

THE FAST OF 15th SHA'BAN

Q: 1 - I have read the Sha'ban issue of your magazine AL - BALAGH certain questions are bothering me with regard to fasting on the 15th of Sha'ban.

I would like to explain the reason for this question. Several months ago a friend explained to me that there is no special significance of the fast of the 15th of Sha'ban. However he says this Hadith is absolutely weak to such an extent that one of its narrators was a person who was regarded by some scholars of Hadith as a fabricator? of Hadith, and a liar. Hence, he says that, until another reliable Hadith can be found the fast of the 15th of Shaban has no special virtue. He also explained to me the following points:

(1) He has not come across any of the Fuqaha having even mentioned fasting specifically on the 15th of Sha'ban; whereas they have mentioned the fasts of Aashura and the six fasts of Shawwal etc.

(2) While it has been narrated in many authentic Ahadith that Rasulullah saw fasted for most of the month of Shaba", this cannot be used to prove any special significance for the specific fast of the 15th of Shahan. He told me that those Ahadith must be explained as they are i.e. for the entire month of Shaban - not the 15th of the month.???

(3) The Hadith regarding visiting the graveyard on the 15th of Shaban is Much more authentic and reliable compared to the Hadith regarding fasting on the 15th of Sha'ban. However, despite this the Mona have prohibited the people from making it a habit. Therefore, since a eery great number of people observe only the fast of the 15th of "Sha'ban and regard it as a sunnah, whereas the hadith in this regard is absolutely and totally weak, the Ulema should stop the people from this also.

(4) When I suggested that what harm, can there be if people observed this fast even if in reality it is not sunnah or even Nall, he stated: This is the way many Bidat have started (though this practice is not a Bid'ah). Furthermore this is a matter of "Aqeedah" and to regard something as Sunnah which in reality is not Sunnah is a very dangerous and grave matter. Hence it is necessary that either the act be proved Sunnah or else the people should be stopped from this since if they practice it they would do so regarding it as a sunnah. Hence I now wish to pose my questions.

(1) He has stated that this Hadith is "totally and absolutely weak" whereas Mufti Sahib has stated that "the scholars of Hadith have some doubts regarding the authenticity of this Hadith. "Has he exaggerated in this claim of "totally and absolutely weak"?

(2) Is it true that one of the narrators was regarded as a fabricator and liar?

(3) Are his arguments in (1), (2), (3) and (4) above correct?

(4) On page 14 Mufti Sahib has written; "Although the "scholars of Hadith have some doubts about the authenticity of this report, yet it is mentioned earlier that the fasts of the first half of Sha'ban have special merits...." I have not found any narration in the article which explains the special merits of fasting in the first half of Sha'ban. All the narrations deal with the fasts of the FIRST HALF of Shaban, please quote this for me.

(5) Mufti Sahib also stated the practice of the Salaf (elders). Who is meant by "elders"?

(6) If it is accepted that one of the narrators was accused of being a fabricator and a liar did the "Salar regard this Hadith as authentic "as is" i.e. despite the condition of this narrator?

(7) Mufti Sahib has stated; "Therefore, it is advisable to fast on the 15th of Sha'ban as an optional (nail) fast". Most people regard this fast as sunnah" and not nafl. Is it incorrect to regard this fast as sunnah?

(8) Is this nail fast equal to keeping a nail fast on any other day for example, the 1st of January; whichever Islamic date that may fall on? (excepting Ramadan, the 10th of Muharram, etc.)?

I hope Mufti Sahib will quickly answer these questions and remove my doubts and the doubts of many others here in this regard. (Yousuf Desai, South Africa)

A: I am grateful to you for your question which provided me with an opportunity to revise my article and to study the subject in more detail.

In fact, the fast of the 15th of Sha'ban is based on a tradition reported by Sayiddna `Ali. Its text runs as follows:

"When the Middle Night of Sha'ban, arrives, you should stand (praying) in the night and should fast in the day following it".

This hadith is recorded by Ibn Maja in his sunan, one of the famous six books of hadith, and also by Baihaqi in his famous book Shu'ab-al-'Iman'. Both of them have reported it without any comment about its authenticity. But after a critical analysis of its chain of narrators it is found that this tradition is mainly based on the report of Abu Bakr ibn Abi Saburah whose narrations cannot be relied upon. That is why the scholars of hadith have declared it as a weak (da'if) tradition.

However, the allegation that the narrator of this hadith i.e. Abu Bakr ibn. Abi Saburah, is a fabricator who used to coin forged traditions does not seem correct. In fact, he was Mufti of Madinah, a well-known jurist and he was appointed as a Qadi (judge) of Iraq in the days of Mansur and was succeeded in this office by Imam Abu Yousuf. He was a colleague of Imam Malik. Once Mansur, the Abbasi Caliph, asked Imam Malik about the scholars of hadith in Madinah. Imam Malik referred to three names, and one of them was that of Ibn Abi Saburah. Had he been a fabricator, Imam Malik would have never referred to his name in this context.

But despite his high position among the jurists, his memory was not of the standard required for the authenticity of a tradition. That is why most of the critics of hadith like Imam Bukhari etc. have held him as weak, but did not declare him a fabricator. Only Imam Ahmad is reported to have remarked about him that he fabricates hadith. But this remark alone is not sufficient to hold him as a fabricator, for two reasons: Firstly Imam Ahmad was born long after him, and his contemporary scholars never held him as such, secondly the Arabic words used by Imam Ahmad are sometimes used for confusing one tradition with another, and not for deliberate fabrication.

This is the reason why the majority of the scholars of hadith have held Abu Bakr ibn Abi Saburah as a weak reporter of hadith, but they did not declare him as a forger or a fabricator.

Now, coming to his tradition about the fast of the 15th Sha'ban it is held by the scholars to be weak but I have not come across an authentic scholar who has treated it as a fabricated (Mawdu) hadith. There are a number of books indicating the fabricated ahadith, but this tradition is not included in these books as fabricated.

It is well-known that Ibn Maja consists of about twenty ahadith held to be fabricated. The list of these fabricated ahadith is available, but the tradition in question is not included therein.

Therefore, the correct position is that this hadith is not fabricated. However, being reported by a weak narrator, it cannot be relied upon in the matter of the injunctions of Shariah. Thus, the fast of the 15th of Sha'ban cannot be termed as sunnah or mustahabb in the strict sense of the term.

Nevertheless, it may be advisable to fast in the 15th of . Sha'ban without taking it as sunnah for several reasons:

Firstly it is fully established through a large number of ahadith that the Holy Prophet has emphasized on the merits of fasting in Sha'ban, and particularly in the first half of the month. The 15th day of Sha'ban, being the last day of the first half, is included in the preferable days for fasting.

Secondly, the merits of the 15th night of Sha'ban is established by more than a dozen ahadith. It means that this night should be spent in prayers and other forms of worship. On the other hand, all the blessed nights which the Muslims are advised to spend in worship are generally followed by fasting on the coming day' like in the Lailatul - Qadr, where fasting on the following day is obligatory, or like the first night of Zulhijjah where fasting on the following days is optional, rather advisable. On this analogy, too, the 15th night of Sha'ban may be followed by an optional fasting on the following day.

Thirdly, the tradition relating to the merits of fasting on 15th of Sha'ban is, no doubt, a weak tradition, not competent? to prove this practice to be a sunnah or a formal mustahabb, but it can be acted upon as a measure of precaution, provided that the practice is not taken as sunnah, or a formal mustahabb.

It is for these reasons that some `Ulama and elders have been fasting on the 15th of Sha'ban and have been taking it an advisable practice.

It is in this context that I had mentioned this fast as advisable in my previous article. But when I revised the article after receiving your question, I now feel that the relevant paragraph may create misunderstanding and it needs clarification. I now amend it in accordance with what is stated above in this article.

Again, I am thankful to you for your letter which enabled me to revise and correct my previous article. May Allah give you the best reward for it.

The nights of two kids are an exception, because their following days are the ones in which fasting is totally prohibited but these nights are preceded with by a number of fasts, either obligatory, like in Ramadan, or optional like in Zulhijjah.

Contemporary fatawaa