

## **“FASTING: IN POLAR REGIONS BY MUSLIMS”**

This article had to be written to succinctly clarify on certain options available to those Muslims, who live either in extreme north or extreme south of the world, and further, that periodically throughout each year, the variable hours of daylight reaches 20 hours (+/-) 2 hours. Similarly on natural balance, nighttimes' darkness reaches 20 hours (+/-) 2 hours accordingly. This depends on the seasonal variations and their countries' extent of curvature toward the poles.

We have many Muslims who live in those regions, especially in the upper northern hemisphere.

The standard practice of fasting from pre-sunrise to after-sunset becomes practically difficult in those regions, and with hardly any break in-between, before getting ready for next breakfast of *Shaeri* and *Fajr* prayer.

Islam is for the whole world and not just for peoples living in the comfort zones between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. Allah knows that. We must dissect His mastery of the laws with in-built deeming provisions, which He has made so superbly, within the splendid verses of the Holy Qur'an.

Whatever applies in the extreme north (for example Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, northern Russia, Siberia, Alaska, Northern Canada), also applies to the extreme south (Stewart Island, Cape Horn, Cape of Good Hope), and of course both the poles' circles areas of the Arctic and the Antarctica.

Muslims are not prohibited from living in those countries; and nowhere in the Holy Qur'an has that ever been stated. Instead, Islam has most graciously put in provisions regarding their regular lifestyles, including fasting practices. This is detailed below.

There is not a nation where prophets were not sent (124,000 total of prophets), and that concludes, that the spiritual laws of Allah were also released and practised in many other countries, and not just the Middle East (Arab countries).

This point is very important, that whilst we recognise and accept our Rasul-Allah (pbuh) as the last and final prophet, and the only person who

was Divinely contracted and completed the final scripture (the Holy Qur'an in 23 years), and which was revealed directly from Allah, that scripture becomes final, complete with solutions, within its texts, for everything that we are looking for. The Holy Qur'an stresses at 33:40 as "Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the prophets. And Allah is ever Knower of all things."

There shall be no other scripture after the Holy Qur'an and so we must navigate our way through the Holy Qur'an for our requirements this is stated at 5:3 as "This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour to you and chosen for you Islam as a religion." (*Author's underlining*). The Holy Qur'an is decreeing that Islam is a perfect religion, and so there is no need to look for solutions from other religions or other scriptures.

The Holy Qur'an sets the standard that fasting is prescribed, but that prescription stretches over many thousands of years; and there were some variations in fasting to suit the advancing levels of civilisation practised (of each era). The Holy Qur'an has its most famous verse on fasting at 2:183 as "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil." (*Author's underlining*).

The purpose given there at 2:183 is not starving us from not eating food and not drinking water, **but guarding against evil**. Hence the purpose of fasting as given at 2:183 is individual's gap-analysis and self-audit of our behaviours over a test-period of one month, and preventing us from falling into evil activities.

The second part in 2:184 introduces the validated flexibility of who may not fast and discretely governed by qualifying mitigations in 2:184 as "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 affect 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." (*Author's underlining*).

The first part of the clause sets the standard of 29-30 days as variable and circumstantial to moon cycles. Persons who are sick and on medication, and those who are crossing time-zones within a day, are taken care of in the second part of the same clause: They must catch up later for those like number of days they were compelled to miss out.

The second part of that same clause is really where the solution resides. To be able to understand this, people must not get so narrow-minded and worry only about daylight hours only (Noted: Fasting is only in daylight), but they must also take into consideration the other four of the five pillars of Islam as obligations: Fasting is one of the five compulsory obligations expected of any Muslim of both genders. (The five compulsory obligations are: Belief in One God, Prayer, Charity, Fasting and Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)).

This means, that whilst there are periods of around 20-hours of seasonal daylight in the Polar Regions, on the contrary, there are also the opposite of around 20 hours of seasonal nights of darkness. That means that first and last prayer times (*Fajr* and *Isha*) will also have to be adjusted!!

The underlying point here is that the hours will vary throughout the year; but what must be grasped is managing of stretched hours, such as 20 hours or longer.

The Holy Qur'an is very accommodating and clarifies at midpoint in 2:184 as "And those who find it extremely hard may affect redemption by feeding a poor man." That alternative becomes conclusive and requires no further deliberation.

The feeding of the poor has to be done spontaneously within Ramadan (and not deferred). This is clarified in Holy Qur'an at 2:184 as "So whoever does good spontaneously, it is better for him; and that you fast is better for you if you know." (*Author's underlining*). There is further clarification in the Holy Qur'an at 2:185 as "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." (*Author's underlining*).

However, there is a need for religious and community leaders in those upper northern and Polar Regions to manage by consensus. In some countries, the Ulema have set standards that people must not fast more than 2/3rds of a day (i.e. 16 hours); as generally 8 hours is consumed in daily chores and peoples' survival affairs, including employment and other essential tasks.

This situation requires involvement of the Ulema, as these are matters of Islamic jurisprudence: when to deem commencement of fasting and when to deem breaking of the fast, all within a daylight window of 20 hours?

There are two options. First option: The Ulema, upon wide consensus, may set the times to commence and break the fast especially when

daylight exceeds 16 hours and this will differ geographically from one country to another, especially with different time zones.

In the case of those who cannot - and Allah has decreed that fasting is to "guard against evil" and Allah does not want His people to practise starvation as torture, again the ordinance in Holy Qur'an states at 2:185 as "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." (*Author's underlining*).

Second option: For extremely long hours which becomes unbearable, those who cannot fast for so long, may seek immediate redemption by feeding a poor man, as the Holy Qur'an states at 2:184 "And those who find it extremely hard may affect redemption by feeding a poor man." (*Author's underlining*).

This also lends support regarding married life and matrimonial affairs, especially in those countries, which have very high proportion of daylight (that is 20 hours or more) and again the Holy Qur'an most mercifully and most graciously clarifies at 2:187 as "It is made lawful for you to go in to your wives on the night of the fast. They are an apparel for you and you are an apparel for them. Allah knows that you acted unjustly to yourselves, so He turned to you in mercy and removed (the burden) from you. So now be in contact with them and seek what Allah has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn, then complete the fast till nightfall, and touch them not while you keep to the mosques. These are the limits of Allah, so go not near them. Thus does Allah make clear His messages for men that they may keep their duty."

The Ulema must reach consensus, which majority part of those 20 hours are deemed as "daylight" so that people fast and comply to the provisions of the Holy Qur'an at 2:183; and which residual part of 20 hours daylight is deemed "outside" the period set exclusively aside for fasting.

Hence, on balances of probability, the Ulema must upon wide consensus, determine that window of 2/3rd of the daylight for fasting during extremely long daylight periods, and must also determine the hours for first and last prayers of *Fajr* and *Asr* when night hours will also be similarly stretched to 20 hours.

The above options must never be enveloped as standard fix for all countries; but the Ulema must widely communicate it to the people, as

the hours so fixed would differ from one country to another, depending on different time zones of Meridian positioning, Latitudes and Longitudes.

The religion of Islam has been fashioned by Allah, as a particular lifestyle for enjoyment with compliance, and according to His design; and certainly not meant to become so burdensome to scare people away.

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