

Fasting & GCSEs:

Al Islah's Guide to Preparing for Ramadhan 2019

Fasting the month of Ramadhan in a long, hot, summer exam season should be one of the moments that define you as a true Muslim.

Why do Muslims Fast?

Fasting in the month of Ramadhan is one of the five Pillars of Islam and is held in high esteem across all Muslim cultures and societies. It is seen as a unique act of worship which combines consciousness, self-control, character development and empathy for the poor.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Salutations be upon him) stated that:

“Islam has been built on five pillars: testifying that there is no God worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, establishing the prayer, paying the obligatory charity, making the Hajj (pilgrimage) to the House, and fasting in Ramadhan.”

The Importance of character development

The prohibitions of fasting not only includes food and drink but also include all forms of rude and offensive behaviour including lying, foul language, fighting, backbiting and slander.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Salutations be upon him) stated that:

“Whoever does not give up false statements, and evil deeds, and speaking bad words to others, Allah is not in need of his leaving his food and drink.”

Hence Ramadhan is seen as the prime time to shed offensive behaviours and use fasting as a vehicle for character development. If a person can strengthen their will-power and give up essential food and drink for a period, they really should be able to give up offensive speech and behaviour for good.

Maximising student performance during public examinations

This year GCSE examinations will fall directly in the month of Ramadhan so the question arises for those children who want to fast, how best can they prepare?

Last minute cramming is not an option

Last minute cramming is not helpful. It overloads the short-term memory with information which is quickly forgotten during the exam because it has not transferred to the long-term memory. Exams actually test skills and application as well as memory retention and these need to be embedded over time. That's why it is important for students to work throughout the course and not leave it all to the last minute. Students need to set a realistic revision timetable which focuses on regular revision with short breaks. Ramadhan is a very busy family time and often short naps are needed in the afternoon. There just won't be the capacity for last minute cramming the night before an exam.

Sleep

In exam season sleep will be just as important, if not more important than nutrition. Staying up all night revising will do more damage than good. It is important to get into a regular cycle of sleeping early before Ramadhan even starts. With the nights being so short the temptation will be to break the fast and stay up until dawn. This should be avoided particularly for younger children. Sleep early and wake up for the pre-dawn meal. Short naps in the afternoon can be a good way of alleviating tiredness but hours and hours of deep sleep all afternoon defeats the purpose of fasting and is not good preparation for exams the next day.

Suhoor Meal

The suhoor is an essential aspect of fasting. The Prophet Muḥammad (Peace and Salutations be upon him) said:

“Eat the pre-dawn meal for in it there is blessing.”

This meal gives vital nutrition to the fasting person and the priority should be to drink plenty of water, remain hydrated, eat fresh fruit and vegetables, and avoid salty and fried foods. Slow energy-release foods such as whole-wheat pasta and porridge can be a useful source of energy for the day, and dates are the tried and tested food to ward off hunger. Small and regular meals are always better than one-off binges. From the time of breaking the fast, the meals should be staggered. After initially breaking the fast with dates, water and fruit along with the favourite starters, the person should take a break before eating their main protein-based meal.

Exam halls

Al Islah Girls High School will give due consideration to ensure conditions in the exam hall are as good as possible for our students. This year in particular the exam schedule is more condensed than ever with clashes between several popular exams. New guidelines brought in now mean that these exams are sat back-to-back with a very short break. All in all, students could find themselves in the exam hall for several hours sitting multiple exams in a day. We will strive to ensure ventilation, shade from sunlight, temperature and humidity have all been considered.

Support Network

Our girls will have a supportive team around them consisting of friends who also want to work hard and do well, teachers who know their subjects inside out, and family members who are there to provide the emotional support when the pressure mounts. A student sits an exam alone but they will certainly feel reassured by the support of their teachers, friends and family.

What are the rewards for fasting in times of great difficulty?

Fasting during the exam season may be one of many challenges that young people will face. Exams are more difficult and more condensed than in previous years, and the distractions are certainly more prolific with smartphones and apps demanding live updates.

In Islam the reward for acts of worship are proportional to the difficulty, hence, for example, the reward for Hajj, which is physically, spiritually and mentally demanding, is 'nothing but paradise'.

The Prophet (SAW) said,

‘There is a gate in Paradise called Ar-Raiyan, and those who observe fasts will enter through it on the Day of Resurrection and none except them will enter through it. It will be said, ‘Where are those who used to observe fasts?’ They will get up, and none except them will enter through it. After their entry the gate will be closed and nobody else will enter through it’.

Scholars explain the reason why Allah declared ‘Fasting is for me, and I will reward it’ is to emphasise that He will reward the fasting person abundantly, beyond the limit of their imagination, and beyond the limit of what words can describe.

DUA FOR EXAMS

وَإِنْ يُرِيدُوا أَنْ يَخْدَعُوكَ فَإِنَّ حَسْبَكَ اللَّهُ هُوَ الَّذِي إِلَيْكَ
بِنَصْرِهِ وَبِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Surah Al Anfal [8:62]