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“HIGHLIGHTING FASTING AND LAILATUL QADR IN OUR SCRIPTURES”

This article has been written to service both Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike.

When is Islamic Fasting in Year 2011?

Fasting 2011 is effectively the Islamic month of Ramadan in the Islamic calendaring system (which is lunar-based), and which coincides to the Gregorian calendar (standard international calendar) from the periods 1st August 2011 through to 30th August 2011 (both dates inclusive).

The immediate next day after completion of fasting, 31st August 2011 is the special celebration day called Eid-ul-Fitr. (Eid means “recurring happiness” and Fitr means “beginning”). Eid-ul-Fitr is joyously celebrated, not because people can now resume regular mealtimes, but it is a celebration for honouring those dedicated people who fasted for a month, abstained from stated activities, are the successful brave ones, who followed all the prescribed requirements for Muslims; and most importantly, kept away from all evils.

The other Eid (Eid-ul-Adzah) is not preceded by fasting, as its purpose is fully different and deals with sacrificing an animal, and historically aligned to the period of annual pilgrimage (Hajj). Adzah means “sacrifice.” It is symbolic remembrance of Prophet Abraham (as), being obedient to Allah and having positively determined as ready to sacrifice his long-awaited for and much-yearned for, first-born and only son, Ishmael.

It is now necessary to resume the discussion on fasting and Lailatul Qadr in Muslim scriptures.

The remaining five odd-date nights of last ten days in the month of Ramadan are of special significance, and one of these nights is the Grand Night and aptly called as “Lailat-ul-Qadr.” It is also referred to as the Night of Majesty. In consideration of the name, it is important to fully comprehend the “majestic” aspect of this special night. The midpoint of these odd-dates (25th, 27th and 29th) days of month is the 27th night. This midpoint date has been universally accepted and practised, regardless of country, language and ethnicity.

Different countries have given it a numerically descriptive name, according to their vernacular. For example, in India, this event is called “Sathweisein” as an expanded version of the Hindi word for numerals 27.

Is Fasting in Islam a Fixed Calendar Event, Such as Christmas and New Year?

As already detailed above, the Islamic calendaring system is lunar-based whereas the Gregorian calendar is not so. Hence there will always be differences in the two calendar systems. This difference varies between 11-12 days, considering leap years. The Gregorian calendar is better known as the Western calendar or “Christian calendar” as it was introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582.

Taking into consideration the differences of 11-12 days between the two calendars, the Islamic events will not easily align to the Gregorian calendar and will always shift backward by 11-12 days. This shifting back manifests a complete re-cycle spanning around 35-36 years (averaged over several centuries). For example, in a given year, fasting may fall in December of that year but around 30 years later, the same event would be bordering around February – March.

Does Lailatul Qadr also Shift Accordingly?

Since Lailatul Qadr is the 27th night in the month of Ramadan, it is without any doubt an inherent feature at fixed times within that month, and so expected to progressively shift along in same pace as the main month of Ramadan.

What is the Majestic Aspect of this Special Night?

It was on this night, in the month of Ramadan, that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) received his very first revelation, which historically became the glorious commencement of Divine authorship of the Holy Qur'an, and which is basically the 19 verses of Chapter 96 of the Holy Qur'an:

- 96:1 Read in the name of thy Lord Who creates —
96:2 Creates man from a clot,
96:3 Read and thy Lord is most Generous,
96:4 Who taught by the pen,
96:5 Taught man what he knew not.
96:6 Nay, man is surely inordinate,
96:7 Because he looks upon himself as self-sufficient.
96:8 Surely to thy Lord is the return.
96:9 Hast thou seen him who forbids
96:10 A servant when he prays?
96:11 Seest thou if he is on the right way,
96:12 Or enjoins observance of duty?
96:13 Seest thou if he denies and turns away?
96:14 Knows he not that Allah sees?
96:15 Nay, if he desist not, We will seize him by the forelock —
96:16 A lying, sinful forelock!
96:17 Then let him summon his council,

96:18 We will summon the braves of the army.

96:19 Nay! Obey him not, but prostrate thyself, and draw nigh (to Allah).

These 19 verses become encapsulated as the sum-total of the description and life-cycle of mankind from conception and birth, material life on earth and material death on earth, and then to the “great trial of all mankind” on the great Day of Judgement, when Allah alone is the Supreme Judge. This introductory first-revealed chapter of 19 verses to the Holy Qur’an and so to Islam is also most magnificently further-validated at Chapter 74 and verse 30 (and very few people understand this relevance of the numeric 19 in the Holy Qur’an):

74:30 *Over it are nineteen.*

The numeric 1 and 9 and its numerical value of 19 is not only the most difficult prime number ever known (divisible only by 1 and 19), but serves as the master-key to all the authorship, editorial and structural engineering of the Holy Qur’an, in terms of its chapters, sections, verses, references for the number of times paired-gender issues and various paired-descriptions of all features have been mentioned, throughout the 114 chapters of the Holy Qur’an.

There are 57 different sets of different mathematical combinations structured into the Divinely authored Holy Qur’an.

The number 19 is not as feeble as superficially visible! It is made up of 1 and 9 and the first and last of single numerals in the range 1-9. In similar twinkling glory, the Holy Qur’an is also evidence that Allah is the first and last (1 and 9) of Divine Power and no other divine consideration in between.

The sum-total of each of these magnificently paired-descriptions are exactly divisible by the most difficult number 19, with no remainder. The Holy Qur’an was revealed with perfect Truth and all in a Balance. This aspect of the magnificence of the Holy Qur’an is given as:

“42:17 Allah is He Who revealed the Book with truth, and the Balance; and what will make thee know that perhaps the Hour is nigh.”

It is not prudent to dwell on the scientifically discovered facts about 19 in this very short article “Highlighting Fasting and Lailatul Qadr in Our Scriptures.”

In other words, this Holy Scripture (the Holy Qur’an) is forgery-proof and beyond the capacity of authoring by ordinary mankind. To further add concrete credibility to the Divine authorship of the Holy Qur’an, the Holy Qur’an gives unconditional open challenge to mankind to produce the like of it, as “31:27 And if all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea with seven more seas added to it (were ink), the words of Allah would not be exhausted. Surely Allah is Mighty, Wise.”

Inasmuch as the anniversaries of person’s births are accepted as birthdays, Lailatul Qadr is the anniversary of the introduction of Holy Qur’an and so on to birth of Islam to mankind on this planet “earth.”

The above (to some extent) explains the majestic aspect of Lailatul Qadr, also referred to as the Grand Night and the Night of Majesty.

Are Fasting and Lailatul Qadr Specifically Identified in the Holy Qur'an?

Fasting is one of the five compulsory obligations expected of any Muslim of both genders. (The five obligations are: Belief in One God, Prayer, Charity, Fasting and Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)).

The compulsivity of fasting is upon those persons in good health, generally from adolescence to senior adulthood. There is specific Ordinance in the Holy Qur'an, as "2:183 O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil."

A further Ordinance explores deeper and wider, as "2:184 For a certain number of days. But whoever among you is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. And those who find it extremely hard may effect redemption by feeding a poor man. So whoever does good spontaneously, it is better for him; and that you fast is better for you if you know."

The same Ordinance in the Holy Qur'an clarifies the purposeful imposition of Lailatul Qadr, as "2:185 The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion. So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast therein, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. Allah desires ease for you, and He desires not hardship for you, and (He desires) that you should complete the number and that you should exalt the greatness of Allah for having guided you and that you may give thanks."

Having established that the Holy Qur'an was first revealed in the month of Ramadan, the Holy Qur'an gives and bears Its own Divine witness, as

"97:1 Surely We revealed it on the Night of Majesty —"

"97:2 And what will make thee comprehend what the Night of Majesty is?"

"97:3 The Night of Majesty is better than a thousand months."

"97:4 The angels and the Spirit descend in it by the permission of their Lord — for every affair —"

"97:5 Peace! it is till the rising of the morning. "

The final verse explicitly concludes that Lailat-ul-Qadr is at that one specific night only but expires prior to sunrise. These five verses (97:1 – 97:5) immediately followed the introductory revelation of the whole of Chapter 96 when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was first visited by Angel Gabriel on the 27th night of the month of Ramadan.

What Exactly is Fasting?

Fasting is a capsule of virtues, comprising fundamental compliance with the Ordinance in the Holy Qur'an ("2:183 O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil"), and strengthening both spiritual and

moral values in people who fast. This includes abstaining from certain activities from dawn to dusk, such as abstaining from food and drink and sexual intercourse, during the stipulated times under fast. In recorded history, all Israelite prophets fasted in some form according to the prescriptions valid during their ages. There is some uncertainty on other prophets who were not from the Israelite mainstream. This conclusion comes from the content of 2: 183 in the Holy Qur'an.

It is also a self-auditing continuous process in making a better person out of the wider broadband of mankind. Once a person successfully completes a month of fasting and in full compliance to all prescribed requirements, then that person must analyse and review his/her past actions and struggle to extend compliance of virtues for the next eleven months.

That, then brings a person full-circle back to where the full compliance started and it simply means that the person has now proven track-record that he/she can easily become better person in full compliance and conformance

Who Must Fast and Who are Exempted?

As stipulated in the Holy Qur'an, all persons of both gender are compelled to fast, this is as at "2:183 O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil." This is required both as a spiritual discipline and a moral discipline in obedience to Allah. Notwithstanding the broad thrust of compulsion for fasting, the Holy Qur'an also allows certain communities and people in certain situations from regular fasting. They are as

- a) People living in the close circles of Polar Regions of North and South poles where periods of darkness and daylight exceeds 24 hours.
- b) People who are sick and need to take medicines regularly.
- c) People travelling on journeys extending over different time zones. Must continue fasting and make up the missed fasts after Ramadan.
- d) Women who are pregnant with child.
- e) Women who are breast-feeding babies.
- f) Girls/women on monthly periods. Must continue fasting and make up the missed fasts after Ramadan.
- g) Very old people dependent on meals during day.

Are Fasting and Lailtul Qadr Documented Anywhere at All?

Both fasting and Lailtul Qadr are specific stipulations in the Holy Qur'an, as follows:

"2:183 O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil."

"97:1 Surely We revealed it on the Night of Majesty —"

Accordingly, the whole of Chapter 97 is clear authority and documented proof of Lailatul Qadr.

What is the History of Fasting?

Based on the declaration at 2:183 “O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil” the immediate conclusion is that all prophets before the birth of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) were detailed to fast, but according to different prescriptions to suit the levels of civilization and the particular countries’ cultures practised thousands of years ago.

All prophets fasted. Whilst it must be recognized that the Holy Qur’an is not a register of all prophets, we are informed that Allah has sent His prophets, numbering in excess 124,000 and that there is not a nation where Allah did not send His Messengers as His Ambassadors on earth.

Some prophets have been mentioned by name, but more specially linked to certain events, which are given as examples and as part of His moral instructions to mankind. As examples we are given names such as Adam, Lot, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Solomon, David, Moses, Jesus.

All these prophets have been mentioned and recognised for their religious work in previous scriptures, prior to the Holy Qur’an.

They are all on record as having a system of fasting but without Lailatul Qadr, as Lailatul Qadr is specific and only for Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) with his declaration of prophet-hood and the revelation of the Holy Qur’an over a space of 23 years.

What is the Reward for Correct and Prescriptive Fasting in the Month of Ramadan?

Whilst the Holy Qur’an has mentioned aspects of reward in more than 150 places all over the Holy Qur’an, it most graciously has specific mention of the rewards for fasting and abstaining from vices and respecting the five pillars of Islam; and the balance of fairness is for both genders, as “33:35 Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and the charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and women who remember — Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward.”

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