

14. What are the five pillars of Islam? Pilgrimage

Hajj provides a unique opportunity for people from different nations meet one another.

The annual Hajj begins in the twelfth month of the Islamic year. The Islamic year is lunar, consequently Hajj occurs throughout all seasons during one's lifetime.

Pilgrims enter a state of sacredness where arguing and fighting, cutting a plant or even harming a fly is prohibited. They wear simple garments that strip away distinctions of class and culture, so that all stand equal before God.

The rites of the Hajj go back to Abraham and his family. They include visiting the Ka'bah and standing together on the wide plains of 'Arafat (a large expanse of desert outside of Makkah). Here pilgrims pray for God's forgiveness, in what is often considered a preview of the Day of Judgment. The Hajj provides a unique opportunity for Muslims to reflect on their lives, to refocus on God, and to return to their families and homes spiritually rejuvenated.

The close of the Hajj is marked by the Festival of Sacrifice, Eid al Adha. Pilgrims sacrifice a sheep or goat, commemorating Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his own son. The sacrificial meat is distributed to the needy. Muslims around the world celebrate this day with prayers, ritual sacrifice, and an exchange of gifts.