

## Celebrating Islamic Occasions

The tradition of commemorating an occasion – mourning or celebrating – is an important part of religion. The experience strengthens faith and keeps it firmly rooted.

Commemorations over the years give continuous inspirations and make for pleasant associations with religion. They also provide lasting memories.

An important part of this tradition is celebrating happy occasions. They are usually commemorated to help believers show their happiness at the occasion. Eid al-Fitr, for example, is celebrated to thank God for the guidance provided during the month of Ramadan which made fasting and worship possible. The birthdays of the Masumin (a) are celebrated as a display of happiness and appreciation for their existence.

Islam gives some guidelines on how best to celebrate, keeping the remembrance of Allah as a focal point of celebration. The celebration of the two festivals – Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha – starts with Salat-ul-Eid. Charity is also given. There is the encouragement to foster family and social relationships, to bring joy to others, especially the needy. These practices teach us to go beyond our own comfort and happiness and remind us that the pleasure of God is the ultimate aim.

Enjoying celebrations is part of enjoying religion. In a world where there is much negativity, especially towards Islam, it can be countered through celebrating spiritual occasions, combining spiritual joy and physical pleasure. It challenges the notion that religion is all serious and grim. Many people feel we do a lot of mourning in our programs. This is necessary and will always be a big part of the Shia faith. But we also need to have lighter moments and help our children see Islam as exciting and appealing.

It is important to maintain our own religious traditions in order to strengthen identity as Muslims. Our children are exposed to the celebrations of Christmas and New Year etc. We must have alternatives if we don't want them to be attracted to foreign traditions. At the same time, we must be careful not to go about it in a secular, materialistic manner. The celebrations are essentially spiritual and serve to connect us closer to God and His chosen ones. There should be avoidance of imitating how others celebrate festivals. We need to have traditions that are unique to Muslims such as;

- decorating with images of the crescent moon, mosque images, calligraphy, geometric art, lanterns etc.
- listening to and reciting Islamic poetry and nasheeds
- making and giving Islamic gifts - Rather than giving a material gift look into giving charity in someone's name, giving the gift of time (I can help you with something), the gift of experience (I can teach you something) or a personal gift that is meaningful and useful.

There must be thought put into how to celebrate. It can then become a means for enhancing attachment to faith in our families.