

Good Evening and Assalaam Alaikum

I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to their elders, past present and emerging.

We are at the half way mark of Ramadhan – the month of fasting..and I thank the Lord Mayor again for hosting this event for the Muslim community of Brisbane.. a community that is old and entrenched in the foundations of this world city, and I am proud of my forefathers who contributed to that. The site of the Holland Park Mosque celebrates its 110 birthday this year, and at the time of being established in 1908, the mosque was the third non-Christian religious establishment built in Brisbane, behind the Brisbane Synagogue in Margaret St, and the temple of the Holy Triad at Breakfast Creek.

Prior to this there was a plethora of Christian churches across the Brisbane CBD primarily, that showcased the Christian communities of early Brisbane. However the fact that at the time of St John's Cathedral, St Stephens Cathedral, Albert St Uniting Church, Church of Christ, St Lukes, St Andrews, St Pauls, All Saints in Wickham Tce, and the City Tabernacle, there were communities who built a Bhuddist temple, a synagogue and a mosque, is a testament to the resilience and commitment of those communities but also a recognition that pluralism and acceptance was what Brisbane was about.

And really, that's what the Brisbane of today is about, recognising that the diverse religious communities in this city have a commitment to their faith, to their community and to their city, because they establish places of worship that not only strengthens those communities and faiths, but also builds a picture of our city as a whole – of who we are as a people and what we are as a vibrant diverse community.

And it's that coming together as a city, and growing our diversity, that allows nights like tonight to be par for the course – for our elected local representatives to be at the grassroots, at one with the community, to engage and support and champion all of us. It gave me great pleasure to see the LM read the Maghrib prayer at last year's iftar dinner – and people may see that to be tokenistic, or to be role playing, but I saw it as a very deep commitment to understanding and respect for our religious duties and obligations.

And as we enjoy the obligations of Ramadhan during a wonderful winter season in Brisbane – how lucky are we – we reflect on the reasons as to why we fast at all. I heard recently that fasting is the one 'pillar of Islam" that is a non-action – for fasting you don't do anything – you don't have to give, or do anything to fast – you have to actively refrain from eating or drinking, stop your ego, stop your bad characteristics, stop your impulses.. in our other pillars – the pilgrimage, the prayer, the charity, the declaration of faith – they are all actions, of doing, of contributing, fasting is about not acting, not doing and not contributing..

But in that non acting, and not doing, there is an awareness that is so powerful, so forceful that it allows you to do the one thing it was designed to do – bring you closer to God. To bring you to God consciousness – to understand that God is with you at all times – and those hunger pangs, and the thirst and the tiredness, and sacrifices are all to bring you to a heightened awareness of God.

In the Quran, Allah says in Chapter 2 verse 183 –

O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint,-

The last word in the verse in Arabic is ‘tattaqoon’ – and you only have to do a Google search to find that there are many interpretations of what that means -

You may become righteous

You become God fearing

May guard against evil

Might remain conscious of God

May attain salvation

Become pious

Perchance you will be cautious

But they all lend themselves to being aware of something outside of yourself, that the idea of fasting is to make you a better person – to make you more humble, and cautious, and to attain salvation and to be righteous, to be conscious of God – they are all good things to gain from doing nothing!

But whilst we can have word debates about tattaqoon – that’s not even the most important part of the verse – the heart of the verse is earlier –

Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you,

The phenomena of fasting is not limited to Muslims – in fact we were the last to be instructed to do it. And our performance of fasting is

unique to others, but the core message of fasting and its rewards is universal.

In the Jewish tradition, fasting during these days, each person is meant to make a personal accounting of his or her behavior and resolve to return to the positive path.

In the various Christian traditions Biblically, fasting is abstaining from food, drink, sleep or sex to focus on a period of spiritual growth. Specifically, we humbly deny something of the flesh to glorify God, enhance our spirit, and go deeper in our prayer life.

So fasting across the Abrahamic faiths is about God consciousness and cleansing of the soul, and changing our behaviour. And fasting is not limited to them – Bahai's, Buddhists, Hindu's, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Oriental Orthodox, Lutherans, Methodist, Pentecostals, Mormons, Jains, and Tao philosophies all advocate fasting as a means of being closer to God or repentance.

So whilst we gather here tonight to recognise a community's commitment to its religious obligation, we must also stand as a community to recognise and respect the obligations of all communities across our city and continue to grow this city into the diverse and pluralistic vision that our forefathers accepted and strived for. And isn't that the greatest awareness of God there is – the awareness of Him as a creator, as He tells us in Chapter 49:13 – I make you into nations and tribes, that you may learn from each other.

And whilst we try to understand the true spirit of Ramadhan, let us understand that as we are supposed to become closer to God through

fasting – even Jesus fasted draw nearer to God for guidance – we must therefore become closer to God’s creations at the same the time.

So our individual successes and aspirations are dependent upon the success and aspiration our wider community – our success is our shared commitment to social well-being. In Chapter 2 verse 185 of the Quran – just after the fasting verse, God says “it was the month of Ramadhan in which the Quran was revealed from on high as a guidance for humanity..”

Therefore it’s incumbent on us a Muslim community that we live the ideals of the Quran and showcase those values in everyday engagement with our wider community and stop segregating ourselves from the mainstream.

We should all strive to undertake the very simple messages of the Quranic ideals – compassion, mercy and justice – and contribute by being the living embodiment of these principles and be active participants in our communities contributing to the shared success of the whole.