

Why can holding beliefs be difficult?

What are the challenges of fasting for Muslims?

(9 – 12 years)

Learning Outcomes

Emerging

- Use the words 'fasting', 'Ramadan' and 'sawm' correctly in talking or writing
- Give one reason why fasting is important for Muslims, and one reason why it is difficult

Expected

- Give two reasons why Muslims fast, supported by a teaching from the Qur'an
- Give a balanced response to the question of whether athletes should fast
- With reference to Muslim athletes and fasting, give a supported view as to why holding beliefs can be difficult

Exceeding

- Offer a supported view as to how easy or hard it is in life to stick to beliefs

Key words and concepts

- **Five pillars:** The basic precepts of Islam including belief in One God and his prophet Muhammad, prayer, giving of charity, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca.
- **Id-ul-Fitr:** Celebration of breaking the fast on the day after Ramadan ends, which is also the first day of Shawal, the tenth Islamic month. Also known as Id-ul-Saghir - the Lesser Id – and Sheker Bayram (Turkish) – sugar feast.
- **Iftar:** A meal served at the end of the day during Ramadan, to break the fast. Literally, 'break-fast.'
- **Imam:** Leader. A person who leads the communal prayer, or a founder of an Islamic school of jurisprudence. In Shi'ah Islam, Imam is also the title of Ali (Radhi-Allahu-anhu – may Allah be pleased with him) and his successors.
- **Ramadan:** The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, during which fasting is required from just before dawn until sunset, as ordered by Allah in the Qur'an.
- **Salah:** Prescribed communication with, and worship of, Allah, performed under specific conditions, in the manner taught by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and recited in the Arabic language. The five daily times of salah are fixed by Allah.
- **Sawm:** Fasting from just before dawn until sunset. Abstinence is required from all food and drink (including water) as well as smoking and conjugal relations.
- **Ummah:** Community. World-wide community of Muslims; the nation of Islam.

- **Belief:** a confidence that something is true that is not easily proved and is something that others will have different views and opinions about. The term often refers to people's faith or religious convictions.
- **Fasting:** for Muslims, going without food or liquid between dawn and dusk. Fasting also means not taking medication or smoking. Muslims undertake this for 29-30 days at the time of Ramadan. Muslims also undertake extra prayers and believe fasting brings them closer to Allah.
- **Commitment:** showing dedication to something that is important to you perhaps a particular belief, activity or cause, even if that commitment means forgoing other things.

Learning activities

- Set the learning activities in the context of the enquiry question, in this example we have suggested the question, 'Why can holding beliefs be difficult?' However, much of the learning suggested could be adapted to questions relating to a religion specific question, e.g., 'What are the challenges of fasting for Muslims?'
- Ask pupils what they recall about the practice of *fasting*. Can they think of different practices in different religions concerning the length of the fast, what the fast consists of and what exceptions there may be? For example, do they know about the Christian observance of Lent and giving up of luxuries during the whole period of 40 days? Can they compare this with the Muslim practice of fasting during the month of Ramadan and the abstinence from food and drink during daylight hours?
- If pupils are not already familiar with the practices of Muslims at Ramadan, explain that for practising Muslims over the age of puberty, about 11, they will fast in daylight hours for approximately 30 days. Fasting means going without food or drink, even water, during the hours of daylight. In the height of summer this means approximately 18 hours with no liquid or food. There are however exemptions from fasting, e.g., for those who are ill or pregnant.
- Ask pupils to make a connection between the Muslim practice of fasting during Ramadan with something they could do to (a) remind themselves of people in the world who do not have enough to eat and (b) improve their own will-power and self-control.
- Share with pupils that the Olympic games in London 2012 was during Ramadan, and that around 25% of the athletes taking part were Muslim. Introduce pupils to the mystery: Should Imran fast during the Games? (The event and sport that Imran is potentially competing in can be adapted to make it topical, e.g., in 2016 this could be the Olympics in Brazil; in 2014 the Wimbledon Tennis Championships will coincide with Ramadan). Provide pupils with the following scenario:

Imran is a 17 year old tennis player...(sport could be adapted) **who has qualified for the ...** [insert event]. **A vital part of the event coincides with Ramadan and, as a Muslim, he is worried about whether he should fast whilst training and competing. He collects together information about the importance of fasting and what other athletes have decided to do to help him make his decision.**

- Organise pupils to work in groups of 3 or 4 and provide them with the different pieces of information that Imran has collected.

General Islamic Teaching

Muslims who are ill or need to look after their bodies (such as when pregnant or breastfeeding).

It is possible to 'catch up' with fasting after a period when Muslims couldn't fast during Ramadan.

When fasting, Muslims do not drink a sip of water, even if it is very hot.

Muslims do not eat or drink between the hours of daylight.

Children as young as 9 will fast.

Ramadan is a month of fasting in Islam.

Giving up food helps Muslims think about those who go hungry all year round.

Muslims are proud to fast to show their obedience to Allah.

Qur'anic Teaching

Qur'an 2: 185

O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be Godwary. (alQur'an.info)

Suggests God wants Muslims to fast because it makes them righteous, or 'Godwary'

Qur'an 2: 184

But should any of you be sick or on a journey, let it be a [similar] number of other days. Those who find it straining shall be liable to atonement by feeding a needy person. Should anyone do good of his own accord, that is better for him, and to fast is better for you, should you know. (alQur'an.info)

Suggests God recommends Muslims fast, but if they cannot, they could feed a needy person instead.

Qur'an 2: 185

Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you, (alQur'an.info)

However God does not create responsibilities that Muslims cannot meet. Islam should not be a burden.

Qur'an 16: 128

Indeed Allah is with those who are Godwary and those who are virtuous. (alQur'an.info)

Fasting shows restraint, this pleases God

What do Muslim athletes do?

Reference: 'Ramadan in Sports: How do Elite Athletes Cope?', Ricard Winton, BBC Sport, bbc.com, 05.09.15

Mo Farah, the runner, eats and drinks if Ramadan occurs during a performance season. He fasts once the season has finished.

Moe Sbihi, an Olympic rower, does not fast if Ramadan falls in the Olympic period.

He fasts instead in the winter months, and eats huge amounts of food in the morning before daybreak, about 4am. He finds it hard to not drink all day when he is training and fasting.

Mo Farah, Moe Sbihi, Abdul Buhari (discus) and other British Muslim athletes did not fast in the run up to London 2012. They did not want to let the team down.

Instead they funded meals for a poor community in Tangiers.

- Ask pupils to read the information on the cards and group together information that links, e.g., narrative, facts, opinions, important information, irrelevant information. Pupils need to decide for themselves how to sort the information. The challenge for them is that at the end of the time allocated they must give Imran some advice.
- Offer pupils a series of oral sentence starters to frame their group response to Imran:
 - I think Imran should... because...
 - I think this decision is hard for Imran because...
 - One argument for breaking the fast is...
 - One argument for keeping the fast is...
 - If I were a Muslim I would...
- Once pupils have offered their responses ask them to think what the counter argument might be and how that might affect their life as a member of the Muslim community.
You could link this work to literacy and ask pupils to write a balanced or a persuasive argument.
- Write in the centre of six large pieces of paper 'Beliefs about...' and then finish the statement with food, behaviour or clothing. Give each group a piece of paper.
 1. Ask the first group to write any beliefs that might have to do with this category, e.g., not eat meat.
 2. Move the piece of paper to a different group. Ask this group to draw a line from a belief and write an example of an occasion when it might be a challenge to hold that belief, e.g., at a party.

3. Move the piece of paper to a final group. Ask this group to write suggestions of what believers might say or do to keep to their belief.
- As a result of this work support pupils to work in groups to enquire into people who have held a set of beliefs and had them challenged. Give pupils a series of people to choose from e.g., Sarika Watkins-Singh who as a teenager was banned from wearing the Kara but took her school to Court and won; the disciple Peter who denied Jesus three times; Samantha Devine, a 13-year-old Catholic pupil in Kent, who was told not to wear a crucifix on a chain because it breached health and safety rules.
 - Ask pupils to create a presentation telling this person's story through drama, newspaper report or other method to share what the person's beliefs were, how they were challenged, and how they managed to resolve the dilemma. In their presentations, pupils should include:
 - different opinions that followers of the religion(s) involved in the story might have about what can be learnt from it;
 - at least TWO important questions that pupils think should be asked about the story they are investigating and the possible answers they think relate best to the way people should live their lives.