



Serve a Sehri

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Hijri calendar, the lunar Islamic calendar, is a special month for pious Muslims all around the globe. It is a time to reconnect with God, cleanse the spirits of accumulated dirt, and start off again on the way to personal improvement anew. Muslims all around the world use the month as an opportunity to re-evaluate their lives and practice self discipline, and every good deed done is promised positive outcomes much in multiples as an added bonus. There are also efforts to strengthen ties between family and friends, and let bygones be, especially as the month's end is marked by the largest Muslim festival, the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Although Ramadan is a time for increased practice of piety, the concept does not conflict with normal life, as many acts of kindness are also considered worship. Like making a beautiful Sehri or Iftar for your loved ones is also a service, and hence part of 'Ibadah', or worship.

Now, what could be better than food over which to reconnect with loved ones? Food is also ingrained in our Bengali culture, as part of all celebrations, and a hearty meal served with love can resolve many a grievance. However, we must also remember to not be wasteful, especially in this month, or any other, and thus arrange for or prepare precise amounts of food for the number of guests involved. Any excess should not be wasted and should be saved for consumption later, boxed as take-away for the guests, or donated to the poor as a treat.

Since most people fast this month, the sensible times for organising a treat would be during Iftaar or Sehri, the two main meals of the month of fasting. A Sehri needs to be arranged in the early hours of the night, since the meal needs to conclude before the morning call to prayer, and guests may want to leave early for those – all or any of Nafal, Tahajjud, and Fajr in tranquillity of their homes. The main idea is that whichever time you select to treat your dear ones, make sure to account for the Islamic rituals of worship.

Next comes the selection of the menu, and it is very important to pick suitable items, especially for those who will be fasting till the day ends at sunset.

Since the intention is to inspire the love of God, decorations on the occasion can also incorporate the theme, and remind everyone of the purpose of the get-together.

We have here a few suggestions for the menu, and how to organise a different Iftar or Sehri get-together in Ramadan, with an exotic twist.

THE MENU

A menu inspired from the Middle Eastern and Arab cuisine:

Drinks

Ayran: a traditional but very simple Turkish cold drink made with yogurt, chilled water and some salt to taste. Or, Cantaloupe/Melon drink with crushed mint leaves.

Appetizer

Tabbouleh: Finely chopped fresh parsley and mint, bathed in fruity extra virgin olive oil and lemon juice or a Fattoush

Main Course

Mujaddara (a rice dish), or Steamed fragrant rice with herbs
Kefta Bil Sayniyeh (Spiced Lamb Patties with Tomato and onion.

Shawarma

Pita or thick flat bread

Soup-e Adas (Lentil soup)

Carrot and Corriander Falafel

Rubyan Meshwi (Arab grilled prawns)

Kufteh (herbed meatballs in light gravy)

Jujeh Kababs Hareesa

Sides

Baba Ghannouj (Mashed eggplant preparation)

Labaneh (A creamy and tart dip made from milk, yogurt and olive oil.)

Hummus

Dessert

Ma'moul (a date filed scrumptious cookie)

Luqaiamt (small, sweet dumplings made from butter, sugar, milk and flour)

Seasonal fruits like mangoes, litchi and jackfruit, along with foreign delicacies like pomegranate, plums and peaches can also be served.

Remember to arrange for both cold and normal temperature water in ample quantities for everyone, especially since this Ramadan is smack dab in the middle of summer! It is up to you to trim down the menu to make it more suitable for the palettes of your guests and avoid any wastage.

After food, the focus is on the ambience. Since it is mostly a time to promote piety and simplicity, but not bereft of enjoyment, keep in mind neatness and a no-fuss outlook for the décor.

For children, you can place a carpet or a soft rug, and sit them down with some appropriately themed colouring books or story books.

For the children's meal time, pick single colour paper plates and place mats on the rug. Any bold colours should be good.

For adults, the finest china or comfort cutlery are both ok. Feel free to take your out your themed items if they are tasteful.

Remember to provide ample room for prayers and rest -- for those who wish to pray before/after the food.

The main idea behind the treat is to be able to connect with the guests, keep them satisfied and help them recognise the good intentions of the host.

Here is to hoping for a blessed Ramadan for all.

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