

# Milton Islamic organization invites non-Muslims to try fasting for Ramadan

SAIRA PEESKER

sairapeesker@metroland.com

Since the start of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan in mid-May, Muslims across the world have been fasting. For most, this means getting up before sunrise to eat and refraining from eating or drinking anything else until the sun goes down.

Fasting can be strenuous, but but also fosters spiritual growth, say members of a local congregation that is encouraging non-Muslims to join them with the "Fast with a Muslim Friend" campaign. Milton members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, a sect of Islam, are

part of a nationwide campaign urging non-Muslims to participate in Ramadan by fasting, then breaking the fast at an Iftar dinner. "We want to reach out to our fellow Canadians," explained Maqbool Sheikh, director of advocacy and public relations for Ahmadiyya's Milton congregation. "Here's a learning opportunity. It helps foster relationships." For those who feel faint at the idea of spending a day without food or water, Sheikh says the idea is to commit to doing whatever feels feasible: a few hours, a half day, or whatever feels manageable. It's more about building bridges than following the letter of

the law, he told the Milton Canadian Champion. Ramadan is observed during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which is slightly shorter than the Gregorian calendar. As a result, Ramadan begins at a different time each Gregorian year.

This year it runs from mid-May to mid-June. During the holy month, Muslims typically fast, give more to charity, refrain from bad behaviour and do additional prayers. "During Ramadan, Muslims place a special emphasis to avoid doing anything that would hinder their spiritual well-being, such as quarrelling, swearing, lying, backbiting," states Ahma-

diyya's Fast with Muslims website. For Sheikh, Ramadan means long days full of prayer, family, reflection and exhaustion.

He wakes up at 4 a.m. to eat, then heads to pray with the community around 4:45 a.m. He comes home to shower and get ready for work, and if he's lucky, he has a chance to nap. At the end of the day, Sheikh heads back to the mosque for 8 p.m. prayers, then has dinner at home with his family, returning to the mosque for the evening's final prayers around 10 p.m. "During the month of fasting there are optional prayers ... they're optional but kind of customary," he explained. "Ideally

you're supposed to get up in the middle of the night to do them, but we just do them (around the same time as) our evening prayers." He's usually done it all over again. Sheikh says the lack of sleep is often more challenging than the fasting. "Napping is key," he said, adding, "Part of the spiritual side of it, though, is you realize how little you need to get through on one meal a day ... There's a billion people around the world who have one meal a day if they're lucky. We're so blessed here." Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Milton is inviting lo-

cal residents to join them for Iftar, the celebratory dinner that ends the fast during Ramadan, on June 4 at Paramount Fine Foods at 1149 Maple Ave. in Milton. Pre-registration is required and those interested in attending are asked to do so online on Eventbrite (search for Free Iftar Dinner in Milton).

Sheikh is eager to share his religion and culture with non-Muslims, saying he hopes people come with questions and curiosity.

"We're asking people to show up between 7:30 to 8:00," said Sheikh. "We'll do a question-and-answer session and will finish with call to prayer, and then eat some delicious food."

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