

MUSLIM FESTIVALS AND CEREMONIES

Rashid Ahmad Chaudhry

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and
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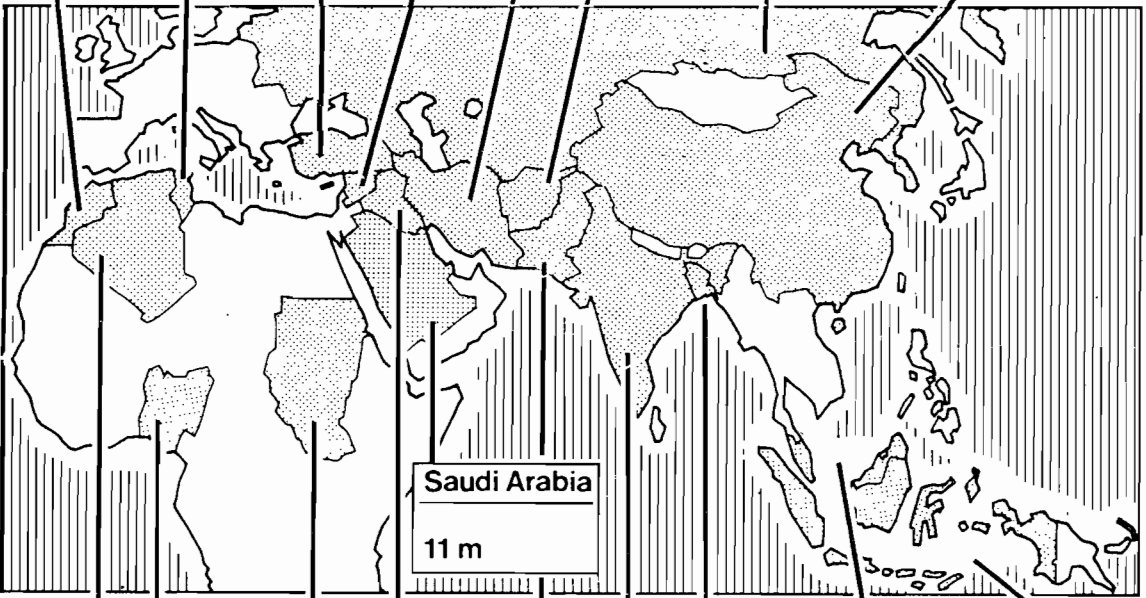
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CONTENTS

	Page
1. What is Islam?	1
2. The Muslim Calendar	4
3. Muslim Festivals	6
4. Friday, a holy day for Muslims	8
5. Eid-ul-Fitr	18
6. Eid-ul-Adhia	27
7. Shab-i-Miraj	37
8. Lailat-ul-Qadr (The Night of Decree)	39
9. Eid Milad-un-Nabi	41
10. Muharram Festival	43
11. Ceremonies at birth	49
12. Marriage ceremony	53
13. Funeral Prayer service	58

The world's Muslims

Morocco	Tunisia	Turkey	Syria	Iran	Afghanistan	Soviet Union	China
20m	7m	47m	10m	41m	17m	60m	90m



Saudi Arabia
11 m

Algeria	Nigeria	Sudan	Iraq	Pakistan	India	Bangladesh	Malaysia	Indonesia
21 m	55m	15m	14m	87m	100m	93m	8m	153m



In the name of Allah Most Gracious Ever Merciful,
We praise Him and invoke His blessings on His noble Prophet.

Introduction

With the introduction of multi-religious studies in British schools and the increasing numbers of Muslim pupils, we have received numerous requests from school teachers as well as students, for the supply of information about Islamic festivals. Mr. Rashid Ahmad Choudri's booklet for school students entitled "Muslim Festivals and Ceremonies" contains a wealth of information, not only about some of the festivals of Islam and the ceremonies performed by Muslims at the time of birth, marriage and death, hitherto inaccessible to English readers, but also about other aspects of the Muslim Faith.

Almost all festivals have socio-religious values, and the author has kept the vast diversity which exists among different sects of Muslims in mind. He has therefore included even those rites and practices which, though not forming an essential requirement of the Faith, yet are undertaken by some Muslims with great zeal and earnestness.

It is hoped that this edition, which has been revised by a committee for children's literature, will continue to be a valuable aid to teachers and students alike, and indeed to all who are concerned with the welfare and training of children.

Secretary.

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK COMMITTEE

Foreword

In order to maintain social harmony in an increasingly multi-cultural society and to remove the barriers of prejudices which prevail today, it is essential to be aware of the variations of culture of the people living in that society. One of the ways of studying the life style of a community is to look at its festivals. Islamic festivals are not merely colourful and festive social occasions; in fact they also represent the living aspects of the Faith.

In this booklet I have explained the nature not only of those Islamic festivals which are universally celebrated such as Friday and Eids, but also some other Muslim festivals which are in vogue in the Muslim society today.

I am extremely grateful and greatly indebted to Maulana Sheikh Mubarak Ahmad, Imam of the London Mosque, Mr. M. A. Saqi, deputy Imam of the London Mosque and Mr. Mansoor Shah, editor of 'Muslim Herald', for their valuable suggestions and comments in bringing this booklet to its present form.

All references are to the Holy Quran, unless otherwise stated.

Rashid Ahmad Chaudhry
1st May, 1983.

Foreword to the Second Edition

With the revised text and the inclusion of colour photographs, I am sure the readers will find this book more interesting. I hope this new edition will be received as warmly as was the first.

Rashid Ahmad Chaudhry
22nd May, 1988

What is Islam?

Islam is the religion preached and practised by the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. Islam is an Arabic word which means 'peace'. It also means 'submission'. A Muslim is, therefore, one who seeks peace and tries to maintain it throughout his life. He is the one who submits to the will of God, as indicated in the Quran, the holy book of Muslims, every word of which is revealed to the Holy Prophet of Islam; Muslims believe in all the Prophets of God, but the Holy Prophet Muhammad is regarded as the greatest of all the Prophets and the best of men.

Five Pillars of Islam

Islamic worship has five features which are known as the five pillars of Islam. They are as under:

- i) The declaration of faith: 'There is none worthy of worship except Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.'
- ii) Salat: to offer five daily Prayers at their appointed times.
- iii) Zakat: To contribute a certain percentage of one's wealth for the benefit of the poor and for some other noble causes.
- iv) Fasting in the month of Ramadhan.
- v) Haj: Pilgrimage to the Ka'aba in Arabia at least once in one's lifetime, if physically and financially possible and if the journey is safe.

Food and Drink Regulations

O ye who believe, eat of the lawful and wholesome things We have provided for you, and render thanks to Allah, if truly it is He whom you worship. He has made unlawful for you that which has died, and blood and flesh of swine, and that on which the name of any other than Allah has been invoked (2:173, 174).

Forbidden to you is the flesh of a dead animal, and blood, and the flesh of swine; and that on which the name of one other than ALLAH is invoked; and the flesh of an animal that has been strangled, or is beaten to death, or is killed by a fall, or is gored to death; and of which a wild animal has eaten, unless you have slaughtered it properly before its death; and that which has been slaughtered at an altar. But whoso is driven by necessity to eat any of these, without being wilfully inclined to sin, in such a case, surely, Allah is Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful (5:4).

Lawful are made to you quadrupeds of the class of cattle other than those which are expressly forbidden, except that you should not hold game to be lawful while you are in a state of pilgrimage.(5:2)

The game of the sea and the eating thereof is made lawful for you as a provision for you and the travellers (5:97).

They ask thee concerning liquor and gambling. Tell them: There is great harm in both and also some profit for people, but their harm is greater than their advantage (2:220).

From the above verses of the Holy Quran we conclude that the following are forbidden in Islam:

- a) Animals and birds that have died a natural death.
- b) Animals killed without invoking the name of Allah.
- c) Animals strangled to death.
- d) The flesh of pig.
- e) Animals of which a wild beast has eaten.
- f) Blood.
- g) Alcohol.

The food which is prohibited in Islam is called HARĀM, and that which is allowed in Islam is called HALĀL.

Islam requires that a Muslim should start his meals by saying:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ○

'Bis Millah, Hir Rahma, Nir Rahim.'

Translation:

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful.
and finish by reciting:*

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَطْعَمَنَا وَسَقَانَا وَجَعَلَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ.

**'Alhamdo Lilla hillazi at'amna wa saqana wa ja'alna minal
Muslimeen.'**

Translation:

*All praise is due to Allah who has given us to eat and to drink
and has made us Muslims.*

Islam also requires that a Muslim should eat with his right hand and should wash his hands before and after meals.

The Muslim Calendar

'They ask thee, O Prophet, concerning the phases of the moon. Tell them: These alterations are a means of determining time for regulation of people's affairs and for the Pilgrimage' (2:190)

The Muslim calendar is based on the lunar cycle and in terms of the solar calendar moves earlier by about eleven days each year. A month is counted from the appearance of the new moon to the next new moon. The lunar month, therefore, consists of either 29 or 30 days; that is why the sighting of the moon is important in deciding the dates of the festivals. The Muslim year starts from the day the Holy Prophet of Islam migrated from Mecca to Medina, in 622 AD. This event is known as Hijra.

To calculate conversions from one calendar to the other the following formula is used:

$$G = H \frac{3 \times H}{100} + 622$$

$$H = G + \frac{G - 622}{32} - 622$$

where G = Gregorian year (AD)
and H = Hijra year (AH)
Thus 1983 AD is 1403 AH

In fact Islam has made use of both the lunar and solar systems of measuring time. Where worship is to be performed in different parts of the day the solar system of reckoning time is used as in the five daily Prayers or for the beginning and breaking of the fast, and where worship is to be completed within a particular month or part thereof, the lunar system is used, as in the determination of the month of fasting or fixing the time of Haj or other festivals.

The names of the months of the Muslim calendar are as follows:

1. Muharram.
2. Safar.
3. Rabi-ul-Awwal
4. Rabi-ul-Sani.
5. Jamadi-ul-Awwal.
6. Jamadi-us-Sani.
7. Rajab.
8. Sha'aban.
9. Ramadhan.
10. Shawwal.
11. Dhul Qu'adah.
12. Dhul Hijjah.

Of these, the first, the seventh and the last two are considered to be sacred months and fighting during these months is considered to be a sin.

The Holy Quran states:

'The number of months with Allah has been twelve by Allah's ordinance since the day He created the heavens and the earth. Of these four are known as sacred' (9:36)

Muslim Festivals

Feast and festivals have become an integral part of human life in almost every society these days. In most cases their origin can be traced to ancient social rites, religious practices or anniversaries of some memorable events. For Muslims all religious festivals have their own special significance. In fact, at the end of different modes of worship, Islam has instituted a kind of festival. The festival following the daily Prayers of the week is the Friday Prayer, called Jum'a Prayer; the one following the month of fasting is called Eid-ul-Fitr, while the festival following the ceremony of Haj at the Ka'aba in Arabia is known as Eid-ul-Adhia.

These festivals are not merely moments of joy and happiness. They are also a form of worship in themselves, as Islam grafts the remembrance of God with every activity of a Muslim. It has related each action of the believer with God's remembrance so that even ordinary activities of life, like sitting, standing, walking, sleeping, wearing shoes or garments, going out of the house or entering into it, going on a journey or returning from it, selling or buying something, eating, drinking, washing, bathing, entering a mosque or going out of it, meeting a friend or facing an enemy, seeing the new moon, starting any work or finishing it, even sneezing, yawning or taking medicine, have been closely attached to His remembrance.

No wonder the idol worshippers of Mecca labelled the Holy Prophet as one who had gone crazy about God. A worldly person would regard these things as sheer madness, but the man who has understood the reality of life, knows that the true purpose of life lies in his devotion to and remembrance of God Almighty. For a Muslim, therefore, a day of festival is not merely a day of feasting and merry-making, but is also spent in praising Allah, remembering His attributes, and thanking Him for His countless blessings and bounties.

Islam is a religion of moderation, therefore it forbids its followers to indulge in extravagance at any time. It does not allow them to go to extremes so as to stand on the brink of insanity either with joy or with grief and sorrow. It teaches them to eat what God has provided for them but to be moderate. The Holy Quran states:

'O mankind, eat of that which is lawful and wholesome in the earth; and do not follow in the footsteps of satan; surely he is your declared enemy.' (2:169)

It instructs its followers not to eat so much as to fill the whole stomach. The Holy Prophet of Islam has remarked: 'Fill up your stomach one-third with water and one-third with food leaving the rest empty for air'. The Holy Prophet also instructed his followers not to drink water or other beverages in one gulp, rather it should be consumed slowly and gradually, pausing at least three times.

Islam also instructs its followers to share their happiness with others, specially the needy and the poor.

The Holy Quran states:

'The truly virtuous feed the poor, the orphan and the captive for the love of Allah, assuring them: We feed you to win Allah's pleasure only. We desire no reward nor thanks from you.' (76:9-10)

'They are neither extravagant nor niggardly, but keep a balance between the two.' (25:68)

'In their wealth those who ask and those who are unable to ask (eg: animals) have a right.' (51:20)

As regards the consumption of food, Muslims are asked not to waste any food. The Holy Quran states:

'Children of Adam, put your minds and bodies in a state of tidiness at every time and place of worship and eat and drink but be not wasteful; surely, He does not love the wasteful' (7:32)



Friday Prayer Service in progress in Basharat Mosque Spain. The leader of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad is delivering a sermon.

Friday, a Holy Day for Muslims

Importance of Friday Prayer

Of all the religious obligations of a Muslim, the most important is Prayer of Salat. It is compulsory for all Muslims, men and women equally. The Holy Quran says:

Observe Prayer in the prescribed form. It is enjoined on the believers to be performed at its appointed times (4:104).

There are five daily Prayers:-

FAJR—offered before sunrise.

ZUHR—offered at noon when the sun begins to decline.

ASR—offered in the afternoon.

MAGHRIB—offered just after sunset.

ISHA—offered in the evening.

In addition to these compulsory Prayers, there are other Prayers, for example the late evening Prayer during Ramadhan called 'TARAVEEH' and the early morning Prayer called 'TAHAJJUD'.

All the compulsory Prayers should be performed in congregation if possible. On Fridays, however, a special mid-day Prayer Service is held in place of the Zuhr Prayer. This is called Jum'a Prayer. Of all the Prayers mentioned above, none is so essential to be offered in congregation as the Jum'a Prayer. The Jum'a, in fact, is the greatest Muslim festival.

Muslims are asked to leave all their worldly pursuits when they are called to the Friday Prayer, and assemble in mosques to offer this Prayer with due observance of all its requirements. The Holy Quran says:

O ye who believe, when the call is made for Prayer on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off all business, that is better for you, if you only knew (62:10).

The Holy Prophet of Islam remarked:

'Your best day is Friday, so you should be diligent on that day in calling down blessings on me, for your blessings are conveyed to me.' (Sunan Abu Daud)

On another occasion he said:

'The best of days on which the sun rises is Friday; on that day was Adam created, on that day he was admitted to the Garden and on that day was he expelled therefrom.' (Muslim)

It is on account of this importance of the Friday Prayer that in Muslim countries, most of the offices and businesses are closed for the day so that people can attend the Prayer Service.

Preparation for Prayer Service

The Holy Prophet of Islam is reported to have said:

"A Muslim takes a bath on a Friday, makes himself thoroughly clean, and uses scented oil or just some perfume. Having thus freshened up, he goes to the mosque. He occupies a place without disturbing people sitting on his right and left. He offers the prescribed prayers, and when the Imam appears, he listens to him in silence. May God forgive his sins between that Friday and the last." (Bukhari)

Muslims are, therefore particularly careful about the Jum'a Prayer. They take a bath, wear clean clothes, use perfume, and come to the mosque as soon as they hear the first sound of the Call to Prayer (Adhan).

The Adhan

The person making the Call chants in a resonant, melodious voice, designed to carry the words of the Call as far as possible. The translation of the Adhan is as follows:-

*'Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest;
Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest;*

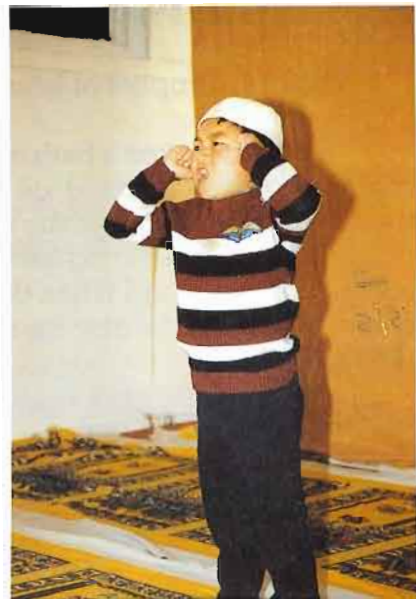
*I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except
Allah;
I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except
Allah;*

*I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah;
I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah;*

*Come to Prayer, Come to Prayer;
Come to Success, Come to Success:*

*Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest;
There is none worthy of worship except Allah.*

A young muedhin calling out Adhan.





A young girl standing in Prayer.

The Friday Prayer service brings together in rural areas people from several neighbouring villages; in towns, all the inhabitants of the town, and in areas of large cities, a section of the city's population. On reaching the mosque the worshippers purify themselves further by performing an ablution which requires:-

- a) Washing the hands up to the wrist three times, the right hand first and then the left.
- b) Cleansing the mouth by rinsing it with water three times.
- c) Cleaning the nostrils thoroughly.
- d) Washing the face three times.
- e) Washing the forearms up to the elbows three times, the right arm first and then the left.
- f) Moistening the hands and running them over the head from the front down to the neck, then running the thumbs round the ears and wiping the inside of the ears.
- g) Washing the feet including the ankles and toes three times, the right foot first and then the left.



RAKU position in Prayer.



Prostration position in Prayer.

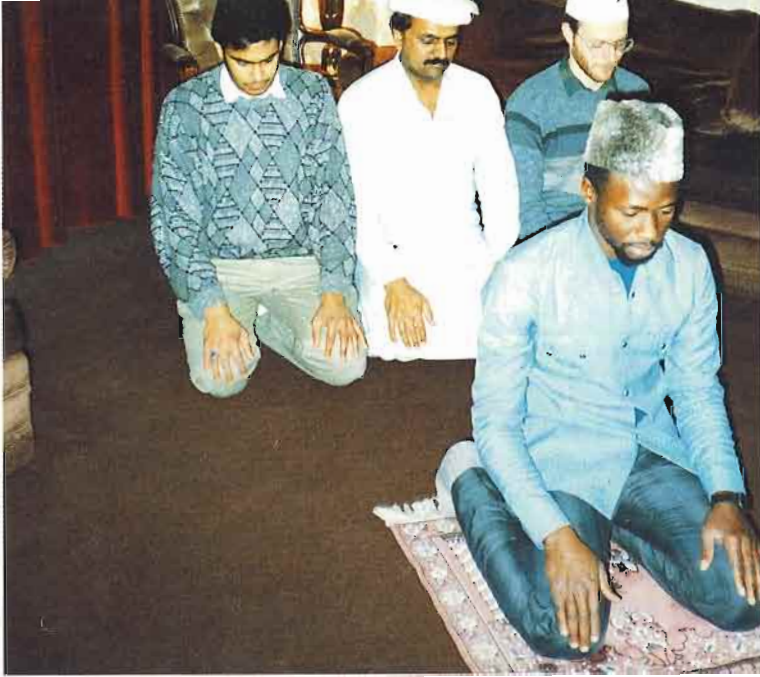


Qadah position in Prayer.



Ending the Prayer by saying 'Assalamo Alaikum!' to the right and the left.

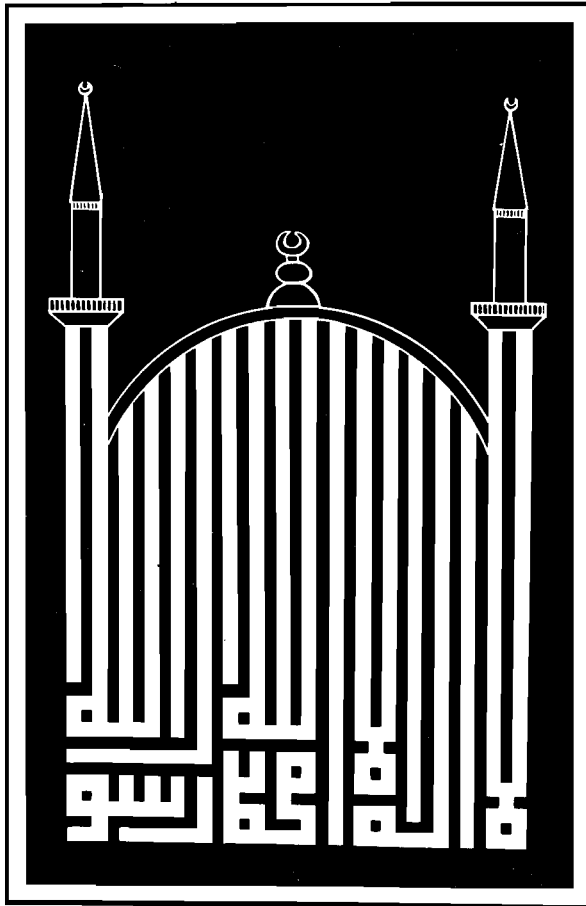
Thus ready for the Prayer service, they assemble in the Prayer Hall of the mosque. When worshippers enter the Prayer Hall, they take off their shoes. This is because the Muslim Prayer involves prostration, and the matting or carpet on which the forehead is placed should be absolutely clean. Women may join in Prayer but stand separate from men. Generally a separate area is provided for them. A mosque is a simple building. Its walls are usually bare, but in some mosques they are decorated with patterns of Quranic



One of the daily Prayers offered in congregation in a home.

verses. There are no statues, pictures, memorial tablets or relics of saints. The services are free from all artistic and emotional distractions. There is no music or singing and no lighting of candles. There are no places reserved for anyone. The king may find a labourer standing next to him and a judge may find an accused sitting beside him. No one has the right to object to another worshipper standing next to him. There is absolutely no distinction of rank, wealth, office, colour, race or nationality in the House of Allah. All are equal and have gathered together for the sole purpose of Divine worship.

In the Prayer Hall, they engage themselves in individual Prayer comprising of four Raka'as. A Raka'a constitutes a standing position called QIYAM, bowing position called RUKU and two prostrations called SAJDAH. At the end of two Raka'as there is a sitting posture called QUADAH, after which the worshipper stands again and similarly completes two more Raka'as making four altogether. Each position in the prayer requires the prescribed phrases in Arabic to be recited silently. After completing the individual prayer, they sit quietly in rows facing the MIHRAB (i.e. in the direction of the Ka'aba) and occupy themselves silently with the praise and glorification of Allah, and invoking Divine blessings on the Holy Prophet.



La ilaha illallah Muhammad-ur-Rasoolullah. There is none worthy of worship except Allah. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

Prayer Service

Immediately before the commencement of the service the Muedhin calls out the Adhan again, after which the Imam (the person who leads the Prayer service) stands up on the MINBAR (pulpit) and delivers a sermon. The sermon generally deals with the moral, spiritual, social and economic welfare of the society. It can also include any current problems facing the community or other matters of common interest. The sermon consists of two parts divided by a short interval, during which the Imam sits down for a few moments and then starts the second part. The first part, beside Sura Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Holy Quran, can be delivered in any language, while the second part of the sermon is in Arabic, the translation of which is as follows:

'All praise is due to God, we laud Him, we seek help from Him and ask His protection, we confide in Him, we trust Him alone, and we seek protection against the evils and mischiefs of our souls and from the bad results of our deeds. Whomsoever He guides on the right path, none can misguide him; and whomsoever He declares misled, none can guide him into the right path. We bear witness that none deserves to be worshipped except Allah. He is alone and has no partner. We bear witness that Muhammad is His Servant and Apostle. O servants of Allah may Allah be merciful to you. Verily Allah commands you to act with justice; to confer benefits upon each other and to do good to others as one does to one's kindred and forbids evils which pertain to your own selves and evils which affect others and prohibits revolts against lawful authority. He warns you against being unmindful. Remember Allah, He too will remember you. Call Him and He will make a response to your call. Verily divine remembrance is the highest virtue.

After the sermon the Imam takes his place in the Mihrab (niche) and faces towards the Ka'aba, and all the worshippers stand behind him in



Mihrab.

rows also facing the Ka'aba. The rows should be straight, worshippers standing next to each other shoulder to shoulder. All are now ready for Prayer. The Muedhin calls out the Iqamah, the notice that the Prayer is about to commence.

IQAMAH:

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest.

I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah.

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

Come to Prayer

Come to Success

The Prayer is about to commence

The Prayer is about to commence

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

There is none worthy of worship except Allah.

The Imam then commences the Prayer which consists of two Raka'as and everyone in the congregation follows him closely in every posture. The Imam concludes the Prayer by turning his face to the right pronouncing the salutation:

'Assalamo Alaikum wa rahmatullah'

Translation:

'Peace be upon you and the blessing of Allah.'

and then turning his face to the left, he repeats the same salutation.

The whole Prayer is offered in utmost humility and submission. No conversation of any kind is allowed during the sermon or Prayer. This congregational service is then followed by two more Raka'as of individual Prayer. The worshippers then disperse in an orderly fashion, meeting and greeting each other. After the service they are at liberty to pursue any worldly activities if they so like. Many Muslims of means give alms and make charitable gifts on this day.

Eid Festivals

Eid is an Arabic word which means 'a day which returns often'. There are two Eid festivals in a year. The first one is called Eid-ul-Fitr and the second which comes about ten weeks later is called Eid-ul-Adhia.

Eid-ul-Fitr

This festival is celebrated at the end of the month of fasting, that is why it is also called the festival of the breaking of the fast. Fasting in the month of Ramadhan is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is, therefore, a practical requirement of the faith and is regarded as an act of devotion.

Fasting regulations

The Holy Quran gives the commandment in the following words:

O Ye who believe fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil (2:184).

A person who is observing the fast is required to abstain from food, drink and even smoking from the first flush of dawn to sunset, each day throughout the month of Ramadhan. The fast is obligatory upon every healthy, adult Muslim, male or female, but there are certain exemptions. A sick person, a person who is travelling, a pregnant woman or one who is breast-feeding her child, one who finds the severity of the fast hard to bear on account of age or other infirmity, are exempt from observing the fast. When the reason for the exemption is only temporary as, for instance, illness from which the person recovers, the number of days of the fast which are missed should be made up at any time after recovery. Should the cause of exemption continue over a lengthy period of time or become permanent as in the case of old age or a chronic infirmity, the exemption is absolute, but the person concerned, if he can afford, should arrange to provide food for a poor person throughout the month of Ramadhan, or give the equivalent amount to charity known as FIDYA.



Eidgah of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Chinta-Kunta, a village in Andhra Pradesh, India.



Huge marquees are set up for Eid Prayer.

As the Muslim calendar is a lunar one, the 29/30 days month of Ramadhan comes eleven days earlier every year, thus it may, over a period of years, fall in different seasons, unlike the period of religious fasting observed by Christians called LENT which always falls in spring.

Purpose of fasting

Fasting is regarded as a physical, moral and spiritual discipline for the purpose of promoting righteousness.

The practice of the Holy Prophet shows that Ramadhan is particularly the month of Divine worship. Therefore abstinence from food in these days should serve as a step for concentrating on the worship of God.

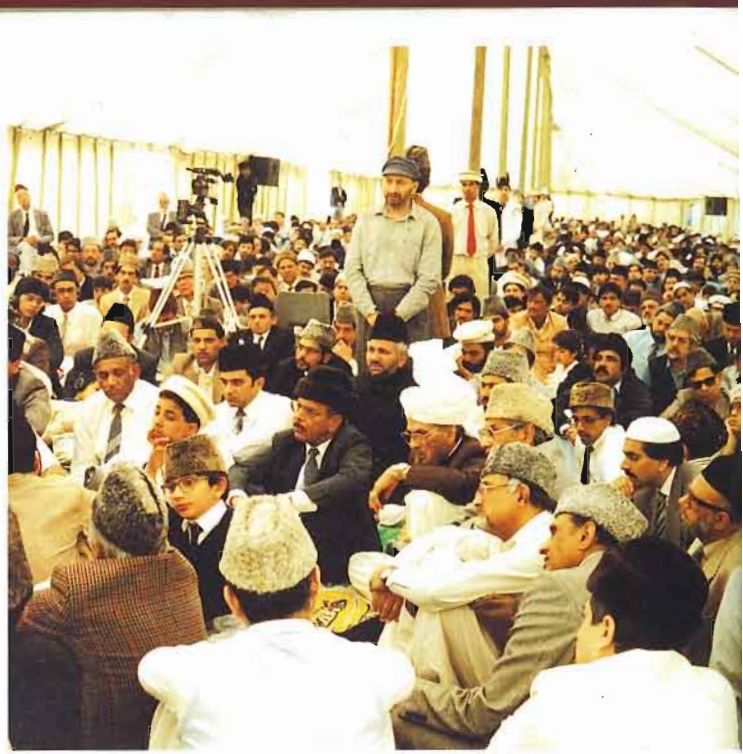
Moreover, the fast places everybody, rich and poor alike, on the same level. The well-to-do experience the pangs of hunger and thirst in the same manner as their less favoured brothers and sisters so that for them hunger and privation cease to be mere expressions and become an experience shared in common. The result is that they become more sympathetic to the needs of the poor.

Fasting is also acknowledged by most medical experts as an excellent means of curing obesity and problems relating to overweight.

Fasting is believed to develop will-power and curb bodily desires and habitual self-indulgences.

Eid preparations

At the end of the month of fasting, when the new moon is sighted, a joyous surge runs through the hearts of all Muslims, young and old, in anticipation of one of the most joyful Eid festivals. Throughout the night necessary preparations are made. The shops are open till late at night for the shoppers. In Muslim countries the



Eid ul Fitr sermon being delivered at islamahad, Tifford, Surrey.

main street of the town and the public buildings are well illuminated at night and decorated with colourful buntings and pennants. Early in the morning, on Eid day, after taking a bath, everyone puts on their best clothes. Children specially wear new garments. Perfume is worn by men and women alike as it was the tradition of the Holy Prophet to wear perfume on such occasions. The breakfast often includes the sweet dish of SHEER KHURMA — vermicelli cooked in milk with dried dates, raisins, almonds and other nuts. Everyone is now anxious to proceed towards the Eidgah, normally an open space or park reserved for the Eid service.

Owing to the large number of Muslims involved, Eid service is conducted in large halls, the central mosque of the city or in the open, where huge marquees may be erected for the purpose of providing shelter from the weather. Women are specially enjoined to be present at Eid gatherings, hence a separate area is provided for them. This is because Islam does not permit the free intermingling of men and women.

As was the practice of the Holy Prophet of Islam, the worshippers go to Eidgah generally by one route and return by another.



After Eid Service Muslims embrace each other and say 'Eid Mubarak'.

Prayer service and celebrations

Eid prayer comprises two Rak'as. The time for the service is announced many days before Eid day. It is before noon and is generally any convenient time for the gathering, fixed after consultation with the people. Like Friday Prayer, Eid Prayer is always offered in congregation. No Adhan or Iqamah is called out for this service. At the appointed time the worshippers arrange themselves in rows with the Imam in front, all facing towards the Ka'aba. The service commences with the Imam calling out ALLAH-O-AKBAR (Allah is the Greatest) aloud. This pronouncement is called TAKBIR. The Prayer is offered in the same manner as the Friday Prayer except that there are a number of extra Takbirs in the Eid Prayer. These Takbirs are uttered aloud by the Imam one after the other. After the seventh Takbir in the first Raka'a and the fifth Takbir in the second, the Imam carries on leading the Prayer as usual and all the worshippers follow him in every movement. When the Prayers is over, a sermon is delivered by the Imam, which generally includes the historical background and spiritual significance of the festival, but any other matters of importance for the Muslims can also be dealt with. After the service the worshippers greet each other by saying EID MUBARAK and embrace each

other. All animosities and ill feelings towards fellow beings are forgotten. The spirit of Eid is one of peace, forgiveness and brotherhood. Thus happy and contented they return home. Special dishes are prepared on this festive occasion. Friends and relatives are generally invited. Gifts and greetings are exchanged throughout the day. Sending Eid cards has also become a tradition these days throughout the Muslim world, though many Muslims prefer to give such money to the poor and needy. Children wait anxiously for this day as they receive presents and money called 'Eidi' from their relatives and elders. Feeding the poor, looking after the needy and visiting the sick are considered as meritorious acts on these occasions.

Sadaqat-ul-Fitr or Fitrana

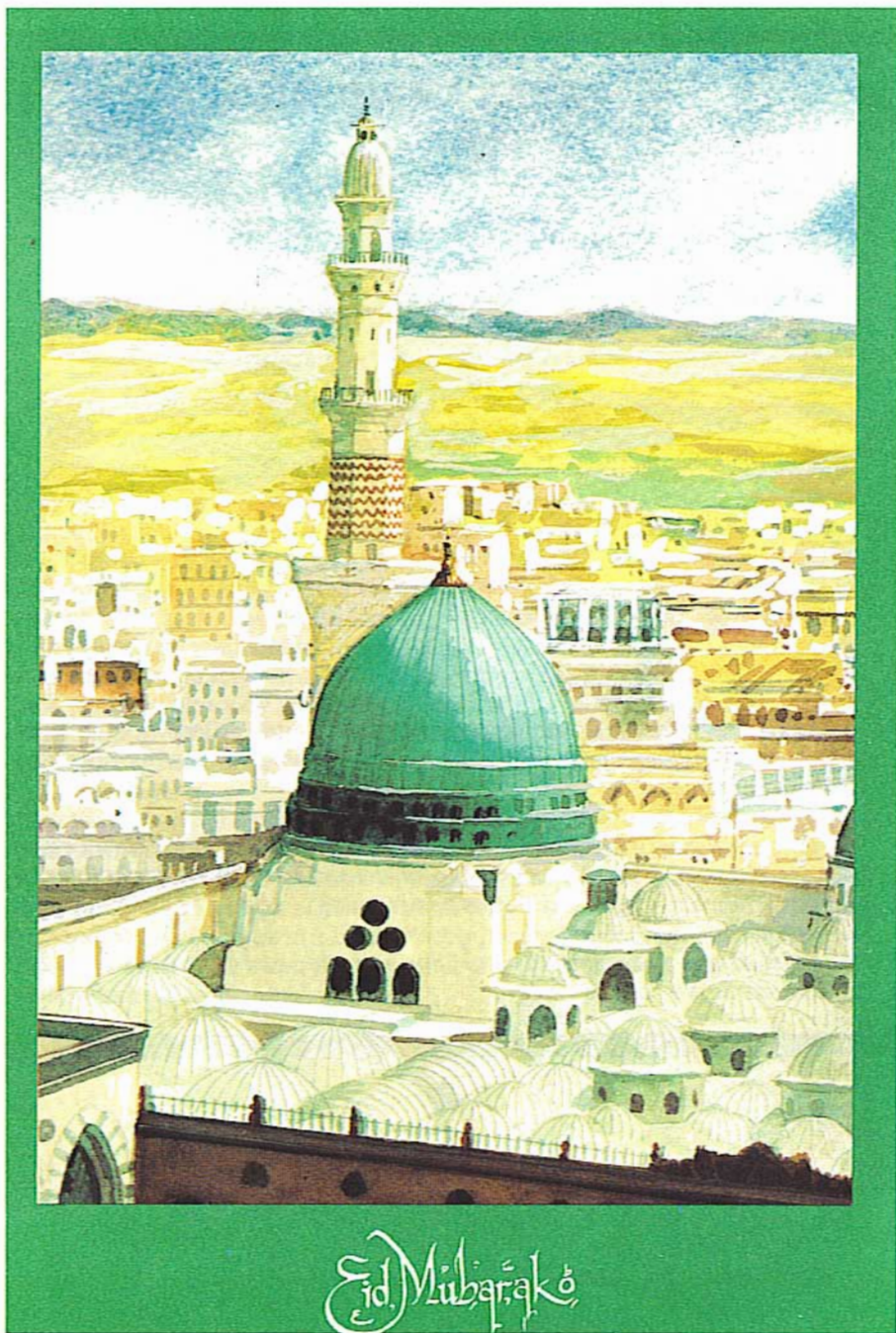
On such an auspicious and festive occasion, Muslims are specially reminded of their obligations towards the poorer section of society. A special contribution called 'Sadaqat-ul-Fitr' or 'Fitrana' is fixed for this purpose. The contribution should be paid by the head of the family on behalf of all the members of the family. It is desirable to pay this contribution before the Eid service in order to enable the poor to join in the festivities of the day.

Philosophy underlying the festival

Every commandment or direction given by Islam is based on wisdom and has a philosophy underlying it. In the daily Prayer services at the mosque, the residents of an area come together five times a day and thus get to know each other, their bond of brotherhood is strengthened and they become aware of each other's needs and requirements. In the Friday Prayer service this fraternal circle of sympathy, love and co-operation is extended so as to include the residents of the whole town or of a sector of a city. On Eid occasions this circle becomes even wider.

Moreover, it is grafted in the minds of the true believers that the spiritual discipline they have carried out during the month of Ramadhan should be continued throughout the year.

While Eid is an occasion for joy and happiness, it is certainly not an occasion to indulge in frivolity, over-eating and mere pursuit of pleasure. The main purpose is always to seek the pleasure of God Almighty by glorifying Him and rendering thanks to Him for having enabled them to perform their duties duly.



An Eid card.

SHEER KHURMA **(Special)**

Recipe:

Ingredients:

<i>Vermicelli</i>	<i>4oz</i>
<i>Milk</i>	<i>4 pintas</i>
<i>Dairy cream</i>	<i>1 tin</i>
<i>Sugar</i>	<i>8 oz</i>
<i>Keora (Essence)</i>	<i>2 oz</i>
<i>Almond nuts</i>	<i>2 oz</i>
<i>Pistachio nuts</i>	<i>2 oz</i>
<i>Coconut grated</i>	<i>2 oz</i>
<i>Dried dates</i>	<i>6 (only)</i>
<i>Raisins</i>	<i>2 oz</i>

Leave almonds and pistachio nuts in cold water at least for an hour before cooking. Peel almonds and make thin slices. Similarly cut pistachio nuts into thin pieces.

Pour milk in a pan, add vermicelli and 2/3 of the nuts. Cook on medium heat for about one hour. Add the tin of cream and cook for another 15 minutes. Then add sugar and stir for one minute.

Add Keora and allow to cool. Sprinkle the rest of nuts over it for decoration. Serve cold or chilled.

ALKALAIJAH (EID DISH)

<i>Flour</i>	<i>1 Kg.</i>
<i>Corn Oil</i>	<i>3 cups.</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>1 table spoon.</i>
<i>Ground cardamom</i>	<i>½ tea spoon.</i>
<i>Yeast</i>	<i>1 tea spoon.</i>
<i>Dates</i>	<i>8 ounces.</i>
<i>Crushed almonds</i>	<i>4 ounces.</i>
<i>Crushed coconut</i>	<i>4 ounces.</i>
<i>Eggs</i>	<i>2.</i>
<i>Sugar</i>	<i>2 ounces.</i>

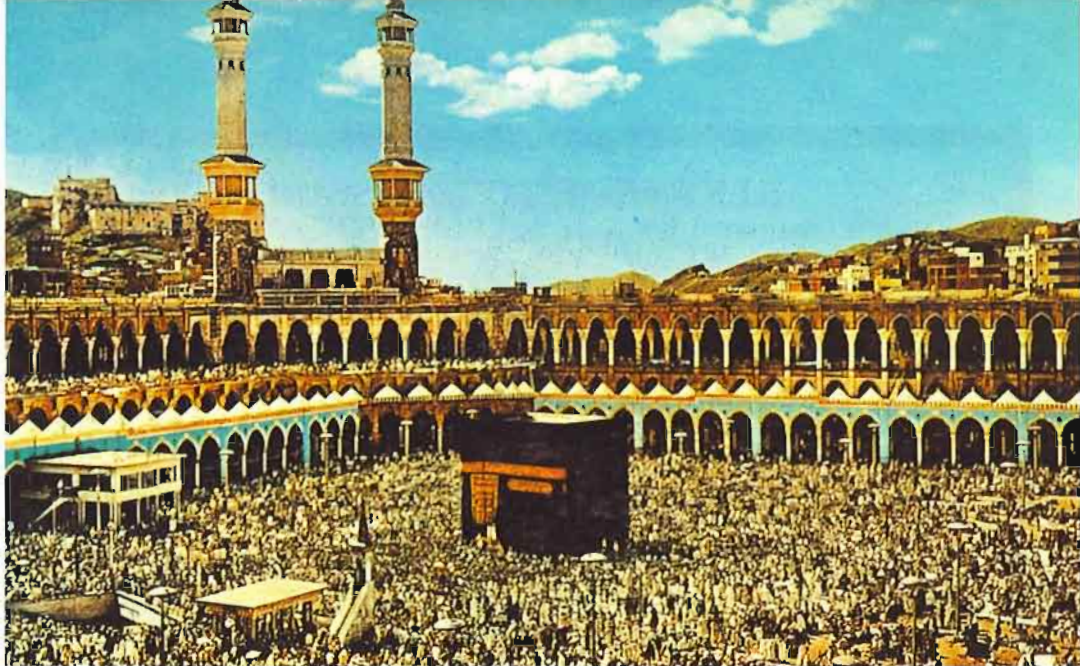
Mix flour, 2½ cups of oil, pinch of cardamom and yeast in a bowl. Add sufficient water to make it into a paste, neither too hard nor too soft. Leave the dough for half an hour.

Clear the dates of stones, crush them a little and put them in a pan with small amount of oil and heat it on a low flame. Turn them over to avoid burning. Take the pan off when they are soft and crispy. Add a pinch of cardamom or as desired, and leave it in a bowl. This is one of the fillers.

Take crushed almonds in a second bowl, add a little sugar and a pinch of cardamom or as desired. This is also a filler. In the third bowl put some crushed coconut. Add a little sugar and a pinch of cardamom or as desired. This is also a filler.

Take the dough made earlier and make small balls of it. With the help of a roller, flatten them into round shapes. Place a small amount of mixture from either of the bowls in the centre of each, fold it, join the ends and turn and press the ends so as to seal them completely.

Beat and whisk the eggs in a bowl. With a pastry brush apply the egg on the surface of each pastry and place them in a preheated oven, gas marked 5c, until baked. (15 to 20 minutes).



The Holy Ka'aba

Eid-ul-Adhia

Another very important festival which comes about ten weeks after the Eid-ul-Fitr is called Eid-ul-Adhia. It is also called 'The festival of sacrifice', and is celebrated on the 10th of Dhul-Hijjah, the last month of the Muslim calendar; the day which marks the close of the Haj ceremony or Pilgrimage to the Ka'aba.

Haj ceremony

Haj is one of the five pillars of Islam. During this season pilgrims from all over the globe flock to Mecca in Arabia and the finest example of true brotherhood of man is shown to the world, otherwise torn by political, economic, religious and cultural strife. Haj is performed during the period from 8th to 13th of Dhul-Hijjah. The important rituals associated with this ceremony are as follows:

i) Putting on IHRAM: A male pilgrim has to discard his usual clothes and dress himself in two white sheets of seamless cloth. One sheet is wrapped round the waist covering the lower abdo-



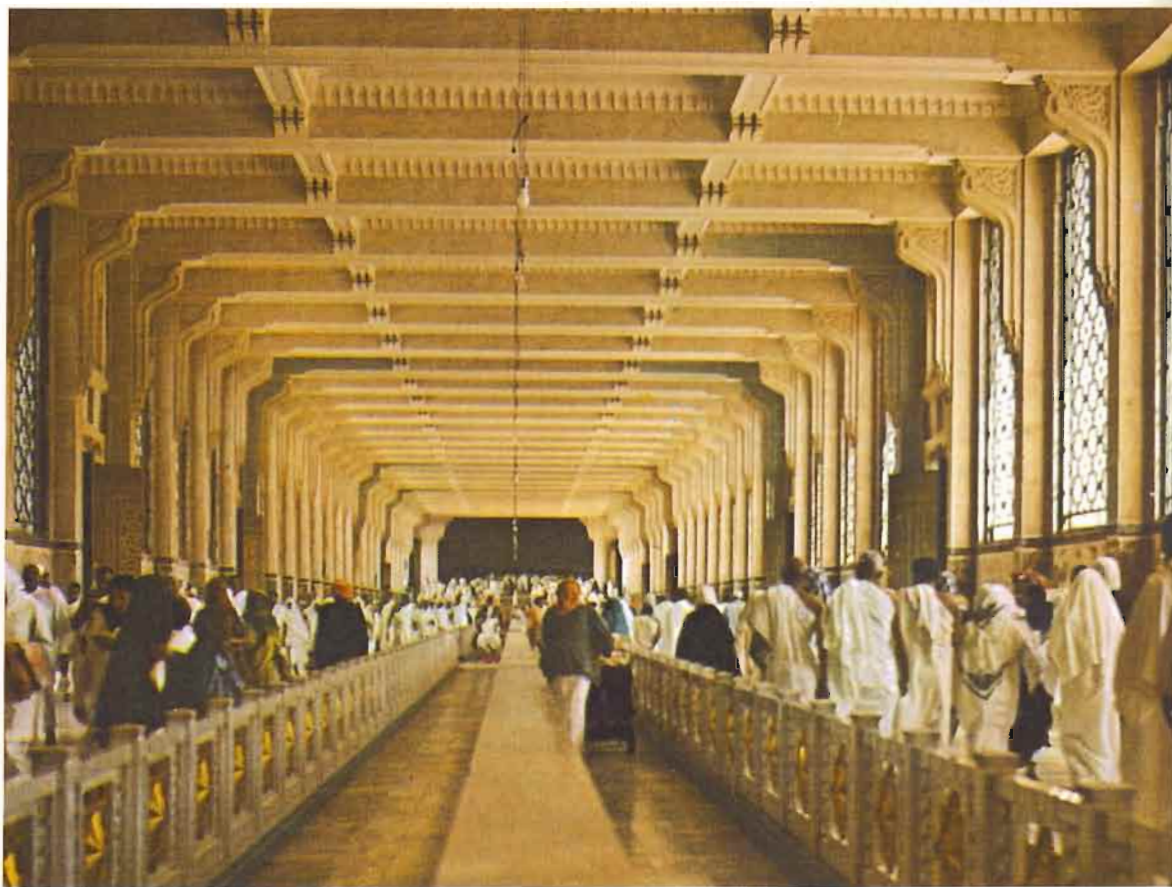
Pilgrims in Ihram.

men, while the other is slung over the left shoulder so that the right shoulder and the head remain bare. Women may dress themselves in simple clothes and should not cover their faces.

ii) Performing seven circuits of the Ka'aba: The pilgrims enter the Great Mosque and go round and round the building of the Ka'aba seven times anti-clockwise, uttering the same phrases which the Prophet Abraham, peace be upon him, uttered four thousand years ago, the translation of which is as follows:

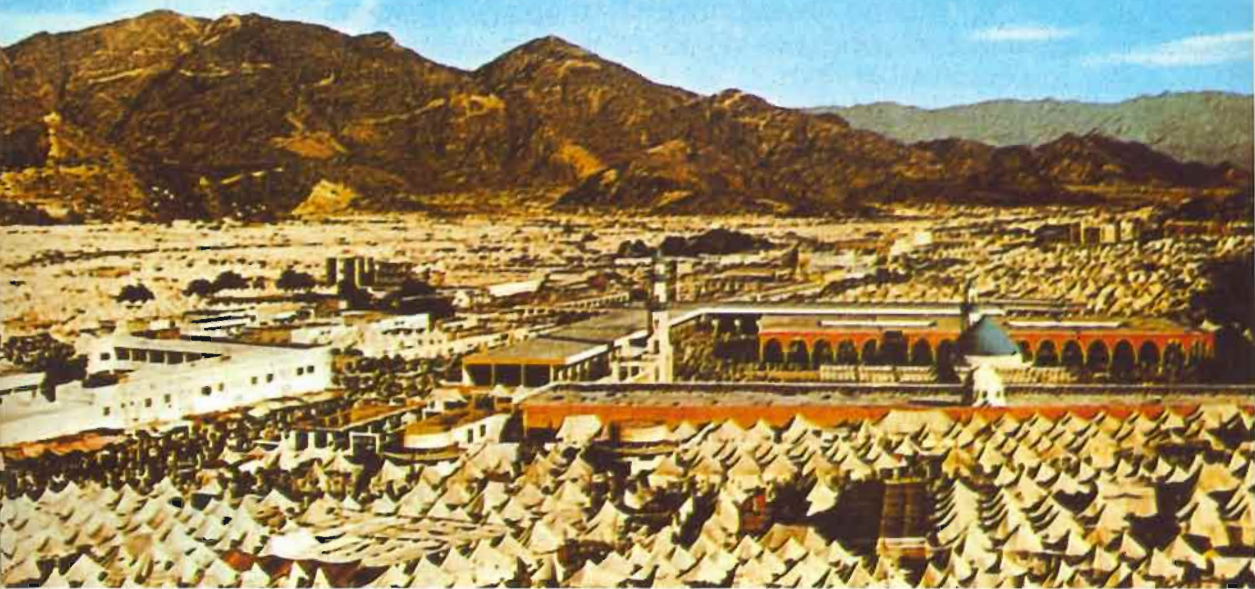
Here I am, my Lord, here I am,
Here I am. There is no associate with Thee.
All Praise and Bounty are Thine;
Thine is the Kingdom.
There is no associate with Thee.

The Ka'aba according to the Holy Quran, is the first House of Worship that was established on earth. It is a very simple stone structure, laying no claim to grandeur of size or beauty of architecture. It impresses by its very simplicity.



Pilgrims walk briskly along this courtyard; a journey covered seven times between the hillocks of Safa and Marwah.

iii) Performing the Sa'ee: The pilgrims walk briskly seven times between Safa and Marwah, two small hillocks situated close to the Ka'aba, re-enacting the search of Hagar, wife of Prophet Abraham, for water for her infant son Ishmael.



A view of Mina where pilgrims offer the sacrifices of animals.

iv) Visiting Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifa: On the 8th of Dhul Hijjah the pilgrims leave Mecca for Mina and spend the night there in prayer and meditation. Next day after Fajr Prayer they proceed to the plain of Arafat where they encamp. They arrive there after midday, offer Zuhr and Asr Prayers together and occupy themselves with the remembrance of Allah till sunset. To stay at Arafat from post meridian till sunset is regarded as an important ritual of Haj. Any pilgrim who arrives at Arafat before sunset on the 9th of Dhul Hijjah is deemed to have participated in the Haj that year.

From Arafat they proceed to Muzdalifa where Maghrib and Isha Prayers are combined and the night is spent in praising God Almighty and in meditation. After Fajr Prayer next morning, just before sunrise, they travel back to Mina.

v) Performing the Rami: On the 10th of Dhul Hijjah the pilgrims throw seven pebbles at Jumrat-ul-Aqba, one of the three pillars which represent Satan. This is called Rami. These pillars are erected on the site where Abraham was tempted by Satan against offering Ishmael as a sacrifice in the fulfilment of his dream. Rami may be repeated on the 11th, 12th and 13th Dhul Hijjah on each of the three pillars called Jumrat-ul-Oola, Jumrat-ul-Wasta and Jumrat-ul-Aqba.

vi) Offering the sacrifice of an animal: On the 10th of Dhul Hijjah, the pilgrims who can afford, sacrifice an animal: goat, sheep, cow or camel, at Mina.

vii) After the sacrifice the pilgrims shave their heads or cut their hair short.

Historical background

Abraham is regarded as the friend of God, and a large number of prophets were raised out of his progeny. He is also known as the father (Patriarch) of the prophets. To understand the significance of his sacrifice, one has to go through the details of the events which are mentioned in the Bible and in the Quran. It is narrated that Abraham saw in a vision that he was slaying his only son Ishmael. When he was convinced that God demanded that he should sacrifice his only son who had been bestowed upon him in his old age, in the cause of the Lord, he became ready to make the sacrifice. He mentioned the dream to his son Ishmael and asked, 'What do you think of it' Ishmael replied: 'Father, do that which you have been commanded. You will find me, God willing, steadfast.'

Thus Abraham made the necessary preparations. When all was ready and he was about to proceed to the fulfilment of what he thought he had been commanded to do, he received the revelation that he had indeed fulfilled his covenant and was asked to slaughter a lamb instead. The true meaning of the dream was not that he should sacrifice his son in the manner in which he had seen himself doing in the dream, but that he should leave his wife Hagar and his son Ishmael in a distant barren valley in order to win the pleasure of God Almighty. There, Ishmael was made an instrument for the purpose of establishing the true worship of God, and this was the place where the first House of Allah, the sacred Ka'aba, was situated, though it was in ruins at that time. This great sacrifice offered by Abraham is the event which is celebrated all round the globe every year, and Muslims, who can afford to do so, slaughter an animal to commemorate that act of devotion. The festival of sacrifices, therefore, urges all Muslims to follow the examples of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael and show perfect submission to God's commands.

Eid-ul-Adhia celebrations

A Muslim is required to perform the pilgrimage at least once in his lifetime, provided that he can afford the cost of the journey, is not indebted to anyone and is not otherwise prevented from performing the Haj. Those who are unable to perform the pilgrimage join in the Eid-ul Adhia ceremony at their own places.



Eid ul Adhia. The traditional Eid dinner includes meat-dishes.

The Eid is celebrated with great solemnity and reverence everywhere. Like Eid-ul-Fitr, Muslims make preparations several days before the festival. The animals to be sacrificed are bought well before the Eid day by those who can afford to do so and are well looked after. These animals should be free from all physical defects and should be fully grown. In the case of sheep or goat, one animal suffices for one household, while a cow or a camel can be shared by up to seven families

Eid day falls on the 10th of the month of Dhul Hijjah, i.e. ten days after the sighting of the new moon. As the sighting of the new moon is announced, Eid preparations start in earnest. The eve of Eid day is always very busy, so the shops in many countries remain open till late at night. Early in the morning after taking bath and putting on the best garments which one could have, Muslims assemble in the Eid-gah or in the large mosques of the town for Eid Prayer Service, which comprises two Raka'as and offered in the same manner as Eid-ul-Fitr. Generally no breakfast is served on this Eid, and those who offer sacrifices do not eat anything until after they have sacrificed the animal. After the prayer the Imam delivers a sermon in which he explains the significance of the festival, giving the details of the sacrifices offered by Abraham, his wife Hagar and their son Ishmael. Returning by a different route and singing the praise of God Almighty, Muslim worshippers return home and slaughter their animals. On Eid day, Muslims recite:

'Allah is the Greatest,
Allah is the Greatest.
There is none worthy of worship except Allah,
Allah is the greatest
Allah is the greatest
All praise belongs to Allah', as often as possible:

Besides other prayers for the occasion the person who is offering the sacrifice of the animal recites the following:

Translation:

'Say my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are for the sake of God, the Lord of all the worlds.'

The person who offers the sacrifice is allowed to use a portion of the meat, the remainder is distributed among the relatives, friends, neighbours and the poor. The animals may be sacrificed on the Eid day or during the two days that follow. Millions of animals are slaughtered all over the world on this occasion. Feasts and festivities follow throughout the Eid day and the two following days, the main dishes being prepared from meat. The skins of the slaughtered animals are sold and the proceeds given to different charities. Eid fund is also collected on this occasion and is spent for the welfare of the community as a whole.

Philosophy of the sacrifice

According to the teachings of Islam, the sacrifice of animals is not offered to appease offended deities nor to win their favour as an atonement of sins as was the case of many other nations. The Holy Quran made it quite clear by stating:

Neither the flesh nor the blood of your sacrifices reaches God, but it is the righteous motive underlying them that reaches Him (22:37).

In other words, the slaughtering of animals is a symbolic expression whereby a Muslim declares his readiness to lay down his own life and everything he owns for the sake of God Almighty. The animal that is sacrificed really stands for the animal in man himself.

Other Muslim festivals

Besides the festivals which have been mentioned so far and which are universally celebrated, there are a few more which are celebrated in some parts of the Muslim world today, and which bring joy, happiness and satisfaction to those Muslims who take part in the festivities with full vigour. The style of the celebrations of such festivals varies from place to place and from one sect of Muslims to another.

It should also be remembered that though in most cases these occasions have originated from the events in the early history of Islam, yet they became known as festivals much later. During the lifetime of the Holy Prophet and his companions we do not find such celebrations as are prevalent today.

SHAB-I-MIRAJ:

Historical Background:

Shab-i-Miraj means the night of Ascent. It is the blessed night when the Holy Prophet of Islam was spiritually transported to heaven and he reached a high stage of nearness to God Almighty which is beyond ordinary human comprehension. The Ascent took place in the fifth year of the Call, about seven years before Hijra. The journey was not with a physical body but was a vision of the highest type. On the way the Holy Prophet met Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and some other Prophets. The purpose of this spiritual ascent was to confirm the high status of the Prophet of Islam, a position which all Muslims believe, is impossible to attain by any other human being. It is related that even Gabriel, the Angel who was accompanying the Holy Prophet remarked at one stage, 'I am forced to stop here. I cannot go any further, but you O Messenger of peace and friend of the Master of the worlds, continue your glorious ascent.'

ger of peace and friend of the Master of the worlds, continue your glorious ascent.'

It is also related that the Holy Prophet continued his journey until he reached very close to the Throne of God Almighty and attained the utmost nearness to Him. After having drunk fully at the Divine fountain of spiritual knowledge he came down to impart that knowledge to mankind.

Celebrations:

According to popular belief the Miraj or Spiritual Ascension took place on 27th of Rajab.

In some Muslim countries the houses, streets and specially the mosques are decorated with colourful pennants and buntings, and at night they are well illuminated by means of electric lights, candles or even oil lamps. As evening approaches the worshippers assemble in the mosques and engage themselves in glorifying the Lord and in singing hymns in His praise and in praise of the Holy Prophet. Public meetings are also held generally after Isha Prayer in larger mosques where speakers throw light on the spiritual status of the Holy Prophet, and various aspects of his life. The story of his spiritual ascension is narrated in detail. After the meetings sweets are generally distributed. Muslims of means give money in charity and also distribute food among the poor. The devoted ones spend the whole night in the remembrance of God.

Lailat-Ul-Qadr

(The Night of Decree)

This blessed night is also called the night of Power. It is the particular night in the month of Ramadhan when the Holy Quran first began to be revealed. The Holy Quran states: 'The month of Ramadhan is the month in which the Quran began to be revealed, the Book which comprises guidance for mankind and clear proofs of guidance and divine signs which discriminate between truth and falsehood...(2:186). The first verses which were revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, were the following:

Translation:

'Recite in the name of thy Lord Who created everything. He created man from a clot of blood. Recite, for thy Lord is Most Beneficent, Who has taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not.' (Ch 96:2-6)

He was forty at that time. The revelation continued until his death ie. for a period of about twenty three years.

The Holy Quran regards the Night Of Decree as better than one thousand months. It states in chapter 97:-

Translation:

'In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. Surely We sent down the Quran during the Night of Decree. How would you know what the Night of Decree is? The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months. Therein descend angels and the Spirit by the command of their Lord with their Lord's decree concerning every matter. It is all peace, till the break of dawn.'

The Holy Prophet of Islam remarked:

'Look for the Night of Decree among the odd nights of the last ten nights of the month of Ramadhan.'

In fact the whole month of Ramadhan is a period of spiritual training wherein believers devote much of their time to fasting. Prayers, frequent recitation of the Holy Quran and remembrance of

Allah, as well as charity and goodwill, but during the last ten days of the month they strive more to worship God Almighty and to do good deeds.

The believers gather in the mosque in large numbers for Prayers and spend these nights in the remembrance of Allah, asking forgiveness for their shortcomings and looking for the blessed night with the firm belief that God accepts the prayers of the supplicant readily during this night.

Those who can afford to devote the whole of their time in the remembrance of Allah, stay in the mosque for ten days. This worship is called I'tikaf or Retreat. They observe fast during the day and occupy themselves with the remembrance of Allah, performing voluntary Prayers and studying the Holy Quran, day and night, apart from the obligatory Prayers which they perform with the congregation. Food and other necessities of life are provided for them during their stay in the mosque, thus they may not leave the precincts of the mosque except for a genuine religious purpose.

Devoting their time thus fully to the remembrance of Allah, they hope to receive the divine favours and blessings connected with this blessed night.

The Prophet of Islam himself was very particular in this regard. It is related that when the last ten days of Ramadhan began, he used to keep awake the whole night and was most diligent in worship.

Ayesha, the wife of the Holy Prophet, once asked him, 'Messenger of Allah, tell me, in case I should realise which night is the Night of Decree, how should I supplicate in it? He answered: Supplicate; Allah, Thou art Most Forgiving and does love forgiveness, then do 'Thou forgive me' (Tirmidhi).

The Holy Quran.



Eid Milad-un-Nabi:

Historical background:

Eid Milad-un-Nabi also known as Mawlid-un-Nabi is the festival to commemorate the birth anniversary of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). It is celebrated on the 12th of Rabi-ul-Awwal. From the point of view of Muslims, this date marks the most important event in the history of the world. Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, is regarded as the Chief of the Prophets, the Perfect man to whom the Holy Quran was revealed, the best exemplar, and the greatest benefactor of mankind. He is the person for whom God has proclaimed:

'Allah sends down His blessings on the Prophet, and His Angels constantly invoke His blessings on him; do you, O believers, also invoke Allah's blessings on him and offer him the salutation of peace.'(33:57)

Celebrations:

The extent of festivities, on this occasion, is restricted because of the fact that the same day marks his death anniversary.

On this occasion therefore public meetings are held in the mosques, where religious leaders make speeches on different aspects of the life of this great man. The stories of the Prophet's birth, childhood, youth and adult life, character, teachings, sufferings and forgiveness of even his most bitter enemies, his fortitude in the face of general opposition, leadership in battles, bravery, wisdom, preachings and his final triumph through God's mercy over the hearts of the people, are narrated in detail.

Salutations and songs in his praise are recited. In some countries, streets, mosques and public buildings are decorated with colourful buntings and pennants and well illuminated at night. Devoted Muslims give large sums to charity. Feasts are arranged and rice and meat dishes are served to the guests and also distributed among the poor. In some big cities large processions are also formed and people in jubilant mood chant verses in praise of the Holy Prophet.

Some Muslims, however, do not celebrate this occasion as his birthday or death anniversary as they believe celebrating birthdays or death anniversaries is not a part of Muslim society as such. They instead hold Seerat-un-Nabi meetings wherein speeches are made on different aspects of the life of this the greatest benefactor of mankind.



Seerat-un-Nabi meeting held in London.



Some devoted followers inflict wounds on their own bodies by means of chains etc.

Muharram Festival

Historical Background:

This is a festival which lasts ten days and commemorates the martyrdom of Hussain, the grandson of the Holy Prophet of Islam. The festival takes its name from the first month of the Islamic calendar. This is the month in which, due to religious differences, Hussain, his family members and a number of his followers were surrounded by the forces of Yazid, the Muslim ruler of that time, while they were on a journey. They were deprived of food and water and many of them were put to death. The incident happened at a place called KARBALA in Iraq in 61 A.H. In fact after the death of the fourth caliph (Ali), Muslims were divided in their opinion as to who should be their caliph, as a result they fought with each other and there was a lot of bloodshed.



A model of the mausoleum of Hussain being carried in the procession.

The Observance of the festival:

Some sects of Muslims hold meetings where speeches are made on the happenings of Karbala, and on the lives of the martyrs, but the Shia sect of Muslims observe this festival in a different fashion. As Muharram, the first month of the Muslim year, approaches, they put on black clothes, as black is regarded as a colour of mourning. Assemblies are held every day during the first



Marchers showing their grief by chanting 'Ya Hussain!'

nine days where Shia orators relate the incident of the death of Hussain and his party in great detail, and on the tenth Muharram, large processions are formed and the devoted followers parade the streets holding banners and carrying models of the mausoleum of Hussain and his people, who fell at Karbala. They show their grief and sorrow by inflicting wounds on their own bodies with sharp metal pieces tied to a chain with which they scourge themselves, to depict the sufferings of the martyrs. It is a sad occasion and everyone in the procession chants 'Ya Hussain', with loud wails of lamentation. Generally a white horse beautifully decorated for the occasion, is also included in the procession, perhaps to mark the empty mount of Hussain after his martyrdom.

During these ten days drinking posts are also set up temporarily by the Shia community where water and juices are served to all, free of charge.



The decorated horse called 'Zul Jinnal' is ready for the procession.

CEREMONIES

Birth of a child

When a child is born in a Muslim family, the parents celebrate his or her birth through thanksgiving, prayers and the performance of certain ceremonies. Some of them are mentioned here:-

i) **Recitation of Adhan and Iqamah:**

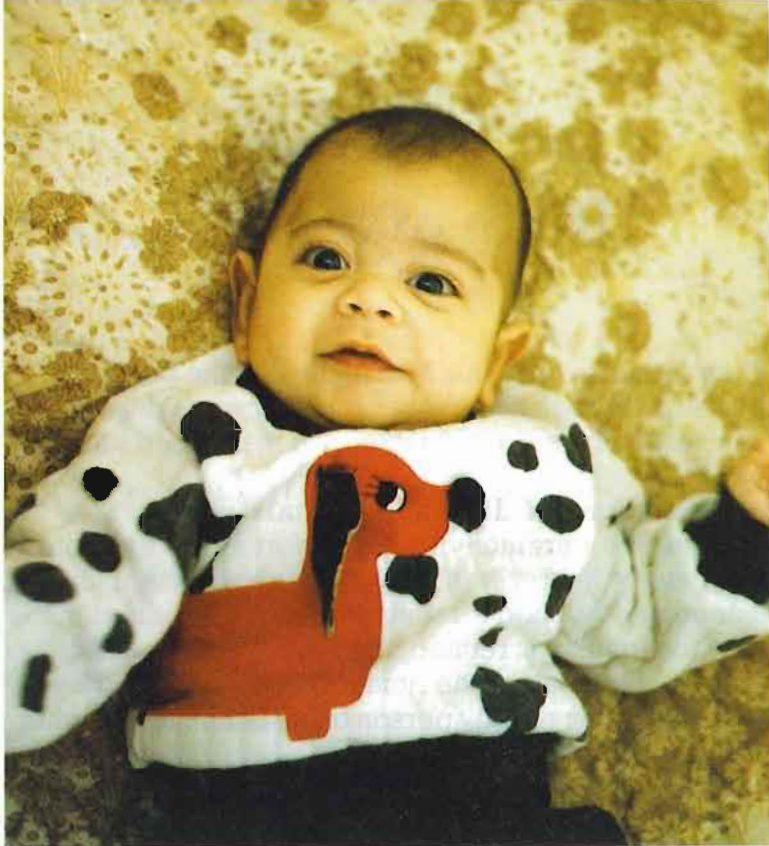
The first ceremony to be performed is to recite Adhan and Iqamah in the ears of the new-born. After the baby is cleaned and washed thoroughly, Adhan is recited in the right ear while Iqamah is recited in the left. Both are whispered into the ears of the baby. The ritual can be performed by anyone, but generally an elderly person of the family or any other pious person is requested to do so.

Adhan is the Call to Prayer which invites the Muslims to the obligatory Prayers while Iqamah is the notice that Prayer is about to commence. (See Friday Prayer service).

The purpose of the ceremony is to emphasise upon Muslims that the main object of human life is to worship Allah, the Master of the Worlds and that the child should be made aware of the religious truths right from his birth.

ii) **The First Feed:**

The first food or substance that the mouth of the baby comes in contact with, is considered important. Therefore before the mother starts giving her baby a suck, a pious person or an elderly person in the family is requested to feed the baby with a little bit of food. If no other person is available, the father of the child performs the ritual. Ripe dates, honey, fruite juices or any other suitable baby food can be used for the purpose. The Companions of the Holy Prophet of Islam used to have their new born babies given the first feed by the Holy Prophet himself, who used to chew up a little bit of a ripe date in his mouth in order to turn it into a mash liquid and then feed it to the baby.



iii) **Shaving the head:**

According to the Islamic traditions, seven days after the birth, the head of the baby is clean shaved and those who can afford give gold or silver equal to the weight of the hair removed as alms to the poor and needy. Generally, after the shave, olive oil mixed with saffron is rubbed gently on the head of the new born. If the shaving is not done on the seventh day after birth, it can be performed on the 14th or 21st day.

iv) **Naming the child:**

If the child is not given a name at birth, it is decided upon the seventh day after birth. It is customary to request a holy person to name the child, but parents or other relatives can also choose a name for the baby. It is a common practice to name the children after the names of the Holy Prophet himself, his companions, famous leaders or other important personalities of Islam.

v) **Circumcision:**

For male children another ceremony which is essential is circumcision. This is not just Islamic practice. It goes back to the time of Prophet Abraham, peace be upon him, and followers of some other religions practise it too. The circumcision can be performed at any time, preferably, within the first seven days after birth. If not performed at that time, it can still be performed later. In some countries this minor operation is done as a routine in the hospitals within a few days of the child's birth, and involves the removing of the loose foreskin of the male organ.

vi) **Aqeeqa or the feast of sacrifice:**

Usually on the seventh day after the birth of the baby an animal is sacrificed and a feast follows wherein friends, relatives and neighbours are invited. Some of the sacrificial meat is distributed among the poor. The animal to be sacrificed can be a goat, a sheep, a lamb, a cow or a camel. If a girl is born, one animal is to be sacrificed, but in the case of a boy animals, two in number should be slaughtered. It should be noted that the feast is not obligatory. It is up to the parents choosing, but the sacrifice must be performed. It is essential that the animal should be free from any physical defect and fully grown. If for any reason the ceremony cannot be performed on the seventh day after birth of the baby, it can be arranged on the 14th or the 21st day. If a child reaches the age of understanding and maturity and knows, or has reason to believe that the sacrifice has not been performed for him or her, he or she can perform it himself or herself.

Marriage

The family is the basic unit of human society. According to the teachings of Islam the foundation of the family is laid through marriage. Marriage is regarded as a civil contract between the parties. Since there is no priesthood in Islam the marriage can be solemnised by anyone who has the knowledge of Islamic law, and it can be performed at a place convenient to the parties. The ceremony is called NIKAH or the pronouncement of the marriage. Usually it is performed in a mosque by the Imam of the mosque. When the bride, bridegroom, their parents, friends, and relatives assemble in the mosque, the Imam recites:-

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ نَحْمَدُهُ وَنُسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ وَنُؤْمِنُ بِهِ وَ
نَتَوَكَّلُ عَلَيْهِ وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا وَمِنْ سَيِّئَاتِ
أَعْمَالِنَا مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ وَمَنْ يَضِلَّهُ فَلَا هَادِيَ
لَهُ وَنَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَنَشْهَدُ
أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي
خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا
رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَ
الْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا ○ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَتَوَلَّوْا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَ
يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا
عَظِيمًا ○ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مِمَّا
قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ○

Transliteration

Al hamdo lilla-hi nah mado hoo wa nas-ta-'eenohoo wa nastagh firohoo wa nomino bihi wa natawakkalo 'alaihi wa naozu billahi min shoroori anfosina wa min sayyi-ati a'amalina maiy-yahdihillaho fala mudzilla lahoo wa maiy-yudzlil-ho fala hadiya lahu wa nash hado allailaha illallahoh wah dahoo la sharika lahoo wa nash-hado anna Muhammadan abdo-hoo warasoolohoo.

Ya ayyohan-nasut-ta-qu Rabbaku-mul lazi khalaga kum min nafsini wa hidatiw wa khalaga minha zaujaha wa bassa minhuma rijalan kathiran wa nisa-a-wattaqullahalazi tasaaloo-na bihi walarham. Innalla-ha kana 'alaikum raqiba.

Ya ayyu-hal ladhina amanut taquallaha wa qoolo qualan sadidanyyus lih lakum a'amalakum wa yagfirlakum zonubakum wa maiyuti-illaha wa rasulahu faqad faza fauzan azeema. Ya ayyu-h-al lazina amanut taqullaha wal-tanzur Nafsum-ma Qaddamat lighad wat-taqullaha Innallaha Khabirum bi-ma Ta'amaloon.

Translation

All praise is due to Allah! We praise Him; we beseech help from Him and ask His protection; we confide in Him; we trust in Him alone; and we seek His protection from the evils and vices of our deeds. Whomsoever He guides to the right path none may misguide him; and whomsoever He declares misled none may guide him unto the right path; and we bear witness that none is worthy of worship except Allah, He is alone and has no partner and we bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Apostle.

O Ye people make your Lord your shelter, Who created you out of one soul and created out of its kind your spouses and thus multiplied men and women; and fear Allah with Whose name you beseech Him and be mindful of the rights of the relations of the womb. Verily God is watching you.

O Ye believers! Be mindful of your duty to Allah, and say the straight-forward thing. Allah will set your doings right and forgive your sins. He who obeys Allah and His Apostle, verily he achieves the great success.

O Ye who believe! Fear Allah and let every soul look to what it sends forth for the morrow. And fear Allah! Verily Allah is well aware of what you do.

This sermon in Arabic was used by the Holy Prophet of Islam on such occasions. It may be followed by an exhortation in which the Imam explains the sanctity of the institution of marriage in Islam and the duties and responsibilities of husband and wife. After the sermon the Imam announces the marriage by naming the parties. As marriage in Islam is a contract between a man and a woman to whose marriage there is no legal bar, the consent of the bridegroom as well as the consent of the bride and her guardian are essential. The Imam, therefore, addresses the guardian of the bride and asks him to announce publicly whether he agrees to the marriage of his daughter, or the girl of whom he is guardian, to the bridegroom. After his declaration, the Imam addresses the bridegroom and asks him to announce similarly his consent to marry the named girl. The bride's free consent is usually obtained before the proceeding either directly or indirectly. Generally a written contract is made out by the bride, her father or guardian and the bridegroom and is signed by two witnesses. A dower (settlement by the husband on the wife) which is fixed before the ceremony is also declared. The ceremony ends with a silent prayer led by the Imam, after which greetings are exchanged. Dried dates and other sweets are usually distributed among those present on such occasions.



Send off ceremony.

Send Off Ceremony: (Rukhstana)

After the Nikah ceremony the couple are regarded legally as husband and wife but generally they do not live together until the send off ceremony is performed. The bridegroom along with his relations, and friends visit the house of the bride or gather in any other suitable place where all her relations and well-wishers also gather for the occasion. Refreshments are generally served to the people present. Gifts and presents are given to the couple by the parents of the bride and other well-wishers in order to help them set up their own independent life. With prayers the bride is bid farewell. It should be noted however that it is not essential for the bridegroom and his party to visit the bride's house for this ceremony. Sometimes the bride is bid farewell by her parents and relatives and she joins her husband in his house.



Waleema party.

Waleema Party:

After the consumation of the marriage the bridegroom invites his relatives, friends and other acquaintances as well as the relations of the bride to a wedding feast called Waleema party. Special invitation cards are generally printed for the purpose. Food is also distributed among the poor on such occasions. All present pray for the success and happiness of the couple joined in marriage.

Payment of Dower:

According to Islamic teaching man is responsible for providing the necessities of life for his wife and children. The Holy Quran says:

'Hand over to your women their dowers willingly, but if they, of their own accord, remit to you a part thereof, then enjoy it as a thing agreeable and wholesome. (4:5)

The sum of money, property or any other valuable given to the wife as a dower, is hers by right. The payment may be made by mutual agreement over a period of time. The nature of the gifts and the method of payment is specified at the time of NIKAH and is incorporated into the marriage contract. The amount depends upon the means of the bridegroom but should neither be excessive nor meagre. The dower must be paid over to the bride unless she agrees to forego it.

Death

Man is mortal, but according to the teachings of Islam death is not the end of life. There is a life hereafter which in fact is a reflection of the present life. Therefore though we become sad at the loss of a person who is dear to us yet we do not bewail our dead. Crying loudly over the dead, or tearing one's clothes or tormenting oneself is not the way a Muslim expresses his grief and sorrow.

When a Muslim hears the sad news of the death of a person he says:-

'Inna Lillahi wa inna ilaihi Rajioon'

Translation:

'Verily to Allah we belong and verily to Him shall we return'

Relatives and friends gather at the house of the deceased person and give comfort and solace to the bereaved family members. The Holy Prophet has instructed the Muslims to bury their dead without undue delay. The dead body is therefore washed properly, wrapped in two unsewn sheets of clean white cloth from head to foot, and carried on a bier (a coffin can also be used) to the place where funeral Prayer is to be performed. It is placed before the Imam and all those who come for the funeral service stand behind the Imam in rows as in any other Prayer Service. The rows should be an odd number. There is no bowing, sitting or prostration in this service. The Imam begins the service by raising his hands to the level of his ears and calling out Allah-o-Akbar (Allah is the Greatest), folds his arms on his chest. Then the Imam as well as the followers recite Al Fatiha silently:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝ مَلِكِ يَوْمِ
الْذِّينِ ۝ إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝ اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ
الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۝ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝ آمِينَ

Transliteration

Bismillahi-r-rahmanir Raheem. Alhamdu lillahi rabbil-'alameen. Ar-rahmani-r-raheem. Maliki yaumiddeen. Iyyaka na'budu wa Iyyaka nasta'een. Ihdinassirat-al-mustaqeem. Sira-tallazeena an'amta alai-him, Ghairil-maghdhubi 'alaihim wadhalleen, Ameen.

Translation

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds. Most Gracious, Ever Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgement. Thee alone do we worship and Thee alone do we beseech for help. Guide us to the right path, the path of those upon whom Thou has bestowed Thy blessings, not of those who have incurred Thy displeasure, nor of those who have gone astray. Amen.

The Imam says Allah-o-Akbar for the second time and all recite the following silently:

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَى
إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَّجِيدٌ. اللَّهُمَّ
بَارِكْ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ
وَعَلَى آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَّجِيدٌ.

Transliteration

Allahumma Salle 'ala Muhammadin wa 'ala Aale Muham-madin kama sallaita 'ala Ibrahim wa 'ala Aale Ibrahima innaka Hameed-um-Majeed.

Allahumma baarik 'ala Muhammadin wa' ala Aale Muhammadin kama baarakta 'ala Ibrahima wa'ala Aale Ibra-hima innaka Hameed-um-Majeed.

Translation

Bless, O Allah, Muhammad and his people as Thou didst bless Abraham and his people. Thou are indeed the Praiseworthy, the Exalted.

Prosper, O Allah, Muhamad and his people as Thou didst prosper Abraham and his people. Thou are indeed Praiseworthy, the Exalted.

The Imam again says Allah-o-Akbar loudly for the third time and then the following Prayer is recited silently if the deceased was an adult person.

اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِحَيِّنَا وَمَيِّتِنَا وَشَاهِدِنَا وَعَائِبِنَا وَصَغِيرِنَا
وَكَبِيرِنَا وَذَكَرِنَا وَأُنْتِنَا اللَّهُمَّ مَنْ أَحْيَيْتَهُ مِنَّا فَأَحْيِهِ
عَلَى الْإِسْلَامِ وَمَنْ تَوَفَّيْتَهُ مِنَّا فَتَوَفَّهُ عَلَى الْإِيمَانِ اللَّهُمَّ
لَا تَحْرِمْنَا أَجْرَهُ وَلَا تَفْتِنْنَا بَعْدَهُ.

Transliteration

**Allahumma-ghfir lihayyana wa mayyitina wa sha-hidina
wa ghaa-ibina, wa sagheerina wa kabeerina wa zakarina wa
unsana Allahumma man ahyaitahu minna fa ah-yihee 'alal
Islam, wa man twaffaitahu minna fa tawaffahu 'alal Iman.
Allahumma La tahrinna ajrahu wa la taftina ba'adahu.**

Translation

O God forgive our living ones and our deceased ones, and those of us who are present and those who are absent, and our young ones and old ones, and our males and our females.

O God, those of us whom Thou grantest life keep them firm on Islam, and those of us Thou causest to die, cause them to die in the faith. Deprive us not, O Allah, of the benefits relating to the deceased and subject us not to trial after him.

In the case of a child, the following Prayer is recited instead of the above mentioned:

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْهُ لَنَا سَلَفًا وَفُرْطًا وَاجْعَلْهُ لَنَا أَجْرًا وَذُخْرًا
اجْعَلْهُ لَنَا شَافِعًا وَمُشَفَّعًا

Transliteration

**Allahummaj'alho lana salafan wa furutan waj'alho lana
ajran wa zukhran waj'alho lana shafi'an wa mushaffa'an.**

Translation

O Allah! Make him our forerunner, and make him, for us, a reward and a treasure, and make him for us a pleader and accept his pleading.

After this the Imam says Allah-o-Akbar the fourth time and turns his face to the right and recites:

Assalamo Alaikum wa Rahmatullah.
(Peace be upon you and the blessings of Allah.)

Then he turns his face to the left and recites the same. The Prayer is thus concluded. The body is taken to the cemetery and buried. Those who can go to the cemetery for the burial go along with the funeral procession.



Muslim cemetery in Qadian, India.

Funeral Prayer is a Collective Obligation (Fardh Kifaya) of the Muslim community, which means that if a few members of the community conduct the funeral service, they are deemed to have fulfilled the obligation on behalf of the whole community. The object of the funeral prayer in Islam is to seek God's forgiveness and His mercy for the dead. The Muslims are therefore encouraged to participate in the funeral service. Ayesha, the wife of the Holy Prophet relates that the Holy Prophet said:

'If as many as one hundred Muslims should participate in the funeral service of a dead person, all of them interceding for him, their intercession would be granted.' (Muslim)

Though, as a general rule, the corpse is placed in front of the congregation for funeral service, yet in certain cases it is also permissible to offer funeral Prayer even without the corpse. This is called JANAZA GHAIB i.e. the funeral service without the corpse being laid in front of the Imam, who leads the Prayer service.

The situation gives a chance to the relatives, friends and acquaintances of the deceased who are living far away, and therefore could not be physically present at the service, to conduct the service at their own places and pray for the deceased.

It should be remembered, however, that the Janaza Ghaib can only be performed after the burial and not before.

This provision also covers the cases where it is impossible to obtain the dead body for burial e.g.: drowning or fire incidents.

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ ۝
وَسَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهَ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ۝

Translation:

'All that is on the earth will perish, and only that will survive which is under the care of thy Lord, Master of Glory and Honour.'
(55:27 & 28)