

The Quran and its Message

The articles on this website may be reproduced freely as long as the following source reference is provided:

Joseph A Islam www.quransmessage.com

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

MOON SIGHTING

Joseph A Islam

Copyright © 2009 Joseph A Islam: Article last modified 19th September 2011

All manner of [Islamic secondary sources](#) and opinions often serve to complicate the clear guidance of the Quran. Many Muslims become apathetic and simply follow their local mosques and their particular stance or allegiances. It is to be remembered that the ways of devotion have been clearly expounded by the Quran and remain **an individual responsibility to best understand and act upon them.**

It remains our duty as believers to seek the best meaning from what we hear and simply not abandon our responsibilities.

039:018

"Those who listen to the Word (the Quran) and follow the **best meaning in it: those are the ones whom God has guided and those are the one's endowed with understanding (Arabic: Albabi)**

002:189

"They ask thee, (O Muhammad), of **new moons (Arabic: ahilati)**, say: They are fixed seasons / indicators of periods **(Arabic: mawaqitu)** for mankind and for the pilgrimage"

UNDERSTANDING 'AHILLAH' (NEW MOON)

The Arabic word 'ahillah' in Arabic is the plural of 'hila' ^ه and means **'to appear'**

Please note, **this is not** the same as 'halal' as in the meaning lawful which carries a different 'Ha' ^ح

It is usually associated with the 'appearance' of the new moon. The primary meaning of 'appearance' is also captured by classical lexicons.

هَلَّ To appear. أَهْلَةٌ plur. of هِلَالٌ A new moon,
or according to some the moon during the first

and last two or three nights; at other times
the moon is called أَهْلٌ—قَمَرٌ

Source: A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran by John Penrice [1]

الهَيْلَالُ *The new moon; or the moon when it
is termed هِلَالٌ: it may be explained as mean-
ing, generally, the moon when near the sun, or
moon a little after or before the change. — See
سَمَاءٌ.*

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [2]

هَلَّ *halla* (hall) to appear, come up, show
 (new moon); to begin, set in (month)
II to say the words *لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ*; to
 shout with joy, rejoice, exult, jubilate;
 to applaud, acclaim, cheer (لِ s.o.) **IV** to
 appear (new moon); to cheer, exult;
 to offer up (لِ ب an animal to a deity)
V to shine, gleam, glow, be radiant; to
 beam with joy (face); to be delighted,
 jubilant; to cheer, rejoice, exult, jubilate
VII to fall heavily, pour down (rain); to
 begin (لِ with), take up, undertake,
 tackle, attack (لِ s.th.), embark (لِ upon)
X to begin, set in (new month); to raise
 one's voice; to intone, strike up (لِ a
 tune); to begin, start (لِ a task); to open,
 begin, introduce, initiate (لِ ب s.th. with
 or by)

هَلَالٌ *hilla* pl. أهلة *ahilla*, أهاليل *ahallil*
 new moon; half-moon, crescent; paren-
 thesis; any crescent-shaped object

هَلَالِيٌّ *hilla'i* lunar; crescent-shaped, lu-
 nate, sickle-shaped

Source: Hans Wehr's Modern Written Arabic [3]

Therefore the best understanding of the word 'ahillah' in the above context is the sighting of the new moon.

This understanding of the word provides a fairly consistent understanding of how the term would have practically been understood. As an example, during the spread of Islam to far distant lands, many travellers would have made journeys of many months on camel backs, horses and ships to remote parts and delivered the message of the Quran to others. Many communities undoubtedly would have accepted the veracity of the message. As Ramadan approached, localised sightings of the moon would have determined the start of the month.

This has been the case until modern travel, technology and communication has made the world into a 'global village'. However, despite these advancements, the celestial bodies still run their course. Albeit, it can be debated whether actual 'sighting' is now necessary with key advancements in scientific knowledge and technology, it is difficult to accept the proposition in light of the Quran that one would not be expected to respect the local ability to sight a moon. Therefore, with the assistance of advancements of 'knowledge', if a moon cannot be sighted in the local area of one's

abode, it is difficult to accept that one can use another global location at another part of the planet to accept the sighting.

It is to be appreciated that celestial bodies have been demarcated for fixed purposes (10:5; 6:97; 17:12) and their remit remains localised despite the technological globalisation of the planet. The sun does not dawn on the whole planet at one time, neither does it set in one fell swoop. The gradual orbit of the celestial bodies leads to different times of prayer, start of fasting, ending of fasting etc depending on the region one happens to abide in. It remains localised.

In much the same way, despite the advancements, moon sighting also still remains a localised phenomenon (albeit this would be at a regional level covering large swathes of land, even continents). The moon still runs its course as it has always done.

036.038-40

"And the sun runs on to a term appointed for it; that is the ordinance of the Mighty, the Knowing. And (as for) the moon, We have ordained for it stages till it becomes again as an old dry palm branch. It is not permitted to the Sun to catch up the Moon, nor can the Night outstrip the Day: Each (just) swims along in (its own) orbit (according to Law)"

FINAL THOUGHTS

Localisation of the moon should be respected for it is with such celestial objects (sun and the moon) that we are instructed to mark our ways of devotion and not one's personal desires or the desires of a particular mosque. These are clear instructions given by scripture.

Continents or countries should form a 'shura' (a form of consultation group) and determine where best their localities are placed with regards a possible moon sighting. Today, with the blessings and advancement of science, there is no reason why we should not make use of what God has granted us. This includes telescopic data and observations to ascertain when it is possible for a locality to sight a new moon. After all, it is God Himself that reveals to His servants the secrets and knowledge of the 'law' that operates His created Universe. Scientific knowledge and technological advancement is not acquired independently of God for it was He who sanctioned it.

055.033

"O ye assembly of Jinns and men! If you are able to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, **then pass!** you cannot pass through but with authority"

Therefore, let us respect the blessings of our technical advancements and make use of them. However, let us not circumvent the basic expectations in matters of religion that have been ordained for believers.

Moon sighting should be dependant on when it is possible for a particular region to view a moon (with the aid of technology if required). Until recently, this is how it has always been. After all, one commits to their prayer depending on the localised sun as opposed to adjusting it for a prayer timing from across another continent.

REFERENCES

[1] PENRICE, J, A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran 1873; Reprint 1991 Adam Publishers & Distributors, Delhi, Page 154

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[2] LANE. E.W, Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 8, Supplement, Page 3044

[3] WEHR. H, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Edited by J.Milton Cowan, 3rd Edition, Spoken Languages Services Inc. 1976, Page 1030

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

[Joseph Islam](#)

© 2010 Quransmessage.com All Rights Reserved