

The Night of Baraat

Allah Ta'ala has afforded His bondsmen certain selected opportunities whereby they may reap His infinite mercy and forgiveness. Some explicit examples of these occasions are the month of Ramadan and Laylatul Qadr. The night of the fifteenth of Shábaan is one such opportunity. Several Ahadith expound the tremendous merit of this occasion. Amongst them is the fact that countless people are forgiven by Allah Ta'ala during this blessed night. It is due to this reason that it is called "The Night of Bara'at" (i.e. the night wherein judgment of salvation from Jahannam (hell) is passed).

Certain Ahadith prove that it is a meritorious night in which the people of the earth are attended by special divine mercy. However, it should be borne in mind that a vast majority of narrations declaring the benefit and virtue of this night are weak but reliable for purposes of virtue.

Some of these Ahadith are :

1. Ummul-Mu'mineen Aishah (radiyallahu anha) is reported to have said, "Once Rasulullah, (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) performed the Salaah of the night (Tahajjud) and made a very long Sajdah until I feared that he had passed away. When I saw this, I rose (from my bed) and moved his thumb (to ascertain whether he is alive). The thumb moved, and I returned (to my place). Then I heard him saying in Sajdah: 'I seek refuge in Your forgiveness from Your punishment, and I seek refuge in Your pleasure from Your annoyance, and I seek Your refuge from Yourself. I cannot praise You in the manner that You deserve. You are exactly as You have defined Yourself.' Thereafter, when he raised his head from Sajdah and finished his salaah, he said to me: 'Aishah, did you think that the Prophet has betrayed you?' I said, 'No, O Prophet of Allah, but I was afraid that your soul has been taken away because your Sajdah was very long.' He asked me, 'Do you know what night it is?' I said, 'Allah and His Messenger know best.' He said, 'This is the night of the half of Shábaan. Allah Ta'ala looks upon His slaves in this night and forgives those who seek forgiveness and bestows His mercy upon those who pray for mercy but leaves those who have malice (against a Muslim) as they were before, (and does not forgive them unless they free themselves from malice).'"

Targeeb wat tarheeb(vol 2 pg.119) on the authority of Imam Bayhaqi (rah)

2. In another Tradition, she has reported Rasulullah, Sallallahu alayhi wa sallam, to have said, "This is the middle Night of Sha'ban. Allah emancipates in it a large number of the people from the Fire, more than the number of the hair growing on the sheep of the tribe, Kalb. But He does not cast a glance at a person who associates partners with Him, or at a person who harbours malice in his heart (against someone), or at a person who severs family ties, or at a man who leaves his clothes extending below his ankles, or at a person who disobeys his parents, or at a person who has a habit of drinking wine."

Targeeb wat Tarheeb, vol. 2, pg. 118 authority of Imam Bayhaqi (rah)

Kalb was a big tribe the members of which had a very large number of sheep. Therefore, the last sentence of the Hadith indicates the large number of people forgiven on this night by Allah Ta'ala.

3. Sayyiduna Muaz ibn Jabal, Radiyallahu anhu, reports that Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) said: "Allah Ta'ala looks upon all those he created in the middle Night

of Shábaan and forgives them all, except the one who associates partners with Him or the one who has malice in his heart (against a Muslim)".

Targeeb wat Tarheeb, vol. 2, pg. 118 from Imam Tabrani and Saheeh ibn Hibban

4. Sayyiduna Abdullah ibn Amr radiyallahu anhu reports that Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) said, Allah Ta'ala looks upon his creation on the middle night of Shábaan and forgives them, except one who harbours malice in his heart and a murderer.

Targeeb wat Tarheeb, vol 2 pg. 119 from Imam Ahmad (rah)

Although the chain of narrators of some of these traditions have minor technical defects, when all these traditions are combined and brought together, it becomes clear that this night has some well founded merits, and observing this night as a sacred night is not a baseless as envisaged by some modern scholars who, on the basis of these minor defects, have declined to give any special importance to this night. Certain scholars of Hadith have granted these Ahadith authenticity and consider their defects very minor, which are amended by the variety and manner of narration. It is for this reason that Ulama and pious personalities of the past always observed this night as one of special merits and tremendous benefits.

Below are a few comments and criticism about the ahadith regarding the virtue of this night:

Hazrat Moulana Yusuf Binnori (rah) says:

" I have not come across any Sahih, Marfoo or, Musnad Hadith regarding the excellence of the night."

Ma'aarifus Sunan, vol. 5, pg. 419.

The Muhaddith, Ibnu-Dihya (rah) has also agreed that neither has anything authentic been narrated regarding the fifteenth night of Shábaan nor has any specific Salaah been prescribed for this night via reliable narrator

Faydhul-Qadeer -Sharhul Jaamis Sagheer, vol. 2, pg. 317

Whilst even Allamah Ibn Taymiyyah (rah), a scholar notorious for refuting such observances, also accepts the virtue of the night of Bara'at. He says:

" So many Ahadith and reports exist regarding the excellence of the Fifteenth night of Shábaan that one is compelled to accept that this possesses some virtue."

Some of the pious predecessors used to specially devote this night for Salaah.

Faydhul Qadeer, vol. 2, pg.317

Moulana Abdur Rahman Mubarakpuri writes in his commentary of Tirmizi:

" The sheer number of Ahadith regarding this night serves as proof against those people who refute the excellence of this night."

Tuhfatul-Ahwazi, vol. 2, pg. 53

Allama Anwar Shah Kashmiri (rah) has written that the significance of the night of Bara'at is proven. There is however, no proof for those weak and unacceptable narrations mentioned in certain books.

Al-Arfus-Shazi, pg. 156

The virtue of this night established from these Ahadith is that from the very beginning of the night Allah Ta' ala turns with special mercy and attention towards the creation and forgives those who repent and seeks forgiveness. Every Muslim should therefore value

this night. Turn towards Allah Ta'ala with sincere regret and shame over sins committed and make a promise never to re- turn to sin again and seek forgiveness from Allah Ta'ala. Seek forgiveness for oneself and all Muslims, living and deceased. Have firm hope and resolution in the heart that Allah Ta'ala will surely show mercy and forgiveness.

Unfortunate people

It is understood from Ahadith that even on this great night, some unfortunate individuals are deprived of Allah's forgiveness. They are:

1. Idolaters
2. Those who harbour enmity against others
3. Those who consume alcohol
4. Those who disobey their parents
5. Those who wear their trousers, kurtas, lungis, etc. below their ankles
6. Those who commit murder
7. Those who sever family ties.

We can thus gauge the severity of these sins and need to abstain from them at all times.

Special virtues of this night

The special virtues of the night of Bara'at are:

1. Contrary to other nights where the last third of the night has special blessings and Allah descends to the lowest Heaven during this section of the night, on the night of Bara'at the special rain of mercy and forgiveness of Allah Ta'ala begins to shower down right from the beginning of the night and continues until dawn.
2. The sins of countless people are pardoned. As already mentioned, Allah Ta'ala's descension during this night to the lowest Heaven occurs from the very beginning, unlike other nights. Furthermore, the number of pronouncements seeking forgiveness far supercede those, which occur on other nights.

Hafiz Zaynud-deen Iraqi, Faydhul Qadeer, vol. 2, pg. 317

It should be remembered that while the narrations regarding the night of Bara'at maybe weak, the narrations regarding Allah Ta'ala's descending to the nearest Heaven during the last third of every night are sound and without defect.

Fasting during the month of Sha'baan is Sunnah and clearly established practice of the Shariah

Fasting in the month of Shábaan, without the stipulation of any day, is proven from Rasulullah sallallahu alayhi wa sallam. In fact, he used to fast excessively during this month. A Hadith of Hazrat Aisha (radiyallahu anha) wherein she describes the fast of Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) substantiates this. She says that aside from the month of Ramadaan, he never used to fast for an entire month. However, of the remaining months, he would fast in Shábaan the most.

Bukhari, vol. 1, pg. 264

Fast of the 15th Shábaan

On the day immediately following the Night of Bara'at, i.e. the 15th of Shábaan, it is advisable to fast.

Though majority of the scholars of Hadith have certain doubts regarding the authenticity of a narration in Ibn Majah, advising one to fast on this day, stating it is extremely weak, it has been mentioned earlier that the fasts of the first half of Shábaan have special merits and Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) used to fast most of the days in Shábaan.

Moreover, a large number of the elders (salaf) of the Ummah have been observing the fast of the 15th Shábaan. This constant practice of our learned and pious predecessors establishes its Istihbaab (preference).

Therefore, it is advisable to fast the 15th of Shábaan as an optional (Nafil) fast. One can also keep a fast of Qada' on this day and it is hoped that he can also benefit himself from the merits of this fast.

What should be done on this night?

In order to obtain maximum benefit from this auspicious night, one should allocate a specific portion of the night for solitude and close communion with Allah Ta'ala. Fervent dua and repentance should be priority and make the sole intention for Allah Ta'ala's pleasure and reformation of the inner self. Other observances that may be practiced are:

(a) Salaah - Salaah is one the most preferable acts to be performed during this night. There is no particular number of Rak'ats but preferably it should not be less than eight. It is also advisable that each part of the Salaah like qiyam, rukoo' and sajdah should be longer than normal. Also try and recite as much qiraat in salaah as possible.

(b) Tilawah - The recitation of the Holy Quran is another form of worship that is very beneficial on this night. After performing Salaah, or at any other time, one should recite as much of the Holy Quran as possible.

(c) Zikr - Engage ones heart in Zikr (remembrance of Allah Ta'ala). One should also recite abundant durood on Rasulullah, (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam). Zikr can also be recited while walking, lying on bed and during other hours of work or leisure.

(d) Dua - The best benefit one can draw from the blessings of this night is prayers and supplications. Dua (supplication) itself is an 'Ibadah, and Allah Ta'ala gives reward on each prayer along with the fulfillment of the supplicator's need. Even if the purpose prayed for is not achieved, one cannot be deprived of the reward of the prayer, which is, sometimes more precious than the mundane benefits one strives for. The prayers and supplications also strengthen one's relation with Allah Ta'ala, which is the main purpose of all kinds and forms of worship.

(e) There are some people due to circumstances will not be able to carry out any vigorous or lengthy Ibadah. Such people should not deprive themselves completely of the blessings of this night. They should attempt to fulfill the following:

(i) Perform Maghrib, Esha and Fajr with congregation in the Masjid, or at home in case of illness.

(ii) Keep ones tongue wet with Zikr, in whatever condition they are until they sleep.

iii) Plead to Allah Ta'ala for forgiveness and for their other objectives. One can do so even whilst one is lying in bed.

(f) Women during menstruation cannot perform salaah, nor can they recite the Quran, but they can recite any Zikr, tasbeeh, durood sharif and can pray to Allah for whatever purpose they like in whatever language they wish. They can also recite the Arabic prayers mentioned in the Quran or in the Hadith with the intention of supplication (and not with the intention of recitation).

(g) According to a Hadith, Rasulullah (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) visited the graveyard of Baqi' during this night where he prayed for the Muslims buried there. Hence, some of the fuqaha (jurists) are of the view that it is mustahab (advisable) to visit the graveyard during this night and pray for the dead. However, this act is neither obligatory nor should it be observed regularly as an obligatory act.

What should not be done on this night

1. As mentioned earlier, the Night of Bara'at is a night in which special blessings are directed towards the Muslims. Therefore, this night should be spent in total submission to Allah Ta'ala, and one should refrain from all those activities, which may displease Allah Ta'ala. Although it is always incumbent upon every Muslim to abstain from sins, yet this abstinence becomes all the more necessary in such nights, because committing sins on such an occasion is tantamount to responding to divine blessings with disobedience and felony. Such an arrogant attitude only invites the wrath of Allah Ta'ala. Therefore, one should strictly abstain from these sins, particularly those mentioned earlier in the article, as these deprive one of the blessings of this night.

2. On this night some people indulge in some activities, which they regard as necessary for the celebration of the Night of Bara'at, like cooking some special type of meal, or illuminating houses or mosques, or improvised structures. All such activities are not only baseless and innovated in the later days by ignorant people, but in some cases they are pure imitation of some rituals performed by non-Muslim communities. Such imitation in itself is a sin; performing it in a blessed night like the Night of Bara'at makes it worse. Muslims should strictly abstain from all such innovations.

3. Some people spend this night holding religious meetings and delivering long sermons. Such activities are also not advisable, because these acts can easily be performed on other nights. This night requires devotion for the pure acts of worship only.

4. The acts of worship like Salaah; recitation of the Quran and Zikr should preferably be performed on this night individually, not collectively. The Nafil Salaah should not be performed in congregation, nor should Muslims arrange gatherings in the mosques in order to celebrate the night in a collective manner.

On the contrary, this night is meant for worshipping Allah in solitude. It is the time to enjoy the direct contact with the Lord of the Universe, and to devote one's attention to Him and Him alone. These are the precious hours of the night in which nobody should

intervene between one and his Creator, and one should turn to Allah with total concentration, not disturbed or intermitted any one else.

That is why Rasulallah (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) observed the acts of worship on this night in total seclusion, not accompanied by anyone, not even by Sayyidah Aishah, (radiyallahu anha), and that is why all forms of optional worship (Nafl Ibadah), should be observed individually.

Some strange and innovative practices associated with Shabe Bar'aat
The occasion of Shabe Bara'at has become synonymous with some baseless beliefs and practices to mention just a few:

a) Burning Bright Lights and Candles: There is no substantiation for these acts, which are pure innovation. The Muslims of India being in close contact with the Hindus probably began imitating them in their practices, thus resulting in imitation of their celebration practices.

Maa thabata bis sunnah p. 215

b) Preparing of Sweetmeets: Some consider this compulsory. Without it there can be no Shabe Bara'at. This is absolutely baseless. Some say that this act gains significance from the fact that on the occasion of Uhud when the blessed tooth of Rasulallah (Sallallahu alayhi Wasallam) became Shaheed, he had some Halwa. Others say that Hazrat Hamza (Radiyallahu Anhu) was martyred on this day and the sweetmeets are in commemoration of him. These are fabricated and concocted theories. How can it ever be possible when it is a known fact that the battle of Uhud in which Hazrat Hamza was martyred took place in Shawwaal and not Sha'baan.

c) Souls visit families: Some people firmly believe that the souls of the deceased visit their families' homes and see whether any food has been prepared in their honour or not. Some people feel that if a person dies before Shabe Bara'at, he is not counted amongst the dead. These are baseless ideologies that clearly contradict Ahadith.

d) Distribution of Food: Some feel that it is compulsory to distribute food on this night with the intention of Isale Sawaab. There is no link between this practice and the significance of the night. No special acts of charity, etc. have been prescribed for this night.

Fataawa Imdadiyya vol, 4 pg 27

e) Hadith on Rajab, Shábaan and Ramadaan: Some people quote the following narration in their lectures: 'Rasulallah (Sallallahu alayhi Wasallam) said, 'Rajab is Allah's month, Shábaan is my month and Ramadaan is the month of my Ummah.'

It should be noted that this 'Hadith' is a fabrication. (Akhbaare Mowdhoo p. 329)

'O Allah! Show us Haqq (the truth) and grant us ability to follow it and show us Baatil (falsehood) and grant us courage to refrain from it. May Allah Ta'ala shower His choicest blessings upon the best of His creation, Hazrat Muhammad (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) and upon his descendants and his entire Ummah. Aameen.