

# *Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam (Lahore) Fiji*

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## **“IDENTIFYING SHAB-E-BARAT IN OUR SCRIPTURES”**

### **When is Shab-e-Barat in Year 2011?**

This is on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2011, as a matter of common information, but really a non-prescribed-event. This article is for Muslims and Non-Muslims alike.

### **Is “Shab-e-Barat” Specifically Identified in the Holy Qur’an?**

No. There is no specific mention of Shab-e-Barat anywhere in the Muslims’ principal Holy Scripture. This event is also variously known as *Laylatul Bara'ah* or *Laylatun Nisfe min Sha'ba* in some countries. The Holy Qur’an is silent on this issue, regardless of different names.

### **What Exactly is Shab-e-Barat?**

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 fact Shab-e-Barat warns Muslims inasmuch as the amber light (orange) is an early warning system of “preparing to stop” before the red light in any traffic light controlled intersection. In a nutshell, Shab-e-Barat is mid-point or the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month (Shaban) in Islamic calendaring system. 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 Eid-ul-Fitr. Ramadan 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, then people must continue with that same trend for the next 11 months towards perpetuity.

### **Who Celebrates Shab-e-Barat?**

Mainly the peoples of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and to lesser extent the peoples of Iran and Afghanistan celebrate Shab-e-Barat as significant annual event. The ideologies applied by these communities differ both geographically and to some extent politically, when their Governments allow the event celebrated nation-wide. Although the 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 luggage” to their cultures. This practice differs significantly amongst different sects within Islam; and this document positively clarifies that Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam (Lahore) does neither celebrate Shab-e-Barat *per se* nor encourages its celebration within its fold.

### **Is Shabe-Barat Documented Anywhere at All?**

Since all aspects in broad spectrum of different Hadith are not widely accepted Islam-wide, but some are accepted in certain communities only, the issue of Shab-e-Barat develops its inherent weakness and becomes questionable. Taking full cognizance of the required tact in diplomacy and respect, it is not for the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam (Lahore) to comment on other sects' beliefs and practices on an issue, which the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam (Lahore) does not believe in and practice. On the contrary, communities which spend cumulatively millions of dollars (or other currency) in lavish foods, festoon lights, fireworks, etc would be better guided to redeploy such resources towards charity, welfare funds and maintenance of mosques as practical examples of spending such funds.

### **What is the History of Shab-e-Barat?**

The event of Shab-e-Barat is also known by different names in different communities and geographies, as already elaborated above. It is also necessary to dwell into and understand some of the significant events which impacted upon India over the last 400-500 years ago, 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 Muslim Rulers imposed strict Muslim prescriptions, on the other hand the mixed Indian populace 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 not forgetting Hindu influences, especially during the reign of Mughal Emperor Jalal-Ud-din Muhammad Akbar, who accommodated these cultural and religious interventions. 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 Mughals (a Persian terminology, which is taken to mean cross-cultured combination of Turkish and Mongols, who ruled northern and greater part of India to the Deccan region), actually allowed introduction of foreign rituals to some extent within Islam in India. The distribution of sweets/halwa to friends and relatives was the symbolic equivalent of distributing "Prasad by Hindus." Hence the earlier comment of customary and "unnecessary excess luggage" introduced to their cultures in India and to the Indian Diaspora.

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