



Starting the Islamic New Year with Reflection and Purpose

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Now that the new Islamic year 1447 has begun, we are presented with a valuable opportunity from Allāh ﷻ. Unlike the common New Year celebrations in the West - filled with fireworks, parties, and festivities - our tradition does not mark the new year in this way.

Instead, it is a time for reflection: on our past, on the passing of time, and on what lies ahead. Each moment that passes draws us closer to our grave and the Day of Accountability.

Every passing second brings us closer to our grave and the Day of Accountability. Allāh ﷻ says:

أَقْتَرَبَ لِلنَّاسِ حِسَابُهُمْ وَهُمْ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مُّعْرِضُونَ

"The reckoning of the people has drawn near to them while they are in negligence, turning away from its signs." (Sūrah al-Anbiyā' 21:1)

If Ḥisāb is taken in its general sense, then the moment one dies, their reckoning begins:

مَنْ مَاتَ فَقَدْ قَامَتْ قِيَامَتُهُ

"When you die, your Qiyāmah has begun".

(Narrated by Abū Nu'aym in Ḥilyat al-Awliyā': 6/268)

The new year is a time to reflect on our moral and spiritual progress. Have we grown in sincerity, worship, and action? Ibn Mas'ūd (RA) used to say:

ما ندمتُ على شيءٍ ندمي على يومٍ غربتْ شمسُهُ، اقتَرَبَ فيه أجلي، ولم يزدْ فيه عملي

"I have not regretted anything more than a day in which the sun set, my life drew closer to its end, and my deeds did not increase". (Qīmat al-Zaman 'Inda al-'Ulamā': 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah al-Ḥalabī al-Ḥanafī, p. 27.)

For many of us, years have passed with little to no progress in our religious or worldly lives. Instead of growing in knowledge or character, we often find ourselves more distracted, spending excessive time on our phones, harming others, and drifting further from Allāh ﷻ.

Each passing day should bring us closer to Him, making us better Muslims and better people. Imagine running a business that shows no profit year after year - you'd surely rethink your approach. Similarly, we must ask: Has my ṣalāh improved? Has my Qur'ān recitation advanced? Has my knowledge of dīn grown? Have my character and relationship with Allāh strengthened?

These are the questions we must reflect on. True success lies not in material gain, but in our moral and spiritual growth. With the arrival of 1447, ask yourself sincerely: How have I changed? Am I any better than I was in previous years?

The Islamic Calendar

When Allāh ﷻ created the heavens and the earth, He also determined the year to consist of twelve months:

إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ مِنْهَا أَرْبَعَةٌ حُرُمٌ

“Indeed, the number of months ordained by Allāh is twelve—in Allāh’s Record since the day He created the heavens and the earth—of which four are sacred”. (Sūrah al-Tawbah 9:36)

As Allāh ﷻ created the heavens and earth, He also created the solar and lunar systems. The Islamic calendar is based on the lunar system, meaning it follows the moon's phases. Each month begins with the sighting of the new crescent moon.

Because the lunar cycle is 29 or 30 days, the Islamic year is shorter than the solar year, having only 354–355 days. Despite being shorter, this system was divinely chosen for acts of worship like Ramaḍān, Ḥajj, ‘Ēid, and Zakāh. Allāh ﷻ says:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهِلَّةِ ۖ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ

“They ask you [O Prophet] about the phases of the moon. Say: They are a means for people to determine time and [for] Ḥajj”. (Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:189)

A Few Benefits of the Lunar Calendar

One of the wisdoms behind following the lunar calendar, as mentioned by scholars, is that it allows major acts of worship like Ramaḍān and Ḥajj to rotate through all seasons.

If we were to follow the solar calendar, Ramaḍān and Ḥajj would always fall in the same season every year - for example, always in winter or always in summer - depending on when it first began. But by following the lunar calendar, these months shift each year, allowing people to experience these blessed times in different climates and circumstances, bringing fairness and balance across regions and generations.

How Was the Islamic Calendar Instituted?

Several incidents led to the establishment of the Islamic (Hijrī) calendar during the caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (RA). For example:

1. While settling a dispute, one man said: “He promised to repay me in Sha‘bān”. The other replied: “I meant next Sha‘bān”, while the first assumed it was the previous one. There was no specific year to clarify the agreement.
2. Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī (RA) wrote to ‘Umar (RA) saying: “We’ve received letters dated Sha‘bān, but we don’t know which Sha‘bān is intended”.

After similar confusion, ‘Umar (RA) raised the issue with the senior Ṣaḥābah in Madīnah. In the 17th year of Hijrah, he said: “Just as the Persians and Romans have calendars, we as Muslims need one too”.

When deciding on a starting point for the Islamic calendar, several suggestions were made:

- Some proposed starting from the birth of the Prophet ﷺ. This was rejected as it resembled the Christian system.
- Others suggested the date of the first revelation.
- Some recommended the passing of the Prophet ﷺ, but this was seen as too sorrowful a moment to mark the calendar’s beginning.

Eventually, ‘Umar (RA) and ‘Alī (RA) suggested starting from the Hijrah - the migration of the Prophet ﷺ from Makkah to Madīnah. The companions unanimously agreed, and the Islamic calendar was officially instituted from that point.

Many scholars say this decision was divinely inspired, as the Hijrah marked the turning point in Islamic history - the beginning of the Muslim community and the establishment of an Islamic society.

The Hijrī Calendar

The Islamic calendar is known as the Hijrī calendar, named after the Hijrah - the migration of the Prophet ﷺ from Makkah to Madīnah. The word Hijrah means to leave or migrate, and this event marks a turning point in Islamic history.

Why was the Hijrah chosen as the starting point?

1. It signified the beginning of Islam as a complete and public way of life, when the message of Islam reached beyond Arabia to the Romans and others.
2. 'Alī (RA) suggested it because it marked the clear distinction between truth and falsehood, and the moment honour was granted to the Ummah.

The Hijrah carries a powerful message. It is about sacrifice for the sake of truth and the preservation of divine revelation. The Ṣaḥābah (RA) gave up everything including their homes, families, and wealth for the sake of Allāh ﷻ. Look at the sacrifices of Abū Bakr (RA), 'Umar (RA), Khālīd ibn al-Walīd (RA), and Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umair (RA) to understand the depth of this commitment.

Each year, the Islamic calendar reminds us of this spirit of patience, faith, commitment, and sacrifice. When we say we're entering a new Hijrī year, it should mean:

- We leave behind last year's weaknesses
- We move away from sins we committed
- We abandon harmful habits and conduct
- We mend broken ties with family - parents, uncles, aunts, and others

The Hijrah also teaches us forgiveness. Consider Habbār ibn al-Aswad, the man who attacked Zaynab (RA), daughter of the Prophet ﷺ, leading to her death. Years later, at the conquest of Makkah, he came to the Prophet ﷺ seeking forgiveness. The Prophet ﷺ simply said: "I have forgiven you".

This is what the Hijrah teaches: to forgive those who have wronged us and begin a new chapter.

Ultimately, our Islamic New Year does not begin with celebration and entertainment, but with a reminder - a reminder of the sacrifices made so that we could be Muslim today. The question we must ask ourselves is:

What sacrifices are we willing to make to preserve and pass on Islām to the next generation?

Muḥarrām – The First Month of the Islamic Calendar

After the companions agreed to begin the Islamic calendar from the Hijrah, the next question was: Which month should mark the start of the year?

Some Ṣaḥābah suggested Ramaḍān, others proposed Rabī' al-Awwal (the month in which the Hijrah actually took place), while some suggested Rajab.

After discussion, they ultimately agreed on Muḥarrām as the first month of the Islamic calendar.

Why Muḥarram?

One explanation is that although the Prophet ﷺ physically migrated in Rabīʿ al-Awwal, the intention and preparations for the Hijrah began in Muḥarram. According to ‘Umar (RA), signs of Hijrah had already appeared in Muḥarram, and the Prophet ﷺ had given permission to many companions to migrate during this time.

Therefore, ‘Umar (RA) said:

“We began our calendar with the Hijrah, and we shall start our year with Muḥarram”.

To conclude, Muḥarram 1447 is already upon us. Take this opportunity to pause and reflect. This sacred month marks the beginning of a new Islamic year - a reminder not of celebration, but of renewal, sacrifice, and purpose. Muḥarram teaches us that spiritual growth doesn't require public displays. It happens in the quiet moments: in sincere du‘ā’, in the efforts to repair our relationships, in private worship, and in acts of kindness no one sees but Allāh ﷻ.

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