

Eid al- Fitr Celebration and Gathering: Mackenzie Health, Richmond Hill

Ontario

July 2015-07-21

I begin in the Name of God the Compassionate the Merciful.

Having an event such as this celebrates the diversity and pluralism which is so common to Toronto, the GTA and York Region. So I would like to begin by thanking the organizers and the officials at Mackenzie Health for facilitating this event.

The day of Eid al-Fitr, literally translated as a Celebratory feast is a celebration which takes place at the conclusion of the month of Ramadan. The import and significance of the day of Eid can only be appreciated by grasping what it is that Muslims are actually celebrating on the day of Eid which was this past Saturday.

In other words, the festival of Eid is appreciated in light of the 29 or 30 days of Ramadan in which all able bodied devout Muslims abstain from food and drink from dawn until sunset. That being said, fasting is prohibited for whomever it entails significant bodily harm-this can include pregnant women, the diabetic,

children, the elderly, or even those who are required to take necessary medication during daylight hours.

During these 29 or 30 days, Muslims partake in various acts of devotion and thanks giving. Among the most poignant of these recommended acts are acts of kindness towards family, friends, and community.

It is stated in the Qur'an which Muslims believe to be the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad: "Fasting has been prescribed upon you just as it was prescribed on those before you..so that perhaps you shall achieve God consciousness- la'alkumtataqun.

-Therefore ideally, Muslims strive throughout the month of Ramadan to be extra vigilant about fulfilling 2 kinds of rights bestowed upon them: The rights of God and the rights of creation. The Qur'an teaches us that one cannot develop God consciousness or God-centered piety without paying heed to God's creation- which includes the environment and all that is in it, most importantly our fellow human beings. And on this point, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has emphasized on multiple occasions that those who fast in this month must be cognizant of the rights of those around them. For instance in a famous sermon regarding Ramadan he said:

“Have mercy upon your young ones and revere the elderly among you.”-end quote. This standard of care extends from a child who is 1 day old up to a 95 year old senior.

The standard is to treat others even better than you would expect to be treated. To show others love, compassion, and mercy is the standard set by the Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Ramadan serves a vehicle by which we may fulfill these commandments which are equally spiritual, devotional, and social in nature. I should emphasize, that Ramadan should serve as an impetus to continue to perform acts of kindness throughout the year which in no way are limited to one month, however due to the special sanctity of the month these acts were especially emphasized by the Prophet.

Furthermore, these proscriptions are to be carried out even in the absence of a common religious identity, but rather our shared identity as human beings is a more than sufficient common denominator to drive us to show each other respect, mercy, and compassion. It is on this note that the Prophet recommended the devout to supplicate to God during Ramadan by saying:

“O God, relieve the debt of every person in debt, O God feed every hungry person, O God-clothe every person without clothes, O God heal the sick, O God,

return every estranged person back to their homeland”- The Prophet went to such an extent to say that the one who recites this supplication after every canonical prayer will have their misdeeds forgiven. Why is this the case?

The simple reason is that, the Prophet Muhammad, expected especially the wealthy or established among his followers and humankind as a whole to be the torch bearers of social and economic welfare-bringing assistance and help to every person in need. Today, we thank God for the opportunity to live in this great country in which, as Canadians we have an inalienable right to healthcare regardless of our race, economic class, gender, or religious identity or lack thereof. The work which Doctors, nurses and other staff perform day in and day out in hospital and health care settings would certainly be classified as those things which pertain to the fulfillment of the rights of God’s creation (*huquq al-nas*).

On the day of Eid, Muslims celebrate the God given opportunity to fast, pray, spend time with family, and be charitable towards others. According to the Prophetic tradition, even on the day of Eid, Muslims are reminded that a life of prayer, physical fasting and devotion is forever incomplete without charity. Charity certainly need not be solely limited to financial assistance I but it could

also be in the form of volunteer services. Right here at Mackenzie Health we have numerous volunteers who dedicate their time to serve the weakest among us, namely the ill and the infirmed. This again is a Godly act so to speak.

If I may I would like to briefly highlight some of the activities of our volunteers here at the hospital:

-Our team of 5 volunteers headed by a local Imam make regular visits to Muslims patients. We pray for them and try to provide them moral and spiritual encouragement to bear the trials they are undergoing.

- And in the case of a death, the local Imam conducts immediate rituals at the hospital helps guide the family in obtaining Muslim funeral services.

I would once again like to thank the leadership at Mackenzie Health for giving us the opportunity to contribute and serve the community.

I conclude by conveying a greeting of peace and blessings upon all of you.