



THE ISLAMIC MONTH OF FASTING

RAMADAN

A guide for employers and employees

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 HOW CAN THIS GUIDE HELP?

There are over 3 million Muslims in the UK, forming one of the country's largest religious minorities, with a diverse set of ethnic backgrounds. Many British Muslims are of South Asian origin but there are also significant numbers of Muslims from North Africa and the Middle East, Central and Eastern Africa, Eastern Europe, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. In addition, there are a significant number of British Native White and African-Caribbean converts to Islam. Often people are unaware of the Islamic practices of their Muslim colleagues and feel too embarrassed to ask. Similarly, Muslims themselves may feel awkward in explaining things or asking for support from their teams or manager during the month.

These notes are intended for managers and others who work with Muslim work colleagues. The guide aims to increase understanding about the month of Ramadan and the practice of Muslims during this period, and particularly how it may affect their work.



1.2 WHY IS RAMADAN IMPORTANT?

Ramadan is important to Muslims because it is the month in which the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed by Allah (God) and transmitted through the Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (pbuh):



“Read, [O Prophet], in the Name of your Lord Who created - created humans from a mere clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who taught by the pen - taught humanity what they knew not.”

Qur'an

1.3 WHEN IS RAMADAN?

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic Calendar. The Islamic calendar is based on a lunar cycle with a lunar month being either 29 or 30 days, with the sighting of a new moon marking the start of every month. Consequently, a lunar year is about 11 days shorter than a typical Gregorian year. This means that the start of the month of Ramadan moves forward every year.



1.4 WHY IS THE QUR'AN SIGNIFICANT TO MUSLIMS?

For Muslims, the Qur'an has been sent down by Allah (God) as a guide for humanity and is Allah's unadulterated word as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (570 - 632 C.E.). This tradition of divinely chosen prophets or messengers in Islam, is shared by both the Christian and Jewish faiths. Islamic prophets include Prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, John and Jesus, to name but a few.

Muslims believe that over a period of 23 years, various verses and chapters of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Qur'an was then compiled into 114 chapters of varying length, with titles such as 'Abraham', 'The Pilgrimage', 'Mary', and 'Repentance'.



2.0 FASTING IN RAMADAN

One of the most important duties for a Muslim during the Islamic month of Ramadan is fasting. Known as 'Sawm' in Arabic, fasting is an obligatory duty during Ramadan, forming one of the five pillars of Islam.

During Ramadan, all healthy Muslim adults are required to fast during the daylight hours (around sunrise to sunset). During these hours, the individual is required to refrain from food, drink and smoking. However, some groups like the elderly, the sick, those that are travelling, or expectant and nursing mothers are exempt.

Aside from the daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan is the most visible and recognisable of Muslim acts the world over. It is a prescribed duty commanded by Allah (God) in the Qur'an:

“O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was for those before you - so perhaps you will become mindful of Allah.”

Qur'an

As with other duties in Islam, fasting becomes obligatory after the age of puberty. The act of fasting is designed as a spiritual experience; to instil mindfulness of God, and influence the moral behaviour of individuals within their environment and towards others.

During Ramadan, Muslims awake before dawn for a meal called 'Suhoor', directly before the start of one of the five daily prayers (the pre-dawn 'Fajr' prayer). The fast ends at sunset, coinciding with another of the five daily prayers (Maghrib prayer). It is Islamic tradition to break the fast (Iftar) with dates or water, followed by the Maghrib prayer and a meal.

It is important to know that fasting is not just about abstaining from eating and drinking. Muslims must also be more vigilant in refraining from other antisocial vices such as verbal abuse, fighting, eavesdropping, backbiting, lying and slander. These acts severely reduce the worth of a fast.



Fasting should encourage a person to feel more compassionate towards those who are less fortunate. The feelings of hunger and thirst not only lead to a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by those who are less fortunate, but also develop an appreciation for what we have. Fasting should also build one's sense of self-control and willpower, which can be beneficial throughout life in dealing with temptations and peer pressure. Through the act of fasting, Muslims learn to control their natural urges such as hunger and thirst, and thus are able to better resist temptations for things which are harmful, such as drugs or coercion towards bad behaviour.



In essence, Muslims must try to be model human beings during the month, with the aim of improving themselves and retaining these virtuous qualities thereafter. It is hoped that after having performed these acts for the whole month, Muslims will continue with these good habits after the month ends. Essentially, Ramadan is often termed the month of purification and offers Muslims a time to 'purify' their souls and physical bodies.



3.0 SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF RAMADAN

2.2 PRAYERS

Muslims typically practice their faith more stringently during Ramadan than they might during other times of the year, due to the virtues of this month. As a consequence, more Muslim staff than usual, may wish to offer obligatory prayers that occur during the working day, for which they will require use of the company quiet room. Where a quiet room is not available, it would be appreciated if a meeting room could be made available to Muslim colleagues, to perform their prayers. Typically, the prayer itself only takes approximately five to ten minutes and the timing has some flexibility. During the summer periods, only the early afternoon 'Dhuhr' prayer will take place in working hours.

Later each evening during Ramadan, Muslims also attend special prayers called 'Taraweeh' prayers at their local Masjid (Mosque). Approximately 1/30th of the Qur'an is recited every evening in the Taraweeh prayers, so that the entire scripture is recited over the course of the month.





3.2 CHARITY

Muslims are generally encouraged to donate to charitable causes and help the needy. This sense of generosity is heightened during the course of Ramadan as Muslims seek to benefit from the blessings of the month.

Many Muslims choose to pay 'Zakat' – an obligatory tax of 2.5% of an individual's surplus wealth to charitable causes – during the month of Ramadan. Additionally, before celebrating the end of Ramadan, Muslims are required to make another small charitable tax called 'Zakat al-Fitr', to help feed the poor. Millions of pounds of aid are typically raised in the UK through this act alone.

The Prophet, peace be upon him said, 'Give charity without delay, for it stands in the way of calamity'.

[Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)]



3.3 COMMUNITY

Ramadan is a time of goodwill, generosity and sharing with all members of the community. Muslims often invite each other to one another's homes to break the fast. This, combined with the congregational evening prayers, gives a greater sense of community and generosity, which is characteristic of the time.

4.0 WORK CONSIDERATIONS



4.1 MANAGING STAFF WHO FAST

Colleagues who are fasting would not expect those who are not fasting to abstain from eating or drinking in their presence.

For some individuals, the exertion in the physical and spiritual aspects during this month may leave them feeling a little tired.

4.2 REASONABLE WORK ADJUSTMENT

On occasion, some Muslim employees may ask for some work time arrangements during Ramadan. It would be appreciated to accommodate this, as far as the operations of the business allow. For example, on some days, many Muslims may prefer to start earlier, and/or have a short lunch break in order to finish early and get home in time to end the fast with their families, or attend social and religious functions.



4.3 BUSINESS OR SOCIAL EVENTS

It is worth noting that most Muslim colleagues who are fasting would not mind attending business events where food is served, but letting them know in advance would be appreciated.

With business away days, Muslims may prefer to remain closer to home during this period, so please try to accommodate this by allowing some flexibility. If an away day is unavoidable, please give consideration to Muslim staff when making such arrangements.

Additionally, with social events, please do not be offended if Muslim colleagues abstain from attending.



4.4 EID CELEBRATIONS

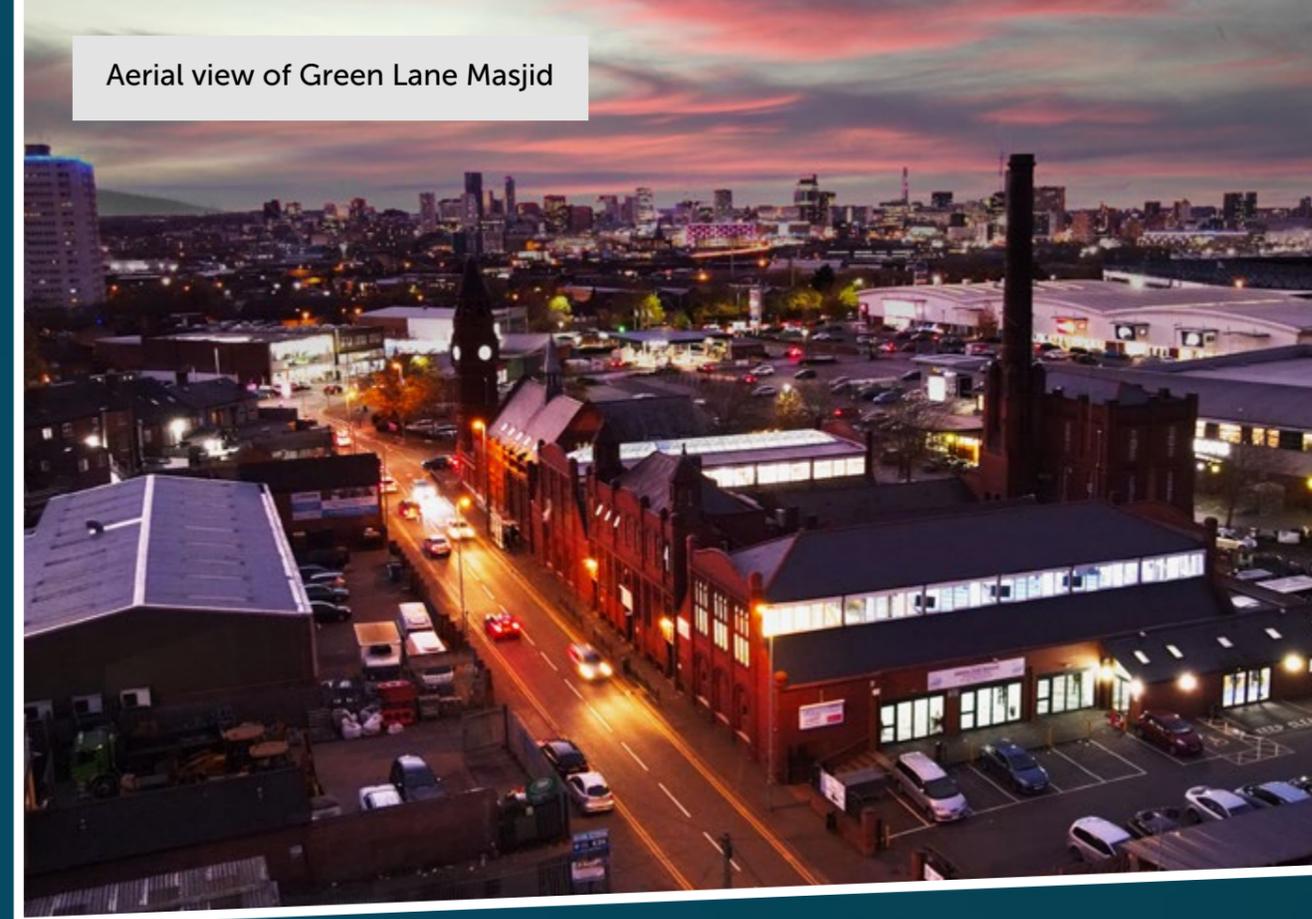
The end of Ramadan is marked by the festival of Eid al-Fitr, for which Muslim employees are likely to want to take annual leave in order to spend time with family and friends. The actual day that Eid falls on will depend on when the new moon is sighted. For this reason, it might not be possible for employees to be very specific about the day they would like to be away from work, until the very end of Ramadan and therefore some flexibility is necessary.

Whilst employers do not have to provide paid leave for religious holidays, employees are entitled to ask for time off from their annual leave. An employer has an obligation to consider the request, and should try and meet it where possible. Please try to accommodate any requests for annual leave during this time. Muslim employees should try and inform their employer for time off as soon as they can. While they may not always be able to give an exact date, they can provide an approximate date. The employer will then have to consider the request and the effect that it will have on the business before making a decision. This may mean that on some occasions, requests may not be accommodated. However, it is important to discuss this issue with the employee.

GLOSSARY

RAMADAN	A sacred month in the Islamic calendar when Muslims fast
QUR'AN	The holy book that Muslims believe was divinely revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)
EID AL-FITR	An Islamic religious celebration, commemorating the end of the month of fasting
ALLAH	The name of God in the Islamic faith
ARCHANGEL GABRIEL	The prime angel who carries out key duties given by Allah (God)
SAWM	The Arabic word for fasting
FIVE PILLARS	The pillars of Islam are: the testimony of faith, prayer, charity, fasting and the pilgrimage to Makkah
SUHOOR	The pre-dawn meal before the fast of the day begins
FAJR	The pre-dawn prayer before sunrise
MAGHRIB	The prayer just after sunset
IFTAR	The breaking of the fast at sunset, followed by the Maghrib prayer and a meal
DHUHR	The prayer that takes place soon after midday
TARAWEEH	The late evening prayer that takes place a few hours after sunset, during the month of Ramadan
ZAKAT	An obligatory tax of 2.5% of an individual's surplus wealth given to charitable causes
ZAKAT AL-FITR	An obligatory tax, generally around £5 per person within a household to feed the poor
PBUH	An abbreviation for 'peace be upon him', which is said after mentioning the Prophet Muhammad's name

Aerial view of Green Lane Masjid



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