

Freeways, Feast, and Fasting: Five Minutes to Eid ul Fitr

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(Five hours ago, I took my 3 year-old son Akira, my two-year old daughter Aida-Grace, and my wife Gin to see Barack Obama speak in Newport News, Virginia. The entire enterprise took us on a three-hour queue and an hour-long trek across a vast freeway overpass as the roads had been closed for the event. After the event, I was scheduled to give the opening convocation for the 2nd Annual Eid Ul Fitr celebration at my institution, the College of William and Mary, where I am advisor and advocate of the Muslim Students Association. This week also marks the Jewish holiday Rosh Hashanah, which my children celebrate at their Hebrew Pre-school.)

On foot across a freeway overpass
strewn with amber and emerald
slivers of beer bottles left there
by the homeless now invisible,
on foot themselves for sure but
elsewhere in this river mouth
that swallowed the tears and blood
of Pocahontas and the Rappahanock.

I am responsible so I navigate the pram
where two of my own lives are seated,
Akira Franco and Aida-Grace,
now more quiet than before,
perhaps perplexed at the sight and sound
of wind smashing concrete,
rubber rubbing sun soaked American asphalt.

My wife, my life,
risks her delicate back tackling the trek uphill this
undulating trail that cuts through the river of cars,
across from us looms an albatross
anchored on this river soaked with historic blood,
the perfect backdrop for a chance to hear words of hope and change.

We have heard the words before,

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the face constantly comforting us on screen.
We know many accuse us of idolatry
and worship of a false prophet.
A flame headed beer-bellied interlocutor
hurls unappreciated free speech filled with hate and anger
denouncing us demons from atop his milk carton soap box.
Would that that the law considered the right to free speech
in the same manner as the right to smoke.

Yet for now we are silent.
We choose to trust and respect ourselves and keep walking towards the shore.
We hear the words of hatred but take no heed nor listen.
We are defiant in our silence.
Even the children exercise restraint:
No talk of Cheerios or Cookie Crunch cereal
nor Barney and Backyardigans,
not even a whisper of Diego the animal rescuer,
or Dora the adventurer;
and from my wife
Not even a mention of an errand left un-run.

We walk together,
neither in deep meditation
nor in purposeful reflection,
but certain in the private peace of
our quiet walk with God.

Descending the freeway, 18,000 others await us.
They too have traveled the same path of broken glass.
They too will wait and stand in line with their children,
thirsty, hungry and hot from the sun.
18,000 people feasting on something
more nourishing than bread, sweeter than wine.
Ours is a banquet of hope and aspirations,
laden with sacrifice and perseverance,
completed with a toast,
silently promising eye to eye,
to see God
and all that is good and gracious in this world,
in one another.

Eid Mubarak! (A happy and blessed end of the fast!)

Ketiva ve-chatima tovah! (May you be written and sealed for a good year in the book of the Lord.)

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