

Allah Has Willed It - I just completed the Moslem Ramzan fast

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Ramadan in Kuwait

I just completed the Moslem Ramzan fast. Since we in the Family are disciplined in fasting, it wasn't very difficult for me to go through the 30 days. In fact, I came to enjoy the change of schedule. But it's really a phenomenal thing to consider the fact that it's ordinary people doing it, without such a deep spiritual connection, only faith and a sense of duty and social form. I'm not sure as many people in America could do it (though if America carries on now, it isn't necessary for them).

The fasting of Ramzan is for purification and discipline, and is one of the five main tenets of Islam (1. Allah is one; 2. fasting; 3. namoj, praying five times daily; 4. charity to the poor; and 5. the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca).

I heard that in Kuwait the atmosphere really becomes purified, because the social code is so strong anyway, and the increased piety of Ramzan adds an almost "angelic" touch. Here, however, although they are definitely Muslim, the adherence both socially and legally is much less strict than in the Arab world, because of cultural and geographical distances, etc. Observance seems external and undisciplined. Young people voice their determination to keep it this year for sure, but after one or two days seem to develop stomach dis orders and other ambiguous maladies that allow them to slip legally.

The less educated, though, usually do keep it, and there is a definite spiritual brightness among them. Everyone village side, rich, poor, educated, or illiterate, usually goes through the whole course.

Celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr in a friend's village, I felt much more deeply tied to them and a warmer heart than I'd ever known with Muslims. This was greatly enhanced by the fact that I, though not a Moslem and professing as much very frankly, had still fasted the whole 30 days in honor of their social, moral, spiritual and (to some extent) political base, observing this vital Islamic custom. Indeed, my friends, neither of whom had fasted, were somewhat shamed before their families, though nothing serious. I now feel some kind of spiritual bond with Islam that I didn't have before, as long as I've been here. I think Islam can be restored, but from the inside out.

Before I thought of Moslems as stubborn, rigid, cold and sometimes completely bleak and dead. Now, however, I can understand their heart, and I can find an affinity that comes much more easily, even if they don't know I've fasted. I even get invited to pray with them from time to time! Christians could never understand this, that's why the enmity has arisen (in part). If we exalt their faith, they have no basis to accuse and we can speak with authority. Of course, it doesn't mean we have to go through the five times per day of bowing to Mecca or the Hajj, but just to respect and honor their faith, and help them understand it in relation to God's greater purpose. And there truly are spiritual Muslims.

Three days before his arrival in the village, Nurul's wife, who had preceded him, gave birth to a little girl, their third. Thereafter a strange drama took place.

Of course all parents love their children, and Nurul was happy. But it was a daughter. Being his third child and being a strong adherent of family planning as are all educated and conscientious countrymen, he could have no more. Many people began clucking their tongues and saying behind their hands what an unlucky fellow he was. Nurul, who is very proud, was undergoing a severe loss of face, so his happiness was definitely tainted by this.

In a primitive society, it's pragmatism as much as anything, and a delicate balance of nature and man, that brings about this favor of boys. Also, in this Muslim society, women are relegated to the position of relative non-entities, existing only to serve their husbands, who, on the other hand, exist to serve God -- a great difference in value. The combination of these two things caused an almost cool reception for the newborn.

I spent much time encouraging Nurul, telling him how fortunate he was, and also by the time his three daughters have grown, the social structure and morality of society will be so changed that it will be immaterial whether they are male or female, but they will have equal glory, beauty, and opportunity, in short equal value as children of God.

Although I was a little shocked and angry at the baby's dull welcome, what followed was stranger. On the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr, the baby began to develop some trouble. It progressed into pneumonia and in 24 hours she died, just like that. The next morning, scarcely five hours later, a funeral of a few minutes was held and she was laid to rest. Scarcely a tear was shed or even much of a show of concern, and I felt it was almost forgotten by the time I returned to the city later that day.

It was Nurul's first experience of this kind, and he was shaken. His wife was more upset, as it had been a difficult pregnancy, I think. Parents always love their children, but there was a sense of relief, I felt, that Allah had taken the girl but now a son could come.

Of course, in such a society these things are treated as facts of life. As many as 50 percent of all children die in infancy in the villages. The same had happened with the previous two issues in this particular family. They aren't callous, just stoic. If their hearts and emotions worked as they do in the West, where parents would have been frantic with grief, then they couldn't withstand the strain. It's always a tragedy, but everything must be seen pragmatically. "Allah has willed it." There's nothing else to say or do.

It was also a shock to think that it was probably, in the beginning, a fairly routine infant complaint that developed complications because there was absolutely no way of treating it. There are no qualified physicians, or even pharmacists or orderlies in the villages. They could do nothing except to contact one old Malauna who reputedly has contact with spirit world and who blew on the baby and gave her and the mother talismans to exorcise the spirit. Prayers were offered and all was placed in Allah's hands.

I prayed for the baby and Nurul, that if she died, Nurul could deeply understand Heavenly Father's heart. But he saw it, at least at first, as a punishment from God, not to him but to the baby. Still, his heart behind his stolid face was turning over in sadness, I think. I'll have a chance to spend more time with him. He comes seeking advice sometimes, though his feeling of intellectual effete causes him to resist much talk of God as yet. Slowly we are gaining the capacity to influence people into thinking in the right direction and to see God as more than a heartless, static force.