



# THE MATLA' ISSUE



# INTRODUCTION

- 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.

## INTRODUCTION

- The actual difference of opinion is regarding the unification (Ittihadul Matali) and difference (Ikhtilaful Matali') of the horizons.

## WHAT IS A MATLA'?

- Matla' means horizon.
- In the context of moonsighting, it 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. (Fatawa al-Shami)

## BOUNDARIES OF THE MATLA'

- Setting the boundaries of the matla' is undecided amongst the 'ulama of the past and contemporary times.
- A broad criterion is that the matla' will be considered different where accepting a particular sighting results in a month coming out to be 28 or 31 days.

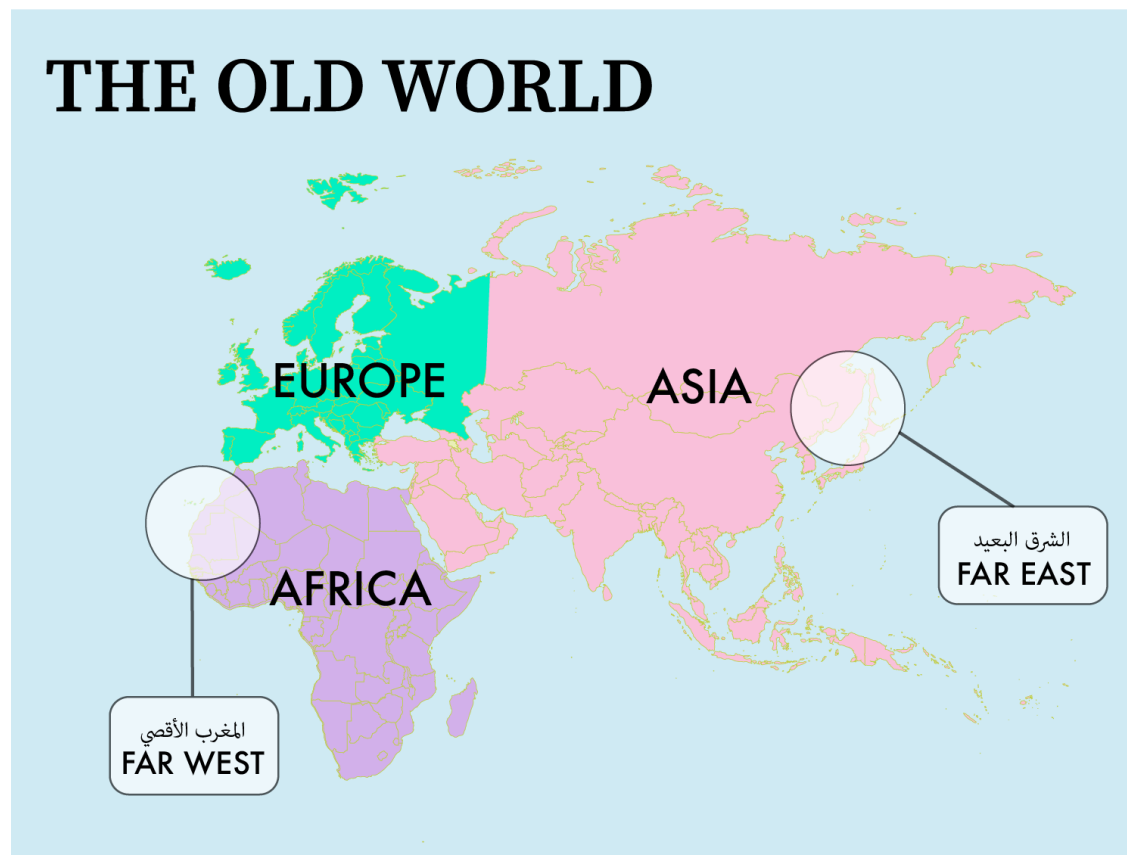
## MATLA' IN MOONSIGHTING

- The difference of horizons is an undisputable reality, meaning that the horizon across the world does differ.
- The question now is whether this actual difference of horizons is considered or not when determining the Islamic date.
- In other words, the contention regarding ikhtilaf matali or 'adm i'tibar ikhtilaf al-matali'.
- Some have recorded 'adm i'tibar ikhtilaf al-matali' as the zahir al-riwayah of the Ahnaf, but our discussion will not be whether or not it truly is the zahir al-riwayah.
- Instead, since both opinions (i'tibar and 'adm i'tibar ikhtilaf al-matali') have been adopted by great Hanafi fuqaha, we will be discussing **a practical solution for the present world.**

# UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF

- In order to understand these two opinions, it is important to consider the geographic reality of the world at the time that the fuqaha made their statements.
- 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 just recently, 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 known world today.

# UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF





## UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF: THE OLD WORLD

- Looking at the map of the Old World 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.

# UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF: THE OLD WORLD

- It is important to know that this was the geographic 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.

## UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF

- 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 have a drastic impact on the discussion of the unification and difference of the horizons.

# UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF



## UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF: THE NEW WORLD

- 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 المعمور or الربع المسكون. 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.”

## UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF: THE NEW WORLD

- **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?”

# UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF: THE NEW WORLD

- **Shaikh Mufti-e-Azam Mohammed Shafi** 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.”

# UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF: THE NEW WORLD

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



## UNDERSTANDING THE IKHTILAF: THE NEW WORLD

- 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.”

## A CONCLUSION BASED ON GEOGRAPHIC REALITIES

- 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 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.

- In summary, the texts of the earlier fuqaha (both for and against considering the differences of horizons) 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 practically impossible for the sighting of one single location to be recognized worldwide. Thus, 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 recorded Zahir al Riwayah ('adm i'tibar ikhtilaf al-matali') is only considered in lands of close proximity, and that it 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'.

## SUMMARY OF PRACTICAL SOLUTION

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- Accepting the sighting of any location within United States to make a decision regarding the Islamic date for the entirety of the nation is practically and logically possible, and ensures unity for Muslim communities in the entire country and thus the entire country shall be held as one matla’.

SUMMARY OF PRACTICAL SOLUTION

## SUPPORTING RESEARCH

- Numerous books and the works of renowned Ulama and astronomers were examined thoroughly in researching this matter.
- During this study, outstanding research by a prestigious alim of the recent past, Shaikh Dr. Mohammed Abd al Latif Salih al Farfaor al Hassani rahimahullah, was found.

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.

## SUPPORTING RESEARCH

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 مجانف عن الصحة، بعيد عن الحقيقة العلمية. ذلك؛ لأن الأرض كما ثبت أهليجية 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 ...

فتأسيسا 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:

- 1- القارة الأمريكية كلها قطر، بما فيها الولايات المتحدة، وكندا والبرازيل وأمريكا الجنوبية والجزر التابعة لها إلى قناة بنما.
  - 2- من المغرب الأقصى وما يسامته شمالا من بريطانيا وفرنسا وإسبانيا إلى الخليج العربي شرقا وما يسامته شمالا 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.
  - 3- ومن شرق الخليج العربي إلى اليابان قطر، بما فيه من إيران وبلاد الهند والباكستان وأفغان والجمهوريات السوفياتية الإسلامية وبلاد الصين وبلاد اليابان (جزر اليابان)
- فكل قطر من هذه الأقطار الثلاثة وحدة مكانية مستقلة عما عداه من القطرين الآخرين، إذا روي الهلال فيه لا يلزم القطر الثاني والثالث، بل يلزم ذلك القطر بكل ما فيه من أمصار ودول وبلاد. والله أعلم.

# SUPPORTING RESEARCH

- **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.”

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

**Horizon 1:  
The Americas**

**Horizon 2:  
Morocco to the Arabian Gulf**

**Horizon 3:  
The Arabian Gulf to Japan**





## SUPPORTING RESEARCH

- **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.”