

Arrival of Ramadhan and essential elements of the fast

The arrival of Ramadhan must be confirmed by sighting the new moon, even if it is seen by only one person, or by the passage of thirty days in the immediately preceding month of Sha'ban. Ibnu Umar said: ***"The people were looking for the new moon and when I reported to the Messenger of Allah that I had seen it, he fasted and ordered the people to fast."*** (Abu Dawud, Al-Hakim, and Ibnu Hibban)

Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet (SAW) instructed: ***"Fast after you have seen it (the crescent) and end the fast (at the end of the month) when you see it. If it is hidden from you, then wait until the thirty days of Sha'ban have passed."*** (Bukhari and Muslim)

Commenting on these reports, At-Tirmidhi states: most knowledgeable persons act according to these reports. They say that it is correct to accept the evidence of one person to determine the beginning of the fast. This is the opinion of Ibnu Mubarak, Ash-Shafi'i and Ahmad. An-Nawawi says that it is the soundest opinion.

According to the majority of scholars, it does not matter if the new moon is sighted in a different location. In other words, after the new moon is seen anywhere in the world, it becomes obligatory for all Muslims to begin fasting, as the Prophet (SAW) said: ***"Fast due to its sighting and break the fast due to its sighting."*** This is a general address directed to the whole Muslim world, that is, "if any one of you sees the moon in any place, then that will be a sighting for all of the people."

The fast has two essential elements that must be fulfilled for it to be valid and acceptable. They are:

1. Intention

Allah instructs in the Qur'an: ***"And they are ordained nothing else than to serve Allah,***

keeping religion pure for Him." The Prophet (SAW) said: ***"Actions are judged according to the intention behind them, and everyone is what he intended."***

The intention must be made before *fajr* and during every night of Ramadhan. This point is based on the *Hadith* of Hafsah which reported that the Prophet (SAW) had said: ***"Whoever does not determine to fast before fajr will have no fast."*** (Ahmad, Nasa'i, Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, and Ibn Majah) The intention is valid during any part of the night. It needs not be spoken, as it is, in reality, an act of the heart which does not involve the tongue. It will be fulfilled by one's intention to fast out of obedience to Allah and for His pleasure.

If one has one's pre-dawn meal (*sahoor*) with the intention of fasting and to get closer to Allah by such abstinence, then one has performed the intention.

2. Abstaining from those acts that break the fast

This point is based on the Qur'anic verses: ***"Eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread of the dawn. Then strictly observe the fast until nightfall."***

The acts that break the fast are intentional eating, drinking or sexual relationship. If one eats due to forgetfulness, a mistake, or coercion, then he does not have to make up the day later or perform any expiation. Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet (SAW) said: ***"Whoever forgets he is fasting, and eats or drinks, is to complete his fast, as it was Allah who fed him and gave him something to drink."*** (The group of narrators) Wallahu A'lam

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