

Radjab, the seventh month of the Islamic calendar, was observed as a holy month in the period of the *Djāhiliyya* in spring. It was the month of the sacrifices of the *‘atā’ir* offered to the pagan deities as a token of gratitude for the augmentation of their flocks and herds. It was also the time of invocations of their deities to increase the number of their flocks. It was as well the month of the sacrifices of the *furu’*, the firstlings of the flocks and herds. The owner of the flock had to sacrifice one ewe out of fifty (or hundred) of his herd.

The holy month of Radjab was also the month of peace in the Arab peninsula; the tribes refrained from raids and warfare. The month was called *al-ašamm* “the deaf” because no sound of weapons was heard during that month and *al-ašabb* “the pouring” because the unbelievers of Mecca used to say that the mercy is pouring forth in this month. Another by-name of Radjab was *al-radjim* “the stoning” because the Satans were stoned in that month and were expelled from the dwellings of the tribes. Other by-names attached to Radjab were: *al-muḳīm* “the constant,” because its sanctity was a firm one, since Radjab is one of the four *ḥurum* months; *al-harim* “the aged” because the sanctity of the month was an ancient one, dating from the time of Muḍar b. Nizār; as the tribes of Muḍar venerated this month, it was also named *radjab Muḍar*. Because of the comprehensive peace among the tribes and their abstaining from hostilities, the month was called *munšil al-all* and *munšil al-asinna*, pointing to the fact that the spearheads were removed, weapons laid down and no fighting among tribes was launched. The name *al-mu‘allā* “the elevated” was attached to Radjab because it was a month highly respected among the Arab tribes. The name *al-mubri’* “the clearing [from fault]” was given to the month because warlike activity was given up, no iniquity was committed and no act of hypocrisy was perpetrated during the month. A peculiar name granted to Radjab was *al-muḳašḳiṣh* “the exonerating,” denoting that Radjab distinguished between the people who stuck to the tenets enjoining abstention from

fighting during the month and those who violated the sanctity of the month by fighting. Finally, the month was called *al-‘atīra* because the sacrifices of the ‘*atīra* were carried out during this month.

According to tradition, the month of Radjab was a time of devotional practices, exertions and fasting. Invocations against the iniquitous and the wrong-doers in this month were especially efficacious.

The opinions of the scholars of Islam as to the permission to continue these practices in Islam were divergent, controversial and even contradictory. The differences in their opinions are clearly exposed in the utterances attributed to the Prophet in the collections of *ḥadīth*.

An utterance attributed to the Prophet and recorded in the early collection of ‘Abd al-Razzāk (d. 211/826) says that the Prophet approved of the sacrifice of the ‘*atīra* which the people used to practice in Radjab. The Prophet said, “Do it, and name it *al-radjība*.”

The utterance of the Prophet enjoining sacrifice of the ‘*atīra* and naming it the *radjība* is opposed by an utterance attributed to the Prophet enjoining annulment of the sacrifice of the firstlings and the sacrifice of the Radjabī ‘*atīra*. It is recorded in the same collection and is formulated plainly: *lā fara‘a wa-lā ‘atīra* “there is no [sacrifice] of the firstlings nor of the ‘*atīra*.”

This prohibitive tradition was, however, changed by the interpretation given to it by al-Shāfi‘ī: there is no sacrifice of the ‘*atīra* nor of the *fara‘a* “as an obligatory practice”, adds al-Shāfi‘ī. This comment of his changes, of course, the meaning of the tradition and its significance.

In the same way was interpreted the utterance of the Prophet *‘alā ablī kullī baytīn an yadbbahū shātīn fī kullī radjabīn wa-fī kullī adḥā shātīn*. The expression *‘alā kullī ablī baytīn* is, however, interpreted not as an enjoinder but only as a recommendation. The utterance has to be understood as recommendation for every family group to sacrifice a ewe during every month of Radjab and to sacrifice a ewe on every *adḥā* celebration.

An utterance of the Prophet about the *‘atīra* permits the sacrifice of the *‘atīra* in any month of the year and enjoins the practice of charity, dividing among the poor the meat of the slaughtered beasts. It is obvious that the sanctity of Radjab was, according to this tradition, fairly limited, or even abolished, while the advice of charity was especially stressed.

A tradition reported on the authority of *‘Ā’ishā* says that the Prophet enjoined the slaughter of the firstling of the herd numbering fifty, which tallies with the prevalent *Djāhili* practice. But another tradition attributed to the Prophet says, “Practice the sacrifice of the *fara‘a* if you want”. Thus the sacrifice was left to the discretion of the believer.

A peculiar utterance of the Prophet turns the sacrifice of the *fara‘a* into a voluntary practice, with a special reservation of the Prophet changing the aim of the practice. The Prophet permitted the practice but remarked that it would be preferable to feed the camel until it grows up and to ride it on expeditions and raids for the cause of God; similarly, it is preferable to feed the ewe until it grows up, to sacrifice it and to divide the meat among the poor.

Similarly, the utterance of the Prophet in which he is said to have approved of the *fara‘a*, saying *al-fara‘a ḥakk*, was considerably changed by the added reservation that it would be better to feed the destined sacrificial animal until it grows up and can be used

to ride on it in a raid for the cause of God (in the case of a camel) or to slaughter it (in the case of a ewe) and give the meat as charity to a needy widow.

Scholars of Islam stress that the slaughter of animals in Raḍjab was continued in the first period of Islam and was only later abrogated. Al-Ḳhaṭṭābī (d. 388/998) considered the *ʿatīra* compatible with the principles of Islam: it was in the period of Islam sacrificed to God in contradiction to the D̲jāhīlī *ʿatīra*, which was sacrificed to the idols. There is indeed a report saying that Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/729) used to slaughter the *ʿatīra* in Raḍjab.

Strictly orthodox scholars stressed that there is no valid tradition concerning the virtues of Raḍjab. There were, however, scholars, especially from among the pious and devoted, who favoured the widely-circulated popular traditions allegedly uttered by the Prophet, emphasising the virtues of Raḍjab and encouraging the carrying out of the various practices considered laudable and right. The Prophet is said to have named Raḍjab “the month of God”, *shahr Allāh*, because it was the month of the people of the *ḥaram* (i.e. the people of Mecca) who were called *āl Allāh*. The problem of the sacrifices during the month of Raḍjab was only one aspect of the disputes among the Muslim scholars as to the ritual practices performed in the Muslim community in that month.

A significant tradition ascribed to the Prophet singled out the peculiar sanctity of three months of the year: “Raḍjab is the month of God, Shaʿbān is my month and Ramaḍān is the month of my people.” As the month of Raḍjab was put on par with the two other months there was an obvious tendency to competition between these holy months regarding the rewards of the ritual practices performed during these months, the exceptional position of certain nights of the months and the prayers during these months. The competition between Raḍjab and Shaʿbān is clearly presented in a tradition reported on the authority of Zayd b. Aslam. The Prophet was informed about people fasting during Raḍjab. He remarked, “How far are they from the virtues of the people

fasting during Sha‘bān!” Zayd observed, “Most of the fasting of the Prophet, except in Ramaḍān, was in Sha‘bān.” The partisans of Raḍjab quoted a report of Ibn al-‘Abbās saying that the Prophet used to fast so many days in Raḍjab that his Companions did not think that he would break his fast; and he used to break his fast so that they doubted whether he would resume it.

As against the people venerating Sha‘bān, the partisans of Raḍjab had recourse to utterances attributed to the Prophet in which the fasting of Raḍjab was recommended and very high rewards were promised to people who were fasting in it. The Prophet is said to have stated that the month of Raḍjab is of a high position and that the good deeds of the believer gain multiple rewards. He who fasts one day in Raḍjab is in the position of a believer who would fast a year. He who fasts nine days, for him the gates of Hell are closed; he who fasts eight days, for him the eight doors of Paradise are opened; he who fasts ten days, God will fulfill for him every wish; he who fasts fifteen days, a herald will announce from Heaven that God forgave him every sin which he had committed in the past. In the month of Raḍjab God carried Nūḥ (Noah) in the ark; he fasted during Raḍjab, and bade his people to fast during it, thus expressing their gratitude to God for their salvation.

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal said that he had in his possession a tradition recording the rewards for fasting of every day of Raḍjab; he considered, however, the *ḥadīth* a forged one. The fasting of the whole month of Raḍjab was nevertheless frowned upon and sometimes forbidden in order not to create a similarity with Ramaḍān. The practices of fasting during Raḍjab were censured by Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and people of the *ṣaḥāba*, says Ibn Taymiyya.

Some nights of Raḍjab are considered to be replete with God's graces. In the first night of Raḍjab, God will grant every supplication of the believer. It is one of the five chosen

nights in the year. Another prayer strongly censured by Ibn Taymiyya was the prayer practised in the midst of Rādjab called *ṣalāt Umm Dāwūd*.

A night highly praised by those who observed Rādjab was the night of the *ṣalāt al-rahbā'ib* “the night of the prayer for extensive and desirable gifts”; it starts on the eve of the first Friday of Rādjab; the prayers and supplications contained hundreds of invocations, prostrations, *rak'as* and recitations of some *sūras* of the Qur'ān. The believer is requested to fast on the Thursday preceding this night. A night of Rādjab distinguished by the rich rewards is the night of the twenty-seventh of Rādjab. The believer spending this night in vigils: praying; thanking God; repeating a hundred times the various phrases of gratitude, the oneness of God, invocations and supplications; performing prostrations and *rak'as*; and reading a *sūra* of the Qur'ān and fasting the next day, will be highly rewarded by God; he will attain God's grace as if he fasted a hundred years and practiced vigils for a hundred years. On that night, Muḥammad was sent as a prophet.

The significant events connected with the life of the Prophet which allegedly happened in Rādjab turn the month into one of the most distinctive periods of the year. According to a tradition, the mother of the Prophet conceived him on the first evening of Rādjab; another tradition claims that he was born in Rādjab. Some traditions assert that the event of the *laylat al-mi'rādj* occurred in Rādjab. Other traditions claim that the date of the *isrā'* was the twenty-seventh day of Rādjab.

The struggle of the orthodox scholars against those practices of Rādjab widely approved by pious ascetics and Sūfīs was not entirely successful. These practices have survived and form until the present time an essential part of Muslim popular belief and ritual.

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