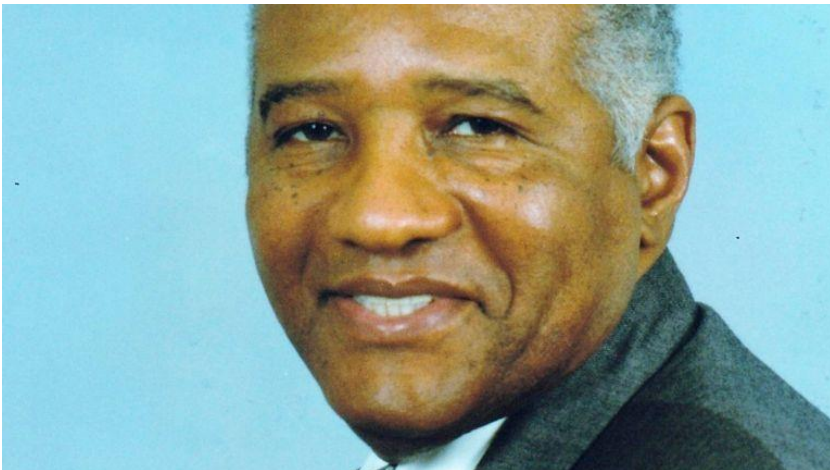


## LONG ISLAND

By Jim Merritt

# Asking the Clergy: How does Ramadan strengthen families and friendships?



Khalid S. Lateef, founder, As-Siraatal-Mustaqeen Islamic Center, Wyandanch Credit: Khalid S. Lateef

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Ramadan, observed this year from May 15 to June 14, celebrates the first time that Allah revealed the Quran to the prophet Muhammad, according to Islamic belief. For

observant Muslims, Ramadan requires dawn-to-sunset fasting, increased prayer and charity, as well as joyous gatherings to break the fast. This week's clergy discuss how their social and family relations improve during Islam's most sacred month.

### **Khalid S. Lateef**

Founder, As-Siraatal-Mustaqeen Islamic Center, Wyandanch

Eating, listening to music, watching TV, being on the computer or being intimate with your spouse can be part of our usual routine. These activities consume our time and divert our

attention from prayer, times of silence, reading the revelations of God and inner reflection. However, during the month of Ramadan, Muslims are required to refrain from sex and food, and are encouraged to avoid as much as possible most of the other activities, from the break of dawn until after the sun sets. In place of these things, we are encouraged to fast, pray and read the Holy Quran; therefore, Ramadan is a very inner reflective month. One of the blessings of the month of Ramadan is that the absence of many of the daily distractions leads to personal insights into one's behavior and one's thinking. Many of these insights address our behavior toward our loved ones and friends; the insights have the potential for improvements in our behaviors, which can lead to better relationships with family and friends. In addition, at the end of each day during the month of Ramadan, Muslims are encouraged to go to their local mosque for breaking fast, the Sunset Prayer and the Iftar (breaking fast) dinner. Everyone breaks their fast in the tradition of prophet Muhammad, with a couple of dates and water; then they pray. After prayer, mats are laid out on the floor for food, which is provided by each family and usually is influenced by the cultures of the mosque members. Everyone sits in a circle, eating and exchanging conversation. The children have time to eat and play with their friends around the mosque's interior and outside grounds. These activities promote positive community socialization between family and friends.

### **Sanaa Nadim.**

Chaplain, Islamic Society Interfaith Center, Stony Brook University

I feel closest to my family and to my Muslim community during Ramadan. We invite our families and friends to break fast, pray, join on evening gatherings and have pre-dawn meals together before the daily fast begins. It is important to be mindful that God is aware of our mind, heart and actions; therefore, one must try to instill affection and peace for their fellow man, with the intention of embedding this in their character for the future. It is much more than the idea of abstaining from food. Ramadan in America has a different taste than in any other place in the world, filled with diversity of various traditions and cultures. Although I have Egyptian roots and love our cuisine, Ramadan allows me to enjoy the flavors of the other Middle Eastern countries, as well as the tastes created by my South-Asian, Asian, African and European friends. The conversation changes with different table settings, however, the unifying feelings — humility, love, laughter — that come with sharing a meal make this month the most special. And, after breaking our fast, many Muslims head to the mosque, for the evening prayer and supplemental prayers that

are customary during Ramadan. We do this in one line, as one people, American Muslims of diverse backgrounds, praying together. As a chaplain, for many years I have gathered students, faculty and non-Muslim members on campus to partake in the daily breaking of the fast. Ramadan is not only a time for Muslims, but it is a chance to bring us all together.

**Dr. Yousuf U. Syed**

Trustee, Islamic Association of Long Island and The Selden Mosque

Because the Holy Quran was revealed to the prophet Muhammad during Ramadan, no other event can bring Muslim families and friends as close together as The Blessed Month of Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims are required to fast for 30 days, from dawn to dusk, avoiding food, water, sex and impure thoughts and behavior. Ramadan is a time of reflection, soul searching, God consciousness, piety, charity, empathy. Ramadan is also a time of strengthening faith, family and friendly relationships in various ways because we must be on our best behavior. Coming together for a daily feast, sharing love and affection, prayers and a pious attitude, helps build strong bonds between families and friends. Muslim women and girls work together to prepare delicious food daily for breaking the fast at the Iftar meal. We often share our feast of international food from various Muslim countries with our non-Muslim friends, including clergy of other faiths, who are all invited to break the fast with us. Ramadan is full of activities that acknowledge that we are all brothers and sisters, such as helping the poor and needy. The pillar of Islam known as zakat prescribes that 2.5 percent of our yearly savings goes toward charity. During Ramadan, large amounts of money is donated to widows, orphans, the sick and poor of the community.

**By Jim Merritt**