

# Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Adha is one of the most important holidays in Islam. This festival marks the day the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) showed his willingness to sacrifice his son Isma'il (Ishmael) when God commanded him to do so. Eid al-Adha follows a lunar calendar and therefore takes place approximately 11 days earlier each year. In 2021, Eid al-Adha will take place on July 19<sup>th</sup>. (Note: because the new moon may be sighted earlier or later in specific locations, it can be difficult to decisively pinpoint the date of Eid al-Adha on U.S. calendars.) Some Muslims in other countries may choose to celebrate based upon observations of the moon as seen from Saudi Arabia.

## History of Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Adha is also known as the Feast of the Sacrifice. According to the Qur'an, Ibrahim had a dream in which God appeared and told him to sacrifice his son Isma'il. Ibrahim was tempted by the Devil, who told him not to make this sacrifice, but Ibrahim decided to do so anyway. At the last moment, however, God intervened and told Ibrahim not to sacrifice his son and that Ibrahim's dream was sent to him to test his faith. God gave Ibrahim a lamb that he sacrificed in Ismail's place. Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son is celebrated as a testament to his faith in God.

A version of this story appears in the Jewish Torah and the Christian Old Testament. In these versions, however, Ibrahim is commanded to sacrifice Isaac, the son he had with his wife Sarah, instead of Isma'il, Ibrahim's son with Hagar.

## Observance of Eid al-Adha

Muslims observe Eid al-Adha in a variety of ways. In Muslim countries, the day is usually celebrated as a public holiday. Around the world, Muslim households sacrifice a lamb, goat, or occasionally a larger animal like a cow or camel as a reminder of the sacrifice Ibrahim was prepared to make. A third of this meat is eaten with people's families, a third is given to friends, and a third is given to the poor. Those who cannot sacrifice an animal due to legal restrictions on animal sacrifice, or who prefer to provide meat to those in need, may donate the equivalent amount of money to a charitable organization or ask a charitable organization to perform the sacrifice and distribute the meat for them.

In addition to this ritual of sacrificing and giving out the meat, Muslims observe Eid al-Adha by going to the mosque for a special prayer. This communal prayer, which is followed by a sermon, takes place the morning of Eid day and is called *Salat al-Eid*.

Muslims usually dress in their best clothes on Eid al-Adha (often new clothes are purchased for this occasion, particularly for children) and spend the day visiting with friends and family. In the United States, communities often rent halls, parks, or fairgrounds and hold activities for children, including rides, games, face painting, and serve food and drinks.

Eid al-Adha falls during the *hajj*, the annual pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. According to Islamic teachings, every Muslim who is physically and financially able is expected to make the *hajj* at least once in their lives; doing so is one of the Five Pillars of Islam (the five requirements to their faith that all Muslims are expected to fulfill).

## Scheduling

Since Eid al-Adha is such a significant holiday, many Muslims may wish to take off work on this day. Invite

your employees to share how they personally observe Eid al-Adha and what practices they have that should be respected during the holiday. If you are doing business in an office that is based in a Muslim majority country, you should also be proactive about finding out whether that office is open on the Eid.

Eid al-Adha is determined using the lunar calendar, so its date changes each year. Supervisors should be alert and check the date of Eid al-Adha in advance. Eid al-Adha is based on the sighting of the new moon. Some Muslims use modern astronomy to determine the date of Eid al-Adha; others wait until an official announcement is made by the Saudi Ministry of Civil Service when the new moon is sighted in Mecca; and others may follow a local moon sighting. To avoid scheduling conflicts, supervisors can circulate the holiday dates in advance or program them into online meeting tools.

Muslim employees who wish to go on *hajj* may request a longer leave of absence in order to make this pilgrimage. Employers should work with their employees to determine how this request may fit into work obligations and be flexible around providing this accommodation when possible.

### **Greetings for Eid al-Adha**

If you would like to recognize Eid al-Adha with your colleges and friends, you can say, “Eid Mubarak,” which means “have a blessed Eid.”

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