

MUSLIMS TO BEGIN MAJOR CELEBRATION

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Muslims all over the world are gathering to celebrate the season of hajj, or pilgrimage, and in West Virginia, Muslims are gathering at the Islamic Center in South Charleston today for the Festival of Sacrifice that commemorates the pilgrimage.

As told in the Koran, the holiday has its roots in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. In faithfulness to what he believed was God's will, Abraham was preparing to kill his son until God provided a ram for the sacrifice.

Jews and Christians believe Abraham was about to sacrifice his second son, Isaac, but Muslims believe he was about to sacrifice his first son, Ishmael. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad is a direct descendent of Ishmael.

Events will begin today at 10:30 a.m. with prayers that are a part of the Eid al-Adha, or festival of the sacrifice. Imam Mohammad Jamal Daoudi will deliver his sermon following the prayers.

Muslims are called on to complete five "pillars," or fundamental tenets, of Islam in their lifetimes. The fifth pillar is hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca.

"The pilgrimage is for Muslims a training course in faith and ethics," Daoudi said. "It increases faith, uplifts the spirit, and inculcates only the best conduct and manners of all pilgrims."

He quoted Muhammad, who said to "perform the hajj for it cleans sins as water cleans dirt."

The equality of all Muslims is emphasized in the hajj by the fact everyone wears the same dress and perform the same rituals, he said.

Daoudi also said that "all the rituals, however, are meant to help the pilgrims acquire the talent of remembering Allah in all that they do, so that they become closer to him. In so doing, they become as pure as angels walking on the earth." Allah is the name of God in Arabic.

Muslims also commemorate the first 10 days of the month of hajj as the last 10 of the 40 days that Moses stayed in seclusion on Mount Sinai, Daoudi said. Alone on Sinai, Moses received the Ten Commandments. Daoudi said that out of respect for the prophet Muhammad and other patriarchs of the faith, Muslims repeat "Peace Be Upon Him" each time they mention the names of these great leaders.

Daoudi said four people from the Islamic Association of West Virginia are on their pilgrimage in Mecca and will return later this month.

After today's prayers, there will be a catered luncheon. The Islamic Center is at the corner of the Kanawha Turnpike and Valley Drive in South Charleston.

For information about services, call 744-1031 or 744-4431. There is also information on the Islamic Center's Web site at www.iawv.org.

THE HAJJ

"And proclaim the Pilgrimage among men; they will come to thee on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel. Lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways; that they may witness the benefits (provided) for them. And celebrate the name of Allah, through the

Days appointed, over the cattle which he has provided for them (for sacrifice): then eat you thereof and feed the distressed ones in want. Then let them complete the rites prescribed for them, perform their vows, and (again) circumambulate the Ancient House."

-- *From the Koran, verses 27-29 Chapter Al Hajj (22)*

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