

## Ramadan in Japan

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Ramadan Mubarak. As I write to you today I am visiting one of the smallest Muslim communities in the world and am currently burning the midnight oil preparing this article.

So far in my short life as a Muslim, I have spent Ramadan in the Gulf where huge importance - and lavish hospitality - is placed on Ramadan. I have also endured the isolation of being the `only muslim in the village` while staying with my non-Muslim parents in the north of England. As much as I loved them it was a miserable time being away from brothers and sisters, sharing their struggles, fasting and the joy of iftars!

This month provides us all with an opportunity for forgiveness from Allah and freedom from our sins. It is the month for performing good deeds and giving to charitable causes. It is the month when the gates of Paradise are flung wide open and the rewards for our good (and bad) deeds are magnified many times over. This is the month yours and my prayers are answered and, insh`Allah, our sins are forgiven.

And so here I am, in Japan somewhere between Tokyo and Kyoto in a country which has no real religious affiliations and where the Muslim communities are tiny. In Kyoto for instance, there is probably no more than 35 Japanese reverts and 350 incoming Muslims. Yet each and every brother and sister I have met here so far has given me an inspiration and optimism in these dark days where Muslims and their lands are being attacked, oppressed and occupied.

According to the Islamic Circle of Japan there were only two mosques in the whole of Japan and now there are more than 50 purpose-built masjids across the land. This is thanks to the faith, eman and generosity of Muslims in Japan and from overseas help and support from brothers and sisters who, like me, have been overwhelmed by the strength and determination of this tiny community.

When I return to London and to the Agenda, I hope to recount you with more inspiring tales about this thriving, plucky section of our great Ummah. As you know, Allah (swt) gifts innumerable blessings on us all during this special month of fasting - one of the five pillars of Islam. The Prophet (peace be upon him) advised all Muslims that whoever fasts this month with faith, seeking Allah's (swt) reward, will have all of his or her past sins forgiven.

And while I write to you from Japan, I also want you to remember another tiny community where Islam is the watchword and where, perhaps, some of Allah`s (SWT) most devoted flock are now sitting, praying, fasting and contemplating. I am, of course, talking about our brothers in Guantanamo Bay where the cellblocks, which now house 14 suspected al Qaeda leaders as well as more than 400 other detainees, have been rocked by a riot and three so-called suicides in recent months. I say so-called, because former Guantanamo detainee Tariq Dergoul came in to Agenda studios recently and told me that he knew the brothers who had died. He said he doubted very much they were of the type who would take their own lives.

Despite all the trials and tribulations of these brothers, they are still holding on tight to the rope of Allah (swt) and I believe their eman is an example to us all.

Please remember the brothers of Guantanamo, and others less fortunate than ourselves, in your duas.