

MOON SIGHTING PRACTICES AND ISSUES: AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW

Abdul Wahab Hassan*

ABSTRACT

New moon sighting is an important practice, particularly for determining the start of Islamic months and festivals. However, there are some observational issues that can arise during the new moon sighting process. The sighting of the new moon can be affected by weather conditions, such as clouds or haze, which can make it difficult to observe the moon. In Pakistan, there is no standardized method for new moon sighting, which can lead to confusion and inconsistencies. Different regions and religious sects may have different criteria for determining the sighting of the new moon, resulting in varying start dates for the month or festival. The use of modern technology such as telescopes, cameras, or satellite imagery is discouraged by some religious scholars. Another potential issue with new moon sighting is human error. This paper highlights the overall process of new moon sighting practices and issues.

KEYWORDS: new moon, hilal, naked eye, tradition, technology

INTRODUCTION:

Among the responsibilities of Muslims, it is also important to obey Allah and His Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). it is their responsibility to follow him in every matter and we must accept what the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) commanded us to do and one should keep one's intellect aside while submitting to the command of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H).

Allah has revealed many verses in the Qur'an about obeying the commands of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). In another verse, Allah Almighty has clearly stated that in the matter in which Allah and his Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) decide, human decisions and power are nullified before the decisions. We have no choice but to follow the commands of Allah and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) . If one disobeys and

* Research Scholar, Sheikh Zayed Islamic Centre, University of Karachi.

tries to follow his own intellect or way, such a person will be completely misled. So Almighty Allah states

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ-^١

So (O Muhammad to mankind): "if you (really) love Allah then follow me (i.e. accept Islamic Monotheism, follow the Qu'ran and the Sunnah), Allah will love you and forgive you your sins, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِي مَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا- ٢

But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you (O Muhammad) judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept (them) with full submission.

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا لِمُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُّبِينًا- ٣

It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed into a plain error.

In addition to these verses, there are many other verses which are related to the followers of the Prophet. In addition to these Qur'anic verses, there are many hadiths which command the obedience and following of the Holy Prophet. Here are some Hadith:

من أطاع محمدًا فقد أطاع الله ومن عصى محمدًا فقد عصى الله ومحمد فرق بين الناس.٤

He, who obeyed the commands of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), obeyed Allah and whoever disobeyed the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) , disobeyed Allah. Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) drew a line between those who are on the right path and those who are on the wrong path.

عن أبي هريرة عن النبي: دَعُونِي مَا تَرَكَتُمْ، إِنَّمَا هَلَكَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ بِسُؤَالِهِمْ وَاحْتِلَافِهِمْ عَلَيَّ أَنْبِيَائِهِمْ، فَإِذَا نَهَيْتُكُمْ عَنْ شَيْءٍ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ، وَإِذَا أَمَرْتُكُمْ بِأَمْرٍ فَأَتُوا مِنْهُ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ.^٥

fore you were destroyed for asking too many question and do not dispute with your prophets, so when I forbid you from anything. So stop , when I order something does much as you can." Hazrat Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) used to narrate that Holy Prophet Muhammad

(P.B.U.H) said, "Do not ask me question unless I tell you something myself.", 'Surely those be

In spite of the clear verses and Hadiths, looking at today's daily life reveals this sad fact that people only trust their intellect and do not take interest to follow the clear orders of Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and run away with rational arguments from the Holy directions of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) .

In response of their misconduct, people would offer their own made rational logics. They say that science has advanced a lot and the world has left the old days far behind. Therefore, following the order of Holy Prophet is most difficult in this modern age. All these Hadiths were for a time that was not so advanced. Sadly, this is the evil thinking of those who claim to be Muslims, while everyone knows that Islam came for everyone. It is for all ages and Islam will last till the day of judgment. Rich or poor, educated or illiterate, citizen or villagers, the commandments of Islam are equal for all. Hence, this philosophy is clearly unacceptable.

At this present time when the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is being abandoned. The importance of obedience to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) would have specially increased because in such a time, the promise of a reward is equal to a hundred martyrs for reviving the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). A Hadith is narrated in this regard

"At the time when there is chaos in my Ummah, whoever revives one of my Sunnah he will get a reward equal to hundred martyrs.

SUNNAH OF THE MOON SIGHTING:

One of the most important Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is the Sunnah of moon sighting. Today, this Sunnah is not given the important that it deserves. The two basic rules of Shariah depends the sighting of the moon are the beginning of Fating and Hajj. Many Hadiths are available in this regard

"Look at the moon and celebrate the Eid after seeing the moon."

After reading this Sunnah, the importance of this Sunnah would be clearly understand.

THE DAYS OF WORSHIP ARE RELATED THE MOON SIGHTING:

In pure Sunnah, the commandments that belong to the days of worship base on moon sighting for example start Fast after seeing the moon, ending the Fast after seeing the moon. Hajj is the most important pillar of Islam. The days of worship of Hajj are also determined by looking at the moon. There are many such commands that depend on the sighting of the moon. Sheikh ul Islam Imam Ibn e Taimiyah R.A has discussed this very nicely in his magazine "Ro'yat ul Hilal Wal Hisab il Falaki" which is able to read and learn.

FASTING AND EID ARE FESTIVALS OR WORSHIP?

In fact the only answer is to find out of the question, what is the reality of Fast, Eid and Hajj etc? Specially Eid ul Azha is a gathering or festival or worship. If Eid ul Azha is a gathering or festival or worship? If Eid ul Azha gets the states of gathering, festival then it cannot get enough importance. When we look at this fact so it would come out openly that these things are basically Islamic worship and gathering is supplementary. Achievement of worship is obedience which is commanded by the Shariah the order has to be followed. In Shariah one's opinion or intellect have absolutely nothing to do with it. The conditions are set for worship by the Shariah, we are bond to abide by these orders. Take Fasting for example, if a person ask "Why the time for Fast is set from dawn to dusk? What is the harm if we increase the time of Fast till Isha? What is the harm, if we increase the days of Fast from 28 to 31 days instead of 29 or 30 days? If the moon sighting is not 29 days what is the difference between us completing 30 days of Fast? Or without waiting for the moon, what is the matter, if we can only close Fast in 29 days. For the sake of Muslim unity, most people start Fast on this day or on the day of Eid, we should also start Fast from the same day whether we have seen the moon or not. What is the harm for doing this?

This is the answer to all rational arguments that:

The command of Fast and Eid is given by Allah and His Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and the main theme of Islamic worship is to obey

the order of Allah and His Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) .Hence, it is the order of Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H)

“Start Fast, when you see the moon and Eid when you see the moon”.

It is necessary for us as a Muslim to obey the command of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and that is the real worship. Wisdom behind the moon sighting for the beginning and end of the month:

Hafiz Ibn e Hajar R.A narrates very nicely the wisdom behind the moon sighting for the beginning and end of Islam:

“فإن غم عليكم فأكملوا العدة ثلاثين ولم يقل فاسلوا أهل الحساب والحكمة فيه كون العدد عند
الاعضاء يستوي فيه المكلفون فيرتفع الاختلاف والنزاع عنهم-“ 6

“It is the order of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), if the clouds come, then complete the 30 days of Fast. It turned out that if the moon did not appear, we must complete the 30 days of Fast.

Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) never said to take the help of mathematician for moon sighting. In fact, this the wisdom behind it that it is very easy for everyone to know the arrival of the month by completing the count of 30 days. There will not be any difference of opinion among Muslims and also must follow the principals of moon sighting which causes no disagreement or quarrel with them. The main point is that we do not attach much importance to the clear words of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and as a result, today we have difference of opinion in these matters.

Allamah Ainiy R.A narrates the policy of moon sighting:

“وعلق الشارع الصوم وغيره بالرؤية لرفع الحرج عن امته في معاناة حساب التيسير”⁷.
“ The Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) ﷺ has made Fast dependent on the moon sighting to save the Ummah from the confusion and troubles given by the mathematician and palmists .

Hazrat Shah Wali Ul Allah R.A states the policy of moon sighting in his best book “Hujjat – Ullahil – Baligah

“ اقول: لما كان وقت الصوم مضبوطا بالشهر القمري باعتبار رؤية الهلال، وهو تارة ثلاثون يوما، وتارة تسع وعشرون: وجب في صورة الاشتباه أن يرجع إلى هذا الأصل-“⁸

“I say, when according to the Shariah, the time of Fast can be observed on the lunar month that depend on moon sighting. The moon is sometimes is of 29 days and sometimes 30 days when there is a doubt so in this case , it is obligatory to follow the orders given in Shariah (If the moon appears, it is okay, otherwise complete the 30 days of Fast).

QUR’ANIC VERSES FOR MOON SIGHTING:

Let us now take a brief review of some Qur’anic verses about moon sighting

“يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ-٩”

They ask you (O Muhammad about the new moon. Say: “They are signs to mark fixed periods of time for mankind and for the pilgrimage”.

Allama Hafiz Ibn e Katheer R.A explains the verse as:

“عن أبي العالية: بلغنا أنهم قالوا: يا رسول الله، لم خلقت الأهلة؟ فأنزل الله (يسألونك عن الأهلة قل هي مواقيت للناس) يقول: جعلها الله مواقيت لصوم المسلمين وإفطارهم، وعدة نساءهم، ومحل دينهم 10.”

Hazrat Abu Aliya states that we came to know that some of the companions asked the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), “O messenger of Allah , why was the moon created ?” So, Allah revealed this verse and Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) stated that “Allah created the moon for Fast, Eid, the ‘Iddah of women and to perform religion activities.

وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَا مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ- ١١

“And the moon, We have measured for int mansions (to traverse) till it returns like the old, dried, curved date stalk.”

Hazrat Sheikh ul Islam Allama Shabbir Ahmed Usmani R.A explains this verse as “Like the sun, the moon does not always remain the same, but falls and rises daily. Allah Almighty has fixed 28 stages to complete this process. It travels steps by step with a fix system. In the first verse was about day and night then the sun was discussed which forms the years and crops. Now let’s talk about the moon, which speed forms the lunar months. Moon and sun meet at the end of the month then the moon hides and when it moves forward, it becomes visible then moves forward stage by stage and would have been completed on the 14th night and after the 14th night it would begin

to diminish and gradually it forms to its original shape and like the old branch of a palm tree and becomes thin, rounded and charmless.¹²

HADITHS FOR MOON SIGHTING:

It is the right time to share the hadiths that were emphasized on the moon sighting. There are many Hadiths in this regard in which Holy Prophet ordered the sighting of the moon with different words. A simple search would reveal more than 40 hadiths and more can be found more easily. There are many Sahaba Karaam (R.A) who wrote hadiths regarding moon sighting. Following are the names of some Sahaba Karaam (R.A).

1. Hazrat Umar bin Al Khitab R.A
2. Hazrat Abdullah bin Umar R.A
3. Hazrat Abdullah Bin Abbas R.A
4. Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqa R.A
5. Hazrat Huzaiifa R.A
6. Hazrat Talaq Bin Ali R.A
7. Hazrat Jabir Bin Abdullah R.A
8. Hazrat Bar'a Bin Aazib R.A
9. Hazrat Abu Bakr R.A
10. Hazrat Abu Bakrah Naf'i Bin Al Hurais R.A
11. Hazrat Rafa'y Bin Khadeej R.A
12. Hazrat Adi Bin Hatim R.A.

Below, only a few hadiths are being given due to brevity which can clear the importance of moon sighting.

HADITHS AS A REFERENCE FOR MOON SIGHTING:

عن عبد الله بن عمر رضي الله عنهما أن رسول الله ذكر رمضان فقال: لا تصوموا حتى تروا الهلال، ولا تفطروا حتى تروه فإن غم عليكم فاقدروا له. ١٣

“It is stated by Hazrat Abdullah bin Umer (R.A) that Holy Prophet حضرت mention Ramadan ul Bubarak and said ,”Do not start Fast until you see the moon, do not celebrate Eid until you see the moon and if the moon does not appear, then complete the counting of 30 days”.

- عن أبي هريرة قال: قال رسول الله: إذا رأيتم الهلال فصوموا، وإذا رأيتموه فأفطروا فإن غم عليكم فصوموا ثلاثين يوماً- ١٤

“It is stated by Hazrat Ab Horayra (RZ) that Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said ,” Start Fast after seeing the moon and when yo see the moon then celebrate the Eid and if the moon does not appear, then complete the counting of 30 days.”

OPINIONS OF SCHOLARS REGARDING MOON SIGHTING:

All Imam(s) are agreed that it is necessary to see the moon with the naked eye for Fast and Eid and worldly sciences are not enough. Below, opinions of Scholars are being copied.

AHNAAF:

Allama Samar Qandi R.A writes in his book

وانما يعرف برؤيته الهلال ان كانت السماء مصحية وان كانت منغمة فانه يكمل شعبان ثلاثين يوما ثم يصوم عن رمضان ، لما روى عن النبي عليه السلام انه قال: ”صوموا لرؤيته وافطروا لرؤيته فان غم عليكم فأكلوا شعبان ثلاثين يوما ثم صوموا-“ ١٥

“If the sky is clear, then the moon is known for Ramadan. If there is a cloud in sky, then Shaban is of 30 days then the Fast of the Ramadan begins because it is the order of Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) that “Start Fasting to see the moon and break the Fast to see the moon. If there is a cloud in the sky, then complete the thirty days of Sha ’ban then start fast”.

It is written in Hashya Tahtavi

ان لا عبرة بقول المنجمين فلا يثبت به الهلال-١٦

“I do not believe what mathematician says. According to mathematician there is no proof of the moon”.

It is written in “Hashya Rad ul Muhtar”

ولا عبرة بقول المؤقتين أى فى وجوب الصوم على الناس بل فى (المعراج) لا يعتبر قولهمبالاجاع ولا يجوز للمنجم أن يعمل بحساب نفسه-١٧

” The calculation of the mathematician regarding the obligation of Fast is unreliable. It is written in “Maraaj “that the opinion of the mathematician is not valid even it is also not permissible for the mathematicians themselves to act according to their calculation “.

MAALIKIYAH:

وصوم شهر رمضان فريضة يصام لرؤيته ويفطر لرؤيته-١٨

“Fast in Ramadan is obligatory for those who observe the new moon. Iftar was performed by looking at the moon “.

Regarding mathematicians, Ibn Hajib Malki R.A says:

ولا يلتفت الى حساب المنجمين اتفاقا. ١٩

“Everyone agrees that no attention will be paid towards mathematician regarding new moon “.

SHAWAFA'I:

Allama Sherazi R.A says:

ولا يجب صوم رمضان الا برؤية الهلال، فان غم عليهم وجب عليهم استكمال شعبان ثلاثين يوما-20

“ That Fast of Ramadan is not proven without the existence of the moon, if clouds come, it is obligatory to complete thirty days of Sha'ban on every Muslim “.

Allama Nawawi R.A says:

فقال في ” التهذيب “ لا يجوز تقليد المنجم في حسابه لا في الصوم ولا في الفطر- ٢١

” It is not permissible for Muslims to imitate those who are mathematicians whether it is Fast or Eid “.

HANAABALAH:

Faqeeh Ibn e Qudamah Muqaddasi R.A says:

وفي الجملة : لا يجب الصوم الا برؤية الهلال أوكمال شعبان ثلاثين يوما- ٢٢

“Here is the summary in this regard that Fast is not proven without the moon or without completing the thirty days of the Sha'ban “.

And Ibn e Qudamah R.A used to write very strictly about mathematicians

وكذلك لوبنى على قول المنجمين، وأهل المعرفة بالحساب فوافق الصواب لم يصح صومه وانكثرت اصابتهم لا نه ليس بدليل شرعى يجوز البناء عليه ولا العمل به فكان وجوده

كعدمه، قال النبي: صوموا لرؤيته وأفطروا لرؤيته- ٢٣

“Fast is not valid even if the mathematicians are trusted and they are absolutely correct. No matter how true they are, because this argument is not Sharai therefore, do not trust or act upon”.

Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) that “Start Fast to see the moon and celebrate Eid to see the moon. This was in short the opinion of the Imam who believed only and only on moon sighting and they strongly oppose arithmetic. So those gentlemen who call themselves believers, these gentlemen are requested to show the opinion of any Imam who trusts in mathematics. There are only a few gentlemen who say that reckoning can be relied upon, but this is strongly rejected by all the Jurists and they call it false and invalid. Hence, we cannot rely on behalf of this false and invalid saying.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND SHARIAH:

In this age full of tribulations, there are all kinds of tribulations. There is also temptation that the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is being abolished and some important Sharia orders that are consistent and which the entire Islamic Ummah has been following for fourteen hundred years and efforts are being made to eliminate the Sharia orders in which one of such great Sunnah is the Sunnah of the moon sighting.

It is being said with great fanfare that this is the age of science and technology and we must take the advantage of the scientific research and equipment and this should be allowed while doing Ijtihad that moon sighting is not necessary for Fast and Eid. We need to rely on scientific research and mathematical calculation are enough to instead of moon sighting. The questions is, are we allowed to do that? Should we abandon Sharia and practice science? And can we call this process Ijtihad? There are two things that are completely wrong and baseless

- 1) Practicing science instead of Sharia
- 2) Calling modern research as Ijtihad

Every Muslim beliefs that following the orders of Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is the success of both our worlds whatever path you take apart from the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), there is no success in it. There is always disagreement and confusion. Today, the Ummah is in a similar predicament. How shameful it is to suffer the Ummah of differences

by making more such moves.

It seems like a bit of a hassle to wait for the moon that moon has appeared or not. Can't we afford waiting for few hours a day in a year to keep this Sunnah of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) alive?

This is a difficult time when the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is being deliberately abolished, what a great reward in reviving the Sunnah in this difficult situation.

If these people are developing the innovation of mathematics in ignorance, then may be Allah will forgive them and may Allah that they are doing as in ignorance because according to Allamah Ibn E Taymiyah, Hafiz Ibn E Hajar, And Hafiz Ibn E Rajab, this is the way of the Jews , the Christians, the Shiites and the Ismailis.

The first thing is to leave Sharia and go to science, this is not permissible for anyone who knows Allah's commandments and laws of Islam. Whoever allows this is surely devoid of the fear of Allah and does not know and understand Islamic laws. It is certainly not correct to call modern research this Ijtihad.

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