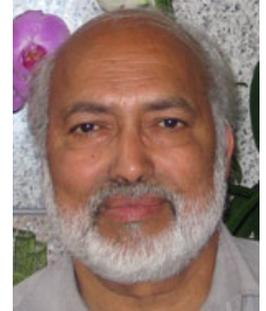


## Muslims make annual pilgrimage

ON Dec. 30, nearly 2 million pilgrims out of a population of 1.3 billion in the world will descend on Mecca to complete one of the pillars of Islam.

They will travel through Saudi Arabia by roads, by sea and by air to the Kaaba, the holiest place in Islam. They will fulfill the fifth Pillar of Islam known as the Hajj, or the annual pilgrimage, from Dec. 26 and ending on Dec. 31.

Prophets Abraham, Hagar and Ismael built and forever consecrated the Kaaba — the black, stone cube, about 80 feet, as a symbol dedicated to the worship of One and only One God.



Abraham, on the advice of an angry and jealous Sarah who feared that the son of a slave woman would inherit Abraham's legacy, got rid of Hagar and Ismael by putting them on a caravan that was headed to Mecca. They found themselves in the midst of a punishing desert.

The scorching heat of the desert sun drove desperate Hagar to tears when she saw Ismael crying profusely for water. Miraculously the divine help came from under the feet of Ismael — a cool spring of water, saving the lives of Hagar and Ismael. Hagar's struggle has given new meaning to the Abrahamic religion of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims who now comprise more than 3.5 billion people in the world.

Prophecy was fulfilled as in Genesis 17:20: "I will bless Ismael and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous, I will make him a great nation."

In the Koran, the Muslim Holy book says, "Oh Abraham — I shall make your progeny as many as there are stars in the sky

The Koran says that Islam is not a new religion. Islam means, total surrender and submission to One God the Creator of all humanity and Master of Judgment Day. The art of total surrender or submission was shown to all the religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

We, the people who hail from Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac and Ismael, namely, Jews, Christians and Muslims, comprise half the world's population and occupy almost three quarters of the land mass, but unfortunately the bloodiest wars have been fought among these Abrahamic tribes for centuries for land and its resources.

A think tank in Washington, D.C., has predicted that the world is so much awash in weapons of mass destruction; it is hard to conceive that humans are going to survive the next century. Also the daily human encroachment on natural life sustaining cycles has destroyed the delicate ecological balance endangering the sustainability of life on this planet. In other words, we are doomed if we do not wake up to the dangers.

We do not have any choice. We must take charge of our destiny. This is the thought that crosses my mind every day. We should not have to kill each other in order to prosper.

Let us as Jews, Christians and the Muslims come together and celebrate Hanukkah, Christmas and Eid Al Adha, the feast of sacrifice. The feast of sacrifice is to remember the sacrifice of Abraham's son. The Jews and Christians say it was Issac, the Muslims say it was Ismael. The Koran is deliberately silent. It only says, "Abraham passed the test and God substituted a ram in place of his son." Now is the time for Abraham's progeny to stop bickering and start repairing the world — "Tikkun Olam."

Iftekhhar Hai is the president of the United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance.

Next week: Anthony McGuire.