

Author Biography

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As we begin an unprecedented Ramadan, Muslims are trying to figure out how to approach this blessed month while being isolated at home and without access to the *masjid*. How do they anticipate their experience this Ramadan to be compared to prior years? Are people optimistic? If so, what predicts their optimism? This brief report is meant to describe the attitudes and behavioral intentions of Muslims for this Ramadan and provide recommendations based on our findings.

Yaqeen Institute released a survey earlier this week that was completed by 450 Muslims from all over the world. This survey was meant to understand the attitudes of Muslims regarding this Ramadan compared to previous years. The sample of Muslims were diverse in their ethnicity, education level, and age.¹ Most participants reported praying five times a day (77%) and considered their relationship with Allah to be quite intimate (55%).

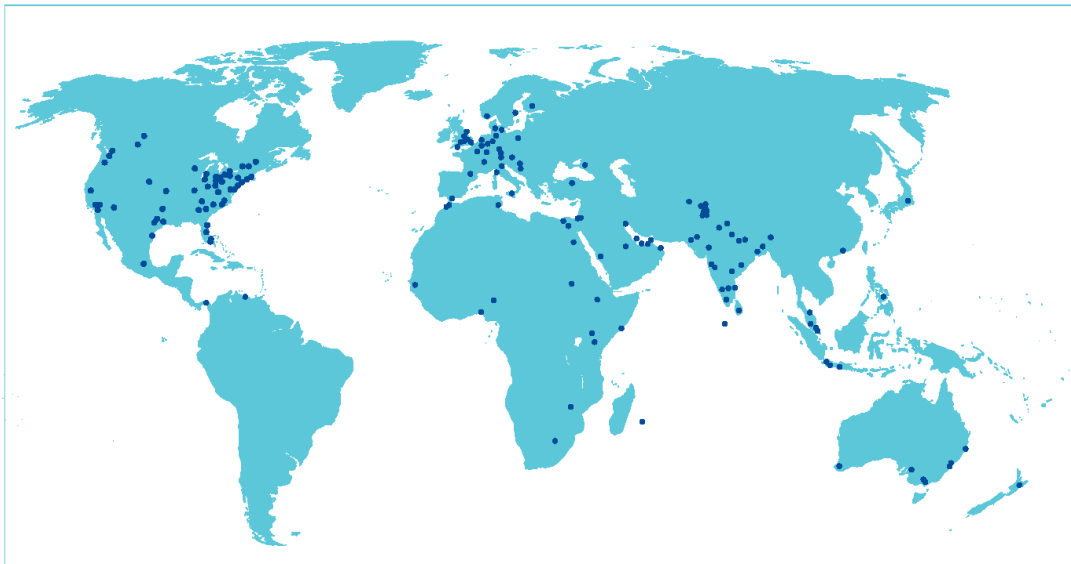


Figure 1. Map of survey respondents worldwide

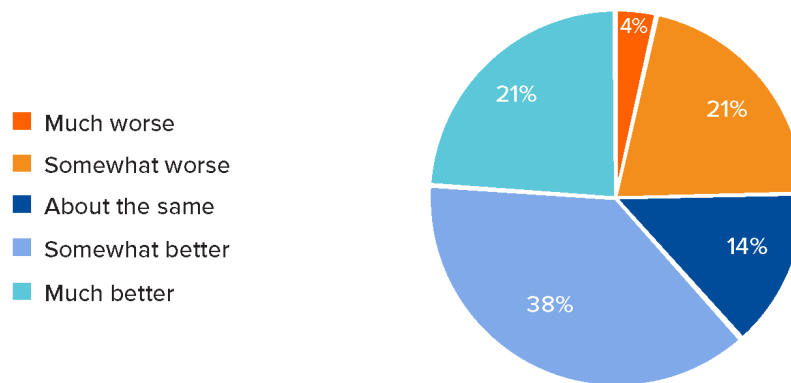
An optimistic *ummah*

Muslims are encouraged to remain optimistic even during challenging and unprecedented times. The Prophet ﷺ said, “I am amazed by optimism, the good

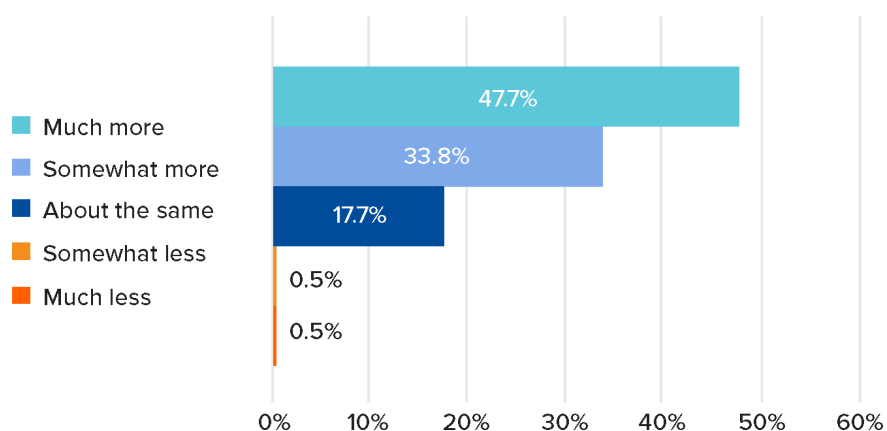
¹ The majority of participants were between 25 and 44 (56%), South Asian (49%), and held bachelor’s degrees (40%).

word, the kind word.”² Fortunately, results from this survey indicate that many Muslims around the world have internalized this message and are generally optimistic about this Ramadan despite the current global situation. Although many

How do you think your Ramadan will be this year compared to last year?



How much Qur'an do you plan to read this Ramadan compared to last year?



² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5422.

Muslims will not have access to the *masjid*, nearly two in three believe this Ramadan will be better than last year. As Ramadan is the month of the Qur'an, much of the optimism appears related to people's expectations that they will have more time to engage with the Qur'an this Ramadan compared to previous years. More than 80% of respondents expect to read more Qur'an than last Ramadan. Here are a few quotes that captured the general sentiment of optimism and having more time to focus on worship.

“This Ramadan will be, *in shā' Allāh*, a chance to improve ourselves and really just focus on our relationship with Allah. It's just Allah and you, and actually that's a great opportunity. We will eventually focus more on our behavior and reflect on our inward state.”

“Ramadan at home this year will bring us to the first Ramadan of seclusion, reflection, and remembrance of Allah.”

“This Ramadan is something different. Those who could not spend Ramadan productively in the past, this year they can do so much that makes them a better Muslim.”

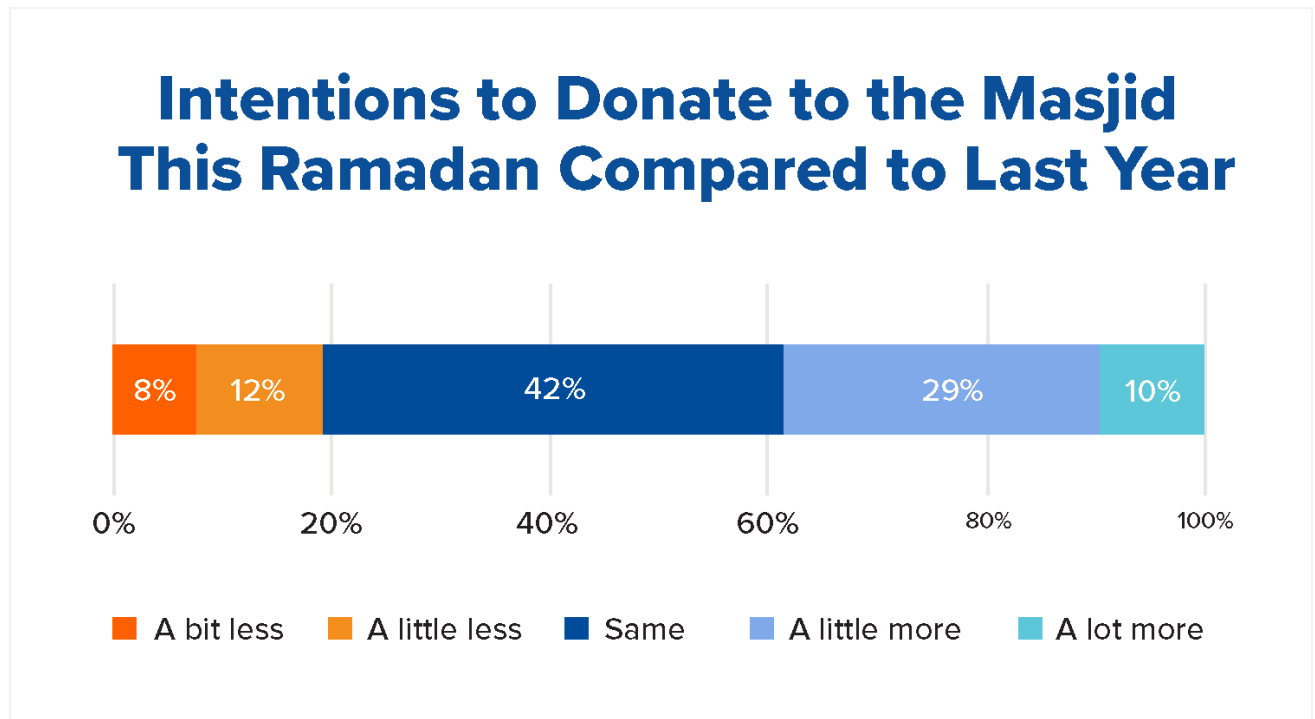
A generous *ummah*

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was the most generous of people, and he was even more generous in the month of Ramadan when Jibreel would meet him to teach him the Qur'an. The Prophet ﷺ would be more generous than a nourishing wind.³ Despite the financial constraints that people are facing due to the COVID-19-related economic downturn, our sample believed that being charitable during uncertain times can only lead to good (81% strongly agreed, 15% somewhat agreed). We asked about their intentions to donate to relief organizations, educational organizations, and *masjids* this Ramadan compared to last Ramadan.

- 57% intended to donate more to relief organizations.
- 35% intended to donate more to educational organizations.

³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1803; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2308.

- 39% intended to donate more to the *masjid*.



Who is optimistic this Ramadan?

We investigated the predictors of optimism for this Ramadan. Optimism was defined by responses of “somewhat better” or “much better” to the question “How do you think your Ramadan will be this year compared to last year?” We found that those who read the Qur’an regularly, consider their relationship with Allah to be intimate, and who see many blessings since COVID-19 spread were more optimistic.⁴ However, those who reported feeling they need a community to thrive this Ramadan were generally less optimistic. How can we use this information to benefit us?

⁴ We used multiple regression to examine the correlates of optimism for this Ramadan. All reported findings were significant at $p = .01$ or less.

Ramadan tips

Based on our research findings, we recommend the following practices to increase positive thoughts that will help us thrive during this blessed month.

Tip 1: Reflect on the Qur'an regularly

مَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَىٰ

We have not revealed the Qur'an to cause you distress.⁵

We found that people who reported reading the Qur'an regularly were more optimistic about Ramadan and saw more blessings in life. This relationship is expressed in the verse, “We have sent down to you the Book to clarify all things and as guidance, mercy, and glad tidings for the Muslims.”⁶ The Qur'an is intended to be a source of peace and comfort for the believer in both this life and the next. Find solace in the Qur'an this Ramadan by reading and reflecting on passages of personal interest. Reflect on Sūrat Yūsuf (Chapter 12) to discover and understand Allah's wisdom in the events that Yūsuf عليه السلام went through. Try and connect his life to your own. Ponder over the life of Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام in Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (Chapter 28), and empathize with how Musa felt when he had to flee his homeland. Immerse yourself in the stories, metaphors, and parables of the Qur'an.

Tip 2: Have an intimate conversation with Allah

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَا ۖ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

And when My servants ask you [O Muhammad] about Me, indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [in obedience] and believe in Me so that they may be guided.⁷

⁵ Qur'an 20:2.

⁶ Qur'an 16:89.

⁷ Qur'an 2:186.

We found that people who consider their relationship with Allah to be intimate expressed more optimism about this Ramadan and plan to be more generous with their donations. While we are currently isolated from people, we are never isolated from Allah. Allah tells us, “I am as My servant thinks I am. I am with him when he mentions Me. If he mentions Me to himself, I mention him to Myself; and if he mentions Me in a group, I mention him in a better group [of angels]. And if he draws near to Me an arm’s length, I draw near to him a fathom’s length. And if he comes to Me walking, I go running to him.”⁸ Set aside a few moments each day (e.g, after *Fajr* or before *Maghrib*) to have an intimate conversation with Allah. No matter what you are feeling or thinking about, Allah’s door is always open.

Tip 3: Practice gratitude journaling and letter writing

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

And remember when your Lord proclaimed, “If you are grateful, I will surely increase you in favor.”⁹

We found that people who see many blessings in life are more optimistic about this Ramadan and plan to be more generous. Gratitude has been shown to improve life satisfaction, sleep quality, mental health, prosocial behavior, and increase optimism.¹⁰ There are two gratitude practices that we suggest for this Ramadan. The first is to start a gratitude journal today and write down five things each day that you are grateful for. These blessings can be big or small, from the roof over your head to the smell of a rose in your backyard. The second practice is to write a gratitude letter (or email) to someone who you deeply appreciate but never had a chance to properly thank. This practice is in line with the Prophet’s statement, “Whoever does not thank people has not thanked Allah.”¹¹

⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7405.

⁹ Qur’an 14:7.

¹⁰ Leah R. Dickens, “Using Gratitude to Promote Positive Change: A Series of Meta-Analyses Investigating the Effectiveness of Gratitude Interventions,” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 39, no. 4 (2017): 193–208.

¹¹ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 4811.

Tip 4: Create a virtual community to feel connected

We found that people who reported feeling they needed a community to thrive were less optimistic about this Ramadan. Feeling socially connected is a basic human need and has always been an important part of Ramadan. We recognize that not being in the *masjid* with friends and family will be difficult this year. However, you can still create a sense of community by regularly having video conferences. Try to set up video conferencing for reading Qur'an with friends, hosting a virtual *ifṭār* party, or hosting a party for a *tafsīr* lecture. We may be apart from family and friends in *physical distance*, but never in *heart*. Remind yourself as you stand alone in prayer at home that millions of people around the world are simultaneously facing Makkah in worship.