

**Religious events: celebrating Eid-al-Fitr as a family.**

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## **Chapter**

### **Title: Religious Events: Celebrating Eid al-Fitr as a family**

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#### **Introduction:**

We are all different from the foods we eat, to the clothes we wear to the events we attend, however despite these obvious differences, there are times and certain events when we come together. One such unique event that brings millions of individuals, families, communities, and even nations together, everywhere, every year is the celebration of Eid. Whether you see this as a religious obligation, ritual or just a general form of festivity, this event has been observed and celebrated for over 1400 years. Quite outstanding when you consider that 1.6 billion human beings (23.3% of the total world's population according to Statista.com) affiliate themselves with the religion in which this is practiced, Islam.

More interesting though is how the event is often celebrated in different formats, from location to location, across the globe, but the fundamental concept has remained the same. People from all backgrounds, social and economic status, languages, traditions, cultures and ways of life come together, as one, devoting themselves in a month-long practice of 'fasting', known as Ramadan.

To understand the link to family and the practices of Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr we must first look at the role of family in Islam. In Marks' (2004) study one interviewee stated that Muslims are dedicated to family and there is an inseparable commitment between faith and family in Islam. Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr are widely known as important religious events in the Muslim faith which will be explored throughout this chapter.

## **Ramadan**

Ramadan marks when Allah gave the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) the Qur'an and is observed through the abstinence of eating or drinking during daylight hours in 2020 this was as long as 19 hours in Oslo, Norway but has been up to 22 hours (Statista, 2020). 'Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam. A key objective of fasting increase in taqwa (closeness to God), and to engender a sense of gratitude, self-discipline and self-improvement, at both an individual and community level' (The Muslim Council of Britain, 2020a, p2). During Ramadan Muslims have two meals; 'Suhoor' which is taken before sunrise, and 'Iftar' after sunset, both of which are a social occasion. Muslims are encouraged to break their fast with family, friends and their wider community. During Ramadan, the Muslim community take part in prayer 'taraweeh' at Mosques and spiritual talks within the community. Eid-al-Fitr is a celebration to end the month of fasting and begins with a congregational prayer in mosques or parks and ends in a social celebration of the whole community. The wider community is also an important part of Muslim life, for example at some Muslim weddings there can be over 500 guests in attendance encompassing family, friends and the wider community. The connection to not only family but the wider community is an important part of the Muslim faith.

## **Eid al-Fitr**

As with any commitment, the rewards for observing such practice leads to a celebration. The Eid al-Fitr celebration marks the end of the month when Muslims celebrate a successful Ramadan of fasting and worship. Eid al-Fitr, also known as the "Festival of Breaking the Fast", is a religious holiday celebrated by all Muslims.

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan and it falls on Shawwal which is the month that follows Ramadan on the Islamic calendar (note this is different to the Gregorian calendar). The event represents the breaking of fasting month. Eid al-Fitr is well known for giving charity to those in need, family and friends gathering, and celebrating the accomplishment of the previous month (Al-Hajieh, Redhead, & Rodgers, 2011). This chapter unpacks Eid celebrations in the context of family, family heritage and family practices.

The whole experience from the beginning of the fasting month, Ramadan, to the night the moon is sighted for Eid ul Fitr to the actual day of the celebration is a whole family affair, bringing together multiple generations. During this period, many families spend a great portion of the time interacting, worshipping, and eating together as a unit.

### ***Events and Family***

Events, family, and community have been intertwined throughout history, Bowdin (et al 2011) explains that we celebrate the “benchmarks” of our lives such as weddings, births, deaths, etc. Shone and Parry (2013) agree that events have played an important role in society since records began. They provide a reason to celebrate and come together with those in our families and social groups. Getz (2007) argues that many events we hold today are rooted in religion and tradition and were a family occasion which often included the wider community. Some of the events celebrated in present day are clearly linked to religion whilst others are more muted but their origins but still lie within religion or tradition. Raj, Rashid, and Walter (2017) support this view believing that the religious service is now frequently followed by a reception or celebration, neither of which would happen without its religious predecessor.

For example, a Christening is often followed by a party at a local venue with food and entertainment, this event would be unlikely to take place without the Christening itself which is a religious event. There are now more events than ever available to suit personal interests however, it is argued that those classified as personal events still largely involve family and friends (Bowdin et al, 2011) and events have always been and continue to be a reason to come together with family and friends, to socialise and share in special moments. Crompton and McKay (1997), Foster and Robinson (2010) and Moss (2014) identified from their research that people attend events to spend time with known social groups and for external interaction and socialisation. Thus, supporting the idea that events offer a community in which to socialise and celebrate.

### ***Events and community***

The term 'community' has changed over time and in order to understand the importance of community in events which are part of the Islamic calendar we must understand the current definition. Raj, Rashid, and Walters (2017) highlight this change in the definition of community, in the past community referred to those in a geographic location however, now it is based on interest communities which are rooted in other characteristics such as ethnicity, religion or social interests. Rusu and Kantola (2017) suggest that during times of celebration or events, communities can be formed amongst those participants and that the celebrative communities are brought together by the cumulative power of rituals/tradition. Suggesting we may now form communities based on our shared experience of an event. Palmer and Lloyd (1972, cited in Bowdin et al, 2011) add to this stating that the UK has many traditions which date back centuries but also new traditions which have been brought to the UK via immigration, adding to the rich tapestry of events, and as a result creating communities.

Shone and Parry (2013) discuss that historically our need to attend events was for the social aspect, for interaction, integration, support from others and the community. Raj, Rashid, and Walter (2017) state that events are all about the vast and varied communities of people of the world. We can see that although the definition of community has changed, from those in a local area to those with shared interests/religions/cultures. However, being part of a community is still important to us as people and that our communities of choice influence in our decision making.

### ***Family as an influence on attending events***

Bowdin et al (2011) explores that there is mixture of internal and external motivations when participating in an event, for example external factors include family, reference groups and culture, whilst internal factors include intrinsic personal reward. Both internal and external factors can be identified in the participation of Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr, people participate as part of their personal faith, but they are encouraged by their reference group and family.

Raj and Griffin (2015), argue that the motivations to participate in religious tourism, events, pilgrimage is entirely personal and made up a mixture of motivations. Raj and Griffin (2015) state that the events content itself, the community and social aspect are again common but in addition spirituality and esteem in the religious community are also identified as motivators for participation in religious events or tourism.

Foster and Robinson (2010) argue that events create an opportunity for family members to bond with one another and they engender pride and create a cohesive and connected community. Foster and Robinson (2010) concluded that the top two reasons to attend an event were to bond with family and to socialise. Moss (2014) agrees that family togetherness is a motivation for people to attend along with cultural explorations and group affiliation.

Moss (2014) further discusses that we should consider people's inner world, their identity and personality and the social world of the event attendee as this may influence their choice to attend. This can be complex and encompass many different motivational factors, for example, personal reason, social group, etc. Uysal, Gahan, and Martin, (1993) support this and suggest that we have personal and interpersonal motivations when attending/participating in an event. However, again in their study they also identified that family togetherness and social cohesion within the community are integral motivators. The reasons for people to participate events are complex and personal, but it is clear the need for family togetherness, socialisation and to feel part of a community are important factors.

Marks (2004) explored the importance of family and religion, identifying that family is centered within religion and that religious practices demonstrate and reinforce the sacred place of faith and family at the centre of life. Marks (2004) also found that family religious practice offers family connections and closeness. As previously discussed Marks (2004) identified that family is at the centre of Muslim life, this importance of family and the opportunity to bond with family and community explains why there is such significance placed upon participating in both Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr.

From studying the various sources, Family, reference groups and personal beliefs are important motivations for why people engage and attend events, specifically religious events. This is especially evident in the Muslim faith, where there is a strong and deep-rooted connection within families but also with the wider community. This is prevalent in the interview from Marks' (2004) 'there is an inseparable commitment between faith and family is Islam'.

This can be seen for example during Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr where it is common to share meals and experiences with family and friends and invite those in your community who may be alone to share in your family's experiences and meals. This connection and closeness to family and the community certainly encourages participation in both Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. As it is an opportunity to not only celebrate but immerse oneself in faith, culture, family, and community which have been identified as common motivators to participate in events.

### **The build-up (Ramadan):**

Reward often succeeds hard work and effort that has been exerted to achieve an end goal. To fully understand and appreciate Eid al-Fitr as a celebration we must look at the events that take place prior to this.

Islam is built on five pillars with each pillar representing a unique form of worship, through which the believer builds his relationship with the Creator. Of all the pillars of Islam, none is more special than Siyaam, better known as fasting. Generally fasting can be observed anytime throughout the year, however there is a specific month in the Islamic calendar that is dedicated to this pillar, known as the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the fourth pillar of Islam in terms of importance in a hierarchical sense. This pillar became obligatory on/to Muslims during the 2nd year after the Hijrah (migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah). It was revealed in the 15th year of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) mission to call people to Islam through these words as recorded in the Qur'an:



*O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqun (the pious). (Fasting) for a fixed number of days, but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number (should be made up) from other days. And as for those who can fast with difficulty, (i.e., an old man, etc.), they have (a choice either to fast or) to feed a poor person (for every day). But whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him. And that you fast, it is better for you if only you know.*

(Quran 2:183–84; Khan 1971)

Ramadan is one of the most celebrated events worldwide amongst Muslims (Bialkowski, Etebari, & Wisniewski, 2010). Fasting during the month of Ramadan is prescribed and exhorted as one of the Five Pillars of Islam—a foundation of the Muslim faith (Alghafli et al. 2014a). As per Islamic law and teachings, the month of Ramadan or the act of fasting is compulsory to all those who fall under the banner of “accountability” which in this sense means post-puberty. However, there are some exemptions that include those who are ill, elderly, pregnant, breastfeeding, menstruating, or traveling are not obligated to completely abstain from food, drink, and sexual activity while fasting, but all other Muslims are exhorted to engage in the Ramadan fast (Alghafli et al. 2014b).

Ramadan, for many practicing Muslims, is the most sacred time of the year, a time that is devoted to enriching spirituality in several ways, including reading the Quran, saying additional prayers (Salat), and reciting supplications (Ziaee et al. 2006, pp. 409, 411). Islamic teachings are primarily derived from the Quran, and the compilations of the sayings (Hadith) of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

*Every action a son of Adam does shall be multiplied—a good action by ten times its value, up to 700 times.*

The importance of fasting is further strengthened when by the Creator declared that there are two occasions of joy for a fasting person: one when he breaks his fast, and the other when he meets his Lord, and the (bad) breath (of a fasting person) is better in the sight of Allah than the fragrance of musk. (Malik n.d., 18:58)

Cultural and religious beliefs have considerable influence on people's lives, behaviour and decision making (Al-Ississ, 2010). The Muslim holy month of Ramadan which is of great importance to Muslims across the world as it features a heightened sense of spirituality and greater dedication toward deeds that secure a favourable afterlife (Wasiuzzaman and Al-Musehel, 2017). During the month of Ramadan people experience a series of emotions; although fasting promotes patience, devotion and worship, it also intensifies emotions and senses and often causes changes in their daily routine. Breakfast is taken before the morning call for prayers and the breaking of the fast is usually a feast after sundown, traditionally by eating dates and drinking water. Due to this, shopping and other socio-religious activities are usually carried out after sundown. The Ramadan month being a blessed month for Muslims is associated with positive mood which accompanies positive emotions such as optimism and happiness (Wasiuzzaman and Al-Musehel, 2017).

Striving to better themselves and become closer to God, participants in this event abstain from sin in order to obtain a higher status. Ramadan is the month of worship, the month of helping the needy through charity and the month of compulsory fasting. During this time, Muslims may not eat or drink during daylight hours.

This can be challenging depending on which continent one is observing the fast. This year, Muslims residing in Oslo, Norway and in Helsinki, Finland, fasted for a total of 20, Whereas the shortest recorded fast was in Wellington, New Zealand, Buenos Aires, Argentina, Cape Town, South Africa, Canberra, Australia, and in Santiago, Chile was 11.5 hours respectively. The total fasting time here in the UK was for 18.5 hours (Al Jazeera News, 2020).

Ideally, Ramadan serves as a religious catalyst for individuals to refine their behaviours and improve their relationships with both Allah and those with whom they interact most closely, including and especially, family.

### **Moon sighting:**

Many important religious events are observed by Muslims around the world such as the Islamic New Year (or Maal-Hijrah), the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Eid-al-Fitr, Eid-al-Adha and the holy month of Ramadan (Wasiuzzaman and Al-Musehel, 2017). The end of Ramadan and the arrival of Eid al-Fitr is marked by the sighting of the new moon. Unlike the Gregorian calendar which is based on the calculations and movements of the sun, the Islamic calendar is based on the calculations and creation of the new moon, the Lunar calendar. The Islamic calendar is used in Muslim countries and by Muslims worldwide to date events and holidays. It is a lunar calendar composed of twelve lunar months a year (Lee & Hamzah, 2010). The Gregorian calendar does not include Muslim events because they depend on the sighting of the moon, and therefore the day and month changes in the Gregorian calendar each year (Chowdhury & Mostari, 2015). The lunar Hijrah calendar begins with Muharram, which is a holy month for Muslims, but only the 10th day (Ashura) is the most sanctified among its days (Satt, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

A large component of both Ramadan and the celebration of Eid al-Fitr depend upon the arrival of the new moon or better known as the sighting of the new moon. Ramadan begins with the sighting of the first crescent of a new moon the ninth month and ends with the sighting of the first crescent in the next month. On the night of the 29th day of fasting (Ramadan), the crescent will be observed closely. If it is visible, then the next day will be the day of fast breaking, Eid al-Fitr; if it is invisible due to cloudy weather, the fasting will continue and Eid al-Fitr will be postponed for one day (Zhongguo Yisilan 2007, pp. 285, 734-735). It is important to note that The Islamic calendar also known as the Hijri, Lunar Hijri, Muslim or Arabic calendar, is a lunar calendar consisting of 29 or 30 days, in 12 lunar months in a year giving a total of 354 or 355 days in an Islamic year.

In comparison to the Gregorian calendar, which consists of 28–31 days in a month, therefore a regular Gregorian year consists of 365 days, but in certain years known as leap years, an additional day is added to February. In retrospect, if the Crescent Moon is visible shortly after sunset on the evening of day 29, the following day is the first day of the new month. If no sighting is made, a 30th day is added to the current month, which is then followed by the first day of the subsequent month.

Muslims in most countries rely on news of an official sighting of the new Moon, rather than looking at the sky themselves. Some follow a set lunar calendar, while others use astronomical observations to announce the arrival of the new Moon. There are also those who mark the new month only after personally seeing a crescent Moon in the sky (BBC News, 2017). In many western countries such as the UK, depending on the time of year and forecast of the weather, it is generally quite difficult to view the moon with the naked eye and therefore Imams (leaders) from certain regions and localities will get together and with the

help a number of observatory reports (astronomical calculations that give accurate calculations of the positioning of the moon and whether it has been sighted or not) will be studied in light of Islamic guidance and law. Once in agreement, a decision is made, and communities are informed.

According to the teachings of Islam, countries and regions are to observe the sighting in their local vicinity and not follow what is being done at a different part of the world. For example, in the past decade the number of people celebrating Eid al-Fitr on two separate days has become a common practice. This is due to some individuals following the moon sighting in Saudi Arabia and not necessary the UK regardless of whether it has been sighted here or not. There are however some exceptions to the rule, and this includes observing the situation in Africa as this is the nearest region to Europe. In this instance if the moon has not been sighted in the UK then the nearest country that falls in the region is looked at for further guidance, in this case Morocco.

### **Preparations for Eid al-Fitr:**

Once the moon has been sighted, and confirmation of Eid al-Fitr for the following day has been confirmed, many families begin to celebrate immediately. This is like many other celebrations across the world such as Christmas Eve, etc. Celebrating this night is different in different parts of the world. In countries such as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, this is celebrated equally as a special occasion. In such countries this night is known as ‘Chaad Raat’ or ‘night of the moon’. Families start to gather just before sunset on roof tops and terraces, waiting eagerly to catch a glimpse of the moon. Once sighted, many families set about their preparation for Eid al-Fitr by going out to markets, city centres, shopping centres,

etc., where they engage with family and friends, an evening of festivity by buying clothes, jewellery, applying hennas as well as bangles. In many parts of the UK where there is a strong contingent of South Asian communities, family and community events are held where people come together to shop, eat and socialise which is often quite difficult due to the time constraints and exhaustion during fasting.

Community centres are generally set out with a variety of stalls, selling anything from bangles to food, and henna artists waiting to apply their designs to customers. Toward the last few days of the month, consumer spending increases further in preparation for Eid al-Fitr (Al-Ississ, 2010) and this results in an increase in sales and revenue especially for grocery stores and clothes shops and other necessities.

In most homes, the evening is filled with a vast amount of cooking in preparation for Eid al-Fitr and in anticipation for the arrival of family and friends the next day. Women and small children apply henna on their hands and arms. Children are generally allowed to stay up till late to soak in the excitement of Eid al-Fitr.

### **Eid al-Fitr: the day of celebration**

As established, Eid al-Fitr is celebrated by Muslims across the globe at the end of their fasting month. This day is also widely popular as the day for distributing their blessing in the form of an obligatory alms (giving to others) to the poor and less fortunate people prior to the performing of Eid al-Fitr mass, as well as a time to gather with family (Satt, 2017, p.3).

A key element to note here is that regardless of where you celebrate Eid al-Fitr across the world, there are key components that everyone must follow regardless of tradition and culture. These components form the Islamic principles and guidance of how Eid al-Fitr should be carried out and observed. This Islamic way of celebration is unique and what binds the 1.5 billion Muslims across the world in unity and a sense of brotherhood. Some of the key tasks carried out include:

- Getting up early to start the day ahead with complete focus and dedication
- To have a bath, which is often seen as a symbolic way of cleansing oneself from past sins and burden
- To use the siwak/ miswak (a teeth cleaning twig made from the *Salvadora persica* tree) to brush teeth as a form of sunnah
- Applying fragrance to oneself
- To wear one's best clothes (not necessarily new clothes), however the key message throughout the whole month and Ramadan and in one's life is not to engage in a lavish show of extravagance
- To eat something sweet (such as dates) before departing for the `Eid prayer
- To go for the prayer early, preferably on foot (a special set of prayers are performed on Eid al-Fitr that are required to be performed in order to fully enjoy and engage with the true joy of the event)
- To give Sadaqat al-Fitr before leaving for the `Eid prayer.
- To choose a different route when returning from the `Eid prayer.

(Mushahid, 2012)

Some of the above points will be explored and explained in more detail as the chapter progresses.

One of the key messages from the whole month of Ramadan that should be carried forward throughout the whole year is giving alms and charity to the needy and understanding the struggles they face during difficult times such as not having food or drink or money, etc. This is further confirmed by sermons by Imams telling followers to sacrifice money, share food with Muslims in need, something known as Zakat ul Fitr, a practice of generosity and looking after the less privileged.

Sadaqat al-Fitr is special alms given on the day of `Eid al-Fitr to the poor so that they too may celebrate Eid al-Fitr. Due to its importance and what it is designed to do, it is crucial that this sadaqatul fitr is sent to the poor and needy as early as possible so that they could also participate in the Eid al-Fitr celebrations. The amounts announced in masjids (place of worship) are usually calculated based on the minimum payable. However, one should endeavour to pay more based on one's affordability (Mushahid, 2012).

The Salat al-Eid prayer and sermon for Eid al-Fitr is offered in local mosques by the Imam (Leader) and it consists of a cycle of prayers followed by a sermon relevant to the community and audience talking about the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also re-emphasising the positive message of Eid al-Fitr, community cohesion, positivity, wellbeing and family ties (Soundvision, 2020)

The Salat al-Eid prayers are attended by all members of the community from all generation creating a great sense of community, belonging and togetherness. As the Salat al-Eid prayer marks the end of Ramadan amongst the attendees there is a great sense of achievement and happiness as everyone is dressed in their best attire, perfumed and spirits are high. (Independent, 2020).



The Salat al-Eid prayer and sermon can last between 30-60 minutes and most typically would take place in a designated area such as a mosque or a large space. In communities where the mosque cannot accommodate the attendees the prayers have taken place in large green spaces, stadiums and even supermarket car parks. (Independent, 2020). Once the Salat al-Eid prayer and sermon is completed the Imam greets all the attendees with the words, 'Eid Mubarak' which means 'Eid Blessings'. After the Imam has addressed all the attendees, the attendees greet each other with hugs and handshakes while saying the words 'Eid Mubarak'. Once everyone has greeted each other attendees disperse to their homes to enjoy the remainder of the day with family and friends (Soundvision, 2020)

After prayer, they embrace one another, forgive one another freely and, as a result enjoy the flow of happiness, joy and peace. They pray not just for themselves but for the rest of the Muslims and for the rest of the mankind. This divine unity through the belief in one Allah is so precious that money cannot buy it. So Eid al-Fitr is training for unity that Allah has ordered Muslims to have (Al Quran 3.103)

The joy then continues to other levels. Muslims prepare nice foods for the family and then invite other friends and families to share the food and happiness. We share our foods with our neighbours regardless of their faith as a nice gesture of sharing happiness, peace and harmony. In the evening, family and friends get together and so do other people of the community to affirm those social relationships which are the heart of the traditional way of living. The children specially like this part of the day; in fact, they anxiously wait for it because, as a custom, all the elders on the day of the Eid al-Fitr have to give some money to those younger than themselves.

Although there are practices which are central to Eid al-Fitr, there are different nuances depending on the location. The following case studies offer insight into the various celebrations and traditions of Eid al-Fitr from across the globe.

### **Case studies:**

#### **Kosovo (Eastern Europe)**

The tradition of Eid celebration in Kosovo whether that of al-Fitr or al-Adha, mainly takes its influence from Turkey. The Ottoman Empire ruled Kosovo for around 500 years, from 1455 to 1912, during which time the majority of the people were converted into Islam (Judah, 2008).

Especially for Eid al-Fitr, (Fitr Bajram in Albanian) one of the first tasks is to give Zakat (obligatory charity). This normally happens during the Holy month of Ramadan, specifically on the day 27th Day of Ramadan, also known as Laylat al-Qadr. The rewards of giving on this day are believed to be greater than in any other day of the year. The tradition in Kosovo is to give Zakat either directly to a family or person whom you have no close family connections with or sent to the local mosque, which is then distributed to those in need. Eid al-Adha ('Kurban Bajram in Albanian') is another celebration in Islam where people are given the opportunity to fulfil one of the Five Pillars of Islam by going to Haj and sacrificing a lamb to then share the meat with the poor or with seven different neighbours. Both, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are also special occasions that enable people to find forgiveness and mend broken relationships or friendships.

Preparation for Eid in Kosovo begins roughly one week or several days before its actual celebration day. Preparation within families begins with the most challenging task, deep cleaning of the house. No home is left without such a clean before sunrise on the day of Eid. This normally involves washing carpets, curtains, house doors, cabinets and other more common cleans such as washing bedsheets, dusting every inch of the house, Hoovering, window cleaning, etc.

This also involves washing your best clothes or buying new ones, so you look at your best on the day of Eid, because a lot of family and friends will visit you and you will visit them. Then comes baking of desserts and sweets such as baklava, different types of cakes, rice pudding, tiramisu, kadaif and many more, which are made to share with other family members, neighbours and other visitors that may visit you on the day of Eid.

On the eve of Eid, the excitement builds and you still see everyone rushing or being active in some form or another putting their finishing touches to whatever preparation they are making in order to finish everything as early as possible so you can catch up on some sleep before rising early on the big day. However, not many manage to sleep much; the children due to excitement, partly because they have new clothes to wear and partly because they will receive gifts and money from family and other relatives. The adults, due to not completing the finishing touches to either baking, cleaning or ironing until the late hours of the night.

The next morning everyone cleans themselves. The family eats breakfast together and gets ready for going to Eid prayers at the local mosque. The tradition is that straight after prayers people visit the graves of those loved ones to greet them, say Eid Mubarak to them and say prayers for them, before going home to wish everyone else Eid Mubarak i.e. relatives, friends

and neighbours. This is done by visiting one another at each other's homes and eating a lot of sweet baking and desserts. Everyone then has lunch at home with their immediate families. Eid lunch is normally quite rich and large with three or four main dishes that have been prepared for the family.

This can be oven-baked rice with a whole chicken in the middle, oven-baked spinach pie ('pite me spanaq' in Albanian), which is a thick double layer pie with spinach and cottage cheese in the middle and stuffed cabbage ('sarme') or stuffed grape leaves ('dolma') both with minced meat, rice and herbs ', followed by several types of desserts. This then gives the family some resting time before either visiting other friends and relatives or welcoming other guests at home, all arranged on the day via telephone or other types of communication. Children and youth also use the day to go out with their friends for some pop and more desserts, while young adults wait until the evening when children are home to go out for celebrating with their friends and their young relatives. There is usually live music or some sort of entertainment going across different cities and towns until the late hours of the night, which ensure the big day goes with a bang.

### **UK and Pakistan (Europe and South Asia),**

The morning begins with strong aromas of spices that reach every corner of the house; these aromas are usually coming from the kitchen where the Eid al-Fitr feast is being prepared.

The morning generally tends to start straight after the morning prayer, Fajar. Everyone in the household aims to follow the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) by bathing, get dressed in their best clothes which are usually a kurta shalwar and anoint themselves in their best perfume and get ready to offer their morning Eid al-Fitr prayer at their local mosque, before leaving the house usually the head of the house offer prayers

(Nazar) over a sweet dish that has been prepared in the morning and in their prayers remember loved ones that have passed away. Once the prayers have been completed members of the household indulge in the sweet dish before leaving for the mosque. On arriving at the mosque multitudes of people can be seen in crisp new clothes. As soon as the Salat al-Eid (prayer) is over, special prayers are offered for a better future and the prosperity of Muslims. Then everyone embraces each other and the phrase Eid Mubarak, meaning Happy Eid, can be heard from all sides. This is the Islamic or purely religious aspect of the day.

Depending on location and tradition, special prayers are held in each households where close family members come together such as elders, uncles, cousins, children etc. to remember their loved ones who have passed away and to thank God for bestowing this special day. Once the prayer is carried out, food is distributed among the attendees. Freshly prepared dishes from the night before as well as those prepared early in the morning are presented to guests which generally include elements of breakfast and sweet dishes. However, depending on the number of households/ families involved, the process is repeated several times, therefore less food is consumed. This special gathering is generally carried out before the Eid al-Fitr prayer in mosque (Pakistan) or directly after the Eid prayer (UK). Once returning home, the next family celebration takes place. Usually, it is mid-day and most of the women and children in the households have changed into their new clothes and jewellery. The flurry of family and friends visiting each other's homes then takes place for the rest of the day; greeting, socialising and of course indulging in a variety of foods at each stop. Not quite a pub crawl but more of a foody stopover. In large families, siblings and their immediate families (children) will usually descend at their elders/ grandparents where the festivities tend to last the whole day.

## **Yemen (Middle East),**

Eid al-Fitr is truly one of those milestones in the year in which togetherness of family and friends is the essence. Eid al-Fitr preparations start within Ramadan with everyone preparing themselves in context of clothes, perfume and accessories. Many phone calls are made to family and friends both at home and abroad. Often conversations are about how Ramadan has been, talking about loved ones that are not going to be present at Eid al-Fitr and about the Eid al-Fitr day itself. Invites are given to local family members to come and spend time with the family on Eid al-Fitr and share the blessings. On the eve of Eid al-Fitr sweet dishes such as Baklava are prepared and the sweet aroma encompasses the house, fresh bread is left to prove, and various savoury dishes are prepared. Food itself is used as a catalyst for socialising on Eid al-Fitr, as it is a great talking point and engages all family members.

The morning of Eid al-Fitr, Lubaan (frankincense) is burnt around the house and women will wear traditional clothes such as jilbab or abaya (long dress). Men, traditionally usually wear sadaqat ul Fitr which is often complimented with a traditional scarf, known as a keffiyeh, which is often wore by men in the Middle East, either wrapped around the head or loosely draped around the back and shoulders. The look is completed with the finest perfume of either Rose or Aloeswood. Generally, Yemeni food is cooked and eaten after the main Eid al-Fitr prayers with family which often include lamb liver, eggs, fool, and fasolia (fasolada, fasoulada or sometimes fasolia, is a Greek, Mediterranean, and Cypriot soup of dry white beans, olive oil, and vegetables).

The remainder of the day is spent either visiting family and friends or vice versa. Visiting families and indulging in various foods and sweets. Family play a big part in society and culture, therefore often families will congregate at an elder's house, where everyone will

meet and spend the day. As the day progresses the men of the house tend to group with other males and the females of house group with other females to socialise and get into the spirit of Eid al-Fitr by sharing stories, food and even sometimes singing traditional songs. Gifts between family and friends are exchanged and these can vary from a box of traditional sweets, chocolates or even the latest perfume/aftershave. Food during the rest of the day will often comprise of is rice with lamb or chicken, zurbian, fish etc.

### **Somalia (Africa):**

The Eid-al-Fitr celebrations begin the day before when the whole house is cleaned from top to bottom and decorated in anticipation of the Eid al-Fitr celebrations. Special fragrance such as bakhoor (incense) is placed in specially designed ornaments such as dabqaad, also known as unsi or girgire, which are incense burners, or censer. It is commonly used throughout countries such as Somalia, Djibouti and Ethiopia. After following the prescribed guidelines for Eid al-Fitr, and returning from the Eid al-Fitr prayer in mosques, families will generally get together to have breakfast. This is known as laxoox with shaah (a form of crepe) with a side of either liver with other vegetables or suqaar (quick fried sautéed meat and vegetables). After breakfast and due to the intense heat of the day, families will tend to stay indoors and rest. In the late afternoon, families then get ready in their new attire and visit parks and funfairs as well as visiting family and friends. Men generally wear white thobes (known as jubbah in the Middle East), a long shirt from shoulders to ankles, whereas women tend to wear abayas. Meals prepared at home generally tend to consist of rice and meat with shigni (fresh spicy hot sauce), salad, and fruit.

**The message: achievement, compassion, and togetherness (unity):**

Fasting is not just about abstaining from food and drinks from dawn till sundown but also abstaining from vice activities, such as gambling, and devoting one's time to acts of piety and charity in order to acquire self-restraint (Seyyed et al., 2005). There are many different dimensions of Eid al-Fitr and how it is perceived by different communities across the globe. Although the overarching message of Eid-al-Fitr is that of closeness to God and reflecting on one's role in life and wider society. During Ramadan, parents and elders play a vital role in the way they behave and conduct themselves around the family and especially children. Fasting, praying, giving charity to the poor, treating everyone with love and respect, are just some of the acts carried out during these blessed days, however, should be the norm throughout one's life. As more time is spent amongst families, these characteristics are observed and taught more closely to younger members of the family. Families are able to spend more time together observing religious acts as well as setting and breaking the fast as a family unit around the dinner table. Social role theory would suggest that expectations about the future are influenced by the roles that men and women assume in society, and that these role expectations reflect culturally embedded gendered norms (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). In recent years many communities living in the western world seem to be shifting the way they celebrate their Eid al-Fitr evenings which is neither a purely Islamic nor a Western manner, but one that rather conforms to their own traditional cultures (Raza, 1991). The younger generation generally tend to spend their evenings with friends either by travelling to different cities, celebrating over a meal and other activities. The day is almost constructed in several different components adjoined together with Eid al-Fitr at its core. The morning is spent in the mosque with family and the local community. The afternoon is generally spent with family and the evening with friends. In other words, a time for family and friends and an opportunity to immerse oneself in the wider community.



### **The impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic on Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr:**

As discussed throughout this chapter, Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr are social occasions bringing together several generations from across the community. However, traditional celebrations came to a halt in 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic caused the UK government to place restrictions upon social interactions and places of worship. Dr Habib Naqvi (cited by NHS England 2020) that Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr were occurring in the projected UK peak of Covid-19 and therefore guidance in line with lockdown restrictions for both the Muslim community and NHS workers participating in Ramadan was created.

For the first time in many people's lifetime restrictions meant it was a very different Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr experience. The UK government and The Muslim Council of Britain produced specific guidance for a safe Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr experience. Public Health England (2020) stated "staying at home during Ramadan will play an important part in the nation's effort to slow the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19)".

Traditionally during Ramadan, Muslims undertake congregational prayers 'taraweeh' and Suhoor and Iftar shared with family, friends and the community. However, during 2020 Muslim's were encouraged by NHS England (2020), Public Health England (2020) and The Muslim Council of Britain (2020a) to conduct prayer at home as family congregation, to stream prayers and talks at home, find virtual means of connecting for Suhoor and Iftar and to plan both meals in advance to limit shopping trips. Public Health England (2020) also advised that should a fasting Muslim contract Covid-19 they may need to seek the advice of a medical professional as to whether to continue fasting.

For Eid-al-Fitr lockdown restrictions still hadn't been eased resulting in The Muslim Council of Britain (2020b) producing guidance for England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales (due to differing lockdown restrictions in each locality). The guidance encouraged Muslims to celebrate Eid-al-Fitr from home, conducting the special Eid-al-Fitr prayers at home or in parks in line with social distancing and exchanging gifts only by post and connecting virtually with family and friends.

This is a stark contrast to the normal family and community orientated prayers, meals and celebrations of Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr.

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