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Ramadan

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Ramadan

Holiday Customs

Informant:

Gonca Soyer is a human development and family studies instructor at Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Apart from schooling, she is a wife and mother of two adorable children. She met and got married to her husband Mehmet in 2009 in Ordu, Turkey. August of 2009, they moved to the United States. Gonca is a very exciting person to talk to. She relays emotion, passion, and knowledge whenever I have spoken to her about her studies and dissertation or about her and her family's holiday customs.

Context:

I interviewed Gonca in her office which is between Ray B West and the Family Life building on Utah State's campus. As I entered the room, I was greeted by not only Gonca herself but her sister Betul who is visiting from Turkey. Gonca is one of my favorite people to talk to. I am currently in her marriage and family relations course and love it! She is funny, engages the class, and applies real life scenarios to class material. Knowing Gonca, her office was sunny, warm, and filled with color. She also was very organized and had several different kinds of pens, highlighters, and markers. We started off by exchanging pens so each of us could try writing with them (we both have an obsession when it comes to thin ink or lead). Since her office is in one of the campus's original buildings, it had some quirks. Not only was it quite warm but when the heater kicked on it made this mooing noise, similar to a cow.

Text:

Ramadan is an Islamic [um] holiday celebration in which we fast for thirty days. We then have a feast or a festival kind of thing at the end of the thirty days for three full days. Every year Ramadan moves eleven calendar days backwards [uh...um...] because we follow the moon calendar. During these thirty days we stop eating an hour and a half before sunset, sorry wait... sunrise and then we fast until sunset that day. We wake up early, around four o'clock, have a light breakfast, and then drink lots and lots of water because we don't drink water during the day—so it's technically no food no water. With my kids, they are not supposed to fast until they reach puberty. So we teach them to understand why we are fasting and if they want to fast or not to fast is totally up to them. The elderly, children, and people who are ill are the only individuals who shouldn't take part in Ramadan. The main point of fasting is for it not to be a hardship but

being able to understand what [uh...] people who never have food at the end of the day feel like. Also, it's like a cleansing—you are cleaning your body from all the food and nutrition, so it's mostly you're focusing on other things rather than the food. Individuals practicing Ramadan usually come to the point where all we're thinking about is food, food, food. When you distract yourself with other activities of love and kindness you basically feel like you have solved a problem for that day. But yeah... Ramadan is about sacrifice, understanding how other people feel, and cleansing the body. Usually Ramadan is a period of time that...the... Qua'an, our holy book, is being revealed. So, Ramadan starts with the revelation of the book to our profit and marks the first day of the fast and ends with the final of the revelation. The revelation takes place during Ramadan...I'm going to switch to Turkish [she says as she clarifies something with her sister], but the whole process took twenty-three years. The Qua'an is basically like a bible that we base our life off of. There are stories of marriage, relationships, and hardships. There are different interpretations of the Qua'an. My family follows what is stated in the Qua'an and also how our profit interpreted it. There are not necessarily any specific foods or drinks that we drink during Ramadan that are different from our day-to-day diet. We never eat pork or drink alcohol. Oh no...I don't know how to say it in English...well [...um...] we do eat special deserts during this time. Oh, one you probably know about Baklava which is made with nuts, honey, or syrup. We also make Gullac which is a desert made with milk, sugar, pomegranates, walnuts, and a special kind of pastry flour. Since we haven't eaten all day, we try to start off small. We usually start the meal with soup. Afterwards, we pray for about ten minutes which allows our food to digest. For the main course we generally eat what we normally eat: rice, pasta, vegetables, and kosher meats. Occasionally, we make special food like lamb chops or fish. Inviting people to Ramadan is how I was raised. In our household we either always have guests, or we cook a lot of

food and then give it to our neighbors. [um...] or, we get invited to another house. Since Logan doesn't have a lot of Muslim people [uh... um...] my family and I did a sort of thirty-day Ramadan challenge this year [gestures air quotes with her hands]. Which we will be doing next year as well, just with a different twist to it. So, for this last year, my husband and I prepared a Facebook post that included a calendar. We basically said pick your day and you are more than welcome to come eat with us during Ramadan because Ramadan is all about sharing your time, understanding each other, and sharing your food basically. After our Facebook friends signed up for a day we would follow up with them to ask if they have any food restrictions, allergies, or preferences. For example, if we had vegetarian guests we would only cook with vegetarian ingredients. Depending on when we are breaking the fast, some of them came like 7:30, whereas others came closer to 8:30. [And....uh...] this year we had guests for all thirty days of Ramadan [eyes widened]. Well actually, since Ramadan is interpreted based on the moon calendar we had guests for thirty-two days. When the start of Ramadan was first announced it was later changed [she paused as she laughed] ... To start Ramada is based entirely off the moon calendar. You need to see the [uh...] the crescent moon to start and since we couldn't see the moon, Ramadan was postponed for two days. Since we had posted the announcement and calendar a month before Ramadan started, we had guests that had signed up for specific days, even though Ramadan hadn't technically started. Weather is one determining factor of the starting of Ramadan. For example, my family in Turkey started a day earlier than we did because the sky was clear, and they could see the crescent moon. The start and end of Ramadan is always announced by the large Muslim organizations across the U.S. The kids loved having people over for all thirty-two days that we celebrated and we loved the opportunity to have people over to our home and share our food and culture. When we lived in Dallas, Texas, the Muslim community

was much larger. During the time of Ramadan, we were constantly getting invited places and we were also inviting people over to our home. Since Logan is our new home and we don't know many people let alone Muslim people, by posting that Facebook post we were able to celebrate Ramadan similar to how we have celebrated it in the past. For next year our goal is to again do thirty days of dinners, but for this year's twist we are going to ask our friends at CRIC [Cache Refugee and Immigrant Connection] to provide us with a list of Muslim families that are new to the community. We will be inviting these families to come to our home and eat Ramadan dinner with us for that day. My husband and I thought of this idea to help refugee and immigrant families feel connected and that they belong to Logan. This year, Ramadan made us feel more connected to Logan because we felt like we could reach out to people that we hadn't met or known before they came to dinner. Overall, Ramadan makes my family feel very fortunate to belong to this community. I hope the experience was positive for all parties involved, I know it was for me.

Texture:

Gonca told me about Ramadan in a very informative way. She explained the components of this holiday tradition like I hadn't been to her home during Ramadan—I had. Even though her extended family isn't in the U.S, I could tell by her body posture and tone of voice that she felt connected to her family, her home, and her culture during our interview. Gonca is a very open person. She loves to teach, talk, and laugh. You could see these personality traits while we discussed Ramadan, as she you could tell she enjoyed teaching me about her cultural traditions

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