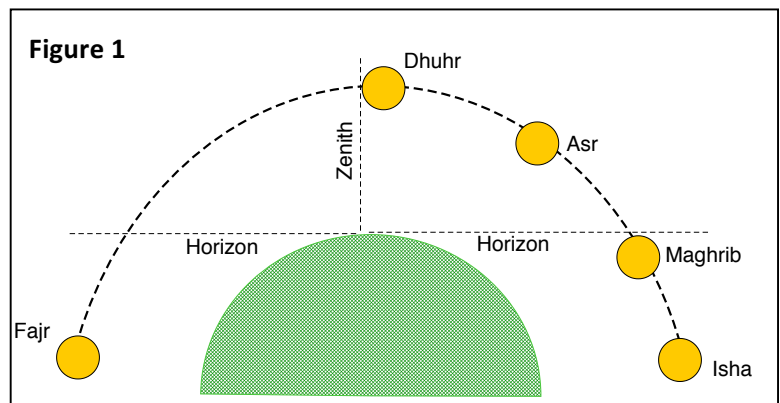


Subject: Calculation of prayer times
From: Local Fiqh Committee, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
Date: February 11, 2014

How do we determine prayer times?

It is well known in Islamic law that daily prayers must be performed at particular times, as the Qur’an states (4:103), “Verily, prayer has been ordained for believers at specified times.” While the Qur’an alludes to various timings indirectly¹, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) explain precisely when to pray during the day, based on the position of the sun. Thus, Fajr prayer occurs with the visible appearance of true dawn before sunrise, Dhuhr prayer occurs after the sun has reached its zenith, Asr prayer occurs in the afternoon², Maghrib occurs immediately after sunset, and Isha occurs after the disappearance of twilight from the horizon³.

Calculations are a reliable method that Muslim scholars have used to generate standard prayer timetables for each locality. These calculations are based on the sun’s position in degrees above or below the horizon (see figure 1).



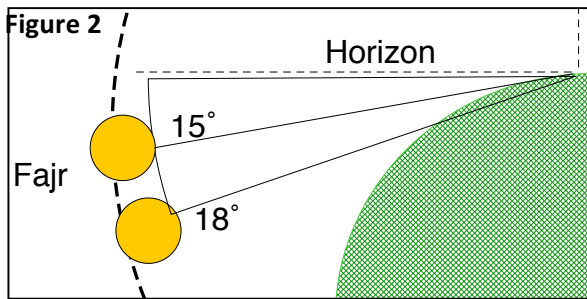
Where does difference of opinion arise?

There are two causes for difference of opinion with respect to prayer times. First, the Muslim scholars themselves may differ in their interpretation of what the hadith of the Prophet mean, as is famously the case with the Asr prayer². Second, there may be different views as to which method of calculation best matches the description in the Hadith. This happens to be the reason for contemporary differences regarding Fajr and Isha times.

¹ The prayer times are referred to in several places in the Qur’an, including 2:187, 11:114, 17:78, 20:130, 24:58, 30:17-18, and 50:39.

² Three of the four schools of Islamic law – Shafi’i, Maliki, and Hanbali – adopt the view that Asr time begins when the shadow of an object is equal in length to the height of the object (plus the baseline shadow length at noon). The Hanafi school, on the other hand, adopts the view that the time begins later, when the shadow is equal to twice the height of an object (plus the baseline shadow length at noon). This is based on differing interpretations of the Prophetic Hadith. (Al-Mawsu’ah al-Fiqhiyyah, vol. 27. p. 312)

³ Refer to Sahih Muslim, Book 5, Chapter on the times of prayer, hadith 217-227.



Fajr time begins with the visible appearance of true dawn. Many scholars in the past have stated this occurs when the sun is 18 degrees below the horizon (astronomical twilight)⁴, while others believe it occurs when the sun is 15 degrees below the horizon (see figure 2), or 17 degrees, or 19 degrees etc. Other more recent sources state that in actuality, there is no fixed angle which applies to the whole world, but rather it depends on a

particular location's latitude above or below the equator, and the season.⁵ Thus, there is no unanimous consensus on this issue, and it is the responsibility of the local Muslim scholarship to determine the solution most appropriate for the community. After intensive investigation and deliberation over this matter, the Manitoba Fiqh committee arrived at a conclusion.

What is the decision adopted by the Manitoba Fiqh committee and why?

The timing of Fajr and Isha will continue to be performed according to what the Winnipeg community has been practicing, namely a calculation of 15 degrees. This is well within the scope of legitimate difference of opinion. Furthermore, there is considerable research to support this method as the most appropriate calculation for Winnipeg, Manitoba. The method was accepted in consultation with many Islamic scholars of jurisprudence including Shaykh Dr. Waleed Edrees Meneese, Shaykh Dr. Iqbal al-Nadvi, and Shaykh Dr. Hamid Slimi. Astronomers have also supported this conclusion, such as Dr Amir Hassan from the National Institute of Astronomy and Geophysics, Helwan, Egypt, who was consulted by this committee. This was also the finding of a study by Egyptian astronomer, Dr. Nabil Yusuf. A recent research paper (in Arabic) called "The Time for Fajr: Between Right and Wrong" by Shaykh Muhammad Al Misri⁶ provides a detailed discussion supporting the accuracy of the 15 degree angle.

An important factor has also been the practical situation of Muslims in Winnipeg. Considering the local situation and practical difficulties is a necessary part of Islamic law, as the removal of hardship is one of the fundamental maxims of Islamic jurisprudence⁷. The decision of using 15 degrees for Fajr and Isha times is in accordance with this noble aim as well. *Wa-Allahu A'lam.*

⁴ This was the position adopted by the Fiqh committee of the Muslim World League, among other organizations as well.

⁵ This is the conclusion of the research of MoonSighting.com lead by Khalid Shaukat (http://moonsighting.com/faq_pt.html), and the position adopted by the Society of Muslim Scholars in UK and explained in the paper, "Why 18 degrees is incorrect" (http://www.hizbululama.org.uk/highlights/Why_18_Degrees.html)

⁶ "Tawqeet al-Fajr, - bayna takhtiah wa tasweeb". (2011). Sh. Muhammad al-Misri. (http://ia600703.us.archive.org/31/items/Fajr_Sadek/Fajr_Sadek.pdf)

⁷ Az-Zarkashi states in his book al-Bahr al-Muhit (6/31): "Adopting the easiest opinion might take place between different schools of thought. It might take place between two conflicting indicators. Some jurists have adopted this approach, on account of the verse: 'Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire for you difficulty.' [Surah al-Baqarah:185] And the verse: 'He has chosen you, and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion.' [Surah al-Hajj:78] And the Prophet's statement: 'I was sent with the true and tolerant religion.' "