

MY MEMORIES OF RAMADAN

RAMADAN STARTS APRIL 23, 2020, AND ENDS WITH EID-UL-FITR ON MAY 24, 2020

GROWING UP IN KARACHI PAKISTAN, FASTING, CELEBRATING & FEASTING DURING RAMADAN IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM CELEBRATING ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD



The Islamic lunar calendar is shorter by 11 days than the Gregorian calendar, which is why Ramadan occurs 11 days earlier each year.

Ramadan and Eid moons signal the beginning and the end of this sacred celebration. Families gather on rooftops, to look for the thin sliver of a new moon, heralding the beginning of the new month. Excitement ensues at the sighting; first to start the month of fasting, and then to end it by celebrating Eid – this is similar to Lent followed by Easter.

NAGHMANA SHERAZI
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Mosques are especially decorated, and the light show is amazing from one corner of the neighborhood to the next!



Iftaar – the meal signifying the breaking of the fast is a communal affair. Whether you are at the mosque, or at home – focus is on service, food and community. Each region has its own specialties, and most households cook enough to send a portion to the mosque so that those breaking their fast at the mosque will have enough food. All are welcome at the table.

Eid is celebrated by visiting neighbors, friends and family. For kids, new clothes and shoes are a big part of the equation, and most girls and women get henna on their hands. Gifts of money are given out to children.

My mother would start making treats for Eid at least a week beforehand. It was always a festive, joyous time spent with whomever was around helping out; boys and girls alike. I learned to cook from my mother, and have always blessed her for teaching me with such patience and love.



Iftaari is always a feast for the eyes, the body, and the spirit, through serving others while fasting. As a child, I remember sitting at tables laden with food, counting the minutes till sunset, and opening the fast upon hearing the call to prayer with a date, and a glass of water. A quick family gathering to pray – the sunset prayer is one of the shorter ones, and then we got down to the serious business of eating, before heading to the mosque for the longest prayer of the day – Isha (last prayer of the day) and Taraweeh (performed only during Ramadan, immediately after Isha). Taraweeh prayers are not mandatory, but most Muslims will go to the mosque and participate, or say them at home; the undoubted enticing factor is that if you attend each night, the imam (leader of the prayer) will recite at least one chapter of the Quran during Taraweeh each night. By the end of the month, all 30 chapters of the Quran will have been read, and completed. In a month when blessings are manifold for each good deed, this is significant! Most people wake up around 2 hours before dawn, to eat sehri, work during the day, and then stay at the mosque till late night to complete their prayers.

In Spokane, with our 16-hour long fasts in the summer, when one is not allowed even a sip of water all day, fasting takes its toll when combined with sleep deprivation; yet all those who fast, take this month on willingly and happily. I always find it fascinating to see how happy and content people seem at the iftaar gatherings each evening at the Spokane Islamic Center.

Lent/Easter, Passover & then Ramadan/Eid

This year, three major religious events will happen close to each other - Lent and Easter followed by Passover, and then Ramadan and Eid; celebrated the world over during the months of March, April and May. Wherever I have been in the world, I have found friends and family to celebrate these events with; regardless of my religion. I have always been invited to, and welcomed at the table for Easter, Seder and, of course, gatherings for sehri (pre-dawn meal) or iftaari (sunset meal) with my Muslim family and friends during Ramadan. In Pakistan, most Iftaar meals include water, dates, a sherbet (usually milk, water, rose flavored sherbet and lots of ice), savory chickpeas, samosas, fruits and so much more. Those of you who know Indian/Pakistani cuisine have probably tasted pakoras (fried vegetable fritters) before – these are a staple for iftaari. If you have not had the pleasure, may I suggest ordering a takeout portion from the Mango Tree downtown! Ravi makes THE best pakoras. You are welcome! This year's festivities will be rather solitary considering the COVID-19 isolation practices; however, I would like to wish **Ramadan & Eid Mubarak to everyone! May the season bring us all peace, health and happiness – ameen.**



It is considered a blessing to break bread with friends and neighbors, and most evenings my family would have guests at the table. If the table wasn't long enough, we would spread a runner on the carpet, and everyone sat on the floor. Similar to this picture – though this is a scene at a mosque, with the young man making sure each plate has a bit of everything, getting ready for a huge number of people.

