In Southwest Asia, as in other parts of the world, religion provides comfort and guidance. It also provides rituals for daily life, such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage.

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**The Hajj and the Western Wall**

Read this passage and use transparency CW42 to learn more about an Islamic pilgrimage and a Jewish holy site.

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**The Journey of a Lifetime** The Five Pillars of Islam are the five fundamental practices or duties required of each Muslim. One of these duties is the requirement to make a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

This pilgrimage, which must be undertaken at least once in a lifetime, is known as the hajj. It is performed during the 7th to 12th or 13th days of the last month of the Islamic year. The hajj is not just a matter of getting to the holy place. It also involves a series of rites and rituals that are said to go back to Muhammad.

Pilgrims begin by putting on the proper garments, which are made of two white seamless sheets. This happens when the pilgrim is about six miles outside of Mecca. The pilgrim is considered to have entered a state of holiness. Then the best-known rite of the hajj occurs. The pilgrim enters the Great Mosque and walks seven times around the Kaaba, or holy shrine. The pilgrim also kisses or touches the Black Stone inside it.

Other essential parts of the hajj include the Arafat day. It takes place between noon and sunset on the ninth day of the holy month. The hajj also involves throwing seven pebbles on three successive days at each of the three pillars at Mina. The hajj closes with a return circling of the Kaaba.

**Prayer in a Public Place** In the Old City of Jerusalem, the Western Wall is Judaism’s holiest site. The plaza on which it stands has become the world’s largest outdoor synagogue.

The oldest part of this wall dates from about the second century B.C. It is the only part still remaining of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, which the ancient Jews regarded as holy. The temple was destroyed by the Romans around A.D. 70.

Today, Jews go there to mourn that destruction and to pray for the temple’s restoration. In fact, the site was once called the Wailing Wall by Europeans. They witnessed the fervent prayers and emotions of worshipers there. Today’s religious visitors also regard the wall as a sacred site. For example, some still believe that prayers written on paper and stuck into the cracks of the walls will be answered.

**Geographic Thinking**

1. What is the hajj, in addition to a journey?
2. What would you expect to see if you were a tourist at the Western Wall?
3. Using the Internet Use the internet to find out more about the hajj. You might, for example, investigate the ritual cutting of hair, animal sacrifice, and other hajj practices and rites; the number of pilgrims who visit each year; how the hajj unites geographically separate Muslims. Write a short report about your findings.