



# **Understanding Islam: A Cultural and Religious Resource**



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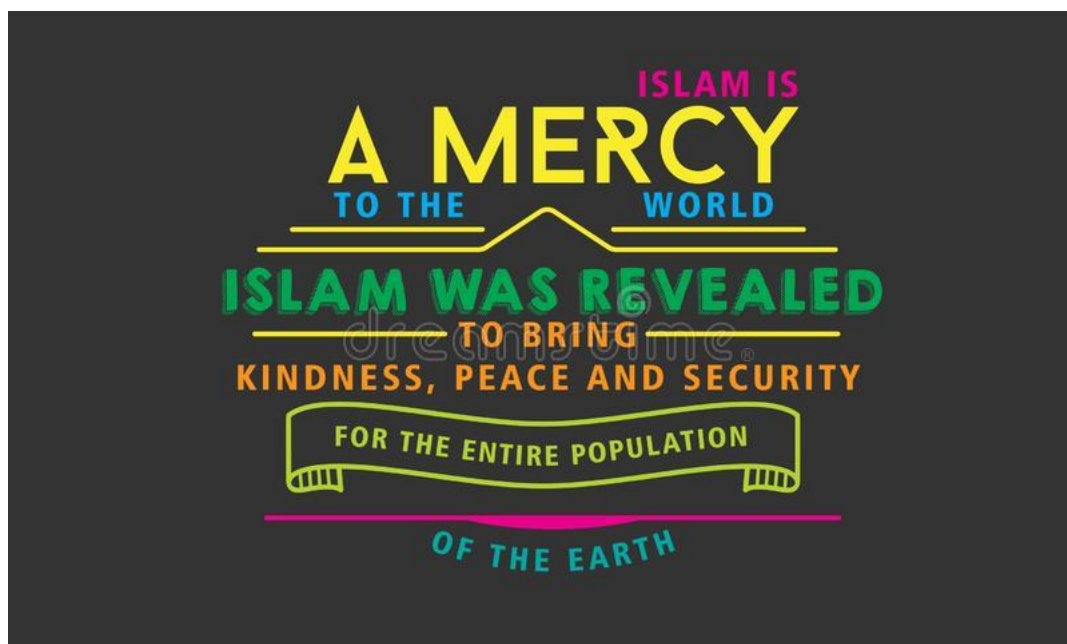
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## Introduction

### What is Islam?

Islam is a religion that has been revealed from God (Allah) to his prophets throughout the history (Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Centre (ISBCC) n.d.). Islam aims to provide equity (Hwajj n.d.) It is a religion and a way of life as some countries follow the islamic law (Shariah) (ISBCC n.d.; Afsaruddin 2018). Islam is a religion of peace, forgiveness and mercy (ISBCC n.d.). It is the second largest and fastest-growing religion in the world (World Population Review (WPR) 2022).



(Dreamstime 2022)



## What is the meaning of Islam?

“Islam means to achieve peace-peace with god, peace within oneself, and peace with the creation of God – through wholly submitting oneself to God and accepting his guidance.” (IslamiCity 2022).

The word Islam is derived from an Arabic word (سلام) Salam, which generates a word with a deep meaning that describes surrender, submission, commitment and peace.

## Who are Muslims and what do they believe?

People who follow the faith of Islam and believe in it are called Muslims. There are more than 1.9 billion Muslims around the world (WPR 2022). A country is considered an Islamic country when 50% of the population are Muslim, such as Saudi Arabia, Maldives and Tunisia (WPR 2022).

Muslims believe in one unique and incomparable God (Allah), and also, they believe on the judgment day which everyone is responsible and accountable of





their action during their lives (ISBCC n.d.). Also, they believe on a chain of prophets, starting with Adam, Noah, Isaac Jacob and others. The last prophet and messenger is Mohammed (peace be upon him (PBUH)) (ISBCC n.d.).

## What does Muslims follow and acts according to?

There are two main sources of Islam which are Quran and Sunna. They both forms the Islamic law which is called Shariah.

Quran is unsurpassable eloquence book; It is a miracle of all the miracles for all times. It was revealed to the prophet Mohammed (PBUH) to compete all people around him who are the most fluent and linguistic in Arabic (Halil 2022). However, all of their audacious poet and eloquent and writes could or ever dared to fact that the Quran was a miracle with its language and words (Halil 2022).

Quran is the exact record of the words that Allah revealed through an angel called Gabriel to the prophet Mohammed (PBUH)(ISBCC n.d.) Mohammed memorised Allah's words and dictated his companions (ISBCC n.d.). During the prophet life, the text of Quran was cross checked. Till today, all the 114 chapters of Quran are remained the same; there is no change at all throughout the centuries (ISBCC n.d.).

Now comes to the Sunna. Sunnah or Sunna is any act, habit, talk that the prophet Mohammed used to do (IslamOnline 2022). Sunna is also an explanation of Quran. Although the Quran is sufficient and do not need the Sunnah, it highlighted the



importance of following the Sunna. It is the legal and traditional practice and custom of the Islamic community (Afsaruddin 2018).

Muslims know Sunnah from statements called hadiths which have been handed down from the companions of prophets.

## The Five Pillars of Islam

Islam is based on five pillars;

- 1- The declaration of Faith (Shahadah): This consists of two sentences, and it is the first two words that people once become muslims must say.  
“There is no deity but God, and Mohammed is the messenger of God”  
(أشهد ان لا اله الا الله و ان محمد عبده و رسوله)
- 2- Prayer (Salah): there are five obligatory prayers in each day. Prayers are the direct connection between the Muslim and Allah.
- 3- Zakat: this is one of the most significant principle of Islam. It means all things that we have is belong to Allah and all wealth is held in trust by human beings. Zakat is charitable giving. It is important to give who is in need.
- 4- Fasting: Ramadan is the Islamic lunar month. Muslims fast from fajir to the sunset. There are numbers of benefit of fasting that will be discussed later.



5- Pilgrimage: this is called Al-Hajj, and it is an obligation for those who can physically and financially do it. It has to be in Mecca where Al-ka'ba is located.



Zamzam.com 2022

## Brief History of Islam

About 570 years ago, a child named Mohammed was born in Mecca to a clan of Quraish (Nawwab et al. 2006). Since Mohammed was a child, he always felt of something missing in the universe. He always thought that this he has and everything around him must be made by something much greater and powerful than humans; something that cannot be vanished at all. He thought it could be the sun cause of the shine and the heat, but the sun dies every evening. He continued search till Allah sent him Gabriel. Since then, Mohammed (PBAH) start the journey of being a prophet and a messenger.

At the beginning of Mohammed (PBAH), not many people accepted the message he was trying to transmit, even in Quraish (Nawwab et al. 2006). However, the



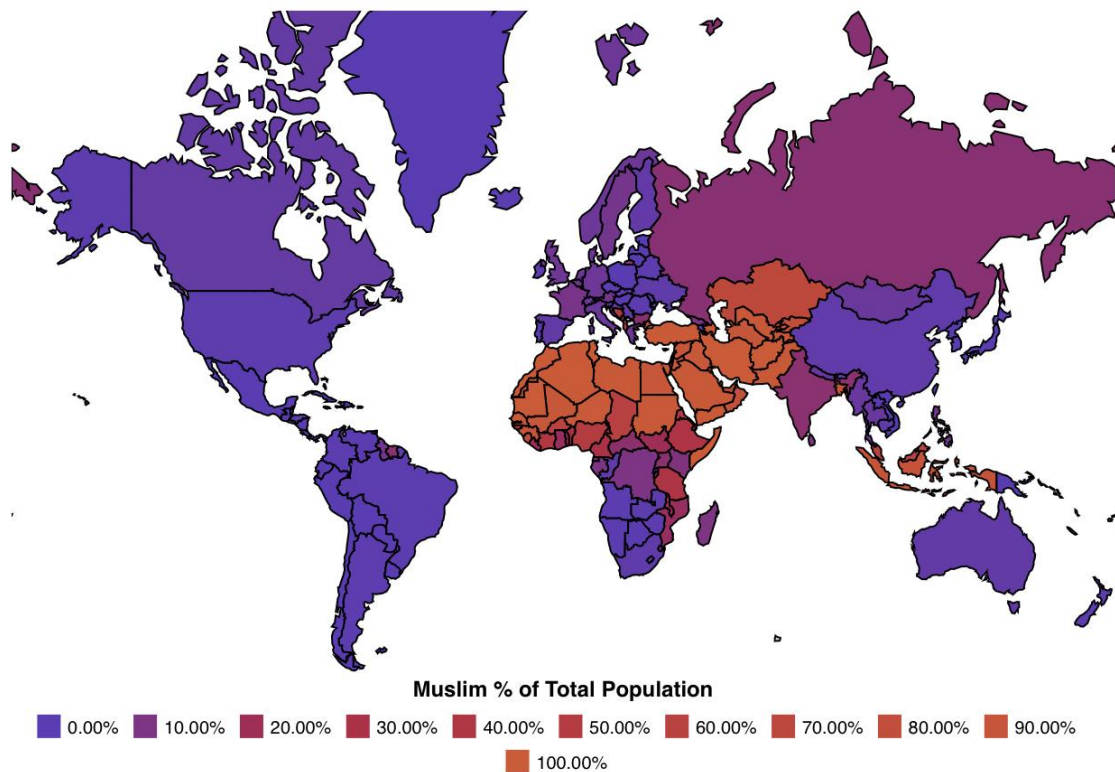
opposition of others strength and sharpen the prophet's sense of mission, and also increased his understanding of the difference between Islam and other religions (Nawwab et al. 2006). Then The prophet continues his journey with success and many of that time became Muslims.

Prophet Mohammed (PBAH) died on 8 June 632, and his death was a profound loss to all Muslims and non-Muslims (Nawwab et al. 2006). Even after the death of the loved prophet, Islam continued to spread all around, thank to Allah and the prophet companions. Although it has been a very very long time since Islam started, all Muslims have the same faith of Allah, the same ideas, and the same guides which are Quran and Sunnah.

Now, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. There are 57 Muslim countries; besides, there are many Muslims who lives in non-muslim countries.



Muslim Population by Country 2022



(World Population Review 2022)

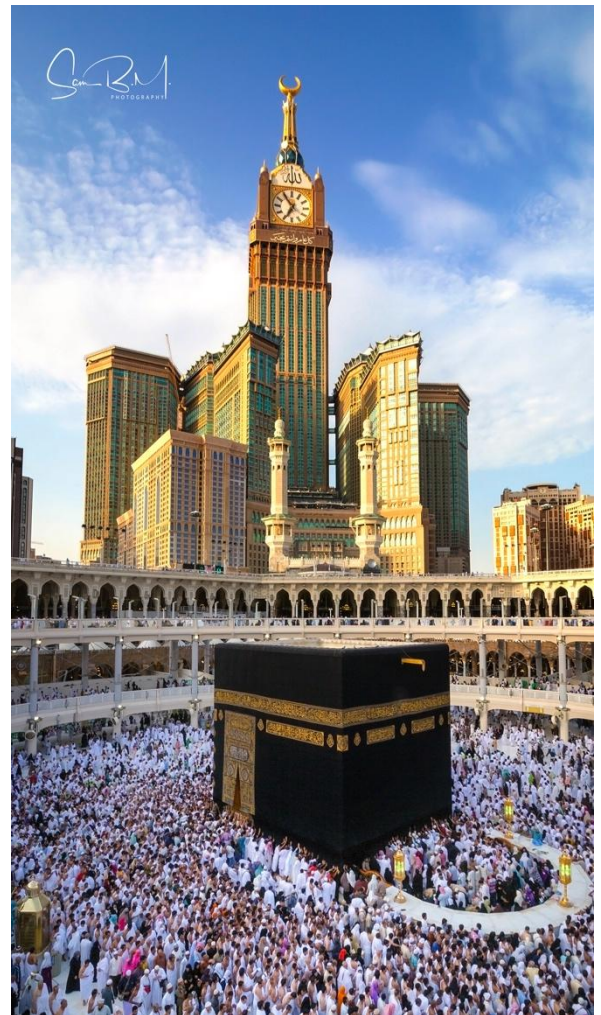
## Prayers (Salah)

We have mentioned before that there are five prayer a day. Pray is a fundamental requirement of Islam faith because it connect the worshipper to Allah directly. For this reason, most muslim students and workers request to take a short break to

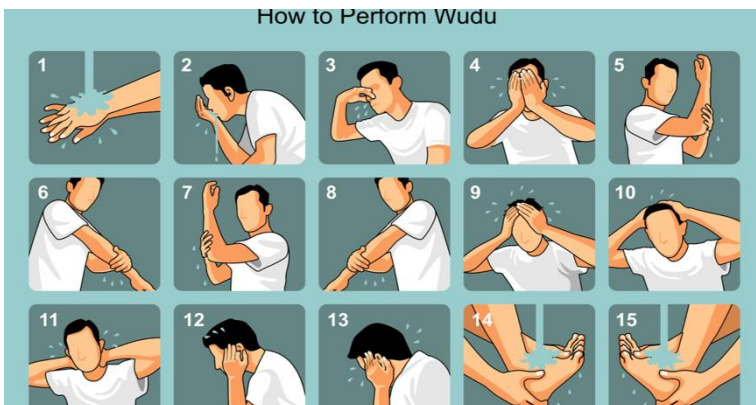


pray in specific times. All the five prayers are required from mature Muslims and highly recommended for children over 10 years.

Before praying, it is important to ensure the area for praying is clean and free of impurities. The pray direction must be to the Kaaba which is the direction of all muslims. Then a person has to perform Wudu. Wudu is a must before each prayer. It is a specific process of hygiene consists of washing the limbs and the face. Then a Muslim can pray.



(Traiblazer\_sam's 2021)



(Muslim and Quran 2022)



Praying has also some steps which will be explained in a picture for better view and understanding. It consists of a few steps depending on which Salah\prayer. It starts with Takbeer and ends with Salam.

### Muslim Prayer step by step

## Learning how to pray

**Takbeer**  
Allahuaakbar

**Qiyam**  
Bismillah  
Surah Al-Fatiha  
Surah An-nas

**Ruku**  
Allahuaakbar

**Sujud**  
Subhana Rabbi'l A'laa  
Allahuaakbar

**Tashahhud**  
Allahuaakbar

**Sujud**  
Subhana Rabbi'l A'laa  
Allahuaakbar

**Salam**  
Allahuaakbar

## Salah Guide

- 1 **Takbeerah**
- 2 **Al-Qiyam**
- 3 **Ruku'**
- 4 **Qiyam**
- 5 **Sajjadah**
- 6 **Tashahhud**
- 7 **Salam**

(Muslim Status 2021)

The five prayers are:

- 1- Fajir: this is the first prayer which Muslim start their day with; its time is before the sunrise, the very first sight of the morning (down morning) till the sunrise (Protoday 2022). This prayer is consists of two Ruku'. In another words two repetition and then comes Salam.



- 2- Al-duhr: this is once it is noon time. It could be performed about afternoon but not too late after the noon time. This prayer includes four Ruku'.
- 3- Al-Asor: This is prayer can be performed once the sun is approximately halfway down from noon to the sunset or the shadow is of a vertical rod (Protoday 2022). It also consists of four Ruku'.
- 4- Al-maghrib: Starts just after the sunset till the sight of the first star in the sky (Protoday 2022). It is a-three Ruku' prayer.
- 5- Al-isha: it begins when the sky is completely dark after Maghrib till midnight or just before fajir (Protoday 2022). It consists of four Ruku'.

## Hijab

Hijab is a very debatable topic for non-muslim people or those Muslims who do not understand its purpose. For Those who wear hijab, it was never question (Nikah Forever Blog 2022). To illustrate more, modesty has always been a required of Islam for both women and men.

Hijab protects women beauty. It enables both genders to communicate correctly by eliminating dirty and lustful thought (Nikah Forever Blog 2022).

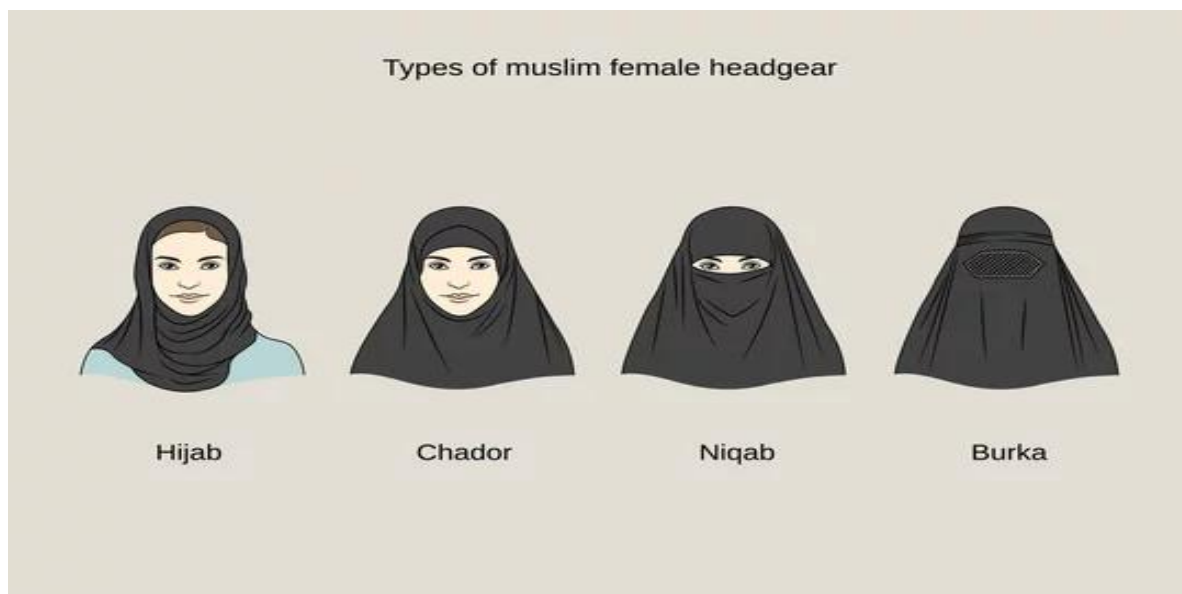
There are many advantages of Hijab. Here are some:

- 1- Hijab represents purity and dignity.



- 2- Protects from harassment- it covers the beauty and the femininity of women which
- 3- Hijab places the focus on intellect – as most people make judgment on the physical traits and appearance of women.
- 4- Hygienic purposes- many people wear a head-cover to ensure cleanliness head\hair.

There are a few types of hijabs which depends on the individual choice:



(Nikah Forever Blog 2022)

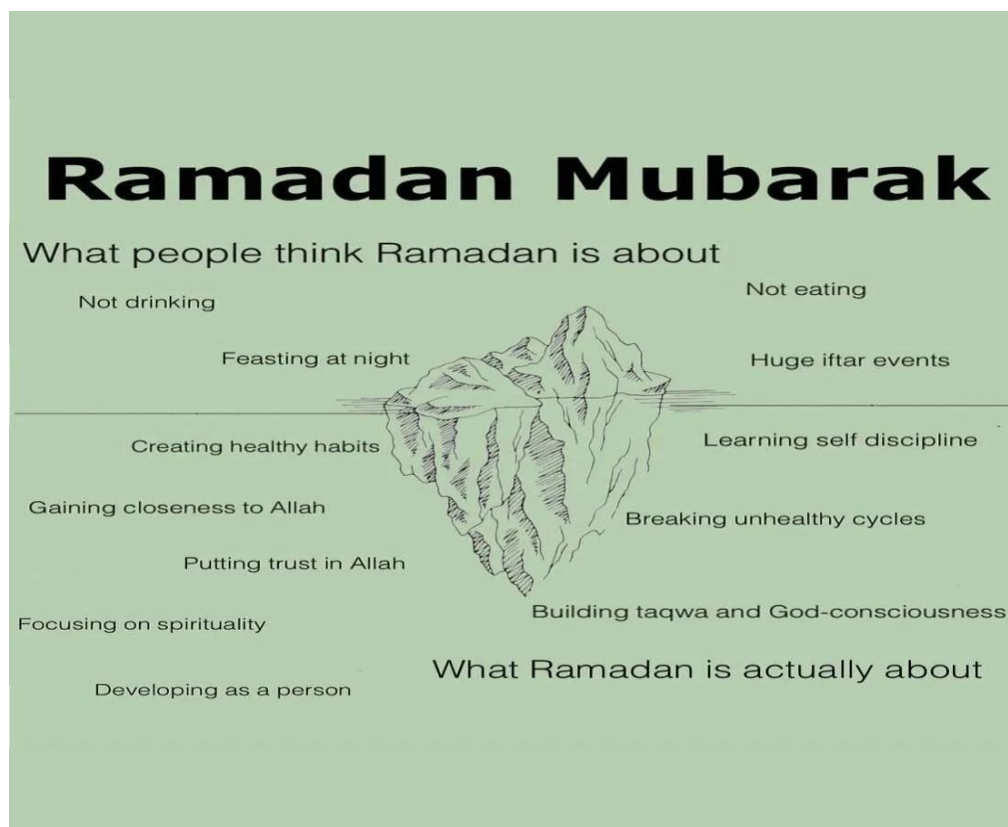
## Occasions

There are a few different occasions in Islam, which include some festivals and some special events such as Eid and Ramadan. In this section we are going to talk about these occasions.



## Ramadan

Ramadan is a month in every year in the Hijra calendar; it is the ninth month. It begins and ends according to the appearance of the crescent moon (Britannica 2022). Due to the difference between the Islamic calendar and the Gregorian calendar, Ramadan starts 10-12 days earlier every year in the Gregorian calendar (Britannica 2022). For Muslims, Ramadan is a period of communal prayer, introspection and reading Quran (Britannica 2022). It is believed that Muslims who observe Ramadan (the holly month) with praying, fasting and faithful intentions, Allah would forgive all the past sins that they have done (Britannica 2022).



(Islamic tics 2022)



## Benefits of Fasting

There are many research that illustrated the benefits of Ramadan fasting style. Here are some of the advantages according to Imran Khan Cancer Appeal (2022):

- 1- Regulate lipids (cholesterol) in the blood and the body.
- 2- The body uses the stored fat as energy during fasting hours.
- 3- Wight loss
- 4- Better control of diabetes.
- 5- Detoxification process
- 6- Better levels of alternates and mental health.

## Before fasting

In Ramadan, we prepare a meal called Sahor, which is the last meal before fasting. It is has to be before Al-Fajir prayer. Some families prefer to have it at midnight, and others just before Al-fajir. Sahor meal is usually a big meal, such as rice with chicken, and other times it could be something light. In some communities, a few hours before the dawn, you hear sound of drums or ring bells which reminds people to have their Sahor before Al-fajir.

Usually, Muslims invite each other for Sahor from family to friends. In this case, there will be multiple types of food and desserts. These are some examples of Sahor:



(Webteb 2022)



(Layalina 2022)



(N7sry 2022)

## During fasting hours

As we mentioned earlier, fasting start from the dawn morning. During the fasting Muslims are not allowed to eat nor drink. Muslims fast according to their areas. Some people fast 7 hours, and this could be less or more depends on the region.

Muslims meet Allah during the fasting hours more because these hours are considered as holly hours. Beside fasting, praying and reading Quran are the most performed worships in Ramadan. Although, we do these worshipping always, but we feel it more and work on them more during Ramadan.



Also, before breaking our fast, preparing food is the most fun part in Ramadan. Many people prepare some food and freeze them, which allow them to spend more time worshipping and less time cooking. However, many people like to cook day by day.

## Iftar

Iftar in Ramadan is special meal. In every day of Ramadan, the breakfast is very special. Muslims break their fast with the sunset. Once the sunset starts, Muslims are allowed to eat and drink till the dawn morning. Some people have their breakfast in their homes and others in mosques.

In mosques, Muslims will have a long line of food, but these dinings usually consist of yoghurt, bread and home prepared food. Almost everyone in the mosque bring one thing with them if they can. If not, everyone is welcomed to eat for free. No costs at all.



(Alarab 2018)



In Iftar, Muslims always share their food together, specially with neighbours. We send from everything we have cooked to next door just before the sunset when the food is fresh. Also, we do have a lot of family gathering for Iftar more than Sahor. Every family will invite all other relatives and sometimes friends.

In this meal, we eat different things. This breakfast is not like any other typical breakfast. A big dining food is provided. Form salads to meat. In Saudi Arabia, the most two important things should be in the breakfast in the Saudi coffee and dates. Also, each part in Saudi has their own cuisines for Iftar. However, Iftar always starts with dates.



(VisitSaudi 2022)



(Almrsal 2022)



(Pbs n.d.)



## Eid al-Fitr

This is the feast of fast-breaking, and it is one of the two major religious celebrations of Islam (Britannica 2022). In many Muslim communities, this Eid is quite celebrated. In the first morning after Ramadan, most Muslims pray at the biggest mosque in their town which allows them to see other people celebrating Eid.

What we do in Eid:

- Children and adults wear new cloth.
- Everyone is dressed up with the best they have.
- Special pastries are baked.
- Gifts are exchanged.
- Extended families visit each other
- Gathering for family meals.



(Arabs stock 2022)





(Mhtwyat 2020)

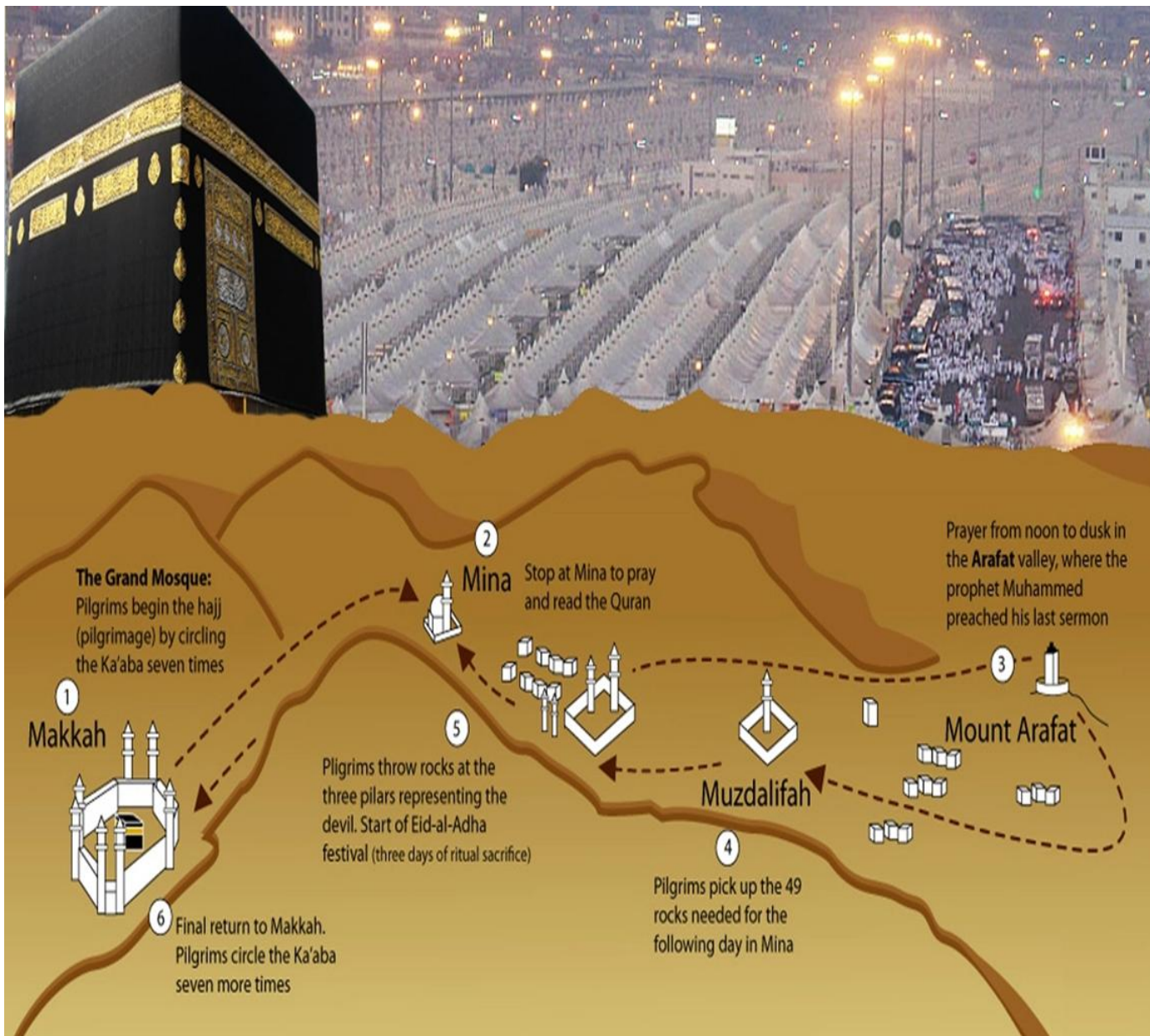
## Hajj

Hajj or Hadj is an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca in a specific period in every Islamic year. It starts on the 8<sup>th</sup> of 12 according to the Islamic calendar. It also lasts for about 5 to 6 days. Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam, which means it has to be carried out at least once in Muslims' lives. However, this pillar is mandatory for those Muslims who can financially and physically perform it. It is not because its cost is high but because it needs to be done in a very specific way which is at the Kaaba (the house of Allah) in Mecca (a city in Saudi Arabia).

To perform Hajj, there are well-known points for Muslims in each region that Hajj starts. In these points, Muslims should be wearing the appropriate cloths to make the sacred rite for Hajj.



## Journey of Hajj



(Islamicity 2022)



## The dressing code of Hajj

The dressing code of Hajj is specific for men which called Ihram. Ihram must not have any sewn parts. Ihram is “a special white garment consisting of two seamless sheets or toweling fabric.” (Across 2022).

The purpose of Ihram clothing is to show the equality of islam, and to highlight that Allah does not treat one over another from their appearance, colour or even people’s positions (Prince, King or pauper). Allah treats all people the same and favourite the worshipper over non-worshipper.



(Daily Sun 2022)



(Meduim 2019)

There is no dressing code for women in Hajj as long as it covers all parts of body, except the hands and the face. Nonetheless, most women wear black or white colours Abaya or hijab clothing (Across 2022).



(Al Jazeera 2015)



## Eid Al-Adha

This Eid is the greater Eid, which follows the of Hajj. In this Eid Muslims sacrifice an animal which could be a sheep, goat, camel or cow (Noor 2020). This sacrifice is mandatory for those who has done Hajj in the same year. Other muslims can sacrifice if they wish and if they can afford it. This sacrifice is called Qurban.

The Qurban meat then should be divided into 3 portions equally (Muslim Aid 2022):

- 1-  $\frac{1}{3}$  for the person who has sacrificed.
- 2-  $\frac{1}{3}$  for friends and extended family.
- 3-  $\frac{1}{3}$  for people indeed (donating).

## How to Celebrate Eid al-Adha

After Fajir and Eid prayers, people start their sacrificing, either by them self or hiring specialists. Of course, this sacrificing must be on the islamic way. Indeed, all food that Muslims eat must be halal.

After Qurban is divided, people start share the meats and invites each other for celebrations which include cooking, BBQ and small gifts for children.



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