

Lailat-ul-Qadr

The Night on which Divine Message descends from Allah is undoubtedly a blessed Night for mankind, like a much-awaited day of rain for a parched land. It is for this that the 'I'tikaf, the retiring for contemplation during Ramadhan as a form of devotion or meditation, is fixed for the last ten days of Ramadhan.

SYED ASHRAF ALI

IT was on the auspicious Lailat-ul-Qadr, the Night of Power or the Night of Honour or Majesty, that the Holy Quran was vouchsafed to the world. By revelation, of course, is meant first revelation because the Holy Quran was revealed in portions during a total period of twenty-three years. It was this blessed Night of Majesty which first witnessed the shining of the Divine Light which was destined to illumine the whole universe.

Lailat-ul-Qadr occupies a unique position in the Islamic calendar. The word "Lailat" in Arabic means Night and "Qadr" stands for Power or Honour or Majesty. The real merit of this glorious Night has been clearly expounded in the Holy Quran:

"We have indeed revealed this (Message) in the Night of Power.

And what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is?

The Night of Power is better than a thousand months." (97:1-2)

The Night of grandeur, better than a thousand months, is indeed a night of great wonders and divine blessings wherein, as the Holy Quran declares, "come down the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission, on every errand" (97:4).

Nobody knows exactly on which particular night in the holy month of Ramadhan did the great "revelation come down to the benighted world, transformed the conflict of wrong-doing into peace and harmony through the agency of the angelic host, representing the spiritual powers of the Mercy of Allah." Although it has been clearly laid down in Sura Baqara: "Ramadhan is the month in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and judgement, between right and wrong" (2:185) nobody knows which

particular Night is the auspicious Night.

The precise date of Lailat-ul-Qadr is said to have been known to the holy Prophet (pbuh) and a few of the companions. The Divine Night has been variously fixed as the 12th, 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or the 29th night of Ramadhan, or more probably one of the last three nights mentioned above.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) reported God's Messenger as saying: "Seek Lailat-ul-Qadr on an odd number night among the last ten in Ramadhan." (Bukhari)

Ibn Umar (RA) said that some of the Prophet's companions had a dream that Lailat-ul-Qadr was among the last seven nights, so the Apostle of Allah. (pbuh) said: "I see that your dreams agree regarding the last seven night, so if anyone asks it he should do so during the last seven nights" (Bukhari and Muslim).

Ibn Abbas (RA) reported the Holy Prophet (pbuh) as saying: "Seek Lailat-ul-Qadr in the last ten nights of Ramadhan, on the twenty-first, twenty-third and twenty-fifth" (Bukhari).

Abu Saïd al-Khudri said: "God's Messenger (pbuh) spent the first ten nights of Ramadhan in devotion, and spent the middle ten nights in a round Turkish tent, after which he raised his head and said: 'I have spent the first ten nights in devotion seeking this Night, then I spent the middle ten nights in devotion, and after that I had a heavenly visitor and was told that it is in the last ten. So he who has engaged in devotion along with me should do so during the last ten nights, for I was shown this Night, then was caused to forget it, but I have been myself prostrating in water and clay on the morning following, so seek it among the last ten and seek it in every night with an odd number."

He said: "Rain fell that night, the mosque which was a thatched building dripped, and



WAHID ADNANI/DRINKNEWS

my eyes saw God's Messenger (pbuh) with traces of water and clay, on his forehead on the morning after the twenty-first night." Bukhari and Muslim agree on the subject matter, the wording being Muslim's up to "and was told it is in the last ten", the remainder being Bukhari's. In the version of Abdullah bin Unais (RA), he said it was the twenty-third night. Muslim transmitted it.

According to Ibn Hanbal, a Hadith narrated by Ibn Umar (RA) claimed that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever seeks the Night, let him seek it on the 27th."

It is not perhaps necessary to fix the Night literally by the calendar. The Night on which Divine Message descends from Allah is undoubtedly a blessed Night for mankind, like a much-awaited day of rain for a parched land. It is for this that the 'I'tikaf, the retiring for contemplation during Ramadhan as a form of devotion or meditation, is fixed for the last ten days of Ramadhan. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself used to spend the last ten days of Ramadhan in complete retirement in the mosque.

Hazrat Ayesha (RA) said that God's Messenger (pbuh) used to exert himself in devotion during the last ten nights to a greater extent than at any other time. (Muslim transmitted it). She said that when the last ten nights began Allah's Apostle (pbuh) prepared himself for religious exercises,

stayed awaked at night and wakened his family. (Bukhari and Muslim).

"A thousand months" may also be taken in a mystic or indefinite sense as denoting a very long period of time. It may not even refer to ordinary human conception of time. On the contrary, it might very well refer to "timeless Time." In the words of Abdulla Yusuf Ali: "A 'thousand' must be taken in an indefinite sense as denoting very long period of time. This does not refer to our ideas of time, but to 'timeless Time.' It transcends Time; for it is God's Power dispelling the Darkness of ignorance, by His Revelation in every kind of affair. One moment of enlightenment under God's Light is better than thousands of months or years of animal life, and such a moment converts the night of darkness into a period of spiritual glory." The Holy Quran: Text (Abdul Yusuf Ali, Translation and Commentary, Lahore, 1938, p 1765).

Lailat-ul-Qadr indeed occupies a very important place in the life of a devoted Muslim. "The descent of the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission" also testifies to the deeper significance and religious sanctity of the auspicious Night, for though a particular Night in the month of Ramadhan may be characterised by great Divine Blessings, it is more especially in connection with the mission of one appointed by Allah for the regeneration of the world that "the angels and the Spirit" come down from

heaven, such being the Divine support of peace.

Sura Qadr ends with the beautiful expression: "Peace! This until the rise of morn!" "Peace" indeed is the chief distinction of Lailat-ul-Qadr. This "Peace" comes to the hearts of the devotees in the form of tranquillity of mind, which makes them fit to receive Divine blessings. When the Night of spiritual darkness is dissipated by the Glory of Benign Providence, a wonderful peace and a sense of security arise in the soul. All worries are stilled in the reign supreme of peace. "And this lasts," in the words of Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali "until this life closes, and the glorious Day of the new spiritual world dawns, when everything will be on a different plane, and the chequered nights, and days of the world will be even less than a dream."

The continuance of the blessed Night till "the rise of morn" is quite clear and evident when the Night is taken literally; morning signifying "the approaching end of the reforms, when truth, like the light of the day, has made itself fully manifest." In the words of Abdulla Yusuf Ali: "The mortal Night gives place to the glorious day of an immortal world." (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, ibid, p. 1764)

Lailat-ul-Qadr, the blessed Night in which thirteen hundred and ninety two years ago the Great Revelation of the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Allah "broke through the darkness of the human soul," and the Holy Quran, the perfect code of human life, reached mankind as a Message of "Mercy from the Lord," carries another significance of Divine Excellence.

As Moulvi Mohammad Ali states: "The time when a Prophet appears is usually a time of darkness and as such is often compared to night in the Holy Quran. But as in this darkness comes a blessing from on high in the person of a Divine Messenger, the Night is a blessed and majestic Night. Hence the period of the advent of a Divine Messenger may also be metaphorically called Lailat-ul-Qadr. Its designation as the Blessed Night in Sura Ad-Dukhan followed as it is by the statement that in it 'every wise affair is made distinct,' shows clearly that the other significance of the world is based on the Holy Quran itself, because it is during the time of a Prophet's advent that true wisdom is distinctly established."

Blessed indeed is this Night of Power!

"The excellences of the Lailat-ul-Qadr are said to be innumerable, and it is believed that during its solemn hours the whole animal and vegetable creation, bow down in humble adoration to the Almighty. (Dictionary of Islam, 1988 edition, Pp. 282-283). The divine importance of this Night of Grandeur is so great that the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) himself declared: "He who spends the Lailat-ul-Qadr through prayers in full faith shall have all his previous sins and guilt forgiven."

As none can afford to miss this glorious and unique opportunity, Muslims all over the world eagerly await this auspicious Night and try their level best to pass this Night through prayers, Quranic recitations and deep meditation with all the possible sincerity and devotion. As this Night provides them with the coveted opportunity to receive Allah's blessings, Muslims in every nook and corner of the world rise to the occasion to avail this glorious opportunity and pray with a sincere and cherished hope to be blessed with Allah's Forgiveness and Mercy.

It is this Mercy of Allah which breaks through the darkness of the human soul on this blessed night. "All the powers of the world divine speed on their mystic Message of Mercy, by Allah's command, and bless every nook and corner of the heart."

But it is not the worldly pleasures and physical comforts that one should ask for on this holy Night. What a man should pray for in this blessed Night is forgiveness and Allah's forgiveness alone. Nothing can be more pleasant, nothing can be more beneficial, nothing can be sweeter than the glorious Mercy of the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Allah.

Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqua (RA) said: "I asked the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) what to say on Lailat-ul-Qadr on the assumption that I knew it was the Night." The holy Prophet (peace be upon him) replied. "One should say: Oh Lord! Thou art forgiving and lovest forgiveness, so forgive me" (Ahmed, Ibn Majah and Tirmizi).

Syed Ashraf Ali is a former Director General, Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh.

Cricket's inglorious certainties

Matters have clearly come to a crunch. If the most recent match was a disgrace, it barely holds a candle to the Sydney Test in January 2009. And the shadow over the Pakistan team extends to its deplorable management.

MAHIR ALI

"CRICKET is an art, a means of national expression," wrote C.L.R. James in a 1966 essay on the batting prowess of Rohan Kanhai. More than four decades later, the first part of that statement isn't difficult to defend, despite all the changes wrought in international cricket in the interim.

It would be possible to vindicate it, for instance, by reference to novice Pakistani fast bowler Mohammed Amir's performance on English fields last month. Tragically, it is now widely considered that the precociously talented youngster also bears out the second part of James' observation.

Cricketing entities past and present have noted that the allegations against Amir and two of his moderately more senior colleagues, Mohammed Asif and Pakistani Test captain Salman Butt, ought to be taken with a few grains of salt until they are conclusively proven. Unfortunately, however, the plausibility of the scenario exposed by The News of the World leaves precious little room for reasonable doubt.

The credibility of the tabloid in question is low even by the unimpressive

standards of publications owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation conglomerate. But the evidence that the newspaper managed to obtain seems sufficiently incontrovertible to go unchallenged even by rivals generally sceptical--invariably with good cause--of the Murdoch media's predilections. Not least, given the context, because Pakistan has form in this regard.

Pakistan's cricket team is by no means the only one to have been dogged by allegations of spot fixing, whereby particular incidents within a match follow a preordained pattern without necessarily substantially affecting its outcome. In the case in question, it was a matter of no-balls at specific occasions during the innings -- and the two bowlers under a cloud overstepped the mark at the prescribed moments in a manner that even a half-blind umpire couldn't have missed. If this was a coincidence, it defied the law of probability.

Cricket has long being described as a game of glorious uncertainties, and few would question the unpredictable consequences of a momentary lack of concentration. But the nature of the game also creates room for inglorious certainties. No-balls are obviously a case in point, if

you feel obliged to bowl one, it's hard to go wrong.

There are also numerous ways of throwing away your wicket. It's all too easy to drop a catch, too. Given that the best of fielders can, at times, be butterfingers, it's hard to pinpoint a deliberately discarded opportunity -- although, if it happens once too often (as has lately been the case with Pakistan in England), suspicions are bound to arise.

Inevitably, Pakistan's reputation in this regard facilitates suspicions even when they may be unwarranted. There was the time, for instance, when Inzamam-ul-Haq's family home was targeted by an uncharacteristically pathetic performance from him. Which, of course, was an absolutely indefensible mob reaction, regardless of the circumstances -- but chances are it wouldn't have happened had it generally been assumed that his poor performance was purely a consequence of poor luck (which it may indeed have been).

I am not, by any stretch of the imagination, a cricket expert. And for many years now the game has only peripherally attracted my attention. Pakistan's habitual waywardness may have something to do with this, but it's also related to the fact that there is far too much international cricket today in all three formats.

When I was growing up in Pakistan, Test series were an annual fixture at best. It wasn't hard to be dismally bored by a Test match heading for a draw -- Hanif Mohammed at the crease came a close second, although somebody or the other (Gary Sobers, for instance, or Asif Iqbal)

could usually be relied upon to liven up proceedings.

It got better. The first India-Pakistan series in my cognisant lifetime was a propaganda masterstroke for Gen. Ziaul Haq. Many of us, though, found it possible to thoroughly enjoy the cricket while holding that dastardly dictator in absolute contempt. Both sides were brilliant, but Pakistan -- under Mushtaq Mohammed's captaincy, with Imran Khan and Sarfaraz Nawaz as the strike bowlers, and a batting line-up that included Majid Khan and Zaheer Abbas in their prime, or close to it -- enjoyed the edge against an opposition that featured Sunil Gavaskar and Gundappa Vishwanath.

Had it been conceivable at the time that either side would be trying to please the bookies rather than the fans, the game would clearly have lost much of its glow.

A few years later, a Pakistan team under Imran gave an excellent account of itself against Bob Willis's England at Lords. A decade later, it secured the World Cup in Australia -- although in the interim the team had fallen sufficiently into disarray for Gen. Zia to request Imran to reconsider his retirement.

Imran heeded the call, and produced results, but embarrassed himself in Melbourne by decreeing the World Cup victory a triumph dedicated to his Shaukat Khanum Memorial cancer hospital.

But that hardly counts as a transgression in the light of what followed, from the abuse of bottle-tops (by some of the world's best fast bowlers, mind you) to



SAP

match-fixing scandals.

Pakistan wasn't by any means the only side involved in the latter practice -- the revelation about South African captain Hansie Cronje's involvement in betting scams was among the saddest blows to international cricket, and players from other countries, including India, have been suspected of being beholden to bookies.

But it's Pakistan that has laboured longest under the darkest of clouds. And it's arguably darker now than it has ever been before -- leading to calls for Pakistan, already incapable of hosting international matches at home, to be stripped of its Test-playing status.

Matters have clearly come to a crunch. If the most recent match was a disgrace, it barely holds a candle to the Sydney Test in January 2009. And the shadow over the Pakistan team extends to its deplorable management. If the Augean stables cannot at this point be cleansed, it's effectively all out for zilch. Imran Khan has been spectacularly unsuccessful as a politician. But he's broadly seen as uncorrupted -- and, hopefully, incorruptible. There's no guarantee he would succeed as a cricket administrator, but it's probably worth a try.

© Dawn. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement, with Asia News Network.

The Seven Stages of Working Life



YOUR work and your personal achievements remain a major focus these days, or so the contents of my mailbox suggest, so let's return to that subject.

William Shakespeare said that a person went through "seven ages of life." I think the immortal bard was spot on.

Here are The Seven Stages of Working Life. Which stage are you at?

Stage One: The Intern.

Arrives late. Explains that he got lost. Told to make coffee. Makes undrinkable black gunge. Sits in on meetings at which he realises, with horror, that he knows nothing about anything being discussed. Spends most of the day feeling terrifyingly useless. Asks inane questions such as, "Please, sir, do we have to ask before we go to the toilet?" At midday, eats packed lunch from home.

Stage two: The Short-Contract Worker.

Arrives early. Waits outside till a staff

member arrives with a key. Devotes all his energy to volunteering for assignments because he is desperate to get hired full-time. At lunch, he eats sandwiches at his desk while doing everyone else's work. He leaves the office last, at 9:00 pm, but still arrives the next morning before the rest of us.

Stage three: The New Hire.

Arrives slightly before other staff. First to take his seat at meetings. Talks constantly about "our vision." Starry-eyed and enthusiastic. Does much of the work that gets done, although he is constantly interrupted by older staff wandering into his room to sit on his desk and spout rubbish. Leaves at 8:00 pm.

Stage four: The Experienced Executive.

Arrives at exactly 9:00 am, not a minute early or late. Has a lot of work to do, but spends most of his time transferring it to other people. Occasionally buys lunch at the wine bar for people at stages one, two and three, because he enjoys the way they worship him. Leaves at 7:00 pm.

Stage five: The Senior Manager.

Strolls into the office at 9:40. Cannot avoid work completely, but does the bare minimum. Lunches at private club, practicing his "vice president" look of worldliness and ennui so as to be ready for the next stage. Sneaks out of

the office on the dot of 6:00 pm.

Stage six: Vice President.

Languidly ambles into the office around 11:00. Finds work a total bore, so he gets people at stages one, two, three and four to do all of his work for him. Spends most of the day sitting on the desks of new hires to give them the benefits of his wisdom. Leaves the office at 5:00 pm pretending to be on the way to a client meeting.

Stage seven: Chairman.

Arrives late. Explains that he got lost because his memory is not what it was. Serves coffee from private percolator. Turns out to be undrinkable black gunge. Sits in on meetings at which he realises,

with horror, that he no longer knows anything about what is being discussed. Spends most of the day feeling terrifyingly useless. Asks inane questions all the time, such as, "Shall we open some overseas offices, or have we already done that sort of thing?" Before leaving at 3:00 pm, he eats packed lunch from home because he can't eat anything without bran.

It's the circle of life.

By the way, every time you start a new job, you usually go back several stages. For example, I'm not a kid, but I am at Stage Three in my current job. What stage are you at?

For more on working life, visit our columnist at: www.vittachi.com.