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### Before Ramazan, a short history

Before the month long fasting was made mandatory, there was just one day on which fasting was observed; on the 10th of Muharram of the Islamic calendar. This day was called the Ashura. The more religious also observed fast for 3 days every month as it was one of the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. Yet it was only in accordance with the long traditions of the Prophet that this was done as no clear verse had been revealed till then about fasting. Finally, all ambiguity was ended when a verse making fasting for the whole month of Ramazan was revealed. This was in the 2nd year after the migration.

The specific verse, roughly translated means:

“O you who believe, fasting is made obligatory to you as it was to people who had come before you, so that you may learn piety.” [Al-Bakrah 2:183]

There is another verse that comes just after the above quoted, which is slightly more elaborate:

"Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur`an, as a guide to mankind, also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgment (Between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting, but if any one is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period (Should be made up) by days later. Allah

intends every facility for you; He does not want to put to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance ye shall be grateful." [Al-Baqara 2:185]

The above quoted verses not only made the fasts mandatory but also laid down the ground rules: all those who are hale and hearty and are not travelling have no excuse for not fasting.

This is the verse that also mentions that the Qur'an was sent down in the month of Ramazan.

### **A typical day of Ramazan**

As soon as the curved silver thread of the Ramazan moon is sighted the month officially begins. The night prayer Tarawih, commences and the morning after, just before day break, the Sehri is eaten.

Soon after the call for the morning prayers sound to the end of the day, Muslims may neither eat or drink.

At sun set when the call for the Maghrib (evening) prayer sounds, signifying the end of the day, the Muslims break their fast after saying a short prayer. The Tarawih is again recited after the Esha (night) prayers and the cycle repeats.

On the evening of the 29th, if the Eid moon is sighted, the Tarawih is not recited and the next day is declared Eid. Needless to say the moon sighting generates much excitement and people start gazing towards the sky right after the Maghrib prayers. If the moon is not seen and there are no reports of moon sighting from any other part then the next day Muslims keep the fast and the Eid falls on the day after.

### **The Lailatul Qadr**

Lailatul Qadr, or the Shab e Qadr is a special night that falls during the last 10 days of Ramazan. The word Lail and Shab mean night, in Arabic and Persian respectively. The literal meaning of Qadr is Power. There is an interesting hadith associated with the night of Lailatul Qadr.

One of the companions of The Prophet asked him how they would ever catch up in terms of sawaab with the Ummahs that had gone before as those people lived for hundreds of years, and hence had more time to pray, fast, and in general earn the grace of Allah. The Muslims, the last Ummah had an average lifespan of only 60 – 70 years. The Prophet did not say anything at the time. Soon after, the verses pertaining to the Lailatul Qadr were revealed. Stating that the one night of Lailatul Qadr were equal to 1000 months. Thus those who pray for this one night would earn blessings equal to 1000 months.

The night of the Lailatul Qadr does not fall on any fixed night, but in any of the odd nights of the last 10 days. That is, on the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th. The Qur'an itself is believed to have been revealed on the 24 Ramazan, that is the night of the 25th. Three periods of Ramazan

## The Tarawih

The Tarawih is the special prayer said during the night of Ramazan. In these prayers the entire Quran is supposed to be covered over a period of 30 days at least once. During the time of the Prophet these prayers were said individually, but the second Caliph Hazrat Umar ibn Khattab changed it into congregational prayers so that it may be said more easily.

This practice is now almost universally followed. These prayers are of 20 rakats (one complete unit of prayer) or 8 rakats. They are said after the esha prayers. After the Tarawih the witr prayers are said in congregation.

## Exceptions

The traveler and the sick have been allowed by Islam to forego fasting. Pregnant women, and women who are breast feeding are also excepted. But they should make up for it by fasting later.

## The fast breaking prayer

While there are different prayers that may be said at the time of breaking the fast, the ones given below are the more common:

Allah humma inni asaloka, Be rahmati kal lati Wa siat kulla shai Antag fir li

Roughly translated it means:

O Allah, I ask that blessing of you which encompasses everything. Forgive my sins.

The second one is shorter:

Ya wa siat fazli Eigh fir li

Translated: O the generous one, forgive me.

## Glossary

Rakats: One complete unit of prayer, it comprises standing with folded hands while the Quran is recited, bowing and prostrating twice.

Witr: Three rakats of prayers said at night after the Esha prayer, this is called the Witr prayer. Usually it is said individually but during the Ramazan it is said in congregation.

Sawaab: One may earn reward much like we earn money for doing specific acts of piety like charity, helping the poor, saying prayers, reciting the Quran, remembering Allah.

Sehri: A short meal eaten just before daybreak. It is a part of fasting, and is considered necessary. A fast would be considered incomplete if the sehri is not taken.

Sunnah: Anything that the Prophet Muhammad did or said. Muslims take the sunnah as one of the two sources of their jurisprudence, the Quran being the other. Things that were done in his presence and he did not stop is also considered a part of the sunnah.

Ummah: The followers of the Prophets are referred to as their Ummah. The Muslims, the followers of the last Prophet, is therefore the last Ummah.

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