

Islamic Rules and Basis for Determining the Beginning and End of Ramadaan

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Just as fasting the month of Ramadaan is a pillar of Islaam, the criteria that marks the start and end of Ramadaan is set by Islaam as well. The new crescent marks the beginning of each lunar month in Islaam, as Allaah ﷻ stated in the Qur'aan in what may be translated as, "They ask you [O Muhammad] about the new crescents, Say, 'They are measurements of time for the people and for *hajj* (pilgrimage).'" [Surat Al-Baqarah, verse 189]

What are the Islamic rules for determining the beginning and end of Ramadaan?

Through many authentic ahaadeeth of the prophet ﷺ we will find exactly how to determine the exact timing of *Ramadaan*, for example:

- a. Abû Hurayrah ﷺ narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Fast after you have seen it [the new crescent] and end the fast [at the end of the month] when you see it. If it is hidden from you, then wait until the thirty days of Sha'baan have passed." [Recorded by Imaams al-Bukhârî and Muslim]
- b. In another version of this *hadeeth*, Imaams al-Bukhârî and Muslim recorded the Messenger ﷺ saying: "Do not [begin] fasting until you see it [the new crescent], and do not [end] fasting until you see it, and if you cannot see it, continue Sha'baan to thirty days."
- c. Also, the son of Umar ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ said: "The month is twenty nine days, so do not fast until you see it, and if you could not see it, complete the month; continue Sha'baan to thirty days." [Recorded by Imaams Muslim and Ahmad]
- d. Furthermore, A'isha ﷺ related that the Prophet ﷺ was very watchful for the crescent of Sha'ban, whereas for other months he was not as watchful, and he used to fast Ramadan when he saw the crescent, and if he could not, he would complete thirty days and then fast. [This was recorded by Imaam Ad-Daraqatni through an authentic chain of narration, according to Imam Muslim's standards]
- e. On another occasion, the son of Umar ﷺ said: "The people looked for the crescent, so I told the Messenger of Allaah ﷺ that I had seen it, so the Prophet ﷺ fasted and ordered the people to fast." [This was recorded by Imaam Abu Dawood, and authenticated by Ibn Hibbaan; considered by Imaam Al-Haakim to be authentic by the standards of Imaam Muslim]
- f. Ibn Abbaas ﷺ described another instance, saying: "A Bedouin came to the messenger of Allaah ﷺ and said: 'I have seen the crescent of Ramadaan,' so the

Prophet said: *'Do you witness that there is no God but Allaah?'* The Bedouin said: 'Yes!' The prophet said: *'Do you witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allaah?'* The Bedouin said: 'Yes!' Then the Prophet asked Bilaal to inform the people to fast the next day." [Recorded by Imaams Abu Dawood, Tirmedhi, Ibn Hibbaan with Al-Haakim's authentication]

After hearing these authentic ahadeeth, we have learned that there are no more than two ways to determine the beginning of Ramadaan and the following month of Shawwaal: Those two ways are:

1. Seeing the new crescent OR
2. Completing the month to thirty days, if the crescent is not seen for any reason.

These previous *ahadeeth* mention the importance of actually seeing the new crescent, and not just knowing that it exists in the skies, when trying to determine the beginning or end of the month. In other words, the crescent may exist in the skies, but if it is hidden from our vision for any reason, then we should delay beginning or ending the month. All scholars have agreed upon this opinion.

What is the Islamic standpoint for using scientific calculations to determine the start and end of the month?

From what has been mentioned from the previous *ahadeeth*, it is unacceptable to solely depend on scientific calculations to determine the start and end of this month because of the following reasons:

1. It contradicts the Prophet's ﷺ orders for determining the start and end of a month. We may use one of the following methods: seeing the new crescent, and if not, then completing the current month to thirty days.
2. Another reason, scientific calculations are unacceptable is because they use a specialized process that not all Muslims have access to. Therefore, it is impossible for Allaah ﷻ to ask Muslims, who differ in their capabilities and educational levels, to worship Him, while not having the resources accessible to the average person to perform their acts of worship.
3. Although scientific calculations are accurate, they will never be free of error, as any scholar of astronomy will admit.

The sayings of the Muslim jurists regarding asserting the start and end of the month relying on calculations:

Muslim jurists have agreed that this way is not right, and here follows some of their saying:

- School of Imaam Abu Hanifa says: ‘It can not be depended upon someone who works with calculations and fixed timing in asserting the month for because he is disagreeing with the way of the Prophet ﷺ’ (Al-Fiqh-u-lislaamy-wa'delatah By Dr. Whbah Az-Zuhayli vol 2, p.599)
- Imaam Maalik says: The view of the crescent can not be asserted by the saying of someone who calculates the flow of the mood and its orbit neither for himself nor for someone else because Allaah, the Legislator, made fasting and ending the fasting rely of the vie of the crescent not on its existence; this is even if the person who did the calculations is right. So the work with the astronomical observatories even if they were right is not allowed. (Al-Fiqh-u-lislaamy-wa'delatah By Dr. Whbah Az-Zuhayli vol 2, p. 600)
- Imaam Ibn Hanbal says: “We should not fast according to the stars and calculations even if they were right, for many times for they do not rely on legitimate basis. (Al-Fiqh-u-lislaamy-wa'delatah By Dr. Whbah Az-Zuhayli vol 2, p.602)

Is one sighting of the new crescent sufficient for the whole Muslim Ummah, or should each region depend on their own sighting?

Most Muslim jurists have adopted the opinion that any sighting of the new crescent, anywhere in the world, is considered valid and acceptable for determining the beginning and end of the month of Ramadaan. These jurists include: Imaam Abu Haneefah, Imaam Maalik and Imaam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. In other words, if the new crescent is seen anywhere in the world, it becomes obligatory for all Muslims to begin fasting, as the Prophet ﷺ said, *"Fast after you have seen it [the new crescent] and end the fast [at the end of the month] when you see it."* This *hadith* is a general address directed to the whole Muslim Ummah. That is, if anyone sees the new crescent in any place, then this will be a valid sighting for all Muslims.

The sayings of the Muslim jurists regarding this matter:

(From the book Al-Fiqh-u-lislaamy-wa'delatah By Dr. Whbah Az-Zuhayli vol.2, p. 606)

- **The Hanaafi Scholars said¹:** “The difference of the moon sighting localities, and sighting the moon during the daytime whether before midday or after it are not considered in terms of determining the beginning or the end of the month. This is in accordance with the preponderant opinion in the Hanaafi School. It is also the opinion viewed by most of the Hanaafi scholars, and it is also the opinion followed in giving fatwas. Therefore, the people of the east are duty bound to follow the new moon sighting of the people of the west if it is proved that they have sighted the moon in a sound and binding way, such as when two men bear witness that they have sighted the new moon, or if they testify to the judgment of the Judge, or if the news of the sighting of the moon becomes well-known to everyone. This does not apply to the case when one reports that the people of such and such city have sighted the new moon, for this is considered a reported speech.

¹ Ad-Dur Al-Mukhtâr wa Rad Al-Muhtâr vol.2, p. 131-132, Maraqî Al-Falâh, p. 109.

- **The Maaliki scholars said²:** “If the crescent is sighted somewhere, people should fast everywhere, whether they live close or far away. People are not to consider in this regard the distance required for shortening the prayer nor the unity in sighting localities or its non-existence. Hence, fasting is obligatory for everyone who is informed about the sighting of the crescent if this sighting is reported by two reliable witnesses or a big group of people.
- **The Hanbali scholars said³:** “If the crescent has been sighted in a certain locality, be it near or far, all the people are obligated to fast. The ruling of the one who has not sighted the crescent is the same as that of the one who has sighted it.

However Imaam Shaafi'i said that each locality should have their own sighting, and they are not obligated to adopt the sighting of another location. He used the following as evidence: Once one of the companions, Kuraib narrated that Um Ul-Fadl has sent him to visit Muaa'wia in As-Shaam (Syria). He said: ‘I went to As-Shaam and accomplished the purpose of my visit, and while I was there, Ramadaan started; I had seen the crescent on Thursday night, and then went back to Madinah at the end of the month. Ibn Abbaas mentioned the crescent asking, ‘When did you see the crescent?’ I replied: ‘We saw it on Thursday night.’ Ibn Abbaas then asked: ‘Kuraib, did you see it?’ I answered: ‘Yes! And the people had seen it, and they fasted, and so did Muaa'wia.’ So Ibn Abbaas said: ‘But we had seen it Friday night, so we will fast until we complete thirty days or until we see the crescent. I then asked: ‘Aren't you satisfied with Muaa'wia's sighting and his fasting?’ Ibn Abbaas answered: ‘No, this is what the Messenger of Allaah had ordered us to do. [Recorded by Imaam Muslim, and others]

Notice from this previous *hadeeth*, that Kuraib arrived to Madinah at the very end of the month of Ramadaan. This is important because Ibn Abbass and the Muslims in Madinah didn't have the knowledge of Mu'awia's sighting, and therefore, they had no choice but to continue their fast based on their own sightings. However, in today's society, communication is highly advanced and fast. News of sightings in any place in the world can reach us before *fajr* time, right before we begin our fast. Nobody can claim today that had Ibn Abbass been informed of a sighting before *fajr* that he would not have followed it and fasted along with the people of As-Shaam. With that said, this previous hadeeth is not applicable to today's society, because rapid communication did not exist at that time as it does today.

The followers of Imaam Shaafi'I further specified the exact distance between locations saying: If the crescent is seen in a certain place, then the areas within this region are obliged to accept this sighting, however, the places outside of this region are not obliged. Anyone who lives within an area spanning 133.056 km from the original sighting location is obliged to follow that area's sighting. This distance was calculated by multiplying twenty-four units of distance by 5544 meters, which is the equivalent of 133.056 km. In other words, all those who live within this 133 km span, are required to follow the sighting.

After hearing this information about determining the beginning and ending of Ramadaan, we ask Allaah ﷻ to give us the health, strength, and Imaan to take advantage of the

² Ash-Sharh Al-Kabîr 1/510, Bidayatul-Mujtahid: 1/278, Al-Qawanîn Al-Fiqhiyyah p. 116.

³ Kashshaful-Qinâ': 2/353

opportunities to worship during the month of Ramadaan and that He accept all of our righteous deeds. *Ameen.*