

## “So That You Become Aware Of Your Spiritual and Moral Responsibility”

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Thus concludes the verse of the Qur'an (2:183) that speaks about the duty of fasting. We have reached the climax of our spiritual revival during these last ten nights. Indeed, it is the “revival” (*ihya'*), that is, gaining back the revitalized life, full of challenges as well as enormous accumulation of spiritual and moral energy to meet those challenges with necessary force and sense of direction. This is God's law (*sunnat allah*) – the law that does not change, because it is God's creation (*fitrat allah*) with which God has created all of us. Eid al-Fitr (notice the etymological connection of the word *fitr* with *fitra*) is regaining the essence of that moment of God's creation of our nature, which, if cultivated rightly, can lead us to maintain the ideal balance in our life – the balance between our physical and spiritual needs. In Arabic, “Eid” means, “that which returns,” – anniversary - to remind us: “Another year has gone and now prepare for the next one.” It is interesting and rather remarkable to note that in Swahili culture, the month of Shawwal is “the first month” (*mfunguo mosi*, literally, “the first month after the fasting”), giving the Eid al-Fitr a prominent place as the first day of Islamic calendar. Calendars, it must be pointed out, are truly indicative of human vision and expectation about important events that call for celebration. I am not an anthropologist to speculate on Swahili culture and its choice of Eid al-Fitr as the beginning of the new cycle of events. But I can safely assume that Eid al-Fitr marked a `beginning' in life cycle events that East African Muslim culture recognized its prominence and institutionalized its celebration as the “First Month” in the religious life of the people.

Eid al-Fitr is certainly connecting us to our “origin” in the nature and to our Creator as the One who fashioned us with that “origin” – the *Fitrat Allah*. However, that origin needs to be discovered by us. Without that probe in our own nature we remain only marginally related to the *Fitrat Allah*. This is the purport of the famous tradition that is reported on the authority of both the Prophet Muhammad and Imam `Ali, which says: “The one who knows her/himself, knows her/his Lord.” This is a statement that calls upon us to learn about our *fitra* so that we can know the *fitra* of the most merciful and most forgiving God.

And yet, to know God's unchanging *fitra* we need to go beyond assent to faith in God. The assent (*tasdiq*) needs to move one step upward. This is the step of understanding the *fitra* and implementing its capacities in our life. This is where the Qur'an constantly reminds us of “those who believe and act righteously”- that is, those who assent to God's existence and then become godly in their life. Keep in mind that Eid al-Fitr begins with the giving of the *zakat al-fitr*. This has a dual purpose: getting the entire month's services to God recognized by God, and, recognizing the rights of the underprivileged in gratitude of God's gift of recharged nature. There is no other form of worship that achieves this dual purpose so clearly as does the *zakat al-fitr*. It is also important to keep in mind the purpose of our creation by the Loving, Caring God, namely, human beings

must endeavor to replicate the mercifulness and forgivingness of God in their life so that they can come closer to that nature (*fitra allah*) with which God created them.

Eid al-Fitr, then, is the celebration of a month-long endeavor to revitalize this natural connection that we ought to have with the unchanging God's law of creation. This is what the Qur'an says about this connection:

So set your face to the religion, a human being of pure faith – God's original (*fitrat allah*) upon which He originated (*fatara*) humankind. There is no changing God's creation (*khalq allah*). That is the right religion; but most people do not know it. (The Qur'an, al-Rum, 30)

This connection prompts us to be kind and forgiving to one another, just as God has decreed for Himself to be merciful over His creatures. The divinely created origin promotes in us the sense of unity founded upon care and concern for all God's creatures who are connected to us in various forms of social, both natural and intentional, relationships. This is the essence of the naturally derived "Golden Rule" laid down by Imam `Ali in *Nahj al-Balagha*. Imam `Ali's "Golden Rule" appears in his last will (*wasiyya*) to Imam Hasan:

O my son, regard your self (*nafsak*) as a scale [against which you measure your behavior] with others. Hence, what you prefer for yourself, prefer it for others; what you find objectionable for yourself, treat it as such for others. Don't wrong anyone, just as you would not like to be wronged; do good to others just as you would like others to do good to you; that which you consider immoral for others, consider it immoral for yourself. Expect the same goodness from people what you yourself consider to be good for them. Don't say things about others which you don't like to hear being said about yourself; don't speak about things you don't know, even if what you know be little; don't tell others what you don't like others to tell you. (*Nahj al-Balagah, Wasiyya to al-Hasan b. `Ali, # 31*)

The "scale" is the "self" – the self that mirrors the divine light of creation (*fitra*) when pure. All forms of worship are a source for keeping this mirror clean and shiny. The last ten nights of Ramadan are the most intense period for purifying the self – the period that starts with the search for the Laylat al-Qadr through devotion on odd nights, and culminates in spiritually the brightest day of Eid al-Fitr. The important part of the ritual on this day is the recitation of the *takbir* – exaltation of God by thanking Him for having set us apart with the gift of His guidance. Let us then celebrate this day by appropriating once again the nature – the *fitra* - by which God created us, and the nature that follows the Golden Rule in its treatment of other human beings. Remember there can be no Eid al-Fitr without observing the *zakat al-fitr* (literally, "purifying the breaking of the fast") by helping those who need our help. This is the hidden benefit of the holy month of Ramadan followed by *Mfunguo Mosi*.

Eid Mubarak! May God's Peace be upon you all! Amin