

From the Desk of Dr. F. Shuayb,

Jum'a Message 8/21/2020 - "Ushering the Islamic New Year 1442 AH"

1. Origin of the Islamic Calendar

Islamic reckoning of time is based on lunar cycles. Allah says, "They ask you about the new moons. Say: 'They are signs to mark fixed periods of time and the Pilgrimage (Hajj)'" (Q.2:189). The Islamic calendar proper did not originate in the Prophet's time but during the caliphate of his Companion 'Umar bn al-Khaṭṭāb in 638 CE. Twelve years after the Prophet's transition, 'Umar, the second Caliph, instituted the *anno hegira* or *hijri* calendar to reconcile conflicts in the reckoning of time in the rapidly expanding Islamic State. 'Umar consulted with other Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ), backdating the Prophet's historic emigration (*Hijrah*) from Makkah to Medina, to the first month of the Islamic year, making Muḥarram 1, 1 AH, the official start of the Islamic lunar year. Thus, the official commencement of the Hegira era or AH calendar is not identical with the actual date of the Prophet's Hijra from Makka to Madīna, which occurred on Rabī'ul-Awwal 12, corresponding to the Gregorian date July 16 or July 22, 622 CE.

The Hijra was an epoch-making event, altering the course of world history. The Islamic calendar did not, according to the Muslim scholar Nadvi (d.1999), "start with the victories of Islamic

wars, or with the birth or death of the Prophet (ﷺ), or the beginning of (Qur'anic) Revelation itself. It starts with *Hijrah* or the sacrifice for the cause of Truth and for the preservation of the (Qur'anic) revelation. It was divinely inspired selection. Allah wanted to teach humanity that struggle between Truth and Evil is eternal. The Islamic year reminds Muslims every year not of the pomp and glory of Islam but of its sacrifice and prepares them to do the same."

2. Characteristics of the Islamic Hijrah Year (AH)

The Islamic year has 12 months that follow the lunar cycles, which is divinely ordained in the Qur'an: "The number of months (in a year) with Allah is twelve in His Book, since the day He created the heavens and the Earth. Four of them are sacred, which is the straight religion, so do not wrong yourselves in those months" (Q.9:36). These sacred months mentioned in the Qur'an are Dhu-l-Qa'dah, Dhu-l-Hijjah, Muḥarram, and Rajab because during the time of Islam fighting in Arabia was prohibited among Arab tribes. The Prophet's introduction of the Islamic method of calculating time effectively abolished the pagan practice of inter-calculation (*an-Nasi'*), which is mentioned in the Qur'an:

"Indeed, transposing (an-Nasi') (of a sacred month) is an addition to Unbelief. The Unbelievers are led to wrong thereby, for they make it lawful one year and forbidden another year, to adjust the number of months forbidden by Allah and make such forbidden ones lawful. The evil of their course seems pleasing to them. But Allah guides not those who reject Faith" (Q.9:37).

The 12 months of the Islamic year are as follows:

1. Muḥarram
2. Ṣafar
3. Rabī'ul Awwal
4. Rabī'uth Thāni/Rabī'ul Ākhir
5. Jamādā-l Awwal
6. Jamādā-th Thāni/Jamādā-l Ākhir
7. Rajab
8. Sha'bān
9. Ramaḍān
10. Shawwāl
11. Dhu-l Qa'dah
12. Dhu-l Hijjah

Because the Islamic year is lunar, it is shorter than the Gregorian western year by about 11 days. For this reason, Ramadan occurs 11 days earlier than Ramadan of last year. It is the same with Hajj. The discrepancy found in Islamic calendars in print or online is due to lack of a global unified approach to determining the new moon of every Islamic month: astronomical or physical sighting.

3. Virtues of Muḥarram:

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a) **Excellence of Fasting in Muharram.**

The Prophet (ﷺ) was asked which month is the best? He (ﷺ) said, "The month of Allah—Muḥarram"

(Reported by Abu Dawud).

b) **Virtues of the Āshūrā Fast.**

Abu Musa narrated that Jews in Arabia used to sanctify and celebrate Āshūrā; thereafter, when the Prophet (ﷺ) came to Medina, he ordered them to "observe it as a fast" (Reported by al-Bukhari & Muslim). Ibn 'Abbas narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ), when he arrived in Medina, noticed the Jews fasting on Āshūrā day. He (ﷺ) asked them, "What is this occasion?" They replied, "This is the sacred day in which Allah saved Moses and Children of Israel from their enemies, so Moses fasted on this day." He (ﷺ) said, "We

are more worthy of Moses than you," ordering Muslims to fast on Āshūrā. The Prophet (ﷺ) himself used to fast on Āshūrā in Makkah as a compulsory fast and ordered Muslims to fast it before Ramadan fast became compulsory; after which, Āshūrā fast

became a Sunnah fast. It is also narrated that Prophet Noah's Ark descended on Mt. Judi in Turkey on Āshūrā day (Reported by Ahmad).

c) **Which day of Muharram is Āshūrā?**

Most Muslim scholars hold that Āshūrā is 10th of Muḥarram. Others say that it is the 9th of Muḥarram. Al-Qurtubi, a great scholar of Muslim Spain, wrote "Āshūrā means ten based on Arabic linguistics. Its origin is the description of the 10th night but later came to represent 10th day of Muḥarram proper." Al-Hakam bn al-Araj narrated that he asked Ibn 'Abbas, "Inform me about the day of Āshūrā." He said, "When you see the crescent of the new moon of Muḥarram, calculate it, fasting on the 9th day." Al-Araj asked him, "Is this how the Prophet (ﷺ) observed the fast?" He replied, "Yes" (Reported by Muslim). The majority view that Āshūrā is 10th Muḥarram is stronger. Allah knows best.

d) **Legal Ruling on Āshūrā Fast.**

Ibn 'Umar narrated that the people of Pre-Islamic Ignorance used to fast Āshūrā and the Messenger of Allah

(ﷺ) fasted it as well, as did Muslims in Makkah before the fast of Ramadan become compulsory, after which the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "the day of Āshūrā is amongst the days of Allah, so whoever wishes, let him fast it" (Reported by al-Bukhari & Muslim). Thus, Āshūrā fast is Sunnah and not obligatory like Ramadan fast.

e) **Was Āshūrā Fast Islamized?**

It is narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Fast the day of Āshūrā but contradict the Jews—that is, fast a day before or after it" (Reported by Ahmad). It is, however, a 'weak' and not authentic hadith. Scholars recommend that Āshūrā be observed among the following options:

(i) Fast Āshūrā alone on 10th of Muḥarram; or

(ii) Fast 9th and 10th Muḥarram; or

(iii) Fast 9th, 10th, and 11th Muḥarram. Allah knows best!