

The Quran and its Message

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Joseph A Islam www.quransmessage.com

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

TIME OF FAJR AND THE END OF SEHRI IN THE MONTH OF RAMADAN

Joseph A Islam

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FAJR

The Fajr prayer is the first prayer of the day and is performed by Muslims at the beginning of dawn. The time for Fajr prayers remains active up until the point of sunrise. There is a considerable time gap from the onset of dawn till sunrise and the two are not synonymous.

Dawn is usually understood as the actual moment at which the sun starts to lighten the sky **whilst remaining well below the horizon** (Diagram 1). As dawn continues, a distinctive colour in the form of a thin thread is visible on the horizon. The sky starts to lighten up until the point of sunrise when the sun's light fully breaks and sunrise is fully observed (Diagram 2)

Diagram 1

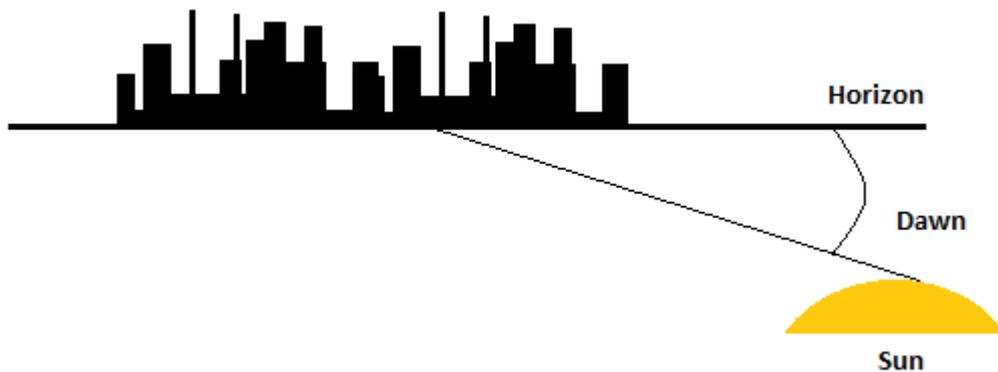


Diagram 2



Illustrations - Joseph Islam

Scientists usually divide the period of dawn into three distinct areas.

(1) Astronomical Dawn

This is the time at which the sun is 18 degrees below the horizon in the morning. Astronomical dawn is that point in time at which the sun starts lightening the sky. Prior to this time, the sky is completely dark. [1]

(2) Nautical Dawn

This is the time at which the sun is 12 degrees below the horizon in the morning. Nautical dawn is defined as that time at which there is just enough sunlight for objects to be distinguishable. [2]

(3) Civil Dawn

This is the time at which the sun is 6 degrees below the horizon in the morning. Civil dawn is defined as that time at which there is enough light for objects to be distinguishable and that outdoor activities can commence. [3]

Sunrise - The time at which the first part of the sun appears above the horizon in the morning.

Muslims usually make use of the scientific 'Astronomical Dawn' as the time for 'Fajr' when the sun is typically 18 degrees below the horizon. However, Astronomical Dawn is very difficult to discern and in most cases, the casual observer would still perceive the sky as fully dark.

True dawn therefore should be a point which is readily observable by the casual observer. Nautical dawn is usually the light which is often first discernible and is also therefore referred to as 'first light'. However this is seldom used by Muslim calculations for the purposes of Fajr.

The clear distinction of the end of the night for the casual observer is a key requirement for the purposes of establishing the time of Fajr. This is also the point at which 'Sehri' ceases during the month of Ramadan and 'Fasting' begins.

002:187 (Part)

"...and eat and drink, until the white thread of dawn appear to you distinct from its black thread..."

It is also unfortunate to note that despite the Quran's clear, unequivocal statement with regards the period for the end Sehri, which remains active up until the time of Fajr, one often notes in Muslim calendars that the time of Sehri usually ends 10 minutes **before** the time of Fajr. There is absolutely no warrant for this common practice other than pure reliance on [Islamic Secondary Sources](#) for support. This practice remains a concept clearly negated by the Quranic directive in verse 2:187 above.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Not only is the time of Fajr usually commenced early when the dark sky is still indiscernible to the casual observer from visible dawn, but despite the clear Quranic verse, the time for the end of Sehri does not usually correspond with the time of Fajr. In practice, Sehri usually ends before the Fajr call for prayer. The Quran remains absolutely unambiguous in its statement that the time of 'Sehri' remains **up until the point of dawn**.

Related article:

- (1) [Fasting is Prescribed Until Night Not Sunset](#)

REFERENCES

[1] NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE WEATHER FORECAST OFFICE, *Astronomical Terms*. [online], <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/ffc/?n=gloss3> [Accessed 25th July 2011]

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[Joseph Islam](#)

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