Important Clarifications Regarding Moon Sighting

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There are certain clarifications and necessary details that if one keeps them in mind, one will be safe from all doubtful questions.

1) There are many injunctions in Shari'ah that are implemented due to the determination of lunar months. For example, fasting, hajj, and both annual celebrations such as Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha are all determined by the lunar months. The Gregorian calendar has nothing to do with such injunctions. Therefore, keeping oneself aware of the count of the lunar months and its dates is one of the obligations of Muslims and Farz-e-Kifaya in Islam because this is a means of worship and any means to an obligatory goal (such as worship) will become obligatory, not only that, but there is reward in it. Henceforth, one should be acquainted with the lunar calculations and dates.

2) Islamic months are usually either 29 days or 30 days: there is no Islamic month that is of either 28 days or 31 days.

3) If the 30 days of any Islamic month are completed then the sighting of the moon is not necessary for the upcoming month. In other words, the next month would start automatically.

4) However, sighting of the month is necessary after the 29th day of a lunar month to determine the next month's arrival. In this, the most important of all the moon sightings are the moon sightings for the months of Sh'aban, Ramadan, the two Eids and the moon sighting for Hajj. The reason for their importance is very clear because different forms or worship such as fasting, pilgrimage and sacrifice is related to them.

5) Moreover, there is a difference in moon sighting for the beginning of the month of Ramadan and the end of it. The end of the month Ramadan would necessitate two different things one is that if the month is only of 29 days and someone claims to have sighted the moon then it would reduced one day of obligatory fasting and the second because it is Haram (forbidden) to fast on Eid it is obligatory to avoid fasting on that day. This is the reason that the jurists have taken more caution particularly in moon sighting at the end of the month of Ramadan. It is a rule that there is more caution taken based on the degree of apprehension. Therefore, to accept the moon sighting of 29th of Ramadan, firm and substantiated proof is necessary.

6) There are two forms of accepting someone's testimony in Islam.

A) Khabray Saadiq

B) Shahadat-e-Shar‘ī

- **Khabray Saadiq** is when someone trustworthy or reliable testifies that something is a certain way, this testimony would be commonly applied and it is good only to his addressee.
Shahadat-e-Shar'i is the second form of testimony according to Shari'ah in which there are some rules and regulations. To convince others of one’s belief Khabray Saadiq would not be sufficient rather Shahadat-e-Shar'i is necessary for this task. There is one thing we should not lose sight of regarding this issue.

The two Eids we celebrate are not like the holidays of other nations rather they are a form of worship as well just as any form of worship. This is the reason that the day of Eid does not have to be on one day throughout the world, just like the timings of other forms of worship vary in different countries; similarly Eid can be celebrated in different timings in various countries. This is the reason that the day of Eid does not have to be on one day throughout the world, like the timings of other forms of worship vary in different countries. So if Eid is celebrated in different timings in various countries it should not be taken as a sign of disunity and division.

During the time of the Sahaba (RA) there were times that two Eids were performed on two different days in two separate towns which were located in the same country and none of the people showed any sign of apprehension about it. Some people have this notion that when the moon is sighted in Saudi Arabia then it should be followed; this has no basis or rationale. Therefore, we should keep in mind an underlying principle, that to change any definite state of affairs or arrangements we need definite proof, doubts and suspicion will not be enough.

For example, on the 29th of Sh'aban we know definitely that we are in the month of Sh'aban, in order to change this reality we would need definite proof and any doubt would not suffice. Similarly, if it is 29th of Ramadan then we know the present reality is Ramadan, in other words Ramadan is the month we are in, in order to change this reality from Ramadan to Sha'wal we need some concrete proof that Sha'wal has started otherwise we would wait until the 30th day is completed and start the month of Sha'wal.

The month of Sh'aban has no obligatory fasting or any such injunction associated with it hence the degree of proof needed to start the month of Ramadan from Sh'aban is different. Where as the month of Ramadan is continuing with obligatory fasts hence to judge, cease or end the month of Ramadan and to start the month of Sha'wal we would need a different degree of proof, more caution has to be taken in this latter category.

7) Due to this difference of importance, if the horizon is not clear or cloudy one man’s testimony would be sufficient at the end of the month of Sh'aban to start Ramadan whereas to end Ramadan two men’s testimony would be necessary. So, to decide the moon sighting on the 29th of the month of Sh'aban there would be two different scenarios.

1. The horizon is very clear
2. The horizon is cloudy and not clear

The ruling would be different in both of the above-mentioned scenarios.

a) If the horizon is clear, then the requirement is that a big group of people should have witnessed the moon sighting.
b) On the other hand, if the horizon was not so clear then to start the month of Ramadan one ‘just witness’ is that the witness should be righteous, practicing of Islamic teachings, and should not be ‘Majhoolul Hal’ or ‘Masturul Hal’ (the witness is not known to anyone).

c) If the form of testimony is such that a person comes to a group or committee of scholars, given that the body of scholars is authentic and the ummah has trust in them or their principles of Fiqh and criteria of Islamic shahadah, and says that I bear witness that at this night at such place I sighted the moon and that committee of scholars accepts that testimony. This form of testimony is recognized in the Shariah as ‘Shahadah A’lar Ru’yaah’

Similarly on the 29th of the month of Ramadan there are two scenarios.

1. The horizon is clear
2. The horizon is not so clear and cloudy.

The ruling would be different in both scenarios.

a.) If the horizon is clear then a big group of people should testify to sighting the moon and only their testimony would be reliable.

b.) If the horizon is not so clear then two witnesses should testify to sighting the moon.

The testimony itself is of three different kinds

a.) Shahadat Alar Ru’yaa- Testimony of moonsighting, which is mentioned above.

b.) ShahadatAlaShahadatil Ru’yaa- To testify on the testimony of someone who sighted the moon. Example would be that for every witness there are two witnesses who attest to the fact that I bear witness that so and so said that I sighted the moon on such and such night in such and such place. Another aspect of this testimony is that if a committee of scholars, which has governance over certain location or region, approves of someone’s testimony that would be sufficient for the people of that location.

c.) Shahadat Alal Qadha- This is a testimony where two or more people who witnessed the moon sighting in person to testify in front of a committee of scholars from another region (and if the committee is approved of their testimony) those two witnesses would be reliable and authentic. Henceforth, it would be decided in favor of the approval of the moon.

If we keep these important standards in mind, this will sustain the Islamic spirit and it will help one to practice upon them.

ALLAH KNOWS BEST