

## Sharing Ramadan and Fasting

### Sharing Feast, Fasting Traditions, and Forging new Friendships



Fasting—abstaining from food, and water, or certain kinds of foods – for a period of time, is a common form of worship in the Abrahamic tradition. Fasts are often related to holy days in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Ramadan is the month when Muslims fast; refraining from drinking and eating from dawn until dusk. Remembering God, and His Blessings more often. It is also a tradition in this month, to break the fast together, with family, friends and neighbors.

This year, the Women’s Auxiliary of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Albany, NY had invited friends, neighbors and women, of all faiths, to join them in a day of fasting (optional), dedicated to praying for peace, love and unity of all mankind, followed by Iftari (breaking of the fast) dinner, and an informational discussion about experiences with fasting, in our shared Faiths.

A total of 30 non-Muslim, American women, attended the Iftari dinner. Most of them had fasted in solidarity with us, and as a sign of respect, and unity, with our Muslim sisters. Those who did not fast chose to give Fidyah. Fidyah is an Islamic allowance, which includes those who are unable to fast for any reason, to be part of the blessings, and sacrifice and not excluded in the month of Ramadan. They simply donate money, normally spent on their food, to be given to the needy. Some of our guests, who were unable to fast, donated food or money to their choice of food pantries/needy, in recognition of our Islamic tradition.

Among the notable attendees was, Sister Pat Corbett, Linda LeTendre (peace activist, blogger a great friend to our Jama'at, she ran the Muslim’s for life blood drive for us in Saratoga Springs, NY last year.) Barbra DiTomasso, Director of the Albany Catholic Diocese’s Commission on peace and justice. Kathryn Peterson, assistant special agent in charge, Albany Division. Karen Canton, a guest who had seen the article in the Daily Gazette about our program, googled the phone number of our mosque in order to participate, Alhumdolillah. Women from neighboring St. Corona’s Church, whom we have helped on numerous occasions, following the

devastation caused by hurricane Irene last year, also attended the program. Another dear friend, Rev. Stanton of PNECC church in Saratoga Springs, NY was unable to join us but had fasted with us and she gave a comprehensive interview in support of our local Lajna. There were many attendees who had joined us for our first Annual Iftari dinner 'Demystifying Ramadan' last year and were thrilled to join us again.

**The Program:**

The program started at 7:30 with recitation of SuraFatiha and translation, followed by a welcome address and introduction to Fasting in Islam and its meaning in other religions. The concept of Unity and commonality in all our faiths was highlighted and emphasized throughout the evening. This common thread drew the audience to an understanding that Muslims and the Islamic faith was not so different to their own and this realization created an atmosphere that was electric and palpable to all those present. The guests went on to share their fasting experiences and inspirational stories thus bringing us all closer to one another, and allowing us to end with the following beautiful Universal Islamic prayer:

"The God Islam asks us to worship is Universal. He takes care of the spiritual, as well as physical needs of everyone. Muslims believe God sent Messengers to all Mankind, in all times whenever, and wherever Humanity was in need of guidance. We believe in the truth of: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Krishna and Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Confucius, Zoroaster, and Muhammad – may peace and blessings of God be on them all. This, is The God, Islam calls us to fall in love with adore and worship. With this concept, of a Single Universal God, all that stand here with me today please pray:

'O God, grant us Unity. Remove from us any and all prejudices. Enable the rich and the poor; the strong and the weak; men and women no matter what religion or race or creed – to live with one with another in peace and harmony.

Let those of us, whom you have blessed with abundance, fully discharge our responsibility to care for those, who are not so fortunate, and remove from us rancor, and suspicion, and unite us all in love, and make peace reign throughout this land and the World, Ameen"

It was followed by a Christian prayer from Sister Pat Corbett who asked all the ladies to hold hands and recited The Lord's Prayer. After the Adhan the fast was broken with dates and some water. The guests were given an explanation of Islamic Salat and the reasons for the various postures inculcated in Muslim prayer. They were invited to watch, or even pray with us, if they so wished. To the amazement and joy of our Lajna members, ALL guests followed our Lajna to the prayer hall and joined us in Salat, Subhan'Allah!!!

Many of the guests wept during prayers, and were so overcome with love and respect for Islam and it's teachings. The atmosphere in the room reached a tangible intensity, in which the emotions of ALL worshipers were united with love and respect for one another and all humanity. It was an extremely humbling, inspiring,

and heartwarming experience and many of those present commented that they considered themselves honored to have been witnesses to such a rare outpouring of emotion, love, and unity, and begged us to hold other events soon.

In our multiple Tabligh activities throughout our lives, we have NEVER witnessed an occasion such as this. This was a miraculous gift given to us by God Almighty, because of the Holy month of Ramadan in which our prayers were answered in such a glorious and wondrous manner, Alhamdulillah!

We had solid media coverage by the Grace of God, and in fact one of the journalist for channel 13 remarked....

“You guys are doing a lot of good work, and are very different from all the other Muslims groups” (we take that as a compliment)

#### Media Coverage:

Print media:

Saratoga Springs, NY

<http://saratogian.com/articles/2012/08/02/news/doc501b23ce558bb357532348.txt?viewmode=fullstory>

Schenectady, NY

[http://www.dailygazette.com/news/2012/aug/01/0801\\_ramadan/](http://www.dailygazette.com/news/2012/aug/01/0801_ramadan/)

Albany NY

<http://blog.timesunion.com/muslimwomen/>

Spotlight News (Albany, Saratoga Springs)

<http://www.saratogaspotlight.com/>

(Story will be published on Monday, August 6, 2012)

Local TV WNYT– NBC affiliate – was front page news and story ran multiple times on TV Friday. There is a little mistake about Ramadan that we have requested them to correct.

<http://wnyt.com/article/10114/>

<http://wnyt.com/article/stories/S2715475.shtml?cat=10114&v=1>

Pictures are attached in the email.

Pasted below are some remarks and emails from the invitees:

“Dear Samin, I’m so sorry that I cannot attend the Iftari tonight. There was a lovely article in the Gazette this week about Ramadan, including quotes from Tahira Khan and mentioning the fast and the Iftari. Blessings to you and all the women who joined in breaking the fast tonight

Fondly, Judy Clouth" (evening branch of Womens Alliance – Methodist Church)

"Tahira

Bravo!!!

What an inspiring evening I had with you last evening!!! YOU touched my heart. Thank you for your spiritual thoughts and beliefs – everyone was listening with both ears. You should be very proud of yourself – I shall never forget it.

Sister Pat"

"Dear Samin and Tahira,

Since during the summer many of us are away, and since the invitation arrived after the deadline for our summer newsletter, we forwarded your message by e-mal to a list of usual EBWA attendees. We also specifically contacted a few people who had joined us in meeting with your women's group. So far we had a positive response from one person, who will contact you herself for a reservation.

Personally, I thought it an especially nice invitation, both in spirit and in form. I regret that I am up north and will be entertaining that week-end. Jud and Kay , two others who are especially interested and Have attended your other functions, also have similar complications. Thanks for including us and for your efforts and for reminding us of the importance of humility, compassion, and inclusiveness.

Sincerely, Jane

PS: I am unable to attend but will send a contribution to the SICM food pantry."

"Dear Samin – Thank you so much for this lovely invitation! I apologize for not responding sooner to your earlier email asking about dates – I'm trying to catch up on a bunch of emails after being away in California for the funeral of my 90 year old uncle. I generally am unable to accept invitations on a Friday evening or Saturday, but I so appreciate your reaching out to include me. I hope to be able to join you and your community for some other program soon!

All the best,

Rabbi Linda – Temple Sinai"