

## Rereading the Hadith From the Perspective of Observing the Crescent

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**Abstract:** While evaluating the hadith, it is necessary to consider things such as understanding the Prophet's intention, the reasons why those things are told, understanding the literary elegance used such as 'parables, comparisons and metaphors', also it is necessary to investigate all the Prophet's sayings together as a whole and last but the most importantly evaluating all the sayings from the Quran's perspective. After having utilized all of the above techniques, extra effort must be used for the application of the sayings to current situations. The above principles must be used while evaluating the hadith about observation of the crescent and determining the exact times of the Ramadhan and the Eids, all of the versus and the hadith must be reconsidered all together as a whole in identifying the best method for determining the exact start and finish times of the Ramadhan and Eid.

**Keywords:** Observation of the crescent, Ramadhan, Eids, hadith

### Ru'yet-i Hilâl Çerçevesinde Hadisleri Yeniden Okuma

**Öz:** Günümüzde bir hadisin değerlendirilmesi yapılırken, Hz. Peygamber'in maksudını, hadislerin vürud sebeplerini, hadislerdeki "mecâz", "teşbih" ve "kinâye" gibi edebî sanatları göz önünde bulundurmamak, aynı konuda gelen hadislerin tamamını bir arada incelemek ve en önemlisi hadisleri Kur'ân perspektifinden ele almak gibi bir takım yöntemlere başvurma gereği vardır. Bütün bu faaliyetlerin ardından elde edilen sonucun günümüze uyarlanması konusunda da ayrıca çaba sarfedilmelidir. Ramazan ve bayramlara başlarken hilali gözetlemekle ilgili hadisleri değerlendirirken de bu prensiplerden hareket etmeli, konuyla ilgili Kur'an ayetleri ve diğer hadisler birlikte ele alınmalı ve bugün için en doğru yöntem seçilmelidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rü'yet-i Hilal, Ramazan, bayram, hadis

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### **Introduction**

Prophets are intermediaries who are chosen by God to help people to find happiness in this world and the hereafter. Their primary duty is to deliver the message coming from God, to guide them to the right path, to lead them and to set an example. The final prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h) also executed this mission. He guided the people who believed him, and lived his life being a role model for them. The prophet Mohammad was the role-modal for human beings. There are good examples in his speech and behaviour for those who believe in Islam. We need to know not only the Quran but also his sayings well to understand his message correctly and to appreciate him fully. However, understanding his sayings and behaviour (sunnah) still stands as a major problem in the way of Muslims today as it has been since the beginning.

On the other hand, necessities and useful things are not only determined through religious commands, and harmful things are not limited to Quranic orders. Religion has left the identification of the harm and use of certain things to human logic and has ordered us to use the good but omit the evil. This reveals the importance of understanding how religious ruling class works. Hence the hadith, 'Whomever Allah wishes goodness for, a good understanding of religion is granted upon Him' emphasises that understanding is a gift from God.

One of the things that needs to be done for the sunnah to be understood correctly and in the best way is to know whether that sunnah is based on specific reasons, conditions and motives. Those specific reasons, conditions and motives are sometimes clearly stated in the hadith, sometimes understood from the way it is said or sometimes understood from the way an event is told in the hadith. Therefore a hadith researcher sees that, for hadith to enforce a valid claim, to remove harmful things and to solve a problem of a certain time, conditions of that time has to be taken into account and the hadith must be based upon those conditions.

Nowadays we can see that there are different practices in determining the start times of Ramadhan and Eid days amongst countries and muslims and the unity has not been achieved in that respect, yet. As an excuse for the aforementioned disunity some madhhab differences are suggested and the hadith on which each madhhab's decisions are based regarding how they determine the start times of special days such as Ramadhan and Eid. In this article we will examine how the relevant hadith is interpreted and other results of different interpretations.

### **1. Hadith relating to the observation of the crescent**

While starting the Ramadhan and Eid it is ordered in the relevant hadith that the crescent should be seen with the naked eye. The relevant hadith regarding the observation of the crescent and starting the month of Ramadhan and Eid by seeing the crescent are as follows;

a. Narated By Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, “Start fasting on seeing the crescent (of Ramadan), and give up fasting on seeing the crescent (of Shawwal), and if the sky is overcast (and you cannot see it), complete thirty days of Sha‘ban.” (al-Bukhari, 1981: Kitab al-Sawm 31).

b. Narated By Abdullah bin Umar: Allah’s Apostle mentioned Ramadan and said, “Do not fast unless you see the crescent (of Ramadan), and do not give up fasting till you see the crescent (of Shawwal), but if the sky is overcast (if you cannot see it), then act on estimation (i.e. count Sha‘ban as 30 days).” (al-Bukhari, 1981: Kitab al-Sawm 31).

c. Narated By Abdullah bin ‘Umar: Allah’s Apostle said, “The month (can be) 29 nights (i.e. days), and do not fast till you see the moon, and if the sky is overcast, then complete Sha‘ban as thirty days.” (al-Bukhari, 1981: Kitab al-Sawm 31).

d. Narated By Ibn ‘Umar: The Prophet said, “The month is like this and this,” (at the same time he showed the fingers of both his hands thrice) and left out one thumb on the third time. al-Bukhari, 1981: Kitab al-Sawm 11).

e. Narated By Ibn ‘Umar: The Prophet said, “We are an illiterate nation; we neither write, nor know accounts. The month is like this and this, i.e. sometimes of 29 days and sometimes of thirty days.” (al-Bukhari, 1981: Kitab al-Sawm 13).

When we look at the classical (original) commentary (interpretations ) of these hadiths, the scholars who suggest we should see the moon with the naked eye hence we shouldn’t rely on lunar calculations are in majority. However There is a small number of scholars who claim that lunar calculations are also acceptable. This is why Muslims have been starting and ending the Ramadhan fasting for the last four centuries through seeing the crescent with the naked eye.

Nowadays, Turkey along with some other countries base their decisions on lunar calculations. Start of the new month is determined through lunar calculations; after the new moon starts, some more time is added on top of the calculations not to neglect the observation of the crescent due to the hadith. However, there are differences between countries that don’t rely on lunar calculations or base their decision on seeing the crescent in some areas but not respecting the fact that the crescent is seen in some other areas. Consequently, Muslims may start the Ramadhan and celebrate Eid in different dates. Most people were not aware of such a contention in previous centuries. However nowadays commonly called in ‘technology (communication) era’ one country’s Eid or fasting can be observed in other countries. Besides, a person can travel through a few countries because the transportation is very fast in this day and age. Different practices in determining start and finish times of a month in various countries trouble muslims.

Whereas if we look into the relevant hadith carefully, in neither hadith nor Quranic verses, it is not forbidden to calculate lunar start and finish dates; on the contrary more attention is drawn to calculations. However, at the time of the final Prophet, it was more appropriate and regarded highly to see the crescent with the naked eye to make it easy on

the people who were illiterate and could not calculate. Those people could not be ordered to calculate the times. The science of astronomy was not advanced and the people who could read and write were few. Inscription was rudimentary, pen, paper and recording was insufficient.

In the Quran, it is not ordered to see the crescent with the naked eye to start the Ramadhan and Eid. On the contrary, calculations are highlighted on the verses regarding the Sun and the Moon. We can see this in the verses below;

*“The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly ) computed.”* (Surah Ar-Rahman, 55:5).

*“And the sun runs his course for a period determined for him: that is the decree of (Him), the Exalted in Might, the All-Knowing. And the Moon,- We have measured for her mansions (to traverse) till she returns like the old (and withered) lower part of a date-stalk. It is not permitted to the Sun to catch up the Moon, nor can the Night outstrip the Day: Each (just) swims along in (its own) orbit (according to Law).”* (Surah Ya-Sin, 36:38-40).

On the other hand in the Quranic verses regarding the Ramadhan fasting it is said: So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting, It is not said ‘when you see the crescent of the month of Ramadhan, you should spend it in fasting.’ In the Arabic language, just like English and unlike Turkish (moon and month are both said as ‘ay’), there is one separate word for month which is ‘shahr’ and there are two other words like ‘moon’(kamer in arabic) and ‘crescent’(hilal in arabic). In the above verse in Chapter Bakara (2); Moon or crescent is not used but the word ‘shahr’ = month (a period of 30 days ) is used. The Word ‘shahr’ appears with the definite article in the Arabic language ‘el’ as ‘ash-shahr’ meaning the month of Ramadhan. . In some tafseer books demonstrating this difference ‘ Whoever reaches the month of Ramadhan’ explanation is given. A famous Turkish tafseer (Quranic interpretation) scholar has said that the aforementioned verse can mean one of the three things. Such as;

1. Whoever is not travelling in the month of Ramadhan should fast in it.
2. Whoever knows Ramadhan closely should fast in it.
3. Whoever sees the crescent of the month of Ramadhan should fast in it. (Yazir, 1971: I/647).

Nevertheless, in most of the first-hand information and in tafseer commentary disregarding the actual intention of the hadith, the verse ‘whoever from you witnesses the month(shahr) should fast’ has been interpreted with the addition of the Word (crescent of the month), so it has become ‘whoever sees (the crescent of) the month of ramadhan should fast.’ So, the matter of seeing the crescent has been wanted to be fortified by the verse as well. It could be acceptable for the verse to be understood as above at the time it was revealed. Because in those days only when they could see the crescent or if the sky was cloudy by completing it to thirty they would determine it. However, nowadays

astronomy and computation is quite advanced. Nowadays Not only can the events that took place in space years ago identified, but also scientific facts regarding future about the Sun, moon and the stars can be calculated.

Allah created the universe in perfect order and placed some existential laws in it. Allah's laws don't change. In this order that He created times are determined, computations are done and some inventions come about. Human beings discover these laws and rules by utilising various help and puts his inventions into the use of humanity. The moon, the sun, the universe and all of the creation are living verses of science.

Islam is a universal religion and the verses in the book of this religion, Quran, consists of laws and rules which are valid at all times. Using the best and the useful methods in calculating calendars and Ramadhan dates does not constrict with the Quran. The number of scholars supporting the idea that existing hadith and verses do not oppose using computations as the times goes by and the conditions and technology improve. The number of scholars who defend computing the exact dates of special events in the light of Quran and hadith are no longer few. Below are the comments of Islamic scholars regarding computing the existence of the crescent in the sky.

## **2. The views of Islamic scholars regarding calculating the existence of the crescent in the sky**

Since the beginning of the first years of Islam, the majority of the scholars who deal with Islamic rulings have been supporting the view that start of lunar months should be based on seeing the crescent, if this is not possible the month should be completed to thirty days before the new one begins and they have also supported the view that calculations and fortunetellers cannot be trusted in determining those days. The idea behind their persistence on the methodology is based on the unreliability of calculations. Astronomy was not so advanced in those days. When the ruling is analysed regarding someone's testimony about seeing the crescent, about checking the reliability of the news, where seeing the crescent is not straight forward, scholars did not accept an ordinary person's witness and brought extra rules about the towns or villages, the number of people in the crowd, the height of the place where the crescent is tried to be seen, also the clarity of the sky. (Al-Marginani, 1986:I/120-121).

On the other hand, firstly the older ones in the second generation from the Prophet's time such as Mutarrif b. Abdullah, from the students of Imam Muhammad b. Hasan ash-Shaybânî, Muhammad b. Muqâtil ar-Râzi, as well as classical scholars such as Ibn Qutayba, Abu'l-Abbâs Ibn Surayj, al-Qaffâl, Qâdî 'Abd al-Jabbâr, Ibn Daqîq al-Îd, Taqiyyuddin as-Subkî, Qâdî Abu't-Tayyib At-Tabarî and some later scholars such as Muhammad Tâhir Ibn 'Âshûr, Jamaluddin al-Qâsimî, Shaykh Muhammad Bakhit, M. Rashid Ridâ, Tantâwî Jawhari, Mustafa al-Marâgî, Muhammad Ali as-Sâyis, Ahmad Muhammad Shâkir, Kâmil Miras, Mustafa Ahmad az-Zarkâ have claimed and supported the view that calculating the lunar calendar is acceptable so long as it is reliable. (Yucel, 2006:XVIII/5)

### **3. The evidence of the scholars who support that calculating lunar months is acceptable**

Even though religious rituals which are due to be performed in certain times has to be performed within the timescale which are defined by the Quranic verses and hadith, the way of determining those times are not limited to certain rules or methodology. For instance; in the Quran start time for fasting is dawn and time for breaking fast is defined as dusk. A person who will be fasting can start and break fasting through observing the sun's movements as well as through abiding by the calculated times of the sun. By the same token determining the crescent times of the lunar movement which marks the start and finish times of a month does not have to be through observation of it because both seeing the crescent and calculating it are merely means to achieve the same result. The important issue is to determine the time correctly. Religious rulings are divided into two as 'aims' and 'means'. Rulings such as fasting in the month of ramadhan, when the month of shawwal starts bringing an end to fasting and celebrating it with Eid, during pilgrimage standing on mount Arafat on the ninth day of the month of Zul-hicce are all aims, the methods or techniques to determine the times for the above rituals are just means.

The hadith that tell us to see the crescent or if not possible to complete the days to thirty by means of starting and finishing fasting and celebrating Eid does not prevent us from calculating the times unlike it is suggested, they are merely telling us the simplest way to determine those times. Just as in the explanation of the verse "And proclaim the Pilgrimage among men: they will come to thee on foot and (mounted) on every kind of camel," journey of haj (pilgrimage) is not limited to two means (only on foot and on camel) so we cannot conclude from the verse that going to perform pilgrimage by car, coach or plane is forbidden and similarly we cannot say that in these hadith determining times are not limited to only seeing the crescent, if not completing the days to thirty. The relevant hadith and the verses show us the simplest and the most appropriate method for it's time. In that era in fact up until very recently lunar movements were not possible to be calculated correctly. Besides The prophet had mentioned that at that time the society was illiterate.

There is no doubt about the fact that The Arabs before Islam and The muslims in the beginning of Islam were illiterate and had no means to calculate astronomic events. Some of the information people had were not scientific knowledge based on laws and regulations that would produce accurate results, rather it was basic information gathered through observation. That's why the times of religious rituals were based on simple signs such as seeing the crescent in the sky. The order of seeing the crescent in the hadith regarding the beginning and the end of the lunar months is not obligatory but for guidance. Identification of the boarderlines of these months' can be done through seeing the crescent directly or if possible it can be done through calculations.

On the other hand most scholars on Islamic law insisted on seeing the crescent and they rejected the idea of calculating it because at their time science was not advanced

enough to calculate such lunar movements and the difference between astronomy and fortunetelling based on the the movement of celestial body, in other words astrology, was not understood clearly. In actual fact most islamic scholars and hadith narrators were either not aware of astronomy or had very little information about it. This is why they did not rely on calculations. Hence the hadith 'whoever goes to a fortune-teller and believes in what he says disbelieves in what was revealed to Mohammad' cannot be presented as evidence. (Ibn Mâjah, 1981: Taharah 122); Tirmidhî, 1981: Taharah, 102). Because astrology meaning fortune-telling cannot be equated to astronomy which is a positive science. The star science what classical islamic scholars would not even call as 'highly likely guess' (zann-ı galib) but as mere prediction was not today's modern space science, astronomy, but was only basic and limited information. This is understood by the fact that those scholars objected lunar calculations, suggesting that calculations were not consistent. Nowadays what is inconsistent is the observation mistakes and it is more accurate to use calculations than observations.

Allah created the universe in the perfect order. It is possible to calculate the exact times of the sunrise, the sunset and the lunar movements. Nowadays where and when the crescent of a new month will appear can be calculated accurately with no doubt. There is no reason why we should not benefit from current astronomic advances and technological developments and there is absolutely no reason why we should reject calculations and still continue observing the crescent.

It is known through calculations that if a month will be 29 or 30 days, the statement 'If the sky is not clear, onu takdir edin' does not contradict with the statement and complete it to thirty days the expression is said to those who are privileged by the science whereas the expression ' complete is to thirty' is said to the general. (Ibn Manzoor, 1994: V/74).

Taqiyyuddin Ibn Daqiq al-Îd, one of the Islamic law making scholars, says *that if the crescent cannot be seen due to cloud, fog etc, and the existence of the crescent in the sky can be calculated since the rule making factor actualises the new months is considered to have started this is because for the new month to start the condition is not to see it in the sky but to know that it is in the sky even if it cannot be seen, hence with this knowledge the new month can start.*(1987: II/8)

Shafi scholar Taqiyyuddin As-Subqi, if it is impossible for the crescent to be seen in the sky according to calculations, people's witness Who say they have seen it should be considered a mistake or lie, because the calculation are accurate whereas witnessing can be presumptuous, and Let alone presumption can never override the accurate knowledge, they cannot even compare. For witnessing to be accepted for the thing being witnessed has to be possible logically, religiously, factually and through senses -if the calculations are proving the impossibility of something being witnessed, the subject which is being witnessed cannot be accepted as witnessed. (As-Subkî: I/209-210).

Accuracy of calculations is proven through the prediction of eclipses well before they occur, one of the contemporary scholars Shaykh Mohammad Bakhit says lunar months

begin by the crescent being located after the sunset in the west side of the sky in a position where it can be seen from the earth, through seeing it directly, or hearing that someone has seen it, or through a declaration from a relevant authority, or through astronomic calculations it is due upon a person to fast who can determine the existence of the crescent in the sky through one of the above methods. (2000: 258-261).

As we approach towards the Poles the time difference between the two sunrises and sunsets extent to as much as six months. People live in those areas and amongst them there are also muslims. In these areas Ramadhan and Eid times cannot be determined through seeing the crescent, and we cannot say that muslims in these areas are not obliged to pray and fast, according to scholars who support the idea that sighting of the moon in other areas is not acceptable in those areas (the principle of ikhtilâf al-matali), we are obliged to use calculations for the determination of the above times in those areas. Because fasting is obligatory not because of seeing the crescent but because it is the order of God. Seeing the crescent is only the sign showing the beginning of the months of Ramadhan in which fasting is compulsory. Just because the sign for a religious ritual is not there, that neither means that rituals has become redundant nor the time for that ritual.

When the crescent is not seen that month's being counted thirty is a mere estimation. Even though it is not seen, there is a possibility that the crescent might be in the sky from a point where it can be seen. Using calculations to determine the visibility of the crescent is a fact. If there is a possibility to reach factual knowledge, it is not permitted to use guesswork over factual information, this is an islamic law agreed upon the majority. From this point of view, in this day and age due to accuracy of astronomic calculations and the number of people who specialise in this area, the obstacle in the way of calculations being used as a means to determine certain times is lifted. Basing time determinations on calculations has become compulsory.

As well as genuine mistakes about seeing the crescent, false announcements of the Ramadhan and Eid due to false witnesses who suggest seeing the crescent has also to be mentioned as it is encountered regularly nowadays even though it is impossible to see the crescent because it is set before the sun and falls to a level lower than the horizon. M hamdi Yazır who defends seeing the crescent as a main method says 'Instead of relying on false witness it's better to act on calculations.' When we can't find the evidence of indisputable majority (for the news to be approved it has to comply with the obviously truthful) keeping the witnesses in compliance with astronomic calculations is a mere necessity.

### **Conclusion**

When we probe into Hadith and sunnah for the purposes of deducting Islamic laws, certain principles should be taken into consideration such as easiness, God's pleasure, public interest, unity. The Prophet Mohammad has demonstrated the easiness principle both in religious rituals and other dimensions of day-to-day life and so we need to bear in



mind this when we present the sunnah of the prophet and also during implication of these sunnah into our lives. Making allowance for the outsiders and the requirements of this era – representation of sunnah to humanity is something which will help us find the humanity that we all are searching.

Determining lunar months through calculations has become easier than sighting of the crescent and more appropriate to the aim of the religion. In the World which is getting smaller by the day, Muslims' celebrating Eids and Ramadhan in different days let alone reinforcing the Oneness of God (tawheed), causing doubts and divisions. We started seeing two people, one fasting when the other is celebrating Eid, in the same house. When acted upon calculation based lunar months, these sort of sights will disappear, the power of unity and oneness in religious rituals such as Eids, Ramadhan and Pilgrimage which are meant to be done altogether, even the symbolic meaning, will be achieved. There cannot be a reasonable scientific or religious explanation to resist to the logical view of unity and developments. However much it was easy and appropriate to observe the crescent in the past and the calculations were so weak, nowadays the calculations have become that easy and appropriate to use. Besides, before there were no other means. Moreover, in the hadith reasons are given for the preference of the observation. The principle of easiness is prioritised. 'Calculating lunar months' could not be said to a society where people cannot read or write.

Today the situation is reversed. Nowadays it is easier to determine months and days through technical means than with the naked-eye observation. Hence, nowadays it is easier and more appropriate to the aim of the Şari to determine the start and finish times of lunar months through calculations for the purposes of religious unity. Besides, calculations don't prevent people from seeing it.

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