

Ritual on Nisfu Sha'ban Hadiths Informed in Indonesian Online Medias: Study on Muslim Practices in Certain Mosques in South Tangerang, Banten-Indonesia

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Abstract: Nisfu Sha'ban is the middle of Sha'ban month. It is taken as an occasion by some Indonesian Muslims to perform certain rituals at mosques and mushollah (small mosques), such as sunnah prayers (non-obligatory prayers), recitation of the Quran (especially Chapter 36 Ya-Sin), and using water as a medium to pray to God. These acts of worship have become a part of the culture of many Indonesian Muslims who perform them at this time each year. They are not concerned whether these activities have a legal basis in the Quran and the Hadiths. Likewise, although there is still a debate between scholars over the authenticity of the Hadiths pertaining to Nisfu Sha'ban, mosques fill up every Nisfu Sha'ban night and the number of activities Muslims carry out then increases each year. This paper seeks to explain this tradition of celebrating Nisfu Sha'ban practiced by Indonesian Muslims, especially those in South Tangerang and the role of some Indonesian online medias in informing these activities.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article would like to show that the activities of Muslims on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban in mosques in Indonesia have become part of Indonesian culture. The pros and cons of the tradition of celebrating Nisfu Sha'ban are discussed in society and online medias. One of the cons often cited is the absence of a strong legal foundation (both from Qur'anic verses and Hadiths), which makes the activities performed during Nisfu Sha'ban religiously unlawful. Nonetheless, such negative opinions do not lower the spirit of those amongst the Indonesian Muslim community who celebrate the tradition, especially in South Tangerang.

As informed in various Indonesian online medias, activities to commemorate Nisfu Sha'ban in Indonesia are not alike for all Muslims but vary in accordance with their different cultures. This lack of uniformity is also caused by the absence of a universal reference, such as a verse from the Quran or a Hadith, that could be used to determine specific activities for celebrating it. Some scholars think that the activities performed in Indonesia to celebrate it

are not based on sound Hadiths (ṣahīh) and that those that are used are mostly false.

Some people, however, are not concerned over whether Nisfu Sha'ban rituals have a legal basis or not because they have been done for generations and have become a part of Indonesian culture. These rituals have become a part of the community and have mixed with local culture. As such, they differ from one community to another. For instance, Betawi people have their own set of activities for celebrating Nisfu Sha'ban, and the same is true for those of other ethnicities.

As informed in various Indonesian online media, every mosque in South Tangerang has a different way to celebrate it. All people also have different beliefs about Nisfu Sha'ban activities. If Nisfu Sha'ban is not filled with various activities, they are convinced that their life on this earth has not yet been lived to the fullest. Besides that, Nisfu Sha'ban night rituals become famous in Indonesian society because it was supported by modern technology, such as online medias spread throughout Indonesia.

Nisfu Sha'ban is interesting enough to be studied in-depth because it has become a part of Indonesian cultures and is celebrated each year by Indonesian

Muslims with a mixture of culture and religion. This article focuses on Muslim rituals in the night of Nisfu Sha'ban and the role of online medias in informing the Muslims activities in South Tangerang.

2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

Muslim practices in the mosques during Nisfu Sha'ban are closely related to ritual. It is extremely difficult and perhaps ultimately unnecessary to define ritual, or to delimit it from ceremony on the one hand or from instrumental or practical action on the other. It is regarded by some anthropologists as a category of behavior, in which case it may be defined as a form of ceremony characterized by its religious nature or purpose. Gluckman (1962 in Smith (1987: 284) distinguished ritual from ceremonial by defining ceremonial as 'any complex organization of human activity which is not specifically technical or recreational and which involves the use of modes of behavior which are expressive of social relationships,' while ritual is a more limited category characterized by its reference to mystical or religious notions, ends or agencies.

Ritual regarded as being symbolically more complex and involving more deep social and sociopsychological concerns. Not only Gluckman, Goody (1986 in Smith: 1987: 284) defines ritual as 'a category of standardized behaviour (custom) in which the relationship between the means and the end is not 'intrinsic' (i.e. is either irrational or non-rational). Not only Gluckman and Goody, other anthropologists such as Leach (1954) regard ritual not as a category of behaviour but as an aspect of behaviour: That is to say, as the aspect of related to its symbolic value rather than to its practical utility. He points out that even the most practical or technical act is performed in such a way as to express the particular cultural identity or values of the actor, so that it has a symbolic or ritual dimension.

He proposes the existence of a continuum between acts whose technical or practical aspects predominate and those where ritual and symbolic ones predominate, without excluding, the possibility of analyzing the technical aspect of predominantly ritual acts or the ritual aspect of predominantly technical ones. It is clear therefore that the categories of technical, ritual and ceremonial are arbitrary distinctions among phenomena which are not always in themselves neatly classifiable (Smith: 1987: 284).

Another area of difficulty and ambiguity has been that of the relationship which exists among the categories of ritual, myth and belief. For a time anthropological studies of ritual and myth were dominated by sterile controversies as to which should be accorded primacy: myth as an expression or enactment of myth. However in modern anthropology this controversy has been largely abandoned, since ritual and myth are generally viewed as two forms of expression of the human symbolic and expressive facility, neither one of which should be accorded primacy over the other.

Myth may be a commentary on ritual and ritual on myth, and there is no need to posit any overall dependency or determination. As far as the relationship between ritual and belief is concerned, it was also widely assumed in the past that there was a close enough relationship between the two for rituals to be held to express or reinforce beliefs and beliefs to underlie or justify rituals. But modern anthropology has increasingly demonstrated that there is considerable intra-cultural diversity in attitudes, feelings and beliefs, and that an accepted social form of expression or action like those embodied in ritual do not imply that the actors concerned share the same beliefs or feelings about the ritual.

Modern studies of ritual and symbolism consequently proceed with great caution when they deal with the question of belief, recognizing that there is a complex and dialectical relationship between individual psychology and experience on the one hand and social and cultural forms on the other (Smith, 1987:249).

To turn to the way in which ritual has been analysed in anthropology, we should first of all mention the pioneering studies of Durkheim (1912), whose theories have influenced many writers in this field. Durkheim's work contained many different strands. On the one hand his functionalist theory of religion and ritual as reinforcing collective sentiment and social integration was developed by Radcliffe-Brown (1952) and other British social anthropologist who elaborated the study of what ritual does and how it expresses features of the social structure.

On the other hand Durkheim's theories of the formation and transformation of collective representations influenced the development of another kind of analysis: the analysis of the content of ritual or what ritual says. The works of Mauss (1925) and Van Gennep (1909) were also of development of the British social structural interpretation of ritual and the French Structuralist approach to ritual and symbolism (Smith, 1987:249). Besides Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, Mauss and Gennep, Turner (1980:33) also states that ritual is an

expression of the failure of secular mechanisms in resolving conflicts in communities.

Through rituals, different village communities can be united. Meanwhile, Mauss (1954) saw that in every ritual there is a process of exchange between man and man, man and God, and gods and spirits. Finally, Gennap (1909) saw that ritual exists in the life of human beings from the time they are born until they die or human life cycle. Some of these theories can be used as reference points in examining the Nisfu Sha'ban rituals performed in the Muslim community of South Tangerang and information about Nisfu Sha'ban in various online media in Indonesia.

2.1 Nisfu Sha'ban Hadiths in Online Medias and Books

Before explaining the Hadiths about the month of Sha'ban, in this article the events occurred in Sha'ban month first explained. The first, event about the transfer of Qiblah to Muslims. In the month of Sha'ban there was a shift in the qiblah of Muslims from Baitul Maqdis to Ka'bah in Mecca. Actually the prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was waiting and wanted the transfer to take place. In the process of waiting, every day he always wakes up from his sleep at night and looks up and expects revelations from God.

Not long waiting for the coming of revelation from God, the it came down too. The revelation from God reads as follows: "Verily, We see thee turning thy face often to heaven; surely, then, will We make thee turn to the Qiblah which thou likest. So, turn thy face towards the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you be, turn your faces towards it. And they to whom the Book has been given know that this is the truth from their Lord; and Allah is not unmindful of what they do." The verses above have a relationship with other verses, as the word of God follows: "And thy Lord will soon give thee and thou wilt be well pleased." (Q.S. al-Dluhaa: 6).

Related to the verses of the Koran above, the prophet Muhammad said: "I did not see your God except He always immediately granted what you wanted." (Narrated by al-Bukhari).

Syaikh Abu Hatim al-Busti said: "Muslims pray to Baitul Maqdis for 17 months and 3 days. Prophet Muhammad also arrived in Medina on Monday 12th Rabi'ul Awal. Then Allah ordered him to face the Ka'bah on Tuesday in the middle of the month of Sha'ban (Ahsan Ghozali, 2016: 10-11).

Second, the specialty of the other month of Sha'ban is the month reported good deeds of human to God. Therefore many Muslims do good deeds in month of Sha'ban with their own way.

The degree of the legitimacy of some of the Hadiths on Nisfu Sha'ban is debated by scholars. These Hadiths include the following: Verily Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, descends to the heavens of the world on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban and pardons more than the number of feathers on the goats of Bani Kalb [an Arabian tribe that had many goats] (HR At-Tabrani and Ahmad).

Al-Imam At-Tirmizy states, however, that this Hadith was deemed weak by Al-Bukhari. In addition to this narration, there are others that, although not considered sound, are accepted by some scholars as foundations for practices performed to celebrate Nisfu Sha'ban at mosques in Indonesia and especially in the area of South Tangerang.

Another hadith explains that the Prophet Muhammad got up from his sleep and did the practices of Sha'ban night. The hadith as follows: On the authority of Aisha (may God be satisfied with her) who said that 'the Messenger of God (P.B.U.H.) woke up one night and performed prayer and a prolonged prostration; so long that I thought he had been taken. When he raised his head from it and finished his prayer, he said, "O Aisha, (or O Humaira), do you believe that the Messenger of Allah did not grant you your right?" I replied, "No, Messenger, but I thought that you had been called by God because your prostration was so long." The Messenger of God (P.B.U.H.) said, "Do you know what night this is?" I replied, "Allah and His messengers know better." He said, "This is the night of Nisfu Sha'ban. Allah appears to His servants on this night and forgives the merciful, loves those who ask for love, and sets back those who are jealous" (Al-Baihaqi).

Al-Baihaqi narrated this Hadith from the chain of transmission of Al-'Alaa' bin al-Harits and declared that it is *mursal jayyid*, i.e. incompletely transmitted because it goes no further back than the second generation after the Prophet (the Successors or *Tābi'īn*). In other words, Al-'Alaa did not record it directly from Aisha and thus the Hadith is not directly derived from the Prophet Muhammad. For this reason, it is considered to be an unsound Hadith. Another Hadith also explains that in the month of Sha'ban a human being's deeds of worship (if he/she has any) will be reported to the heavens. The word "heavens" here may refer to God. However, the Hadith only mentions that this will occur in the month of Sha'ban and not at the time of Nisfu Sha'ban. This means that there is no Hadith that pertains specifically to deeds performed during Nisfu Sha'ban.

The Hadith about religious practices in the month of Sha'ban is as follows: On the authority of Usama bin Zaid, who asked the Prophet (P.B.U.H.), "I've never seen you fast more than in the month of

Sha'ban." He replied, "The moon of Sha'ban is a month that is often forgotten and is between the month of Rajab and Ramadan. It is the month when the deeds of human beings are raised to the Lord of all worlds. I am glad if my deeds are taken up while I am fasting." (Narrated An-Nasai), (Ahsan Ghozali, 2016: 34-35).

Based on the following Hadith, many benefits are proffered by Allah on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban, as described in Imam Ibn Majjah's book of Hadith in his chapter on sunnah. The Prophet said: When the evening of Nisfu Sha'ban comes, worship at night and fast in the day. Verily (the mercy of) Allah descends into the lowest heavens at the setting of the sun, and He calls out, "Whoever apologizes to me, I will forgive them. If anyone asks for sustenance, I will bestow it on him. If there is anyone who is sick, I will heal them," and other statements until dawn (HR Ibnu Majah with a weak sanad) (<http://www.rumahfiqih.com>).

This Hadith has been used some Indonesian Muslims to explain the performance of rituals on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban. Looking at the three Hadiths just mentioned, we see that Hadith experts have different opinions about the rituals performed on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban. Some of these Hadiths do not explain in detail what is to be done at that time. For this reason, Nisfu Sha'ban is passed differently in every mosque. If in a certain mosque a special prayer of four rak'as is done (shalat tasbih), chapter 36 (al-Yasin) of the Quran is recited, and tahlil (the repeated recitation of the Muslim profession of faith [Lā Ilāha Illallāh, there is no god but God]), then the mosque's congregation simply follows in enacting these practices without knowing the traditions related to Nisfu Sha'ban.

Some scholars say that night Nisfu Sha'ban has several names (usually the number of names indicates glory that has a name). For example in Islam God has ninety-nine names or is called asmaul husna or it can also be called the attributes of God. Likewise with the month of Sha'ban, he has several names and has different meanings. Imam Abul Khair at-Thaliqani explained that: The name Nisfu Sha'ban night has twenty names, as written by Ghazali (2016: 113-118) as follows:

1. Lailatul Mubarakah

Lailatul Mubarakah means that the night is full of blessings in its substance, or because of other meanings contained in it, also because at that night God divides everything that has been ascertained to humans. This name is taken from the historical conclusions of Atha' bin Yasar, as he said: "When the night of Nisfu Sha'ban comes, then the angels will write the names of every person who will die from Sha'ban to Sha'ban again. In fact, someone who did dholim (performing an act is not in accordance

with the rules), committed prostitution, married women and planted trees, even though planting had been replaced by rows of living people to be written in the ranks of dead people." In another history it is also stated that: "When came Nisfu Sha'ban night, the death angel was given a sheet.

Then He was said to him: Revoke the lives of the people listed in this sheet. Indeed a servant planted crops, married his wives and built buildings even though his name was written in a row of people the one who will die, then the angel of death will not wait for anything unless he is ordered and he takes away his life." In another history it is also stated that: "Indeed, in the night Nisfu Sha'ban Allah decides all his decisions and surrenders them to each of his officers on (the night) Lailatul Qadr." Lailatul Qadr is the night in which Allah sent his angels to see humans who believe in worshipping their Lord.

God gave many thighs to Muslim people who did good activities (praying, reading the reading of Quran, and doing charity) that night. The night of Lailatul Qadr is in the month of Ramadan and not in the month of Sha'ban or one month after the month of Sha'ban.

In another story it is also stated that the surrender of duty from God to the angels occurred on the twenty-seventh night of the month of Ramadan. From this information, it can be concluded that the night of the twenty-seventh of Ramadan and when the event occurred it coincided with the night of Lailatul Qadar. This night many Muslims do good deeds and they hope to God to give them reward.

2. Lailatul Takhir

Lailatul Takhir is the night of the elimination of human sin. Among the names of the month Nisfu Sha'ban is Lailatul Takhir or the night of the abolition of human sin, because on this night all the sins of mankind for one year were abolished by God. God will erase the sins of those who did good deeds that night. As doing good deeds on Friday nights in removing sins for one week and doing good deeds on the night of Lailatul Qadar can erase human sins for one year. This information was conveyed by Imam as-Subki in his commentary.

3. Lailatul Ijabah

Another name for Nisfu Sha'ban is the night of the submission of human pleas. That night the faithful man asked for something they wanted and God granted his request. Maybe on other nights God is difficult to grant human pleas and on the Nisfu Sha'ban night Allah quickly grants human requests. "Five nights where the prayer in it will not be rejected (by Allah), that is on Friday night, the beginning of the month of the month of Rajab, the night of Nisfu Sha'ban, the night of Lailatul Qadar and the night of two feasts (Idhul Fitri and Idhul Adha)."

4. Lailatul Hayat and Lailatul 'Idil Malaikat

Another name for Nisfu Sha'ban is Lailatul Hayat and Lailatul 'Idil Malaikat. Lailatul Hayat means night of life, while Lailatul 'Idil Malaikat means nighttime angels. This name is based on the words of Imam Abu Abdullah Thahir bin Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Haddadi in his book entitled: 'Uyunul Majalis. In the book it says: Surely angels in the sky have two nights of feast days as those of Muslims.

The two days of the angel's blessings are Lailatul Bara'ah (night of liberation), namely Nisfu Sha'ban night and Lailatul Qadar night. While human holidays are Eid al-Fitri and Eid al-Adha. The angel's day of worship is at night, because they never sleep, so for them between day and night there is no difference. And the humans celebrate during the day because night time for them is to sleep time so that in the evening they can sleep soundly and rest." If we look at Abdullah Thahir's opinion, the equality between humans and angels is to have a feast and the difference lies only in time: the feast of humans is celebrated during the day and the feast of angels is celebrated at night. Abdullah Thahir's statement is not based on the hadith of the prophet Muhammad.

5. Lailatus Syafa'at

Another name from Nisfu Sha'ban is the Night of Intercession (double). Information about this intercession is taken from the opinion of Imam Abu Manshur Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Hakim an-Naisaburi and several other scholars. Intercession comes from the word *asy-sayafa* '(double) and the opposite of the word from *al-witru* (singular), meaning to make something singular be double or more than one, such as dividing one into two, three into four, four into five, five being six and so on. This is the understanding of Intercession in language.

Whereas according to terms, intercession means mediating for others by giving benefits to them or rejecting *Madharat* (things that are not good), namely the giver of intercession provides benefits to those who are given intercession or refuse *Madharat* for him.

6. Lailatus Bara'ah and Lailatu Shak

Other names from Nisfu Sha'ban are Lailatus Bara'ah and Lailatu Shak (Liberation Night and Certification Night). So named Lailatus Bara'ah and Lailatu Shak because on that night every Muslim is given freedom from torment of hell and is given a certificate of forgiveness. Some scholars have been asked, why is tonight called the night of liberation? they (ulama) answered: When an employee pulls taxes and alms, fulfills all the rights owned by *Baitul Maal* (Treasurer of the State), then he will be given a

writing and he is declared free. Why? because he will be free from all responsibilities and became his responsibility.

Likewise with the night of liberation, every Muslim will be given a freedom and it will be conveyed to him: You have fulfilled all rights and you have carried out all the conditions that have been determined, so now take your freedom from hell (you will be free from the torment of hell). Then it is said to a person, you have underestimated my rights and you do not carry out the conditions that have been determined (his rights), then take your freedom from God who has power over nature and its contents.

7. Lailatul Jaizah, Lailatur Ruhan, Lailatul Ta'dhim and Lailatul Qadar

Other names from Nisfu Sha'ban Lailatul Jaizah (coronation night), Lailatur Rujhan (night of excellence), Lailatul Ta'dhim (night of glorification) and Lailatul Qadar (night of determination). Naming the night Nisfu Sha'ban with these names is based on information from Imam as-Subki in his commentary. He is an expert scholar of hadith, tafsir, ushul fiqh, nahwu, sharaf and literature from the Shafi'i school. He is also the Chief Justice. This Supreme Court Justice was dubbed as *Syaikhul Islam*, the High Priest, He was mentioned as the top leader of the Shafi'i School in Egypt.

His writings reached one hundred and fifty books in various disciplines. He was born at 1 Shafar 683 H in the city of Sabak Al-Abid, Al-Munafiyah. After running a basic religious education on his father, he later moved to Cairo. An official from the *Nashiriyah* government appointed him Judge *Qadhi* in Damascus. He also became a preacher in the great *Umayyad* mosque and lecturer at several universities there. He served as presiding judge for seventeen years, then he fell ill and his position was replaced by his son *Tajuddin as-Subki*, he himself returned to Cairo and died there at 3 Jumadil Akhir 756 H (Abbas, 2011).

8. Lailatul Gufran

Another name for Nisfu Sha'ban is Lailatul Gufran, which means the night of forgiveness and freedom from the torment of hell. So, this person who does good deeds in Nisfu Sha'ban will get forgiveness from Allah and his past sins are blotted out. This is the opinion of the scholars about the names of Nisfu Sha'ban nights. There are people who interpret the Nisfu Sha'ban night based on their opinions and there are also based on the Prophet's hadiths.

There are also those who call the month of Sha'ban with the month of *Qur'an*. As is known, every Muslim is recommended to read the Koran

every time and a good place. Reading the Koran is highly recommended at times that have been commanded by Allah and read it in glorious places and at the right time. Like reading the Koran in the month of Ramadan (the month in which Muslims are commanded by Allah to fast) and reading the Koran in the month of Sha'ban, reading the Koran in the Holy City of Mecca, at Raudlah al-Musyarrafah (Madinah) and other places who is glorified by God. This statement is also often expressed by salaf scholars (Ghozali, 2016).

Today many Muslims, especially in Indonesia, are interested in learning the Koran and reading the Koran correctly. For them by reading the Koran his heart will become more calm and the tangled mind will disappear. They also hope that by reading the Koran they will get a lot of rewards from Allah. They also hope in Allah, by reading the Koran on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban Allah will forgive his past sins.

Shaykh Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali said: "I narrated (conveyed) - with a very weak (weak) - from Annas, he said: Muslims when they enter the month of Sha'ban, they are busy looking for the Koran and reading it, issue zakat for their property to help poor people in fasting during Ramadan." Salah bin Kuhail said: "Bulan Sha'ban is called Syahrul Qurra (month for Quranic scholars)." Hubaib ibn Abi Thabit when he entered the month of Sha'ban, he said: "This month is the month of the experts of the Koran." Amar bin al-Qais al-Mula'i when he entered the month Sha'ban closed his shop and used his time to read the Koran. Hasan bin Sahl said: "O my Lord, you made me between two noble months, then what is my virtue? Then Allah said: "I made the time for you to read the Koran." (Ghozali, 2016) On that basis many scholars spend time reading and understanding the Koran, until now many Muslims who always fill their time by reading the Qur'an.

Al-'Allamah Syaikh Ahmad bin Hijazi said: "In the past Salafus Shaleh always filled the month of Sha'ban with a lot of reading the Koran, and it was recommended for Muslims to follow their good habits. The scholars said, even though some of us do not understand the meaning of the Koran, so just reading it has gained a lot of rewards. Reading the Koran not only gets knowledge about the Islamic religion but also gets reward.

Hadiths about the virtue of reading the Qur'an: Abdullah bin Mas'ud rd said: "The Prophet sallallaahu 'Alaihi Wasallam said: "Whoever reads one letter from the Our'an, then for him one goodness with that reading, and one good is folded into 10 goodness for example and I don't say الم one letter but one letter Alif, one letter Laam and one letter Miim." (Narrated by Tirmidhi).

Aisyah RA explained that the Prophet Sallallaahu 'Alaihi Wasallam said: "A person who is fluent in reading the Our'an will be with the noble angels (in Heaven) and (they) always obey Allah, as for those who read the Our'an and stumble the brick in it and the hard reading of it, then for him two rewards." (Narrated by Muslim). Our'an verses about the virtue of reading the Our'an: "The month of Ramadhan [is that] in which was revealed the Our'an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful." (Our'an 2:185).

Other verses of the Our'an: "Indeed, this Our'an guides to that which is most suitable and gives good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that they will have a great reward." (Our'an 17:9). "And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ." (Qur'an 5:48).

The verses of the Qur'an and the Hadiths above explain to us about the importance of reading the Our'an, studying its contents and applying them in daily life.

2.2 Nisfu Sha'ban Night Rituals

As written in some online medias, books and also based on field research, on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban, many Muslims in Indonesia, especially in the area of South Tangerang go to the mosque to perform special rituals. Some others, however, do not go to the mosque nor enact any special rituals due to beliefs that differ from those who do or having other occupations at that time. A Hadith that advises Muslims to come to or gather in the mosque on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban and perform special rituals has not been found, as indicated by the Hadiths mentioned above.

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On the authority of Ali bin Abi Talib (Hadith marfū', i.e. attributed specifically to the Prophet Muhammad), the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) said, "If the light of Nisfu Sha'ban comes, wake up at night and fast during the day...Indeed Allah (Glory be to Him the Highest) comes down that night at the setting of the sun and says, 'If there is anyone who asks for forgiveness, I will forgive him. If there is anyone who asks for sustenance, I will give him sustenance. If there is any sick man, I will heal him' (Ibn Majah with a weak chain of transmission) (Ghozali, 2016).

Practices commonly carried out during Nisfu Sha'ban, including gatherings for invocation (dhikr) and special prayers in the mosque, are not mentioned in sound Hadiths and were also not enacted by the Prophet Muhammad nor the Companions. Nisfu Sha'ban rituals are found to have been performed only during the time of the Followers (tābi'īn), the generation that came after and followed the Companions.

Some mosques in the Ciputat district of South Tangerang are packed with Muslims performing special rituals on Nisfu Sha'ban night. Many Muslims come to the mosque nearest to their home to perform the sunset prayer (maghrib). After it is finished, they return to their home to take some water. Others bring water with them when they come to the mosque for the sunset prayer (magrib) but keep it with them.

There are also those who do not have time to bring water from the house and instead buy some from stalls situated near to the mosque. After completing the sunset (magrib) prayer all the water that was brought in is placed in the middle of the mosque and the lids of each bottle are taken off. The people present in the mosque sit cross-legged in a circle around the water. Led by the imam, they recite together Chapter 36 of the Quran al-Yasin three times, each time with a specific intention in

mind. After they finish reading Quran al-Yasin, they reading tahlil (zikr) and close with prayer.

The caps of the bottles containing water that were brought to the mosque must be opened because, according to some Muslims who were present there, the prayers that are made to God can enter the water and sanctify it, i.e. turn it into sacred water. Indeed, at first the water is not sacred if al-Yasin has not yet been read and prayers have not been made. It thus at this point cannot be used to treat diseases.

However, once made sacred and prayed over, the water can be used for drinking as well as bathing. In the latter case it is added together with other bath water. According to some Muslims in Ciputat South Tangerang, this bath water can then be used to protect the body from various diseases. Furthermore, the water can be used for other purposes in accordance with the beliefs of each person who uses the water.

According to one congregation in a mosque in Ciputat, this sanctified water has tremendous power, especially to treat various physical and mental diseases or illnesses. Ultimately, this is a form of ritual that is always present in the human life cycle. As Gennap (1909) has argued, human life cannot be separated from ritual. Turner, meanwhile, (1974: 33) notes that one of the functions of ritual is to unite man.

There are also some Muslims in South Tangerang who fast from the beginning to the middle of Sha'ban month. Perhaps they do so because of a Hadith narrated by Imam an-Nasa'i and Imam Abu Dawud and approved by Imam ibn Khuzaimah on the authority of Usama bin Zaid which explains that the Prophet Muhammad once fasted in the month of Sha'ban, as noted above. In some South Tangerang mosques, *Nisfu Sha'ban* night is also celebrated with *ketupat* (a kind of rice cake and wrapped with coconut leaves). People bring it to the mosque or *musallah* and eat it together there with other Muslims.

Eat *ketupat* together as a symbol to share the fortune together between them. In their daily lives they are busy with their work and during the night ceremony *Nisfu Sha'ban* they can gather together in the mosque to pray to God. Due to this tradition, some Muslims in certain South Tangerang mosques are busy on *Nisfu Sha'ban* to prepare *ketupat*, while some others buy it from traditional markets.

Some Muslims consider *Nisfu Sha'ban* rituals performed as acts of worship to have no strong legal basis and may even be considered as heretical acts (or acts which were never practiced by the Prophet

Muhammad). Some other Muslims, however, do not question them because previous scholars have performed them. They assume that following the actions of previous scholars is good and must be observed. Although the Hadiths that explain about *Nisfu Sha'ban* are not considered to be false traditions, they are still not sound ones.

3 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is a method used by researchers to obtain data. The data that has been obtained is assessed and analyzed. There are two methods that are often used by researchers in conducting research: First, quantitative methodology and second qualitative methodology. Nevertheless both of them complement each other. In this study I used qualitative methodology to look at the practices of Nisfu Sha'ban carried out by Muslim communities in some mosques in the city of South Tangerang, Banten Province-Indonesia.

As said by W. Lawrence Neuman (1991: 328), a qualitative research style involves more than looking at qualitative data. He also said that Positivists often try to convert the data into a quantitative form or analyze it using quantitative techniques. For positivists, qualitative data are mental states or conditions that cause measurable behavior. The issue is how to capture it with precise, reliable quantitative measurement.

A descriptive method is employed in writing this article. I describe the views of a group of people about what they do on the night of Nisfu Sha'ban in mosques and small mosques (musholla), especially in the area of South Tangerang. The data were collected in three ways: first, collecting data from articles written in some online medias, such as: Kompas, Tempo, Republika, Suara Pembaharuan and Sindo Newspapers. Second, through observation of the rituals performed by several Muslims on Nisfu Sha'ban nights in mosques and mushollas (small mosques).

To get data through this observation, I visited several mosques and Musollahs in South Tangerang. The data obtained is used as the material for writing this article. Third, through interviews with several informants, including mosque chairmen, heads of musholla, participants in Nisfu Sha'ban rituals, imams (prayer leaders) and some Muslims who do not participate in Nisfu Sha'ban celebrations or disagree with the tradition. The interview place was conducted in the mosque, musollah and at home, according to the place of interview determined by

the informants. The data obtained is also used as the material for writing this article.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In researching some articles published in some online medias and in conducting field research, I found that there were two groups of Muslims in South Tangerang who has different views in seeing some activities of Muslim in nisfu sha'ban night. The first group maintains that the rituals performed then by some Muslims do not violate Islamic law even though there are no authentic traditions (hadiths) that justify the practice. For them, if Nisfu Sha'ban is commemorated with positive actions, then there is no problem if nisfu Sha'ban night is filled with good activities.

The opinion of this first group can strengthen or support the opinion of Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Alawi al-Maliki al Hasani (2016) in his book of *Maazaa Pii Sya'baan*. In his book he said that, sunnah (the practice of prophet Muhammad and reward from God) for muslim people to live or celebrate the Nisfu Sha'ban night in groups in the mosques, for prayer, prayer activities and other activities (reading of Quran). Thus, even though the Hadiths which explain the virtues of the night Nisfu Sha'ban are considered *dlo'if* (weak) by some Muslim scholars, but some reasons can be given. Therefore, Muslim community, especially in South Tangerang to turn on the activities at the night of nishfu sha'ban and hope reward from God.

Meanwhile, the second group contends that the practices and rituals performed during nisfu Sha'ban by Muslims in South Tangerang mosques in particular do not have a strong legal basis in either the Quran and Hadiths (prophet of Muhammad tradition). For them, if a Muslim individual or group performs an action that is not based on either of these two sources, it is to be considered heretical (*bid'ah*). Nevertheless, both groups respect each other's views and do not cause a conflict between each other. While the opinions of the second group of Muslim, contrary to the opinion of of Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Alawi al-Maliki al Hasani above.

Online media has an important role in: (1) informing about the nisfu sha'ban Hadiths (2) informing about the activities of Muslims on the night of nisfu sha'ban and (3) medea discussion about whether or not the night of nisfu sha'ban is filled with kindness activities.

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