

## Laylat-ul-Qadr

Imam A. M. Khattab

Today is the 26th day of the month of Ramadan, and in most of the Muslim countries they celebrate *Laylat-ul-Qadr* on the 26<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan, on the assumption that Laylat-ul-Qadr falls on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> of the month of Ramadan. But, in fact, nobody knows when Laylat-ul-Qadr falls.

Ramadan is especially mentioned in the Qur'an as the month in which the Qur'an was revealed.<sup>1</sup> In *Surat-ul-Qadr* is the verse, "Verily, We have revealed the Qur'an in the Night of Power (Laylat-ul-Qadr)." <sup>2</sup> And Chapter Ad-Dukhān<sup>3</sup> starts with, "Verily, We have revealed it in a blessed night." Looking at these two Qur'anic verses, we conclude that "the blessed night" is Laylat-ul-Qadr, and Laylat-ul-Qadr is one of the nights of the month of Ramadan. When the Muslims used to ask the Prophet, peace be upon him, about the exact night of Laylat-ul-Qadr, he would say, "Look for it in the last ten days of Ramadan." Being greedy in their eagerness to know, if we may say, they asked the Prophet to narrow down the range some more. So, according to the hadith, he told them to look for it in the odd numbers of the last ten days of the month of Ramadan, meaning that it could be the night of 21, the night of

23, 25, 27, or 29. But, how did they come, in the Muslim countries, nowadays, to celebrate Laylat-ul-Qadr on the night of the 27th? It is a matter of guessing. The Muslims observed the Prophet, peace be upon him, in his time and found that he gave the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> more importance by praying more during that night, so they said it could be that night. As a result, Muslim countries nowadays celebrate the night of the 27th as Laylat-ul-Qadr.

How is it celebrated? They celebrate it by having *i'tikāf* in the *masjid*: spending the whole night in the mosque, praying all night and reading the Qur'an – spending that entire night in worship.

Laylat-ul-Qadr is an event in the Islamic calendar around which a lot of myths have appeared, just like the event of *Isrā'* and *Mi'raj*.<sup>4</sup> And that is why, sometimes, I say, only the Qur'an can be relied upon one hundred percent – in it every word is true and has a meaning – but any other book written by any *'ālim*<sup>5</sup> should *not* be taken for granted. If something does not make sense, question it.

There are myths surrounding the night of Laylat-ul-Qadr. I grew up in Egypt and I used to hear our elders saying, "Watch for Laylat-ul-Qadr; you may see it." How did they

---

<sup>1</sup> 2:185

<sup>2</sup> 97:1

<sup>3</sup> 44:1

---

<sup>4</sup> The ascension of the Prophet to heaven, mentioned in chapter 17 of the Qur'an.

<sup>5</sup> Scholar

conceive Laylat-ul-Qadr? To them it was an opening in the sky through which a light would come through.<sup>6</sup> If you saw the light and prayed to Allah, your prayer would be fulfilled. That is how our people understood it sometimes. But, in fact, if we analyze it from the point of view of commonsense or logic, or the body of knowledge that we possess today, Laylat-ul-Qadr is a blessed night for one reason: the Qur'an was revealed, or, rather, that the revelation of the Qur'an was initiated in Laylat-ul-Qadr, since the Qur'an was revealed over a period of 23 years and not in one night. Some ulama explain the Qur'anic verse: "شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ" Verily,

We have revealed it in *Laylat-ul-Qadr* to mean that God initiated its revelation in Laylat-ul-Qadr. So, the significance of Laylat-ul-Qadr is that the guidance to human beings was initiated. That guidance consists of laws, rules, and commandments. You could bury your past, and start a new life by following these laws, rules and commandments, and thereby, save yourself, but it has to be a life-time effort: worshipping one night – the 27<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan – will not work. This night is significant because it is a reminder that something happened during that night which is the sole source of your happiness in this life and in the life to come. The significance of Laylat-ul-Qadr is not that someone stays up one night in the mosque, prays all night, reads Qur'an all night, then considers his problem solved. It is not that easy.

What is the Qur'an? The Qur'an describes its own task and function:

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

This Book – let there be no doubt in it – is meant to be a guidance for all the muttaqeen.<sup>7</sup> هُدًى Guidance! That is the

function of the Qur'an. Next, the Qur'an explains who, and

what, *al-muttaqeen*, or the pious people, are: those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond the reach of human perception, establish prayer, and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance; and who believe in what was revealed to you, Muhammad, and what was revealed before you, and above all they are sure of the coming of the Day of Judgment. These are the attributes of the pious people to whom the Qur'an came as guidance. In another verse, the Qur'an describes itself as: "Verily, this Qur'an shows the way to all that is most upright."<sup>8</sup> So, the significance of the Qur'an is that it guides. But *how* does it guide? And *where* does it guide you to?

If we analyze the Qur'an, we find it consists of stories, questions and answers, fatwas, rules, laws, and commandments. While the dictionary defines a story as "a myth", a "Qur'anic story" is not a myth. It is a fact. The Qur'an has 25 stories of prophets or messengers, their lives, and what happened to them; how they preached the message of Allah to their people, and what was the message with which they came. These stories have a specific function. One function of the Qur'anic stories is to comfort the Prophet, peace be upon him. You know, when he was preaching Islam, the Prophet was insulted, tortured, stoned; certain women scattered thorns in his path. As a human being, sometimes, he would reach almost to a point of despair. But a revelation would come to him with a story, telling him about Nuh<sup>9</sup> and his people, for example, how they made fun of him while he was building the Ark. The story of Yusuf<sup>10</sup> is the most detailed story in the Qur'an, and it starts by saying to the Prophet: We are telling you the most beautiful of stories, O Muhammad, in the revelation which We are revealing to you now (the Qur'an) while you had no knowledge of these things before this revelation came to you. And, at the end of the story of Yusuf, it says to the Prophet: "This account of something that was beyond the reach of thy perception We now reveal unto thee, O Prophet, for thou wert not with Joseph's brothers when they resolved upon what they were going to do and wove their schemes against him." It tells him about the story of Ibrahim<sup>11</sup> and his people throwing him in the fire; the story of Jesus and how the Jews claimed that they crucified him and the Qur'an

<sup>8</sup> 17:9

<sup>9</sup> The Prophet Noah

<sup>10</sup> The Prophet Joseph

<sup>11</sup> The Prophet Abraham

<sup>6</sup> I, personally, have an astonishing mythical story to tell. The understanding of the people in my village was that on this night the entire earth is bathed in a wondrous light, and all that is on earth prostrates before God. My grandmother supposedly had the "good luck" of seeing this wonderful night. When she awoke in the middle of the night, she claimed, she found the tree in her yard in a position of prostration so she tethered her goat to the apex of the tree so the goat could eat the leaves up there. When she claimed all of the above, her thinking sons questioned her and said that the goat should be tethered up there now, so why isn't it? And that's how they came to disbelieve her story.

<sup>7</sup> 2:1

informs the Prophet: “They killed him not, they crucified him not, it is a matter in their own imagination.” So all these Qur’anic stories came to comfort the Prophet and to inform him about what happened to those past prophets.

After the initial revelation of the Qur’an to Muhammad, further revelation stopped for a while. That is what is called *Fatratul-Wahy*. There was a long interval before further revelation came to the Prophet, so the Arabs started to make fun of Muhammad by saying His God had abandoned him, his God had paid him farewell, He would never receive him again. Muhammad felt very hurt and dejected by their remarks. Then, a revelation came at that time, in the form of a sura called *Ad-Dūhā*<sup>12</sup>, to comfort him in the time of his hardship. In that sura, God says to him, “I swear by *ad-duhā* and *al-layl* . . .” *Ad-duhā* is the time of the day when the sun is in its fullest shining glory, and *al-layl* is opposite of *ad-duhā* – the darkness of the night when the night is at its darkest. “I swear by *ad-duhā* and *al-layl* that your God did not pay you farewell and He did not forsake you.” The sura continues with God reminding Muhammad of his past: Were you not an orphan and God found the people who took care of you? Were you not wandering and God guided you to the straight path? Were you not a poor person and God supported you and found you the job with Khadija to work, to invest her money for her? It reminds him of these things to comfort and reassure him.

The second format found in the Qur’an is the question and answer. People used to come to the Prophet and ask him questions about certain things and he would respond by saying, okay, give me time until the answer comes to me. And he would wait for the answer until a revelation would come to solve the problem and answer the question. This is a lesson for us. Imagine that Muhammad, ‘*alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*,<sup>13</sup> refused to answer questions because he did not like to make mistakes. He waited for revelations before answering. And compare that with us, nowadays. Ask any Muslim a question and you will get an answer *automatically*. We know everything. We are not fearful to give fatwas. We know everything. Muhammad did not claim that. As a result of people asking questions, there are Qur’anic verses beginning with “يَسْأَلُونَكَ : They ask you. قُل : Say to them . . .”

“*They ask you when the Day of Judgment will be. Tell them:* The

knowledge of that is confined to God.”

“*They ask you what to pay? Say:* What you can afford.”

“*They ask you about the crescent? Tell them:* It is a symbol of time with which we know when to perform our rituals in Hajj.”

“*They ask you about orphans? Say:* Doing good to them is best.”

“*They ask you regarding the Muslim woman’s period? Say:* This is a hurt; avoid sexual intercourse with your wives during that period.”

There are many, many verses in the Qur’an coming in that form: questions asked of the Prophet by his contemporaries, and answers revealed to him in the Qur’an which are verdicts whereby we can shape our behavior. Muhammad did not answer these questions on his own. He waited for revelation to come to him and that is supported by the Qur’anic verse: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Consider this unfolding of God’s message as it comes down from on high! This fellow-man of yours has not gone astray nor is he deluded, and neither does he speak out of his own desire: that which he conveys to you is but a divine inspiration with which he is being inspired” [53:1-4].

The third format consists in plain, clear rules such as: “It is prohibited for you to eat a dead animal, to drink blood, to eat pork, to eat any animal that is slaughtered with any name, other than the name of God, mentioned on it; don’t eat the money and the wealth of the orphan.” Rules! These are called Commandments.

Then, a part of the Qur’an is in the form of advice, for example, when Luqmān advised his son: “O my son, don’t make a partner to God. O my son, establish prayer; enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong; be patient facing hardships; don’t turn your cheek to the people; don’t walk on earth with arrogance; lower your voice when you are talking.” All this is advice, a form of orders from a father to his son, telling him how to behave. So the value and the significance of the Qur’an is that it is a guide, and a Muslim is supposed to shape his behavior according to it. And because the revelation of the Qur’an was initiated during Laylat-ul-Qadr, that is the significance of Laylat-ul-Qadr. Staying awake during the night of al-Qadr and worshipping God all the night will not solve the problem. The problem is bigger than that. Staying awake during the night of al-Qadr, thinking that will erase all your sins is a false idea. It is like the false idea put forward by some people who quote a certain “hadith” stating that anyone who performed Hajj and didn’t do anything bad, did not commit

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 93 in the Qur’an

<sup>13</sup> Upon him be prayers and peace

any offense against the rules of Hajj, will come back as innocent as the day his mother delivered him – completely free of any sin! It is not that easy.

A lot of women come and ask me if, after they have returned from Hajj, they can uncover their hair, or do they have to be attired in hijab? “If I go for Hajj can I do this, this, this afterwards, or not?” It is not that. . . Hajj has nothing to do with that. You are supposed to be a good Muslim before Hajj and after Hajj. It is not only after Hajj that you have to be on your best behavior. But, such are the ideas which we have inherited and they are wrong. Hajj is just another obligation we have to perform, and the Hajj demonstrates how black and white, male and female, old and young, rich and poor, all of them attired in the same clothes, circling around the Ka‘bah, are equal before God. No preference of one over the other, in the eyes of God, except on the basis of piety and good deeds:

that’s the meaning of the Hajj. Similarly, in the case of Laylat-ul-Qadr, there are a lot of myths around it, and some people think that if you stay awake that night, and you worship and read Qur’an, and pray, you will be “born-again” as they say in some other religious terminology. It is not that way. When you recognize the importance of, and worship during the night of Laylat-ul-Qadr, you are celebrating an event which happened once in the life of Man, and that is the start of revelation of the Qur’an. [Imam quotes:]

“إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ” Verily, We have revealed the Qur’an during the Night of Power.” So, in fact, the celebration is not the celebration of the night itself, but a celebration of what took place during that night, and that is the revelation of the Qur’an.