

Food-focused talk continues Muslim series at library

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As part of the Muslim Journey Series at the Wilmette Public Library, food writer Yvonne Maffei presented *Sweet & Savory Ramadan: 30 Nights of Foods that Nourish*, exploring Islamic culture and religion while giving insight into the holy month of fasting.

“Our main focus today is to explore the fasting and food rituals of Ramadan, while dispelling some common misconceptions about Islam,” Maffei said.

A Catholic convert herself, Maffei discussed her own journey to Islam, educating the audience on the truths concerning Islam religion and the culture. She explained that Ramadan falls on the ninth month of the lunar calendar, when it was believed that the Koran was first presented to Muhammed. Ramadan is described as a month of fasting, charity and prayer.

“The point of Ramadan is to reflect and focus on purification. [Ramadan] helps you to become a better person,” Maffei explained.

She also defined terminology such a Halal, described as a natural, wholesome and organic way of eating and being.

“Halal means what is permissible,” she said. “It is a direct commandment from the Koran telling us what is and what isn’t allowed as it relates to food and lifestyle.”

Maffei clarified the scope of the fasting ritual, explaining that Suhoor is the breakfast eaten during Ramadan, and that it must be consumed before the sunrise. Suhoor must sustain individuals until Iftar, the name of the meal eaten after the sun sets. No other eating or drinking is to take place throughout the daylight hours.

“Something changes in you when you fast — your compassion for the impoverished is enhanced. You have more empathy for those who are suffering,” she said.

“I am just fascinated with this food, the lecture, the culture and the process of fasting,” Skokie resident Deborah Granite said. “Based on what I have learned today I would be interested in trying a few days of fasting, just to get a sense of what it is really like to go through.”

Once the 30 days of fasting comes to an end, Muslims celebrate with `Eid, marking the end of the Ramadan, when eating after sunrise is permissible once again.

To prepare the body and rebuild blood sugar either before an Iftar meal or during `Eid, fruit, usually dates, are commonly used to break the fast. Maffei prepared a recipe of fresh Mejool dates, dressed with Crème Fraiche, chopped pistachios and shaved citrus zest, allowing the audience to sample the treat.

“Eid is a time to celebrate with families and friends; it is a mix of food and prayer,” Maffei said.

With the overarching goal of the Muslim Journey Series to increase understanding of Islamic faith, Maffei’s presentation gave library patrons an in-depth look and taste into the culture of Islam, and meaning behind Ramadan, leaving residents with a newfound perspective.

“This lecture was just fabulous, and very enlightening,” Wilmette resident Jean Agathen said. “I’ve learned so much about the whole culture and the religion. I have gained a better understanding of Ramadan. The whole Muslim Series has been one of the best programs the Wilmette Public Library has ever run.”