



ONE UMMAH, MANY HORIZONS

**UNDERSTANDING
MOON-SIGHTING
DIFFERENCES**



Dr. Zohair Abdul Rahman



One Ummah, Many Horizons: Understanding Moonsighting Differences

Introduction

From the beautiful civilizational symbols of the *ummah* is our calibration with the lunar calendar. The seasons of worship move through the seasons of nature so that we experience variations in timings, temperatures, and the signs of Allah in nature around us as we seek to fulfill what each moment in the calendar demands. We perform Hajj in Dhul-Hijjah, and fast in the month of Ramadan, the 6 days of Shawwal and the voluntary days of Sha'bān and Muharram. We go on our spiritual seclusion of *'itikāf* in the last 10 nights of Ramadan, seek out the night of our destiny on Laylat-ul-Qadr, seek out redemption through fasting in commemoration of 'Ashūrah and 'Arafah, experience the best days of the year with the first 10 days of Dhul-Hijjah and celebrate the festivals of the feast (Eid ul-Fitr) and the sacrifice (Eid ul-Adha). Thus, the rhythm of our worship flows through the seasons of nature as we move along the seasons of our own life from childhood to adulthood and then to old age – 'they all swim in their own orbit.'¹ This dynamic interplay makes each season of worship of the year different and unique at each point in our lifetime. The hot and long summer Ramadan is not like the cool and short Ramadans of the winter. As Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, "The best time for the believer is the winter, its nights are long for prayer and days short for fasting."²

The determination of the lunar calendar has always been a matter of scholarly debate from the dawn of the Islamic era. The differences of the opinions from the jurists, driven by their veneration of the sacred law, attention to detail, and intellectual depth, is one of the beautiful features of this *ummah*. Imām Aḥmad was once presented with a book by one of his students named Ishāq ibn Buhlūl called "*Kitāb al-Ikhtilāf* (The Book of Different Opinions)" and Imām Aḥmad said, "You should call it "*Kitāb as-Sa'ah*" (The Book of Expansiveness [ease])."³ The difference of opinion is a mercy for this *ummah* that enables flexibility, adaptiveness, and ease for people based on the ever-changing circumstances of life.

This paper outlines the different positions of the scholars and legal schools related to moonsighting. It is written for the reader interested in learning about the differing views and why there is controversy. We will go over the issues of *ikhtilāf al-maṭāli'* (distinction of horizons) versus *ittiḥād al-maṭāli'* (unification of horizons), the issue of *ḥisāb* (astronomical calculations) and the issues pertaining to the minimum requirement of witnesses. There will be a concluding section on unity. We hope this resource can elevate the discourse and bring some clarity to an issue that stirs up annual debate.

¹ Quran, 36:40.

² Laṭā'if al-Ma'ārif, p. 706.

³ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah, vol. 1, p. 297.

Key Textual Evidences Used in Issues Related to Moonsighting

Establishing Moonsighting

أَبْنِ عُمَرَ، - رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا - عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّهُ ذَكَرَ رَمَضَانَ فَقَالَ " لَا تَصُومُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْا الْهَيْلَالَ وَلَا تُفْطِرُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْهُ فَإِنْ أُغْمِيَ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَقْدِرُوا لَهُ "

'Abdullah b. 'Umar (Allah be pleased with both of them) reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying: Do not fast till you see the new moon, and do not break fast till you see it; but if the weather is cloudy calculate about it.⁴

One of the unique features of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim is that he will gather multiple *riwāyāt* (versions) of a ḥadīth in one place for the scholar to be able to appreciate the different wordings that have been reported. Many times these differences are legally consequential, and results in the need for the jurist to reconcile variant wordings and preference some over others based on multiple factors including the strength of the *isnād* (chain of narrators), the consistency with other known texts or principles or the reported actions of the companions or senior successors and other factors that are detailed in the books of *Uṣūl ul-Fiqh*.

For this ḥadīth, there are 16 *riwāyāt* recorded by Imām Muslim bin Ḥajjaj (d. 261 AH). In the *riwāyah* that comes from Nāfi' from Ibn 'Umar, there are the following variants:

- The Prophet mentioned that the months are 29 and used hand gestures to show the amount by showing 10 fingers twice saying "like this, like this", and the third time he said "like this" he put down one of his thumbs.
- He specified to calculate it as 30 in Ubaydullah's *riwāyah* through Nāfi'. This is reported through Abu Usāmah and Numayr. But there is a conflicting *riwāyah* through Yaḥyah ibn Sa'īd where the narrators specifically mentions that the Prophet did not count it as 30. This can potentially be an example of *idrāj* (insertion into the text of ḥadīth from the commentary of a later narrator that was assumed to be part of the original ḥadīth).

In the *riwāyah* that comes from Sa'īd ibn Amr bin Ṣa'īd from Ibn 'Umar, there is an interesting wording added:

⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1080

أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ ابْنَ عُمَرَ، - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا - يُحَدِّثُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " إِنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّيَّةٌ لَا نَكْتُبُ وَلَا نَحْسِبُ الشَّهْرُ هَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا - وَعَقَدَ الإِبْهَامَ فِي الثَّلَاثَةِ - وَالشَّهْرُ هَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا "

"We are an unlettered *umma*, we do not write and we do not calculate. The month is like this and like this and like this and made 29 with his fingers by removing the thumb in the 3rd count and then he said it is like this and like this and like this and made 30."

A similar ḥadīth from Abu Huraira is as follows and specifies counting the month as 30 if there is doubt on the 30th night.

قَالَ سَمِعْتُ أَبَا هُرَيْرَةَ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ - يَقُولُ قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَوْ قَالَ قَالَ أَبُو الْقَاسِمِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " صُومُوا لِرُؤُوسِهِ، وَأَفْطِرُوا لِرُؤُوسِهِ، فَإِنْ غَبِيَ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَكْمِلُوا عِدَّةَ شَعْبَانَ ثَلَاثِينَ."

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet (ﷺ) or Abul-Qasim 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' bān."⁵

There isn't significant variation in this narration. Another important ḥadīth is the following:

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، قَالَتْ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " الْفِطْرُ يَوْمَ يُفْطِرُ النَّاسُ وَالْأَضْحَى يَوْمَ يُضْحِي النَّاسُ "

'Ā'ishah narrated that: The Messenger of Allah said: "Al-Fitr is the day that the people break the fast, and Al-Adha is the day that the people sacrifice."⁶

عَنْ كُرَيْبٍ أَنَّ أُمَّ الْفَضْلِ بِنْتَ الْحَارِثِ بَعَثَتْهُ إِلَى مُعَاوِيَةَ بِالشَّامِ، قَالَ: فَقَدِمْتُ الشَّامَ، فَقَضَيْتُ حَاجَتَهَا، وَاسْتَهَلَّ عَلَيَّ رَمَضَانُ وَأَنَا بِالشَّامِ، فَرَأَيْتُ الْهَيْلَةَ لَيْلَةَ الْجُمُعَةِ، ثُمَّ قَدِمْتُ الْمَدِينَةَ فِي آخِرِ الشَّهْرِ، فَسَأَلَنِي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا عَنِ الْهَيْلِ، فَقَالَ: مَتَى رَأَيْتُمُ الْهَيْلَةَ؟ فَقُلْتُ: رَأَيْتُهُ لَيْلَةَ الْجُمُعَةِ، فَقَالَ: أَنْتِ رَأَيْتَهُ؟ فَقُلْتُ: نَعَمْ، وَرَأَاهُ النَّاسُ وَصَامُوا وَصَامَ مُعَاوِيَةَ، فَقَالَ: لَكِنَّا رَأَيْنَاهُ لَيْلَةَ السَّبْتِ فَلَا نَزَالَ نَصُومُ حَتَّى نَكْمِلَ ثَلَاثِينَ أَوْ نَرَاهُ، فَقُلْتُ: أَوْ لَا تَكْتَفِي بِرُؤْيَا مُعَاوِيَةَ وَصِيَامِهِ؟ فَقَالَ: لَا، هَكَذَا أَمَرَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ

Kuraib reported that Umm al-Fadl bint al-Harith sent him to Mu'awiyah in Syria; he said: I arrived in Syria and fulfilled her need, and Ramadan began while I was there in Syria, so I

⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, 1909.

⁶ Jāmi' Tirmidhī, 802.

saw the crescent on the night of Friday. Then I returned to Madinah at the end of the month, and 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them both) asked me about the crescent and said: "When did you see the crescent?" I said: "We saw it on the night of Friday." He said: "Did you see it yourself?" I said: "Yes, and the people saw it and fasted, and Mu'awiyah fasted." He said: "But we saw it on the night of Saturday, so we will continue fasting until we complete thirty days or see it." I said: "Is the sighting of Mu'awiyah and his fasting not sufficient for you?" He replied: "No, this is how the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم commanded us."⁷

Minimum Testimony Required

عَنْ عِكْرِمَةَ، أَنَّهُمْ شَكُّوا فِي هِلَالِ رَمَضَانَ مَرَّةً فَأَرَادُوا أَنْ لَا يَقُومُوا وَلَا يَصُومُوا فَجَاءَ أَعْرَابِيٌّ مِنَ الْحَرَّةِ فَشَهِدَ أَنَّهُ رَأَى الْهِلَالَ فَأَتَى بِهِ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ " أَتَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ " . قَالَ نَعَمْ . وَشَهِدَ أَنَّهُ رَأَى الْهِلَالَ فَأَمَرَ بِلَالًا فَنَادَى فِي النَّاسِ أَنْ يَقُومُوا وَأَنْ يَصُومُوا

Narrated 'Ikrimah: Once the people doubted the appearance of the moon of Ramadan, and intended neither to offer the tarawih prayer nor to keep fast. A bedouin came from al-Harrah and testified that he had sighted the moon. He was brought to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). He asked: Do you testify that there is no god but Allah, and that I am the Messenger of Allah? He said: Yes; and he testified that he had sighted the moon. He commanded Bilal who announced to the people to offer the tarawih prayer and to keep fast.⁸

عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ زَيْدِ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ، أَنَّهُ خَطَبَ النَّاسَ فِي الْيَوْمِ الَّذِي يُشَكُّ فِيهِ فَقَالَ أَلَا إِنِّي جَالِسْتُ أَصْحَابَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَسَاءَلْتُهُمْ وَأَنْتَهُمْ حَدَّثُونِي أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " صُومُوا لِرُؤُوسِهِ وَأَفْطَرُوا لِرُؤُوسِهِ وَأَنْسُكُوا لَهَا فَإِنْ غَمَّ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَكْمِلُوا ثَلَاثِينَ فَإِنْ شَهِدَ شَاهِدَانِ فَصُومُوا وَأَفْطَرُوا " .

'Abdur-Rahman bin Zaid bin Al-Khattab addressed the people on the day concerning which there was doubt (as to whether the month had begun) and said: "I sat with the Companions of the Messenger of Allah and asked them, and they narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: 'Fast when you see it and stop fasting when you see it, and perform the rites on that basis. If it is obscured, then complete thirty days, and if two witnesses testify then fast and stop fasting."⁹

⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1087.

⁸ Sunan Abū Dawūd, 2341. Declared weak by Al-Albānī. This is an example of a *mursal* ḥadīth where 'Ikrimah the student and freed slave of Ibn Abbās who is a successor is narrating a ḥadīth without reference to the companion in between.

⁹ Sunan Nasā'ī, 2116. Declared ṣaḥīḥ by Al-Albānī, as-Suyūṭī and others.

Scholarly Positions on Issues related to Moonsighting

Global Sighting: Ittihād al-Mutālī'

The Ḥanafīs and the Ḥanbalīs generally hold that sighting in one horizon is binding on all.

Hanafi

وإذا ثبت في مصر لزوم سائر الناس، فيلزم أهل المشرق برؤية أهل المغرب، في ظاهر المذهب... وهو المعتمد عندنا

Ibn Humām: "If the crescent is established in Egypt, it binds all people; and the people of the East follow the sighting of the people of the West — this is the authorized view of the madhhab and it is the one we adopt."¹⁰

Hanbali

وإذا رآه أهل بلد لزم الناس كلهم الصوم

Al-Ḥajjāwī: "If the people of one *balad* (locale) sees the moon, then it is binding on everyone else"¹¹

This is based on the general statement from the ḥadīth of Abdur-Rahman ibn Zayd ibn Khattab quoted in the previous section, "Fast when you see it and stop fasting when you see it."

Mālikī

This position is generally seen on the side of 'global' with an important nuance that is relevant to our times as well,

"If it is established that the people of another locality have seen the crescent, then they must act accordingly on that day...But they agreed that this doesn't apply for lands that are very far apart like Andalus and Arabia."¹²

Local Sighting: Ikhtilāf al-Mutālī'

Shafi'i

وإذا رُئي ببَلَدٍ لَزِمَ حُكْمُهُ الْبَلَدَ الْقَرِيبَ دُونَ الْبَعِيدِ فِي الْأَصَحِّ، وَمَسَافَةُ الْبَعِيدِ مَسَافَةُ الْقَصْرِ

¹⁰ Faḥ al-Qadīr, vol. 2, p 313

¹¹ Rawḍ al-Murbi' Sharḥ Zād al-Mustaqnī, p. 234

¹² Bidāyat ul-Mujtahid, p. 229.

Imām Nawawī: “If the crescent is sighted in a town, its ruling applies to the nearby town but not to the distant one, according to the sounder opinion; and the distance that defines ‘distant’ is the distance that permits shortening the prayer.”¹³

There are some minor positions within each madhab that do favour local sighting, including from Ibn Taymiyyah who made distinctions of local horizons based on expert opinion.

“The horizons of the crescent are determined according to the agreement of those knowledgeable in astronomy. If they coincide, then fasting is obligatory (based on one sighting), and if not, then it is not.”¹⁴

The regions that are considered to reasonably share a horizon should be determined by specialists. The question of what determines a distinct *matla*’ is one that continues to be debated. It is important to note that classically, they did not make distinctions based on political borders. Imam Nawawī mentioned travellers distance, while Ibn Taymiyyah describes a more scientific determination. As we live in a time where national borders and identity are emphasized, it is interesting that some groups will limit sightings to their country even if there is a place that is much closer in horizon in a different country. Making distinctions of *matāli*’ (horizons) based solely on imaginary political lines has no real basis in sacred law. Rather, the distinctions should be made geographically and based on shared horizons.

Some argue for keeping sightings confined to a political nation because of suspicion of credibility from other countries. To dismiss a person’s *‘adālah* (uprightness) based purely on ethno-national lines is the essence of prejudice and is also an unfounded method in our sacred law. The minimum required testimony will be covered in a later section.

Calculations

All four schools of thought reject the use of calculations to establish the beginning of Ramadan. There are some who mistakenly believe that astronomical calculations are a new endeavor without precedent in our history. The reality is that calculating the lunar months was a science that was known from the *salaf* until now. The reliability of this science progressed throughout the centuries, but the jurists never recognized this as a legitimate way to determine the new month.

Ibn ‘Uthaymīn says, “Fasting does not become obligatory based on calculations. If the astronomers calculate the phases of the moon in the night of Ramadan but they do not see the crescent, then they are not to fast. This is because the legislation connected to this ruling is based on an observable action - which is seeing the moon.”¹⁵

A person may assume that this is an example of our scholars favouring a less sensitive method with greater margin of error (visual sighting) over a more sensitive method

¹³ Minhāj at-Ṭalibīn, p. 74.

¹⁴ Al-Inṣāf, vol. 7, p. 336.

¹⁵ Sharḥ Mumtī’ ‘alā Zād al-Mustaqni’, vol. 6, p. 314

(calculations) that is not affected by environmental conditions. It is important to note in some cases, the subjective perception is what is intended by the sacred legislation rather than ascertaining the objective reality. Another example in *fiqh* where this is seen is in the issue of *ṭahārah* (purification). Ibn Qudāmah mentions that whatever is not visible to the naked eye is overlooked. There may be microscopic particles of najāsah, but this is not legally consequential. Further, the principle of certainty not being overruled by doubt (*al-yaqīn lā yazūlu bi-shakk*), is not a principle that ensures being congruent with objective reality - but rather it is a means of bringing subjective clarity. If a person is certain they performed wuḍū but doubtful if they broke it afterwards, they go back to their place of certainty and remain in a state of purity. It is quite possible that objectively, they had indeed broken their wuḍū, but what is important is the perception of the subject.

There are a minority of scholars who held the position of using calculation when the clouds are obscuring vision. “If the crescent is obscured (by clouds), recourse is made to calculation based on the movement of the moon and the sun. This was the position of Muṭarrāf bin Shikhīr who is one of the senior tabi’ūn (successors).”¹⁶

Ibn Surayj reports from Imām Shafi’ī, “Whoever holds the position (madhab) of relying on inference through the stars and the lunar phases, and it becomes clear to him through such inference that the crescent is visible and has risen, then he may fast, and it will suffice him.”¹⁷

So there is precedent in the salaf for the use of calculations, but this was a minor position that none of the later scholars of the 4 major schools considered. As we see from the statement attributed to Imām Shafi’ī, there was an acknowledgement of this school existing.

There are a number of contemporary fatwa and Imāms councils that have adopted calculations based on this precedent and their own interpretation of the evidence including the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), the Fiqh Council of North America and the Australian National Imāms Council (ANIC). The most notable of contemporary scholars who supported calculations was the late Shaykh Yusuf al-Qarḍāwī.

Fasting on the Day of Doubt

This is an issue that is unique to the Ḥanbalīs who stated that a person must fast on the ‘day of doubt’ (the 30th of Sha’bān if the moon wasn’t sighted due to clouds or haze). The other schools agree that a person is not to fast on the day of doubt.

The evidence used for Ḥanbalīs who say a person should fast is the ḥadīth of Ibn ‘Umar where it is mentioned, if there are clouds obstructing vision then ‘faqdirū lahū’ (which can mean constrict it - meaning restrict Sha’bān to 29). As shown in the previous section, there are conflicting *riwāyāt* of this ḥadīth that mention counting them as 30. Hence, the Ḥanablīs fast on this day is out caution (iḥtiyāt).

¹⁶ Bidāyat al-Mujtahid, p. 227

¹⁷ Bidāyat al-Mujtahid, p. 227

There is disagreement in the madhab regarding this. Ibn Uthaymīn records 7 different positions¹⁸ but ultimately sides with it being prohibited to fast on this day based on the narration,

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، - رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ - قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " لَا تَقْدَمُوا
رَمَضَانَ بِصَوْمِ يَوْمٍ وَلَا يَوْمَيْنِ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ كَانَ يَصُومُ صَوْمًا فَلْيَصُمْهُ "

Abu Huraira (Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying: Do not observe fast for a day, or two days ahead of Ramadan except a person who is in the habit of observing a particular fast; he may fast on that day.¹⁹

Then Ibn Uthaymīn says, "If the Imām believes it to be obligatory and commands the people to fast, then he should not dissent. And it would not be considered dissenting if he simply eats in private."²⁰ This shows the principle of not compromising public unity and the importance of following the authority of the area. This is a key aspect we will highlight in the unity versus uniformity section.

Testimony

Shafi`is

Entering Ramadan is with one witness and exiting Ramadan with two upright witnesses. This is their way of reconciling the two narrations mentioned in the evidence section for testimony. They mention one of the possible wisdoms being that people may be biased to want to hasten Eid but won't be as biased to want to start with Ramadan.²¹

Hanafi's

If it is cloudy, one upright testimony will suffice. If it is a clear sky, then there needs to be a large number (*jamm al-ghafir*). It has also been narrated from him that he would accept two upright witnesses if the sky is clear.²²

Malikis

Two upright witnesses for both entering and exiting Ramadan.²³

Hanbalis

¹⁸ 1) It is *wājib* to fast, 2) It is *ḥarām* to fast, 3) It is *mustahabb* to fast, 4) It is *makrūh* to fast, 5) It is *mubāḥ* to fast, 6) Act based on the previous pattern - if the Jamād ath-Thānī and Rajab were both 30 days, then Sha`bān would be 29. If they were both 29 days, then Sha`bān would be 30 days., 7) The people should follow the Imām (local religious authority).

¹⁹ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1082.

²⁰ Sharḥ Mumtī` 'alā Zād al-Mustaḥqī', vol. 6, p. 318.

²¹ Bidāyat al-Mujtahid, p. 228.

²² Bidāyat al-Mujtahid, p. 228.

²³ Bidāyat al-Mujtahid, p. 228.

One upright witness for both entering and exiting Ramadan.²⁴

Uprightness

Ibn ‘Uthaymīn defines *‘adālah* (uprightness as), “An upright testimony defined as someone who fulfills his obligations, does not perform major sins and does not persist in minor sins.”²⁵

Can a Woman Give Testimony?

According to the Ḥanbalīs, both men and women are the same in testimony when it comes to affairs of the religion. “This is a religious matter where men and women are equal, just as they are equal when it comes to narrating religious traditions.”²⁶

Unity versus Uniformity

All three approaches have scholarly precedent and evidence, falling under the category of valid difference of opinion. This is why regardless of what position a scholar follows, their advice for the individual living in a community remains the same - follow the position of your local religious authority.

This is a challenge in Western countries that don’t have centralized or formally recognized authority. The substitute for this are a person’s local masjid, an Imām’s council, or a national body. What does one do if these different bodies conflict with each other? The most important thing to do is not to break away from your local area. So a person follows their local regular masjid. If there are multiple *masājid* within similar driving distance that have differing methodologies, then a person can choose the masjid that they are most comfortable with based on their methodology.

It is important for each level of organization to attempt to unify and accept the verdict from the institutions that are wider in scope. Ideally, there is a trusted national body that takes on this responsibility and is accepted by the mainstream irrespective of individual opinions. It may take time, education and public awareness to get to this stage. Robust scholarly debate should continue to take place at the level of the ‘ulemā to come to a methodology that is most aligned with what Allah is pleased with. But this should not be the arena for the public to be involved.

There are two different issues that often get confused with one another, and that is uniformity versus unity. While we recognize that we do not need uniformity in practice to establish unity among the believers, people will often use this distinction to justify them breaking away from the community in favour of their own personal position when it comes to moonsighting. Ramadan is a communal event, and the festivals of Eid, fasting and breaking the fast are intended to be done collectively by the sacred law. Therefore, using the notion of ‘valid

²⁴ Bidāyat al-Mujtahid, p. 228.

²⁵ Sharḥ Mumtī’, p. 323.

²⁶ Sharḥ Mumtī’, p. 327.

difference of opinion' to not opt in to a shared methodology within a locale is contravening the clear goals of the *shari'ah* when it comes to sharing the same Ramadan dates within one.

The following anecdote gives us a great precedent to reflect on.

عَنْ كُرَيْبٍ أَنَّ أُمَّ الْفَضْلِ بِنْتَ الْحَارِثِ بَعَثَتْهُ إِلَى مُعَاوِيَةَ بِالشَّامِ، قَالَ: فَقَدِمْتُ الشَّامَ، فَقَضَيْتُ حَاجَتَهَا، وَاسْتَهَلَّ عَلَيَّ رَمَضَانُ وَأَنَا بِالشَّامِ، فَرَأَيْتُ الْهَيْلَةَ الْجُمُعَةَ، ثُمَّ قَدِمْتُ الْمَدِينَةَ فِي آخِرِ الشَّهْرِ، فَسَأَلَنِي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا عَنِ الْهَيْلِ، فَقَالَ: مَتَى رَأَيْتُمُ الْهَيْلَ؟ فَقُلْتُ: رَأَيْنَاهُ لَيْلَةَ الْجُمُعَةِ، فَقَالَ: أَنْتَ رَأَيْتَهُ؟ فَقُلْتُ: نَعَمْ، وَرَأَاهُ النَّاسُ وَصَامُوا وَصَامَ مُعَاوِيَةَ، فَقَالَ: لَكِنَّا رَأَيْنَاهُ لَيْلَةَ السَّبْتِ فَلَا نَزَالَ نَصُومُ حَتَّى نَكْمِلَ ثَلَاثِينَ أَوْ نَرَاهُ، فَقُلْتُ: أَوْ لَا تَكُنْفِي بِرُؤْيَا مُعَاوِيَةَ وَصِيَامِهِ؟ فَقَالَ: لَا، هَكَذَا أَمَرَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ

Kuraib reported that Umm al-Fadl bint al-Harith sent him to Mu'awiyah in *Shām*; he said: I arrived in *Shām* and fulfilled her need, and Ramadan began while I was there in *Shām*, so I saw the crescent on the night of Friday. Then I returned to Madinah at the end of the month, and 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them both) asked me about the crescent and said: "When did you see the crescent?" I said: "We saw it on the night of Friday." He said: "Did you see it yourself?" I said: "Yes, and the people saw it and fasted, and Mu'awiyah fasted." He said: "But we saw it on the night of Saturday, so we will continue fasting until we complete thirty days or see it." I said: "Is the sighting of Mu'awiyah and his fasting not sufficient for you?" He replied: "No, this is how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ commanded us."²⁷

This narration is proof for local moonsighting, and shows that Muslims starting Ramadan on different dates between locales was not problematic for them. But this does not describe multiple communities within a locale having different dates with different methodologies. Rather, it demonstrates a singular methodology employed that resulted in different dates based on area. It may be that all of Australia decides to adopt local moonsighting, and this shared methodology may result in different start dates between Western Australia and Queensland. But this is a case where unity does not require uniformity.

However, if there are 4 masājid within a 10 km radius that are all utilising different methodologies, then this is a case of a failure of unity. While these are valid methodologies legally, the social consequences of this cannot be ignored. The notion of Muslim neighbours starting and finishing Ramadan on different days is an absurdity. Thus, the public should not be passionately advocating for one methodology over the other - but rather we should be passionately advocating for masājid to come together under a unified approach. Micro-unity will eventually lead to macro-unity.

May Allah make us reach Ramadan with hearts ready to receive His blessings and May He shower His Mercy on the *ummah* of his Prophet all over the world, Ameen.

²⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1087.