

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

THERE'S NO ONE WAY TO CELEBRATE HARI RAYA

IT is done according to a community's unique traditions and culture

WHEN I was in kindergarten, my father was the head of Radio Television Malaysia's News Department. His second home was Angkasapuri and because of the nature of his work, I can count with my then, tiny stubby fingers, the number of times we went back to Taiping, my mother's kampung, for Hari Raya Aidilfitri.

It was always spent in Preuling Jaya. The celebration would kick off with the countdown — *malam ngah lekor* — about a week before Hari Raya, when Daddy would light up *pelita* around the house. On the eve of Raya, every male in the family, including the boys, would gather at a designated meeting point, and visit the houses along our road for the yearly *tabik*.

The ladies would be busy cooking special dishes to serve everyone. To this day, my 42-year-old brother, Abang, remembers the various houses — signature dishes. These included *laksu*, *lajor*, *le-bali sambal* *sonong* and *soni*.

On the first day of Raya, we would troop over to my grandmother's home in Section 8. She was fondly known as *Akak*. Daddy would insist that we go as early as possible because he loved to perform his Raya prayers at the mosque my grandfather, Pateh Akhir, helped to build. Almost all of my Daddy's siblings would be there. Every year, the ladies would help *Akak* prepare a big feast while the men made their way to the mosque for prayers.

Later in the evening, almost all our relatives would come over to our house to feast on my Mak's delicious signature dish — special fried chicken and *lato* adorned with shreds of chicken, scrumptious *perkedel* (fried mashed potato ball with chicken/beef, herbs and other condiments). As Daddy liked everything to be freshly made, Abang and Mak would usually be busy in the kitchen, frying the *perkedel* and specially marinated chicken,



Though their customs might differ, most people visit relatives and friends during Hari Raya. FILE PIC

while Abang and Akak usually helped out with the dirty dishes and served the *residual*, *kuah kacang* and *ketupat*.

As the youngest in the family, I was given the easiest task. My assignment was to refill the empty *keklok* jars and insert money in *duit raya* packets. However, as I grew older, the responsibilities that I had to shoulder increased, and I became part of the cleaning crew. Things changed when I got married and, boy, was I in for a culture shock. Suddenly, I was thrown in a situation where I had to meticulously plan a *tabik* *hampung* trip. Due to the unpredictable nature of my husband's job, we could never really plan and decide on the day we would travel back to his hometown, Kota Bharu. Hence, more often than not, we would be among the thousands of people contributing to the heavy traffic flow along Karak Highway and Gua Musang.

The Raya rituals were different. There was no house-to-house *tabik* on the eve of Raya. And, on the morning of Hari Raya, everyone, excluding those with young children, would go to the mosque for *raya* prayers, a first for me. Also, instead of trooping over to

someone else's house, my father-in-law's house was the focal point.

Hence, my mother-in-law would be cooking up a storm on the eve of Raya, to cater to the throngs of visitors.

Her signature dish, *ugam kazi*, was a crowd favourite. People could be seen mopping the gravy off their plates with tiny, buttery buns.

Her *nasi bukhari*, served with chicken, *acar manis* and the special tomato *sambal*, was scrumptious.

At times, I could not help but ponder on how my husband's way of celebrating Raya was similar, but also different from mine.

This is what I find beautiful about culture and tradition. Even though we are Muslim and Malay, there isn't a specific way to celebrate Hari Raya.

Admittedly, differences in culture and tradition can be divisive, but, when acknowledged, understood and celebrated, they can also be instrumental in promoting unity.

What is important, I suppose, is to learn to adapt. But, adapting and fitting in is not as easy as one might think. A renowned inter-

cultural communications scholar, Sverre Lysgaard, wrote extensively on the process of adaptation.

The phases — honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment and mastery — explain about the transition process experienced by the individuals in the attempt to understand the culture and quality of life in a new environment.

As I am well into my fifth year of marriage, I feel that I have got over the initial culture shock. However, there is always something new that I am learning from my husband and his family, and that means I have yet to reach the master phase.

To be honest, I am not sure if anyone can firmly claim that they have reached the master phase because people change all the time and, to me, that means we are constantly kept on our toes as we try to adapt to change.

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