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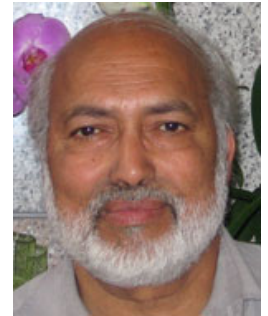
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## Ramadan Journey

TONIGHT it is Sept. 26, the fourth night of Ramadan, the holiest month in the Muslim calendar.

It's close to 1 a.m. and my 64-year-old body is wearing down. The muscle in my right leg has collapsed and great pain has overtaken me. My knees, my back and my ankles are also aching from constant prostration.

I am deprived of sleep and my cycle has changed. I get up around 3 a.m. to eat and drink all I can. Then we have to carry on the day, from sunrise to sunset, without a morsel of food or a drop of water. It is so hard for me to get up in the middle of the night and force myself to eat. But it is one of the five pillars of Islam.



During Ramadan, the prayers are multiplied 10 times in Allah's eyes, as the Quran will be recited in every mosque all over the Muslim world, completely finishing on Oct. 22. So I remind myself that Ramadan is the jihad within us all. It is about growing within your mind and heart, purifying it of all gluttony, lust, jealousy and revenge. Ramadan helps create a culture of peace and tranquility. The atmosphere is full of forgiveness and being mindful of your neighbor's sufferings and problems.

Through fasting and reading the Quran, I feel connected to Allah and I know that Allah is watching over me. Every act of mine is being recorded and made ready for the trial on the Day of Judgment.

But it is getting hard, and I do feel dizzy when the hunger really gets to me. Oh, that terrible headache because I could not have caffeine! Because of my age, sickness and overall physical conditions, I am looking more for exceptions to the rule. After all Allah does not put a burden on any soul greater than its capacity to bear says the Quran.

The Quran and Hadiths — collections of Islamic laws derived from the Quran — says, "If you are old and infirm, then feed two hungry people or give in charity the cost of feeding the hungry, homeless and the destitute."

So my wife and I decided to see how we would feel the next day before we call upon Allah the merciful, loving and kind to make fasting easy on us.

On the seventh day of Ramadan, it seems like my body has adjusted and the pain I felt all over is gone. My sleep pattern is now more adjusted and I sleep one full hour — or two — during the day to catch up.

The lack of food and drink also does not bother me that much — a great deal of readjustment has happened internally.

For me, Ramadan is a journey within my soul. It is only me and Allah. So I am very thankful that I did not quit when the pressure was the greatest. Now I look forward to completing the rest of 19 fasting days. This month is full of blessings says our Prophet of Islam.

Iftekhar Hai is the president of the United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance in South San Francisco. Next week: The Rev. Anthony McGuire

