

In terms of the Eid announcement 2019/1440 AH

A descriptive explanation on Rooyat e Hilal committee of North America

After the Eid announcement of the Rooyat e Hilal committee on 2019/1440, many people have mentioned their doubts. This is why we felt the need for this article to be written. Here, we will mention the Islamic perception regarding moon sighting which will make it easy to understand these rulings. (إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ)

However, before anything, it should be known that there is a board of Islamic Scholars in Rooyat e Hilal committee that conducts discussions regarding moon sighting first, then they make a decision on related affairs and pass it over to the working committee. The working committee then conveys it to the people through various sources of communication. Finally, the chairman of Rooyat e Hilal committee or the Chief Qadi makes the ultimate decision and announces it. So, by the grace of Allah, every month, Rooyat e Hilal committee makes arrangements for moonsighting, and then announces the new month after it fulfills all the Shar`i requirements.

On the occasion of Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha, we see a norm of happiness amongst people and they get emotional regarding the moon during these months. Sometimes even the rules of the Sharia are disregarded. It should be well known that looking for the moon of Ramadan, Shawal, or Zul Qada is not just a tradition, nor is looking for the moon of Eid ul Fitr or Eid ul Adha just for celebration purposes. Rather, moon sighting is related to worship. Whether it is the moon of Ramadan or Eid ul Fitr, these have to do with worship. Therefore, even a slight error would become a reason for accountability with Allah ﷻ. This is why, until the honorable scholars are satisfied, they do not make an announcement regarding the new month so that they are not held accountable on the day of judgment.

Allah says: “They ask you regarding the new moon. Say: ‘They are measurements of time for the people and for Hajj’” (Baqarah 189).

It is stated in a Hadith narrated by Sayyiduna Abdullah bin Umar (May Allah be pleased with both): RasulAllah ﷺ said: ‘The month consists of 29 nights as well. Therefore, do not fast until you see the moon. If it is concealed from you (i.e. if you don’t see it), then complete the count of 30.’ (Bukhari 1907)

It is also narrated from him: “The Beloved Messenger ﷺ mentioned Ramadan. He opened up his blessed fingers then closed them. Then he said: ‘The month is like this and like this, then third time he closed his blessed thumb. (Meaning he opened up all 10 of his blessed fingers twice, and the third time he opened up all his fingers except for one thumb, this way the number became 29). So, fast after sighting the moon and celebrate Eid after sighting the moon. If the moon is hidden from you, then complete the number of 30. (Muslim V4, Kitab ul Siyam).

There are many narrations like this mentioned in the 6 authentic books of Hadith; however, we sufficed with mentioning just two of those to clarify our ideology. There are two basic principles regarding starting a new month according to the scholars of Islam, the honorable jurists, the Mujtahideen Imams, and the respected Ummah. The first one of them is

completion of the number of days, meaning completing 30 days and then starting the new month. The second one is having 29 days by moon sighting, i.e. looking at the moon when it is sighted then starting the new month. Although there are 8 principles laid out by the honorable jurists of Islam, the two principles we mentioned are the basic ones, while the rest are just branches of these two. The blessed hadith explicitly mentions that fasting can only be done after seeing the moon, and Eid ul Fitr can only be celebrated after seeing the moon. In the same narration, it is mentioned that the month can consist of 29 days as well. Therefore, when the moon sighting is established on the 29th night, then the new month will start.

The blessed month of Ramadan 2019/1440 was started with moon sighting. The moon was sighted in Houston and other areas, which is how June 3rd was the 29th of Ramadan. According to the Hadith which was mentioned – to celebrate Eid when the moon is sighted on the 29th - the concept of starting the new month was found here. This is how there is no doubt in the first of Shawal falling on June 4th. If the start of Ramadan depended on testimonies etc., then there could have been some doubt that maybe June 3rd could be the 28th of Ramadan. However, by the mercy of Allah, this is not what happened in this situation.

Some people base the Islamic rulings on astronomical calculations and they totally reject the idea of moon sighting. We will talk about this issue later on in this article, but first let us finish the discussion that we started.

Honesty and Trustworthiness of the Witnesses: Maryland is where the moon was sighted, and it should be kept in mind that the people who saw it were extremely trustworthy and honest. There is no possibility of questioning their devotion, religiousness, and piety. They are well educated and very familiar with both secular knowledge and Islamic law. They are the senior students of “Al-Noor Institute of Islamic Sciences” under the organization of Al-Noor Society of Greater Houston. They are mature, clever minded, and intellectual people. They are from the upcoming graduating class and are completing their final year of *Fadeelat* at the institute. They are well aware of the religious and astronomical principles for sighting the moon. They made proper arrangements and went to a place of high altitude to sight the moon in Maryland. They also had such mobile applications that would help calculate the state of the moon and were part of a group with a total of six individuals. Also, the horizon was clear over there. These people saw the moon again and again for quite a while. Then they informed us and we made the announcement after properly fulfilling the legal procedure. If their Rooyat (moon sighting) was not considered, then it would have been wrong according to the Sharia. There would be no question of rejecting the testimony in such a situation. Mufti e Azam Pakistan Mufti Waqar ud Din (may the mercy of Allah be upon him) says,

“When Shariat has made the sighting of the moon the basis for rulings, then the sighting itself will cause the laws of Ramadan and Eid to come into action. Even if that sighting opposes the calculations of astronomers.” (Waqar ul Fatawa; part 2, p. 426)

Now the summary is that the blessed Hadith proves that only sighting of the moon is considered, which is established here. So, in this situation, the first of Shawwal ul Mukarram will definitely be on Tuesday June 4th because considering the 29th, sighting the moon is clearly established and the witnesses are just and trustworthy, Allah-fearing and pious.

Calculations are not considerable: Astronomy, Knowledge of time, and calculation are not considered in Shariat; rather, only sighting the moon is considerable just as it was mentioned

above. There is a blessed Hadith mentioned in Bukhari Sharif and other books of authentic narrations:

عن ابن عمر رضي الله عنهما عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه قال : " إِنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّيَّةٌ لَا نَكْتُبُ وَلَا نَحْسِبُ الشَّهْرَ هَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا
يعني مرة تسعة وعشرين ومرة ثلاثين

"[It is narrated] from Ibn Umar رضي الله عنهما, that Nabi ﷺ said: "We are an unschooled nation. We do not write or calculate. The months are like this and this. Meaning sometimes of 29 and sometimes of 30." (Bukhari Sharif; p.336, Hadith #1913)

Imam Ibn Hajr Asqalaani and Imam Badr ud-Din Aini رحمه الله stated in the explanation of this blessed Hadith: "The concept of 'unschooled' refers to the knowledge of the stars, their speed, and their circulation. People were not very aware of the knowledge of calculation, which is why the command of fasting was made dependent on the sighting of the moon. This was in order to save people from difficulties, and this rule remains to this day regardless of whether more people became knowledgeable of this science. Rather, the context of this text indicates to the fact that the rulings of sighting the moon are not based on calculations. Such that Imam Badr ud-Din Aini رحمه الله has even said:

‘لو كان الحكم يعلم من ذلك يقال: فاسألوا أهل الحساب’

Translation: If the proof for the rulings of the moon was to be known through calculations, then it would've been said: ask the experts of calculations."

He then stated, "Ibn Bazeezah said, 'proving the moon through calculations is an invalid opinion.'" This is because the Sharia has prohibited us from studying and investigating the knowledge of stars. That is why this thought is just an estimated proof and not definite. From the four Imams, the people of the Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali school of thought have completely rejected the idea of proving the moon through the knowledge of time and astronomy. Dr. Wahba Al- Zuhaylee has mentioned its detailed description in his book which is mentioned below:

Hanafis: The news of astronomers will not be relied upon because of opposing our Nabi ﷺ. If the news of the astronomers is correct, even then we are not obliged according to Shariah. We are obliged to the habitual sighting of the moon.

Malikis: As for the person who calculates the speed of the moon, the proof of the moon will not be based on his statement; neither for him, nor for anyone other than him. This is because the lawgiver ﷺ has based the commemoration of Fasting, Eid, and Hajj on sighting the moon, and not on the presence of the moon. Even if we accept the validity of calculations, even then it will not be permissible to act upon the announcement of astronomers, and the Sharia does not require us to do so either.

Hanbalis: It is not Wajib to fast according to astronomy and calculations, even if it proves to be accurate many times. This is because the Sharia gives it no consideration all. (Extracted from Al Fiqh Al Islami Wa Addilatuhu, Dr. Wahba Al-Zuhaylee Al -Shaami)

Shafi'is: The statement of an astronomer is considerable for himself and for others as well. However, the soundest opinion is that his statement will not make it compulsory to start fasting for the common people. (Al-Fiqh Ala Al Mazhab Al Arba'aa, Allama Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jazeeri).

In another famous Hanafi text 'Radd Al-Muhtar', it is stated, 'There is no consideration of astronomers' statement. Their statement is not considerable for making the starting of fasting obligatory. Rather, in the book, 'Mi'raaj' it is stated that there is consensus on the opinion that the statements of astronomers are not considerable. Moreover, it is not even permissible for the astronomer to act upon his own calculations. (Radd ul Muhtar v2, pg. 387, H.M. Saeed Company, Karachi Pakistan)

After this descriptive explanation, we know through experience that calculations sometimes prove to be inaccurate, and the rulings of Sharia cannot be applied to mere estimated affairs, especially those which have to do with worshipping Allah ﷻ. In these affairs, definite proofs are the base, otherwise Sharia would end up being meaningless if we base our affairs on estimates.

Proofs opposing calculations and astronomers: It is stated in Waqar ul Fatawa that Molvi Yaqood Ahmed Miftahi asked Mufti Azam Pakistan Mufti Waqar ud Deen regarding this issue. Take a look at his question that there are numerous occasions in which there are events opposing the calculations. He states in his question

“According to the prediction of astronomers, is it permissible to start and end Ramadan and Eid ul Adha? Is it allowed to condition the moon with the prediction of astronomers? i.e. if the astronomers predict the visibility of the moon on a certain day, then would the testimonies regarding moon sighting be considerable or not? The main issue is that the astronomers and experts of calculations have constructed a framework that before the new moon, during the new moon, and after the new moon, the moon is not visible to the people for 20 hours. Therefore, in this case, would the testimonies of witnesses be acceptable according to the Sharia?”

Note: Contradictory to the rules of astronomers, there were events in the UK and many other countries, where in one case 16 people, in another case 3 people, and in the 3rd case 1 man and 2 women saw the moon of Eid ul Fitr and Ramadan and they testified as well. This is present in our records. Furthermore, in the northern areas of Pakistan, in India and surrounding areas, in the United States, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, there have been testimonies of moon sighting and the decision was made through them, even though they were going against the calculations of astronomers. According to the explicit explanation of the Honorable Jurists and Muftis of Islam, the research of astronomers has no interference in the rulings of Sharia. But according to the modern research regarding the moon, would it be permissible to use it for Shar`i rulings or not?” (Waqar ul fatawa v2, pg 423-424)

The point to mention this question is that the questioner confessed himself that there have been events which proved the calculations to be wrong and there have been testimonies regarding that. Therefore, it is not valid to make calculations and astronomy as a proof for rulings of Sharia. Sighting the actual moon, getting testimonies regarding it, or the articles which have been laid out in juristic books regarding would be sufficient for proving rulings of Sharia.

In his book, “Falakiyat e Jadeeda”, Mr. Tameez ul Deen Qasmi has mentioned these explanations regarding moon sighting in terms of calculations and astronomy:

1) The moon which was sighted by binoculars had become 6.87 degrees away from the Sun. It had existed 13.47 hours since the new moon. This means its age was 13.47 hours. This moon was only visible through binoculars and not through the naked eye.

2) The moon was sighted with the naked eye after looking at it through the binoculars. That moon was 8.1 degrees away from the sun and it had lasted 15.53 hours after the new moon. This means its age was 15 hours, 31 mins, and 55 seconds. This moon was very hard to be sighted with the naked eye and it was very rare. (Falakiyat e Jadeeda pg 110, Published in India)

According to the above mentioned principles, on June 3rd at 6am the moon had risen, and 8:51 was the time of its setting. This is based on the horizon of Baltimore, Maryland. At that time the moon's age was 15 hours, which means it was possible to sight it, and this is how it was sighted.

As the moon moves to the west after waning, the possibility of its sighting gets higher. This is why the moon would not be sighted in the east, but it would be sighted in the west. Therefore, the astronomical calculations can be considered a supporting evidence for moon sighting, but the ruling of Sharia will be done with the actual Rooyat (moon sighting). In our situation, the announcement of Eid done by Rooyat e Hilal committee was totally according to the rulings of Sharia and its requirements. May Allah grant us the ability to be steadfast on the principles of Sharia. Aameen.

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