

Fast 22

“Keep up prayer from the declining of the sun till the darkness of the night, and the **recital of the Quran at dawn**. Surely the recital of the Quran at dawn is witnessed. And during a part of the night, keep awake by it, beyond what is incumbent on you; maybe your Lord will raise you to a position of great glory.”
— Ch. 17, v. 78–79.

Notes: Although the address above is in the singular (i.e., the commands “keep up” and “keep awake” are in the singular, and “you” and “your” are singular), and it is the Holy Prophet who is addressed here, but it applies to every Muslim. From the “the declining of the sun” till “the darkness of the night” are the four prayers *zuhr*, *asr*, *maghrib* and *ishā*. The “recital of the Quran at dawn” is the *fajr* prayer, in which usually there is a lengthy recitation of the Quran.

“the recital of the Quran at dawn is witnessed” — This means that there is greater concentration of mind at that quiet time, and the recital is witnessed by man’s inner self.

“And during a part of the night, keep awake by it (i.e., by prayer)...” — This refers to the voluntary *tahajjud* prayer, the time for which is after midnight and before *fajr*. It is the time even more suited for concentration of mind and communion with God. The Holy Prophet, and those of his followers who kept up the tradition of *tahajjud* prayers, indeed rose to “a position of great glory” spiritually and morally.

“O you covering yourself up! Rise to pray by night except a little, half of it, or lessen it a little, or add to it, and **recite the Quran (distinctly) at a leisurely pace**.” — Ch. 73, v. 1–4.

“Your Lord knows indeed that you (O Prophet) pass in prayer nearly two-thirds of the night, and sometimes half of it, and sometimes a third of it, as do a group of those with you. And Allah measures the night and the day. He knows that all of you are not able to do it, so He has turned to you mercifully; **so read of the Quran whatever is easy for you**.” — Ch. 73, v. 20.

Notes: These verses, at the beginning and end of chapter 73, refer to the *tahajjud* prayer, in which an individual, by himself, recites long portions of the Quran. The first passage addresses the Holy Prophet and says that the Quran must be recited with *tartil*. This word means to enunciate the letters distinctly and to read the words

at a slow pace. This is so that attention is turned to their meaning and it moves the heart.

In his compilation of hadith reports, Bukhari has quoted the words from the above verses, “recite the Quran at a leisurely pace”, along with the verse “And it is a Quran We have made distinct, so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees, and We have revealed it in portions” (17:106), and concluded from these verses that *it is disapproved to recite the Quran fast*. In other words, this command to recite the Quran distinctly and slowly is general for all Muslims. Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

“The instruction to read the Quran slowly, so that attention is turned towards its meaning and it moves the heart, is found not only in Hadith but, as shown by Bukhari by quoting these verses, it is also clearly given in the Quran. Despite this, those who have memorized the Quran compete with one another in speed of reciting. In the month of Ramadan, the Quran as recited during *tarawih* prayers cannot usually be understood by anyone. It is recited so fast that even if someone tried to follow its meaning, they are not able to do so. In some places the entire Quran is recited in just one night on the night of the 27th of Ramadan, which is clearly contrary to the command of the Holy Quran to read it with *tartil*.” (*Fazl-ul-Bari*, v. 2, p. 1215)

Bukhari, in the same place, reports that the Holy Prophet told a companion, who used to complete a reading of the Quran every night, to take **one month** to finish it. When he insisted that he could do it in a shorter period, the Holy Prophet allowed him **seven days**, but no less. According to other reports, the Holy Prophet set a limit of three days. He also said: “He who completes the Quran in less than three days, he has not understood it” (Tirmidhi). This shows that the Holy Prophet wanted people to understand the Quran, and his preference was that one should take a month to finish it.

In the second passage above (73:20), it is stated at the end: “Read of the Quran whatever is easy for you”. Reciting of the Quran should not be undertaken as a burdensome task, subjecting one to hard labour. It is not a race against time.

‘Finishing the Quran’ means that one individual reads through the whole of it. There is no concept in Islam of distributing the various parts of the Quran among a number of people in a room and having each person read a different part, and considering this to be ‘finishing the Quran’. Nor is the finishing of the Quran connected in Islam with marking any occasion, such as a sad or happy occasion.