

## Significance of Festivals in Islam

### Introduction:

It is common knowledge that scientists have assessed the age of this planet Earth to be around 4.9 billion years old<sup>1</sup>. Once the planet had reached ambient temperatures for configuration of land, seas and clouds, the commencement and then continuous reproduction of plants and animals, Almighty God finally created humanity commencing with Adam and Eve. Adam was the first of all prophets<sup>2</sup> and also the first to believe in Oneness of Almighty God. Many new religions<sup>3</sup> had developed over thousands of years and changed the destinies of several nations throughout the world.

### Discussions:

- 1) Almost all religions have developed certain religious festivals, which in some ways reflect their religious beliefs and practises. Islam is the last and final of all revealed religions. In addition to being the last and final revealed religion, Islam has retained all the pristine purity of past great religions. This fact has been most succinctly stipulated in the Holy Qur'an at **HQ2:136** *"Say: We believe in Allah and (in) what has been revealed to us, and (in) what was revealed to Abraham, and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and (in) what was given to Moses and Jesus, and (in) what was given to the prophets from their Lord, we make no distinction between any of them and to Him we submit."* The Holy Qur'an states that Almighty God does not make any quality

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<sup>1</sup> This dating is based on evidence from radiometric age-dating of meteorite material and is consistent with the radiometric ages of the oldest-known terrestrial and lunar samples.

<sup>2</sup> There were over 124,000 prophets since creation of planet Earth. Out of which, 313 were both Prophets and Messengers (*Nabi* and *Rasul* respectively). This is given in Hadith, in *Musnad ibn Hanbal*, Hadith No 21257. Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was both Prophet and Messenger and as the seal of prophets, he was the Final Prophet ordained by divine revelation, who brought the final revealed Holy Scripture as the Holy Qur'an and the final revealed religion as Islam.

<sup>3</sup> There are over 4,200 different religions in the world (2015 census).

distinction between any of them and to Almighty God do all Muslims submit. Muslims therefore, do not just believe in Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) but in all previous Prophets, who were similarly ordained by divine revelations. Whilst the past Prophets were consistently true to their revelations, their subsequent followers downstream, brought about distortions; and these distortions are not in the Holy Qur'an as rules of Islamic laws.

- 2) Religious festivals or important historical events of religious significance in Islam are: (1) *Eid ul-Adha* (Pilgrimage and Sacrifice) and (2) *Eid ul-Fitr* (end part after fasting in Ramadan).
- 3) The common factor between both Muslim festivals is the patriarch Prophet Abraham (*as*), whose descendants branched out as Jews, Christians and finally Muslims.
- 4) In the first festival, the festival of *Eid ul-Adha* (Pilgrimage and Sacrifice) is in honour of two great historical events, which Almighty God used to test the compliance and allegiance of Prophet Abraham (*as*) to Him. Prophet Abraham's (*as*) first wife Sarah (aka *Saira*) was barren and did not bear children. Prophet Abraham (*as*) then married another wife, Hagar (aka *Hazra*), with the anticipation of having a son as his heir. However, Prophet Abraham (*as*) did not lose his Faith in Almighty God and continued to pray for a son.
- 5) In the first test, Almighty God ordered Prophet Abraham (*as*) to abandon his second wife Hagar together with his first born child (Ishmael) in the wilderness of Arabia, which he obediently did. Some years later, Almighty God made another Order to Prophet Abraham (*as*) to go over and retrieve his second wife Hagar and child (Ishmael) from Mecca and then bring them back home.
- 6) In the second compliance and allegiance test, Almighty God made yet another Order to Prophet Abraham (*as*) to offer his only and

now 10-11 year old, same first born son (Ishmael) for human sacrifice<sup>4</sup> which he proceeded to do in readiness.

- 7) An important point to note is that human sacrifice by slaughter of the first born child as a son, was widespread practice amongst the pagan idolaters and polytheists, thousands of years previously. In addition to his preparedness to sacrifice his only son, Prophet Abraham (as) spoke to his son (Ishmael) and told him about the Order. Ishmael agreed and he lay down at the allocated spot to be blindfolded and then slaughtered; but Almighty God stopped Prophet Abraham (as) at the final moment before slaughtering and made another Order that a fattened lamb gets sacrificed instead. This historic event has been recorded in the Holy Qur'an as revealed verses at **HQ37:100-110** *"My Lord, grant me a doer of good deeds. So We gave him the good news of a forbearing son. But when he became of age to work with him, he said: My son, I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you: so consider what you think. He said: My father, do as you are commanded; if Allah please, you will find me patient. So when they both submitted and he had thrown him down upon his forehead, and We called out to him saying, O Abraham, you have indeed fulfilled the vision. Thus do We reward the doers of good. Surely this is a manifest trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice. And We granted him among the later generations (the salutation): Peace be on Abraham! Thus do We reward the doers of good."*
- 8) Both of these tests have put an end to the ancient pagan practice of offering the first born son as human sacrifice. Different versions of paganism were practised before the previous prominent

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<sup>4</sup> Human sacrifice of the first born child as a son, was widely practised amongst the pagan idolatrous and polytheistic communities. If the first born child was a daughter and the son came later, then the son was spared and not sacrificed. This was widely practised amongst the Carthaginians and the Phoenicians, who worshipped the idol of Molech. Molech was a pagan god with a very large human body but head of a bull with horns. The discovery by archaeologists of over 20,000 earthenware urns containing fossilised skeletons of very young boys was made in the caves of Carthage. That of course means that at least 20,000 young boys were killed as sacrificed. Baal was another pagan god to whom human sacrifices of children were made. The worshipping of Molech and Baal were practised as both pre-Abrahamic.

prophets abolished that out of paganism. The act of sacrifice, by slaughtering a prescribed animal, has become part of the *Hajj* or pilgrimage performance by Muslims to Mecca. This is stipulated in the Holy Qur'an at **HQ2:158** *"The Safa<sup>5</sup> and the Marwah are truly among the signs of Allah; so whoever makes a pilgrimage to the House or pays a visit (to it), there is no blame on him if he goes round them. And whoever does good spontaneously — surely Allah is Bountiful in rewarding, Knowing."*

- 9) The second festival is *Eid ul-Fitr*, celebrating completion of fasting in the month of Ramadan. All past prophets previous to Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) also fasted. Fasting in the month of Ramadan is also a compliance test, which Almighty God has placed on healthy persons, to follow all the religious obligations closely and guarding against evil (sins). The boundaries of tolerance and prescriptiveness of fasting by Muslims has been stipulated in the Holy Qur'an at **HQ2:183-185** *"O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil. 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 one. So whoever does good spontaneously, it is better for him; and that you fast is better for you if you know. The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to people and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion. So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast in it, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you, and (He desires) that you should complete the number and that you should exalt the*

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<sup>5</sup> The Safa and Marwah are two hills, near the Ka'ba in Mecca, which Muslim pilgrims must travel on foot, forth and back seven times (anticlockwise). This is in memory of Prophet Abraham's second wife Hagar, who was desperately running between the hills, searching for water for her infant son Ishmael who was left unattended on the hot sand in the desert.

*greatness of Allah for having guided you and that you may give thanks.”*

- 10)** *Eid ul-Fitr* (end of fasting) is the celebration by all Muslims after their successful and compliant month-long fasting for Ramadan.
- 11)** The month of Ramadan is also the anniversary of the first revelation of the Holy Qur’an, which happened on one of the odd nights of 25<sup>th</sup> , 27<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan, in a cave given the name of Hira, over 1,400<sup>6</sup> years ago. As matter of practical consistency, Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) directed that the selected event be settled as the 27<sup>th</sup> night. This is in the Hadith and called *Lailat-al-Qadar*<sup>7</sup> or the Night of Majesty. This is also stipulated in the Holy Qur’an at **HQ97:1-5** *“Surely We revealed it on the Night of Majesty — And what will make you comprehend what the Night of Majesty is? The Night of Majesty is better than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend in it by the permission of their Lord — for every affair — Peace! it is till the rising of the morning.”*
- 12)** The Holy Qur’an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) in series of batch revelations lasting a stretch of 23 years<sup>8</sup>.
- 13)** In response to questions, Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) encapsulated the answers, as given in the Hadith. This is Hadith No. 1906, Book of As-Saum, Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 3: *(A Bedouin with unkempt hair came to Allah's Messenger (pbuh) and said, "O Allah's Messenger (pbuh)! Inform me what Allah has made compulsory for me as regards the prayers." He replied: "You have to offer perfectly the five compulsory prayers in a day and night (24 hours), unless you want to pray Nawafil." The Bedouin further*

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<sup>6</sup> Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was meditating in prayer inside a cave called Hira, near Mecca, in year 610AD when he received his first visitation and so to his first revelation from Archangel Gabriel, who delivered to Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) the first 5 verses of what is Chapter 96 of the Holy Qur’an: HQ96:1-5 *“Read in the name of your Lord Who creates — creates man from a clot (of blood) — read and your Lord is most Generous, Who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.”* The balance of 14 verses were revealed later.

<sup>7</sup> Hadith Sahih Bukhari 32:4

<sup>8</sup> The Holy Qur’an was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) in 610AD when he was at age of 40 and completed in 632AD.

*asked, "Inform me what Allah has made compulsory for me as regards fasting." He replied, "You have to fast during the whole month of Ramadan, unless you want to fast more as Nawafil." The Bedouin further asked, "Tell me how much Zakat Allah has enjoined on me." Thus, Allah's Messenger (pbuh) informed him about all the rules (i.e. fundamentals) of Islam. The Bedouin then said, "By Him Who has honoured you, I will neither perform any Nawafil nor will I decrease what Allah has enjoined on me. Allah's Messenger (pbuh) said, "If he is saying the truth, he will succeed (or he will be granted Paradise)."*

- 14)** All Muslims in whatsoever country throughout the world must celebrate these two festivals every year, to the extent without fail.
- 15)** The goal for the faithful Muslims may be fitted into a nutshell with the following quotation in the Holy Qur'an as **HQ6:161-163** *"Say: As for me, my Lord has guided me to the right path — a right religion, the faith of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not of those who set up partners (with Allah). Say: My prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are surely for Allah, the Lord of the worlds — no partner has He. And this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who submit."*

### **Synopsis:**

- a)** In Islam, the Muslim festival of *Eid ul-Adha* is directly linked to the patriarch Prophet Abraham (*as*), who had twice received separate Orders directly from Almighty God to sacrifice his first born son.
- b)** The first Order was when his first born son was an infant and Almighty God ordered Prophet Abraham to abandon wife and child in the wilderness of Arabia.
- c)** The second Order was when the same son was around 10-11 years old, Almighty God again ordered Prophet Abraham to sacrifice the same son, as was the widespread ritual practised amongst ancient pagans in those days, many thousands of years ago.

- d) Of course, upon direct Order from Almighty God, the son was not sacrificed and Prophet Abraham was ordered to substitute a fattened lamb in lieu of his son.
- e) That Order from Almighty God put an end to the ancient pagan practice of sacrificing the first born child as a son.
- f) That event also forms the basis of pilgrimage by Muslims to Mecca and sacrifice of quadrupeds in that honour.
- g) The festival of *Eid ul-Fitr* is celebrated immediately the next day after completion of fasting in the month of Ramadan.
- h) Fasting in Ramadan is the compliance test fully well for Muslims with all Orders in the Holy Qur'an and supported by appropriate quotes from the book of Hadith, the book of practices of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*).
- i) The month of fasting and *Eid ul-Adha* are also reminders for Muslims to pay up their obligations to charity funding.
- j) In addition, the month of Ramadan is also the anniversary of the first series of revelations of the Holy Qur'an over 1,400 years ago.

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