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Holy Month of Ramadan

by Bill Leader

During the Holy Month of Ramadan, which began on Monday, August 1, Muslims must fast from sunrise to sundown. No food, no drink, not even water. The pangs of thirst and hunger that Muslims experience are designed to remind them of the plight of other people on this earth; people less fortunate than themselves. They are also urged to help others through charity or with donations to charitable organizations.

Ramadan will end either on Monday, August 29, or Tuesday, August 30. The Muslim religion bases its year on the Lunar Calendar or by phases of the moon. The months, under the Lunar calendar, begin at the first sighting of the New Moon or the scimitar moon. It ends at the first sighting of the next new moon. (The Gregorian Calendar, which is used in the west, is based on the Pope Gregory XIII decree of February 24, 1582. It is also known as either the Western or Christian Calendar.)

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Lunar Calendar. Literally translated from Arabic, Ramadan means intensely hot -- hot enough to scorch the earth.

Imam Muhsin Shaheed of Fort Worth is also the Muslim Chaplain of the DFW Airport Interfaith Chaplaincy program. "The discomfort experienced by Muslims during Ramadan is actually a help to all humanity," Imam Shaheed explains.

"After the first three days you get used to it. It's sort of like a long-distance runner. You start off and then you sort of learn to go with the flow and keep going," he explained.

During the Holy Month, he said, "You pray and you reflect on the condition of the world."

In addition to not eating or drinking during daylight hours, a Muslim tries to dispel any evil thoughts from his mind -- even simple gossip. Muslims should not look at members of the opposite sex with any type of lustful thoughts.

There are about 10 million Muslims currently living in the United States -- several hundred work at DFW International Airport and several hundred for American Airlines. Many Muslims in the United States are African American.

Imam Shaheed explains that during the 1920's, many African Americans living in the southern states migrated to cities in the north. Among African Americans it is known as the Great Migration. Conditions for African Americans were considered better in the northern cities where jobs were available in manufacturing plants.

In Detroit, Michigan, a man appeared known as Wallace Fard Muhammad. He is believed to have come from the area known today as Pakistan. As Imam Shaheed explained, "That was before the partition and the creation of two separate countries -- India and Pakistan."

This man preached a new religion to many African Americans. Many embraced the religion. The first Mosque established in the United States was opened in 1930 in Detroit, Michigan.

One man who embraced Islam had migrated to Detroit from his native Sanderville, Georgia. He called himself Elijah Mohammed. But Elijah Mohammed, Imam Shaheed explained, tended to use his "pulpit" to excoriate other races of people, including Europeans. However, his son, W.D. Mohammed, who took over the Mosque from his father, preached a pure form of Islam. This is to uplift all humanity, regardless of race or religious beliefs.

There are five "pillars" of the Muslim faith.

1. Belief in one creator
2. Pray five times per day
3. Charity -- to help those less fortunate than oneself
4. Fast during the month of Ramadan
5. The Hajj or Pilgrimage. A Muslim, if they can afford it, should try and make one trip to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, to experience The Hajj.

Adnan Aldabaja, who works for American Airlines IT (information technology), is also President of AA's Muslim ERG (employee resource group). He is also a member of the DFW Airport Interfaith Chaplaincy board of directors.

In the Old Testament of the Christian Holy Bible Abraham has a son, Isaac, by his wife, Sarah. He then takes his second wife, Hajar, and she bears him a son, Ismail. The family moves to the area of Mecca where Abraham abandons Hajar and his son, Ismail.

"It was an area of desert. There is no water for Hajar and her son," Aldabaja explains.

She pulled herself up a hill for a better view to look for water. There was another hill nearby.

"She ran between these hills seven times to try and locate some sign of water for her and her son," Aldabaja explains.

But then miraculously, water suddenly bubbled up on the very spot on which Ismail was standing. It becomes known as the Well of Zamzam.

Muslims on their visit to Mecca walk seven times around the Kaaba. It is a symbolic reminder of the seven times Hajar ran between the two hills.

The Well of Zamzam still exists today.

"People love to drink from it!" Aldabaja said. He has visited Mecca and experience the Hajj.

Some people fear Islam and its followers but Aldabaja says Islam is a religion of peace. The Quran is best understood in its original Arabic language.

It is the word of God or Allah given to the prophet Mohammad.

"And it has never changed. It has never changed in the 1,400 years it was first delivered to the Prophet Mohammed," Aldabaja said.