



NEW MUSLIM
ACADEMY

Navigate CHRISTMAS as a Muslim

For many new Muslims, and particularly those who come from Christian backgrounds and cultures, Christmas can be a challenging time. On the one hand, it was a time and occasion that they had celebrated for many years, evoking nostalgic memories of childhood, joy and happiness with family and loved ones. It was a time of gifts, sharing food and family traditions. The scents, sound and scenery are vivid. In many parts of the world, Christmas is also a public holiday, which means that most people will be off from school and work. Many will plan to travel to be with family at this time.

On the other hand, and as new Muslims, we learn that Christmas is not an Islamic celebration. It has no basis in Islam. Its religious roots are either pagan in terms of the dates and time of year, or Christian in terms of symbolism and meaning. It can be difficult to deal with the contradicting traditions during this time. Take the following points into consideration as you navigate the season.

Firstly, in the time of the Messenger Muhammad, when he migrated to Medina, the locals had their annual pagan celebrations. The Messenger Muhammad told them that God had replaced these celebrations with the two Muslim celebrations that were better for them, as they revolved around the exclusive worship of the One True God. Those were new Muslims back then and we are new Muslims today.

Preserving our faith and identity as Muslims is paramount. When we trivialize the impact of non-Islamic celebrations and customs, we are in danger of minimizing the impact it may have on our faith.

Instead, we can find ways to use the time period of Christmas in other constructive experiences that do not entail compromising our faith. We shouldn't allow this holiday to make us feel as if we're missing out, unworthy, or in any way less than those celebrating. What seems difficult initially, will become easier with time. Old traditions are replaced with new ones. If you have children of your own, now is a good time to start a new routine for this holiday. As a new Muslim, you are having to make many changes in your life, all to seek God's reward, and how you view Christmas is one of them.

Secondly, If spending time with your non-Muslim family is expected of you or desirable by you, that is not a problem at all. If so, your intentions should always be clear and pure. Keeping family ties is an Islamic teaching and if this is the only time you can fulfil this, do not waste the opportunity. As Muslims, we should not ridicule the practices or beliefs of others or harm them. At the same time, we should not participate in anything that would compromise our faith or beliefs. It is a balancing act. We should not attend church services or any religious festivities, but can take part in family dinners and gatherings. Planning ahead of time to miss the main day of festivities is another option, and instead meeting family the day before or after.

Thirdly, we should not participate in anything which is unlawful in Islam. That includes eating food that is prohibited, drinking alcohol or intoxicants, and anything else which is contrary to Islamic teachings. Family pressure can be very difficult to contend with, but clear communication and setting personal boundaries does wonders. If you feel that your family will pressure you into doing certain things you are uncomfortable with, or are generally opposed to your religion or beliefs, you should consider a way out before attending.

Fourthly, it may be a good idea to sit down or correspond with family members before Christmas and explain to them Islamic beliefs about this celebration. Tell them what you would be comfortable with and what would make you uncomfortable. Just as you are entering a new phase in your life, your family is also having to adapt to this change and how they interact with you. They may be scared that you are changing or they are going to lose you. This is why maintaining good character, respect and communication is important.

Fifthly, if you know other new Muslims in your area, it may be a good opportunity to meet with them and find a suitable alternative. Perhaps your local mosque is holding some programs during the break that you can attend for those days. You can use the time for a short break elsewhere and make a personal or family vacation out of it. The alternative to Christmas doesn't have to mean being depressed, sitting at home and watching TV.

Sixthly, Satan is always tempting us and never far away. Christmas is a prime opportunity for Satan to tempt us to sin. This may be in an outright way by breaking God's laws. Sometimes, the feeling of loneliness or missing out on what others are enjoying are emotions meant to tempt us. It is only a day or two, and your patience and perseverance is beloved to God and extremely rewarding.

Last but not least, one of the most beloved actions to God is to sacrifice for His sake. Islam means to submit to God and His commands. Sacrificing other desires is part of devotion to God. For each person, that struggle changes and varies according to their particular situation. This is manifest in different circumstances, conditions and other factors, such as the time of the year as is the example with Christmas. At such times, we have to remember to focus on this aspect of submitting to God and to know that what God has chosen for us is far better.

Finally, turn to God and pray to Him. Ask God to help you and guide you in these decisions. Ask Him to keep you strong during this time and help you overcome any difficulties and hardships. Trust in God and remember your desire to seek His reward and pleasure.

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