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The Merits and Guidance of Fasting in Sha'bān

The month of Sha'bān is among the virtuous months for which specific guidance is provided in the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Authentic Aḥādīth report that the Prophet ﷺ would frequently fast during this month. These fasts were not obligatory but rather an act of preparation for the blessed month of Ramaḍān. Through his words and actions, the Holy Prophet ﷺ provided guidance on how to approach this month. In one narration, Anas (RA) reports that the Holy Prophet ﷺ was asked: "Which fast was most virtuous after Ramaḍān? He said: "Sha'bān in honour of Ramaḍān". (Jāmi' at-Tirmidhī:663) Another narration states:

عن أُسَامَةَ بْنِ زَيْدٍ، قَالَ: قُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ لِمَ أَرَاكَ تَصُومُ شَهْرًا مِنَ الشُّهُورِ مَا تَصُومُ مِنْ شَعْبَانَ . قَالَ: "ذَلِكَ شَهْرٌ يَغْفُلُ النَّاسُ عَنْهُ يَتَنَبَّهُونَ عَلَيْهِ إِذَا كَانَ مِنَ رَجَبٍ وَرَمَضَانَ وَهُوَ شَهْرٌ تُرْفَعُ فِيهِ الْأَعْمَالُ إِلَى رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ فَأُحِبُّ أَنْ يُرْفَعَ عَمَلِي وَأَنَا صَائِمٌ"

Usāmah bin Zaid said: "I said: 'O Messenger of Allāh, I do not see you fasting any month as much as Sha'bān.' He said: "That is a month to which people do not pay much attention, between Rajab and Ramaḍān. It is a month in which the deeds are taken up to the Lord of the worlds, and I like that my deeds be taken up when I am fasting." (Sunan an-Nasā'ī: 2357)

In one narration, 'Ā'ishah (RA) narrates:

"أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَصُومُ حَتَّى نَقُولَ لَا يَفْطِرُ وَيُفْطِرُ حَتَّى نَقُولَ لَا يَصُومُ وَكَانَ يَصُومُ شَعْبَانَ أَوْ عَامَّةَ شَعْبَانَ"

"The Messenger of Allah used to fast until we said: 'He will not fast.' And he used to fast Sha'bān, or most of Sha'bān." (Sunan an-Nasā'ī: 2177)

These narrations highlight the merit of fasting in Sha'bān, even though it is not obligatory. However, the fasts of Sha'bān are recommended only for those who can keep them without compromising their energy and strength for the obligatory fasts of Ramaḍān.

Another significant feature of this month is the night of the 15th of Sha'bān and fasting on its day. This night, often referred to as Laylat al-Bar'ah (the night of freedom from the fire of hell), holds a special place in Islamic tradition. Detailed information about the virtues of this night and the fasting associated with it can be found on pages 3-4 of this newsletter.

- **Maulana Syed Rehan Haider**

100 ways to enter Jannah (36-40)

36

Reciting Sūrah al-Mulk

37

Reciting Āyat al-Kursī after every obligatory prayer

38

Praying Ṣalāh with congregation for 40 days without missing the first Takbīr

39

Speaking the truth

40

Protecting the gaze

Marriage to Khadījah (RA)

Khadījah (RA), after hearing Maysarah recount the events of his travels, including Nastūrah the monk's declaration and the remarkable sight of angels providing shade, approached Waraqah bin Nawfal to share these extraordinary occurrences. Waraqah responded: "Khadījah! If these reports are accurate, then undoubtedly Muḥammad is the prophet of this Ummah. I am fully aware that this Ummah eagerly awaits a prophet whose appearance is near."

On learning of these remarkable events, Khadījah (RA) felt a deep desire to marry Rasūlullāh ﷺ. Consequently, two months and twenty-five days after his return from the Syrian trade expedition, she sent a marriage proposal to Rasūlullāh ﷺ. On the advice of his uncle, Rasūlullāh ﷺ accepted the proposal.

On the day chosen for the Nikāḥ, Rasūlullāh ﷺ, accompanied by his uncles Abū Ṭālib and Ḥamzah, along with several prominent members of the family, made his way to the residence of Khadījah (RA). Khadījah's (RA) father had passed away before the battle of Fūjjār, so her uncle 'Amr bin Asad attended her Nikāḥ in his place.

Abū Ṭālib delivered the Khuṭbah for the Nikāḥ, concluding with these words:

أَمَّا بَعْدُ فَإِنَّ مُحَمَّدًا مِمَّنْ لَا يَوَازُنُ بِهِ فَتَى مِنْ قَرِيشٍ إِلَّا رَجَحَ بِهِ شَرْفًا وَنَبَلًا وَفَضْلًا وَعَقْلًا وَإِنْ كَانَ فِي الْمَالِ قَلٌّ فَإِنَّهُ ظِلٌّ زَائِلٌ وَعَارِيَةٌ
مُسْتَرْجَعَةٌ وَلَهُ فِي خَدِيجَةَ بِنْتِ خُوَيْلِدٍ رَغْبَةٌ وَلَهَا فِيهِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ

"Muḥammad is a young man who, if compared to any other youth from the Quraysh, will surpass them in honor, nobility, intellect, and virtue. While he may not have much wealth, wealth is nothing more than a fleeting shadow and a trust that must eventually be returned. He desires to marry Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, and she shares the same desire."

At the time of this sacred Nikāḥ, Rasūlullāh ﷺ was twenty-five years old, while Khadījah (RA) was forty. The agreed-upon Mahr (dowry) was twenty camels. According to Sīrat Ibn Hishām and Ḥāfiẓ Abū Bishr Dawlāmī, the stipulated Mahr was twelve and a half Awqiyyah of silver. Since each Awqiyyah equals forty dirhams, the total dowry amounted to five hundred dirhams. This was Rasūlullāh's ﷺ first Nikāḥ, while it was the third for Khadījah (RA).

Reference: Muḥammad Idrīs Kāndhlawī, Seeratul Muṣṭafā (Page 33)

- **Mufti Abdul Kareem**



The Parable of Guidance and Knowledge

«إِنَّ مَثَلَ مَا بَعَثَنِي اللَّهُ بِهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ مِنَ الْهُدَى وَالْعِلْمِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَصَابَ أَرْضًا فَكَانَتْ مِنْهَا طَائِفَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ قَبِلَتْ الْمَاءَ فَأَنْبَتَتْ الْكَلَّا وَالْعُشْبَ الْكَثِيرَ يَرْفَعُ وَكَانَ مِنْهَا أَجَادِبٌ أَمْسَكَتِ الْمَاءَ فَنَفَعَ اللَّهُ بِهَا النَّاسَ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهَا وَسَقَوْا وَرَعَوْا وَأَصَابَ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهَا أُخْرَى إِنَّمَا هِيَ قَيْعَانُ لَا تُمْسِكُ مَاءً وَلَا تُنْبِتُ كَلَّا فَذَلِكَ مَثَلُ مَنْ فَقَهُ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ وَنَفَعَهُ بِمَا بَعَثَنِي اللَّهُ بِهِ فَعَلِمَ وَعَلَّمَ وَمَثَلُ مَنْ لَمْ يَرْفَعْ بِذَلِكَ رَأْسًا وَلَمْ يَقْبَلْ هُدَى اللَّهِ الَّذِي أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ»

Verily, the parable of the guidance and knowledge that Allāh Almighty sent with me is the likeness of rain falling upon the earth. Among them is a good group which receives the water and thus there is abundant growth of herbage and grass. Among them is a barren land which retains the water and thus Allāh benefits people from it; they drink from it and graze their animals. And it falls upon another group which is only abysmal; it does not retain water, nor does herbage grow. Such is the parable of one who understands the religion of Allāh and benefits from what Allāh sent with me; he learns and he teaches. Such is the parable of one who does not raise his head and does not accept the guidance Allāh sent with me.

Significance of The Night of Barā'ah (freedom from the fire)

One of the distinctive features of the month of Sha'bān is that it contains a night known as Laylat al-Barā'ah (The Night of Freedom from the Fire). This is the night that falls between the 14th and 15th of Sha'bān. The night of the 15th of Sha'bān, also known as Shab-e-Barāt, is a topic of significant disagreement. Some people entirely deny the importance of this night and consider worship during it to be a sin and a Bid'ah (innovation). On the other hand, there is a group that acknowledges its significance and spends the entire night in worship.

Islam discourages extremism and negligence, and it is essential to adopt a path of moderation in all matters. Therefore, those who deny the importance of this night should not be criticised, as their stance is based on evidence. Similarly, those who worship on this night should not be condemned or considered sinful, as they also have their evidence.

It is truly unfortunate that Muslims quarrel over minor issues. While disputes over matters of belief were already common, now conflicts have extended to acts of worship as well. Take Shab-e-Barāt as an example—this is neither a matter of obligation nor compulsion; it is a voluntary act of worship. At most, one can say that the one who performs it will be rewarded, and the one who does not will not be sinful.

There is no doubt that the Aḥādīth related to Shab-e-Barāt include weak (Ḍa'īf), fabricated (Mawḍū'), and Mursal narrations (A narration where the chain of transmission is missing a link, typically the Companion, with the Tābi'ī directly attributing the statement to the Prophet ﷺ). As far as fabricated narrations are concerned, they are undoubtedly unacceptable. However, rejecting weak and Mursal Aḥādīth outright by claiming they are entirely inadmissible is not correct. If weak Aḥādīth are supported by corroborating evidence, they can be acted upon. Regarding Mursal Aḥādīth, in my view, they are unconditionally authoritative (Ḥujjah).

In the introduction of my PhD thesis, I have extensively discussed the validity of Mursal Aḥādīth and established that not only are they authoritative, but in some cases, they can be even stronger than Musnad Aḥādīth (those with a connected chain). As for the narrators of the Aḥādīth related to Shab-e-Barāt, it is incorrect to make a sweeping statement that all of them are weak or fabricators. Almost every narrator has some criticism leveled against them; where there is a claim of weakness for a narrator, there is also a statement of reliability for the same individual.

Aḥādīth regarding the virtues of Laylat al-Barā'ah

Imām Tirmidhī narrated:

عن عائشة قالت: "فقدت رسول الله ﷺ ليلة فخرجت فإذا هو بالبقيع فقال: أكنّيت تخافين أن يحيف الله عليك ورسوله، قلت يا رسول الله! اني ظننت أنك أتيت بعض نساءك" فقال: "إن الله ﷻ ينزل ليلة النصف من شعبان الى السماء الدنيا، فيغفر لأكثر من عدد شعر غنم كلب"

‘Ā’isha (RA) said: "I missed the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) one night, so I went out and found him in al-Baqī'. He said: "Did you fear that Allāh and His Messenger would be unjust to you?" I said: "O Messenger of Allāh! I thought you had gone to one of your other wives." He said: "Indeed, Allāh descends to the lowest heaven on the night of mid-Sha'bān and forgives more than the number of hairs on the sheep of the tribe of Kalb." (Al-Tirmidhī: 3/275) The tribe of Kalb was well-known for its large flocks of sheep, and this statement highlights the vastness of Allāh's ﷻ forgiveness on this night.

Ibn Mājah narrates in another narration:

قال رسول الله ﷺ: "إذا كانت ليلة النصف من شعبان فقوموا ليلها و صوموا نهارها، فإن الله تعالى ينزل فيها لغروب الشمس الى سماء الدنيا فيقول: ألا مستغفر لي فأغفر له، ألا مسترزق فأرزقه، ألا مبتلى فأعافيه، ألا كذا ألا كذا حتى يطلع الفجر"

"When it is the night of mid-Sha'bān, stand in prayer during its night and fast during its day. For Allāh, the Exalted, descends to the lowest heaven at sunset and says: 'Is there anyone seeking forgiveness so that I may forgive them? Is there anyone asking for provision so that I may grant it to them? Is there anyone afflicted so that I may relieve them?' And so on, until the dawn breaks." (Ibn Mājah: 2/438)

In another narration, Mu'adh ibn Jabal (RA) narrated:

عن معاذ بن جبل (رض) قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: "يطلع الله على خلقه ليلة النصف من شعبان فيغفر لجميع خلقه إلا لمشرك أو مشاحن"

"Allāh ﷻ looks upon His creation on the night of mid-Sha'bān and forgives all of His creation except for a polytheist or one harboring enmity." (Reported by al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Ḥibbān)

While some of these narrations have minor technical issues in their chains of transmission, the collective weight of all these narrations makes it clear that this night possesses special virtues. It is incorrect to dismiss its significance entirely, as some modern scholars have done based on these minor flaws. In fact, many scholars of Ḥadīth have regarded some of these narrations as authentic, and the minor defects in others are considered curable through the variety of transmission chains. This is why the pious predecessors of the Ummah have consistently recognised this night's merit and have spent it in worship and prayer.

The aforementioned narrations as well as numerous other narrations indicate that special attention should be given to worship on this night. Among the Tābi'īn, notable figures such as Khālīd ibn Ma'dān, Imām Makḥūl, Luqmān ibn 'Āmir, and others would place great emphasis on this night. Furthermore, the renowned mujtahid Imām Ishāq ibn Rāhwayh also recognised the significance of this night.

Acts of Worship for This Night

To observe Laylat al-Barā'ah, one should strive to worship as much as possible, ideally staying awake the entire night or dedicating significant time, especially the latter half of the night. Engaging in Ṣalāh is highly preferred, with no fixed number of Rak'āt, though performing at least eight is recommended. One should try to prolong recitation, Qiyām, Rukū', and Sajdah.

Reciting the Qur'ān extensively and engaging in Dhikr, including frequent Durūd upon the Prophet ﷺ, are also very beneficial. Engaging in Du'ā', especially those taught by the Prophet ﷺ, is a key act of worship, which draws us closer to Allāh ﷻ.

Women who cannot perform Ṣalāh or recite the Qur'ān can still engage in Dhikr, Tasbīḥ, and Durūd. They may also make supplications in their preferred language.

The Fast of the 15th of Sha'bān

Fasting on the day following Laylat al-Barā'ah, i.e., the 15th of Sha'bān, is Mustahabb (recommended). The Prophet ﷺ has reportedly encouraged this fast. While some scholars question the authenticity of the narration, it is well-established that the Prophet ﷺ would fast frequently during Sha'bān. Furthermore, many pious predecessors of the Ummah observed this fast, indicating its merit.

Therefore, fasting on the 15th of Sha'bān is an optional (Nafl) fast and is highly recommended. Alternatively, one may observe a Qaḍā' fast on this day, benefiting from both its completion and its merits. May Allāh Almighty grant us the understanding of the true significance of this night and enable us to engage in abundant worship. (Āmīn)

References: Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani: Islamic Months; Merits and Percepts (Pages 64-68 & 73-74), Dr. Shabbir Ahmed: The Reality of Shab-e-Barā'ah (In the Light of Aḥādīth).