

15th Shabaaan **(Lailatul Barat /** **Shab-e-Barat)**

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Presented by:
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SHAB-E-BAR'AT is generally considered a festival of Muslims. Certain customs have been evolved which are adhered to, vigorously. From celebrations point of view, this is second to only *Muharram*. But the truth is that is absolutely man-made festival. Neither Qur'an nor *Hadith* and the era of companions of Prophet Muhammad Sallallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) indicate the existence of this festival, then. None of the Islamic scholars of early post -Kilafat-e-Rashida period have called such a feast Islamic.

As a matter of fact, Islam is not a religion of customs and festivities. It is a straightforward and reasonable religion which restrains human beings from the shackles of rituals, futile and time consuming fete. Islam urges people to save precious time, energy and wealth and pay attention towards unshakable realities of life. It wants people to spend their time on activities, which prove to be the cause of happiness and prosperity in this life and Hereafter.

It is highly uncharacteristic of such a religion to mark one day in a year for fire-cracking and confectionering and allow people to keep on wasting valuable time and hard-earned money every year. It is further remote of the spirit of Islam to make people observe a custom which is not only a drain on time and money but, at times, even proves fatal and reduces property to ashes. Instead of asking people to celebrate such baseless customs, if it was already a trend during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad Sallallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) . It would have surely been stooped forcefully. All such festivities, which were performed during those days were banned, as it is.

The matter of confectionery and firework is so explicit that every individual, with even little knowledge of Islam, will instantly acknowledge that these practices are against the values of Islam. When it is endeavored to figure out link of recognized religious belief, with this specific day of *Shaban*, no such association is traceable. At the most, Islamic literature reveals only an event: once, on the night of *Shaban* the 15th, Hazrat Ayesha did not find Prophet Muhammad Sallallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) on his bed, so she left in his search and reached Jannat-ul Baquee. He was present there. On quizzing, he replied on this night, Allah turns his attention from the sky to this world and forgives as many sins of people as the total number of hair of all the sheep's put-together of the clan, called Kalb. But a prominent writer of *hadees*, Imam Tirmizi has declared this tradition a fragile and has claimed, through his research, that it can not be believed with certainty that Hazrath Ayesha was its source. There are other narrations which are found in lesser known compilations of Hadees. The excellence of this night is said to be only because human fates

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are decided in this, and affairs of birth and death are finalized. But all these traditions are weak. Every argument, in its favor, suffers one or the other flaw. This is why none of the reliable old collection of Hadees mentions about these stories. Even if their authenticity is recognized in too, then also, the only inference could be that praying and asking for His forgiveness for the sins, during this night, is an appreciable act. If this is done individually, and then they will be rewarded. Other than this, the perusals of these narrations does not prove that either 14th or 15th night of Shaban is proclaimed to be Eid or some collective prayers are pronounced for this occasion.

The more reliable books on *Hadees* acknowledge that Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) used to be in a peculiar state, in the month of Shaban, prior to the commencement of Ramadan. It is in the month of Ramadan that the stupendous honor of Prophethood was bestowed upon him and the revelation of immortal Book, the Qur'an, commenced. Due to these reasons, he not only used to keep unusually regular fasts and perform longer prayers during Ramadan, but even in advance, Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) would inch closer to Allah. Hazrath Ayesha and Umme Salma state that besides Ramadan, Shaban was the only month during which Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) fasted most, rather the entire month was spent in fasting. But this practice of his was specifically for his own sake. It was due to his deep spiritual attachment, he had with the month of revelation of Qur'an. For, common Muslims were instructed by him to stay away from fasting during the second fortnight of Shaban. He suspected that if Muslims got habitual of fasting during this period, then gradually this would turn into a trend and people will have to bear unnecessary burden of 10-15 fasts, in addition to the compulsory fasting of the entire month of Ramadan. Thus people would have borne the burden, which had not been put on them by the injunction of Allah.

Islam has taken necessary care of the fact that its followers do not adopt rituals and rites which Allah has not asked them to. None of the self-created custom, artificial ceremony or any collective practice should take the shape of Faraz. Allah knows better as to what will and what will not be beneficial for the people. He also knows that how much of it is necessary for human beings to perform. By exceeding the limits prescribed by him, if people establish certain customs and rituals of their own, and practice them like Faraiz, then they will make the life unnecessarily difficult for themselves. Past nations had committed the same blunder of pioneering rituals and customs and made them essential and part of their religion. Consequently, they were entangled in such a web of their

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making that they could not find exit route and eventually got paralyzed. Qur'an has declared customs as synonymous to "shackles" and the chief objective of the life of Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) is said to be setting free the mankind from such chains and shackles. Due to this, the shariat of the Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) has proposed a lean and mean stream of *faraiz* and eliminated all other customs and traditions. There is no third festival in Islam other than Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha. There is no pilgrimage other than *Haj* and besides *zakah* there is no charity or donation which is declared as *Faraz*. Thereafter, a simple rule is laid forever that man is not authorized to cut down on any of the *faraiz*. Similarly, he is not mandated to make any additions either.

Initially, people who understood the spirit of Islamic injunctions, they strictly adhered to these principles. They restrained from pioneering and establishing new customs and when they noticed alarming trends, they were uprooted, for good. They knew that these conventions, though initiated with noble intentions and considered righteousness, would gradually turn into *Sunnah*, then *wajib* and finally *faraz* and thereafter will even overtake *faraz*. Due to sheer ignorance, people tend to mix up this piety with various ills and make it an ugly practice. Such customs, put together, become a curse for society and impediment for the progress of humanity. It is because of this, the *Ulemah* and *Imams* of early Islamic era used to be very careful in guarding Islam from such unwarranted additions. They had unflinching faith that considering anything as part of *Shariah*, which is actually not, and adding more significance to something than given by *Shariah*: both instances are heresy and every such act was considered to be apostasy.

Unfortunately, in subsequent centuries, Muslims became reckless and gradually started slipping into the vicious circle of customs, as other nations did. One of the primary reasons of this has been that nations which came into Islamic fold in the later era, could not get proper Islamic orientation and training. They embraced Islam along with some of their primitive customs and lifestyles. They were, for ages, accustomed to disgraceful festivities, customs and pilgrimage, without which their religious lives were colourless. After embracing Islamic *Shariah*, instead of feeling relieved from the getting rid of old rituals and freeing themselves from the shackles of bad customs, they got worried as to how to recapture the burden which Islam had eliminated and how to wear the shackles which Islam had broken. Thus, they modified the facade of some of their old customs; they invented some others and even turned Islam into the same religion of fun and frolicking, as their old religion were. These inventions were

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made very aptly. Qur'an and Hadees were never scrutinized with the objective of learning the principles and guidelines of leading an Islamic life; rather it was done to find excuses for continuing their old customs and inventing new conventions. When they managed to find a minor clue, they converted into a mammoth and perpetual custom. People felt proud on filling the gap by inventing festivities, which were originally not there, without realizing that they have worn the same shackles which were destroyed by Allah, through His Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H), and they have again fallen into the trap from which no nation has ever managed to come out.

FASTING AND SELF-RESTRAINT

Among numerous other spiritual and moral benefits of fasting, one is to prepare man for developing self-control. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of this, one ought to know the Islamic conception of self-restraint and then how fasting helps in achieving this.

The meaning of self-restraint is that man's psyche (Islam defines psyche as that part of one's self, which takes decision on good or evil deeds.) exercises blanket control on his body and its energies, and the requisition and desires of baser-self (in Islamic terminology, baser-self is defined as that part of one's self which motivates people for evil deeds) should be in its clutches to make them abide by its demands. Psyche occupies the same position in a human body as that of a ruler in his empire. Body and its different parts are the subordinates of psyche. All mental and physical powers are meant to be at its disposal. The rule of baser-self is limited to presenting them to psyche, with request. The final decision rests with psyche as to how these energies and tools are put to use and which of the baser-self requisitions be accepted or rejected. If one's psyche is so frail that it is unable to rule the empire of his body, according to its wishes, and begins to take the desires of baser-self as command or instructions, then it becomes a paralyzed psyche. Such people cannot lead a successful and purposeful life. Those who have left a mark in history and human civilization are the ones who had domination on the human energies, at their disposal; who have not lived as prisoners of their wishes and slaves of their desires but have kept their wishes and desires under check; and those who have firm determination and rock-solid resolution.

But there is a contrasting difference between psyches which itself assumes the role of Allah and the one which functions under the subordination of Allah. For a

successful life, complete domination on psyche is nevertheless a must, but if it is free of its Creator and unmindful of its Lord; which is not restrained by a superior moral system; which presumes that it is not accountable for its deeds, if such a psyche dominates the power of his baser-life and body and becomes a rock like psyche, then it could merely produce Fir'aun, Namroud, Hitler and Mussolini. Such a self-restraint is neither appreciable nor is it desirable in Islam. The self-restraint which is required by Islam is that man's self, firstly, surrenders itself to Allah makes compliance of His instructions and the desire to fulfill His wishes its sole objective; assumes himself to be accountable to Him, then such a virtuous and Muslim psyche exercises iron rule on its body and wields complete domination on its baser-self and its body and wields complete domination on its baser-self and its demands, so that it becomes a strong and vibrant force in this world.

This is the definition of self-restraint, from Islamic point of view. Now, it is elaborated as to how fasting in stills this energy into human beings.

If the demands of human body and baser-self are analyzed, it will be inferred that three demands are pivotal, and all of them are most vehement. First is the demand for food, on which relies the subsistence of life. Second is the carnal desire, depends on which the survival of humanity. Third is the longing for rest and relaxation which is a must for reenergizing and rejuvenating human physique. All the three demands, within reasonable limits, are absolutely compatible with nature. But the same three loops, at the disposable of baser-self and bodies are such, that at the slightest lapse, they make man's conscience their own slave. Each of these demands turns into a long list of sub-demands and each one struggles to make man forget his principles and ignore the decries of his conscience, in order to attract his entire attention for its realization. A fragile psyche, once entrapped, the demand for food makes it a glutton. Sensual desires force him to stoop to inhuman level, and lethargy does not allow him to reach new heights. It, then, becomes the governed rather than the ruler of baser-self and its function is reduced to executing orders of baser-self by hook or crook and through every hanky-panky route, available to it.

Fasting encompasses these three demands of baser-self and trains the psyche to control them. Fasting notifies the psyche, which is faithful to Allah, which your Allah has prohibited dining and drinking for the whole day; during this period you are also forbidden from carnal pleasures; you cannot, from dawn to dusk, enjoy such pleasure even through means which are otherwise permissible. It also appraises the psyche that the will of Allah is, after breaking the daylong fast, do

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not slacken and lie down, rather get up and offer prayers longer than normal days. It instructs that after long and tiring prayer, when you got to bed, do not take a long sleep till morning, rather wake up long before dawn, against the normal course and eat something before starting the fast. After communicating these injunctions, the responsibility of pursuing them is left on every individual. Constabulary, intelligence or any other external agency is not deployed to implement these instructions. If one dines or gratifies sensual desire, clandestinely, then no one is around him, except Allah, to notice. If one makes lame excuses to avoid long prayers in the night (Taraveeh), then no force on the earth will quiz him. Every thing depends on his own, if the psyche of a Muslim is pledged with Allah and if his will power is strong enough to tame the baser-self, then he will himself mould the demand for food, desire for sex and wish for rest into a system which has been established, against the routine.

This exercise is not restricted just for a day. One day training cannot be sufficient for this kind of activity. This is conducted for a month, at a stretch. This program has been chalked out for 720 hours in a year; to get up towards the last part of the night; stop eating at the break of dawn (sahar); restrict from dining through out the day; break the fast (iftaar), immediately after the sun set; then spend early part of the night by standing for unusually long prayers (taraveeh); and after relaxing for few hours, repeat the same course the following day. Thus, three strongest and most common urges of the baser-self are molded, perpetually, to provide strength to the psyche for ruling the baser-self according to the will of Allah. This conditioning program is not held just once in a life time, rather one month is devoted every year, from the age of reaching adolescence till one dies. This repetition is meant to revitalize and strengthen the grip of psyche over baser-self.

This exercise is not carried out to make the psyche of a Muslim control just his hunger, thirst, carnal desires and the urge to relax. Nor is this done to retain control over baser-self and body, for a month only. Strictly, the primary objective is that after having tamed the three strongest cravings of the psyche, one should emerge strong enough to exercise restraint over his all desires and emotions; and be prepared to comply with the injunctions of Allah during the remaining eleven months of the year as well, through his body; and its forces. One should strive for every piety which consents with the will of Allah, restrict himself from every vice which is abhorred by Allah and strictly adhere to those restrictions which Allah has placed on his demands and demotions. Baser-self should not be put in the driver's seat to steer him at will, the responsibility of navigation should rather be in his own hands to direct the urges as desired by

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Allah. One should not have such a weak will power that even after recognizing the mandatory instructions (faraiz) as a must and wishing to fulfill them; but finding the body beyond his control. Never! Within the physical empire, should one behave like a dominant ruler who always commands his subordinates according to his own whims? Creating this power is the ultimate objective of fasting. One who fails to achieve this strength through fasting, he unnecessarily puts himself to the inconvenience of hunger, thirst and of sleep and rest.

Qur'an and Hadees (the sayings of Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) both have clearly elaborated this: Qur'an states: Fasting has been made mandatory for you so that you attain the trait of self restraint. Hadees of Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam (P.B.U.H) is: One who tells lies and practices lies, he is not required by Allah to stop eating and drinking. He further added that most of the fasters are such that they do not gain anything from fasting, except hunger and thirst. (5th July, 1948)

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