



**BOSTON
ISLAMIC
SEMINARY**

Calculating Ramadan

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(Fast when you see the moon, and break fast when you see the moon) (Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

(صوموا لرؤيته وأفطروا لرؤيته)

This is an Islamic jurisprudential (fiqh) reasoning which support the adoption of astronomical calculations in determining the start dates of the month of Ramadan as a valid and suitable Islamic methodology for the Muslims today).

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First, Allah (swt) makes Al-Ahila (Lunar phases) as a tool for Muslims to determine most of the dates of Religious occasions as indicated in Surat (2:189 (Al-Baqara). And this is considered as an undeniable principle, no one can decide Hajj or Ramadan based on the Gregorian calendar for example or any other calendar.

Second, Allah (swt) has created the Moon, the Sun, the days and nights in order for us to learn the number of years and the accounting of time, as Allah (swt) says in Surat (17:12 (Al-Isra) and in Surat (36:37-41 (Yassin).

Third, the same Hadith our scholars had used to support the moon sighting by visual observation can also be used to support the usage of astronomical calculations. For our Prophet (pbuh) was given (Jawame' Al-Kalem,) multiple meanings conveyed by the same word. When he (pbuh) says in the meaning of "...fast to its Ru'eyatihe...", (Al-Bukhari and Muslim). our scholars understood "Ru'eyatihe" to mean "physically visualize", which is one of the most widely interpreted meanings of "Ru'eyatihe". That is also the way the Prophet (pbuh) had practiced it along with his companions and the Arabs during his time. For that was the only means they had to evaluate the phases of the Hilal (moon). However, in the Arabic language, "Ru'eyatihe" can also mean to express an opinion, decision, or thought. This is why for example, in Arabic the words "ra'ey" or "Ru'eya" mean opinion or perspective. Based on this, I believe the Prophet (pbuh) had purposefully kept the door open for future generations of scholars to interpret such a word accordingly. Consequently, I firmly believe that the usage of astronomical and scientific calculations is a method that can be superimposed to coincide with the meaning of "Ru'eyatihe". Had our Prophet (pbuh) used different words that carried specific meaning towards "to physically visualize", such as "basara" or "nathara", then there would be no doubt as to the means to use in such sightings. Additionally, when considering the usage of the root word of "Ru'eyatihe" in the Quran, we find such words as "Ra'a" to mean "contemplating", "thinking", "pondering". This is unlike the usage of "nathara" or "basara" which confer the meaning of physically sighting a subject. An example of this difference can be found in Surat (Yunes) 10:43).

Fourth, Our Prophet (pbuh) was sent as a mercy to all mankind. It would have been a hardship on people during his time to use calculations as most of them were illiterate and least of all able to read or to write or to calculate. He thus used the least common method for people to arrive at such a determination for estimating the moon phases. At the same time, he did not discourage those with the ability to use calculations to deduce the same conclusions. That is why he (pbuh) had said in the meaning of “we are a people that neither write nor calculate”; this was of course concerning the people of his era. However, the state of his Ummah (pbuh) has changed since then. We have today many knowledgeable Muslim scholars, the majority of whom are very proficient in all aspects of science. It would not be fair to ask of those scholars and generations to ignore their acquired and accurate knowledge and to instead use inaccurate methods in determining the start dates of the lunar calendar. I believe this is why previous scholars such as Asubki, Al-Qadi Abu Tayeb from Shafi’e and Abu Al-Abbas Ibn Surayj had said: “If someone knows thru calculations the start date of Ramadan, then they must begin their fast based on those calculations”.

Fifth, The Arabs before Islam used to depend on the local moon sighting as the only available means to determine the start of the months. But unfortunately, such determinations were mostly accommodating to their personal self-interests. For example, they made up a change in the Sacred Month of Muharram, delaying it to the month of Safar! And as a result of this violation of the divine law they caused a big confusion. More details about this event can be found in Surah (Tawbah 9:37). However, our Prophet (pbuh) had not passed away before clarifying the genuine order of the lunar months as created by Allah (swt). He (pbuh) had highlighted the existence of this order while performing his last hajj by saying: “The partition of time has turned to its original form which existed when Allah first created the heavens and the earth. The year is of twelve months, out of which four are sacred”. (Al-Bukhari).

From these events, we can understand the following:

- Different agendas and personal motivations can influence such decisions and determinations when people are allowed to use their own subjective sighting, as it happened during the Arab time before Islam and as it sometimes happens unfortunately in some Muslim countries today.
- We have to have a sound reference to validate the accuracy and the cyclic variability of the lunar months. Our prophet (pbuh) was this reference during his time and delivered the godly confirmation regarding the validity of the lunar months in his last hajj. And that was sufficient for the people who were not able to calculate at that time. Today, who will confirm the accuracy of our Islamic months? Will it be those who are using unfamiliar and inaccurate

methods in determining the start dates of the lunar calendar or political leaders who may have self-interested motives?

- Therefore, the only fair and unequivocal way should be that which is based on an agreed upon and verifiable knowledge that Allah (swt) has bestowed upon and allowed people to discover: knowledge and accuracy which any scholar can confirm.
- It is my firm belief and sincere conviction, based on the declaration of our Prophet (pbuh) concerning the real Islamic calendar in his last Hajj, that he (pbuh) was the first one to establish the science of astronomical calculations in determining the start dates of the lunar months.

Finally, the usage of the astronomical calculations in determining the lunar months is not a new approach in our Islamic Fiqh, but rather it has been established by our great scholars such as Mtraf, Abdullah ibn As-Shakheer from Al Tabee'n (the righteous successors) Imam As-Subki, a great Shafi'i scholar, Sheikh Rashid Rida, a great interpreter of the Quran, the famous hadith scholar Sheikh Ahmad Shakir, and the former Imam of Alazhar Mostafa alzarqa. All of these great scholars understood and explained the Hadith: "Fast when you see the moon, and when it is cloudy, then complete the month of Sha`ban for thirty days", (Al-Bukhari and Muslim). and in another narration he (pbuh) said: "Estimate it". This last Hadith addresses two kinds of people: for a layman who has no knowledge of calculations, he should either sight the moon or complete Sha`ban for thirty days, while for other knowledgeable people they should use their experience with calculation to determine the start of the month.

Based on the above reasons and facts, I fully agree with and support the Fatwa of the Fiqh Council of North America and of the European Council in determining the start dates of Ramadan and Eid. And I sincerely encourage that this Fatwa be adopted by all contemporary Muslims, leaders, organizations, and individuals.

More reasons and benefits for the Muslim community in the US regarding this Fatwa

- Ease and mercy are the basis of the Islamic spirit. Allah says at the end of the verse of fasting the month of Ramadan in Surat Al- Baqarah: "Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult". Our Prophet (pbuh) always chose the easier of any two permissible options. It has become obvious adopting the permissible Fiqh opinion of astronomical calculations for the Islamic dates is easier for the community in order to be able to know in advance the important dates of Ramadan and Eid.

- The majority of our respected and renowned Muslim scholars, in addition to the two well known and established Islamic research institutions (the Fiqh Council of North America and the European Council for Fatwa and Research), have concluded that astronomical calculations for the Islamic dates are not against the Sunnah. Rather, they are highly recommended since accurate calculation methods are now available to determine the Islamic dates of Ramadan and the Eid in North America.
- Early announcements of the start dates for Ramadan and both Eids reduce hardship and eliminate confusion that would otherwise manifest itself as witnessed in previous years.
- Early announcements of the start dates for Ramadan and both Eids allow Muslims to have well planned and organized activities, and to appropriately schedule their holidays and time off from work or school.
- Early announcements of the beginning of Ramadan and the Eids will help Muslims of America to become more united and structured in their religious celebrations. This can help us to eventually have our Islamic holidays officially recognized in North America.
- Adopting such an opinion will be a great sign of the flexibility and modernity of our Islamic rules and that can be used for the interest of our community.

Sincere advice from the heart: Adopting a Specific Opinion While Working Together Effectively

While we adopt and promote the method of calculation to determine our Islamic Calendar, we advise ourselves and others with the following recommendations for this process:

- Tolerating differences in Fiqh opinions is one of our most important Islamic ethics.
- Upholding the unity of Muslims takes precedence above and beyond any valid difference of Fiqh opinions. We must therefore recognize and respect the legitimacy of differences on this issue and maintain a sense of brotherhood and unity.
- Divine law ordains that change will require time for acceptance. When people begin to see the new approach more objectively, it will Inshallah be adopted and accepted with full appreciation. The annual prayer schedule that is followed widely by Muslims today – which uses calculation - is a great proof for that.
- Any amount of success in achieving this new approach this year should be accepted and appreciated as a good start. And at the same time, we have to make sincere efforts in educating and preparing our community for greater unity in the years to come Inshallah.

Our core values when we work amongst ourselves and with others

Good understanding: We should free ourselves from inherited cultures, customs and rituals and refrain from needless arguments.

Deep faith: We should free ourselves from the grip of our human self and its desires and stay clear from the ways of Shay'tan. Only then would we be successful with Allah and hope to gain His blessings.

Continuous work: We should use our free time constructively and not preoccupy ourselves with useless endeavors or waste our time in argumentation. We should focus on contributing toward building a better and united community and uphold the best of representations in all different aspects of our lives.

Sincere advice – which will earn us the trust and hearts of people. And will allow us to help one another in carrying the duty of Islam while safeguarding each other from the temptations of Shay'tan.

We hope and pray that this advice and position will bring greater harmony and unity among all American Muslims, and Muslims in the world.

“Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate after you have guided us and grant us from yourself mercy”