

Eid-ul-Fitr

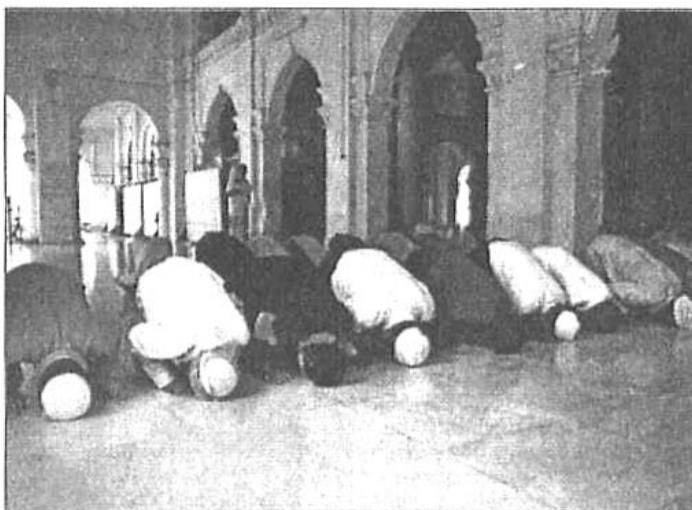
SYED ASHRAF ALI

Eid-ul-Fitr is a comparatively new festival, and 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 A.D. In fact, Eid-ul-Fitr is the newest major festival amongst the celestial religions.

Eid-ul-Fitr was not known to the Muslims till the Holy Hijrat to the then Yathrib (now Medina) in 622 A.D. 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 was 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 prior to the Holy Prophet's (peace be upon him) hijrat to Medina were mere Arabic versions of the two great festivals of the Zoroastrians namely, Nauruz and Mihirjan respectively.



Muslims offering prayer on Eid-ul-Fitr.

Both Nauruz, the Festival of the New Year, and Mihirjan, 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 Ksira (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 Manbadh (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, and Mihirjan 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 to the regular Babylonian year, thus commencing about the time of 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 Mihirjan. To both, these two occasions were of great honour and significance.

It is well illustrated by the following saying of Salman al Farsi (RA) 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 Mihirjan. Therefore, these two festivals excel all other days in the same way as these two jewels excel all other jewels."

The general scheme of celebration of Nawroze and Mihirjan not only laid emphasis on the artificial created world.

"The believer manifests the attributes of faith and positive testimony to God's existence, the unbeliever also manifests God by his denial of God's existence; which provides the opposite against which faith becomes knowable." (Introduction to *Fih-i-Ma-Fih-i* by Thackston)

How to comprehend God? God manifests Himself in hundreds of ways, but no two are the same. Mawlawi quotes the Koranic verse Ar Rahman: "Everyday in (new) splendour doth He shine" (Translated by Yusuf Ali). In time of joy there is one manifestation, in time of sorrow another, in time of fear another, and in time of hope another.

He asked: "Am I not your Lord?" And you responded "Bala" (Yes!) How can one thank Him for that "bala" (Yes)? By "bala" (suffering misfortune)."

The soul that was separated from its source suffers pain for a human being's innate covenant in his conscience as well as in his quest for God after being sent to the world. Hence, the Mawlawi's metaphor of a reed-flute's plaintive note to travel back to its source, The Reed Bed -- which was so beautifully penned by Rumi at the beginning of

the created world.

Mathnawi -- says:

"Listen to the reed, how it tells a tale complaining of separation saying "ever since I was parted from the reed bed my lament has caused man and woman to moan" (translated by Nicholson).

One has to set out and travel on the path of finding God; he or she may not know the exact destination or station but will be rewarded with the achievement of covering a distance; "whoever labours for the glory of God is never lost, though he shut both his eyes." Here, the Mawlawi quotes the Koranic verse, "whoso doeth a particle of good shall see it." "You are veiled," says Mawlawi, to see how far one has progressed, and at the end you will see this world as a seedbed of hereafter.

Man has the capability for spiritual development as God has breathed His "Spirit" into him, even though he shares animality with beasts and materiality with inorganic things. He, the Almighty, brought man from non existence into being, then from being into the state of minuteness, and from the state of minuteness into a state of vegetation, and from the state of vegetation into the state of animality,

and from animality into the state of humanity, and from humanity into the state of angelicity -- ad infinitum. Cries Mawlawi Rumi, "At what stage I was less in my development?"

normalcy." Eid-ul-Fitr stands for the joy of breaking of fast or the joy of returning to normalcy.

It reaches 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 Sadaqa-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 night of the Eids have special importance in the eyes of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "He who passes the night 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 drink 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 that Islam is no static system of worship.

It is a living and dynamic movement of thought and action which free 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 the true sense through prayers and penance, self-restraint, and abstinence from vices in the right kilm 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 clay of a cold star can remain unwept, un-honoured and unsung on this auspicious occasion.

Each and every hungry mouth has to be fed, every nude has to be clothed, and 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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"The man," says Rumi, "is the donkey into which angel's feathers were stuck in the hope of his becoming angelic." Man must, therefore, shed his animal nature in order to sharpen and perfect his spiritual awareness. "One must abandon the ego and be born again to the spirit."

Prayer occupies a special feature in Mawlawi's work. "There is no way to approach God other than prayer." Koran reveals that God created humans and jins to worship Him. But outward ritualistic prayer is just a "shell." Its "soul" is, however, unqualifiable and infinite, without beginning and without end. It is a state of total absorption and unconsciousness during which these external forms remain outside.

Mawlawi sings in one of his ecstatic ghazals: "My ablation is with weeping/ thus my prayer will be fiery/And I burn the mosque's doorway when my call to prayer strike it/Is the prayer of the drunken, tell me, is this prayer valid? For he does not know the timing and is not aware of places." (Translated by Anne Marie Schimmel).

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Rumi and the path

SYED REZAUL KARIM

HAZRAT Mawlawi Jalaluddin Rumi (b 1207), hailed as "the greatest mystic poet of the world" by the German poet philosopher Wolfgang Von Goethe for his Mawlawi and Divan-e-Kabir, was surprisingly depreciative of writing poetry. He made a remark in his Discourses, (*Fih-i-Mafih-i*) that he spouts verses for entertaining his friends, "as if someone was to put his hand into tripe to wash it because his guests want to eat tripe. Hence it has become necessary for me to recite poems since others have wished for this."

But the Mawlawi, his magna-munus, comes up with this remarkable preface: "This is the book of the Mawlawi, which is the roots of the roots of the (Islamic) religion in respect of its unveiling the mysteries of attainment (of the truth) and of certainty; and which is the greatest science of God and the clearest (religious) way of God and the most manifest evidence of God" (translation -- Nicholson).

The late Harvard Professor of Indo-Muslim Culture, Anne Marie Schimmel remarked, "Mawlawi's poetry and prose are

their inborn arrogance and selfishness (90:4-8), and their propensity to keep away from the "steep path," which it describes as the freeing of slaves (90:13), feeding the destitute in famine (90:14), and helping the needy and those in distress (90:15-16).

"We have created man in distress. Does he think no one has power over him? He says, I have wasted much wealth. Does he think that no one sees him? Have we not given him two eyes, and a tongue, and a pair of lips, and shown him the two highways? But he does not brave the steep (one). And what will make you understand what the steep (one) is? (It is) the freeing of a slave, or the feeding of an orphaned kinsman during famine, or of the needy (lying) in the dust. Then he will be of those who believe, who advocate perseverance, and enjoin mercy (90:4-17)."

During the Meccan period (610-622), the Qur'an reverts to this theme in several of its verses, and commands the rich to give what is due to three classes of people:

"Qurba -- Traditionally construed with a kinsman or relative, its epistemology permits its present day rendering as "ones own people" -- implying those people with whom we have direct dealings, including our direct employees and staff. However, since poor employees and staff fall under the needy category, we have

maintained traditional connotation in this exercise.

• Miskin (Pl. masakin) -- any needy person regardless of faith.

• Ibn as-sabil -- literally son of the road, traditionally rendered to as wayfarer (ibn as-sabil) -- a traveler who has no financial means to return home, but its epistemology permits its present day rendering as destitute -- someone who squander are the brethren of Satan, and Satan is most ungrateful to His Lord (17:26-27)."

"Give your relatives (qurba) their rightful due, and to the needy (masakin) and the destitute (ibn as-sabil), and do not squander wastefully, for those who squander are the brethren of Satan, and Satan is most ungrateful to His Lord (17:26-27)."

"Give your relatives (qurba) their rightful due, and to the needy (masakin) and the destitute (ibn as-sabil). This is best for those who seek God's approval: for its is they that shall attain to a short while that I give in charity and be among the righteous' (63:10)."

"(Remember,) if you give a generous loan to God, He will multiply it for you, and forgive you, for God is Appreciative, Lenient (64:17)."

Come the Medinite period

(622-632), the Qur'an consistently directs the rich to their broader social responsibility, by asking them to give a generous loan to God -- an expression that obviously implies generous attitude in helping out the poor and needy financially.

"Who is it that will offer a generous loan to God, that He multiplies it for him? (Remember,) God is Aware of all your deeds (2:271)." "Those who persevere in seeking their Lord's approval, who keep up prayer and spend of what We have given them, secretly and publicly, and who repel evil with good -- such shall attain the eternal abode (13:22)."

"You who believe, spend of what we have given you before the day comes when there will be no bartering, no friendship and no intercession. As for those who deny the truth -- it is they who are evildoers (2:254)."

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"Who is it that will offer a generous loan to God, that He multiplies it for him? Such shall have a noble reward (57:11)." "Those who persevere in seeking their Lord's approval, who keep up prayer and spend of what We have given them, secretly and publicly, and who repel evil with good -- such shall attain the eternal abode (13:22)."

"Charitable men and charitable women who give a generous loan to God -- it will be multiplied for them; and they shall have a noble reward (57:18)."

"The Qur'an cautions against hurting the recipient's sentiments:

"Those who spend their wealth -- by night and by day; in secret and in public -- they have their reward with their Lord; they have nothing to fear nor will they regret (2:274)."

"Those who spend their wealth in the way of God, and do not follow up with reminders of their generosity, or with abuse -- like those who spend their money only to be seen by the people ... (2:264)."

Past ill feelings must be ignored while helping others:

"Let not those of you who have been graced (with God's favour) and have abundance, swear against helping out those among their own people (qurba), the needy (masakin), and those who fled along God's way. Let them forgive and overlook. Don't you wish that God should pardon you? (Remember,) God is most forgiving and most merciful (24:22)."

The Qur'an prefers confidentiality when it comes to giving financial assistance:

"If you spend in charity openly, it is fine -- but if you keep it secret and give it to the needy, it is even better for you, and will offset for you no bartering, no friendship and no intercession. As for those who deny the truth -- it is they who are evildoers (2:271)."

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The Qur'an warns against overspending out of generosity:

"Spend in God's way, yet do not expose yourself to ruin by your own hands, and be generous -- for indeed, God approves of the generous (2:195)."

"Do not keep your hands bound to your neck, nor stretch it as far as it extends -- lest you find yourself blamed, and destitute (17:29)."

The Qur'an also introduced a notion of shared possession of wealth/income, complementing its call for sharing one's income with the others (4:32).

"Do not covet the bounties of God, which He has bestowed in different measures to either of you: men will have a portion of what they earn, and women will have a portion of what they earn. Ask therefore, God of His bounty, and (remember,) God knows everything (4:32)."