

## CHAPTER 4

### A BRIEF HISTORICAL EXPOSITION OF THE CLASSICAL DEBATE ABOUT SIGHTING THE MOON AND CALCULATIONS

With very few exceptions, classical Islamic scholars required naked-eye sighting as a precondition to confirm or negate Ramadan. They opposed calculations and rejected their use to determine both Ramadan and whether the new moon had been sighted. A detailed scrutiny of their discourse will show that they rejected and actually prohibited all calculation-based methods for any aspect of Ramadan. Their opposition to the imprecise astrologically computed calculations makes a lot of sense when understood within the context of intercalation, astrology, fortune telling, imprecision, hardship, and similar matters that directly affect faith and dogma.

It is also important to consider their cultural and political milieu when discussing their attitude toward naked-eye sighting. Many classical scholars, among them Ibn Taymiyyah, actively confronted the extreme allegorists such as the Ismaʿilis, philosophers (e.g., Neoplatonists), and anti-traditionalist liberals (e.g., Muʿtazilites). These so-called liberals attempted to intellectualize Islam and its texts at the expense of its original context, meanings, and intents. As a result, the traditionalists prohibited any variance between the actual texts and what they agreed to be the literal meanings.

However, this frequently promoted *ijmaʿ* (consensus) existed only among the jurists of a given *fiqhī* school, an ideological movement, or even only in the mind of a particular jurist without any accompanying support among others or within his/her own intellectual world. For instance, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyam insisted upon some quite literal understandings of such descriptive Qurʾanic phrases as the “hand of Allah,” “face of Allah,” “eyes of Allah,” and “chair and throne of Allah.” They asserted that the linguistically proven literal meanings of “hand,” “face,” “eyes,” and so on were the originally intended meanings of the Qurʾan and Sunnah as long as any comparison between those belonging to Him and those belonging to His creatures is avoided. Both imams’ selective insistence that “hand” denotes the “actual hand” (as long as Allah’s hand is clearly understood to be different from the human hand and without *kayf* or asking how it looks), and their opposition to other possible metaphorical connotations of “hand”

(e.g., support and protection), is a good way to elaborate the point under discussion. Ibn Taymiyyah, trying to avoid allegorizing the text, insisted upon the text's literal sense over the metaphorical sense. In fact, he ruled that the Mu'tazilites were unbelievers as well as (indirectly) the later Ash'arites, among them al-Ghazali and many other experts in *tafsīr*, hadith, and fiqh.

This literally prone conservative ideological movement expressed extreme concern about interpretations that did not include the original linguistic meanings. They enforced the exact prophetic action as well as the Companions' actions and interpretations as the sole intended Sunnah and true explanation of several ambiguous verses. This group of ideologues was quite aware of the havoc that intellectualizing or liberalizing the sacred text could wreak on the Qur'an's original intent. They quoted this fact in their writings along with numerous examples, such as the role played by Philo of Alexandria in the Jewish understanding of the Hebrew Bible and his concept of "Logos" as the first emanated "Intellect."<sup>1</sup>

Ibn Taymiyyah also knew the role that this concept had played later in Christian theological thought. The early Church Fathers<sup>2</sup> borrowed Philo's concept and incorporated it into a fully fledged incarnational theology – the incarnation of God in the person of the historical Jesus of Nazareth – to such an extent that he was completely lost. In his *Jesus According to Paul*, Paul Furnish writes: "Paul focuses his attention neither on the teachings of Jesus nor on Jesus' Palestinian ministry. His attention is focused, rather, on Jesus the crucified Messiah and the risen Lord."<sup>3</sup> John Hick observes: "Paul fits Jesus into his own theology with little regard to the historical figure."<sup>4</sup>

This allegorical interpretation of the sacred text enabled St. Augustine of Hippo to categorize scriptural meanings into literal (apparent), allegorical, spiritual, and mystical. As a result, the New Testament was so mangled in the attempt to find spiritual and mystical meanings that the original content was lost.

Keeping in mind this comparative development of the concept of allegorical interpretations in Christianity and Judaism, Ibn Taymiyyah and many other traditionalists struggled to preserve the Qur'an's original intent and original form by emphasizing the literal meanings of such Qur'anic terms as the hand, face, and eyes of Allah.<sup>5</sup>

Al-Ghazali, al-Razi, and other theologians considered it inappropriate to describe such things in physical terms. Instead, they interpreted His "hand" as His power, dominance, and support, as in "I will give you a hand." This does not mean "I will cut off my hand and give it to you," but that "I will

lend you support.” This established metaphorical use has been linguistically and culturally approved. Many of these jurists/theologians refuted such phrases’ literal meanings and maintained the principle of assigning the true understanding of the phrases to the knowledge of Allah (*al-tafwīd*). Al-Ghazali and others considered any insistence upon the literal meanings of such words to be sheer anthropomorphism, whereas Ibn Taymiyyah considered their metaphorical interpretations (*ta’wīl*) tantamount to disbelief.<sup>6</sup>

Traditionalist scholars had to fight many battles on multiple fronts to preserve what they believed to be the texts’ precise nature. Convinced that the Ummah’s degeneration into petty factions and separate states, as well as its loss of political might, was linked directly to its departure from the sublime Sunnah. A good example was the Mongols’ utter destruction of the Muslim world; Ibn Taymiyyah witnessed this period of political and social degradation. What these scholars struggled for was nothing short of implementing the pristine faith and restoring the Prophet’s lost *sunan* (traditions) to the best of their understanding.

On the other hand, many academicians, theologians, jurists, and scholars right through to modern times have criticized them for some very narrow and extreme interpretations of the Islamic texts, as already seen in the case of M. Zahid al-Kawthari. Among contemporary academicians, Abdul Aziz Sachedina blames this selective insistence upon some meanings at the expense of other accepted meanings, and then claiming divine propriety for these human interpretations to the exclusion of others, for Islamic fundamentalism and all other acts of Muslim violence.<sup>7</sup> Khaled Abul Fadl writes extensively about the possible dangers of this selective explanation.<sup>8</sup>

I will not go as far as to hold this traditional insistence on the letter of the Qur’an and Sunnah (and to use that literal process at the expense of the texts’ spirit) as responsible for such modern political problems as terrorism. I fully recognize the sincerity that goes into past and contemporary scholarly attempts to preserve the Sunnah in its pristine form. However, I would like to state that this kind of narrow selection, if carried to extreme limits, can often challenge the spirit as well the holistic meanings of the Qur’anic and the prophetic texts. It goes beyond the established objectives (*maqāṣid*) of the Shari’ah and results in endless hardship for many sincere Muslims. The Qur’anic principle of “ease” (*taysīr*) is meant to make people’s lives easy as long as the Shari’ah’s pristine spirit is not violated – and that is exactly what Allah demands of us in 2:185:

Ramadan is the [month] in which was sent down the Qur’an, as a guide to human-kind, also clear [signs] for guidance and judgment [between right and wrong]. So

whosoever witnesses the month among you should fast in it [spend it in fasting], but if anyone is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period [should be made up] by days later. Allah intends ease for you; He does not want to put you in difficulties. [He wants you] to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that which He has guided you; and perhaps you shall be grateful. (2:185)

The following part of it can be particularly helpful to our discussion:

Allah intends ease for you; He does not want to put you in difficulties. [He wants you] to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that which He has guided you...

In light of this, let's glance at the classical position on determining the Islamic months by calculations as opposed to naked-eye sighting. This long-standing debate seems to have begun even before the jurisprudential schools of thought appeared. Mutarrif ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al-Shakhir, one of the Successors, is reported to have been the first person to use calculations to determine Ramadan when the sky was cloudy on 29 Sha'ban. The first known imam, Ahmad Abu Hanifah, died in 150 AH. By the time of Imam Malik the debate over calculations seemed to have developed into a full-scale *fiqhī* discussion. Imam Malik opposed Mutarrif's position on using calculations to determine any aspect of Ramadan or fasting. In addition, he is reported to be the first proponent of the argument that the hadith of *ikmāl* is descriptive of the hadith on "calculation," as will be seen below.

It seems that the issue of *ikmāl* was not yet developed during the era of Companions like Ibn 'Umar and others, who fasted on 30 Sha'ban even if it had been cloudy on the previous day. Abu Bakr and 'Umar, as well as 'A'ishah and Asma' (Abu Bakr's daughters), would have never intentionally violated the prophetic ruling on completing thirty days in the case of obscurities on 29 Sha'ban. They fasted on the thirtieth day if the horizon was obscured on the previous day.

It seems that Ibn 'Umar, the original narrator of the prophetic hadith requiring naked-eye sighting and completion in the case of cloudy weather, followed neither of these prophetic patterns in certain situations. For example, he would ask for naked-eye sighting on 29 Sha'ban and fast the next day if it was seen, fast after 30 Sha'ban if the moon had not been sighted on the previous day, and also fast the next day if the new moon was not sighted on the evening of 29 Sha'ban due to obscurities. In this case, he would fast without actually sighting the new moon and without completing thirty days of Sha'ban.

Abu Muhammad ibn Hazm al-Zahiri and many others have highlighted his practice and its implied conflict with the reported hadiths. We shall dis-

cuss this topic in detail when dealing with the weakness of the *ikmāl* argument. Here, I just want to make the point that the Companions seem to have had different opinions on this matter. Ibn ‘Abbas, Abu Hurayrah, Ammar ibn Yasir, and others agreed that thirty days must be completed in the absence of naked-eye sighting on 29 Sha‘ban due to obscurities. But others, such as Ibn ‘Umar, opined that Muslims should fast the next day if the new moon was not seen because of obscurities.

Ahmad ibn Hanbal and many traditional scholars maintained that Muslims are required to fast 30 Sha‘ban if nobody went out on the evening of 29 Sha‘ban to sight the moon or the claim of sighting was made by untrustworthy individuals whose witness was rejected by the Muslim ruler. According to him, such a day is known as the “day of doubt.” He also declared fasting on 30 Sha‘ban a mandatory day of Ramadan in the absence of naked-eye sighting owing to obscurities on 29 Sha‘ban.

عَنْ أَحْمَدَ أَنَّهُ حَصَّ يَوْمَ الشُّكِّ بِمَا إِذَا تَقَاعَدَ النَّاسَ عَنْ رُؤْيَةِ الْهِلَالِ أَوْ شَهِدَ بِرُؤْيِهِ مَنْ لَا يَقْبَلُ  
الْحَاكِمُ شَهَادَتَهُ، فَأَمَّا إِذَا حَالَ دُونَ مُنْظَرِهِ شَيْءٌ فَلَا يُسْمَى شَكًا.<sup>9</sup>

To Ahmad the “day of doubt” is confined only to the day when the people did not go out to sight the new moon or it was witnessed by those whose witness is not accepted by the ruler. It is not a “day of doubt” if the new moon was not sighted due to obscurities.

If the prophetic command to “complete thirty days if it is cloudy” been categorically decisive and legally mandatory (*wājib*), then none of the Companions (e.g., ‘Umar and Ibn ‘Umar) and prominent Successors (e.g., Mutar-rif, Mujahid, and Ta‘us), and imams like Ahmad ibn Hanbal would have fasted in the case of obscurity on the 29 Sha‘ban, which would contradict the prophetic command to complete thirty days. Ibn Qudamah explains this point as follows:

وَقَدْ فَسَّرَهُ ابْنُ عَمَرَ بِفَعْلِهِ، وَهُوَ رَأْيِهِ، وَأَعْلَمُ بِمَعْنَاهُ، فَيَجِبُ الرُّجُوعُ إِلَى تَفْسِيرِهِ.<sup>10</sup>

Ibn ‘Umar explained [the hadith of sighting and estimation] with his own practice. It is [important because] he was its [original] narrator and the most knowledgeable about its [true] meanings. Therefore, it is obligatory to turn to his explanation [of this hadith].

The two divergent opinions of Imam Malik and Imam Ahmad converged against the use of calculations because the astrologists claimed

access to the Unseen (e.g., the stars) and their calculations and assertions were inaccurate. The dogmatic implications of these astrological assertions were disastrous for the general public's faith and *‘aqidah*. Moreover, since these imprecise calculations were not widely available, most of the classical jurists rejected them and banned their use to determine or negate Ramadan. Successors like Mutarrif ibn ‘Abd Allah and jurists like Ibn Surayj took an exceptional stand – they permitted calculations in the case of obscurities or for those who undertook them. These individuals maintained that the prophetic command requiring the completion of thirty days was actually addressed to the general public, and that the command to use “estimation or calculation” was aimed at the educated sector.

وَعَنْ مُطَرِّفٍ أَيْضًا أَنَّ الْعَارِفَ بِالْحِسَابِ يَعْمَلُ بِهِ فِي نَفْسِهِ. أَمَّا ابْنُ سُرَيْجٍ فَأَعْتَبَرَ قَوْلَهُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: (فَأَقْدُرُوا لَهُ): حِطَابًا لِمَنْ حَصَّهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى بِعِلْمِ الْحِسَابِ.<sup>11</sup>

Mutarrif also maintained that the one who knows calculations should personally act upon them. Ibn Surayj, on the other hand, maintained that the prophetic command “calculate for it” is addressed to the ones whom Almighty Allah has bestowed with knowledge of calculations.

The implications of Mutarrif and Ibn Surayj's positions were far reaching, and they were criticized by the majority of classical jurists.

Later, Taj al-Din al-Subki, another Shafi‘i, went one step further by not only accepting the use of precise calculations as an authentic means to determine Ramadan (in the case of obscurities), but by also rejecting the statements of witnesses who claimed to have sighted the new moon lest the calculations prove otherwise. He allowed the use of calculations to negate a stated naked-eye sighting if they proved that the new moon was not yet on the horizon. This big step forward earned him the criticism of the majority of classical scholars. The classical books of almost all *fiqhī* schools are filled with polemics against him for taking such a progressive position.

Al-Subki expressed his pain and frustration in the following words:

قَدْ يَحْضُلُ لِبَعْضِ الْأَعْمَارِ وَالْجُهَالِ تَوَقُّفٌ فِيمَا قُلْنَا، وَيَسْتَنْكِرُ الرُّجُوعَ إِلَى الْحِسَابِ جُمْلَةً وَتَفْصِيلًا وَيَحْمَدُ عَلَى أَنَّ كُلَّ مَا شَهِدَ بِهِ شَاهِدَانِ يَثْبُتُ، وَمَنْ كَانَ كَذَلِكَ لَا حِطَابَ مَعَهُ وَنَحْنُ إِنَّمَا نَتَكَلَّمُ مَعَ مَنْ لَهُ أَدْنَى تَبْصُرٍ وَالْجَاهِلُ لَا كَلَامَ مَعَهُ.<sup>12</sup>

Some recklessly ignorant [person] may hesitate to accept what we have stated. He might regard it as abhorrent to resort to calculations in part or in whole, and may be stuck with the idea that whatever is witnessed by two persons is proven. No

conversation can take place with such a rigid person. We are talking to those who at least enjoy the [knowledge of] basic logic. We cannot talk to the ignorant.

Al-Qaradawi wonders what his opinion would have been on the question of naked-eye sighting if he were living in our modern times with all of its scientific developments in astronomy.

فكيف لو عاش السبكي إلى عصرنا هذا ورأى من تقدم علم الفلك ... كما أشرنا.<sup>13</sup>

In 1939, the famous hadith authority Ahmad M. Shakir had the courage to go one step further: he maintained that modern astronomical calculations were certain enough to ascertain Ramadan's arrival and end without necessarily resorting to naked-eye sighting. Having devoted his entire life to hadith literature and detailed study of the hadith sciences, he concluded – and was strongly criticized for doing so – that confirming the month of Ramadan, based upon the new moon's birth, was the closest position to that of the prophetic hadiths.

ولقد أرى قولى هذا أعدل الأقوال، وأقربها إلى الفقه السليم، وإلى الفهم الصحيح للأحاديث الواردة في هذا الباب.<sup>14</sup>

I consider my position [statement] to be the most equitable [righteous] of [all] the positions. This position is the closest to sound understanding and to the true meanings of all the hadiths narrated on this subject [calculation and moon sighting].

In 2006, the Fiqh Council of North America, following his lead, accepted astronomical calculations in confirming the Islamic months and to establish a predetermined calendar based upon them. The European Fiqh Council adopted his position in May 2007. Both councils have been reprimanded for following the Sunnah of the Jews and abandoning that of the Prophet. So the saga continues.

#### CLASSICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND NAKED-EYE SIGHTING AS THE CAUSE OF RAMADAN

In view of this brief historical exposition, we now turn to the classical texts themselves. Al-Jassas states:

قَالَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ: قَوْلُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "صُومُوا لِرُؤُوسِهِ" مُوَافِقٌ لِقَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى: (يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْإِهْلَةِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ) وَاتَّفَقَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ عَلَى مَعْنَى الْآيَةِ وَالْخَبَرِ فِي اعْتِبَارِ رُؤْيَةِ الْهِلَالِ فِي إِجَابِ صَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ ، فَدَلَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى أَنَّ رُؤْيَةَ الْهِلَالِ هِيَ شَهْرُ الشَّهْرِ.<sup>15</sup>

The statement of the Prophet “Fast by sighting it” is in line with the Qur’anic verse that says, “They ask you about the new moons. Say: ‘They are timings for people and for hajj.’” The Muslims have a consensus that the verse and the hadith mean considering the sighting of the crescent moon in requiring the fasting of Ramadan. It leads to [the fact] that the sighting of the new moon is what is termed “witnessing the month.”

He concludes that naked-eye sighting is the only method prescribed by the Prophet for confirming Ramadan. If it cannot be determined by actual sighting on 29 Sha‘ban owing to unfavorable conditions (e.g., cloudy weather), then completing thirty days is required, for that is the original rule.

وَقَوْلِهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ (صُومُوا لِرُؤْيَيْهِ وَأَفْطِرُوا لِرُؤْيَيْهِ ، فَإِنْ غَمَّ عَلَيْكُمْ فَعُدُّوا ثَلَاثِينَ) هُوَ أَصْلٌ فِي اعْتِبَارِ الشَّهْرِ ثَلَاثِينَ ، إِلَّا أَنْ يُرَى قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ الْهِلَالُ ، فَإِنْ كَلَّ شَهْرٌ غَمَّ عَلَيْنَا هِلَالُهُ فَعَلَيْنَا أَنْ نَعُدَّهُ ثَلَاثِينَ. هَذَا فِي سَائِرِ الشُّهُورِ الَّتِي يَتَعَلَّقُ بِهَا الْأَحْكَامُ، وَإِنَّمَا يَصِيرُ إِلَى أَقَلِّ مِنْ ثَلَاثِينَ بِرُؤْيَا الْهِلَالِ.<sup>16</sup>

In light of the prophetic hadith, the original rule is that the month consists of thirty days unless the new moon is sighted before that. We must count thirty days for every month when we are unable to see the moon owing to cloudy weather. This rule applies to all the months connected with Islamic rituals. Only the physical sighting of the new moon will make the month less than thirty days.

He also asserts that Muslim jurists have reached consensus to reject calculations in confirming or negating Ramadan.

فَالْقَائِلُ بِاعْتِبَارِ مَنَازِلِ الْقَمَرِ وَجَسَابِ الْمُنْتَجِمِينَ خَارِجٌ عَنِ حُكْمِ الشَّرِيعَةِ. وَلَيْسَ هَذَا الْقَوْلُ مِمَّا يَسُوغُ الْأَجْتِهَادُ فِيهِ ، لِدَلَالَةِ الْكِتَابِ وَنَصِّ السُّنَّةِ وَإِجْمَاعِ الْفُقَهَاءِ بِخِلَافِهِ.<sup>17</sup>

One who believes in the phases of the moon and the calculations of the astrologers is against the Shari‘ah. This is not the area of ijtiḥad, for the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and the consensus of the jurists are against it.

Badr al-Din al-‘Ayni summarizes the classical juristic majority’s opinion:

لا يصح اعتقاد رمضان إلا برؤية فاشية أو شهادة عادلة، أو إكمال شعبان ثلاثين يوماً، وعلى هذا مذهب جمهور فقهاء الأمصار بالحجاز والعراق والشام والمغرب، منهم مالك والشافعي والأوزاعي والثوري وأبو حنيفة وأصحابه وعمامة أهل الحديث.<sup>18</sup>

The [month of] Ramadan can be based only on a widespread public sighting [of the new moon] or a trustworthy witnessing or the completion of thirty days of Sha‘ban. The majority of the jurists in the [major] cities of al-Hijaz, al-Iraq, al-Sham, and al-Maghrib maintain that. They include Malik, al-Shafi‘i, al-Awza‘i, al-Thawri, Abu Hanifah and his disciples, and most of the *Ahl al-Ḥadith*.

The reason for starting the months with actual sighting, according to al-Jassas, is to begin the acts of worship with certainty instead of basing them upon mere probabilities.

وَهَذَا قَوْلُ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: (صُومُوا لِرُؤُوسِهِ وَأَفْطِرُوا لِرُؤُوسِهِ، فَإِنْ غَمَّ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَكْمِلُوا عِدَّةَ شَعْبَانَ ثَلَاثِينَ). فَفَرَضَ عَلَيْنَا عِنْدَ غَمَّةِ الْهَيْلَالِ إِكْمَالَ عِدَّةِ شَعْبَانَ ثَلَاثِينَ يَوْمًا، وَإِكْمَالَ عِدَّةِ رَمَضَانَ ثَلَاثِينَ يَوْمًا عِنْدَ غَمَّةِ هَيْلَالِ شَوَّالٍ، حَتَّى يَدْخُلَ فِي الْعِبَادَةِ بَيِّقِينَ، وَيَخْرُجَ عَنْهَا بَيِّقِينَ. وَكَذَلِكَ ثَبَّتَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مُصَرَّحًا بِهِ أَنَّهُ قَالَ: (لَا تَصُومُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْا الْهَيْلَالَ، وَلَا تُفْطِرُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْهُ). وَقَدْ رَوَى التِّرْمِذِيُّ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ: (أَحْصُوا هَيْلَالَ شَعْبَانَ لِرَمَضَانَ).<sup>19</sup>

This is what the Prophet says, “Begin fasting by sighting it and stop fasting by sighting it. If it is cloudy, then complete by counting thirty days of Sha‘ban.” He has required us to count thirty days of Sha‘ban when it is cloudy and also count thirty days of Ramadan when it is cloudy [on 29 Ramadan] before starting the month of Shawwal. This is required so that we can start the acts of worship based upon certainty and stop the acts of worship based upon certainty. This is what the Prophet has manifestly commanded by another authentic saying, “Do not fast until you see the new moon and do not break the fast until you see the new moon.” Al-Tirmidhi has narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet said, “Count the moon of Sha‘ban to determine Ramadan.”

Al-Jassas represents the view of the majority of classical jurists. The official Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi‘i, and Hanbali position is that calculations are not the authentic way to determining the months, for these must be confirmed either by naked-eye sighting or completion. In the following pages, we will see how these classical scholars argue in favor of this established position.

Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Hamawi states:

الشَّرْطُ عِنْدَنَا فِي وُجُوبِ الصَّوْمِ وَالْإفْطَارِ رُؤْيُ الْهَيْلَالِ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ بِقَوْلِ الْمُنْتَحِبِينَ. وَفِي التَّهْدِيدِ عَلَى مَذْهَبِ الشَّافِعِيِّ رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ: لَا يَجُوزُ تَقْلِيدُ الْمُنْتَحِمِ فِي حِسَابِهِ لَا فِي الصَّوْمِ وَلَا فِي الْإفْطَارِ.<sup>20</sup>

For us [Hanafis], the condition for the fast and breaking the fast is the sighting of the crescent [moon]; the calculation of the astrologists cannot be followed in this matter. In *Al-Tahdhib*, according to the Shafi‘i school, it is also stated that astrological calculations cannot be trusted either for beginning or ending the month of fasting.

Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Kharshi presents the Maliki position:

الصَّوْمُ يُثْبِتُ بِمَا تَقَدَّمَ لَا يَقُولُ مُنَحَّمٌ فَلَا يُثْبِتُ بِهِ لَا فِي حَقِّ غَيْرِهِ وَلَا فِي حَقِّهِ هُوَ؛ لِأَنَّ صَاحِبَ الشَّرْعِ حَصَرَ الثُّبُوتَ فِي: الرُّؤْيَى، أَوْ الشَّهَادَةِ، أَوْ إِكْمَالِ الْعَدَدِ فَلَمْ يُخَيِّرْ بِزِيَادَةِ عَلَى ذَلِكَ فَإِذَا قَالَ الْمُنَحَّمُ مَثَلًا: الشَّهْرُ نَاقِصٌ أَوْ زَائِدٌ لَمْ يُثْبِتْ إِلَى قَوْلِهِ، وَلَا إِلَى حِسَابِهِ، وَقَعَ فِي الْقَلْبِ صِدْقُهُ أَمْ لَا.<sup>21</sup>

Fasting cannot be observed by following the statement of an astrologer. Neither the astrologer nor anyone else can fast based upon that, because the Prophet has confined the fasting solely to the sighting of the witnesses or completing thirty days. No other method is prescribed. Therefore, no attention should be paid to the statement/calculations of the astrologer regarding the month, whether one believes in the precision of his calculations or not.

Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Dasuqi (Maliki), who elaborates the same view, adds that Imam Malik is of the opinion that thirty days should be completed for all the months when it is cloudy and the possibility of sighting the moon is non-existent.<sup>22</sup> Imam Malik himself is reported to have said:

وَقَدْ رَوَى ابْنُ نَافِعٍ عَنِ مَالِكٍ فِي الْمَرْثِيَّةِ فِي الْإِمَامِ لَا يَصُومُ لِرُؤْيَى الْهَلَالِ وَلَا يُفْطِرُ لِرُؤْيَيْهِ ، وَإِنَّمَا يَصُومُ وَيُفْطِرُ عَلَى الْحِسَابِ أَنَّهُ لَا يُقْتَدَى بِهِ وَلَا يُتَّبَعُ.<sup>23</sup>

Ibn Nafi'a reported in *Al-Mazniyyah* that Malik was of the opinion that in fasting if an imam followed calculations instead of moon sighting then he should not be followed [or obeyed in daily prayers].

Abu al-Walid argues that one should compensate for the days one has fasted based upon the calculations and not upon sighting or completion.

قَالَ الْقَاضِي أَبُو الْوَلِيدِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ فَإِنَّ فَعَلَ ذَلِكَ أَحَدٌ فَالَّذِي عِنْدِي أَنَّهُ لَا يُعْتَدُ بِمَا صَامَ مِنْهُ عَلَى الْحِسَابِ وَيَرْجِعُ إِلَى الرُّؤْيَى وَاكْتِمَالِ الْعَدَدِ فَإِنْ اقْتَضَى ذَلِكَ قَضَاءَ شَيْءٍ مِنْ صَوْمِهِ قَضَاهُ.<sup>24</sup>

Al-Qadi Abu al-Walid stated that (if someone fasted based upon calculations) then his fasting is not accepted as valid. He must resort to the sighting or completion method even if it required making up for some missed days.

#### THE MUSLIM UMMAH IS UNLETTERED

The Prophet said:

حَدَّثَنَا آدَمُ حَدَّثَنَا شُعْبَةُ حَدَّثَنَا الْأَسْوَدُ بْنُ قَيْسٍ حَدَّثَنَا سَعِيدُ بْنُ عَمْرٍو أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ ابْنَ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ إِنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّيَّةٌ لَا نَكْتُبُ وَلَا نَحْسِبُ الشَّهْرَ هَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا يَعْنِي مَرَّةً تِسْعَةً وَعِشْرِينَ وَمَرَّةً ثَلَاثِينَ.<sup>25</sup>

We are an unlettered people; we neither write nor calculate. The month is like that and like that, meaning sometimes twenty-nine days and sometimes thirty days.

Muslim reports that the Prophet, while describing the month, folded his thumb the third time:

قَالَ سَمِعْتُ سَعِيدَ بْنِ عَمْرٍو بْنِ سَعِيدٍ أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ ابْنَ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا يُحَدِّثُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ إِنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّيَّةٌ لَا نَكْتُبُ وَلَا نَحْسِبُ الشَّهْرَ هَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا وَعَقَدَ الْإِبْهَامَ فِي الثَّلَاثَةِ وَالشَّهْرُ هَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا يَعْنِي تَمَامَ ثَلَاثِينَ.<sup>26</sup>

We are an unlettered people; we neither read nor calculate. The month is like that and like that, and he folded his thumb the thirdtime, and the month is like this and this and this, meaning thirty days.

Based upon the above reports, Shihab al-Din ibn Ahmad al-Ramli (Shafi'i) argues:

أَنَّ الشَّارِعَ لَمْ يَتَعَمَّدِ الْحِسَابَ بَلْ أَلْغَاهُ بِالْكُلِّيَّةِ بِقَوْلِهِ نَحْنُ أُمَّةٌ أُمِّيَّةٌ لَا نَكْتُبُ وَلَا نَحْسِبُ الشَّهْرَ هَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا وَقَالَ ابْنُ دَقِيقِ الْعَيْدِ الْحِسَابَ لَا يُحَوِّزُ الْأَعْتِمَادَ عَلَيْهِ فِي الصِّيَامِ.<sup>27</sup>

The Prophet did not depend upon calculations at all but negated it by his statement “We are an unlettered nation, we neither write nor calculate ... Ibn Daqiq al-Id stated that calculations cannot be the source of confirming the fasting [of Ramadan].”

Al-Nawawi, in *Al-Majmū'*, also quotes this hadith and gives almost the same reasons for the rejection of calculations:

وَمَنْ قَالَ بِحِسَابِ الْمَنَازِلِ فَقَوْلُهُ مُرْدُودٌ بِقَوْلِهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي الصَّحِيحَيْنِ (إِنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّيَّةٌ لَا نَحْسِبُ وَلَا نَكْتُبُ، الشَّهْرُ هَكَذَا، وَهَكَذَا) الْحَدِيثَ قَالُوا: وَلِأَنَّ النَّاسَ لَوْ كُفِلُوا بِذَلِكَ ضَاقَ عَلَيْهِمْ؛ لِأَنَّهُ لَا يَعْرِفُ الْحِسَابَ إِلَّا أَفْرَادٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ فِي الْبُلْدَانِ الْكِبَارِ، فَالضَّوَابُ مَا قَالَهُ الْجُمْهُورُ، وَمَا سِوَاهُ فَاسِدٌ مُرْدُودٌ بِصَرَاحِ الْحَادِيثِ.<sup>28</sup>

The statement of those who talk about the moon phases is rejected by the prophetic report authenticated by (Bukhari and Muslim) that “we are unlettered people; we neither write nor calculate. The month is like this and like this.” It will cause people hardship if they are required to follow the calculations, for they are known only to a few people living mostly in big cities. Therefore, the majority position is the right position and whatever else is there is rejected by the authentic sayings of the Prophet.

Ibn Hajar explains the meaning of the hadith “we neither write nor calculate” in the following words:

و قوله: (لا نكتب ولا نحسب) تفسير لكونهم كذلك، وقيل للعرب أميون لأن الكتابة كانت فيهم عزيزة، قال الله تعالى (هو الذي بعث في الأميين رسولا منهم) ولا يرد على ذلك أنه كان فيهم من يكتب ويحسب لأن الكتابة كانت فيهم قليلة نادرة، والمراد بالحساب هنا حساب النجوم وتسييرها، ولم يكونوا يعرفون من ذلك أيضا إلا النزر اليسير، فعلق الحكم بالصوم وغيره بالرؤية لرفع الحرج عنهم في معاناة حساب التسيير واستمر الحكم في الصوم ولو حدث بعدهم من يعرف ذلك، بل ظاهر السياق يشعر بنفي تعليق الحكم بالحساب أصلا، ويوضحه قوله في الحديث الماضي "فإن غم عليكم فأكملوا العدة ثلاثين" ولم يقل فسلوا أهل الحساب، والحكمة فيه كون العدد عند الإغماء يستوي فيه المكلفون فيرتفع الاختلاف والتزاع عنهم.<sup>29</sup>

The hadith is a description of how they actually were [a reflection of their reality that they were unlettered]. The Arabs were called illiterate because writing skills were very rare among them. Allah has said, "It is He who has sent among the unlettered a messenger from among themselves." This fact cannot be refuted by [the assertion] that among them there were some [individuals] who could write and calculate. The reason is that writing [skills] were very rare among them. And *al-ḥisāb* here refers to the calculation of the stars [celestial bodies] and their movement [in their orbits]. They also had only a very little knowledge of it [calculation]. Consequently, he [the Prophet] connected the ruling on fasting and other things with the sighting so as to remove from them the difficulty of having to struggle with calculating the movements of the celestial bodies. This ruling would continue even if, later on, someone knew that [how to calculate]. However, the apparent context [of the hadith] gives the sense of not connecting the ruling with calculations in the first place and this is explained by his (the Prophet's) statement in the hadith previously discussed: "Complete by counting thirty if it is cloudy" and he did not say "Ask the astronomers." The wisdom behind this is that counting thirty [days] is easy for everyone (all those who are commissioned to fast). Therefore, it will protect people from argument and discord.

### A RATHER AWKWARD INTERPRETATION OF IBN HAJAR'S QUOTATION

Hamza Yusuf translates the above statement in a slightly different way:

Indeed, Ibn Hajar and others understood the hadith "We are an unlettered community – we neither read nor calculate" to mean something entirely different. They did not interpret the Prophet's preface as an operative cause but rather as a descriptive statement, an important and necessary distinction in jurisprudence. Ibn Hajar provides the following explanation of the hadith:

"Calculate," here, refers to astronomy and to the orbits of the planets because only a handful of them knew such things at that time. Thus the Prophet has made the legal obligation of fasting contingent upon actual sighting in order to remove any burdens from his community, i.e., of having to struggle with computations

of celestial orbits. This ruling continues even should later people be able to do that. Indeed, the apparent meaning of the hadith rejects any association of calculation with the legal ruling....

Nowhere did he say, “If it is obscured then ask the people of calculation.”<sup>30</sup>

He goes on to conclude:

Ibn Hajar recognizes that only a small number of people knew much about astronomy at the time, which is not dissimilar to our current situation, given the vast numbers of illiterate Muslims alive today. But there were, indeed, among the first generation of Muslims some who knew how to calculate astronomical phenomena given that some were capable of producing an intercalated lunisolar calendar. Moreover, Ibn Hajar understood that the ruling was a permanent one and not, as some have said, one that is contingent upon the innuery of his community, and thus falsely concluded that if some people learned such things later, they could switch to determining their months by calculation.<sup>31</sup>

Some sentences of Imam Ibn Hajar in the above translation are manipulated, apparently so that they will have some specific implications far removed from Ibn Hajar’s own intent. For example, the sentence: *و لم يكونوا يعرفون من ذلك أيضا إلا النزر اليسير* is translated as “*because only a handful of them knew such things at that time.*” This specific sentence is italicized to emphasize that “only a small number of people *knew much about astronomy at the time*, which is not dissimilar to our current situation, given the vast numbers of illiterate Muslims alive today. But there were, *indeed, among the first generation of Muslims some who knew how to calculate astronomical phenomena given that some were capable of producing an intercalated lunisolar calendar.*”

Frankly, the above translation of this sentence is faulty and the conclusions drawn are fanciful. I have yet to see any proof in the books of hadith, *sīrah*, and Islamic history that any of the Prophet’s disciples knew much about calculations (used to intercalate the lunar calendar in order to synchronize it with the solar calendar) in general and calculations in particular. Al-Shatibi confirms that astronomy was not among the Arabs’ sciences.

<sup>32</sup> لأن ذلك لم يكن من معهود العرب ولا من علومها.

Because it (astronomy) was neither commonplace nor a science of the Arabs.

It is true that the pre-Islamic Arabs used an intercalated calendar for hajj and other purposes. There is no proof that any Companions played any part in this intercalation. The prophetic description that “we are an unlettered people” supports this historical fact. It is very likely that these

Arabs sought help from their Jewish friends to fix their calendars. There is ample historical evidence for their close affinity with the Jews of Madinah and some other places, which continued even after the Prophet's migration there. Furthermore, fixing the calendar by intercalations did not require much sophistication as regards calculations. The average length of the lunar month had been known to the Greeks and Babylonians centuries before the Arabs. The rabbis used this basic astronomical knowledge to multiply and add extra days so that the lunar year could follow a solar year. The procedure needed more mathematical than astronomical calculations.

Ibn Hajar here denies that astronomy was quite developed during the time of the Companions and also that only a few of them knew much about it.

There is another flaw in the above translation of Ibn Hajar's text.

بل ظاهر السياق يشعر بنفي تعليق الحكم بالحساب أصلاً، ويوضحه قوله في الحديث الماضي  
 ”فإن غم عليكم فأكملوا العدة ثلاثين“ ولم يقل فسألوا أهل الحساب.

But the apparent context (of the hadith) gives a sense not to connect the ruling with calculations in the first place. This is explained by his (the Prophet's) statement in the previously discussed hadith, “Complete counting thirty if it is cloudy.” He did not say “Ask the astronomers.”

Hamza Yusuf's rendition of the phrase *بل ظاهر السياق يشعر* as “indeed, the apparent meaning of the hadith” is also somewhat inaccurate. There is a big difference between *بل ظاهر السياق* “but the apparent context” and saying “indeed, the apparent meaning...” I am not asserting here that Ibn Hajar approved of calculations to confirm Ramadan, because he did not. Again, the possible reasons for his disapproval are also discernable from his own statement: he emphasized the difficulties of computing calculations and argued elsewhere in his book that they were the work of astrologers who were devils among humans (لأنهم شياطين الإنس) and that their calculations were nothing but conjecture and guesswork. Consequently, they were not suitable to serve as the foundation of a legal ruling (*al-ḥukm al-sharʿī*). He contended that the hadith's apparent context also led to this understanding.

#### “THE MONTH IS TWENTY-NINE”: MISUNDERSTANDING THE PROPHETIC HADITH

Hamza Yusuf also asserts that the Prophet did not use common numerals but rather his hands to describe the lunar month.

What I find profoundly interesting is Qadi Abu Bakr's point that the Prophet (pbuh) could very well have used the words "twenty-nine and thirty" when indicating the number of days possible in a lunar month. Had he done so, those he was speaking to would have understood him, as he was wont to state numbers on many other occasions as reported in sound hadith; he used high numbers, such as one million (*alfū alf*); he also used twenty-seven, twenty-five, and five; and he used the number ninety-nine in the sound hadith, "God has ninety-nine Names, one hundred less one; whoever enumerates them will enter Paradise." However, he chose not to state any numbers when showing the number of days in a lunar month, as if to deter people from thinking about enumeration specifically when it comes to determining the lunar months. Hence, instead of saying the words "twenty-nine and thirty," the Prophet (pbuh) actually used his blessed hands, showing with his fingers how many days are possible in the month, as if to emphasize using the most basic and fundamental human ability of sight. It is as though he were saying, "Look, see, perceive with your eyes the month, even upon my hands." This insistence upon sighting the moon illustrates so well "the sense in Islam that it is the immediate surrounding conditions, rather than any theoretical ones, that reflect the Divine will of God in its relation to men, and that it is these which should determine the sacred acts."<sup>33</sup>

This is a flawed understanding of the prophetic hadith, because the Prophet did use the number "twenty-nine" when describing a lunar month in multiple authentic hadiths. This is reported by al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nisa'i, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and almost every book of hadith. I do not know how Hamza Yusuf could miss such an obvious fact. Of course the Prophet always made things easy for his disciples and, indeed, for his entire Ummah. While he did use his hands to illustrate the possible numbers of days in a lunar month, he did not avoid using numerals like twenty-nine to describe the lunar month.

Muslim reports the following:

حَدَّثَنِي هَارُونَ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَحَجَّاجُ بْنُ الشَّاعِرِ قَالَا حَدَّثَنَا حَجَّاجُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ قَالَ قَالَ ابْنُ جُرَيْجٍ أَخْبَرَنِي أَبُو الزُّبَيْرِ أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ حَجَّاجَ بْنَ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا يَقُولَا اعْتَزَلَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ نِسَاءَهُ شَهْرًا فَخَرَجَ إِلَيْنَا صَبَاحَ تِسْعِ وَعِشْرِينَ فَقَالَ بَعْضُ الْقَوْمِ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ إِنَّمَا أَصْحَابَنَا لِتِسْعِ وَعِشْرِينَ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنَّ الشَّهْرَ يَكُونُ تِسْعًا وَعِشْرِينَ ثُمَّ طَمَقَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَدَيْهِ ثَلَاثًا مَرَّتَيْنِ بِأَصَابِعِ يَدَيْهِ كُلِّهَا وَالثَّلَاثَةَ يَتِسَعُ مِنْهَا.<sup>34</sup>

Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah narrates that the Prophet separated himself from his wives for a month. He came out to us on the morning of the twenty-ninth. Some of the people indicated to him that it was the morning of the twenty-ninth. The Prophet said, "Certainly, the month consists of twenty-nine [days]. Then the Prophet folded his both hands three times, twice folding [and opening] all of his fingers and the third time [opening] only nine.

Al-Bukhari reports on Anas ibn Malik's authority that the Prophet said that the "month certainly consisted of twenty-nine days."<sup>35</sup> Al-Tirmidhi categorized these specific prophetic hadiths (in which the Prophet categorically stated that the month consisted of twenty-nine days) as good and authentic:

قَالَ أَبُو عِيسَى هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ صَحِيحٌ

Abu 'Isa stated that this report is *hasan sahih*.<sup>36</sup>

If someone were to argue that this prophetic description of the lunar month with the "common numerals that mathematicians use" did not refer to Ramadan but to another lunar month, it would not matter, because a lunar month is still a month. I further state that there are numerous hadiths in which the Prophet referred to Ramadan and said that the month consisted of twenty-nine days. For instance, Abu Dawud reports:

حَدَّثَنَا سَلِيمَانُ بْنُ دَاوُدَ الْعَتَكِيُّ حَدَّثَنَا حَمَادٌ حَدَّثَنَا أَيُّوبُ عَنْ نَافِعٍ عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الشَّهْرُ تِسْعٌ وَعِشْرُونَ فَلَا تَصُومُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْهُ وَلَا تُفْطِرُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْهُ فَإِنْ غَمَّ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَقْدَرُوا لَهُ ثَلَاثِينَ.<sup>37</sup>

Ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet said, "The month is twenty-nine [days]. Therefore, do not fast until you see it [the moon] and do not break the fast until you see it. Count thirty days if it is obscured from you.

Imam Muslim also narrates the same with a little variation.

وَحَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ يَحْيَى وَيَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ وَقُثَيْبَةُ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ قَالَ يَحْيَى بْنُ يَحْيَى أَخْبَرَنَا وَقَالَ الْأَخْزَوِيُّ حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ وَهُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ دِينَارٍ أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ ابْنَ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ الشَّهْرُ تِسْعٌ وَعِشْرُونَ لَيْلَةً لَا تَصُومُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْهُ وَلَا تُفْطِرُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يَغَمَّ عَلَيْكُمْ فَإِنْ غَمَّ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَقْدَرُوا لَهُ.<sup>38</sup>

Ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet said, "The month consists of twenty-nine nights. Therefore, do not fast until you see it [the moon] and do not break the fast until you see it, unless it is cloudy. Count it if it is obscured from you.

Imam al-Nasa'i reports:

أَخْبَرَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْمُثَنَّى قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ عَنْ سُفْيَانَ عَنْ الْأَسْوَدِ بْنِ قَيْسٍ عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ إِنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمَّيَّةٌ لَا نَكْتُبُ وَلَا نَحْسِبُ الشَّهْرَ هَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا وَهَكَذَا ثَلَاثًا حَتَّى ذَكَرَ تِسْعًا وَعِشْرِينَ.<sup>39</sup>

Ibn ʿUmar reported that the Prophet said, “Certainly, we are an unlettered people; we neither write nor calculate. The month is like that and like that and like that” (three times), until he mentioned twenty-nine.

### CALCULATIONS ARE CONNECTED WITH MAGIC AND ASTROLOGY

One of the main reasons for these scholars’ rejection of calculations is the close connection between astronomy and magic, which the Prophet has forbidden. For instance, Ibn Hajar strictly prohibits the use of calculation by quoting the prophetic sayings that warn Muslims about the evils of astrology, such as “Anyone learning any part of astrology is learning a part of magic.” ʿUmar was quoted as saying, “Learn from astrology whatever part is helpful in guiding you over the land and ocean and then stop.” Therefore, any part of astrology other than the directional symbols and signs is, according to Ibn Hajar, un-Islamic.<sup>40</sup>

Ibn Taymiyyah, a strong opponent of using astronomical calculations to confirm or negate Islamic months, argued that they could never lead to a reliable method of finding the crescent moon, and that he, like al-Jassas, also claimed that the scholars agreed on this matter.

اتَّفَقَ عُلَمَاءُ الشَّرِيعَةِ الْأَعْلَامُ عَلَى تَحْرِيمِ الْعَمَلِ بِذَلِكَ فِي الْهَيْلَالِ . وَاتَّفَقَ أَهْلُ الْحِسَابِ الْعُقَلَاءِ عَلَى أَنَّ مَعْرِفَةَ ظُهُورِ الْهَيْلَالِ لَا يُضْبَطُ بِالْحِسَابِ ضَبْطًا تَامًا قَطُّ ؛ وَلِذَلِكَ لَمْ يَتَكَلَّمْ فِيهِ حُدَاقُ الْحِسَابِ ؛ بَلْ أَنْكَرُوهُ ؛ وَإِنَّمَا تَكَلَّمْ فِيهِ قَوْمٌ مِنْ مُتَأَخِّرِيهِمْ تَقْرِيْبًا وَذَلِكَ ضَلَالٌ عَنِ دِينِ اللَّهِ وَتَغْيِيرٌ لَهُ شَبِيْهُ بِضَلَالِ الْيَهُودِ.<sup>41</sup>

Mainstream scholars of the Shariʿah agree that using calculations in determining the new moon is forbidden. Wise astronomers also agree that there is no way to authentically determine the crescent moon from calculations. That is why expert astronomers do not use, but reject, calculation. Only a group from the later generations, out of ignorance, have used it. This is basically changing the *dīn* of Allah by misleading people and following the misguidance of the Jews in this matter.

Here, Ibn Taymiyyah seems to be referring to the Jewish Rabbinical Council’s decision to adopt astronomical calculations as the authentic means of confirming the Jewish lunar months. Elsewhere, he expressed his opposition to such a practice:

ولا ريب انه ثبت بالسنة الصحيحة واتفاق الصحابة انه لا يجوز الاعتماد على حساب النجوم كما ثبت عنه في الصحيحين انه قال انا امة امية لا نكتب ولا نحسب صوموا لرؤيته وأفطروا

لرؤيته والمعتمد على الحساب في الهلال كما انه ضال في الشريعة مبتدع في الدين فهو مخطيء في العقل وعلم الحساب.<sup>42</sup>

Undoubtedly calculations are rejected by the Sunnah as well as the consensus of the Companions, for the authentic hadith says ... Therefore, the person who depends upon calculation is a misguided innovator, not only mistaken in matters of the Shari'ah but also in matters of logic and astrology.

### CALCULATIONS ARE INACCURATE

Ibn Taymiyyah also argued that astronomical knowledge was misleading and a forbidden act in and of itself, because its disadvantages outweighed its advantages. He quoted several prophetic narrations to denounce astrology.<sup>43</sup> He also substantiated his point by a practical encounter that he had had with the so-called astronomers of his time, from which he concluded that the methodology of astronomical calculation was based purely upon falsehood and cheating.

وَهَكَذَا الْمُنْجُمُونَ، حَتَّى أَنِّي لَمَّا خَاطَبْتُهُمْ بِدِمَشْقَ وَحَضَرَ عِنْدِي رُؤَسَاؤُهُمْ، وَبَيَّنْتُ فَسَادَ صِنَاعَتِهِمْ بِالْأَدِلَّةِ الْعَقْلِيَّةِ الَّتِي يَعْتَرِفُونَ بِصَحَّتِهَا، قَالَ لِي رَئِيسُ مِنْهُمْ: وَاللَّهِ إِنَّا نَكْذِبُ مِائَةَ كَذْبَةٍ حَتَّى نَصُدِّقَ فِي كَلِمَةٍ.<sup>44</sup>

This is how the astrologers are! I, by logical arguments, proved the wrong nature of their profession when I debated with their chiefs in Damascus. One of them told me that, by God, we concoct a hundred lies so as to be able to produce one truth.

He further contended:

وَالْأَدِلَّةُ الدَّالَّةُ عَلَى فَسَادِ هَذِهِ الصَّنَاعَةِ وَتَحْرِيمِهَا كَثِيرَةٌ، لَيْسَ هَذَا مَوْضِعَهَا، وَقَدْ ثَبَتَ فِي صَحِيحِ مُسْلِمٍ، عَنْ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ (مَنْ أَتَى عَرَّافًا فَسَأَلَهُ عَنْ شَيْءٍ لَمْ يَقْبَلِ اللَّهُ لَهُ صَلَاةً أَرْبَعِينَ يَوْمًا). وَالْعَرَّافُ، قَدْ قِيلَ إِنَّهُ اسْمُ عَامٍّ لِلْكَاهِنِ وَالْمُنْجِمِ وَالرَّمَالِ وَنَحْوِهِمْ.<sup>45</sup>

The arguments against this profession and its prohibition are too many. This is not a place to go into the details of that. It is sufficient to quote what Muslim narrated from the Prophet, "If someone asks an astrologer (*'arrāf*) about something [unseen], Allah will not accept his prayers for forty days. The term (*'arrāf*) denotes the magician, the astrologer, and the others."

This group of scholars suggests several punishments for those who use astronomy and calculations. For instance, Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Alish points out that nobody, either the astrologer himself or anyone else, should

fast according to calculations. It is also forbidden to approve of an astrologer. Such a person should be given the death penalty without any opportunity for repentance if he openly propagates the belief that the stars directly influence human destiny. He should be treated as an apostate if he conceals his beliefs but argues indirectly about the impact of stars on human life. He should be asked to repent and, if he refuses to do so, should be put to death. He will be a sinful believer if he takes the stars as signs indicating events in the world, yet does believe that the actual power lies with Allah, not with the stars.<sup>46</sup>

In the view of Ibn Rushd, astronomers must be disciplined.<sup>47</sup> Abu al-Sadat al-Mubarak ibn Muhammad al-Jazri calls them human devils, for they base their calculations on mere conjecture, hunches, and anticipation. He also quotes the hadith mentioned above, which connects the knowledge of astrology with the knowledge of magic.

لأنهم شياطين الإنس وقد جاء في بعض الأحاديث من اقتبس بابا من علم النجوم لغير ما ذكر  
الله فقد اقتبس شعبة من السحر.<sup>48</sup>

Because they are devils of the human race. Some prophetic reports stated that “whosoever acquired any chapter of astrology other than what Allah permitted in reality acquired a portion of magic.”

#### A SUMMARY OF THE CLASSICAL MAJORITY'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST CALCULATION

This group's main arguments against the use of calculation as a valid source of determining the Islamic months can be summarized as follows:

- 1: As regards confirming or negating the Islamic months, especially that of Ramadan, the Shari'ah requires naked-eye sighting for only this can guarantee certainty. Physical sighting, in their view, seems to be the goal instead of the means. By sighting, they mean naked-eye sighting. They further assert the existence of a consensus among all classical scholars that naked-eye sighting or the completion of thirty days is the only way of confirmation. They reiterate that the prophetic narrations calling for estimation or calculation in the case of cloudy weather must be understood in the light of the narrations that require the completion of thirty days. That is what they believe the consensus to be. Ibn Taymiyyah defined the consensus as:

أن تجتمع علماء المسلمين على حكم من الاحكام وإذا ثبت إجماع الأمة على حكم من الأحكام لم يكن لأحد أن يخرج عن اجماعهم فان الأمة لا تجتمع على ضلالة.<sup>49</sup>

Consensus occurs when Muslim scholarship agrees upon a ruling of one of the Islamic rules. No one is permitted to oppose this consensus because the Ummah does not agree upon something inherently wrong.

He also argued:

والتحقيق أن الاجماع المعلوم يكفر مخالفه كما يكفر مخالف النص بتركه.<sup>50</sup>

The reality is that one who contradicts an established consensus in fact commits an act of disbelief. It is just like rejecting an established religious text.

- 2: Calculations are hypothetical in nature and mere conjectures. They can never lead us to an authentic method of determining the beginning or end of the Islamic lunar months. Such classical scholars as Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Jassas also seem to have claimed agreement among the *jumhūr* about rejecting them altogether.
- 3: Following calculations causes hardship for the general public, for its knowledge is confined to a few individuals mostly living in big cities, and so on, as argued by al-Nawawi.
- 4: Dealing with calculations and the movements of celestial bodies is the profession of magicians and fortune tellers, aspects of divination forbidden by the Shari<sup>h</sup>. The Prophet forbade this by saying:

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو بَكْرِ بْنُ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ وَمُسَدَّدُ الْمَعْنَى قَالََا حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى عَنْ عُبَيْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ الْأَخْنَسِ عَنْ الْوَلِيدِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَنْ يُونُسَ بْنِ مَاهَكَ عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَنْ أَقْتَبَسَ عِلْمًا مِنَ التُّجُومِ أَقْتَبَسَ شُعْبَةً مِنَ السُّحْرِ زَادَ مَا زَادَ.<sup>51</sup>

Anyone learning any part of astrology is learning a part of magic.

Abu Dawud also narrates that the Prophet prohibited <sup>Ali</sup> from mixing with astrologers.<sup>52</sup>

- 5: The Prophet forbade Muslims to deal with calculations in relation to Ramadan when he said that they were an unlettered people and that they neither wrote nor calculated. On the other hand, he told them to

depend upon naked-eye sighting or complete thirty days. Some of them contend that the Prophet prohibited calculations because he was aware that Madinah's Jewish community was using them to confirm the Jewish months. In fact, the Jewish calendar was fixed by Rabbi Hillel II in 363 and the city's Jews had access to it. The Prophet intentionally prevented the Muslims from imitating them by ending the use of calculations to confirm the Islamic months.

حَدَّثَنَا آدَمُ حَدَّثَنَا شُعْبَةُ حَدَّثَنَا الْإِسْوَدُ بْنُ قَيْسٍ حَدَّثَنَا سَعِيدُ بْنُ عَمْرٍو أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ ابْنَ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ  
اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ إِنَّا أُمَّةٌ أُمِّيَّةٌ لَا نَكْتُبُ وَلَا، نَحْسُبُ الشَّهْرَ هَكَذَا  
وَهَكَذَا يَعْنِي مَرَّةً تِسْعَةً وَعِشْرِينَ وَمَرَّةً ثَلَاثِينَ.<sup>53</sup>

We are an unlettered nation. We neither write nor calculate. The month is this way and this way. It means that sometimes it is twenty-nine days and sometimes thirty days.

- 6: Following astronomical calculations in matters of religion, such as the months of Ramadan and Shawwal, would nullify the spirit of the acts of worship like fasting. This contradicts the Prophet's clear commands, for he said, "Do not start fasting until you see the moon and do not stop fasting until you see the moon." He used both positive and negative verbal forms (fast by seeing and do not fast until you see it) to ensure that Muslims understood the significance of naked-eye sighting and did not follow Jewish practices in their faith and actions. Therefore, any Muslims who contravene his emphatic commands and start fasting based upon calculations must compensate for the days observed.
- 7: The Arabic word for the new moon is *hilāl*. The linguistic definition of this word requires that it deflect light and be shining, not dark. Shining, then, is connected with human sighting. Therefore, we cannot start the new month until we see the new moon.