



Yom Arafat, January 31st

This Muslim holy day, the Day of Hajj (Pilgrimage), takes place on the ninth day of the twelfth month of the Muslim lunar calendar, the day before the beginning of Eid Al-Adhha (below). People on the Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia that every Muslim must do once in their life) assemble for the "standing" on the plain of Arafat, which is located near Mecca. Muslims elsewhere in the world gather at a local mosque for pray and for solidarity with those at Arafat.

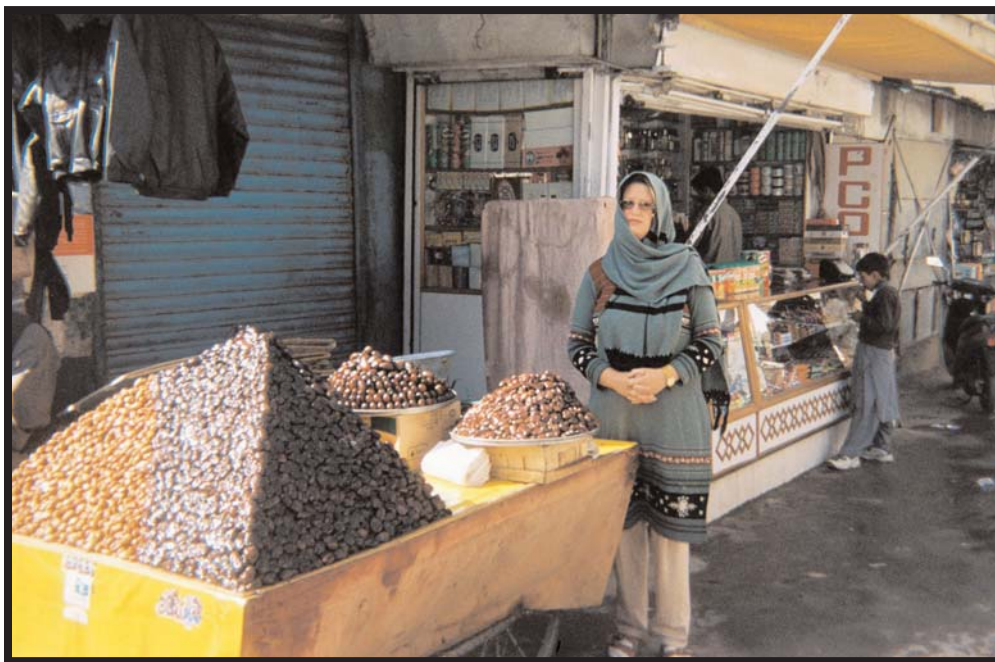
Eid Al-Adhha, February 1st-4th

This is the "feast of sacrifice" and is celebrated from the tenth through the thirteenth days of the twelfth month of the Muslim year. It marks the anniversary

of Abraham's willingness and obedience to sacrifice his son Ishmael on God's orders, and His mercy in substituting a lamb for Ishmael. At this time special prayers are said in mosques or in fields designated for that purpose.

It is during this time of the year that people generally make the Hajj, or the pilgrimage to Mecca. Whether on the Hajj or at home, people celebrating this begin the first day, February 1st 2004, by sacrificing an animal as a commemoration of the Angel Gabriel providing Abraham with a lamb as a substitute. Most of the meat is shared with family and neighbors, but one-third is given to the poor.

The rest of the holiday is celebrated with good food, gifts for children, and general merrymaking.



Dianes Dates

Yesterday I Realized Something...

...something that seemed significant to me (Diane). An interesting progression of events.

Wednesday of last week we got kittens. Maybe it was Tuesday. Either way, it signified that we are "home". That's what it meant to us: the end of transition. A bit of "settling in" happens when you adopt pets into the family.

Then on Saturday, something also rather significant happened. A first. Never before in my life have I chosen furniture. We've always used furniture that someone else used first – furniture that was either "just there" already, or that was handed down to us. So this was the first time. We got furniture that I liked, that I had decided which colors I wanted and which style I wanted. And it came to the house that we get to call "ours" for a time.

These two events were sort of "milestones" for me, and at the time I didn't realize it.

The next day, Sunday, in the worship service, there was a song I felt intensely. It's on Michael W. Smith's "Worship" CD ... I had to choke out the words, "I lay it all down again" ... maybe you know the song. It continues, "to hear you say that I'm your friend. Help me find the way. Bring me back to You. You're all I want. You're all I've ever needed. You're all I want. Help me know You are near."

It's so hard to say those words because, really, I think I also want a little bit more stability. I think I also want a little more ability to settle in one place, to call one

dwelling my home. But I'm singing the words, "You're all I want." So, is that true for me? Is my desire for God bigger than my desire to stop moving from place to place? Is my desire for God bigger than my desire to have surroundings inside some walls that are pleasant to me, which I can identify as my own? Is God really ALL I want?

I truly want to sing those words, and to feel that they are in fact true for me. I don't want to be a hypocrite ... but am I really content to "LAY IT ALL DOWN AGAIN"? Each word there is so important. But it is especially the AGAIN part of that line which sort of gets to me. On Saturday when we got the furniture it felt like such a wonderful blessing to have something

that was sort of "my own", that no one else chose for me. And yet, I feel as though God wants me to offer it to Him, willingly, and LAY IT ALL DOWN AGAIN. I had it one day before I felt He asked me to make sure it wasn't clenched tightly in my fist.

I don't want to say YES to Him about that. Even if God doesn't tell us to up and leave this new "my own" anytime soon, I feel that I need to tell Him that I'm willing, just in case that is what He wants us to do. It's a very difficult thing, to be willing to say, "Yes, Lord, I will give up the furniture you just allowed me to select and receive, I'll even be willing to get rid of the kittens we just adopted; I'm willing to trust You with our kids."

Is He really ALL I want? Or am I sort of drawing the line in the sand, emotionally telling God, "This is all I can do, I can't go any further than this. I've already come this far, and now I'm not willing to continue."

That is my journey. It's very difficult. I'm not sure yet if God is asking me to let go (again) of the longing for stability, so that I can see Him bigger in another way. Or maybe He just wants to know that I am willing, and He isn't going to ask that of me now. I am not sure. We might need to move again in the summer, even though in December we just moved into this, our "own", house. If we do, it will not be within this same culture. Or, it may be that God allows us to sign a lease on this house for the next school year too. But we do not know. I have no assurance either way. But I do know one thing: I need to be able to say honestly to God, "You're ALL I want."

Al-Hijra, February 22

This holiday marks the beginning of the Muslim New Year on the first day of the first month, the month of Muharram. In addition to being the start of the New Year, Al-Hijra is also the anniversary of Muhammad's hijra to Medina, an important event theologically. Sometimes this is also called Rabi Al-Awwal.

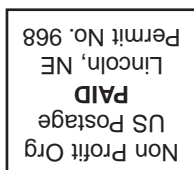
Muhammad left Mecca just as his enemies were preparing to murder him, and he arrived in Medina eight days later. Muhammad was soon given supreme authority in Medina, and he began to establish the rituals of Islam and carry out social reforms.

The tribe with which we work will be observing this day.

'Ashura, 3-Mar-04

Taking place on the tenth day of the month of Muharram, 'Ashura marks the anniversary of the death of Imam Husain, the grandson of Muhammad. This is a holy day celebrated more by Shi'ites than by Sunni Muslims, because Sunnis don't recognize Husain's claim as successor to Muhammad. The tribe with which we work is Sunni. However, tradition has it that a number of other important events occurred on 'Ashura such as Noah's ark coming to rest and the Prophet Abraham's birth.

News from Jeff & Diane



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