

Moving Forward from Shab-e-Barat¹ to Ramadan for All Muslims

The topic of Shab-e-Barat has been so badly distorted by some persons, that a positive clarification is essential. At the outset, both the Holy Qur'an and the six *Sahih Hadith*² do not report any compulsiveness by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in observing Shab-e-Barat³, as a significant annual event for Muslims. It should also be noted in this special regard, that the Hadith period covers 23 years of the Prophet's gloriously exemplary life, especially whilst the Holy Qur'an was being revealed in separate deliveries. An issue, which requires recognition, is the non-universality and the non-commonality throughout the Muslim world on this event of Shab-e-Barat. In some Muslim communities, the event of Shab-e-Barat is given disproportionate publicity to some prescribed events, and in some other Muslim communities, Shab-e-Barat is just another night of dutiful prayers. The event of systematically moving forward from Shab-e-Barat to Ramadan⁴ may be compared to the

¹ *Shab-e-Barat* comes from Persian roots, which was widely used during the Mughal Rule era and occupation of India (1526-1857). The various other Arabic country equivalents are *Lailatul-Bara'ah*, *Laylatul Nisfe min Shaban* and (*Lailatul Nisfe* in Southeast Asia). Some Muslim communities confuse this issue further, by incorrectly quoting the Holy Qur'an at 44:2-3: "**2.** *By the Book that makes manifest!* **3.** *We revealed it on a blessed night— truly We are ever warning.*" In fact, this reference in the Holy Qur'an correctly refers to *Lailatul-Qadr* and which falls in the last 10 nights in the month of Ramadan. Please also note this verse reads in past tense and cannot be referring to Shab-e-Barat, which is 2 weeks before Ramadan. The Holy Qur'an was first revealed commencing with Chapter 96 on the 27th night in the month of Ramadan, which means the gap of 14th-15th Shaban till the 27th night in Ramadan is 6 weeks apart into future. Surely, the quotation in the Holy Qur'an at 44:2-3 refers to *Lailatul-Qadr* and definitely not Shab-e-Barat. No revelation before *Lailatul-Qadr*.

Further, amongst the Shiite communities, 15th Shaban is also the celebrated birth date of their 12th and last Imam, Imam Mahdi. Hence the common Muslim is pelted with so much confusion and so gets very misguided.

² The six *Sahih Hadith* are: (1) Sahih Bukhari by Imam Bukhari, aka Muhammad Ibn Ismail al-Bukhari (d.870). (2) Sahih Muslim by Muslim Ibn al-Hajjaj al-Naishapuri (d.875). (3) Sunan al-Sughra by al-Nasai (d.915). (4) Sunan Abu Dawood by Abu Dawood Suleiman (d.888). (5) Jami-al-Trimidhi by Muhammad Isa al-Trimidhi (d.892). (6) Sunan ibn Majah by Ibn Majah al-Qazwini (d.887). They were all Persians; and Bukhari and Muslim each hold over 7, 000 Hadith. The windows of collections of Hadith were spread less than 50 years in total.

³ Shab-e-Barat is an early but subtly friendly warning event, as mid-point of the Islamic month of Shaban, that the next month following is Ramadan, the prescribed holy month of fasting. In a nutshell, Shab-e-Barat is mid-point or the 15th day of the 8th month (Shaban) in Islamic calendaring system.

⁴ Ramadan, the 9th month, is that self-assessment and testing period for Muslims to go in their lives prescriptively correct, insofar as self-discipline, self-control, purity, charity and obedience to Allah matter. In a nutshell, if people can pass this testing period of a month, as exemplary Muslims, then those Muslim people must continue with that same trend for the next 11 months towards perpetuity. Ramadan involves fasting and keeping away from all sinful activities. Fasting is a capsule of virtues, comprising fundamental compliance with the Ordinance in the Holy Qur'an 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*", and strengthening both spiritual and

analogy of changing traffic lights in modern times; and the legal expectation of voluntary compliance by vehicle drivers. Of course, the common universal understanding on light colour signals is “green” for proceeding through; “orange or amber” is a warning system of preparing to stop before the “red” which is compulsory stops. In fact Shab-e-Barat warns Muslims as an early warning system inasmuch as the “amber or orange” light as “preparing” before the period of Ramadan. Ramadan includes an ascending combination of personal discipline, voluntary compliance and appreciation in understanding the feelings of others, who may not be variously endowed in all the material dainties in this worldly life. Similarly, the stipulated life for all Muslims is not cruising away in the “green light” at all times.

Shab-e-Barat is correctly viewed as annual reminder or warning for preparedness. In some other Muslim communities, Shab-e-Barat has been greatly elevated to the status of very expensive religious festival, which involves buying new clothes, festoon lights, fireworks and lots of sweets (and in some ways similar to Deepavali in India)⁵. The obvious question, which dwells in the minds of some people is, why the variation of understanding exists around the world within the communities of Muslims? As detailed above, this early warning is around 2 weeks prior, allowing people to get their household inventory in order in preparation for fasting and finally culminating to joyous *Eid-ul-Fitr*. Two significant events, which occur within Ramadan and later upon completion of Ramadan, are explained in subsequent paragraphs, towards the end of this article. These events are Lailatul Qadr and finally *Eid-ul-Fitr* respectively. 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, on annual adjustments according to the lunar calendar. This is clarified below.

A fundamental point, which must be remembered at all times, is to understand the inconsistency of dates for Muslim festivals and events. As comparative examples globally, New Year is 1st January and Christmas is 25th December each year, based on the universally accepted and used Gregorian solar calendar system⁶. On the contrary, Muslim festivals and other significant events are based on the lunar calculated calendar system, which is approximately 10-12 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar of 365 (366) days (leap year).

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.

⁵ These practices are not required of Muslims’ prescription and prevalent only in the Indian sub-continent and clearly ingress of practices (or “cut and paste”) from Hinduism, which upholds those almost identical behaviours. Sadly, these practices have been carried through to other countries with Indian Diaspora.

⁶ The Gregorian calendar is solar based and is better known as the Western calendar or “Christian calendar,” as it was introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 in the Vatican. (Muslim calendar system is lunar based).

The conversion process from lunar (Muslim) calendar to Gregorian is not so simple, and requires matching the geographical co-ordinates of each country's latitude and longitude, and its position from the International Date Line, and then rematching with birth of the new moon; then finally translating that match into equivalent Gregorian dates. For example, Fiji is appreciably blessed, in that Fiji is positioned just below the equator (at 17-deg South latitude) and the International Date Line (the 180-deg Meridian passes straight through Fiji). In other words, the new day every day begins in Fiji; and the old day every day ends in Fiji. The first newspapers in the world are also printed in Fiji – every day.

Some other countries, which are globally positioned closer to either of the Polar Regions and away from the International Date Line, may experience variation by a day (plus or minus a day to another country in comparison) in determining the birth of the new moon and then translate the conversion to the Gregorian calendar. A further point, which may cause a different date (plus or minus a day to another country in comparison) is the visibility occurrence of the new moon, because the earth also has an axial tilt of almost 23.4-deg to the vertical. This however is not fixed and varies in the decimal only over many centuries. Yet another factor is the obliquity of the earth's ecliptic orbit and the orbit of the moon around the earth every 27.3 days. The purpose of explaining these key points is that some Muslim communities in a certain country may announce the sighting of the new moon, which confuses some other Muslims in another country, which was not sighting the new moon at exactly the same time. These points are very important to remember at all times, because of the timeliness in moving forward from Shab-e-Barat to Ramadan.

Shab-e-Barat is the bridging cross-over into the period of Ramadan. Before venturing to explain Ramadan, it is still necessary to understand who all celebrate Shab-e-Barat? They are mainly the Muslim peoples of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and to lesser extent the peoples of Iran and Afghanistan as a significant annual event. The ideologies applied by these communities differ both geographically and to some extent politically, and in some other cases, their Governments allow the event celebrated nation-wide. Although their common principal scripture, the Holy Qur'an does not impose any specific observation and practice of Shab-e-Barat, the Diasporas of these communities from India, have continued and carried their beliefs on Shab-e-Barat as customary and "unnecessary excess baggage" into their cultures and which is becoming a serious worry. This practice differs significantly amongst different sects⁷ within Islam; and this document positively clarifies that neither the Holy Qur'an nor the leading six *Sahih Hadith* impose or even mention Shab-e-Barat as a significant or even a compulsory event for celebrating annually by Muslims. In majority of Arab-world countries, Shab-e-Barat is non-event and generally unheard of. In a few other Arabic speaking countries, Shab-e-Barat is given some recognition, but under different descriptive names; as already explained in Footnote No1.

⁷ Islam has two main Divisions of Sunni (majority) and Shiite and amongst them there are 72 sects existing.

It is necessary to understand, by rolling back into history, how Shah-e-Barat actually started in India. Accordingly, it is also necessary to dwell into and understand some of the significant events, which impacted upon India over the last 400-500 years, commencing with Delhi Muslim Sultanate (1206-1526), the Mughal Empire (1526-1857) and the British Raj (1858-1947), which finally led to independence of India and Pakistan in August 1947. During these very trying times (1206-1857), the Indian communities were under intense pressures, where on one hand the Mughal Rulers⁸ imposed strict Muslim prescriptions, on the other hand the mixed Indian populations went through transformations, which included conversions from other faiths to Islam and some extent of cross-marriages. Islam was periodically infused with Arabic, Turkish, Afghani and Persian culture-mix and the host-country's Hindu influences. This was especially during the reign of the great Mughal Emperor Jalal-Ud-din Muhammad Akbar, who accommodated these cultural and religious interventions⁹. It should also be noted, that such non-prescribed "add-ons" are prevalent only in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and to lesser extent by the peoples of Iran and Afghanistan. Millions of Muslims in the rest of the world have mostly not even heard of the term "Shab-e-Barat" let alone celebrating it. The Mughal actually allowed introduction of foreign rituals to some extent within Islam in India. The main ideology imposed by the Mughal era religious leaders, was based on unfounded propagation that Allah annually reviews and rewrites the destinies¹⁰ of all Muslims on the night of Shab-e-Barat; and hence they must stay awake all night in prayer. The distribution of sweets/halwa to friends and relatives was the symbolic equivalent of distributing "prashad" by Hindus after a prayer

⁸ Mughal is a much respected Persian ethnic terminology, which is taken to mean the cross-cultured combination of Timurids (from Tamerlane) and Mongols (from Genghis Khan), from Samarkand in Uzbekistan, who entered India through Afghanistan, then conquered India and ruled the northern and the greater part of India and to the Deccan region. The six great Mughal Emperors were: 1. Zahir ud Din Muhammad Babur (b.1483- d.1530). 2. Nassir ud Din Muhammad Humayun (b.1508 - d.1556). 3. Jalal ud Din Muhammad Akbar (b.1542-d.1605). 4. Noor ud Din Muhammad Salim (b.1559-d.1627). 5. Shahanshah Shahab-ud-Din Muhammad Shah Jehan (b.1592- d.1666) aka Shahab-ud Din Muhammad Khurram (b.1592-d.1666) 6. Abul Muzaffar Muhy-ud-Din Muhammad Aurangzeb Alamgir (b.1658-d.1707). There were 13-other Mughal Emperors of India (from 1707- to 1837) but of lesser Ruler's intensity, which led to general weakening of their Mughal Rule in India. The last Mughal Emperor of India was Emperor Abu Zafar Siraj Ud Din Muhammad Bahadur Shah II. He died in exile in Burma in 1862 after being ousted by the British in 1857, and then British in India commencing with the British Raj (1858-1947).

⁹ Emperor Akbar's wife was a Hindu, her name was Joda Bai, as a Rajput Princess and daughter of Raja Bharmal of Amber (now known as Jaipur) and later she became a Muslim with the name of Mariam uz-Zamani Begum.

¹⁰ This is a gross misunderstanding that Allah has to review His past actions and then rewrite the destinies for we mankind! There are 86 places in the Holy Qur'an, which refer to Allah as the Best Knower and to even imagine that Allah has slipped in His decision-making is a serious transgression. Examples of quotation that Allah knows everything at all times are in the Holy Qur'an: At 2:1, "*I, Allah, am the best Knower.*" At 13:9, "*The Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Great, the Most High.*" At 67:13, "*And conceal your word or manifest it, truly He is Knower of that which is in the hearts.*" There are so many other quotes on Allah as "best Knower."

retreat. It is now necessary to explain Ramadan, an event which has been mentioned in the scriptures of both the Holy Qur'an and the six *Sahih Hadith*.

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'an¹¹. Ramadan 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 then struggle to extend compliance of virtues for the next eleven months. That experience, 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 of ascending higher and that he/she can easily become a better person with continued full compliance and conformance.

All prophets of Allah as His Ambassadors fasted. His prophets, numbered in excess of 124,000¹² and that there is not a nation where Allah did not send His prophets as His Ambassadors on earth. As examples, we are given in Scriptures names such as Adam, Lot, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Solomon, David, Daniel, Isaiah, Moses and Jesus. They all fasted for certain periods to meet certain obligations. We read in the Bible in Exodus at 34:28 that Moses fasted for 40 days and 40 nights when he went up to Mount Sinai to receive the two Holy Tablets, which we call the Ten Commandments. We also read in the Bible in Matthew at 4: 1-11 that Jesus fasted for 40 days when the devil challenged him to convert stones to bread. So fasting has been a universal practice.

As stipulated in the Holy Qur'an, all persons of both gender are compelled to fast, this is as at 2:183.¹³ 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 classifications of people in certain situations, optional freedom 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.

¹¹ 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."*

¹² Musnad of Imam Ahmad Hanbal, Hadith No 21257 states that Allah has sent over 124,000 prophets to earth.

¹³ *"O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil."*

- c) People travelling on journeys extending over different time zones. Such people must resume after skipping fasting, and then 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 (menstruation). They must resume after skipping fasting and continue fasting and make up the missed fasts after Ramadan.
- g) Very old people dependent on meals during the day.

The declaration of the Holy Qur'an at 2:183 stressfully states, *"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 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. They are all on record has 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.

Whilst the Holy Qur'an has mentioned aspects of reward in more than 150 places all over it, the Holy Qur'an most graciously has specific mention of the rewards for fasting, and abstaining from vices, and respecting the five pillars of Islam¹⁴; and the balance of fairness is for both genders, as the Holy Qur'an states at 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."*

Lailatul Qadr or the Grand Night is really the point of commencement of Islam when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) received the first visitation and revelation directly from Archangel Gabriel. Within the month of Ramadan, the remaining five odd-date nights of last ten days are of special significance, and one of these nights is the Night of Majesty. The midpoint of these odd-dates (25th, 27th and 29th) days of month is the 27th night. This

¹⁴ The Five Pillars of Islam universally established over 1,500 years ago are: 1st. Shahadah (declaration of One God only and no other deities). 2nd Salat (prayer fives daily). 3rd .Zakat (compulsory charity set at minimum of 2.5% of net income and other wealth). 4th .Fasting in month of Ramadan (includes voluntary fasting at other times). 5th .Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

midpoint date has been universally accepted and practised, as the Night of Majesty. 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:

"1. Read in the name of thy Lord Who creates — 2. Creates man from a clot, 3. Read and thy Lord is most Generous, 4. Who taught by the pen, 5. Taught man what he knew not. 6. Nay, man is surely inordinate, 7. Because he looks upon himself as self-sufficient. 8. Surely to thy Lord is the return. 9. Hast thou seen him who forbids 10. A servant when he prays? 11. Seest thou if he is on the right way, 12. Or enjoins observance of duty? 13. Seest thou if he denies and turns away? 14. Knows he not that Allah sees? 15. Nay, if he desist not, We will seize him by the forelock — 16. A lying, sinful forelock! 17. Then let him summon his council, 18. We will summon the braves of the army. 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 96 of 19 verses to the Holy Qur'an, is also most magnificently further-validated at 74:30¹⁵ (Few people understand this relevance of the numeric 19 in the Holy Qur'an).

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 Holy Qur'an has been made definitely forgery-proof with the mastery usage of number 19. 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 at 42:

¹⁵ 74:30 "Over it are nineteen."

17 as: *“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. 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 stated at 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 “the 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.

It is now necessary to explain what exactly *Eid-ul-Fitr* is. (*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, and who followed all the prescribed requirements for Muslims; and most importantly, kept away from all evils.

Eid-ul-Fitr also requires compulsory congregational prayers at all mosques and religious centres; and Muslims of both gender and all age groups and of whatsoever ethnicity, including those people who may be physically disadvantaged, must all congregate for *Eid* prayers. This strengthens the brotherhood of Islam as unity in diversity¹⁶.

It is for all correct thinking Muslims to guide and assist other Muslims; the Holy Qur’an has sanctioned that correct advice shall be given to those who need to be guided. This is given in the Holy Qur’an at 3:103, as *“And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful.”*

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Fiji

¹⁶ Although there are 72 sects known within the fold of Islam, all Muslims regardless of whatsoever sect they may be aligned to, must set aside their minor differences and embrace the commonalities of their Faith as one Islam – a unified Faith – with the choicest blessings from Allah.

