



Monthly Release...

THE MONTHLY CRESCENT MOON SIGHTING ATTENTION:

The Council of Shia Muslim Scholars of North America

OUR PRINCIPLES OF CRESCENT MOON SIGHTING:

Based on the Holy Qur'an and the correct Sunnah all Muslim jurists, upon whom there is consensus of their juristic capabilities, since the time of the occultation of Al-Imam Al-Mahdi (atf) until present day are in agreement that the crescent moon sighting is only confirmed through the ability to see it with the naked eye.

Between Jurisprudence & Astronomy:

In the age of information technology and accuracy in astronomical calculations, the following question is posed: Why do jurists not depend on astronomical research and predictions?

The Jurists have answered such inquiries with detailed studies from which we cite the following points:

- The Jurists believe that when Allah states, “And they ask you about the crescents, tell them that they are time references for people and for the hajj [pilgrimage]...” He is addressing people in general and this serves to guide them to take the crescent as a measure, or a reference point, for the start of their religious or Islamic months. As such, it is unwise to depend upon the opinions of astronomers without Allah (swt) or His Prophet (saw) guiding people to do so [either through the sayings, actions or

authorization of the infallible, therefore, Allah], for it is an ancient and well-known science to many, pre-Islamically.

- The jurists point out that the holy Qur'an stated the word "crescents" and not the "moon." For the crescent is one of the phases of the moon cycle. This is when the moon is in a specific place and angle between the sun and the earth. Therefore, it is essential that we do not confuse between the two terms, for one represents the state of the moon at a specific phase of its cycle, which is referred to as the "crescent" while the other is a culmination of the calculations of the moon movements previously known from thousands of years and will stay as such for as long as Allah pleases.
- Undoubtedly, the jurists pay special attention to follow every piece of information, and any scientific advancement and use it as long as it does not conflict with the religious texts. For example, they accept the opinion of the astronomer when he states that there is no possibility of a sighting. In addition, the jurists accept the opinion of the astronomer when he states that the crescent sighting is dependent upon the atmospheric conditions, such as the clarity of the skies, that there are no barriers such as dust, or smoke that is if the astronomer's opinion gives one contentment (which is a state in which one does not have complete certainty, however, he does have enough information that leads him to feel comfortable or content with the information). However, the problem here is with the astronomers and not with the jurists because the astronomers have great differences amongst themselves in assessing the time most suitable for the possibility of a sighting, rather they emphasize the difficulty in attaining contentment themselves. Refer to the following link: <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/islamic.php>
- The jurists point out that their issue with confirming the sighting of the moon using a telescope, as well as other such apparatus, is because of the verse itself, which states, "And they ask you about the crescents..." In the verse, the religious burden of proof is upon the general public, not a select few experts (such as astronomers), and this would be in the form of a sighting, in its absolute form. This means with special attention to the method most commonly used by the general public and that is considered to be "sight." As a result, using the telescope as a primary method to

bring the moon closer to sight is considered a burden that is not expected of the follower. Rather, such technology might cause a discrepancy if we were aware that the technology is capable of showing the moon even if it were, under normal circumstances, blocked from normal vision by the rays of the sun. Under such circumstances, would one be able to determine the beginning of the month when the moon is in the dark moon phase (i.e., the moment of conjunction in elliptical longitude with the sun, when the moon cannot be seen from the earth). As an analogy, a person who prays must purify his clothing of blood by using water to wash the area; it is sufficient for him to remove the redness of the blood for him to be able to pray in his clothing. However, if the follower were to place the purified area that was previously contaminated with blood under a microscope, he would be able to see that there are still remnants of the red blood. Is he required to use the microscope to truly purify his clothing, or is it sufficient for him to follow the jurisprudence, which tells him to look at the site of impurity and ascertain its purity after washing using the naked eye?

The Unity of Horizons and the Multiplicity of Horizons:

The question as to whether the sighting of the moon in one area of the world applies to all in rest of the world, such that all can be unified on one day of Eid is one that is repeated every year. This, in the terminology of jurisprudence, is called “The unity of the horizons” or “the multiplicity of the horizons.”

The jurists have differed on this issue based on the differences in their principles of derivation. For there are those of them, the jurists, who derived the ruling of the unity of the horizons and others who derived the ruling of the multiplicity of the horizons, of whom there are many.

The unity of the horizons

“The unity of the horizons” means that if the sighting is confirmed in accordance with the correct verdict in one area of land then it will apply to the rest of the lands that share the

night with the area of the original sighting. This was the verdict of the late Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayed Abul-Qasim Al-Khoei (died 1992). Though it is perhaps not limited to them, others such as His Eminence Ayatollah Shaykh Al-Waheed Al-Khurasani and his eminence Ayatollah Shaykh Isaac Al-Fayyad have a similar verdict, although their verdicts actually define a smaller geographic area that is included within those considered to share the night.

For example, if a sighting were confirmed in New York, U.S.A., since it shares the night with London, U.K., then the next day would be the start of the lunar month for both cities.

The Multiplicity of Horizons

“The Multiplicity of Horizons” means that every area of land has its own specific horizons. In this case, if a sighting is confirmed in one area it does not necessarily mean that it is confirmed for other areas. Instead, it is confirmed on the condition that is based upon the criterion that is the proximity of the size and the altitude of the crescent between the area of land where it was sighted and other areas. This view has been adopted by many jurists, headed by his eminence Ayatollah Sayed Ali Al-Seestani refer to the following link:

http://www.imam-us.org/Portals/0/0_FQ_istiftaa.GIF

In addition, one can figure out the altitude and the size of the crescent between two cities using the following link: <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/AltAz.php>

The Results:

Based on the preceding information, the monthly releases by the crescent committee of the Shia Muslim Scholars of North America regarding the crescents of the lunar months, takes into consideration the verdicts of the jurist whom is most followed, his eminence the grand Ayatullah Sayed Ali Al-Seestani. The committee does instruct those who follow other jurists to refer to the jurist whom they emulate.

The Protocol for the monthly release:

1. The members of the crescent committee study the state of the crescent both astronomically and mathematically, to ascertain the expected areas in which the crescent may be sighted.
2. The members of the committee make several phone calls with the religious scholars, preachers and trusted believers in the expected areas of crescent sighting. This is done in an effort to help them prepare and organize for the expected crescent sighting.
3. The crescent committee receives phone calls from the believers to receive news of their sightings.
4. On the night of the sighting, the committee holds a phone conference that may take them into the late night due to the differences in the time of sunset between the east coast and the west coast across North America.
5. Once the committee is comfortable with the religious confirmation of the sighting or not, a release is drafted and published via the Internet.

What we expect from the believers:

In support of upholding piety of Allah, the sanctity of the community, and in hopes to be organized in our work, we expect that the believers, may Allah elevate their status, are attentive to the following points:

1. Showing understanding with respect to the differences in opinions when it comes to scientific research. For the opinions of the jurists are included within this principle. As a result, we can expect to see a number of opinions, in addition to the differences, because there is more than one jurist. One such case is the issue of the unity of the horizons and the multiplicity of the horizons. Therefore, we expect and place our hopes in the believers' that they accept and embrace this diversity in juristic opinions just as they accept diversity in their everyday lives. We also hope that coercion is not used to try to convince others of their own beliefs.
2. Allowing the believers to practice their religious rituals without monopolizing the mosques and Islamic centers by a specific group. For houses of worship are Allah's, Allah says, "Surely the mosques are Allah's." Therefore, allowing others to perform the Eid rituals when there are multiple opinions on the day of Eid. There is no harm in having a general announcement of the day of Eid, which reflects the majority, and catering to those who are not. Or, in an effort to uphold unity and in consideration of the congregation, the minority delays their prayers until the day of the majority with the intention of "*istebbab raja' al-matloobiyyah*" (meaning recommendation of seeking that which is expected to be asked by Allah).
3. For those who would like to know the day of Eid ahead of time, so that they may take vacation time, it is recommended for them to look into the web sites that show the astronomical predictions for the crescent moon sighting over a span of the two most probable days in which the sighting will occur and take both days off. This will allow for a longer holiday, which will surely bring a great deal of pleasure to one's family.
4. In consideration of the feelings of other family members who may be emulating a different jurist, we hope that they cooperate in being part of the solution to this issue which is a result of the occultation of the Imam (as) and that they do not make this a point of internal family conflict.

Why A Crescent Committee?

As a result of the increased divisions and conflicts, along the lines of the faithful believers, on the issue of determining the Eids and the religious events, which is a result of the lack of understanding of the religious verdicts and juristic opinions, in the fifth annual conference of the Shia Muslim Scholars of North America, the topic of forming a crescent committee was posed, voted upon and passed unanimously. This meant that each member would recommend a number of the members, annually, to research the issue of the crescent on a monthly basis and to provide monthly releases to help educate the believers on the topic of the beginning of every month. In addition, it would cater to the majority who are following the most knowledgeable scholar of the time.

The Authenticity of the Crescent Committee Releases?

The crescent committee ensures that the releases are non-binding to any party. For each person returns to the verdicts of the jurist that he emulates then himself or those with expertise in determining topics in which they specialize. The crescent committee is none other than a volunteer effort that is sincere in its servitude to Allah The Almighty that serves to help the faithful believers who trust its members and use them to aid them in determining the beginning of the lunar months. It is a volunteer effort that aims to educate, so that it can prevent differences and reduce separation.

How are the members of the committee selected?

This is done through a process of recommendations given by the participants of the annual conference of the Shia Muslim Scholars of North America, with the approval of the members. In addition to the knowledge of the jurisprudence surrounding this topic, the criteria include that the members must be precautionous in nature, show geographical diversity, and ethnic diversity. This will allow all members of the society and geographical areas of North America to be represented equally.

Why Are the Opinions of other Jurists not announced?

The crescent committee is part of the Shia Muslim Scholars of North America, as such the committee returns to the most knowledgeable jurists who are emulated by the majority of the believers globally. This is done so that we maintain the unity of the communities and to ensure that the objectives continue to be met without stopping at the differences in verdicts.

In addition, if any of the opinions are mentioned then in all fairness all opinions must be announced without prejudice. This in itself is a task that is difficult to achieve within a span of a few hours especially on the night of Eid. For mentioning some and leaving others would have a negative effect and that would be counter productive. Therefore, the council takes the opinion of the jurist of the majority, and refers the remaining followers to their respective jurist.

* * *