

Who Hid the Eid Lamb?

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Muslims celebrate two major religious feasts called Eids. One is Eid al-Adha, the feast of sacrifice, when many Muslim families sacrifice a lamb to eat and share with the poor. In part, the rituals of Eid al-Adha are meant to commemorate the test that Muslims believe Abraham had to go through when preparing to sacrifice his son Ishmael. Another Eid that Muslims celebrate is Eid al-Fitr, when Muslims celebrate the end of the month of fasting, Ramadan.*

SELMA AND MAHER were delighted that Sitti (Grandmother) Fatoum had come from the village to spend Eid al-Adha with them. The entire family was gathered in the sitting room, and Selma was eager to show Sitti Fatoum her new dress. On Eid day, Selma never wore anything old: socks, shoes, even underwear had to be brand new. She held up her new dress to Sitti saying: "What do you think of my Eid dress, Sitti? Isn't it pretty? I chose it myself."

Sitti laughed, saying: "It sure is a pretty dress, habibti (darling)."

Sitti looked at the dress and at the happy faces of Selma and Maher, and she found herself remembering one particular Eid long ago when she was about nine years old.

Maher shook Sitti gently and said: "What is the matter Sitti? You seem so far away."

Sitti smiled her special smile, and both Maher and Selma knew that she was about to tell one of her stories. They loved those stories, because Sitti was a headstrong girl as a child and always got into trouble. With one voice they said: "Tell us the story Sitti. Do tell! Do tell!"

SITTI SIGHED AND GOT A FARAWAY LOOK IN HER EYES.

I remember as though it just had happened yesterday. I was about your age, Selma, and one day, while I was helping my mother with the house chores, a Bedouin woman came along. She had a lamb in tow that she was trying to sell. As they haggled over the price, I started to play with the lamb. Soon we became friends, and I was really glad when Yumma (Mother) bought the lamb.

Yumma was pleased with herself because she had made a good bargain. She patted the lamb on the head and said to me: "Take good care of the lamb, Fatoum. In a month's time it should make a great sacrificial lamb for Eid al-Adha."

For me, Eid al-Adha was a long time away. I took full charge of the lamb. Every day I took him to graze in the green wilderness around the village. In

* In the version of the story told in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 22), Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son Isaac, not Ishmael.



Roman ruins from the city of Bet She'an, Israel

no time, this little lamb became my best friend. I even gave her a secret name. I called her Soafi (*Woolly*).

I spent hours playing with Soafi. I made flower necklaces from the wild poppies growing in the wilderness to put around Soafi's neck. Soafi followed me everywhere, just as though I were her mother. If I ran, she would run after me, and then we would get into a race. Sometimes, when I felt sad, I would whisper my secrets in her ear, and I felt certain Soafi understood what I said, because she just nodded her head and nuzzled against me.

One day, a week or so before Eid al-Adha, Yumma and Amti (*Aunt*) were sitting in the yard embroidering a dress for the Eid. They were pointing at Soafi while leisurely discussing different recipes on how to cook the Eid lamb. I was in the garden giving Soafi some water. I froze in mid-action, as it dawned on me that the Eid lamb they were talking about was none other than my friend.

I was so wrapped up in Soafi that I had forgotten why we had bought her in the first place.

I needed to think fast. I jumped up and left the yard with Soafi meandering leisurely behind me.

Yumma looked up from her embroidery and said: "Where are you going Fatoum? I need your help in the house. You know there is much to be done now that Eid al-Adha is soon approaching."

I said quickly: "I won't be long, Yumma. I am just taking the lamb to the pasture to graze before sundown."

"Good girl, Fatoum; fatten it up for us," Yumma said. Amti guffawed and said: "Your lamb will surely be the best Eid lamb we have ever tasted."

Tears welled up in my eyes, and I ran up the road sobbing, not knowing what to do. Poor Soafi grazed placidly by my side, unaware of my family's plans for her. There was no way I was going to let my Soafi be the sacrificial lamb for the Eid.

I decided then and there to hide her. I took her to a small cave on a hillside, tied her up with a long, slack rope, and then ran back home just before dark.

When Yumma saw me, she asked: "Fatoum where is the Eid lamb?"

"I don't know, Yumma. I think it got lost," I said. Yumma's face turned red, and she sputtered angrily: "Lost! What do you mean lost? The lamb was last in your care, Fatoum. I don't believe this! You have been mooning after that lamb. Did you hide it somewhere? Where is it? What could you have done with it?"

"I don't know. I don't know," I kept muttering these words over and over.

My brothers volunteered to look for the lamb and find it for Yumma. Yumma was frantic with worry. The whole Eid celebration revolved around the Eid lamb. Our aunts, uncles, and cousins were all invited to the special feast, and whoever heard of Eid al-Adha without lamb at the table!

My brothers searched high and low but could not find Soafi. Everybody was angry at me. They were sure I had hidden the lamb and were resolved to find it.

I felt dreadful, afraid they would find the lamb and afraid they wouldn't. I thought of the one person who might help me. It was Jiddi (*Grandfather*). As the family elder, his word was always heard, and he and I had a special relationship. I rushed to his room where he was lying down to rest and threw myself at him sobbing:

"Oh, Jiddi, I am so sad. Why do we have to sacrifice a lamb for the Eid? Why?"

Jiddi, who had heard the commotion in the house and already knew what had happened, patted my head and said gently:

"Do you remember the story of our Lord Abraham, may he rest in peace, and how the Angel Jibril (*Gabriel*) appeared to him just as he was about

to sacrifice his only son to God? The angel gave him a sheep to sacrifice in place of his son Ishmael."

I had heard the story countless times. "I know Jiddi, I know, but, . . ." I sniffled.

Jiddi continued, saying: "On Eid al-Adha, Muslims all over the world sacrifice a lamb if they can afford to do so, just as our Lord Abraham, peace be upon him, had done. As you know, part of the sacrifice is given to poor people, so they, too, can celebrate. Families celebrate the Eid by gathering round the feast table to eat and be thankful."

I sobbed harder and said, "Yes, I know, Jiddi, but if only you knew how much I have grown to love this lamb. It has become my friend. Please, Jiddi, help me save my lamb just this once."

Jiddi frowned deeply and moved his worry beads faster. He said, "May God forgive us all. The adults in this family should have known better than to let a little girl like you get attached to the Eid sacrifice. Stop crying, little one. Stop crying. I will try to help you save your friend, but you must promise me one thing."

I said eagerly, "Yes! Anything, Jiddi, please."

Jiddi said, "You must promise that you will never, ever get attached to a sacrificial lamb again."

I jumped up and down saying, "I promise, Jiddi, I promise."

I held my breath while Jiddi thought for a little while. The only sound in the room was the click, click, click of his worry beads. Jiddi straightened himself up in bed and called Yumma. He said to her: "What do you think, dear daughter, if we keep Fatoum's lamb, so that we may benefit from its milk and wool?"

At first, Yumma, who was still very angry at me, objected strongly, but after a while she conceded to Jiddi's request, especially after I had promised never to be so foolish again.

Jiddi gave Yumma some money from his clothing chest to buy another lamb for the family feast, and so my Soafi was spared. I hugged Jiddi and almost smothered him with my kisses, saying: "Thank you, Jiddi, for saving my friend, thank you!"

Soon the Eid came. I woke up at the crack of dawn and put on my new Eid dress, and out I went with my brothers and sisters. We swung on the specially



The Jordanian village of At Tayyiban, a few miles south of Wadi Musa

Source: www.greatmtror.com

decorated Eid swings. Going up high was thrilling. Yumma was busy with the other women preparing the Eid feast for lunch. We went family visiting with Yaba (*Father*), stuffing ourselves on mamoul (*date-filled pastries*) and almond-covered sweets.

All the family gathered in our house for the Eid lunch. I sat next to Jiddi. There was plenty of food for everyone and lots of fun and laughter. It was a truly special Eid that I have never forgotten. It was the only Eid when I did not eat lamb.

MAHER AND SELMA HAD LISTENED INTENTLY TO SITTI'S STORY. When she was finished, Maher asked: "And what happened to Soafi after that, Sitti?"

Sitti said, "We kept her in the yard and eventually she gave us baby lambs and lots of milk, which we used to make yogurt and cheese."

Selma laughed and said: "Oh! Sitti, we did not know that you were so naughty as a little girl."

Sitti smiled: "If you want to know who was really naughty as a child, I'll tell you. It was your dad, not me."

Maher shouted excitedly: "Do tell, Sitti! Do tell!"

Father objected, laughing. "Please, Yumma, don't tell. I will never hear the end of it; you know that."

Sitti wagged her finger at father and said: "You can't stop me. I have made up my mind to tell."

The children were delighted and prepared themselves to hear more stories from Sitti, this time about father's antics as a child.

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