

## INTRODUCTION



**P**RAISE BE TO GOD, Cleaver of the dawn-lights, who has manifested His beauty and majesty in every corner of His creation for all who have eyes to see beyond the veil of matter and form. It is He who has made some of the mysteries of His infinite power comprehensible to those whom He has imbued with intellect, that they might observe, comprehend and precisely measure the movements and qualities of all things, from the building blocks of existence to the catapulting of galaxies through an expanding cosmos. And still, for all that He has manifested to us, He has concealed yet more behind the veil of His subtlety, for He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden.

It is He who exhorts His devout worshippers, through the movements of the Sun and moon, to look beyond creation to the One who created those great signs of the celestial sphere and set them in their orbits. So is man turned, through his very contemplation of the wonders of existence, to adoration of the mystery of His Creator; observation of light and shadow in this world ultimately lead to the beholding of God's countenance in the life eternal.

We ask our Lord Most High to send His eternal peace and blessings on our Master Muhammad, the light of truth outshining the Sun and moon in glory and beauty, his family, beacons of his Prophetic light, his companions, the stars of guidance, and those who followed them in light, guidance and spiritual perfection.

This work has been long in the forging. The question of prayer and fasting times in high latitude countries, such as the UK, is a question that has vexed successive generations of scholars and lay

Muslims alike during the period that large settled communities have been living in these lands. Over the years, I have been consulted each Ramadan by students of knowledge and concerned Muslims in regards to the accuracy (or otherwise) of various Ramadan timetables in circulation. In the past, the response from me (and many other young scholars in such positions) had been one limited to the immediate needs of people, which was to follow the local masjid prayer and fasting timetables. However, given the upsurge in debate and even acrimony on this topic, and especially the risk of serious dissension (*fitna*) in the community, it appeared that there was a responsibility to provide more detailed guidance on the issue.

It commenced as an attempt to perform a systematic and robust observational study of dawn, conducted through 2012/3 with a team of observers. On the basis of these (and further) observations, as well as lengthy discussions with scholars and scientific experts on various sides of the debate, the research base of this work developed into its current form.

It was a tale that grew in the telling, each observation or discussion prompting yet further research – though all related to the central subject matter at hand: the effect of twilight in high latitude countries on worship. Chapter 5, which deals with the Islamic legal discussions, has been amended and re-written so frequently over the past couple of years that it is virtually a second edition!

In this work, therefore, I will attempt to address the major conceptual issues around the determination of fajr and isha time at high latitudes. In doing so, I gratefully acknowledge the endeavours of senior scholars (ulama) and jurisconsults (muftayin), and the resulting body of research that they have accrued over the decades in which a large Muslim community has been resident in the UK.

This work is divided into three broad sections. The first two chapters are an amended version of an early position paper circulated among scholars, framing the major issues for discussion and further research, as well as a counsel to the lay Muslim who holds no direct responsibility for determining the prayer times. Together, they form a summary paper, aimed at the generality of Muslims, which outlines the major facets of the debate and provides some guidance on their responsibilities regarding their obligatory worship. Prefixed to this is

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an executive summary of the work that lays out the main investigations and headline conclusions for ease of reference.

The second section is a detailed examination of the scientific, historical and legal issues around twilight, which is aimed primarily at ulama, students of knowledge and those given the responsibility to take decisions about prayer and fasting timetables on behalf of the Muslim community. The last section details a year-long field study that sowed the seeds of this research, as well as the work's conclusions, which it is hoped will serve as a foundation for discussion going forward.

We would request readers to bear in mind that the issue of determining the beginning of the fast at high latitudes is a practically complex and legally detailed one on which there is no modern consensus. Additionally, the reader will find that the research and opinions of a number of different scholars and organisations have been analysed and critiqued. The purpose of this paper is neither to definitively endorse nor reject their observational data, legal positions or subsequent extrapolations. However, it does take into account the wide historical acceptance of those views by the Muslim community in the UK.

Some miscellaneous points: the Arabic text has not been rendered with diacritical markings due to time constraints. Additionally, the major Arabic terms under discussion, such as *tulu al-fajr* and *al-shafaq* have not been italicised, whilst less commonly used terms have been – this also applies to book and journal titles. The *alif-lam* has also been excluded from Arabic names, such that *al-Quduri*, for example, is simply rendered *Quduri*. All this is to render the work easier on the eye, but it is recognised that this may cause some confusion. Lastly, all times are GMT/BST unless otherwise specified.

Cognisant of these facts, we pray that the following clarification and advice will be of benefit, God willing.

