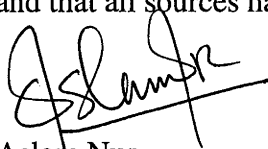


**RAMADAN**  
**FASTING AND FEASTING IN LAMNO ACEH**

**By**  
**ASLAM NUR**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of**  
**Master of Arts**  
**In the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology**  
**Faculty of Arts**  
**The Australian National University**  
**January 1996.**

I declare that this thesis is my own composition,  
and that all sources have been acknowledge.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aslam Nur', written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Aslam Nur

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the course of my research and the writing of this thesis, I received invaluable help and encouragement from many people. It is impossible to individually mention each of them here.

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deepest thanks to my parents. Without their love and their invocation for my future, I would be nothing.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a description of the religious and social experiences of a Acehese Muslim society during Ramadan. Since there is a local adaptation of religious practice in every Islamic community, this study intends to examine the meaning of Ramadan for the Acehese people of Indonesia and more specifically, the people of Lamno. This *kecamatan* (district) is located in the coastal area to the west of Banda Aceh, the capital city of the special province of Aceh. Although all Islamic communities in the world express the meaning of Ramadan in terms of universal Islamic values, the specific articulation of these values in Aceh, is closely related to the socio-cultural background of the local population.

Fasting (abstaining from food, drink and sexual intercourse) as the main worship during Ramadan is practised individually as a direct responsibility to God. However, since fasting is conducted by all Muslims at the same time and in a particular month, this religious duty affects Muslims social activities. Because Ramadan fasting is related to other forms of worship such as giving alms and preparing meals for poor people, all these forms of worship have a direct impact on the life of the community. These activities articulate and thus reinforce certain key values in the Acehese community. In all aspects of Ramadan activities, the element of ritual is an instrumental and expressive activity that tends to promote social solidarity.

This study indicates that for the Acehese, Ramadan is not only perceived as a month of fasting; of blessing; and of God's forgiveness - as is mentioned in the Qur'an and the hadith - but also as a month of purification; a month of *ibadah* (religious worship); and a month of joy. These notions have

traditionally determined the ideal path for the Acehnese in order to reach the essential core of Ramadan at the normative level.

The study finds that most of the people's activities as well as some social norms have changed during Ramadan. The interaction between members of the family, of the extended family, and of the community become more harmonious compared with other times. Thus aspects of the social life of the Lamno people during Ramadan resembles the circumstance of normative *communitas* during liminality.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

For the Acehnese who live in Lamno and probably for Muslims elsewhere as well, Ramadan is the most important month of the year. During this month, all Muslims are obligated to fast, that is to avoid eating, drinking and sexual relations from sunrise until sunset. Ramadan is regarded by Muslims as a holy month and the greatest month because during this month God will give forgiveness to those who fulfil all obligations and avoid the forbidden. In Aceh, as in other Islamic societies, Ramadan is welcomed with joy and gladness and there is much pleasure evident in the tone of people's voices. Ramadan's ritual activities thus provide a window - from an anthropological perspective - to investigate the way Islamic duties are carried out at a practical level by Muslims.

Despite its particular significance, Ramadan has been ignored so far as a specific topic in most Indonesian ethnographies of Islam. There have been several works written about Ramadan, but these are only short discussions and are purely ethnographic descriptions without any interpretation. Snouck Hurgronje (1906), for example, only devoted a few pages to Ramadan activities in his ethnographic works on Aceh.

Although his record on Ramadan activities among the Pidie people of Aceh was brief, James Siegel (1969) found that in this society Ramadan is a moment of pride and triumph. It is especially a time when men feel renewed and in full possession of themselves. According to Siegel, if a man returns home from *rantau* (outside home area) at any time during the year, it is most likely to be either during Ramadan or during some other great Islamic festivals, such as

the celebration of the pilgrimage. Blackwood (1993) also found that among the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Ramadan is a time for the Minangkabau who live outside their homeland to return to their home areas. During this time, the migrants renew their close ties with their village and bring their earnings to share with kin in the village.

In his discussion of religion among the three principal strata of Javanese Islam, Clifford Geertz (1991) gave a short account of the fast as a part of Javanese *santri* activities during Ramadan. Similarly, Babcock (1983) wrote about Ramadan activities in his discussion on religion and cultural identity among the Javanese of North Sulawesi. In this society, he found that Ramadan was not just viewed as a month of fasting but as a much more religious month than any other.

Several days before the coming of Ramadan, there are short articles in newspapers or magazines about Ramadan. Generally, all these articles are of a descriptive nature, based on Islamic prescriptions, and discuss the importance of Ramadan from a normative level and do not delve into the important meanings of Ramadan from the people's point of view.

Likewise in ethnographies on other Islamic societies, Ramadan as a specific topic of investigation, has been examined only minimally. Ryan (1978:276), for instance, briefly discussed Ramadan activities among the Yoruba people of West Africa. There have been some analyses which have attempted to examine the meaning of Ramadan from the performer's perspective. Zaki Yamani (1987) discussed Ramadan activities in Saudi Arabia and saw Ramadan in that country as asserting both nationalistic solidarity and a much wider solidarity with all Muslims. The reason is that during this month, individuals and society close their doors to other cultures, that is to non-Muslims, and return to what they believe is their traditional way of life.

Eickelman (1976:137) found in Morocco that the celebration of Ramadan distinguishes 'men with reason'. Following him, Marjo Buitelaar (1992) gave a complete explanation of Ramadan activities from an anthropological perspective among the Berkanese and the Marrakeche people of Morocco. Her work is especially interesting with its emphasis and analysis of women's participation, as well as examining the three notions of Ramadan from a general Moroccan perspective: the notion of purification; the notion of *umma* (the Islamic community); and the notion of *ajr* (religious merit).

The primary objective of this study is to provide an understanding, at a practical level, of the way Muslims carry out religious rituals during Ramadan. When a scholar studies Islam, Islam is distinguished by two forms: firstly, normative Islam - what is described in the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Muhammad's tradition); and secondly, Islamic histories - namely what is practised by Muslims at the ritual level (Denny, 1985:65-77, Rahman, 1985:189)<sup>1</sup>. These two approaches to Islam can be explained that the traditional Islamic scholars are concerned with the Qur'an, the Sunnah and their interpretations at the expense of everyday religious understanding and practices. The major topic and discussion for them is the question of how to understand properly the texts of religious tradition: the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the commentaries on each. Anthropologists focus on locally distinctive tradition at the expense of the religiously shared (Bowen, 1993:5). Several examples of Islamic studies from the anthropological perspective can be cited, such as Clifford Geertz's book titled *Islam Observed* (1968), and John R. Bowen's book titled *Muslims Through Discourse* (1993).

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<sup>1</sup>Certain different terms are employed to point out this distinction. Eickelman (1981) uses the terms "formal" for "normative Islam, and "informal" for "Islamic histories". Waardenburg (1979) employs term "official" for "normative Islam", and "popular Islam" for "Islamic histories".

Based on the idea that "the study of ritual is the study of actual behaviour as much as it is the mastery of ideal form" (Denny, 1985:77), I attempt in this study to convey the ideas and feelings expressed by Acehnese Muslims performing Islamic rituals during Ramadan. I believe that, to some extent, the meaning of such rituals for people varies from one society to another, and the variation of meaning is related to the socio-cultural background of each society.

In this study, I build on this basic question as my point of departure for further analysis: namely, what is the meaning of Ramadan with all its religious ritual for the Acehnese people. In exploring this question, I follow Geertz's perspective, what he called "thick description" in the sense of ethnographic analysis (Geertz, 1973:6). This means that to do ethnography is not only to collect and to write up the data, but most importantly is to interpret and construct the data with a specific meaning. In general, this study will examine and construct three notions of the meaning of Ramadan for the Acehnese people: Ramadan as a month of purification; Ramadan as a month of *ibadah* (worship); and Ramadan as a month of joy. These three notions are related to the Acehnese experience of life for both the month before Ramadan and during Ramadan.

Since the special province of Aceh covers a very large area, I focus this study on three *gampong* (villages) of the Lamno district. This study is a result of three months of fieldwork in Lamno.

## **1.2 Lamno**

Lamno is a *kecamatan* (district) situated in the Northern most coastal area of Sumatra approximately 90 Km to the west of Banda Aceh, the capital city of the special province of Aceh. This *kecamatan* is divided into seven

*kemukiman* (a subdivision of an district) which consists of forty eight *gampong* (villages) with an estimated population of 20,986 inhabitants<sup>2</sup>. Although Lamno is situated in a coastal area, only four percent of its inhabitants work as fishermen. Most people work as farmers in *sawah* (wet rice field) and *ladang* (cultivated field), whereas the remainder work as traders, labourers and civil servants. As in other Acehnese societies, almost all the inhabitants of Lamno are Muslims except some migrants from outside who work as civil servants.

In Aceh, Lamno is often associated with two features: some blue eyed people of European descent and the existence of a shrine - the tomb of Poteu Meurehom Daya. In one *gampong* of Lamno, that is Daya village, we encounter some people who have lighter skin and blue eyes. Historically, Lamno - even before the arrival of the Dutch in Aceh - was a trading city which had good trading relations with the European countries such as Portugal and Spain (Zainuddin, 1961:204-5). At that time, a process of assimilation took place and many European people stayed there and married local women. As a result, to the present, some of their descendants can still be found among the inhabitants of Lamno.

In comparison to the wider population, their bodies are bigger and taller, and their women are perceived as more beautiful than other Acehnese. At first glance, they almost look like European people. One can recognise them as Acehnese by looking at their clothes and by listening to their speech. However, they do not form an exclusive group, nor do they regard themselves as people with a higher social class as happens among some of the Arabic descendants<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>This estimation is based on the figures in 1993 which were provided by *kecamatan* Jaya Lamno office. It is important to note that every *gampong* (village) in Aceh has at least *one meunasah* (prayer house). A collection of several villages is called a *kemukiman* which is defined by having one mosque. The village head is named *keuchik* and he is assisted by an *imeum meunasah* (the person in charge of the meunasah activities) (Siegel, 1969, Weekes, 1984:4-5).

Nevertheless, whilst these Lamno people live at the same social level as other people in the same community - as one man explained to me - it is difficult to marry a *jagad* (white) woman. Because of their beauty, they command a very high brideprice.

Another striking feature of Lamno is the existence of the shrine of Poteu Meurehom Daya. He was Sultan Shalatin Alaidin Riayat Syah, the first person to preach Islam in the Daya Kingdom and who later became a *Sultan* (Ruler) of the Islamic kingdom of Lamno Daya. People appreciated him and regarded him as *ureng keramat* (a person who has received *berkah*, blessing of Allah). After he died in 1508, the people have always paid deep respect to him. His name, Poteu Meurehom, means: our king who received the blessing of God (Marjuni, 1982:21). Later, because he had no descendants, the kingdom became part of the Islamic kingdom of Aceh Darussalam<sup>4</sup>.

Like the tombs of other Islamic saints in other Islamic societies, the tomb of Poteu Meuroehum is deemed to be a good place to seek *berkah* and to *peuleh kaoy* (perform a specific deed if one's request is granted). Therefore, many people with different *hajat* (purposes) come there, not only from Lamno, but also from other parts of Aceh.

Although visiting tombs is a common practice in all Islamic societies, the social and religious meaning of visiting the tomb of a saint varies from one society to another and is shaped by everyday life experiences. For example, Eickelman shows that in Morocco visiting a certain tomb is a spiritual

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<sup>3</sup>In Aceh, some families of Arabic descent are regarded as *sayyid*, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, such as the al-Idrus family, and they form a higher class compared to other Acehnese.

<sup>4</sup>Poteu Meuroehom had three children. However, two of them had already died in the struggle with the Portuguese. His daughter Puteri Nurul Huda married Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah, the king of Islamic Kingdom Aceh Darussalam. Therefore, he had no male descendant to continue his kingdom.

movement to renew and update religious understanding (Masud, 1990:44-45). Whereas in Indonesia it is generally accepted that visiting a saint's tomb is mostly in order to receive the saint's *baraka*, since *baraka* is regarded as a remedy for various kind of ills (Jamhari, 1994). However, in almost all Islamic societies, the saint - not only while alive, but also after his death - and his tomb, are deemed as a source of *baraka* (Evans Pritchard, 1973:8-9, Trimmingham, 1971:26).

Upon reaching the Poteu Meurehom's tomb, visitors must climb ninety-nine *anak tangga* (steps). This is because the tomb of Poteu Meuroehom is situated on the top of a hill surrounded by the Lamno sea on three sides. According to the *juru kunci* (caretaker), the ninety-nine steps symbolises that the Poteu Meurrehoum had already received the blessing of Allah, since Allah has ninety-nine names. The tomb is covered by a white (although slightly soiled) *kelambu* (mosquito net). Visitors can only see the tomb by raising the *kelambu*. According to the *juru kunci*, the *kelambu* is changed when the cloth is no longer appropriate for use (approximately every two years), or when there is a contribution from a visitor. Moreover, when the visitor wants to perform *do'a* (invocation) or to recite the *yasin* (a specific chapter of the Qur'an), they should take ablution and then enter within the *kelambu* and sit just behind the tomb. Before leaving the tomb, visitors are advised to wash their face or one part of their body with water from a *guci* (earthen water pot) behind the tomb. It is believed that the water is a part of Poteu Meureuhom's *keramat*, and through that water the visitors will obtain the *baraka* of Poteu Meureuhom.

Since he is regarded as *ureng keramat* (saint), many stories of miracles are related to his tomb. One of the famous stories is about his *guci*. In the past, it was believed that although the water in the *guci* could be used as much as needed, and as long as certain rules were not broken, the water would never dry

up. However, during the Japanese Occupation, Japanese soldiers took the *guci*'s water - most were not Muslim and to be a Muslim is one of several prerequisites - and since that time, the *guci* became dry. Therefore, at present, the *guci* has to be filled with water from a *sumur* (well) which is still in the yard of the tomb. Nonetheless, the use of this well water does not reduce the *keramat* of Poteu Meureuhom.

One important ceremonial event in the context of this tomb is the *kaurie* (communal feast) *peumenab dan seumulueng*. The *kaurie* is held on the tenth day of the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar<sup>5</sup> and is guided by the descendants of the friends of Poteu Meureuhom. In the *peumenab dan seumuleung* feast, there are five or six buffaloes slaughtered. It is believed that those animals belong to Poteu Meureuhom. Until now, according to a descendant of Poteu Meureuhom's friends, more than fifty of Poteu Meureuhom's buffaloes can still be found in Daya village. All these buffalo are under the control of the descendants of Poteu Meureuhom's friends. Although these buffaloes are only intended for slaughter in the *peumenab* and *seumuleung* feast, some of the controllers have sold the buffaloes secretly. Therefore, starting several years ago, in order to establish more control over the disposal of these buffaloes, the responsible family is now expected to announce to the people how many buffaloes are available before the slaughtering takes place.

The feast begins following the performance of the *'id al-adha* prayer, approximately around ten o'clock in the morning. The leader, who is called *panglima*, recites the history of Poteu Meureuhom and this is followed by some *do'a* by the *teungku imum* (Islamic leader). Although the occasion of slaughter

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<sup>5</sup>This is the month during which the Pilgrimage to Mecca takes place. The ritual slaughtering of a lamb or cow, to commemorate Ibrahim's willingness to obey God's command and sacrifice his son Ismail. The sacrifice that is performed not only by the pilgrims in Mecca, but ideally by all Muslims.

falls on *'id al-adha* (the Islamic time of sacrifice), this feast is not intended as the ritual of "*keurubeuen*" (sacrifice). Therefore, the *peumeunab* and *seumulung* feast is a specific Lamno feast which is not recognised by other Acehese societies. Furthermore, after slaughter, the meat is divided into three piles; one pile for the descendants of Poteu Meureuhom's friends, another is shared by poor families in *gampong* Daya, and the remainder is cooked and eaten by all the participants at the feast. In this feast, the cosmological view of the Lamno people concerning the meaning of *keramat* is very clear: *keramat* can be transmitted from one person to another. Therefore, according to my informant, because people believe that by eating the meat, the *keramat* of Poteu Meureuhom will be transmitted to their body, some visitors are willing to buy the meat at a price above the market price. Interestingly, although the Poteu Meureuhom's buffalos are regarded as a part of his *keramat*, sometimes those buffalo are used by people for plowing their *sawah* (wet rice field).

The maintenance of the tomb provides evidence that this society is strongly influenced by Islamic tradition. Nevertheless the tomb of Poteu Meureuhom and the ritual activities around the tomb are not the only symbols of dynamic Islamic life in Lamno. Another important element of the dynamic life of Islam in Lamno, particularly in daily activities, is the existence of several *dayah* or *pesantren* (Islamic Boarding Schools) with their *teungku* (religious scholars). Historically, the *dayah* and its *teungku* has had a great influence within Acehese society, not only in dealing with religious matters, but also in solving social problems (Siegel, 1969:9-11). In the wars of the colonial era, for example, the military leadership of the Acehese passed into the hands of religious leaders. Therefore, Snouck Hurgronje, a famous Dutch adviser in social and religious matters, argued that the Dutch should suppress the *teungku* and confine their activities only to religious matters.

There are several *dayah* (Islamic boarding school) in Lamno, the biggest one is *dayah* Budi which has more than one thousand students. All *dayah* observe a traditional form of education and only follow *mazhab* Syafi'ie. *Dayah* Budi is guided by *teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq, a person who has strong influence within Lamno society and is widely followed by the people. In every general election, for example, leaders from all Indonesian political parties visit him in order to attract the attention of the people. Nevertheless, he never expresses a specific choice and lets the people choose whatever party they want - because he is aware that he must stand by all groups. *Teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq also holds a *pengajian* (general teaching) each week in Sabang mosque. In this *pengajian*, people can meet him, kiss his hand and ask him questions which are related to daily activities as well as specific religious problems.

The important influence of *teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq within Lamno society can also be seen by his eminent role in determining the first day of the month of Ramadan. During the last few days of *Shaban*, predicting when Ramadan will begin becomes a favourite discussion among Lamno people. It is because, sometimes (if not always), what is decided by the government through the Department of Religious Affairs is contradicted by what is decided by several *teungku* in Aceh (this contradiction will be further discussed in chapter IV). *Teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq's decision is eagerly awaited as definitive by most people in Lamno.

Most importantly, several years ago, the dynamic movement of Islamic modernism began reaching Lamno<sup>6</sup>. Although, this movement does not take the

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<sup>6</sup>In Aceh, as well as in other parts of Indonesia, the Islamic modernist movement is often identified in terms of the Muhammadiyah organisation. This organisation was founded by Kiyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan in Jogjakarta in 1912. He studied Islam in Saudi Arabia and his ideas were influenced by Muhammad Abduh and the Wahabi movement. The basic idea of Muhammadiyah is to reject *bid'ah* (heresy), and only accept the Qur'an and Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad tradition) as a source of Islamic teaching (Samad, 1991:57-68).

form of an organisation such as Muhammadiyah and PERSIS, the ideas of Islamic modernism became a new topic of discussion among the people. As a result, certain people (although not many) have begun to criticise several ritual practices which were properly accepted by people, such as *kaurie ureng matee* (feasts to commemorate a death) and the tradition of visiting Poteu Meureuhom's tomb.

In conclusion, the special province of Aceh is divided, governmentally, into ten districts. The capital city of this province is Banda Aceh. Historically, the Acehnese have divided Aceh into four regions: Aceh proper, Pidie, East Aceh and West Aceh (Siegel, 1969:12). However, in the context of *adat* (tradition or custom), the province recognises seven *daerah adat* (traditional areas) based on different languages, different traditional clothes and different traditional food (Alamsyah, 1990:7). Lamno occupies a unique position. According to the regional division, Lamno is located in the *Aneuk Jamee* area. In this area, the Minangkabau language is regarded as the traditional language. However, everyone in Lamno speaks the Acehnese language, and many people can not speak Minangkabau. In relation to traditional food - particularly foods which are served in every ceremony - the Lamno people follow *aneuk jamee* tradition in some parts. Furthermore, because Islam has been regarded as a fundamental aspect of Acehnese culture<sup>7</sup>, the *adat* (tradition) of Lamno can be deemed as an example of Acehnese culture in general.

### 1.3 Outline

In Chapter Two, the discussion will focus on the rituals in Ramadan from the prescriptive Islamic point of view. These prescriptions will follow the

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<sup>7</sup>The relation between *adat* (tradition) and Islam in Aceh can be best understood in the Acehnese idiom "*Adat bak poteu Meureuhom, hukom bak syiah kual, hukom ngon adat, lagee zat ngon sifet*" (Tradition in the hands of the government, Islamic law in the hands of the Islamic scholar. Tradition and the Islamic law are seen as something which can not be separated)

*Qur'an* (revelations from Allah), the Sunnah (customs or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), and the perception of some Islamic scholars in discussing Ramadan with all its religious activities. The purpose of this discussion is to establish a basis from which to consider how such rituals are transformed and implemented by the Acehnese Muslims at a practical level in Lamno.

Chapter Three will examine the ways the Acehnese welcome Ramadan. By looking at the people's activities on the days preceding Ramadan, I begin to formulate and define the Acehnese perception and understanding of the core of Ramadan. Following Chapter Three, Chapter Four discusses Acehnese activities during Ramadan itself. In discussing the Acehnese activities during the month, I follow the *ibadah* (religious services) activities that must be performed by Muslims during Ramadan, such as fasting and special night prayer. As in Chapter Three, the objective of this discussion is to convey the ideas and feeling expressed by people performing those activities.

In Chapter five, I elaborate on those activities preceding and during Ramadan and develop my own interpretation. The purpose of this elaboration is to answer the question of how the Acehnese view Ramadan. There are three key notions that are discussed in this chapter: Ramadan as a month of purification, as a month of *ibadah* (religious services), and as a month of joy. Chapter Six offers a conclusion and summarises the critical elements of the preceding chapters.

## CHAPTER II

### RAMADAN IN THE ISLAMIC PRESCRIPTION

#### 2.1 Introduction

The religion of Islam is based on two fundamental sources: the Qur'an and the hadith. The Qur'an is the Word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the archangel Gabriel. The hadith, sometimes called the *sunnah*, are the record of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (Nash, 1988:42:67:). The Qur'an and the hadith together constitute the *shari'ah*, the Divine Law, a set of social and human norms, a path to be pursued by Muslims. Since the Qur'an and the hadith do not by themselves constitute a legal system, therefore, the science of *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence, was developed (Ibrahim, 1965:1). By the end of the third century after *hijrah*, Muhammad's immigration from Mecca to Medina, several *mazhab* (schools of law) had been founded. These schools of law are the Hanafy (767), the Maliky (795), the Syafi'iy (820), and the Hanbaly school (855) (Tritton, 1980:58-61). The Acehnese, and probably the majority of Muslims in South-East Asia belong to the Syafi'iy school (Ismuha, 1983:32, Weekes, 1984:xxx).

Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calender, is a very special month for Muslims. In this month the Qur'an was revealed for the first time as joyful tidings of a new dawn for ailing humanity were bestowed by God. Furthermore, Allah prescribed fasting during Ramadan and declared the two - fasting and Ramadan - to be inseparable. Ramadan is described as *syahru al-mubarak* (the month full of the blessings of Allah) because it is at this time Allah gives His blessing of forgiveness to Muslims. In one hadith, the Prophet Muhammad said: "When Ramadan arrives, the gates of Paradise are flung open,

while those of Hell are closed, and all the devils are put in chains" (Al-Ghazali, 1979:11).

In this chapter, I will focus on Ramadan and its associated *ibadah* (religious services) in term of Islamic prescriptions. By "Islamic prescription" I refer to the Qur'an, the hadith, and Islamic various scholars' points of view on the *ibadah* during Ramadan. The organisation of this chapter is based on all the *ibadah* that are performed by Muslims during the month. In the last part of the chapter, I will describe several important events in the life of the Prophet Muhammad which took place during Ramadan.

## 2.2 Religious Services of Ramadan month

The first *ibadah* which is always associated with Ramadan is fasting. Fasting - in the Qur'anic perspective is stated in terms of *sawm* - during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam which must be performed by all Muslims<sup>1</sup>. The obligation of fasting during Ramadan is stated in the Qur'an, *sura* (chapter) 2: 183 "O you who have believed ! fasting is prescribed for you, just at it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may refrain from doing evil and do the deeds of righteous ones"<sup>2</sup>.

According to one hadith, as quoted by Al-Ghazali (1979:5), at the time the Prophet Muhammad *hijrah* (migrated) to Medina, he found that the Jews observing fasting on the day of *Ashura* (the Day of Atonement). When they were asked about it, they said: "This is the day on which God gave victory to Moses and the children of Israel over Pharaoh, so we keep it as a fast to honour

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<sup>1</sup>The five pillars of Islam are:*shahadah* (Islamic testimony that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger), *shalat* (the five daily prayers), *zakat* (alms-giving), *sawm* (fasting during Ramadan), and *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) (Swarup, 1984:1-2).

<sup>2</sup> All the the Qur'anic translation in this thesis are from based on the book titled "True translation of the Glorious Holy Quran, by the late Ali Ahmad Khan Jullundri (1962).

it." The Prophet replied by saying, "We are more worthy of Moses than you are." Then the Prophet and his *sahabah* (friends) observed a fast on that day. One year later, that is in the second year of *hijrah*, Muhammad received the revelation from Allah (*surah* 2:183 as stated above) to abolish the obligation of the *Ashura* fast -but the custom of fasting on Ashura became optional and supererogatory - and instead to institute the obligation of the Ramadan fast for all Muslims (Ash Shiddieqi, 1990:50, Houtsma et al., 1987: 193, Al-Ghazali, *ibid*).

Fasting in the legal sense entails complete abstinence from food, drink, and sexual intercourse from before sundown until sunset everyday for the entire month. Allah says in the Qur'an:

"It is made lawful to you to approach your wives on the night of the fasts, they are your covering, and you are their covering. God knew that you were dishonest to your own soul, but He turned to you (mercifully) and forgave you, so now associate with them and seek what God has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn, then complete the fast till night" (Sura 2:187).

Fasting during Ramadan is compulsory for every Muslim, male or female, under the following conditions: they must be mentally and physically fit; to be of full age; the age of puberty and discretion; to be present at their permanent settlement; and it should be fairly certain that the fasting is unlikely to cause the person any harm, physical or mental. For a woman, she must not be menstruating or still bleeding from childbirth (Abdalati, unknown:92-3, Houtsma et al., 1987: 193). Breaking the fast is only permitted to those who are ill, travelling, and menstruating. For these people, the fasting days missed have to be made up later in the year. Allah says in the Qur'an: "...but if any of you is ill or on journey then he should fast a like number in the days later, God desires ease for you, and He does not desire to put you to difficulty..."(Sura 2: 185).

There are other exceptions from the obligation of fasting, as mentioned in the Qur'an: "...And for those who are unable to fast, a redemption by feeding a poor man..." (Sura 2: 184). Those people included in this category are: pregnant women, nursing women, those aged who are unable to observe the fast, and people who perform hard work. These people are released from the obligation of fasting. However, they have to compensate by feeding one needy person every day (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990: 81-9, Hassan, 1980:183-4).

Breaking the fast without any reason is very sinful. In one hadith, as recorded by Al-Hakim, the Prophet Muhammad said: "Anyone who breaks the fast without having any reasons that release him from the obligation, he cannot make up the fast that he has broken forever" (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:185, [my translation]). However, should someone unintentionally eat or drink when they should be fasting, the fast is valid. In this context, the Prophet said: "If one eats by an oversight, he may continue the fast because God Himself has caused him to eat" (Houtsma et al., 1987:194). Having sexual intercourse during the daytime very sinful - because it breaks the fast - and the person has to pay a special fine. The fine can be discharged by either freeing a slave or, failing that, by observing a two month fast or, failing that, by feeding sixty poor people (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990: 140-2, [my translation]). However, during the Prophet's lifetime, a poor man who violated this prohibition received his expiation at no cost to him. The Prophet gave him a basket of dates and told him: "Go and give it to your family to eat (Swarup, 1983:47).

There are several practises recommended by the Prophet for fasting people. They are advised to take *sahur*, a light meal before the break of the dawn. In one hadith, as recorded by Bukhari, the Prophet said: "Eat *sahur* for there is propitiousness in it" (Nadwi, 1980:204, Hassan, 180) Besides, they are also advised to take *futur* (meal for breaking the fast). The time for *sahur* is as

late as possible before sunrise, while *fatur* is taken as soon as possible after sunset. Additionally, fasting people are strongly recommended by the Prophet to refrain from indecent talk, slander, calumny, lying and insult. In this context, the prophet said; "if one does not keep his hands and feet from evil deeds, the result of his fasting is only hunger and thirst" (Abdalati, unknown:94, Houtsma et al., 1987: 194). Based on this hadith, Al-Ghazali, an Islamic sufi (1058-1111) divided the fasting into three levels. Firstly, the fasting of the "general public", which involves refraining from satisfying the appetites of the stomach and sex. Secondly, the fasting of the "select few", which involves keeping the ears, the eyes, tongue, and hand, as well as other senses, free from sin. Finally, the fasting of the "elite among the select few", is the fast of the heart from mean thoughts and worldly worries and its complete unconcern with anything but God (Al-Ghazali, 1979:28). In his view, fasting has a special virtue in comparison with other religious duties, because it puts the endurance of believers to the test and involves a continuous battle against Satan.

One of the major problems in any discussion of Ramadan fasting is how the first day of Ramadan should be determined. This problem emerged because the Qur'anic verse in sura 2: 185, which said that "Ramadan is the month in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed, as a guide to mankind, and a criterion to judge between the truth and the falsehood, so whoever of you is present (at one's own home) in this month, then he should keep the fast..." can be interpreted in various ways. There are two methods which have been used by Islamic scholars to determine the first day of Ramadan. The first is through the *ru'ya* (seeing) method. In this method, the beginning of Ramadan occurs when the *hilal*, the first crescent of the new month, is seen. The second method is through the *hisab* (astronomy), by which the first day of Ramadan is determined by

calculating the exact duration of Ramadan, which as a lunar month, consists of between twenty-nine and thirty days (Buitelaar, 1993:21-2).

People who hold to the *ru'ya* method build their arguments on one hadith which was recorded by Bukhari and Muslim, which says: "Fast when you see the moon, and break the fast when you see the moon" [my translation]. Another hadith said that: "Indeed, the month is twenty-nine days. So, do not observe the fast unless you see the moon, and do not you end the fast till you see the moon. If it is cloudy, you have to extend the Shaban month to thirty days (Rahman, 1980:125, Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:100-1, [my translation]). In contrast, people who stand on the *hisab* method build their argument on the Qur'anic verse which says that: "It is He Who made the sun shining lustrous and the moon luminous, and ordained for he stages that you may number the years and reckon the days and month..."(Sura 10: 5). Therefore, the first day of Ramadan can be determined by reckoning the rotation of the sun and the moon.

Another of the most intimate *ibadah* associated with Ramadan is *shalat taraweh* (special night prayer). This prayer is observed after performing the *Isya* (evening) prayer. The special night prayer is not only recommended to be observed during Ramadan, but also during other months. However, it was most strongly recommended by the Prophet Muhammad that this prayer to be observed during Ramadan. In one hadith, which was recorded by Muslim, the Prophet Muhammad said: "Whoever of you observes the special night prayer during Ramadan, and only because of faith in Allah and because of asking His blessing, Allah will forgive all his sins (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:190, [my translation]). In another hadith, the Prophet indicated that the link between Ramadan fasting and the special night prayer can not be separated in the context of receiving the Forgiveness of Allah (Ash-Shiddieqy, *ibid*). Therefore, this

prayer is an important part of the activities of Muslims in order to attain the core of Ramadan.

One of the major problems in any discussion of the *shalat taraweh* is determining the extent of its *raka'at* (circle)<sup>3</sup>. The standard view is that the *shalat taraweh* which was observed by the prophet Muhammad has only eleven *raka'at*. In one hadith which is recorded by Bukhari and Muslim, one of the prophet's wives, Aisyah, explained that: "the Prophet Muhammad observed the special night prayer, whether during Ramadan or in the other months, with only eleven *raka'at*"(Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:192, [my translation]). In contrast, many other Islamic scholars argue that the *shalat taraweh* during Ramadan consists of twenty three *raka'at* or more. However, this view is less firmly grounded because there is no any indication that the Prophet observed *taraweh* prayer with more than eleven *raka'at* (Ibid: 1990:196-7).

Reciting the Qur'an at night is one of the important activities during Ramadan. The Prophet Muhammad used to pay the greatest attention to the recitation of the Qur'an during this month. At the time of recitation, the Prophet was accompanied by the archangel Gabriel. This was reported by Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter, who said that: "the archangel Gabriel comes to the Prophet every night during Ramadan in order to listen to Muhammad's recitation of the Qur'an and also he recites the Qur'anic verses in front of the Prophet" (ibid: 187, Nadwi, 1972:194).

The last ten nights of Ramadan are the best period of the month. It is at this time that the night known as *Lailatul Qadar* (the night of power) takes place<sup>4</sup>. The *Lailatul Qadr* is the night in which the Qur'an - in its entirety - was

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<sup>3</sup>In the Muslim prayer ritual, the *raka'at* involves the bending of the torso from an upright position, followed by prostration.

<sup>4</sup> *Qadr* means power, honour, glory, and also decree and destiny. While *qadr* denotes what "God distributed, divided or apportioned, as though by measure, sustenance, or the means of

sent down (to the firmament of the world) and, thereafter, was revealed little by little to Muhammad (Nadwi, 1972:209). The significance of *Lailatul Qadr* has been described by Allah as a night which is better than a thousand months. The Qur'an says:

"1- Surely, We have revealed it (the Holy Qur'an) in the magnificent Night of Destiny and Command. 2- And what do thou know what the Night of destiny and Command is?. 3- The Night of Destiny and Command is better than a thousand months. 4- The angels and the holy spirits (Gabriel) descend in it by the permission of their Lord with all the Commandments of God for all affairs. 5- Peace! What a blessed Night! (in which God sends Peace over His Earth), and which at last turns into the break of Dawn" (Sura 97:1-5).

In one hadith, as recorded by Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet Muhammad said: "Whoever stands in prayer and worship on the Night of Power, with complete faith and with sincere hope of gaining reward, all his previous sins are forgiven" (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:256, [my translation]). Although the *Lailatul Qadr* is a very special night, no one knows exactly when the *Lailatul Qadr* will take place. The reason for not distinguishing the exact time of *Lailatul Qadar* is to encourage all Muslims to observe as many *ibadah* as possible during the last ten nights of Ramadan. The Prophet Muhammad gave only a short explanation about this night, saying that: "One should seek the Night of Power in the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan" (Nadwi, 1972:209).

One important *ibadah* which was observed by the Prophet during the last ten nights of Ramadan was *i'tikaf* (staying in a mosque without going out). The intention of *i'tikaf* is to be close with Allah and to be far from any violations of God's law (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:265, Ayub, 1985:91). The prophet Muhammad observed the *i'tikaf* for ten days from the twentieth day until the last day of

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sustenance". According to some authorities, the appellation of *Lailatul Qadr* applies to the night in which the means of sustenance are apportioned (Nadwi, 1972:207).

Ramadan, in order to encounter the *Lailatul Qadr*. At that time, he did not leave the mosque and performed *zikir* (Islamic chanting) and *do'a* (prayer) (Ash-Shiddieqy, *ibid*:269).

During the last days of Ramadan, Muslims have to pay *zakat al-fitrah*. The word *zakat* means "to purify", and the *al-fitrah* means "the purity" (Rahman, 1980:112). In relationship to the obligation of fasting, *zakat al-fitrah* is one of the duties of Ramadan and will serve to atone for any involuntary negligence during this month. The Prophet Muhammad said: "The function of *zakat al-fitrah* is to serve to atone for any involuntary negligence on the part of fasting people and also to be a food for needy and poor people on the day of '*id fitri* (the celebration of the end of Ramadan (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:285, [my translation])

The *zakat al-fitrah* must be handed over by every free Muslim for himself and all persons for whom he is legally bound to support. This must be done at the latest on the first day of the Shawwal, before people perform the '*id fitri* prayer. If the *zakat al-fitrah* is paid after performing the prayer, it was not regarded as the *zakat al-fitrah*, but only as a usual donation. A man is exempt only if he possesses the bare necessities of life for himself and his family (Houtsma et al., 1987:1204). The recipients of the *zakat al-fitrah* are the same as in the case of the general *zakat*<sup>5</sup>. However, according to some Islamic scholars, the *zakat al-fitrah* must be given to the needy and the poor as a priority. The Prophet Muhammad said: "Give the *zakat al-fitrah* to needy and

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<sup>5</sup>The recipients of the *zakat*, according to the Qur'an, sura 9:60 are: "Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and the administrators who are appointed over them to administer, and for those, the love of True Religion has captivated their heart (so that they have left their kith and kin and everything for the love of Truth), and to release the slaves, and those in debt, and in the Way of God and for the wayfarer, this is an ordinance from God; and God is the Possessor of great knowledge and wisdom".

poor, in order to save them from being a beggar on the '*id al-fitri* day" (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:188, [my translation]).

The end of Ramadan is marked by the '*id al-fithri* festival. Muslims celebrate this festival by performing two *raka'at* '*id* prayer at the mosque or *lapangan* (field). Before performing the prayer, Muslims are advised by the Prophet to take a bath, put on perfume, and wear new clothes. While they go to the place of prayer, Muslims chant *takbir*. The chanting of *takbir* is to say: "Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest. There is no God But Allah, Allah is the greatest" (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:291 [my translation]). The celebration of '*id al-fitri* marks the end of Ramadan.

### **2.3 Important Islamic events during Ramadan**

The first important event to take place during Ramadan is *nuzulul Qur'an* (revelation of the Qur'an). At the time when Muhammad was about forty years old, he made a spiritual retreat in which he spent much of his time in *tahannuth* (solitude), and devoting himself to worshipping God at the Mount of Hira (Armstrong, 1991:82). According to his betrothed, Aisyah, solitude became so dear to Muhammad that he would go to a cave on Mount Hira to engage in meditation there for a number of nights. Then he would return to his family for a short time to procure provisions for another stay (Glubb, 1970:84).

One night on the seventeenth day of Ramadan 610, as reported by Aisyah, a vision come to him in the cave and said to him : "O Muhammad, thou art the Messenger of God, and I am Gabriel". Later, the angel ordered him, "Recite". Muhammad refused by saying: "I am not a reciter". The angel then enfolded him, pressing him so tightly that he could not breathe (Glubb, *ibid*). Eventually, after Gabriel had ordered him to recite for a third times, the archangel said:

Read in the Name of thy Lord the Cherisher, Who created ;  
He created man from clot of blood:  
Read! and thy Lord is Most Honourable, and Most Benevolent,  
Who taught (to write) by pen.  
He taught man that which he knew not (Sura 96:1-5).

The revelation on Mount Hira was obviously the most important event in the history of Islam. After receiving these five verses, Muhammad became a Messenger of Allah who was sent as "*rahmatan lil-alamiin*" (a Mercy for the Worlds) (sura21:107). Above all, the month of Ramadan, as the month in which the Qur'an was first revealed, became the starting point for Muhammad to call all human beings into Islam. Allah says in the Qur'an: "Ramadan is the month in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed, as a guide to mankind, and the criterion to judge between the truth and falsehood (*sura 2: 185*).

Another important event to occur later in Muhammad life during Ramadan was the battle of Badr. This battle was the first direct confrontation between Muslims (Muhammad and his followers) and unbelievers in the history of Islam. The Muslim forces in this battle were only three hundred and fourteen men, whereas the unbelievers were more than nine hundred (Hamka, 1982:139). Although the Muslim troops were severely outnumbered, the Prophet and his followers won the battle. Allah says in the Qur'an: "...So if there are a hundred stable and patient ones of you, they shall overcome two hundred, and if there are a thousand they shall overcome two thousand by God's permission; and God is with the patient ones" (Sura8:66). Until Badr, the Muslim cause had often seemed to be completely hopeless, but after this victory the Muslims were filled with an exhilarating confidence (Armstrong, 1991:177). The Qur'an mentions

the battle of *Badr* as a *furqan* (a sign of salvation), through this battle God separated the just and the unjust (Sura 3:13)<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, the capture of Mecca took place in Ramadan, two years before the Prophet's death. The history of Mecca can be traced back to the story of Abraham and his son, Ishmael, who were instructed by God to build a temple, Ka'aba, there (Armstrong, *ibid*:161). Even before the coming of Islam, the Ka'aba was most important Arab shrine and was already the destination for an annual pilgrimage from all over Arabia. Mecca is believed by Muslims to be the navel of the earth; it was created first and round it the world spread out, so it is called "the mother of towns" (Tritton, 1980:143).

Muhammad was born, reached adulthood, and received the first revelation of God in Mecca. Due to many obstacles which faced him in preaching Islam in Mecca, thirteen years after being declared a Messenger of Allah, he *hijrah* (emigrated) to Yatsrib, which later became known as Medina (city of the Prophet). In Medina, Islam was welcomed and received by almost all the Arabic tribes there. Eight years after *hijrah*, on January 1, 630, during Ramadan, the Prophet with ten thousand followers came to Mecca and captured the city. He had come to that city not to persecute the people of Mecca, but to abolish the old religion, which had failed them (Armstrong, 1991:243). The capture of Mecca is, indeed, a symbol of the victory of absolute monotheism over paganism and other religions.

Ramadan with all its religious rituals, and with the many important historical events which occurred during the month, becomes a very special period for all Muslims. To conclude this summary of prescriptions relating to

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<sup>6</sup>Indeed there was already a sign for you in the two hosts that met together in encounter; one party was fighting in the way of God and the other,unbelieving (who) attacked first and was fighting against God whom they (believers) saw twice as many as themselves with their own eyes; and God strengthens with His aid whom He pleases; surely there is a lesson for those who have sight (Sura 3:13).

Ramadan, I want to mention one hadith, in which the Prophet Muhammad said that: "The five daily prayers, from one Friday to another Friday and from one Ramadan to another Ramadan, are atonement for any sin which is done between those times" (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:29, [my translation]).

## CHAPTER III

### SHABAN: WELCOME YE RAMADAN

#### 3.1 Introduction

In his ethnographic work on Aceh, James Siegel (1969:184) pointed out that the Acehnese - both women in the villages and men in towns - begin to talk about *puasa* (fasting) two or three months before it comes. It is understandable because in the Acehnese's terminology Ramadan is named *pengule buleun* (the king of months). The time of Ramadan is regarded as *huroe get, buleun get* (the best days, the best month) full of the blessing of God. Apart from *huroe get, buleun get*, the Acehnese also deem Ramadan as a month where they can enjoy themselves and retire from their common daily activities. In this context, the Acehnese say "*sieblah bueleun ta meuharekat, sie buleun ta meuhabeh*" (eleven months we have to work, and in a month we spend all that we have). Although Ramadan requires all Muslims to fast, neither women nor men are especially concerned about the difficulty of performing this duty. On the other hand, Ramadan is welcomed with happiness and joy and its many pleasures are evident in the tone of their voices.

During Shaban<sup>1</sup>, the signs that Ramadan is close at hand appear not only in daily conversation among people but also in their activities. The fishermen in Lamno, for example, who usually go fishing only at night and stay at home in the day, during Shaban will go fishing not only at night but also during the day. One fisherman explained that by so doing he can get extra money for spending in Ramadan since during Ramadan he never goes fishing and concentrates only on *ibadah* (religious service). Meanwhile, *kaum mak* (housewives) and the neighborhoods of the *gampong* start collecting and preparing the food

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<sup>1</sup>Shaban is the eight month in the Islamic calander; it is the month before Ramadan begins.

ingredients which will be used during Shaban ceremonies and during Ramadan. Their conversation centers around the special delicacies that they will serve to their families at *makmeugang* (two days before Ramadan) and in the evening meals at the breaking of each day of fast. Despite the fact that almost all the prices of goods in the market increase - this always happens during Shaban and Ramadan - they seem very happy in doing so.

Additionally the approach of Ramadan is marked by an increasing degree of ritualised behaviour, particularly the numbers of people who go to pray in a *meunasah* (small mosque). During other month the *meunasah*, is usually only attended by a few people; but several days before Ramadan many Muslims now go to perform *seumayang meujama'ah* (praying together). It seems to me that, by so doing, people want to renew and invigorate their religious feeling. When I asked why more people pray in the *meunasah* during Shaban, many of them responded to my question saying that: "*tanyo ka toe ngon buleun get*" (we are close to the best month). Furthermore the *imuem meunasah* (Islamic leader who performs all religious duties) reminds the Muslims at *seumayang Jum'at* (special Friday prayer) of the importance of Ramadan for everyone. This month Allah bestows His forgiveness on all humankind. Hence we should welcome and fill Ramadan with many religious services, otherwise we will lose the core of Ramadan.

During Shaban, people recognise and perform three kinds of traditional feasts; *kaurie bu*, *kaurie beureat*, and *meuramin*. *Kaurie* is a form of communal feast, a coming together of large numbers of people, who eat a common meal of rice with various special meat, vegetable and fish sauces. Although to some extent this term is similar to the "*slametan*" in Java (Geertz, 1991:11), some *kaurie* in Aceh do not have religious meaning, such as *meuramin*. Furthermore,

in regard to Ramadan, the celebration of these *kaurie* are an indication that Ramadan is already close at hand.

Two week before Ramadan, the *Bupati* (the head regency) of West Aceh announces several rules that must be obeyed during Ramadan. This announcement is placed in public areas such as markets, shops, and in the *mesjid* (mosques). Among these announcements, is the requirement that all *warung* (coffee shops and restaurants) should be closed from 5 am in the morning until 5 pm in the afternoon. These regulations also extend to people who are not Muslim. They have to respect fasting people by avoiding eating, drinking and smoking outside their house. Historically the involvement of the government in Aceh in welcoming Ramadan can be traced back to the Iskandar Muda period<sup>2</sup>. On the last Friday of Shaban, *ulama* (Islamic scholars) advised the *raja* (king) about the first day to begin Ramadan fasting. The *raja* then announced this date to the people and reminded them of the restrictions which should be observed during Ramadan (Jalil, 1991:25).

In this chapter I will describe the preparatory phase of Ramadan by describing the people's activities during Shaban. By doing so, the meaning of Ramadan for the Acehnese people can be examined. Firstly, I will focus on activities which are related to *ibadah* (Islamic worship) in order to show how people express the meaning of *huroe get*, *buleun get* at a practical level. The remainder of the chapter will deal with those joyful and more secular activities through which people welcome Ramadan. However, to some extent, both meanings - *ibadah* (worship) and *senang* (happy) - mingle in one ceremonial occasion. As a result, sometimes, the sense of *ibadah* is lost with only the "party atmosphere" remaining apparent.

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<sup>2</sup>Iskandar Muda (1607-1636) was the seventh king of the Islamic Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. In his epoch, the Kingdom reached the Golden Age (Hasjmy, 1990:20).

### 3.2 Kaurie Bu

During Shaban, the atmosphere of merriment and the joy of life is prominent as almost a natural precursor before committing oneself to the serious mood and demands of Ramadan. This atmosphere can be best seen in the Acehnese' terminology for Shaban, that is, *buleun kaurie bu* (the month of the rice feast) (Hoesin, 1970:212). Historically, this terminology derives from the fact that one day during Shaban, every household observes a rice feast in order to remember and show their ancestors that they have not been forgotten (Hurgronje, 1906:221). There are at least three feasts recognised by Acehnese people during Shaban; *kaurie bu*, *kaurie beureat*, and *meuramin*. At the *kaurie bu* (rice feast), each household will invite from their *gampong* poor people and a few orphans to share the feast with them. On this occasion, the members of the family, together with their invited guests, recite some verses of the Qur'an and *do'a* (invocation) before having rice. By doing this, they believe that their link with their ancestors is preserved and strengthened.

In Aceh, many Muslim believe that the link between living people and the dead still exist, particularly between parents and their children. As an explanation, one *teungku* cited to me a *hadith* which states that " When a descendant of Adam (men) dies, all of his rewards are cut off except for three; the reward of his alms, the reward of his knowledge which was preached to the people, and the reward from prayer of his worthy children". Based on this *hadith*, people believe that a descendant has an obligation to *meudo'a* (invoke) for his ancestors since the best prayer is the prayer performed by his own descendant.

In the context of Ramadan as a month of forgiveness, the *kaurie bu* is regarded as a good way to *meudo'a* and to *peuleh* (transmit) the love of living people to the dead (ancestors). Through the *kaurie bu*, the performers attempt to

communicate with the dead, particularly to obtain cleanliness of the soul before people accomplish religious services during Ramadan. It is due to that the *kaurie bu* is regarded by people as an important obligation of living people toward their ancestors. One family explained to me that they always have a *kaurie bu* in Shaban in order to express their gratitude to their ancestors who bequeathed all materials for them. Furthermore, on the night of performing this feast, there is a special plate full of food, particularly *breh leukat kuneng* (yellow sticky rice) together with *kemenyan* (incense) burning in a coconut shell which is put in a corner of a special room as a tribute to the ancestors. According to several people, the function of incense is to call the angels to participate in the feast and send the prayers to God. People believe that the spirit of their ancestors will return home and take this tribute. Although the Acehnese also hold *kaurie ureng mate* (feasts to commemorate the dead), *kaurie bu* during Shaban is a very special feast <sup>3</sup>. This is because in other *kaurie ureng mate*, anyone in the *gampong* can come without any invitation, whereas in *kaurie bu* only the specifically invited poor, may take part. Therefore, for orphans and poor people in the *gampong*, Shaban is a pleasurable month because during this month many people will invite them to take a part in their *kaurie*.

Furthermore, on the day following their *kaurie bu*, a family visits their ancestors' tombs. In Lamno, many graveyards, particularly the old tombs located in the back of the house or in *pekarangan* (backyard) of the household. Usually, all the graves belong to one genealogy and can not be mingled with other

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<sup>3</sup>In Aceh, the *kaurie ureng mate* is held on the first, second, third, seventh, fortieth and hundredth day of the decease of the person concerned of dead people. On these occasions, people in the village, both women and men, come together to the house of deceased and recite *tahlil* (Laa ilaha illa Allah - There is no god but Allah) and some verses of the Qur'an. After reciting *tahlil*, the family of the house serves all guests with cakes and drinks. However, on *kaurie tujoh* (the seventh feast day) the family serves the guests a big meal that consists of rice, beef and many other foods. Similarly, in the *kaurie bu*, the family serves all the invited guests a big meal such as in *kaurie tujoh*.

genealogies<sup>4</sup>. Although the family can always visit their ancestors' tombs every day, a special visit should be made in the context of *kaurie bu*. Usually they come with a flask of water sweetened with some flowers and pour it on the tombs after cleaning. In visiting the tombs, however, there is no other specific ritual to be conducted except reciting some *do'a* (prayer) to the ancestor.

Recently, although people continue to hold *kaurie bu*, there has been a shift in the way people perceive the importance of this feast and their way of performing *kaurie bu*. The fundamental nature of the feast as an expression of appreciation to the ancestors has almost become lost. *Kaurie bu* remains only as an expression of gratitude to God and happiness at the coming of Ramadan. The evidence of this change can be seen in that some people no longer prepare the special plate with yellow sticky rice and incense when they hold this feast. Similarly many families no longer invite the poor or orphans to their *kaurie bu* but limit their guests to extended family only. Therefore there are no poor present when a family recite their *do'a*. Even more critical to the changing religious significance the Acehnese place on *kaurie bu* is the fact that many families no longer recite the *do'a*. As mentioned before, there is a multiple significance to recite the *do'a*; communion with family; purification of the soul (both living and death) in preparation for Ramadan; and earning religious merit by providing food for the poor. Of these three, only the first seems to remain, the desire to preserve the family linkage among the living family members. This supposition was confirmed by the fact that on the following day, members of these families no longer carry out a special visit to their ancestors' tombs as an important element in the *kaurie bu* tradition. One family told me that *kaurie bu* is only *adat* (tradition), and is not to be considered as an *ibadah*.

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<sup>4</sup>In the back of Abdullah's house, for instance, there are four graves: the grave of Abdullah's wife's grand father, Abdullah's wife's grand mother, and Abdullah's wife's parents. Whereas the grave of Abdullah's parents are not situated there because they have a different geneology than Abdullah wife's family.

Nonetheless, the shift in the way some people perceive the importance of *kaurie bu* in Lamno is not accompanied by a substantial change in the aspect of this feast. For the majority, they still talk about *kaurie bu* as a feast that is a symbolic expression of human purification in dealing with the holy month, that is Ramadan. It is understandable, especially during Ramadan, cleanliness of the soul is an important part of people's concerns. *Teungku* Hasan mentioned to me one *hadith* saying that: "if one does not give up blasphemy and doing evil deeds in Ramadan, giving up eating and drinking means nothing to Allah". "In this manner, I argue that religious connotations have been attached to people's interpretation of cleanliness. Therefore, at the level of people's interpretation, *kaurie bu* is regarded as instrumental to *peugleh hate* (to cleanse the soul), and for mediation, not only between living people and their ancestors, but also among living people, particularly among families who have a similar genealogy.

### **3.2 Kaurie Beureat**

Another important feast in the month of Shaban is *kaurie beureat*, held at night in the middle of Shaban. This night is well known as *malam beureat* (the night of determination). Unlike *kaurie bu* which is conducted individually in every household, *kaurie beureat* is a communal feast which is held by all villagers in a *meunasah* (small mosque) under the direction of the *imuem* (Islamic leader). In this feast, all the families in the *gampong* come to the *meunasah* with one *idang* (a packet of food including rice and a variety of side dishes which are served in a tray). These *idang* are designed to be shared with other people. I argue that the communal nature of *kaurie* is expressed not just by the fact that everyone in the *gampong* participates, but also by the nature of their participation. Everything is done as a community, and this leads to a continuous, cooperative involvement in the various aspects of the *kaurie*. As a result, in

every *kaurie*, the atmosphere of happiness is clearly evident and much pleasure obvious in the tone of the participants' voices.

*Malam beureat* is an Acehnese interpretation of one of the Prophet Muhammad's tradition, that is, one night in the middle of Shaban (the Arabic term is *nisfu* Shaban) the prophet Muhammad performed a special prayer which is known as *shalat nisfu* Shaban (prayer of *nisfu* Shaban). Because this prayer is not compulsory<sup>5</sup>, Muslims in many Islamic societies have attempted to elucidate the importance of this prayer, to explain why the prophet performed this special prayer. The Yoruba people of Nigeria, for instance, believe that in the middle of Shaban, God will alter the human *qadar* (divine foreordainment) and provide a new program for humanity (Ryan, 1978:276). Similarly with the people in Lamno, they also believe that during this night in the middle of Shaban Allah will re-determine the fate of humanity for the coming years; therefore, a special ritual is warranted.

In the Acehnese cosmology, it is believed that the fate of humanity will be determined through the divine appearance of a many leafed tree. The leaves of the tree represents people and the tree itself is a symbol of human fate. Every year in the middle night of Shaban, Allah will shake the tree until some of the leaves fall. Furthermore, the fallen leaf is an indication that the person represented will die within that year. Whether as prevention or preparation, the Acehnese as well as all Muslims are encouraged to carry out religious services during this particular night or at least to perform prayer and fasting as the Prophet did.

In Lamno, *nisfu* Shaban is not only filled with *seumayang* (prayer), but also with *kaurie* (feasting), that is *kaurie beureat*. In this *kaurie*, all participants of the *kaurie* arrive in the *meunasah* with their *idang* before sunset. After

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<sup>5</sup> Muslim are required to pray five times a day and at a definite time.

performing *seumayang magrieb* (sunset prayer), the participants sit side by side in a large, circular configuration with their *idang* in front of them. Usually, the participants of all communal feasts tend to avoid eating their *idang*. To some extent, it is regarded as shameful to eat one's own offering. The *teungku* will begin by explaining the importance of celebrating the night of *nisfu* Shaban. The speech goes on from one story to another, and at last, the *teungku* reminds all participants to take an active part in *nisfu* Shaban prayer which will be held after *seumayang Isya'* (evening prayer) and to fast on the following day. The *teungku* also mentions the importance of *nisfu Shaban* in regard to Ramadan. Finally, the *teungku* recites a specific *do'a* (prayer), and the *keuchik* (village chief) invites the participants to eat by saying " *peu yang kana ta peuhabeh, Bismillah*" ("that which we have brought here must be finished, eat in the name of Allah"). In the *kaurie*, the distinction between *teungku* as a religious leader and *keuchik* as secular leader is clear. We find that the responsibility for ritual prayer is in the *teungku's* hands, whereas the responsibility for the ritual meal is in the *keuchik's* hands<sup>6</sup>.

When the feast has finished, the participants collect their empty trays and talk among themselves before going home. At last, only a few men still remain in the *meunasah* to do *isya'* prayer and *nisfu Shaban* prayer. Here, I find that the sacredness of *nisfu* Shaban, which is still regarded as an important time in the Acehnese perception, is primarily filled with a secular activity, that is *kaurie*; whereas *seumayang* as the most important ritual in the context of *nisfu Shaban* is only conducted by a few people. Therefore, in Lamno, the religious

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<sup>6</sup>The smallest territorial unit in Aceh is called *gampong* (village). The *gampong* is headed by *keuchik* and *teungku*. However, they have different job and different responsibility. The *keuchik* is like a father in each household, and he responsible for everything which is related to administration of the *gampong*. The *teungku* stands like a mother in the household. He is responsible for any religious duties. In *kaurie*, for instance, *keuchik* mobilises the people to participate in it by bringing various foods, while the *teungku* guides the people in the recitation of prayer in the *kaurie* (Snouck, 1906, vol.I: 64:70, Ismuha, 1983:16-17).

importance of this night is diminished by the focus on the happiness of *kaurie beureat*. Although most people state that the *kaurie* is not important in the context of *nisfu Shaban*, in fact, the prayer and fasting which are regarded as the prophet's tradition are becoming less important than *kaurie*.

Moreover, *malam beureat* rituals are still perceived as part of the preparation for welcoming Ramadan. The *teungku*, for instance, in his speech before the feast begins, advises the participants by saying "if we are still alive next year, Ramadan is a good moment to renew our faith and our religious service". In his *do'a* (invocation), the *teungku* also asked Allah to give an opportunity to all Muslims to honor the holy month (Ramadan) which was coming soon. Furthermore, the *keuchik* (chief village) announces to all the feast's participants that in the morning of the last Friday of Shaban, all the villagers should take part in cleaning the mosque and *meunasah*. He emphasised this by saying "*jamee rayeuk ka rap trouk*" (our big guest [that is Ramadan] will come soon).

It is evident from the people's conversations during the *kaurie beureat* that one of the meanings of *nisfu Shaban* has come to dominate organizing the preparations for Ramadan. The more traditional significance of prayer and fasting on the following day as Allah redetermines the combined fate of mankind is being lost. Only the communal nature of the feast preceding Ramadan remains.

### **3.3 Peugleh Meunasah**

The *peugleh meunasah* is another form of communal activity which is intended to clean or to renew the *meunasah* or *mesjid*. The *meunasah* in Aceh has a very significant function, both religious and social (Hurgronje, 1906, vol. I: 62-3, Alfian, 1977:199). The *meunasah* is a place where people do *seumayang*

*meujamaah* (prayer together), study Islamic teaching, and perform religious feasts such as *kauire mulud* (a feast to commemorate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad). The *meunasah* is also the place where villagers can come together to discuss and to solve any social problem; being a sleeping place for boys, and also a place where men spend the rest of the day after doing daily activities.

It is important to note that the tradition of *peugleh meunasah* is different from the tradition of "*bersih desa*" (cleansing the village) which is carried out within Javanese culture. In Java, as Geertz recorded (1991:81-3), the tradition of *bersih desa* is intended to clean the village from any dangerous spirits by offering foods to the guardian spirit of the village at the spirits' place of burial. This tradition is conducted once a year in the eleventh month of the lunar calendar. In Aceh, the tradition of *peugleh meunasah* is intended only to clean the *meunasah* or mosque from dust as part of the activities for welcoming Ramadan. The *meunasah* is not only used by people (during Ramadan) as a place to perform *ibadah*, particularly daily prayer, but also as a place where men can spend their time during the day.

Although the tradition of *peugleh* (cleansing) *mesjid* and *meunasah* is not a communal feast, it involves social solidarity in the life of the Islamic community. Traditionally people do *peugleh meunasah* once a month, but usually not everyone participates in that work. However, *peugleh meunasah* in the context of welcoming Ramadan - although there is no particular punishment for those who not participate - almost without exception, everybody is involved in this special cleaning at the end of Shaban. Several young men who never participated in *peugleh meunasah* on a monthly basis told me that for Ramadan they felt embarrassed if they did not participate in that work. Since *peugleh meunasah* takes place on Friday, people who work as civil servants, for example, are urged to offer a pot of coffee or money if they can not participate

in this communal work. Importantly, in regard to Ramadan, the tradition of *peugleh meunasah*, as with other cleaning activities, serves to begin Ramadan in an atmosphere of cleanliness.

Beside *peugleh meunasah*, this focus on cleansing also affects every household. According to several informants, there are two times that people have to renew or repair their house, namely before Ramadan, and when a father marries off his daughter. The marriage tradition in Lamno takes a matrilineal form in which the groom will live in the bride's house. As part of the preparation to hold a wedding reception, a family should repair the house to honor the coming of the son-in-law. This is, on the one hand, a reflection of the respect of the bride's family toward the groom. On the other hand, this is also a reflection of the last responsibility of a father toward his daughter since after marriage a woman obtains legal possession of the house<sup>7</sup>. In daily conversation, for example, a wife is always associated with the house and is called by the term "*peurumoh*" "the owner of the house" (Polem, 1977:107). An old man explained to me that it is an embarrassment if someone does not repair his house in marrying off his daughter, even only by changing a single iron sheet.

The resemblance between the coming of Ramadan and the coming of the son-in-law explains the expressions of happiness and respect at the coming of Ramadan. People often say that *peugleh meunasah* is a compulsory tradition which should be conducted in order to find the core of Ramadan, that is, the forgiveness of Allah. In his speech, the *teungku* said that Allah will not give His forgiveness if we do not clean His house, that is *meunasah*. The *keuchik* mobilises the villager by asking them a question "how can we pray during

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<sup>7</sup>In Lamno, like other parts of Aceh (Gayo is an exception), soon after a father married off his daughter, the house belongs to his daughter. In many cases, the parents will build another house for themselves and for the rest of their family. At last, the parents will stay with their youngest daughter's family. For further information on the marriage system, see Jayawardena, 1977:157-72, Siegel, 1969:51-2.

Ramadan if the *meunasah* is unclean ?". Therefore, since Ramadan is deemed as a holy month, purification remains an important aspect of Acehese preparation.

### 3.4 Meuramin

On Sundays about two weeks before the beginning of Ramadan, people spend their day by having *meuramin* at a seashore. *Meuramin*, sometimes known by the term *tulak hawa* is an excursion or picnic which is conducted by one family or together with another family in a recreation area in order to express a feeling of happiness. In *meuramin*, people bring various delicious foods which are eaten only rarely. If the *meuramin* is held communally, people do *ripe* (share money) to pay all the costs, particularly the transportation cost. In Aceh, the *ripe* is always a solution in a communal activities, both ritual or social, such as in *religious kaurie* and in building a *meunasah* or *mesjid*.

Although *meuramin* is not tied to a specific time, there are two important kinds of *meuramin* which are recognised by Acehese people according to their calendrical ritual: firstly, *meuramin* in *huroe Rabu abeh* (the final Wednesday of Shafar month), and secondly, *meuramin* to welcome Ramadan. Shafar in the Acehese cosmology is deemed as a month in which to avoid any serious undertaking because historically in this month, the Prophet Muhammad had a fatal sickness. Therefore, on *Rabu abeh*, in order to avoid a misfortune, people go to the seashore or to the river to clean their body by having bath. Sometimes they come with pieces of paper which consist of certain verses of the Qur'an to be mingled with the water (Hurgronje, 1906, vol. I, 206-7). *Rabu Abeh meuramin* is not solely an expression of happiness, but most importantly, it is a ritual which is intended to purify the body from any dangerous spirits

*Meuramin* in the context of Ramadan in Aceh can be deemed as a form of the Acehese' interpretation of the Prophet's saying that if a person welcomes

Ramadan with a feeling of happiness, his/her body will be saved from the heat of hell on the day of judgment<sup>8</sup>. Since *meuramin* is an expression of satisfaction, the Acehnese regard it as a good way to carry out the Prophet's suggestion. Although the Prophet Muhammad did not carry out any kind of celebration in welcoming Ramadan, Muslims in many Islamic societies have elaborated the meaning of happiness in the context of their social setting. Furthermore, the *meuramin* also takes on the major characteristic of *kaurie*, that is neighbours come together to the beach and share their food. Therefore, *meuramin* is a joyful activity in the context of welcoming Ramadan.

Another characteristic of *meuramin* in welcoming Ramadan is that it is usually conducted communally among several neighbours who do *ripe* to pay the cost of transportation. Before doing *meuramin*, *kaum mak* (house wives) discuss with their neighbours what they will have to eat and who will cook specific foods. This discussion is intended to avoid similarities in food preparation and to have a variety of meals since on a *meuramin* they share food with each other. Although Lamno is located on a coastal area and people - even in the fishing village - always carry out *meuramin* at the seashore rather than at a mountain. However, the location of the seashore that is chosen for *meuramin* is far from their village, so that people can enjoy themselves when they are on the way to the beach, since they very rarely use the bus.

When I asked them why they choose to do *meuramin* at a beach or river instead of in the mountains, some people answered that they can swim at the beach and that can not be done on the mountain. However, it is not just the recreation available at the beach, but I think, this type of *meuramin* can also be deemed as a purification activity. This is because almost everyone, men or women, children or young people, bathe in the sea in this *meuramin*. In

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<sup>8</sup> This hadith is recorded by Ahmad and Nasai (Ash-Shiddieqy, 1990:30-1).

Morocco, as a comparison, on the days preceding Ramadan people visit the public bath and scrub themselves there to purify their body for the coming of Ramadan (Buitelaar, 1993: 38)<sup>9</sup>.

Several years ago, a new term came into use by the Acehnese to refer to this *meuramin* tradition. This new term is known as *hari minggu akhir* (the last Sunday) because this feast is carried out on the last Sunday of Shaban. The shift from *meuramin* to *hari minggu akhir* did not solely happen at the terminological level; it was also followed by a change in people's behaviour at the practical level. From one perspective, *hari minggu akhir* is an expression of happiness at the coming of Ramadan, while in another sense, this term is a declaration that Ramadan is an *ibadah* (religious services) month in which everyone during Ramadan should forget the satisfaction of feasting. To some extent, this new term reflects the core meaning of Ramadan. But at the practical level, people tend to express and to obtain the happiness through several actions which sometimes collide with Islamic teaching as well as with Acehnese tradition.

One of the unfavourable aspects of the tradition, which is being criticised by some people, is the amount of time and the way people conduct *hari minggu akhir*. In the *meuramin* tradition, people spend their time on the seashore at midday, while in *hari minggu akhir*, people are at the seashore from Saturday afternoon until Sunday evening. At the seashore, people spend their time playing dominoes, listening to music and dancing together<sup>10</sup>. Although all these games are performed by men - no women camped over night - the *teungku*

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<sup>9</sup>Minangkabau people of West Sumatra recognise a tradition to welcome Ramadan, which is called "*balimau*" (washing body with citrus fruit). Several days before Ramadan begins, many people take bath in the beach or the river in order to purify their body. On this occasion, they clean their body by using citrus fruit (I got this information from several Minangkabau people who lived in Lamno and Banda Aceh).

<sup>10</sup>Playing dominoes, what Acehnese call *meen bate*, is very popular game among young men in Aceh. In usual days, from evening until midnight, many young people spend their time playing this game. During Ramadan, almost all the *warung* provide this game at night.

and religious people viewed such activities as contrary to Islamic teaching. When I asked several *teungku* about this practice of welcoming Ramadan, they argued that the prophet and his *sahabah* (prophet's friends) did not do things in this manner. The leaders of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Scholar's Council) of Aceh remind everyone through the local newspaper to avoid conducting the celebration of *hari minggu akhir* (Serambi Indonesia, 19-1-1995). The reason they give is similar to that of the other *teungku*, such a tradition was not recognised in the time of the Prophet and of his *sahabah*.

Nonetheless, when I met with several groups of young men who spent the night at the seashore and asked them about *hari minggu akhir*, some said that this is a good time to be happy before entering the *ibadah* month. Also, according to them, this tradition does not contradict the Islamic teaching because "we do not drink, and no women join us. Although we play dominoes, we do not gamble, it is only a game". Generally, the concept of sin in Aceh is always related to *hawa nafsu* (desire or passion) which is exercised in the form of drunkenness, women, stealing, and gambling. One Acehnese' proverb states: "*menyo keumueng bahagia, bek jeb madat, bek meumukah, bek ceumecui, bek meujudi*" (if you want to have prosperity, you have to avoid drinking, *zina* [having illicit sex], stealing, and gambling"<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, by avoiding all these sinful behaviours, *hari minggu akhir* is seen by many of today's young men as an acceptable expression of gladness at the coming of the *pengule bulen* (the king of the month).

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<sup>11</sup> In the period of the Islamic Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam (1511), drinking, having illicit sexual, stealing and gambling were regarded as a major infractions of life of the community. For these infractions, the Kingdom followed Islamic Law. For example, a thief would have his hand cut off, a drunkard would be exhorted etc. (Hoesin, 1970:182-91).

### 3.5 Makmeugang

The two days preceding the coming of Ramadan are recognised by people as *huroe makmeugang* (*makmeugang* days). *Huroe makmeugang*, also called *huroe simeusie* (slaughtering day) is the tradition that on that day all households should have meat to cook, particularly beef or buffalo. The Acehnese regard meat as a very special food, not only because of its benefit for human health, but also because meat is an expensive meal compared with other dishes. Hence, as a part of the happiness associated with the coming of Ramadan, people celebrate by having meat. On *makmeugang* day, beside having meat, people also provide several traditional cakes such as *timphan*, *leumang* or *keutupat*. Therefore from the Acehnese perspective, a person can not, properly speaking, begin Ramadan without having *makmeugang* which is deemed as a border phase between everyday life and the liminal time of Ramadan.

As early as the middle of Shaban, *makmeugang* day has become a focus of people's conversation whether in the *meunasah* or in the *warung*. Usually the conversation is begun by predicting the price of a kilogram of meat and later the conversation touches on many aspects of social life. In dealing with *makmeugang*, there is a tradition which is known as *sie meuripe* (meat of communal sharing) where a person who has several buffaloes or cows will invite villagers to buy meat from him on *makmeugang* day. Each family of the village is asked how much he intends to buy in order to get an accurate count of how many head of cattle it may be necessary to slaughter. Usually, the meat is measured in a stack which consists of all parts of the cow's body such as heart, lung, and intestines which are favourite dishes for the Acehnese.

The tradition of *sie meuripe* does not solely benefit the owner but also the villagers. The owner does not have to pay the market tax nor hire a market stall. On the other hand, the tradition enables the buyers to have meat on

*makmeugang* day although they do not have the money on that day. *Sie meuripe* is a form of meat credit which can be paid for at certain times during the next several months. Also, the *sie meuripe* can be paid for not only by using money, but also with rice. Comparing the price of *sie meuripe* with other *makmeugang* meats which are sold in the market, *sie meuripe* is a little more expensive. But this is compensated for by of social solidarity. Some of the *sie meuripe* will be contributed to poor people in the village who are unable to provide meat on *makmeugang* day.

The existence of *makmeugang* to welcome Ramadan gives an opportunity to poor people to enjoy the delicious taste of meat at least once a year. Poor people usually eat meat only at *kaurie* (feasts) which are held by others, whether in *kaurie ureng mate* or at wedding receptions. One man told me that he will have the experience of a *pajoh rayeuk* (big meal) only when someone invites him to a *kaurie*. Therefore Shaban is regarded as a happy month since this month is characterised as a *buleun kaurie* (feasting month). Furthermore, since *makmeugang* is deemed as a transition between everyday life and the liminal time of Ramadan, everyone prepares special funds to be spent for this tradition. One father of a household explained to me that he had been saving money for *makmeugang* day for two months. Although the price of meat on *makmeugang* day is more expensive than at other times, it does not decrease the people's demand. On ordinary days, according to a butcher in the Lamno market, the market only provides two buffaloes to be slaughtered. On *makmeugang* day there are more than twenty buffaloes are slaughtered and this does not include *sie meuripe* which are slaughtered in the villages.

*Makmeugang*, symbolised by the requirement to provide meat reflects the honour of Acehnese men in front of their family. In Lamno, the ability of men in providing *makmeugang* meat is a manifestation of their honour. One told

me that three years ago in Banda Aceh, a *becak* (pedicab) driver cut off his penis because he could not bring meat to his family on *makmeugang* day. Before the accident, his wife told him that it was better for him to cut his penis off and throw it away in the sea if he could not provide *makmeugang* meat. Feeling his honour as a man was tarnished, he cut off his penis in front of his wife. Since the meat of *makmeugang* is a symbol of men's honour, men will do the shopping on *makmeugang* day, particularly to buy meat. Therefore on *makmeugang* day the general picture in Lamno, whether in the market or in the villages, is of men carrying *sie makmeugang*.

For a man who is getting married, *makmeugang* day can be a prestigious day and also, on the other hand, can be an unhappy day. On that day, he should show his wife's family that he is capable of providing *makmeugang* meat. Usually, if a family already has a son-in-law, he is the responsible person for providing *makmeugang* meat. One man told me that he borrowed money from his brother in order to fulfil this compulsory tradition. Although a man still has an equal obligation to take care of his original family as well as his married family, since he stays in his wife's house, his obligations to his wife's family are greater. Therefore, the ability of a man to provide the *sie makmeugang* to his wife's family, at the same time, increases his honour in front of his wife's family.

The honor of Acehnese women in the context of *makmeugang* is equally strong. A woman will be sad on *makmeugang* day, if she can not cook meat in her kitchen. Although she works all the time in the kitchen, a woman will be very happy on *makmeugang* day if she can serve meat to her family. Besides, there is a tradition on *makmeugang* day for a woman who has just married to give cooked meat together with some money to the mother of her husband. By giving these, she wants to express her loyalty in front of her husband's family and also to show that her husband is still responsible to his family. Therefore, I

argue that the *makmeugang* tradition symbolises the honour of men, and also symbolises the honor of women's position in the family.

*Makmeugang* day is also celebrated by people returning home from outside. A women who has a husband in *rantau* (outside home town) will be very worried if on the days preceding *makmeugang* her husband has not returned home. She worries not only about how to buy *makmeugang* meat, but more significantly, because a family should be together on that day. One house wife who had two children studying in Banda Aceh told me that last year she cried on *makmeugang* day because her children did not come home. I often heard people in the *warung* or in *meunasah* asking each other about their family in *rantau* and whether they would come home or not on *makmeugang* day. When I asked why people should be together on *makmeugang* day, many people repeated the saying "*huroe get, buleun get*" (the best day, the best month). *Imeum meunasah* gave me an accurate answer by saying "because *makmeugang* is full of good meat, all the good things should be tasted by all family members. Also, because Ramadan is a holy month, people need to *peugleh hate* (clean the soul) by forgiving each other".

Another important point of the *makmeugang* tradition in the context of Ramadan is the symbol of slaughtering a cow or buffalo. The slaughtering of a cow or buffalo is not only in order to have its meat, but also to express the killing of *hawa nafsu* (desire or passion). In his discussion about the Acehnese, James Siegel (1969:98-105) pointed out that a man's nature in the Acehnese' conception consists of *akal* (rationality) and *hawa nafsu*. When man responds to *hawa nafsu*, he is led away from God, and become like an animal. On the other hand, through the use of *akal*, man can know God's command and control man's instinctive nature, that is *hawa nafsu*. However, between *hawa nafsu* and *akal*

there is always a struggle. Therefore man needs religion in order to guide his *akal* on the religious way.

The resemblance between animal behavior and *hawa nafsu* can be best understood in the saying *lagei leumoe* (like a cow) or *lagei keube* (like a buffalo). Those two words often appear in daily conversation when people want to talk about someone with bad behaviour or someone who has done something wrong. The reason for the comparison with a cow or buffalo is because those animals are only endowed with *hawa nafsu*. Furthermore, since people use both animals in plowing rice fields, those two animals have become a symbol of stupidity. In Aceh, those two words are only expressed by people to someone when they are very angry. The slaughter of a cow or buffalo on the days preceding Ramadan is indeed an expression of cleansing the body from any *hawa nafsu* which would be an obstacle for a Muslim in performing the many religious services during Ramadan.

To sum up, ceremonies during Shaban are intended to welcome Ramadan. Since Ramadan is regarded as a holy month, purification becomes an important aspect in Acehnese activities during Shaban. Several Islamic rituals, such as prayer and pilgrimage require purification (in Islamic term this is stated as *thahara*) as requisite for being valid. It is understandable that purification emerges as a part of the important preparation for Ramadan since during this month Muslims have to perform many rituals. If the *kaurie bu* and slaughtering the cow on *makmeugang* day symbolise the process of purifying the soul (inner human self), *peugleh meunasah* and *rumoh* (house) emphasises the purification of materials (outside the self). Both imply the importance of purification in welcoming Ramadan. Furthermore, Shaban can be regarded as a preliminary phase leading people away from their everyday life into the liminal time and space of Ramadan. The practice of *meuramin*, for instance, is an expression of a

border line between having secular and sacred happiness. Traditionally the single afternoon at the seashore with swimming is symbolic of the purification needed for properly conducting Ramadan. Practiced in this way, *meuramin* is more sacred. The more modern practice of a weekend away by the young men shifts the focus of *meuramin* toward the secular.

## CHAPTER IV

### RAMADAN: PATHWAY TO PARADISE

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the last few days of Shaban, predicting the first day of Ramadan becomes the main topic of conversation. Although it has already been indicated on all calendars, the Lamno people seem to wait until there is official information either from the government or from *teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq for confirmation of the first day of Ramadan<sup>1</sup>. Based on people's experience in the past, the government's decision on the first day of Ramadan has sometimes been contradicted by the decision made by several *teungku*. Therefore, people who have a strong commitment to the *dayah* -those who belong to Perti will follow the *teungku*'s decision, whereas the majority will follow the government's decision<sup>2</sup>.

The contradiction emerged because of different techniques being used to observe the coming of the *buleun* (moon). According to *teungku* Hasan, a leader of *dayah* Miftahul Ulum, the government's technique is incorrect, because the prophet Muhammad and his *sahabat* (Muhammad's friends) saw the moon with their eyes and not with the aid of equipment such as a telescope. Besides, he added, the government's religious affairs officials are influenced by

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<sup>1</sup>In many Islamic societies, the announcement of the first day of Ramadan is something discussed and waited by people during the last days of Shaban. In Saudi Arabia, people talk about the beginning of Ramadan with the phrase "*zahar aw ma-zahar*"(did it appear or did it not) (Zaki Yamani, 1987:80). Similarly, in Marrakech of Morocco, the first day of Ramadan becomes a favourite subject of discussion among the people (Buitelaar, 1993:52). Like Marrakechis people, in Lamno, people also often ask each other "When do people in Saudi Arabia begin fasting?". Although there is a different time between Aceh, Morocco and Saudi Arabia, it seems to me that many Muslims in many Islamic societies view Saudi Arabia as the centre of Islam to be followed.

<sup>2</sup>PERTI (Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah) is an Islamic organisation which was founded in Bukit Tinggi, Padang in 1930. This organisation was intended to unify all traditionalist Muslims into one organisation (Noer, 1980:241), In Aceh, all *teungku* with their *dayah* gather together into this organisation in confrontation with Muhammadiyah (Baihaqi, 1983:148).

Muhammadiyah which always employs *ilme hisab* (astronomy). Astronomy was not recognised in the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his *sahabat*. When I argued that it is difficult to observe the moon in a cloudy situation, *teungku* Hasan said, in this circumstance, the days of Shaban month must be extended to thirty days. In contrast, *teungku* Yusuf Harun, a leading figure in astronomy and member of Muhammadiyah, argued that by using astronomy, not only can one predict exactly the first day of Ramadan, but also many other things such as lunar or solar eclipses. Although the prophet did not use astronomy, he added, it was not forbidden by him. He quoted one hadith saying that: "in scientific matters, you are better than me".

This year, when I conducted my field work, both the *teungku* and the government agreed on the timing of the first day of *puasa*, that is, 1 February 1995. Hence, everyone in Lamno began *puasa* together, but more importantly, there was no conflict among the people. After *magrib* (sunset), some people turned on their television to hear the government's determination of the new moon. Several minutes later, both women and men, children and old people, went to the *meunasah* to perform *seumayang isya'* (night prayer) which was followed by the *seumayang taraweh* (a special night prayer during Ramadan). At that moment, everyone was happy to have entered into the liminal time of Ramadan<sup>3</sup>.

In this chapter, I will describe the religious services and events which take place during Ramadan month. In order to give a clear description, the

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<sup>3</sup>In some Islamic societies, there is a special congratulatory phrase to be mentioned when people meet others after the announcement of the beginning of Ramadan. In Saudi Arabia, people visit their neighbours and say "*kul 'am wa-antum bi-khair*" (to see and live Ramadan again) (Zaki Yamani, 1987:81). In Morocco, when people meet their neighbours, they say "*membruk lik remdan*" (blessing be upon you this Ramadan). In Aceh, there is no a specific congratulatory phrase to be mentioned, and also people do not pay visits to their neighbours. People only meet each other in the *meunasah* at the time of *taraweh* (special night prayer).

discussion will follow the order of the religious services as performed by the local population.

## 4.2 Puasa

The first night prior to the first day of *puasa* (fasting) creates an initial distinction between everyday life time and the liminal time and space of Ramadan. This night is characterised by people staying awake or not sleeping until the time of *saho* (a meal taken just before day break). After performing *taraweh*, some people stay in the *meunasah* while others go to *warung* (small coffee shops or eating houses). In the *meunasah*, people spend the night by *meudaroih* (reciting Qur'anic verses) or just by talking to each other. Another activity of people during this night in the *meunasah* is watching television. Several years ago, the Indonesian government through the Department of Information subsidised one black and white television for each village in Lamno. This television was put in the front of the *meunasah*, so people could watch it every night. However, in some villages of Lamno, the televisions are already broken.

Men in the *warung*, generally, spend the night drinking coffee, watching television, or playing dominoes. Although they go to sleep later than usual, women (particularly housewives) on the first night of Ramadan must get up much earlier than usual since they have to prepare *saho* for their families. For men, the first night of Ramadan marks the beginning of a time of relaxation because their usual activities during the month are reduced; whereas for women, the first night of Ramadan signals the beginning of a busy time since Ramadan activities require them to work harder than usual.

Both men in the *meunasah* and in the *warung* will go back to their house after midnight or before the *saho*. Once at home, a husband wakes up his wife

and keeps her company while she is cooking. Abdullah, the father with whom I stayed, always accompanies his wife in the kitchen at *saho* time and helps her to bring water from the well into the kitchen. According to him, in every Ramadan, he never sleeps during the night because it is a good time to *meibadah* (do religious service) and to enjoy himself. This enjoyment for Abdullah and many other men means gathering together in the *meunasah* or in the *warung* during the night and sleeping during the day. Because playing dominoes is a popular game among young people, almost all *warung*, both at Lamno market and in the villages, provide this game during Ramadan.

One hour before *imsak* (the final time for eating or drinking), all family members, including children, wake to eat *saho*. In Lamno, many families have their meal sitting on a *tikar* (a plaited mat), not at a table. They sit side by side on one *tikar*, including their son-in-law who normally never eats with his parents in law. Before eating *saho*, a father usually reminds his children to say *niat puasa* (wish intensely to perform the fast) in Arabic. People believe that the pronunciation of *niat* is a prerequisite to legitimise the *puasa*. However, some children are unable to say *niat* in Arabic, so they say it in Acehnese. After *saho*, a father would insist that all the children avoid sleeping before conducting the *subuh* (sunrise) prayer. Later, when the alarm is broadcasted by radio from Banda Aceh and is followed by the voice of the *bedug* (drum) in the *meunasah*, people stop eating, drinking and smoking. This is a sign that *puasa* time has begun.

After performing the *subuh* prayer, men *return* home and sleep, whereas women, stay in the *meunasah* to recite the Qur'an. Young people, both women and men, walk around the village which is described as the tradition of *jak subouh* (walking in the morning). Interestingly, the tradition of *jak subouh* only takes place during Ramadan. This is not a normal practice during the rest of the

year. Moreover, because this tradition is only carried out by young people, it is sometimes referred to as *asmara subouh* (love in the morning). Through *asmara subuh*, many young men have chance to become acquainted with the young ladies in the village and this often results in them falling in love. In a society where women are forbidden to go outside alone, *jak subouh* functions as an escape for them from a secluded life. By reason of the for it that they must go to the *meunasah* to perform *subuh* prayer, no one can forbid them, not even their father.

The common scene of Lamno in the mornings of Ramadan is different and very quiet, particularly during the first two weeks of Ramadan. Schools have a holiday during the first week of Ramadan. Also, many shops in the market will only start trading activities around midday. Moreover, all government offices reduce their working hours to allow their officials to catch up on sleep missed due to getting up for the *saho* meal. On regular days, office hours start at 8 a.m and end at 5 p.m. However, during Ramadan offices begin activities at 9 a.m and stop at 3 p.m. Although office hours are already reduced, many officials still arrive well after the adjusted starting time. For example, when I went to the district office on the second day of Ramadan at around ten in the morning, I only met a few officials. When I questioned them on why the others were late, they responded to my question by saying that *nyoe biasa bak buleun puasa* (it is a common thing during fasting month).

Surprisingly, during Ramadan, people often use this explanation to justify their mistakes. For instance, when Abdullah came back from shopping and had forgotten to buy what his wife asked for, he said to his wife "*puasa* made me forget". Since fasting people abstain from food and drink, they try to make use of the feeling of hunger and thirst as an excuse to justify their failures. Also, on other occasions, I often heard that people question someone when a

mistake was made, saying that "why, is it because of *puasa* ?". Hearing this idiom several times, I soon realised that the idiom is used by people as a request for leniency and to avoid conflict between people during Ramadan.

Men wake up from their morning sleep around ten or eleven. After taking a bath, they leave the house and usually they go to the market or the *meunasah*. An hour before *seumayang luho* (midday prayer), many men gather in the *meunasah* and converse while laying down on the floor. Men's behaviour during Ramadan is characterised by *lale puasa*, that is, an effort to distract the mind from focusing on fasting by several means. Although there are many kinds of *lale puasa* such as playing dominoes, sleeping during the day is the best example of a man's *lale puasa*. Furthermore, after performing *seumayang luho*, everyone lies down on the floor and goes to sleep. Usually they wake up before or during the time for *seumayang asha* (evening prayer).

Sleeping during *puasa* has its own value in people's perception. One said that sleeping is a good way to avoid blasphemy and doing evil deeds. The reason is because, when people have a conversation, sometimes, they can not control themselves from blurting out something or gossiping about another. From this point of view, sleep during *puasa* is regarded as *ibadah*. Before sleeping, for instance, I often heard some people jokingly say to their friend that they will perform *ibadah*, by which they mean that they want to sleep. Also, within the context of *ibadah*, other people argue that by sleeping during the day, they will not feel sleepy at night when they perform *taraweh* prayer and other religious services.

In contrast, some *teungku* consider that sleeping during *puasa* is *makruh* (reprehensible) because the sleeping person cannot feel the suffering of hunger and thirst, which is an important purpose of Ramadan fasting. Besides, the prophet Muhammad showed that his activities -not only *ibadah* activities, but

also general activities- increased during Ramadan. The *teungku* gave me an example that the battle of Badr took place during Ramadan. Therefore sleeping during *puasa* should be considered as *makruh* for fasting people. However, the *teungku* agreed that sleeping is better than engaging in frivolous conversation which sometimes can result in the loss of *pahala* (religious merit) for fasting people.

Another important activity of *lale puasa* which takes place in the *meunasah* is the telling of *hikayat* (old stories) which are narrated by *ureung tuha* (old people) in the village. Historically, the *hikayat* have played an important function not only in building up Acehnese's behaviour and attitudes, but also as a main source of anti-colonialist sentiment. In the past, the *hikayat* were always narrated by *teungku* in the *meunasah*, particularly at night, when boys in the village sleep there (Hamidy, 1977:24). However, in recent years, boys in the village no longer sleep in the *meunasah* (Alfian, 1977:199), and many people never hear *hikayat* except during Ramadan.

Like Gayo people in the centre of Aceh, people spend the time during Ramadan listening to *didong* (sung poetic duels) (Bowen, 1991:29). However, because the climate in this area is cool, the telling of *didong* does not take place in a *meunasah* but in a small, simple house which is called "*serami*" (Baihaqi, 1983:192). In general, the telling of *hikayat* or *didong* during Ramadan creates a specific joy. The atmosphere of hunger and thirst of the fasting people changes to an atmosphere of happiness in the face of the fast. In the *meunasah* of Ujung Mulo village, for example, many people, not only young children but also old people, wait for *teungku* Ahmad to hear his *hikayat* before *seumayang luho*. Before *ashar*, men either wake up from their midday sleep and then go to the market to buy some vegetables and side dishes or they return to their homes. In Lamno, shopping activities during Ramadan are generally carried out by men,

instead of women. Abdullah, a father with whom I stayed in Lamno only gave me a short explanation saying that "It is not good for women to go outside during *puasa*". In regard to Abdullah's reason and also after further examination, I found that women who go outside their house during *puasa* must wear a *selendang* (head scarf) and to some extent they tend to avoid encountering men. I was surprised one day when I met a nurse in the *Puskesmas* (community health centre) that she wore *jilbab* (a veil to cover the head) because I knew that she had never worn *jilbab* at other times. In general, during Ramadan, women spend their time and carry out their activities inside the house, whereas, men spend their time and conduct their activities outside the house.

After *seumayang ashar*, Lamno market is crowded with people, most of whom are men. During the evening of Ramadan, special Ramadan markets are set up along the street of the Lamno market. These special markets only sell snacks for *buka puasa* (breaking the fast), particularly, traditional snacks such as *timphan*, *leumang* and *tape* which are rarely found at other times. Although housewives have already cooked or prepared snacks for *buka puasa* at home, men in the market will buy others snacks before they go back to their houses for *buka puasa*. In general, the amount of food prepared for *buka puasa* exceeds the quantity needed to fill the stomach. Perhaps this occurs because when people prepare the food for *buka puasa*, they measure the amount according to their feelings of hunger and thirst. However, a housewife with whom I lived, gave another reason for preparing excess food. She said that it was in order to share snacks with other neighbourhoods or to serve those who have *buka puasa* in the *meunasah*.

On the first day of Ramadan, all members of a family break the fast in their house; no one does this in the *meunasah*. As the days of Ramadan draw on, however, several men tend to choose the *meunasah* as a place to break the fast.

Occasionally, during the month, several families will serve all the men who break the fast in the *meunasah*. Even though no one is obliged to do this, serving foods for fasting people is a good deed. During my conversation, I found that there are several reasons why they choose to break the fast in the *meunasah*. Some men said they do this in order to meet other people. However, all of them agreed that foods served for *buka puasa* in the *meunasah* are better than those served at home because everyone will serve other people with their best food.

Several minutes before *buka puasa*, all members of the family are already at home and sit on the *tikar* (plaited mat) in front of various snacks and wait for the sound of the alarm which is broadcasted through the radio as a sign that the time for breaking the fast has come. In order to get a general description of this feature of *buka puasa*, I visited several houses to share with them *buka puasa*. Generally, three facts surprised me: the quality of food was better than usual, the quantity of food was greater, and many housewives cooked traditional food<sup>4</sup>. Even poor families tended to prepare a range of foods for *buka puasa* and the evening meals. I remembered what the Acehnese say about Ramadan, that is "*sieblah buleun ta meuharekat, sie buleun ta meuhabe*" (eleven months we have to work, and in a month we spend all that we have).

After breaking the fast and performing *seumayang magrib*, the family members return to their *tikar* to have dinner. However, some families have dinner before performing *seumayang*. The *teungku* said that the people who combine *buka puasa* and dinner do not follow the tradition of the prophet Muhammad. The prophet, according to the *teungku*, always broke the fast by having a piece of date palm or something not cooked by fire, and after

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<sup>4</sup>In Saudi Arabia, food and people's attitude to food also distinguishes Ramadan from other months. Traditional food such as *fatta*, *sambousak*, *kunafa*, are provided by housewives during Ramadan, while in other months, people tend to prepare western food (Zaki Yamani, 1987:82). Similarly in Morocco, housewives prepare traditional food such as, *hrira*, *sebbakiyas*, for breaking the fast. These foods are only cooked during Ramadan (Buitelaar, 1993:58).

performing magrib prayer, he had his dinner<sup>5</sup>. Generally, for their dinner during Ramadan people consume less than usual. After observing *taraweh*, however, they once again have a meal. In contrast, children who do not fast can consume more than usual.

### 4.3 Taraweh

In Lamno, the interval between *magrib* and *isya* is approximately one and a half hours. During this time, men rest at home, while women are busy with washing kitchen equipment. Eventually, everyone in the house gets ready to go to the *meunasah* to perform *isya* and *taraweh* prayer. Usually, women wear *telekung* (a white clothe to cover the head while they pray) when they leave the house. Most the streets in the villages of Lamno are not equipped with electric lights, therefore, one or two people of the family carry flashlights. Other people who do not have a flashlight will go to the *meunasah* in the dark night or wait for other people who pass by their house. On the way to the *meunasah*, usually, a husband will walk behind his wife and his daughters to look after them and to give them a light because the flashlight is held by the husband.

Arriving at the *meunasah*, some people enter directly, others will take ablution, and the rest just stay outside to finish their cigarettes before the *azan* (call for prayer) is intoned. Children often chase each other in the yard of the *meunasah*. At the door of the *meunasah* courtyard, young boys may attempt to eye the young girls who pass in front of them, or they may shine the light of the flashlight on their faces if they are not accompanied by their parents. The girls respond to them by saying "don't you know that we are in the fasting month?".

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<sup>5</sup>A doctor told me that since the stomach has been empty for several hours, one should not break the fast with a huge meal. Therefore, it is better to perform *seumayang magreb* before having dinner. The interval between *buka puasa* and *seumayang magreb* (around thirty minutes) helps the stomach and the other organs which have slowed down during the day to return to their normal function.

Just as the time of *seumayang suboh* gave rise to the tradition of *jak suboh*, *taraweh* gives an opportunity for young people to be seen by each other. Therefore, for young women and men, there is a specific pleasure for them during Ramadan.

All these activities cease as soon as the sound of *azan* is intoned by the *bileu* (person who chants the *azan*). Everyone enters the *meunasah* and sits side by side in several *shaf* (rows of people when standing for prayer). The place for men and women for praying is separated by a white clothe which is extended vertically from one side to another. This white clothe is called a *tabir*. Although the women's place is behind the men's, they cannot see the men since there is a *tabir* separating their places. Several minutes later, the *bilue* pronounces the *qamat* (call to start the prayer) and all the people stand to straighten their *shaf*. Boys stand in the last row of the men's place, and they are reminded by the *imuem* (leader of prayer) to be quiet and not to make any noise while people pray.

*Seumayang taraweh* as a special night prayer during Ramadan is performed after *seumayang isya*. The interval between these two prayers is around fifteen minutes. In Banda Aceh or in other regency cities such as Meulaboh, this interval is filled by a *ceramah agama* (an Islamic sermon) which is carried out every night by different people on different topics. In contrast, even though there are many *dayah* and their *teungku* in Lamno, there are no *ceramah agama* by the *imuem meunasah* between *isya* and *taraweh* except on the first night and several nights in the middle of Ramadan. When I enquired of several people why there is no *ceramah agama* every night, people said that it is because there is no other *ureung malim* (eligible person) to speak about Islam in the village except for the *imuem* himself. However, it seems to me that this answer is a reflection of the facet that people in the village of Lamno are in a

period of change. The transition from a society where Islam was understood from an Islamic legal point of view focusing on discussions on *halal* or *haram* to a society in which Islam is understood through various other academic disciplines<sup>6</sup>. The *imeum* gave me an explanation on why he does not want to give a *ceramah agama* every night saying "what more should I say, all people already know about *puasa*".

In regard to *ceramah agama*, three government institutions set up a special team during Ramadan which was called the "*tim ceramah Ramadan*" "Ramadan Islamic speaking team"<sup>7</sup>. This team consisted of many members, including all the heads of government institutions in Lamno. Every member of the team visited one *meunasah* every night in order to provide *ceramah agama* for people before *taraweh*. The advantage of the existence of this team was in the provision of various kinds of information; the drawback however, was that since this team consisted of government officials, many of them spoke only about development programs without having any relation to Islam. Therefore, some people labelled them as "*ceramah pemerintah*" (political speeches), and not "*ceramah agama*" (Islamic sermons).

Among the *meunasah* which are scattered in the forty eight villages in Lamno, only *meunasah* in two villages perform *taraweh* with eleven *raka'at* (divisions of prayer). People in the remaining villages perform *taraweh* with twenty three *rakaat*. In many Islamic societies, the different number of *rakaat* of *taraweh* has led to conflicts between people who perform eleven *rakaat* and people who believed that *taraweh* should consist of twenty three *rakaat*. In Java,

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<sup>6</sup>It is widely discussed that *dakwah* (Islamic preaching) must be reformulated in parallel with the changes in many aspects of culture and social life. For a broad discussion in the context of Indonesian social life, see Achmad, 1983.

<sup>7</sup>These three institutions are at the *kecamatan* (district) level. They are the Indonesian Islamic Council, the Department of Religious Affair, and the Department of Information.

for instance, the traditionalists (represented by the NU organisation) practise the twenty three *rakaat*, whereas the modernists (represented by Muhammadiyah and Masyumi) adhere to the practice of the eleven *raka'at* (Geertz, 1991:221). Similarly, in Lamno, people who perform taraweh with twenty three rakaat are labelled as Perti or *dayah* people. In contrast, although there is no Muhammadiyah organisation in Lamno, people who perform *taraweh* with eleven *raka'at*, are regarded as Muhammadiyah people.

Nonetheless, some people in the *meunasah* where *taraweh* is carried out with twenty three raka'at only perform taraweh with eleven *raka'at*. These people will follow the *imuem* until the eighth *raka'at*, and then they go outside and stay there until the *imuem* performs *seumayang witr*<sup>8</sup>. When the *imuem* starts *seumayang witr*, these people enter the *meunasah* and follow him. As a result, they only perform *taraweh* with eleven *raka'at*. When I asked them why they only perform *taraweh* with eleven raka'at, they said "we believe that eleven or twenty three *raka'at* are *sah* (legitimate). Also, most importantly, there is no difference in the amount of *pahala* (religious merit)".

However, in his weekly *pengajian* (Islamic sermon), *teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq pointed out that people who perform *taraweh* with only eleven *raka'at* are regarded as *ureung beuo* (lazy people). In contrast, when I mentioned what was stated by *teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq to one *imuem* who performs *taraweh* with eleven raka'at, he said smilingly "This is a good advance for him. Before he regarded people who performed *taraweh* with eleven *raka'at*, not only as not being legitimate but also as people who would go to hell. But now, he only labelled them as lazy people". So far, I have observed that the conflict between

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<sup>8</sup>The twenty three *raka'at* of *taraweh* consist of twenty *raka'at seumayang taraweh*, and three *raka'at seumayang witr*. Whereas the eleven *raka'at* of *taraweh* consist of eight *raka'at seumayang taraweh* and three *raka'at seumayang witr*.

those two perceptions only occurs at the level of opposing argumentation, and does not lead to physical conflict as happened in the past<sup>9</sup>.

#### 4.4 Meudaroh

After performing *seumayang taraweh*, women return home, whereas many men stay in the *meunasah*. Men in the *meunasah* form several groups, and every group has a special topic of conversation. While they are sitting, several people serve coffee and snacks. Like the snacks of *buka puasa*, the snacks which are served after *taraweh* are also brought by families in the village. Usually, when people go to *meunasah* for *seumayang isya*, they come with a plate of snacks. In the evening, the snacks are intended for people who *buka puasa* in *meunasah*, whereas at the night, the snacks are meant for people who recite the Qur'an. The tradition of reciting the Qur'an during the night time of Ramadan is known by the term of *meudaroh*.

The term *meudaroh* is originally derived from an Arabic term; *tadarrasa-yatadarrasu-tadarrusan*, which means "to study". In Aceh, the term *meudaroh* usually refers to the tradition of reciting the Qur'an in the *meunasah* and only during Ramadan. Outside the period of Ramadan, the tradition of reciting the Qur'an is expressed as "*beet Qur'an*"<sup>10</sup>.

After having a cup of coffee, several men take their place in the middle of the *meunasah* to begin *meudaroh*. The reciters sit side by side in a small

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<sup>9</sup>As described by Baihaqi (1983:146), different perceptions in understanding topic of religion have led to physical conflict among some Acehnese Muslims.

<sup>10</sup> When I visited the tomb of Poteu Meurehom a week before Ramadan, I met two young women sitting behind the tomb and reciting the Qur'an. Having questioned the *juru kunci* (caretaker), I learnt that they were from *dayah* Budi and would *peutamam beet* (to finish reciting the Qur'an). Many *dayah* students, indeed, believe that by *peutamam beet* at the tomb of Poteu Meurehom, they will gain more *berkah*, not only as a reward for reciting the Qur'an, but also *berkah* from Poteu Meurehom.

configuration, and each of them holds the Qur'an. When people carry out *meudaroh*, they make use of a microphone and loudspeakers. As a result, the sound of men who perform *meudaroh* can be heard throughout the villages.

In *meudaroh*, the Qur'an is recited from the first *surah* (chapter) until the last chapter. Every night, people attempt to finish one and a half *juz* (sections)<sup>11</sup>. On the following night, they continue to recite from the verse at which they stopped the night before. The way of reciting is by taking turns. While one man reads, the others do *sima* (listen to the recitation). When he finishes one verse of the Qur'an, the man just behind him will take over. In *meudaroh*, there is no permanent reciter, which means every one can take a place and leave the group whenever he wants. Also, any one can stop reciting when he feels that he is tired. It is common for one person to retire for a moment to have a drink or smoke a cigarette. After which he will return to his place in the group again and continue to recite the Qur'an.

The sound of *meudaroh* broadcast from every *meunasah* creates a new atmosphere during the night. Unlike the silent nights of other months, the tradition of *meudaroh* during Ramadan brings the night to life. In this circumstance, no one is afraid to go outside in the dark night, including children. On ordinary nights, boys and some young men are often afraid of the appearance of *burong* (evil spirits), yet on the night of Ramadan, children may play in the courtyard of the *meunasah* until midnight. When I mentioned ghosts or evil spirits, many of them said that they there were not afraid because there are no ghosts or evil spirits during Ramadan. The reason they gave me for this was because the prophet Muhammad said "all jinn and devils will be tied up during

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<sup>11</sup>The whole of the Qur'an is divided into 30 sections.

Ramadan". However, and I think it is because Ramadan nights are full of *meudaroh* voices, which is responsible for the sudden "bravery".

Once the whole of the Qur'an has been recited - from the first verse until the final verse - people in the village prepare a feast, which is called *kaurie peutamam daroh*. In many *meunasah*, people are able to finish reciting the Qur'an within two or three weeks; however, the *kaurie peutamam daroh* is not normally held until the last week of Ramadan. This *kaurie* is not as big as other *kaurie* such as *kaurie beureat* or *kaurie truen Qur'an*, where a large meal is provided. Instead, everyone, both women and men, sit together in the *meunasah* after performing the *seumayang taraweh* and eat snacks with coffee or tea. The women and the men sit in specially designated places. Although this *kaurie* is not as big as other communal feasts, the picture of joy is seen very clearly in all the participants. Women do not normally remain in the *meunasah* after *taraweh*, but on this occasion, they are entitled to stay and to eat.

In some villages of Lamno the *kaurie peutamam daroh* is conducted on the twenty seventh night of Ramadan, because many people believe that this is the night of *lailatul qadar* (the night of power). According to Qur'anic explanation, the night of *lailatul qadar* is better than a thousand months, in that each good deed performed on that night will receive the same rewards as those done over a period of a thousand months. Although the Prophet Muhammad explained that the night of *lailatul qadar* will occur during odd nights in the last ten days of Ramadan, many Muslims believe that *lailatul qadar* only comes on the night of the twenty- seventh of Ramadan. In Morocco, for example, many people pay a special visit to the shrine tomb during this night. They believe that the spirits who have been locked up during Ramadan are released on the twenty-

seventh and return to earth (Buitelar, 1993:68)<sup>12</sup>. Although there is a shrine tomb in Lamno, that of Poteu Meurehom's tomb, people do not visit it. The *juru kunci* (caretaker) said that during Ramadan the tomb is closed and so no one can visit it for the purpose of searching *berkah*.

In the Acehnese perception, at a particular moment of *lailatul qadar*, all tress will bow to the ground in the direction of *qiblat* (the holy mosque in Mecca). According to Snouck Hurgronje, on the evening of the twenty-seventh night, every household sets a special lamp which has seven mouths, and the lamp is put in front of the door of a house (1906:235). However, this tradition has not survived. In reply to my question about Snouck's account of the tradition, one old man in the village said "Snouck was wrong, the lamp was not a part of *lailatul qadar*, but it was intended as an expression of happiness at the coming of *huroe raya*. In the past, because there were no candles, children in Aceh played with lamps". To some extent, this old man was correct, because during the last nights of Ramadan, I found that many children in the villages set colourful candles in front of their houses.

Since the *lailatul qadar* is better than a thousand months, some people in the villages of Lamno adjust their *meudaroh* so that they can finish the recital of the Qur'an on *lailatul qadar*. By doing so, they believe that they will receive a greater *pahala* (religious merit), both the *pahala* of *meudaroh* and the *pahala* of *lailatul qadar*.

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<sup>12</sup>In Saudi Arabia, many people believe that the *lailatul qadar* will occur on 27th of Ramadan. During the night, around one million people come to the Great Mosque at Mecca and that at Medina to observe the *taraweh* prayer. Almost everyone spend the night by recite *do'a* and *zikir* (religious chant to remembrance the God) (Zaki Yamani, 1987:85).

#### 4.5 Nuzulul Qur'an

The seventeenth day of Ramadan has a symbolic significance in the history of Islam. On that day, the Prophet Muhammad received the first *wahyu* (revelation) from Allah, which marked him as a messenger of Allah. Because of its significant function, Muslims in different societies celebrate this day in various ways. In Indonesia, for instance, the importance of this day can be seen in activities which are not only conducted by people at the local level, but also by the government. Usually, each mosque will perform a special Islamic speech, called "*ceramah nuzulul Qur'an*" (Islamic speech to commemorate the descent of the Qur'an). A special celebration is also performed at the state palace, and is attended by the President of the Republic of Indonesia. In addition, the government celebration of *nuzulul Qur'an* is usually broadcast on government television and radio from Jakarta throughout Indonesia.

In Lamno, many activities are conducted by people in the period leading up to *nuzulul Qur'an*. Because all these activities take place during the night, namely after *seumayang taraweh*, the night life of Lamno villages becomes very lively. Among these activities are *musabaqah tilawatil Qur'an* (competition in reciting the Qur'an) which is carried out at the level of the *kemukiman* (district sub-division). In *kemukiman Lambeusoe*, which consists of ten villages, people concentrate all the activities of *nuzulul Qur'an* in the mosque of the *kemukiman*. The competitors are divided into two levels of participants: children and adolescents, both girls and boys.

People build a *mimbar* (rostrum) and decorate it with colourful paper and traditional clothe. There are three electric lamps of different colours; green, yellow and red on the *mimbar*. These electric lamps are a sign for the reciters to begin, prepare to finish, and stop reciting the Qur'an. The reason that the *mimbar* is set up outside the mosque is to give opportunity for all women to

come and watch the competition, since menstruating women are not allowed to enter a mosque under Islamic teaching. Additionally, since the *mimbar* is outside the mosque, many more people can take part than would be possible inside the mosque.

Starting with the first night of the competition, the yard of the mosque is filled with spectators who come from all the villages within the *kemukiman*. Women wear *sarongs* and *selendang* (scarf worn over the shoulder). In the yard, some of them stand on the grass, while others sit on *tikar* (plaited mats) brought from their homes. To some extent, women tend to sit with women and men form a men's group. In each of the groups of women, there are one or two old women, whose task may be to look after the young girls. However, among those groups, I found that there were several groups which consisted of young men and women. Their attitude was different to that of the other spectators. While the others remain silent, they may speak or sometimes laugh during the Qur'an recital. According to several old men in the villages, in previous years when communal activities which involved both men and women were held, a rope was placed as a border between the men's place and the women's place. When I asked them why the rope had not been employed to separate the women's and men's places, one of them replied "*hom keuh, kadang jamen ka meu ubah*" (I don't know, maybe, the era has changed). The word "*jamen*" (era) in his idiom is something that is related to the past in the context of tradition or culture. Acknowledging with the passage of time that values within the society also change.

The Qur'an recital competition is concluded with two ceremonies: a communal feast called *kaurie truen Qur'an*, and *ceramah nuzulul Qur'an*. If *kaurie beureat* is carried out at the level of village and takes place in the *meunasah*, *kaurie truen Qur'an* is carried out by people at the level of

*kemukiman* and takes place in the mosque. Therefore, participants in the *kaurie truen Qur'an* are more numerous than at the *kaurie beureat*. Moreover, according to several informants, people in Aceh recognise two big *kaurie* which are carried out at the level of *kemukiman*: *kaurie mulud*, and *kaurie nuzulul Qur'an*. Although these two *kaurie* are the biggest communal feasts, the participants at the two feasts are different. In *kaurie mulud* women may take part, while in the *kaurie truen Qur'an*, only men may participate.

In answering my question as to why no women participated in *kaurie truen Qur'an*, many men mentioned that the women were busy at home during the evening. Whereas the *kaurie mulud* is conducted during the day, that is, before *seumayang luho*, *kaurie truen Qur'an* is carried out at evening time, that is, at the time for breaking the fast. Therefore, it is impossible for women to participate in the *kaurie* since they are busy with household activities. However, I think, it is not only because they are busy at home, but is also related to the value placed on women during Ramadan. The general attitude of Acehnese men toward women during Ramadan can be best seen in Abdullah's explanation as to why he, as a husband, carries out household shopping activities during Ramadan. As he said, "it is not good for women to go outside during Ramadan". Adullah's explanation helps explain why women may not take part in the *kaurie truen Qur'an*.

From noon on the *kaurie* day, young men of the villages in the *kemukiman* gather in the mosque to prepare the *kaurie* equipment. Some people cook *idang rayeuk* (the big servings) of the *kaurie*, that is, the meat of two goats which are provided by *imuem mukim* (chief *kemukiman*), and the others clean the floor of the mosque. Although every household will contribute one *idang* (a packet of food including rice and a variety of side dishes which are put on a tray) to the *kaurie*, the *imuem mukim* generally wants the *kaurie* to be more

prestigious by having goat meat as the side dish. According to my informants, goat meat is the favourite food of Acehnese people. Along the streets from Banda Aceh to Lamno, for example, I find that many houses are set up as a *warung* and provides only goat as a side dish. One *warung* is famous for its name "*warung nasi kambing*"(restaurant of goat side dish). In Aceh, if goat is served in a communal feast, it is regarded as a big feast.

The participants of the *kaurie truen Qur'an* are not only villagers of the *kemukiman*, but also include invited people such as the *Bapak Camat* (district leader) and several village chiefs from other *kemukiman*. The participants of the *kaurie* sit side by side and face to face in several columns with *idang* in front of them. Although the invited people have a special column, the food that they have is no different to that served to other participants. It is because all the *idang* contributed by people, are placed directly in the columns without further inspection. Therefore, every column consists of different kinds of side dishes and the participants of the *kaurie* will have different foods. However, in a communal feast, everyone offers the side dishes he has to others, and others will offer him their side dishes.

In *kaurie truen Qur'an*, people break their fast by having dinner. Several minutes before the fast is broken, everyone is ready with their plate, which is full of rice and a variety of side dishes. On the one hand, everyone wants to eat the variety of foods in front of them. Yet, they are not allowed to eat these foods, until it is time to break the fast. I found that many people would repeatedly glance at their watch, as if they felt that the time was passing too slowly. Also, people would often imitate the voice of the alarm as a sign that the time for breaking the fast was coming. When the alarm was heard, all the participants busily set about finishing their food.

Another activity in the celebration of *nuzulul Qur'an* is *ceramah nuzulul Qur'an* (nuzulul Qur'an Islamic sermon). This *ceramah* is performed at night on the day of *kaurie truen Qur'an*. The speaker of *ceramah nuzulul Qur'an* is a very famous *teungku*, who usually comes from outside of Lamno. During my research in the *kemukiman* Lambeusoe, the speaker of *nuzulul Qur'an* was *teungku* Nasir Muda Waly, a leader of a *dayah* in Meulaboh. Among *dayah* people or the Perti community, this *teungku* is regarded as an *ureung keramat* (Islamic saint), not only because of his obedience to and his knowledge of Islam, but also because of his genealogy. His father, *teungku* Muda Waly, was a founder of a large traditional *dayah* in South Aceh and his father was also a *mursyid* (guider) of *tariqah nakhsabandiyah* in Aceh (Baihaqi, 1983, 149). Because the speaker was a very well-respected person, many people came to hear his *ceramah*.

The *ceramah* was conducted in front of the mosque where the competition in reciting the Qur'an also took place. The spectators came not only from villages of the *kemukiman* but also from other *kemukiman*. People who lived far from the mosque came to hear the *ceramah* by minibus and truck. In Lamno, trucks are used by people not only to carry good and livestock, but also as a form of transportation. For example, during *huroe peukan* (the weekly market), some trucks become the main method of transporting villagers from distant areas to the market. When I asked a *keuchik* about the cost of transportation to come to the *ceramah*, he said that for the *ceramah*, the owner of the transportation would not take any money from people. "*Tanyo bak buleun get, keupue peng*" (we are in the best month, so what need have we for money) was added by another person who was sitting beside him. The answer, indeed, reflects people consciousness toward the important of accumulating *pahala* (religious merit) during Ramadan.

Before the *ceramah nuzulul Qur'an*, the youth leader of the *kemukiman* announced the winner of the Qur'an recital competition. All the winners went to the *mimbar* and stood there until they each received a gift presented by the *imuem mukim*. Although it was almost eleven a clock when the *ceramah nuzulul Qur'an* began, many people were still arriving at the mosque. The yard of the mosque was not large enough to accommodate all the spectators, therefore, many people stood in the street, outside the yard of the mosque. The attitude of the spectators varied. Some of them concentrated on the speaker, particularly people who sat near the *mimbar*. Others, particularly young people, formed a special group who often talked to each other while the speaker spoke. In general, the attitude of the public at the *ceramah* was similar to the spectators at the Qur'an recital

#### 4.6 Zaket Pitrah

*Zaket pitrah* (which is sometimes referred to as *pitrah*) is originally from the Arabic word *zakat al-fitrah*. *Pitrah* is an obligatory donation which is given by Muslims a few days before the end of Ramadan. In Lamno, people consider *pitrah* to be very important in regard to fasting. In his explanation on the importance of *pitrah*, for example, *teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq said that it was not just a religious obligation, but was also considered one of the keys to entering paradise. Therefore, every fasting person must give the *pitrah*; otherwise, the fast has no meaning for him or her. Similarly, in the view of Barkanese people of Morocco, one's fasting is not valid until one has paid these obligatory alms, the fasting remains hanging between Earth and Paradise (Buitelaar, 1993:72).

In Lamno, the influence of the *dayah* - as a centre of Islamic traditional - on people's knowledge about the obligation of *pitrah* is clear. Many *teungku* believe that the obligation of *pitrah* should be discharged by using rice, because

the Prophet Muhammad paid *pitrah* in the form of wheat. Moreover, in many villages of Lamno, I found that *amil zaket* (the collector of *zakat pitrah*) could only be a *teungku*, and to some extent the distribution of *pitrah* only went to a few people in the village. In comparison, some *meunasah* or *mesjid* (mosques) in Banda Aceh, the collector of *pitrah* is not the *imuem meunasah* or *imuem mesjid*, but a group of people who are chosen by the community at a special meeting before or during Ramadan. Furthermore, everyone in the village has the right to advise the collector on how and to whom the *pitrah* should be distributed. Also, *pitrah* is contributed by people in Banda Aceh not only in the form of rice, but also in the form of money.

Since the Prophet Muhammad paid *pitrah* by using wheat - wheat being the staple food for people in the time of the Prophet and his *sahabah* - many traditional *teungku* in Lamno argue that the *pitrah* obligation only can be discharged by using rice. In his explanation of the *pitrah*, *teungku* Hasan, a leader of *dayah* Miftahul Ulum in Lamno, said that the alms of *pitrah* was regarded as truly *pitrah* if it consists of the main food of the people. In Aceh, the staple is rice, so, *pitrah* will only be legitimate if it is performed by people using rice. With a little sarcasm, *teungku* Hasan added, "can money be eaten?". Almost all people in Lamno agree with *teungku* Hasan on the matter of *pitrah*. Therefore, during the last few days of Ramadan, every male householder must arrange a special stock of rice for the discharge of their *pitrah* obligation.

Discharging the *pitrah* takes place in the *meunasah* at night after the performance of *seumayang taraweh*. When a person takes out his *pitrah*, he must declare to the *teungku* - as the collector of *pitrah* - that the rice which he has brought is the *pitrah* of all members of his family. Abdullah who has three children, for instance, explained to the *teungku* that the rice in the sack represents the *pitrah* of his family, which is comprised of five people (Abdullah,

Abdullah's wife, and three children). After that, the *teungku* measured the rice by using a special tin to determine whether it was the correct amount. If the rice is correct, both the *teungku* and the distributor of *pitrah* will shake hands. At this moment, the *teungku* said to the distributor: "I receive your *pitrah* (by mentioning the name of distributor) and the *pitrah* of your family. May Allah bless you and your family".

Nonetheless, some people do not take out the *pitrah* in the *meunasah*; instead, they will present the *pitrah* directly to a poor family in the village. Their reason for doing this varies. Some said that by giving the *pitrah* directly to a poor family, they feel more satisfied because they can communicate directly with the poor people. Others distributed the *pitrah* to a poor family which belonged to their extended family. The reason for this is because the first person who must be helped should be a member of the close family. If the *pitrah* is taken out to a *teungku*, they do not know to whom the *pitrah will be* distributed. Yet others take their *pitrah* and offer it to *teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq, a leader of *dayah* Budi. According to these people, by giving to *teungku* Ibrahim Ishaq, they will receive not only the religious merit of *pitrah*, but also the *berkah* of the *teungku* because the *teungku* is an *auliya* (saint).

The different means employed to take out the *pitrah* suggests that the Lamno people are undergoing change. In the past, as recorded by Snouck Hurgronje (1906, vol. I: 231, 268), the collector of alms in Aceh was only the *teungku*. Similarly, in Gayo society, the collector and distributor of *pitrah* is also in the hands of the *imem* (Bowen, 1991:22)<sup>13</sup>. Because some people feel dissatisfied with the distribution of *pitrah* as it is performed by the *teungku*, they tend to distribute the *pitrah* directly by themselves. According to several people in the village, this is because only half of the *pitrah* will be distributed to poor

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<sup>13</sup>The word "*imem*" is similar to *teungku* or *imuem* in the Acehese language.

families in the village, while the rest of the *pitrah* will be taken by the *teungku*. Although the *amil zaket* has the right to receive a portion of the *pitrah*, the largest part of the *pitrah* should be distributed to the poor. In one *meunasah* in the village of Lamno I found that on the last night of Ramadan, there was still one gunny sacks full of *pitrah* rice. According to Islamic teaching, all *pitrah* must be given to the right people before the performance of the 'id prayer (on the first day after Ramadan end). One person suggested that the rice in the sacks was the *teungku's* by right as *amil zaket*. However, in answer to my question about the rice, the *teungku* said that it was part of *pitrah* for *sabil Allah* (the way of God) which is given to the mosque of the *kemukiman*.

When I spoke to some *teungku* about the suggested imbalance in distribution of the *pitrah*, all of them rejected this. Some said that the people refuse to hand over the *pitrah* to the *teungku* because they felt they were more educated than the average villager. I was told that the majority of these were civil servants and to some extent they were stingy people. It was because of their stinginess that they only give the *pitrah* to their extended family, while many other poor families would not receive their *pitrah*. In contrast, if all the *pitrah* were collected by the *amil zaket*, every poor family in the village would receive the same *pitrah*. All *teungku* said that Islam gives one portion to the *amil zaket* for their activity in the context of collecting and distributing. Therefore, if the *teungku* takes a part of the *pitrah*, it does not contradict Islamic teaching.

In Lamno, the *pitrah* was divided into three parts. One part was for poor families in the village. Another part for *sabil Allah* (the way of God) which is given to the mosque of *kemukiman*. The last part is given for *amil zaket*, that is, the *teungku* acting as collector. At the level of *kemukiman*, conflicts usually occur because every village in the *kemukiman* contributes a different amount to

the mosque. This difference, actually, occurs due to the fact that every village has a different population and a different number of poor families. The village which has a large population with a few poor families, will contribute more to the mosque compared with other villages. Sometimes, in a *kemukiman*, a rumour spreads that a *teungku* from a village which has contributed only a little *pitrah* to the mosque has taken much *pitrah* for himself.

The last two days of Ramadan are the days for distributing the *pitrah* to the poor families in the villages of Lamno. One member of each poor family comes to the *meunasah* in the afternoon, after *seumayang luho*, in order to receive the *pitrah*. In Lamno, it is the women who receive the *pitrah* on behalf of their families. Although they come to *meunasah* with their husband or their children, the recipients of the *pitrah* from the *teungku* are women. One man explained to me that because the rice is cooked by women, therefore, women should receive the *pitrah*. When a woman comes to receive the rice, the *teungku* usually asks her how many family members she has. This question is intended to determine how much rice should be measured out. Later, when she leaves the *meunasah* with the *pitrah* rice, the *teungku* urges her and all her family members to increase their *ibadah*. Also, the *teungku* reminds all the recipients of the *pitrah* that every portion of *pitrah* rice contains *berkah* (blessings of God), hence, no portion of *pitrah* rice should be wasted.

#### 4.7 Huroe Raya

The celebration of the end of Ramadan, which in Islamic terms is called "*id al-fithri*", is one of several Islamic calendrical rituals (Ryan, 1978:280, Babcock, 1981:79, Horvatich, 1992:205). In Acehnese terminology, *id al-fithri* is called *huroe raya puasa* (the great day after Ramadan)<sup>14</sup>. The ritual of *id al-*

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<sup>14</sup>Islam recognises two of festival days. Firstly, *idh al-fithri*, which takes place at the end of Ramadan or on the first day of the tenth month of the Islamic calendar. The second is *id al-*

*fithri*, which means "return to be cleansed" can not be separated from the religious services performed by Muslims during Ramadan. The relation between *puasa* and *huroe raya* can be understood as the relationship between two terms: "struggle" and "victory". *Puasa* is a spiritual journey to release the human body from satanic powers. This journey is represented by restraining basic human urges: one must stop eating, drinking, and having sexual intercourse. On the other hand, *huroe raya* is a feast of victory where fasting people are freed from satanic desire. In Acehese culture, men are characterised as possessing both *akal* (rationality) and *hawa nafsu* (desire or passion). *Huroe raya* is a time when men feel renewed and in full possession of themselves (Siegel, 1969:188).

For several days, after Ramadan, people in many Islamic societies, indulge in merry-making, such as visiting each other or having communal excursions. Although anyone may do these activities at any time, *huroe raya* activities - which I will describe later - are different from others. Additionally, in many countries where the majority of the population is Muslim, such as in Indonesia or Nigeria (Ryan, 1978:281), the government regards the day of *'id al-fithri* as a national holiday. In the context of Indonesian Muslim social life, *'id al-fithri* is generally regarded as an important moment in which to give and receive forgiveness from others. The tradition of *mudik lebaran* (return to the village during *'id al-fithri*) is evidence of the importance of *'id al-fithri* in the life of Indonesian Muslims<sup>15</sup>.

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*adha*, which takes place on the tenth day of the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar, celebrating the sacrifice of Ismail.

<sup>15</sup>*Mudik lebaran* refers to the tradition of those who live in urban areas returning to their home area during *'id al-fithri*. This tradition can not be separated from the fact that many villagers migrate to cities and live there for long or short periods. Once a year, these people return to their homeland, especially during *'id al-fithri*. Through *mudik lebaran*, the migrants maintain close ties with their home village, and bring their earnings to their families in the village (Blackwood, 1993:10).

In Lamno, preparations for celebrating the *huroe raya* are underway from the beginning of Ramadan. As the days draw on and *huroe raya* approaches, it becomes more frequently a topic of conversation. Generally, women talk about *huroe raya* in the context of preparing several traditional cakes which will be served to guests. Men talk about *huroe raya* in terms of how to obtain the money needed to celebrate this day. Children talk about *huroe raya* in terms of wearing new clothes and visiting family members to receive money. In every place where people sit and talk, such as in a *warung*, a *meunasah* or at home, *huroe raya* is mentioned by people in a different tone of voice, whether as a problem or as an anticipated holiday.

The most important activity in the celebration of the *huroe raya* is the preparation of a variety of traditional cakes. Preparation of these cakes is not easy work and people in Lamno have two ways to solve the problem: collective and individual cooking. Not only in Aceh, but also in other parts of Indonesia, people identify "*gotong royong*" (mutual assistance) as a basic feature of social relationships (Bowen, 1986:545-58). Therefore, in a society like Lamno where social relationships among people are close, many housewives work together in their neighbourhood to prepare the traditional cakes. As a result, the nature of the preparation of the *huroe raya* cake is similar to other communal activities, such as *kaurie*. Everything is done as a community, and this leads to continuous, cooperative involvement in various aspects of social life.

Walking around the villages of Lamno during the last day of Ramadan, one can find many groups of women busy cooking. The standard house in Lamno is terraced and the floor is raised above the ground on several poles. The cooking activities are done in the space below the house. Although the women work in the heat of wood fires and the tropical climate, their happiness is clear from their faces. Joking is part of their conversation. According to Abdullah's wife,

the housewife with whom I stayed, much of the conversation during cooking is related to the happiness of the coming of *huroe raya*. However, since many funny stories are interspersed in the conversation, Ijah said that sometimes the women lose control of their tongue. They soon realise that they have blasphemed when someone reminds them by saying "*tanyo teungoh puasa*" (we are fasting).

Unlike collective cooking which takes place during the day, individual cooking is conducted at night. Therefore, during the last ten days of Ramadan, few women perform *seumayang taraweh* in the *meunasah* because they have to prepare *huroe raya* cakes for their families. When I suggested to several women that their quantity of *pahala* (religious merit) was less than men because they did not fully perform *taraweh*, all of them disagreed with me. Ijah said that although the women do not perform *taraweh*, they gain another source of *pahala* from cooking *huroe raya* cakes. Another woman argued with me by saying that, if the women do not prepare *huroe raya* cake, could the men do it? She added that women's *pahala* was even larger than men's because women's activities during Ramadan are greater than usual, whereas during Ramadan, men only *tenget* (sleep). The word *tenget* in the Acehese terminology not only means "sleep", but also connotes laziness. From the women's perspective, therefore, men are regarded as lazy during Ramadan because all their activities are reduced. On the other hands, women have their own way to receive more *pahala*, that is, through increasing their activities during Ramadan.

On the last Sunday of Ramadan, the market of Lamno is full of people, both men and women. The reason is not only because Sunday is *huroe peukan* or *huroe gantoe* (weekly market)<sup>16</sup> in Lamno, but also because people need to

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<sup>16</sup>In every *kecamatan* of Aceh, people recognise two forms of market; *peukan cut* (usual market) and *huroe peukan* or *huroe gantoe* (weekly market). A "usual market" is a daily market, whereas

purchase items necessary for *huroe raya* such as new clothes and new shoes. Here is an apparent contradiction in the religious perception of women's activities in the context of the *huroe peukan* during Ramadan. Generally, shopping during Ramadan is performed by men, not by women, because in Lamno society it is not regarded as good for women to go outside during *puasa*. However, in the context of *huroe raya*, women are allowed to go to *huroe peukan* and mix there with men. I asked several men about this contradiction, but I could find no compelling explanation. Generally, men replied that, because men do not know about women's clothes, they let the women do their own shopping. Similarly, some women were surprised when I asked about the contradiction. Many of them said that it was impossible for men to provide women's clothes, by which they may have referred to underwear.

On further examination of the practice of allowing women to go out during Ramadan, I find that it is related to a characteristic of *huroe raya*, namely that everything be new for *huroe raya*. However, since it is regarded as unpropitious for men to buy their wives' clothes, women have to provide the clothes themselves. Therefore, although women are not generally permitted to go out during *puasa*, the approach of the *huroe raya* festival, on the other hand, forces them to depart from the practice that secludes them. At this point, I would argue that when a "religious value" - purification - and a "secular value", - the joy of *huroe raya* - conflict for a particular ceremony, this leads to a loss of the religious values. Only the "joyous atmosphere" remains apparent.

Additionally, just as the last day of Shaban is termed *makmeugang*, the last day of Ramadan is also termed by people as a *makmeugang* day. In welcoming Ramadan, people said *makmeugang puasa*, whereas in relation to

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a"weekly market", as its name suggests, is a market in which its activities only occur weekly. Every *kecamatan* has a different day for its weekly market (Hasybullah 1977:173-78).

*huroe raya*, people say *makmeugang huroe raya*. However, less meat is prepared for *makmeugang huroe raya* than for *makmeugang puasa*. The difference in the amount of the meat prepared is related to the purpose of serving meat at the *makmeugang*. In *makmeugang puasa*, the meat is intended as a specific side dish for the family throughout Ramadan, whereas the meat of *makmeugang huroe raya* is intended to celebrate the joy of *huroe raya*<sup>17</sup>. On the day of *makmeugang huroe raya*, once again a newlywed man must provide his wife's family with *makmeugang* meat, while the wife has to give money and other *huroe raya* materials such as cakes and sugar to her husband's family. This is an expression of the harmonisation of the relationship between the husband's and the wife's family.

On the evening of the last day of Ramadan, the sound of the *bedug* (drum) is sounded from the *meunasah* in the *villages* of Lamno by a group of young men. After *seumayang ashur*, the sound of the *bedug* can be heard in all the *villages* of Lamno. There is a traditional song for *huroe raya* which mentions that "the drum is beaten, as a sign that *huroe raya* is coming. Children with their new clothes play in the market, as a part of the joy of *huroe raya*"<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, people's behaviour on the night of *huroe raya* can be regarded as the ending of the liminal time of Ramadan. This night is called "*malam takbie*", and it is at this time that people recite a special religious chant<sup>19</sup>. In the past,

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<sup>17</sup>There is a special way of cooking the meat which makes possible the consumption of the meat throughout Ramadan. The Acehnese call this method "*sie rebouh*", in which the meat is mixed and cooked using vinegar.

<sup>18</sup>The Acehnese text of this song is: "*gedam-gedum tamboh di peh, tanda jadeh huroe raya, aneuk mit cut-cut ngon baje baroe meusenang ria jak ue peukan*".

<sup>19</sup>The religious chant of *malam takbei* is from the prophet Muhammad. The chant is "*Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar. La ilaha illa Allah, Allahu akbar. Allahu akbar wa lillahi al-hamd*" (Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest. There is no god except Allah. Allah is the greatest and praise only be to Allah).

people recited the *takbie* only in the *meunasah*. For several years nor, people have recited the *takbie* while going around the village, sometimes using trucks.

On the morning of the first day of *huroe raya* (the first day of Syawwal)<sup>20</sup>, a special communal prayer, called *seumayang huroe raya*, is performed in the mosque. The *seumayang* is performed by everyone, both men and women, adults and children, in the mosque of the *kemukiman*. Before going to the mosque, all people take a bath which symbolises the cleanliness of the body after the completion of the Ramadan fasting. Additionally, it is recommended by the Prophet Muhammad to wear new clothes and to use perfume when people go to perform the *seumayang huroe raya*. The new dress and the perfume are part of the acts necessary for fulfilment of *huroe raya*. According to several informants, many people in the village, particularly poor people, change their clothes for a new set only on *huroe raya*. Others said that there is a different feeling when people buy new clothes normally and when those clothes are bought for *huroe raya*. Wearing new clothes on *huroe raya* not only makes people happy, it also makes them feel clean. Therefore, bathing, wearing new clothes, and using perfume on *huroe raya* are symbols of the joy of *huroe raya*, and also an expression of the freedom of the body from sin.

After performing *seumayang huroe raya*, all people return to their homes. On arriving at home, members of the family ask pardon of each other. There is a special pattern to this. A wife shakes hands with her husband and asks pardon from him; children ask forgiveness from their parents and from their brothers or sisters. Among siblings, younger children ask forgiveness from elder children. The Acehnese term for asking pardon is "*meuah lahe baten*" (forgive me for any external and internal sins), and the response is "*lahe baten*" (me too,

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<sup>20</sup>*Syawal* is the tenth month according to the Islamic calendar. The month follows Ramadan.

from external and internal sins). Men then visit their neighbours and the *imuem meunasah* of the village. Then they visit relatives, especially those in the same village, while relatives in other villages, are visited at a later date, instead of on the first day of *huroe raya*.

A newlywed couple will visit the husband's parents before visiting the neighbours within the wife's neighbourhood. When they visit their close family - both the husband's and the wife's families - for the first time after their marriage, the new couple will bring a plate of traditional cake. Later, when they return, the women of the house of the family will give them some money. According to several old people in Lamno, in the past, the new couple would be given a chicken or a duck when they visited their families on *huroe raya*. The gift of a chicken or a duck on *huroe raya* is a reflection of the closeness of their familial relationship. Similarly, when children visit their family, such as a grandfather or an uncle, they will be given some money. Receiving the money is another kind of joy for children during *huroe raya*. Abdullah's children proudly showed me all the money that they were given during visits to their relatives.

To conclude, the activities of *huroe raya* mark the end of the liminal time of Ramadan and the beginning of usual time. The core of Ramadan is the opportunity for mankind to eliminate their past sin. Although forgiveness is the right of God, which means that only God can eliminate human sin, asking pardon is a reflection of the human awareness of their weaknesses. Having fasted people feel as if they have been reborn into this world because all their sins have been eliminated, *huroe raya* is a feast of victory, and a new opportunity for all Muslims to enter into a new life.

## CHAPTER V

### RAMADAN IN THE ACEHNESE PERCEPTION

#### 5.1 Introduction

In the two previous chapters, I have traced and described how the people of Lamno prepare themselves for the coming of Ramadan and adjust their lives during the month. Based on those descriptions, from an anthropological perspective, Ramadan can be regarded as a "liminal time" in the Islamic calendrical rituals. Liminality is a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, or as an interstructural situation (Turner, 1969: 167, 1979:234). The liminal period as defined by Turner is an ambiguous condition, a dissolution of all categories and classifications, a suspension of normative obligations, and a period of seclusion (Morris, 1993:253). Therefore, during liminality, room is created for the members of a society to re-evaluate their basic assumptions into new meaningful wholes (Buitelaar, 1993:129).

In this chapter, I attempt to interpret all those activities which take place before and during Ramadan according to several notions. By doing so, the basic question of this study, the meaning for the Acehnese people of Ramadan with all its religious ritual will be explored. Radcliffe-Brown (1975:51-2) developed three considerations for approaching the study of a ritual: firstly, consideration of the purposes or reason for the rite; next, consideration of the ritual meaning or symbolism; and finally, consideration of the effect of the rites, both individual and social. Regarding Ramadan ritual activities, there are three key notions which lend meaning to the performance of Ramadan rituals in the views of the Acehnese people. These three key notions are: Ramadan as a month of purification, Ramadan as a month of *ibadah* (religious service), and Ramadan as

a month of joy. However, all of these three notions are interrelated and as a result, to some extent, it is difficult to make a distinction between them.

## **5.2 Ramadan, month of purification**

At the normative level, purity is an important concept which is of great concern to Islamic teaching. Allah says in the Qur'an: "... Surely God loves those who turn to Him constantly, and He loves those who keep themselves clean" (Qur'an 2:222). Also, the prophet Muhammad said: "purity is half of *iman* (faith)". Purity in Islamic terms is stated in terms of *thahara*. The word *thahara* also has the technical sense of ceremonial, Levitical purity and purification (Houtsma et al., 1987: 608), and the word *thahara* also entails physical and spiritual purification (Rahman, 1980:73). Islamic theologians have developed the meaning of purification into four levels: purification of the body from physical dirt; of the members from offences; of the heart from evil desires; of the spirit from all that is not God (Houtsma et al., *ibid*). Several Islamic services, such as prayer and pilgrimage, require prior purification in order to be valid. Therefore purification must always accompany these religious services.

The opposite word of *thahara* is *najs* (impurity). In Islam, this is divided into major and minor impurity. Sexual intercourse (with or without ejaculation), menstruation, and child-birth are major impurities. While minor impurities include traces which are left after urination or defecation; dust or mud on the roads, soles of shoes, blood squashed out of a full-fed flea; blood or pus from a boil or pimple or from cupping (Houtsma et al., 1987:609). When one is in the condition of impurity, he or she is forbidden to perform any religious service until he or she performs a rite of purification. In order to become physically pure

from any major impurity, one must take a bath, whereas to purify the body from a minor impurity, one need only perform ablution<sup>1</sup>.

Above all, the cleanliness of the soul, which is symbolised in *niat* (purpose or intention to perform *ibadah*), is an important prerequisite in all Islamic religious services. *Niat* is to wish intensely to perform a religious service with full knowledge of God's Omniscience and Omnipresence (Rahman, 1980:4). All religious services are subject to the ideas of the performer, and these ideas are shaped by the inner beliefs of the performer. The Prophet Muhammad said: "works are in their intention only". On another occasion, the Prophet said: "his wages shall be in accordance with his intention" (Houtsma et al., 1987:930). Whether or not an *ibadah* is legitimate, therefore, is determined by the *niat* of the performer of the *ibadah*. *Niat* resides in an inner state or in the human soul; it is invisible and can not be apprehended solely through human action (religious service). Therefore, *niat* is closely related to *iman* (faith) as a basic element of Islam.

The best way to understand the importance of *niat* in Acehese perception is through an understanding of Acehese cosmological beliefs. In the Acehese cosmology, the world is divided into two part: *lahe* (outer self) and *baten* (inner self). In the *lahe* are the tangible, visible, and audible things and events. The *baten* contains invisible, hidden entities, such as spirits and the soul, and also the mental states that correspond to physical events (Bowen, 1993:106). Since *niat* is placed in the inner world, as something related to the soul, the Acehese deem the cleanliness of the soul to be of primary importance to every action. In the Acehese terminology, the soul is divided into two opposed conditions: *gleeh hate* (cleanliness of heart), and *brouk hate*

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<sup>1</sup>Taking ablution is to wash the face, the hands and the forearms up to elbows, rub the wet hands to the head, wash the feet (Tritton, 1987:1140, Rahman, 1980:70).

(naughtiness of heart). The word *hate* (heart) here does not mean the heart in the physical sense; rather it is related to the inner state as a main source of intentions that correspond to physical events. For example, when an Acehnese points out a person who carries out a good or a bad deed, they often describe the person in terms of *gleeh* or *brouk hate*.

During Ramadan, Acehnese perceptions about the importance of purity become apparent. This concern with the importance of purification emerges not just because all religious services would be invalid unless the conditions of purity were met, but also because of the core of Ramadan itself, namely that it is a month of forgiveness. Allah promises that if Muslims follow all their obligations and avoid what is forbidden, He will reward them by eliminating their sins. Fasting people fear that they will not attain the core of Ramadan if they are impure; hence, several purification activities must be performed on the days preceding Ramadan. In the *kaurie bu*, for instance, the intention to purify the soul is clear. Through the *kaurie bu*, people attempt to communicate with their ancestors in order to *peugleh hate* (to cleanse the soul). By doing so, they believe that they will enter into Ramadan in a cleansed condition.

Since Ramadan is regarded as a month of purification, everything that can contaminate is avoided. Some of those things which are deemed as impure are found only in the Acehnese view, which means they are not in accordance with the Islamic teaching. During the night time in Ramadan, for example, many men stay outside their house perhaps in the *warung* or in the *meunasah*. The reason is not only to talk with friends or to perform *ibadah* by reciting the Qur'an, but also in order to avoid contact with their wives. When a man in the *meunasah* or in the *warung* wants to go back to his house during the night, often his friends remind him jokingly: "*nyou buleun puasa, bek tou that ngon inong*" (this is a fasting month, do not go too close to your wife). Although it is difficult

to directly ask people about their sexual attitudes during Ramadan, the above example helps to explain the Acehese perception that having sexual intercourse can result in a person becoming impure and, eventually, losing the core of Ramadan.

Another aspect of purification with which people are concerned during Ramadan is *warung* activities. During the day, as required by the government, all *warung* must be closed and are not allowed to sell any food until two hours before the time for breaking the fast. In Lamno, as far as I noticed, all the *warung* follow and obey this regulation. However, in other areas such as in Meulaboh or in Banda Aceh, some *warung* sold rice secretly during the day. People felt that the purity of Ramadan was being destroyed, and as a result, the *warung* were torn down (Serambi Indonesia, 15 February 1995). A day before this incident, Major-General Teuku Djohan, a former vice-governor of Aceh, wrote an open letter to the head of the regency of Banda Aceh which was published in the local newspaper. He mentioned that there was a hotel in Banda Aceh which sold food during the day, not only to guests of the hotel but also to the general population. He suggested that the regent of Banda Aceh should warn the owner of the hotel. He closed his letter with an expectation that the government must save the purity of Ramadan by controlling the *warung* activities (Serambi Indonesia, 14 February 1995).

Similarly, one day I took a trip by bus from Lamno to Meulaboh. All the passengers were fasting, except one person, who was smoking on the bus. Some one told him to stop smoking because all the passengers were fasting. However, he ignored the warning, saying that, although he was a Muslim, he was in a *musafir* (traveller's) condition. Later, I heard someone mutter "*lage ureung kaphe*" (like the unbeliever). Finally, when the bus driver realised that there was

a commotion among the passengers, he said to the smoker: "If you do not respect the fasting people, please get off the bus".

These descriptions clearly indicate the importance of keeping the month of Ramadan in a pure condition from the Acehnese perception. The sacredness of Ramadan as a month of purification creates a border between Muslim and non-Muslims. In terms of Ramadan as a liminal time, its sacredness can generally be translated as: that which is 'set up', 'protected from the outside' or 'on one side' (Douglas, 1966:8). In terms of *communitas* during the liminal period, as Turner argued (Morris, 1993), all community members, both ordinary people and government, attempt to keep Ramadan pure.

Another important event in the context of Ramadan as a month of purification is the circumcision of boys. Although according to Islamic teaching the circumcision is not a sign that a boy has reached maturity, the Acehnese regard circumcision as marking the border-line between the life of childhood and the life of manhood. After circumcision, for example, boys always wear pants (before this they often go about naked), and now only rarely play with girls. In Pidie, where men are characterised with the tradition of *merantau* (to leave the home area), circumcision is a sign that a man must begin the *merantau* tradition by moving out of his parents' house and into a *meunasah* for sleeping. If they do not move out of the house, the other boys tease them, saying that "they are still sucking at their mother's breast" (Siegel, 1969: 152). Because circumcision is considered as an important step in the transition of a boy to manhood, it is understandable that a parent would want to circumcise his boy during Ramadan. A parent told me that by performing circumcision during Ramadan, the boy enters maturity in a completely clean condition. Furthermore, this will positively affect his behaviour in later life.

Regarding the transition between childhood and manhood, fasting during Ramadan can also be regarded as a symbol of the entrance into the life of adulthood. Often a parent tells those children who can complete the fast that they are no longer a child, but have become an adult. Similar with the Moroccan perception, fasting during Ramadan is a symbolic maker of the beginning of adulthood (Buitelaar, 1993:168). It is because the fasting confirms that he or she has grown up to meet the responsibilities of being a full-fledged member of the Muslim community. In Lamno, as well in other parts of Aceh, children usually begin learning to fast - before they begin fully observing the fast for a whole month - when they are seven or eight years old. Usually, they begin learning to fast by observing it for only half a day. However, if the children can observe the fast completely from sunrise until sundown, some parents will give them a gift.

The Acehnese believe that a person who dies during this blessing month, will enter directly to paradise. There are three times that are regarded by the Acehnese as blessed times to die: on Fridays, during Ramadan, and when he or she is performing *haji* (pilgrim to Mecca). When I asked what happened if a bad person died during Ramadan, some people said that, Allah would postpone questioning him or her until the end of Ramadan. This is because the doors of Hell are closed during Ramadan and, therefore, all punishments will be postponed until the end of the month.

Returning to the process of purification during Ramadan, the performance of *zakat al-fitr* is also important. The word *zakat* is an Arabic word which means to purify, and the word *al-fitr* means "the purity" (Rahman, 1980:112). The function of *zakat al-fitr* completes the process of purification for fasting people. The Prophet Muhammad said that the function of *zakat al-fitr* is to serve to atone for any involuntary negligence on the part of

fasting people during Ramadan and also to provide food for poor and needy people on the day of *'id al-fithry* (Shiddieqy, 1987:285, [my translation]).

When the spiritual core is incorporated in the peoples' understanding of an *ibadah*, they perform it not just as an empty obligation, but as an act of deep personal importance to the individual. From the Acehnese point of view, the obligation of *zakat al-fitrah* is one of the keys to enter into paradise. *Teungku* Hasan claimed that fasting brings the Muslim only to the door of paradise, and no one can enter paradise before giving the *pitrah*. By quoting this saying of the Prophet, *teungku* Hasan said that after giving the *pitrah*, all Muslims become cleansed, and therefore, they can enter into paradise since paradise is only intended for cleansed people. This perception has become a strong motivation for the Acehnese to prepare special *pitrah* rice, since the fasting itself means nothing if they do not pay the *pitrah*.

The last events of the purification process of Ramadan is on the day of *huroe raya* (*'id al-fitri*), the feast to celebrate the end of Ramadan. The *huroe raya* has two facets. It is a part of the purification process, but it is also a feast of victory because the fasting people have been freed from satanic desires and cleansed of their past sins. The elements of purification in the feast of *huroe raya*, can be traced to several Muslim attitudes about the *huroe raya*. Bathing on the morning of *huroe raya*, for instance, can be deemed as a climax of the purification process of Ramadan. To express this condition of purity after observing all the religious services during Ramadan, people wear new clothes, (or at least, clean clothes) on the day of *huroe raya*.

The chanting of *takbie* and *tahlil* (Allah is the greatest, there is no God but Allah), which is followed by the performance of a special prayer on the morning of *huroe raya*, is an expressions of the cleanliness of a Muslims' faith from any kind of false worship. If wearing new clothes and perfume are symbols

of physical cleanliness at the end of Ramadan, the chanting of *takbie*, the special prayer of *huroe raya* and asking pardon from other people, are the symbols of spiritual cleansing.

Visiting each other on *huroe raya* and asking pardon which is requested by the phrase "*meah lahe baten*" (forgive me from any way), is reciprocal practice. On one hand, when a person visits others and asks pardon, it means that the person wants to eliminate any sins he or she has committed against the other. On the other hand, it also implies that the person has already forgiven any sins committed by those others. Above all, these purification events during *huroe raya* can be seen as a point of transition from the liminal time of the sacred month back into everyday life. Because people feel that they are reborn and without their sins, *huroe raya* is for the Acehnese not only the climax of the purification process, but also the starting point for the return to everyday life.

### **5.3 Ramadan, Month of Worship**

In some discussions of the characteristics of religion (Tylor, 1979:11, Parson, 1979:63), religion is defined as consisting of two basic elements: belief and ritual. The relationship between these two elements can be best understood in terms of belief as a "concept" and ritual as an "action". Belief as a concept will inspire or promote activity, and the activity itself is ritual (Bell, 1992:19). In Islam, the term for belief is "*aqidah*" and the term for ritual is "*ibadah*". However, in a broad discussion on Islamic ritual, the term *ibadah* is often - if not always - translated into English as "worship" (Bowen, 1993:23, Nasr, 1988:106). In this discussion, I want to use "worship" or sometimes "*ibadah*" instead of using the term "ritual".

The *ibadah* in Islam is divided into two classifications: *ibadah khassah* (special worship), and *ibadah ammah* (general worship). The former includes

all religious duties that must be performed by all Muslims, especially the religious duties, which are included in the "five pillars of Islam". The latter includes all activities which are performed by Muslims in order to seek the blessing of Allah (Mahayuddin, 1986:446). When the Acehnese talk about special worship, they use the term of "*ibadah wajib*" (obligatory worship). In contrast, when they talk about general worship, the Acehnese use the term "*amai*". The word *amai* comes from an Arabic term, *amal*, which means deed or work. However, the term *amai* in the Acehnese language comprises all deeds which are observed solely in order to obtain the blessing of Allah.

During Ramadan, the Acehnese are manifestly conscious of the importance of performing religious worship, both *ibadah wajib* and *amai*. Even a few days before Ramadan begins, people have started attempting to renew and update their religious feelings and the significance of the performance of religious worship. For several days before Ramadan, many more Acehnese come to the *meunasah* to pray together, whereas usually this is only performed by a few people. This change in attitude, indeed, can not be separated from the Acehnese understanding of *the pahala* (religious merit) which they will receive during Ramadan. They believe that each good deed which is performed during Ramadan, and is solely intended for gaining the blessing of Allah, brings the performer one step closer to Paradise. Additionally, it is believed that any *do'a* (invocation) is more likely to be answered in this month than in other months. Therefore, Ramadan is stated by the Acehnese as being "*huroe get, buleun get*" (the best days, the best month); which primarily means the best time to accumulate *pahala* and to receive the blessing of Allah.

In the Islamic teaching, *pahala* is mentioned in terms of *ajr*, which means the spiritual reward for pious acts, the accumulation of which yields admittance to paradise (Buitelaar, 1993:118). The basic concept about this

religious merit can be found in the Qur'an: "Whoever presents himself (in the Presence of God) with good deeds, so he receives a tenfold reward; but he who presents himself with evil works he receives none other than a like punishment, and they are not treated unjustly" (Surah 6:160).

The belief that the amount of *pahala* can be increased during Ramadan has led people to perform many acts of religious worship. (In the preceding chapters, many examples of activities which are undertaken in order to achieve the core of Ramadan have been described.) In many cases I found that these activities, both *ibadah* and *amai*, were mentioned in the context of gaining *pahala*. When the *imuem meunasah* required a boy to clean the *meunasah*, for instance, he said to the boy: "Do you want a big *pahala*? if you want it, please sweep the floor of the *meunasah* tomorrow morning". This demonstrates the religious consciousness of the Acehnese during Ramadan, as though they saw themselves walking on the pathway that enters directly to paradise.

Further evidence that the Acehnese are conscious of the importance of *pahala* during Ramadan is that almost everyone becomes very generous at this time. This behaviour can be seen in several *ibadah* activities, such as the tradition of serving people in the *meunasah* with snacks for *buka puasa* and for *meudaroh*. Additionally, according to several informants, the fund for construction of a *meunasah* or mosque in Lamno usually comes from donations and *zakat* which are collected during Ramadan. Many people in Lamno postpone their payment of *zakat* until the coming of Ramadan. Although it is not a religious requirement to pay *zakat* at this specific time, people choose this time because of *pahala*. By paying *zakat* in Ramadan, they will get two *pahala*: the *pahala* of *zakat*, and the *pahala* of Ramadan. *Sadaqah* (donations) are distributed to poor people and orphans more than during other months. Usually

people give the *Sadaqah* for poor people in form of new clothes or of money for the celebration of *huroe raya*.

Thus during Ramadan worship is intensified. Religious practice and moral values (support of the family, serving the community, the encouragement of alms-giving) are strengthened. Furthermore, during ordinary months, only the mosque provides a special *celengan* (money box) for collecting *sadaqah* at Friday prayer. During Ramadan, a money box is also provided by the *imuem meunasah* for people who observe *seumayang taraweh* in the *meunasah*. People believe that Ramadan brings the blessing of Allah and that the good deeds are multiplied in the eyes of Allah.

In Lamno, the *meunasah* and several *dayah* are often considered to be the best places to perform *ibadah* and to receive *pahala* during Ramadan. This view is based on the fact that these two places are the significant sites for people to perform ritual activities. In some parts, however, the *meunasah* and the *dayah* have a gender distinction, in which the *meunasah* belongs to men, whereas the *dayah* belongs to women. This is because women come to the *meunasah* only at limited times; that is to perform the daily prayer, a special night prayer and to recite the Qur'an after performing *seumayang suboh*. Beyond these times, the *meunasah* belongs to the men, whether as a place to rest or as a venue to perform certain *ibadah*, such as *meurateb* (to recite several religious chants) or to recite the Qur'an.

In contrast, during Ramadan, the *dayah* is often associated with women, as a place for them to gain *pahala*. This view emerges due to the fact that the majority of the participants in *suluk* which is carried out by *teungku* in their

*dayah* are women<sup>2</sup>. Among several *dayah* to be found in Lamno, there are two *dayah* which carry out this mystical ritual: *dayah* Miftahul Ulum and *dayah* Darul Nizam. Although the *suluk* ritual is not restricted by gender or by age, the majority of participants are old women. During my conversations with several people, I could not find a compelling reason as to why many more women took part in the Ramadan *suluk* as compared to men. However, according to *teungku* Hasan, the *mursyid* (*suluk* guide) in *dayah* Miftahul Ulum, the purpose of the *suluk* is not only intended as a spiritual exercise, but also, more importantly, as a process of purification. Since women regularly menstruate, it is more difficult for them to obtain a state of complete purity. Therefore, through the Ramadan *suluk*, women attempt to obtain complete purification.

To some extent, *teungku* Hasan's comment on *suluk* symbolises the Acehnese view of gaining *pahala* from a gender perspective. It is often said by men that women's *pahala* is less than men, not only during Ramadan, but also in general. This perception is always based on the injunction against women performing religious duties such as prayer or fasting while they are menstruating. Therefore, compared with men - who perform religious duties constantly - women's *pahala* is less than men's. However, when I asked other *teungku*, they said that although women regularly become ritually impure through menstruation, their *pahala* is not less than men. Allah says in the Qur'an: "So their Lord accepted their prayer, His answer to them being 'I will never destroy the good deeds of a doer of good among you, whether the doer be male or female, you are members, one of another ...' "(Surah 3:195).

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<sup>2</sup>*Suluk* is an important ritual which is recognised in Islamic mystical teaching. *Suluk* or *tariqa* is a practical method to guide a seeker by tracing a way of thought, feeling, and action, leading through a succession of 'stages' to experience the divine Reality (*haqiqa*) (Trimingham, 1971:3-4, Aboebakar, 1980:108).

Actually, the view that women's *pahala* is less than men is not found solely in Aceh, but is also believed by Muslims in other Islamic societies. In her discussion of notions of female religious worth in a male-dominated world, Buitelaar (1993:133) concludes that "in the male-dominated view, women's religious esteem is considered to be less prestigious than that of men". I think the view that women's *pahala* is less than men's *pahala* is another expression of symbolic male dominance in many Islamic communities, whereby women are tacitly presumed to be second-best Muslims.

Other *teungku* who did not perform the *suluk* ritual in their *dayah* held a weekly *pengajian* (religious talk). The *pengajian* lasted two hours in the morning and was only attended by women; no men came. I could not find an accurate answer as to why no men took part in this weekly *pengajian*. Attempting to link this phenomena with others activities during Ramadan, I think, Ramadan creates a specific place for women as well as for men, in which men and women do not mix. Therefore, during Ramadan, the *dayah* belongs to women, and the *meunasah* belongs to men

Since Ramadan is always associated with the accumulation of *pahala*, several religious disputes emerged in the conversation on certain aspects of *ibadah*. People who perform *seumayang taraweh* with twenty-one *raka'at* believe that their *pahala* is greater than people who only pray eleven *raka'at*. By contrast, people who perform taraweh with eleven *raka'at* argue that the others do not follow the prophet's tradition, since the Prophet observed *taraweh* with only eleven *raka'at*. Generally, in Indonesian Islamic communities, the disputes over religious matters emerges on particular topics, such as death rituals, sacrificial rituals, and certain aspects of prayer (Bowen, 1993, Geertz, 1991). It is in these that the dichotomy of traditionalist and modernist Islam come to the fore. Because Ramadan is an *ibadah* month, it is understandable that the *ibadah*

which are observed during this time are of great concern. Everyone attempts to perform *ibadah* properly and, of course, every one believes that their *ibadah* are based on the Prophet Muhammad's tradition.

In Lamno, it is important to highlight that direct confrontation over religious matters is very rare compared to others part of Aceh<sup>3</sup>. This is because the *dayah* and *teungku* as centres of traditionalist Islam are very much a part of community life. Another reason is at the time of my field work, Muhammadiyah as a movement of modernist Islam in Indonesia had not become established in Lamno. Although the views of several Islamic modernists had already entered Lamno, these views were held only by a few individuals. Most importantly, the Lamno community during Ramadan endeavours to create the harmony described by Turner as "communitas" during a period of liminality (Morris, 1993:253-4).

#### **5.4 Ramadan, Month of Joy.**

The Acehnese notion of Ramadan as a month of happiness may be best understood in their saying, "*sieblah buleun tameuharekat, zsiebuleun tameuhabeh*" (Eleven months we have to work, and within a month we spend all that we have). Although on the surface this idiom most accurately describes Acehnese economic behaviour, the ramifications extend much deeper. Ramadan with its denial of physical pleasure through religious activities (such as fasting) seems far from enjoyable. However, when we look at the behaviour of people at this time, they experience much pleasures, as evidenced by the tones of their voices as they go about their activities.

The first joy that is often associated with Ramadan is that the month brings the Acehnese people in the *rantau* to stay with their families in their

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<sup>3</sup>Bowen (1993) records the religious disputes among people in the Gayonese society.

homeland<sup>4</sup>. Although the tradition of *merantau* in Lamno is not as strong as in Pidie (Siegel, 1969), people in Lamno do recognise the necessity of men living outside their family homes. There are two reasons why the people in Lamno live apart from their families. Firstly, they leave their families in order to seek knowledge, usually going to Banda Aceh or to Meulaboh. Secondly, men who leave their families do so because of economic necessity. The most common *rantau* for the second is going to the mountainous areas to "*jak meunilam ue gunoeng*" (planting patchouli which grows in mountainous areas)<sup>5</sup>.

During the month of Shaban men who live outside Lamno begin returning to their families. The *kaurie bu* which is held during Shaban, for instance, suggests that all members of the family have already returned since the central aspect of this *kaurie* is the coming together of a family in order to communicate with the ancestors through *do'a*. Even those members of a family who have settled outside Lamno should be informed and invited to join in the *kaurie bu*. Another important indication that the Ramadan brings means the joy of family reunions can be seen in the tradition of *makmeugang*. Many housewives worry about the fact that some family members are not at home for *makmeugang* day. Generally, this is the case, even though now days the typical time for coming home particularly among young people and students, occurs from the second week of Ramadan until several days before *huroe raya*.

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<sup>4</sup>As with Saudi Arabian people, individuals or families who lived outside their country try to return before the announcement of the beginning of the month. Ideally, nobody should spend this month in the *ghurba*, foreign land, away from home (Zaki Yamani 1987:80).

<sup>5</sup>In the *jak meunilam* tradition, four or five village men who share kinship bonds form a group. They stay in the mountains for five or six months and only return to their villages for very important reasons such as to get rice. Since Ramadan is deemed a time when all family members should be together, the *jak meunilam* is altered with the coming of Ramadan. This means that, if people reckon that they can not harvest the patchouli oil before the beginning of Ramadan, they will not cultivate it. Not only patchouli, but other plants such as peanut or chilli are also cultivated. The harvest time for these crops must also take place before Ramadan.

It is expected that those returning to Lamno bring gifts for their family, or at least, bring extra money to cover the expenses of Ramadan. Therefore, as Ramadan approaches, people who work outside Lamno are expected by their families to return. They are required in Lamno not only because of the money that they will bring, but most importantly, their presence is required so that the family can be together in carrying out several rituals, such as *kaurie bu*, and *makmeugang*. Excluding students, people who live outside Lamno are often regarded by the villagers as more prosperous. When these people meet with villagers in the *warung* or in the *meunasah*, the villagers often ask them about their experiences in accumulating money outside Lamno.

As a month which emphasises family solidarity, Ramadan introduces a new circumstance in the interaction between a son-in-law and his wife's parents. During Ramadan all members of a family, including the son in law, sit together on one plaited mat when they have a meal. Normally, a son-in-law never has a meal with his wife's family; Ramadan eliminates this prohibition. In Lamno, where residence takes a matrilocal form, direct interaction between a son-in-law and his parents-in-law is very limited. However, Ramadan introduces a new value to their interaction. I would argue that in some ways, the model of interaction between family members during Ramadan is similar to the *communitas* of Turner's liminal time (Turner, 1979:234).

Besides the joy experienced with families reuniting, there is also the happiness associated with the many *kaurie* (communal feasts) which take place before and during Ramadan. At any *kaurie*, the feast consists of two basic elements: the ritual prayer which is symbolised through *do'a*, and the ritual meal which is symbolised through providing several kinds of foods (Hefner, 1989:104-5, Bowen, 1993:230-1). Although the *kaurie* usually consists of both a ritual prayer and a ritual meal, to some extent, people in Lamno now think of

these *kaurie* only in terms of the ritual meal. The nature of *kaurie* in Lamno can be described as a feast where people come and sit together to eat a common meal of rice and various special meats, sharing the food which is placed in the centre. The joy experienced with these *kaurie* in the context of Ramadan now focuses on the element of the special foods which are to be found at any *kaurie*, not on the prayer.

In his description of the characteristics of communal feasting in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, McAllister (1987:396) reported that the communal feast begins with the gathering of contributions of food, cash, and other necessary resources. They include sharing resources and work, exchanging ideas and decision-making, and most importantly, eating. Similarly, in the Lamno *kaurie* tradition, all people, men and women, rich and poor, are involved in cooperative groups to help ensure the success of the *kaurie*. The communal nature of any *kaurie* does not rely just on the number of participants, but on the nature of their involvement. Since everything is done in cooperative groups, people are continually together and socialising as they participate in the various aspects of the feast.

During Shaban, people perform three kinds of *kaurie*: *kaurie bu*, *kaurie beureat*, and *meuramin*. During Ramadan, people carry out *kaurie truen Qur'an*, *kaurie peutamam daroih*, and also some men break the fast together in the *meunasah*. In Lamno, it is often said that when people come to the *kaurie*, they will *pajoh mangat* (eat much delicious food). This saying implies that in people's perception the *kaurie* is always associated with delicious foods, or with extraordinary foods. Because any *kaurie* - including the *kaurie ureung mate* (the funeral feast) - is always accompanied by eating, whether it is a large meal or it is merely snacks, the image of *kaurie* is something to be enjoyed. Ramadan,

when many *kaurie* take place, therefore, can be regarded as a month of special joy.

Ramadan as a month of joy can also be seen in the Acehnese daily activities. Men's activities during Ramadan are generally reduced, particularly in relation to those involving livelihood and accumulating wealth. Van Genneep (1908:3) argues that "the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another". What he means by this is that human life is a series of transitions from birth, through puberty, and marriage to death. In a similar vein the Acehnese believe that human life is a constant shift between working and resting. No one can work continuously without having time for leisure. Extending this idea, people in Lamno attempt to legitimise their attitude during Ramadan, which is summed up by the phrase: "eleven months we have to work, within a month we spend all that we have".

During the first week of Ramadan, in the fishing *gampong* of Kuala Daya and Ujung Mulo, almost everyone remains instead of going to the sea. Their reason for not fishing is always based on the idea that Ramadan is both an *ibadah* month and a month of joy. When I pointed out that they would earn nothing if they did not go fishing, some of them replied by saying that: "we do not have to push ourselves, because although we go fishing, we will not be rich men". Similarly, other people explained to me that the month of Ramadan is a good time to stay with family and to meet friends in the village. Although normally they also meet and converse with their friends, I noticed that there is a particular pleasure that when they can meet more often during Ramadan.

The significant joy of Ramadan for men is their retirement from the usual work necessary for earning a livelihood. Instead, they gather day and night with friends in the *meunasah*, and also spend time in the *warungs* during the night. During Ramadan, the *meunasah* and the *warung* become central

points for men to meet with others and to spend most of their time. The significant joy of Ramadan for women is perhaps to be able to serve the family an abundance of special food, to redecorate the house. New furnishings, such as a tablecloth or curtains, are most likely to be purchased at this time of the year, especially during the last days of Ramadan<sup>6</sup>.

The greatest happiness of Ramadan is, of course, the celebration of the *huroe raya puasa* festival. The joy of *huroe raya* is evident in each household, in the neighbourhood, and in the market from the second week of Ramadan. In Aceh, *huroe raya* is marked by wearing new clothes, visiting others, and eating various traditional foods. When people meet or go visiting, they ask each other forgiveness by shaking hands and saying "*meah lahe baten*" (forgive me for inner and outer wrongs) in an emotional manner. They respond by saying "*lahe baten*" (me too, for any of my wrongs). Children have a special way of celebrating the *huroe raya*. If on the first day they visited their extended families and received money from them, then on the second and third days, they spend their time and the money in the Lamno market buying food or toys.

The celebration, usually lasts for three or four days, during which people visit others and also welcome visitors in their home. However, the ambience of *huroe raya* persists in people's behaviour until the second week of the month of Shawwal. Visiting others, particularly members of the extended family who may be living in other *gampong* or *kecamatan*, continues until then. Eventually, the joy of *huroe raya* is finished as everyone returns to their daily activities.

For the Acehnese, the celebration of *huroe raya* concludes Ramadan as a month of purification, a month of *ibadah* (religious worship), and a month of

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<sup>6</sup>When I asked some housewives what aspect of Ramadan made them feel happy, some replied: "In Ramadan we can renew our household furnishings". Visiting people in *huroe raya*, I found that in many houses there were new furniture or appliances. If nothing else is bought, at least there will be new table cloths or curtains.

joy. The *huroe raya* of Ramadan is one of the three most important moments of the year for the Acehnese, the others being the *'id- adha* and the *maulud* festival. But it is only at Ramadan and *huroe raya* that the Acehnese renew and invigorate their religious feelings as well as their relationship with family and friends.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

In this study, I have considered the sacred and secular meaning of Ramadan for the Acehnese people. The Acehnese express the meaning of Ramadan in terms of universal Islamic values: Ramadan is a fasting month, Ramadan is a month of blessing, and Ramadan is a month of God's forgiveness. Nevertheless, the articulation of these values must be understood within the Acehnese socio-cultural background.

The Acehnese regard the core of Ramadan not only by understanding it from the normative level - as prescribed in the Qur'an and the hadith - but more importantly, they have specific interpretations - at the practical level - of the meaning of Ramadan. Through an investigation of the life experiences of Acehnese people during Ramadan, I conclude that in this society, Ramadan is also regarded as a month of purification; a month of *ibadah* (religious worship); and a month of joy. It is important to recognise that these notions (at the practical level) do not contradict the core of Ramadan (at the normative level). Indeed, the function of these three notions can be deemed as an ideal path for the Acehnese to achieve the core of Ramadan as revealed in the Qur'an and the hadith.

The notion that Ramadan as a month of purification leads the Acehnese to renew and refine their *lahe* (outer self) and *baten* (inner self) values once within a year. *Lahe* includes the physical conduct, while *baten* includes religious and moral values. When the Acehnese talk about purification of their outer selves, they describe it in terms of being healthy. The concept of being healthy in the context of Ramadan as a month of purification has wide meaning. It is not only understood in relation to the "health of the body", but also comprises "a

healthy environment". A few day before and during Ramadan, people are particularly concerned with the cleanliness of the *meunasah* and the household. Moreover, it is widely believed that to observe the fast is healthy. Fasting during Ramadan helps the organs of the body, especially the stomach, to rest and release waste products which have accumulated in the body during the preceding months.

When the Acehnese talk about purification in the context of their inner selves, they describe it in the context of *gleeh hate* (cleanliness of heart). In the Acehnese cosmology, the word "*hate*" (heart) is related to an inner state as the main source of intentions corresponding to physical events. The Acehnese acknowledge that the *iman* (faith) of Muslims toward Allah is determined by the condition of their inner state. It is widely believed that Satan influences humankind to commit sin by gaining control over human desire. When human desire is uncontrolled, humans are like animals or worse. In the *makmeugang* tradition, the purification element by which the Acehnese kill their human desire is symbolised by slaughtering a cow or a buffalo. Muslims must be in a condition of purity at the time they observe the *ibadah* of Ramadan. Performance of the fast and other religious rituals during Ramadan are also deemed a process of moral and physical purification. Thus, Ramadan creates a specific time for people to renew and to invigorate their inner and outer selves.

The end of Ramadan is marked by the *huroe raya* festival. When the Acehnese mention the *huroe raya* festival, they always relate it to the tradition of visiting others in order to ask pardon. Asking pardon, indeed, is a reflection of consciousness that everyone has of one's faults and weaknesses. In order to be always in harmony with others, one has to acknowledge his/her faults, weaknesses and wrong deeds toward others by asking forgiveness. The best time

to ask, of course, is soon after doing a wrong deed. However, because, sometimes, a person does not realise that he/she has offended another, *huroe raya* for Acehnese is a good moment to give forgiveness and to receive forgiveness.

Ramadan in the Acehnese perception is also deemed as a month of *ibadah* (worship). During Ramadan, people become more aware of performing religious worship. It is a time for people who do not regularly perform daily prayer during other months to make an effort to do so. Moreover, it is widely believed that a *do'a* (invocation) is more likely to be answered in this month than at other times. This perception leads to a change in people's religious attitude. *Dayah* and *meunasah* become centres for religious gatherings since these two places are regarded as the best places to perform *ibadah* and to receive *pahala*.

The emergence of this religious consciousness during Ramadan gives advantages in social life. Fasting is a spiritual exercise; it reinforces human honesty and strengthens the confidence of individuals. Incidents of gossiping, insulting, or slandering others are rare compared with other times. Another advantage is that almost everyone becomes more generous during Ramadan. *Sadaqah* (donations) are distributed to poor people and orphans more than in other months. Some people say that if one wants to know the real circumstances of the life of an Islamic community, then it should be during Ramadan.

When the Acehnese talk about *ibadah*, they describe it in the context of receiving *pahala* (religious merit). Ramadan is *huroe get buleun get* (the best day, the best month); the best time to accumulate *pahala* and to receive the blessing of Allah. It is widely believed that the reward for a good deed performed during Ramadan will be multiplied. Thus most activities, even sleep

during the fasting time, are connected with *ibadah* and the accumulation of *pahala*. It is believed that if a person dies during Ramadan, he or she will enter directly to Paradise.

Ramadan in the Acehnese perception, is also regarded as a month of joy. This notion emerges in the popular phrase about Ramadan that *sieblah buleun tameuharekat, siebuleun tameuhabe* (Eleven months we have to work, and a month we spend all that we have). This idiom, indeed, indicates that the normal activities of the Acehnese people change during Ramadan. It is not an exaggeration to say that night becomes day and day becomes night. This does not mean that people sleep all day, but it does indicate that the nights during Ramadan in Aceh are very lively compared to the nights in other months.

Since Ramadan is deemed a month of joy, everyone feels happy and pleased with the coming of Ramadan. Although Ramadan is full of *ibadah*, and it is seen from outside may appear far from enjoyable, from within it has many pleasures. It is interesting that all these joyous activities are not contradicted by Islamic teaching but rather can be reckoned as part of *ibadah*. Indeed, when the Acehnese talk about the joy of Ramadan, they do not go beyond Islamic rule.

When the Acehnese speak of Ramadan, they connect it to the *huroe raya* festival. This festival, indeed, contains two kinds of joy: physical joy and spiritual joy. The physical joy can be seen in people's activities such as wearing new clothes, visiting each other, sharing and eating traditional cakes. The spiritual joy of *huroe raya* is that sins are eliminated by God on that day (if Muslims observe what is advised and avoid what is forbidden). It is a moment where God opens His blessing and His forgiveness. For all Muslims there is no much greater joy in life than receiving the blessing of God.

Additionally, the social life of Lamno people during Ramadan resembles the liminal period which Turner labelled as "normative *communitas*". The relations between fasting people are more harmonious compared with other times and this is a significant element of *communitas* during liminality. The phrase "*tanyo bak buleun puasa*" (we are in the fasting month) often appears in daily conversation. On the one hand, this phrase is intended as a sign of warning when someone has made a mistake. On the other hand, this idiom also symbolises the importance of the harmony of people's interactions during Ramadan.

Finally, Ramadan brings to people a new opportunity to renew and invigorate their moral as well as their physical life. Ramadan is a moment for the Acehnese to return to their basic identity as an Islamic community. Through experiencing a special life during Ramadan, the Acehnese endeavour to proclaim to themselves and to other people that their basic identity as Muslims has not changed.

## GLOSSARY

(Note: only those meanings which are relevant to the study are provided here)

- Adat : Custom, tradition
- Akal : Reason; rationality
- Alem : A person with some learning of Islam, but not as learned as *ulama*.
- Amil zakat : The collector of alms.
- Ashar : Afternoon; afternoon prayer.
- Auliya : See *uerung keuramat*.
- Azan : Call to prayer.
- Baten : Inner self
- Berkah : God's blessing
- Bileu : The person who says the azan.
- Blang : Rice field
- Buka puasa : The time for breaking the fast; cakes at the time of breaking the fast.
- Buleun : Month, moon
- Dayah : Pesantren; Islamic boarding school.
- Decha : Sin; sinful
- Do'a : Invocation; prayer; recitation
- Donya : The world; this world, as the opposed to the hereafter.
- Fikh : The science of the Islamic jurisprudence.
- Gampong : Village
- Hawa nafsu : The part's of man's nature that he shares with the animal; everything within man that aris spontaneously.
- Huroe peukan : Weekly market

Huroe raya puasa	: The celebration of the end of Ramadan month, which taken place on the first day (idul fithri) of the month (Syawwal) following the fast.
Ibadah	: Religious services, especially refer to the "five pillars of Islam".
Idang	: A packet of food including rice and a variety of side dishes which is served at a communal feast.
'Id al-fithri	: See <i>Huroe Raya Puasa</i> .
'Id al-adha	: The feast of sacrifice.
Imuem	: Leader in performing prayer; and everything which is related to religious duties.
Isya	: Night prayer
Jak suboh	: The tradition of walking in the morning during the month of Ramadan.
Kabupaten	: Regency, headed by <i>bupati</i> .
Kaurie	: Communal feast.
Kecamatan	: A subdivision of a regency headed by a <i>camat</i> .
Kemukiman	: A collection of several villages, headed by <i>imuem mukim</i> .
Lahe	: Outer self
Luh	: Noon; the prayer observed at noon.
Magreb	: Sunset; prayer observed at sunset.
Makmeugang	: The tradition of slaughtering cow or buffalo before Ramadan.
Maulud	: The Prophet Muhammad's birth day and its celebration.
Meudaroh	: The tradition of reciting the Qur'an during the night of the Ramadan month.
Meuharekat	: To work, especially in relation with gaining one's livelihood.
Meunasah	: Small mosque in a village.
Meuramin	: The excursion to the beach or the river; social gathering with food during Shaban.

- Meurantau : To stay outside one's home area.
- Meurateb : Religious chants
- Mulud : The feast to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.
- Pahala : Religious merit
- Peukan : Market
- Peuleuh kaoy : To perform a specific deed if one's request is granted.
- Puasa : To fast, the fasting month.
- Raka'at : Division or circle of ritual prayer.
- Ripe : Voluntary contribution for a communal feast.
- Saho : The meal taken just before day break.
- Sawah : Wet rice field
- Selendang : Shawl or stole worn by women over their shoulder or diagonally across body.
- Seumayang : To perform any of five daily prayers.
- Suboh : Daybreak, prayer observed at daybreak.
- Suluk : The practical method to guide a seeker by tracing a way of thought, feeling, and action, leading through a succession of 'stages' to experience the Divine Reality (Trimingham, 1971:3-4).
- Sunat : Islamic services which are recommended but not obligatory.
- Syari'at : Divine law
- Tahlil : Reciting the phrase of "*La ilaha illa Allah*" (There is no God But Allah).
- Takbir : Reciting the phrase of "*Allahu Akbar*" (Allah is the Greatest).
- Taraweh : Special night prayer during the month of Ramadan.
- Teungku : Title originally given to those learned in Islam.
- Ureung keramat: A person who has supernatural qualities; holy men.

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