

Ramadan Reflection - Week 1, 2022

My experience of Ramadan now reaches back more than twenty years to 2001 when I living with Franciscan friars in Egypt, and serving at a small clinic outside of Cairo where I ministered to people afflicted with leprosy. After a busy morning of cleaning wounds and bandaging hands and feet, my Muslim coworkers and I would take a break, drinking tea and eating freshly baked break. But that all changed with the coming of Ramadan when Muslims abstain from all food and drink from sunrise to sunset.

on the At first, I continued to observe my tea break alone, in another room out of consideration for my coworkers. But break time was a chance for us to relax together and even laugh amid the sickness and suffering around us. It didn't make sense for me to take a break alone, and so within a few days I began to fast with them. By the end of the first week, I was able to stay at the clinic overnight to break the fast and end the day and spend much of the week in the evening and friendship.

It's no wonder that Muslims welcome Ramadan. It's a joyous time in spite of the rigors of fasting which can be considerable during the longer days of summer. Strands of colored lights are stretched across streets and special lanterns (*fanoos*) are hung overhead and outside homes and businesses. Strangers will greet one another on the street with: *Ramadan Mubarak!* (a blessed Ramadan) or: *Ramadan Kareem!* (a generous Ramadan). Entire city streets will be transformed into block-long tables so that friends, neighbors and perfect strangers can join in one great feast provided through the generosity of businesses and individuals.

But Ramadan is much more than fasting and feasting with family and friends. As I experience it, Ramadan is to borrow a computer term about *rebooting* one's spiritual life. Fasting *resets* our bodies with less sleep at night and no nutrition during the day so that we can *refocus* on the source of all life *Allah* (God). In short,