When is EID?

When is Eid? asks a Muslim friend, I replied 'I do not know, do you?' … 'No, I work in a factory and have to apply for leave in advance, I cannot afford to lose money'
When Ramadan starts? asks a Non-Muslim co-worker, I replied ' aa….aaa..the weather is too hot today, oh,,,oh let me get this call, see you….." …definitely embarrassing situation and cannot answer….

Identifying the Eid Day or determining the first day of Ramadan especially in North America and Europe (lately we are seeing this issue in the Muslim countries too) has become a dilemma for Muslims in this modern day of age. Countries where Muslim population has been living for centuries have adopted a system which works for them, most of the time. The Muslims in these Muslim countries use mainstream media to report the moon-sighting and a specific day of Observance. It is becoming difficult to establish Eid day in the countries where Muslims arrived recently. It has become challenging for these Muslims to decide when to take the day off from work, what day to book a place for EID Salaat, when to book a flight back home and other date dependent activities that would require future planning. Most of the time the decision identifying the Eid day are taken by the individuals employed by Islamic organizations who do not face real-time issues faced by mainstream workforce. This has definitely become a dilemma for today's Muslim in Non-Muslim environments and also in becoming an issue in Muslim countries.

The contention is basically determining the start of the next lunar month. There are basically two established processes of determining the beginning of a Lunar month.

1. Moon sighting or not-sighting
2. Following an established Hijri calendar

Let us discuss each process in detail:

1. Moon sighting or not-sighting

For whatever reason, if we decide to use moonsighting as a means, there could be six venues of moon sighting;

a) Confined to a City…Time of Prophet
b) Confined to a Country …Established in Muslim Countries
c) Follow Saudi Arabia (Makkah) ..Proposed by people in Muslim minority countries
d) Based on moonsighting anywhere in the world …Practiced by some Islamic Organizations in NA
e) Based on Time zones …proposed by me
f) Moon sighting at the Dateline …proposed by me

a. Confined to a City

This was the practice at the time of Prophet Mohummud (PBUH). This is the most simplified and practical form of establishing the beginning of the month and can be

implemented in any circumstances, anywhere and is not dependent on any technology or communication media.
If the new moon is sighted by any individual in a city, then Eid should be observed by all individuals in that city. It makes sense, because when a Muslim is celebrating Eid, he or she celebrates it with the people in the community. One goes for prayers to a local Masjid and meets with the people of the same city he lives in. It does not affect one as to when Eid is being celebrated in another distant city. This is a logical method for people in one city to celebrate Eid on the same day. Observing Eid using the city approach is a simplified means and not dependent on technology and is adaptable in all circumstances and eras. Though in the current age this method is not in practiced and is replaced by the political boundaries of countries oppose to the geographical boundaries of a city.

b. Confined to a Country

This is practiced among Muslim governments. Country approach means that if the new moon is sighted by any individual in a country then the Eid should be observed by all the individuals living in that country. It works because the government is involved in the decision-making and broadcasting of the findings. Though this is not a reliable method as the political map of the countries kept on changing. Once a country was from Africa to Europe to Asia, was Eid celebrated on the same day? Off course not.
This venue is NOT doable (Muslims tried for past 50 years) in North America. For instance, I am in New York and did not see the moon and no one saw the moon in any other place east of Denver, so now we are waiting to witness it on the west coast. It is a summer day and the sun sets at 9:00 p.m. PST and by the time the moon is sighted and validated it is 11:00 p.m. PST, so in New York it's already 2:00 a.m. in the morning. Now we start communicating this to all the Islamic centers across the country and by the time we receive confirmation it is 4:00 a.m. or 5:00 a.m. in the east. This is a very inefficient and cumbersome process & method.

c. Follow Saudi Arabia (Makkah)

There is a sizeable minority who propagate following Makkah or Saudi Arabia for moon sighting, I think this theory has evolved on the notion that the whole world should celebrate Eid together or observe Ramadan together on one specific day to show unity. This could be okay if we live in a time zone behind Saudi Arabia, but what about for Muslims living in a time zone ahead of Saudi Arabia. For example, in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia or Japan, they will not be able to follow Makkah, so the notion of celebrating on one day all across the world cannot be achieved. Thus, making this an un-practical method and contrary to the practice of Prophet Mohummud.

d. Based on moonsighting anywhere in the world

This is practiced by some Islamic Organizations in NA. This sounds like more appropriate approach while we adapt a more correct method.

e. Based on Time zones

Here I am suggesting a practical method (though it is not my first choice) for those who really want to base their decision on sighting of the moon. This method is confined to time

zones in a country (e.g. USA & Canada have four main time zones). If the moon is sighted in a city of a particular time zone, then all the cities that fall under that time zone can celebrate EID. This method will also eliminate the waiting time for findings and will make it more manageable to communicate.

f. Moon sighting at the dateline

I would like to take this opportunity to suggest another method that can be considered. 'The moon-sighting on the date line' and a decision is made about Eid observance within an hour by a team of Muslims that includes scientists, communication experts, and Islamic scholars (on stand-by if needed), etc. Once it is decided it can be announced and communicated to the whole world instantly. This will give most of the Muslim population a lead time; i.e., if the decision is made one hour after sunset at the date line, almost all of the countries will have enough lead time to prepare. If one thinks that the whole Ummah should celebrate EID on the same day, then this would be the course one would take. But this will have to be a consolidated effort and to me it does not look executable due to the variety of governments, sects and opinions etc. By the way "Is it the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad to celebrate Eid same day in the whole country or world?" If not, why all the fuss?

Limitations of moon sighting method: Above we have discussed six methods of moon sighting but we have not yet discussed the limitations and implications of adapting the method of moon sighting. First let us analyze the directives of Islam pertaining to different rituals of Islam:

- Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was sent down: this Book is a perfect guidance for mankind and consists of clear teachings which show the right way and are a criterion of Truth and falsehood. Therefore, from now on whoever witnesses it, it is obligatory on hire to fast the whole month, but if one be ill or on a journey, he should make up for the same number by fasting on other days. God desires to show leniency to you and does not desire to show any hardship. "therefore, this method is being shown to you so that you may complete the number of Fast days and glorify God for the Guidance He has shown to you and be grateful to Him. (Quran 2: 185)

- It is made lawful for you to approach your wives during the night of the fast; they are an apparel for you and you for them. Allah knows that you were committing dishonesty to your souls. So, He has relented towards you and pardoned you. Now, you may approach your wives and seek what Allah has written for you. **Eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread of night**, then complete your fast till nightfall. Do not approach your wives during I'htikaf (retreat in the mosques in last ten days of Ramadhan). These are the limits set by Allah: do not ever violate them. Thus, Allah makes His revelations clear to mankind so that they may guard themselves against evil. (Quran 2: 187)

- Narrated Abdullah bin Umar: God's Apostle said, "The month (can be) 29 nights (i.e. days), and do not fast till you see the moon, and if the sky is overcast, then complete Sha'ban as thirty days." (Sahih al-Bukhari Book #31, Hadith #131)

- Narrated Ibn Umar: I heard God's Apostle saying, "When you see the crescent (of the month of Ramadan), start fasting, and when you see the crescent (of the month of Shawwal), stop fasting; and if the sky is overcast (and you can't see It) then regard the crescent (month) of Ramadan (as of 30 days)". (Sahih al-Bukhari Book #31, Hadith #124)

- Narrated Abdullah bin Umar: God's Apostle mentioned Ramadan and said, "Do not fast unless you see the crescent (of Ramadan), and do not give up fasting till you see the crescent (of Shawwal), but if the sky is overcast (if you cannot see it), then act on estimation (i.e. count Sha'ban as 30 days)." (Sahih al-Bukhari Book #31, Hadith #130)

There is a customary misconception in religious fraternity that the piety is measured by the amount of hardship one can put on himself or place on other worshippers. Islam negates this and it is evident in the Quranic verse above.

The Quranic Ayah above says that one should start the fast (Fajr time too) when one can distinguish between white and black thread. **Do we really get up every morning and try to observe white & black thread?** We forgo this direct command of God in Quran and use calculation method to determine the Fajr time and times of other prayers.

These Hadiths were not narrated by PBUH directly to the Ummah, but by someone 250 years after the demise of prophet PBUH which could not be authenticated 100 percent Not to mention that all the three hadiths mentioned above are narrated differently though it is associated to the same person (Abdullah bin Umar)? The reason being that it was carried over 5 generations by various individuals after the demise of our Prophet, and it is bound to lose its originality and authenticity. In spite of this fact, we are giving precedence to a Hadith over Quran, Alas!

These Hadiths also fail to address the following:

1. To whom this command is being addressed to? An individual, if it is, do, we apply it? or a group of people?
2. Is this narration confined to a house, a community, a city, a country, or the whole world?
3. Should one witness the crescent even if 30 days are completed no clear instructions.

The central idea of the Hadith is, if the beginning of the month is established, it becomes obligatory for every Muslim to follow it. Though we are over-ruling the Hadith's literal meaning, to me if it is a command of my prophet it would not have these ambiguities

Let us take a closer look at how reliable the method of moon sighting really is, in a place where the sky could be overcast for prolonged periods like Caribbean (Caribbean Islands,

Trinidad, and Guyana) where they have a 6-month long rainy season and sighting is not possible because of clouds. let us say the weather was clear and we saw the moon on the 30th, the next month sky was cloudy and we could not see the moon on 29th, even though it would have been visible in a clear sky. So, we completed 30 days, this way we are 1 Day off to the actual month. When the next month ends, the same situation arises. The sky is overcast and we complete the 30 days even though in a clear sky the crescent would have been visible. Now we could be one or two days off from the actual 1st of the month and this can continue to the next month and eventually could be three days off. This example exhibits how this method can be unreliable in countries where the sky can be overcast for some extended or even sporadic periods. This matter is for subject matter experts, professionals and scientists to solve and as a courtesy and favor to Muslim Ummah as a whole these maulanas should keep themselves away from it. Upright prove that **moon-sighting is the least reliable**

The most misunderstood question is whether the moon sighting is a means or a requirement for ascertaining the beginning of an Islamic month. To clarify it more, one does not have to witness the moon sighting as a requirement it is just a means to establish the beginning of the month. If sky is cloudy and we complete 30 days we are not sighting the moon, but just establishing the beginning of the month. This is a clear indication that the Sharia did not intend the sighting as a requirement but simply as a Mean, this method was recommended to the Muslims of that era who lived in a clear-sky environment and in the absence of technology.

2. **Following Pre-calculated Hijri Calendar:**

Above we established that moon sighting is not the most reliable method of determining the start of the lunar month. When we can follow the spirit of **the Quranic command** (of God) and use calculation to establish Salaath timings 1825 times in a year, definitely we can follow the spirit of a Hadith (of Prophet (PBUH)) to establish the new moon 12 times in a year. (though Quran takes precedence over Hadith)

The chances of the calendar being inaccurate are very slim and if there is a slight inaccuracy it will never be for more than one day which will eventually correct itself. God has allowed us to be wrong in determining the start of the month by stating that if it is cloudy complete 30 days, though the moon could have risen on 29th.

This proves to be a very reliable method and moreover it is not putting Muslim masses and mainstream workforce into unprecedented hardship. Following the Hijri Calendar (calculation method) eliminates doubt and confusion among Muslim communities. The process for determining Eid day will not involve conflicts, but instead offer clarity, harmony and coherent understanding among Muslim communities and will keep all Muslims united.. …*My first choice*

Conclusion:

The definition of the unity is that we do things differently as long as it is not against our core belief and accept the variety with open heart and without a bias. It is said that the difference

of opinion is the 'ROOH' of Islam. Unity is tolerance towards other methods and opinions. Please do not take away power of free thinking from our fellow Muslims, not much is left anyway. **Follow Pre-calculated Hijri Calendar" and I am pretty sure that most of you will agree with me.** There will be no confusion and people will be able to perform EID in tranquil and dedicated manner and would probably spend more time in IBADET than meetings and arguments. As a caution, I want to re-emphasize that the calculation should be based on coordinates as it is done for Salaath timings and should not be based on Makkah for the whole world. ISNA did this mistake of choosing Makkah as their location, and the very first year the moon was sighted in USA (normally moon is sighted earlier in the Western hemisphere) and people lost their faith in the ISNA Lunar calendar.

- Turkish Muslims use an Islamic calendar
- The dynasty of Fatimids in Egypt used a tabular pre-calculated calendar over a period of two centuries, between the 10th and 12th centuries, before a change of political regime reactivated the procedure of observation of the new moon

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June 15, 2013

Having said that, why should we not rely on calculation to start or end fasting month? This has become an issue for many people and we must honestly analyze the spirit behind it. Most of the Muslims who migrated to the western countries are from the areas where the rain is scarce and they rarely face challenges in sighting the moon. We should consider what is practical and convenient for the masses. If we live in a Muslim country, then we can use any method since the means of communication is in the hands of the government.