

Surah 2, Al-Baqarah Medina 87

The Quranic Text & Yusuf Ali's Translation:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِةِ... ^{up}

2: 189. They ask thee concerning the new moons.

... قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ ...

Say: they are but signs to mark fixed periods of time in (the affairs of) men, and for pilgrimage.

... وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَى ...

It is no virtue if ye enter your houses from the back; it is virtue if ye fear God.

... وَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٨٩﴾

Enter houses through the proper doors, and fear God, that ye may prosper.

Transliteration *Yas'alu_naka 'anil ahillah(ti), qul hiya mawa_qitu linna_si wal hajj(i), wa laisal birru bi anta'tul buyu_ta min zuhu_riha_ wa*

*la_kinnal birra manit taqa_, wa'tul buyu_ta min
abwa_biha_, wattaqulla_ha la'allakum **tuflihu_n(a)**.*

Muhammad Asad's Translation:

2: 189

THEY WILL ASK thee about the new moons.
Say: "They indicate the periods for [various doings of] mankind, including the pilgrimage."
165 However, piety does not consist in your entering houses from the rear, [as it were,] but truly pious is he who is conscious of God."
166 Hence, enter houses through their doors, and remain conscious of God, so that you might attain to a happy state.

Muhammad Pickthall's translation:

They ask thee, (O Muhammad), of new moons.
Say: **They**

are fixed seasons for mankind and for the pilgrimage. It
is not righteousness that ye go to houses by
the backs thereof
(as do the idolaters at certain seasons), but
the righteous man
is he who ward off (evil). So go to houses by
the gates
thereof, and observe your duty to Allah, that ye
may
be successful

Ali's comments:

202. There were many superstitions
connected with the New Moon, as

there are to the present day. We are told to disregard such superstitions.

As a measure of time, where the lunar calendar is used, the New Moon is one great sign, for which people watch with eagerness. Muslim festivals, including the Pilgrimage, are fixed by the appearance of the New Moon.

The Arabs, among other superstitions, had one which made them enter their houses by the back door during or after the Pilgrimage. This is disapproved, for there is no virtue in any such artificial restrictions. All virtue proceeds from the love and fear of God.

203. This is a Muslim proverb now, and much might be written about its manifold meanings. A few may be noted here.

- If you enter a society, respect its manners and customs.
- If you want to achieve an object honorably, go about it openly and not "by a backdoor".

- Do not beat about the bush. If you wish success in an undertaking, provide all the necessary instruments for it.

The subject of the New Moon provides a good transition between the Ramadan fast, which begins and ends with the New Moon, the Pilgrimage, whose ten days commence with the New Moon, and the War which Islam had to wage in self-defence against the Pagans, who wanted to exclude them from the Pilgrimage after they had driven them out of the house and home.

Amatulla's comments:

1. Lunar phases are given as a measure of period for human activities and sacred duties.
2. Here again the Quran is placing the intent or purpose of an action as the priority. Rituals have no meaning if the

right intention is not there. Rigorous rites and rituals should be taken only in light of their purpose, if due to a circumstance or a mindset change of a people or culture at different time, if a particular ritual fails to achieve its objective, it should be discarded. This Quran is qualifying again and again regarding performance of a ritual with this kind of injunction. A believer then must be aware about the ultimate purpose of all actions.

Muhammad Asad's comments

165 – The reference, at this stage, to lunar months arises from the fact the observance of several of the religious

obligations instituted by Islam – like the fast of Ramadan, or the pilgrimage to Mecca (which is dealt with in verses

196-203) – is based on the lunar calendar, in which the months rotate through the seasons of the solar year. This fixation on the lunar calendar results in a continuous variation of the seasonal circumstances in which those religious observances are performed periodical increase and the decrease of the hardship involved.

In addition.....by lunar months has a bearing on the tide and ebb of the oceans, as well as on human physiology (e.g., a woman's courses – a subject dealt with later on this surah).

166 I.e., true piety does not consist in approaching questions of faith through a "back door", as it were - that is, 'through mere

observance of the forms and periods set for the performance of various religious duties (cf 2:177). However important these forms and time-limits may be in themselves, they do not fulfil their real purpose unless every act is approached through its spiritual "front door", that is, through God-consciousness. Since, metonymically, the word bab ("door") signifies "a means of access to, or of attainment of, a thing" (see Lane I, 272), the metaphor of "entering a house through its door" is often used in classical Arabic to denote a proper approach to a problem (Razi).