

“MESSY MUSLIMS”

FOR LESSON

*Eid and Ramadan
in Brooklyn*

NARRATOR **Mohammed Fayaz**



ALI Tell me what — when you were growing up as a child or as a younger adult, what was **Eid** like in your family? Tell me, like, from either the night before or just walk me through what Eid is like.

FAYAZ So, I never — Eid, for us, is just like quintessential holiday. So, like, always got it off from school. And, like, I never felt envy for, like, Easter or Christmas, Thanksgiving, things that would be publicly celebrated, because I was like, oh, I have my own. And, it’s always, like, dressing up in your finest clothes. Once we started fasting, like, the end, the first Eid that comes around is, like, our favorite because it’s, like, oh, shoot, like, we get to eat. Like, it’s over. Like, when you’re a kid you don’t really understand the importance of fasting. Or you don’t have, like, a real relationship with it yet. You’re just doing it because you’re told to do it. So, being able to — and especially, like, the food is really incredible. Lots of amazing cooks in my family, and so depending on whose house we would go to, it was always really fun just to get dolled up and go. I remember as I started to get older and started to identify as, like, more queer or understand that I was gay, I started to, like, feel very awkward.

ALI So, when you talk about community, and maybe it’s communities — I don’t know — but what are your — what is your community, or what is your communities? How do you define that or them?

FAYAZ Community, it’s like a micro scale and a macro scale. So, micro is just like my best friends, my closest people, people I call to when I can’t get out of bed, people I call to say “**Eid Mubarak**” to, people who I — like, later today I have nothing going on, for once. And I’m like, I hit up, like, four different people

RUN TIME 3:59

EID

a Muslim holiday. There are two Eids in the Muslim calendar. Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the month of fasting in Ramadan. Eid al-Adha commemorates the sacrifice of Abraham.

EID MUBARAK

holiday greeting exchanged by Muslims on the two annual celebrations, at the end of Ramadan and on the commemoration of the sacrifice of Abraham. In Arabic, the greeting means, “Blessed Festival.”

to see if they wanted to cook dinner tonight. So, like, that's a lot of people. But it's like, there's, like, certain rings to it. So the closest would be, like, my, like, papis in Papi Juice. And then, like, I'm in a group chat with my friends. It hasn't been as active lately, but it's called Messy Muslims. And it's all of the folks on Instagram that I follow. We follow each other. We're all aware of each other, that are Muslim or grew up Muslim or might have converted or something but have some relationship to Islam. And it's beautiful because it's a lot of South Asian folks. It's Bangladeshi folks. It's Bangladeshi folks via Australia. It's a lot of Somali folks, Sudanese folks. It's Pakistanis in Texas. It's me. It's a friend from the U.K. There's just, like, a very diverse crew, mostly women and femmes and gender-nonconforming folks like myself and then a few guys or, like, two guys.

ALI Why is it called Messy Muslims?

FAYAZ Messy Muslims? Because we — we're messy. You know, some of us don't practice. Some of us practice. Some of us eat bacon. Some of us love — some of us don't only eat **halal** food. Some of us have — some of us grew up Muslim and are maybe not really Muslim anymore in the sense of, like, practicing, but are still Muslim, if that makes sense. And some of us have complicated relationships with Islam. Some of us fast, and some of us don't.

So this year — so last year we were all — last year the group was very active. And we started meeting up, and we started having dinners, and we started going to Yemen Café on Atlantic and just like endless tea and just ordering plates and plates. And places, like, that are amazing because they don't kick you out. Like, there's never — the check will never arrive unless you ask for it, which is ideal.

And it's amazing because I think we all got that from our families and the way our families sit around and act and stuff. And so, messy in that sense. And it's

HALAL
means *permissible* in Arabic. Halal meat is beef, chicken, lamb, or goat that has been slaughtered using the prescribed method.

beautiful because I really wasn't fasting. I wasn't really — for Ramadan — until this group chat. And last year I did ten days. And then, this year I did 25, like all on my own volition. And it's beautiful because I can bring it up in my — in the chat, like, hey, like, what are y'all eating, because this oatmeal's not cutting it, you know?

And it's beautiful because then — and then, some of the girls can be honest like, oh, I'm actually not fasting this whole week because I'm on my period. And, like, for us to not — for me as, like, someone who grew up male to be, like, not freak out about that is, like, so beautiful to also talk about that and to think about, like, oh, like, is there — are there other ways you do —

What else do you do on Ramadan if you can't exactly fast? Like, are you fasting the mind or the spirit or the tongue?

And, like, to have these conversations about, like, what Islam is for us in 2018 is really beautiful because there's no right answer to it.

BIO Mohammed Fayaz was born in 1990 in Brooklyn. He was raised in the Jamaica Estates and Middle Village neighborhoods in Queens. As a young adult, he channeled his creativity into art, with a particular focus on depicting people of color. He created early promotional materials for the group Papi Juice, which was founded to celebrate queer and trans people of color, and became one of their core organizers.

CITATION Fayaz, Mohammed, Excerpt from oral history interview conducted by Zaheer Ali, October 22, 2018, Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.52; Brooklyn Historical Society.