MUNEM WASIF/DRIK NEWS

Night of Salvation

Our duty on this Night of Privilege or Night of Salvation is not only to seek Divine Mercy but also to seek the path of goodness, kindness, upright conduct and charity, to be always ready to respond to the cry of the needy, to stand by the word that is pledged, to bear true witness, to remove all artificial differences between man and man, and to clear up all misunderstanding in our dealings with fellow brethren in every sphere of activity and in every domain of thought.

SYED ASHRAF ALI

THE auspicious Night on the 15th of Shaban, known as Lailat-ul-Baraat (popularly known as Shab-e-Barat in this sub-continent) is indeed a glorious and important occasion in the life of every God-fearing Muslim. Both the words, "Lailat" in Arabic and "Shab" in Persian, mean "Night," and "Baraat" means "Salvation" or "Privilege."

It is on this auspicious Night of Privilege, or Night of Salvation, that Benign Providence, in His infinite Mercy, blesses each and every human being with a unique opportunity to receive the most coveted Divine Mercy. Acclaimed traditionalist Ibn Maja (his Sunan is universally accepted as one of the Sihah Sitta, the six authentic traditional works) reported on the authority of no less a person than Sher-e-Khuda Hazrat Ali (RA) that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "On this Night, from the moment the sun sets, Allah descends into the firmament of this earth and goes on asking till sunrise: 'Is there any seeker of salvation, so that I may give it to him; is there anyone in need of food, so that I may feed him; is there anyone suffering, so that I may cure him?' "

The Encyclopedia of Islam, published in Leiden, Netherlands, corroborates this claim: "In Hadith it is said that on this Night Allah descends to the lowest heaven, from there He calls mortals in order to grant them forgiveness of sins" (Tirmidhi Sunan, B. 39). (Tirmidhi's Sunan is also considered to be one of the six authentic traditional works.) No wonder, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), the best of all creations, the Ashraf amongst the Ashraful Makhluqats, never failed to avail this unique and glorious opportunity and himself used to pray all through this auspicious Night every year with a view to receiving Mercy from the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Allah.

Lailat-ul-Baraat has not been mentioned directly or specifically in the Holy Quran, but that does not in any way empower any Muslim to ignore or make little of the Divine Excellence of the Night of Salvation, because there are numerous authentic Ahadith and evidence which testify so eloquently to the fact that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself used to say special prayers on this holy night. Records are there that on one occasion he (peace be upon him) spent half of this auspicious Night of Privilege through a Nafl prayer of two rakat and the rest of the Night through a long "Sejda" or Prostration.

What is more, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) used to offer this prayer with inimitable dedication, and unfathomable concentration. Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqa (RA) reported that on one such occasion the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was so deeply absorbed in his meditation that she became awfully nervous and thought that he (peace be upon him) had shuffled off the mortal coil. On another occasion, according to Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqa (RA), our holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said his prayers on this sacred night with such unparalleled devotion and dedication that his feet got swollen.

It is also reported that the holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Allah forgives every Muslim on this Night. He does not, however, forgive the Mushrek, this jealous, the cruel, and the adulterer" (Baihaqi). There are also many Ahadith which very clearly indicate that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) not only said special prayers on this sacred Night but also visited graveyards and prayed for the departed souls.

He also instructed his wives to honour the sanctity and Divine Majesty of this blessed Night. There is also an authentic Hadith which states that Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqa (RA) went to Jannatul Baqi on this Mubarak Night in search of the holy Propet (peace be upon him).

It is not only the renowned traditionalists who champion the sacredness and excellence of the Night of privilege but even a great and universally respected saint and scholar like Hazrat Syed Abdul Quader Jilani (RA), popularly known as Hazrat Bara Pir Sahib, testifies in his *Guniatut Talebin* that Bibi Ayesha Siddiqa (RA) herself heard the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) saying: "Allah opens the Doors of Mercy and Grace for man on four Nights -- the two Nights of Eids, the Night of the 15th of Shaban, and the Night of Arafat." (The two other Nights, Shab-eQadr and Shab-e-Miraj, have been specifically referred to in the Holy Quran)." The Doors remain open throughout the Nights till the Fajr prayers." Glorious incidents like these testify so brilliantly to the holy Prophet's (peace be upon him) belief in the importance, sanctity, serenity and divine excellence of the auspicious Night of Privilege.

It is claimed that on the holy Night of Privilege the heavenly tree Sidrat-ul-Muntaha, specifically mentioned in the holy Quran (LIII:4), is shaken to decide who shall die in the following year. "According to popular belief," says the Encyclopaedia of Islam, "on the night preceding the 15th of Shaban the tree of life on whose leaves are written the names of the living is shaken. The names written on the leaves which fall down indicate those who are to die in the coming year."

It is claimed by some that it is the Sidratul Muntaha, "the Lote-tree of the extremity," a tree in the seventh heaven having its root in the sixth, which is shaken to decide who is going to die in the coming year. (Sidratul-Muntaha has been mentioned twice in the Holy Quran.) No wonder the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself advised all not to forget or foolishly ignore the sacred importance and sanctity of the Night of Privilege.

Lailal-ul-Barat (or Lailat-al-Bara's), the Night of Quittancy in the words of the Encyclopaedia of Islam, is indeed a solemn and sacred occasion of Divine Excellence, which has to be celebrated in a befitting way, not through candles and crackers, not through *halwa* and *roti*, not through extravagance and merry-making, but through prayers and penance as was done by the holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

It is true the hundreds and thousands of Muslims in Bangladesh celebrate this Night through zealous and active participation in private and congregational prayers held in mosques. Unfortunately, however, there are many among us who, through sheer ignorance or utter carelessness, turn this auspicious night into a mere occasion of merry-making and gaiety, fun and frolic, forgetting the very essence of this glorious Night.

There are some who think that crackers and candles are part and parcel of Shab-e-Baraat. Nothing can be farther from the truth. This awful custom, introduced by the Barmecides in Baghad, simply because they were fire-worshippers and loved fire even after they accepted Islam, not only disturbs the *namazis* and meditators on this auspicious Night but also leads to unnecessary wastage and prodigality, which are forbidden in Islam.

Those who try to equate *halwa* and *roti* with the sacred Night of Privilege, claiming that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) lost a few teeth in the Battle of Ohud on the 15th of Shaban and hence people should not cook anything hard as a mark of respect to that historic incident. Some also claim that Hazrat Amir Hamza (RA) embraced martyrdom on the 15th of Shaban. Both these claims are totally baseless as both the incidents occurred in the month of Shawal and had simply nothing to do with the 15th or any other day of the month of Shaban.

There is no harm if *halwa* and other sweetmeats are cooked on this occasion, but let these be prepared only for sharing with the poor and the have-nots. The very spirit of such a noble and auspicious occasion will be lost if those who are affluent fail to share the good fortunes with those who are less privileged.

Our duty on this Night of Privilege or Night of Salvation is not only to seek Divine Mercy but also to seek the path of goodness, kindness, upright conduct and charity, to be always ready to respond to the cry of the needy, to stand by the word that is pledged, to bear true witness, to remove all artificial differences between man and man, and to clear up all misunderstanding in our dealings with fellow brethren in every sphere of activity and in every domain of thought.

Syed Ashraf Ali is former Director General of Islamic Foundation.

Nury Vittachi

The boringest thing ever

OVER dinner, two friends of mine spent an enter evening arguing over which was the most boring thing in the world: watching paint dry or watching grass grow.

What a ridiculous waste of time! Everyone knows the answer is watching CCTV7.

Show regular viewers of CCTV7 some grass growing, and the excitement would probably give them heart attacks.

No, wait. CCTV7 is a government of China channel with a special brief to attract people in the agriculture area, so they probably already have shows like that: "Exclusive 24-hour TV marathon: LIVE outside broadcast of grass growing."

You want boring TV? A guy sitting at the next table said he'd watched a live telecast of a fishing competition where no one caught anything. A new low in the history of the small screen?

Surprisingly not. His wife claimed that she had read that an "all-accountancy" TV channel was about to be launched. Whoa! End of argument.

The following morning I conducted detailed research on the subject (that is, I typed "accountancy TV" into Google) and found she was right.

It's curious how accountancy has become a theme of this column recently. Not only that, but your humble narrator briefly emerged from book-writing isolation for a single event on Friday last week, and it was a party thrown by the accountants institute of Hong Kong, sponsors of my latest children's book.

Anyway, producers at UK-based Accountancy TV say they will take popular ideas from regular TV and give them a spin to make them relevant to financial professionals.

At the time of writing, no draft listings have been published, so here are some ideas of what the schedule of Accountancy TV could look like.

The X Files: An accountant keeps his bottom drawer locked.

Big Brother: Attractive accountants (oops, oxymoron) share a house where hidden cameras catch them peeking at each other's balance sheets.

Late Night With David Letterman: An accountant advises a philandering TV host on how to make his blackmail payments tax-deductable.

The World's Next Top Model: We're talking about business models, of course, and the hot new one involves bankers declaring their main income while channeling their bonuses to tax havens.

Baywatch: A group of accountants in swimsuits practice their math while waiting to rescue companies which start to sink.

Friends: Five buddies sharing an apartment get into amusing tangles trying to work out how to divide up the household budget.

Home Improvement: A do-it-yourself expert delivers household tips while his accountant buddy calculates the depreciation caused by amateur remodeling work.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer: A high school cheerleader is assigned by higher powers to cleanse the world of darkness. In other words, she's an auditor.

Desperate Housewives: The week before taxes are due to be filed, a group of women discuss how they can cover up the fact that they have thrown away all their husbands' receipts.

The Flintstones: Fred Flintstone works in an office carving profit and loss sheets into chunks of rock and gets into trouble when he loses his chisel.

Spongebob Squarepants: In a town at the bottom of the sea, a talking sponge does the accounts for The Krusty Krab restaurant. "Mr Krab, this business is under water," he tells his boss.

America's Funniest Home Videos: An on-stage TV presenter shows clips of accountants making minor errors in

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Programming made easy

It can be argued that programming is creative work. To be an expert programmer the learner must develop a passion for it. To instil passion for programming into the psyche of the learners, the instructor must adopt appropriate teaching methodology.

MD. ANWARUL KABIR

TRANSFERRING knowledge effectively largely depends on the teaching methodology followed. Teaching programming is more difficult than teaching any other course because of its inherent complexities. So the programming course demands a special teaching methodology.

Computer Science is relatively a new discipline in our educational institutions at tertiary level. Although it is an optional subject, a few students are encouraged to take this subject at higher secondary level. Even those who take this course and get good grades fail to demonstrate their basic programming skills. This reflects the weakness of most of the educational institutions that offer computer science at HSC level without assessing their capabilities in this context.

Most of the colleges suffer from lack of efficient computer teachers and adequate lab facilities. Besides, there are gaps in the curriculum of HSC Computer Science course too. So, unlike developed countries where Computer Science has been introduced at school level, our students get introduced to it, especially the programming course, in a true sense at the university level.

Keeping the above reality in mind, the instructors of the programming course at university level must realise that they are opening up new windows of relatively complex knowledge for the learners.

Learning programming languages needs to look into two different aspects, namely syntax and semantic. Syntax means the rules or grammar of the programming language in which the program is to be written. Semantic is the logic that should be followed for solving problems. Though, for acquiring programming skill, one should give importance to both syntax and semantic, semantic should get priority in learning technique.

Observation suggests that teaching the syntax of the programming language first frequently leads the first-time learners of programming towards utmost frustration. This is because, unlike natural languages, programming languages follow strict grammatical rules and computers do not accept even a minor mistake in program codes.

Due to this rigidity of programming languages learners sometime becomes panicky. However, writing of the code becomes easier if the students learn the semantic aspects of the program first. So, while teaching a programming course, the instructor must give emphasise on semantic aspects of the problems.

In general, writing a program should go through a two-phase process -- problem solving and implementation.

In the problem-solving phase, we need to focus on analysis and specification, which define the problem and identify the inputs and outputs. After that we need to design the logic for solving the problem. This logic, or general solution for solving the problem, is called the algorithm, or inherent semantic, of the program to be written.

The first half of the semester can be spent on teaching semantics or algorithms for different problems without using any programming language. For teaching algorithm, the instructor should introduce flow-chart or pseudo-codes to the students so that they may be able to solve problems, using these tools, with pen and paper. The problems should be interesting yet challenging for the students.

A problem can be solved in different ways. So, in designing the algorithm, students may follow different approaches, which should be encouraged. However, the instructor should explain the merits and demerits of different approaches of the solutions for the same problem.

The implementation phase translates the algorithm into a programming language (code). In this phase, the learners should be introduced to the editor of the concerned programming language and its different features (e.g. selection statements, loop-structure, arrays, function). Besides, the instructor at this stage must explain the hardware aspects of the computer following the prevalent von-Neumann architecture of computers. Learning about memory and processors gives a clear conception in writing codes as the programs run on the machine.

After learning about the editor of the programming language and the computer architecture, the students should translate their algorithms for different problems into code. The instructor must ensure that the learners follow the divide and conquer approach in writing the code. A large problem should be broken into smaller pieces, called modules, using different features of the language (e.g. procedure, function, class) so that they can be solved individually.

When a program is completed, it should be tested through inputting different test data. This practice will help them much in their future programming endeavours.

Constant practice is essential for becoming an efficient programmer. Arranging mini- programming competition among the learners will definitely help in this regard. Besides, assigning group and individual programming projects to the students is also essential for improving their programming skills.

Which language should be selected as a tool for the first time learners? So far, different programming paradigms have been introduced. Among them, procedural and object oriented paradigms are widely used to teach the first programming course. Many prefer C as a first programming course and many others advocate for Java or C# (following the object orientation).

The writer is strongly in favour of C or any other procedural language as the first programming language because it is easier to follow the logical construct of the procedural language. If a programmer is conversant with the procedural language it will not be difficult for him/her to switch to other programming paradigms, including object oriented ones.

Finally, it can be argued that programming is creative work. To be an expert programmer the learner must develop a passion for it. To instil passion for programming into the psyche of the learners, the instructor must adopt appropriate teaching methodology.

Md. Anwarul Kabir is a university academic at Computer Science Department, AIUB.
E-mail: kabir@aiub.edu