



For Muslim letter carriers, Ramadan means working without food or water



Abraham Askar

Ramadan, which falls in the ninth month of the lunar-based Islamic calendar, begins with the first sight of the new crescent moon and ends with the next new moon. It marks the prophet Muhammad's initial revelation of the Quran, the holy book of Islam. The month is a sacred time when Muslims practice fasting—one of the five pillars of Islam, the most important practices of the religion. Fasting generally entails abstaining from food and drink from before the first light of dawn until the setting of the sun.

When Muslim letter carriers, or any letter carriers, go on a fast, it can be difficult for them as they are performing a physical job. As we all know, letter carriers are expected to carry satchels up to 35 pounds at a time and packages weighing up to 70 pounds. In addition to carrying heavy parcels, carriers often walk more than 12 miles a day.

Ramadan falls about 10 days earlier every year, this year lasting from March 10 to April 9. Muslims break their fast before sunrise at *Suhoor*, meaning pre-dawn meal, and after sunset at *Iftar*, meaning the breaking of the fast. For Muslim letter carriers, this means going without food and water for almost their entire workday.

The Postal Record spoke with four Muslim letter carriers to learn about Ramadan's traditions and the challenges that fasting presents when working a physical job. One is **Abraham Askar**, an 18-year carrier from Marrero, LA Branch 4323, who was eager to share his experiences during Ramadan. Three of the carriers are from Western Wayne County, MI Branch 2184 in the Dearborn area, which is west of Detroit. Dearborn is considered the most densely populated area by Muslims in the United

States and is home to the largest mosque in North America.

Marwan Ghoteimi, a carrier in Dearborn Heights, employs his own strategy when it comes to fasting. Instead of eating at *Suhoor* in the morning, he goes without eating until *Iftar*, when he eats his entire day's worth of food.

"Some people, if they eat in the morning, they get hungry very soon," Ghoteimi said. "I'm one of those kinds of people. Because when we go home after the sunset, we'll be making a lot of food, so we eat a lot."

For his part, Askar has come up with a diet that helps him make it through the day. In the mornings he wakes up an hour before dawn "in order to have a healthy meal and hydrate properly before the sun begins to rise."

"I try to consume high protein, high complex carbohydrates and hydrating foods such as melons, cucumbers, dates, raw honey, figs, bananas, eggs, Greek yogurt and oatmeal," Askar said. "I also take a multivitamin and hydrate with lots of alkaline water before the sun rises. Also, I avoid overeating."

Ghoteimi has been a letter carrier since 2012, so during much of his time as a carrier Ramadan occurred during the hot summer months of the year. During summertime, it was difficult for him to go without water throughout the day. At times, he even had to break his fast to drink water.

"I [would] just take what I need[ed], like just a little bit of water," Ghoteimi said. "I didn't drink as much as I could or the amount that I needed."

If Muslims break their fast, they can make up for the fast at another time in the year, which Ghoteimi said he did if he ever needed to drink water during the day, when Ramadan occurred in summer.



“In the wintertime...I don’t care about food, I don’t care about eating,” Ghoteimi said.

Now that Ramadan will be in winter and springtime, he is not at all concerned with breaking his fast.

“It’s not going to be a big deal for me,” said Ghoteimi. “For some people, if they don’t eat, it’s an issue for them.”

As a Louisiana native, Askar’s fasting has at times coincided with temperatures reaching over 100 degrees in the summers. He said, “that was really a test of my faith,” but noted that the food and water he drinks before and after sunlight have helped him a lot. During his breaks Askar sits in cool, shaded areas.

Mohamad Rahal, a seven-year carrier in Dearborn, said, “The first couple of days [are] very hard, especially because every day you’re drinking water by habit or whatever, so it’s hard.”

After a few days, Rahal said, he gets used to fasting and can go throughout his day without getting very hungry or experiencing other side effects from going without eating.

For **Ahmed Ibrahim**, a 12-year carrier in Dearborn, it usually takes about a week to adjust to fasting.

Despite the difficulties that fasting presents when working a physical job, the four carriers each called it a necessity for those who practice Islam.

“It is very important, it’s part of the religion, so it’s not like you have the option to do it or not to do it—you have to do it unless you have a medical reason,” Rahal said.

Fasting means more to Muslims than simply not eating; the practice is done for multiple reasons, including the sense of empathy that it fosters.

“We have to feel what people that don’t have enough food to eat every

day feel, to feel what they feel,” said Ibrahim.

In addition to the empathy, Ibrahim and Ghoteimi both said they feel that fasting rejuvenates their bodies. “Fasting makes the body refresh itself again,” Ghoteimi said.

At the end of the month of Ramadan is one of the major holidays in Islam, Eid al-Fitr. That translates to “Festival of Breaking Fast,” when Muslims are done with fasting and celebrate by holding community prayer in the morning, followed later in the day by meals, gifts and socialization with family and friends. Before the prayer, members of the community offer Zakat al-Fitr, a charitable donation of food, and it is collected to be distributed to those who need it.

In 2001, the Postal Service issued its first Eid Blessings stamp, which was commissioned for USPS’s Holiday Celebrations series. Three new issues of the stamp have since been released. The stamp features the Arabic phrase “Eid Mubarak,” which can be translated as, “Blessed Eid.” **PR**

In accordance with the five pillars of Islam, Askar made a pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj).

