



Ramadan

JOURNAL

How can I get involved: Community Iftars
Ramadan in the UK: Pakistani-British Community
What Ramadan means to me
Kids' Corner: Halal rice crispy treats

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DIALOGUE
SOCIETY

The Dialogue Society is a registered charity, established in London in 1999, with the aim of advancing social cohesion by connecting communities, empowering people to engage and contributing to the development of ideas on dialogue. It operates nation-wide with regional branches across the UK. Through discussion forums, courses, capacity building publications and outreach it enables people to venture across boundaries of religion, culture and social class. It provides a platform where people can meet to share narratives and perspectives, discover the values they have in common and be at ease with their differences.

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How can I get involved?

This week we want to introduce our themed community iftars which we have been conducting for over 20 years!

In last week's edition of the Ramadan Journal, we introduced our project "IftarMe", which involves experiencing an iftar with a Muslim family. IftarMe is an attempt to bring dialogue into our homes and enjoy the Ramadan spirit with our neighbours from different or non-faith traditions. Our community iftars, on the other hand, are open to all of those in the community, whether Muslim or not; it is an opportunity for us to re-connect and dialogue around this year's theme of "**Rekindling the Community Spirit**". This year we will be hosting more than 30 community iftars throughout the UK.

These events provide an opportunity to see our diverse community all together engaged in dialogue in a pleasant evening of entertainment and good food!

Please do get in contact with us through info@dialoguesociety.org if you would like to attend.

Dialogue Society

Who are we?

A great question to ask, especially if you're new to our organisation.

The Dialogue Society is a registered charity, established in London in 1999, with branches across the UK. Our volunteers and community coordinators actively engage in projects with the aim of advancing social cohesion by connecting communities, empowering people to engage and contributing to the development of ideas on dialogue and community building.

We understand dialogue to consist of meaningful interaction and exchange between people of different groups and individuals who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding.

Thus, we stand for promoting dialogue, firstly as a natural and basic expression of the human person and secondly for overcoming pressing social problems through

open, honest, candid and critical engagement. More generally we stand for democracy, human rights, the non-instrumentalisation of religion in politics, equality and freedom of speech. We oppose undermining democratic values and human right norms in the pursuit of any political or religious ideology and discriminating against others on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or age.

For more information regarding our organisation, you can watch our "What's Dialogue Society?" video below.



What's Dialogue Society?



Ramadan in the UK: Pakistani-British Community

This interview series highlights the cultural nuances amongst Muslims and how Ramadan is celebrated throughout the UK.



This week's interview was conducted with Ajaib, a Pakistani-British Muslim who is a business owner and volunteer in the wider community in Kent. He volunteers with several organisations including the Canterbury Street Mosque (Kent Muslim Welfare Association) and serves as the chair of the Medway Inter-faith Action (MIFA).

What does Ramadan mean to you?

Ramadan fosters a spiritual connection with Allah and allows one to become a better Muslim, refreshing and reminding oneself of why we are Muslims. Through a month of reflection and worship, we learn to lead a not perfect, but better life for the hereafter.

What ethnic community are you from, and can you tell us a little bit about

your culture? (Some fun facts, favourite food, landmarks, and history).

Family is key to our culture, both enjoying iftar and prayers in the mosque together with our family is important. There is an increased focus on turning inwards to our faith with extra prayers such as tarawih and reading the Quran. Historically speaking, Ramadan is the month in which the Quran was first revealed thus in our culture we try to read the whole Quran in Arabic to honour its inception. In recent years the translation of the Quran has been more readily available, which hasn't always been the case, allowing us the opportunity to contemplate the word of Allah at another depth.

From a specific Pakistani-British culture point of view, at iftar time you would invite your family or friends for a large meal and get together. As a family we have moved away from this, the focus of Ramadan isn't just the food, the focus should be on the remembrance of Allah. Preparing such a large meal takes a lot of effort for the host family and leaves little time for reflection both during the day and in the evening. We do still make "iftar packs" and give them to our friends rather than having a large meal together, we've moved this to the mosque which makes us more connected with the community. Everyone in our mosque's community brings a dish and we share them amongst ourselves, allowing us the opportunity to re-connect as a community and share a light meal together with plenty of time and focus for our tarawih prayers. Muslims also believe the community spirit of praying together in mosques adds to the virtuousness of the prayer - so this is a bonus we don't want to miss out during Ramadan.

How does your ethnic community celebrate Ramadan in the UK?

Traditionally it is unhealthy with foods you may already know like the pakora, we eat mainly fried foods which we shouldn't be eating really. As a family, we've tried to move, albeit not completely, to a healthier, air fried rather than a deep-fried diet. Our staples are foods like rice and curry, and a sweet dish, during Ramadan there are of course dates, water and for some a little milk.

For me, it is important to differentiate between the iftar and the meal. Iftar simply means breaking the fast, then you pray Maghrib and then have an evening meal. I think it's important to not overdo the evening meal, so you have more time and energy for evening prayers and remembrance of Allah.

What do you miss from Ramadan when it passes?

You do feel like something has gone away, you do miss the fasting and the tarawih prayers... the general spirituality which emerges when the family and community are together. Fasting and connecting, trying to be better Muslims.

Of course, you can fast at a lesser intensity throughout the year and visit the mosque and spend time with your family, but you do miss the intensity of Ramadan.

How can we rekindle the community spirit during Ramadan?

There are many wonderful ways we can do this in our local communities. On April the 16th we have our own event, "Ramadan Iftar with the Community" with our local mosque. We will invite people from different backgrounds, Muslim or not, it doesn't matter. Hoping to engage in discussion and come to

appreciate our differences and similarities.

There are also several talks, I recently attended an open Zoom online talk led by a Mufti on Ramadan which was a great way for non-Muslims to engage and ask questions that they had. I believe we need a common understanding; education plays a key role as does physical getting to come together, if possible, of course not necessarily.

Food and a good chat are a great way to break down barriers.

RECIPE

Pakora

A perfectly spiced and crispy Indian snack. Ideal for a family feast, serve with your favourite chutney.

Preparation time: 20 mins

Cooking time: 25 mins

Serves: 6

Ingredients

- 1 green chilli, chopped
- thumb-sized piece ginger, roughly chopped
- 1 tomato, roughly chopped
- 200g gram flour
- 1 ½ tsp chilli powder
- 1 ½ tsp garam masala
- 1 ½ tsp ground coriander
- 2 medium potatoes, peeled, halved and thinly sliced, then halved into quarter moons
- ½ aubergine, thinly sliced, then halved into quarter moons
- ½ cauliflower, cut into florets
- 1 large onion, finely sliced
- ½ lemon, juiced
- vegetable oil, for frying
- chutney, to serve

How to Cook

- (1) Heat oven to 120C/100C fan/ gas 1/2. Make a paste by blitzing the chilli, ginger and tomato together, then set aside.
- (2) Mix the gram flour with the spices. Add all the prepared vegetables and toss in the mix. Slowly add 150ml water until the batter coats the vegetables – they should be well coated, but not swimming in it.
- (3) Add the tomato mixture and get your hands in there, mixing well until everything is incorporated. Add a little lemon juice and seasoning.
- (4) Heat the oil to 180C. Take a handful of the mix and squeeze it into a loose little ball, to ensure the vegetables stick to each other when lowered in the oil. Use a spoon to carefully drop the ball into the oil.
- (5) Fry for about 4 mins until golden and crispy, then taste to test for seasoning and consistency. You may also need to add a little water or gram our to the mixture at this point if your tester ball didn't hold together. Repeat, frying the remaining mixture in batches.
- (6) Drain on kitchen paper and keep warm in the oven as you go. Serve immediately with chutney.

Source: 2022. Pakora recipe | BBC Good Food. [online] BBC Good Food. Available at: <<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/pakora>>





Coinciding Festivals: Vaisakhi

In this issue we Vaisakhi, the Sikh festival of harvest and will be celebrated on the 14th of April this year.

Although it is originally the festival of harvest in the Punjab, a celebration showing gratitude and thanks for the harvest of food and crops that year, it is also a celebration of the founding of the Sikh community in 1699.

Celebrations at Vaisakhi include services held in the gurdwara, prayers for crops, large fairs, sporting competitions and bhangra dancing and folk music. In addition, committees for the gurdwara are elected and the Nishan Sahib (the orange flag outside every gurdwara) is taken down and replaced with a new flag. The flagpole is taken down and washed in milk

and yoghurt and then water. This is to symbolise cleanliness and purity.

In addition, some Sikhs travel to Anandpur, where Guru Gobind Singh formed the Khalsa. They may also travel to the Harmander Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar to celebrate.

Source: BBC Bitesize. 2022. Vaisakhi - Practices in Sikhism - GCSE Religious Studies Revision - Eduqas - BBC Bitesize. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zm848mn/revision/2>> [Accessed 22 March 2022].



What Ramadan means to me

Ozair Surti

Growing up as a Muslim boy in London, Ramadan has always been a very special time: family Suhoors (waking up is always difficult though!), Iftar parties, late night Taraweeh prayers (special Ramadan prayers), reading the Quran and so much more.

In fact, the weeks leading up to it are just as important as the month itself. My mum always makes a huge batch of samosas, spring rolls and cutlets as starters for our Iftaars, and I try and help by making a few oddly shaped samosas before realising I should leave it to the experts.

My favourite memories of Ramadan are always the ones when we're visiting Pakistan. It feels completely different when you're surrounded by give or take 20 cousins, 7 aunts and uncles and countless other relatives to whom you're not exactly sure how you're related. We all sit on the floor for Iftar (on a cloth called a 'Dhusthakaan' in

Urdu), stay up till Suhoor time and go out to eat before heading to the Masjid for Fajr prayer. Most of my best memories with my family have been during Ramadan. For example, when I was around 7 years old, my cousins and I used to try and have the strangest food for Suhoor; crushed up pot noodles straight out of the packet were not uncommon (nor was feeling a bit queasy during the fast!).

Whilst Ramadan is a lot of fun, it can also be difficult. Fasting during school time during the summer was never easy but it made every day feel so much more worthwhile. I know that I always feel accomplished after every fast – my days never feel wasted during the blessed month. It also makes me feel more at peace and reminds to focus the important things in my life: faith and family. Fasting helps me to concentrate throughout the day too – without having food or drink to distract me, I can sit down and get tasks

done more quickly (although when the hunger pains kick in a few hours before Iftar, it's usually time for a lie down).

Ramadan serves to remind Muslims that there are many who have much less than us and that we should always be grateful for what we have. As someone in a very fortunate and privileged position, I'm always happy that Ramadan reminds us of this.

Finally, Ramadan has many spiritual, scientific, and other benefits. It has played such an integral part of my childhood – I still remember begging my parents to let me fast when I was 9 years old – that I can't imagine a year going by without it.

I hope this Ramadan brings us all blessings, happiness, and joy. I can't wait!



Kids' Corner



Allow the shapes to cool completely then enjoy!



Halal Rice Crispy Treats

Ingredients

- 6 cups of puffed rice cereal (Rice Krispies or the generic stuff. Doesn't make a difference. The marshmallow is the star in this recipe.)
- 1 jar of Marshmallow Creme (it doesn't contain any gelatine)
- 3 tablespoons butter

Directions

- (1) Spray a 9x13 pan with nonstick spray or grease with butter and set aside. *I use a pan that's 10x15 because it produces more pieces. The treats come out slightly thinner, but you still get a decent bite out of it.*
- (2) In a non-stick pot, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the marshmallow creme and stir to completely melt and combine with the butter.
- (3) Remove from heat and add the rice cereal. Stir gently but thoroughly with a rubber spatula to cover the cereal completely.
- (4) Press into the greased pan and let cool completely to hold its shape.

For shaped treats

After pressing the mixture into the greased pan, use the cookie cutter of your choice to shape the treats while the mixture is still warm. Place the cut shapes on a sheet of wax paper to set. Continue to cut out the shapes until you've finished the tray. Gather the scraps and press together to cut out more shapes. Continue to do so until you've used up as much of the mixture as possible.

Source: Little Life of Mine. 2022. Halal Rice Crispy Treats. [online] Available at: <<http://littlelifeofmine.com/halal-shaped-rice-crispy-treats/>> [Accessed 15 March 2022].



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