40720 - Which Country to Follow for Ramadan and `Arafah?

the question

Because of some personal circumstances we moved to Pakistan, where a lot of things are different, such as the time of prayer, etc. I want to ask you: I am keen to fast on the day of `Arafah, but the Hijri date in Pakistan is different from the date in Saudi: when the date in Pakistan is the 8th of the month, it is the 9th in Saudi. Should I fast on the 8th – which is the 9th in Saudi – or should I fast according to the date in Pakistan?.

Summary of answer

You should fast and break your fast with the people of the country where you reside, even if it differs from your country of origin. Similarly, on the Day of `Arafah, you should follow the local practice of your place of residence.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Understanding the Scholarly Debate on Moon Sighting

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked: what if the day of `Arafah is different because of the moon being sighted at different times in different countries? Should we fast according to the moon sighting in the country where we are or according to the moon sighting in Al-Haramayn (the two Holy Sanctuaries)?

He replied:

This is based on a difference of opinion among the scholars: Is there only one moon sighting for the whole world or does it vary according to when the moon rises in different places?

The correct view is that it varies according to when the moon rises in different places. For example, if the moon is sighted in Makkah , and today is the ninth, and it is sighted elsewhere one day before Makkah, and the day of `Arafah in Makkah is the tenth for them, it is not permissible for them to fast on this day because it is `Eid. Similarly if it so happens that they sight the moon after Makkah, and the 9th in Makkah is the 8th for them, then they should fast the day that is the 9th for them, which is the 10th in Makkah.

This is the correct view, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When you see it (the new moon) fast and when you see it break your fast.” Those who did not see the moon in their own location have not seen it.

Just as people unanimously agreed that the times for dawn and sunset vary according to their own location, so too the months are also worked out by location, just like the daily timings. (End quote from Majmu` Al-Fatawa, 20|)

Should All Muslims Follow One Moon Sighting?

And he (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked about some people who worked in the Saudi embassy in a foreign country, who said that they were having a problem concerning the fast of Ramadan and the fast on the day of `Arafah. The brothers there had split into three groups:

1. One group said: we will fast with Saudi and break the fast with Saudi.
2. Another group said: we will fast with the country where we are living and break the fast with them.
3. The last group said: we will fast Ramadan with the country where we are living, but we will fast the day of `Arafah with Saudi.

They asked the Shaykh to provide them with a detailed answer concerning the Ramadan fast and fasting the day of `Arafah, whilst noting that for the past five years, in the country where they were living neither Ramadan nor the day of `Arafah had been observed on the same days as in Saudi; their Ramadan started one or two days after it had been announced in Saudi, and

sometimes three days after.

He replied:

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The scholars (may Allah have mercy on them) differed concerning the issue when the moon is sighted in one part of the Muslim world and not in another : do all the Muslims have to act on the basis of that, or only those who sighted it and the people who live in the same region, or only those who sighted it and the people who live under the same government? There are many different points of view.

The most correct view is that the matter should be referred to those who have knowledge of it. If the moon rises at the same point for two countries they become like one country, so if it is sighted in one of them that ruling applies to the other. But if the rising points differ, then each country has its own ruling. This is the view favoured by Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him); this is the apparent meaning of the texts of the Quran and Sunnah and what is implied by analogy.

- In the Quran, it says (interpretation of the meaning):

{So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan i.e. is present at his home), he must observe Sawm (fasts) that month, and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number [of days which one did not observe Sawm (fasts) must be made up] from other days. Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you. (He wants that you) must complete the same number (of days), and that you must magnify Allah [i.e. to say Takbir (Allahu Akbar: Allah is the Most Great)] for having guided you so that you may be grateful to Him.} [Al-Baqarah 2:185]

What is implied by this verse is that whoever does not see it is not obliged to fast.

In the Sunnah, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When you see it (the new moon) then fast, and when you see it, break your fast.” What is implied by this Hadith is that

if we did not see it we are not obliged to fast or to break the fast.

- With regard to analogy, the times for starting and ending the fast each day should be worked out in each country on its own, according to the local times of sunrise and sunset. This is a point on which there is scholarly consensus. So you see the people in east Asia starting their fast before the people of west Asia, and breaking their fast before them, because dawn breaks for the former before the latter, and the sun sets for the former before the latter.

Once this is established with regard to the times for starting and ending the daily fast, it also applies to the start and end of the monthly fast. There is no difference between them.

But if many regions come under the same government, and the ruler gives the command for the fast to start or end, then his command must be followed, because this is a matter of scholarly dispute but the command of the ruler dispels that dispute.

Based on the above, you should fast and break your fast along with the people of the country where you are living, whether that is in accordance with your country of origin or not. Similarly on the day of `Arafah you should follow the country where you are living. (End quote from Majmu` Al-Fatawa, 19)

And Allah knows best.