

The Festival Of Eid al-Azha

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Eid al-Azha is the second of the two festivals of Muslims. It is not simply an annual festival. It reflects the spirit required perennially of every individual.

The day of Eid al-Azha begins with two units of namaz read at an Eidgah or a masjid. During this namaz, Muslims remind themselves of their duties towards humanity, proclaim the glory of God, and pledge themselves to follow the life of the Prophet and giving up all irreligious activities.

The two units of namaz observed in the Eidgah, are just like other prayers. The only difference is that in this namaz the takbir is recited more than once. Takbir means 'God is great'. The true significance of this takbir is that 'God is great, and I am not great.' So the essence of takbir is modesty.

Then, at the end of namaz, the believers say: 'Peace be upon you, peace be upon you.' Thus they address all mankind, binding themselves to living peacefully in society, eschewing all kinds of violence, and adopting a lifestyle which does no harm to others.

Muslims are required to recite takbir on their way to the masjid as well as when they are returning from the masjid to their homes. Takbir (God is great) on the one hand is to proclaim the greatness of God, and on the other, it is remembering that 'I have to live with modesty in this world.'

The second most important activity is an animal sacrifice on a particular date and, in terms of the spirit in which it is carried out, it is, more precisely, dedication. The festival of Eid al-Azha is an annual re-enactment of Prophet Abraham's actions. But its spirit must be kept up the whole year round in all the

actions of Muslims, both men and women.

Sacrifice is the adoption of a higher level of living. When one endeavours to live above one's material needs, and controls one's desires for the sake of a greater cause, this is making a sacrifice. Sacrifice means living for ideals rather than for the material in life.

If physical sacrifice is for one day, spiritual or intellectual sacrifice continues for the rest of the year. In the ritual sense, Eid al-Azha means animal sacrifice, but in the spiritual sense, it means making a pledge to live for a higher goal, even if it requires abandoning material needs.

The message of Eid al-Azha is that one should adopt a higher level of life, control one's desires, and manage negative thoughts to maintain a state of positivity at all times: one should adhere to moral principles, even if it requires the sacrifice of material interests.

At the time of the animal sacrifice, Muslims are required to recite this pledge: 'My worship, conduct, my life and my death are totally devoted to God.' These words reflect the true spirit of sacrifice. Eid al-Azha means a day of covenant to live a life that is God-oriented.

As on other festivals, Muslims are required to meet their neighbours, both Muslims and non-Muslims, express their best sentiments towards them and exchange gifts as a symbol of love. This part can be termed as spiritual interaction and, as such, is bound to promote peace and harmony in society.

When the Prophet of Islam entered the Great Mosque of Mecca, he said: 'O God, You are peace, peace comes from You, peace returns to You. Grant that I may live with peace in my whole life, and bless me with the Home of Peace.'

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