**Meaning of the Months of the Islamic Calendar and Muharram the Start of the Islamic Calendar**

By [Muhammad Al-Qasim](http://www.islamonline.net/English/NewHijriYear/LunarCalendar/04.shtml#*#*)

Indeed, there are many causes behind naming months of the Islamic calendar as such. In what follows we will try to shed some light on some of those causes:

**1. Muharram**: is named so because the Arabs used to prohibit fighting during it.

**2. Safar**: is named so because the Arabs used to leave their homes during that month as they used to set out to fight their enemies. It is also said that they used to leave their homes to escape summer heat.

**3. Rabi` al-Awwal**: is named so because it usually coincides with the spring time.

**4. Rabi` al-Akhar**: is named so because it usually coincides with the winter time.

**5. Jumada al-‘Ula**: The Arabs named it so because water gets frozen at winter time, and that coincides with the time of Jumada al-‘Ula.

**6. Jumada al-‘Ukhra**: is named so because it coincides with winter time.

**7. Rajab**: is derived from the Arabic word ‘rajaba’ which means to ‘sanctify’ something. The Arabs used to sanctify the month of Rajab by putting a halt to fighting during that month.

**8. Sha`ban**: The Arabic word Sha`ban is derived from the word ‘tash`aba’, which means to go in different directions. It is said that Sha`ban takes such a name because the Arabs used to go in different directions fighting their enemies.

**9. Ramadan**: The word Ramadan is derived from ‘Ar-ramda’ which refers to extreme heat. Ramadan time used to coincide with that extreme climate of heat in the Arab Peninsula, and that is why it is called Ramadan.

**10. Shawwal**: The name Shawwal is derived from the Arabic word ‘tashawwala’, which refers to the scarcity in she-camels’ milk.

**11. Dhul-Qi`dah**: refers to Arabs decline to go out fighting their enemies as the early Arabs used to call it a sacred month.

**12. Dhul-Hijjah**: is named so because the Arabs used to perform Hajj during that month.

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**Ibn `Abbâs relates: “I never saw Allah’s Messenger show greater concern for a day of fasting, seeking its virtue over other days, than he did for the Day of `Âshûrâ’ and the month (of Ramadan).”**

**This is an authentic hadîth related in *Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (2006) and *Sahîh Muslim* (1132).**
**The meaning of the hadîth:**

This hadîth shows us that the day of `Âshûrâ’ is an important day for fasting. It is the tenth day of the month of Muharram. The month of Muharram, in turn, is one of the sacred months referred to in the verse: “The number of months in the sight of Allah is twelve (in a year) – so ordained by Him the day He created the heavens and the earth; of them four are sacred.” [*Sûrah al-Tawbah*: 36]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) identified these months by saying: “A year is made up of twelve months, of which four are sacred. Three of them come right after each other. They are Dhû al-Qa`dah, Dhû al-Hijjah, and Muharram. Then there is Rajab that comes between Jumâdâ and Sha`bân.” [*Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (4662) and *Sahîh Muslim* (1679)]

It is encouraged to fast throughout the month of Muharram. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “The best fasts after Ramadân are in Allah’s month of Muharram.” [*Sahîh Muslim* (1163)]

The most emphatic day to observe fast in the month of Muharram is the tenth day, the day of `Âshûrâ’. Fasting on this day is an act of great virtue. Abû Qatâdah relates that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “I hope from Allah that observing the fast of `Âshûrâ’ will expiate for the sins of the past year.” [*Sahîh Muslim* (1163)]

The reason why we observe this fast is that after the Prophet (peace be upon him) came to Madinah, he observed the Jews observing fast on the day of `Âshûrâ’. He asked them why they did so, and they said: “This is a virtuous day. It is the day in which Allah saved the Children of Israel from their enemies, so Moses used to fast on this day.”

The Prophet then said: “I have a greater right to Moses than you.” Then he fasted that day and commanded (the Muslims) to fast.” [Sahîh al-Bukhârî (1900)]

**The ruling of fasting on `Âshûrâ’:**

The fast of `Âshûrâ’ is an emphatic Sunnah (*sunnah mu’akkadah*). It is not obligatory. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “`Âshûrâ’ is but one of Allah’s days, so whoever wishes to fast on this day should do so, and whoever wishes to refrain from fasting may do so.” [*Sahîh Muslim* (1136)]

It is good to encourage children to observe this fast. Al-Rubayyi`, the daughter of Mu`awwadh, relates that early in the morning of `Âshûrâ’, Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) sent word to the villages of the Ansâr that: “Whoever has started this day by eating should continue (as if fasting) for the rest of the day, and whoever started this day fasting should complete the fast.” Since then, we used to observe the fast on that day and have our children fast as well. We would make toys for them out of wool, and whenever they would start crying for food, we would give them a toy to occupy them until it was time to break the fast.” [*Sahîh al-Bukhârî* (1690) and *Sahîh Muslim* (1136)]

It is also Sunnah to fast the day before `Âshûrâ’ or the day after it. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Fast the day of `Âshûrâ’, but do so differently than the Jews by fasting the day before it or the day after it.” [*Musnad Ahmad* (1/241) and *Sahîh Ibn Khuzaymah* (2095)]

Ibn al-Qayyim writes in *Zâd al-Ma`âd* (2/75): “There are three ways to observe this fast. The best is to fast the day before `Âshûrâ’ and the day after it. Next in excellence is to fast on the ninth of Muharram as well as the tenth. This is what most of the hadîth indicate. The next is to fast the tenth day by itself.”

**Some mistakes connected with this day:**

Ibn Taymiyah writes [*Minhâj al-Sunnah* (4/544)]:

Because of the killing of Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) on that day, Satan was able to introduce two false and innovated practices to the people. The first is that of grieving and wailing on the day of `Âshûrâ’, along with self-flagellation, shouting, weeping, remaining thirsty, and reciting elegies. Then, there is what this leads to: the practice of defaming and cursing the Pious Predecessors, falsely accusing those who are innocent along with the guilty…

Those who introduced all these practices did so in order to foster strife and division among the Muslims. The Muslims are agreed that such practices can be neither obligatory nor preferred. Indeed, cultivating sadness and wailing about past tragedies is one of the most calumnious of practices that Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him) have prohibited.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever strikes his cheeks and tears his shirt and calls to the ways of the times of ignorance is not one of us.” [*Sahîh al-Bukhârî*

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| **Muharram: The Start of the Islamic Calendar** **12/7/2010 - - Article Ref: IC0303-1877Number of comments: 72 By:**[**Muhammad Taqi Usmani**](http://www.islamicity.com/articles/action.lasso.asp?-Search=search&-database=Services&-Table=Magazine&-noresultserror=error.asp&-Response=search.asp&-MaxRecords=10&-SortField=Pdate&-SortOrder=Descending&-op=eq&PFlag=X&-op=cn&S=I&-op=cn&search=Muhammad%20Taqi%20Usmani)**IslamiCity\* -** |  |

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| http://www.islamicity.com/global/images/photo/Other/Islamic_calendar%5b187x223%5d.JPG |

**The Islamic New Year is called Amon Jadid. Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar. The New Year date changes every year as the Islamic calendar is 11 days shorter than the solar calendar.**

**The Islamic or Hijrah calendar is lunar-based, consisting of 12 lunar months in a year of 354 or 355 days. It is used to date events in many Muslim countries (concurrently with the Gregorian calendar), and used by Muslims everywhere to determine the proper day on which to celebrate Islamic holy days and festivals. The first year was the year the Prophet Muhammad and his followers migrated from Mecca to Medina where he set up the first Islamic state in 662 CE, known as the Hijra, occurred. Each numbered year is designated either H for Hijra or AH for the Latin anno Hegirae (in the year of the Hijra).**

**Muslims welcome Muharram the first month of the New Year by fasting especially the ninth and tenth of the month.**

Muharram is the month with which the Muslims begin their lunar Hijrah Calendar. It is one of the four sanctified months about which the Holy Quran says, "The number of the months according to Allah is twelve months (mentioned) in the Book of Allah on the day in which He created heavens and the earth. Among these (twelve months) there are four sanctified".

These four months, according to the authentic traditions are the months of Thulqadah, Thullhijjah, Muharram and Rajab. All the commentators of the Holy Quran are unanimous on this point, because the Prophet  in his sermon on the occasion of his last Hajj, has declared:

"One year consists of twelve months, of which four are sanctified months, three of them are in sequence; Thulqadah, Thullhijjah, Muharram, and the fourth is Rajab."

The specific mention of these four months does not mean that any other month has no sanctity, because the month of Ramadan is admittedly the most sanctified month in the year. But these four months were specifically termed as sanctified months for the simple reason that their sanctity was accepted even by the pagans of Makkah.

In fact, every month, out of the twelve, is originally equal to the other, and there is no inherent sanctity, which may be attributed to one of them in comparison to other months. When Allah Almighty chooses a particular time for His special blessings, then it acquires sanctity out of His grace.

Thus, the sanctity of these four months was recognized right from the days of Sayyidina Ibrahim. Since the Pagans of Makkah attributed themselves to Sayyidina Ibrahim they observed the sanctity of these four months and despite their frequent tribal battles, they held it unlawful to fight in these months.

In the Shariah of our Prophet  the sanctity of these months was upheld and the Holy Quran referred to them as the "sanctified months".

The month of Muharram has certain other characteristics peculiar to it, which are specified below.

**Fasting during the month**

The Prophet  has said: "The best fasts after the fasts of Ramadan are those of the month of Muharram."

Although the fasts of the month of Muharram are not obligatory, yet, the one who fasts in these days out of his own will and choice is entitled to a great reward by Allah Almighty. The Hadith cited above signifies that the fasts of the month of Muharram are most reward-able ones among the Nafl fasts i.e. the fasts one observes out of his own choice without being obligatory on him.

The Hadith does not mean that the award promised for fasts of Muharram can be achieved only by fasting for the whole month. On the contrary, each fast during this month has merit. Therefore, one should avail of this opportunity as much as he can.

**The day of Ashurah**

Although the month of Muharram is a sanctified month as a whole, yet, the 10th day of Muharram is the most sacred among all its days. The day is named Ashurah.

According to the companion Ibn Abbas. The Prophet , when migrated to Madinah, found that  the Jews of Madinah used to fast on the 10th day of Muharram. They said that it was the day on which the Holy Prophet Musa (Moses) and his followers crossed the Red Sea miraculously and the Pharaoh was drowned in its water.

On hearing this from the Jews, the Prophet  said, "We are more closely related to Musa than you" and directed the Muslims to fast on the day of Ashurah. (Abu Dawood)

It is also reported in a number of authentic traditions that in the beginning, fasting on the day of Ashurah was obligatory for the Muslims.

It was later that the fasts of Ramadan were made obligatory and the fast on the day of ''Ashurah was made optional. Sayyidah Aishah has said:

"When the Prophet  came to Madinah, he fasted on the day of Ashurahh and directed the people to fast it. But when the fasts of Ramadan were made obligatory, the obligation of fasting was confined to Ramadan and the obligatory nature of the fast of Ashurah was abandoned. One can fast on this day, if he so wills, or can avoid fasting, if he so wills."

However, the Prophet  used to fast on the day of Ashurah even after the fasting in Ramadan was made obligatory.

Abdullah Ibn Masud reports that the Prophet  preferred the fast of Ashurah to the fast of other days and preferred the fast of Ramadhan to the fast of Ashurahh. *(Bukhari and Muslim)*

In short, it is established through a number of authentic hadith that fasting on the day of Ashurah is Sunnah of the Holy Prophet  and makes one entitled to a great reward.

According to another Hadith, it is more advisable that the fast of  Ashurah should either be prefixed or suffixed by another fast. It means that one should fast two days: the 9th an 10th of Muharram or the 10th and 11th of it. The reason of this additional fast as mentioned by the Prophet  is that the Jews used to fast on the day  of Ashurah alone, and the Prophet  wanted to distinguish the Islamic-way of fasting from that of Jews. Therefore, he advised the Muslims to add another fast to that of Ashurah.

Some traditions signify another feature of the day of Ashurah.

According to these traditions one should be more generous to his family by providing more food to them on this day as compared to other days. These traditions are not very authentic according to the science of Hadith. Yet, some Scholars like Baihaqi and Ibn Hibban have accepted them as reliable.

What is mentioned above is all that is supported through authentic sources about Ashurah.

However, there are some legends and misconceptions with regard to Ashurah that have managed to find their way into the minds of the ignorant, but have no support of authentic Islamic sources, some very common of them are these:

This is the day in which Adam was created.

This is the day in which Ibrahim was born.

This is the day in which Allah accepted the repentance of Sayyidina Ibrahim.

This is the day on which the Qiyamah (dooms-day) will take place.

Whoever takes bath in the day of Ashurah will never get ill.

All these and other similar whims and fancies are totally baseless and the traditions referred to in this respect are not worthy of any credit.

Some people take it as Sunnah to prepare a particular type of meal in the day of Ashurah. This practice, too, has no basis in the authentic Islamic sources.

Some other people attribute the sanctity of Ashurah to the martyrdom of Sayyidina Husain during his battle with the Syrian army. No doubt, the martyrdom of Sayyidina Husain is one of the most tragic episodes of our history. Yet, the sanctity of Ashurah cannot be ascribed to this event for the simple reason that the sanctity of 'Ashurah was established during the days of the Prophet  much earlier than the birth of Sayyidna Husain.

On the contrary, it is one of the merits of Sayyidna Husain that his martyrdom took place on the day of Ashurah.

Another misconception about the month of Muharram is that it is an evil or unlucky month, for Sayyidna Husain was killed in it. It is for this misconception that people avoid holding marriage ceremonies in the month of Muharram. This is again a baseless concept which is contrary to the express teachings of the Holy Quran and the Sunnah. Such superstitions have been totally negated by the Prophet. If the death of an eminent person in a particular day renders that day unlucky for all times to come, one can hardly find a day, free from this bad luck, out of 365 days of the whole year, because each and every day has a history of the demise of some eminent person. The Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet  have made us free from such superstitious beliefs, and they should deserve no attention.

Another wrong practice related to this month is to hold the lamentation and mourning ceremonies in the memory of martyrdom of Sayyidna Husain.

As mentioned earlier, the event of Karbala is one of the most tragic events of our history, but the Prophet  has forbidden us from holding the mourning ceremonies on the death of any person. The people of Jahiliyyah (Ignorance) used to mourn over their deceased relatives or friends through loud lamentations, by tearing their clothes and by beating their cheeks and chests. The Prophet  stopped the Muslims from doing all this and directed them to observe patience by saying "Inna lillaahi wa innaa ilayhi raaji oon". A number of authentic hadith are available on the subject.

To quote only one of them: "He is not from our group who slaps his cheeks, tears his clothes and cries in the manner of the people of jahiliyyah."

All the authentic jurists are unanimous on the point that the mourning of this type is absolutely impermissible. Even Sayyidna Husain shortly before his demise, had advised his beloved sister Sayyidah Zainab not to mourn over his death in this manner. He said: "My dear sister, I swear upon you that you, in case I die, shall not tear your clothes, nor scratch your face, nor curse anyone for me or pray for your death".

It is evident from this advice of Sayyidna Husain that this type of mourning is condemned even by the blessed person for the memory of whom these mourning ceremonies are held. Every Muslim should avoid this practice and abide by the teachings of the Prophet and his beloved grandchild Sayyidina Husain.

**Blessings of Muharram**

It is the first month of the Islamic Calendar.

The meaning of the word:- The word "Muharram" means "Forbidden." Even before Islam, this month was always known as a scared month in which all unlawful acts were forbidden, prominently the shedding of blood.

A blessing of Muharram:- There are many bounties of this month, especially the tenth of Muharram.

Two of the many virtues of the 10th of Muharram:-

On this day he who spends more lavishly for the sake of his family members, Allah Taala will bestow blessing upon the sustenance of the following year.

Abu Qataada has related that the Prophet  has reported to have said, It is my thought that by fasting  on the 10th of Muharram Allah Taala will pardon the sins of the past  year.*(Tirmizi)*

**Events of Muharram**

Shaykhain Tirmizi & Haakim has narrated from Anas that the following verse:

"Allah may forgive thee of thy sins that which is past and that which is to come." *(Al-Fath)* was revealed on the 10th of Muharram.

The Prophet Muhammed  went to defeat Bani Muhaarin and Bani Tha'laba (Tribes of Bani Gatfan) in the year 4 A.H. (Asahhus-siyar)

**History of Hijrah: Migration for Peace and Justice**
**12/17/2009 - Religious - Article Ref: IC0801-3481
Number of comments: 9
By: I Nawwab, P Speers & P Hoye
IslamiCity\* -**

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| http://www.islamicity.com/education/ihame/resources/aw45a.gif |
| Photo: A colonnade of lofty arches surrounds the courtyard at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, after Mecca the second holiest city of Islam.  |

After Prophet Muhammad had preached publicly for more than a decade, the opposition to him reached such a high pitch that, fearful for their safety, he sent some of his adherents to Ethiopia, where the Christian ruler extended protection to them, the memory of which has been cherished by Muslims ever since. But in Mecca the persecution worsened. Prophet Muhammad's followers were harassed, abused, and even tortured. At last, therefore, Prophet Muhammad sent seventy of his followers off to the northern town of Yathrib, which was later to be renamed Medina ("The City"). Later, in the early fall of 622, he learned of a plot to murder him and, with his closest friend, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, set off to join the emigrants.

In Mecca the plotters arrived at Prophet Muhammad's home to find that his cousin, 'Ali, had taken his place in bed. Enraged, the Meccans set a price on Prophet Muhammad's head and set off in pursuit. Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr, however, had taken refuge in a cave where, as they hid from their pursuers, a spider spun its web across the cave's mouth. When they saw that the web was unbroken, the Meccans passed by and Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr went on to Medina, where they were joyously welcomed by a throng of Medinans as well as the Meccans who had gone ahead to prepare the way.

This was the Hijrah - anglicized as Hegira - usually, but inaccurately, translated as "Flight" - from which the Muslim era is dated. In fact, the Hijrah was not a flight but a carefully planned migration which marks not only a break in history - the beginning of the Islamic era- but also, for Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims, a new way of life. Henceforth, the organizational principle of the community was not to be mere blood kinship, but the greater brotherhood of all Muslims. The men who accompanied Muhammad on the Hijrah were called the Muhajirun - "those that made the Hijrah" or the "Emigrants" - while those in Medina who became Muslims were called the Ansar or "Helpers."

Prophet Muhammad was well acquainted with the situation in Medina. Earlier, before the Hijrah, the city had sent envoys to Mecca asking Prophet Muhammad to mediate a dispute between two powerful tribes. What the envoys saw and heard had impressed them and they had invited Prophet Muhammad to settle in Medina. After the Hijrah, Prophet Muhammad's exceptional qualities so impressed the Medinans that the rival tribes and their allies temporarily closed ranks as, on March 15, 624, Prophet Muhammad and his supporters moved against the pagans of Mecca.

The first battle, which took place near Badr, now a small town southwest of Medina, had several important effects. In the first place, the Muslim forces, outnumbered three to one, routed the Meccans. Secondly, the discipline displayed by the Muslims brought home to the Meccans, perhaps for the first time, the abilities of the man they had driven from their city. Thirdly, one of the allied tribes which had pledged support to the Muslims in the Battle of Badr, but had then proved lukewarm when the fighting started, was expelled from Medina one month after the battle. Those who claimed to be allies of the Muslims, but tacitly opposed them, were thus served warning: membership in the community imposed the obligation of total support.

A year later the Meccans struck back. Assembling an army of three thousand men, they met the Muslims at Uhud, a ridge outside Medina. After an initial success the Muslims were driven back and the Prophet himself was wounded. As the Muslims were not completely defeated, the Meccans, with an army of ten thousand, attacked Medina again two years later but with quite different results. At the Battle of the Trench, also known as the Battle of the Confederates, the Muslims scored a signal victory by introducing a new defense. On the side of Medina from which attack was expected they dug a trench too deep for the Meccan cavalry to clear without exposing itself to the archers posted behind earthworks on the Medina side. After an inconclusive siege, the Meccans were forced to retire. Thereafter Medina was entirely in the hands of the Muslims.

**The Constitution of Medina** - under which the clans accepting Prophet Muhammad as the Prophet of God formed an alliance, or federation - dates from this period. It showed that the political consciousness of the Muslim community had reached an important point; its members defined themselves as a community separate from all others. The Constitution also defined the role of non-Muslims in the community. Jews, for example, were part of the community; they were dhimmis, that is, protected people, as long as they conformed to its laws. This established a precedent for the treatment of subject peoples during the later conquests. Christians and Jews, upon payment of a yearly tax, were allowed religious freedom and, while maintaining their status as non-Muslims, were associate members of the Muslim state. This status did not apply to polytheists, who could not be tolerated within a community that worshipped the One God.

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| http://www.islamicity.com/education/ihame/resources/aw50b.gif |
| Photo: Devout Muslims from all over the world gather for the pilgrimage to Mecca, for nearly fourteen centuries one of the most impressive religious gatherings in the world. |

Ibn Ishaq, one of the earliest biographers of the Prophet, says it was at about this time that Prophet Muhammad sent letters to the rulers of the earth - the King of Persia, the Emperor of Byzantium, the Negus of Abyssinia, and the Governor of Egypt among others - inviting them to submit to Islam. Nothing more fully illustrates the confidence of the small community, as its military power, despite the battle of the Trench, was still negligible. But its confidence was not misplaced. Prophet Muhammad so effectively built up a series of alliances among the tribes his early years with the Bedouins must have stood him in good stead here- that by 628 he and fifteen hundred followers were able to demand access to the Ka'bah during negotiations with the Meccans. This was a milestone in the history of the Muslims. Just a short time before, Prophet Muhammad had to leave the city of his birth in fear of his life. Now he was being treated by his former enemies as a leader in his own right. A year later, in 629, he reentered and, in effect, conquered Mecca without bloodshed and in a spirit of tolerance which established an ideal for future conquests. He also destroyed the idols in the Ka'bah, to put an end forever to pagan practices there. At the same time Prophet Muhammad won the allegiance of 'Amr ibn al-'As, the future conqueror of Egypt, and Khalid ibn al-Walid, the future "Sword of God," both of whom embraced Islam and joined Prophet Muhammad . Their conversion was especially noteworthy because these men had been among Prophet Muhammad's bitterest opponents only a short time before.

In one sense Prophet Muhammad's return to Mecca was the climax of his mission. In 632, just three years later, he was suddenly taken ill and on June 8 of that year, with his third wife 'Aishah in attendance, the Messenger of God "died with the heat of noon."

The death of Prophet Muhammad was a profound loss. To his followers this simple man from Mecca was far more than a beloved friend, far more than a gifted administrator, far more than the revered leader who had forged a new state from clusters of warring tribes. Prophet Muhammad was also the exemplar of the teachings he had brought them from God: the teachings of the Quran, which, for centuries, have guided the thought and action, the faith and conduct, of innumerable men and women, and which ushered in a distinctive era in the history of mankind. His death, nevertheless, had little effect on the dynamic society he had created in Arabia, and no effect at all on his central mission: to transmit the Quran to the world. As Abu Bakr put it: "Whoever worshipped Prophet Muhammad , let him know that Prophet Muhammad is dead, but whoever worshipped God, let him know that God lives and dies not."

*This article has been incorporated from "ARAMCO and Its World: Arabia And The Middle East", Edited by Ismail I. Nawwab, Peter C. Speers & Paul F. Hoye*