

Eid al-Fitr in the Shi'i Faṭimi Ismaili Tradition

By: Qazi Dr. Shaikh Abbas Borhany al-Waleed

PhD (USA), NDI, Shahadat al-Alamiyyah (Al-Hawzah al-'ilmiyyah, Najaf, Iraq), M.A, LLM (Shariah)

Musheer: Federal Shariat Court of Pakistan

Member: Ulama' Council of Pakistan

Chairman: The Guardian Pakistan

Attorney at Law & Religious Scholar

Website: www.durrenajaf.com

Academia: <https://durrenajaf.academia.edu/QaziBorhany>

Contact for spiritual help: najafspiritualcenter@gmail.com

Published: Daily News; Mag Weekly, Pakistan, 21st Oct. 2006

Revised: 2026

Abstract: Eid, in the Islamic ideology, is not merely a social holiday but a divinely granted Naimah, joy and gratitude. This article situates Eid al-Fitr within a wider scriptural pattern: Nabi Ibrahim (as) deliverance from the fire, Nabi Yunus (as) liberation from the fish, and the heavenly Maidah sought by Nabi Isa (as) in Qur'an 5:114 as an 'Eid' for the faithful. Against that theological background, the study revisits a luminous yet often neglected chapter of Muslim history: the glorious Fatimi Ismaili period in the West Arabia and North Africa, especially in Misr, with particular attention to the reign of the fourteenth Ismaili Imam, al-Muiz. It reconstructs how the conquest of Misr by Sayyiduna Jawhar al-Siqilli led to the founding of al-Muizziyyah al-Qahirah (Cairo) and the establishment of al-Jam'e al-Azhar, an institution whose name recalls al-Zahra', the epithet of Sayyidah Fatimah (as). The paper then maps the civic and cultural ecology that enabled Ramadan and Eid to be celebrated as public religion: the building of Masajid, Madaris, Hospitals, organized Bazaars, roads, gardens, and rest houses for travelers, alongside courtly ceremonies that brought elites and common people into visible interaction. It also reviews ritual markers attributed to the era, including the articulation of Wilayah in the Adhan, the revival of 'Hayya Ala Khayr al-Amal', and the use of auditory signals (cannons) to mark Suhur, Iftar, and Eid. The enduring Fanus lantern tradition is read as a fusion of piety, urban lighting, and communal joy. Finally, drawing on Hujjah of Khurasan, ruby of Badakhshan, Sayyiduna Nasir'e Khusraw's Wajh'e Din, the article presents a Tawil interpretation of Eid al-Fitr as Najat from Jahalah through sacred 'ilm, thereby connecting festivity to repentance, social care, and the moral discipline that preserves Eid from waste and the prohibited. Reading Eid practice highlights the Fatimi Imam's procession to the Musalla, the Takbir'at, and the Khutbah, followed by the communal Safrāh and the elite reception described by Sayyiduna Nasir as tables of sweets shaped like palaces. The same ethic of feeding others echoes in later customs of Misr such as food tables for the poor and the distribution of clothing and dinars. The article concludes that the joy of Eid is validated when it heals hearts, safeguards lawful limits, and renews solidarity. .

Keywords: Eid al-Fitr; Fatimi Ismaili; Al Imam al-Muiz; Jawhar al-Siqilli; al-Azhar; Qahirah; Fanus; Ramadan cannon; Musalla; Khutbah; Safrāh; Tawil; Wilayah.

Every nation or community observes some festivals which indicate their socio-religious, historical and cultural significance. The day when by the order of Nimrud [1] Ibrahim(as) was dropped into the blazing fire which was instantly cooled down by the order of Allah, it became the day of Eid for his Ummah. The day when Yunus (as) was released from the Fish, it was Eid for his followers. When Essa (as) extended the following Dua: [2]

"O our Rabb! Descend upon us Maidah from the heaven which may become Eid for us".

Therefore, the day when Maidah was bestowed to the followers of Essa (as) it became their Eid. Similarly, the Ummah of Muhammad (S) observed Eid as a divine reward on the completion of the thirty days of Ramadan. Eid al-Fitr is such a joyful day when bliss and merriment spreads over the entire Muslim world. I cherish a glorious but neglected period of the Muslim history when the flag of the Bani Fatimah [3] had arisen from North Africa and was flying high in complete dominance in the Arabian Peninsula and parts of Europe. It was the period of the 14th Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Imam al Muiz[4], when the conqueror of Misr, Sayyiduna Al-Qaidjohar al-Siqali [5] founded the city of "Al Muizziyyah al-Qahirah" and built "Al Jam'e al-Azhar"[6], which is derived from "al-Zahra" (the Radiant), the famous given name of Sayyidah Fatimah (as), the only daughter of Muhammad (S) from Khudaijah (as).

Al Muizziyyah al-Qahirah became the hub of intellectuals from far and wide as Al Jam'e al-Azhar was a favorite seat of learning. What Zulm (tyranny) it is that today this ancient academic institution is in the clutches of the militant cult of Wahabi Salafis who are promoting intolerance instead of harmony from this place and defaming the true Islam. Sayyiduna Johar al-Siqali publicly declared testimony in the Adhan (the call to Salaat) to the Wasayah and Imamah of Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) after the Risalah of Muhammad (S). The phrase "Haiyya Ala Khayr'il Amal" (rush to the best of deeds), which was dropped from the Adhan by the second Khalifah, was also revived and echoed from the Minarat of al-Azhar. The landmark achievements of the Fatimi Empire were magnificent Masajid, splendid Madaris, great hospitals, organized Baz'ar, business areas, road and travelers resting places, with all of these pointing out a superb culture and prosperous society. It was a great city with hundreds of shops and baths as well as structures taller than the city's fortified wall. The buildings were well constructed and separated from each other with gardens irrigated by water from the wells. The magnificent city of Al Muizziyyah al-Qahirah was at the height of its glory on account of the enlightened approach of its rulers, the Fatimi Imams.

According to the historians of Misr, Aimmat Fatimiyyin started the custom of firing the Ramadan and Eid cannons, which was adopted by succeeding rulers. The Fatimi Imam ordered that a cannon be placed on Muqatam hill to enable all Muslims to hear the signals of Sahr, Ift'ar and Eid. Fawanis (lantern) of the Ramadan is an essential part of Ramadan's magical atmosphere in Egypt. According to historians, the use of Fawanis can be dated back to a celebration during the Fatimi dynasty when Egyptians welcomed the arrival of the Fatimi Ismaili Imam al-Muiz (as) to Al Muizziyyah al-Qahirah by lighting hundreds of Fawanis. Since then, Fawanis of various kinds - of many hues and degrees of brightness - have always been special to Misr. Before the invention of electricity, al-Qahirah itself was noted for its spectacular use of lanterns to illuminate the city, especially during Ramadan al-Muazzam. Many Ramadan celebrations and traditions introduced during the Fatimi era have lasted till today. The roads and streets of Al Muizziyyah al-Qahirah

were decorated with coloured Fawanis (lamps) from the beginning of Ramadan till the end of Eid season.

Regarding the origin of Fawanis, it is said that the Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imam al-Hakim (as) wanted to light the streets of Al Muizziyyah al-Qahirah during the ibadah season and Eid hence he ordered all the Shaikhs of Masajid to hang Fawanis that could be illuminated by candles. As a result, the Fanus became a custom that has never been neglected. Another narration states that during the time of Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imam al-Hakim (as), women were not allowed to leave their houses except during Ramadan; even then they travelled with a little boy carrying a copper Fanus which was then used as a tool to announce the arrival of a woman to caution men in the street to move aside and make way. As the laws against women softened, women were allowed to go out as they wished but people liked the idea of the Fanus, and so it became a tradition that little children carry them at night, something which still takes place in Misr today.

Celebrations of Eid would begin following the Salaat al-Maghribayn of the last day of Ramadan. The Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imam used to go for Salaat al-Eid mounted on the royal horse with his retinue. The royal procession began from the Bab al-Eid (one of the doors of al Qasar Al-Imam al-Fatimi in the north eastern part). The Imam carried the A'sa (walking stick) of his great grandfather Rasulullah (S) in his hand for Barakah. The Musalla (Eid Gah) was built by Sayyiduna Johar al-Siqali (ra) [7] near the Bab al-Nasr. The atmosphere was filled with the sound of Takbirah. Al Imam al-Muiz completed the Eid Salaat with total devotion. Sayyiduna Al Qadi al-Nauman (ra) [8] recited Takbir. After completion of the Salaat, the Fatimi Imam and Khalifah rested on the Minbar, offered Salaam upon the attendants of the congregation and then delivered a Khutbah, replete with eloquence. After delivering the first part of the Khutbah, he sat down at the higher step of the Minbar while with him on lower steps were Sayyiduna Johar, Commander of the Fatimi Forces, Ammar bin Jafar and Shafi - the flag bearers. The Imam recited the Kalimah: "La 'ilaha 'illal'lah Muhamaddun Rasulullah Aliyan Waliullah" twice and then began the second part of the Khutbah. Finally he recited Dua with repentance and tears. His manner of Dua itself manifested that he was also one of the "Ahl al-Dhikar". The eyes of the listeners instantly welled up. At the end of the Khutbah, Al Imam al-Muiz (as) proceeded towards the cantonment, and from there he went to Al Qasr al-Mualla, where a huge crowd waited to attend the Safrah (Dastar Khawan) arranged on behalf of the Fatimi Imam. A very long and spacious Safrah was spread for the guests. What a wonderful time it was when the emperor and the public mixed with each other. It was an empire that gave a new phase of renaissance to the Ummah. Further, it provided a perfect opportunity to understand the Nabawi practice in the faculty of politics. The Fatimi Ismaili Imams strongly demonstrated the meaning of divine politics and left a clear example for the future generations to follow.

The second feast on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr for dignitaries and elites was arranged usually in Ew'an al-Dhahab. A large silver plate of sweets was placed before the Imam and he took some for the blessings. This magnificent scene is described by the celebrated Ismaili Da'i and intellectual of Central Asia, better known as the "Ruby of Badakhshan", "Hujjah of Khurasan", Sayyiduna Abu Muin Hamiduddin Nasir'e Khusraw (ra): [9]

"It was the tradition of the Bani Fatimah to decorate the court and arrange a ceremony. Prominent figures from all corners like aristocrats, courtiers, Ulama and Sad'at were invited.

After a Salaam and Tahniy'at session, a feast was served in honour of the guests. Each invitee was seated, as per protocol."

It was the first audience of Da'i Nasir in the Fatimi court. Mesmerized by the grandeur of the court, he described:

"The arrangements of the feast where a wide variety of dishes in the form of trees decorated and palaces made of sugars were prepared".

Sweets and nut markets flourished in Al Muizziyyah al-Qahirah, providing the sugar for making al Alalik, a kind of sweet in the shape of lions and horses. Kunafa and Atayef, traditional Ramadan sweets, were also introduced during the Fatimi period. Eid al-Fitr cookies, a long standing festive feature of the traditional feast in Misr, date back hundreds of years to the Fatimi rule. Today's "Mawaid al-Rahman" food tables laid out during the month of Ramadan for the poor have been inspired by the huge tables of food ordered by rulers and top officials for the underprivileged during the Fatimi era.

Mawaid al-Rahman is still today organized by groups of neighbors, private businesses, Masajid, charity organizations, or individuals in following the Bani Fatimah who fed others in the name of Allah. Islam encourages acts of kindness and generosity, especially during Ramadan during which observant Muslims strive to be on their best behaviour. During the Fatimi era, people of Misr would give out candies to state officials and organize huge banquets. Fatimi Imam al-Aziz (as) would arrange two banquets on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr. Following the Salaat in the morning on Eid's first day, Fatimi Imam sat at his Masnad to be served with the cookies. Celebrations were incomplete without new clothes, Dinars and different kinds of sweets being distributed to the masses.

It is noteworthy to discuss the intellectual interpretation of the Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Da'i with regard to the significance of Eid al-Fitr. In his masterpiece "Wajh'e Deen" [10], Sayyiduna Nasir'e Khusraw provides an esoteric interpretation of Eid al-Fitr. He explains:

"In Zahir, Eid al-Fitr is the day when the Sa'im (fast-breaker) is liberated from the restrictions of Sawm (fast) and enjoys food and drink to gain physical strength. Similarly in Batin, Eid al-Fitr is symbolic of Bab al-'ilm, Mawlana Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as), who is Asas (Foundation) of the Daw'ah (of Islam). As people are freed from Sawm restrictions on Eid al-Fitr, they would be freed from the Zulmah (darkness) and the Jahlat (ignorance) after attaining the 'ilm of Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as). The spiritual strength of Mumineen through the 'ilm of As'as is increased and they attain power. In Zahir, a Mumin celebrates and enjoys food, while in Batin he enjoys Maidah (spiritual nourishment) [11] which is the 'ilm of Tawil (esoteric science) bestowed by Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) to the seekers".

Nahj al-Balaghah" [12], a collection of the sayings, sermons, and letters of Ali (as), is a good source to enjoy the blessings of the "Maidah". Wilayah of Ali (as) is the real Eid of his devotee because it allows him to attain spiritual strength. Maidah is the Naimah of Wilayah of the Imam from the progeny of Sayyid ash-Shuhada, Moula Abi Abdillah al-Husain ibn Ali (as), which Allah has granted to the seekers of Naj'at (salvation).

On the joyous occasion of Eid al-Fitr we should not forget the philosophy behind it and the higher values of Islam. Our joy on Eid al-Fitr should not be confined to celebrate it as a festival only but as a time to re-establish the broken hearts through moral and financial support. It is an appropriate time to demonstrate the Sunnah of Muwas'at [13]. It is also a time to share the pain of others around us. Life is short and we have never too much time for gladdening the hearts of those who are travelling the dark journey with us. Youngsters should share their time with elders who live with nothing but memories. All of us can contribute some of our time by volunteering for charity and the welfare of society.

Eid al-Fitr, a Muslim festival of joy, is entirely different from non-Muslims celebrations. Islam never withdraws restriction of Har'am in any festival, it is only the non-religious people who indulge in Har'am and Munkar activities like womanizing, drinking, and gambling. Eid is an opportunity for believers to do Taubah because Allah shall not turn from His open door of Rahmah on this Mubarak day to the one who seeks Istaghfar. Only the ignorant spoil this Naimah - golden opportunity of the day of Eid in Har'am activities. Eid al-Fitr is a renewal and reaffirmation of love, caring and sharing. Eid no doubt is a feast of joy and goodwill, and when it arrives we should try to be a part of sharing love and goodwill. The festival of Eid is not for Israf (waste) and committing Har'am (prohibited by Shariah), but to recount the Naimah and offer Shukr. In this context it can be said then that the Hikmah of Eid al-Fitr is that a person refrain from evil.

It is essential to ponder over Ayah 114 of Surah al-Maidah. The son of Mariyam (as) offered Dua with complete devotion and submission as follows: [14]

"O Rabb! Send upon us Maidah from the sky which may become Eid for us and for our future generations and it may become a miracle in our favour from You. Confer on us (physical and spiritual) Rizaq and You are the best sustainer of Rizaq".

If we study with Ma'arifah and Basirah the above Dua of Essa (as), it would be clear that the above Dua al-Mustaj'ab of Essa (as) is not only for his period but for all ages and times to come. The believers of the past, present and the coming generations have been spoken in this Dua of Eid. This perpetual Dua of Essa Nabi (as) will continue till the Qayamah. The time for Eid is fixed but the spiritual Eid is beyond any limit of time. From the Aalam al-Ruhani the Maidah of Hidayah descends which is the real source of inner satisfaction, something that can't be attained through consuming any physical food. Allah has granted Barak'ah and Sad'at of Maidah in every age and epoch for the seekers of Naj'at. For the divine favour of Maidah, Dua, efforts, struggle and planning are helpful. Without Taqwa, attainment of Naimah and Naj'at is not possible. May Allah bless us in both worlds with the gift of Rizaq of Duniya and A'akhirah.

It is indispensable to study the following beautiful Dua: [15]

"O Allah! If our Rizaq is in the Sky, allow it to descend; if it is under the Earth, put it out for us; if it is afar, then bring it closer to us. If it is closer to us then make it available without difficulty for us. If it is small in quantity, make it abundant. If it is sufficient, infuse in it Barakah for us, A'ameen."

Amir al-Mumineen Ali (as) said: [16]

"Eid is for one whose Siy'am has been accepted by Allah and He looks towards his devotion with admiration. The day in which no sin has been committed is a day of Eid".

The 9th Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Imam Ahmad al-Mastur better known as Al Shakhs al-Fadil, Saheb al-Rasail (as) says: [17]

Eid is the day when people get together and remember Allah and His chosen ones.

Moreover, the learned writer of 800 "Al Majalis al-Muayyadiyyah" Sayyiduna Al Muayyad al-Shirazi (ra) says: [18]

"Eid al-Fitr is the sign of culmination of the Siy'am of Ramadan. People would achieve Naj'at through Wala, as they get Naj'at of Siy'am through Eid. 'ilm is a divine food, the one who gets it, enjoys the sacred Eid forever.

The Dua of Al Imam al-Sajjad, Ali ibn al-Husain (as) comes on my lips: [19]

"O Allah! Send Salaw'at upon Muhammad (S) and Aal'e Muhammad (as). Listen to my secret Dua, grant acceptance to my Dua with respect and honor when I turn back from Salaat al-Eid. No difficulty can break Your will and You are never unable to grant the things asked from You; You are capable of everything. There is no fear and power except that of Allah, who is great and of a lofty status".

May Allah continue His Naimah of Maidah towards us in Zahir and Batin. May Allah fulfill our Hajaat and remove Afaat. May Allah grant us additional time with perfect health and facilities to collect provision of and for the final journey. Eid is an occasion when Muslims refresh the Sunnah of Musafiha (hand shake) and Muaniqah (embracing the same sex) without discrimination along with the distribution of charity. May Allah grant all of us contentment in abundance and more time to collect good deeds, A'ameen.

Bibliography and Notes

- 1). Nimrud, a biblical figure described as a King of Shinar (Assyria/Mesopotamia), was according to the Book of Genesis and Books of Chronicles, the son of Cush, the great-grandson of Noah(as). The Bible does not mention any meeting between Nimrod and Ibrahim (as), although a confrontation between the two is said to have taken place according to Jewish and Islamic traditions.
- 2). Surah al-Maidah, Ayah 114
- 3). Read more: <http://iis.ac.uk/encyclopaedia-articles/fatimids>
- 4). The founder of Al Muizziyyah al-Qahirah, the 4th Shi'i Fatimi Ismaili Imam-Khalifah al-Muiz (953-975 CE) marks a watershed in the transformation of the Fatimi Empire from North Africa to an expansive Mediterranean power.
- 5). Jawhar al-Siqili: Abu al-Hasan Jawhar ibn Abdullah was originally a Sicilian. He was brought to Qairawan (now in Tunisia) after being arrested by Muslims. He served as a slave and was later released by Al Imam al-Muiz (as). Then he was elevated as Vizier and the commander of the Fatimi forces. He conquered Fez in Northern Morocco up to the Atlantic. After the western borders had been secured, Jawhar al-Siqili took Misr in 969 from the Ikhshidis after a siege at Giza. The conquest was prepared by a treaty with the Ikhshidi Vizier Abul Fadl Jafar ibn al-Fadl (by which Sunnis would be guaranteed freedom of religion).
- 6). Read more: <http://iis.ac.uk/encyclopaedia-articles/al-azhar>
- 7). Jawhar al-Siqali,
- 8). Sayyiduna Al Qadi al-Nauman (ra) is a paramount personality who wrote numerous books on various subjects, Da'a'im al-Islam being one. It is considered to be the Shia Fatimi Ismaili Fiqh code of life. He served Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imams for 66 long years with pen and deeds. He is alive today through his writings. He became an example for scholars and taught them how to interpret religion, and protect Daw'ah. He provides us with enough material of Maarif regarding Ahl al-Bayt (as) and Imam al-Zaman (as). In 363 (AH) he passed away in Misr and Al Imam al-Muiz (as) led his Salaat al-Janazah.
- 9). "Safarnamah", Sayyiduna Abu Muin Hamiduddin Nasir'e Khusraw(ra), Da'i of 18th Shia Fatimi Ismaili Imam al-Mustansir(as), published Germany
- 10). "Wajh'e Deen", Sayyiduna Abu Muin Hamiduddin Nasir'e Khusraw (ra), Khana'e Hikmah, Hunza, Pakistan
- 11). Ma'idah: spiritual food
- 12). Nahj al-Balagha:

- 13). *Read on Muwas'at, in Qur'an Studies: www.durrenajaf.com*
- 14). *Ayah 114: Surah al-Maidah*
- 15). *"Khazain'o Barakat al-Dua", Mumbai.*
- 16). *Nahj al-Balagha:*
- 17). *"Ikhwan al-Safa", Al Imam Ahmad al-Mastur (as), Qahirah.*
- 18). *"Al Majalis al-Muayyadhiyyah", Sayyiduna Al-Muayyad al-Shirazi (ra),*
- 19). *"Al Sahifah al-Sajaddhiyyah", Al Imam Ali Zayn al-Abideen (as), Qahirah.*

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