Answering the most debated Ramadan topics

Professional Notes
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Allah, subhanahu wa ta’ala, chose this month for us to fast as He says:


“O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.” Surah al-Baqarah, 2:183

Allah also revealed the Glorious Qur’an in the month of Ramadan as He says:


“The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur’an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it…” Surah al-Baqarah, 2:185

Ramadan is one of the special times of the year, and fasting is one of the most special acts of worship. The Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, said that there is nothing similar to fasting. [Musnad of Imam Ahmad and Ibn Hibban]

Allah has emphasized the reward of the patient ones as He says:


“Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account.” Surah al-Zumar, 39:10

In many books of Tafseer, scholars explain that the patient ones are those who fast.
Historical Events That Occurred in Ramadan

• ‘Isa, alayhi assalam, was risen to the heavens
• Musa, alayhi assalam, died
• The Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, was given the Qur’an
• Khadija, radyAllahu ‘anha, died
• The Battle of Badr
• Fath-Makkah (Conquest of Makkah)
• Digging of khandaq (ditch)
• Story of al-‘asnaam (the idols) in Makkah
• Muslims arrived to the shore of Al-Andalus and Sudan
• Countries were even established in Ramadan

But remember, the most important change is the change that happens to you in Ramadan! It should not merely be a change in your sleeping and eating habits but rather a change in your deen and character. The Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, said that if you do not stop saying and doing evil, then there is no point in you leaving your food and drink. Allah, subhanahu wa ta’ala, is not interested in changing your eating habits; He wants you to change your relationship with Allah, you relationship with the people, and your overall character.

The Prophet, Sallallahu ‘Alayhi Wa Sallam, Fasted

The Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, used to fast in Ramadan and even outside Ramadan. ‘A’ishah, radyAllahu ‘anha, reported that the Prophet would fast so much until it seemed he would never break his fast. He never fasted an entire month except Ramadan.

Anas, radyAllahu ‘anhu, said that there was not a single day he wished to see the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, fasting except that he would find him fasting that day. And there was not a day that I wished to see the Prophet not fasting except that he was not fasting that day. And there was not a single night I could think of that I would wish to see the Prophet praying except that he was praying that night. [Bukhari and Muslim] Anas was the servant of the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, and spent 10 years with him.
People Who Appreciated Fasting

Sayyidah Nafisah was from the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alay wa sallam’s, family, and she died in Egypt. When she was dying, people offered her food, but she refused. She explained that for the last 40 years, she hoped to die while fasting—and she died before Maghrib. Not only was she fasting, but she was also reading Qur’an:

قُل لَّمَن مَّا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ فَلِلَّهِ كُنْبٌ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةُ

“Say, ‘To whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth?’ Say, ‘To Allah. He has prescribed upon Himself mercy.’” Surah al-An’am, 6:12

‘A’ishah, radyAllahu ‘anha, had a student by the name of Masruq. She used to say to him innaka waladi (indeed you are my son). He became very ill; while he was dying, he was fasting. The people called ‘A’ishah over in an attempt to convince him to take his medicine and break his fast, but he refused. He said that he wanted to make it easy for himself on a day that is 50,000 years long.

These stories should make us truly appreciate the great act of ibadah of fasting during Ramadan. We thank Allah for allowing us to fast the previous Ramadans, and we ask Him to make this Ramadan the best one yet.

Fasting at the Age of Puberty

At What Age Does Fasting Become Obligatory for Boys and Girls?
Sh. Waleed: The fasting is prescribed upon the Muslim who reaches the age of puberty—and this differs from person to person. Puberty is the sign of an individual Islamically becoming an adult, and it is defined by certain signs (and a certain age according to some scholars).

The clearest sign of a female reaching puberty is when she starts her menses. Some girls may start their menses at the age of 10 or 11 years old; at that time, fasting becomes obligatory upon her in addition to all the other rules of Islam.

For boys, the sign they have reached puberty is the ability to produce maniy (sperm), and this can be established through a wet dream (istimna’).

There is also discussion about the growth of pubic hair being a sign of puberty (however, this is not agreed upon). The Shafi’is and Ahnaaf do not consider this as a sign of puberty while some of the Hanabila and Malikiyya do consider it a sign.

In regards to age, the Shafi’is and Hanabila consider 15 years old as the age of puberty. The Ahnaaf and Malikiyya consider 17 or 18 years old as the age of puberty for boys, and 17 years old for girls.
More debate exists about this topic, but the issue of age only comes into the equation if none of the signs appear. Physical signs like changing of the voice, growing of the armpit hair, or growing of the pubic hair are not considered Islamic signs of reaching puberty. Furthermore, no scholars ever considered them to be signs.

**Bottom Line:**

**Sh. Waleed:**

- Signs agreed upon by the scholars:
  - For a woman—menstruation, pregnancy, or wet dream with production of female sperm
  - For a man—producing sperm

- Age—more debate here
  - Why 15? Because the Prophet, **sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam**, rejected boys of age 14 to join the army. Others say that may have been a cultural component as a 15 year old is similar to a young man (but it doesn’t necessarily equate with reaching the age of puberty).

- Thick pubic hair—some say it is a sign of puberty, others say no because the Prophet, **sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam**, never made it clear. Maybe the Prophet treated some people as mature when they had this sign, but we cannot generalize a ruling from such a scenario.
  - So, some scholars came up with the idea of 17 and 18 years old. (17 for girls because they mature earlier; end of 17, beginning of 18 for boys). Based on a statement of ‘Abbas, **radyAllahu anhu**.

- Advice—we should teach younger kids to fast, as early as 7 years old or even younger. Some scholars say to treat it like salah: order them to fast at the age of 7, and put more emphasis on it at the age of 10.
  - In Bukhari, there is a hadith stating that the Muslims taught their kids to fast on the day of ‘Ashura (fasting ‘Ashura was obligatory in the beginning). So, they used to encourage the kids to fast and bring them toys to play with at the back of the masjid until the adhaan was called.
  - Keep in mind that you must properly assess whether your child can fast without complications such as dehydration, etc. In some places of the world, the fasts are very long, especially in the summer. You can have them fast half a day and then slowly increase the duration of fasting.
  - Fasting is not obligatory on the kids until they reach the age of puberty—don’t make it difficult, don’t make them hate fasting or the deen.
Health Conditions

What health conditions exempt someone from fasting? Under what conditions can a person skip fasting and provide the Kaffara?

Sh. Waleed: Allah said if you are sick or travelling, it is permissible for you to make it up on other days. But how is “sickness” defined? The four madhahib and vast majority of Muslim jurists said that there are four reasons to break the fast due to sickness:

1. If fasting that day will increase the sickness.
2. If fasting will cause the sickness to be worse, or delay the healing process. For example, if one had surgery and not taking certain medicines will delay the healing process.
3. If it causes a great deal of hardship (mashaqa). For example, if one is in great pain due to chemotherapy and needs medication to control the pain.
4. If someone takes certain medication that causes him/her to be extremely dehydrated and it will be a great deal of harm to the individual. Dehydration itself is not the reason for breaking the fast, but rather the negative consequences of dehydration (such as dizziness or fainting).

Note: a light cold, a light headache, or allergies, are not considered “sickness” unless they reach a severe level.

What if one is not currently sick, but fasting and not taking medication will likely have a negative impact on the person’s health in the future? (e.g. high blood pressure, diabetes)

Sh. Waleed: Scholars say it will take the same ruling as if one is sick, and this is a strong opinion agreed upon by the fuqaha across the board. Ibn Qudamah said that the person who fears becoming sick due to fasting is treated like the sick person. An-Nawawi has also mentioned the same in his book “al-Majmu”. However, there is one trend among earlier scholars, some of the tabi’in, and adh-Dhahiriya: they said it does not take the same ruling as if one is sick, but the later scholars did not hold this opinion.

Should I break my fast because of my sinus problems in the allergy season?

Sh. Waleed: We have to look at how not breaking the fast would affect the person. If not breaking the fast would cause a great deal of hardship, then breaking of the fast is permissible. If the person’s allergy reaches a level where he is unable to function properly, in this case, it is better to break the fast and take the medication. However, if not breaking the fast would cause the person to just sneeze a little bit, then that is not a reason for him to break the fast.

Consultation with Muslim doctors vs. non-Muslim doctors

Sh. Waleed: Muslim scholars commonly say that in terms of the impact of fasting on your health, one should ask a Muslim doctor. It should be a Muslim doctor whom you trust in terms of deen and knowledge. You can also consult a non-Muslim doctor about the impact fasting has on your health, and this is the strongest opinion among the fuqaha. Hanbalis
and Malikis also share this opinion that a non-Muslim doctor (whom you trust) can be consulted. This is also the opinion of Ibn Qayyim, Ibn Taymiyyah, and they base this on the fact that the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, hired Abdullah ibn Uraqit during his hijrah. Ibn Qayyim commented on this story and used this to support his opinion that you can hire a non-Muslim doctor and that you can seek help/advice of a non-Muslim.

If you do consult a non-Muslim doctor, make sure to explain to the doctor what fasting is and make sure that this doctor also values religion and will respect your religion. We see in our history that many of our scholars used to have non-Muslim doctors. For instance, al-Marwadi narrated that he was visiting Imam Ahmad and he saw a Christian doctor leaving Imam Ahmad’s room. The doctor was accompanied by a priest. Al-Marwadi was curious about what he saw, so Imam Ahmad said the priest wanted to visit him. The point Sh. Waleed is making here is that consulting a non-Muslim doctor is also very common.

**For someone undergoing cancer treatment, I know he cannot fast and he has to feed a meal to a poor person for every missed day. Can all the meals be fed to 29-30 people in one day during the first week of Ramadan, or does it have to be done one per day?**

**Sh. Waleed:** The majority of the fuqaha say that the entire kaffara can be given to one person, it can be given all in one day, it can be distributed over multiple days and multiple people. Anas, radyallahu ‘anhu, cooked food and invited poor people to eat from it. Many of the fuqaha dislike the idea of giving cooked food to poor people, they say it is better that they're given a choice, because what if the people do not like the cooked food? The Hanafi have a different position. The Ahnaf hold the opinion that giving 30 meals to one person is counted as kaffara for just one missed fast because giving one poor person 30 meals would remove that person from the category of being “faqeer”, but the vast majority of the fuqaha do not agree with the Ahnaf on this. Sh. Waleed thinks the majority of the scholars in this regard have a stronger argument.

**Exams and Work**

**What about hardship in regards to one’s career or education while fasting? What if someone has an important project at work or students who have exams? At what point does this sort of hardship become a reason to break one’s fast, if at all?**

**Sh. Waleed:** In terms of exams, if it is a boy in school over the age of puberty who is taking an exam, this is no reason for him to break his fast. The concern here is the message of valuing the dunya over the deen that is being sent to the children. However, if the child feels dizzy or is about to faint or is unable to function due to fasting, then it is permissible to break the fast. In terms of work, if someone’s work requires physical labor, then an argument can be made about the permissibility of breaking the fast under certain circumstances. For example, if one is a construction worker and feels signs of dehydration while fasting at work, then he can break his fast.
Which First, Maghrib Salah or Food?

Is it okay to eat your meal before praying or is this considered delaying prayer for a non-valid reason? (This question is not referring to iftar, it is referring to a family that prefers to have the full meal before Maghrib prayer)

Sh. Waleed: Eating a full meal before Maghrib is okay as long as they pray Maghrib on time, and they don’t keep eating until the time for Isha comes in. The Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, said to eat dinner before Maghrib (this is in Bukhari). So it’s okay to delay the salah to eat. The Prophet disliked for someone to pray while desiring food.

Sh. Yasir: Only the Shafi’i are very strict in regards to the timing of Maghrib salah, the other three madhab say Maghrib can be prayed any time from the beginning of Maghrib time to the end (i.e. until before Isha comes in).

Controversy Over Fajr Timing

When does Fajr Begin?

Sh. Yasir: A lot of the prayer charts radically differ in their prayer timings even in the same city. This goes back to the fiqhi controversy of calculating the beginning of Fajr.

Al-Fajr as-Sadiq

Sh. Yasir: Fajr begins at al-Fajr as-Sadiq (the true dawn), which is when the horizon is lit up horizontally with the rays of sun, not just vertically. During the middle of the night, there is a vertical strip that will appear, and as the sun continues to come closer to the horizon, that strip expands outward and becomes flat. When it is on the entire horizon, Fajr time has started. We need to finish our suhoor before this time.

In theory, this is agreed upon by the scholars and all four madhahib. But how do we translate that into a scientific equation?

18-degree Model

Sh. Yasir: About 30 years ago in Makkah, Umm al-Qura invited many scholars and astronomers who decided to adopt the 18-degree model. When the sun is 18 degrees beneath the horizon, it will be considered Fajr; this is the standard/default in the majority of masajid around the world.

Though this is the safer opinion, it is not the only opinion. Some groups have stated different degrees: 19, 17.5, 15, 12, and even 9. So, there is a spectrum of controversy.

ISNA and some British councils have adopted 15 degrees. This difference in degrees translates into a different time (e.g. about 30-minute difference in the US or 2 hours in the UK).
Sh. Yasir says that the whole notion of having one precise number for the whole globe does not make sense. That number varies from latitude to latitude, season to season. It may be logical to adopt the 18-degree model at the equator, but to assume that the 18-degree model will operate everywhere on the globe does not make sense.

That being said, Allah knows best, there is leeway. There are so many factors. Even two individuals monitoring the horizon may give different testimonies regarding the same degree due to factors such as differences in eyesight and air pollution. Fajr as-Sadiq is not really a scientifically precise or calculable time. Unlike sunrise, which can be precisely calculated and determined by the sun rising above the horizon.

Therefore, Sh. Yasir recommends that we follow our individual masjid. 18 is fine, 17 is fine, 15 is fine; going below that may be a little problematic, but Allah knows best. We should not say that a degree model is batil because it differs from our own degree model.

Sh. Yasir’s masjid in Memphis follows the ISNA method.

Sh. Waleed: His masjid also follows the ISNA method. However, if you pray at a masjid or know someone else who follows a different methodology, it is also acceptable.

If there are two masajid with different timings, is it permissible to go with the easier one?
Sh. Yasir: Typically, individuals should pick the timing of the masjid they usually pray with, the masjid they associate with. There should be some kind of unity among a city, so stick with the group you’re associated with. Don’t pick and choose yearly based on convenience.

However, in specific cases in which there may be a huge difference in Fajr timing (e.g. in the UK, Fajr could be at 1:30am in one city and 3:30am in another city based on the degree model they use). Sh. Yasir does not see a problem in choosing the easier one. The 18-degree model may present with much hardship. Thinking of children, teenagers, and people who have work, there is no problem if people swap masajid for ease. It is not a question of halal or haram, not a question of haqq or batil, it is a question of which degree is more accurate, and the average person does not know which one is more accurate. In sha Allah, there is no sin if the person decides to swap masajid for this reason.

“…He has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty…” Surah al-Haj, 22:78
Khatm al-Qur’an

How strong of a Sunnah is reading the entire Qur’an during Taraweeh?

Sh. Waleed: There is no doubt that reading the entirety of the Qur’an is one of greatest acts of deeds we can perform during the month of Ramadan. Completing the Qur’an (not necessarily in Taraweeh) is not only Sunnah Nabawiya, but it is also Sunnah Salafiya (the salaf al-salih used to do it).

The Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, used to review the entire Qur’an with Angel Jibreel, ‘alayhi assalam, during the month of Ramadan. The year the Prophet died, he reviewed it with Jibreel twice. [Sahih Bukhari]

Many of the scholars would make multiple khatma of the Qur’an. Al-Aswad, a student of Ibn Mas‘ud, would complete the Qur’an every two nights. Imam Shafi‘i would make 60 khatma during Ramadan.

Many of the tabi’in, Mujahid, Qatadah, and a long list of scholars would repeat multiple khatmas, and this is something they learned from the Sahaba, radyAllah ‘anhum.

What about reading the entire Qur’an in Taraweeh?

Sh. Waleed: There is no harm in finishing the entire Qur’an in Taraweeh. But did the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, recommend it or order us to do that? No.

However, we have certain indication, from how the Sahaba used to pray. ‘Umar bin al-Khattab, radyAllah ‘anhu, for example, gathered the Sahaba behind Ubayd in salah. 100s of verses would be recited before Fajr. Another narration from Younis Ibn Ubayd states that Abu Abdul Rahman Ibn Bakrah, a companion, would lead the people in al-Basrah and Saeed Ibn Abi al-Hasan and Marwan al-Abdi would lead the salah and pray 20 rakahs and would make khatmas of the Qur’an twice during Taraweeh.

Imam Muhammad Ibn Ismail al-Bukhari would gather his students in the first night of Ramadan to lead the prayer with 20 rakahs. In Ramadan, he would pray with them until he made khatma of the Qur’an.

In the madhahib, they mention that the Imam should not exceed above one khatma of the Qur’an to make it easy for the followers. Some scholars say it is allowed to make more than one khatma.

Al-Kasani, a great Hanafi scholar, said it is recommended to make khatma of the Qur’an because ‘Umar did so with the Sahaba. But al-Kasani said in our days, it is hard for people to witness the whole entire khatma of the Qur’an more than once. However, he said you should read according to what individuals are capable of.

It is reported that Imam Malik did not believe making khatma was part of the Sunnah; it is not something from the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam. Imam Ahmed said you read
according to what people are capable of, so if khatma is difficult for people especially with such late nights, you don’t have to do khatm al-Qur’an, but if the community can handle it, then that’s fine too.

**Moonsighting**

**A Western Controversy**

**Sh. Yasir:** He has an entire article on moonsighting on MuslimMatters.com and encourages everyone to read it to learn more. The controversy does not affect most Muslim countries because the Muslim government announces the day of Eid in those countries. So, the decision is unified throughout the entire country based on the ministry.

However, we have no ministry of Islamic affairs or one united leadership in America and the Western world; so every masjid basically does what it wants to do based on its position.

**Two primary positions in classical Islam relevant to us**

**Sh. Yasir:**

1. Unifying the world with one sighting
2. Following your own latitude of the region you are in, thus following your own province.

These two opinions are found in classical Islam and technically within one madhab. It is common to find both opinions being championed by various people.

**For the bulk of the ummah’s history, every single province followed its own sighting.**

**Sh. Yasir:** Even within the madhab, it is not crystal clear, because this question was largely a theoretical question for most of the history of the ummah. Regardless of what you believe in theoretically, realistically you would follow the opinion of your province or locality. For example, the Muslims of Andalus would never follow the Muslims of China or the Muslims of Arabia because there was no way to communicate with one another about a global sighting, regardless of theory.

Even according to an authentic hadith in Sahih Muslim in which Ibn Abbas discusses the different moonsightings in Damascus vs. Madinah from the words of Kurayb, we understand that the Sahaba had different days of starting Ramadan. It was not considered a big deal.

Sh. Yasir believes there is no problem if every locality follows its own moonsighting. If someone wants to argue for a unified sighting, that is also not a problem and is an acceptable opinion under sound classical Islam. However, the latter has never happened in the history of the ummah and to assume it is going to happen now is somewhat idealistic.

The Prophet, *sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, said that the fasting is the day you start fasting and Eid al-Fitr is the day you do Eid al Fitr [Tirmidhi]. So, no matter what happens in the sky, what matters is that the community comes together on the day Ramadan and the day
of Eid al-Fitr so that the community is united. If one city is following one day and another city is following another, so be it. However, within a city, if there is a difference, Sh. Yasir suggests that we go with the dominant majority. If there is no dominant majority, we stick with our local masjid that we pray with.

ISNA released a new fatwa a few years ago to forget visual sighting for calculations, which was rejected by and large by masajid and scholars. We are seeing the revival of this position and Sh. Yasir has become sympathetic to this opinion after years of working with the community. He deems it as a permissible alternative given the dynamics of the American and Western Muslim communities.

In a theoretical ideal world, Sh. Yasir would hope to have local sightings, and that is the default and what has historically occurred. However, given the dynamic of the Muslim minority living in North America, not knowing when Ramadan and Eid are can be highly problematic. With more and more states declaring Eid a national holiday, it may be difficult to make Eid prayer accommodations. Working professionals such as doctors, engineers, etc. do not know which day to take off. Logistically, it would be easier to know in advance when Eid is going to be. We are not living in a Muslim land; we are a minority struggling to hold on to our identity.

It is permissible in Shariah to take context into account when we look at fiqh positions. Many scholars ignore reality and they think pure theory. That is not how fiqh is derived; fiqh should also arrive from practicality and reality. In Sh. Yasir’s opinion, calculations are NOT the strongest fiqhi opinion, but given the dynamic of the Western Muslim community, he believes it makes sense for us to start thinking more and more about the practical ramifications of knowing when Eid is going to be and the usefulness for us to do that.

**Is the moonsighting a ritual act of worship?**

**Sh. Yasir:** Is it an act of worship that Allah has commanded us to do or is it merely a sign of the actual ritual, which is Ramadan? Some scholars say the former, that it is worship. However, in Sh. Yasir’s humble opinion, there is nothing in the Qur’an and Sunnah, in and of itself, that says it is an act of worship.

Why do we care about this? Because if it is an act of worship, then we do not think about it or try to rationalize it. We simply hear and we obey (e.g. we pray 5 times a day, we don’t ask why 5, we just do it). However, if we say that it is not a ritual act, we are allowed to think about it and rationalize it. What is the reason and wisdom behind this legislation?

We can say that sighting the moon is not a ritualistic act/act or worship in and of itself, but rather an indication.

**“They ask you concerning the new moons. Say, ‘They are fixed times for mankind, and (for) the Pilgrimage.’”** Surah al-Baqarah, 2:189
As for the hadith that says, “We are an illiterate nation, we neither read nor we write,” Sh. Yasir states that many scholars, especially those against calculations, have misunderstood the hadith. The point of the hadith is not a prohibition or commandment, but simply describing the status quo at that time in which the majority of the Sahaba were illiterate. No one says the ummah should remain unlettered for the rest of our future. In fact, the Muslim ummah is very literate now. This hadith is not prohibiting the calculations method. Therefore, we should not see this hadith as prohibiting the use of status quo in the future.

**Conclusion**

**Sh. Yasir:** Follow the majority in your area and do not have ill feelings in your heart towards other Muslims if they choose to follow a different opinion.

If you are in charge and you have to decide, then the best position is local moonsighting. However, practically and pragmatically, he does not have a problem with embracing the calculation model, and it is a valid opinion especially since we are a minority. We can say whatever we want, but within 20 years, Sh. Yasir believes that it will be the default position among the Muslim minority world, regardless of what position we have right now and Allah knows best.

**Another Opinion**

**Sh. Waleed:** There is a methodology that he follows and recommends others to follow. In any issue related to the masses, he always recommends that we refer back to the Council of Fiqh as opposed to a group of relatively unknown individuals. The Council of Fiqh has a large number of specialists who look deeply into issues and conduct much research before they issue a fatwa. There is an agreement recognized by the Muslim councils that specifically rejected the calculations method in determining the beginning of the month.

Even from a fiqh perspective, he may go with Sh. Yasir’s choice. But when he gives fatwas to the public, Sh. Waleed goes with what the Council of Fiqh says. Ironically, in times where it is impossible to unify the ummah on one method of moonsighting, the fuqaha have said this is the rule.

Looking at the fundamental issue at hand, it is ok to choose an opinion among the scholars that can fit certain circumstances for a specific group of people such as minorities. The opinion should not be weak.

An-Nawawi said the calculation method is “a corrupt rejected opinion”. Scholars of the Maliki, Shafi’i, and Hanbali madhab also spoke against this opinion. When we establish rulings, we must look at the evidence, not at the people’s need. We cannot use the deen due to the weakness of people’s iman. Shaykh al-Islam explains that you cannot invent things in the religion just because of the lack of iman among the people. We cannot adopt something new in Shariah just to make it easy for people. That is the wrong way.
Hadith concerning the illiterate ummah
Sh. Waleed: What Sh. Yasir said is absolutely correct, it doesn’t mean we don’t learn math or about the world. However, Sh. Waleed disagrees that this hadith is describing the status quo. It may be part of it, but this hadith is saying that this month, how we determine the sighting of the moon, how the month is calculated, we use it in the most illiterate way. We don’t use calculations when it comes to this matter; we use it in the most illiterate and simple way.

A judge in Saudi Arabia said in 1426, that for the last 20 years, they failed to recognize the moon a single time with a telescope while they could see it with their actual eye. Even more unscientifically speaking, it is not very effective to sight the moon using a telescope. Instead, it is more effective to use your own eyes if you have good eyesight and are in a good location. The telescope puts more light in a specific point, possibly making it more difficult to detect the start of the new month. So, the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, was saying to use the most simple way of looking at the moon.

Response to Sh. Waleed
Sh. Yasir: What Sh. Waleed is saying is a very accepted opinion. But would Imam an-Nawawi say the exact same thing given the current circumstances of today? Should we blindly follow their opinion of their time and place, or should we try to do what they would have done given that times have changed, as well as astronomy, science, and technology. What they knew astronomically was great, but it’s nowhere close to what we know. As for the majami’, the scholars of Saudi Arabia all have differences. Ikhtilaaf al-Mutali’ is the standard and default position of the majority of the ummah.

Albani and others had Wahdat al-Mutali’, and it is the position of AMJA.

Sh. Yasir is stressing the importance of unity more than a fiqhi position.

Taraweeh

Can the Imam read from the mushaf during Taraweeh?
Sh. Waleed: The Shafi’is and the strongest opinion amongst the Hanabila say it is permissible. Imam Ahmad also said it is permissible, but when he was asked about the fardh salah, he said no, I have not heard anything about it. Most of the Hanabila also say the Imam should not read from the mushaf during the fardh salah.

In Ramadan, he believes it is allowed based on the narration from Dhakwaan, the boy of ‘A’ishah, who used to lead her Ramadan from the mushaf. Also, Az-Zuhri said that the best ones among us used to read from the mushaf during the salah.

Imam Malik allowed it (but he disliked that you pick up the mushaf and start looking at it in the middle of salah). However, most of the Maliki don’t recommend it at all.
The Hanafi madhab is very strict, saying that the salah is batil if one looks at the mushaf because it is an unnecessary movement in salah.

You should try to find someone who is hafidh, but if the Imam needs to hold the mushaf, it is permissible.

**Can you read the English translation while praying behind the Imam?**

Sh. Waleed: Shaykh Ibn Baaz gave a fatwa that if you don’t move your lips to the English translation (eyes only), it is permissible. But if you are actually speaking the English in salah, it is not allowed. Just looking with the eyes is permissible, especially if you don’t speak Arabic because it can help you focus. He has a paper published about this matter on AMJA.

**How strong of a Sunnah is it to pray Taraweeh?**

Sh. Yasir: The word Taraweeh does not occur in the Sunnah. Taraweeh prayer is the same as the Qiyam al-Layl, Tahajud, and Witr. Except that in Ramadan, it is called Taraweeh. It was called Taraweeh in the time of the tabi‘in because they would rest (yurowahoon) after every 4 rakhas. Taraweeh means to rest.

So, it is the same as Qiyam al-Layl (the night prayer). It is especially recommended in Ramadan to pray it and that’s one of the three reasons of having the previous sins forgiven:

1. Whoever fasts Ramadan
2. Whoever prays the nights of Ramadan
3. Whoever prays Laylatul-Qadr with iman and expecting the reward from Allah

It is a very strongly emphasized Sunnah, but it is not wajib (obligatory). If a person is able to pray at home, that is fine. If a person is able to pray at the masjid, that is fine. Sh. Yasir says that the default ruling is to attempt to pray in the masjid for the average person because there is more spirituality. But for the one who is used to praying at home alone long hours and the one who likes to recite the Qur'an himself, there is no question that privacy is also encouraged, and one may have more ikhlas praying Taraweeh at home.

**What about the number of rakhas?**

Sh. Yasir: First realize that Taraweeh is a nafl prayer, and therefore, there is no number that is mandatory. We cannot have a mandatory number for something that is nafl. So, if a person wants to pray any number of rakhas, that would be permissible. Historically speaking, the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, typically prayed the 11 rakhas of Qiyam al-Layl (8+3); this was his overall sunnah. And in the time of ’Umar bin al-Khattab, he realized that 11 is very very long, so made them shorter recitations. We have authentic narrations saying that he made them 20 rakhas. Therefore, it is from the actions of ’Umar (he is a person whom we follow), so it is completely permissible to pray 20.

We also know that the people of Madinah under Imam Malik would pray 36 rakhas. The people of Makkah would perform Tawaf after every 4 rakhas. So the people of Madinah wanted to compensate for that, so they added extra rakhas.
The number of rakahs is not the important principle, but rather the quality of rakahs. If a person wants to pray 8 or 20 rakahs (or even less or more) it is permissible. But historically speaking, 8 and 20 have been the predominate ones. Choose quality over quantity!

**Sh. Waleed:** He agrees with Sh. Yasir. But the 36 rakahs prayed by Imam Malik was actually started by ‘Umar bin Abdulaziz. After that, the people of Madinah imitated him. And that is how Imam Malik saw the people of Madinah pray. You can pray any number that you would like.

There is a difference between the word Taraweeh and Qiyam. Qiyam refers to praying by yourself while Taraweeh is praying in congregation. Even if you pray Taraweeh by yourself, we don’t call it Taraweeh but rather Qiyam (even if you have a rest between the rakahs).

Some fuqaha said, it is not recommended for those well-known and respected to pray at home as opposed to in congregation so they will not be a bad role model for the community.

### Fasting and Travel

**If someone fasts while traveling, is it praiseworthy or discouraged?**

**Sh. Waleed:** If traveling will cause hardship, stress, and difficulty for a person, scholars agree that it is better for him or her to break the fast. But what if there is no harm? The Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi’i madhahib say it is better to fast because Allah says:

> وَأَنَّا نَصُومُوا خَيْرًا لَنَاَّكُمْ

> “And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him” **Surah al-Baqarah, 2:184**

The Prophet, **sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam**, once fasted on a very hot day. Everyone broke the fast except the Prophet and Abdullah bin Rawaha.

The Hanabila disagree with the majority opinion. They say that breaking the fast is better. The Prophet, **sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam**, said that it is not birr (piety) that you fast while traveling. So, don’t think that it is better for you to fast if you’re traveling (no extra virtue).

Some say that if you fast while traveling, the fast is not valid. Reported by Ibn Abbas, Abu Hurayrah, Az-Zuhri, who mentioned the hadith, “They are the ones who disobeyed”. But this was in Fath Makkah (a specific situation), so it is impermissible to take that as a general rule.
Sh. Waleed thinks that it is permissible to fast while traveling or to break the fast. He doesn’t see a virtue in either scenario.

‘A’ishah reported that Hamza bin `Amr Al-Aslami asked the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, if it is permissible to travel while fasting. The Prophet said that he can fast if he wishes or he can break his fast.

Anas used to travel with the Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, and he was taught that the one who fasts will not criticize or look down upon the one not fasting and vice versa.

**General Advice**

**Sh. Yasir:** Don’t burn yourself out the first few days with overzealousness. Within 3 days, we may be so sleep deprived. In the middle 10 days of Ramadan, the masjid may be very empty in comparison to the first and last 10 days. We should only take on as much as we can handle. The Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, told us not to take on more than we can do. So, don’t go overboard that you will burn yourself out. Instead, start with what is reasonable and then slowly build up because we need to finish Ramadan strong and at our best.

**Sh. Waleed:** We wish the best for Sh. Abu Eesa and his family. We recall the wise word of Sh. Abu Eesa: it is so important for the people of Ramadan to focus on the wajibat (obligations). We may focus so much on the Sunnah (recommended) acts that we may actually neglect the wajibat. People may focus a lot on Taraweeh and Qiyam al-Layl, but they forget about the perfection of siyyam, fardh salah, akhlacq, treating our parents with ihsan, and maintaining ties of kin. The Prophet, sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam, reported that the most beloved deeds to Allah are the obligatory ones.

May Allah, subhanahu wa ta’ala, make this the best Ramadan for all of us!