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Ramadan culture in modern Cairo

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CHAPTER TWO

PRESCRIPTIONS ON RAMADAN ACTIVITIES AND LEISURE IN ISLAM

The holy month of Ramadan is very important for every practicing Muslim. The word 'Ramadan' is derived from an Arabic word to mean intense heat, scorched ground, and shortness of rations. It is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is considered the most venerated and blessed month of the Islamic year. It was in 610 A.D. when prophet Muhammed is said to have received revelations from God that later became Islam's holy book, the Koran. The Koran *surat al-Baqara* 2:185 states that it was in the month of Ramadan that the Koran was revealed as guidance to mankind.²⁶ Another verse of the Koran *surat al-Qadr* 97:1 states that it was revealed 'on the night of decree' which Muslims generally observe on the night of 26-27 Ramadan.²⁷ The revelation of the holy book is not the only reason why Ramadan became a valued month for Muslims. It is also the month during which Muslims on March 17, 624 CE won in the battle of Badr against the unbelieving Quraish in Mecca (Wagtendonk, 1968). The victory was attributed to divine intervention and the ingenious war strategies implemented under the guidance of the Prophet. According to Wagtendonk (1968:80), *surat al-Baqara* 2:185 accounts as 'clear signs of the Guidance and Salvation' reflects on the importance of Ramadan in relation to the Koran and Muslims' victory in the battle of Badr.

One of the basic practices of Ramadan and one of the five key pillars in Islam is *sawm* or fasting.²⁸ However, it is important to note that the holy month is not only about fasting but also making positive amends that benefit oneself and the Muslim community

²⁶ All quotations from the Koran are from Khatib's (1986) translation of the holy book. The translation has the added bonus that it was authorized by al-Azhar religious institution.

²⁷ According to tradition, this night occurs on one of the odd-numbered nights of the last ten days of Ramadan, most probably the twenty-seventh night. It is called the Night of Decree because all Divine Decrees concerning life, death, provision, calamities or good fortune for the whole year descend to the earth's heaven (Khatib, 1986). More information on this special night will be presented later on in the chapter.

²⁸ The five pillars of Islam or the five duties incumbent on every Muslim are: *Shahada* (profession of faith), *Salah* (ritual prayer five times each day), *Zakah* (Islamic tax or tithing), *Sawm* (fasting during Ramadan) and *Hajj* (Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during life).

or *umma*. Thus one is encouraged to start or intensify participation in prayers, read the Koran, engage in charity work to help unprivileged communities etc. Many Islamic prescriptions stress that Ramadan is the time of giving and mercy, whereby during this month Allah blesses the believers with forgiveness and great reward. The sacred nature of Ramadan provides a huge opportunity for Muslims to improve themselves and their communities and to gain countless bounties and blessings from God. Ramadan can thus be viewed as the time for achievement which is accomplished by positive change in behavior (Mahmood, 1969).

This chapter will provide a theological overview of what is said in Islamic prescriptions about the month of Ramadan, fasting and other activities that Muslims are encouraged to participate in or abstain from during the holy month. It will also provide traditional formal Sunni orthodoxy's stance on free time, recreation, relaxation and those activities or spaces that are specified as *haram* (prohibited).²⁹ This chapter will conclude with key issues rooted in Islamic scriptures, namely motherhood, femininity and modesty that are key determinants in women's access to leisure time and space.

PRESCRIPTIONS ON RAMADAN ACTIVITIES

1. Koran, *Hadith* & *Fiqh*: Theological Basics of Islam

The basis of Islamic theology is the Koran and the *hadith*. The Koran literally 'the recitation' is the main religious text of Islam which is considered by Muslims as the words of God (Mahmood, 1969).³⁰ Islam holds that the Koran was revealed to Muhammed by the angel Jibril (Gabriel) over a period of 23 years, with some later messages replacing earlier ones (Fisher, 1997). The prevailing traditional view is that most of the Koran was written down by Muhammed's companions while he was alive,

²⁹ By traditional formal Sunni orthodoxy I mean the dominant form of normative Islam in Egypt. It is important to be aware that there is no official central authority in Islam, much as it is often claimed or suggested. For brevity's sake I will use in the chapter phrases like 'Islam holds' or 'What Islam says about' to imply the dominant form of normative Islam in Egypt.

³⁰ Many names have been attributed to the Koran, each bearing a certain significance, among which are: *al-Furqan* (the distinguisher or separator between righteousness and evil), *Kalam Allah* (the Word of God), *al-Kitab* (the Book), *al-Nur* (the Light), *al-Huda* (the Guidance) and *al-Dhikr* (the Remembrance or the Utterance).

and the prime method of transmission was oral.³¹ The Koran consists of 114 chapters of varying lengths, each known as a *sura* (pl. *suwar*). Chapters are classed as Meccan or Medinan, depending on which place the verses were revealed. Chapter titles are derived from a name or quality discussed in the text, or from the first letters or words of the *sura*. Muslims believe that Muhammed, on God's command, gave the chapters their names. Generally, longer chapters appear earlier in the Koran, while the shorter ones appear later. The chapter arrangement is thus not connected to the sequence of revelation. Each *sura* is formed from several *ayat* (verses), which originally means a sign or miracle sent by God. There is a crosscutting division into 30 parts, *ajza*, each containing two units called *ahzab*, each of which is divided into four parts (*rub` al-hizb*). The Koran is also divided into seven stations (*manazil*).

The 'miracle' of the Koran can be summed up in three main points. It is believed to offer the essential and eternal guidance for humans as ordained by Allah.³² It has drawn out a 'complete way of life' through dealing with the events and incidents that took place as it was revealed (Ali, 1998:1). The holy book touches on individual and social matters such as inheritance, kinship and overall forms of human interactions. The miracle of the Koran lies also in its eloquence and rhetoric excellence (Khatib, 1986). 'Inimitability' is the theological and literary term for the matchless nature of the Koranic discourse. Muslim *`ulama* (community of legal scholars of Islam and the *Shari`a*) believe that the insuperable literary style of the Koran is its main proof of its divine origin that cannot be matched by human endeavor (Mahmood, 1969). Furthermore, it is often believed that the holy book includes prophesies on scientific theories and discoveries which is interpreted to prove the divine origin of the Koran. This scientific knowledge covers various subjects including creation, astronomy, the animal and vegetables kingdom, and human reproduction.³³

The prescriptions from the Koran are complemented and specified by the *sunna* (pl. *sunnan*) or prophet Muhammed's path and customs. The *sunna* represents a vast

³¹ For detailed information on the assemblage, ordering and recording of the textual material of the Koran, see the 'collection of the Koran' in McAuliffe et al Encyclopedia (2006).

³² Koran *surat al-Baqara* 2:2

³³ For more elaborate reading on scientific knowledge in the Koran, see 'Koran and Science' in McAuliffe et al Encyclopedia (2006).

collection of speeches and actions by the Prophet that serves as a set of guidelines of behavior to believing Muslims (Leemhuis, 1984). The term *sunna* is usually confused and used interchangeably with the term *hadith*. The *hadith* or tradition is an account of what the Prophet is believed to have said or done, or of his implicit endorsement of something said or done in his presence (Bearman et al, 2005). Burton (1994: ix) distinguishes between *sunna* and *hadith* in a clear manner by stating that the term *hadith* refers to a 'document, whereas the term *sunna* refers to the usage described in such a document'.

The *hadith* consists of two sections: the chain of authorities (*isnad, sanad*), and the text proper (*matn*)-and are stratified into one of the four major parts: *sahih* (sound), *hasan* (good), *da`if* (weak), or *saki* (infirm) (Bearman et al, 2005). Of the numerous collections put together, seven classifieds (assembled according to topic) or *musannaf* works gained particular popularity among Muslims, these are the *ahadith* of: Imam al-Bukhari (HB), the Sahih of Muslim (HM) and the Sunnan works of Abu Dawud (HA), Ahmad, al-Tirmidhi, an-Nasa' and Ibn Maja.³⁴ Especially the works of Bukhari and Muslim have gained particular popularity among Muslims in the Arab World. In Egypt most `ulama and research respondents referred to *ahadith* from Bukhari, Muslim and Abu Dawud.

According to Kazi (1992), particularly the works of Bukhari and Muslim are considered to be reliable and are termed correct, when it comes to authenticity and respect. Kazi states (1992:12) that 'all that was humanly possible for ensuring the authenticity of the *ahadith* was completed by the third century Hegira...no other religion, nation, party or even small group of people can parallel what the early Muslims did to ensure the authenticity of *ahadith* and the *sunna*'.³⁵

While the Koran and the *sunna* form the theological bases of Islam, these scriptures do not provide comprehensive guidelines that constitute a legal system. Accordingly, the science of *fiqh*, jurisprudence, was developed based on interpretation of the texts within the legal framework. *Fiqh*, the science of religious law in Islam covers

³⁴ For the remainder of the chapter I will be using the abbreviations of HB, HM, HA in reference to the *ahadith* of Bukhari, Muslim and Abu Dawud, which are the most popular references in Egypt.

³⁵ The year of the Hegira, 622 AD, is the starting point for the Muslim era and marks Prophet Muhammed's emigration from Mecca to Medina.

all aspects of religious, political and civil life (Bearman et al, 2005). In addition to the laws regulating ritual and religious observances or *`ibadat*, containing orders and prohibitions, it includes the whole field of family law, the law of inheritance, of property and of contracts and obligations, in a word provisions for all the legal questions that arise in social life (*mu`amalat*); it also includes criminal law and procedure, and finally constitutional law and laws regulating the administration of the state and the conduct of war (Bearman et al, 2005). Many key issues related to religious observance and behavior in Ramadan are rooted in *fiqh*. By the end of the third century after the Hegira, several schools were established: Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki and Shafi`i.³⁶ These four schools share most of their rulings, but differ on the particular *ahadith* they accept as authentic and the weight they give to analogy or reason (*qiyas*) in deciding difficulties. Most Sunni Egyptian Muslims follow the Shafi`i school rulings.

The upcoming sections in this chapter will present the most important Ramadan themes relating to the holy month and those issues that are of relevance to the research subjects. Hence my choices of Koran verses, *ahadith* and *fiqh* primarily depended on those that offer guidelines on the virtues of fasting, encouraged practices during the holy month and those that may be sources of contestations among Muslims.

2. Ramadan Timeline

Since Muslims use a lunar calendar of 354 days, the holy month gradually moves through all four seasons. When it falls in the summer, the period of fasting is much longer than in the shortest days of winter. The commencement and duration of the holy month varies from one country to the other and is a topic of controversy among contemporary Muslims.

³⁶ The Hanafiyya school is the first of the four orthodox Sunni schools of law. It is distinguished from the other schools through its placing less reliance on mass oral traditions as a source of legal knowledge. It developed the legal exegesis of the Koran through a method of analogical reasoning known as *qiyas*. The Shafi`iyya was the third school of Islamic jurisprudence. According to the Shafi`i school the paramount sources of legal authority are the Koran and the Sunna. Of less authority are the *ijma* of the community and thought of scholars (*ijtihad*) exercised through reason (*qiyas*). The scholar must interpret the ambiguous passages of the Koran according to the consensus of the Muslims, and if there is no consensus, according to *qiyas*.

One prescription states that the arrival of Ramadan is based on the sighting of the new crescent moon (*hilal*), when seen (*ru'ya*) by only one person. Ibn Umar is considered to have said: 'The people were looking for the new moon and when I reported to the Messenger of Allah that I had seen it, he fasted and ordered the people to fast'.³⁷ However if the sky is unclear and physical sighting of the crescent is inapplicable, Muslims are then encouraged to complete the month of Sha`ban and consider it as consisting of thirty days.³⁸ Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet instructed: 'Fast after you have seen it (the new crescent) and end the fast (at the end of the month) when you see it. If it is hidden from you, then wait until the thirty days of Sha`ban have passed'.³⁹

There are also *ahadith* in which another position is held, and that is founded on mathematical and astronomical calculations of the beginning and the end of Ramadan. Ibn Umar reported the Prophet as saying in connection with Ramadan: 'Do not fast till you see the new moon, and do not break fast till you see it; but if the weather is cloudy calculate about it'.⁴⁰ Ubaidullah also narrated that the Prophet made a mention of Ramadan and said: 'The month may consist of twenty-nine days, and it may be thus, thus and thus, and (he further) said: Calculate it, but he did not say thirty'.⁴¹

Accordingly, the holy month can consist of twenty-nine days, instead of thirty, and its start based on the sighting of the new crescent may vary from one location to the other as seen by one person and/or calculated astronomically. The majority of *`ulama* state that it does not matter if the new moon has been sighted in a different location. In other words, after the new moon is seen anywhere in the world, it becomes obligatory for all Muslims to begin fasting, as the Prophet is narrated to have said: 'Fast due to its sighting and break the fast due to its sighting'. This *hadith* is interpreted to mean that if someone sees the moon in any place, then that will be a sighting for all of the people. Another opinion among the Hanafiyya and the Shafi`iyya, every 'country' (or territory) is to take into consideration its own sighting and not necessarily to follow the sighting of others.

In Egypt, Ramadan starts according to claims of crescent sighting in the country

³⁷ See for example HA 12:2312; 13:2319.

³⁸ Sha`ban is the eighth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, which precedes Ramadan.

³⁹ HB 3:31:130

⁴⁰ HM 6:2363

⁴¹ HM 6:2366

and does not depend on Saudi Arabia's Higher Judiciary Council sighting of the moon. Some `ulama, especially in Egypt, have long disagreed with the Saudi Arabia's disregard of astronomy by depending on 'inaccurate' sightings that often contradict scientific calculations (Saleh, 2007).

3. *Niya*

Niya or intention is a key point repeated continuously in Islamic prescriptions especially *ahadith*, and by Egyptian Muslims in terms of defining the validity of one's fasting and other deeds. As will be presented later in the book, Muslims believe that one's intention determines leisure choices and, simultaneously, leisure behavior serves as an indicator of intention.⁴² For example, a person who is continuously performing prayers reflects his 'pious intention' to get closer to Allah.

The Koran stresses on the condition of sincerity (*ikhlas*) for Muslims practicing their faith: 'Yet, they were only ordained to worship God, making religion pure for Him, upright; observing prayer, and paying the purification dues. That is the upright religion' *surat al-Bayyina* 98:5. The Prophet is also cited to have said: 'Actions are judged according to the intention behind them, and for everyone is what he intended'.⁴³

In relation to fasting, the *ahadith* show the importance of *niya* in determining its validity. This intention must be made before *fajr* or dawn and during every night of Ramadan. This point is based on a *hadith* by Hafsa who reported that the Prophet said: 'Whoever does not determine to fast before *fajr* will have no fast' (that is, it won't be accepted).⁴⁴

In several *ahadith* it is stated that one's intention in serving Allah, is not only restricted to fasting, but includes other activities such as *hajj* or pilgrimage to Mecca and charity.⁴⁵ Moreover, it is believed that God rewards good deeds according to intention.⁴⁶

⁴² The notion of *niya* will be elaborated on later in chapters five and seven that deal with how piety and authenticity are contested in contemporary times.

⁴³ See for example, HB 1:2:51

⁴⁴ HA 13:2448

⁴⁵ HB 1:2:25

⁴⁶ See for example, HB 1:2:51

It is also reported in some *ahadith* that God punishes those who acted upon sinful intention.⁴⁷

4. Fasting in the Koran

The Koranic verses that refer to Ramadan are not many, in comparison to verses that relate to other pillars of Islam such as ritual prayer and alms-giving. *Surat al-Baqara* (2), verses 183-187, widely refers to the practice of fasting in the holy book. These verses date from the time when the prophet Muhammed stayed in Medina and came into contact with Jewish people (Goitein, 1966). The Jews fasted on the Day of Atonement to commemorate Moses' descent after his second sojourn on Mount Sinai. According to one tradition, when Muhammed was introduced to Jews' fast, he inquired about what it meant for them. They replied that the Day of Atonement was the sacred day upon which God had liberated Israel from its enemy. As an expression of appreciation, Moses had introduced a fasting day. To this Muhammed responded by specifying the *`ashura*, the tenth day of the Islamic New Year, corresponding to the Jewish Day of Atonement, as a compulsory fasting day for Muslims. After Muhammed broke off his relations with the Jews about a year later, he eliminated obligatory fasting on the *`ashura* and replaced it by a fasting period for a fixed number of days. This is what the words 'for days numbered' refer to in *surat al-Baqara* 2: 184. Later, the fasting of 'days numbered' in its turn was replaced by fasting during the whole month of Ramadan. Gradually, however, fasting during Ramadan gained ground over fasting 'for days numbered', and Ramadan became a sacred month. The unique character of Ramadan may account for the fact that it is the only month mentioned explicitly in the Koran.

QS 2:183. O you who believe, the fast is decreed for you as it was decreed for those who were before you-perhaps then you will become venerated-

It is told here that fasting is prescribed for the Muslim believers, just as it has been commanded for other people before. This is one of the verses in the holy book that affirm the idea of fasting in Islam is not a new one but rather a continuation of earlier

⁴⁷ See for example, HB 1:2:30

revelations. According to commentaries provided by Ali (1998) on this verse, the principle of self-denial in Muslim fasting is not a new one. This is one of the verses in the Koran that draws attention of the Muslim idea that Islam is a continuation of earlier revelations and holds similar rituals as they do.⁴⁸

QS 2:184. For days numbered. But he who is sick or on a journey, (can then fast) a number of other days. As for those who can afford with hardship, (there is) redemption in feeding an indigent. But it is better still for him who does good of his own accord; that you fast is better for you, if you but know.

When fasting was decreed for the first time, able people were allowed to break it, granted that they fed one poor person. There was a special kind of ransom (*fidya*) to be paid, in the form of food to a needy person. However, this verse was abrogated and replaced by the verse that follows; whereby no exception was made for able people except when they were sick or travelling more than eighty-seven miles (Khatib, 1986).⁴⁹ Hence, while the Muslim fast may appear to be stricter than other fasts, it also provides exceptions for special conditions. In the verse it states, elderly people or those with special health circumstances are not obliged to fast. The Shafi'i would include pregnant women and nursing mothers. The verse closes by emphasizing that fasting is beneficial for believers, even though they may not be aware of this.

QS 2: 185. The month of Ramadan in which the Koran was sent down, a guidance to the people, clear signs of the guidance and of al Furqan. Hence, whoever of you witnesses the month shall have to fast it; whoever of you is sick or on a journey, (let him then fast) a number of other days, for God desires for you ease, and desires not for you privation. You shall complete the number (of days decreed), and you shall glorify God for having you guided; peradventure you will be grateful.

This verse makes clear that fasting is prescribed not in any month but specifically during Ramadan, when the Koran was first bestowed unto mankind and in which right and wrong became distinct (Khatib, 1986). This first revelation occurred during a special night, the *laylat al-qadr*, during prophet Muhammed's first revelation which occurred

⁴⁸ See for example, Koran *surat al-Baqara* 2:136 and *surat al-'Imran* 3:67

⁴⁹ Initially fasting consisted of complete abstention from food, drink and sexual relations until sunset, after which only one meal was permitted before fasting was taken up again until the next sunset. The high strict level of his kind of fasting is probably the reason why the Koran initially permitted breaking the fast in any situation and pay ransom (Wagtendonk, 1968).

during one of his regular retreat to Mount Hira in Mecca. The uniqueness of this night is explained in *surat al-Qadr* 97:1-5 that describes it as the ‘night of power’ that is ‘better than a thousand months’. More discussion on the role of the importance of this night in relation to Ramadan practices will be covered later in the chapter. In getting back to *ayah* 185 in *surat al-Baqara*, the idea that those unhealthy or travelling persons are not required to perform fast is re-stressed. Ali (1998) notes that the verse closes with an emphasizes that humans should see Ramadan not as a burden but as a blessing due to the facilities and concessions given and the spiritual significance of the month; accordingly mankind should be grateful.

QS 2: 186. And if My servants ask you concerning Me, surely I am nigh. I will answer the call of the supplicant when he entreats Me. Hence, respond to Me, and let them believe in Me, that they may be guided aright.

This verse was, based on exegetes, revealed to prophet Muhammed after he was asked how close God is and the efficacy of private supplications (*du`a*). People were wondering whether they could pray to God in seclusion or if He was too far to respond to their calls. The answer to that question is thus found in the above quoted verse that states that there is no mediation between God and His people (Khatib, 1986). So, whenever anyone calls for God or seeks His help, He shall be responsive without any intercession or mediation if the supplicant is truthful and genuine. Wagtendonk (1968) argues that the *du`a* and the practice of *i`tikaf* (seclusion in the mosque) are thus increasingly encouraged and practiced in Ramadan.

QS 2:187. It is lawful to you to consort with your wives on the night of the fast. They are a raiment for you and you are a raiment for them. God knows you have betrayed yourselves, but He has relented towards you and has relieved you. So, now have intercourse with them, and seek what God has decreed for you. And eat and drink till the white thread become distinct to you from the black thread of the dawn. Then complete the fast till night fall, and do not consort with them wile you cleave to the mosques. These are god’s bounds, so approach them not, Thus God elucidates His signs to mankind; perhaps they will be god-fearing.

The first part of the verse specifies the relations between husbands and wives during the fasting period. Fasting does not only involve abstinence of food and drink but also sexual

intercourse. Intercourse is permitted though during the nights of Ramadan. However, this has not always been the case, as early Muslims refused to have sex with their partners for the entire month (Asad, 1980). Similarly, early Muslims used to eat one time a day when they broke their fast. According to Asad (1980) this verse corrected these misunderstandings but stating clearly that food, drink and sexual encounters are permitted limitlessly from dusk till dawn. Another important point that Ali (1998) points out in reference to marital relationships in that verse is that men and women are encouraged to be sources of ‘mutual support, mutual comfort and mutual protection, fitting into each other as a garment (or a raiment) fits the body’ (Ali, 1998: 70). This verse also addresses the daily length of the fast. The effects and colors of dawn described here specify when the fast begins. The fast ends till sunset or till the ‘night fall’. Finally, the verse presents the recommended activities during the last third of the month. It is reported that the Prophet used to devote himself to prayer and mediation in the mosque or *masjid* during the last 10 days in Ramadan (Asad, 1980). And this refers to the practice of *i`tikaf* as discussed in the earlier verse.

5. Fasting in the *Hadith*

While the Koran verses cover important points on fasting, they are few and incomprehensive when it comes to specifications outlining rewards of fasting and conditions for ensuring a valid fast.

5.1 Rewards of fasting

Several *ahadith* state that Allah will provide special rewards or *hasanat* for all those who fasted during Ramadan in obedience to God. ‘He has left his food, drink and desires for My sake. The fast is for Me. So I will reward (the fasting person) for it and the reward of good deeds is multiplied ten times’.⁵⁰

It is also noted that those who successfully complete the fast will take special pleasures every day they break their fasts and at the day of resurrection. Those Muslims

⁵⁰ HB 3:31:118

who fast with sincere intention or *niya* will enter through a special gate in Paradise named *Ar-Rayyan*. The Prophet is cited to have said ‘There is a gate in Paradise called *Ar-Rayyan*, and those who observe fasts will enter through it on the Day of Resurrection and none except them will enter through it. It will be said, ‘Where are those who used to observe fasts?’ They will get up, and none except them will enter through it. After their entry the gate will be closed and nobody will enter through it’.⁵¹ It is also stated in a number of *ahadith* that those who perform the fast out of earnest faith and in their attempt to gain God’s rewards, their sins will be forgiven. Abu Huraira reported prophet Muhammed as saying ‘He who observed the fasts of Ramadan with faith and seeking reward (from Allah), all his previous sins would be forgiven’.⁵²

Fasting with the intention of serving Allah, is reported in some *ahadith* to save one from ‘the Fire of Hell’⁵³ as the practice is believed to act as a ‘shield’ or a source of protection.⁵⁴ It is also stated that during the holy month the ‘gates of Paradise are opened and the gates of the (Hell) Fire are closed, and the devils are chained’.⁵⁵ Several *ahadith* also state that God holds high regards to those fasting that the odor coming out from a fasting person’s mouth is better than the smell of ‘musk’.⁵⁶

5.2 Conditions for ensuring a valid fast

Besides having sincere intention in fasting, there are other important conditions that ensure a valid fast. Fasting in Islam is not only restraining oneself from food, drink and sex, but also all limbs (*jawarih*) of the body (al-Husayni, 1975). It is recommended for Muslims to control the tongue from speaking insults and back-biting. When someone is insulted or assaulted by another person, he or she is supposed to reply by stating twice ‘I am fasting’. The eyes should try and restrain themselves from any unlawful gazes. The hand is expected not to steal or touch any *munkarat* or illegitimate things, like alcohol or gambling games. The ears should not listen to idle talk, gossip, lyrics and notes that

⁵¹ HB 3:31:120. Also see HB 5:57:18; HM 6:2569

⁵² HM 4:1664. Also see HB 3:31:125

⁵³ HM 6:2570;6:2571:6:2572

⁵⁴ HM 3:31:118; HM 6:2566

⁵⁵ HB 4:54:497

⁵⁶ HB 3:31:118; HM 6:2568

contain obscene and indecent things; the nose should fast also by not sniffing, smelling unlawful things. The feet should fast by not going to places where sinful acts are propagated. The curfew of the body and mind during the state of fasting enables the person who has fasted in the true spirit of Ramadan to have the necessary requirements to withstand the turbulence of life for the next eleven months (al-Husayni, 1975). Fasting is thus a state of mind that transcends the physical restraint.

Several narratives state that the most important thing in fasting is not merely physically restraining from the obvious food and drink, but the total commitment of one's body and soul. In one *hadith* reported by Abu Huraira, the Prophet is reported to have said: 'He who does not stop from false talk or stop from acting upon false talk, Allah will have no need that he abstain from his food and drink'.⁵⁷ In addition, Abu Said al Khudri reported the Prophet as saying: '...On the day you fast, do not use obscenity, nor yell at others, nor act ignorantly towards them. However, if anyone abuses you verbally or attempts to draw you to fight with him say I am fasting, two times'.⁵⁸

Moreover, some *ahadith* specify the terms of sexual relationship between husband and wife during the fasting month (Möller, 2005). Having sexual relations during fasting hours invalidates the fast. If a person commits this mistake he/she is obliged not only to make up for that day after Ramadan by fasting, but also make some specified compensations. The prescribed ways for compensations comprise of freeing a slave, fasting for two consecutive months or feeding sixty persons. The tradition adds that those who do not have the financial or physical means to compensate in these ways will not be obligated to perform them. It is however permitted for married couples to engage in sexual relations during Ramadan but in the non-fasting hours as discussed earlier in the Koran *surat al-Baqara* 2:187.

Some prescriptions note other conditions under which fasting become invalid. According to some, during the fast it is permitted to bath, gargle, brush the teeth, rub the hair with oil-if this is part of one's daily routine-apply kuhl, antimonium, on the eye-lids, and to vomit, as it bloodletting and tasting food so long as it is spat out again (Jeffery, 1962). Fasting will not be broken if water is also inhaled by mistake during ritual

⁵⁷ HB 3:31:127. See also for example HB 3:31:126 and HB 8:73:83.

⁵⁸ HM 6:2563. See also, HM 6:2562

purification or *wudu*' and if one accidentally swallows something. Even when one breaks the fast from absent-mindedness, by eating or having sexual contact, the fasting day remains valid, because: 'If any one forgets and eats or drinks, let him complete his fast, for it was Allah who caused him thus to eat or drink' (Jeffery 1962:100). Moreover, after one had intercourse and wakes up in the morning in an impure condition he/she may clean up immediately and continue with the fasting. This was in fact the way prophet Muhammed himself acted. If someone dies while still owing fasting days, due to a break in previous fasting or illness, a close inheritor fasting in his or her place can make up the lack.

6. The *Iftar* Meal

Iftar is the evening meal for breaking the daily fast during Ramadan. It is recommended for one to break his fast right after sunset or *maghrib*.⁵⁹ With reference to *sunnan* Abu Dawud the practice of hastening to break the fast in Ramadan is seen to differ with the practices of Christians and Jews during fasting periods.⁶⁰ Narrated Sahl bin Sad, the Prophet said: 'The people will remain on the right path as long as they hasten the breaking of the fast'.⁶¹

Traditionally, a date is the first thing to be consumed during *iftar* when the fast is broken. Narrated Salman ibn Amir, the Prophet said: 'When one of you is fasting, he should break his fast with dates; but if he cannot get any, then (he should break his fast) with water, for water is purifying'.⁶²

7. The *Sahur* Meal

The *sahur* is a light meal taken shortly before the break of dawn. There is consensus that this meal is a highly recommended *sunna*. The greatest *baraka* or blessing of *sahur* meal maybe that Allah engulfs those who partake in it with His forgiveness, shows His mercy on them, while His angels ask of Him to forgive and pardon them during the meal (al-

⁵⁹ See for example HB 3:31:178

⁶⁰ HA 13:2346

⁶¹ HB 3:31:178

⁶² HA 13:2348

Husayni, 1975). What reaches Allah when one is eating *sahur* meal in preparation of fasting, is the intent that one has made a genuine effort to obey Allah in fasting. This is why it is recommended to make intention with the *sahur* to emulate the Prophet; and to eat the food to gain strength and energy during fasting, so as to get the reward from Allah.

A number of narratives highlight the spiritual significance of the meal. Anas reported the Prophet as saying: ‘Take meal a little before dawn, for there is a blessing in taking meal at that time’.⁶³ Finally, Al-Irbad ibn Sariyya narrated, ‘The Apostle of Allah invited me to a meal shortly before dawn in Ramadan saying: Come to the blessed morning meal’.⁶⁴

8. *Laylat al-Qadr* and *I'tikaf*

The uniqueness of *laylat al-qadr* (Night of Power) has been described in the Koran *surat al-Qadr* 97:1-5 as noted earlier. In many *ahadith* it states that one of the many greatneses of the holy month is that this special night occurs during its period, where prayers are ‘better’ or worth more than any other times of the year. Abu Huraira relates that the Prophet said when one Ramadan came ‘A blessed month has arrived. Observing it in fasting is mandated on you (the believers). During this month, the gates of Paradise will be opened and the gates of Hellfire will be closed. The evil ones (*Shayatin*) will be handcuffed. In it there is one night, during which worship is better than worship in a thousand months. Whoever is denied its blessings has been denied the biggest blessing’.⁶⁵

Muslims are thus encouraged to establish ritual prayers during this night, where the ultimate reward is forgiveness of one’s sins. Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet said, ‘Whoever established prayers on the night of *Qadr* out of sincere faith and hoping for a reward from Allah, then all his previous sins will be forgiven; and whoever fasts in the month of Ramadan out of sincere faith, and hoping for a reward from Allah, then all his previous sins will be forgiven’.⁶⁶

The exact date of this prosperous night is not exactly known and *hadith* literature

⁶³ HM 6:2412

⁶⁴ HA 13:2337

⁶⁵ See for example, HB 3:31:125

⁶⁶ HB: 3:31:125

does not offer any specific date.⁶⁷ Some traditions say it occurs during one of the last odd nights in the last ten days of the holy month, while other *ahadith* specify the last seven nights and others state that this special night happens in the last three nights.⁶⁸ With such ambiguity, it is therefore advised for people to ‘seek’ this night.⁶⁹ Nowadays *laylat al-qadr* is celebrated in the night between the 26th and 27th of Ramadan (Wagtendonk 1968:83). In Egypt people commonly hold the opinion that this special night occurs on the 26th and 27th and, thus, carry out intensive prayers during these two nights.

The *i`tikaf* (retreat in the mosque) prayers is usually performed during the last ten days of Ramadan. Muslims in their efforts to ‘seek’ or search for *laylat al-qadr* actively engage in this pious exercise in the last ten nights of the month. It has been narrated that the Prophet used to practice *i`tikaf* in the last ten nights of Ramadan and used to say, ‘Look for the Night of *Qadr* in the last ten nights of the month of Ramadan’.⁷⁰ In the state of *i`tikaf*, a person can stand, sit, sleep, etc.; and there is not one particular form that this retreat must be carried out in; unlike the *salah* or prayers which has a specific form to it. The practice is based on worship and serious reflection. While it is preferable for people to seek *i`tikaf* in the mosque, many individuals especially women prefer to do it in the privacy of their homes. No *hadith* was found that prohibits women from conducting *i`tikaf* either the home or mosque.

9. Tarawih Prayers

Tarawih is derived from the Arabic root word *raaha*, which means to rest, relax and use as recreation. It is so called because the believers used to prolong it. After every four *raka`at* (to bow from the waist in the performance of the ritual prayers) they would stop for rest and relaxation and resume until *tarawih* was complete. These nightly supererogatory ritual prayers are carried out shortly after *salat al-`isha* (obligatory night prayer) and those who take part in it are believed to have their sins forgiven. Abu Huraira

⁶⁷ According to HB 1:2:46; HM 6:2624 the prophet Muhammed was about to announce day of *laylat al-qadr* when he was disturbed by some people fighting outside the mosque. In HB 3:32:240 it was narrated that the prophet stated that this ‘news was taken away; yet this may be for your (humans) own good’.

⁶⁸ For these different dates, see HB 1:12:777; HB 9:87:120; HM 6:2617; HB 3:32:240 and HM 6:2633-2634.

⁶⁹ HM 6:2619

⁷⁰ HB 3:32:237

narrated the Prophet as saying: ‘Whoever prayed at night in it (the month of Ramadan) out of sincere Faith and hoping for a reward from Allah, then all his previous sins will be forgiven’.⁷¹

The prophet Muhammed was the first to establish the *sunna* of congregational, *jama`a* prayer of *tarawih* at the mosque. He did not continue with this *sunna* as he was worried that the Muslim *umma* may mistake these prayers as obligatory. Aisha has been reported as saying: ‘The Messenger of Allah observed *tarawih* prayer in the mosque one night and people prayed with him. He repeated the following night and the number of participants grew. The companions congregated the third and fourth night, but the Messenger did not show up. In the morning he told them, I saw what you did last night, but nothing prevented me from joining you except my fear that it might be made mandatory on you in Ramadan’.⁷² It has also been related that Umar ibn Al-Khattab, second Caliph, went to the mosque at night in Ramadan and saw people praying individually in every corner of the mosque with a few in groups. He did not like the sight a bit. Umar is recited to have said, ‘I thought it would be better to gather these under one Imam’. So, he combined them under Ubayy ibn Ka`b and Tamim ad-Dari to alternate and lead the believers in eleven *raka`at* of night prayer. The next day `Umar was in the mosque which was full with *tarawih* prayers. He was delighted and said: Well, this is the best *bid`a* (innovation)’.⁷³

The number of *raka`at* performed in *tarawih* is subject to many controversies. The numbers mentioned are: 39, 29, 23, 19, 13, and 11 *raka`at* (Möller, 2005). The prophet Muhammed performed 11 *raka`at* according to the following account: Abu Salama ibn `Abd al-Rahman narrated that he once asked Aisha ‘How was the prayer of Allah's Apostle in Ramadan?’ She replied, ‘He did not pray more than eleven *raka`at* in Ramadan or in any other month. He used to pray four *raka`at* ---- let alone their beauty and length----and then he would pray four ----let alone their beauty and length ----and then he would pray three *raka`at*’.⁷⁴

Everybody is encouraged to attend *tarawih* prayers at the mosque, including

⁷¹ HB 3: 32: 226

⁷² HM 4:1666

⁷³ Umar's use of the word *bid`a* in this report has been presented and unjustifiably cited as justification for concocting up various so called good innovations.

⁷⁴ HB 3:32:230. See also HM 4:1607, Aisha stated that the Prophet performed 11 *raka`at*.

women, provided they are properly covered. The Prophet is quoted in a *hadith* to have said ‘If the wife of any one of you asks for permission to go to the mosque, do not stop her’.⁷⁵ However, when they attend the mosque they should not wear perfume, nor raise their voices, and or show their beauty.⁷⁶ In the Koran *surat al-Nur* 24:31, it states that women ‘...should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof...’ This verse means that women are expected to only display their outer garments, based on what the Prophet commanded some women, attending *Id* prayers. Umm 'Atiya is accounted to have said ‘O Messenger of Allah, some of us do not have the outer garment (*jilbab*). The Messenger of Allah told her to let a sister (who has more than one) give her one to wear’.⁷⁷

It is *sunna* that women pray behind the men in the rear lines. The Messenger has been reported as saying: ‘The best lines for men are the front lines and the worst lines for men are the rear lines. The best lines for women are the rear and the worst lines of women are the front line’.⁷⁸

10. Charity

The acts of charity and benevolence towards the less privileged is greatly emphasized in Islamic prescriptions; where it has been narrated that the Prophet once said that ‘charity is a necessity for every Muslim’. It is important to note that there are various kinds of charity activities in Islam. There is the obligatory *zakah* (almsgiving), where every wealthy adult Muslim must give 2.5% of his or her wealth in charity every year. Allah says: ‘O you who believe, expend of what We have provided you before a day comes when there shall be neither trafficking, nor friendship, nor intercession’ the unbelievers are the iniquitous’ *surat al-Baqara* 2:254. This is the least charity a Muslim must give every year. Then there is the regular, voluntary charity or *sadaqa* that can be given any time, from inviting others to a meal to giving money to a charitable organization.

While charity is desired all year long, during the holy month it stands in a special arena as exhibited in the *sunna* of prophet Muhammed. Ibn Abbas related: ‘The

⁷⁵ HB 827; HM 442

⁷⁶ HM 443

⁷⁷ HB 1: 8: 347

⁷⁸ HM 4: 0881

Messenger of Allah is the most benevolent among the people. His benevolence increases markedly during the month of Ramadan when the angel Jibril meets him every night of Ramadan, to rehearse with him the Holy Koran. The Messenger of Allah was more charitable with his good possessions than the moving winds that bring torrential rain'.⁷⁹

The increased generosity of the Prophet in Ramadan has several reasons and indications that must be acknowledged (al-Husayni, 1975). First, Ramadan is the month of mercy, where God blesses and forgives believers. Thus, those who are merciful and giving in Ramadan, God will be even more merciful and giving and will bestow upon them countless bounties and blessings.

Another purpose of fasting is commiseration with the hungry and deprived (al-Husayni, 1975). For one to undertake the fast of Ramadan is to be reminded of and to sympathize with the deprived everywhere. To sharpen the lesson, recommended to those who can afford is the voluntary act of feeding a neighbor, especially a poor one, every day of Ramadan, in further emphasis that Ramadan is the month of charity, of altruism, of neighborly love and kindness. It also prescribes, as personal atonement, the feeding of sixty persons for every day of Ramadan on which the fast is broken deliberately in defiance of God, and the feeding of two people (in addition to making up the fast on other days) if the fast is broken for legitimate reasons.

Moreover, charity teaches one to be generous and stave off miserliness (Antoun, 1968). This is especially the case since in the Koran it is stated that humans are attracted to wealth and its accumulation. 'Embellished for mankind is the love of lusts, of women, and children, and the accumulation of heaps of gold and silver, and the marked horses, and the cattle and tillage. But that is the enjoyment of the worldly life; but God, with him is the best of return' *surat al-`Imran* 3:14. Islamic traditions note that there is nothing wrong in being wealthy but it is important to avoid being greedy.⁸⁰

The Koran and *ahadith* state several conditions in relation to charity practices. One main purpose of charity is to hinder miserliness and to draw humans nearer to God. If instead the donor seeks fame, then the act of charity becomes worthless. Thus it is encouraged for one to provide charity in secret, as it is often better for the donor since it

⁷⁹ HB 3:31:126; HM 30:5718

⁸⁰ See for example, HB 6:60:469

protects against insincerity, and it is better for the recipient as it maintains his dignity. In the Koran *surat al-Baqara* 2:271 it says ‘If you give your offerings openly, it is well. But if you conceal them and grant them to the poor, it will be better for you and will atone for some of your ill-deeds. And God is cognizant of what you do’. Some *`ulama*, however, say that it is sometimes better to give charity publicly, so that others will also do the same. However, one must be on guard against any hypocritical notions.⁸¹ Thus what draws the line on how one should provide charity is more about intention in serving God rather than doing it as a display of one’s wealth.

Moreover, any good one has earned by giving in charity can be erased by mocking and hurting the recipient. In *surat al-Baqara* (2:264) it is stated, ‘O you who believe, do not annul your charity by reproach and harm, like him who spends his wealth in ostentation of people, and believes not in God and the Last Day’. According to Ali (1998) the high criteria for charity is that it must be done for Allah, must not be followed by reminders to the act of charity and, no reward should be expected nor should any kind of injury be caused to the recipient. For example, taking advantage of persons donated money to, and hurting them by making them feel ashamed of their poverty. Further it is encouraged for one to be humble, in terms of thinking little of their donation and avoiding pride.

Charity should be taken from the best of one’s wealth, and from what is dearest. In the Koran *surat al-Baqara* 2:267 it says ‘O you who believe, expend of the good things you have earned, and of what We have brought forth for you out of the earth, and seek not the bad to spend from it, when you would not take it from yourselves except that you connive at it. And know that God is Opulent, Laudable’. Khatib (1986) explains that this verse stresses on the idea that a person should give charity of what he or she has lawfully earned.

Finally, the best charity is believed to be the one which continuously benefits people, such as helping to build a school, a clinic, or a water supply system, or helping a

⁸¹ Allah discontent with the attribute of hypocrisy and hypocrites is presented in several verses in *Surat At-Tawbah*: 077, 097, 101

poor person start up his own business. This is known as *sadaqa jariya* which means ongoing charity or endowment for service all year long. It is found in *surat al-Baqara* 2:43, 83, 177 and 277. The Prophet is recited to have said in a *hadith* Muslim: ‘When a person dies, his works end, except for three: ongoing charity, knowledge that is benefited from, and a righteous child who prays for him’.⁸² This means that any good you do that benefits people even after you die will count for you.

It is advised for women to take part in charity activity rather than stay home. It is narrated that Jabir ibn ‘Abd-Allah said ‘my maternal aunt got divorced and wanted to go and pick some fruit from her trees. A man told her off for going out, so she went to the Prophet and he said: Never mind, go and pick the fruit from your trees. Maybe you will be able to give it in charity or do something good with it’.⁸³ Furthermore, some of the Prophet’s wives were known for being key philanthropic contributors to their communities. Khadija was known for her remarkable efforts in freeing slaves; while Zainab was known as ‘*umm al-masakin*’ (mother of the poor) helping children who lost their parents.

Leisure in Islam

In Islamic legal terminology there is no specific term to denote leisure, yet that does not mean that the concept is absent in Muslim prescriptions nor societies. Martin and Mason (2003 and 2004) noted that while the concept of leisure is a Western one, developed and used over the past century, as a phenomenon and practice it exists within Muslim context. To explore what the dominant forms of normative Islam in Egypt says about leisure, it is imperative to specify what is meant by leisure in this framework. Thus it is useful to draw the distinction between the ‘objective definition of leisure, defined in terms of particular types of activities carried out in certain residual periods of time and the subjective definition of leisure as a state of mind’ (Martin and Mason, 2004). In terms of objective definition, this section will cover those activities and spaces that Muslims are either encouraged or discouraged in taking part in. Thus distinction between *halal* (permitted), recommended and *haram* (prohibited) types of leisure activities/spaces will be presented.

⁸² For more on the theological basis of *sadaqa jariya*, see El Daly (2001).

⁸³ HM 1483

In relation to subjective leisure, reference will be made on Islamic stance on usage of leisure time in terms of the benefits (spiritual, individual and social) derived. The following section will only deal with theological basis of leisure in Islam, while the next two chapters will present how leisure is practiced in contemporary Egyptian society.

11. Useless Leisure Discouraged

Sheikh Muhammed Salih al-Munajjid (1997), an Islamic scholar known for his many Islamic edicts, provided an insightful *fatwa* (a religious opinion concerning Islamic law issued by an Islamic scholar) on how Islam generally relates to the leisure issue.⁸⁴ The *sheikh* stressed that the Islamic definition of pastime does not include the idea that a person can be entirely free of any responsibility to do something beneficial, particularly in serving God and the Islamic *umma*. Islam wants the Muslim, after fulfilling his obligatory duties towards God, to use his spare time for fruitful pursuits towards oneself or his/her community; thus leaving him with no free time for meaningless activities. In the Islamic *shari`a* (body of Islamic religious law) it is declared *makruh* (abominable) to engage in meaningless pastimes.

Sheikh al-Munajjid (1997) added that Islam does not require an individual to spend all his free time in religious activities in a way that will exhaust and drain him. He explains instead that Islam calls for humans to enjoy themselves such as spending time discussing decent topics with family or friends in the evening; visiting one another; joking in gentle and polite ways, and other forms of relaxation. The *sheikh* stated that what is important is that for one not to leave time intervals that may be filled with evil or harmful activities. That is why Islam has abolished all kinds of customs, festivals and celebrations during the time of the *jahiliyya*.⁸⁵ These celebrations used to be filled with evil and immoral behavior such as drinking alcohol, gambling, worship of idols and listening to misguided poetry which did not speak of any worthwhile human concerns.

⁸⁴ *Sheikh* (title for religious leader) al-Munajjid is popular among contemporary Egyptian Muslims through his television programs on *Iqraa* (read) channel. Many of the books he authored are widely available in the Arab markets.

⁸⁵ *Jahiliyya* is an Islamic concept of 'ignorance of divine guidance' or 'the state of ignorance of the guidance from God' or 'Days of Ignorance' referring to the condition Arabs found themselves in pre-Islamic Arabia, i.e. prior to the revelation of the Koran to Muhammed. By extension it means the state of anyone not following Islam and the Koran.

Instead, Islam replaced these customs with other forms of celebrations and customs that encouraged communal bonding and drew believers closer to God. Examples of useful leisure activities that the *sheikh* noted were, communal worship by performing the prayer in congregation, learning and reciting the Koran together, visiting one another etc. All of these activities were ‘noble, pure and filled with meaning and worthy aims’ (al-Munajjid, 1997).

Worthless or distractive activities have been referred to as ‘*lahw*’ and ‘*la`ib*’ in several *ayat* in the Koran, which the *fuqaha* (experts in *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence) have similarly used for sports and games. Interpreter of Islamic law Ahmed E Bemat (1989) in his book *Islam and Games* summarizes the stances of several `ulama on what the terms *lahw* and *la`ib* mean in relation to the Koran. The famous mediaeval religious scholar al-Fakhr al-Razi, in his commentary on *surat Muhammed* (47:36), ‘surely this world’s life is only a jest (*la`ib*) and frolicking (*lahw*). But if you believe and be God-fearing, He shall give you your wages and shall not ask (all) your wealth’, writes that when an individual ignores or postpones important stuff it is termed *lahw*, and if he or she does give up important work it is called *la`ib* (Bemat, 1989).⁸⁶ Al-Razi clarifies that ‘important work’ refers to those activities that are noble, virtuous and helps one acquire the necessities of life.

Bemat (1989) notes that some `ulama or commentators distinguish between the two terms from different perspective, whereby *la`ib* are activities that one gets pleasure, joy and satisfaction, whereas there is no such objective in *lahw*. Other commentators view *lahw* and *la`ib* as equally immoral and un-recommended. Muslim scholar Thanauallah writes that *lahw* is that work in which the object and result is not right and no benefits is gained (Bemat, 1989). *La`ib* is that work in which no benefits is derived at all, because games are transient in nature, and both (*lahw* and *la`ib*) distract one from worship or other acts of devotion. Some religious scholars agree that both *lahw* and *la`ib* are the work of ‘foolish men-the unintelligent, whose intelligence is subnormal’ (Bemat, 1989: 54); they make one ‘forgetful about the work of the Hereafter’ (Bemat, 1989: 174).

⁸⁶ Khatib (1986) interprets ‘He shall give you your wages and shall not ask (all) your wealth’ to mean that God will ask people to expend their riches on the poor, or in the form of purification dues.

Some of the *ayat* that refer to one or both terms are: 6:32, 6:70, 29:64, 47:36, 57:20 and 70:42 as follows:⁸⁷

QS Surat al-An`am 6:32 And this world's life is but jest and frolic. Better surely for those who fear God, will be the last abode. Do you not comprehend?

QS Surat al- An`am 6:70 And leave those who take their religion as jest and frolic, and whom this world's life has deluded.

QS Surat al-`Ankabut 29:64 And this world's life is nothing but frolic and jest. And certainly the Last Abode is the true life if they but knew.⁸⁸

QS Surat Muhammed 47:36 Surely this world's life is only a jest and frolicking. But if you believe and be godfearing, He shall give you your wages and shall not ask (all) your wealth.

The above four verses revolve around some key arguments. According to Ali (1998) play and amusement are not serious activities without any lasting significance. Their roles are to refresh or prepare one for other more serious things in life. These more serious things are religion (service to God) and the Hereafter, which one should prioritize above worldly pleasures. Moreover, one's life overall should be seen as a transient or short-term duration that acts as a passageway to Paradise. Thus one should focus on noble or virtuous acts during lifetime and not get distracted by those tempting and temporary activities of amusement.

QS Surat al-Hadid 57:20 Know that this world's life is but frivolity, and frolicking, and adornment, and boasting between you and multiplication of wealth and children.

This verse is meant to abase the earthly life and magnify the life to come in which there will be either eternal felicity or anguish (Khatib, 1986). Ali (1998) also explains that this verse warns against those who spend their lives playing, amusing themselves, showing off and accumulating wealth and competing with one another. This contrasts with the preceding verse, in the same *aya* that complements all those who do charity work and other virtuous acts.

⁸⁷For detailed explanation on how *la`ib* and *lahw* are used in these Koranic references, see Ali (1998).

⁸⁸ That is the Abode of the eternal life, which is not followed by death, nor does it have a term of life after which it withers away (Khatib, 1986)

QS *Surat al-Ma`arij* 70:42 So let them blunder and frolic, until they come face to face with their day that they are promised.

It warns against those who waste their time in contumacy and in falsehood and unproductive play rather than more useful things (Khatib, 1986). The verse concludes that the Day of Judgment will come and the truth will be revealed, as further described, in the next two verses of the same *sura*, *al-Ma`arij*.

Overall, the above verses and some other in the Koran have been interpreted to indicate that useless play and entertainment (*lahw & la`ib*) is severely disapproved. Islam emphasizes a life to be spent with a true purpose and aim wherein each moment is spent in some beneficial manner (Bemat, 1989).

12. Recreation and Relaxation Encouraged

In regards to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, there seems to be a general consensus amongst the different *ulama* that Islam encourages one to recreate and relax his mind and body (Bemat, 1989). Generally Islam recommends removing boredom from one's self and gain alertness and agility in order to focus fully towards the main objectives of life. This enjoyment, however, must be within the limits and boundaries laid down by Islam and not fall within the category of useless entertainment (*lahw & la`ib*), as discussed earlier, or compromise the laws of the *shari`a*.

According to the Koran, Islam's goal is not to burden man with hardships or difficulties as stated in *surat al-Hajj* 22:78 and *surat al-Baqara* 2: 185.⁸⁹ It recognizes that God has created human beings with needs and desires, so that, as they need to eat and drink, they also need to enjoy and relax themselves.

There are numerous *ahadith* that exemplify that recreation and relaxing one's body and mind are not just permissible, they are a requirement. In a *hadith* the Prophet is narrated to have advised people not to exhaust their bodies, and to remember that the

⁸⁹*Surat al-Hajj* 22:78 'And He (Allah) has not laid upon you constraint in religion'. Khatib (1986) comments on this phrase saying that Allah has not added hardship or oppression. *Surat al-Baqara* 2: 185 'God desires for you ease, and desires not for your privation'.

'body has a right' over oneself just like a spouse.⁹⁰ Moreover, following the Messenger's example, his companions relaxed their bodies and minds (Bemat, 1989). Bemat notes that only with a refreshed body and mind one can engage in serving Allah more earnestly.

Hence, to relax the body and mind and to maintain its physical well-being has been acceded to in the *shari`a*, however, remaining within its limits thereby. In addition, one is discouraged from exceeding the bounds and engaging in any activity which will make one unmindful and heedless of God.

13. Time for Religion and Time for Mundane Leisure

Islam also recommends that one organizes one's time so that at a certain period one can dedicate it to religious activities, which should always be prioritized, and at other times one can engage in beneficial recreation activities.

The following incident substantiates that in Islam there is a time and place for everything permissible. In one *hadith*, Hanzala al-Usaidi is reported to have narrated that: Abu Bakr met me and asked, 'How are you, Hanzala?' I replied, 'Hanzala has become a hypocrite'. He said, 'What are you saying?' I replied, 'When we are with Allah's Messenger, he mentions the Fire and the Garden until it is as if we can see them. But when we leave the Prophet's company and play with our wives and children or busy ourselves with our properties, we forget much'. Abu Bakr said, 'By Allah, I have experienced the same thing'. He and I then went to visit the Prophet and I said, 'O Messenger of Allah, when we are with you, you talk about the Fire and Garden until it is as if we can see them. Then we go out and play with our wives and the children and deal with our properties, and we forget much. The Prophet then said, By Him in Whose Hands is my soul, if you were to continue at the same level at which you were when with me in remembering Allah, the angels would shake hands with you when you are resting and when you walk about, but, O Hanzala, there is a time (for this) and time (for that)'.⁹¹ The Prophet is believed to have repeated the last phrase three times. In this *hadith*, the Prophet acknowledges that the Muslim should have a time for God and a time for himself and family (al-Qaradawy, 1992). It is interpreted, that the ideal Muslim's life should be

⁹⁰ HB 62:127

⁹¹ HM 37:6623

balanced between his duties to His Lord and his duties to himself, his family and community and others. A balanced life from that perspective does not mean constant seclusion in the mosque, nor denying the human need for recreation, amusement and joy.

Moreover, Islam recognizes that certain occasions call for celebration and rejoice. For example, in *surat Yunus* 10:58 it states 'Say, in the munificence of God and in His mercy, so let them rejoice in it; that is better than what they amass.' The term 'rejoice' in this verse means to celebrate the revelation of the Koran (Mahmood, 1969) and the bounty and mercy of God (Khatib, 1986). Another celebration or event worthy of rejoice is when the prophet Muhammed and his followers migrated (*Hegira*) from Mecca to the city of Medina in 622 where they were received by a welcoming crowd singing/playing music.⁹² Another incident narrated by Aisha when one time Abu Bakr came to the Prophet's house and witnessed two small girls singing during the *`Id* or feast time. It is accounted that Abu Bakr protested by saying: 'Musical instruments of Satan in the house of Allah's Apostle!' However the Prophet is believed to have responded by saying 'O Abu Bakr! There is an *`Id* for every nation and this is our *`Id*.'⁹³

14. Favorable Types Of Sports

Islam emphasizes the importance of being in good physical shape in case of war (Walseth, K and K, Fasting, 2003; Bemat, 1989). The Koran and *ahadith* express a favorable attitude towards horse-riding, archery, swimming and foot-racing. In *surat al-Anfal* 8:60 it is stated 'And prepare for them of whatever force and of stations of horses you can, to terrify thereby God's enemy and your enemy and others apart from them whom you know not but whom God knows'. That is, prepare for the enemy whatever you can obtain of war machinery and equipment, and whatever places of defense and organization you can attain (Khatib, 1986). This Koranic *sura* is often referred to in relation to Allah's wishes for having strong Muslims to protect their faith. Strong in this sense does not only mean physically but encompasses strength in science, philosophy, history, literature etc. In a *hadith* narrated by Muslim, the Prophet is recited to have said

⁹² Residents of Medina sang an ever-popular song '*tala` al-badru `alaina*', which is taught and sang at many Egyptian schools today.

⁹³ HB 2:15:70, see also HB 4:56:730

‘The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer’.⁹⁴ In relation to this point, it is important to understand the political and defense policy of Islam. Islam operates on the ideal that a just society can be established by fighting and defending itself, from transgressors or external threats, within a moral framework (Bemat, 1989). The Koran states ‘And fight for the cause of God those who fight you, but transgress not, for God loves not the transgressors’ (*Surat al-Baqara* 2: 190). This verse is considered to be an answer to those who contended that Islam was built on aggression. The command here is to commit no aggression but only to defend oneself without transgression (Khatib, 1986).

The Prophet encouraged the *sahaba* or his companions to take part in several activities, mainly horseback riding, archery, swimming and foot-racing. In the Koran *surat al-Nahl* 16:8 it is stated that ‘And horses, and mules and asses for you to ride, and for ornament. And He creates what you know not’.⁹⁵ In one *hadith*, Uqba-ibn `Amir reported that the messenger of Allah said: ‘Everything with which a man plays is unlawful except..... his training his horse...’.⁹⁶

As for archery, Uqba ibn `Amir also narrated that he heard the Prophet saying: ‘Whoever gives up archery after having learnt it, is not of us...’.⁹⁷ On another occasion, the Prophet is reported to have once passed by a group of his companions who were competing in archery; he encouraged them saying: ‘Shoot and I am with you’.⁹⁸

The Prophet himself raced with his wife Aisha who narrated: ‘I raced with the Prophet and beat him in the race. Later when I had put on some weight, we raced again and he won. Then he said, ‘This cancels that’, referring to the previous occasion’.⁹⁹ This *hadith* is unique as it shows that the Prophet himself manifested his affection to his wife Aisha through playing and practicing sports with her.¹⁰⁰ This form of playfulness and manner of jovial activity is vital in a healthy marriage relationship and considered as

⁹⁴ HM 6774.

⁹⁵ In anticipation of what would be invented of ways and means of transport, this verse hints at all future developments in that regard (Khatib, 1986).

⁹⁶ HA 14:2507

⁹⁷ HM 020:4714

⁹⁸ HB 4:55:592

⁹⁹ HA 14:2572

¹⁰⁰ This *hadith* was narrated only by Aisha and none of the *sahaba*, that makes it obvious that the race was carried out in absolute privacy.

permitted in Islam (Bemat, 1989). Hence, the Prophet was narrated to have said: ‘Every such engagement of man which entails play and amusement is null and void except archery, training one's horse and playing with one's wife, for these things constitute righteousness’.

It should also be remembered that all permissible things become acts of worship when they are coupled with good intention (Bemat, 1989). Thus, when playing sports, one should make an intention of removing laziness, exercising the body and staying healthy in order to worship Allah in a better way.

15. Unfavorable Types of Activities.

Those types of leisure activities that distract one from the obligatory (*fard*) and necessary (*wajib*) obligations are not termed lawful within Islamic context (Bemat, 1989). Besides, those games that have no worldly or religious benefit and have no purpose to it, and are played only to pass time can also not be deemed permissible, for Islam disapproves of useless entertainment and wasting one's time, as it was stated earlier. During the time of *jahiliya* there were certain kinds of games and habits that were later prohibited in Islam as they were considered to negatively impact time, human health and money.

Those games that have been explicitly prohibited in the *hadith* as not lawful are backgammon, playing with dice, cards and, generally, gambling or games of chance. The Messenger of Allah is recited to have stated that playing with dice is undesirable for Muslims.¹⁰¹ *Surat al-Ma'ida* (5:90) explicitly states that gambling and games of chance is prohibited and is considered the ‘abomination of Satan's handiwork’ or the tools of Satan to keep believers from proper work. That included all types of gambling and arrow shuffling, which was a favorite game of the pagan Arabs (Khatib, 1986). In *surat al-Baqara* 2:219, similar to alcohol, it is stated that gambling has greater harm than profit to mankind. The Islamic principle on which the objection against gambling is based is on the idea that a person gains what he/she has not earned or lose on a mere chance (Ali, 1998).

Those habits or sports that are very aggressive or risk the participants' safety and

¹⁰¹ HA 34:4210

well-being are also discouraged. If sustaining injuries is very common, then the game would not be permissible (Bemat, 1989). 'And expend in the cause of God, and do not cast yourselves by your own hands into annihilation' *surat al-Baqara*, 2:195.

Further the consumption of intoxicants, including alcohol is prohibited. Abdullah ibn Amr reported that the messenger of Allah prohibited intoxicants....and *ghubaira* (a kind of wine).¹⁰² In *surat al-Ma'ida* 5:90 it is stated further that intoxicants or strong drink is also disapproved of. In *surat al-Baqara* 2:219 it is notes that wine or *khamr* are of 'great sin', where the 'sin is greater than their usefulness'. *Khamr* is literally understood to mean the fermented juice of the grape; applied by analogy to include all intoxicating liquor or drug (Ali, 1998). The harm in alcohol is great on human health and social wise too. In the books of Bukhari there are also numerous *ahadith* that demonstrate a negative stance on the consumption of alcohol.¹⁰³

It is also recommended that any game a Muslim takes part in should be free from extravagant and lavish spending, for money should be spent in more purposeful and meaningful things (Bemat, 1989). According to *surat al-An'am*, 6: 141 'And do not squander for He loves not the squanderers'.

16. Places that are Sinful should be Avoided

Going to places where Allah is disobeyed and in which sacred limits are openly violated for fun and for leisure is considered to be something that is forbidden according to *Shari'a* (Bemat, 1989). *Surat al-Furqan* 25:72, 'And those who do not bear false witness, and when they pass by idle chatter, they pass by with grace'. In this verse it is advised for Muslims to avoid vain, absurd and obscene gatherings (Khatib, 1986). If an individual finds himself in such a negative context, he must depart from it in an honorable, dignified way and not in a fussy arrogant way.

17. Women and Leisure: Time and Space

The Koran, in addressing the believers, often uses the expression, 'believing men and women' to emphasize the equality of men and women in regard to their respective duties,

¹⁰² See for example, HA 26:3662

¹⁰³ See for example HB 7:69:481; HB 7:69:482

rights, virtues and merit. In *surat al-Ahzab* (33:35), for example, it addresses all virtues as applicable to both men and women, with no differentiation. However in relation to women's access to leisure time and public space, certain issues must be highlighted.

In my 2005 research on mothers' leisure experiences, it was observed that Egyptian women's access to free time was highly constrained by obligations of motherhood. Women's sense of obligations towards childcare was explained as a matter of natural instinct and in connection to Islamic scriptures. These scriptures stress the importance of the mothers' role in raising her children and the great difficulty that she must endure for the sake of her family, for which she will be abundantly rewarded by God. In one *hadith*, the Prophet has been quoted as saying: 'Paradise is under the mother's foot', while another considers the mother more entitled to a son's concern and support than the father (Inhorn, 1996:83). One Koranic verse *surat al-Kahf* 18:46 states, 'Wealth and Offspring are the adornments of earthy life'. Accordingly, mothers are encouraged to prioritize their free time towards family duties.

As for women's presence in public space, certain conditions must be observed. Modesty in behavior is expected, not only from women but men too (Macleod, 1996). The Koran *surat al-Nur* 24:30 states, 'Say to the believers that they should restrain their eyes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them'. Ali (1998) comments on this verse by noting that a bold stare by a man towards a lady violates the rules of good manners and it is thus prohibited. Modesty does not only guard the weaker sex, but also guards the spiritual good of the stronger sex. *Surat al-Nur* 24:31, is mostly interpreted as stating that women should observe 'modesty'. The verse states that women should observe limited covering of the body and limited seclusion from inappropriate viewers. Women are thus encouraged to not use makeup and ornaments that may seduce men. Moreover, the 'veil' should be drawn 'over their (women) bosoms'; this part of the verse is interpreted by Ali (1988) to mean that females' garments should cover all parts of the body except the face and palms of the hand. Therefore, covering of the face is strictly not an Islamic custom.

Finally, with regards to women's seclusion, Islam states that women should not expose their 'adornment' or beautification to men except to their 'husbands or father or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers'

sons or sisters' sons or their women¹⁰⁴, or what their right hands possess or male attendants of no sexual desire or children who have seen nothing of women's hidden parts' *surat al-Nur* 24:31.¹⁰⁵ In other words, women are free to mingle with those people with whom marriage is explicitly forbidden; and to not expose their beauty to those of the opposite sex whose kinship does not represent any obstacle for marriage.

18. Conclusion

The material presented in this chapter provided theological basics of Ramadan practices, Islam's stance on leisure in general and, finally, issues related to females' access to leisure time and space. Several key issues are concluded in this chapter that will have direct implications on how Ramadan is lived and contested in contemporary Cairo, as we shall come to see. In this section I will not only summarize the main points in this chapter but also highlight those subjects that are negotiated within modern context.

Islamic prescriptions generally complement one another on the vast majority of Ramadan practices like the virtues of fasting, charity, night of power etc. Nevertheless, there are some theological disagreements on other subjects such as when Ramadan starts, the duration of the holy month and the number of *raka`at* during *tarawih* prayers. Such lack of consensus of these and similar issues may become sources of confusion and debates among Muslims. Moreover, the issue of *niya* or intention is of utmost importance as touched upon earlier. The notion of *niya* as we shall come to see is not restricted only to performing the fast but also applies to doing charity work and other activities that are crucial in realizing the virtues of the holy month. One recurring matter of debate among contemporary Muslims is whether one is performing Ramadan deeds out of sincere *niya* in serving God or for materialistic gains or social pretence. This issue will be elaborated further on in chapter five on piety.

Moreover almost all recommended Ramadan activities presented in this chapter such as *sahur*, *iftar*, *tarawih*, charity work and *sunna* like breaking the fast with a date continue to exist till the present day in Egypt. The next two chapters will show how the

¹⁰⁴ The term 'their women' means women in their service or slave girls (Khatib, 1986).

¹⁰⁵ The phrase 'male attendants of no sexual desire' refers to those who would not be attracted to the opposite sex because of their old age or being castrated. The term 'children' refers to those youngsters who have not reached the age of pubescence.

holy month is actually lived in modern Cairo. While many of the Ramadan activities that were tackled in this chapter will recur again (particularly in chapter four) the way they are practiced and perceived differs considerably. The spiritual basis of these Ramadan activities do not lose their significance in the modern context, they become rather redefined. Additionally, some other traditions with no theological basis, and thus not mentioned in this chapter, are invented to fit with modern living as will be presented later.

In relation to leisure and Islam the material presented in this chapter are reflective of some of the *fatwas* and religious interpretations highly publicized and popular among Egyptians. Mainly, it is recommended that one should always prioritize religious duties above worldly activities, engage in meaningful leisure activities that benefit the Muslim *umma* and avoid those activities or spaces that are filled with obscenities, idleness, alcohol, gambling or other harmful acts that can negatively impact one's health, community or finances. Moreover, the *`ulama* agree that Islam encourages one to recreate and relax his or her body and mind through lawful or *halal* means. I wish to highlight the notion of progressive or useful kinds of leisure at this point, since it becomes of high importance in defining what is authentic Islam within the modern nation state as will be presented in chapter seven.

Finally the theological basics on motherhood and modesty within the public sphere serve as criteria for women's access to leisure time and space. In the coming chapters it will become clear how youth females in contemporary Cairo negotiate these notions through their participation in a vast range of Ramadan leisure activities. The dynamic relationship between normative/theological Ramadan and local/lived traditions of Ramadan in Cairo will unfold more explicitly in the coming chapters of the book.