

The islamic ritual of ramadan

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



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Introduction

The non-western cultural ritual that I chose to research and write about is Ramadan. This is a ritual that is well known and is practiced by over 1.6 million Muslim people around the world. Specifically in places such as Malaysia, Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. This practice in particular caught my attention due to its month long duration and its deep cultural roots and traditions that might seem very hard to follow for people from outside cultures. The month long ritual is to celebrate and worship their God or Allah, it is also a time of the year families in this culture to get closer to one another.

Fasting and Praying

In the Islamic culture it is said that Ramadan originated in the year 610 when Allah revealed the first verses of the Quran to Prophet Mohammed. The Quran is the Islamic sacred book, which is said to hold Allah's word. It is also said that during this time the heavens open up and the gates of Hell close.

To celebrate this event, once Muslims reach the age of 12, they partake in Ramadan, the main practice of this ritual, and what it is most known for by people from other cultures, is the fasting that takes place for a whole month. However, the fasting only takes place while there is daylight out, this includes water. During the fasting period they have one meal early in the morning called sohour; as well as once the sun sets, they have a meal called iftar. A very common food for iftar is any type of sweet food or dessert this is to give the Muslim people participating in Ramadan a quick energy boost. Fasting is so important for this Islamic ritual because when they are not focusing on human needs such as food or water they are able to become closer to Allah. Similarly to other cultures, such as Catholics during Lent or Jewish people during Yom Kippur, Muslims participate in fasting this is seen as a time for them to cleanse their bodies and show resistance to temptation. In addition it reminds the Muslim people to be grateful for what they have and to think about those in poverty. This supports the idea of giving to charity or giving back to those in need during Ramadan. Another important aspect of Ramadan is the nightly prayers, in general that Islamic culture advocates for praying every night but it becomes even more important during Ramadan. In summary it is said that those who pray during the nights of Ramadan shall be rewarded by Allah by having previous sins forgotten.

Giving Up Temptations

Adding on to the list of things that Muslims have to give up, according to the journal article, “ Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians” there are many aspects that

go into having a proper Ramadan. The author, Samuli Schielke states, "Forms of entertainment deemed immoral or un-Islamic – flirting and making out, consumption of alcohol and cannabis, pornography – largely stop during the holy month." (Schielke). This just further exemplifies the importance of this ritual and the dedication of the Islamic culture; this is truly a time for family and prayer and not tempting oneself with anything other than those two things. In the very same article, Samuli gives insight to what he believes to be the purpose of Ramadan. In short, Ramadan is not a period for self or societal growth or improvement, but rather a time for reward, forgiving sins, and having the goal to enter the afterlife.

Commercialization of Ramadan

To my knowledge, Ramadan has stayed consistent with its rituals and meaning to the culture for many years but recently there have been thoughts that Ramadan may become a more commercialized holiday rather than a ritual. A study was done by Sandikci Ozlem and Omeraki Sahver and they wrote an article titled, "Globalization and Rituals: Does Ramadan Turn Into Christmas?". This article was released in 2007, it is possible that since then, Ramadan has seen even bigger strides towards a more commercial holiday. At the time of their study they reported seeing shops selling items such as Ramadan themed calendars and lanterns. To backpack on this, they reported that, "...in recent years performance of Ramadan rituals in Turkey began to take place more in the public space and in a visibly consumption-oriented manner. For instance, five-star hotels offer lavish Ramadan feasts..." (Ozlem). This is evidence that shows in certain areas, Ramadan has turned into an advertised holiday. From this, the question can be asked

whether or not the commercialization of Ramadan will be beneficial for the ritual or take away from its core purpose? The argument can be made for both sides. While I don't believe that Ramadan will turn into a Hallmark holiday, I think that it will still be celebrated for the reason of getting closer to Allah. However, in this happening maybe some restrictions become lenient such as entertainment, if the ritual is commercialized then maybe forms of entertainment will try to be incorporated into the holiday. Which could have its benefits such as being able to communicate with the younger demographic a bit easier. Therefore, possibly leading them to start practicing Ramadan earlier in life, or at least get them looking forward to it and this can help ensure that the ritual continues to be passed on from generation to generation. One thing that I think is certain is that, whether Ramadan becomes globalized or commercialized or not, I think that fasting, prayer, family bonding, and connection with Allah will remain unchanged.

Ramadan and Researches

In looking up articles surrounding Ramadan, I noticed that the popular study being done was not on the history or culture, but rather on the health aspect of those who partake in Ramadan and fast. They took into consideration, people's weight, heart rate, and breathing, but they also tied in mental health and how the ritual affects relationships in a family. A study done by the Department of Physiology Smt NHL Municipal Medical College, Ahmedabad, lead by the author Shaista Saiyad reported on the full body experience of participating in Ramadan. There were obvious statements about how the lack of eating and drinking for 13 hours at time lead to weight loss and the decrease of waist circumference. In addition, their research

showed that those who celebrated Ramadan also saw an overall reduction in anxiety. This was accredited to the constant family time that individuals experienced during the month of Ramadan. They also observed that family bonds were stronger and relationships saw little to no faults. In a way Ramadan and its traditions help to contribute scientific processes and advancements.

Conclusion

I first heard about this ritual in May of 2019 and it was because a basketball player for the Portland Trailblazers, Enes Kanter was playing during the playoffs while fasting for Ramadan. He didn't even drink water during the games. I had no idea that the fasting lasted for a month and that there were other cultural aspects and traditions linked to this ritual. This research essay and class has taught me that everything a culture does is for a reason and they are usually done because it was passed down and taught by older people within that culture. Also that culture is not just religion or way of thinking, but it's a combined way of thinking and acting, it is a way a person lives. Anthropology is so important because everywhere one goes there is a different culture and a different way of living and if no one knows about it then that way of life could fade out and be forgotten.