

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

THE 'LOST' MONTHS OF HAJJ

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Many Muslim readers who have experienced the greater pilgrimage (Hajj) to Saudi Arabia will be familiar and witnesses to some of the following:

- The intense congestion as millions of people cram their sacred rites within the 5 days between the 8th and 12th Dhul Hijjah, the last of the lunar Islamic calendar months.
- The severe congestion during circumambulation (Tawaaf) of the Ka'aba where unknown females and males are often pressed together in an undignified manner.
- Where husbands, fathers and sons attempt to protect their females and young ones during the Tawaaf from being crushed or charged. This often forces them to move further away from the centre sometimes resulting in extremely long circuits on the periphery of the sacred mosque compound and roofs. What subsequently results is the unjust situation where the elderly and weak are driven away for their own safety to the outskirts of the Tawaaf perimeters and the strongest have the shortest circuits as they push themselves ever closer to the Ka'aba.
- The severe congestion at other ceremonial rites such as the 'devil stoning' (Rammi). This often leads people to be crushed, hit by the stones by overzealous pilgrims with their sheer numbers along with the stampedes that at times results. The consequences have been at times fatal.
- The difficulties of accommodation, the exorbitant costs associated with them imposing on the overall costs of the trip. This makes it difficult, if not impossible for certain people to perform their pilgrimage, especially if they have families.

- The long delays and demands placed physically and mentally on those that commit themselves to these rites, young and old.
- Some females who find themselves compromised as their menstrual cycle falls within the days of the Hajj and are only able to perform certain rites of worship.
- The oft robotic nature of the experience as one frantically attempts to keep up with all the rituals compromising at times the very essence and purpose of the spiritual pilgrimage.

These difficulties and many more faced by pilgrims which at times do result in fatalities seem a far cry from the Quran's perspective of how Islam should be practiced (i.e. without it being burdensome). Many pilgrims now believe that it is expected for them to face such hardships in practicing their pilgrim rites as the rewards are much higher when endured with patience.

Many unscrupulous travel agents take advantage of this thought and instead of imparting due care towards their pilgrims, they instead offer decrepit services and accommodations leaning on the sensibilities of the pilgrims, the mantra being (quite conveniently for them), that a pilgrim should not complain as it is better for them to endure.

God clearly states in the Quran that He imposes no difficulties on His servants in religion

022.078

“And strive in His cause as ye ought to strive, (with sincerity and under discipline). He has chosen you, and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion; it is the cult of your father Abraham. It is He Who has named you Muslims, both before and in this (Revelation); that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and ye be witnesses for mankind! So establish regular prayer, give regular charity, and hold fast to God! He is your Protector - the best to protect and the best to help!”

We note in other verses, the same message reiterated:

002:185 - With regards fasting, God desires for you ease; He does not desire any difficulties or hardship for you.

005:006 - With regards Wudu (ablution) in which God wishes to place no difficulty but intends to make you clean.

073.002-3 - God instructs the Prophet to abate a little and regulate his night long worship so that it imposes no hardship for him and the believers.

Most, if not all of the above difficulties would be solved, if Muslims were prepared to recognise the clear verses of the Quran.

THE MANY MONTHS OF HAJJ

What may come as a surprise to many Muslim readers is that while the majority of the Muslims follow the traditions of their forefathers blindly (without question) including some of the Hajj ceremonies and restrictions, from the Quran's point of view, **4 months** have been appointed in which to perform the Hajj. However, tradition and practice have restricted this to 5 days in 1 particular month.

One can only imagine how many problems this would alleviate and resolve if the authorities and pilgrims only made use of the Quran's injunction.

Well known months:

002:197

“For Hajj are the months (Arabic: Ashurun - plural) well known. If anyone undertakes that duty therein, Let there be no obscenity, nor wickedness, nor wrangling in the Hajj. And whatever good you do, (be sure) God knows it. And take a provision (With you) for the journey, but the best of provisions is right conduct. So fear Me, o ye that are wise”

The desperation of many commentators is all too apparent when reading their commentaries with regards this Quranic verse. Some attempt to explain the problem of the plural mention of months away by inferring that this is a reference to the regularity of the annual pilgrimage. This view is clearly unsupportable from the Quranic text which is stating a reference to the **months** within a year.

Another explanation which is oft cited is that this is a reference to the pilgrimage which is to be performed within the four months and as the 5 days of Dhul Hijjah fall within those months, then this is what is being inferred. This is again implausible for the following reason:

The Quranic Arabic allows no such admission for such an interpolation as the reference is clearly to the appointed months for Hajj which are well known (in plurality).

002:197

For the Hajj (Arabic Al-Hajjuh) Months (Arabic: Ashurun - PLURAL) well known (Ma'lumatun).

If the Arabic word was 'Shahrin' - This would have referred to **one** month

If the Arabic word was 'Sharain' - This would have referred to **two** months

The word in Arabic which has been used is '**Ashurun**' which means months, in this case, three or more.

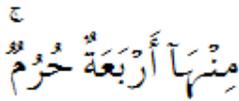
Therefore this verse does not inform the reader that the pilgrimage is within 'a month' (singular month) but rather, informs the reader that the pilgrimage is to be performed '**within the months**'. As a case for comparison, fasting is prescribed and is clearly cited as 1 month along with the name of

the month (Ramadan) – 2:184-185. There is no restrictive mention of the month of 'Dhul Hijjah' with regards to the pilgrimage in the Quran. The reference is clear, these are '**months**' appointed.

4 MONTHS OF THE YEAR ARE SPECIFICALLY DESIGNATED AS SACRED

009:036

“Lo! the number of the months with God is twelve months by God's ordinance in the day that He created the heavens and the earth. **Four (Arabic: Arba'atun) of them are sacred:** that is the right religion. So wrong not yourselves in them. And wage war on all of the idolaters as they are waging war on all of you. And know that God is with those who keep their duty (unto Him)”



Arba'atun

Illustration - Joseph Islam

It is clear that 4 months out of the year are designated as 'sacred months'. We also note from verses 9:2-5 that 4 months are specifically granted to those with whom obligations were removed as they continuously broke treaties and invoked hostilities against the Muslims. Respite was then granted from the Day of Pilgrimage and extended 4 months in succession which were termed the sacred months.

Paraphrasing 9:2-5

“So go about in the land **for four months (9:2)**.... And an announcement from God and His Messenger, to the people (assembled) on the **day of the Great Pilgrimage (9:3)**... So when the **sacred months have passed away (9:5)**”

WHY DO SOME ENGLISH COMMENTATORS IMPLY APPOINTED DAYS WHEN TRANSLATING SOME VERSES?

It is clearly appreciated that the Hajj ceremony will take a certain number of days to complete given the rites mentioned in the Quran. However, this is very different from appointing them in a specific part of the year in a particular month.

From the Quran it can clearly be seen that the Hajj can be observed in any of the **sacred months designated**.

The verses in question only refer to the Hajj taking a certain number of days, but there is no mention of ‘appointed days’ (i.e. specific days of the year when Hajj has to be performed).

002:203

“And remember (Arabic: wa-udkhikuru) God (Arabic: l-laha) during (Arabic: fi) days (Arabic: ayyamin) certain number (Arabic: Madudatan)

The same word ‘Madudatan’ is used elsewhere in the Quran to describe a certain number. For example, the certain number of days that the people of the Book claimed that the Fire of Hell would be able to touch them which is rebuked by God (3:24) and the certain number (of Dhirams) that Prophet Joseph was sold for (12:20).

That is how the word has also been used in the above verse to denote ‘a certain number’. This is very different from being ‘appointed’ on ‘specific days’ as a certain number of days can be taken up in performing pilgrim rites in any of the four sacred months.

022:028

....and mention (Arabic: wayadhukuru) the name (Arabic: is’ma) of God (Arabic: l-lahi) on (Arabic: fi) days (Arabic: Ayyamin) known (Arabic: Malumatin)

In the above verse, one once again notes the reference to a certain number of known days which would be necessary to complete the Hajj as it was instituted by Prophet Abraham. ^(pbuh) If one notes the previous verses and context, this is a proclamation that was made by Prophet Abraham. ^(pbuh) The immediate question that would arise would be, did Prophet Abraham ^(pbuh) have the same calendar of the Arabs or was this specifically a reference to the rites which took a certain number of days? The latter seems the most cogent explanation given the context.

WHEN DO THE SACRED MONTHS BEGIN THEN?

The lunar calendar as understood today by the Arabs is divided as follows:

1. **Muḥarram** محرم (or Muḥarram al Ḥaram)
2. **Ṣafar** صفر (or Ṣafar al Muzaffar)
3. **Rabī al-Awwal** (Rabī I) الأول ربيع
4. **Rabī al-Thānī** (or Rabī al-Ākhir) (Rabī II) الثاني ربيع أو الآخر ربيع
5. **Jumādā al-Ūlā** (Jumādā I) الأولى جمادى
6. **Jumādā al-Thānī** (or Jumādā al-Ākhirah) (Jumādā II) الثانية جمادى أو الآخرة جمادى
7. **Rajab** رجب (or Rajab al-Murājab)
8. **Sha’bān** شعبان (or Sha’bān al-Mu’azzam)
9. **Ramaḍān** رمضان (or Ramaḍān al-Mubārak)

10. **Shawwāl** شَوَّال (or Shawwāl al-Mukarram)
11. **Dhū al-Qa'da** القعدة ذو (or Dhū al-Qi'da)
12. **Dhū al-Hijja** الحجة ذو (or Dhū al-Hajja)

According to tradition, the four sacred months are:

- (1) Dhu al-Qada (11th month)
- (2) Dhul al-Hijja (12th month)
- (3) Muharram (1st month)
- (4) Rajab (which is between Jumada al-Thani and Sha'ban) – (7th month)

According to the Quran, 4 months were designated 'sacred' on the day of the great pilgrimage in succession. If this is taken to be Dhul Hijjah (as the name suggests), then the four months will be:

- (1) Dhul al-Hijja
- (2) Muharram
- (3) Safar
- (4) Rabi al-Awwal

There is clearly no dispute with Dhul Hijjah falling in as one of the four sacred months, as also the name implies a clear connection with the greater pilgrimage (i.e. Hajj). 'Rabi' however is interestingly derived from the root word for 4 (Arba) and means fourth. This word is also used in 18.22 to signify the claim of the dog being the fourth with regards the people of the Cave and in 58.7 where God is described as the fourth amongst a secret consultation of 3 showing that He is ever present.

One notes that there are 2 months in the calendar month which bear the prefix 'Rabi' which includes Rabi al-Awwal (3rd calendar month) and Rabi-al-Thani (4th calendar month). What is even more interesting is that although 'Rabi-al-Thani' equates perfectly as being the 4th month of the calendar, one also notes that the 3rd month also has the prefix 'Rabi' as part of its title.

One simply cannot overlook the connection with the 3rd month of the calendar being described as Rabi which is also the last of the fourth sacred months starting from Dhul-Hijjah (12, 1, 2 and 3 in succession).

ALTERING THE SACRED MONTHS

It is often difficult (if not at times impossible due to mutual exclusivity) to reconcile the traditions with the Quranic text. Certainly in this case, when within the traditional ambit, the month of Rajab (7th calendar month) has somehow become recognised as a sacred month begging the question, why the sudden break in succession? Or equally, as to why the 11th month, Dhul al-Qadda, is designated the first of the sacred months?

A verse of the Quran possibly throws some light on the matter where even at the time of the Prophet people were inclined to alternate or postpone a sacred month which clearly seems politically motivated.

009:037

“Postponement (of a sacred month) is only an excess of disbelief whereby those who disbelieve are misled; they allow it one year and forbid it (another) year, that they may make up the number of the months which God has hallowed, so that they allow that which God has forbidden. The evil of their deeds is made fair seeming to them. God guides not the disbelieving folk”

FINAL THOUGHTS

From a Quranic perspective, it appears that the Hajj which takes a certain number of days to complete can be performed anytime by any person during the four sacred months. These sacred months would begin from the new moon (Dhul Hijjah) and extend for a period of four lunar months.

002:189

“They ask thee, (O Muhammad), of new moons, say: They are fixed seasons for mankind and for the pilgrimage”

Please note the plural usage of ‘moons’ (Arabic: l’ahilati - Plural) in the above verse which would also indicate the start of each of the four sacred months of the pilgrimage season. Furthermore, there is no mention of ‘fasting’ in this verse. Fasting is conducted within a single month and is mentioned separately.

If Hajj were to be performed in any of the sacred four months, this would potentially address the increase in pilgrim numbers and alleviate congestion and other concerns mentioned in the opening paragraph. It would also allow Muslims from across the globe more flexibility to conduct their pilgrim rites.

Some questions to ponder:

- What would the consequences be (both positive and negative) if the 4 Quranic sacred months were recognised and Hajj was instituted within them as the Quranic narrative suggests?
- How many other practices and additions have Muslims potentially introduced into religion which find no support in the Quran and in which they blindly follow the traditions of their forefathers?

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