

# Worship Script April 11, 2021

*[Version for sharing -- without the tech cues and copyrighted text]*

## **“Ramadan Gifts” with Ashruf EI-Dinary**

This Sunday we explore the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. What meaning does it hold for our Muslim neighbors? What are the spiritual gifts of this sacred time? And what meaning can it hold for us as Unitarian Universalists?

## **“Sundays After”**

After service this Sunday we will have an additional small group breakout room. Together with guest speaker Ashruf EI-Dinary, we have the opportunity to explore the day’s worship service and discuss any thoughts or emotions it may have elicited.

## **Welcome (Pam)**

**VIDEO [Welcome Video]**

**Music: Wake Now My Senses**

## **Call to Worship (Pam)**

Let us enter this time, set apart from time

Made sacred by our intention

A time for contemplation

for reflection

for prayer

When we intertwine with our connections

our community

our interdependent web

As we seek to grow in gratitude

in generosity

in compassion

Let us open our hearts and minds to receive the gifts of this time.

Come, let us worship together.

**Chalice Lighting (Mel C.) [Pam introduce]**

As we light this chalice, may it illuminate our insight

To see our own reflection

To see the path before us

and

To see the connections among us.

**Regular Music: From All that Dwell (instrumental) - Audio Only**

**Story for All Ages (Pam)**

*Ramadan Moon* by Na'ima B. Robert, illustrated by Shirin Adl

*[Several read-aloud versions can be found on youtube.]*

**Wondering Questions**

- I wonder why fasting during Ramadan helps people to be more thankful?
- I wonder what good deeds you could do to help make things better for others?
- I wonder if this story reminds you of any of our Unitarian Universalist Principles?

**Regular Music: Go Now in Peace (instrumental)**

## **Meditation - - STEPHEN RECORDING**

### **Pastoral Prayer (Pam)**

Spirit of Life and Love, God of Many Names and no name at all.

We come today with joys in our hearts and sorrows in our souls.

As we enter the month of Ramadan,

celebrated by our Muslim neighbors here at home and around the world,

May we, too, invite time in our lives for prayer and self-reflection.

May we come to the world humble and grateful for all that we have.

May we seek to grow in kindness and generosity.

And may we do our part in sustaining

the interdependent web of humanity and creation.

God as Mercy, Grace, and Compassion, fill us with these divine qualities and with the strength to live them out in the world.

And now let us continue our prayer as we pause together in a moment of reflection, a time to connect with ourselves and our holy. Together we will share 3 minutes of silence.

**(3 minutes of silence)**

May it be so, and Amen.

### **Joys and Concerns (Pam)**

This morning, we take time to lift up our joys and concerns.

I begin this morning by lighting a candle in memory of Freddie Gray. On April 12, 2015, Freddie Gray was arrested in Baltimore and died after sustaining injuries in police custody. A candle of remembrance for Freddie Gray and for all black lives needlessly lost.

I invite you now, if you desire, to type a joy or concern into the chat box.

I will read aloud the joys and concerns I see and light a candle for each one.

... I now light a final candle for all that remains in our hearts and on our minds this morning.

## Music: Make Channels for the Streams of Love

### Offering (Pam)

We lift up all our joys and concerns, spoken and unspoken. And we lift up our gratitude for this church community. In this spirit of gratitude and generosity, I invite you to contribute to our virtual offering plate by sending a check through the mail, or by going to our website and clicking on the donate button. Both addresses will be posted in the chat.

[www.channingmc.org/wp/donate/](http://www.channingmc.org/wp/donate/)

Channing Memorial Church  
3677 Park Ave.  
Ellicott City, MD 21043

For all your gifts of time, talent, and treasure, we give thanks.

## Musical Interlude (instrumental) - Share Audio Only

### First Reading (Pam)

Our first reading this morning is from the Quran, Sura 2, verse 185:

“The month of **Ramadan** is that in which was revealed the **Quran**, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion (for distinguishing right from wrong). So whoever sights [the crescent of] the month,<sup>1</sup> let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful.”

## Musical Interlude (instrumental) - Share Audio Only

### Second Reading (Pam)

Our second reading is “Ibrahim's Prayer” By Jan Taddeo

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/ibrahims-prayer>

## **Music: Building Bridges**

### **Sermon (Ashruf)**

I was probably about 8 or 9 when I started to be aware of Ramadan. Maybe 10. Time does blur the memories. But not the emotions. We had been going to the local mosque in NW Chicago suburbs for several years. My father was one of the founders for the new building. We would meet on Sunday mornings for religious school activities while the adults were upstairs for the Imam's lesson followed by prayer.

I never felt really comfortable there. I liked the other kids, but the whole experience seemed foreign to me. I was forced into it as an obligation. They were trying to teach us Arabic, which we did not speak at home. It was Sunday -- my weekend. And it was more school. Ugh.

Besides, religion was not a big part of my family. Yes, my father is Muslim. Yet, he would not pray very often, at least not formally. He would sometimes whisper little prayers to himself when he got in the car or on other occasions. But he never really taught us or practiced Islam at home, directly. I later learned that his family was VERY religious. My great-grandfather founded a mosque in Tanta, Egypt. My grandfather entered the religious college and became the assistant dean, maybe even Sheikh, at al-Azhar university -- one of the oldest Islamic colleges in the world. As did one of my uncles. We would celebrate the big Islamic feasts with succulent Egyptian food. But our home life was really devoid of Islamic religious practice.

My mother was raised in one of the Christian denominations. I'm still not sure which one -- and I never asked. Religion is not a part of her life. I have never seen her attend church services other than weddings or funerals. We did have Christmas and Easter events at home, but these were secular celebrations.

But I was about 8 or 9, maybe 10, when I was becoming aware of my Father observing Ramadan. Celebrating the month of Ramadan with the month-long fast is one of the 5 pillars of Islam. It is an obligation. Part of your religious duty. And he would do it. The month-long fast meant no eating or drinking or smoking from sunrise to sunset. I think I was most aware of my father not smoking during the day. He would normally smoke 2-packs a day. But during Ramadan he would not smoke during the day and that was a big deal. Along with the stresses of reduced food and water, I could see him "suffer" through some of the days and weeks during Ramadan. He would make it through the end of the month and then we would enjoy the feast, Eid al-Fitr. Those were times when the Mosque would host fabulous pot-luck dinners and we could eat all the amazing home-cooked food from Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere -- from where-ever all the families had emigrated. The feast was a very happy moment. And to me it seemed like the end of an ordeal.

As a teen I started to become more interested in religion, especially comparative religion -- learning about the similarities and differences. One of the things that struck me about Islam was the focus on justice and equity and compassion. which is aligned with the Second UU principle.

During my journey I would talk to my father about Ramadan and say that I wanted to fast. He would tell me "No," very surprisingly. He thought it was too much for me and that I was too young. There are some rules around fasting. It is only prescribed if you are in good health. If you are traveling, then you should not fast. For adults who cannot fast, they are to feed the poor during Ramadan.

Being out on my own in my early 20's gave me the opportunity to choose things for myself. One year I decided that I wanted to fast during Ramadan. My father was discouraging me. Frankly, he continued to discourage me well into my 40's. But that's another matter.

The challenge for me was identifying when to start Ramadan. I wasn't attuned to the Islamic lunar calendar. And this was before we all had easy access to the Internet. I had to rely on my parents to advise me that Ramadan was starting in 5 days and I would start looking for the new moon. Or not. I think I really relied on them to call and wish me Happy Ramadan. The tricky part is that the sighting of the new moon differs across the world. Some people start celebrating Ramadan based on when the new moon is sighted in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Others base the calendar on the local date for the new moon. It can vary by 1 day depending on the location.

So I started my journey that year with my first fast. It was exciting and challenging. At that time, I was not much of a morning person. Getting up around 3:30 or 4:00am to eat was really difficult. And selecting my food choices was also a challenge. I wanted to make certain I had enough calories to get through the day and not pass out. Yet, the traditions are to eat a modest meal. I would come home and would eat dinner late -- around 7pm or 8pm after sunset. It must have been spring-time, probably March or April which would have made this 1989 - 1991. That first year I made it through about 2 weeks of fasting. My body couldn't handle it.

At that time I saw fasting as opening my awareness to the challenges and struggles of going without -- as a way to understand the difficulties of the poor. This was one of the lessons taught on those Sunday mornings years ago. I was experiencing the compassion for others and feeling a connection. Developing respect for the challenges of others and their inherent worth and dignity, the first UU Principle. I started questioning poverty and why we tolerate impoverishment in the US and around the world. I was growing up and experiencing life outside my insulated childhood. But I found it is only part of the story.

As the years went by, I would continue to fast, although not every year and rarely for the full 30 days. I always seemed to have a trip scheduled during Ramadan, so I couldn't fast during those days (wink). But there were times when I would try to fast during a short trip.

Probably in my late 30's I was feeling that Ramadan was my connection to my culture and my extended family in Egypt. It was an invisible link to that life. If my family had not come to America in 1971, I would be living in Egypt and Ramadan would be a part of my life along with so many other cultural differences and challenges.

I noticed that as I would fast, I would start to feel differently about life and people around me. About 10 days into fasting, I feel a change. I'm less uptight. Less angry. More accepting. Peaceful. Feeling tranquility in my daily activities. Respecting others and feeling interconnected. I cannot express it clearly, but it is a noticeable shift. Out of all the feelings and emotions from Ramadan, this is the one I wish I could hold on to following the Fast.

Fasting is the most visible aspect of Ramadan. One that others question, critique, and don't fully understand. I have had people tell me "I don't know how you can do it," or offer encouragement and support. I have had people apologize for eating in front of me. Yes, it's not cool to be eating in front of someone who is fasting. It's always good to be sensitive to their current experience. For me, seeing others eat was never a problem. But I have focused too much on fasting in this narrative.

Ramadan is also about charity or Zakat. The sharing of your wealth with others who are needy and less fortunate. Again, giving Zakat is one of the 5 pillars of Islam. It is traditional to donate 2.5% of your wealth (not income). Many people do this through contributions at the local mosque or by directly giving to people they know. My father and I would send money to the family back home in Egypt, for which many were always very grateful. I have to say this is an area that I have neglected in the past few years and one that I need to work on. I do get many charity solicitations this time of year from various Islamic and Middle Eastern organizations. I'm clearly on their mailing lists. But I am reluctant to follow through with these groups not knowing the details of their other political supporters or their full scope of activities. Clearly, I need to grow my trust and compassion for others.

Remembering back to the first reading today, it is stated in the Quran ""The month of Ramadan is that in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion (for distinguishing right from wrong). So whoever sights [the crescent of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful."

The meaning of Ramadan is really about celebrating the spiritual and the connection to the revelation to Prophet Muhammed, Peace be upon him. The Quran was revealed over many years, but the tradition states that the initial revelations occurred during the month of Ramadan. It is customary to read through the Quran during the 30 days of fasting. And to offer extra prayers.

One of the powerful traditions is during the last 10 days when there are more community prayer services. The Night of Power -- Laylat al-Qadr, or the night of revelation, occurs during these last 10 days. It is the holiest night in Islam and represents the night when the Angel Gabriel revealed the first verses. It is traditional for Muslims to celebrate this on the 27th night of Ramadan by staying up all night reciting the Quran. It is said that good deeds performed during Laylat al-Qadr bring blessings for 1000 months.

Again, I never observed this growing up. And only now do I experience the Night of Power by reading about it on the internet. Yet, this period does hold special meaning for our family in the US and Egypt. It was during the last 10 days of Ramadan, and maybe even Laylat al-Qadr, that my grandfather passed away. I never knew the man -- he died in 1936 -- but I do recall this family story and tradition during Ramadan.

So as I start my 2021 fast tomorrow -- yes, it is officially starting Monday evening in the U.S. according to the Internet -- I feel excitement and apprehension. Thinking through whether to eat pancakes or traditional eggs and beans for breakfast. Thinking about how late dinners will affect Pam. Looking forward to that sensation of peace and tranquility I feel in the middle of the month. And wondering how I will grow my Ramadan experience. During Ramadan, one experiences humility and a breakdown of ego. From this I have come to accept that no one is independent, the 7th UU Principle. Blessings in life come from beyond us, from nature, from others.

Thank you for joining me on this narrative. Ramadan Mubarak or Blessed Ramadan.



**Music: We Would Be One**

**Extinguishing the Chalice (Mel C.)**

**Benediction (Pam)**

And now go forth with intention  
Go forth with awareness  
Go forth with compassion  
Enter into our interdependent web  
And meet the world where it needs you.  
Go in peace.

**Music: Ramadan Moon** <https://youtu.be/M9mTID6uVwY>

Our closing music is “Ramadan Moon,” by Yusuf Islam, who some of you may know better as Cat Stephens.

**Closing Remarks (Pam)**