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# Faith and charity should be our guide

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On Thursday, Americans gave thanks for many things. Our health. Our families. Our prosperity. Call it the harvest of our hearts.

This day of thanksgiving is steeped in tradition, some as old as our country and others as fresh as Mom's apple pie. Each has special meaning and we should honor each in its own right, because no matter how modest or how plentiful our blessings, it is mentally and spiritually beneficial to reflect, offer thanks and share our bounty with others.

I have been asked by friends. "Do Muslims celebrate Thanksgiving?" I always answer "Absolutely!"

As a matter of routine, Muslims give thanks to God many times every day. We pray five times a day and after each prayer we thank God 33 times. We also have an additional 17 units of prayer that begin with thanking God. Do the math and you'll see it adds up to giving thanks 182 times every day!

This Thanksgiving is a special year on the Islamic calendar. Thanksgiving Day also marked the observance of Eid Al Afrah, which is one of the holiest days on the Islamic calendar. For Muslims who have not made the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, it is a day of fasting.

But today (Friday, Nov. 27) marks the first of a three-day feast called Eid Al Adha (Festival of the Sacrifice). It also is an important holy day on the Islamic calendar. Muslims in America and throughout the world commemorate Eid Al Adha by offering special prayers at the mosques with visiting family, friends and neighbors, sharing meals, exchanging gifts and wearing our best clothes.

Eid Al Adha has deep religious significance. It

shines a spotlight on the cornerstone of the Islamic Faith (Islam means "submission"). It symbolizes a powerful biblical story of sacrifice, obedience and thanksgiving that is shared by Muslims, Christians and Jews. The story is about Ibraheem (or Abraham), who was called upon by Allah (God) to sacrifice his son Ishmael (Isaac in the Christian and Judaic gospels) as an act of obedience and submission.

Once God saw Ibraheem was willing to comply, he spared the boy and rewarded the father by telling him he had passed the test of obedience. He then provided the hungry family with a ram as a substitute sacrifice. This is why faithful Muslims still ceremonially sacrifice an animal during Eid Al Adha and share the meat with those in need.

The lessons of reverence and sharing that we take from these scriptures are especially relevant during this holiday season. Since charity begins at home, Muslims in Hernando County have been distributing Ramadan-Thanksgiving food baskets for the needy families and veterans for nine years. The program is so popular it has now gone nationwide.

These lessons of faith and charity reflect the values of our country and our religions. As people of all faiths give thanks for all we have, we also acknowledge that sacrifice is necessary to help our fellow man. We give of our time and resources to lend a hand or save a life.

Like Ibraheem and his family, we all should be prepared to do what is asked of us and be thankful for our blessings, not just during holidays, but all year long. We should have faith that when we place others' needs above our own, we will be rewarded.

That thinking is in keeping with the truest traditions of Thanksgiving. It is what unites us. Call it our harvest of humanity.