

Al-Hajj and the Islamic Calendar



Al-Hajj

Many non-Muslim Americans are unfamiliar with Islamic holidays, celebrations and festivals, though lately editors have recognized this fact and included articles in their newspapers about Ramadan during the Islamic month of fasting. This year *Al-Hajj*, the greater pilgrimage, one of the five pillars or fundamentals of Islam, begins on the evening of April 25, 1996, the eighth day of the Muslim month *Dhu-l-Hijjah* in the year 1416 of the Islamic calendar. If health and means allow it, all Muslims are obliged to perform this pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia at least once in their lifetime.

One of the most important moments of Hajj is the primary visit to the *Ka'ba* in Mecca. According to Muslim tradition, the patriarch Abraham with his son Ismail built a square, stone house known as the *Ka'ba* on a site in Mecca already hallowed by Adam. Embedded in the southeastern corner of the building is the Black Stone which tradition says fell from heaven when Adam, the first human being, came to earth. For many years prior to the coming of Islam this building had been the object of pilgrimage to the people of the Arabian desert. During these long years the Meccans fell away from Abraham's belief in one God and filled the *Ka'ba* with more than three hundred idols of wood and stone. But Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, after receiving a revelation from God that there were not many different gods, but only one God (*Allah* in Arabic) who was the God of all people, cleansed the building of all these idols. In the *Quran*, the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, Abraham was ordered to:

Announce to the people the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every deep and distant highway that they may witness the benefits and recollect the name of God in the well known days over the sacrificial animals. He has provided for them. Eat thereof and feed the poor in want. Then let them complete their rituals and perform their vows and circumambulate the Ancient House.
(Quran 22:27-29)

Today, well over a million Muslims heed this call, coming from all parts of the globe, seldom now by camel, but by plane and bus and car, to perform the sacred rituals during the three to six days of the *Hajj* and to receive the spiritual blessings they incur. These rituals take place at the Grand Mosque of Mecca in Saudi Arabia and in three other places in the environs of that city. A brief description of these rites will help the non-Muslim to understand the nature of the *Hajj*.

The First Day (the 8th day of Dhu-l-Hijjah)

Preparations must be made before actually beginning the *Hajj*. The *haram*, the sacred area around Mecca is forbidden to all but Muslims and before entering it a pilgrim must visit a *miqat*, where the male pilgrim performs the ritual washing and puts on a special gown, a simple cotton robe made of two white sheets of seamless cloth which symbolizes purity, renunciation of mundane pleasures and the equality of all believers. Women have no required dress, though most wear a simple white gown and head covering, but their faces should be unveiled. No jewelry or personal adornment is permitted. The pilgrim performs a ritual ablution and prays, "*At Thy service, my God, at Thy service*" indicating that he is responding to God's call to make the *Hajj*. The pilgrim is then prepared to enter the Great Mosque. He circles seven times around the *Ka'ba* recites certain prayers and drinks water from the well of Zamzam. By tradition, the spring of Zamzam gushed forth when God heard the thirsty plea of Ismail, son of Abraham and Hagar, who was abandoned in the desert with his mother. The well is no longer open at the surface but water is led off to underground rooms where many faucets supply the water to the pilgrims. After these rites in the Grand Mosque the pilgrims leave for Mina, a small uninhabited village five miles east of Mecca. They spend the night, as the Prophet did on his farewell pilgrimage, praying in preparation for the "Standing", the central rite of the *Hajj*, which will occur the next day. So ends the first day, *yawm at-tarwiyah*, "the day of deliberation" or "reflection".

The Second Day (the 9th day of Dhu l-Hijjah)

This day is called the *yawm al-wuquf*, "the day of standing" and also *yawm 'Arafat* "The day of 'Arafat". 'Arafat is a plain about 12 miles southwest of Mecca and pilgrims flock there en masse after the dawn prayer at Mina. They stand, facing Mecca, to meditate and pray. The central invocatory prayer is the *talbiyah* which is recited from the moment the pilgrim dons the *ihram* until the end of the "standing" at sunset. In the Hebrew Bible Isaiah speaks thus :

*Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,
Whom shall I send and who will go for
us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.
(Isaiah 6:8)*

The *talbiyah* prayer, which is attributed to Abraham in the Quran, recalls this verse:

*Here am I, God! here am I!
Here am I, God! here am I!
And associate none with Thee; here am I!
Surely praise and blessing are Thine,
and dominion!
And associate none with Thee, here am I,
God!
Here am I!*

This day of prayer and examination of conscience is seen by some as a foretaste of the Day of Judgment. Actually very few stand the entire time; despite the name of the day it is not required. For at least part of the day, most pilgrims sit, eat and talk at the base of a 200 foot hill called the Mount of Mercy where Muhammad delivered his Farewell Sermon. Just after the sun goes down a cannon is fired which is the signal for the pilgrims to make their way back toward Mina to a place called Muzdalifah. There, traditionally, they collect pebbles for the following days' rituals, worship and fall asleep under the stars.

The Third Day (the 10th of Dhu-l-Hijjah)

Before dawn the sleeping pilgrims are again alerted by cannon to rouse themselves and return to Mina; the "day of sacrifice", *yawm an-nahr* has begun. Also called 'Id al-Adha or "the feast of sacrifice", this festival day is celebrated throughout the Muslim world. It is an opportunity for Muslims who remained at home to feel they are a part of the pilgrimage. At Mina they throw seven of the stones they collected at the largest of three whitewashed pillars, which represents the "Great Devil" and symbolizes the pilgrims' repudiation of evil. After this rite the obligatory animal sacrifice may be performed at any time before the end of the 12th day. Each pilgrim must buy a sacrificial animal, often a sheep or goat. The animal is slaughtered and eaten, the uneaten portion of the meat is collected and given to the poor. Now the pilgrim's hair is clipped or shaved (women cut only a symbolic lock of hair) as a sign of deconsecration, and the state of *ihram* is ended. Though one may resume their customary dress, certain conditions of abstinence continue until the pilgrim has left Mina. The pilgrim returns to the Great Mosque at Mecca and once again circles the *Ka'ba* seven times reciting

a prayer during each circuit. While he is doing this he tries to kiss or touch the Black Stone embedded in the *Ka'ba*, which is the precise point at which the circling begins. Often times it is too crowded and the pilgrim must be content to blow a kiss in its direction. This final obligatory ritual is called making the *Tawaf* (the ritual circumambulation of the *Ka'ba*) of the Return and the pilgrim is now a *haaj* (colloquially *hajji*). Though all essential rites have been completed, most pilgrims now perform "the Running" (*Sa'y*). In a spacious enclosed corridor attached to the Sacred Mosque they run or walk quickly back and forth between two low hills. This represents Hagar's frantic search for water for her son Ismail, until the angel Gabriel appeared and stamping his heel on the ground brought forth a spring which is the origin of the Well of Zamzam. Pilgrims drink from the well before starting the *Sa'y* and many people carry the sacred water home with them to share their pilgrimage with family and friends. For three more days, if he desires and has the time, the pilgrim may stay at Mina and perform more rituals, which, though not part of the actual Hajj are very popular.

It seems appropriate to end this article on the Hajj with a passage from a letter written by one of America's most famous Muslims, Al-Hajj Malik El-Shabbazz, or Malcolm X. He wrote this to his assistants in Harlem after performing his pilgrimage.

During the past eleven days in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept on the same rug - while praying to the same God - with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the words and in the actions and in the deeds of the white Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan and Ghana. We were truly all the same (brothers) - because their belief in one God had removed the white from their behavior, and the white from their attitude.

For a copy of the pamphlet in which this letter is excerpted call "The Institute of Islamic Information and Education" (312) 777-7443.

Suggested Readings and Videos About the Hajj

Historically, the pilgrimage has been a way of binding together the many nations and races that make up the Muslim community in a religious experience that transcends all others. Many Hajj have written their impressions of these days. Included in the following bibliography are excerpts from these books which will give the reader a taste of what the Hajj means to the millions of men and women who have been fortunate enough to make the pilgrimage.

Al-e Ahmad, Jalal. *Lost in the Crowd.* Three Continents Press, 1985.

A fascinating travel diary of the author's experiences and reflections on the Hajj.

'Arafat

When we got here last night we were spreading out our lightweight bedding when I saw a large insect walking on the blanket. It resembled a beetle. I killed the poor thing, and all at once I realized I shouldn't have. Killing God's creatures dressed in *ihram*! But it was too late. Mohaddes, who took one end of the blanket so we could shake him off, said that it was dangerous. May it rest in peace, God willing! Then we ate dinner and went to sleep. And such a cold night! I wrapped the towel of my *ihram* around my body beneath my blanket and lay down, coughing, with the help of 15 drops of Ipesandrine.

Hirashima, Hussein Yoshio. *The Road to Holy Mecca.* Kodansha International Ltd., 1972.

The author, a Japanese photo-journalist who converted to Islam, was given permission to record his photographic impressions of Mecca in the early 1970s during the Hajj.

The pilgrimage made by Muslims from all over the world expresses respect and love for Allah. All converge on the Ka'ba without barriers of race or social status. Now I myself stood before this place of universal worship. As I looked around me I saw a rather rotund, middle-aged, bespectacled man clinging to the wall of the Ka'ba and chanting a prayer in low tones. I realized that we were both moved to tears by our emotions, and as our eyes met he asked me, "Where are you from?"

"From Tokyo," I replied.

"Truly, a distant place!" he said in surprise, and asked, "Are there many Muslims in Tokyo?"

"No, only a few, I am sorry to say," I said, and we began again to pray. I thought of my own contribution to Islam, which I resolved to make through my profession as a journalist. I felt the need to dedicate my life to the cause of freedom and justice, and it seemed as if my resolve strengthened as I pressed my fingers against the wall of the Ka'ba.

Peters, F. E. *The Hajj: the Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places.* Princeton University Press, 1994.

A delightful anthology of first-hand accounts of the Hajj shaped into a richly detailed narrative. One of *Choice's* Outstanding Academic Books of 1994.

The Stoning of Satan

On arriving at Wadi Mina, each nation encamped upon the spot which custom has assigned to it at every returning Hajj. After disposing of the baggage, the Hajjis hastened to the ceremony of throwing stones at the devil . . . At the entrance to the valley, towards Muzdalifa, stands a rude stone pillar, or rather altar, between six and seven feet high, in the midst of the street, against which the first seven stones are thrown, as the place where the devil made his first stand. Toward the middle of the valley is a similar pillar, and at its western end a wall of stones, which is made to serve the same purpose. The Hajjis crowded in rapid succession round the first pillar . . . and every one threw seven small stones successfully upon it; they then passed to the second and third spots where the same ceremony was repeated. The stones used for this purpose are to be the size of a horsebean or thereabouts, and the pilgrims are advised to collect them in the plain of Muzdalifa, but they may likewise take them from Mina; and many people, contrary to the law, collect those that have already been thrown. (Burckhardt 1829)

Wolfe, Michael. *The Hadj: an American's Pilgrimage to Mecca.* Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993.

The author's participation in the age-old rites of the *Hajj*, is the culmination of a three month stay in the Arab world beginning in the fasting month of Ramadan.

The crowd advanced freely, gaining a little speed as we left the souks, turning right at a junction, left under an arch, opening out all at once on a spacious plaza . . . the square was filled a hundred deep with ranks of Moroccans packed shoulder to shoulder, shuffling toward a center door. The crowd was close yet calm. There was neither pushing nor shoving. . . I noticed lined up just outside the gates a welcoming committee of six beggars. Old men in white caps and brown djellabas. . . they stood chanting in unison for alms. I laid a dirham on the final blind man's palm and came to a stop at a shallow flight of stairs. The steps led down through a wall into a forecourt. The crowds descending flowed to either side - for the maw of the passage was blocked at waist level by a ten foot cedar pole. The pole I knew was to bar non-Muslims . . . These poles had acquired symbolic force before my trip began. At home I had non-Muslim friends familiar with my journey who enjoyed predicting dire consequences. Americans make skittish travelers and when it comes to going among Arabs, most of the population is ill informed . . . They came up with ridiculous suggestions: I should darken my face enroute with shoe polish; I should wear brown-tinted contact lenses to hide my hazel eyes. Deportation and evisceration were popular motifs at good-bye parties . . . At home I had lived this scene a thousand times, with a mixed rush of excitement and apprehension . . . I had viewed myself as an isolated figure. I stood out, I looked white and Western, I felt inadmissible. Here on the other hand, I blended in, another Muslim wrapped in a djellaba. This so relieved my anxiety about the pole that as the crowd pressed in on every side . . . my first impulse to beat the crowd was simply to duck the pole and take a shortcut. No one took a shortcut . . . I conformed to the flow of the crowd around the pole.

Encyclopedia

Glasse, Cyril. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam.* Harper and Row, 1989.

This one volume encyclopedia is a valuable resource for school libraries since a good deal of the material in it is hard to locate easily in general encyclopedias. It was of great use in compiling the notes for this issue of Middle East Resources.

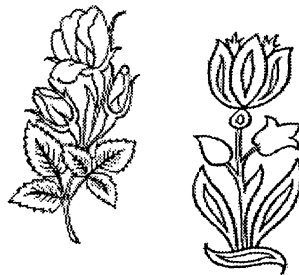
Videos

The Guests of God. Meridian International Communications, 1991. (70 minutes)

The Wentzel family, a German father and an Irish mother (both of whom had converted to Islam before they met) accompanied by their two children, have their daily experiences and impressions recorded as they perform the *Hajj* rituals.

Video: Mecca: the Forbidden City. IranFilm Studios, n.d. (60 minutes)

Though the quality of the film is poor, this video takes the viewer through the *Hajj* from the arrival of the pilgrims to their departure 14 days later. It is without a narrative and successfully conveys the magnitude and importance of this extraordinary pilgrimage.



The Islamic Calendar

Months of the Islamic year

The calendar years date from the Emigration (*Hijra*) of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 AH (year of the Hijra). Since ancient times the Arabs, like almost all Semitic people, based their calendar upon the cycles of the moon rather than upon the sun, on which the Gregorian calendar is based. The actual beginning of a month depends upon the physical sighting of the moon. This reflects the sense in Islam that it is not the theoretical conditions, such as the predicted beginning of a month, but the immediate surrounding conditions that reflect the will of God in relation to man. The Jewish calendar is based upon similar principles. In practice, calendar days run according to astronomical calculations of the moon's motion. The names of the month however reflect an ancient division according to the seasons of the solar year.

• <i>Muharram</i>	"the sacred month"
• <i>Safar</i>	"the month which is void"
• <i>Rabi al-Awwal</i>	"the first spring"
• <i>Rabi ath-Thani</i>	"the second spring"
• <i>Jumada-l-Ula</i>	"the first month of dryness"
• <i>Jumada-th-Thaniyyah'</i>	"the second month of dryness"
• <i>Rajab</i>	"the revered month"
• <i>Sha^cban</i>	"the month of division"
• <i>Ramadan</i>	"the month of great heat"
• <i>Shawwal</i>	"the month of hunting"
• <i>Dhu-l-Qa^cdah</i>	"the month of rest"
• <i>Dhu-l-Hijjah</i>	"the month of pilgrimage"

Days of the week

The *hijri* year consists of 354 days divided into twelve lunar months of alternating 29 or 30 days. Since this differs from the 365 days in the solar year, the Islamic calendar moves back 11 days each solar year which means that holidays can fall in any season. This is particularly difficult when *Ramadan*, the month of fasting falls in the heat of summer and Muslims must abstain from all food and drink between sunrise and sunset. Five days of the week are named by the ordinal numbers beginning with the first day which is Sunday. Friday is named "the Day of Congregation" and Saturday is the "Day of Rest" a reference to the Jewish Sabbath (of which reference many Muslims are unaware).

• <i>Yawm al-Ahad</i>	Sunday
• <i>Yawm al-Ithnayn</i>	Monday
• <i>Yawm ath-Thalatha</i>	Tuesday
• <i>Yawm al-Arbi^ca'</i>	Wednesday
• <i>Yawm al-Khamis</i>	Thursday
• <i>Yawm al-Jumu^ca</i>	Friday
• <i>Yawm as-Sabt</i>	Saturday

For agricultural purposes a solar calendar is a necessity (i.e. planting needs to be done in the same season every year) and in practice the Western Gregorian calendar usually referred to as the *Masihī*, the "Messianic" or Christian calendar is used today as the working calendar in almost all Muslim countries, except for determining days of religious observance.



Holidays

The day begins at sunset, so holidays begin on the eve of the date on which they are celebrated. 'Id al-Fitr and 'Id al-Adha are the only holidays that were prescribed by the Prophet Muhammad and thus are the only holidays observed by all Muslims. Other holidays are recognized as significant events in the history of Islam and are observed in most of the Islamic world.

- *Ra^cs al-^cAm* (1st of *Muharram*)

The Islamic New Year.

- *^cAshura* (10th *Muharram*)

A beneficent holy day for Sunni Muslims whose observance is, according to some sources, almost certainly derived from the Jewish Day of Atonement. For the Shiites however, because it is coincidentally the anniversary of the slaying of Imam Husain, grandson of Muhammad, it is the culmination of a period of terrible mourning.

- *Mawlid* (or *Milad*) *an-Nabi* (12th of *Rabi' al-Awwal*)

The Prophet's birthday; a festival marked by joyous celebrations which vary according to local customs.

- *Laylat al-Mi^craj* (27th of *Rajab*)

"The Night Journey" in which Muhammad was miraculously transported from Mecca to Jerusalem where he ascended into the heavens from the rock of the Temple Mount, on which the Dome of the Rock sanctuary stands today. He met and prayed with the Prophets Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others. Joyous celebrations are held according to local customs.

- *Laylat al-Bara^cah* (15th of *Sha^cban*)

According to pious belief, a night in which the destinies of the coming year are fixed, and sins absolved. Observed with intense prayer.

- *Laylat al-Qadr* (27th of *Ramadan*)

The last ten days of this month of fasting are particularly holy; secular festivities are prohibited in the month of Ramadan. The 27th is most often presumed to be *Laylat al-Qadr*, the night of the descent of the Quran, but it may be celebrated on the 21st or the 23rd. These last 10 days of Ramadan (*I^ctikaf*) are considered special and many devoted men spend the days at the mosque, or at home, reading the Quran and praying.

- 'Id al-Fitr (1st of *Shawwal*)

The "Feast of fast-breaking" is three days of festivities marking the end of *Ramadan*.

- 'Id al-Adha (10th of *Dhu-l-Hijjah*)

The "Feast of Sacrifice" commemorates the sacrifice of his son that God asked of Abraham. Though the *Quran* does not specify which son (in the Hebrew Bible it is Isaac, son of Abraham's wife Sarah) it is usually believed, by Muslims, to be Ismail, son of Hagar. It is celebrated throughout the Muslim world. The 8th, 9th and 10th of this month are the days of pilgrimage to Mecca.

- 'Id al-Ghadir (18th of *Dhu-l-Hijjah*)

A Shiite festival which commemorates the event in which Muhammad designated 'Ali as his successor. It is not observed by Sunnis.



Teacher's Supplement

1. From the context in which they are used, define the following words. (see glossary for definition of words not defined in text)

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| a. Al-Hajj | f. Mosque |
| b. Allah | g. Haram |
| c. Ka'ba | h. Sacrifice |
| d. Circumambulate | i. Haaj (Hajji) |
| e. Pilgrimage | j. Hijri year |

2. The *Hajj* is a pilgrimage made by Muslims to Mecca. Pilgrimages are not always religious, they may be nationalistic or secular as well. Below are the names of some well known places where people go on pilgrimage, though they may not call it that. Assign students to find information about one of these sites to answer the following questions:

- Where is the site and why is it the object of a pilgrimage?
- Describe any particular ritual/s that might take place there.
- What do the people who visit the site expect/hope will happen?
- Would you consider their visit a pilgrimage? Justify your answer.

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| a. Graceland | d. Vietnam Memorial |
| b. Wailing (Western) Wall. | e. Canterbury Cathedral |
| c. Lourdes | f. Lincoln Memorial |

3. In groups of three or four, have the students choose a religion with which they are unfamiliar and research one of its most popular holidays. Describe this holiday to the class in one of these ways:

- a. Write and perform a skit for the class.
- b. In comic book "strips" illustrate the rituals of the holiday.
- c. Make a collage that expresses the theme of the holiday .

4. Ask each student to choose their favorite family holiday and write a short essay, or give a talk, telling why it is special to them and how they celebrate the day. If they have photographs or a video to share with the class that would be great. This is a wonderful chance for students to learn more about other cultures and is a very popular activity. Remind the students that the holiday may be religious, patriotic, personal or an anniversary.

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