

CHC Criterion for Defining the Horizon (Matla')

Throughout history, Ulama Kiram have invested their faculties and resources to the greatest extent possible, in order to solve contemporary issues. The extensive research and utmost dedication of the Ulama can be understood only after reading their extraordinary works. Along with having profound insight of the Shar'i texts, they also had a deep understanding of the proper practical application of these texts in contemporary affairs. It is only after exhaustive thought and careful deliberation of the Shar'i texts, along with considering astronomical and geographical data, that the Ulama Kiram reach a conclusion in religious matters such as moonsighting. Only after such exhaustive and thorough research are rulings given.

The second national CHC conference was held in 1435 AH/2014 CE in New York City, titled "Shariah Approved Solutions to Hilal Sighting and Allied Issues." Eight hours were spent in scholarly discussions and deliberation. The conference was conducted in the presence of elder and experienced Ulama from 21 states, many of whom, along with having sound expertise in Tafseer, Hadith, and Fiqh, had practical experience of moonsighting for more than 30 years in the mainland USA. Some of these scholars had also published written works regarding this subject.

In this conference, a few important matters were unanimously decided that would assist in making timely and undisputed decisions every month based on the injunctions of the Shari'ah. Among the many significant decisions, one was to expand the current understanding of horizon (matla') under the following conditions: the horizon will include (1) those countries which meet the requirements of al Tariq al Mujib, or a verified information system, (2) share common time zones with mainland USA, (3) have established Hilal committees by the local Ulama Kiram, and (4) whom CHC is actively in contact with. In

adherence to these requirements, South America, Panama in Central America, and the Caribbean Islands were included in the horizon. This decision was made by the unanimous agreement of all the Ulama present.

Note: Since the establishment of the Central Hilal Committee, fifteen years of diligent monthly observations conducted by the CHC Representative Ulama Kiram and their practical experience have confirmed that whenever the moon is sighted in these locations outside of the US (South America, Central America, and the Caribbean Islands) it will definitely be sighted in the western areas of the United States as well. This is also obvious in terms of astronomy, as the moon age increases and more of the moon becomes illuminated as it continues to move West.

It is important to keep in mind that there is no fiqhi difference of opinion regarding global or local moonsighting. Nowhere in the voluminous books of any of the adept jurists of the past is there any mention of such a difference. Unfortunately, the terms ‘global’ and ‘local’ are portrayed today as equally valid opinions. Equally pretentious is the call towards Tawheed al Ahillah wal A’yad, (Unifying the Crescents and Eids)—a newly-invented idea that contradicts both the sound intellect and the dictates of Islam—as having Eid on different days over the world does not negate unity, not to mention that supposed unity at the expense of established Islamic teachings is not to be tolerated.

What does exist is a difference of opinion regarding the unification (Ittihadul Matali) and difference (Ikhtilaful Matali) of the horizons. The matla’ is an undecided matter among the ‘Ulama from the early predecessors to the contemporary elders. Nonetheless, it is an issue of ijtihad and must be decided by the fuqaha of the time. The 28/31 day

issue is a broad criteria to help define this extent by natural factors. For example, if the Muslims of China accepted the sighting of Chile for this past Shawwal, their Ramadan would be only 28 days long. Similarly, if the Muslims of Chile wait specifically for the sighting of China, their month may become 31 days long. This criteria is broadly defined by distance, but it is not always necessarily so.

Numerous books of renowned Ulama and astronomers were examined thoroughly while researching this matter. During this study, outstanding research regarding moonsighting was found, written by a prestigious alim of the recent past, Shaikh Dr. Mohammed Abd al Latif Salih al Farfaor al Hassani rahimahullah. Shaikh Abd al Latif al-Farfaor rahimahullah was a founding member of the Majma' al Fiqh al Islami al Duwali (IIFA), Jeddah, KSA, a student of Shaikh Abd al Fattah Abu Ghuddah rahimahullah, the eldest son of one of the greatest Syrian Hanafi scholars in recent times, Shaikh Mohammed Salih al-Farfaor rahimahullah, and the author of numerous scholarly books. Shaikh Abd al Latif al-Farfaor rahimahullah was an expert in Hanafi Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh and various other Islamic sciences. His research paper was presented before the Majma' al Fiqh al Islami al Duwali in 1406 AH/1985 CE, and was also included in the Majallah Majma' al Fiqh al Islami al Duwali (N. 2, V. 2, pg 901). It was later published in 1988 by Darul Ma'mun as an independent book, named *Bulghat al-Mutali' fi Bayan al-Hisabi wa al-Matali'*.

It was a pleasant coincidence to see that the scholarly research presented by the Shaikh regarding horizons directly concurred with the decision made by the Ulama of the Central Hilal Committee after exhaustive thought and careful consideration.

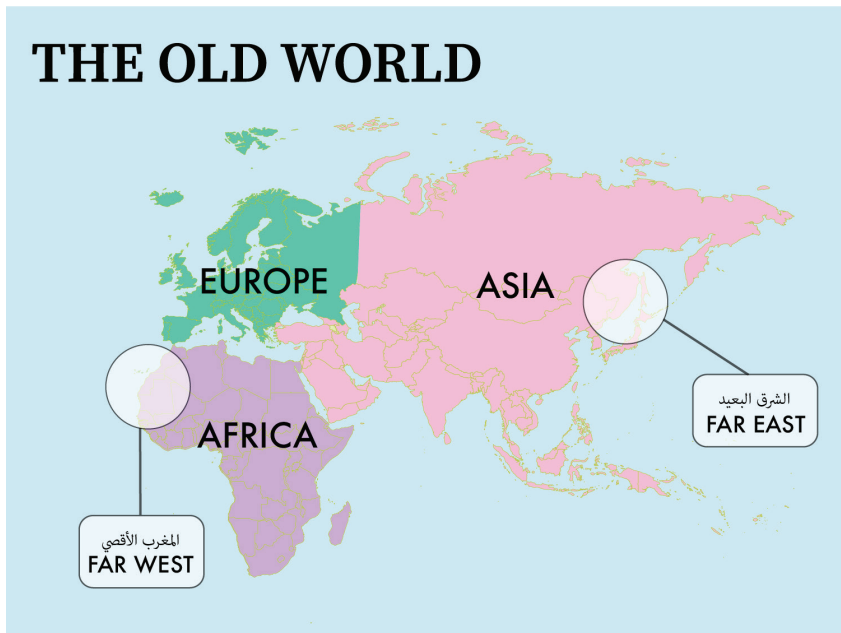
THE GEOGRAPHIC WORLD: THEN AND NOW

Before delving into the study of Shaikh al Farfaor rahimahullah, it is imperative to understand the historic timeline of the geographic boundaries of the world. The eastern and western ends of the known world were different in the past and evolved over time as more of the world was discovered.

Until recently, just about a mere 500 years ago, there were only three known continents to the civilized world. These continents were Asia, Africa, and Europe, and the Americas had not yet been discovered. The geographical concept of the world at this time – before the discovery of the Americas – was called the ‘Old World.’ In contrast, the term ‘New World’ was developed to refer to the world we know today – after the discovery of the Americas.

Looking at the map of Asia, Africa, and Europe (the Old World) together shows that there is an Eastern portion to the far right of the map. This used to be called the Far East (الشرق البعيد) and consisted of roughly four modern-day nations: China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. This was considered the Eastern end of the known world at the time. On the left is the Western portion, which was known as the Far West (المغرب الأقصى). This is at the shore of the Atlantic Ocean and consisted of four noteworthy areas: Morocco, Mauritania, Western Sahara, and Senegal. This was considered the Western end of the known world at the time.

The figures below roughly depict the Old and New Worlds.



It is important to keep in mind that this was the geographic reality of the world taken into account by the great Ulama of the past, when they discussed Ittihad al-Matali' (a single horizon for both the East and the West) and Ikhtilaf al-Matali' (different horizons by city or town). Consider the following key text of al-Durr al-Mukhtar:

فيلزم أهل المشرق برؤية أهل المغرب

"The people of the East must take the sighting of the people of the West."

Ahlul Maghrib, the people of the West, cannot and does not refer to the people of today's West (i.e., America), as the Americas had not been discovered at that time. Rather, it refers to the people from the west coast of the known world at the time, the Old World. This was the shore of the Atlantic Ocean, notably Morocco, as mentioned above. By understanding this, the text becomes clear. It also becomes evident that the texts of these earlier scholars about the unity or disunity of the horizons are impossible to hastily plaster in our time.

EXPLANATIONS GIVEN BY RENOWNED RECENT HANAFI SCHOLARS

The discovery of North and South America five centuries ago expanded the known, civilized world and changed its eastern and western borders. The words 'east' and 'west' now took up new meanings, varying from their age-old definitions significantly. These new discoveries had a drastic impact on the discussion of the unification and difference of the horizons.

For instance, earlier Hanafi Ulama had said:

فيلزم أهل المشرق برؤية أهل المغرب

"The people of the East must take the sighting of the people of the West."

They had also written:

لا اعتبار لاختلاف المطالع

“There is no consideration of the disparity in horizons.”

In light of the newfound geographic realities of the world, recent authorities have explained and interpreted the authoritative texts of the older Hanafi scholars. Shaikh Mawlana Burhanuddin Sanbhali rahimahullah explains, “In the era of the scholars and jurists that this statement is attributed to, what was the concept of East and West? What was the known world in their time? Did they consider the Earth to stretch to the corners we now know today? Obviously not! And the Islamic scholars were not alone in this regard, for the expert geographers and cartographers in that era (and much later too) divided the Earth into four parts and considered only one of the four to be inhabited. This was known as ‘the inhabited fourth.’

الربع المسكون or الربع المعمور

This was because the Americas and Australia had not been discovered yet. They did not know about many Eastern islands located in the Far East. They believed that the Canary Islands were the westernmost corner of the world, and that these islands were the beginning point of the longitudinal lines. The inhabited portion of the world was then divided into seven climes.”

Shaikh Sanbhali rahimahullah further explains, “The jurists of the past were the most intellectual academics of their time. How can we assume that they would establish an illogical ruling? In the known world today, it is impossible to take the sighting of one location as necessary for the entire world to follow. Those who hold the idea of Ittihad al-Matali’ (a single horizon for both the East and the West) are incorrectly categorized as people who do not believe in different horizons, as their disregard for different horizons is really limited to

just a few rulings of the Shari'ah. In reality, they have never meant that the horizons across the globe do not differ, because that would be negating an established and obvious fact. In fact, Allamah ibn Abideen al-Shami (rahimahullah) clears this up in *al-Radd al-Muhtar*:

“It should be clear that the horizons being different is in itself an indisputable fact. This means that two cities are so far apart that the moon is visible in one city the same night it had been obscured in the other. The only difference of opinion here is whether this factual disparity in the horizons should be taken to account or not; is everyone required to consider their own individual horizon or not?”

Another luminary from the past, Shaikh Mohammed Shafi Usmani rahimahullah explains this in similar words. He says, “One of the reasons why Imam Abu Hanifah rahimahullah and other great scholars declared that *Ikhtilaf al-Matali'* (different horizons by city or town) must not be considered was because of the impossibility of one city's report reaching another city, especially when the cities were so far as separated by East and West. In fact, it was no more than an abstract idea, and abstractions have no effect on Shar'i rulings. A well-known principle among the jurists is that rare occurrences are tantamount to nonexistence. Because of all this, they deemed *Ikhtilaf al-Matali'* (different horizons by city or town) to be invalid.”

“But today, the development of airplanes has made the corners of the world as one. It is no longer a mere conjecture for the reports of one city to reach the other corner of the world, but has instead become a daily occurrence. As a consequence, if we accept the report of the East in the West, or the report of the West in the East, then this will inevitably result in the month being 28 days in some parts of the world, and 31 days in others, (while an Islamic month is either 30 or 29 days). Due to this, when cities are so far apart, such that there is a possibility of 28 or 31 days, the only recourse is to consider the validity

of difference in horizons, and this will also be in accordance with the principles of the Hanafis.”

The great Muhaddith of the last century, Shaikh Mawlana Yusuf Binnori rahimahullah mentions in his renowned book, “Ma’arif al-Sunan:”

والذي يظهر أن الأئمة لم ينقل عنهم إلا قول عدم العبرة للاختلاف، مطلقاً من غير فرق بين قرب وبعد ومن غير تفصيل، وإنما المنقول عنهم قول إجمالي، ومنشأ ذلك أن طَيَّ مسافة بعيدة يختلف في مثلها مطلع الهلال ما كان يمكن في شهر واحد، نظراً إلى نظام المواصلات في ذلك العهد، ونظراً إلى النظام المعهود في قطع المسافة عند ذلك، فما كان يمكن أن يرى رجل الهلال ثم يصل قبل تمام الشهر إلى بلد يختلف مطلعاه فكان الحكم هو لزوم بالوجه الشرعي وعدم العبرة للاختلاف، فجاء قول عدم العبرة من هذه الجهة، وظاهر أن نفس اختلاف المطالع الشرقية والغربية لم يكن ليخفى على مثل الأئمة حكماء الأمة، ثم إذا جاء من بعدهم فوسعوا دائرة قولهم إلى ما لم يريدوه، وأخذوا قولهم بأوسع معنى الكلمة عاماً في كل مطلع - وأرى أن هذا غير ملائم، ولا بد أن يراعى تلك الظروف المحيطة والأحوال المحاطة والأغراض الدائرة في الباب

“It is apparent that the opinion recorded from the earlier jurists is that the differences in horizons should not be considered. They opined so very broadly without making any distinction between close and distant locations, and without going into detail. However, this is a compendious opinion, one that is based on the fact that it was impossible in that era to cover such a distance in a single month that would change the horizon of the moon. This is clear by looking at the system of communication in that time and the modes of travel that they had. So, a person could not see the moon and then reach a place so far that the horizon would change within the same month. Thus, the only possible ruling was to necessitate the sighting of one place for others around it, and to disregard the differences in horizons. This is where the opinion of the dismissal of horizons came from. Otherwise, it

is obvious that these intellectual and scholarly authorities were aware of the unmistakable fact that the horizons are indeed different from East to West. A few later individuals however stretched this opinion to bounds that the scholars themselves had not intended, and portrayed their words in the broadest sense to include all horizons. However, I do not consider this suitable. Instead, it is necessary to take account of the borders and conditions as well as the intents and objectives of that era.”

Keeping all this in mind, it is evident that it is starkly incorrect to consider the words of the earlier scholars as open-ended and literal in their meaning. The general words used by the earlier scholars cannot mean that the entire world must follow the report of any and every sighting, wherever it may come from. This is because in the era of the early jurists, the extreme West of the world ended at Morocco. Moreover, they did not have the means for rapid communication like there are today, and so they had no practical problem in unifying the horizons. In our modern times, however, news can reach the other corner of the world in mere seconds.

Due to this, it is practically impossible to take these texts and apply them in their literal sense today. For example, the sunset in New York, USA is 12 hours after the sunset in Malaysia, which means that when the sun sets in New York, it will already be early morning in Malaysia. If we assume that the moon is sighted in New York, it becomes impossible for the residents of Malaysia to accept that sighting and fast too, because the time of fasting has already begun for them.

This impracticality remains despite the fact that communication is at its finest, and the news of our sighting can reach them in a second or two. Because of these practical problems, the later Hanafi authorities, like Allamah Abdul Hayy al Lakhnawi (d. 1304 AH), Allamah Binnori

(d. 1397 AH), Allamah Anwar Shah Kashmiri (d. 1352 AH), Allamah Shabbir Ahmad Usmani (d. 1369 AH), and Allamah Mufti Rafi Usmani (d. 1444 AH) rahimahumullah have all considered the validity of difference in horizons.

In 1967, the renowned Ulama Kiram and prominent personalities of the time held a conference in Lucknow, India, and made an important resolution in the Council of Islamic Research, Nadwatul Ulama. The resolution is as follows: “In reality, the world does not have only one horizon; rather, it is established that the horizons are different throughout the world (Ikhtilaf al Matali’). This is an indisputable fact with no Fiqhi differences of opinion among the jurists. The jurists merely differ in regards to whether or not this difference should be considered in starting the month of Ramadan and ending it. In light of the evidences and explanations of the Hanafi scholars, it is the unanimous resolution of the Council that the difference of horizons shall be considered for distant cities.”

In summary, the texts of the earlier jurists are justified to mean that when the moon is sighted in a particular location, distant cities can accept this report (once it is established) only if it is practically and logically possible to accept it and act upon it in these far-off cities. This is because the extensive spread of population across the globe in the present day has made it impossible for the sighting of one single location worldwide, which makes it clear that in distant cities, *Ikhtilaf al-Matali’* (different horizons by city or town) must be recognized. This can also be expressed in this way that the *Zahir al Riwayah* of the Hanafi jurists, that is, *Ittihadul Matali’*, is only considered in lands of close proximity, and that *Ittihadul Matali’* cannot be strained to mean the entirety of the presently known world. This further aligns with the historic geographical realities of the era in which the early Hanafi jurists opined *Ittihadul Matali’*.

However, it is reiterated that this should be kept in mind that the actual difference of opinion among the Muslim jurists is not with regards to whether different horizons exist, but rather, whether this difference is considered, because the existence of this difference is undeniable and self-evident, as acknowledged by the great Hanafi jurist, Allamah Ibn Abideen Shami rahimahullah: “It should be clear that the horizons being different is in itself an indisputable fact.”

SUPPORTING RESEARCH OF SHAIKH AL FARFAOR RAHIMAHULLAH

قال الشيخ الفرفور في رسالته : بلغة المطالع في بيان الحساب والمطالع :
الذي ثبت بعد اكتشاف مجاهيل الأرض وقاراتها، لا سيما أمريكا، منذ قرابة أربعمئة سنة
ونيف أن كلا من القولين (القول باتحاد المطالع لدى أهل المشرق والمغرب، والقول باختلاف المطالع
بين كل بلد وبلد ومصر ومصر) كليهما مخانف عن الصحة، بعيد عن الحقيقة العلمية. ذلك؛ لأن
الأرض كما ثبت أهليلجية التكوين (بيضوية) ولها وجهان؛ وجه منير باتجاه الشمس، ووجه معتم
باتجاه العكس. فساعة يكون النهار في أوله في الوجه المنير يكون الليل في أوله في الوجه المعتم،
ومن هنا يختلف توقيت الزمان، وتوقيت الساعات وما إلى ذلك ...
فتأسيساً على ذلك لا بد من معيار علمي مجرد، نمسك به في حل هذه المشكلة، ألا وهو خطوط
الطول.

فلنقسم الأرض حسب هذا المعيار (خطوط الطول) إلى ثلاثة أقطار كبرى رئيسية، والفواصل
بينها طبيعية كالبهار:

١- القارة الأمريكية كلها قطر، بما فيها الولايات المتحدة، وكندا والبرازيل وأمريكا
الجنوبية والجزر التابعة لها إلى قناة بنما.

٢- من المغرب الأقصى وما يسامته شمالاً من بريطانيا وفرنسا وإسبانيا إلى الخليج العربي
شرقاً وما يسامته شمالاً من العراق وتركيا وجبال الأورال. كل ذلك قطر وفيما بين ذلك مثل الجزيرة
العربية وبلاد الشام وتركيا وأروبا الشرقية والغربية والمغرب الأوسط والأدنى ومصر والسودان
والحبشة وما إلى ذلك.

٣- ومن شرق الخليج العربي إلى اليابان قطر، بما فيه من إيران وبلاد الهند والباكستان
والأفغان والجمهوريات السوفياتية الإسلامية وبلاد الصين وبلاد اليابان (جزر اليابان)

فكل قطر من هذه الأقطار الثلاثة وحدة مكانية مستقلة عما عداه من القطرين الآخرين، إذا رُوي الهلال فيه لا يلزم القطر الثاني والثالث، بل يلزم ذلك القطر بكل ما فيه من أمصار ودول وبلاد. والله أعلم.

Shaikh al Farfaor rahimahullah writes: “After the discovery of unknown lands and continents – especially the discovery of America about 400 years ago – it became established that the opinions of Ittihad al-Matali’ (a single horizon for both the East and the West), and of Ikhtilaf al-Matali’ (different horizons by city or town), are both incorrect and far from reality. This is because the Earth has an elliptical ovoid shape. And it always has two sides: one illuminated because it is facing the Sun, and the other dark because it is facing the opposite direction. This means that at a single time, it is day in the illuminated side and night in the dark side and due to this, time differs throughout the world.

In light of all this, it is necessary to have a purely fact-based criterion that we can adhere to in the face of this obvious obstacle. This criterion is the longitudinal lines. Using these lines, we can divide the Earth into three major regions, which are already separated by natural dividers like oceans:

(1) The Americas (The Western Hemisphere) are one region. This includes the United States of America, Canada, Brazil and the rest of South America, and the peninsulas bordering it until the Panama Canal.

(2) From Morocco (and north of it, including Britain, France, and Spain) to the Arabian (Persian) Gulf in the East (and north of it, including Iraq, Turkey, and the Ural Mountains) is all one region. This obviously includes everything between that as well, including the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Northern and Southern Europe, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, etc.

(3) From East of the Arabian (Persian) Gulf to Japan is a single region. This includes Iran, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republics of the former Soviet Union, China, and the Japanese islands.

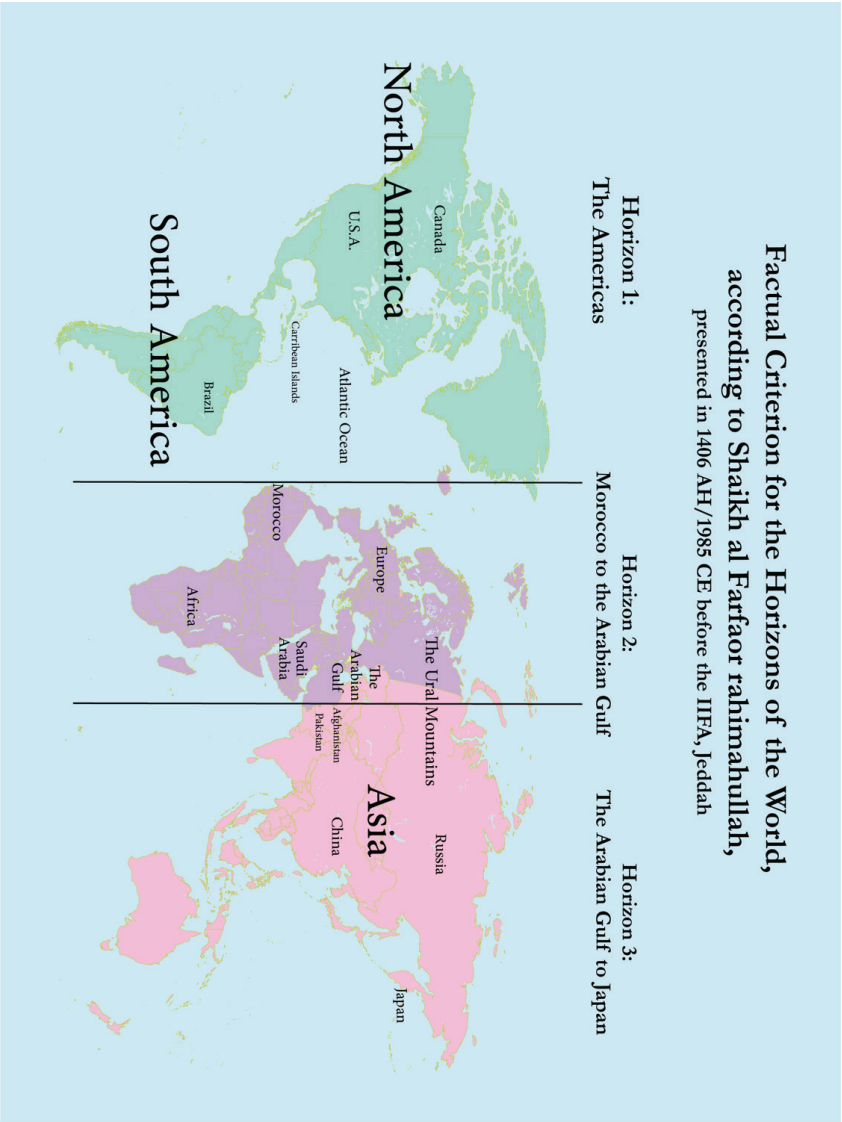
Each of these three regions is an individual place on its own – completely distinct from the other two regions. If the moon is seen in one, its sighting does not apply to the second or third region. Rather, it applies specifically to that particular region where the moon was seen, including to all its cities, states, and countries. And Allah, the Almighty knows best.”

Shaikh Mohammed al Fateh considers the above-mentioned research of Shaikh al Farfaor rahimahullah to be the correct view in his important book on this subject, *al Badr al Tali’ fi Ikhtilaf al Matali’*. He writes: “This is the correct opinion as it is far from any exaggeration or understatement, and thus is the preferred opinion over all others. It can be further substantiated by the clear and indisputable fact that the Earth will always be divided into two sides: one illuminated by the sun and one dark due to its absence. This means that at one given time, the moon rises and is visible in only one of the two sides.”

During the discussion, Shaykh Abd al-Latif al-Farfaor rahimahullah raised an important question before the Ulama: “How can we generalize the ruling and apply *Ittihad al-Matali’* to the entire globe, while knowing that at one time, the moon is visible in only half of the globe, and not in the other half? I am yet to find an answer to this question!”

See Shaikh al Farfaor rahimahullah’s research mapped on the next page.

Factual Criterion for the Horizons of the World,
according to Shaikh al Farfaor rahimahullah,
presented in 1406 AH/1985 CE before the IIFA, Jeddah



CALIFORNIA IN THE NORTH AMERICAN HORIZON (MATLA')

This detailed and scholarly research presented by Shaikh al Farfaor rahimahullah further substantiates the boundaries of the horizon set by the Ulama of the Central Hilal Committee in the 2014 conference. Moreover, it justifies the inclusion of the West Coast, particularly California, in the single matla' of the United States.

WHY THE MOON IS MORE VISIBLE ON THE WEST COAST

The chances of sighting the Hilal are generally higher on the West Coast. This is because the local conditions drastically improve the likelihood of positive reports. The moon grows in age as it appears to move across the sky from East to West. As the moon's age increases, more and more of it becomes illuminated, thus making it more visible. By sunset time in California, the age of the moon increases significantly, improving the chances of sighting. Furthermore, the high altitude of observation is an important factor in the influx of positive sightings from the West Coast. The higher a person ascends, the more the chances of visibility increase. This is a fact confirmed by early Muslim scholars and contemporary astronomers. Allamah ibn Abideen writes:

أن الرؤية تختلف باختلاف صفو الهواء وكدرته وباختلاف انهباط المكان وارتفاعه، فإن
هواء الصحراء أصفى من هواء المصر، وقد يرى الهلال من أعلى الأماكن ما لا يرى من الأسفل فلا
يكون تفرد به الرؤية خلاف الظاهر بل على موافقة الظاهر
(رد المحتار، ٩٨٣/٢. كراتشي)

“The sighting of the moon differs based on the clarity of the sky, and the altitude of the observer. The sky of the desert is clearer than that of the city. Moreover, the Hilal may be sighted from higher

altitudes while at a lower altitude, it would not be visible. So the person at higher altitudes being the only one to sight is not, in fact, absurd but truly reasonable.”

Responding to a question regarding the factors that affect crescent moon visibility, the U.S. Naval Observatory stated: “There are many factors in the sighting of the thin crescent Moon. In addition to the four that you cite, one must also add in altitude of the observer and atmospheric transparency, which are directly linked to each other. In general, the higher you are in the atmosphere, the more transparent the sky should be since you are looking through less air, water vapor, and suspended dust.”

That, coupled with the experience of the local observers, results in the increased possibility of sighting the moon on the West Coast.

CONCLUSION

The Central Hilal Committee of North America would like to make a passionate and heartfelt appeal to the Muslims of North America to trust the ‘Ulama Kirām and adhere to their decisions regarding the beginning and end of the blessed month of Ramadan and the correct day of Eid al Adha, as these are all purely ‘ibadah related issues. We ask Allah to show us the Straight Path and allow us to follow it, and show us what is incorrect and allow us to abstain from it.



