

Ramadan in the palestinian world

Ramadan has a special place in every Muslim's heart. We wait for it all year. As a small child, I remember my excitement at hanging colorful lanterns on the house. My parents taught my siblings and me to abstain from food and drink from dawn to dusk, instilling in us that the idea of fasting is to train yourself to be patient, to elevate your soul from mundane desires, and to try to free your mind from evil impulses, and do good deeds for people around us.

the holy month of Ramadan started early for Muslims in Gaza this year. In some sense, we've been fasting since October but for tragic reasons. I woke Monday, the first day of fasting, an hour before dawn to prepare the pre-fast meal known as *suhour*. This is usually a moment of profound joy and spirituality but this year I could not hold back my tears. The mosques lie in ruins, so neighbors all around performed the call to prayer on their own initiative. *Suhour* consisted of stone-hard bread, which I baked from barley, corn, soy, and even bird feed that we managed to find and ground together. The sand-like taste was tempered by the fact that we were able to dip it in the olive oil that we pressed from our own olive trees before the war, which I found in my father's deserted home in Gaza City.

For our first meal after fasting, I had saved two small bags of pasta. Though it was infested with weevils, I managed to clean and boil the pasta, and serve it with tomato sauce for *iftar*. I used to partially prepare the next day's *iftar* the night before, so that my fasting hours could be focused on worship. With so much scarcity, this is now a faraway dream.

It would be easy to lose faith when inhumanity surrounds us. It may sound strange but, after surviving five months of brutal war, the start of the holy month has in some ways deepened my faith. I wish this year that fasting was only about purifying our souls from the body's mundane desires. But, for us Gazans, it has also meant learning to live without many people we love. I hope that they are in a better place now.