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Muslim Students' Association, University of Maine

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Muslims celebrate end of fast this week

This week Muslims everywhere celebrate Id-al-Fitr, a feast which signifies the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan. The UMO chapter of the Muslim Students' Association, a North American Muslim student religious organization, will celebrate the "Id" with a get-together open to everyone, Thursday night in the Memorial Union's Bangor Room. The local chapter's 20 members will serve refreshments and special desserts from Muslim countries of the Mid-East, including Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Muslim lunar calendar, is characterized by the daily observance of a strict dawn to dusk fast, during which "one must rigorously avoid introducing any substance into the interior of the body." The abstinence extends to the metaphysical, as believers in Islam must avoid all base thoughts as well. However, at the end of the day, Muslims can moderately partake of both food and drink.

The institution of fasting has existed more or less among all cultures, and the month of Ramadan can be compared to the observance of the Lenten fast by Christians, and the abstinence practiced on the Jewish "Day of Atonement." The ordinance of fasting (Saum), as practiced by the Muslims, symbolizes the period when the Quran (the Koran, or Holy Book of Muslims) began to be revealed to the Prophet Mohammed, and is binding upon all members of Islam, except for the aged, the sick, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and travelers. When exempting circumstances change, the fast must be observed, even when the proscribed time for fasting has ended.

Each day, the fast must begin with a declared intention before sunrise. Without an intention, an offering of the day to God, the fast is invalid. If one breaks the fast, an atonement is owed, which once consisted of the freeing of a slave. Since this is no longer possible, today's fast-breaker must lead a life of abstinence for an additional 60 days.

Before the advent of Mohammed, in the 7th century A.D., many religious traditions of the modern day Muslim were already firmly imbedded into the folklore of his country, modern-day Saudi Arabia. When promulgating his faith and his laws, Mohammed adopted the traditions as a lever for elevating his nation and surrounding nations from the depths of the social and moral degradation into which he believed they had fallen.

Mohammed attached to the guiding precepts of Islam certain practical duties called the Five Pillars of Islam. These include the recitation of the creed, the Muslim declaration of faith; prayers, which are required five times a day of every Muslim to strengthen his belief in god; alms-giving, which requires every Muslim to give away two and one-half per cent of his savings to the poor and needy; a pilgrimage, which requires every Muslim, if within his means, to perform a pilgrimage to Kabba in Mecca and the fasting which Muslims believe restrains the passions from the gratification of all the senses, and directs the overflow of the spirits into a health channel.

The artwork encasing this story is an example of Arabic calligraphy. The slender minaret on the right, and the mosque depicted on the left symbolize the universal Muslim intonation, "Al-hamd-ul Allah!", translated literally, "All praise be to God!"

