

## ISLAMIC FESTIVALS MARK JOY OF RIGHTEOUS DAYS

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Like many other religious groups, Muslims all over the world have their own festivals. The Islamic term for a festival is the Arabic word Eid. In Islam, there are two main different religious festivals occurring in two different months of the lunar calendar. The first is called Eid Al-Fitr or the festival of fast breaking, and the second is called Eid Al-Adha or the festival of sacrifice.

Muslims observe the lunar calendar which is based on the orbiting of the moon around the Earth. This calendar has 12 months. Each month consists of either 29 or 30 days with a total of 353 to 355 days in a lunar year which make it 11 or 12 days less than the solar calendar. Therefore, there is no fixed date for the Eid based on the solar calendar.

For Muslims, the Eid is an occasion of spirituals and social joy and happiness. Spiritually, each Eid comes after the fulfillment of one of the main acts of worship in Islam. Eid Al-Fitr comes after Ramadan, the fasting month, and Eid Al-Adha comes after the fulfillment of the Pilgrimage duty. Both acts are undertaken for the sake of the fulfillment of God's commands.

Socially, Muslims exchange visits and gifts, the poor receive money and food from the wealthy, children get new toys, new clothes, gifts and other goods. Generally, these two days are covered with the spirit of peace, love and mercy.

The morning of each Eid day starts of a prayer in congregation (normally performed after sunrise in the mosque) followed by a sermon. After the sermon, the believers spend the Eid day by exchanging visits and invitations.

The festival of fast breaking, or Eid Al-Fitr, is celebrated on the first day of the tenth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. This month is called Shawwal, and it comes right after Ramadan. This year Eid Al-Fitr is this week, on the birth of the new moon.

The festival of Eid Al-Adha is celebrated on the 10th day of Thul-Hijja, the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The sacrifice aspect is to honor our forefather, the prophet Abraham. On this day, Muslims are urged to slaughter a lamb or sheep, eat some of its meat and distribute the rest to friends and needy families.

In West Virginia, the Muslim community usually gathers in the Charleston headquarters of the Islamic Association of West Virginia. Muslims from West Virginia and neighboring states head toward Charleston to pray and socialize together in celebrating this very important religious occasion. The festival starts with a prayer followed by a sermon.

After that, everybody shakes hands and hugs warmly congratulating fellow Muslims of the Eid. Then the congregation gathers for a group lunch where every family or individual brings a dish or something to eat and share the food with the rest of the congregation. The celebration also includes special programs normally prepared for children such as games and fun activities. In the afternoon and the evening of the Eid day, members exchange home visits congratulating and sharing the merriment and joy of these happy and righteous days.

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