

Eid-ul-Fitr and its injunctions

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The second meritorious aspect of Shawwal is that it has been chosen by Allah Almighty for the celebration of "Eid-ul-fitr", one of the only two annual festivals recognized by the Shari'ah. This happy day is designed by the Shari'ah as a sign of gratefulness by the Muslims on the accomplishment of Ramadan, and as an immediate reward by Allah for those who spent the month of Ramadan in fasting and performing other forms of 'ibadah.

Instead of commemorating an event from the past, the Shari'ah has prescribed the first of Shawwal as an annual festival for the Muslims at an occasion when they themselves accomplish a great 'ibadah. This approach reminds the Muslims that they should not rely only on the accomplishments of their ancestors, rather, they should themselves perform meritorious acts to please their Creator.

In prescribing the ways to celebrate the happy day, Islam has adopted another unique approach. The festivals of other religions or nations normally comprise of some acts of rejoicing and enjoyment. The whole happy day is normally spent in dancing, singing and playing. In contrast, Islam has prescribed a simple yet graceful way to observe the happy day. First of all, it is mandatory on all the well-off Muslims to start their day by paying "Sadaqat-ul-fitr" to the poor of their society, so that they, too, may enjoy the day along with others, and may not be worried for earning their livelihood at least on that day of happiness.

After paying the "Sadaqat-ul-fitr", the Muslims are required to proceed to an open place where they can offer the Eid prayer collectively. In this way, they are supposed to present themselves before their Creator and offer two rak'ats of this special type of Salah, which makes them receive blessings from Allah and start their celebration by these divine blessings. After the Salah also, they are supposed to rejoice the day in a responsible manner, without violating the limits prescribed for them and never indulging in the acts prohibited by Allah.

Keeping this point in view, we will now discuss specific rules prescribed for observing the day of Eid-ul-fitr.

The Night Preceding 'Eid-ul-Fitr':

It had been the practice of the Prophet, Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam, that he would not sleep in the night preceding the day of Eid-ul-fitr. This night has been named in a Hadith as the Night of Reward (Lailatul Jaiza). Almighty bestows his rewards on those who have spent the month of Ramadan abiding by the dictates of Shari'ah, and all their prayers in this night are accepted. Therefore, it is desirable to perform nafl prayers in this night. The Prophet, Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam, is reported to have said:

Whoever stands up (in worship) in the nights preceding the two Eids expecting rewards from his Lord, his heart will not die when the other hearts will die. (Ibn Majah)

To benefit from this opportunity, one should perform as much worship in this night as he can, and should pray for all his needs and desires.

Before Going to Eid Prayer:

The following acts are prescribed as Sunnah at the beginning of the day of 'Eid-ul-Fitr before proceeding to the Eid prayer:

1. To wake up early in the morning.
2. To clean one's teeth with a Miswaak or a brush.
3. To take a bath.
4. To put on one's best available clothes.
5. To wear perfume.
6. To eat a sweet food, preferably dates, before the Eid prayer.
7. To recite the following Takbir in the low voice while going to the 'Eid prayer:

Allahu Akbar Allahu Akbar La Ilaha Illa Allah Wa Allahu Akbar Allahu Akbar Wa Lillahi Alhamd

Eid Prayer:

The second obligation on 'Eid day is to perform the 'Eid prayer. Some rules in this respect are mentioned hereunder:

1. The Eid prayer is Wajib (obligatory) on every male Muslim.
2. The Eid prayer can be performed any time between the Ishraq and Zawal.
3. It is preferable that the 'Eid prayer is performed at an open field and not in a mosque. However, if, it is difficult for any reason to perform it in an open field, it can also be performed in a big mosque.
4. It is not advisable to hold the 'Eid prayer in every mosque, rather it is preferable that the people from several small mosques get together to either perform it in an open field or, in its absence, in a big mosque which can accommodate a large number of people.
5. No Nafil Salah can be performed before the 'Eid prayer, neither in one's home, nor at the place of 'Eid prayer. Similarly, Nafil prayer cannot be performed after the Eid prayer at the same place. However, it can be performed after one comes back to his home.
6. The Eid prayer has neither Adhan nor Iqamah.

How to Perform Eid Prayer:

The Eid Prayer has two rak'ah to perform in the normal way, with the only addition of six takbirs, three of them in the beginning of the first rak'ah, and three of them just before ruku' in the second rak'ah. The detailed way of performing the 'Eid prayer is as follows:

The Imam will begin the prayer without Adhan or Iqamah. He will begin the prayer by reciting takbir of Tahrimah (Allahu Akbar). You should raise your hands up to the ears, and reciting the takbir, you give a little pause during which you should recite Thana' (Subhanak Allahumma.....). After the completion of Thana' the Imam will recite takbir (Allahu Akbar) three times, and after reciting each Takbir (Allahu Akbar) in a low voice, you should bring your hands down and leave them earthwards. But, after the third takbir, you should set them at the level of your navel as you do in the normal prayer.

After these three takbirs the Imam will recite the Holy Qur'an, which you should listen quietly. The rest of the rak'ah will be performed in the normal way.

After rising for the second rak'ah, the Imam will begin the recitations from the Qur'an during which you should remain calm and quiet. When the Imam finishes his recitation, he will recite three takbirs once again, but this time it will be before bowing down for ruku'. At each takbir you should raise your hands up to the ears, and after saying "Allahu Akbar" bring them down and leave them earthwards. After these three takbirs have been called and completed, the Imam will say another takbir for bowing down into the ruku' position. At this takbir you need not raise your hands. You just bow down for your ruku' saying, 'Allahu Akbar'. The rest of the Salah will be performed in its usual way.

Khutbah: The Address of 'Eid-ul-fitr:

In this Salah, Khutbah is a Sunnah and is delivered after the Salah, unlike the Salah of Jumu'ah where it is Fard and is delivered before the Salah. However, listening to the Khutbah of 'Eid Salah is wajib or necessary and must be heard in perfect peace and silence.

It is a sunnah that the Imam begins the first Khutba by reciting takbirs 'Allahu Akbar' nine times and the second Khutbah with reciting it seven times.

Note: The way of 'Eid prayer described above is according to the Hanafi school of Muslim jurists. Some other jurists, like Imam Shafi'i, have some other ways to perform it. They recite Takbir twelve times before beginning the recitations from the Holy Qur'an in both rak'ah. This way is also permissible. If the Imam, being of the Shafi'i school, follows this way, you can also follow him. Both ways are based on the practice of the Prophet, Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam.