

Anas ibn Mālik narrated saying:



When God's Messenger (peace be upon him) migrated to Madinah, its people used to celebrate two days. He asked: 'What are these two days about?' They said: 'We used to celebrate them prior to Islam'. God's Messenger said: 'God has replaced them for you with two better days: the Day of [Eid] al-Aḍḥā and the Day of [Eid] al-Fiṭr'.⁽¹⁾

From the Qur'an

- ﴿You are, however, required to complete the necessary number of days and to extol and glorify God for having guided you aright and to tender your thanks.﴾ (2: 185)
- ﴿Give glory to God during certain appointed days. Those who hasten their departure after two days incur no sin, and those who stay longer incur no sin, provided that they are truly God-fearing. Have fear of God and know well that you shall all be gathered before Him.﴾ (2: 203)
- ﴿Do not substitute bad things of your own for their good things.﴾ (4: 2)
- ﴿Say: 'In God's bounty and grace, in this let them rejoice; for this is better than all that they may amass'.﴾ (10: 58)

The Narrator

Abu Ḥamzah Anas ibn Mālik ibn al-Naḍr of the Anṣār was a distinguished scholar, mufti, excellent reciter of the Qur'an and a leading scholar of Hadith. He was the chronicler of Islam. He was the servant of God's Messenger and his household. Anas was the last of the Prophet's companions to die in Basrah. He was only ten years of age when the Prophet migrated to Madinah, and he was 20 when the Prophet (peace be upon him) passed away. He took part in several military expeditions with the Prophet, as also the pledge given to the Prophet (peace be upon him) known as 'the pledge under the tree'. God's Messenger prayed to God to give him plenty of wealth and offspring. He died in Year 93 AH 712 CE.

Summary

The people of Madinah used to celebrate two days annually in pre-Islamic days. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) migrated to Madinah and saw them celebrating them, he asked the cause of their celebration. They told him. He told them not to mark them anymore, because God has substituted these days for them with the two better days of Eid: al-Fiṭr and al-Aḍḥā.

1 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 1134; al-Nasāī, 1556.



Message and Meaning

When the Prophet (peace be upon him) migrated to Madinah, he found that the Anṣār celebrated two Zoroastrian days, namely, Nayrūz and Mahrajān. The Prophet wondered at these celebrations. They told him that this was a tradition going back long in pre-Islamic days and that they used to mark them with festivities. The Prophet then told them to stop this because God had given them two much better days: the two Eids of al-Fiṭr at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and al-Aḍḥā on the day of the hajj.

The hadith indicates an order not to celebrate the festive occasions marked by unbelievers and idolaters, whether they are following earlier revelations or not. This is a rule of association and dissociation. It should be noted that the Prophet mentioned that God replaced these with two better days. A replacement does not occur without abandoning what is replaced.

What confirms this prohibition is that these two celebrations have been totally removed. There is not a single mention of them during the Prophet's lifetime or during the reign of the four rightly-guided caliphs. Had the Prophet not ordered his companions to abandon marking them with whatever they previously did, their tradition would have survived. Traditions are not replaced unless something else is put in their place. Moreover, it is in the nature of women and children, as well as many men, that they look forward to a festive day when they have fun and entertainment.



Implementation



The hadith implies that it is not permissible to celebrate the feasts and occasions of unbelievers. It is not permissible for a Muslim to celebrate such feasts, nor to emulate the unbelievers in their food and drink on such a day.



If the prohibition applies to the celebration of the feasts of unbelievers whose rituals are no longer marked and will not be revived until close to the end of time, then it is more applicable to the celebration of the feasts of the Jews and Christians, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) foretold that some of us would emulate them. He warned against this in clear terms.



The hadith makes clear that it is perfectly permissible to have fun and play during the days of Eid. The Prophet made clear that the Eid days replaced the old Zoroastrian days of play and fun. Moreover, the Prophet (peace be upon him) permitted the Abyssinian visitors to play with their spears on the Day of Eid. He allowed 'Ā'ishah, the Mother of Believers, to watch them as long as she liked.



It is perfectly permissible to rejoice and play on the Days of Eid, provided that such fun and play does not involve anything forbidden, such as gambling and games of chance, or the unacceptable mixing of men and women, or distraction from religious duties.



Rejoicing and displays of pleasure on the days of Eid are recommended by Islam. It is encouraged to arrange games, fun activities, exchange of visits particularly with relatives, and providing more generously for one's family so as to spread the feeling of pleasure and relaxation.



On the day of Eid, a Muslim should formulate the intention of marking this ritual of pleasure. Thus he earns a reward for his cheerful activities as well as for his food and drink.



Muslim rulers and advocates of Islam should look into people's situations, habits and transactions so as to point out what is permissible and what is not. People may become used to a certain habit which originates from something that is forbidden or discouraged and they may be unaware of this. If the matter becomes clear for the ruler, advocate or scholar, he should tell the people of how God and His Messenger view this habit. They will then do what earns God's pleasure.



Providing an alternative is the best way to abandon what is unlawful. If an educator wants his children and students to abandon some bad habits or practices, he should give them a good alternative that pleases them. God replaced the old festive occasions of the people of Madinah with the two Eid occasions Muslim celebrate every year.



Preventing the cause that leads to something forbidden is an established rule of Islamic law. The Prophet prevented play and fun activities on the occasions marked by the unbelievers to prevent a possibility that it might lead to participation in their religious rituals. It is important that scholars should observe this principle in their rulings and fatwas. A scholar may realize that it is better to stop something which is not prohibited in itself because this may lead to sinful action or even to disbelief.



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