



“THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LUNAR AND SOLAR ECLIPSES IN ISLAM”

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1. Introduction:

A few seconds heavenly spectacle, and then it was gone – the last solar eclipse of the millennium. It had been witnessed by millions around the world.

The moon 1/400th the size of the sun, and 400 times closer to the earth than the sun, has the same size as the sun when viewed from the planet Earth. Thus, when the moon comes in-between the sun and the earth a ‘Solar Eclipse’ results.

This is what, almost the entire human race witnessed, yesterday, the 11th of August 1999. This was destined to be a great historical event, as it was the last solar eclipse of not only this year (1999), but of this century and this millennium.

2. Two Important Eclipses in the History of Islam:

This event was a reminder of two important eclipses in the history of Islam. The first one occurred during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him; the second one occurred twice during the Promised Messiah and Mahdi Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib’s lifetime.

3. The Solar Eclipse During Our Holy Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) Lifetime:

A solar eclipse occurred only once after the advent of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He led a 2-rakah prayer on this occasion.

It is narrated in the most authentic book of the Hadith (Tradition of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) – Sahih Bukhari:

‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amr said,

When the sun was eclipsed in the time of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, a call was given that prayer-service gathering together (people) was going to be held. (Bukhari - 16 : 3.)

This eclipse occurred on the day of the death of Ibrahim, the Prophet’s eighteen-months old son. The service differed from the ordinary prayer service in that there were two qiyams and two rukus in each rakah (Note: After the first qiyam (i.e., the standing posture in the service) there was a ruku’ (i.e., the bending-down posture in the service) as in the ordinary service, though of longer duration, and then a qiyam followed again in which a portion of the Quran was recited; this was followed by

a second ruku', after rising from which the sajdah (i.e., prostration) was performed as in ordinary service; the recitation being in a loud voice, as in Friday and 'Id prayers [Bukhari – 18: 2, 19].)

There is also mention of a sermon having been delivered after the service (Bukhari – 16:4). In this sermon, the Prophet, while enjoining charity and seeking forgiveness from God (istighfar), referred particularly to Ibrahim's death. When the people saw that the sun had darkened, they began to say among themselves that this was due to Ibrahim's death. The Prophet rebutted this idea in his sermon, saying that "the sun and the moon do not suffer eclipse for any one's death or life" (Bukhari 16:13). This was the only occasion of an eclipse on which a service was held by the Prophet (Zad al-Ma'ad I, p. 129).

(The above two paragraphs have been taken [and modified a bit] from 'The Religion of Islam' by Maulana Muhammad Ali, p. 338, under the heading 'Service During Eclipse'.)

4. The Significance of the Prayer/Service Offered During a Solar or Lunar Eclipse:

The service/prayer offered during a solar or lunar eclipse has a very deep-rooted meaning, and should not, at any cost, be considered a form of moon- or sun-worship.

The essence of this prayer lies in the fact that a Muslim seeks protection from his Creator (Allah), while offering this service from his spiritually-luminant soul (symbolised by the bright sun/moon) from becoming enwrapped in the spiritual-darkness (symbolised by the eclipsed sun/moon) of evilness, misconception and sinfulness.

5. The Solar and Lunar Eclipses During the Promised Messiah and Mahdi Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib's Life:

The solar and lunar eclipses occurring during Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib's lifetime were great heavenly signs, prophesied in the history of Islam and other religions. Both, the lunar and solar eclipses, occurred in the holy Islamic month of Ramazan (that fell in the months of March and April in the year 1894 A.D.). The lunar eclipse occurred on the 13th of Ramazan (or 20th March 1894) and the solar eclipse occurred on the 28th of Ramazan (or 6th April 1894). This was a unique phenomenon, because never before, in the history of the universe, had both eclipses fallen within the same lunar month.

After occurring in the East, the same phenomenon occurred in the West, in the month of Ramazan falling in the year 1895 A.D.

Below is an account of this phenomenon, taken from the book – 'Christ is Come' by Mirza Masum Beg Sahib, p. 15-19.

a. The Heavenly Sign:

There was another sign, the great sign of the Heaven, which leaves not a shadow of doubt [on the appearance of the Promised Mahdi and Messiah]. The advent of a man from God, and for that matter, of the prominent position of Messiah-cum-Mahdi, was indeed an event of no small magnitude. Such an important occurrence is invariably accompanied by signs and wonders, so that the world may easily be able to recognise him. The appearance of the Promised Messiah has, accordingly, been marked. The Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has left for

our guidance an unmistakable sign, the like of which has never been witnessed by the world, ever since its creation:

[Arabic omitted]

"Of our Mahdi there are two signs which have never taken place ever since the Earth and the Heaven came into existence. One is that in the month of Ramazan the moon shall be eclipsed on the first of its nights and the sun in the middle of its days; and such a sign has never occurred ever since the creation of the Earth and the Heaven." (Dar al-Qutni, vol. 8, p. 188).

This tradition was of such a universal acceptance that even the books of the Shi'as have recorded it at length:

[Arabic omitted]

"It has been reported from Abu Jafar alai-his-salaam (peace be on him) that the event of the Mahdi's appearance shall be attended by two clear signs which will carry with them the weight of ten strong signs. These are the solar and the lunar eclipses; and a similar sign has never happened ever since Adam came upon this planet. All the astrological records fail to cite even one such instance from the beginning of the creation, down to the present time." (Ikmal al-Din, p. 361)

b. The Law of Eclipse:

The advent of the Promised Messiah-cum-Mahdi, it is evident from the Holy Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) tradition, shall be heralded by this strange and singular sign of the heaven. The moon, in the month of Ramazan, shall be darkened on the first of its appointed nights and the sun in the middle of its fixed days. Now it is a well-known astronomical law, that a lunar eclipse always take place on the 13th, 14th or 15th lunar night, and a solar one on the 27th, 28th, or 29th day of the lunar month. Hence the sign of the Mahdi's appearance, to put the whole thing in a straight and simple language, is that in the month of Ramazan the moon shall be eclipsed on the 13th night and the sun on the 28th day.

This sign of the Double Occultation of the sun and the moon can be traced as far back as the Old Testament. Speaking of the "Second Coming of the Lord", it says, "the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine" (Isaiah, 13:10). Similarly we read: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven." (St. Matthew, 24:39).

A mention of this great sign is also found in Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs:

[original script omitted]

"When the Nishkalank Avtar will appear, his coming will be proclaimed unto the whole world; and the sun and the moon will give his evidence." [Ravi in Sanskrit means the sun and Ind stands for the moon].

c. The Mahdi's Appearance:

This double obscuration of the sun and the moon took place in the year 1300 Hijrah, corresponding to the year 1894 of the Christian era. In the month of Ramazan, in that year, the moon was eclipsed on the 13th night and the sun on the 28th day, precisely in accordance with the Holy Prophet's, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, word. It was such a unique and unprecedented eclipse,

that it has ever since been called THE DARK DAY in history. Astronomers turned every leaf of their dusty record in vain, for not a single similar instance they could find ever since this world came into existence. The Mahdi, of a truth, had come into the world. And he was no other man than Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib of Qadian. Righteous souls rallied round him and Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib applied himself with assiduity to the rejuvenation of Islam.

The growing popularity and success of Hazrat Mirza Sahib made the Maulvis all the more adamant. They fretted and fumed with envy, crying that the sign had not been fulfilled, and that the lunar eclipse, according to the Holy Prophet's, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, hadith should take place on the first night of Ramazan and the solar eclipse on the 15th day:

[Arabic omitted]

The lunar eclipse on the 1st and the solar on the 15th, according to the law governing eclipses, are sheer impossibilities. Moreover, the moon of the first night is almost invisible, and it will be much more so if it were eclipsed. No human eye will be able to see this sign, this darkened moon of the first night, and yet it is, according to the Maulvis, the singular sign of the Great Mahdi. And, thus such a interpretation of the hadith is, on the very face of it, senseless and absurd.

d. Imam Ibn-i Tamiyya:

The Maulvi is ever averse to scientific truth. Even the learning of modern sciences he looks down upon as a rank heresy. To make his conviction complete, we shall, therefore, quote from the accredited Muslim sages and savants. Writes Imam Tamiyya:

[original text omitted]

"The solar eclipse occurs towards the last part of the month when the moon has not yet begun to shine forth; and the lunar eclipse in the bright nights, i.e., 13th, 14th or 15th. This is the law of God pertaining to the motions of the sun and the moon." (Al-Ta'aruz ba'yn al-'Aql, p. 224)

[original text omitted]

"The astronomers say that the lunar eclipse takes place only when the moon occupies a special position with respect to the sun; and it does not occur excepting on the 13th, 14th or 15th. Likewise, the solar eclipse cannot take place excepting on the dates of 27th, 28th or 29th when the sun comes nearer to the moon." (Hujaj al-Kiramah, p. 344).

e. The Arabic Lexicon (hilal vs. qamar):

Last of all, we shall quote from the Arabic lexicon. For the moon there were two terms in Arabic language, hilal and qamar. For the first three or four nights, the moon is called hilal by the Arabs, and thenceforward, up to the end of the month it is called qamar. They never used the term qamar for the moon of the first three or four nights. It is written in Sihah Jauhari:

[Arabic omitted]

"The moon of the first, second and third nights is called hilal, and after the third up to the end of the month it is called qamar on account of its brightness."

Lisan-al-Arab is another famous Arabic lexicon. Under the term qamar it writes:

[Arabic omitted]

that is, the term qamar is used after the third night up to the end of the month. The Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, used the term qamar and not hilal; hence, it could not be the moon of the first night, as wrongly interpreted by the Mulla.

A Mahdi had been promised to the Muslim nation. Mahdi means one who guides aright. He was to appear in the fourteenth century of the Islamic era, when corruption and irreligion shall be on the rampage. All the nations – Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims – waited for him very eagerly. The Hindus called him Nishkalank or Kalki Avtar; the Sikhs named him Mahdi Mir, the Christians called his appearance as the Second Coming of the Christ; and the Muslims gave him the name of Promised Messiah-cum-Mahdi. Several signs, beyond the power of mortal man, had been foretold to mark his advent. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib of Qadian has been raised in fulfilment of these prophecies. He proclaimed himself as such in 1880. In 1882, the sign of Plague came to be fulfilled. In 1883, the Sign of Seven Days Fire from East occurred. In 1889, the Hajj was stopped. In 1894, the sign of Heaven came to pass. In the month of Ramazan, the moon was eclipsed on the 13th and the sun on the 28th. There has been no other claimant; hence, the case is quite clear. It is now up to the Muslims and the Christians, the Hindus and the Sikhs, to accept him and join hands with him for the promotion of his sublime mission.

6. An Extract from the Promised Messiah and Mahdi Hazrat Mirza Sahib's Book 'Najm-ul-Huda' (The Star that Guides):

Yet, another proof of my truth is contained in the lunar and the solar eclipses which happened in the month of Ramazan. I have described this occurrence in detail, in my book, "The Nur al-Haq". I was already a constant recipient of divine help when this sign was manifested. As narrated in the Holy Prophet's saying, this sign was a sure indication of the advent of the Mahdi. Praise then be to God, Who showered His favours upon me in such abundance and fulfilled His promise by manifesting His signs. He thus opened the path of guidance for His seekers and lent them His light to enable them to traverse the path. The inwardness of the question was now laid bare to the wise, and the truth was made clear to all who were prepared to see. It may indeed be said that these divine signs are like a bright sword drawn from its sheath, to silence the opponents and to condemn the disbelievers. For there might be men to whom my appearance at a period of ascendancy of the Cross and the prevalence of its cult and at the beginning of this century might not appeal as conclusive proofs of my coming from the Lord, and similarly there might be men who are of the opinion that my writing of certain Arabic works and my mastery of the depths of Arabic literature could not be considered to be signs of any special divine help, and it was just the fruit of my own secret industry; to such men the signs of the eclipses were a thing to ponder on. Could such occurrences also be the result of human machinations? Were they not sure and certain witnesses from God? The particulars of these signs, as narrated by the eminent Muslims in the books of Hadith are as follows: Dar-ul-Qutni reports to have heard from Imam Muhammad Baqir the following statement:- "Our Mahdi shall be accompanied by two signs the like of which have not happened since the creation of the heaven and the earth, namely, that in a certain month of Ramazan there will be an eclipse of the moon on the first of the three nights usual for such eclipses and in the same month in the second of three days assigned for the solar eclipse there will occur an eclipse of the sun." The same report is found in Baihaqi and compiler of Hadith. The author of the Risala Hashriyya has even remarked that these eclipses will happen in the month of Ramazan and after their occurrence the Mahdi will be recognised in Makka. One of these pious narrators has also observed that the Mahdi will be recognised only after numerous divine signs have been disclosed by Heaven and that in the beginning of his mission he will be denied and rejected by the people

who will take him to be a deceiver and impostor and pronounce against him the fatwa of heresy and apostasy and that the same objections will be raised against him as were raised against the Holy Prophet [pbuh]; but in the end his acceptance will gain prevalence in the earth and no two believers will be found who will not remember him with admiration and praise. The fact also should be borne in mind that the Holy Qur'an makes mention of this sign of the double eclipse as an indication of the near approach of the last day as you may read in the sacred verse: "And when the eye shall be dazzled, and when the moon shall be eclipsed and the sun and the moon shall be united (in the eclipse)." (The Holy Quran - 75 : 7 - 9). Nor, must it be supposed that the sign indicated here is one among the events of the Judgement-day; because the eclipses referred to in the verse depend for their occurrence upon the existence of this earth. They are the result of certain definite and well-known circumstances and occur at fixed times and stated periods. In the case of the eclipses, the circumstances are such that after they have ceased, the sun and the moon will return to their former condition. On the other hand, the phenomena which will be manifested on the last day are such as will come to pass only after the universe has been completely upset. The circumstances which will bring them to pass can arise only after the earth has ceased to exist and also its denizens. In short, the eclipses depend for their occurrence upon the existing order of our system, and from the beginning of the universe form a part of its phenomenon. It, therefore, follows that the lunar and solar eclipses mentioned in the Holy Qur'an are only the harbingers of the last day and not the sign of the last day having already set in. All these questions have been fully dealt with by me in my work, "The Nur al-Haq". Several other important matters have been related in that book in connection with these signs. These I wish to reproduce here in order to add to the weight of this argument.

I had stated in that book - "The Nur al-Haq" - that those people who after witnessing the sign of the eclipses would not still believe in my truth, nor prefer religion to the world, would be visited with punishment. It accordingly came to pass, that after the occurrence of those eclipses a plague was sent to the heedless people of this country, and thousands of them were carried away by the epidemic. The disease caught the miscreants as in a fire. They fell a prey to it in towns and villages. The fire has not yet been quenched and is still hovering over their heads. And all this came to pass as was foretold previous to the event in successive Divine revelations. And in this is a sign for the God-fearing. Further, I had said in the same book that after the occurrence of this sign of the eclipses, God would lend His help to the righteous, that their number would increase, and their affairs would prosper and that God would manifest more signs and spread the knowledge of His truth among mankind. God out of His mercy and grace has fulfilled all these prophecies. He has helped the believers to overcome opposition and in accordance with His promise increased the number of my followers. One of these signs I proceed to describe below and I take the opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to God for His great mercy. Men gifted with observing eyes will not fail to discern the Divine sign in these incidents (Najm-ul-Huda, p. 21-23.)

7. Khwaja Ghulam Farid Sahib of Chachran Confirming this Heavenly Sign:

"Mirza Sahib has mentioned a number of signs regarding his Mujaddidiyyat (Reformership), but amongst them two signs, that he has published in his book, are extraordinary, and are very convincing as regards to his claim as the Mujaddid (Reformer). Firstly, he has said that it is reported in the Hadith (Tradition) that the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, has said that the Mahdi will appear in a village name Qadia, the Arabic adaptation of the name Qadian. Secondly, he says that Imam Muhammad Baqir (rta) has reported in Dar-ul-Qutni, "Of our Mahdi, there are two signs which have never taken place ever since the Earth and the Heaven came

into existence. One is that in the month of Ramazan the moon shall be eclipsed on the first of its nights and the sun in the middle of its days; and such a sign has never occurred ever since the creation of the Earth and the Heaven."

"As the solar and lunar eclipses occurred on the 6th of April 1894, therefore, Hazrat Mirza Sahib widely advertised, as conclusive and undeniable evidence (Ittimaam-e-Hujjut), the announcement of the fulfilment of the prophecy that the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, had narrated as regards to the appearance of the Promised Mahdi. [He said] it was binding on everyone to accept his Mahdiship.

"The Maulvis (religious clerics), of the time, asked a childish question that the meaning deduced from the Hadith is that the lunar eclipse would occur on the first night of Ramazan and the solar eclipse at mid-Ramazan, but the lunar eclipse occurred on the 13th and the solar eclipse on the 28th of Ramazan, which is contrary to the hadith. [They said] the solar and lunar eclipse in the era of the Mahdi will be a different one.

"After that, Hazrat Khwaja Sahib said, 'Subhan Allah' [Glory be to Allah], listen to what Mirza Sahib has said explaining the above-mentioned hadith, and has answered the denying Maulvis. Mirza Sahib said that the meaning of this hadith is that in support and affirmation of our Mahdi, two signs have been appointed from the time of the creation of the Earth and the sky, these have not appeared in the time of any claimant. And, those two signs are, that in the time of the claim of the Promised Mahdi, the lunar eclipse will occur on the 1st night of the 3 appointed nights, i.e., on the 13th night of Ramazan; and the solar eclipse will occur on the middle of the 3 appointed days, i.e., the 28th of Ramazan.

"After that, Huzoor (i.e., Hazrat Khwaja Sahib) said, that certainly the meaning of this hadith is the same as has been narrated by Mirza Sahib; that the lunar eclipse always occurs on the 13th, 14th or 15th night of the lunar month, and the solar eclipse always occurs on the 27th, 28th or 29th day of the lunar month. Hence, the lunar eclipse that occurred on the 6th of April 1894, was indeed the 13th of Ramazan, which is the first-appointed night of the lunar eclipse; and the solar eclipse occurred on the middle of the appointed days of the solar eclipse."

Taken from: Isharat-e-Faridi, vol. 3, p. 70-2. A compilation of the talks by Khwaja Ghulam Farid Sahib of Chachran; compiled by his son.

8. Conclusion:

With such clear manifestations of the truth of Hazrat Mirza Sahib, as the Divinely-appointed Promised Mahdi and Messiah, no one should suspect him. Some ignorant Maulvis tried to belittle this great heavenly sign by calling the reporter of this hadith as a hypocrite, others said that this hadith is Zaif (weak), still others made sillier excuses for not believing in this sign. We shall, Insha-Allah, clarify all misconceptions in our 'Accusations Answered' section.

But, the following questions remain for the Maulvis to answer:

1. Hasn't the truth of the Promised Messiah been manifested beyond doubt, by these heavenly signs shown by the Almighty Allah, upon which no mortal has control?
2. When these signs have shone-forth, are they not the boldest and the most clearest and manifest signs of the truth of the Promised Messiah? Is it not a shame to call a hadith Zaif (weak) when it has proved to be the strongest?