



### My 7 Day Ramadan Fasting Experience by Emma Shelford

As a non-Muslim I made a decision to support the children of WEPA by carrying out a week of fasting of my own from sunset to sunrise every day, for 7 days. It was met with some surprise from my loved ones as I have a condition called Crohns disease but consulted my doctor before I embarked on this journey. The purpose of fasting is to cleanse the body and obtain strength from within to resist temptation of food during the sunlight hours. Needless to say I knew this would be a challenge for me but it meant a lot to give it my all!

#### **Day 1**

The 4am alarm call was not welcomed with open arms but I embraced the early start and sat to eat my breakfast that I had prepared the night before. With one eye shut still, I drank down my filling smoothie, had a drink of water and took myself back off to bed until my alarm for work rang out.

I attended a session in one of our teacher's classrooms which she has kindly given up for Ramadan as a place that the children can go and pray, rest and carry out Ramadan themed activities. The spirit and determination of the children that attended was inspiring, not a complaint amongst them!

Towards the end of my working day the thirst really set in, I felt very dehydrated but the children's support and happy persona kept me going. Being at home was so much harder than being at work. After collecting my daughter from school, I prepared her lunch for the following day for her and her evening meal all with the thought that I would not be having anything until just after 9pm.

Finally, I broke my fast at 9:11pm and I really did savour each mouthful and each sip I took! Day 1 was complete and I felt very proud of what I had achieved and ahead was more of the same.

#### **Day 2**

It suddenly dawned on me that I wanted to find out more about Ramadan and the reasons behind why the Muslim cultures carry this out. Where to seek this enlightenment? The children of WEPA knew all I needed to know. One by one, hands rose up in the lunchtime Ramadan club telling me all about the different reasons and the history behind Ramadan - I felt very humbled.

I was struggling a little with my motivation and will power so I also asked the children what tips they could offer me and the responses made me feel so proud of the children.

***"If you think about all the starving children abroad then that will help you to carry on."***  
***"Remember that this is about being strong and try and distract yourself with other things."***  
***"Read passages from the Quran or another book you find calming and relaxing."***  
***"Smile and know you can do it."***

These responses are now firmly in the forefront of my mind and knowing how dedicated the children are to this spurs me along even more.

At home, tiredness overcame me and so I took the opportunity to rest, my daughter and I huddled on the sofa and I looked at her and felt overwhelmed with the emotion and the enormity of what I was trying to achieve. My daughter told me she was proud of me and offered to fast with me on Saturday to help me through. I was finally understanding how grateful I am for the life I have and that even when times are tough, we all have the strength within us, wherever we take it from whether it is religion or otherwise.



### **Day 3**

Today I have struggled with waking up to eat and for work, I have come to realise how heavily I rely on caffeine to wake me up and get me started. I have to use pure self-will to throw myself out of bed and into my day. This comes from my strong desire to complete my week of fasting using the new found strength this discipline has given me.

Ramadan is about kindness and thinking of others so today and every day here on, I want to ensure that at least once I do something kind for someone else. Even just a message to someone I have not spoken to in a while to see how they are feeling today. Simple acts of kindness can often have the most impact on someone's day.

At home it was housework day... it was a struggle to get through it but I kept on moving keeping the dedication of the children and the things they had told me the day before to mind. I decided to look up some more information about Ramadan and came across the word "taqwa" which is all about being cautious and aware of choices you make. It was extremely interesting and really made a lot of sense, it is definitely something I will take with me once fasting is over.

### **Day 4**

I am sure there must be a certain irony to the word fasting because I am on complete "go slow" today. The 4am alarm calls for breakfast are taking their toll but the hunger and thirst has really become a mind over matter situation. I am using a lot of the mental tools and strength that I have learned to get me past this.

### **Day 5**

It was a fairly warm day today which made the no water element to the fasting a bit more difficult than usual but with the new found strength I had to keep on going, I didn't break. Work kept me very busy which helped to take my mind off of things. I had been invited to an Iftar (breaking of the fast) at a friend's house that is of Muslim faith but I felt very unwell that evening and was running a bit of a temperature so I decided to decline regretfully as know the experience would have been great.

### **The Weekend**

I knew that the weekend would be the hardest due to being at home more often than not so tried to keep myself busy doing things with my daughter, taking some leisurely walks while she rode her bike and some light chores around the home.

Taking my daughter to gymnastics usually means that I have a soya latte from the onsite Costa but not this time, I had to make do with the aroma from my partner's coffee instead! I was looking forward to an evening with my family relaxing in front of the TV.

Sunday felt like the longest day but I knew I was on the home straight so I felt a real sense of pride and calm within myself. At sunset instead of rushing to eat and drink I opened up my bay doors and just stood looking up to the sky feeling really humbled by the whole experience and the support and kindness I had received from people in the Muslim community at WEPA.



### **To Conclude....**

Overall this experience has opened my eyes to a world which is often very misunderstood, it showed me that no matter what your situation you can get through most things in life with support, kindness and determination – the experience was one I wouldn't change for anything.

I would like to personally thank Mrs Mohamed who was so kind in her words and advice. Her support throughout was unrelenting and I feel like she knew exactly when I needed her most to give me some words of encouragement.

I was most touched with her beautiful gift of my very own English translated version of the Quran; I will read it with patience and take my time to absorb all it has to offer.