **personal phone call** from a committee member should follow a formal written invitation in order to ensure participation;

6. Send Invitations

- After compiling your list of local interfaith religious, political and civic leaders, begin mailing out invitations;

7. Build a Media List

- Build a media list by calling local TV stations to ask for the name and fax numbers of their “assignment editors” ;
- Call the daily newspapers to ask for the same information about their “city editors” ;
- Call the news/talk radio stations to ask for their “news directors” ;

- Call directory assistance to find out if there is an ASSOCIATED PRESS bureau in your area. Ask for the name, email and fax number of their AP “daybook editor” ;
- It is best if you research your own list, but you may also call CAIR to receive a customized local media list;

8. Send out the News Release

- Email and fax the news release to local media outlets (per the contact persons listed in point 5. above);
- Call *one day* before the event to make sure these individuals received your release;
- Make sure that the “daybook editors” in particular get the release;

9. Designate a Media Coordinator

- Appoint a Media Coordinator from your ‘Share Ramadan’ committee who will handle all media interviews related to the actual event;
- Participants in the iftar should be instructed to refer interview requests *only* to that designated person;
- The media contact person should prepare for interviews by creating a list of “talking points” that are designed to deal with anticipated questions;

10. Educate Community

- Educate the members of your local community by explaining the necessity of building a positive image of the mosque, school or Islamic community center in the surrounding area;
- Let them know that experience of other communities has shown that a positive neighborhood image offers many benefits;
- Ask for input concerning the details of when and at what time the iftar should be held. There are no hard and fast rules for such things;

11. Prepare the Venue

- Clean and prepare the mosque or local venue;
- The first impression is one that will last. Have a mosque clean up day prior to the open house.
- Consider touching up areas that need painting;

12. Set-up Reception

- Prepare a reception area where guests can be received, informed about mosque etiquette and served refreshments;
- Have greeters at the door to direct arriving guests. Have knowledgeable people conduct tours of the facility;
- Do not leave guests unattended;

- Give each guest a nametag;
- Ensure that there are male volunteers available for male guests and female volunteers for female guests to give tours through gender segregated areas of the mosque;
- Be sure to clean the mosque after the event;

13. Mosque Etiquette

- Inform your guests of mosque etiquette before they arrive (see “Welcome to Our Mosque” brochure);
- This will make them feel at ease;
- Be ready to answer questions about prayer, separation of men and women and other common issues;

14. Post signs

- Put up signs at appropriate locations in the facility to help guests find their way around. Many of them have never been to a mosque before;

15. Pamphlets and Handouts

- Select literature to be given to the guests. Avoid material with a strong political message;
- Do not push materials on guests;
- Be sure to have displays and make presentations about Islam and Muslims;

16. Mosque Etiquette

- Inform your guests of mosque etiquette before they arrive (see “Welcome to Our Mosque” brochure);

17. Food

- The food should represent a variety of ethnic dishes from different cultures;
- This is an excellent introduction to the diversity of the community;

18. Document the Event

- Record the event by videotaping the iftar and taking pictures of the event, as well as counting the number of attendees.
- The photos and info on your event can be later shared with your guests, sent to the media and copies of the video, pictures and newspaper articles should also be forwarded to CAIR so that we can include it on our website and chronicle the national success of this project.

19. Thanking Guests

- Please do not forget to send “thank you” notes to the religious, political and civic leaders who attended the iftar;

- This will ensure that the channels of communication between your mosques and other local religious and civic leaders will remain open and will hopefully improve interfaith dialogue in your local areas for years to come;

20. Send CAIR photos and articles

- Send copies of pictures, videos and news articles about your successful 'Share Ramadan' iftar events. This will enable us to document the national success of this wonderful project;

“Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: “Whoever fasts in the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith, and hoping for a reward from God, all his previous sins will be forgiven.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 3, Hadith 125)”

“Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: Ramadan “is the month of sharing with others.” (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 614)”

B. Islam and Muslims FAQs

Q: What is Islam?

A: Islam is not a new religion. It is the same truth that God revealed to all His prophets (Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus, etc.) throughout history. Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life. Muslims follow a religion of peace, mercy and forgiveness.

Q: Who are Muslims and what do they believe?

A: Muslims believe in One, Unique, and Incomparable God, creator of the universe. They believe in the Day of Judgement and individual accountability for actions. Muslims believe in a chain of prophets beginning with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, David, Solomon, and Jesus. God's eternal message was reaffirmed and finalized by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on them all). One becomes a Muslim by saying, "There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God." By this declaration, the person announces faith in all of God's messengers. There are an estimated 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide. No more than 20 percent of Muslims live in the Arabic-speaking world. The country with the largest Muslim population is Indonesia.

Q: What is the Quran?

A: The Quran is the record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic. It was memorized by Muhammad and then dictated to his companions. The text of the Quran was cross-checked during the life of the Prophet. The 114 chapters of the Quran have remained unchanged through the centuries. Translations of the meaning of the Quran exist in almost all languages.

Q: What are the "Five Pillars" of Islam?

A: 1) The Declaration of Faith - This consists of the two sentence declaration described above. 2) Prayer - Muslims perform five obligatory prayers each day. Islamic prayers are a direct link between the worshiper and God. Islam has no hierarchical authority or priesthood. A learned Muslim chosen by each congregation leads the prayers. 3) Zakat - One of the most important principles of Islam is that all things belong to God and that wealth is held in trust by human beings. Zakat, or charitable giving, "purifies" wealth by setting aside a portion for those in need. This payment is usually two and a half percent of one's capital. 4) Fasting - Every year in the Islamic lunar month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from first light until sunset. The fast is another method of self-purification. 5) Pilgrimage - A pilgrimage to Mecca, or Hajj, is an obligation for those who are physically or financially able.

Q: What about the American Muslim community?

A: There are an estimated 7 million Muslims in America. The Muslim community in America is made up of people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and national origins. There are almost 2,000 mosques, Islamic schools and Islamic centers in America. Muslims are active in all walks of life. Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in this country and around the world.

Q: What about Muslim women?

A: Under Islamic law, women have always had the right to own property, receive an education and otherwise take part in community life. Men and women are to be respected equally. The Islamic rules for modest dress apply to both women and men equally. (Men cannot expose certain parts of their bodies, wear gold or silk, etc.) If a particular society oppresses women, it does so in spite of Islam, not because of it.

Q: What is *Jihad*?

A: “Jihad” does not mean “holy war.” Literally, *jihad* means to “struggle,” strive and exert effort. It is a central and broad Islamic concept that includes struggle against evil inclinations within oneself, struggle to improve the quality of life in society, struggle in the battlefield for self-defense (e.g., - having a standing army for national defense), or fighting against tyranny or oppression.

FACT I

There are an estimated 7 million Muslims in America. The Muslim community in America is made up of people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and national origins.

FACT II

The worldwide population of Muslims is 1.2 billion.

FACT III

Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in this country and around the world.

FACT IV

Demographers say that Islam will soon be the number two religion in America. (This may have already occurred.)

FACT V

Demographers also say that by the year 2025, one in four people on earth will be a Muslim.

FACT VI

There are more than 2,000 mosques, Islamic schools and Islamic centers in America. Muslims are active in all walks of life.

C. Ramadan FAQs

Q: How did the fast during Ramadan become obligatory for Muslims?

A: The revelations from God to the Prophet Muhammad that would eventually be compiled as the Quran began during Ramadan in the year 610, but the fast of Ramadan did not become a religious obligation for Muslims until the year 624. The obligation to fast is explained in the second chapter of the Quran:

“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint...Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting...” (Chapter 2, verses 183 and 185)

Q: What do Muslims believe they gain from fasting?

A: One of the main benefits of Ramadan is an increased compassion for those in need of the necessities of life, a sense of self-purification and reflection and a renewed focus on spirituality. Muslims also appreciate the feeling of togetherness shared by family and friends throughout the month. Perhaps the greatest practical benefit is the yearly lesson in self-restraint and discipline that can carry forward to other aspects of a Muslim's life such as work and education.

Q: Why does Ramadan begin on a different day each year?

A: Because Ramadan is a lunar month, it begins about eleven days earlier each year. Throughout a Muslim's lifetime, Ramadan will fall both during winter months, when the days are short, and summer months, when the days are long and the fast is more difficult. In this way, the difficulty of the fast is evenly distributed between Muslims living in the northern and southern hemispheres.

Q: What is *Lailat ul-Qadr*?

A: *Lailat ul-Qadr* (“Night of Power”) marks the anniversary of the night on which the Prophet Muhammad first began receiving revelations from God, through the angel Gabriel. An entire chapter in the Quran deals with this night: *“We have indeed revealed this (Message) in the Night of Power: and what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by God's permission, on every errand. Peace!...This until the rise of morn.”* (Chapter 97) Muslims believe *Lailat ul-Qadr* is one of the last odd-numbered nights of Ramadan.

Q: Is it difficult to perform the fast in America?

A: In many ways, fasting in American society is easier than fasting in areas where the climate is extremely hot. This year at least, the number of daylight hours will be less than when Ramadan occurs during the spring or summer. In Muslim countries, most people are observing the fast, so there are fewer temptations such as luncheon meetings, daytime celebrations and offers of food from friends. Many American Muslims would prefer a daytime work shift during Ramadan so that they may break the fast with their families and attend evening prayers.

Q: How can non-Muslim co-workers and friends help someone who is fasting?

A: Employers, co-workers and teachers can help by understanding the significance of Ramadan and by showing a willingness to make minor allowances for its physical demands. Special consideration can be given to such things as requests for vacation time, the need for flexible early morning or evening work schedules and lighter homework assignments. It is also very important that Muslim workers and students be given time to attend Eid prayers at the end of Ramadan. Eid is as important to Muslims as Christmas and Yom Kippur are to Christians and Jews. A small token such as a card (there are Eid cards available from Muslim bookstores) or baked goods given to a Muslim co-worker during *Eid ul-Fitr* would also be greatly appreciated. Hospital workers should be aware that injections and oral medications might break the fast. Patients should be given the opportunity to decide whether or not their condition exempts them from fasting.

Q: Do people normally lose weight during Ramadan?

A: Some people do lose weight, but others may not. It is recommended that meals eaten during Ramadan be light, but most people can't resist sampling special sweets and foods associated with Ramadan.

D. Appendix

The following section contains sample documents which you may find useful in organizing your local iftar.

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1. SAMPLE PROGRAM

30 minutes before sunset

Invitees arrive
- Registration/Tour of Mosque
- Mingling/Networking

15 minutes before sunset

Welcome and Opening Remarks
- What is Ramadan?
- Significance of *Iftar*

5 minutes before sunset

Handing out of water and dates
- Hand out translation of *adhan*

Sunset (*Maghrib*)

Adhan (Call to Prayer)
- *Iftar* meal

10 minutes after sunset

Maghrib (Sunset) Prayer

15 minutes after sunset

Dinner
- Closing Remarks/Thank You
- Networking

(Remember to take still pictures and video of the event and send copies to CAIR.)

2. SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

[Name of coordinating committee]
[Address]
[Phone]
[Fax]
[E-mail]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - **[Insert Date]**

- MEDIA ADVISORY -

LOCAL MUSLIMS HOLD 'SHARING RAMADAN' EVENT People of all faiths invited for dinner celebrating Ramadan

WHAT: On **[insert day]**, **[insert date]**, members of the local Muslim community will celebrate reach out to their neighbors of all faiths by hosting a traditional Ramadan *iftar*, or fast-breaking dinner, at **[name and location of event]**.

"As more than one billion Muslims worldwide celebrate Ramadan by fasting and appreciating the blessings given to us, it is equally important for the American Muslim community to reach out to our neighbors as an example of true Islamic ideals," said **[name and title of media spokesperson]**. "We are here to show our friends and neighbors that American Muslims will continue to be contributing members of our society," said **[last name of spokesperson]**.

Ramadan is the month on the Islamic lunar calendar during which Muslims abstain from food, drink and other sensual pleasures from break of dawn to sunset. The fast is performed to learn discipline, self-restraint and generosity, while obeying God's commandments. Fasting (along with the declaration of faith, daily prayers, charity, and pilgrimage to Mecca) is one of the "five pillars" of Islam. The end of Ramadan will be marked by communal prayers called "Eid ul-Fitr," or Feast of the Fast-Breaking, on **[insert date]**. (Because Ramadan is a lunar month, the actual date is governed by sighting of the new moon. Ask local coordinators for exact dates and times.)

There are an estimated **[number of Muslims]** in **[your area]** and some seven million nationwide. Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in this country and around the world.

WHEN: **[INSERT DAY AND DATE]**

WHERE: **[INSERT LOCATION OF IFTAR]**

CONTACT: **[NAMES AND NUMBERS OF MEDIA CONTACT PEOPLE]**

- END -

3. “WELCOME TO OUR RAMADAN” BROCHURE

WELCOME TO OUR RAMADAN FAST-BREAKING

Welcome to the *Iftar*!

The *iftar*, or ‘fast-breaking,’ is an integral part of Muslim community life during the sacred month of Ramadan. At sunset every night during Ramadan, Muslims around the world gather in their homes and mosques to break their fast together with their families and communities. This communal meal comes after a day of self-discipline in which Muslims abstain from food and drink and make an extra effort to avoid impatience and harsh words. After eating, Muslims will spend the evening seeking the pleasure of God through contemplation and prayer.

The Islamic Greeting

The Islamic greeting frequently heard in the mosque is the Arabic phrase, “As-salamu alaykum” meaning “peace be with you”. The customary response is “Wa alaykum as-salaam, which means “and with you be peace”.

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan (pronounced rom-uh-dahn) is the ninth lunar month of the calendar used by Muslims. This month is special because the *Qur’an* (Islamic holy scripture) was first revealed during this month. During Ramadan, all healthy adult Muslims must fast by abstaining from food and drink from dawn until sunset every day. They also strive to spiritually purify themselves by trying to abstain from all that is evil in speech and action. It is also recommended that each Muslim read the entire *Qur’an* during this month.

When will the fast be broken?

At sunset, the *adhan* (call to prayer) will be made. This call to prayer is always recited in Arabic and is the signal for Muslims to break their fast, often with the traditional three dates and water. Before sitting down for a meal, they stand together for the sunset prayer.

The Call to Prayer (translation)

God is most Great, God is Most Great

God is Most Great, God is Most Great

I bear witness that there is no God but [the One] God

I bear witness that there is no God but [the One] God

I bear witness that Muhammad is a Messenger of God

I bear witness that Muhammad is a Messenger of God

Hasten to prayer, Hasten to prayer

Hasten to success, Hasten to success

God is Most Great, God is Most Great

There is no god but [the One] God

The Sunset Prayer

Muslims strive for physical and mental purity before standing in prayer. To that end, they are required to wash their faces, hands, arms and feet before praying.

Guests are welcome to observe the prayers. Your hosts will direct you to an appropriate place to sit and watch. Kindly observe silence and kindly remove shoes before entering the prayer hall. Women are requested to cover their heads with scarves which should be provided by your hosts.

After the call to prayer, Muslims will move to the prayer hall to line up for the congregational prayer. They will form tight ranks, a symbol of unity and equality within the Muslim community. Men and women form separate lines for the prayer in order to maintain modesty and concentration during the physical movements of standing, bowing and prostration. Their separation does not, in any way, symbolize any relative superiority or inferiority.

The prayer begins as the *imam*, or prayer leader (pronounced ee-mahm), raises his hands with the words “Allahu Akbar” (“God is most Great”). From that moment, worshippers are required to devote total concentration to the prayer as they follow the words and actions of the *imam*. The *imam* first recites the opening chapter of the Quran, called *Al-Fatiha*, and follows this with more Quranic verses of his choosing. After the recitation, worshippers bow and prostrate in unison, silently praising God.

The prayer ends as worshippers turn their faces to either both sides with the Arabic words meaning, "Peace be with you and the mercy of God." Some of the congregation will then stand to leave the prayer hall while others will add their own personal devotions afterwards.

Al-Fatiha (translation of opening chapter of Quran)

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
Praise to be God, Lord of the Worlds
The Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful
Ruler of the Day of Judgment
Only You do we worship, only You do we ask for help
Show us the straight path
The path of those whom You have favored
Not that of those who earn Your anger nor those who go astray.

Children in the Prayer Hall

Children will often be present during prayers, whether participating or watching. Their presence continues the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, who was very tender towards children. The Prophet sometimes carried one of his grandchildren on his shoulders while leading the prayer and was also known to shorten his prayer if he heard a baby crying.

The Iftar

After completing the sunset prayer, Muslims join in a joyous and nutritious meal. Because Islam is a global religion, there are many special Ramadan foods enjoyed by different ethnic groups. Among these are soups and salads, rice dishes and meat, and of course, sweets.

Since Islamic etiquette enjoins modesty in behavior, many mosques will have separate seating areas for single men and single women. Families may choose to sit together as a unit or family members may choose to sit down with their friends in their respective areas. Seating arrangements will vary from one community to another. During Ramadan, Muslims begin their meal with the prayer, "O God, for You I fasted, and in You I believe, with Your provision I broke your fast." After eating, Muslims say '*alhamdulillah*' ("thanks be to God").

The Night Prayer

The final of the five daily prayers is said as night falls. Like the other four prayers, it is preceded by the *adhan* and is carried out in congregation. A special lengthy prayer called *salat al-taraweeh* is said only during the month of Ramadan, after the night prayer. It is optional and characterized by long recitations of the Quran.

4. SAMPLE NEWSPAPER AD

“Sharing Ramadan”

with your Muslim neighbors

As your Muslim neighbors fast during the month of Ramadan, you are cordially invited to an *iftar* (fast-breaking) meal at your local mosque.

[Name of Mosque]

[Address]

[Date, Time of Iftar]

[Phone Number]

To find the nearest mosque participating in the ‘Sharing Ramadan’ project, please visit www.cair.com or e-mail info@cair.com