

Day, Night, and the times of Fasting and Prayer in the Qur'an

Marwan Boustany
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1 Day and night in the Qur'an

Key to the topics of fasting and prayer is the definition of nahar [day] and layl [night]. We need to have some clarity here in order to define the bounds of both fasting and prayer in a day.

1.1 The observational perspective

In dictionaries of classical Arabic the following is the meaning given to the words ليل and نهار:

نهار [Nahar]: Day as opposed to Layl (night). It tends to be defined as from sunrise to sunset or from dawn until sunset. Though some defined it as the time of the spreading ['flowing'] and dispersion (some say 'its collecting together') of the sight giving light.

Lane's Lexicon:

نَهَرَ , (S, Msb,) aor. َ , (Msb,) It (water) ran upon, or along, the ground, (S, TA,) and made for itself a نَهْر [or channel like that of a river]. (S.) See also 10. ____ It (anything, as in one copy of the S, or anything copious, as in another copy of the S and in the TA) ran, or flowed; (S, TA;) as also استنهر , (S,) or انتهر . (TA.) ____ It (blood) flowed with force: (Msb:)

نَهَارٌ Day; or day-time; contr. of لَيْلٌ: (S, TA:) or broad daylight, (Mgh,) from sunrise to sunset: (Mgh, Msb, K:) this is the original signification: (TA;) or this is the signification in the vulgar conventional language: but in the classical language it signifies the time from the rising of the dawn to sunset: (Msb:) or the light between the rising of the dawn and sunset: (K:) and so accord. to the lawyers: (TA:) in the trads., it is the whiteness of the نهار, and the blackness of the ليل; and there is nothing intervening between the ليل and the نهار: but sometimes the Arabs amplified, and applied نهار to the time from the clear shining of the dawn to the setting [of the sun]: (Msb.) or (so accord. to the TA. but in some copies of the K, and) the spreading of the light [which is a cause] of sight and its dispersion: (K:) in this explanation in the L, in the place of وَأَفْتَرَأَهُ we find وَأَجْتَمَعُهُ [and its collecting together]:

ليل [Layl]: Night. It tends to be defined as from sunset to dawn or from sunset to sunrise. It is treated as what is the opposite of day [Nahar]. It is also defined as a time of darkness or blackness. If we define it as the opposite of the time of the spreading/flowing and dispersion of the sight giving light into our area, then it would mean the time when the light flows away and there is no sight giving light in the sky.

There is no unanimous and unequivocal single meaning assigned to these words in the Arabic dictionaries. I am of the opinion that these meanings are affected by what became the practice of fasting, as notice that both the definitions of night and day conveniently can have the night starting and day ending at sunset whereas the night ends and the day starts at dawn. This is an oddly unsymmetrical understanding of day and night.

In the following I hope to analyse the Qur'anic usage of the terms Layl and Nahar. Our creator, the creator of day and night has better right to define it than a dictionary, ultimately. Let us represent

the 24-hour day as:

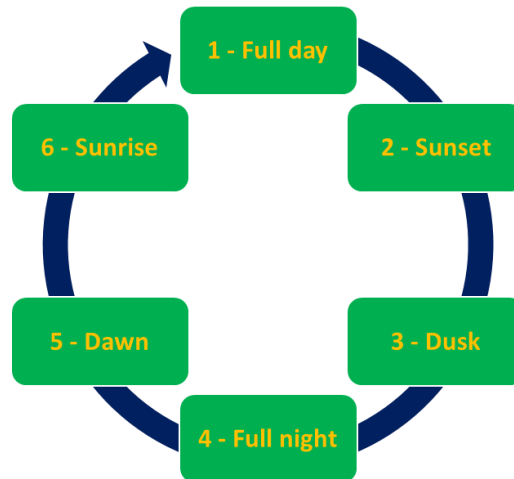


Figure 1: Parts of the 24-hour day

I will use these 6 phases to define the day and night based on the Qur'anic guidance. I intend to test which of the following accepted/dictionary/possible meanings for nahar [نهار] [and consequently layl [ليل]] fits with the Qur'an best:

1. Nahar: Sunrise to sunset [6 -> 2]
 - 1.1. Layl: [2 -> 6]
2. Nahar: Dawn to sunset [5 -> 2]
 - 2.1. Layl: [2 -> 5]
3. Nahar: Dawn to dusk [5 -> 3]
 - 3.1. Layl: [3 -> 5]

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَسْمَعُونَ

He it is who has appointed for you the night that you should rest therein and the day **enabling sight**. Surely, in that are signs for a folk that listen/consider.

(10:67)

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا جَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِيَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Do they not see that We made the night that they may rest therein and the **day enabling sight**?

Indeed in that are signs for a people who believe.

(27:86)

[See also (40:61)]

From Lane's Lexicon:

مُبْصِرٌ

[Making, or causing, to see, or to have sight: and hence, giving light; shining; illumining: and conspicuous; manifest; evident; apparent: also making, or causing, to have mental perception, or knowledge, or skill.] وَالنَّهَارُ مُبْصِرًا, in the Kur [x. 68, &c. (in the CK النَّهَارُ مُبْصِرًا)], means, And the day [causing to see; or] in which one sees; (K;) giving light;

shining; or illumining. (TA.) And فَلَمَّا جَاءَتْهُمْ آيَاتُنَا مُبْصِرَةً, also in the Qur [xxvii. 13], † And when our signs came to them, making them to have sight, or to have mental perception, or knowledge, or skill; expl. by تَجْعَلُهُمْ بُصْرَاءَ: (Akh, Ş, K:) or giving light; shining; or illumining: (Ş:) or being conspicuous, manifest, or evident: or we may read مُبْصِرَةً ↓, meaning having become manifest, or evident. (Zj, M.) And آتَيْنَا ثَمُودَ النَّاقَةَ مُبْصِرَةً, also in the Qur [xvii. 61], † And we gave to Thamood the she-camel, by means of which they had sight, or mental perception, or knowledge, or skill: (Akh:) or a sign giving light, shining, or illumining; (Fr, T;) and this is the right explanation: (T:) or a manifest, or an evident, sign: (Zj, L, K:) and some read مُبْصِرَةً ↓, meaning having become manifest, so as to be seen. (Zj, L.) And جَعَلْنَا آيَةَ النَّهَارِ مُبْصِرَةً, also in the Qur [xvii. 13], ‡ We have made the sign of the day manifest, or apparent. (K, TA.)

The distinctive essence of day is that it enables vision/perception; you can see things clearly during day due to the light of the sun. You can see things, clearly, during and for some time before sunrise and after sunset but not as the night sets in. What you would seek to see in your environment is not obscured by the reduction in light associated with the approach of night. The transition from the time of clear vision to that of obscured vision, is the transition from nahar to layl.

This would favour understanding the day as stretching into the time before sunrise and after sunset, as we can still see at those times. [5 -> 3]

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَقُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُوداً

Establish prayer at setting of the sun [a] until the [full/intense] darkness of the night [b]. And the recitation of dawn, indeed, the recitation of dawn is ever witnessed.

(17:78)

[a] Some take this to refer to the setting of the sun from the mid-day point [perhaps motivated by finding justification for the 5 prayers].

[i] However, the word has the fundamental meaning of rubbing, and the setting of the sun can be seen as the rubbing of the sun with the horizon. It is in fact understood this way also.

[b] The adjective [غَسَقٍ]/[full/intense darkness] implies not just night, but to a fully dark phase of night.

[i] If layl started at the time of full/intense darkness, then the adjective is unnecessary. This implies that layl also stretches into the dawn/dusk period. [3 -> 5]

وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا
وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَاهَا
وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَّاهَا
وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا

By the sun and its brightness,
by the moon when it follows it [the sun],
by the day when it displays it [the sun] [a],
by the night when it covers it [the sun] [b]

(91:1-4)

[a] Two possible ways to interpret this:

[i] This could mean that day is defined by the sun being visible [6 -> 2].

[ii] Or it could be mentioning that it is during the time of day that the sun is visible.

[iii] From the verses dealt with before and after, we should understand this as [ii]. This verse highlights the distinctive aspect of the day, and the source of the light that enables sight.

[b] Two possible ways to interpret this:

[i] This could mean that it is night when the sun is concealed [2 -> 6].

[ii] Or it could be mentioning that it is during the time of night that the sun is concealed.

[iii] From the verses dealt with before and after we should understand this as [ii]. This verse highlights the distinctive aspect of the night, darkness and the lack of the light that enables sight.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَى
وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّى
وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَى

By the night when it **conceals** [a]

And [by] the day when it makes [things] **apparent** [b]

And [by] He who created the male and female, [c]

(92:1-3)

(92:1-2) follows on from (91:3-4) using the same words in relation to layl and nahar. However, without direct reference to the sun, it focuses on the phenomenon by their effect.

From Lane's Lexicon:

جَلَا (Ṣ, Mgh, Mṣb,) [aor. {يَجْلُو} inf. n. جَلَاءٌ (Mṣb,) It (a thing, and † an affair, or a case, Mgh, or † information, or tidings, Mṣb,) was, or became, clear, unobscured, exposed to view, displayed, laid open, disclosed, or uncovered, (Mgh, Mṣb,) لِلنَّاسِ to men, or the people; (Mṣb;) as also تَجَلَّى, said of a thing: (Ṣ, Mgh, Mṣb:) it († information, or tidings, Ṣ, Mṣb, or † an affair, or a case, Mgh,) was, or became, apparent, or plainly apparent, overt, conspicuous, manifest, notorious, plain, obvious, or evident, (Ṣ, Mgh, Mṣb,)

[a] With [b] in mind, the night is that which conceals from clear vision due to darkness. We can take this to mean that our surroundings become concealed from clear vision due to the reduction of or lack of the sun's light.

[i] The word [غشى] means to cover or conceal something [Lane's Lexicon].

[ii] Factoring in [b], we can take this to refer to [3 -> 5].

[b] With [a] in mind, the day is that which makes things fully apparent due to the light. The day being defined as that time when you can see your surroundings due to the light of the sun. (27:86) and (40:61) support this.

[i] [تَجَلَّى] from Jim-Lam-Ya means something is made clear, unobscured, exposed to view, displayed, laid open, disclosed, or uncovered [Lane's Lexicon].

[ii] This supports nahar being [5 -> 3].

[c] Light and dark, and their states, are as binary as male and female.

If the preceding is correct would mean that nahar goes from dawn to dusk, while layl goes from dusk to dawn. Which dusk? Civil, nautical, astronomical or somewhere in between? The time should be when you start to need artificial light, or light not from the sun, to see what you could clearly see earlier in the day. That is, when the reducing light [and increasing gloom] starts to impact visibility.

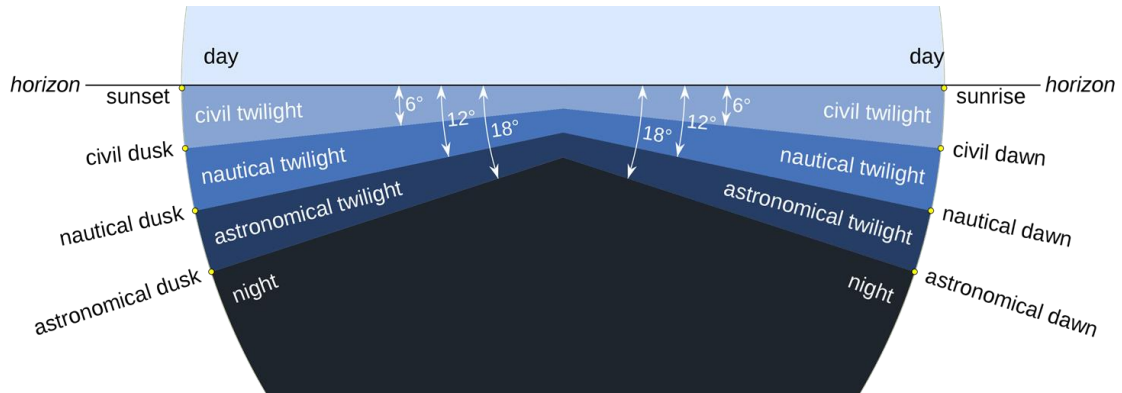


Figure 2: The Twilights [Taken from Wikipedia]

The UK HM Nautical Almanac [states](#) (Ignoring the effects of moonlight) that at:

1. Morning Civil Twilight
 - 1.1. "Large terrestrial objects can now be distinguished."
2. Evening Civil Twilight
 - 2.1. "Large terrestrial objects can be seen but no detail can be distinguished."

Based on this and observation, civil twilight is a reasonable and consistent guideline for the start and end point for layl. An interesting note, and perhaps also a useful guide from this site can be found in the following statements (Ignoring the effects of moonlight):

1. End of the Hours of Darkness:
 - 1.1. "Ends 30 minutes before sunrise as defined by the United Kingdom Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations (1989) and always occurs during civil twilight in the UK."
2. Beginning of the Hours of Darkness
 - 2.1. "Begins 30 minutes after sunset as defined by the United Kingdom Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations (1989) and always occurs during civil twilight in the UK."

Finally, in relation to astronomical twilight, the Almanac says (Ignoring the effects of moonlight):

1. Beginning Morning Astronomical Twilight
 - 1.1. "Sixth magnitude stars are no longer visible to the naked eye under good conditions"
2. Beginning Morning Nautical Twilight
 - 2.1. "It may now be possible to discern the sea horizon and **it is no longer dark for normal practical purposes.**"

This, along with Figure 2, would indicate or support that astronomical twilight is the boundary to [عَسَقِيَ اللَّيْلِ] the full/intense darkness of layl referred to in (17:78).

1.2 The functional perspective

In times when the day is impractically long or technically too long [see section 3.3], it is worth considering that Allah has associated a function and purpose to the day and night for us. One that allows us to look at layl and nahar not from an astronomical perspective but from a functional perspective.

فَالِقُ الْإِصْبَاحِ وَجَعَلَ اللَّيْلَ سَكَنًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ حُسْبَانًا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ

[He is] the cleaver of daybreak [out of the night] and has made the **night for rest** and the sun and moon for calculation. That is the determination of the Exalted in Might, the Knowing.

(6:96)

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَسْمَعُونَ

He it is who has appointed for you the **night that ye should rest therein** and the day enabling sight.

Surely, herein are signs for a folk that heed.

(10:67)

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ آيَاتَيْنِ فَمَحَوْنَا آيَةَ اللَّيْلِ وَجَعَلْنَا آيَةَ النَّهَارِ مُبْصِرَةً لِتَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ
وَلِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابَ وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ فَصَّلَنَاهُ تَفْصِيلًا

And We have made the night and day two signs, and We erased the sign of the night and made the sign of the day the enabling of sight, **that you may seek bounty from your Lord** and may know the number of years and the account [of time]. And everything We have set out in detail.

(17:12)

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا وَالنَّوْمَ سُبَاتًا وَجَعَلَ النَّهَارَ نُشُورًا

And it is He who has made the **night for you a covering and sleep [a means for] rest** and has made the day a resurrection.

(25:47)

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا جَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِيَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Do they not see that We made the **night that they may rest therein** and the day enabling sight?

Indeed in that are signs for a people who believe.

(27:86)

[See also (40:61)]

وَمِن رَّحْمَتِهِ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِن فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

And out of His mercy He made for you the **night** and the **day** that you may **rest therein** and [by day] **seek from His bounty** and [that] perhaps you will be grateful.

(28:73)

إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا

Indeed, for you by day is prolonged occupation.

(73:7)

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا

وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا

And made your sleep [a means for] rest

And made the night a covering

And made the day for livelihood

(78:9-11)

We learn from these ayaat that Allah has specified or linked purposes with the nahar and layl. Namely:

1. **Nahar:** A time for seeking Allah's bounty, for seeking and/or earning your livelihood.
 - 1.1. Time of travel to work, work, other day time tasks and time of travel back home.
2. **Layl:** A time for rest and sleep, presumably at home.
 - 2.1. The time of settling, eating, relaxing and sleeping.

This Qur'anic perspective fits naturally with the geography of Mecca and other regions in and around the equator. The days are more balanced with the night and more typically reflect the work rest cycle that would have dominated historically.

However we can perhaps extract more insight from this to extract it from a geographical context, so see the sections on fasting and prayer for the relevant discussion.

2 Fasting and Ramadhan

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ
أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَن كَانَ مِنكُم مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ
طَعَامُ مَسْكِينٍ فَمَن تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ وَأَن تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ
شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ
الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ
الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَى مَا هَدَاكُم وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ
وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَرْشُدُونَ

أَحِلَّ لَكُمُ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلَى نِسَائِكُمْ هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَّهُنَّ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنتُمْ
تَخْتَانُونَ أَنفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنكُمْ فَالآنَ بَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَابْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا
حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتُمُوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ وَلَا
تَبَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَقْرُبُوهَا كَذًا لَّكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لِّلنَّاسِ
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ

O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil).

(Fasting is prescribed for) numbered of days; and if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number (should be made up) from days later, and for those who are able to do it (from those who miss the fast for illness or travel), is a ransom of feeding one that is indigent. But he that will give more, of his own free will, it is better for him. And it is better for you to fast, if you only knew.

The month of Ramadhan in which was revealed the Qur'an, guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion (of right and wrong). And whosoever of you is present, let him fast the month, and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, (let him fast the same) number of other days. Allah desires ease for you; He does not desire hardship for you; and (He desires) that you should complete the period, and that you should magnify Allah for having guided you, and that peradventure you may be thankful.

And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.

It has been made permissible for you the night preceding fasting to go to your wives [for sexual relations]. They are clothing for you and you are clothing for them. Allah knows that you deprived yourselves [of this right], so He turned to you in mercy and removed [this error] from you. So now, have relations with them and seek that which Allah has decreed for you. And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night]. Then complete the fast until the sunset. And do not have relations with them as long as you are staying for worship in the mosques. These are the limits [set by] Allah, so do not approach them. Thus does Allah make clear His ordinances to the people that they may become righteous.

(2:183-187)

2.1 General message

1. Fasting was prescribed for us to gain consciousness of Allah with the consequent modification of behaviour.
2. Fast the month of Ramadhan.
 - 2.1. You know it's beginning and end by the moon phase where you are:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيْتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ وَلَيْسَ الْإِرْبَانُ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ
الْإِرَّ مِنَ الْأَنْفِ وَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

They ask you about the new moons. Say, "They are measurements of time for the people and for Hajj." And it is not righteousness to enter houses from the back, but righteousness is [in] one who fears Allah. And enter houses from their doors. And fear Allah that you may succeed.

(2:189)

فَالِقُ الْإِصْبَاحِ وَجَعَلَ اللَّيْلَ سَكَنًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ حُسْبَانًا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ

[He is] the cleaver of daybreak and has made the night for rest and the sun and moon for calculation. That is the determination of the Exalted in Might, the Knowing.

(6:96)

3. Fasting is for the 29/30 days of the month of Ramadhan, these are the numbered days.

2.2 Considerations

1. Allah desires ease for us and not hardship, so this can be kept in mind. Fasting is not supposed to be a damaging or unduly difficult experience.
2. We should aim to complete the period of fasting and glorify Allah. It is better to fast so always make the effort and do not look to try and avoid it without good cause(s).

2.3 Prohibitions

1. No eating or drinking from dawn until night.
2. No sexual relations from dawn to night and/or while you are at the mosque.

2.4 Exceptions

If you are on a journey or you are sick then you can make up any missed days later. Further to this, if you are able or can afford it, is the feeding of a poor person (and more if you can). This act is a ransom to be paid, if you can, for missing days in Ramadhan, even if you make the days up at a later point.

It has been considered that this ransom is for one who finds it difficult to fast [يُطِيقُونَهُ], and so does not fast, but feeds people instead. That is, if you find it difficult to fast, then just pay the ransom.

However the word يُطِيقُونَهُ is better understood as 'having the ability to' and so does not comfortably fit such an understanding. Further to this, verses 184 and 185 reiterate their contents, and in 185, no mention is made of feeding someone in the context either of missed days due to difficulty in fasting or due to missed days from illness or travel. If we understood that there was a third category mentioned in (2:184) [just paying a ransom and avoiding fasting], then it would have also existed in (2:185).

There are circumstances beyond illness or travel that may indicate that we can miss days and make them up. If we consider the two cases mentioned by Allah in the verse, illness and travel, we can derive further understanding.

Illness: In the circumstance that it could be deemed physically damaging or just unduly taxing due to an illness, you can skip the fast and make it up later. In the case that your illness is perpetual, then no making up of the days exists, however feeding the poor if you can, remains. This category appears to deal with challenges to fasting rooted **in your own body**.

Travel: In the circumstance that it could be deemed physically damaging or just unduly taxing due to travelling, you can skip the fast and make it up later. This category appears to deal with challenges to fasting rooted **in your environment and/or circumstances**.

We have therefore in these two categories enough flexibility to deal with any circumstance which may make fasting a trial and/or an undue challenge, rather than a means to God consciousness.

3 Times of Fasting

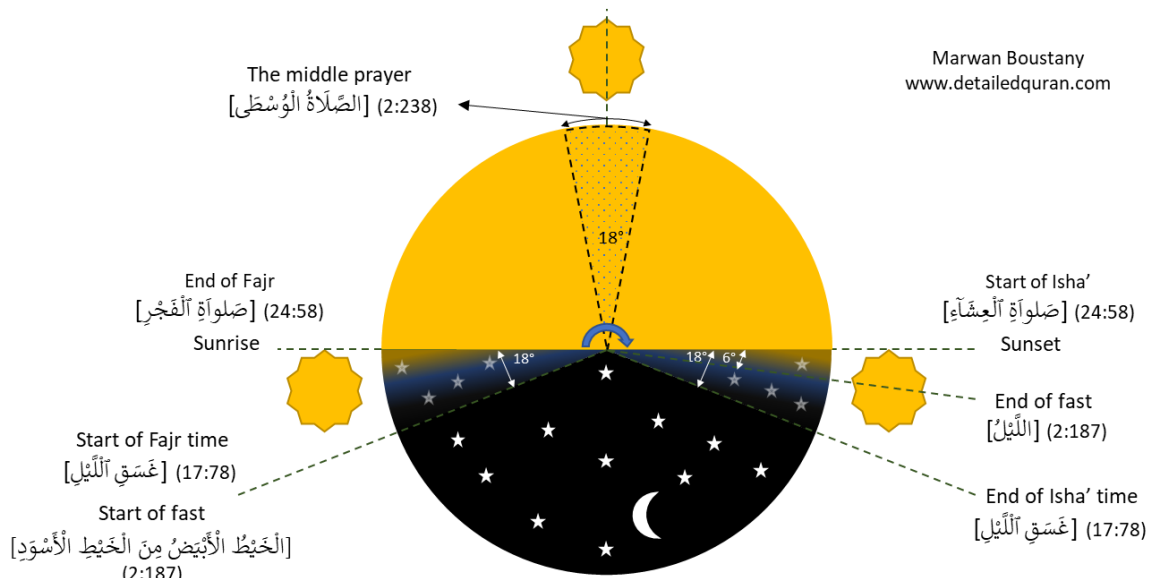


Figure 3: Times of prayer and fasting

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتَمُوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ ... and eat and drink until the white thread (of light) becomes distinct to you from the black thread (night/darkness) of the dawn. Then strictly observe the fast until/to the **night** ... (2:187)

3.1 Starting the fast: Astronomical observation

Here the beginning of the day is defined by that time when the light of dawn is seen as a line on the horizon, that contrasts against the full/intense darkness of night, the [عَسَقَ اللَّيْلِ] of (17:78). I have represented this as the time of astronomical dawn in Figure 3.

Astronomical dawn is when the centre of the sun is 18° below the horizon and is the transition from full darkness in the sky to the first encroachment of the sun's light on the horizon.

The UK HM Nautical Almanac [states](#) (Ignoring the effects of moonlight) that at:

1. Beginning Morning Astronomical Twilight
 - 1.1. "Sixth magnitude stars are no longer visible to the naked eye under good conditions"
2. Beginning Morning Nautical Twilight
 - 2.1. "It may now be possible to discern the sea horizon and **it is no longer dark for normal practical purposes.**"

3.2 Ending the fast: Local observation

In contrast to relying on observation of the sky and horizon for the start of fasting, here we use the criteria of local visibility. Here, civil twilight is a useful guideline for when we finish fasting. It is a time when the remaining sunlight in the sky is insufficient to clearly light your local environment due to the encroaching darkness. We could consider it the time at which we would need other light to see things clearly.

Civil twilight is when the centre of the sun is 6° below the horizon. As a guideline, if we take London U.K. as an example, civil twilight occurs about 35-40 minutes after sunset. Darkness, as stated by the HM Nautical Almanac referred to earlier, starts at around 30 minutes before sunrise and after sunset.

Finally, this contrasts with the standard Sunni approach of breaking fast at sunset. From the preceding, we see that sunset is a part of the *nahar*, not *layl*.

3.3 When does the day become too long?

3.3.1 Astronomically

This is a challenging topic for many Muslims, however there may be a way to calculate this directly from the Qur'an.

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ
... and eat and drink until the **white thread (of light) becomes distinct to you from the black thread (night/darkness) of the dawn**. Then strictly observe the fast until/to the night ...
(2:187)

The ability to see the white thread against a dark night sky is likely limited by the length of the day, in very long days, the night sky may not actually become dark at any point. For example, when there is no longer astronomical twilight (the sun's centre does not go 18° below the horizon) the sky never quite gets dark. Muslims should calculate at what point (how many degrees below the horizon) the sky stops being dark, and this will define the **maximum possible length** of the day acceptable for fasting based on the criteria of observability of the white thread.

Days that are longer than this should not be fasted (as you will not have actually witnessed the start point as per (2:187)) based on the astronomical day. See also section 3.4 in relation to this.

In the U.K., in 2020, the longest such fasting could be approximately 20.5 hours. While at that same time it would be approximately 15:20 hours in Mecca, where astronomical twilight exists all year round.

3.3.2 Functionally

We see from section 1.2 that Allah has associated certain activities and purposes for the nahar and layl phases of a 24-hour day.

If we apply the understanding of nahar from there, namely:

Nahar: A time for seeking Allah's bounty, for seeking and/or earning your livelihood. That is, the time of travel to work, work, other day time tasks and time of travel back home.

We can learn or derive two points of understanding:

1. Allah designed the fast and prayer/salaah as practices that are centred on the activities of the nahar and the time associated with such.
 - 1.1. With some reflection on the 7th century, it is logical to think that people would work or seek a living in the hours of light so they could see what they were doing etc. They would wake with the light and start their day.
2. We may consider that the nahar, as defined by the sun, has become too long when it continues substantially after the standard activities associated with the nahar. Or equivalently, when it continues substantially into the time of rest and sleep.

With this in mind, we could perhaps interpret night in the following ayah:

ثُمَّ أَتَمُّوا الصَّيَّامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ
... Then strictly observe the fast until/to the night ...
(2:187)

To refer to that time when work is normally completed and one has returned home for rest and thereafter, sleep.

It might be interesting to consider that with such an understanding; people may fast at different times in the 24 hour day. If you sleep during the day and work at night, fasting has no benefit for you. But if you adjusted your fast to your work/rest cycle, its purpose and benefit could still be enjoyed.

3.4 What to do when days become too long

Two suggestions follow that would fit in with the discussions of sections 1.2 and 3.3.2. There are other solutions people may wish to use, the key point being that we design these solutions within the bounds of the purpose of fasting [section 2] and the idea behind the fasting period [section 1.2].

3.4.1 Fast the time of Mecca

As the original geography/recipients of this revelation/guidance, the timings for the fast should always be suitable from here. Some guidelines from Mecca's timings are:

- In the course of the year, deep night ends between 04:10 and 05:40, average of 04:55. Night [civil twilight] arrives between 18:15 and 19:30, average of 18:48.
- In the course of the year, the length of the fast goes from 12:35 to 15:20 hours.

This comes to an average fast of about 14 hours.

3.4.2 Fast the average length of the working day

Considering the UK, a possible approach would be:

1. Astronomical dawn in London fluctuates between approximately 01:00 and 06:00 throughout the year. Let's set the average at 03:30
2. Average workday is from about 09:00 to 17:30.
3. Average commute is about [30](#) minutes.

From this we would get a fast that starts at 03:30 and ends at 18:00. A fast of 14.5 hours.

4 Times of Prayer

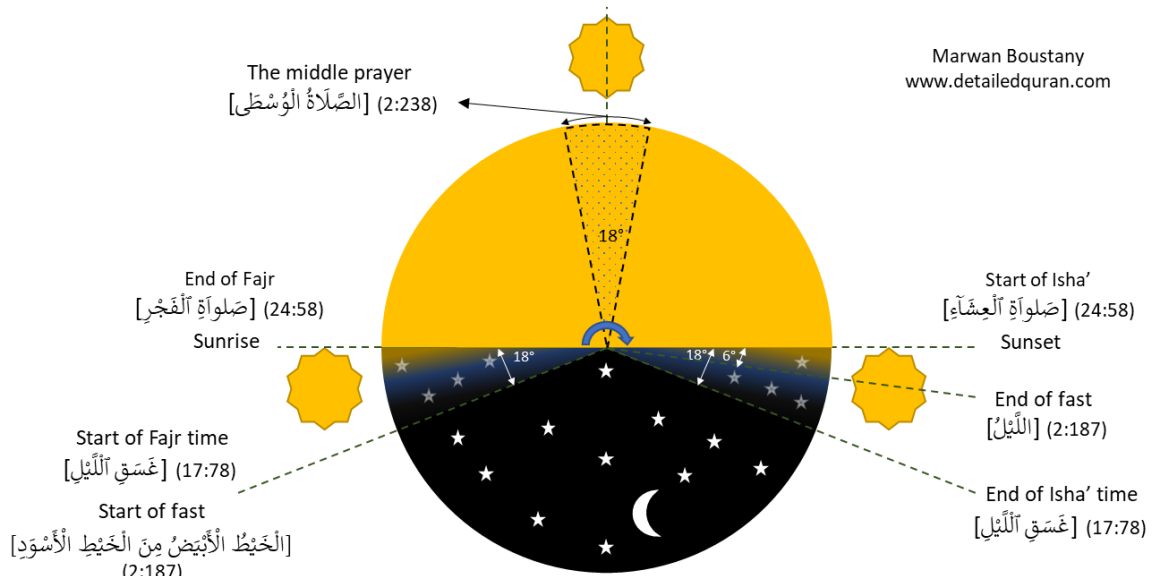


Figure 4: Times of prayer and fasting

4.1 [Observational] Times of the key prayers

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَقُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُوداً

Establish prayer at setting of the sun [a] until the [full/intense] darkness of the night [b]. And the recitation of dawn, indeed, the recitation of dawn is ever witnessed.

(17:78)

[a] The Arabic work [ذلك] has the meaning of rubbing/pressing, and when used as [دَلَّكَتِ الشَّمْسُ], is taken to mean 'the sun set', inclined to setting or setting from the midday. [Lane's Lexicon]

[i] There is a tendency to define it as setting from the midday in order to say that all the prayers are encapsulated by this verse. However, doing so covers 5 prayers without any clarification of timings. The simple meaning of setting helps to define prayer period and aligns with 11:114 for clarity.

[b] With [a] defining the first point, the full darkness of night defines the other. As discussed in section 1.1, this refers to astronomical twilight.

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفِي النَّهَارِ وَرُفْعاً مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ذَلِكَ ذِكْرٌ لِلذَّاكِرِينَ

Establish **salaah** at the two ends of the day, and in a period of **the night** [in proximity to the ends of the day]. Surely, good deeds annul ill deeds. This is a reminder for the mindful.

(11:114)

In combination with (17:78), this verse tells us the time frame at both ends of the day where prayer would take place. This includes the first/last part/phase of the day that exists between sunrise/sunset and ~ civil twilight and a portion of the night thereafter. The understanding in (17:78)[a] of [لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ] to mean the setting of the sun, not only adds clarity to that verse, it also

aligns with the time range presented in (11:114).

حَافِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَىٰ وَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ قَانِتِينَ

Maintain with care the prayers and [in particular] the **middle prayer** and stand before Allah, devoutly obedient.

(2:238)

Taking the simplest possible understanding, I take the middle prayer to be temporally and sequentially in the middle of the fajr and isha prayers. This is also the same prayer as the Friday prayer, this is justified in a separate document on salaah in the Qur'an.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِيَسْتَأْذِنَكُمْ الَّذِينَ مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ لَمْ يَبْلُغُوا الْحُلُمَ مِنْكُمْ ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ مِّن قَبْلِ صَلَاةِ الْفَجْرِ وَحِينَ تَضَعُونَ ثِيَابَكُمْ مِّنَ الظُّهْرِ وَمِن بَعْدِ صَلَاةِ الْعِشَاءِ ثَلَاثُ عَوْرَاتٍ لَّكُمْ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَا عَلَيْهِمْ جُنَاحٌ بَعْدَهُنَّ طَوَّافُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

O you who have believed, let those whom your right hands possess and those who have not [yet] reached puberty among you ask permission of you [before entering] at three times: before the **dawn prayer [a]** and when you put aside your clothing at **noon [due to the heat] [b]** and after the **sunset prayer [c]**. [These are] three times of privacy for you. There is no blame upon you nor upon them beyond these [periods], for they continually circulate among you - some of you, among others. Thus does Allah make clear to you the verses; and Allah is Knowing and Wise.

(24:58)

[a] At the time when you are likely to be changing from bed clothes to day clothes.

[b] If/when you change/remove clothes to cool down on a hot summer noon.

Extract from Lane's Lexicon:

ظُهْرٌ The point of midday: (M, A, K:) or only in summer: (M, K:) or i. q. هَاجِرَةٌ [i. e. midday in summer or when the heat is vehement: or the period from a little before, to a little after, midday in summer: or midday, when the sun declines from the meridian, at the ظُهر: or from its declining until the عَصْر: (S, O, TA:) or the هَاجِرَةٌ, which is when the sun declines from the meridian: (Mṣb:) or the vehement heat of midday:...

[c] After your evening prayer when at some point you may change into bed clothes.

[i] Of note is that this prayer, the isha prayer, is Qur'anically the name for the prayer in the period of sunset to night. What is currently called the maghrib prayer by most Muslims.

[ii] Note the dictionary entry below and also note the hadith after it.

Extract from Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Quran by Al-Raghib al-Isfahani:

العِشِيُّ من زوال الشمس إلى الصّباح. قال تعالى: ﴿إِلَّا عِشِيَّةٌ أَوْ ضُحَاهَا﴾ [النازعات : 46] ، والعِشَاءُ: من صلاة المغرب إلى العتمة، والعِشَاءَانِ: المغرب والعتمة، والعِشَاءُ: ظلمةٌ تعترض في العين

He defines [العِشِيُّ] as from the disappearance of the sun to the dawn and [العِشَاءُ], as seen in (24:58), as the time from the sunset/maghrif prayer until the darkness [of night]..

Reference: Sahih al-Bukhari 563

In-book reference: Book 9, Hadith 40

<https://sunnah.com/bukhari/9/40>

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو مَعْمَرٍ - هُوَ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ عَمْرٍو - قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الْوَارِثِ، عَنِ الْحُسَيْنِ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ بَرِيدَةَ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ الْمُرَيْثِيُّ، أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " لَا تَغْلِبَنَّكُمْ الْأَعْرَابُ عَلَى اسْمِ صَلَاتِكُمُ الْمَغْرِبِ ". قَالَ الْأَعْرَابُ وَتَقُولُ هِيَ الْعِشَاءُ.

Narrated `Abdullah Al-Muzani: The Prophet said, "Do not be influenced by bedouins regarding the name of your **Maghrib** prayer which is called `Isha' by them."

The hadith is a very interesting clue as to the renaming the people of hadith tried to do with the name of prayers. It seems they wanted to silence the Bedouins who preserved its proper Qur'anic name.

4.2 What about very long days?

Keep in mind the discussion of section 1.2.

4.2.1 Purpose of Salaah

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

"I am God; there is no other god beside Me; you shall worship Me alone, and observe the Salaah (Prayers) to remember ME."

(20:14)

آتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ

"Recite that which has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer (Salaah); surely prayer (Salaah) keeps (one) away from indecency and evil, and certainly the remembrance of Allah is the greatest, and Allah knows what you do."

(29:45)

4.2.2 [Functional] Times of key prayers

This discussion builds on sections 1.2 and 3.3.2.

The key function of salaah is to remember Allah, and that has the benefit of keeping us away from the evil that lives in the forgetting of Allah.

Allah defined it on both ends of our workday and in the middle of it. Something that in the average workday, would happen at least once every 5 hours while awake. In days of great length or shortness, it would serve the spirit and logic of Allah's guidance to pray, at least, these functionally timed periods:

1. Before starting the work day.
2. In the middle of the work day.
3. At the end of the work day.