

# Accompanying Ramadan





## Introduction from Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald MAfr

There are two main Christian feasts. Christmas, which commemorates the birth of Jesus, is always celebrated on 25 December. It is preceded by a time of special prayer called Advent. Easter, in which Christians remember the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, is a movable feast, but it always occurs either in March or April. This feast also has a special time of preparation called Lent.

Muslims also celebrate two main feasts. There is Eid al-Adha, the Great Feast, which commemorates the sacrifice of Abraham, and there is Eid al-Fitr, the Little Feast, which marks the Breaking of the Fast after the month of Ramadan. Because Muslims follow a lunar calendar which is 11 days shorter than the solar year, these feasts take place at a different time each year,

Ramadan, the ninth month of the year according to the lunar calendar followed by Muslims, is a holy month. It is marked by a way of fasting which sets Muslims apart from others. On the island of Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, where many Muslims live, the Christians devised a programme which they called *Duyog Ramadan*, "Accompanying Ramadan". The idea was taken from music: when people sing they are accompanied by someone playing the guitar; the guitarist doesn't sing, but he or she backs up the singers by strumming. In a similar way Christians, who are not observing Ramadan, can accompany the Muslims who are doing so.

The priests and people of St Vincent de Paul parish, in Liverpool, decided to do this. They wished to accompany their Muslim brothers and sisters, especially by their prayers. In order to sustain this effort some information about Ramadan, or about Islam in general, was provided every day on the parish Facebook account. It is these daily posts that have been collected in this booklet.



Each post is in two parts. There is first some brief information about some aspect of Islam, and then a multiple-answer question. The answer to this question is given after the next post.

A message was sent out to Muslim friends before Ramadan began. It contained these words:

“

**In a few weeks' time, you will enter into your holy month of Ramadan. We would like you to know that we are praying for you at this time, as Ramadan approaches. May our Merciful God look upon us with mercy. May God protect us and console us in times of suffering. May God help us to change our ways so that we may respect our planet and all God's creatures which inhabit it with us.**

”



## The Month of Ramadan

Here is a description of the month of Ramadan given by Muslims: "The holy month of Ramadan unites all Muslims in fasting, feasting, worship and prayer. It is a time for contemplation, spirituality and brotherhood. It is also known and recognized as the month of the Qur'an."

From this description it will easily be understood how much more difficult Ramadan will be for Muslims during this period of social distancing. They will not be able to break the fast together, nor will they be able to gather in the mosque for special prayers. Let us remember them in our prayers.



**Ramadan is the name of the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic calendar year. What is the original meaning of the term Ramadan?**

- a) Hotel.
- b) Burning heat.
- c) Medication.

## Fasting

One of the main features of Ramadan is fasting (*sawm*). The following injunction is found in the Qur'an:

You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may be mindful of God.

(Qur'an 2:183)

When does this fasting take place? The fast lasts each day throughout the hours of light – tradition says, from when you can distinguish a white thread from a black thread, until this is no longer possible (in Liverpool in the winter the hours of daylight are short whereas in the summer months daylight is long).

What does this fast consist of? It means not allowing anything to enter the body, no food, no drink, no smoking or vaping.

Fasting is undertaken out of obedience to God – as mentioned above, it is prescribed in the Qur'an. "Through heightened awareness of their bodily needs, Muslims come to a greater awareness of the presence of God and acknowledge gratitude for God's provisions in their lives" (art. Fasting, *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*) It is also a way of showing solidarity with people who suffer from hunger.

2

**Fasting is the fourth of the five pillars of Islam. Can you name the other four?**

**The answer to question 1**

*The correct answer is b)*

Before Islam adopted the lunar calendar, Ramadan, the 9<sup>th</sup> month, always occurred in the summer in Arabia when the heat was very intense.

The lunar year is shorter than the solar year, so now Ramadan moves forward every year by 11 days.



## Special Prayers

During the month of Ramadan special prayers, called *tarâwîh*, are performed. They are not obligatory, but many people often stay behind in the mosque after the final prayer of the day to recite them together. They often include the recitation of substantial passages from the Qur'an.

3

**What is the meaning of *Salât*?**

- a) A greeting.
- b) Ritual prayer.
- c) A vegetarian dish.

**The answer to question 2**

*The correct answer is:*

*shahâda* – the profession of faith;  
*salât* – prayer;  
*zakât* – alms-giving;  
*hajj* – pilgrimage to Mecca.





## Breaking the Fast

The end of the fast each day is signaled by the call to pray the evening prayer at sundown. In some countries the signal for the end of the fast is a canon blast. The traditional way of breaking the fast is first to take a date and a sip of milk, perform the evening prayer, and then come together for a communal meal (*iftâr*).

For this meal the family will come together, or in some places the inhabitants of the same street. Often hotels and restaurants provide *iftârs* to which the poor are invited free of charge. *Iftârs* are organized for Muslims and non-Muslims together. On 18 May 2019, the Liverpool Region Mosques Network organized a large *iftâr* at the Pier Head.

4

### Who is the *mu'ezzin* and what is his role?

- a) The one who calls to prayer.
- b) The leader of the prayer.
- c) A poor person.

### The answer to question 3

*The correct answer is b)*

The Arabic word *salât* probably comes from a Syriac word *selota*, meaning to bow or prostrate.



## A Christian Greeting

5

**According to the Islamic calendar, this year is 1441. In which year of the Common Era did the Islamic era begin?**

- a) 570.
- b) 622.
- c) 632.

**The answer to question 4**

*The correct answer is a)*

The call to Prayer is known as the *adhân* (the 'dh' pronounce like the 'th' in the English "that").

The *mu'ezzin* is the one who chants this call to Prayer. The leader of the Prayer is known as the *Imâm*. This may be someone who has been appointed as the Imam of a mosque, but any man who knows what to do, and knows how to recite some verses of the Qur'an, can lead the prayer. If there are only women present praying together, a woman will act as Imam. A word for a poor person in Arabic is *miskîn*.

In 2020 Fr Victor Edwin, an Indian Jesuit, President of the Islamic Studies Association (ISA) in India, sent greetings to Muslims for Ramadan. He concluded by saying:

Dear brothers and sisters, in these difficult times of the COVID-19 breakout that has pushed peoples across the continents into 'lockdown' situations, we along with you pray for God's healing touch upon all people. We pray for God's consolation to those families that have lost their loved ones during this pandemic. We pray specially for the doctors and hospital staff and volunteers who serve the sick in these most difficult times.

We pray that every man and woman come to realize their true responsibility as human persons and learn to surrender their will to the Will of God according to their diverse religious traditions.





## Reciting the Qur'an

An important place is given during Ramadan to the recitation of the Qur'an. Many Muslims will read the whole of the Qur'an during this Holy Month. In Egypt one can often see people in public transport taking out a copy of the Qur'an and reciting it for themselves.

The Qur'an has 114 *sûras*, or chapters, but it is also divided into 30 parts of equal length, one for each day of the month of Ramadan. So by reading one part every day by the end of the month one will have completed reading the whole of the Qur'an.

6

**The Qur'an is the Holy Book of Muslims. What does the term *qur'ân* mean?**

- a) Inspiration
- b) A musical instrument
- c) Recitation.

**The answer to question 5**

*The correct answer is b)*

570 is usually recognized as the year of Muhammad's birth.

632 was the year of his death.

622 was the year of the *hijra*, the move from Mekka to Madina where the Muslim community was born.

(The Christian era, which has become the Common Era, is calculated from the birth of Christ, whereas the Islamic Era is calculated from the birth of the community.)



## Mosque

7

**If the mosque (*masjid*) is “the place where one prostrates”, what is a *sajjâda*?**

- a) A prayer mat.
- b) A cloak worn when performing the prayer.
- c) An instrument indicating the exact time for the prayer.

**The answer to question 6**

*The correct answer is c).*

The term *qur'ân* comes from the Arabic word *qara'a* which means 'read' or 'recite'. The first chronological message of the Qur'an is a command to Muhammad: *iqra'*, "Recite in the name of your Lord who created". (Q 96:1)

The *salât*, the Ritual Prayer, to be valid must include some verses from the Qur'an (at least three). These are always recited in Arabic by the one who leads the prayer. They are never read from a book.

One who recites the whole of the Qur'an by heart is known as *hâfiz al-qur'ân*, a guardian of the Qur'an.

This year, because of COVID-19, Muslims cannot perform *salât*, their Ritual Prayer, in the mosque. What is the mosque? Our English word is derived ultimately from the Arabic *masjid* which means "the place where one prostrates".

As we see in photos and videos, prostration, bowing down so that the forehead touches the ground, is one of the important gestures made during the Prayer. Other gestures are standing, bowing, and sitting down on one's heels. The Imam indicates the rhythm.

These gestures form a unit (*rak'a*) of prayer. They are repeated twice, three times, or four times according to which prayer of the day is being performed.





## Maryam

Muslims have a great respect for Mary, the mother of Jesus. There is a *sûra* (chapter) of the Qur'an that bears her name, *sûrat Maryam*, the *sûra* of Mary (*sûra* 19). The Annunciation, when the Angel Gabriel comes to tell Mary that she will give birth to a son, is recounted in chapter 1 of the Gospel of Luke, and in *sûra* 3 (*The Family of 'Imran*) and also in *sûra* 19 (*Maryam*) of the Qur'an. About ten years ago in Lebanon the Feast of the Annunciation, 25 March, was declared a national holiday for all the citizens of the country.

Christians and Muslims have formed the habit of coming together to pray on this day, not only in Lebanon but also elsewhere. In 2020 a group of Christians and Muslims of the Lebanese association *Adyân* (Religions) composed a special prayer in view of the coronavirus pandemic. Here is the text:

O God, Our Lord, Lord of Creation and of the whole human race,  
You chose Mary, choosing her above all women,  
sending to her the Angel Gabriel to announce to her the good news which we celebrate together as Christians and Muslims.

Our Lord, You are the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy, the One who loves all human beings.  
You have blessed us with life, save us from the danger of this pandemic.

Our Lord, may the Virgin Mary be a model for us in our lives, may her example motivate us to preserve unity amongst us when confronted with distress and suffering.

May we trust in Providence, rather than resign ourselves to fear and pride, so that we, like Mary, may show solidarity and give generous service. Lord, You who are the All-Hearing, the Granter of Security, give your help to carers, nurses and doctors, heal the sick and console the afflicted, give to those in need their daily bread and all they require.

We implore your help so that we may remain devoted to You and faithful to one another. Amen.

8

**How many women are mentioned by name in the Qur'an?**

- a) 1.
- b) 3.
- c) 7.

**The answer to question 7**

*The correct answer is a)*

The one who prays needs to be separated from the floor or the ground. Usually mosques are carpeted. If there is no carpet, or if one is praying outside the mosque, a prayer mat will be used. If no prayer mat is available something which separates from the ground can take its place, a piece of cardboard or, for a man, his shirt.



## The Direction of Prayer

9

**How many Prayers are prescribed for Muslims each day?**

- a) 3.
- b) 5.
- c) 7.

**The answer to question 8**

*The correct answer is a).*

Mary/Maryam is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Her name occurs 34 times, far more often than in the Gospels.

Other women are referred to in the Qur'an, but they remain unnamed.

When Muslims perform *salât*, their Ritual Prayer, they always face towards Mekka.

The direction of prayer (*qibla*) is indicated in the mosque by a niche (*mihrâb*). Elsewhere it may be indicated by an arrow. This can be seen often in the rooms of hotels frequented by Muslims. The Imam, the leader of the prayer, also faces Mekka, so he has his back to the assembly.

When people gather for prayer, whether they are few or many, whether in the mosque or elsewhere, they form lines. They are exhorted not to stay behind, leaving gaps in the lines, but to move forward and fill up any gaps. Perhaps something similar could be done in our churches.





## Obligation to fast

Who is required to fast during Ramadan? All adult Muslims, both men and women, are required to observe the fast during Ramadan. Children are not obliged, but they may be encouraged to fast during a certain number of days in order to learn what it means.

Those who are ill or elderly are not obliged to fast. Those who are travelling are excused from the fast, as also are women who have just given birth or are breast-feeding.

These people should, if possible, make up the fast later.

10

### Who or what is a *Mufti*?

- a) A door-keeper.
- b) A non-Islamic way of dressing.
- c) A legal authority.

### The answer to question 9

*The correct answer is b)*

The number of obligatory prayers is not found clearly in the Qur'an. It has been established by tradition.

The five times of prayer are daybreak, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening.

It may be mentioned here that Muslims from the Indian sub-continent do not use the term *salât* for Ritual Prayer, but *namâz* (a word of Persian origin).



## Right Intention

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### What is meant by *wudû*?

- a) Ablutions.
- b) Final salutation.
- c) A wooden throne or support for a Qur'an.

### The answer to question 10

*The correct answer is c).*

The *mufti* is a legal scholar who provides an authoritative legal opinion (*fatwa*) in answer to a question posed by an individual or a group of people.

Questions often concern the application of a law in new circumstances. For instance, the fast of Ramadan means that no substance should enter the body; is it permissible to receive injections during Ramadan?

In majority Muslim countries the government often appoints a Chief Mufti whose office it is to respond to people's questions.

The door-keeper may hold the key (*miftâh*), but is not there to answer questions.

The English word 'mufti' has nothing to do with Islam.

[Prophet], have you considered the person who denies the Judgement? It is he who pushes aside the orphan and does not urge others to feed the needy. So woe to those who pray but are heedless of their prayer; those who are all show and forbid common Kindnesses.

(Qur'an, *sûra* 107)

This passage from the Qur'an underlines something of great importance: the Muslim should perform his or her duties for the right intention. There should be no ulterior motive. If Muslims pray in the mosque only to be seen, so that people will consider them good Muslims and will frequent their business, this is a form of hypocrisy. One's life should be in accordance with one's devotional practices. Can we not say the same about the practice of Christianity?





## Friday Prayer

For Muslims Friday (*jumu'a*) is the day of congregation. The noon prayer on Friday is a special community prayer. The prayer is shorter than usual – only two units – but there is a sermon delivered by the Imam. In the Qur'an it is said:

Believers! When the call to prayer is made on the day of congregation, hurry towards the reminder of God and leave off your trading – that is better for you, if only you knew – then when the prayer has ended, disperse in the land and seek out God's bounty.

(Qur'an 62:9-10)

From this it can be deduced that Friday is not necessarily a rest day. It is recommended only to stop work in order to be present for the community prayer. Yet many majority Muslim countries have adopted Friday as the weekly rest day.

12

### What is the *minbar*?

- A special clock indicating the time of prayer.
- A pulpit.
- A place at the mosque for refreshments.

### The answer to question 11

The correct answer is a)

Before performing the *salât* (Prayer) Muslims, both men and women, are required to wash in order to be ritually pure. They are to wash their hands, their arms up to the elbows, their feet, their face and their mouth.

Mosques always provide facilities for these ablutions.

*Wadâ'* is the final salutation; at the end of the Prayer. The one praying turns to the right and to the left with a greeting of peace.

The wooden support for the Qur'an is a *kursî*, a throne.



## Mekka (or Mecca)

Mekka is the city in present-day Saudi Arabia where Muhammad was born. In pre-Islamic times it was an important trading centre, and also already a sanctuary and a place of pilgrimage for the different tribes in Arabia. The focus of the pilgrimage was the Ka'ba, a cubic building which served as a temple for the worship of many divinities.

When Muhammad and the first Muslims took control of Mekka, they made the Ka'ba into a place of worship of Allah, the one God.

When performing *Salât* Muslims face Mekka.

Mekka is also the goal of the annual pilgrimage (*hajj*). It is for Muslims the holiest city.

13

**The Ka'ba is a building in the form of a cube; it is the central shrine in Mekka. What is the *tawâf*?**

- The name for the Black Stone contained in the Ka'ba.
- The rite of circumambulation (circling round the Ka'ba).
- A special garment worn for the pilgrimage.

**The answer to question 12**

*The correct answer is b).*

The *minbar* (pronounced "mimbar") is used for the sermon during the Friday prayer. It is usually in the form of a movable staircase. The preacher sits or stands on the top step.





## Madina

Madina (pronounced 'medina', and sometimes spelt that way) is the second holiest city in Islam. It was originally an agglomeration in an agricultural area in Arabia called Yathrib, to the north of Mekka. At the time of Muhammad its main inhabitants were two Arab tribes (Aws and Khazraj) who were constantly in conflict with each other. There were also three groups of Jews. Muhammad had acted as a mediator between the two conflicting Arab tribes, so he was already known in this place.

When he and his first disciples in Mekka were being persecuted, he decided to go to Yathrib where the first Islamic community took shape. This was in C.E. 622. Consequently, according to tradition, the agglomeration took the name of *madīnat al-nabī*, "the city of the Prophet", shortened to Madina.

Muhammad lived for a further 10 years in Madina until his death in 632. It remained the political capital of the Islamic empire until 661.

Pilgrims to Mekka often visit Madina as well. The two cities are known as the *haramayn*, the two holy places. They are "forbidden" cities, in that non-Muslims are not allowed to enter them, but they are also 'sanctuaries' in which bloodshed is prohibited.

14

**In 622 C.E. Muhammad and his disciples went from Mekka to Medina. This is known as the *hijra*. What does the word *hijra* mean?**

- a) Compromise.
- b) Flight.
- c) Migration.

**The answer to question 13**

*The correct answer is b)*

An essential part of the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mekka, is to circle seven times round the Ka'ba. This is done on two occasions: at the beginning of the pilgrimage rites and at the end.

Men and women perform this rite together; there is no separation of the sexes.



## Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the third Holy city for Muslims. It is in fact called in Arabic *al-Quds*, “the Holy”.

It is revered by Muslims for its connection with Muhammad. *Sûra 17 (The Night Journey)* starts:

Glory to Him who made His servant [Muhammad] travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship.

(Qur’an 17:1)

The “sacred place of worship” is understood as being the Ka’ba in Mekka, with “the furthest place” (*al-aqsâ*) in Jerusalem.

From the place where Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son – a site where later was constructed the Dome of the Rock – Muhammad was taken up to heaven.

This site is where the Jewish Temple had stood before it was destroyed by the Romans in C.E. 70.

Today al-Aqsa mosque is situated in one corner of the Esplanade, but the whole Esplanade of the Temple is recognized by Muslims as being al-Aqsa.

Jerusalem was never important politically for Muslims, but it became a place where Muslims, seeking a deeper spiritual life, settled. Even today Muslims, especially from Asia, like to visit Jerusalem after having performed the pilgrimage to Mekka.

15

**The Holy One (*al-Quddûs*) is one of the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God (see Qur’an 59:23).**

**Which of the following is also among the Ninety-Nine Names?**

- a) Father.
- b) Light.
- c) Potter.
- d) Shepherd.

**The answer to question 14**

*The correct answer is c).*

The root meaning of *hijra* is to emigrate, to dissociate oneself, to part company.

The English version of this word is Hegira, or Hejira, defined by Collins Dictionary as “the flight of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D.; the starting point of the Muslim era”.

Though the newly-born group of Muslims faced difficulties in Mekka, the migration to Madina was less a matter of fleeing from danger and more of a political move to allow the community to become established.



## A reflection by a Muslim living in Europe

Similar to Lent, Easter and Passover, Ramadan is a season for community, generous hospitality and charity, deep reflection, prayer and renewal. This Ramadan, we have a unique opportunity to engage in many aspects of the season that often get submerged in the usual runaround of daily life and evening gatherings full of family and friends eating, laughing and praying together. Stationed in our homes, we will be forced to sit with ourselves and observe and hear what flows up and out of our hearts. Many of us who have the privilege to work from home will have cherished time with children, to tell stories, write songs and make crafts that celebrate the symbols of the season. With our high streets and shops still mostly closed, we have the rarest of opportunities in our lifetime – to fast from our rampant consumerism. Without large dinner gatherings to plan for, we can take this chance to focus on the often-overshadowed dimension of generosity, that of humble simplicity.

Most of all, we have a chance, unlike so many previous Ramadan years, to feel the reality that so many of our brothers and sisters around the world face daily, regardless of the coronavirus quarantine. This year, as we sit in our own largely self-enforced lockdowns, we can be ever mindful of Uyghur, Kashmiri, Rohingya Muslims and many others for whom lockdown is not simply an inconvenience, but a living nightmare, one that we would be too scared to even dream. Let us ensure that this Ramadan, every time we feel the need to complain about our circumstances, we hold our tongue and turn instead to prayer for those whose needs are far greater than our own.

If Ramadan is “peak season” for charity in Islam, then this year, with a heightened awareness of the inequalities in our societies that this crisis has revealed, let us give with unbridled generosity. In helping our neighbours, tending to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged among our communities, and donating whatever we can to

charities working on the frontlines of this crisis, including those tackling homelessness, medical and care needs, and loneliness and isolation, we can ensure the well-being of every member of our society. Here, perhaps we may also remember the beautiful prophetic tradition that “even a smile is an act of charity.” Passing on our smiles, from one to the other, we can combat incredible adversity with infectious hope.

16

**Dr Nawaz has mentioned Uyghur, Kashmiri and Rohingya Muslims. To which of the following countries does each group belong: China, India, Myanmar?**

**The answer to question 15**  
*The correct answer is b)*

The names of God are derived from the Qur’an.

a), c) and d) do not occur. They would be considered incompatible with the transcendence of God.

*Sûra 24* of the Qur’an is called *al-Nûr* (Light). It contains the following passage: God is the light of the heavens and earth. His light is like this: There is a niche, and in it a lamp, The lamp inside a glass, a glass like a glittering star, Fuelled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west, Whose oil almost gives light even when no fire touches it... Light upon light – God guides whoever He will to His light. (Qur’an 24:35).





## Belief in God

The Pillars of Islam (that is, of Islamic practice) have been mentioned (see the answer to question 2). What are the Pillars of Islamic belief? They are the following: God, angels, prophets, revealed books, the decree of God, Judgement on the Last Day.

It is not possible to explain all of these in one short paragraph, but a word can be said about the first pillar of belief: God.

Muslims believe in One God. The name of God in Arabic is *Allâh*. This is a contraction of *al-'ilâha* which means “**the** divinity”. In other words there is no other divinity, no other god.

Jews, Christians and Muslims agree that there is only one God.

The Second Vatican Council has taught that “together with us (Christians) they (Muslims) adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day” (*Lumen gentium*, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no.16).

We understand this God differently. Jews and Muslims do not accept a God who is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But this does not mean that we adore a different God. There is only one God. It is interesting to note that Arabic-speaking Christians use the name *Allâh* for God.

17

**The term *islam* means submission to God. The *Muslim* is one who submits to the will of God. What does *îmân* mean?**

- a) Charity.
- b) Faith.
- c) Leader.

**The answer to question 16**

*The correct answer is*

Uyghur – China; Kashmiri – India (the region of Kashmir is however disputed between India and Pakistan which each administer different parts of it); Rohingya – Myanmar [Burma] (The Government of Myanmar claims that the Rohingya are originally from Bangladesh and has been sending them back to this country).



## Sunni and Shi'a

Muslims have the same basic beliefs and practices, and yet they are divided. The main division is between Sunni and Shi'a. How did this division come about?

When Muhammad died in 632 C.E. one group of Muslims held that he had left no provision for the future. Some leading Muslims got together and chose one of the first converts to Islam, Abu Bakr, as the Caliph (the successor) to govern the community.

Another group asserted that Muhammad had appointed his nearest male relative, his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali, to be his successor. There developed a party (*shi'a*) supporting 'Ali in opposition to the ruling Caliph.

So on the one hand there were those Muslims who supported the idea of a Caliph as a political-military ruler of the Islamic community, and on the other hand those who insisted that the authority over the community is mainly spiritual, that the community is led by an Imam ('leader') who must be a descendant of Muhammad.

Today about 90% of Muslims world-wide are Sunnis. The Shi'a, of whom there are different groups, constitute roughly 10%.

18

**The majority of Muslims are Sunnis. What does the word Sunni mean?**

- a) People of the Orient.
- b) People of a Pleasant Disposition.
- c) People of Tradition.

**The answer to question 17**

*The correct answer is b)*

Our word "Amen" comes from the same root as *îmân*.

Charity is *ihsân*, or "doing that which is good".

The leader (for example at Prayer) is called an *Imâm* (see the answer to question 4).



## Sufism

As in Judaism, in Islam the Law is very important. Correct practice (orthopraxis) is often given more importance than correct belief (orthodoxy). Yet right from the beginning there have been Muslims who have wanted to go beyond the outward observance of the law, practising asceticism, striving to perform all acts with a pure intention, stressing meditation over action, rating spiritual development higher than strict observance of the law. This Islamic mysticism is known as Sufism, and the people who follow this way are known as Sufis.

The Sufi may be an individual, but more often belongs to a confraternity or an order known as a *tariqa* ('way'). There are many different Sufi orders, each with its own practices, especially prayers added to the ordinary ritual prayers. The members do not live together, but they assemble, usually once a week, to pray, often chanting and making rhythmical movements accompanied by drums. These Sufi orders have contributed much to the expansion of Islam.

19

**Mystics in Islam are called Sufis. What is the meaning of the word *sūf*?**

- a) A line/row formed when performing *salât* (ritual prayer).
- b) A simple meal of soup.
- c) Wool.

**The answer to question 18**

*The correct answer is c)*

Tradition (with a capital T) is, in Arabic, *sunna*. This is what is customary, usually based on what Muhammad said or did recounted in a 'tradition' (with a small 't') (*hadîth*).

The Sunna stands alongside the Qur'an as a source of Islamic law.





## The Fatiha

Passing by the grave of a Muslim, one may often see written on the tombstone: “For the deceased who lies here please recite a *Fâtiha*.”

*Al-Fâtiha*, which means “the opening”, is the name given to the first *sûra* (chapter) of the Qur’an.

This chapter is recited during every unit of the *salât* (Ritual Prayer), so that a Muslim who performs the five daily prayers will recite it 17 times during the day.

In some ways it is the Islamic equivalent of the Our Father.

Here is the text:

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy,  
the Giver of Mercy!  
Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds,  
the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,  
Master of the Day of Judgement.  
It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help.  
Guide us in the straight path:  
The path of those You have blessed,  
those who incur no anger  
and who have not gone astray.

20

***Al-fâtiha* is the name given to the first *sûra* (chapter) of the Qur’an. How many *sûras* (chapters) are there in the Qur’an?**

- a) 24.
- b) 74.
- c) 114.

**The answer to question 19**  
*The correct answer is c)*

Wool in Arabic is *sûf*. The first mystics, or ascetics, in Islam adopted wearing a rough woolen garment, and so became known as Sufis.

When Muslims perform the Prayer together they stand in a line/row (*saff*; plural *sufûf*).

## The last days of Ramadan

The last ten days of Ramadan are special. Within them falls the Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*).

This special night is mentioned in the Qur'an; in fact a *sûra* is dedicated to it:

We sent it down on the Night of Glory.  
What will explain to you what that Night of Glory is?

The Night of Glory is better than a thousand months;

On that night the angels and the Spirit descend again and again with their Lord's permission on every task.

Peace it is until the rising of the dawn.

(Qur'an 97)

The translation used here gives Glory. Other translators suggest Power, Honour or Destiny.

The "it" in the first line refers to Revelation, in other words for Muslims the Qur'an which is held to have been communicated to Muhammad by the Spirit (usually understood as referring to the Angel Gabriel).

The Night of Destiny is therefore a night of special blessing. It is usually identified with the 27<sup>th</sup> day of Ramadan, but this identification is not certain, so pious Muslims give special attention also to 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Ramadan.

Yusuf Ali, in his translation of the Qur'an, says that it is best to take this in a mystic sense. "It transcends Time: for it is God's Power dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance, by his Revelation, in every kind of affair."

21

**Angels have many different functions. Which of the following is NOT their role?**

- a) To celebrate the praises of God.
- b) To fight on behalf of true believers.
- c) To give names to God's creatures.

**The answer to question 20**

*The correct answer is c)*

From *sûra* 2 onwards the *sûras* are arranged more or less according to decreasing length. *Sûra* 2 *al-baqara* (The Cow) has 282 verses, whereas *sûra* 114 *al-nâs* (People) has only 6.





## The last days of Ramadan (continued)

In 2019 two of the priests of St Vincent's, Fr Terry and Fr Michael, attended an *iftâr* (meal for the breaking of the fast) at the Abdul Quilliam Mosque at Brougham Terrace on the West Derby Road, which claims to be the first mosque in England.

In 2020 unfortunately, because of the restrictions necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic, it was not possible for the mosque to offer similar *iftârs*. We sympathized with them, and with all the Muslims who, like us, were not able to gather in their places of worship. We had been made very welcome in 2019.

Among the literature that we were given on that occasion was a *Ramadan Guide*. One of the articles in this publication was on "Ramadan: The Days of Mercy". It starts off by saying: "The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) has made it easier for us to gain the full blessings of Ramadan by dividing the month into three parts of ten days each, with each part having its own special significance.

The first 10 days: Days of Mercy;  
The second 10 days: Days of Forgiveness;  
The last 10 days: Salvation from the Hellfire."

This last division of the month is a reminder that Muslims believe in the reward of Paradise and the punishment of Hell. The following prayer is given:

O Allah! I ask you for paradise and whatever words and actions may take me near to it. I seek your protection from the fire and whatever words or actions that may take me near it. I beseech You to make Your decisions for me good.

22

**Ritual Prayer in Islam is called *salât*. Additional prayer is often referred to as *du'â*. What is the original meaning of the word *du'â* ?**

- To call.
- To make double.
- To give something that is due.

### The answer to question 21

The correct answer is c)

The angels say to God: "We celebrate your praise and proclaim your holiness" (Q 2:30).

This promise is made at a time when the first Muslims were having to defend themselves: If you are steadfast and mindful of God, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand swooping angels if the enemy should suddenly attack you! And God arranged it so. (Q 3:124)

But God asked the angels to tell Him the names of things, and they replied that they did not have this knowledge. God taught Adam to name all creatures (see Q 2:30-33).





## Fatima and Mary

For Catholics Fatima always evokes the apparitions of Our Lady that took place at Fatima, in Portugal. This locality took its name from an Arabic princess, daughter of a Muslim leader who became a Christian.

The original Fatima was the daughter of Muhammad by his first wife, Khadija. Fatima was given in marriage to Muhammad's cousin, 'Ali, to whom she bore two sons, Hasan and Husayn, who were both Imams after their father. Fatima is thus revered by the Shi'a who call her the "Mother of the Imams." She is a woman of sorrows, of many tears, because her husband 'Ali was not recognized as the rightful successor of Muhammad and was later assassinated, on account also of the martyrdom of her son Husayn. A tradition (*hadith*) is attributed to Muhammad according to which he said: "Fatima is foremost among the ladies of Paradise." In the Shi'ite tradition she is counted among the 14 Holy Ones together with Muhammad and the Twelve Imams, the only woman to be included. Yet she is not mentioned in the Qur'an, unlike Mary whose mother said of her:

I name her Mary and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from the rejected Satan.

(Qur'an 2:36)

Consequently, in fulfilment of this prayer, Mary and Jesus were untouched by Satan and remained sinless. To Mary the angels said:

Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure. He has truly chosen you above all women.

(Qur'an 2:42)

23

**Fatima is considered to be the "mother of the Imams". How many Imams have there been?**

- a) 7.
- b) 12.
- c) 49.

**The answer to question 22**

*The correct answer is a)*

*Salât* is a prayer of praise, but this is supplemented, especially as part of the sermon during the Friday Prayer, by supplication, calling on God for particular needs.

From the same root comes the word *da'wa* (or *da'wah*) which means "invitation", and is used for the invitation to embrace Islam.



## Jesus and Mary as a Sign for all people

The name of Mary is frequently mentioned in the Qur'an. This is because Jesus, recognized by the Qur'an as a prophet, is often referred to as "the son of Mary". This way of presenting Jesus is for Christians both negative and positive. It is negative in that it does not declare Jesus to be the Son of God. On the other hand it is positive in the sense that it accepts the virgin birth of Jesus: Jesus is the "son of Mary"; he has no earthly father. The following is a text from the Qur'an:

Remember the one who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her from Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for all people.

(Qur'an 21:91)

All commentators agree in identifying "the one who guarded her chastity" as the Virgin Mary. She and her son, Jesus, are naturally bound together. They constitute a single sign. But we may ask: a sign of what? In the Gospel Jesus is essentially a sign of salvation. On seeing the baby Jesus, Simeon declares: "My eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see" (Luke 2:30-31).

The centre of the Qur'anic message is that there is One God, Creator and Judge, who will judge the whole of mankind at the end of time. At the end of time God will assemble the whole of humanity before Him. Many contemporaries of Muhammad did not accept this teaching, so the Qur'an argues that just as God, who created the world simply by his word, has no difficulty in bringing about the virginal birth of Jesus, so He who brought about this miraculous birth will also be able to bring about the new birth of mankind at the general resurrection. So the emphasis is on God's power rather than on His saving love.

Christians and Muslims are close in their beliefs, but there remain essential differences.

24

**Which of the following New Testament figures is NOT mentioned by name in the Qur'an?**

- Jesus.
- John the Baptist.
- Joseph, son of Jacob, husband of Mary.
- Zechariah.

**The answer to question 23**

*The correct answer is*

any one of them, depending on which group of Shi'a one is referring to.

The majority of the Shi'a (Ithna'ashari Shi'a, or "Twelvers") recognize 12 Imams. The twelfth Imam has been in occultation, a Hidden Imam, since 941 C.E. It is believed that he is still alive, though hidden, and that he will return at the end of time as al-Mahdi, the Guided One.

Ja'far al-Sadiq, the Sixth Imam, designated his eldest son, Isma'il, to succeed him, but then changed the designation to another son, Musa. Some recognized Isma'il as the last Imam (these are known as "Seveners").

Others recognized Muhammad, the son of Isma'il, as continuing the line of Imams. These Isma'ilis follow Prince Karim Aga Khan IV as their Living Imam; he is thus the 49<sup>th</sup> Imam since the death of Muhammad.





## Prophets

25

**Which of the following figures of the Old Testament is NOT mentioned in the Qur'an?**

- a) Jacob.
- b) Jeremiah.
- c) Job.
- d) Jonas.

**The answer to question 24**

*The correct answer is c)*

Joseph is not named in the Qur'an, probably in order to emphasize the virginity of Mary. There is a veiled reference to him as the guardian of Mary in the verse:

You were not present among them when they cast lots to see which of them should take charge of Mary (Q 2:44).

This is in accordance with the Christian tradition, found in the apocryphal *Book of James*, that widowers were invited to cast lots with their rods for Mary, and that as a result Joseph was indicated as the one to take charge of her.

Jesus is mentioned many times in the Qur'an.

The story of Zachariah and the birth of John (*Yahya* – who is not called “the Baptist”) is found in *sûra* 19 of the Qur'an (Q 19:1-13).

One of the pillars of faith for Muslims is belief in prophets. These are men chosen by God to give a message to mankind. Different prophets are mentioned many times in the Qur'an, for example in this text:

Say (Muhammad), “We (Muslims) believe in God and in what has been sent down to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes. We believe in what has been given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We do not make a distinction between any of them.

(Qur'an 3:84)

There are also three non-Biblical Arab prophets mentioned in the Qur'an: Hud, Salih and Shu'ayb. From the Qur'anic passage quoted above, it can be noticed that Jesus is recognized as a prophet. Though this verse says that no distinction is made between any of the prophets, in fact a distinction is made between a simple prophet (*nabî*) who is given revelation in the form of general moral teaching; a messenger (*rasûl*) who is sent to convey also a law.

Muhammad is recognized by Muslims as both prophet, indeed **the Prophet** (*al-nabî*) and messenger, **the Messenger of God** (*rasûl Allâh*), and in fact as the final prophet and messenger.

Muhammad is not the father of any one of you men; he is God's Messenger and the seal of the prophets.

(Qur'an 33:40)





## The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God

26

**The Call to Prayer contains the phrase *Allâhu akbar* and at the beginning of the *salât* (Ritual Prayer) this phrase is proclaimed by the imam and repeated by the assembly.**

**What does *Allâhu akbar* mean?**

- a) God is All-Aware.
- b) God is All-Powerful.
- c) God is Greater.

**The answer to question 25**  
*The correct answer is b)*

None of the Major Prophets of the Bible, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, or of the Minor Prophets, including Amos and Hosea, figure in the Qur'an, with the exception of Jonah.

Jacob (*Ya'qûb*), is mentioned a good number of times, particularly in the *sûra yûsuf* (Q 12) which tells the story of Joseph.

The example of Job (*Ayyûb*) who cried out to God in his suffering is related in Q 21:83-84.

The story of Jonah (*Yûnus*) is told in Q 37:139-148.

The month of Ramadan is a time not only for fasting but also for prayer. Devout Muslims will make a special effort to read the Qur'an during this month. Another way of praying is to reflect on the Names of God. A Muslim has written: "The more one reflects on the Divine names, the more one is elevated in the realm of spirituality. A reflecting human being becomes a mirror for the Divine names. The human being that becomes such a mirror becomes a perfect human being." According to tradition there are ninety-nine Names of God. Their recitation is encouraged in the following *hadîth* (saying of Muhammad): "To God belong the 99 Names, that is one hundred minus one, for He, the Unique, loves to be designated by these Names, enumerated one by one; the one who knows the 99 Names will enter Paradise."

100 minus 1: there is one Name missing, the Supreme Name, or the Hidden Name of God. This is a reminder that the Names given to God in human language can never fully convey the mystery of God.



## Revealed Books

According to tradition, on the Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*), 27 Ramadan, the whole Qur'an was sent down to Muhammad, subsequently to be given piecemeal as needed. But the Qur'an is not the only Scripture to have been given, as the Qur'an itself enjoins:

You who believe, believe in God and His Messenger and in the Scripture He sent down to His Messenger, as well as what He sent down before. Anyone who does not believe in God, His angels, His Scriptures, His messengers and the Last Day has gone far, far astray.

(Qur'an 4:136).

God's Messenger refers to Muhammad, and so by "the Scripture He sent down to His Messenger" is intended the Qur'an. But what has been sent down before? The Qur'an mentions the Torah (*tawrât*) given to Moses, the Psalms (*zabûr*) given to David, and the Gospel (*injîl*) given to Jesus. It is worth noting that just as the Qur'an is the message given to Muhammad to preach, so the Gospel (*Injil*) is understood as being the message preached **by** Jesus, of which only fragments remain. For Muslims the four Gospels which speak **about** Jesus are not the Gospel mentioned by the Qur'an and so are not considered to be part of the revealed Book.

It is important to note another passage of the Qur'an:

We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down.

(Qur'an 4:48).

The conception is that God's revelation came in successive editions, the Qur'an being the final edition. Usually when people are buying books they choose the latest edition. This may explain why many Muslims are not interested in reading the Bible.

27

**Muslims often speak about *al-Qur'ân al-Karîm*. What does "Karim" mean?**

- a) Glorious.
- b) Holy.
- c) Nourishing.

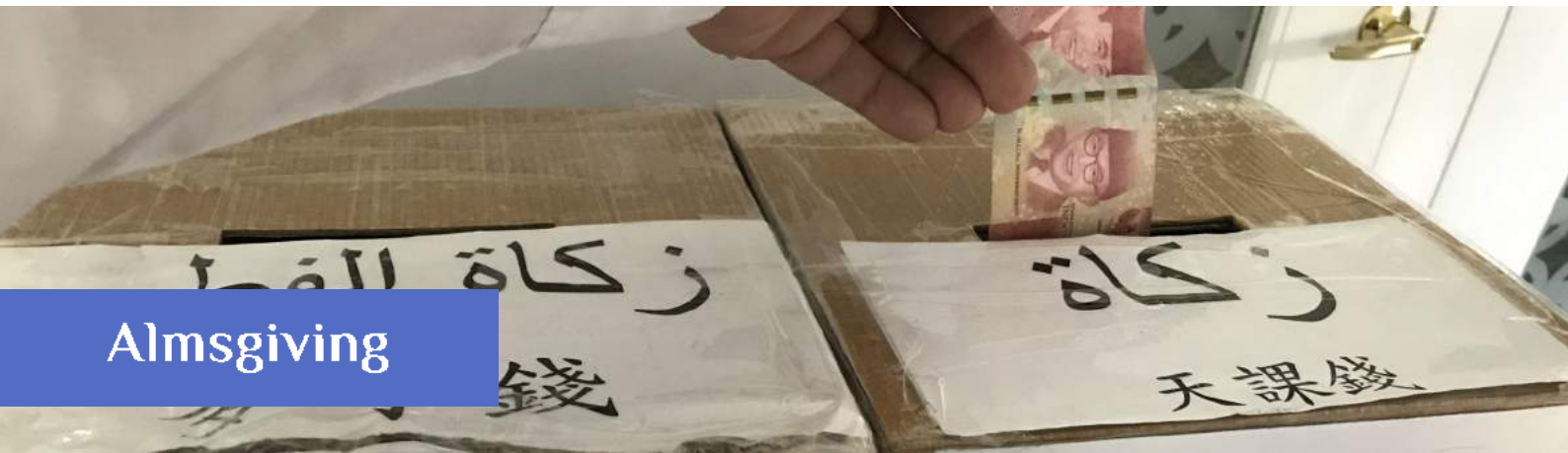
**The answer to question 26**

*The correct answer is c)*

a) *Al-Khabîr* – All-Aware; b) *Al-Qâdir* – All-Powerful  
*Allâhu akbar*, God is greater, expressing the sublimity of God, is unfortunately used as a slogan in political rallies and even in violent demonstrations.

The Grand Imam of al-Azhar and Pope Francis protested against this in their joint statement on Human Fraternity (signed on 4 February 2019):

"We call upon all concerned to stop using religions to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanaticism, and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression... God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want His name to be used to terrorize people."



## Almsgiving

The third pillar of Islam is Almsgiving (*zakât*). This is in fact a tax to be paid to the community by all believers who have financial means. It is not a tithe, a payment of 10%, but rather paying 2.5% of one's net revenue after all expenses have been paid. This can be accompanied by free-will offerings (*sadaqât*) which are encouraged. There is also a *zakât al-fitr*, the almsgiving at the end of Ramadan, a special donation for the poor which can be made either in kind or by a financial offering (in 2019 the Abdullah Quilliam Mosque indicated 5 pounds sterling per person as the amount to be given).

So Zakat can be seen as an expression of solidarity with the faith community. One can think of the pillars of Islam in this way:

*Shahâda*, profession of faith: entry into the *Umma*, the community of Muslims

*Salât*, Ritual Prayer: communion with God and with fellow Muslims

*Zakât*, Almsgiving: solidarity with the community.

*Sawm*, Fasting during Ramadan: the experience of belonging to a distinct community (people around are not observing Ramadan)

*Hajj*, Pilgrimage to Mecca: the experience of belonging to an international community.

Is there anything for Christians to learn from this?

28

**Zakat is the name for Almsgiving. What is the root meaning of *zakât*?**

- a) Intelligent.
- b) Pleasurable.
- c) Pure.

**The answer to question 27**

*The correct answer is a)*

The Arabic word *karîm* has in fact multiple meanings: noble, eminent, generous, kind, precious.

As one of the Beautiful Names of God it is understood as meaning Generous. Applied to the Qur'an it is usually translated as Glorious.

The Arabic for holy is *qadîs*. *Al-Quddûs*, the All-Holy is another of the Names of God.

Arabic-speaking Christians call the Holy Bible *al-kitâb al-muqaddas*.





## Greetings to Muslims from the Vatican

The Second Vatican Council, which took place over 50 years ago, was the first Council of the Church to deal specifically with Islam. *Nostra Aetate*, the Council's Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions has a special paragraph on Islam. This ends with an exhortation:

Over the centuries many quarrels and dissension have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values. (*Nostra Aetate* 3).

In 1964 Pope Saint Paul VI set up a special office in the Vatican for relations with people of other religions, now known as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Since 1967 this office has been sending greetings to Muslims on the occasion of Ramadan. The message for 2020 starts off in the following way:

The month of Ramadan is so central in your religion and therefore dear to you at personal, familial and social levels. It is a time for spiritual healing and growth, of sharing with the poor, of strengthening bonds with relatives and friends. For us, your Christian friends, it is a propitious time to further strengthen our relationships with you, by greeting you, meeting you on this occasion and, where possible, by sharing in an *iftar* with you. Ramadan and *'Id al-Fitr* thus are special occasions to foster fraternity between Christians and Muslims. It is in this spirit that the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue offers its prayerful best wishes and hearty congratulations to you all.

29

**Which is the country that has the largest population of Muslims?**

- a) Egypt.
- b) India.
- c) Indonesia.
- d) Nigeria.
- e) Pakistan.
- f) Saudi Arabia.

**The answer to question 28**

*The correct answer is c)*

The understanding of *zakât* is that, as well as being an act of solidarity with the community, it is also an act of purification. The Muslim who gives away part of what he or she has, can then enjoy the rest with a clear conscience.

There is another word *dhakî*, often pronounce "zakî", which means intelligent, sharp-minded.

*dhawq* means "taste".



## Eid al-Fitr

30

**For this final day the question asked for an evaluation of this accompaniment during Ramadan.**

**The answer to question 29**

*The correct answer is c)*

The following figures, taken from Wikipedia, are a rough guide.

Eid al-Fitr, the feast (*îd*) of the Breaking of the Fast, begins when the moon is sighted on the evening of the first day of the month of Shawwal, the month which follows Ramadan. It is also known as the Lesser Feast (*al-îd al-saghîr*) compared to Eid al-Adha, the feast of the Sacrifice, or the Greater Feast (*al-îd al-kabîr*), commemorating the sacrifice of Abraham and which is celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of *Dhu al-hijja* (the Pilgrimage month).

On Eid al-Fitr children usually receive gifts of new clothes and toys, as well as sweets.

|                                  | Total population (millions) | Muslims (millions) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Indonesia                        | 240                         | 227                |
| Egypt                            | 95                          | 86                 |
| Largest number in the Arab world |                             |                    |
| India                            | 1,210                       | 170                |
| A small minority!                |                             |                    |
| Nigeria                          | 195                         | 90                 |
| Largest number in Africa         |                             |                    |
| Pakistan                         | 207                         | 200                |
| Second in the world              |                             |                    |
| Saudi Arabia                     | 27                          | 27                 |
| Christian foreign workers 1.5    |                             |                    |



This final post was  
put on Facebook  
as a recorded message

Today I am recording this message rather than just putting a text on Facebook. This gives me the opportunity to express to our Muslim brothers and sisters, on behalf of all of us at St Vincent's, priests and people, our very best wishes as they celebrate 'Id al-Fitr, the feast (*'îd*) of the Breaking of the Fast at the end of the month of Ramadan. I would like to tell our Muslim friends that we at St Vincent's parish have been accompanying them all through the month of Ramadan.

We know that on the morning of the feast there is a special Prayer when all Muslims are invited to gather together. Last year [i.e. in 2019], at the Abdul Quilliam Mosque, three services were scheduled for the celebration of the 'Id Prayer, at 7.30, 8.30 and 9.30 in the morning. It is not always possible for all Muslims to attend, some because of illness, others because of work. We sympathize with them. But we know, like you, that God is near, *Allâhu qarîb*, Distancing is not part of God's *sunna*, His normal way of relating to us. *Allâhu ma'a al-sâbirîn*, "God is with the steadfast" (Q 2:153), and you have surely been steadfast as you have observed Ramadan. May God pour out on you an abundance of blessings. We say to you: *'îd mubâarak, al-salâmu 'alaykum wa-rahmat Allâh wa-barakâtu-hu*, A Blessed Feast, Peace be with you and the Mercy of God and His Blessings.

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لا هباز على  
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