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ISLAM H 232/A

The Qur'an and Cover



The Qur'an is held by Muslims to be the direct word of God, inscribed in Heaven and revealed piecemeal to the prophet Mohammed by the angel Gabriel over a period of 20 years as a message for all humanity. The Qur'an is written in Arabic. Muhammed was illiterate and he had to memorise the passages of text that he was given. He repeated these passages to others and they were written down on scraps of wood and parchment, to be compiled into a single volume at a later date.

In Muslim homes the Qur'an is treated with great reverence. It is kept on the highest shelf and covered with a special cloth. Readers wash their hands before touching it. When read it is placed on a special stand.

Qur'an Stand



The two sides of this Indian-made stand have been carved from a single piece of wood. Islamic design, both in religious buildings and in the home, tends to avoid picturing human beings and animals. Instead surfaces are covered with geometric patterns or, as is the case here, patterns which suggest a network of vegetation. The effect is to create a sense of complexity and repetition.

Prayer Timetable



The Muslim calendar is based on the lunar year and so the months and festivals are not on the same date in the Christian calendar each year. Muslims date their years from the migration of the prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina and the establishment of the first Muslim community. This event is called the Hegira and took place in 622 AD according to the Christian calendar. The letters A.H. in this prayer timetable denote 'After the Hegira'. The first page of the calendar points out that 1404 A.H. is the same as 1983/84 AD in the Christian calendar.

One of the Five Pillars of Islam, the basic duties which all Muslims are meant to perform, is Salat - prayer five times a day facing Mecca. The times for praying each day are listed in the prayer timetable.

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Qibla (Compass), with Booklet



In mosques the wall which gives the direction of Mecca is called the qibla. When praying all worshippers will bow down to face in that direction. However, for those who are not in a mosque, it can be difficult to tell in which direction to face. This example, unfortunately, has been broken.

Islamic Diary and Calendar



The Islamic calendar has 12 lunar months in a year of about 354 days. The lunar year is about 11 days shorter than the solar year. The months are Moharram, Safar, Rabia I, Rabia II, Jumada I, Jumada II, Rajab, Shaban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhu 'l-Qa'da, and Dhu 'l-hijjah. This diary contains information such as advice about how Muslims should pray when travelling and a list of mosques in the UK.

Prayer Hat and Head Scarf



In Islam the individual human body is regarded as, in a sense, a kind of mosque which, especially when worshipping, should be kept clean and well-ordered. When praying men are expected, if possible, to cover their head as a sign of respect. There is a wide variety of opinion about how women should dress, but covering the head on all public occasions is widely practiced in Islam.

Prayer Carpet



Muslim men remove their socks and shoes and perform ritual washing before praying. It is customary to pray on a small carpet kept for this purpose, although any clean piece of cloth, rushwork or other material may be used. Such carpets are often elaborately decorated with patterns or, as in this case, with a picture of a mosque.

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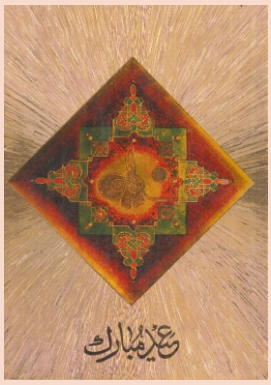
Eid Cards



Eid cards might be sent at either of the two major Muslim festivals, Eid ul-Fitr or Eid ul-Adha.

Eid ul-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. On the day of the celebration, a typical Muslim family gets up very early and attends special prayers held only for the occasion in big mosques, in large open areas, stadiums or arenas. The festivities and merriment start after the prayers with visits to the homes of friends and relatives and thanking the Creator for all blessings. Eid is a time to come together as a community and to renew friendship and family ties. This is a time for peace for all Muslims in the world to devote to prayers and mutual well-being.

Eid ul-Adha is celebrated by Muslims worldwide as a commemoration of Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son for God. This happens to be approximately 70 days after the month of Ramadan. The first day is the primary holiday, on which men, women, and children are expected to dress in their finest clothing and perform prayer in a large congregation. Muslims who can afford to do so sacrifice domestic animals, usually sheep, as a symbol of Ibrahim's sacrifice; this sacrifice is called Qurban. The meat is distributed amongst their neighbours, relatives, and the poor and hungry. The story of Abraham/Ibrahim being willing to sacrifice his son is found in the Jewish/Christian bible, but for Jews and Christians the son involved is Isaac, not Ishmael.

Necklace



This necklace contains the Arabic word for God - 'Allah' - in the centre. The name is written in gold colour against a green background. The colour green has a special place in Islam. It is often found in mosques and other important places, as well as on the flag of Saudi Arabia. Some say green was Mohammad's favourite colour and that he wore a green cloak, while others believe it symbolises vegetation and life. In the Qur'an (Surah 18:31), it is said that the inhabitants of paradise will wear green garments of fine silk. While the reference to the Qur'an is verifiable, it is not clear if other explanations are reliable or mere folklore.

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Prayer Beads



Muslim explorers or traders may have introduced the prayer bead tradition to Islam. Muslim prayer beads, which can be called a misbaha, or tasbir, are often made with 99 beads, standing for the 99 attributes or names of Allah. The Prophet Mohammed, according to tradition, is reported to have said, 'Verily, there are ninety-nine names of God, one hundred minus one. He who enumerates them would get into Paradise.' This caused people to search them out in the Qur'an, and a list was compiled. Over time it became custom to recite the list in its entirety. This misbaha has a marker every thirty beads, dividing the chain into three equal parts. According to folklore the camel is the only creature who knows the hundredth name of God, which is reason why he trudges across the desert with a haughty expression.