

RELEVANCE OF THE UMMUL QURA CALENDAR

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I would like to share with you, what I have inferred with respect to the hijra calendar, which was the topic of discussion in the month of Ramadhan.

First and foremost, we all know that there exists an Islamic calendar. The Holy Quran says, "Verily, the number of months with Allah is twelve months (in a year)....."(9:36).

This calendar is known as the Hijra Calendar or the Ummul Qura calendar. It is based on the calculation of the rotation of the moon around the earth (1). Each phase of the moon and its angular distance indicate each date, which is shown as a natural calendar hung in the sky⁽¹⁾.

So what is the purpose of this calendar (definitely not for remembering to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries). The Quran says, "They ask you (O Muhammad SAW) about the phases of the moon. Say: These are dates for mankind and for the pilgrimage....."(2:189).

Hence, we definitely need a calendar to precisely perform our "amal" (such as recording events, date of birth and death and so many engagements in life, fasting and hajj). What happens if we get the dates wrong (especially if we get the first day of the month wrong and we cannot find out on which day an event occurred)? The Quran says, "The postponing is indeed an addition to disbelief, thereby the disbelievers are led astray....."(9:37).

How do we obtain an Islamic calendar? If I want to design a calendar; I neither have to be an astronomer nor a mathematician to do it.

So, what are my "requirements" to design a calendar?

(a) the astronomical facts from the Holy Quran (an insight into the advanced field of astronomy will be an added advantage; forget it, if its not your cup of tea....after all Rasoolullah (SAW) was precisely able to know the months with whatever knowledge Allah (swt) gave him in the light of the Quran).

(b) About the rotations and revolutions of the moon and the earth

(c) About the basic rules regarding the lunar calendar, like –

- the months either have 29 or 30 days;
- about the waxing and the waning crescents;
- that the last day of every month ends with a conjunction, where the sun, moon and the earth come in a straight line and it is called a new moon day, hence we wont be able to see the moon on the last day of a month;
- and then the most important – that the following day after new moon will be the beginning of the next month whether we see it or not (now that should raise few eyebrows).

(d) And of course, observing the phases of the moon daily (not just on the last day of Sha'ban or Ramadhan). Experienced people would be able to tell the exact date by simply looking at any phase of the moon. We also will be able to tell if that particular month will have 29 or 30 days. If

the growth (changing phase) of the moon is faster it will have 29 days, if it is a bit slow then it will have 30 days. This inference again comes with experience.

With all this, the months can be calculated exactly for thousands of years backward and forward⁽¹⁾. All this, we call "calculation". When we hear the phrase "scientific calculation," for most of them, it sounds very modern. At least now we should be able to understand, that, this is how the Rasool (saw) taught us to calculate and in fact this phrase is 1400 years old!

During the Rasool's (saw) period the Arabs followed the Jewish lunar calendar, which had alternating months of 30 and 29 days. Hence, the prophet gave them instructions to correct it⁽¹⁾.

Allah created the sun to calculate the time, the moon to calculate the dates and the stars to guide the travelers. (They have other functions though) The Quran says:

"And the sun runs on its fixed course for a term (appointed).....And the moon. We have measured for its mansions (to traverse....." (36:37-38).

"It is He who made the sun a shining thing and the moon as a light and measured out for it stages that you might know the number of the age (of the moon) and the reckoning.....He explains the Ayaat in detail for people who have knowledge" (10:5).

"The sun and the moon run on their fixed courses (exactly) calculated with measured out stages for each (for reckoning)" (55:5).

What we could probably understand is that, these revelations (Ayaat) came through the Rasool (saw) and he would have definitely gone by the careful observance of the **hilals (phases)** of the moon and there is no way he could have erred.

It is clearly understood that the movement of the sun and the moon is highly ordered. Hence it is possible to keep track of their motion. From the above verses Allah says that the motion of the sun and the moon is "fixed", "measured", "calculated". Then how can we say that we should not calculate or "cannot" calculate as some people claim. They are in fact contradicting Quran and whoever does that, is waging a war against Allah. The very purpose of assigning phases for the moon is to make people understand how they could find out the dates and calculate time. If we refuse to learn it we are waging a war against Allah. (10:5)

From the motion of the sun, we had calculated its angular distance and put it in the form of watches⁽¹⁾. Then why is the moon discriminated? Why can't we calculate the angular distance of the moon and correct our date when we went wrong? We can also put it in the form of a calendar. We have learnt the laws of the movement of the moon and we have landed on the moon.

Regarding the beginning of the month - Most of the time, we won't be able to see the moon on the first day or even on the second day, but it does not make any difference in calendar dates because it is related to the motion of the moon⁽¹⁾ (remember, the moon is constantly changing its

phase and it does not wait for the humans on the earth to sight it, by the time we decide, the next day begins). By the time the human naked eye could spot it, it would be day 2 or 3.

Hilal's visibility as Dr. Doggett puts depends not only on moon's age but also moon's angle, altitude, differences between the azimuths of the sun and moon at sunset, brightness of sky after sunset and experience of observer⁽²⁾. All these factors along with a very low surface brightness, makes it difficult for the human naked eye to view the new crescent. The problem arises when everybody wants to see the moon from every point on the earth which is not possible. The religion is not so difficult and complicated.

When the Quran shows an error proof method to calculate the months, then why postpone the beginning of fasting and celebrating Eid. Is the Hadith (which says see the moon and fast) standing in our way? Do you wish to downplay the words of Allah for the sake of the literal translation of this Hadith? What is the purpose of the Hadith in general? It is for us to lead an Islamic way of life and "refrain from doing anything haram." But what do you think this Hadith is doing to us? You hold onto this Hadith and commit a sin by fasting on the 1st of Shawwal. Remember, no Hadith is above Allah's Quran. Moreover, the Hadiths are reported by humans and hence we have something called the 'weak Hadiths' or 'not authentic Hadiths' which we won't be able to differentiate. But there is no such thing in the Holy Quran. I don't say that we should completely ignore Hadiths, but when we have a Hadith contradicting the Quran, then follow the Quran. Furthermore this Hadith is not contradicting. The literal meaning given to it to suit the ideas of those who have a disease in the heart creates the confusion. The real meaning is fast according to it.

Now coming to the ground realities..... In India, during the British rule, before 1947, Eid was celebrated on the same day in the entire sub-continent. But today, not only in India, but in many countries Eid is celebrated on 2 days and in some cases 3days (that happened in 1987, 1999 etc)⁽³⁾. Any date is valid only for 24hours. Can we say that today is 13th of Sunday in Saudi Arabia and then after 1or 2days 13th Sunday in India? There is absolutely no logic in it. Then why do we face problems today? No doubt it is because of the so called 'learned ulemas,' their egoistic approach to the matter. There are 'moon committees' in different states and there is absolutely no co-ordination among them. One does not share or listen to the views of the other. Sample this- in 1999, the month of Ramadhan was in January. The Karnataka Moon Committee (KMC) announced beforehand that Eid would be celebrated on the 20th of Jan. But the crescent was sighted in Lucknow on the 18th and DD channel in its 8.30pm news edition announced that Eid would be celebrated on 19th. And what did the KMC do?....under pressure....it refused to change its mind and stood by its word of Eid celebration on 20th but forbade fasting on 19th terming it haram!!!! If there is no Eid on 19th, then why is it haram fasting on that day?⁽³⁾. To whom are they showing their ego? do they know that egoism and superiority complex is one way of 'shirk.' What is the point in calling them 'Islamic scholars' when they had flushed all their learning and teachings in the drain. Of course, there are ulema' who have stood for the principles of Islam and rightly guided people, but lost in the crowd.

In 2006, in U.P. Eid was announced by the Markazi Chand Committee on Tuesday and by the "Shahar Qazi" of Lucknow, on Wednesday⁽⁴⁾. So that's an example of a conflict within the committees of the same state. There are many such instances of discord among the ulemaa's

during the month of Ramadhan in the past. What's really heartening is that, there exist few Muslim tribes who do not have much communication with the outside world, fast and celebrate Eid by looking at the phases of the moon (the lunar calendar). It's sad that the so called learned ulemaa's don't even understand what these people know regarding the prophet's sunnah.

There is one more aspect I would like to share. Say, if today is Friday. We, in India will be the first to offer the Fajr prayer and 2 ½ hours later the Saudis would offer the prayer. Likewise, we will be the first to offer Jumu'ah and only then people in Saudi offer the prayer. This implies that whatever "amal" we do, we, in India would be the first to do and then the Arabs. Then what is the logic behind we fasting and celebrating Eid 2 or 3 days after Saudi? We should be fasting and celebrating Eid before them. ⁽¹⁾

Most of them feel that we should be doing what the majority of the people do. If in case you are working in a government office, you see majority of them accepting bribes. Will you join with the mainstream or stay away, saying it un-Islamic. Its not a question of majority or minoritywhatever I or you dowe have to present our account of deeds individually before Allah and the so called majority or minority wont stand behind us.

A lot of people ask me as to why we don't convince the ulemaa's. There are people who are doing this from the 1950s and most of the ulemaa's committee don't agree. Even if a handful of them agree, they don't want to tell it out. Imagine, these people would have been preaching that we should 'see the crescent and fast concept' for 20 years or more and one fine day will they tell the same crowd that I have gone wrong and that everybody should follow the calendar? The ulemaa's fear that they might lose their relevance and that people would doubt their each and every preaching. If at all an aalim agrees to admit, then he should have enormous amount of iman to do that. Instead of arguing with an egoistic panel of ulemaa's (we can definitely make a point, though), what I feel is that, everything should start from an individual. The Quran says – you seek guidance from Allah, Allah will guide you. (13:11) (we can always get assistance from the ulemaa's but we cannot blindly follow them). We should spend some time to educate ourselves and then share it with our family and friends. They in turn should educate others. If this is how its going to be, won't the ulemaa's think twice before proclaiming things before an educated crowd? They will understand that they cannot take us for a ride.

I wish you all think over this. My niyyath is not to win an argument, but to share with you, what made me follow the Hijra calendar. Let's pray to be together in the midst of believers in the hereafter.

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