

SUB: Culture Students Essay Contest

At first glance, you would probably look over me briefly before determining that I was Asian. My darker skin tone, my sleek hijab, in addition to my shorter stature all give hints to my Pakistani heritage. But what you probably can't tell from simply glancing at me, is that I'm actually mixed. I'm only 50% Pakistani, with my other half being a quarter caucasian and a quarter black. I'm still 100% muslim though due to my father being born into Islam and my mother desiring to convert to it before I was born. But the heterozygosity of my composition results in how I implement my faith being a bit different than other muslims.

For one, I was not raised to abstain from music involving instruments; rather, I was taught to embrace piano at a young age and to appreciate my cousin's choir ability. I have strong Iman in Islam yet I have other cultures to account for in my belief. I don't eat pork during thanksgiving (one of the most important sins to keep in mind) but I do relish in the soul food my relatives cook. I go trick-or-treating on Halloween with my cousins because my mother was raised enjoying it, yet I have many muslim friends who choose not do so. I also attend haunted houses during the October season and all those other places that seek to scare you out of your wits!

Cultural events with religious undertones are also celebrated differently. Weddings in Pakistani culture are several days long and often have the bride in an outfit of red, scarlet, or gold. In addition her entire arm and hand are decorated in henna, and she can be seen wearing a salwar kameez heavily laden in jewelry. There's a separate ceremony for the friends of the bride, the friends of the groom, and a general party called a walimah before the wedding, all of which attempt to build positive feelings and excitement for the actual ceremony, as well as ready the bride and the groom. Dancing is a huge part of the wedding, and hundreds of guests are often invited to attend and celebrate with the couple. Sometimes the bride and groom even arrange money games where the guest can obtain money by completing some basic task, such as Joota Chupai or the shoe stealing game, where unmarried females can hide the shoe for cash. A muslim marriage in contrast simply requires a nikah, where an Imam performs the ceremony and the to be weds exchange vows after Quran is read. During religious holidays like Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha I often wear salwar kameez to the masjid before going out to my friends houses to celebrate the occasion. In comparison my best friend who is Palestinian may wear a thaweb, or an abaya. On Eid I also get Eidi (money present) from my parents, a tradition my father got from his.

Another interesting thing to note is my father is also a sunni muslim, a division in Islam based off of a rift that occurred shortly after the prophet's death. Whether your denomination is sunni or shia is often determined by where you are from, with most shia's concentrated in the middle east while sunni's are scattered throughout the globe. My father was ethnically Pakistani even though he was born in Saudi Arabia, and although both are predominantly Sunni muslim populations he still chose how he practiced based off of his father. As a result I pray differently than the shia muslims, with my five separate prayers compared to the latter's three seperate ones.

We also differ in how we view angels, scholars, or even the day of judgement, yet in the end we still follow the same religion and serve the same god.

Even though I have these small differences in how I implement Islam in my daily life, the core beliefs that are shared between me and my friends are what matters most. One fact that will always be shared is the belief in the five uniting pillars of Islam. This is the foundation that all practitioners of Islam share as it identifies an individual as a Muslim and believer in Allah (the arabic word for god). The first and most essential of them is the belief in Shahada, or that there is only one god and Muhammed is his last messenger and prophet. These five pillars draw people of all color together, and even though your culture might affect how you practice your faith we all have the same message that we must believe in and therefore can choose to implement in our own way. I may be mixed, but in the end how I exercise my faith is almost exactly the same way that my completely desi friend does in the way that matters.