

# The Lunar Calendar is the Islamic choice

From *Tafsir Maariful Quran* [1392 AH/1972] by Mufti Muhammad Shafi (RA) - (Vol.1/pp. 480-482)

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِةِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ

*They ask you about the new moons. Say: They are indicative of time for people, and of the Hajj; (2:189)*

This verse tells us no more than that the moon will help identify the count of months and days on which rest transactions and acts of worship, such as, the Hajj. The same subject has been dealt with in *Surah Yunus* in the following manner:

وَقَدَّرَهُ مَنَازِلَ لِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِّينَ وَالْحِسَابَ

*And determined it (the moon) by stations, that you might know the number of the years and the reckoning [of time]. (10:5)*

This tells us that the benefit of having the moon pass through different stages and conditions is that people may find out through it the count of years, months and days. But, in a verse of *Surah Bani Isra'il*, this count has been connected to the sun as well in the following words:

فَمَحَوْنَا آيَةَ اللَّيْلِ وَجَعَلْنَا آيَةَ النَّهَارِ مُبْصِرَةً لِّتَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِّينَ وَالْحِسَابَ

*Then We erased the sign of the night and brought out the sign of the day to see, so that you seek the blessing from your Lord and get to know the number of years and the reckoning [of time]. (17:12)*

Although this third verse proves that years and months can be counted with the help of a solar calendar also, yet the words used by the Holy Qur'an with regard to the moon very clearly indicate that the lunar calendar is a fixed choice in the Shari'ah of Islam, specially in prescribed acts of worship which relate to a particular month and its dates; for instance, the months of Ramadan and Hajj, as well as injunctions related to the days of Hajj, Muharram and *Ladatul-Qadr* are all tied to the sighting of the new moon, all this because in this verse, by saying *يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِةِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ* (They are indicative of time for the people and of the Hajj), it has been established that the lunar calendar is the one to be trusted upon in the sight of Allah, although, the count of months can come out of a solar calendar as well.

The Shari'ah of Islam has opted for the lunar calendar because it is based on something which every sighted person can see on the horizon and be informed accordingly; the knowledge of it is equally easy for the scholars, the ignorant, the villagers, the islanders and the dwellers of the mountains. This stands in contrast with the solar calendar which depends on meteorological equipment and mathematical computations which cannot become the common personal experience of everybody so easily. Then comes the matter of religious observances, the *Ibadat*, where the lunar calendar has been fixed as an obligation. This has also been favoured in social and business transactions because it serves as a basis for the acts of Islamic worship, and a symbol of Islamic identity, notwithstanding the position of the solar calendar which has not been prohibited juristically, the only condition being that the use of the solar calendar should not become so widespread that people forget all about the lunar calendar. If this happens, it would necessarily affect the obligatory *Ibadat* like Fasting and Hajj adversely, a sampling of which is visible in our time, in offices and businesses, government and private, where the solar calendar is being used with such frequency that many people do not seem to even remember all Islamic months by name. Apart from the juristic position of the lunar system, this situation is a deplorable demonstration of our lack of will to approach and uphold such a matter of national and religious identity with a sense of self-respect. It is not difficult to use the solar calendar only in office situations where one has to deal with non-Muslims as well, but for the rest of office correspondence, private dealings and daily requirements the lunar calendar may be used with advantage, that is, if this is done, the user will earn the *thawab* of performing a *fard 'ala al-kifayah* (an obligation which, if performed by some, suffices for others), and of course, national identity will be preserved.

# The preservation of the lunar calendar is *Fard al-Kifayah*

From *Tafsir Maariful Quran* [1392 AH/1972] by Mufti Muhammad Shafi (RA) - (Vol. 4/pp.372-378)

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إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ

*Surely, the number of months according to Allah is twelve (as written) in the Book of Allah on the Day He created the heavens and the Earth; (9:36)*

## Injunctions and Rulings

The verses cited above prove that the order of months and the names by which they are known in Islam should not be taken as terms coined by human beings. In fact, the day the Lord of all the worlds created the heavens and the Earth, He had also settled this order and these names and, along with it, particular injunctions to be carried out during particular months. From here, we also come to know that, in all Islamic legal injunctions, only lunar months are credible in the sight of Allah Ta'ala. In other words, all injunctions of the Shari'ah of Islam - such as, fasting, Hajj, Zakah and many others - relate to the lunar calendar. But, when it comes to finding out the day, date and year, the way the Holy Qur'an has declared the Moon as its indicator, it has, very similarly, identified the Sun too as the other sign: **لِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابَ** (so that you may know the number of years and the count [of time] - 10:5).

Therefore, keeping track of days and years through a lunar or solar calendar is equally permissible. But, Allah Ta'ala has favored the lunar calendar for His injunctions and has made it the pivot round which the laws of the Shari'ah of Islam revolve. Therefore, **the preservation of the lunar calendar is *Fard al-Kifayah* (a religious obligation which, if fulfilled by some, will absolve others). If the entire community of Muslims were to abandon the lunar calendar and forget all about it, then, everyone will be a sinner.** However, if it remains viably preserved, the use of another calendar is also permissible - but, there is no doubt that it is against the way of Allah and the way of the worthy forbears of Islam - therefore, it is not good to opt for it unnecessarily.

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