

FESTIVALS



There are two authentic Islamic festivals annually: *'Id ul Fitr* and *'Id ul Adha*.

'Id ul Fitr

This is a celebration of the completion of the month of fasting in *Ramadan*, and is on the first day of the next month, *Shawwal*. It is an occasion of great joy, mixed with a tinge of sadness at the passing of the blessed month of *Ramadan*.

The day begins with a light meal, after which the family will go to a special *'Id prayer*. If the weather is not too cold or wet, this prayer may be held outdoors, in a field or park. Otherwise, it will be in the mosque. After the prayer, the *Imam* (who leads the prayer) gives a short talk.

People wear their best clothes for *'Id*. Young people particularly delight in buying new clothes especially for *'Id* day, if their families can afford it.

After prayer the rest of the days is spent in visiting friends and relatives. Everyone will try to serve special food; as Muslims come from every race and nationality, the foods served on that day will reflect the particular cultural background of the family.

Ramadan is a month when the giving of charity is particularly encouraged. On *'Id* day a special charity is distributed amongst the poor and needy, known as *Zakat ul Fitr*. This charity is to enable the poor and the needy to share the joy of *'Id*.

'Id ul Adha

This is on the 10th day of the month of *Dhul Hijjah* (followed by three further days of celebration called *Tashriq*). It is at this time that the pilgrimage to Makkah culminates for the millions completing the annual *Hajj*.

This celebration commemorates the willingness of Prophet *Ibrahim* (Abraham) to sacrifice his oldest son, *'Isma'il* (Ishmael). Allah was pleased that *Ibrahim* and *Ismail* were willing to obey His command, and so ordered that a lamb

should be sacrificed instead of *'Isma'il*.

Just as in *'Id ul Fitr*, there is a special *'Id* prayer in the morning. After the prayer every family arranges to have an animal slaughtered, such as a sheep, goat, cow or camel. The meat of the sacrificed animal is shared amongst relatives, neighbours and the poor.

People again wear their best clothes. During the three days people try to visit as many of their relatives, neighbours and friends as possible.

Other occasions

During the last ten days of *Ramadan* there is a special night called *Lailatul Qadr* (The Night of Decrees). The *Qur'an* describes this night as being better than a thousand months. It is a night which many Muslims try to spend in prayer, seeking the pleasure of *Allah*. The exact night is not known, other than it is on an odd-numbered night within the last ten days of *Ramadan*.

Although there are other occasions in the calendar of historical or cultural significance to Muslims, they do not form a part of *Islam*.

Absence from school or work

Religious holidays for Muslims amount to only four days per year. In accordance

with section 39 (2) of 1944 Education Act, headteachers should allow Muslim pupils to be absent from school on these days. Some education authorities with sizable Muslim populations include these two Muslim festivals within the holidays for the schools under their control.

Employers should show sensitivity towards their employees, and ensure that they are able to take leave on these days, as they form an integral part of their religious practices.

If you have any queries, you may put them in writing to The Muslim Educational Trust, who will try to help if possible.