

# BACKGROUND NOTES TO **RAMADAN**

## **Introduction**

Although fasting can be done anytime, it is prescribed during the month of Ramadan between the hours of dawn and dusk. The exact moment of the fast begins traditionally when one can distinguish clearly between two strands of black and white cotton - *“eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black”* (Sura 2:187).

Pregnant women, young children, elderly, sick and travellers can be excluded, although travellers usually make up the fast later. As the Qur’an says: *“Fast for a specific number of days, but if one of you is ill, or on a journey, on other days later.”* (Sura 2:184)

## **Procedures**

There are disparities in the lengths of time for the fast throughout the world due to the variances in daylight hours across the globe. Indeed, this is one of the reasons that *“To describe a typical Ramadan fast day would be impossible, as all communities differ, at least in the detail.”* (Turner)

Fasting involves nothing entering the mouth during these hours, not even water. For some Muslims they would even go as far as spitting rather than swallowing saliva and to not clean their teeth so as to avoid swallowing water. Others would not take oral medications but insist on medical injections.

Beyond eating, drinking, and smoking, violence and sexual acts are also forbidden. In practice, this includes the thoughts of such acts as well as the deeds. *“Not only is one supposed to refrain from these things but also from thinking about them.”* (Elias)

Nonetheless, despite all the forbidden thoughts, actions and the sacrifices, Ramadan is not a negative month. Ramadan has a purpose of being mindful of God and should therefore be a happy time. It is a time for joyful discipline and celebration and there should not be a sombre mood.