

Civilizations Exchange &
Cooperation Foundation



An Introduction to the Practice of Islam

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A guide developed to assist U.S. families hosting Muslim students.

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An Introduction to the Practice of Islam

The purpose of this manual is to help host families, students and organizations in the United States better understand many of the students coming from countries that have significant Muslim populations and why they may place so much importance on certain issues. To a large extent, the cultural behavior is influenced by the religious teachings, which differ from one region to another based on the cultural practices and interpretations of the religion.

This booklet will begin to introduce the reader to the basic principles of Islam, practices of Muslims, a brief history of Islam in America, and then touch upon some of the more sensitive issues that are raised as the exchange students begin their adventure in the United States and the host families open their homes and welcome a child into their lives.

Introduction to Islam and Muslims

What is Islam?

Islam literally means peace and submission to the will of Almighty God (**Allah**), the Creator of the universe, the heavens, the earth and everything in between. It provides a constant balance between the spiritual and the material life of the individual, as well as the community. Islam is not a new religion, but the final culmination and fulfillment of the same basic truths that God revealed to humanity through all of His Prophets from Adam to Mohammed, the last prophet after Jesus. Islam is not only a "religion," but it is a way of life symbolized by mercy, forgiveness and peace - with God, with oneself, and with the creations of God through submission and commitment to the guidance provided by God. A **Muslim** is the one who practices and adheres to Islam.

Islam shares with Judaism and Christianity many similarities due to the fact that Moses, Jesus and Mohammed (*peace and blessings be upon all of them*) are the descendents of Prophet and Patriarch Abraham through his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham built the Ka'ba; the first mosque on earth, which later became the center of the sacred city of Mekka toward which all Muslims face when they pray.

1.2 billion Muslims stem from all races, nationalities, colors and cultures across the globe from Asia to Africa and from Europe to America. Only one out of five Muslims is Arab. Sunni and Shi'a are the two main denominations/sects within Islam. **Sunni** compose about 90% of all Muslims and **Shi'a** compose about 10% of all Muslims. The major issue about which they disagree relates to who is eligible to become a successor of Prophet Mohammed. Sunni consider any righteous, pious and knowledgeable Muslim eligible to assume leadership of the community. Shi'a believe that only descendants of the Prophet's household are the rightful heirs to the spiritual leadership. The information in this guide touches upon issues that relate to Muslim students in general.

Allah:

Allah is the Arabic word for God and used by Arab Muslims and Christians alike. Among His many attributes are the Creator, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, Lord of the worlds, All-seeing, All-hearing, All-knowing, All-forgiving, and the Wise. Allah is referred to in the Qur'an before each chapter as Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful.

Prophet Mohammed, the Son of Abdullah (570 – 623 AD):

Prophet Mohammed was born 570 A.D. in Mecca, now known as Saudi Arabia, at a time when Christianity was not yet fully established in Europe. Since his father died before his birth and his mother shortly afterward, he was raised by his uncle from the respected tribe of Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, which impressed Khadjiah, the woman for whom he worked, so much that she proposed marriage to him when he was 20 years old and she was a widow of 40. He is described by historians as calm, kind, and meditative. He detested his society, which was steeped in ignorance and idol-worship. At the age of 40, after a long contemplation at the "Mountain of Light" near Mekka, he received the first revelation of the Qur'an from Allah through Archangel Gabriel. The angel instructed him that he had been chosen by Almighty Allah (God) to be His prophet and messenger and to deliver His message to mankind. The next 13 years of preaching the Qur'an in Mekka was met by rejection and resistance by the Mekkans. During that time, only a few believed in him as a prophet and messenger. He migrated with his followers and lived the next 10 years in Medina, which became the nucleus state of Islam. At the time of his death in 623 A.D. the greater part of Arabia was Muslim.

What is the Qur'an?



The Qur'an is the complete record of the exact words revealed by God through the Archangel Gabriel to Prophet Mohammed. The 114 chapters were dictated by the Prophet to his companions as they were revealed within a span of 23 years. The Qur'an has been preserved orally and in a written format until this day.



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The Qur'an is the principle source of guidance for Muslims' faith and everyday practices. It deals with all subjects including wisdom, doctrine, worship, and law. It provides guidance for a just society, proper human conduct and equitable economic principles. Its basic theme is the relation between God and His creatures. The Arabic language, as a medium of the Qur'an and the prayer liturgy, became a unifying factor among Muslims today. It is recited and chanted the same way in all parts of the world.

What is the Sunnah?

The term "sunnah" normally refers to the life of Prophet Mohammed, i.e. his sayings, actions or his approval of things that happened in his presence. It is the second source of guidance and Islamic law or "Shar'iah" after the Qur'an. Muslims are recommended to follow the actions, behavior and the manners of Prophet Mohammed in his private and public life.

The 5 Pillars of Islam:

The following 5 pillars are the framework of the Muslim life.

1 – *Shahadah* (Testimony of Faith)

There is no god worthy of worship except God and Mohammed is the messenger of God. This simple formula is pronounced by all the faithful and emphasizes that the only purpose of life is to serve and obey God and that this is achieved through the teachings and practices of the last Prophet, Mohammed.

2 – *Salah* (Prayer)

Salah is the name of the obligatory prayers, which are performed 5 times a day and are a direct link between the worshipper and God. The prayers are performed individually or in a congregation. They contain verses from the Qur'an, as well as personal supplications. They are performed at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall and thus determine the rhythm of the entire day.

3 – *Zakah* (Almsgiving)

In Islam, all things belong to God and wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust. The word Zakah has two meaning: "purification" and "growth." Setting aside a proportion for those in need, purifies our possessions and like the pruning of plants, this cutting back balances and encourages new growth. It is calculated as 2 1/2 % of your total annual income.

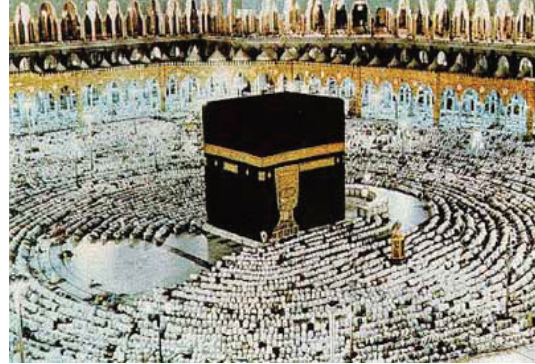
4 – *Sawm* (Fasting)

The obligatory fasting takes place during the month of Ramadan, the 9th month of the lunar calendar. All **able** Muslims fast from dawn to sunset - abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations with their spouses. Fasting has a physical and spiritual benefit of self-purification and self-restraint. By restraining oneself from indulging in worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person focuses on his/her purpose in life and remembers the countless

bounties of Almighty God. Some people are exempt from fasting during the month of Ramadan. You fall into this category if you are ill, pregnant and/or nursing, traveling, on your menstrual cycle or under a doctor's care and may be harmed by fasting.

5 – Hajj (Pilgrimage)

The annual Hajj is an obligation at least once in a lifetime for those who are physically and financially capable. More than 3 million people perform it annually coming from every corner of the world. The rite of Hajj, which originated at the time of the Patriarch, Prophet Abraham, takes place in "Zul - Hijjah," the 12th month of the lunar calendar and lasts 4 days. Pilgrims wear a simple garment made of special white cloth that strips away distinctions of class and culture, so that **all stand equal before God.**



so that **all stand equal before God.**

This act of worship provides a unique opportunity for people of different nations to meet one another. An example of the impact of this can be clearly seen in the life changes of Malcolm X upon his return from making Hajj and experiencing the brotherhood of all people worshipping Allah.

It is through this annual event, which began over 1400 years ago, that Muslims have an opportunity to exchange ideas, inventions and knowledge either before or after fulfilling the religious acts of worship.

Islam in America

Some historians document the presence of Muslims on the American continent even before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. Many of the African slaves, who were brought to North America, were Muslims.

At the end of the 19th century Muslims migrated from Syria, which at that time consisted of the areas currently known as Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Syria, due to the persecution of the Ottomans. The first visibly organized presence of Muslims in America was with the movement of the "Nation of Islam." This was actually more of a national movement than a truly Islamic movement.

In the late 60s, Muslims in America started to organize themselves and build their mosques, schools and civic organizations. Statistics show that today the number of Muslims in America is between 8 and 10 million, and they are part of the American fabric. It is rare to visit a hospital in America without finding at least one, and more often than not, many Muslim doctors. The American Muslim community today is becoming a bridge between America and the rest of the Muslim World.

9/11: A Turning Point

The tragic events of 9/11 created a new reality on the ground in three aspects:

1. Fanaticism and extremism of any religion should be addressed. It has the potential to make human beings more dangerous than nuclear weapons, which are protected by the country which owns them.
2. The necessity emerged for additional programs striving to develop better understanding between the East and the West, which involve scholars, clergy, students and active members of the interfaith and business communities. Some exchanges of scholars and clergy are already underway. These efforts to provide opportunities for face to face dialogue and exchanges of ideas between diverse groups of participants are helping to eliminate stereotypes and reduce the misunderstandings that have existed for quite some time.
3. People in the U.S. with diverse backgrounds and religious affiliations are joining forces more than ever before to work toward common goals, to better educate the people of their society, and to create better understanding of the world today as it grows into a global village.

The Need for Cultural Exchange Programs

There is no substitute for the wonderful results of the exchange programs and the benefits they produce in the short and long-term future. Hosting students, which is more common in

America than in any other nation, is becoming a sacred act of kindness. The sense of openness and generosity in the 21st century is more common in America than in other nations for many reasons, and the impact that it has on the students when they return to their home countries is far reaching.

For non-Muslim families, hosting students from the Islamic faith in particular, has been a rewarding act for many host families and their communities. It brings with it an introduction to a new culture and religion, which is in many instances, foreign to Americans. Since exchanges are a two-way street, the benefit is shared and the students, their natural families and also their countries come to a better understanding about the United States and its people that was previously unknown or misunderstood.

The Influence of Religion on Culture

The cultural behavior of many Muslims is influenced greatly by religion. Some Muslims realize it and some do not. The **Qur'an** (*the Holy Book - word of God*) and the **Sunnah**, (*the sayings or actions of the Prophet*) are the sources of the **Islamic Shari'ah** (*Law*) and provide guidance for Muslims' everyday activities.

Both guide the individual spiritually, morally and socially. It is important for people of other faith traditions to become acquainted with some of these issues when living or interacting closely with a Muslim student.

Please keep in mind, just as in other religions, not all students have a good grasp of the religious requirements, practices, or wisdom. The level of religious education and practice varies from family to family and region to region. You might ask a student to explain why he/she does things a certain way. They may not be able to answer your question or their answer may seem confusing. Listening to them without appearing to judge or cause them discomfort, will go a long way as they strive to feel accepted.

IMPORTANT ISSUES THAT MAY ARISE WITH YOUR STUDENTS

Students' First Experience in the U.S.

The Qur'an encouraged Muslims to travel throughout the land for the purpose of learning and to see the signs and greatness of God in His creation.

Chapter 29, "The Spider", Verse 20:

"Say Mohammed to them:" Travel throughout the earth and see how Allah did originate creation; then Allah creates the later creation; surely Allah has power over all things."

Chapter 22, "The Pilgrimage", Verse 46:

"Have they not traveled in the land so that they should have hearts with which to understand, or ears with which to hear? For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts, which are in the breasts."

Chapter 49, "The Dwellings", Verse 13:

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another (not that ye may despise each other). Very the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)."

Interacting with Parents, Elders, and the Opposite Sex:

Parents

The teachings of Islam emphasize treating people with respect. You will find that the respect given to parents falls just below that given to God and they are held in very high esteem.

Chapter 31, "Luqman", Verse 14:

"And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and good to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship and

his weaning is in two years – give thanks to Me and your parents until Me is the final destination.”

Chapter 17, "The Sons of Israel/The Night Journey", Verses 23-24:

“And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you behave kindly to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them, but address them in terms of honor.

And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility through mercy and say: “My Lord! Bestow on them your mercy as they cherished me in childhood.”

The mother is particularly venerated:

Prophet Mohammed said: “Heaven lies under the feet of mothers.”

Prophet Mohammed was asked: “Who is the most important one in my life? He replied: Your mother. The man said: Who is next? The Prophet replied: Your mother. The man asked: Who is next? The Prophet replied: Your mother. The man asked: Who is next? The Prophet replied: Your father.”

Special attention may need to be given to the comfort level of your student even though he/she has been welcomed into your household as one of your children. There is still a certain sense of modesty and shared respect that will provide them with a sense of well-being:

- Avoid walking through the house in particularly revealing clothes or pajamas
- Knock on the door before entering bedrooms
- Allow the host mother to welcome/engage in physical contact with the female students.

Elders

After the parents, the elders are also treated with the utmost respect. It is not the norm to find a young person calling someone older by his first name without using the title of “Uncle or Aunt.” You may notice cultural exchange students, who just arrived, lowering their glances out of respect when talking with the host mother or host father. They have been taught not to stare at their faces. The students might address them as Mr. Bill and Mrs. Joan. The same is true when addressing teachers in school. They will adjust to U.S. standards with a little time.

Prophet Mohammed said: “He is not one of us, who does not respect his elders, have mercy on those who are young, and give scholars their rights and due respect.”

People of the Opposite Sex

The relation between the man and the woman in Islam is based on mutual respect and considering people as your brothers and sisters. Some Muslim societies differ in the level of interaction socially between men and women, but it is primarily based on what the Qur'an teaches:

Chapter 24 "The Light", Verses 30 and 31:

"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them: and Allah is well acquainted with all you conceal.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male attendants free of sexual desires, or small children who have no carnal knowledge of women; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O Believers! Turn all of you together towards Allah in repentance that you may be successful."

Men and women appear in public dressed modestly as they interact. The women cover their bodies, as well as their hair. The men dress in loose clothes to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to them. Some of the actions/cultural practices that may vary from cultural practices in your area as far as interactions between men and women are:

- **Handshakes:** Some do not shake hands with the opposite sex, while others will shake hands if one extends their hand toward them.
- **Hugs:** Normally only exchanged between two women or two men.
- **Kisses:** The religious greeting for men toward men is a handshake and hug, if traveling. In the Middle Eastern countries, the cultural tradition is for men to kiss one another on the cheek and women to do the same with women. It is not necessarily like that in other countries with significant Muslim populations.
- **Dress:** Women's dress is described in the Qur'an as loose and covering the entire body. Religiously covering becomes mandated from the age of puberty. Cultures today have different tastes/styles, which can be a telltale sign when trying to identify the region from which the person comes.
- **Dating:** In most of the Muslim countries, dating does not exist in the same manner as in the USA. Even though there is a shift in the cultural practices today in many of the Muslim countries, Islamic religion prohibits premarital sex. In most of the practicing societies, engagement is the only time when the couple can go out together publicly, and intimate relation is only after the wedding.

Within Schools

The dress code is very important and students will need to speak with the teacher or principal to request a modified gym uniform. Sweatpants will be fine particularly if the class has both boys and girls together.

It is also not part of the cultural or religious practices to have a shower with other students following Gym Class or organized sports unless there are private shower stalls. It might be suggested that they can shower with their pants on if there are no other options.

Manners and Behavior

Due to the respect given to elders, a student may feel shy to express their feelings about what they like and dislike. They may even agree out of respect. You may need to encourage your student to speak their minds and share their opinions when asked to do so. You may also find the opposite true since the students may go a bit overboard as they begin expressing themselves in situations they may never have encountered before.

Helping with Household Chores

Religious teachings always show the prophet as someone who took part in the household chores. The culture in some of the countries often encourages the practice in wealthy families of males being served by maids. It is important for them to understand that it is part of the culture of this society, as well as Islamic culture, for them to help around the house. If the host parent makes it clear that they need to share in the responsibility, they will gladly do it.

Interaction with People of the Book

The Qur'an refers to the Christians and Jews as "**People of the Book**". Chapters and verses talk repeatedly about Abraham, Moses Jesus, prophets from the sons of Israel and their stories.

The Torah and the Bible are mentioned throughout the Qur'an as divinely revealed texts. The

Qur'an mentions that what differs with previously revealed texts and the Qur'an is the interpretations made by Christians and Jews years later, but not the actual and original biblical texts revealed to both Moses and Jesus.

Despite theological differences, the Qur'an instructed the Muslims that there would be no compulsion in religion and that they should not use the differences as an excuse to prevent them from reaching out, living as one community, and aspiring to build a tolerant, respectful and peaceful world.

The Islamic teachings clearly instruct the believers to let God be the Judge of who is right and who is wrong. The Qur'an allows Muslims to co-exist with People of the

Book, eat their food (as long as it does not contain pork or alcohol), and even marry from them. The past centuries of co-existence between Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Middle East, the protection of the places of worship and the religious freedom in the Muslim countries are testimonials that Islam recognized Christianity and Judaism as part of the monotheistic family and calls for the house of Abraham to be a house of peace, love, mercy and a competition in doing what is good and righteous....

Chapter 5, "The Table", Verse 5:

"This day (All) things good and pure are made lawful unto you, and the food of the people of the book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. Lawful unto you in marriage are not only chaste women who are believers, but chaste women from among those who have been given the book before you; when you have given them their dowries, taking them in marriage, not fornicating nor taking them for lovers in secret; and whoever denies faith, his work indeed is of no account, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers."

Chapter 5 "The Table", Verses 82-85:

"...And you will find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe are those who say: 'Lo! We are Christians,' because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not given to arrogance.

And when they listen to that which has been revealed unto the Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears, because of their recognition of the truth. They say: 'Our Lord, we believe, inscribe us as among the witnesses.'

What cause can we have not to believe in Allah and the truth which has come to us, seeing that we long for our Lord to admit us to the company of the righteous?

And for this prayer hath God has rewarded them for their saying with gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide forever. That is the reward of the good."

Prophet Mohammed and People of the Book:

The prophet's legacy of teaching tolerance and respect was the norm. He lived among the Jewish community when he migrated to Madina from Mecca. He received the Christian Bishops of Njran and hosted them. They established their prayers in his holy mosque.

Prophet Mohammed says: "Whoever hurts a Christian or a Jew, I will be his opponent on the Day of Judgment."

There are communities in some countries that are predominately Muslim and they do not have Christian or Jewish neighbors, nor are they used to interacting with them on a regular basis. You may find some Muslims who have negative feelings about the information that has been circulated in their communities due to the colonization in 19th and 20th century and the current political situations between the "Christian West"

and the “Muslim East.” You will find that it just takes time and patience for views to change once interaction begins.

Some of the students, who never lived in another family’s house, might feel uncomfortable regarding a variety of issues and that will vary based on prior experiences and also how practicing and observant they are.

Visiting a Church, Synagogue, or Temple

Many cultural exchange students are not used to interfaith activities and may never have visited a church, synagogue, or temple before. It is part of their experience in the U.S. to be introduced to the values and ethics of other religions, which helps to dispel the misconceptions they may have.

Some host families, eager to share their lives with the new addition to the family, might inadvertently make the student feel pressured to participate in the service at their “place of worship.” It is important to help the student feel comfortable to visit and observe some of the activities without interpreting it as proselytizing.

Places of worship in America have a variety of activities, including social and civic programs. In many Muslim countries going to church means to worship, it is not necessarily like that in America where there might be youth activities or others events sponsored by the church, synagogue or temple.

At the same time, many families go together to the service and the student may find this uncomfortable. There have been incidents where the students have felt pressured to attend the services often and the situation became very delicate. These misunderstandings can be avoided by allowing the students to participate in other activities like volunteering in the nursery while the family is in the sanctuary.

Dietary Laws and Prohibitions

The word **HALAL** means “lawful.” It is often mentioned when discussing what you eat and drink. Since what you eat affects both the body and the spirit, the teachings of Islam prohibited substances that harm either. The Qur’an considers all food and beverages lawful unless a prohibition is mentioned. There are two types of prohibitions: 1) the food itself and 2) theological reasons.

1 - Prohibition of the food consists of: pork, blood, dead animals of any kind killed by strangling, violent blows, head long falls, goring to death, or partly eaten by a predator.

Chapter 5, “The Table”, Verse 3:

“Forbidden to you for food are dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which any other name than Allah has been invoked (at the time of slaughtering); that which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a head long fall, or by being gored to death; that which has been partly eaten by a wild animal; unless you are able to slaughter it in

due form; and that which is sacrificed on stones set up for idols; But whoever is compelled by hunger, not inclining willfully to sin, then surely Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful."

2 - Theological Prohibitions consist of certain acts in the Qur'an, which require pronouncing the name of God on it in order to become "lawful." Taking the life of the animal requires the pronouncement also as a blessing. It shows gratitude to God, the Creator of this animal, who allowed the human to take the life of the animal for our consumption.

Chapter 6, "The Cattle", Verse 121:

"And do not eat from that on which Allah's name has not been pronounced, and that is most surely a transgression....."

Examples of prohibited foods:

- **Pork**

The Qur'an outlines clearly the prohibition of the "Pig" in several chapters and states that it was also forbidden in the previous revelations (like the Torah on the Israelites.) Reasons given by scholars vary from issues surrounding the cleanliness of the animal to the meat itself. Muslim students will appreciate being told what types of food contain pork.

- **Alcohol**

Alcohol is forbidden as a beverage, as well as being used as an ingredient in food. It is interesting to mention here that intoxicant beverages were prohibited in Islam gradually within the first 14 -15 years of revelation of the Qur'an.

The first verse addressing alcohol asked people to thank God for what he blessed them with.

Chapter 16, "The Bee", Verse 67:

"And of the fruits of the palms and the grapes, you obtain from them intoxication and wholesome foods. Behold in this is also a sign for those who are wise."

The second stage was the verse which explained to the believers that there is both harm and benefit in alcohol, but the harm outweighs the benefits.

Chapter 2, "The Cow", Verse 219:

"They ask you (O Mohammed) concerning wine and gambling, say in both of them there is great sin and some benefits for mankind, but the sin is greater than the benefit....."

The third stage instructed them not to approach prayer while they were drunk in order for them to think clearly while communicating with their Lord.

Chapter 4, "The Woman", Verse 43:

“O you who believe do not approach your prayers while you are drunk, until you fully understand what you say.....”

The fourth and final stage abrogated the previous instructions and replaced them with a permanent prohibition of alcohol and warned of its personal and social affects.

Chapter 5, "The Table", Verses 90-91:

“O you who believe, intoxicants and gambling, sacrificing to stones and division by arrows are an abomination of Satan’s handiwork – shun it in order for you to be successful.

Satan’s plan is but to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer: will you not then abstain?”

Different Approaches by Students

The word “**halal**” is equivalent to the term “**kosher**” in Judaism. When a Muslim student asks for halal food, essentially it means that the food contains no pork or alcohol and that the meat has been slaughtered according to the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammed and the name of Allah has been mentioned at the time of slaughtering.

Other types of food are left to the taste of the people. For instance, not all people are comfortable eating various kinds of seafood.

Chapter 5, "The Table", Verse 5:

“This day (all) things good and pure are made lawful unto you, and the food of the people of the book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them.”

In case halal meat is not available, Muslims are instructed to utter, “**In the name of God,**” (*Bismillah*) on the food before they eat. Some students might insist to eat only halal meat, while others may prefer to be vegetarian. In this respect, the Islamic teachings are flexible and leave this to the discretion of the individual. You can also check locally for halal food markets.

How to Find the Nearest “Halal” Meat Store

There are several ways to locate stores that sell halal meat. Some of them are as follows:

- Contact a local mosque to obtain the addresses or phone numbers of local stores.
- Using the internet, type in local.com and enter your city and state. You will receive a listing of local stores. (The internet is a wonderful resource that may provide you with more options.)

- Some grocery stores such as Giant Food and Shoppers Food Warehouse stock frozen halal chicken nuggets and other products from Al Safa Halal Inc.

Special Plate/Utensils

Some students might request a special plate and utensils set aside so that they do not mix with plates on which pork has been served.

Cleanliness and Religious Washing "Wudu"

The 5 times daily prayers (Salat) require a state of cleanliness. *Wudu* or "**ceremonial wash**" is required before each of the 5 daily prayers. It involves washing the hands, face, arms, wiping over the head and washing the feet.

The individual may pray more than one time after making wudu as long as they did not "break their wudu" by using the bathroom, sleeping, etc...

Chapter 5, "The Table Spread", Verse 6:

"O you who believe, when you prepare for prayer wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows, wipe your heads (with water); and (wash) your feet the ankles....."



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Since cleanliness is a must before the prayer, you will see Muslims use water, in addition to using the toilet paper in the bathrooms. It is a religious practice and students might keep a small bucket/cup or plastic squeeze bottle, similar to those given by hospitals to women who have just given birth, in the bathroom.

Water Conservation/Accommodations

In countries with significant Muslim populations, making wudu is performed either in a special room or over the basin. Since many bathrooms in America have carpet, it needs to be explained to the students to place a small hand towel under their feet to minimize making the carpet wet, as well as to use the water conservatively. Please be patient with your student as they make this adjustment.

Pets and Dogs

There are a lot of misunderstandings about the issue of "Dogs" in Islam. The dog itself is mentioned in the Qur'an as a loyal and honest companion and mentions the miraculous story of the young Christians in the early era of persecution. They ran and hid in a cave with their dog, slept for 309 years and woke up again. Verse 18 mentioned that the dog slept with them and even touched upon the position of his sleep.

Chapter 18 "The Cave", Verse 18:

“You would have thought them awake, while they were asleep, and We turned them on their right and on their left sides: their dog stretching forth his fore-legs on the threshold: if you had looked at them, you would have certainly turned back from them in flight, and would certainly have been filled with terror of them.”

The dog, in most of the Muslim communities, is acquired for the purposes of protection as a watch dog or for special use with hunters or police. They are not commonly seen as domestic pets, while cats, birds and other pets are quite common. Religiously, the dog is not to be in the house for the simple fact that the saliva is considered unclean or “Najis” and should not touch any piece of cloth or part of the body. If that happens, it becomes unclean and needs to be washed thoroughly and in some sayings of the prophet, 7 times – one of the seven by dust.

To shed some light on that issue, it’s helpful if you realize that at the time of the prophet in the desert of Arabia, dogs did not have the attention and care of the modern veterinarians today in Europe and America. Dogs, in some instances, bite and may have rabies, which could be dangerous and possibly deadly. Despite the fact that shots are becoming more available today, dogs are still not used as domestic pets in Muslim societies. That explains why many cultural exchange students are very uncomfortable with or scared of dogs in the house. Students might request that the dog not be permitted to enter their rooms where they pray.

By the time the student prepares to return to their home country, their comfort level and perception of the dog changes.



Mosques

Mosques are the houses of worship for Muslims. Normally the 5 daily congregational prayers take place in the mosque. The most important prayer is Friday Prayer just after noon. Its importance is similar to that of the weekly Sunday service in Christianity or Saturday service in Judaism. In America, not all the students are able to attend the Friday service. Some students, who regularly attend back home, like to go periodically, especially in Ramadan. To find a mosque close to you, go to this website www.islamicfinder.com and enter your

zip code.

All people are welcome to visit. Some non-Muslims call in advance to schedule an appointment for themselves or for a group tour and Q&A session. Since the prayer includes prostration on the ground, the prayer hall is kept clean and visitors also take off their shoes. Women are asked to dress modestly and bring a scarf to cover their hair.

Islamic Cultural Center Tempe, AZ

In addition to being a house of worship, the mosque is the center of educational, social, and recreational activities for the community. Mosques differ from place to place. It is simple in structure where the niche in the front wall faces Mecca located in what is now Saudi Arabia. Some of the mosques are built traditionally from scratch with minarets and domes and some are buildings or private homes, which have been converted into mosques. The architecture and services differ from place to place depending upon the community. Some are used only for the 5 daily prayers, while others include an educational institution, as well as areas for the social activities of the community.

Since the mosque is considered to be the "house of God," whoever visits it is considered the guest of God. This explains why some students request to go to the mosque. It may help them as they work through issues, feel connected to the community, or satisfy their need to experience the sanctity.

The Role of the Imam / Authority Figure

Some students feel an extra sense of comfort to have contact with an Imam to answer some of their religious questions especially when they first arrive. Sometimes students are asked certain religious questions by their host families, or someone in their host community and they do not feel their English helps them to answer properly from the Qur'an. It is helpful for them to know that there is a way to contact the Imam for assistance.

Ramadan & Issues Related to Fasting

Ramadan is the month of fasting and has a special place in the hearts of all Muslims. It is the ninth month of the lunar calendar. In addition to fasting from dawn to sunset, it is the time when Muslims put forth extra effort to read Qur'an each day, offer additional prayers and perform acts of charity. The main two meals in Ramadan are:

- **"Suhoor"** - the meal eaten before beginning the fast at dawn. Students wake up before dawn to eat their "Suhoor" meal. *(This meal can be prepared at night so it is ready for the student at dawn for convenience. They should also be encouraged to drink plenty of fluids during these meals, particularly water to avoid any hydration issues.)*
- **"Iftar"** - begins at sunset and is the time of eating to break the fast. Traditionally dates, "a natural sweet" and water are used to break the fast. Sunset prayer is then offered, followed by a nutritious, high-protein meal. *(In many countries lentil, bean and other types of soups and dishes that can be prepared in advance are offered as part of the meal.)*

During Ramadan extra prayers are performed each evening called "Taraweeh prayers." They

can be prayed in congregation at the mosque or alone at home. During this month many Muslims read the entire Qur'an at least one time from cover to cover. This month is a time for reflection, meditation, feeding the needy and poor, and strengthening the family ties. (*You may notice the student spending more time in his/her room performing prayers during this month.*)

Chapter 2, "The Cow", Verse 183:

"O you who believe, fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you that you may learn self-restraint."

The "**Night of Honor**" is the night when the Qur'an was revealed. It takes place during the odd nights of the last 10 days of Ramadan. It is generally expected to be the night of the 27th. The Qur'an equates the value of this night with the worship of a thousand months. Muslims try to spend this night performing extra worship including offering prayers for most of the night and reading Qur'an.

Holidays and Celebrations in Islam

The two main Eids "**celebrations**" in Islam are:

1. **Eid-ul-Fitr:** "*The Feast of Breaking the Fast*" is the most spiritually fulfilling holiday for the Muslims around the world. They feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment and joy for completing the commandments of God during this intensive month of worship. These moments of happiness begin with the news of the "sighting of the moon" during the last night of Ramadan, which announces the beginning of the new month of Shawwal. The Eid starts with performing an act of charity on behalf of each member of the household called "**Zakat- ul-Fitr.**" The "Eid prayer," a congregational prayer for the entire community, is held in the mosque or another designated location large enough to accommodate the entire community. Following the prayer in the morning, people visit one another and exchange gifts. Each country has a special type of food and sweets that are served during the Eid. The joy is similar to Christmas in America. It is a 3 day celebration and includes new clothes for everyone, gifts for the children from the parents, relatives and close friends, as well as plays, games, puppet shows and trips to amusement parks. There are also community members, who visit hospitals and other centers to distribute gift bags and Qur'ans to those who are ill or unable to celebrate with the community.
2. **Eid-ul-Adha:** "*The Feast of Sacrifice*" takes place on the 10th of month of Zul Hijjah and it is part of the rites of Hajj. Pilgrims and others sacrifice an animal in commemoration of angel Gabriel's substitution of a lamb at the time when Prophet Abraham passed the test of his readiness to sacrifice his son, Isma'il, in obedience to God. It is a 4 day celebration, in much of the same way as Eid-ul-Fitr, starting with prayer, sharing meals, visiting friends and family, exchanging gifts, providing games and other activities in which the children participate.

Cultural Exchange students will appreciate knowing the time and location of the Eid prayers and perhaps doing something special to celebrate them.

Other Holidays

1. **The Birthday of Prophet Mohammed:** This occasion takes place on the 12th day of Rabi-ul-Awwal, "the 3rd month of the lunar Islamic calendar."
2. **Ashur'a:** This celebration is generally observed by the Shi'a community and commemorates the death of the prophet's grandson.

These two events are observed by some but not by every Muslim.

Interest (Usury or Riba) & Bank Accounts

Since the "Islamic Financial System" forbids interest, students might feel uncomfortable to have a saving account, which accumulates interest. This subject has been one of the sensitive issues for Muslim communities living in the West and conducting transactions within the "Western Financial System," which depends upon interest.

Although scholarly opinions have emerged in recent times that vary regarding the definition of the "**interest**" given or received by various financial institutions, it might be easier for the host family to establish an interest free checking account for students rather than a savings account.

Recently, some states have undergone modifications in the list of identification / information needed to establish a bank account or in the policies of their institutions. Host families in these states set up an account in their name with the student as a co-signor and the account is managed /maintained by the student under the supervision of their host families.

Saving Accounts and Interests

Some students may choose to have a "**Savings Account.**" In many instances, Muslims in the West, who have a savings account, normally disburse the generated interest on phone bills, gas, and things of that nature, but not on food. For more information on specific situations, please feel free to communicate with CECF.

For More Information

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact **CECF**.

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