

## A day of rejoicing and also of resolve

SYED ASHRAF ALI

**E**ID-UL-FITR is comparatively a new festival and is not as old as Eid-ul-Azha. Whereas Eid-ul-Azha, commemorating the glorious sacrifices of the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them) goes back to the days of yore in the eighteenth century before Christ, Eid-ul-Fitr originated in the 7th century AD. In fact, Eid-ul-Fitr is the most modern and youngest festival amongst the major religions.

Eid-ul-Fitr was not known to the Muslims till the Holy hijrat to the then Yathrib (now Medina) in 622 AD. After his hijrat to Medina, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) found the people there regularly celebrating two festivals of Persian origin the Mihirjan and the Nawroze on the nights of the full moon of spring and autumn respectively. The way these two festivals were celebrated in then Arabia and Persia were not only highly objectionable but also not compatible with the norms and practices in Islam.

Nawroze and Mihirjan festivals celebrated by the people of Arabia were mere Arabic versions of the two great festivals of the Zoroastrians namely, Nauruz and Mihrajan respectively. Both Nauruz, the Festival of the New Year, and Mihrajan, the Feast of Mithra, used to last six days, the number perhaps being based on the six Persian gahanbars. The first day of the new year was called Nauruz-i-Amma ('of the people') or Kucak ('little') and the sixth day was Nauruz-i-Hasa ('noble') or Buzurg ('great').

It was the custom of the Kisra (Persian Kings) that the King opened the Nauruz festival and then proclaimed to all that he would hold a session for them, and bestow benefits upon them. On the second day the session was for men of high rank, and for the members of the great families. On the third day the session was for his warriors, and for the highest Manbath (priests), on the fourth day it was for his family, his relations and domestics, and on the fifth it was for his children and clients.... when the sixth day came, and he had done justice to all of them, he celebrated Nauruz for himself and conversed only with special friends and those who were admitted into his privacy. As in the case of Nauruz, the first day of Mihirjan was known as Mihirjan-i-Amma and the last Mihirjan-i-Hasa. As stated earlier, this festival like Nauruz also lasted six days. But at one period it spread over thirty days, the first five being, according to Al-Biruni, 'feast days for the princes, the second for nobility, the third for the servants of the princes, the fourth for their clients, the fifth for the people, and the sixth for the herdsmen. Thus instead of each of the six gahanbars being represented by only one day of the festival, it was at one time honoured both at Nauruz and at Mihirjan by a period of five days.

Both Nauruz and Mihrajan were originally New Year festivals. The Avesta year originally began about the time of the autumnal equinox and during the closing years of the reign of Darius I (522-486); it was changed to conform with the regular Babylonian year, thus commencing about the vernal equinox.

The Arabs used to celebrate Nawroze and Mihirjan from the night of the full moon of spring and autumn respectively almost exactly in the same way as the Persians celebrated Nauruz and Mihrajan. To both these two occasions were of great honour and significance. It is well illustrated by the following saying of Salman al Farsi as cited by Al-Biruni: "In Persian times we used to say that God has created an ornament for his slaves, of rubies on Nauruz, of emeralds on Mihrajan. Therefore, these two festivals excel all other days in the same way as these two jewels excel all other jewels."

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**No Eid can be successful if it is spent only through fun and frolic, pleasure and gaiety, joy and happiness. There can be no Eid for a Muslim if his neighbours remain unfed and unclothed. No orphan, no helpless person, no hapless soul on this earth can remain unfed, unhonoured and unsung on this auspicious occasion. Each and every hungry mouth has to be fed, every nude has to be clothed, every neglected and despised person has to be looked after in right earnest.**

The general scheme of celebration of Nawroze and Mihirjan were very rightly stopped and the Muslims started celebrating the two auspicious Eid-days in right earnest days in the mornings of which are the Muslims supposed to say a two-rakat special congregational prayer. And, as in all other prayers in Islam, there is no discrimination of race and nationality, no difference between black and white, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, slave and master, haves and have-nots in this thanks-giving congregational prayer of Eid-ul-Fitr.

The word Eid in Arabic means "joy" and Fitr stands for "break of fast" and symbolises 'return to normalcy'. Eid-ul-Fitr stands for the joy of breaking of fast or the joy of returning to normalcy. It reaches

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Eid-jamat at National Eidgah : Peace and happiness for all

mankind every year as a divine boon, with a promise of joy and happiness, culminating as it does the month-long period of siyam and taqwa, fasting and self-restraint, tarawwi and i'tikaf, prayers and penance.

Eid-ul-Fitr, the day of rejoicing and offering heart-felt gratitude to Allah through Sadqa-i-Fitr and the two-rakat congregational prayer in the morning, is indeed a great and auspicious occasion. It is so auspicious that even women, who are always equal participants in the hardship, austerities and pleasures of Ramadan, have been told by the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) to go out and say the Eid prayers in the Eidgah. Even the nights of Eids have special importance in the eyes of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "He who passes the nights of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha through prayers will never waver or be afraid on the Day of Judgement, while others will tremble or quiver on that fateful day".

Eid-ul-Fitr is really an exceptional occasion something totally different from an ordinary festival. The month-long fasting of Ramadan teaches a Muslim how to practice taqwa or self-restraint in the most scientific way. Sex and food and drinks are prohibited for every able-bodied Muslim from dawn to dusk during this holy month, but these are permitted not only throughout the remaining eleven months but also from dusk to small hours in the night even during the month of Ramadan a scientific scheme which is quite reasonable and bearable. This hitherto unknown system not only makes hardship of self-restraint bearable but also pleasant, and the temporary renunciation makes the fulfilment of the basic desires even more pleasant. Naturally, therefore, at the end of month-long arduous siyam and tarawwi, taqwa and i'tikaf, Eid-ul-Fitr reaches us as a pleasant climax and teaches us that Islam is no static system of worship. It is a living and dynamic movement of thought and action which frees men from the grip of animal instincts, from the idea of artificial differences between rich and poor, high and low, and makes them act upon divine guidance. It teaches us over and over again that Islam is a comprehensible code of life, a perfect "Deen" which covers every aspect of life, and imposes the authority of Allah in all its dimensions, in every sphere of activity, in every domain of thought.

None can afford to ignore or fight shy of this auspicious day a unique prize-giving ceremony in which the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious Allah, in His infinite mercy, Himself distributes the prizes to the winners who have successfully practised not merely fasting but al-siyam in true sense through prayers and penance, self-restraint and abstinence from vices in the right kiln of Islam. According to a Qudsi Hadith, Benign Providence Himself declares: "Every man's work belongs to him. A good deed is repaid from tenfold to seven hundred times. But Fasting belongs to Me and I repay."

No Eid, however, can be successful if it is spent only through fun and frolic, pleasure and gaiety, joy and happiness. There can be no Eid for a Muslim if his neighbours remain unfed and unclothed. No orphan, no helpless person, no hapless soul on this earth can remain unfed, unhonoured and unsung on this auspicious occasion. Each and every hungry mouth has to be fed, every nude has to be clothed, every neglected and despised person has to be looked after in right earnest. The very joy of Eid will be marred if the poor neighbours still remain uncared for, if the poverty-stricken near and dear ones still groan in misery and helplessness.

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## Pinch of hunger and gastronomic delight on Eid-day

KAJI AULAD HOSSAIN

**B**EFORE going into details, I would like to recall a simple anecdote of my life for it has a relevance with the subject matter referred to here. Under the Technical Assistance Programme of the Colombo Plan, I was required to stay in London and remain in constant touch with a department of the British Treasury (Ministry of Finance) for a few months and during my stay there one day my house owner Mr. Ali (who hailed from Sylhet) told me that one of the characteristics of the English people is that they want to bring smile on the faces of the people around them. If we make an analysis of such a candid and meaningful observation of Mr. Ali then I must say that this observation is relevant with the duties and performances of the followers of Islam.

Eid-ul-Fitr is the greatest Muslim religious festival and the Muslims all over the world celebrate this solemn occasion immediately after observing month-long 'Siam' (fasting) during the lunar month of Ramadan. Other communities like Christians, Hindus and Buddhists also have their greatest religious festivals viz : Christmas, Durga Puja and Buddha Purnima, but Eid-ul-Fitr festival of the Muslims is basically different from festivals of other communities for fasting for full 30 days during the month of Ramadan is obligatory on the part of all eligible adult Muslims as enjoined by Almighty Allah in Sura (chapter) Baqara (or the cow) of the Holy Quran. And while fasting for 30 days the Muslims are required as per Quranic injunction to practise self-restraint. Merciful Allah also desires that the Muslims should simultaneously do good things besides glorifying their Creator during this month. So, unlike other communities Muslims celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr and enjoy the festival after month-long training for self-purification and glorification of Almighty Allah.

In this context, I may refer here to 7 Ayats of Sura Maun (or neighbourly needs) of the Holy Quran and a very important observation of our holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) made while delivering his historic Farewell Pilgrimage Address before a vast concourse of people standing on the top of a hill in the field of Arafah for the aforesaid Quranic Ayats. The observation of the holy Prophet (pbuh) clearly indicate the duties and performances of the Muslims particularly the rich and affluent section of the society vis-a-vis bringing smile on the melancholy faces of the hungry and indigent persons of the society including our poor and helpless neighbours.

- In Sura Maun Almighty Allah declares :  
(In the name of Allah Most Gracious and Merciful)
1. Has thou observed him who belieth religion?
  2. That is he who repelleth the orphan,
  3. And urgeth not the feeding of the needy,
  4. Ah, woe unto worshippers
  5. Who are heedless of their prayer;
  6. Who would be seen (at worship)
  7. Who refuse (to supply even) neighbourly needs.

In Ayats 7 Sura Al-Hadid (iron) Almighty Allah says in the following manner: ( In the name of Most Gracious and Most Merciful.)

"Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and spend of that whereof He has made you trustees, and such of you as believe and spend (aright) theirs will be a great reward."

While addressing the vast concourse of people in the field of Arafah as indicated above the holy Prophet declared in clear and unambiguous terms that a person should give his slave the same food to eat that he himself eats, he should also give him the same dress to put on, the dress he himself wears.

After making an analysis of the aforesaid few Quranic Ayats from Sura Maun and Sura Al-Hadid, and the observation of our holy Prophet (pbuh) the quintessence we derive out of them is that Almighty and Benign Allah wants us that we should love the orphans and we must not "repel" them. He also wants us that we should not be oblivious of the "neighbourly needs" or small acts of kindness. There are ill-fed, ill clad, ill-educated and indigent persons leaving in every locality/area, and these helpless needy people should be helped by the rich and well-to-do persons, persons who have crores of taka as bank balance, not for a day or two or once in a blue moon, but regularly until these persons who are indigent and feel the sharp pinch of hunger, are properly rehabilitated. Let us not forget for a moment that our Prophet (peace be upon him) was also an orphan and Benign Allah dislikes very much who repels the orphans and in the words of Almighty Allah, "who urgeth not the feeding of the needy". Merciful Allah wants that all possible assistance should be extended to the orphans and the indigent persons of the society by the rich and well-to-do persons.

Eid-ul-Fitr is the greatest Muslim festival and we know that there is hardly an occasion like this which can match the bonanza and charm of tasty and delicious food that this festive occasion can offer. When the rich, wealthy and well-to-do persons will have the gastronomic delight on Eid Day the orphans and the needy persons of the society will experience the sharp pinch of hunger. On Eid Day immediately after the fasting in the month of Ramadan when the rich and moneyed persons enjoy various kinds of delicious dishes do they ever think for a moment of the melancholy faces of the unfortunate poverty-stricken hungry people and the helpless orphans living in their areas? I humbly feel most of them do not. Let not the gastronomic delight of the well-to-do get priority over the sharp pinch of hunger felt by the indigent on Eid Day. Let us share happiness with them. Allah will be pleased for the very word 'Eid' means happiness, so we should share happiness with others including the poor.

## Significance of the occasion

M NIKNAM

**E**ID-UL-FITR is celebrated at the end of the holy month of fasting during which the believers are required to refrain from enjoying such things which are otherwise lawful for them as well as avoiding anything in violation of Allah's commands. Such an exercise has positive effects on the practical lives of the believers and helps them refrain from adopting corrupt ways. Actually this is a gigantic task, which deserves all kind of rejoicing. That is why Almighty Allah asks the believers to enjoy this occasion. In this respect

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**the celebration of the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr is itself a model of an egalitarian Islamic society, because Muslims pay Zakat Fitr to the needy on this day. Fitr is obligatory for any Muslim who is mature, sane, conscious and financially able to pay for himself and his dependents. The proper amount of the said Fitr must be paid or set aside before one offers the Eid prayer.**

the glorious Qur'an says:

"Say: In the grace of Allah and in His mercy -- in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather" (10:58)

Besides, numerous traditions consisting of prayers and worship to Allah on this day which has been

quoted from the noble Prophet (SAW) and his Ahl-ul-Bayt (AS) reveal the significance of this day.

Taking the solemn bath (Ghusl) on the night preceding the day of Eid is religiously recommended. This is a night of great sanctity and profound virtues, and should preferably be spent in worship and prayer to Allah.

Imam Zain ul-Abidin (AS) used to devote this whole night to prayers and worship to Allah and he said: "This night is as important as the night of power (i.e. to say, the odd night towards the latter part of Ramadan, when the glorious Qur'an was first revealed to our noble Prophet [SAW]).

It is quoted from the Prophet (SAW) that, "One who offers six rakat prayers on this night reciting in each rakat, the Chapter Hamd once and Chapter Tawhid five times, Allah will pardon his sins."

Haris A'awar narrates that on this night, Imam Ali (AS) after Maghrib prayers used to offer two rakat prayers. In the first rakat he used to recite Chapter Hamd once and Chapter Tawhid 100 times, in the second rakat he used to recite both Chapters once only. After the completion of the prayers, he would bow his head in prostration and recite "Atubo Elallah"(I repent to Allah) 100 times and then would comment thus: "I swear by One (God)! Who has the sole command over my life." Whoever will, in this way, offer two rakat prayers, the Beneficent Allah will positively fulfil any wish requested from Him.

Moreover, the celebration of the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr is itself a model of an egalitarian Islamic society, because Muslims pay Zakat Fitr to the needy on this day. Fitr is obligatory for any Muslim who is mature,

sane, conscious and financially able to pay for himself and his dependents. The rate is say, 3 kilograms of wheat, barley, raisin, rice or similar products per person. It is also permitted to give the cash value of such items. The time for taking out Fitr is on the evening of Eid-ul-Fitr and the time to pay it is from the night of Eid till the noon of the Eid day.

The proper amount of the said Fitr must be paid or set aside before one offers the Eid prayer. If one does not offer the Eid prayer, Fitr must be paid before noon of that day. Fitr should be used in one of the following ways:

1. To give to a poor person whose income or cash in hand is not enough to meet his own and his family's expenses for an entire year.
2. To give to a needy person who is completely helpless and indigent.
3. To give to those whose job is the collection of Zakat and its distribution and should be paid to those who deserve receiving it.
4. To give to those whose hearts can be influenced to incline to Muslims or Islam, such as non-Muslims who would be attracted to Islam or would help Muslims in a time of war if they are given proceeds from Zakat.
5. To free slaves.
6. To repay the debt of one who cannot do so himself.
7. To be used in the way of Allah for works of public benefit such as building mosques, schools or bridges.
8. To aid a traveller who is in need of help during journey and needs to return home.

This Eid has also its own special prayers. But before offering Eid prayers it is recommended to have a breakfast of dates. The Eid congregational prayer is preferably held under the open sky. But the natives of Mecca should only offer it within Ka'ba. The specified time of Eid prayer is between sunrise and the sun's initial decline (Zawal). If this prayer happens to be missed, it cannot be offered late as "Qaza". Women are exempted from this prayer, but if they are inclined, there is no restriction for them to pray.

The Eid prayer has two rakats. In the first rakat, there are five takbirs (takbir is to say Allah-u-Akbar) and five qunuts (is the recommended supplication recited during the daily prayers but is obligatory for the Eid prayer), and in the second rakat, there are four takbirs and four qunuts. Eid prayer is performed as follows:

In the first rakat, after reciting Sura Al-Hamd and another Sura, (preferably Sura A'ala), recite takbir and raise your hands to recite qunut. After finishing, recite takbir and qunut again. Repeat for a total of five takbirs and qunuts. After the fifth qunut, recite takbir and then perform ruku' (bowing) and two sojud (prostration) and stand erect. This completes one rakat. In the second rakat, after reciting al-Hamd and one other Sura, (preferably Sura ash-Shams), recite takbir and qunut four times in the same manner as in the first rakat and complete the prayer as usual. After the prayer, the Imam (Prayer Leader) recites two khutbas (sermons).

Note that Adhan or Iqamah does not precede the Eid prayer unlike the five daily prayers, but it is recommended to call As-Salat (to prayer), thrice.

It is preferable to go to the mosque for Eid prayer. If this is not possible then one should say the prayers at home, in the manner described above. If this is not possible, then recite it like the morning prayers, but in the first rakat recite qunut (whatever you know) five times, and in the second rakat four times.

This is a compilation by the author from different Iranian publications, courtesy: Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dhaka.



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