

McLean CONNECTION

Fasting for Faith

McLean family comes together to find wisdom and calm during the month of Ramadan.

By [Aranya Tomseth](#)

Wednesday, October 25, 2006

When Khalique Zahir and Lubna Varcie first started dating, they knew instantly that they were meant for each other because they saw eye to eye on two very important matters.

"We were on the same line on the same page, and that's what attracted us to each other," said Varcie, now Lubna Varcie-Zahir. "We both love food and religion was something we agreed on."

Although they had grown up in completely different parts of the world — she in Kuala Lumpur, Bombay and London, and he in West Virginia — they both shared the same values, likes and dislikes. Today, Khalique and Lubna live in McLean with their three children, Sara, 9, Zain, 5, and Rhea, 2. Both work at Fairfax Hospital — Khalique as a plastic surgeon and Lubna as an internist. The couple is striving to raise their children with the same beliefs that their own parents instilled in them. "We believe in God, we believe in prayer," said Lubna. "We believe in the basic tenets of our religion, but we also do everything else ... we both have a pretty strong sense of Islam even though we were brought up in different countries."

OVER THE LAST month the Zahir family has been celebrating Ramadan, an annual tradition that takes place during the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. During the month of Ramadan people of Islamic faith fast between sunrise and sunset. At sunset the fast is broken with a prayer and a meal called "iftar." Very young children do not participate in the fast, but most start around the age of 7 or 8. Sara Zahir first started when she was 8.

"It was hard," said Sara. "I did take a couple of licks of a lollipop, but I had fun learning it."

Sara participated in the Fast of Ramadan with her parents this year as well, although she did not fast on school days, or on the days that she had soccer games.

"I do a lot of half days," she said.

Sara understands the purpose of Ramadan, and said that it makes her feel good to make a small sacrifice for a higher purpose. She also noticed that fasting gives her a much greater appreciation for food.

"Things taste better," said Sara. "Other people in the world don't have as much food as we do, so we're kind of saving up for them."

Khalique Zahir said he enjoys teaching his children about Ramadan because it is rewarding to watch them learn about their faith.

"It's a lot more than just fasting," said Khalique. "It's an opportunity for our kids to express their beliefs and learn more about who they are."

DURING the month of Ramadan, Muslims are also expected to put more effort into the teachings of Islam by praying more frequently, performing acts of kindness and spending more time with family and friends. Both Khalique and Lubna say that



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Ramadan is one of their favorite times of the year.

"It's a period when we have time to reflect on who we are, where we have been and where we are going — it brings our family together," said Khalique. "When you're hungry, you're more observant in general."

Lubna said she sees Ramadan as a time of personal renewal.

"You get to recharge your battery," she said. "You get closer to God, you read more, you pray more, and you get back in touch with your own spirit."

During Ramadan, the Zahir family wakes up before dawn, says the first of the five daily prayers, and then has something to eat. Another prayer is said later in the morning, and then once again upon returning home and just before breaking fast.

"We make it a point to try and break fast together," said Lubna. "Normally, we don't always get to eat together because one of us will be working late at the hospital, but during this time, we make a real effort to get home in time."

The daily prayers are varied, but ultimately deal with the same themes.

"You ask for health, for wisdom, for family safety and many different things," said Khalique. "I was brought up to pray for others and you hope that someone is praying for you too. It's not just 'give me a new car' or 'give me a new house ...' you pray for peace, wisdom and health."

THE END of Ramadan is celebrated with an enormous feast called "Eid-ul-Fitr" which translates to "The Festival of Breaking the Fasts." Muslims typically gather together with a large group of friends and family for the celebration.

"At the end of Ramadan, you really do realize what you have," said Lubna.

Khalique and Lubna Zahir said that they appreciate the diversity of the McLean area because it offers a supportive and understanding environment for people of all faiths. Khalique estimates that his fellow co-workers at Fairfax Hospital are made up of a group that is approximately 30 percent Jewish, 20 percent Muslim and 50 percent Christian.

"But we all work together, we all have the same general genetic makeup, we all watch the same sports — it's just our religious beliefs are a little different and we speak different languages," said Khalique. "But we respect everybody else's religions and we have all the different holidays on the calendar."

Khalique studied religion in college and said that over the course of his studies he realized that all religions are essentially the same in their basic tenets of moral uprightness and kindness toward others.

"Unfortunately, people tend to focus more on the differences than the similarities," he said.



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