FAQ ON HOLY MONTH OF RAMADAN AND ISLAMIC FASTING

Q: What is Ramadan?
A: Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. In this month Muslims all over the world fast from dawn to dusk.

Q: When does Ramadan begin?
A: Muslims follow the Islamic lunar calendar that is about eleven days shorter than the Georgian calendar. The beginning of the Islamic lunar months depends on the actual sighting of the new moon. Thus Ramadan begins on a different day each year. This year Ramadan will most likely begin on Monday, June 6, 2016 and is expected to end on Tuesday, July 5, 2016.

Q: What is meant by fasting during Ramadan?
A: In Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food, drink, smoking and other sensual pleasures from dawn to dusk. The fast is performed to obey God’s command with an aim to inculcate discipline, humbleness and self-restraint, to experience what the poor and destitute feel, and to develop the noble habit of generosity.

Q: Do Muslims gain anything from fasting?
A: The main benefits of Ramadan are an increased humbleness and compassion for those in need of the necessities of life, a sense of self-purification and reflection, and a renewed focus on spirituality. Muslims also appreciate the feeling of togetherness shared by family and friends throughout the month. Perhaps the greatest practical benefit is the yearly lesson in self-restraint and discipline that is carried forward to other aspects of a Muslim's life.

Q: Do all Muslims fast in Ramadan?
A: Fasting is compulsory for all Muslims who are mentally and physically fit, past the age of puberty, in a settled situation (not traveling), and are sure that fasting is unlikely to cause real physical or mental injury.

Q: Who are exempted from fasting?
A: The following are exempted from fasting during Ramadan: Children under the age of puberty, the sick, seniors for whom fast causes unbearable hardships, pregnant women for whom fasting is harmful for self or for the fetus, nursing mothers who fear that fasting causes difficulties for the self or the child she nurses, the menstruating women, the travelers on journeys and those who are mentally incapacitated or not responsible for their actions.

Q: What about children, can they fast voluntarily?
A: Muslim children under the age of puberty can fast with the permission and supervision of their parents. The parents will help them develop the practice of fasting gradually so that when the children reach the age of puberty they are mentally and physically prepared to fast in Ramadan. If a child cannot or does not feel like continuing the fast, he/she will be allowed to break the fast before dusk without blame or penalty.
Q: What is the approximate number of Muslims in North America and around the world?
A: Demographers say there are an estimated 600,000 Muslims in Canada, 6 million in the United States and some 1.3 billion worldwide.

Q: What are the traditional practices for the month of Ramadan?
A: Many practices can be seen in various cultures and ethinical groups. However, the following four practices are universal among all Muslims.
* **Suhoor**, i.e. Waking up before dawn to eat something before the commencement of the fast.
* **Iftaar**, i.e. Breaking the daily fast with a drink of water and dates at dusk.
* **Tilaawah**, i.e. Qur’an Recitation. Most Muslims recite a portion of the Holy Qur’an every night so as to complete reciting the entire Holy Qur’an during the month.
* Social visits and giving of alms and charity are highly recommended during this month.

Q: What is Eid ul Fitr?
A: Eid ul Fitr is the Festival of Fast-Breaking. Celebrations at the end of Ramadan begin with special morning prayers on the first day of Shawwal, the month following Ramadan on the Islamic lunar calendar, and last for three days. It is forbidden to fast during Eid because it is a time for relaxation. Muslims must pay “Zakaat-ul-Fitra” (alms) before beginning their Eid prayers. During Eid Muslims greet each other with the phrase “Eid Mubarak” (eed-moo-bar-ak), meaning “blessed Eid”. Some also say “May God accept your deeds [you performed during Ramadan]”. 