

Sawm and Shahadah

SAWM

Qur'an 2: 183 notes that: 'O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting'

Meaning fasting is required of Muslims.

The month of Ramadan considered holy by both Sunni and Shi'a because Muhammad received his first revelation in this month. Shi'a consider Muhammad received the whole Qur'an in his heart at that time. As Qur'an 2: 185 states, 'The month of Ramadan is one in which the Qur'an was sent down as guidance to mankind'. Muslims fast ('sawm') between sunrise and sunset during the month of Ramadan.

The night of Muhammad's first revelation is called the Night of Power. The first words Muhammad heard are given in Qur'an 96: 1-5:

'Read in the name of your Lord who created;

Created man from a clinging mass.

Read and your Lord is the most generous,

Who taught by the pen,

Taught man what he did not know. '

The purpose of fasting is to be mindful of God, or to acquire *taqwa* ('God-consciousness'). It also teaches self-control and comradeship with the *ummah*. It is a spiritual time where Muslims will pray more, spend more time in the mosque or reading the Qur'an.

The purpose of fasting is primarily to develop spiritually and in awareness of God. Those who are ill, elderly, pregnant and breastfeeding, making an arduous journey or engaged in a task that would make fasting dangerous are exempt. They should not put their health at risk in order to develop God-consciousness. Women do not fast when they have their period in the month of Ramadan as they are considered unclean. They make up their days of fast later.

List BELIEFS

List ACTIONS

SHAHADAH

Meaning 'the testimony' in Arabic, from the verb 'sahida'= 'to observe, witness or testify'

Affirms two basic Muslim beliefs: (1) there is one God, (2) Muhammad is the messenger of God.

In Shi'a Islam the Shahadah contains a third part; (3) Ali is the steward of God.

The Shahadah does not require a specific action although it is spoken regularly in prayer.

The Shahadah is whispered into the ear of a newborn baby and a dying person so it is the first and last thing a Muslim hears. It is spoken aloud when someone wishes to convert to Islam.

List BELIEFS	List ACTIONS