

Five Holistic Ways to Celebrate Ramadan

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New generations of Muslim American families struggle to keep Muslim holidays relevant or exciting – especially when competing with a glitzy Christmas or a fast-moving culture that only slows down between Thanksgiving and New Year. The struggle for Muslims is most starkly felt during [fasting month](#) of Ramzan (also referred to as Ramadan), a sacred time many of us find difficult to poignantly observe especially as it is a month of continuous observance.

Muslims are caught in competitive cycles: we can't compete with Christmas, and neither should we be. We also can't reasonably expect all of Western society to slow down simply because of our minority celebrations.

In more recent times, cause oriented Muslims have turned to taking the month to draw community gathering and awareness. Growing up, I was forced to attend iftar (breaking of the fast) parties that were little more than social gatherings – a chance to dress up and gossip. Many still are and while this is a chance for a community to socialize, it does very little in the way of instilling or reinforcing principles in a child, especially children who already feel like outsiders or don't like meaninglessly socializing.



Where do any of these styles of celebrations leave people who don't fit? How do you make Ramadan more meaningful and celebratory when you don't have time or interest in activism,

aren't able or interested in vacuous socializing, and feel there is something off-putting about turn Ramadan into Christmas?

You can try embracing Ramadan holistically.

A holistic philosophy is "characterized by comprehension of the parts of something as intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole."

What makes something holistic is the mind, body, spirit integration. During Ramadan, we fall in the gap of focusing on the fast, checking off the box to make sure we eat, getting in prayers, and attending an Iftar gathering or two. The process is disjointed and rushed, mirroring very much the chaotic American culture many Muslims simultaneously also criticize. How can we expect an outside population to make space for us, to honor our rituals, if we don't find time to sanctify them?

Finding ways to make Ramadan holistic shouldn't take a lot of time or money. It can be done with integrating more awareness into how we live and practice our faith, and how that practice is mirrored in our personal space.

The way to do that is to *slow down* and make honor rituals.



Your Day Starts at Dawn

Many spiritualists cycle their body with the natural world. They slow down at 8 or 9pm and are in bed by 10pm, rising with the sun.

Our first pre-fast meal of the day, called Sehri or Suhoor, shouldn't be a few bites and a drink we down in a sleepy stupor. It should be practiced with awareness. Bring out your best dishes, wait for the kettle to boil, look at the sky changing colors, stretch your body. Celebrate the stillness of twilight. And when you've done that, don't go back to sleep. Stay up, pray, read, reflect, meditate, or write. We rarely have time to ourselves in our culture to stop and think. Use this time and this month to start practicing a better habit.

Many people have also started getting in the habit of turning off their wi-fi through the night till it's time to start the day. This helps ensure you're able to focus and spend time without distraction or interference.



The Ritual of Celebration

Ramadan can be very hard to practice. There's the stress of what to eat during Sehri. It really helps to menu plan for the week and consider what you'll have every morning that is easy to make and nourishing until it's time to break your fast. The act of preparing your simple meal in the morning can be

beautiful and as much as a ritual as making that cup of tea.

And since Ramadan falls in the summer for at least a while longer, put the rich fruits of the season to work for you. Integrate them into your morning/evening meals, and use them as part of the table spread to create celebratory tablescapes.



Iftar Eyesores

I cringe when I see pictures of the average iftar: a kitchen table or island stuffed with food and drinks. There's no planning, no aesthetic element, no style or celebration of coming together. Things don't need to be ugly and it doesn't take that much effort or planning to throw together a nice table or even a well organized spread.

Iftar is a celebration and the most community oriented part of the day, even if it's just you and your loved ones breaking your fast together. Honor that time and that space. Honor yourself and your faith.



Art-deco inspired Eid cake toppers I made years ago.

Why It's so Important to Define Space

Our space is sacred. Jewish scholar Jonathan Z. Smith explores

this theme in his work [To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual.](#)

Smith stresses the importance of place—in particular, constructed ritual environments—to a proper understanding of the ways in which “empty” actions become rituals.

The space we set aside to build a temple, church, synagogue or mosque is a vital part of ritual, the third dimension manifestation of belief. The same holds true for what you build in your home. How do you use the space in our home to honor your beliefs? Are you mimicking Christianity or are you creating something that is unique to your personal journey as a believer?



Creating Altars to Anchor to a

Holistic Mindset

Use flowers, lights, lanterns to mark the celebration in your home. Honoring your space doesn't need to be flashy and it doesn't need to be some generic Etsy print out. Make it your own with pieces that have meaning and value. Use a mantle, a windowsill or a dresser to create a dedicate space if you can't or don't want to go "all out."

My own small home is towering with books and there's very little free space left. I make it a point to have at least one small area dedicated to symbolism: a book, a prayer bead I made, a cherished photo, some rocks and a candle. You do what works for you and every year what that might look like can change. The purpose of this space is to anchor your mind and spirit to your practice. What happens in a 5000 square foot mosque is no different than what happens on the prayer mat or what is imprinted in your mind as you pass sacred signifiers in a nook in your home.

