

# INTERCEDE

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## Ramadan: Conquering the Darkness of the Soul?



By Dale Fagerland

Ahmad shuffles through the deserted streets of his village in the dead of night echoing over and over the summons, “Get up, O faithful believers! Arise, for this is the blessed festival of Ramadan. Get out of bed and cook, eat and pray — for prayer is better than sleep.”

The 3 a.m. “caller” implores the faithful, shouting through his tattered megaphone, “Eat and drink now before the sun comes up. Dine and drink now, then exercise discipline and self-control during daylight hours.”

Ahmad continues to beckon his fellow Muslims, “Abstain from eating and drinking for Allah's sake. Arise, abstain, be victorious and receive forgiveness for sins. Get up, O faithful believers! Arise and conquer the darkness of your soul. Purify yourselves through self-restraint and good deeds. This is the blessed fast of Ramadan.”

Ramadan is intended to be one of the most sacred and

spiritually renewing of all Islamic practices. This month-long fasting ritual takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims are mandated to abstain from such normal pleasures and necessities as food, drinking, smoking and even marital sex during daylight hours.

Ramadan is the month in which Islamic tradition states the Quran began to be revealed to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. Participating Muslims are not to eat or drink anything from dawn until after sunset. While voluntary fasting is recommended for Muslims at other times, during Ramadan fasting becomes obligatory. In some strict Islamic nations, publicly breaking the fast is a criminal offense punishable by a prison term.

Sexual intercourse during daylight hours is a serious breach, unless it is done “forgetfully,” according to the *Hadith* — which comprise thousands of pages in numerous volumes of teachings and sayings of Muhammad in addition

*continued on page 4*



# Until All Have Heard

*How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14*

Mark Hausfeld  
International Director  
Global Initiative:  
Reaching Muslim Peoples



For many years our home was in a South Asian capital city of over a million people. The city was sprawled between the foothills of the Hindu-Kush Mountains to the north and its older “sister city” to the south. The only direction for our beautiful city to grow was to the east or toward the agricultural fields to the west.

Our home was located at the western edge of the city and faced large terraced farming fields. Each spring we watched from our dining room window as tractors plowed furrows into the rich sub-continent soil. The farmers then strapped bags of wheat seed over their shoulders and began the process of sowing. In seamless motion they reached in and took a handful of wheat seed, raised their arms to full




extent, then opened their hands at precisely the right moment, flinging the seed into the air so that the perfectly arched seed made its way into the fertile soil. Year after year from our dining room window we watched this marvelous process of seed-sowing. This part of the process always reminded me of Jesus' parable about the “Sower and the Seed” in Matthew 13:3-9.

Through the summer months we could see the wheat break forth from its bed and reach for the sun, eventually producing vibrant stalks. Our window reflected the golden wheat as it reached fruition, looking toward harvest.

Harvest time came in late summer. The wives and daughters of the farmers would gather at the edges of the carpet of thick wheat, where they would squat like baseball catchers. Then with feet flat to the soil they would begin their advance into the harvest. With razor sharp sickles in their right hand and grasping a bundle of wheat with their left, they made the opposite swinging motion than that of the sower many months before. With arms reaching to their fullest extent, they pulled the sharp sickle toward themselves — and the blade cleanly cut the stalk of wheat at the base.

At our family devotional at this time of year we would discuss the story of Ruth and her journey to the wheat fields of Palestine — where she found her Kinsman-Redeemer (Ruth 3:9). Today a great harvest of Muslim souls is being poured into the silos of the Kingdom of God. It is because the soil of their hearts is being turned over by the Holy Spirit and the true seed of the Scripture — not the Quran — is being sown into their hearts. Sadly though, most Muslims still await the discovery of their Kinsman-Redeemer.

Our lead article provides an excellent understanding of the Islamic month of Ramadan. During this “spiritually sensitive” time of the Muslim year, the God of the Scripture who created and loves them wants to water their parched spirits with His Holy Spirit.

Here is where we become farmers! First, pray for Muslim hearts to be prepared to receive the truth. Second, “farm” the soul of your Muslim acquaintances through relationship. Third, offer them a Bible in their language. Last, find out their felt needs and offer to pray for them in Jesus' name, fully expecting God to pour out His rain on them. Remember, the Lord of the Harvest said, “...the harvest is ready.” There is no lack of harvest — but there is a lack for more farmers in the harvest (Luke 10:2). 

# Muslim World News



## Couple sentenced to death for blasphemous texts

### Pakistan

A Pakistani court has sentenced to death a Catholic couple convicted of blasphemy for insulting the Prophet Mohammed and the Qur'an. The sentence came a week after Sawan Masih, another Christian, was sentenced to death on the same charges.

Shafqat Emmanuel, 44, and his wife, Shaguftah, 41, residents of Gojra, Punjab, were accused of sending blasphemous text messages. Gojra Additional Sessions Judge Mian Amir Habib, who conducted the trial, convicted them April 4 and pronounced their death sentences. An appeal is planned.

The complainant, Muhammad Hussain, had alleged he was busy in prayer on July 18, 2013, when he received blasphemous text messages on his cell phone.

Gojra City Police Station House Officer Muhammad Nisar told *World Watch Monitor* that Hussain's call data revealed the messages were sent from Shaguftah's cell phone number. The police were, however, unable to recover the SIM card from Shaguftah's phone, while Shaguftah asserted that she had lost her cell phone a month prior to the incident.

Nevertheless, the Gojra police detained the couple, along with their four children, and pressured them to name someone who could have sent the messages.

Nisar told *World Watch Monitor* that a large number of Islamic clerics became enraged when they heard of the text messages, and that they remained in the police station until a police case was opened.

Police formally arrested the couple on July 20 and sent them to Toba Tek Singh District Jail the next day.

"Shafqat has admitted to the police he sent the blasphemous messages and gave his statement to the judicial magistrate," Nisar said.

Riaz Anjum, who first represented the couple, said the police acted inappropriately.

"Investigation should have been done by the senior superintendent before lodging the case, but here the police have (already) extracted a confession from Shafqat, which is illegal," he said.

Islamists staged a sit-in on a major Gojra crossing, Mankanwala, on July 23, 2013, and demanded death for the couple.

Another attorney for Shafqat and Shaguftah told *World Watch Monitor* the police were unable to provide any substantial evidence during the April 4 trial to connect the couple to the offending text messages.

"The police could neither recover the SIM nor submit the service provider's record that the same number was issued to Shaguftah," said Nadeem Hassan. He said on the day of final arguments, several lawyers from the city of Lahore had come to represent the accuser, intimidating the judge. "The judgment has been influenced and the order is pronounced under pressure," Hassan said.

The Anglican Bishop of Gojra, John Samuel, pointed out that hundreds of lives had been affected when at least seven Christians — six from the same family — died in August 2009 when a mob attacked the Christian Colony in the couple's hometown, Gojra.

He said a similar situation arose in the Joseph Colony in Lahore in March 2013. "But Pakistan's justice system could not punish a single person for violence against Christians. On the other hand, a Christian couple has been convicted without sufficient evidence."

The couple's lawyer Hassan said that an appeal against the verdict has been prepared and will be filed soon.

Only days before the couple's arrest, a man in a separate case was sentenced to life imprisonment for allegedly sending out blasphemous text messages in a case lodged Dec. 28, 2011. The Lahore High Court threw out the case against Sajjad Masih on Oct. 14, 2013, ruling he could not be tried for the same offense twice.

— *World Watch Monitor*

# Ramadan: Conquering th

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to the Quran. The guilty must fast for 60 days, feed 60 people the equivalent of one meal each, or give charity equal to a meal to 60 persons. Eating or drinking unintentionally is forgivable, but the person is expected to fast one additional day to make up for each day of lapse. Where Muslims are a small minority, there is much less pressure to adhere strictly to the prohibitions.

Travelers may postpone fasting so no undue hardship is experienced. Exempt from fasting are the elderly and seriously ill persons, but they should give a meal to a needy person for each day of fasting missed if they can afford it. Insane persons are exempt as well as small children, nursing mothers and pregnant women. A woman is physically impure and spiritually unfit during her menstrual cycle to participate in the intensely religious rituals of prayer and fasting.

The Quran commands the practice of the fast of Ramadan: *O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed to those before you [Christians], that ye may (learn) self-restraint...fast till the night appears...*(Quran 2:183-187). [Abdullah Yusuf Ali]

The much-anticipated start of the month is based on a combination of physical sightings of the new moon and astronomical calculations. The practice varies from place to place, some relying heavily on sighting reports and others totally on calculations. In the United States, most Muslim communities follow the decision of the Islamic Society of North America, which accepts actual sightings of the new moon anywhere in the United States as the start of the new month. The Quran and *Hadith* indicate the precise moment of the fast each evening is to begin when one can distinguish the difference between a white thread and a black one.

The Islamic lunar calendar is usually 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar, so Ramadan migrates closer throughout the seasons. The entire cycle takes around 35 years. In this way, the length of the day, and thus the fasting period, varies in length from place to place over the years. The end of the month of Ramadan is marked by the three-day celebration of *Id ul-Fitr* (the feast of the breaking of the fast).

In many countries, Muslims break the fast by eating a few dates, as Muhammad was known to do. This is fol-



lowed by the sunset prayer, then dinner. Ramadan emphasizes community, and since everyone eats dinner at the same time, Muslims often invite one another to share in the Ramadan evening meal. It usually involves three days of dressing up, visiting family and friends, gift-exchanging, singing, feasting and celebrating the conclusion of Ramadan. Muslims around the world prepare their favorite foods during this month and liberally share hospitality with family, friends — and sometimes with Christians.

Well-wishers greet one another during *Id ul-Fitr* with such expressions as “*Id Mubarak*” (a blessed festival), “May you be well throughout the year,” or “Congratulations on the occasion of Ramadan.”

Orthodox Muslims cite many lofty and noble intentions for Ramadan:

**Time of discipline:** Such a stringent exercise of abstinence requires great discipline. Very early in the day the body craves liquids, especially in extreme climates. Praying five times each day and keeping the fast are mental, physical and spiritual disciplines that test one's endurance to the limit. Many devout Muslims go beyond the demands of the law and refrain from even swallowing their saliva while fasting — an almost impossible achievement. Such discipline is believed to be an exercise of submission to the will of Allah.

# The Darkness of the Soul?

from Page 1



**Time of spiritual growth:** Orthodox Muslims explain that to fast is to hold back, to refrain from, to abstain — in order to rise beyond and move past former limits. Devout followers believe that Allah will bestow spiritual and material blessings upon those who seek the fast with sincerity.

**Time of struggle:** Some Muslims equate the fast of Ramadan with *jihad*, an Arabic word meaning “struggle.” Many claim that this rigorous spiritual struggle of discipline, submissions and resisting temptation is *jihad akbar* or “the greatest struggle.” Muslims believe that abstaining from the necessities and pleasures of life during Ramadan represents a moral struggle to attain a higher spirituality.

**Time of self-control:** During Ramadan, every part of the body is to be restrained. The tongue must be kept in check from backbiting and gossip, and the eyes must restrain themselves from looking at unlawful things. The hand must not touch or take anything that does not belong to it, and the ears must refrain from listening to idle talk or obscene words. The feet must be curbed from going to sinful places. Ideally, every part of the body is to observe the fast — thereby exercising self-control, patience, sacrifice and humility. To control the love of comfort, hunger and sex is to behave as Allah's servants.

However, reality reveals quite different results since human nature tends to be more irritable and short-tempered

when deprived of food and drink. There is often more anger and quarreling during Ramadan than at other times. Extremists use this “holy” month to ramp up their radical activities. Widespread participation in the fast usually results in the pace of life slowing and productivity decreasing. Emotions run high, absenteeism increases, government offices, schools, and businesses have shorter hours.

**Time of devotion:** Many Muslims consider the fast of Ramadan as a kind of tune-up for their spiritual lives. Ramadan is a time to fast for the sake of Allah and to offer more prayer than usual. Muslims believe they will receive special *baraka* (blessings) from Allah throughout the year if they read the entire Quran, which is divided into 30 sections, during Ramadan. Others will spend part of their day listening to the recitation of the Quran in a mosque, beseeching Allah's pleasure and forgiveness. Muslims claim that the stringent conditions of hunger and thirst simply in obedience to the Divine Order measures the faith the Muslim has in Allah and helps to strengthen faith by putting it to a severe test.

**Time of reflection:** Keeping the fast of Ramadan is supposed to foster appreciation for the bounties and blessings of Allah, which man is so apt to take for granted in the midst of plenty. The aim of abstinence is to instill in man a spirit of gratitude and devotion to Allah, causing the Muslim to be deeply conscious of the pangs of hunger and discomfort suffered by the less privileged who suffer such stringent conditions all through their lives. Identifying with the poor is supposed to result in a spirit of sympathy and sacrifice leading to charity toward the less fortunate.

**Time of solidarity:** Muslims take great pride and satisfaction in belonging to the *ummah* — the worldwide Islamic community. This camaraderie finds its highest expression in the dual rituals of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and the annual fast of Ramadan. There is great pressure on Muslims to conform to the demands of ritual. Thus, even nominal or non-practicing Muslims feel pressured to participate in the month-long fast.

**Time of forgiveness and rewards:** Numerous *Hadith* passages indicate that keeping the fast of Ramadan and saying prayers faithfully will result in the forgiveness of past sins. These alleged quotes of Muhammad state that

*continued on page 6*

# Ramadan: Conquering the Darkness of the Soul?

continued from page 5

when the month of Ramadan starts, the gates of paradise are opened and the gates of hell are closed, and the devils are chained. However, Islamic theology teaches that more than fasting is involved in the forgiveness of all past sins. Islam presents a wide range of legalistic works that must be accomplished in order to have one's sins forgiven. Fasting is only one of these works — even then Muslims make absolutely no claims that all their good works will make them acceptable to Allah on Judgment Day.


**Time of power:** The “Night of Power” (*Lailat al-Qadr*) during Ramadan is considered the most holy night of the year. It is the night in which Muslims believe Muhammad first began to receive revelations from Allah through the angel Gabriel — revelations he claimed to receive for the rest of his life; which would later be assembled in a book, the Quran. Muslims believe that Allah gave the Quran to humankind as a gift of guidance.



The Quran states: *We have indeed revealed this (message) in the Night of Power...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!* (Surah 97).

Although there are different traditions regarding the exact night, most regard the Night of Power to be the 27th of Ramadan. Because they believe this is a sacred night in which Allah sends out thousands of angels to bestow favors on the faithful, Muslims around the world spend the entire night in lengthy prayers, chanting the name of Allah and recitations of the Quran. During the last 10 days of Ramadan, some men seclude themselves in the mosque for several days and nights in spiritual retreat and vigil.

How desperately our Muslim neighbors are striving to gain forgiveness of sins and favor with God through self-denial and good works. The good news for Muslims is that by simple faith in Jesus you can be forgiven by God, you can become children of God, you can receive the Spirit of God, you can come to know God personally, and you can spend eternity in His presence.

Just as Ahmad walks the streets of his Muslim village calling, “Arise, be victorious and receive forgiveness of sins...Arise and conquer the darkness of your soul...” may we as followers of Jesus announce to our Muslim friends the resurrection power of Jesus to truly conquer the darkness of the soul. 

## Prayer Profile: *Dongxiang of China*



The Dongxiang region is a desolate, arid place with a moon-like landscape. Other Muslims in China do not consider the Dongxiang (population 605,000) to be a part of the Islamic faith because of their involvement in drug and prostitution rackets. There has never been a single known church or Christian among the Dongxiang.

1. Pray that someone will translate the Scripture.
2. Pray that Han Chinese Christians will be led to reach out to the Dongxiang.
3. Ask the Lord to send His Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of the Dongxiang people.



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**Friday, July 4, 2014. Please pray**

...for seeking Muslims who have now started the month-long fast of Ramadan, which began on June 28.  
...for the **Summer Institute of Islamic Studies** which is in progress at AGTS in Missouri through July 11.  
...for a **Global Initiative member** presenting the vision of reaching Muslims in Papua New Guinea.

**Friday, July 11, 2014. Please pray**

...for **Sufi Muslims** during this month of Ramadan.  
...for **Oasis Outreach ministries** to Muslim refugees in Bulgaria. Helpers and finances are needed.  
...for a **Global Initiative team member** teaching next week in the Indonesian Institute of Islamic Studies.

**Friday, July 18, 2014. Please pray**

...for **Muslim students** in European universities to receive witness of Jesus Christ.  
...for the **Latin American Church** as it continues sending missionaries to the Muslim world.  
...for seeking Muslims as they continue their month-long fast of Ramadan.

**Friday, July 25, 2014. Please pray**

...for the **605,000 Dongxiang Muslims** — an unreached people group of China.  
...for **protection for underground churches in Iran**. Iran is home to 74 million Muslims.  
...for a **sense of spiritual emptiness** to pervade the lives of millions of Muslims as they complete Ramadan.

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**Friday, August 1, 2014. Please pray**

...for **Muslims in Angola**. Despite its location in southwestern Africa, Angola is home to about 250,000 Muslims.  
...for the **thousands of Muslim-background Berbers in North Africa** who have become followers of Jesus.  
Intercede for protection and success in their church planting initiatives.  
...for the **millions of Muslims** who have now completed the Ramadan fast.

**Friday, August 8, 2014. Please pray**

...for **Germany's 4 million Muslims**. Germany has a larger Muslim population than Kuwait, Lebanon, or the UAE.  
...for the **23 million Muslims of Yemen**, the poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula.  
...for **"Karim"** as he broadcasts the gospel into the Muslim-majority countries of North Africa.

**Friday, August 15, 2014. Please pray**

...for the **Oasis Center in Madrid, Spain** — reaching out to their huge Muslim community with language and computer classes, and other "felt need" approaches.  
...for **Muslim converts in Iran**. Those who become Christians immediately fear for their jobs because 80 percent of the economy is directly run by the Islamic government.  
...for the **elements of violence** that pervade many Muslim countries, wreaking havoc on innocent populations.

**Friday, August 22, 2014. Please pray**

...for **Live/Dead church planting teams** in the Middle East and North Africa.  
...for the **thousands of "mullahs"** who work in Islamic mosques and seminaries throughout the world. These gatekeepers exert inordinate influence over the common people.  
...for **efforts** to reach 200,000 Muslim immigrants in Japan.

**Friday, August 29, 2014. Please pray**

...for **outreach ministries to Muslim Arabs** and other Muslim nationalities who have immigrated to Holland.  
...for a **revelation of truth** to seeking Muslims about the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross.  
...for the **launching of the Institute of Islamic Studies** at Continental Theological Seminary in Brussels, Belgium during the first two weeks of September.

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