

Fasting in Ramadan:

A Compliance Test for Muslims

Fasting is a compliance test for all Muslims of whatsoever sects¹ or sub-sectarian as divisions² within Islam. The universality of Islam is linked and constitutionally bound together by the principal religious law for all Muslims. It is common knowledge that the Holy Qur'an, which was divinely revealed to Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) more than 1400 years³ ago, has remained intact as the original principal law for all Muslims, and spiritually linked throughout the world. Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*), the Final Prophet⁴ lived 570 AD – 632 AD.

In all Muslim majority countries⁵, fasting is regulated to some extent centrally by their Governments, and which brings about an official influence to the event. In those other countries, which are not Muslim majority⁶, Muslim religious leaders take control of the situation for sake of global consistency.

There is a guiding need to recollect that specific Ordinance in the Holy Qur'an on fasting, which is at HQ2:183 as *"O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you⁷, so that you may guard against*

¹ There are 72 sub-sectarian divisions within Islam, which have developed out of the two mainstream Sects.

² The two mainstream Sects are: (1). Sunnis, (2). Shiites. Wahhabi is under umbrella of Sunnis and Sufi is mystical and can be from either Sunnis or Shiites. Sunnis are the largest (at 80-85% - all over the world) followed by Shiites (15-20% and its highest density is in Iran and all countries bordering Iran, and then thinning out to other countries). Out of these mainstream Sects evolve Islamic Schools of Law (e.g. Hanafi, Shafi'i, Malaki, Hanbali); and Islamic Movements (e.g. Al-Ikwan Al-Muslimun [spreading out of Egypt into the Arab world], Jamaat-i-Islami, Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam (Lahore), Ibadi, Ahle-Haqq) and others which comprise the 72 sub-sectarians.

³ The Holy Qur'an was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) in year 609 AD with Chapter 96 v 1-5. The remaining 14 verses (6-19) were revealed much later. The entire Holy Qur'an was revealed from 609 – 632AD over a span of 23 years. Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) died peacefully soon after the completion of the Holy Qur'an in year 632AD.

⁴ Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was the Final Prophet and prophethood sealed upon his death in 632AD; there shall never be another prophet of any description whatsoever. The authority is in the Holy Qur'an at 33:40, which reads 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."*

⁵ Muslim-majority countries which have Muslim populations exceeding 80%: Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco, Iraq, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Niger, Mali, Senegal, Tunisia, Guinea, Somalia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Libya, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Palestine, Kuwait, Mauritania, Oman, Kosovo, Gambia, Bahrain, Comoros, Western Sahara, Djibouti, Maldives, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Mayotte.

⁶ Muslim-majority countries with population below 80%: United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Albania, Brunei, Sudan; Malaysia, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Eritria, Ethiopia, and Kazakhstan.

⁷ Israelite prophets (descended from Isaac, the second son of Prophet Abraham) all fasted as recorded in scriptures. Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was the only prophet who descended from Ishmael the elder of two sons of Prophet Abraham. Israelite prophets (for example) who fasted are as follows: Moses fasted for 40 days when he went up to Mount Sinai to receive the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Prophet King David fasted and broke his fast when his son (from his second wife) died. Jesus Christ fasted for 40 days when travelling through

evil." The purpose given there at HQ2:183 is not starving Muslims from not eating food and not drinking water, but guarding Muslims against evil. Hence the purpose of fasting as given at HQ2:183 is Muslim individual's gap-analysis and self-audit of all Muslims' behaviours over a common compliance test-period of one month, and preventing Muslims from falling into evil activities.

Fasting is one of the five compulsory obligations⁸ and also doubles as one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam; and fasting is expected compliance of any Muslim of both genders. (The five compulsory obligations as fundamental pillars of Islam are: Belief in One God [*the Unseen and Imperishable Almighty God*], Prayer five times daily, Charity, Fasting and Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)). It is imperative to examine the ever-superlative Holy Qur'an, which stipulates these obligations in their priority roll-out order and as basically introductive rules. There are unchallenged introductive rules about Almighty God and these have been stated in the Holy Qur'an at HQ2: 1-5 as "*I, Allah, am the best Knower. This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty, who believe in the Unseen and keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them, and who believe in that which has been revealed to you (Muhammad) and that which was revealed before you, and of the Hereafter they are sure. These are on a right course from their Lord and these it is that are successful.*"

It is perhaps also prudent to mention at this juncture, the sequential frequency of these obligations, which have been so brilliantly set into priority order by Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*). The first three of these obligations (One God [*as Almighty God*], Prayer to Almighty God five times daily, and Charity) are activities, which are compulsory performances upon all Muslims each day and night of their life. The remaining two obligations, Fasting and Pilgrimage, are not daily compulsory obligations, but obligations which have been set for different times in their life. Fasting is in the Islamic month of Ramadan⁹ and fasting is practised globally, whereas Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) is mostly an annual event, which requires prescribed global congregational gatherings at Mecca, in Saudi Arabia.

the mountain regions of the desert and he was tempted by the devil several times. Although there were in total over 124,000 prophets in this world since creation, not all of them fasted. Prophet Muhammad's (*pbuh*) statement in Hadith No 21257 in *Musnad Ibn Hanbal* that there were over 124,000 prophets since creation, which includes 313 Messengers, commencing with Adam.

⁸ Compulsory is only for those matured persons in sound health. The exceptions and exemptions have been explained appropriately, later in this document.

⁹ Please refer to footnote 10.

Fasting has been purposefully prescribed as an annual event¹⁰ and at specific times, so that the universality of Islam gets practised in unison. Almighty God loves His creatures of mankind¹¹ so much, that He has ordered that mankind must have a system of self-compliance for continuous corrections and leading them to the right path. Fasting also includes a system of gap-analysis, which at the same time is for mankind to assess their performance of obligations: what they are actually doing from what they should be doing. The obvious question, which now arises, is: what has gap-analysis got to do with fasting in Islam? The answer requires an explanatory analogy with business functions.

In business and economics, gap-analysis is an indicator business tool that helps companies' measurements of actual performances against potential performances. In other words, in any major project or business administration, gap-analysis is a vital management tool in determining the differences of where the project or business needs to be, for that business remaining on expected pre-set targets, and where it is functioning in its current position. That difference is the gap. Of course the gap has to be bridged to help the company not performing below the production possibilities frontier. All companies, which have failed to address gap-analysis, have run into serious complications, such as business winding up or even bankruptcy. It shall always be necessary to have periodic in-house audit functions (Internal Audit) as proactive measures, which will identify weaknesses in the business system and so to bring about necessary bridging of those gaps. Accordingly, the "spiritual-business management" of every Muslim goes through similar curves in life; and this requires spiritual gap-analysis of all Muslims, regardless of gender and sub-sectarian mainstreams.

The "spiritual-business's gap-analysis" tool is the Muslims' prescribed fasting rules in the month of Ramadan. Gap-analysis of Muslims also involves an audit period, during a special selective halting of some daily and some regular functions (i.e. the one month fasting in Ramadan is halting from certain regular lifestyles), which will identify to the person of his/her weaknesses, such as

¹⁰ All events and festivals in Islam are based on the Islamic Hijri calendar and not on the Gregorian calendar. The twelve months in the Islamic calendar are: *Muharram, Safar, Rabi al-Awwal, Rabi-ath-Thani, Jumada-al-Ula, Jumada-ath-Thaniya, Rajab, Shaba'an, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhul-al-Qada, Dhul-al-Hijja*. Hijri is year numbering system in the Islamic calendar, taken from 622AD as base year, the date of the migration of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) and his close followers from Mecca to Medina. Muslim New Year starts with the month of Muharram. Muslim calendar dates will read the year number with suffix of AH.

¹¹ Mankind is the best of all of Almighty God's creations.

certain non-compliances, illegal or non-allowed activities, his/her poor personal life management resulting in wastages in life; and drifting away from the five compulsory obligations (principles) of every Muslim.

Hence annual fasting becomes a compliance test for all Muslims throughout the world; and this compliance test shall continue to be so for all Muslims till the “Last Day” (which is the end of the world).

The specific time for this compliance test is the full month of Ramadan every year, which requires practical fasting, from a period of darkness just before the early glow of sunrise to just after sunset, daily. The month of Ramadan is that self-assessment and testing period for Muslims to go in their lives prescriptively correct, insofar as self-discipline, self-control, honesty, purity, charity and obedience to Almighty God matter. In a nutshell, if people can pass this testing period for a month, then people must continue with that same trend for the next 11 months towards perpetuity. That continuity for the next 11 months is perhaps the more difficult part; some people who especially adjust their regular lifestyles into full compliance for a month in Ramadan, may need that extra drive and determination, to continue doing so prescriptively for the next 11 months.

Hence, fasting as a compliance test, reminds Muslims that life is more than worrying and struggling for wealth, having the pride of children, owning all sorts of fabulous properties, motor vehicles, yachts and private aircraft, having all the attractive material luxuries the world offers; and drifting away from the prescribed performances of Muslims. Some people take special pride of their family and children. As a counter-balance, the Holy Qur’an reminds Muslims at HQ63:9 as *“O you who believe, do not let your wealth nor your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah; and whoever does that, these are the losers.”*

The month of Ramadan reminds Muslims further about the purpose of life in this world and this is stated in the Holy Qur’an at HQ6:32 as *“And this world’s life is but an idle sport and play. And certainly the abode of the Hereafter is better for those who keep their duty. Do you not then understand?”*

The compliance test has the purpose of reminding Muslims that there is an unavoidable event, as the Last Day when all people will be judged for their spiritual performances in this material world. Those who were compliant and those who were non-compliant will be parted into different directions. This is

made very clear in the Holy Qur'an at HQ10:7-10 as *"Those who do not expect the meeting with Us, and are pleased with this world's life and are satisfied with it, and those who are heedless of Our messages — These, their abode is the Fire because of what they earned. Those who believe and do good, their Lord guides them by their faith; rivers will flow beneath them in Gardens of bliss. Their cry therein will be, Glory to You, O Allah! and their greeting, Peace! And the last of their cry will be: Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds!"*

Muslims are further reminded that the compliance test reawakens them and that whatsoever the Muslims want, shall be the final outcomes based on their performances in this material world. In addition, Muslims are further warned not to drift away from Almighty God and not to ever consider other objects of worship. This warning is given in the Holy Qur'an at HQ42:19-21 as *"Allah is Benignant to His servants; He gives sustenance to whom He pleases; and He is the Strong, the Mighty. Whoso desires the tilth of the Hereafter, We give him increase in his tilth; and whoso desires the tilth of this world, We give him thereof; and he has no portion in the Hereafter. Or have they associates who have prescribed for them any religion that Allah does not sanction? And were it not for the word of judgment, it would have been decided between them. And surely for the wrongdoers is a painful chastisement."*

Islam through the documented medium of the Holy Qur'an emphasizes that there is no compulsion in religion and this point is stated in the Holy Qur'an most significantly at HQ2:256 as *"There is no compulsion in religion — the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error. So whoever disbelieves in the devil and believes in Allah, he indeed lays hold on the firmest handle which shall never break. And Allah is Hearing, Knowing."*

Although, insofar as Islam matters, there is no compulsion in religion, Islam has most mercifully allowed conditional exceptions to people from fasting. This has been stated in the Holy Qur'an at HQ2:184-185 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 effect 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. The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion. So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall*

fast therein, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. 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."

Islam does not impose fasting upon Muslims with such severity that the Muslims will face serious difficulties in their regular life, during the month of Ramadan. The flexibility of exemption has been made especially for those:

- ✓ who may not be in sound health,
- ✓ who may be either very young or very old in age,
- ✓ people who are required to take certain necessary medications during the day,
- ✓ women during their monthly courses,
- ✓ women who are pregnant with baby,
- ✓ mothers who may be breast-feeding babies,
- ✓ people who are on extended journey and which crosses time-zones,
- ✓ people living in the close circles of Polar Regions¹² of North and South poles where periods of darkness and daylight exceed 20 (+/-) 2 hours.

The first part of the clause in HQ2:184 of the Holy Qur'an sets the standard of 29-30 days as variable and circumstantial to moon cycles. The second part of HQ2:184 in the Holy Qur'an introduces the validated flexibility of who may not fast and discretely governed by qualifying mitigations in HQ2:184 as "*For a*

¹² 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, night-time's darkness reaches 20 hours (+/-) 2 hours accordingly. This depends on the seasonal variations and their countries' extent of curvature toward the poles. The Earth has a vertical rotational tilt of 28.5 deg. There are 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. 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 and similar justifiable exemptions. This means, that whilst there are periods of around 20-hours (+/-) 2 hours of seasonal daylight in the Polar Regions, on the contrary, there are also the opposite of around 20 hours (+/-) 2 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. Whilst the Gregorian calendar is solar based, the Islamic (Hijri) calendar is lunar based and because the Islamic calendar is 11-12 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar, the Islamic (lunar based) calendar will always advance by that many days each year. Hence the Islamic month of Ramadan will gradually and systematically move through all four seasons over 34-35 years into future and that cycle gets repeated over.

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."

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. Almighty God knows that very well. Muslims must therefore dissect and analyse His mastery of the laws with brilliantly in-built deeming provisions, which Almighty God has made so superbly, within the splendid verses of the Holy Qur'an.

Islam has become the fastest growing and the most dominant minority religion next after Christianity, in all Central, Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern European countries, including all countries in the Polar Regions. Prudence dictates that those Muslims should be assisted and correctly guided, so that they may also enjoy the privileges to practise Islam in its full glory, including the compliance test of fasting in the month of Ramadan.

However, because of extremely long day hours and sometimes extremely long night hours, in the Polar Regions, the reasonable hours of fasting has to be uniformly adjusted. There is a need for religious and community leaders in those upper northern and lower southern Polar Regions to manage by consensus. In some countries, the Ulema¹³ 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 20-22 hours.¹⁴

¹³ Ulema refer to highly educated class of legal scholars of the religion of Islam and they are generally as arbiters of Islam's Sharia Laws. The Ulema are very well versed on all matters of Islamic jurisprudence, which includes both the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith. Their academic qualifications require them, in addition to law degree, to have further degree on Islamic matters called *Ijazah*. On a point of distinct clarity, Ulema does not include ordinary *imams* in the mosque such as practising *molvis* and *mullahs*.

¹⁴ There are two options in such situations of Polar Regions, where the climatic pattern includes extremely long hours of daylight and alternately extremely long hours of darkness. First option: The Ulema, upon wide consensus of the Muslims, may set the times to commence and break the fast especially when daylight exceeds 16 hours (two-thirds of a day) and this will differ geographically from one country to another, especially with different time zones. In the case of those who cannot - and Almighty God has decreed that fasting is to "guard

The Ulema will generally base their decision on the Holy Qur'an and the six *Sahih Hadith*.¹⁵

The term "*Lailat-ul-Qadr*" or the Grand Night of Majesty has been mentioned in many articles and discussions. The remaining five odd-date nights of last ten days in the month of Ramadan are of special significance, and one of these nights is the Grand Night and aptly called as "*Lailat-ul-Qadr*." It is also referred to as the Night of Majesty. In consideration of the name, it is important to fully comprehend the "majestic" aspect of this special night. The midpoint of these odd-dates (25th, 27th and 29th) days of month is the 27th night. This midpoint date has been universally accepted and practised, regardless of country, language and ethnicity. It was on one of these odd-number nights when Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was first visited by Archangel Gabriel (*Jibreel*) in the cave¹⁶, where he was in deep meditation of prayer.

against evil" and further, Almighty God does not want His people to practise starvation as torture. Again the Ordinance in Holy Qur'an states at HQ2:185 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.*" 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 HQ2:184 "*And those who find it extremely hard may affect redemption by feeding a poor man.*" This also lends support regarding married life and matrimonial affairs, especially in those countries, which have seasonally very high proportion of daylight (that is 20 hours or more) and again the Holy Qur'an most mercifully and most graciously clarifies at HQ2:187 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.*" It is reiterated that such departures from the norm is only in those Polar Regions, where sometimes daylight exceeds 20 hours continuous and sometimes night darkness exceeds 20 hours continuous. 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 HQ2:183; 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.

¹⁵ Practices of Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) are recorded in *Hadith*, especially in the cases of six authenticated (*Sahih*) *Hadith*, such as listed 1-6 in order of highest elevation, with highest at 1: 1. *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 2. *Sahih Muslim*, 3. *Sunan al-Sugra*, 4. *Sunan Abu Dawood*, 5. *Jami al-Trimidhi* 6. *Sunan ibn Majah*.

¹⁶ Holy Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) received his first revelation in *Ghar-e-Heera* (Cave of Heera) in the month of Ramadan in year 612AD. They were the first 5 out of 19 verses of the Holy Qur'an, which is whole of Chapter 96 (when fully revealed).

It was on this night, in the month of Ramadan, that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) received his very first revelation, which historically became the glorious commencement of Divine authorship of the Holy Qur'an, and which is basically the 19 verses of Chapter 96 of the Holy Qur'an (HQ96:1-19), as "*1 Read in the name of your Lord Who creates — 2 Creates man from a clot, 3 Read and your Lord is most Generous, 4 Who taught by the pen, 5 Taught man what he did not know. 6 No! Man is surely inordinate, 7 Because he looks upon himself as self-sufficient. 8 Surely to your Lord is the return. 9 Have you seen him who forbids 10 A servant when he prays? 11 Do you see if he is on the right way, 12 Or enjoins observance of duty? 13 Do you see if he denies and turns away? 14 Does he not know that Allah sees? 15 No! If he does not stop, We will seize him by the forelock —16 A lying, sinful forelock! 17 Then let him summon his council, 18 We will summon the braves of the army. 19 No! Do not obey him, but prostrate yourself, and draw near (to Allah).*"

The 19 verses become encapsulated as the sum-total of the description and life-cycle of mankind from conception and birth, material life on Earth and material death on Earth, and then to the "great trial of all mankind" on the Great Day of Judgement, when Almighty God alone is the Supreme Judge.

Different countries have given "Lailat-ul-Qadr" a numerically descriptive name, according to their vernacular. For example, in India, this event is called "Sathweisein" as an expanded version of the Hindi word for numerals 27.

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

Hence it is imperative, that Muslims adhere to the injunction in the Holy Qur'an at HQ3:103 as "*And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful.*"

-End of Document-

Fiji