

- Syrian Refugees: A Snapshot of the Crisis in the Middle East and Europe

- Benefits of Meditation: an Ancient Form of Healing

- Celebrating Eid al-Adha

- The Annual Hajj Pilgrimage: FAQs for American Students

*St. John's University: The Language Connection*

## Syrian Refugees: A Snapshot of the Crisis in the Middle East and Europe

by Enas Asiri



### Who are the Syrian refugees?

Imagine that your country has a war with itself for five years. Imagine that for five years you don't have clean water, electricity and even a home. Because of that more than four million refugees of the Syrian Civil War have left the country during the course of the war. Most of them went to their neighbors: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. The most significant population was in Turkey with 1,805,255 according to UNHCR.



### Why are they leaving? What challenges do they have?

Syrian conflict started back in 2011, after the Arab spring in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

This spring inspired Syrians to become free from the Assad regime. With peaceful demonstrations the Syrians wanted peace, freedom and good living. Although Syria is rich in natural resources, it is a very poor country. President Assad responded to them by torturing, killing, and shooting at protesters. This situation developed into civil war. And now Syria is divided by three occupiers: the regime, rebel fighters, and Islamic extremists. The war is still raging today.

Now Syrians must be aware that there are long-term challenges and the war will take time, maybe five years more. It is possible that they will not return to their country again.



### Who are the most vulnerable?

His name is Aylan. He was three years old. This heartbreaking picture of a Syrian child reverberated across the globe. He was in a red T-shirt and blue shorts and found face-down on a

Turkish beach. Aylan, his mother and his five year old brother were trying to reach a Greek island when they drowned. They were in boats and suddenly the vessels capsized. Their father, Abdullah, survived. The father said, "My wife is my world and I have nothing, by God. I don't even think of getting married again or having more kids. ... I am choking, I cannot breathe. They died in my arms." The reporter, Bouckaert, was among many who shared the photo of Aylan Kurdi on Twitter. "What really touched me were the little sneakers," he says. "I'm a father of two boys myself. ... I realized that his parents had dressed him that morning for a very difficult journey."

### How can you help them?

Refugees need food, clothing, health assistance, shelter, and basic household and hygiene items. They need reliable supplies of clean water, as well as sanitation facilities. They'll need warm clothing, heaters, and heating fuel to get through the coming winter months. Children need a safe, protective environment and a chance to play and go to school. Adults need employment options in case of long-term displacement. There are many NGOs out there to help. You can donate money or clothes and anything you want. There are Doctors without Borders, Save the Children and UNICEF.

# Benefits of Meditation: An Ancient Form of Healing by Wasmiah Alajmi



**Meditation:** It is an ancient form of healing, which is defined as a state of profound, deep peace that occurs when the mind is completely alert.

There are both mental and physical benefits of meditation.

**Physical benefits of meditation:** Increases energy level as you gain an inner source of energy, reduces blood pressure, pain, and flu symptoms, and improves immune system.

**Mental benefits of meditation:** Decreases anxiety, increases creativity and happiness, improves emotional stability, develops intuition, improves clarity and peace of mind, and reduces problems.



Meditation sharpens and expands the mind through focus and relaxation. There are different forms of meditation. The common two forms are: sitting quietly, or repeating a word or phrase.

But the goal is still the same,

keeping the mind focused and relaxed, calmed down and with a sense of peace.

## How can you get started?

The first step in preparing to meditate is to choose a peaceful environment, wear comfortable clothes and take off your shoes. Decide how long you want to meditate; minimize any tension or tightness before you begin by stretching because it helps loosen you up and prepare both your body and mind for meditation. It is very important to sit in a comfortable position when you meditate. Close your eyes especially if you are a beginner so it helps you to avoid distractions and external visualizations, and keeps you more focused. Now you are perfectly prepared.

The second step is to practice meditation. First, follow your breathing; become aware of the rising and falling of your abdomen as you breathe in and out. Clear your mind. Second, repeat a mantra (a sound, word or phrase) over and

over, until you silence the mind and enter a deep meditative state, such as, repeating the word peace, calm, or silence; you can choose anything as long as it is easy to remember. Do a body scan; close your eyes and pick a starting point on your body, usually the toes. Concentrate on whatever sensations you can feel in your toes, and make a conscious effort to relax any contracted muscles and release any tension or tightness. Once the toes are fully relaxed, move on to your feet and repeat the relaxation process. Continue along your body moving upwards from your feet to your head. Once you have completed the relaxation of each individual body part, focus on your body as a whole and enjoy the sensation of calmness and looseness you have achieved.

Meditation has a lot of benefits. Try to start with one minute until you get to twenty minutes as the meditators recommend.



# Celebrating Eid Al-Adha by Marwah Khalifah



Eid al-Adha is one of the biggest holidays for Muslims. Our celebration starts after the descent of the Hujjaj (people who made the Hajj) from Mount Arafat, a hill east of Mecca.

It is also the memory of the story of Abraham when he wanted to sacrifice his son Ishmael in response to God's command. So the Muslims approached God on this day to sacrifice a sheep, cow or camel. They distributed the animals to relatives and also to the poor and their families.

In Arabic dahia is the word for the sacrificed animal. For this reason we called it Eid al-Adha. Eid al-Adha occurs on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah and lasts for three days. It is always on the same day of the Islamic calendar.

Muslims all over the world celebrate and begin the celebrations washing and wearing new clothes and using perfume. They also go to the mosque to pray the Eid prayer after sunrise.

Al-Adha begins with a Sunnah prayer of two bowings (rakats) followed by a sermon (khutbah). After that, every Muslim family must have a goat or a lamb to prepare for slaughter on the same day of Eid. Next, we prepare a big meal of breakfast and special food and meet parents and relatives and exchange greetings. The families invite each other and they visit family members and relatives. They give them sweets, gifts and money and we give children a lot of sweets and gifts.

This year there is great news. For the first time New York City has made our Eids school holidays, so all NYC public school children can enjoy this wonderful Muslim tradition.



# The Annual Hajj Pilgrimage: FAQs for American Students

## by Mustafa Khalifah



### What is Hajj?

The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca takes place in the last month of the year in the Muslim calendar. All Muslims are expected to make it at least once during their lifetime. This important trip can be taken alone or with family.

### When is Hajj?

Annually the Hajj takes place from the 8th to the 12th of Zul-Hijjah which is the last month of the Muslim lunar calendar. This year Hajj 2015 took place from September 20th to 25th.

### Why do Muslims do Hajj?

Every year, millions of Muslims go to Hajj in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, fulfilling one of the five pillars of Islam. The other pillars are the word of Tawheed, Pray, Zakah (the rich give money to the poor) and Fasting.

### Who go to Hajj?

All Muslims when they are at least 15 years old can go to Hajj because it is required if they can.

### Where do people go to Hajj?

Millions of Muslims travel from around the world to the holy city Mecca-Saudi Arabia to complete the Hajj. During this time, Mecca's population grows from 2 million to 4 million.





## Editorial Staff

**Wasmiah Alajmi**, a Saudi Arabian, graduated from high school in 2013. She studied one year at the University of Dammam, then she got a scholarship to study Respiratory Therapy in the U.S. She might change her major to Actuarial Science, but she is still reading about it. She has an independent, assertive, helpful personality, and she likes to read about health in general and psychology. She hopes that she can change a lot of things in Arabic society and make people think in more logical ways rather than traditional ones.

**Sultan Aljarboua** has been studying at St. John's University Manhattan since January 2015. He worked in two telecom companies starting in customer service in the Saudi Telecom company in 2004. He has been married since 2010. His goal is to complete studying at St. John's University in the United States. He will study in the business section.

**Enas Asiri** recently graduated from King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah. She took her bachelor degree in Human Resource Management. She plans to study for her master in Finance. She likes to travel and visit new places.

Although this is the third time visiting New York, it's her first time studying here. Her goal in life is to make the world a better place to live in.

**Marwah Khalifah** is studying English at St. John's University. Although this is her first trip to New York, she has also visited Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In fact, she studied in Seattle, Washington in 2014. She is from Saudi Arabia. She graduated with her bachelor degree in law in 2013. She plans to study here for her master in law. Her favorite hobbies are reading and cooking.

**Mustafa Khalifah** is studying English at St. John's University. He is from Saudi Arabia and this is his first trip to N.Y. He is recent graduate from high school - May 2015. He came to U.S to study chemistry. He hopes to complete his university after he finishes his course of English as the second language.

**Linda Dukette** is a language educator at St. John's Language Connection.

