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Honoring all mothers transcends all faiths

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Holidays are some of the most obvious ways to recognize differences in the world's major religions. Whether it is Ramadan, Christmas, Rosh Hashana or Vesak, everyone knows that those special days have special spiritual meanings to certain groups of people.

But the holiday we observe today is one that people of all faiths, and even those who have no faith, can agree on. It is a day we honor our mothers, and on this point there can be no disagreement: Each of us is blessed with life because our mother gave it to us.

Without embellishment, it is fair to say that the very existence of humanity rests squarely upon the shoulders of mothers. As nurturers, teachers and protectors, they arguably perform the most important job in our society.

Each religion pays tribute to mothers in its own way. I am a Muslim and we are taught by the Prophet Mohammed that "paradise is under the feet of mothers," and that our mothers have three times more right to their children than fathers. Judeo-Christians are commanded by God to "Honor thy father and mother." And Buddhists are told in their oldest texts that carrying their mothers on their shoulders without complaint for 100 years would not be sufficient repayment for childbirth.

And sometimes, newer traditions are born. About five years ago, my male friends and I began to honor our mothers, the mothers of our children (our wives), and less fortunate mothers of all faiths by cooking and serving a special meal on Mother's Day. Even men who do not cook have no excuse on this day; they can fire up the grill and they can clean up the dishes. The important thing is to serve your mother,

as she has served you for so long and in so many ways. This is our way of demonstrating unity and appreciation for the very important roles mothers play in our lives.

Think of all that mothers do, especially in today's society. Many find it necessary to raise children while working one or maybe even two jobs outside the home, not to mention the underappreciated jobs inside the home, like cooking, cleaning and laundry. And, in too many cases, those overworked mothers are the only parent in the home. I am convinced that respecting and caring for our mothers, especially those who are abused, abandoned or alone, would cure many of society's ills.

My mother worked as a teacher and a social services supervisor. She is largely responsible for helping me achieve my goal of becoming a medical doctor through her unconditional love, kindness and prayers. But she also was there for other children who needed mothering, providing them with food and clothing for their bodies and books for their minds. They and I are eternally grateful.

It is appropriate that our religions, cultures and countries set aside a day like today to pay tribute to our mothers and to the memories of mothers who are no longer with us. However, we should resolve to acknowledge our mothers' roles in our lives and our communities every day, not just one day a year. And we should show our esteem and our gratitude with acts of love that go beyond the commercial aspects of the celebration.

The word "jihad" is often misinterpreted and abused as it accurately relates to true Muslim beliefs. The word actually means to make the best effort one can toward becoming a better person. Mohammed said that the best jihad is to care for your parents.

On this Mother's Day 2009, people of all faiths should resolve to better ourselves - and our entire planet - by taking better care of our mothers.