

Which Moon Sighting to Follow: Makkah or North America

Question: As-Salamu `Alaykum. With the approach of Ramadan, Muslims are confused about the beginning of Ramadan. Should we follow the moon sighting in Makkah or in North America? Can we follow astronomical (mathematical) calculations to decide on the beginning of Ramadan?

Answer

Wa `alaykum As-Salamu wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh.

In The Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.

It is no wonder that Muslims all over the world are yearning to see the new moon of Ramadan in order to start fasting the blessed month. Muslims are required to demonstrate remarkable unity and they should try to unify themselves as regards such occasions.

Indeed, fasting the blessed month of Ramadan is an individual obligation for those who are capable of fasting. Allah Almighty says: "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off evil." (Al-Baqarah: 183)

In his response to the question, **Sheikh Muhammad Iqbal Nadvi**, Imam of Calgary Mosque, Canada, and Former Professor at King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, states the following:

"Islamically, we need to understand that we should follow the lunar calendar and it starts with the moon sighting. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said: "Fast when you see it (the new moon) and break your fast when you see it."

So, the moon sighting is the basis for the beginning and the end of the month. Now we have one opinion that says that the moon is sighted in each area, just as `Abdullah Ibn `Abbas explained that in his time Mu`awiyah started fasting in Damascus on Saturday and in Madinah they started fasting on Friday. So he said they each follow their own sighting. And of course we have another opinion, which emphasizes on going with one single moon sighting for all Muslims all over the world. My own understanding is that neither of the two opinions is wrong as long as they are based on strong evidence from the Sunnah.

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Now, the situation in North America is based on two major criteria: first, to depend on the moon sighting in North America; and second to choose the moon sighting of Makkah in order to avoid differences.

Of course the best option is to depend on our own sighting in North America, which is undertaken by the biggest Islamic organizations, ISNA and ICNA.

However, I have reservation related to the math calculations because, Islamically, the calculation should support the moon sighting and not be used as exclusive evidence, which means that such calculations tell us when to look for the new moon. So, if we announce the start of Ramadan based on the moon sighting, it will be the best option."

May Allah guide you to the straight path, and guide you to that which pleases Him, Amen.

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