

**COMMUNITY:** Muslims celebrate what is thought to be the happiest time of the year

# Food, friends and charity mark Ramadhan

## OBSERVANCES

An occasional look at your neighbour's customs and traditions

BY MIKE ADLER  
STAFF WRITER

Rahat Ghafoor turns to his friend Salman Khan and embraces him three times.

"In this way, we express our happiness, how we are happy inside," Ghafoor said outside the doors of Armadale Community Centre in Milliken.

This warm gesture, performed by many others Tuesday after the prayers of 700 concluded inside, is a tradition of Eid-ul-Fitr.

For Muslims, the Eid can be the happiest day of the year, a time for families to exchange gifts, show charity, and visit dear friends.

It seems sweeter — like a reward from God, they say — to believers who gave up food and water during Ramadhan, a holy month ended by the Eid.

"The prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, told us this month is very near to God," Ghafoor explained.

But even those too young to fast, like Anas Khan, 7, know the many joys of the day. "We get toys and we get new clothes," the boy said.

Anas could also look forward to eidi, or gifts of cash.

"Sisters get them from their brothers. Children get them from their parents," his father, Amjad Khan, said.

The Eid begins the day after the moon is seen, heralding a new Islamic month. The cooking of holiday food begins immediately in each Muslim household, because visitors are expected.

In the Milliken home of Syed and Bilquis Quadri, each visitor was offered tasty desserts, beef kebobs and a warm bowl of sheer khourma, a sweet Eid dish of vermicelli, eggs, milk, dried fruit and nuts.

It's easier to do good deeds during Ramadhan, with the doors of heaven open and the doors of hell closed, said daughter Khudsiya Quadri.

"In front of God, everybody is equal, the rich and the poor, because we're all fasting."

And there must be no cheating, lying or back-biting during Ramadhan, she said.

"It breaks the bad habits," Khudsiya concluded. "It puts things in perspective."

Ramadhan is a practice for the rest of the year, when Muslims try to continue their good deeds, son-in-law Syed Ibrahim Quadri said.

But Syed Quadri added helping others is the most important aspect of the day.

"If you don't do that, the whole purpose of Eid is not good."

All Muslims entering the Eid

prayers, even newborns, must make a donation to charity called fitra. It was \$6 a head at Jaffari Islamic Centre, a Thornhill mosque, and \$5 at Armadale.

Unlike the five daily prayers in Islam, prayers for the Eid must be done in a large congregation, so the Islamic Society of Markham needed the town building.

The group wants to build a mosque in Milliken and plans to start as soon as the snow melts.

"Everybody is excited. Everybody wants to see this place of worship," said Mohammed Ansari, society president.

One recent dinner for the mosque raised \$420,000 from the community.

"That shows their commitment," said Khalid Usman, a Markham councillor who is a Muslim.

Addressing worshippers Tuesday, Mayor Don Cousens pledged that, from now on, his town council would perform no business on the Eid.

This commitment recognizes the Muslim community is growing by leaps and bounds, Usman said.

"I think in a couple of years it's going to be the largest minority in Canada, especially in York Region."

At Centennial College in Scarborough, Khudsiya Quadri was recognized for work on the Muslim Student Association, which finds Muslims space for daily prayers. Her North York workplace now does the same.

It's becoming more common for employers to know of the Eid and Ramadhan, she said.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE ADLER

Khudsiya Quadri, her father Syed Quadri and brother-in-law Syed Ibrahim Quadri hosted guests on the Eid, offering special holiday treats.

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