



## Groundbreaking Conference on Moon sighting

Ilaahi Masjid – Hope Street – Dewsbury

*"And for the moon we have appointed measured phases, until it turned (pale, curved and fine) like an old branch of date palm. [39] Neither it is for the sun to overtake the moon, nor can the night outpace the day. Each one is floating in an orbit."*  
**[40] Surah Yasin**

Ilaahi Masjid, Hope Street, (7<sup>th</sup> July 2007) hosted a debate on the methodology adopted in the UK for determining the start of Islamic months. The organisers discussed the various methods currently in use and the difficulties and disunity this creates. The aim of the event, as pointed out by one of the speakers, was not to score points by declaring one methodology better than another. It was to look at the various arrangements currently in place and try and reach a consensus that was acceptable to most people.

The principle which is perhaps least contentious in this perennial debate is that the start of a new month is based on a physical sighting of the crescent. Very few scholars, modern or classical, allow for a new month to be declared based solely on astronomical calculations.

Another given, at least in principle, is that a local sighting is preferred over reliance on information from another country, especially one which is thousands of miles away, and separated by a several time zones.

What set this conference apart from other similar events in recent years is that the organisers were focused on providing a solution for UK Muslims, as opposed to proving the validity of sightings in one country or another. The first speaker asked an important, but often overlooked question: When the moon can be sighted here is it appropriate for people in the UK to follow pronouncements from Saudi or Morocco? To illustrate his point he used the example of prayer times. Is it right for Muslims in the UK to pray their zuhr or juma when it is time for zuhr in Saudi? It is clearly not, and almost everyone understands that simply because it is zuhr time in Saudi does not mean that we too can pray zuhr in the UK. Likewise, simply because the moon has been sighted in Saudi, does not mean that we too can declare the start of the new month in the UK.

The argument that it is impossible to view the moon in the UK because of cloud cover is not entirely valid, argued one of the speakers. He explained that for

several years he had made an effort to sight the new moon every month, and in a year he is successful in sighting the moon up to 6 times. And when he was unable to sight the moon, there were people in other towns or cities who could confirm a physical sighting.

Based on this, and other presentations, the proposal that gained currency was to move to a system which relied on UK sightings to determine the start of Islamic months.

In the ulama meeting attended by 70 plus ulama there was general consensus in favour of adopting the method of a local sighting in accordance with Sunnah and a method now being implemented in over 60 Masaajid of London for the past several months. It was also suggested a group of ulama approach our elders with these proposals.

It would be an act of great reward if on the 29<sup>th</sup> of each month one was to act upon the Sunnah and try to sight the moon rather than switching the T.V. on to check if Taraaweeh has started in Saudi.

A fact that needs to be understood very clearly is that astronomical data which is very accurate regarding the phases of the moon, mentioned in the above verses of the Quraan, cannot be used in place of a physical sighting of the moon as we have been strictly ordered to observe a sighting. However this data can be used as guidance in obtaining a correct sighting, just like we have made use of data in printing our salaah timetables. No one is seen checking the shadow of a stick to determine ones times. Based on this there is no **Islamic or astronomical** justification for a country to be 2 days in front of the rest of the world in its sighting.

It is an obligation on all sections of the community, Ulama, committees and the public to try and resolve this issue so as not to bring the validity of our fasts into question. To hinder progress would be taking on the burden of everyone's wrong fasts on oneself. Like mentioned each individual must look for a correct sighting before fasting not just rely on an announcement like one has to look for the correct channels of paying Zakah. May the Almighty guide us all towards the truth with true sincerity, May he accept all our acts of worship and save us from making this into a personal or begrudging issue. Aameen!

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