

# Muslims begin fast

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With the first new moon of October, Muslims around the world will begin fasting for Ramadan -- a month of spirituality, charity, and community.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It begins in Canada with the sighting of the first new moon of Ramadan by the Islamic Society of North America. This year, the new moon is expected to appear on Oct. 3 or 4.

For 30 days, all healthy adult Muslims must abstain from food, drink, and physical pleasures during the daylight hours.

"In the Qur'an, there is a commandment to Muslims ... that you shall fast for the month of Ramadan," said Riazuddin Ahmed, president of Muslims for Peace & Justice (MPJ) in Saskatchewan. "The Prophet Muhammad in his own lifetime performed this worship and he taught his followers how to do it and that tradition is carrying on."

A small meal is eaten prior to dawn each morning. Muslims will often bring food to their mosque and eat together while they take part in Tarawih prayers, where the Qu'ran is recited cover to cover over 30 days.

The breaking of the fast usually begins with dates, the food eaten by the Prophet Muhammad. In countries with warmer climates, some Muslims break their fasts with a pinch of salt to replenish the sodium lost in their sweat during the day.

"The idea of fasting is mind over body," said Ahmed. "When you are not eating in the daytime, you're hungry, your stomach is growling, you get an idea of the poor people of the world who may be going without food and you develop an empathy for them, and therefore you're expected to become more charitable."

The end of the month of Ramadan is marked by Eid ul-Fitr (Festival of Charity), where Muslims gather for large congregational prayers and spend the day in celebration with family and friends. Each person makes a charitable donation to take part in the festivities.

Last November, more than 400 Muslims gathered in the gym at Regina Huda School to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

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