

Impermissibility of Calculations
&
The Necessity of Moon-Sighting
&
Direction of Qiblah

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Reason for this Research

We are mentioning the guidelines used by Masjid Omar al-Farooq to determine the month of Ramadhan and Hajj.

Moon-Sighting – The Only Shari’ah Way

Every year the same issue is brought up, ‘moon sighting or calculations’; in present times the issue has gained more momentum as it has been adopted by some societies and more papers have been written in support of the calculations. This research aims to provide two things:

- a. The legitimacy of moon-sightings and that this is the only way mentioned in the Shari’ah.
- b. Refutation of commonly used proofs by those who support calculations.

Evidences of Moon-Sighting

1. Allah, the Exalted, says:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِةِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ

Meaning: “They ask you, [O Muhammad], about the new moons. Say, "They are measurements of time for the people and for Hajj.” (Quran 2:189)

Comment: The ‘Hilal’ is the decisive measure on account of which the beginning and ending of months are determined in the Hijri Calendar; it is used to determine the beginning and ending of seasons of worship as well such as the month of Ramadhan and the season of Hajj.

The Prophet ﷺ did not inform us to ‘calculate’ the beginning and ending of the month nor did he infer that we resort to ‘estimating’ it. Instead the command of our beloved Prophet ﷺ is quite clear, a Muslim is to use moon-sighting to determine these issues.

2. The Prophet ﷺ said:

إِنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّيَّةٌ ، لَا نَكْتُبُ وَلَا نَحْسِبُ ، الشَّهْرُ هَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا . يَعْنِي مَرَّةً تِسْعَةً وَعِشْرِينَ ، وَمَرَّةً ثَلَاثِينَ

Meaning: We are an unlettered nation. We do not record or calculate. The month may be like this or like that (i.e. it may be 29 days or 30 days). (Bukhari)

Comment: What this Hadeeth actually means is that we should behave as an unlettered, unversed individual in relation to determining the beginning and ending of the months in the Hijri calendar. This attitude would dictate that you not record the months, nor

should one calculate when they begin or end. This part of our faith is done with a very simple, basic approach; one is to sight the moon with their eyes. If they see the crescent of Ramadhan, they are to begin fasting and if they see the crescent of Shawwal, they are to stop fasting.

Some may argue about this Hadeeth saying, **'This hadeeth only applies to the period of time in this Ummah when people were unable to properly calculate. Now that it can be done accurately, this Hadeeth is no longer applicable.'**

How true is this statement? In reality it is very far from the truth. One of the cardinal rules that pertain to Hadeeth states:

الأصل في الكلام الحقيقة

Meaning: Every text from the Quran and Sunnah is taken at face value. The meaning of a text cannot be suspended nor can it be shifted from its apparent meaning to one that is metaphorical without evidence.

Another point that should be in mind is that every proof is solid in terms of its meaning and it is applicable to all times and places. Another cardinal rule of Hadeeth states:

الإسلام صالح لكل زمان ومكان

Meaning: Islam is suitable for all times and places.

If someone claims that a hadeeth no longer applies, the burden of proof is upon them.

Allah says:

قل هاتوا برهانكم إن كنتم صادقين

Meaning: Say, give your evidence if you are telling the truth. (Quran 2:111)

3. The Prophet ﷺ said:

صوموا لرؤيته وأفطروا لرؤيته ، فإن غبى عليكم فأكملوا عدة شعبان ثلاثين .

Meaning: Fast on account of sighting it and stop fasting on account of sighting it. If it cannot be sighted (due to weather conditions) complete the month of Sha'ban as 30 days. (Bukhari)

Comment: The Prophet ﷺ has instructed the Ummah to sight the moon and not to resort to any other means to determine the beginning and ending of a month.

Common Misconceptions

Claim: Calculations during the time of the Prophet ﷺ and afterwards were not accurate and therefore, discarded and not used by the Salaf. Today, the situation is different since the accuracy of calculations is pristine and near-perfect.

Response: This is an erroneous assumption. Imam Ibn Abdul-Barr, may Allah have mercy on him, mentioned that the level of the Arabs knowledge of calculating the beginning and ending months was on par with the non-Arabs from different nations around them.¹ There was also an elite group of Arabs known as ‘An-Nas’ah’ or ‘Ahlun-Nasee’ who would determine which months were sacred; they would defer a sacred month to another and so on. These individuals were well-versed with calculations, Allah, the Exalted says:

إِنَّمَا النَّسِيءُ زِيَادَةٌ فِي الْكُفْرِ يُضَلُّ بِهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُحْلُونَهُ عَامًا وَيُحَرِّمُونَهُ عَامًا لِيُوَاطِنُوا عِدَّةَ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ فَيَحْلُوا مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ ۗ زَيْنٌ لَهُمْ سُوءُ أَعْمَالِهِمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ

Meaning: Indeed, the postponing [of restriction within sacred months] is an increase in disbelief by which those who have disbelieved are led [further] astray. They make it lawful one year and unlawful another year to correspond to the number made unlawful by Allah and [thus] make lawful what Allah has made unlawful. Made pleasing to them is the evil of their deeds; and Allah does not guide the disbelieving people. (Qur’an 9:37)

There is no doubt that in every era, there would emerge those who claim that the knowledge of those prior to them was insufficient. The same would hold true for those in the present era; people would come after them who would show the error of their ways. The important thing here, is that the astronomers of every era believed their calculations to be impeccable, and near-perfect, when in fact they were not.

Claim: The Prophet ﷺ said: “فإن غم عليكم فاقدروا له” which literally means: “estimate its time”. They claim this means ‘to calculate.’

Response: This narration is explained through the other narration: “فأكملوا عدة شعبان ثلاثين” which means: “Complete the month of Sha’ban as 30 days.” The rules of Hadeeth dictate that one is to interpret a narration through other narrations and not rely on linguistics to complete this task.

¹ At-Tamhid 7/155

Claim: Since we affirm the timings of prayers through calculations, why not do the same for the month of Ramadhan?

Response: Imam al-Qarafi, may Allah have mercy on him, said:

الفرق الثاني والمائة: "(بين قاعدة أوقات الصلوات يجوز إثباتها بالحساب والآلات وكل ما دل عليها وبين قاعدة الأهلة في الرمضانات لا يجوز إثباتها بالحساب)"

Meaning: The 102nd Difference: Prayers can be affirmed through calculations and devices whereas the month of Ramadhan cannot be affirmed through calculations.

The reason for this is quite simple; the rays of the sun and fall of night and the redness in the sky are tell-tale signs of when specific prayers are due. The same does not hold true for 'moon-sighting'. Instead the beginning of the month is tied with sighting the moon directly; something that is not subject to regularity of motion. Although the moon may be said to be visible in parts of the sky; in reality it may not be. In other instances when it is said that it cannot be sighted, it may be sighted. In summary calculations that are used to determine the visibility of the moon is not precise and what is not precise cannot be used in Shari'ah.

Conclusion

The only way to affirm the beginning or ending of the month of Ramadhan is through moon-sighting. Calculations may be used to aide one in sighting the moon, but cannot be used independently.

Although there are certain views, which are abandoned, that indicate the legality of using calculations the evidence is heavily stacked against this system.

We ask Allah to grant us success in this life and in the next. Ameen.

Direction of Qiblah

There is no doubt that facing the Qiblah during prayer is a prerequisite of the prayer.

There are two instances in which facing the Qiblah is not necessary:

- a. If one is unable to face the Qiblah (due to a sickness or handicap)
- b. If one is travelling in a car or other vehicle in which he cannot face the Qiblah.

If a person can see the Ka'bah, it is a must upon them to face it.

As for one who cannot see the Ka'bah, they are required simply to face the general direction of the Ka'bah; they are not required to face the Ka'bah itself. This is the view of the majority of scholars including Imam Abu Hanifah, Malik and Ahmed, may Allah have mercy on them all.

This view is supported by the words of Allah:

قَوْلٍ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ

Meaning: So turn your face toward al-Masjid al-Haram. And wherever you [believers] are, turn your faces toward it [in prayer]. (Qur'an 2:144)

The word 'Shatr' which is translated here as 'towards it' is actually a literal translation; the proper translation is 'turn your faces towards its direction'.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

ما بين المشرق والمغرب قبلة

Meaning: Between the east and the west is the Qiblah. (Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah)

What this means is that for those in Madinah, their Qiblah was between these two directions. The Prophet, may Allah exalt his mention, informed us of a general direction. He did not indicate that one would have to accurately determine and find the actual direction of the Ka'bah and then pray towards it.

Conclusion

If one is a few degrees off the 'proper' direction, there is no sin upon him and the prayer Inshallah is acceptable. The only time this would be an issue is if there is a great divide, i.e., if the Qiblah is in the Northern direction, but prayers are offered in the Southern direction. This will affect the correctness of the prayer!