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156- Ruling on moon sighting for the night of 'Ashura'

Q: Many Muslims are keen to observe Sawm (Fast) on the Day of 'Ashura' (10th of Muharram) as Du'ah (callers to Islam) always encourage them to do so. Why do you not then direct people to sight the new moon of Muharram then broadcast the news of the confirmed sighting via the media?

A: It is a Sunnah (supererogatory act of worship following the example of the Prophet) to observe Sawm on the Day of 'Ashura', for Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his Sahabah (Companions of the Prophet) observed Sawm on that day. Prophet Musa (Moses, peace be upon him) also observed this Sawm as an expression of gratitude to Allah (Glorified and Exalted be He). They did so because on that Day Allah rescued Musa and his people and destroyed Pharaoh and his people. Therefore, Musa (peace be upon him) and the Children of Israel observed this Sawm out of gratitude to Allah (Glorified and Exalted be He). Our Prophet (peace be upon him) did the same thanking Allah (Glorified and Exalted be He) and following the example of Prophet Musa. In addition, people of Jahiliyyah (pre-Islamic time of ignorance) used to observe Sawm on the same Day, and the Prophet (peace be upon him) stressed the importance of observing Sawm on it, but this changed when Allah obligated observing Sawm in Ramadan, so the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated: *«Anyone who wishes to observe Sawm on it (the Day of 'Ashura') may do so, and anyone who wishes to abandon it may do so.»*

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However, the Prophet (peace be upon him) informed us that observing Sawm on the Day of 'Ashura' expiates the sins of the past year.

It is preferred to observe Sawm also on the day preceding or succeeding 'Ashura' to differ from the practice of the Jews. The Prophet (peace be upon him) stated: *«Fast a day before (the Day of 'Ashura') or after it.»* According to another narration: *«Fast a day before (the Day of 'Ashura') and a day after it.»* Thus, a person applies the Sunnah by observing Sawm on the Day of 'Ashura' along with one day before or after it, or along with one day before it and one day after it, or by observing Sawm on all the three days. All the forms mentioned above are good as they differ from the practice of Allah's enemies, i.e. the Jews. As for sighting the new moon of Muharram to know the exact night of 'Ashura' (9th of Muharram), this is not necessary as observing Sawm on 'Ashura' is Nafilah (supererogatory act of worship) not Faridah (obligatory act of worship). Moreover, if a Muslim is not sure about the exact Day of 'Ashura' and observes Sawm on the day before it and the day after it; this will be accepted and they will be greatly rewarded. Therefore, it is not necessary to observe the new moon marking the beginning of Muharram just for this reason, because it is only Nafilah.

Source: Fatwas of Ibn Baz

