



The Month of Rajab

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Rajab is the seventh month in the Islamic lunar calendar. This month was regarded as one of the sacred months (Al-Ashhur-al-hurum) in which battles were prohibited in the days of the Holy Prophet. It is also a prelude to the month of Ramadan, because Ramadan follows it after the intervening month of Sha'ban. Therefore, when the Holy Prophet sighted the moon of Rajab, he used to pray to Allah in the following words:

"O Allah, make the months of Rajab and Sha'ban blessed for us, and let us reach the month of Ramadan (i.e. prolong our life up to Ramadan, so that we may benefit from its merits and blessings)."

Yet no specific way of worship has been prescribed by the Shari'ah in this month. However, some people have invented some special rituals or practices in this month, which are not supported by reliable resources of the Shari'ah or are based on some unauthentic traditions. We would like to explain here the correct position about them.

1. Celebration of Lailatul Mi'raj

It is generally believed that the great event of Mi'raj (ascension of the Holy Prophet to the heavens) took place in the night of 27th of Rajab. Therefore, some people celebrate the night as "Lailatul- Mi'raj" (the night of ascension to heavens).

Indeed, the event of mi'raj was one of the most remarkable episodes in the life of our beloved Holy Prophet. He was called by Almighty Allah. He travelled from Makkah to Baitul-Maqdis and from there he ascended the heavens through the miraculous power of Allah. He was honoured with a direct contact with his Creator at a place where even the angels had no access. This was the unique honour conferred by Allah to the Holy Prophet alone. It was the climax of the spiritual progress which is not attained by anybody except him. No doubt the night in which he was blessed with this unparalleled honour was one of the greatest nights in the history of this world.

But, Islam has its own principles with regard to the historic and religious events. Its approach about observing festivals and celebrating days and nights is totally different from the approach of other religions. The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet did not prescribe any festival or any celebration to commemorate an event from the past, however remarkable it might have been. Instead, Islam has prescribed two annual celebrations only. One is Eid-ul-Fitr and the other is Eid ul-Adha. Both of these festivals have been fixed at a date on which the Muslims accomplish a great 'ibadah (worship) every year. Eid-ul-Fitr has been prescribed after the fasts of Ramadan, while Eid-ul-Adha has been fixed when the Muslims perform the Hajj annually. None of these two eids is designed to commemorate a particular event of the past which has happened in these dates. This approach is indicative of the fact that the real occasion for a happy celebration is the day in which the celebrators themselves have accomplished remarkable work through their own active effort. As for the accomplishments of our ancestors, their commemoration should not be restricted to a particular day or night. Instead, their accomplishments must be remembered every day in the practical life by observing their teachings and following the great examples they have set for us.

Keeping this principle in view, the following points should be remembered with regard to the "Lailatul-mi'raj":

(1) We cannot say with absolute certainty in which night the great event of mi'raj took place. Although some traditions relate this event to 27th night of the month of Rajab, yet there are other traditions that suggest other dates. Al-Zurqani, the famous biographer of the Holy Prophet has referred to five different views in this respect: Rabi-ul-Awwal, Rabi-u-Thani, Rajab, Ramadan and Shawwal. Later, while discussing different traditions, he has added a sixth opinion, that the mi'raj took place in the month of Zulhijjah.

Allama Abdulhaq Muhaddith Dehlawi, the well-known scholar of the Indian subcontinent, has written a detailed book on the merits of Islamic months. While discussing the 'Lailatul-mi'raj' has mentioned that most of the scholars are of the view that the event of mi'raj took place in the month of Ramadan or in Rabi-ul-awwal.

(2) It is also not known in which year the event of Mi'raj took place. The books of history suggest a wide range between the fifth-year and the twelfth year after the Holy Prophet was entrusted with prophethood.

Now, if it is assumed that the event of Mi'raj took place in the fifth year of his prophethood, it will mean that the Holy Prophet remained in this world for eighteen years after this event. Even if it is presumed that the mi'raj took place in the twelfth year of his prophethood, his remaining life-time after this event would be eleven years. Throughout this long period, which may range between eleven years and eighteen years, the Holy Prophet never celebrated the event of mi'raj, nor did he give any instruction about it. No one can prove that the Holy Prophet ever performed some specific modes of worship in a night calling it the 'Lailatul-mi'raj' or advised his followers to commemorate the event in a particular manner.

(3) After the demise of the Holy Prophet also, no one of his companions is reported to celebrate this night as a night of special acts of worship. They were the true devotees of the Holy Prophet and had devoted their lives to preserve every minute detail of the sunnah of the Holy Prophet and other Islamic teachings. Still, they did not celebrate the event of mi'raj in a particular night in a particular way.

All these points go a long way to prove that the celebration of the 27th night of Rajab, being the lailatul-mi'raj has no basis in the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet or in the practice of his noble companions. Had it been a commendable practice to celebrate this night, the exact date of this event would have been preserved accurately by the Ummah and the Holy Prophet and his blessed companions would have given specific directions for it.

Therefore, it is not a Sunnah to celebrate the Lailatul-mi'raj'. We cannot declare any practice as a sunnah unless it is established through authentic sources that the Holy Prophet or is noble Companions have recognized it as such, otherwise it may become a bid'ah about which the Holy Prophet has observed in the following words: "Whoever invents something in our religion which is not a part of it, it is to be rejected."

Being mindful of this serious warning, we should appreciate that the 27th night of the month of Rajab is not like 'Lailatul-qadr' or 'Lailatul-bara'ah' for which special merits have been mentioned expressly either by the Holy Qur'an or by the Holy Prophet .

However, all the recognized modes of 'ibadah (worship) like Salat, recitation of the Holy Qur'an, dhikr, etc. are commendable any time, especially in the late hours of night, and obviously the 27th night of Rajab is not an exception. Therefore, if someone performs any recognized 'ibadah in this night from this point of view nothing can stop him from doing so, and he will be entitled to the thawab (reward allocated for that recognized 'ibadah insha-Allah.) But it is not permissible to believe that performing 'ibadah in this night is more meritorious or carries more thawab like 'Lailatul-qadr' or 'Lailatul-bara'ah', because this belief is not based on any authentic verse or on a sunnah of the Holy Prophet . Similarly, it is not a correct practice to celebrate this night collectively and to invite people to special ritual congregations.

(4) Some people suggest some special modes of worship to be performed in this night. Since no special mode of worship is prescribed by the Shari'ah in this night, these suggestions are devoid of any authority and should not be acted upon.

It is believed by some that the Muslims should keep fast on 27th of Rajab. Although there are some traditions attributing special merits to the fast of this day yet the scholars of hadith have held these traditions as very weak and unauthentic reports which cannot be sufficient to establish a rule of Shari'ah. On the contrary, there is an authentic report that Sayyidna 'Umar, Radi-Allahu anhu, used to forbid people from fasting on this day, rather to compel them to eat if they had started fasting.

It should be borne in mind here that a "nafl" fast can be observed any day (except the six prohibited days of the year); therefore, fasting on 27th of Rajab is not prohibited in itself. What is prohibited is the belief that fasting on this day is more meritorious than fasting in other normal days. One should not fast in this day with this belief. But if someone fasts therein, believing it to be a normal nafl fast, there is no bar against it.

Sacrifice (qurbani) in the month of Rajab

In the days of ignorance (jahiliyyah) the Arabs used to offer the sacrifice of a goat in the month of Rajab. This sacrifice used to be called 'Atirah' or 'Rajabiyyah'. This sacrifice was offered in the name of different so-called gods and their icons. In the beginning of Islam, this custom was retained, but the Muslims modified it by offering the sacrifice of 'Atirah in the name of Allah instead of the false gods. But finally, this custom was abandoned and the Holy Prophet prohibited the offering of 'Atirah. In a tradition of Sayyidna Abu Hurairah, Radi-Allahu anhu, reported by both al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Holy Prophet has said: "Fara' is nothing and 'Atirah is nothing."

Abu Hurairah, Radi-Allahu anhu, has explained in the same tradition that 'Fara' was the first child of a she-camel. Whenever a she-camel delivered its first child, the Arabs used to sacrifice it in the name of their so-called gods, while the 'Atirah' was a goat used to be sacrificed in the month of Rajab. Since the Holy Prophet stopped both these customs, 'Atirah is no longer a recognized practice.

Umrah in the month of Rajab

Ibn 'Abidin, the well-known scholar of the Islamic jurisprudence, has mentioned that the people of Makkah (in his days) used to perform 'umrah in the month of Rajab. Perhaps they believed that performing 'umrah in this month is more meritorious than in other months. Then Ibn Abidin himself has rejected the authenticity of this practice, because no tradition of the Holy Prophet is found to this effect. Conversely Sayyidah 'Aishah, Radi-Allahu anha, has expressly negated the presumption by saying that the Holy Prophet never performed an 'umrah in the month of Rajab (Sahih Muslim 1:409)

However, Ibn 'Aibidin has quoted a narration that 'Abdullah ibn Zubair, Radi-Allahu anhu, completed the renovation of Ka'bah shortly before 27th of Rajab, and as a sign of gratefulness he performed 'umrah and slaughtered some animals. But this report cannot form the basis of a recognized annual practice, firstly because the report is not very authentic, and secondly because it does not mention that Abdullah ibn Zubair, Radi-Allahu anhu, had adopted it as a continuing practice. At the most, he performed 'umrah once as a sign of gratefulness on the completion of Ka'bah. It does not mean that he performed it as a characteristic of the month of Rajab. Therefore, performing 'Umrah in this month is like performing it in any other month and no special merit can be attached to it merely because it has been performed in the month of Rajab.

The Salat of "Ragha'ib"

Another special mode of worship attributed by some people to this month is the Salat of Ragha'ib. According to the custom of such people, this Salat is performed in the night of first Friday of the month of Eajab. The Salat of Raghaib is said to consist of twelve rak'ats to be performed in pairs with six salams, and in each rak'at the surah al-qadr is recited three times followed by the Surah-al-ikhlas. This type of Salat is also not based on any sound source of Shari'ah. Therefore, almost all the jurists and scholars of Shari'ah have held that the Salat of Raghaib is a baseless practice and it is not permissible to treat it as a recognized practice of this month. It is true that there is a tradition, narrated by Razin, the author of a book of hadith, which attributes the origin of this practice to the Holy Prophet but almost all the scholars of the science of hadith have held it to be absolutely unauthentic. Therefore, no importance can be attached to it.

Distribution of Breads:

Another baseless practice in the month of Rajab is that the people bake special types of breads and, after reciting some verses and prayers on them, distribute them among their friends and neighbors. This custom has two different shapes.

1). In some communities, this custom is celebrated on 17th of Rajab on the assumption that Sayyidna Ali, Radi-Allahu anhu, was born on 11th of Rajab and the 17th of Rajab is the day on which his 'Aqiqa (Shaving of his head) was performed. In order to celebrate this happy event, the breads of some special type are prepared and after reciting Surah Al-Mulk on them, they are distributed among the relatives and friends. These breads are generally called "breads of Tabarak" because Surah Al-Mulk is usually recited on them.

This practice is baseless because it is never proved that Sayyidna Ali, Radi-Allahu anhu, was born on 11th of Rajab or that his Aqiqa was performed on 17th of this month and, as explained earlier, even if these events are proved to have happened in those days, their commemoration through these specific rituals is not warranted by the Shari'ah.

2). A more common practice of this type is observed on 22nd of Rajab whereby some breads and meals of a special type are prepared and distributed among the people. Since these special meals are usually placed in some bowls made of clay, the custom is usually known as "Koonda", an Urdu equivalent of such bowls. It is usually believed that the custom is designed to make 'isal-al-thawab to the soul of Sayyidna Jafar Al-Sadiq who himself has directed his followers to observe this custom and has promised them that whoever observes it, his desires will be fulfilled.

All these assumptions also have no basis at all, neither historically, nor according to the principles of Shari'ah. In fact, the date of 22nd of Rajab has no concern whatsoever with Sayyidna Jafar al-Sadiq, Rahimah-u-Allah. According to the historians, he was born on 8th of Ramadan 80 A.H. and died in Shawwal 148 A.H. No specific event of the life of Sayyidna Jafar al-Sadiq is proved to have happened on this date. The people believing in the custom refer to a coined story mentioned in an unauthentic book named "Dastan-e-Ajeeb".

Briefly stated, the gist of the story is that a poor woodcutter lived in Madinah in the days of Jafar Al-Sadiq. He went abroad to earn his livelihood. His wife was employed in the house of the Prime Minister. Once she was cleaning the courtyard of the Prime Minister when Sayyidna Jafar al-Sadiq passed by her. It was 22nd of Rajab. He advised her to bake some breads of a special type and make 'isal-al-sawab to him. According to this story, he promised her that if her desire is not fulfilled after this practice, she can catch hold of him at the doom's day. On hearing this, the woman made a vow that if her husband will come back with a considerable wealth, she will observe the custom of "Koonda". On the same day her husband, who was in another country, found a valuable treasure in the earth and came back with it to Madinah where he established himself as a rich man and started living in a magnificent castle. When his wife told the story to the wife of the Prime Minister, she disbelieved her and because of this disbelief, she and her husband, the Prime Minister, were punished by Allah. He was removed by the king from the prime minister-ship and was imprisoned in a jail and was ordered to be hanged. While being in the prison, the wife of the Prime Minister remembered that she had disbelieved the story of Jafar al-Sadiq told to her by her

maidservant and their misery might be the punishment of their disbelief. On this point, she and her husband repented before Allah and made a vow to observe the custom of "Koonda", if they are released from the jail. After they made such a vow, the whole scenario of the events changed suddenly. The king released the Prime Minister from the jail and reinstated him on his former position.

As it can be seen by any reasonable person, this story is totally forged on the face of it. The person who has coined this story did not even know that Madinah had never a king nor a Prime Minister. All the Muslim rulers were named as caliphs and had no Prime Minister at all. In the days of Umayyads, their capital was Damascus and in the days of Abbasids, their permanent seat was in Baghdad.

It is ironical that the story of such a woodcutter is not even known to anybody in Madinah, nor in any city of the Arab countries. No Arabic book has ever referred to it. It has no mention except in an Urdu book 'Dastaan-e-Ajeeb', the author of which is unknown. One can easily see that a custom based on such a fallacious and mythical story can never be an Islamic custom. Islam has always been far away from such superstitions.

Therefore, this baseless custom should completely be avoided by the true Muslims. Some historians have opined that in fact, this custom has been coined by some Shi'ites because the date of 22nd of Rajab is the date of the demise of Sayyidna Mu'awiyah whom they take as their biggest enemy. They took that date as a happy occasion and made the Sunni Muslims also to celebrate it on the pretext of the above mentioned story.

Be that as it may, it is evident that such customs have crept into the Muslim society by their long association with Hindus who commemorate different historical events of their religion in the like manner. The Muslims must be careful about these customs, because they are not only an invention of ignorance but also the imitation of non-Muslims in their religious rituals. No doubt the "'isal-al-thawab' to the soul of a deceased Muslim, and particularly to a pious person is not only permissible but also a commendable practice but the Shari'ah has not prescribed a particular date, nor a particular mode to do so. If someone wants to make "'isal-al-thawab" to Sayyidna 'Ali, Radi-Allahu anhu, or to Ja'far al-Sadiq, he can do it any day and by performing any act of worship, like Salat, fast, Sadaqah, dhikr etc. There is no reason why it should be restricted to a special type of meal or bread distributed on a particular date. What makes this practice worse is the fact that the people accustomed to this practice deem it as necessary as a fard (obligation); rather they treat it as more necessary than fard because they do not care to perform the obligatory Salat or to fulfill the rights of men obligated on them, but they are very strict and punctual to perform these activities. Moreover, if a person does not observe this practice, they reproach him and call him with bad names. Such behaviour makes this custom a bid'ah which is condemned by the Holy Prophet as a misguidance. Therefore, the Muslims must abandon all such practices and should not cling to it only because it has been the practice of their society for many years. A Muslim is supposed to follow the dictates of Shari'ah and not the practice of the society, if it violates any of its principles.

Conclusion

The upshot of the above discussion is that the Shari'ah has not prescribed any specific way to observe the month of Rajab or to perform a specific mode of worship or a ritual in any one of its dates. However, being a prologue to the month of Ramadan, it should be availed of for preparing oneself for Ramadan and one should pray Allah to make him reach the blessed month and to benefit from its unique merits.

<http://www.albalagh.net/general/rajab.shtml>