



'ISHĀ AND FAJR DURING PERSISTENT TWILIGHT

A CLARIFICATION ON THE ISSUE

By

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In the name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Abstract

The start times of 'Ishā and Fajr has been the most contentious topic among contemporary scholars since decades, and the debate is further complicated because of persistent twilight during the summer months in the UK. Consequently, this has caused much confusion among the general Muslim population about their timings. What are the underlying reasons for such significant disparities in their timings in local Masājid and is there an alternative solution for those struggling to stay awake until late to perform 'Ishā? This article adopts an educational approach in clarifying the fundamental reasons in the disparity of views and whether any dispensation exists for those genuinely struggling in praying 'Ishā late during extreme latitude months. Our analysis concludes that there is no consensus on the matter as every Masjid adopts a specific estimation method either best suited to their local congregants, based on independent investigation or strict adherence to the fatwas of the earlier predecessors. We also highlight that amidst the differences; individual circumstances should be considered to alleviate genuine constrain experienced by certain Muslims regarding late 'Ishā Salāh.

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1. Introduction

Almost every Masjid in the UK prepares Salāh timetable for their local congregants using astronomical data. Due to persistent twilight during peak summer months, the start times of ‘Ishā and Fajr has been the most contentious among contemporary scholars for decades. After sunset, the light in the horizon gradually merges with the dawn obfuscating the beginning time of ‘Ishā and Fajr. Despite multiple attempts during the 1980s by senior Deobandi scholars of unifying the Deobandi Masājid on a single estimation method for ease and consistency for the public, their Salāh timetables significantly vary between them and consequently, causing much confusion and unrest among the masses. For instance, some timetables stipulate ‘Ishā one-hour after Maghrib, whilst others adopt a non-Hanafi position of combining both Maghrib and ‘Ishā together. Other Masājid set 11pm as the standard time for ‘Ishā throughout the high latitude months. Fajr start time in some Masājid is marked at 1:20am whilst others it begins around 2:00am or even 3:00am (which also affects the suhūr end time those who fast). Another issue is the difficulty that many people experience in praying ‘Ishā late due to personal circumstances, health conditions and disruption in the sleeping patterns particularly women and children affecting their daily routine.

What are the underlying causes for such significant disparities in the Salāh timetables and what alternative solutions are available for those struggling to stay awake until late to perform ‘Ishā? In this article, we aim to explore these fundamental matters. This research paper adopts an educational approach that clarifies the reasons for such contention to make sense of the matter. We begin by discussing the astronomical beginning time of ‘Ishā and Fajr, the persistent twilight phenomenon and then proceeding towards understanding the current practice of local Masājid. The latter section includes a short discussion on alternative practice for those struggling to pray ‘Ishā late. We then finally conclude with the summary of the discussion with some recommendations. Due to the complexity of the subject and limited scope, we focus particularly on the Deobandi Hanafi perspective and the practices of our local Masājid in Bradford. Readers can then analytically compare our discussion with the practices in their local town or city respectively.



2. The Astronomical Beginning and End Time of 'Ishā and Fajr

The Hanafi jurists unanimously agree that Fajr's start time, also demarcating the end time of 'Ishā, occurs at the break of dawn where the light stretches horizontally across the eastern horizon, known as subhu sādiq or true dawn.¹ According to an authentic report, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ gestured by stretching his blessed hands to indicate the light of dawn spreading horizontally so to distinguish it from the light that precedes the actual Fajr time vertically in the Eastern horizon known as subhu kādhib or false dawn.² This vertical light remains momentarily in the horizon and is then immediately followed by a horizontal light marking subhu sādiq. Fajr ends unanimously at sunrise.

Hanafi jurists differ over the start time of 'Ishā. According to Imām Abū Hanīfah ﷺ 'Ishā begins when the sky becomes totally dark which occurs after the disappearance of both the redness (shafaq ahmar) and the whiteness (shafaq abyadh) in the western horizon. Contrarily, his two eminent disciples, Imām Abū Yusuf ﷺ and Imām Muhammad ﷺ (better known as sāhibayn) view that it is the disappearance of the redness (shafaq ahmar) that marks the 'Ishā beginning time.³ The divergence of views

¹ Burhaniudīn Marghināni, Hidayah, Kitāb Salāh, vol 1, p. 217

[بَابُ الْمَوَاقِيتِ]

أَوَّلُ وَقْتِ الْفَجْرِ إِذَا طَلَعَ الْفَجْرُ الثَّانِي وَهُوَ الْبَيَاضُ الْمُعْتَرِضُ فِي الْأُفُقِ، وَآخِرُ وَقْتِهَا مَا لَمْ تَطْلُعِ الشَّمْسُ لِحَدِيثِ «إِمَامَةِ جَبْرِيلَ - عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ -، فَإِنَّهُ أَمَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - فِيهَا فِي الْيَوْمِ الْأَوَّلِ حِينَ طَلَعَ الْفَجْرُ، وَفِي الْيَوْمِ الثَّانِي حِينَ أَسْفَرَ جَدًّا وَكَادَتْ الشَّمْسُ تَطْلُعُ..... وَآخِرُ وَقْتِهَا مَا لَمْ يَطْلُعِ الْفَجْرُ الثَّانِي لِقَوْلِهِ - عَلَيْهِ الصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ - «وَآخِرُ وَقْتِ الْعِشَاءِ حِينَ يَطْلُعُ الْفَجْرُ» .

Ibn Humām, Fathul Qadeer, Kitāb Salāh, vol 1 p. 223 - Shamila

وَرَوَتْ عَائِشَةُ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا - «أَنَّهُ أَعْتَمَ بِهَا حَتَّى ذَهَبَ عَامَةُ اللَّيْلِ»، وَكُلُّهَا فِي الصَّحِيحِ. قَالَ فَتَبَّتْ أَنَّ اللَّيْلَ كُلَّهُ وَقْتُهَا، وَلَكِنَّهُ عَلَى أَوْقَاتٍ ثَلَاثَةٍ، إِلَى الثَّلَاثِ أَفْضَلُ، وَإِلَى الرَّيْفِ دُونَهُ، وَمَا بَعْدَهُ دُونَهُ، ثُمَّ سَأَلَ بِسُنْدِهِ إِلَى نَافِعِ بْنِ جُبَيْرٍ قَالَ: كَتَبَ عُمَرُ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ - إِلَى أَبِي مُوسَى الْأَشْعَرِيِّ: وَصَلِ الْعِشَاءَ أَيَّ اللَّيْلِ شِئْتَ وَلَا تَعْفُلْهَا.

² Sunnan Tirmizi, Hadeeth No: 706

عَنْ سَمُرَةَ بِنْتِ جُنْدَبٍ قَالَتْ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: «لَا يَمْنَعَنَّكُمْ مِنْ سُخُورِكُمْ أَذَانُ بِلَالٍ، وَلَا الْفَجْرُ الْمُسْتَطِيلُ، وَلَكِنَّ الْفَجْرَ الْمُسْتَطِيلَ فِي الْأُفُقِ»: «هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ»

³ Some Jurists have asserted that Imām Abū Hanīfah retracted from this view, however Ibn Humam in his Fathul Qadeer rejects this claim that his retraction has not been authentically established.

Durrul Mukhtār wa hashiyah Ibn Ābideen Shāmi, Kitābus Salāh, vol 1 p. 361 - Shamila

is based on the different interpretations of the term shafaq in the prophetic statement where the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “And the time for Maghrib Salāh remains until the shafaq does not disappear”.⁴ Imām Abū Hanīfah رحمه الله interpreted the shafaq as the disappearance of abyadh (white light) whilst his two students interpreted it as ahmar (red light). To explain this further, when the sun sets below the western horizon for Maghrib Salāh, the rays of sunlight partially remain in the horizon creating different colours. Initially redness appears in the sky then followed by white light and thereafter total darkness. According to the sāhibayn, once the initial redness disappears then ‘Ishā begins even if there is light in the sky, whilst Imām Abū Hanīfah رحمه الله maintained that both shafaqs must disappear for ‘Ishā to begin. This implies that for the sāhibayn, ‘Ishā begins earlier whilst in Imām Abū Hanīfah’s رحمه الله view, it is still Maghrib until the sky becomes totally dark.

The scientific term for shafaq is twilight which is the illumination that appears after sunset before darkness in the western horizon and in the eastern horizon before sunrise. There are three twilight rays the sun passes during sunrise and sunset period, each one measured in degrees.

(و) وَقْتُ (الْمَغْرِبِ مِنْهُ إِلَى) غُرُوبِ (الشَّفَقِ وَهُوَ الْحُمْرَةُ) عِنْدَهُمَا، وَبِهِ قَالَتْ الثَّلَاثَةُ وَإِلَيْهِ رَجَعَ الْإِمَامُ كَمَا فِي شُرُوحِ الْمَجْمَعِ وَغَيْرِهَا، فَكَانَ هُوَ الْمَذْهَبُ.

(قَوْلُهُ: وَإِلَيْهِ رَجَعَ الْإِمَامُ) أَيَّ إِلَى قَوْلِهِمَا الَّذِي هُوَ رِوَايَةٌ عَنْهُ أَيْضًا، وَصَرَّحَ فِي الْمَجْمَعِ بِأَنَّ عَلَيَّهَا الْفَتْوَى، وَرَدَّهُ الْمَحْقِقُ فِي الْفَتْحِ بِأَنَّهُ لَا يُسَاعِدُهُ رِوَايَةٌ وَلَا دِرَايَةٌ إِلَّا ح. وَقَالَ تَلْمِيذُهُ الْعَلَامَةُ قَاسِمٌ فِي تَصْحِيحِ الْقُدُورِيِّ: إِنَّ رُجُوعَهُ لَمْ يَنْبُتْ، لِمَا نَقَلَهُ الْكَافَّةُ مِنْ لَدُنِ الْأَنْبِيَةِ الثَّلَاثَةِ إِلَى الْيَوْمِ مِنْ حِكَايَةِ الْقَوْلَيْنِ، وَدَعَاوَى عَمَلِ عَامَّةِ الصَّحَابَةِ بِخِلَافِهِ خِلَافُ الْمَنْقُولِ. قَالَ فِي الْإِحْتِيَارِ: الشَّفَقُ الْبَيَاضُ، وَهُوَ مَذْهَبُ الصِّدِّيقِ وَمُعَاذِ بْنِ جَبَلٍ وَعَائِشَةَ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ - . قُلْتُ: وَرَوَاهُ عَبْدُ الرَّزَّاقِ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ وَعَنْ عُمَرَ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْعَزِيزِ، وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعُ الْبَيْهَقِي الشَّفَقَ الْأَحْمَرَ إِلَّا عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ، وَتَمَامُهُ فِيهِ. وَإِذَا تَعَارَضَتْ الْأَخْبَارُ وَالْأَنَارُ فَلَا يُخْرَجُ وَقْتُ الْمَغْرِبِ بِالشَّكِّ كَمَا فِي الْهَدَايَةِ وَغَيْرِهَا. قَالَ الْعَلَامَةُ قَاسِمٌ: فَتَبَّتْ أَنَّ قَوْلَ الْإِمَامِ هُوَ الْأَصْحَحُ، وَمَشَى عَلَيْهِ فِي الْبَحْرِ مُؤَيَّدًا لَهُ بِمَا قَدَّمْنَا عَنْهُ، مِنْ أَنَّهُ لَا يُعَدَّلُ عَنْ قَوْلِ الْإِمَامِ إِلَّا لِضُرُورَةٍ مِنْ ضَعْفِ دَلِيلٍ أَوْ تَعَامُلٍ بِخِلَافِهِ كَالْمَرَارِعَةِ، لَكِنَّ تَعَامُلَ النَّاسِ الْيَوْمَ فِي عَامَّةِ الْبِلَادِ عَلَى قَوْلِهِمَا، وَقَدْ آيَدَهُ فِي النَّهْرِ تَبَعًا لِلتَّقَايَةِ وَالْوَقَايَةِ وَالِدَّرَرَ وَالْإِصْلَاحَ وَدُرَرَ الْبِحَارِ وَالْإِمْدَادَ وَالْمَوَاهِبَ وَشَرَّحَهُ الْبَرْهَانَ وَغَيْرَهُمْ مُصْرِحِينَ بِأَنَّ عَلَيْهِ الْفَتْوَى. وَفِي السَّرَاحِ: قَوْلُهُمَا أَوْسَعُ وَقَوْلُهُ أَحْوَطُ، وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ.

⁴ Sahih Muslim, No. 173

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، قَالَ: «وَقْتُ الظُّهْرِ إِذَا زَالَتْ الشَّمْسُ وَكَانَ ظِلُّ الرَّجُلِ كَطُولِهِ، مَا لَمْ يَحْضُرِ الْعَصْرُ، وَوَقْتُ الْعَصْرِ مَا لَمْ تَضُمَّرِ الشَّمْسُ، وَوَقْتُ صَلَاةِ الْمَغْرِبِ مَا لَمْ يَغِبِ الشَّفَقُ، وَوَقْتُ صَلَاةِ الْعِشَاءِ إِلَى نِصْفِ اللَّيْلِ الْأَوْسَطِ، وَوَقْتُ صَلَاةِ الصُّبْحِ مِنْ طُلُوعِ الْفَجْرِ مَا لَمْ تَطْلُعِ الشَّمْسُ، فَإِذَا طَلَعَتِ الشَّمْسُ فَأَمْسِكْ عَنِ الصَّلَاةِ، فَإِنَّهَا تَطْلُعُ بَيْنَ قَرْنَيْ شَيْطَانٍ»

- 1) **Civil Twilight** - Between the horizon and 6 degrees below the celestial horizon.
- 2) **Nautical Twilight** – Between 6 to 12 degrees below the celestial horizon.
- 3) **Astronomical Twilight** – Between 12 degrees until 18 degrees. Thereafter, the sky becomes totally dark.

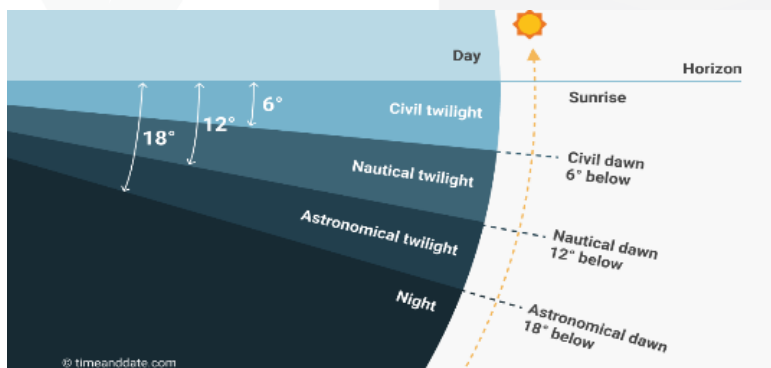
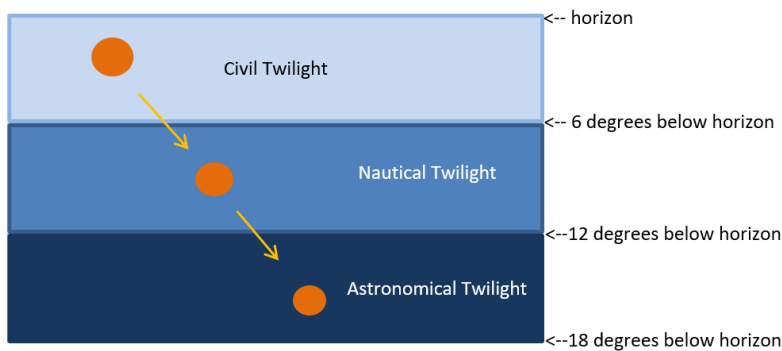


Fig 1: Showing the sun passing through the 3 twilights during sunrise and sunset. (Source: [Summer twilight – Explaining Science](#))

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Time	Position of the Sun	Light levels
Daylight	Above horizon	
Civil Twilight	Sunset to -6 degrees below horizon	Sky is bright, particularly in a western direction. A few of the brightest stars can be seen in the East. We can see clearly outdoors without artificial light.
Nautical Twilight	-6 degrees to -12 degrees below horizon	Sky is much darker. Artificial light needed to see clearly outdoors. All the brighter stars can be seen.
Astronomical Twilight	-12 degrees to -18 degrees below horizon	Sky is very dark, but brighter in a westerly direction. Hundreds of stars can be seen.
Darkness	More than -18 degrees below	IF away from light pollution, sky appears black. Thousands of stars can be seen and the Milky Way is visible.

Fig 2: (Source: [Summer twilight – Explaining Science](#))

The images illustrate the variant illumination levels of light during each twilight phase based on the visibility of the stars at night giving us an estimation of the start of ‘Ishā and Fajr. The lowest depression recorded is around 24 degrees after which the sun begins to rise. The astronomical mark for both ‘Ishā and Fajr as Shaykh Maulana Yaqub Qāsmi sāhib’s ﷺ suggests is 18 degrees angle below the horizon (the generally accepted view). As in, ‘Ishā begins after the disappearance of astronomical twilight and Fajr at the start of the astronomical twilight.⁵ This is only possible however if we assume ‘Ishā to begin after the disappearance of all three twilights according to Imām Abū Hanīfah’s ﷺ view otherwise according to the sāhibayn, ‘Ishā starts earlier which is during the astronomical twilight, after the nautical twilight phase. Either way, during the low latitude months, the sky becomes totally dark leaving no traces of light in the horizon after the astronomical twilight phase.

We referenced to a twilight occurring vertically in the eastern horizon before subhu sādiq. It appears momentarily and it either remains or disappears until astronomical twilight emerges.⁶ The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ referred to it as the subhu kādhib – false

⁵ Maulana Yaqūb Qasmi, *Subh Sādiq wa Shafaq ki tahqeeq*, p. 43-44

⁶ Maulana Yaqūb Qasmi, *Subh Sādiq wa Shafaq ki tahqeeq*, p. 72-73

Mufti Rashid Ludhyanwi (ra) disagrees with zodiacal twilight referring to subhu kadhib as it appears well before astronomical twilight. (see Ahsanul Fatawa, vol 2, p. 160)

dawn, because that is still tahajjud and suhūr time. Many have argued this to be similar to zodiacal twilight which occurs just before the astronomical twilight.⁷



Fig 3: Zodiacal twilight also referred to as the false dawn (Source: [All you need to know: Zodiacal light | Astronomy Essentials | EarthSky](#))

Contest

⁷ McCulure, B, and Byrd, D. Zodiacal light; All you need to know. <https://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials/everything-you-need-to-know-zodiacal-light-or-false-dawn/> [accessed July 2021]
[It's time to watch for the zodiacal light | Astronomy Essentials | EarthSky](#)

The reddish skies at dawn and dusk are caused by Earth's atmosphere, and the zodiacal light originates far outside our atmosphere. The zodiacal light is the real sunlight reflecting off the dust particles which move in the same plane as Earth and the other planets orbiting our sun.





Fig 4: Zodiacal twilight also referred to as the false dawn (Source: <https://earthsky.org/tonight/zodiacal-light-false-dawn-of-autmn/>)



Fig 5: Comparison between both Subhu Sādiq and Kādhīb.





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The comparative images of the fajr kādhīb and zodiacal twilight give a reasonable assumption that they are not so dissimilar. This vertical twilight appears twice; in the western horizon after sunset and in the eastern horizon before sunrise. After sunset shafaq ahmar appears and then immediately followed by shafaq abyadh. The light during abyadh spreads horizontally and thereafter a light appears vertically after 'Ishā'. This sequence is reversed in the eastern horizon before sunrise as in the vertical twilight (subhu kādhīb) appearing, then the horizontal twilight (subhu sādiq) and thereafter redness. Shaykh Zafar Ahmad Usmāni رحمته الله describes this exact phenomenon along with their durational time length being equal, *"The appearance of both redness and the whiteness in the horizon after sunset are both similar (nazeer) in the appearance of whiteness and redness before sunrise due to both being among the signs of their manifestation, and so the time duration between sunset to the disappearance of the whiteness is (also) the time duration from the white Fajr to sunrise correspondingly... (Initially) when the fajr appears, it manifests with a white vertical light (kādhīb) then a horizontal light (subhu sādiq) and then redness. The shafaq (in the west) manifests after sunset from redness, then horizontal white light ('Ishā') and then vertical."*⁸

Astronomers estimate the time duration of 4-6minutes between each degree the sun passes that does vary depending on the season.⁹ The differences between both subhus and both shafaqs as the famous classical astronomer Ali Afandi رحمته الله posited is roughly 3 degrees.¹⁰ Putting this into perspective, if subhu sādiq occurs at 18 degrees then subhu kādhīb will be at 21 degrees. If shafaq abyadh occurs at 18 degrees then shafaq ahmar is

⁸ Shaykh Zafar Ahmad Usmani Thanvi, I'laus Sunnan, Kitab Salāh, Ch, Mawaqeeq, vol 2, p. 15

⁹ Some generally calculate the minutes between the degrees by first multiplying 24hrs by 60minutes, 1,440 minutes and then dividing it by 360° giving you the total estimate of 4 minutes.

¹⁰ Durrul Mukhtār wa hashiyah Ibn Ābideen Shāmi, Kitābus Salāh, vol 1, p. 359 - Shamila

ذَكَرَ الْعَلَمَةُ الْمَرْحُومُ الشَّيْخُ خَلِيلُ الْكَامِلِيُّ فِي حَاشِيَتِهِ عَلَى رِسَالَةِ الْأَسْطِرْلَابِ لِشَيْخِ مَشَائِخِنَا الْعَلَمَةِ الْمُحَقِّقِ عَلِيِّ أَفْنَدِيِّ الدَّاعِسْتَانِيِّ أَنَّ التَّفَاوُتَ بَيْنَ الْفَجْرِينِ وَكَذَا بَيْنَ الشَّفَقَيْنِ الْأَحْمَرِ وَالْأَبْيَضِ إِنَّمَا هُوَ بِثَلَاثِ دَرَجٍ



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calculated at 15 degrees. Contrarily, those adopting the 15 degrees position for 'Ishā and Fajr calculate subhu kādhīb to occur at 18 degrees and shafaq ahmar at 12 degrees.¹¹ Prominent Deobandi scholars including Shaykh Mufti Shafi Usmāni sāhib ؒ and Allamah Yusuf Binnori sāhib ؒ maintain the 18 degrees view for the start of 'Ishā and Fajr time.¹² Shaykh Zafar Usmāni ؒ considers this to be the correct position.¹³ Shaykh Ashraf Ali Thānvi ؒ is reported to have published a detailed timetable for the entire year in response to a questioner from the UK in 1932 using the astronomical data in which he ruled 18 degrees to be the marking point for 'Ishā and Fajr. The timetable also included the months and dates where persistent twilight occurs. In the early 1980s, a committee of scholars was convened in Bradford, UK presided by Mufti Mahmud sāhib Gangohi ؒ. After much deliberation, the final resolution (among many others) was the unanimous decision that 18 degrees demarcates the start of 'Ishā and Fajr.¹⁴ Their decision was based on the aid of astronomical data. Mufti Rashid Ahmad sāhib Ludhyanwi ؒ contested the 18 degrees position by positing that 15 degrees was the real demarcation for 'Ishā and Fajr. Through multiple observations of the natural horizon (along with other senior scholars present at the time), he concluded that at 18 degrees the white light in both the western and eastern horizon was vertical, not horizontal. After sunset, this vertical light appeared around 12 minutes after the disappearance of shafaq abyadh and around similar duration before the horizontal light before sunrise. So, the light at 18 degrees in the eastern horizon before sunrise was in fact subhu kādhīb

¹¹ Amjad Mohammed, *The Islamic Prayer Times for 'Ishā' and Fajr according to Muslims in the UK*, published at the Institute of the Revival of Islamic Sciences (IRTIS)

¹² Maulana Shawkat Ali strongly contested this view stating that Shaykh Mufti Shafi sāhib and Allamah Yusuf Binori did not maintain the 18 degrees position but was instead the position of Professor Abdul Lateef Sāhib. The withdrawal of both scholars from 15 degrees to 18 degrees as Maulana Sāhib argues was not thoroughly investigated by the scholars and merely transmitted without verification. See *Subhu Sādiq wa Kadhīb key muta'iliq Akabir ke Ikhtilaf ki Haqeeqat*. PDF Available at: [Subhu Sādiq wa Kadhīb Ikhtilaf ki Haqeeqat.pdf](#)

¹³ Shaykh Zafar Ahmad Usmani Thanvi, *I'laus Sunnan*, Kitab Salāh, Ch, Mawaqeeq, vol 2, p. 15

¹⁴ Maulana Yaqūb Qasmi, *Subh Sādiq wa Shafaq ki tahqeeq*, p. 43-72-78, Mufti Rafi Usmani, *Nawadir al-Fiqh*, vol 2, pp. 90-97



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and after sunset, it was much later than the start time of 'Ishā.¹⁵ Some Masājid in the UK adopted 15 degrees position for both 'Ishā and Fajr. Currently, Wifaqul Ulama adopt 15 degrees for 'Ishā because of the disappearance of shafaq ahmar (following sāhibayn's position but agree 18 degrees for the disappearance of abyadh) and 18 degrees for Fajr.¹⁶ Many Deobandi Masājid strictly follow the 18 degrees view because of the senior scholars' position on this matter. Among them however are those who permit following the 15 degrees during the months close to perpetual twilight for ease. Irrespective of the differences, the underlying agreement between both groups is that 'Ishā begins no earlier than astronomical twilight. Whilst this poses no significant differences during low latitude months, the winter months, where their time differences are approximately 10-20 mins, the predicament lies during the high latitude months where the sun's depression does not exceed 12 – 13 degrees below the horizon.

3. Estimating 'Ishā and Fajr During Perpetual Twilight

The UK coordinates are situated between 50-60 degrees latitude above the earth's equator. The earth's axis is tilted by 23.5 degrees which causes uneven lengths of the days and nights throughout the year. Regions in the northern hemisphere during the summer season such as UK, are tilted towards the sun resulting in longer hours of day light and shorter nights creating persistent twilight in the sky.¹⁷ Meaning, astronomical

¹⁵ Mufti Rashid Ludhyanvi, *Ahsanul Fatawa*, vol 2, pp. 159-189

Respected Mufti Sāhib sought assistance from experts to observe the natural skies alongside data to confirm his position of 15 degrees. Based on his observation, during sunset, Shafaq ahmar occurred at 12 degrees, Abyadh 15 degrees and the vertical twilight 18 degrees. This order is reversed during sunrise.

¹⁶ Wifaqul Ulama Salāh times 2024, available at: <https://www.wifaqululama.co.uk/salahtimes/>

Hizbul Ulama however oppose calculating Salāh times in degrees due to the significant variations of the horizons and regions and moreover the seasons. They argue determining the times by use of real natural observation, mushahadah as was the prophetic practice. See Maulana Yaqub Ahmad Miftahi, *Fajar and Isha Times & Twilight*.

¹⁷ Solstice and equinox (source: Zodiacal <https://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials/everything-you-need-to-know-september-equinox/>)



twilight never disappears.¹⁸ The graph below taken from a credible website illustrates the pattern of the sun's depression below the horizon in different months of the year.

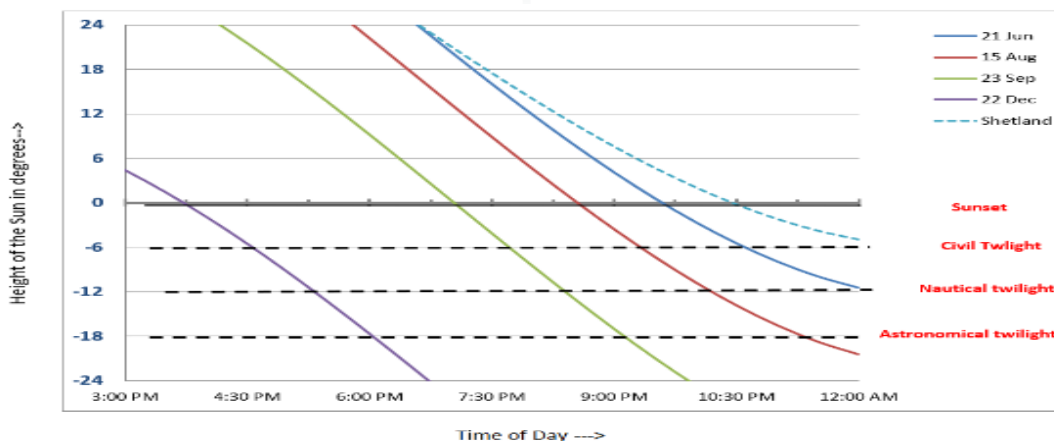


Fig 4: (Source: [Summer twilight – Explaining Science](#))

- The blue line shows the path of the Sun at the June solstice
- The brown line shows the path of the Sun in the middle of August
- The green line shows the path of the Sun at the September equinox
- The purple line shows the path of the Sun at the December solstice.¹⁹

The above graph displays the sun's depression not setting below 12-13 degrees especially during the June solstice. In some parts of England, astronomical twilight persists throughout the night whereas in the extreme north such as Scotland, nautical twilight persists all night until dawn. Shafaq abyadh and possibly shafaq ahmar (which appears during nautical and the early phase of astronomical twilight) do not disappear.

¹⁸ See articles *The sun - Why is twilight longer in summer than winter and shortest at the equinox - Astronomy Stack Exchange*, available at: <https://astronomy.stackexchange.com/questions/2408/why-is-twilight-longer-in-summer-than-winter-and-shortest-at-the-equinox> [accessed July 2021]

Summer twilight – Explaining Science, available at: <https://explainscience.org/2019/06/16/summer-twilight/> [accessed July 2021]

¹⁹ *Summer twilight – Explaining Science*, available at: <https://explainscience.org/2019/06/16/summer-twilight/> [accessed July 2021]

During this phenomenon, the night gradually merges into Fajr time obscuring the start time of 'Ishā and further complicating Fajr beginning time.²⁰ The phenomenon of persistence twilight where astronomical twilight does not fully disappear occurs around 13th May until 31st July according to the HM Nautical Twilight data.²¹ During early May and late August, shafaq abyadh disappears close to midnight creating difficulty for people to pray 'Ishā late.

Classical Hanafi jurists such as Ibn Ābidīn Shāmi رحمته الله and others recall the case of Bulghar whose citizens also faced a similar predicament of perpetual twilight. Bulghar city is located towards the extreme northern point in modern day Russia with latitudinal coordinates of 54-58 degrees. Imām Thatāwī رحمته الله described this region as extremely cold. During the first forty days of the summer season the sun remains in the sky for twenty-three hours and sets for only an hour.²² 'Ishā time was virtually non-existent as its inhabitants experienced one hour of night only giving very little time to pray 'Ishā and Fajr. Imām Marjāni رحمته الله interestingly recounts Imām Ahmad ibn Fadlān's personal observation when he entered Bulghar and a tent was erected for him on the first night of his visit. He relates, "We waited for a short time expecting the call to prayer for 'Ishā. When we heard the call to prayer and stepped outside of the tent, Fajr had started. I asked the Mu'adhin, "Which prayer did you call for?" He replied, "For Fajr." I asked,

²⁰ See Reedwan's explanation of the twilight phenomenon at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wl1mcO8fC9s> [accessed July 2021]

²¹ HM Nautical Almanac Office: Twilights (ukho.gov.uk) available at: <http://astro.ukho.gov.uk/nao/miscellanea/birs2.html> and <http://www.govwire.co.uk/news/hm-nautical-almanac-office> [accessed July 2021]

²² Hashiya Tahtawi p. 178

"ومن لم يجد وقتهما أي العشاء والوتر "لم يجبا عليه" بأن كان في بلد كبلغار وبأقصى الشرق يطلع فيها الفجر قبل مغيب الشفق في أقصر ليالي السنة لعدم وجود السبب وهو الوقت وليس.

"كبلغار" قال في القاموس بلغر كقرطق يعني بضم فسكون والعامية تقول بلغار مدينة الصقالبة ضاربة في الشمال شديدة البرد اه قوله: "في أقصر ليالي السنة" وهو أربعون ليلة في أول الصيف عند حلول الشمس رأس السرطان فإن الشمس تمكث عندهم على وجه الأرض ثلاثا وعشرين ساعة وتغرب ساعة واحدة على حسب عرض البلد

“What about ‘Ishā?” He responded, “We prayed that with Maghrib.” So, I asked, “What about the night?” He replied, “This is it, it’s as you’ve seen it. In fact, the night is shorter than this! It’s getting longer now!” He mentioned then that for up to a month he didn’t sleep at night fearing he would miss Fajr Salāh.”²³ We come to discover that the people of Bulghar also experienced the predicament in the obscurity of ‘Ishā beginning time and combined it with Maghrib together due to persistent twilight.

The case of Bulghar initiated an internal debate among the Hanafi jurists on the obligation of ‘Ishā. Some deemed it as not obligatory at all due to its absence of time whilst others considered it necessary to estimate its time by adopting one of the following methods; dividing the night to half, following closest region’s Salāh times, stipulating the last valid Salāh time during this period and so forth (see footnote).²⁴

²³ انه لما قدم بلغار في اول ليلة بتوا بها قبته المضروبة له، ومعه خياط كان للملك من اهل بغداد ليتحدثنا قال فتحدثنا مقدار ما يقر انسان نصف ساعة ونحن ننتظر أذان العشاء فاذا بلدان فخرجنا من القبة وقد طلع الفجر. فقلت للمؤذن، أي شيء أذنت؟ قال، الفجر. قلت، فعشاء الخير؟ قال نصليها مع المغرب. قلت، فالليل؟ قال، كما تري، وقد كان أقصر من هذا، وقد أخذ الن في الطول. وذكر انه منذ شهر ما تم الليل خوفا من ان يفوته صلاة الصبح رسالة ابن فضلن الصقالبة (ص ١٢٤ - ٥ استشهد في نظورة ألق للمرجان ص ٣٨٥-)

²⁴ Hanafi jurists suggested one of the following alternatives, some of which borrowed from other legal schools.

- Some considered that Ishā was no longer compulsory due to the absence of its sabab. Imām al-Marjānī disagrees with this position (which will be discussed later).
- Some considered it valid by adopting a precautionary attitude, however for fear that it may not be a compulsory prayer, to pray it individually.
- Some prayed it by adopting the school of Imām Mālik (ra) or Imām Shāfi‘ī (ra) or other Fuqahā. In other words, they viewed it compulsory and prayed it by utilising their methods as detailed below in exceptional circumstances.
- Some were of the view that the prayer time had occurred because the shafaq that needed to be considered was shafaq ahmar, which had disappeared. Therefore, this is referring to those days in which it would disappear.
- Some were of the view that the shafaq should disappear in the direction of the horizon in which the sun has set; in other words, the western horizon. The light on the eastern horizon was considered as the start of dawn. As a result the night was split into two (Niṣf al-Layl), the first half representing night (Ishā) and the second half representing dawn (Fajr). So they would not eat after half the night if they were fasting the next day.
- Some prayed Ishā but with the view that it was a qadhā of the Ishā from the night before.
- Some prayed Ishā after half the night was over as in, the second half of the night.

Among those Hanafi jurists that maintained 'Ishā to be absolved were Imām Baqālli رحمه الله, Imām Nasafi رحمه الله the author of Kanz Daqāiq and Imām Marghināni رحمه الله. They argued that, time was the primary sabab (cause) for Salāh and when it's sabab is absent then its legal obligation is not applicable just as a person with amputated arms and feet is absolved from the obligation of washing them for wudhu.²⁵ Prominent jurists such as Ibn Humām

- Some would calculate based on the times of the closest region to them who continued to have shafaq disappearing.

Translation taken from *Ishā at High Latitudes?* available at: <https://www.wifaqululama.co.uk/highlat/>

منهم : من يساهل بلكلية ويزعم سقوط هذه الفريضة فتلك الأيام من السنة وأبعدهم عن التقي وأضلهم عن سواء السبيل هذا بعض وليس عنده شيء إلا صرف النجماد علي التقليد والتعصب المحض.

منهم : من يحاط وبأخذ بلحوظ ف مواضع اللّف ويعتبر الأقوال المحكية فيها صحيحة ويراها حجة شرعية.

منهم : من يصلبها آخذا بذهب مالك والشافعي وغيرها من الأمة.

ومنهم : من يقول إن الوقت يدخل لّن الشفق هو المرة علي الأصح وهي تغيب وإناً يبقى البياض والصفرة وهي غيرها ومن

ذلك ذهب أبو المعالي من الشافعية إلا أن أول وقت العشاء حيّ يغيب الشفق وهو الصفرة دون البياض والمرة.

ومنهم : من يقول ان الشفق يغيب من جهة الغرب ومحل الأقول واما يبقى في الجانب الخّر وجهة الطلوع بعد وصول الشمس

إلي خط نصف النهار ف انطاطها فهو محسوب من الصبح ولذا منع بعض من زعم سقوط العشاء عن أكل السحر بعد نصف

الليل في هذه الأوقات.

ومنهم : من يتكلف وينوي في كل يوم قضاء عشاء اليوم السابق.

ومنهم : من يصلي بعد انقضاء نصف الليل.

ومنهم : من يقول بِلتقدير ويعتبر غيبة الشفق في اقرب البلد إليهم فاذا مضى من الزمان قدر ما يغيب فيه الشفق في اقرب

البلدان إليهم دخل وقت العشاء وخرج وقت المغرب ومقتضي ذلك أن يصلوها الّ في نصف الليل بلغيوية في اقرب البلدان إليهم كُ الأقرب حتّ

يغيب عندهم. نظورة التّ للمرجان ص ٣٩٠

²⁵ Durrul Mukhtār wa hashiyah Ibn Ābideen Shāmi, Kitābus Salāh, vol 1, p. 18

مَطْلَبٌ فِي فَاقِدِ وَقْتِ الْعِشَاءِ كَأَهْلِ بُلْعَارِ

(وَفَاقِدٌ وَقْتُهُمَا) كَبُلْعَارِ، فَإِنَّ فِيهَا يَطْلُعُ الْفَجْرُ قَبْلَ غُرُوبِ الشَّفَقِ فِي أَرْبَعِيَّةِ الشِّتَاءِ (مُكَلَّفٌ بِمَا فَيُقَدِّرُ هُنَا) وَلَا يُنَوِّي الْقِضَاءَ لِعَقْدِ وَقْتِ الْأَدَاءِ بِهِ أَفْتَى

الْبُرْهَانَ الْكَبِيرَ وَاجْتَارَهُ الْكَمَالَ، وَتَبِعَهُ ابْنُ السَّحْنَةِ فِي أَلْعَاذِهِ فَصَحَّحَهُ، فَرَعَمَ الْمُصَنِّفُ أَنَّهُ الْمَذْهَبُ (وَقِيلَ لَا) يُكَلَّفُ بِمَا لِعَدَمِ سَبَبِهِمَا، وَبِهِ جَزَمَ فِي

الْكَنْزِ وَالذَّرْرِ وَالْمُلْتَقَى وَبِهِ أَفْتَى الْبُقَالِيُّ، وَوَأَفَقَهُ الْحُلْوَانِيُّ وَالْمَرْغِينَانِيُّ وَرَجَّحَهُ الشُّرَيْبِلِيُّ وَالْحَلَبِيُّ، وَأَوْسَعَا الْمَقَالَ وَمَنَعَا مَا ذَكَرَهُ الْكَمَالَ قُلْتُ: وَلَا يُسَاعِدُهُ

حَدِيثُ الدَّجَالِ؛ لِأَنَّهُ وَإِنْ وَجِبَ أَكْثَرُ مِنْ ثَلَاثِمِائَةٍ ظَهَرَ مَثَلًا قَبْلَ الزَّوَالِ لَيْسَ كَمَسْأَلَتِنَا؛ لِأَنَّ الْمَقْفُودَ فِيهِ الْعَلَامَةُ لَا الزَّمَانُ، وَأَمَّا فِيهَا فَقَدْ قُفِدَ الْأَمْرَانِ.

ﷺ and Ibn Ābidīn Shāmi ﷺ disapproved of this view and maintained that ‘Ishā still remained obligatory irrespective of its sabab existing or not. They adduce the prophetic Hadīth which describes the days of Dajjāl’s existence to be forty days; one day stretching long as a year, second day stretching to long as a month, his third day long as a week and the remaining thirty-seven day to be like the normal days of the year. A companion asked, “O Messenger of Allāh! The day which will be like a year, will one day’s Salāh suffice then?” He responded, “No! You must estimate it (its timings for that year).”²⁶

This narration establishes that Salāh times must be estimated irrespective of the absence of their times. The analogy of the amputation of hands and feet given is incorrect because in the case of amputation, no alternative exists as of which, the Shariah absolves them from the obligation of wudhu. In contrast, an alternative method is prescribed explicitly in the text namely, estimating its time. Moreover, there is an established principle that analogy is a valid recourse only in the absence of a clear text but where a clear text exists, any analogical argument against it becomes void.

Ibn Humām, Fathul Qadeer, Kitāb Salah, vol 1 p. 224

بَابُ الْمَوَاقِيتِ

وَمَنْ لَا يُوجِدُ عِنْدَهُمْ وَقْتُ الْعِشَاءِ كَمَا قَبِلَ يَطَّلِعُ الْفَجْرُ قَبْلَ غَيْبُوتِهِ الشَّمَقِ عِنْدَهُمْ، أَفْتَى النَّبَائِلُ بِعَدَمِ الْوُجُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ لِعَدَمِ السَّبَبِ، وَهُوَ مُحْتَمَلٌ صَاحِبِ الْكُنْزِ كَمَا يَسْتَفْتَى عَسَلُ الْيَدِينِ مِنَ الْوُضُوءِ عَنْ مَقْطُوعِهِمَا مِنَ الْمَرْفِقَيْنِ، وَأَنْكَرَهُ الْحُلَوَائِيُّ ثُمَّ وَاقَعَهُ، وَأَفْتَى الْإِمَامُ الْبَرْهَانِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ بِوُجُوبِهَا، وَلَا يَرْتَابُ مُتَأَمِّلٌ فِي ثُبُوتِ الْفَرْقِ بَيْنَ عَدَمِ تَحَلُّلِ الْفَرْضِ وَبَيْنَ سَبَبِهِ الْجُعْلِيِّ الَّذِي جُعِلَ عَلَامَةً عَلَى الْوُجُوبِ الْحَقِيقِيِّ النَّابِتِ فِي نَفْسِ الْأَمْرِ وَجَوَازِ تَعَدُّدِ الْمَعْرِفَاتِ لِلشَّيْءِ، فَانْتِفَاءُ الْوَقْتِ انْتِفَاءُ الْمَعْرِفِ

²⁶ Ibn Humām, Fathul Qadeer, Kitāb Salah, vol 1 p. 224

وَانْتِفَاءُ الدَّلِيلِ عَلَى شَيْءٍ لَا يَسْتَلْزِمُ انْتِفَاءَ جَوَازِ دَلِيلٍ آخَرَ وَقَدْ وَجَدَ، وَهُوَ مَا تَوَاطَأَتْ أَحْبَابُ الْإِسْرَاءِ مِنْ فَرْضِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى الصَّلَاةَ حَمْسًا بَعْدَ مَا أَمُرُوا أَوَّلًا بِحَمْسِينَ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَرَّ الْأَمْرُ عَلَى الْحَمْسِ شَرْحًا عَامًّا لِأَهْلِ الْأَفَاقِ، لَا تَفْصِيلَ فِيهِ بَيْنَ أَهْلِ قَطْرِ وَقَطْرِ وَمَا رَوَى «ذَكَرَ الدَّجَالُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - : قُلْنَا مَا لَبِئْتُهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ؟ قَالَ: أَرْبَعُونَ يَوْمًا يَوْمًا كَسَنَةِ وَيَوْمًا كَشَهْرِ وَيَوْمًا كَجُمُعَةٍ وَسَائِرُ أَيَّامِهِ كَأَيَّامِكُمْ فَقِيلَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ فَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الَّذِي كَسَنَتِ أَيْكُفِينَا صَلَاةَ يَوْمٍ؟ قَالَ: لَا أَقْدُرُوا لَهُ» رَوَاهُ مُسْلِمٌ، فَقَدْ أَوْجَبَ أَكْثَرُ مِنْ ثَلَاثِمِائَةٍ عَصْرٍ قَبْلَ صَبْرُورَةِ الظِّلِّ مَثَلًا أَوْ مِثْلَيْنِ، وَقَسَّ عَلَيْهِ، فَاسْتَفَدْنَا أَنَّ الْوَاجِبَ فِي نَفْسِ الْأَمْرِ حَمْسٌ عَلَى الْعُمُومِ، غَيْرَ أَنَّ تَوَازُعَهَا عَلَى تِلْكَ الْأَوْقَاتِ عِنْدَ وُجُودِهَا، وَلَا يَسْتَفْتَى بِعَدَمِهَا الْوُجُوبِ، وَكَذَا قَالَ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - «حَمْسُ صَلَوَاتٍ كَتَبَهُنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْعِبَادِ» ثُمَّ هَلْ يَنْوِي الْقَضَاءُ؟ الصَّحِيحُ أَنَّهُ لَا يَنْوِي الْقَضَاءَ لِقَدَمِ وَقْتُ الْأَدَاءِ وَمَنْ أَفْتَى بِوُجُوبِ الْعِشَاءِ يَجِبُ عَلَى قَوْلِهِ الْوِثْرُ أَيْضًا.

The Hanafi jurists provided no specific calculation method due to the internal debate on the obligation of 'Ishā Salāh itself and hence, resorted to the Shafi'i legal school (mentioned above). Ibn Ābidīn Shāmi رحمته الله after discussing the matter at length concludes with the following statement.

“The summary is that we do not accept the necessary existence of the actual cause (Salāh time) rather estimation is sufficient like the days of Dajjāl. It is possible that meaning of estimation as mentioned (before) is what Shafi'iyyah stated whereby the timing of 'Ishā according to their view is the disappearance of the shafaq (ahmar) in the closest region to them, and the first meaning is more apparent.”²⁷

Ibn Ābidīn Shāmi رحمته الله cites the Shafi'i madhab that 'Ishā time will be estimated according to the nearest latitudinal region where 'Ishā time exists. Ibn Ābidīn Shāmi رحمته الله immediately follows the discussion on whether 'Ishā time will be offered with the intention of adā or qadhā. He concludes that if the nearest latitudinal region determines the time of 'Ishā then it will be offered as adā and outside of it's time is deemed qadhā. Others insist that due to the absence of time, it will be offered with the intention of qadhā only.²⁸ The reason why some opine as qadhā, as Mufti Amjad argues, is because of the probability of Fajr occurring before praying 'Ishā. The intention of qadhā is therefore a precautionary approach.²⁹ In truth however, depending on which position

²⁷ Durrul Mukhtār wa hashiyah Ibn Ābideen Shāmi, Kitābus Salāh, vol 1, p. 18

بَقِيَ الْكَلَامُ فِي مَعْنَى التَّقْدِيرِ، وَالَّذِي يَظْهَرُ مِنْ عِبَارَةِ الْفَيْضِ أَنَّ الْمُرَادَ أَنَّهُ يَجِبُ قَضَاءُ الْعِشَاءِ، بَأَن يُقَدَّرَ أَنَّ الْوَقْتَ أَعْنَى سَبَبِ الْوُجُوبِ قَدْ وَجَدَ كَمَا يُقَدَّرُ وَجُودُهُ فِي أَيَّامِ الدَّجَالِ عَلَى مَا يَأْتِي؛ لِأَنَّهُ لَا يَجِبُ بِدُونِ السَّبَبِ، فَيَكُونُ قَوْلُهُ وَيُقَدَّرُ الْوَقْتُ جَوَابًا عَنْ قَوْلِهِ فِي الْأَوَّلِ لِعَدَمِ السَّبَبِ. وَحَاصِلُهُ أَنَّا لَا نَسَلِّمُ لِرُومِ وَجُودِ السَّبَبِ حَقِيقَةً بَلْ يَكْفِي تَقْدِيرُهُ كَمَا فِي أَيَّامِ الدَّجَالِ. وَيَحْتَمِلُ أَنَّ الْمُرَادَ بِالتَّقْدِيرِ الْمَذْكُورِ هُوَ مَا قَالَهُ الشَّافِعِيُّ مِنْ أَنَّهُ يَكُونُ وَقْتُ الْعِشَاءِ فِي حَقِّهِمْ بِقَدْرِ مَا يَغِيبُ فِيهِ الشَّفَقُ فِي أَقْرَبِ الْبِلَادِ إِلَيْهِمْ، وَالْمَعْنَى الْأَوَّلُ أَظْهَرُ،

²⁸ Durrul Mukhtār wa hashiyah Ibn Ābideen Shāmi, Kitābus Salāh, vol 1, p. 19

إِذَا عَلِمْتَ ذَلِكَ ظَهَرَ لَكَ أَنَّ مَنْ قَالَ بِالْوُجُوبِ يَقُولُ بِهِ عَلَى سَبِيلِ الْقَضَاءِ لَا الْأَدَاءِ، وَلَوْ كَانَ الْإِعْتِبَارُ بِأَقْرَبِ الْبِلَادِ إِلَيْهِمْ لَرِمَ أَنْ يَكُونَ الْوَقْتُ الَّذِي اعْتَبَرْتَاهُ لَهُمْ وَقْتًا لِلْعِشَاءِ حَقِيقَةً بَحِثْ تَكُونُ الْعِشَاءُ فِيهِ آدَاءً مَعَ أَنَّ الْقَائِلِينَ عِنْدَنَا بِالْوُجُوبِ صَرَّحُوا بِأَنَّ قَضَاءً وَبِقَدْرِ وَقْتِ الْأَدَاءِ:

²⁹ Amjad Mohammed, *The Islamic Prayer Times for 'Ishā' and Fajr according to Muslims in the UK*, published at the Institute of the Revival of Islamic Sciences (IRTIS)

is adopted, when its fixed time has been calculated then it will be read with the intention of adā and outside its time will be qadhā. Considering the Bulghar case, one of the four estimation methods were adopted;

- a) Estimate by half of the night (*nisful layl*). In other words, the night will be divided into two parts between sunset and sunrise. The first half will mark 'Ishā Salāh and the second half for Fajr.
- b) Estimation by the last recorded time of one's local city during the actual 'Ishā and Fajr times. That time then remains fixed throughout the remaining months until August. This is known as *aqrab al-ayyām*.
- c) Estimation by following the calendar of the nearest region of the same latitude. This is known as *aqrab al-bilad*.
- d) Estimation by one-seventh of the night. Dividing the night from sunset to sunrise into seven portions; six portions for the night and one for *subhu sādīq*.³⁰

Ibn Ābidīn Shāmi رحمته الله further on comments on the erroneous assumption that many jurists held that darkness must precede the Fajr beginning time and therefore Fajr time like 'Ishā also ceases to exist during persistent twilight.

"I say, the differences reported between or senior scholars of the madhab is regarding the obligation of 'Ishā and witr. We have not seen any one amongst them presenting (any view) on the qadhā of Fajr in this case. Instead, their discussion of the matter is identifying the Fajr because Fajr according to them is the name of white light spreading across the horizon according to the authentic narration as mentioned previously without specifying darkness preceding it albeit we do not accept the darkness not occurring here."³¹

³⁰ Maulana Yaqūb Qasmi, *Subh Sādīq wa Shafaq ki tahqeeq*, pp. 47-48.

³¹ Durrul Mukhtār wa hashiyah Ibn Ābideen Shāmi, *Kitābus Salāh*, vol 1, p. 18

أقول: الخلاف المنقول بين مشايخ المذهب إنما هو في وجوب العشاء والوتر فقط، ولم تر أحدا منهم تعرض لقضاء الفجر في هذه الصورة، وإنما الواقع في كلامهم تسميته فجزا؛ لأن الفجر عندهم اسم للبياض المنتشر في الأفق موافقا للحديث الصحيح كما مر بلا تفهيد بسبق ظلام. على أن لا نسلم عدم الظلام هنا، ثم رأيت ط ذكر نحوه.



Ibn Ābidīn رحمته clarifies two matters here, firstly the dispute is regarding estimation of 'Ishā Salāh, not Fajr (because it has a beginning time) and secondly, it is not a necessary condition that darkness must precede the Fajr. In this case, as Reedwan argues, the twilight shifting from the western to the eastern horizon at solar midnight would sufficiently mark the start time of Fajr due to the fulfilment of tabyīn – horizontal light in the east. So, Fajr will not be valid so long as the twilight remains in the western horizon.³²

4. Dates of Perpetual Twilight and Practice of Local Masājid

The HM Nautical Almanac calendar that virtually every Masjid depends on for calculating the Salāh times, provides us with information of varying latitudinal timings of Salāh of the whole year. The below dates were taken from the HM Nautical Almanac with the consultation of Mufti Amjad Muhammad.³³ This enables us to determine not just the 'Ishā and Fajr start time but persistent twilights during the specific months with precise dates.

1. **Astronomical twilight disappears** - *Shafaq ahmar* and *abyadh* both disappear between 18th August – 24th March. The sun's depression dips as below as 24 degrees. 'Ishā and Fajr must be prayed at their original times.
2. **Shafaq abyadh disappearing late**- This occurs roughly around 25th March – 5th May and 8th -18th August. 'Ishā time does exist but later. However, it can be read earlier before 11pm if one chooses to adopt the 15 degrees view. Following the sāhibayn opinion of praying 'Ishā after the disappearance of shafaq ahmar is permissible.

³² Reedwan argues that as the dispute is regarding the Isha start time and not Fajr and therefore, applying the aqrAbūlayyam principle to Fajr as some contemporary Muftis have done so is a misunderstanding. Rather the correct method is nisful-layl. See detailed article on the Fajr calculation misunderstanding available at: [Fajr misunderstanding.pdf](#)

³³ Amjad Mohammed, *The Islamic Prayer Times for 'Ishā' and Fajr according to Muslims in the UK*, published at the Institute of the Revival of Islamic Sciences (IRTIS). It must be noted that these estimations are for regions such as Bradford, Manchester, Leeds and so forth. These dates will differ from regions situated in the extreme south and extreme north.





3. **Shafaq ahmar disappearing very late after 11pm (or close to midnight)** - This is generally considered late. The estimated dates are 6th May – 25th May and 17th July – 7th August. *Shafaq ahmar* as already mentioned persists until the end of nautical twilight implying it continues much later than 11pm.
4. **Non-Existence of 'Ishā or persistent twilight** – This is the peak moment where 'Ishā virtually ceases to exist because the sun's depression does not set more than 12-13 degrees below the horizon. Astronomical twilight does not occur as of which, traces of shafaq ahmar may still exist throughout the night. The dates recorded for this phenomenon are 26th May to 16th July.

Based on the aforementioned data, point 1 and 2 are not so much contentious as 'Ishā time does exist and no need for estimation. The primary concern is point 3 and 4. In point 3, shafaq ahmar disappears extremely late, potentially close to midnight after which 'Ishā can be prayed according to the sāhibayn's position. This however can prove difficult for many people for remaining awake late at night to pray 'Ishā with the possibility of missing Fajr. Point 4 on the other hand, shafaq ahmar does not disappear prompting jurists in resorting to estimation.

To resolve this predicament, many gatherings of senior Ulama were convened to solve this issue of which two are of particular importance. The first dates to June 9th 1982, in Savile Town, Dewsbury comprising of forty senior scholars chaired by Mufti Ismail Kacholvi. The committee of scholars proposed and signed the following resolutions;

- A) Days when both Salāh times set in must be followed according to their correct timings (on the timetable)
- B) During high altitude months, 'Ishā and Fajr will be estimated based on the Hadīth of Dajjal.
- C) In consultation with other senior scholars, including Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmāni رحمۃ اللہ علیہ issued the verdict of calculating 65 minutes (or one hour) after Maghrib (assuming that the shafaq ahmar disappeared on hour after maghrib).





Essentially, when shafaq abyadh does not disappear but shafaq ahmar remains then to resort to sāhibayn's position.

- D) (In determining Fajr) applying the one-seventh rule as in dividing the night, sunset to sunrise into 7 parts; first six for the night and the last portion (seventh) for subhu sādiq.
- E) (Another option for subhu sādiq) was to fix (arbitrarily) one hour and a half before sunrise to mark the beginning time of Fajr. This was proposed by Shaykh Maulana Ashraf Ali Thānvi رحمۃ اللہ علیہ.³⁴

Maulana Yaqub Qāsmi رحمۃ اللہ علیہ among the senior scholars and experienced researchers in this field participated and, in his book, he included the recorded minutes of the meeting, collection of fatwas of senior scholars for reference and provides valuable insight on the matter. He contended that the shafaq ahmar disappears after an hour, as is evident that the shafaq ahmar exceeds beyond the one-hour. On certain occasions, as observed the time gap between both shafaqs disappear (when shafaq abyadh disappears that is) can prolong to over 2-3 hours during high latitude months. Moreover, the fatwas of the senior scholars such as Shaykh Zafar Usmāni رحمۃ اللہ علیہ and others cited were based in the context of India and are therefore not applicable to UK context.³⁵ A careful assessment of the fatwas reveals varying positions as each senior mufti proposed one method different from the other. For instance, citing Mufti Kacholvi sāhib's fatwa, he suggested the practice of the sub'u layl (first six for the night and 'Ishā to be read one-hour after maghrib and the last seventh for subhu sādiq) Fajr. Mufti Mahmud Hasan Gangohi sāhib رحمۃ اللہ علیہ who chaired a meeting of scholars on 29th May 1983 in Howard Street, Bradford, concluded with the preference of the aqrab al-ayyām rule – applying the last recorded official time of Fajr through the persistent twilight days.³⁶ This decision was supported by the Jami'at Ulama Britania which included senior scholars such as Shaykh

³⁴ Maulana Yaqūb Qasmi, *Subh Sādiq wa Shafaq ki tahqeeq*, pp. 49-54

³⁵ Maulana Yaqūb Qasmi, *Subh Sādiq wa Shafaq ki tahqeeq*, pp. 57-63

³⁶ Maulana Yaqūb Qasmi, *Subh Sādiq wa Shafaq ki tahqeeq*, pp. 94-99 – 130-131





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Yusuf Motala sāhib ﷺ as of which many timetables fix 1:30am as the standard time going by this principle. As for those following the one-seventh rule, they will begin their Fajr later than 1:30 am.

Thus, we find that no standardized fixed method. Each Masjid adopted a position suited to their condition. According to the Wifaqul Ulama website, Fajr is fixed at 18 degrees on normal days but allowed employing one of the two positions; aqrab al-ayyām and nisful layl (splitting the time between sunset and the next sunrise into two parts and the last portion is considered to be *subh sādiq*) during high latitude months of persistent twilight.³⁷ To further resolve the 'Ishā Salāh predicament, a council of senior scholars was convened (not date mentioned) and after 7 hours of deliberation, the gathering proposed one of the following estimation methods for 'Ishā (as no agreed solution was reached due to the complexity of the issue);

1. *Ishā* ' times at each latitude should be restricted to 65 minutes after the *local Astronomical sunset* on the longest day of the year, accounting for the refraction of sunlight. This is the latest sunset at most location.
2. *Ishā* ' times at each latitude should be calculated at 15° degrees and at 1/7th of night and the lower value adopted.
3. *Ishā* ' times should be locked at a certain time regardless of the latitude and sunset time for our country e.g. 23:00. *Ishā* ' times at each latitude should be calculated at 15° degrees otherwise locked at 23:00 and no later until *Ishā* ' sets earlier than 23:00.
4. Local Ulama should look at Haraj for their individual communities, discuss and deliberate with senior scholars and adopt suitable times.³⁸

We can reasonably assume that despite the absence of a unified method, local Masājid adopt either aqrab al-ayyām, nisful layl and subu'layl, fixed 11:00pm or one-hour after maghrib for 'Ishā arbitrarily.

³⁷ Wifaqul Ulama Salāh times 2024, available at: <https://www.wifaqululama.co.uk/salahtimes/>

³⁸ Wifaqul Ulama; Isha at High Altitude, available at: <https://www.wifaqululama.co.uk/highlat/>



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5. Is there Dispensation to Combine Salāhs for those Struggling to Pray 'Ishā Late?

Practicing Muslims who genuinely struggle to pray 'Ishā late due to personal circumstances often enquire whether they are permitted to pray 'Ishā earlier than one-hour or combine 'Ishā with Maghrib. Circumstances may include such as women engaged in personal chores, young children needed to sleep so to wake up for Fajr and school on time, particular illnesses or working people who must wake up early for work and so forth. A recent case where a father enquired about his teenage daughter suffering from epileptic fits and at times exacerbated due to lack of sleep. The teenage girl is conscious of her Salāhs but struggles to stay awake until 11:00pm to pray 'Ishā. Another case was a woman due to her daily chores (as well as other health issues) struggled to remain awake late and needed to wake up early to prepare her children for school. On certain occasions, due to extreme tiredness and lack of sleep she ends up missing her Fajr Salāh too. These are some examples among many.

Majority of the Deobandi fatwas generally disallow combining the Salāhs together for the fear of misappropriation of the ruling and because the Hanafi school generally do not permit combining of Salāhs. Maulana Marghub Ahmad Lajpuri permitted praying 'Ishā with Maghrib in extreme circumstances. In his view, praying 'Ishā with Maghrib is in reality not combining the Salāhs because actual combining of Salāhs is applicable only when the timings of Salāh actually exist whereas, 'Ishā in this case (perpetual twilight) is non-existent. His reasoning is based on two fundamental principles; firstly, drawing on the principles of haraj and necessity in matters of worship, if genuine difficulty exists then the Shariah allows ease. He vehemently condemns scholars stringently enforcing the one-hour rule without consideration of individual circumstances. Secondly, he adduces the practice of senior scholars such as Mufti Sa'īd Palanpuri sāhib ﷺ and Shaykh Mufti Taqi Usmani sāhib who themselves allowed combining 'Ishā with Maghrib during persistence shafaq. Maulana Marghub sāhib





however does recommend a brief interlude between Maghrib and 'Ishā for the Sunnah and Nafil prayers and to distinguish between both Salāhs.³⁹

We previously discussed that the one-hour rule was arbitrarily fixed for the sake of consistency and as a precaution. Nevertheless, this in our humble opinion cannot be emphatically enforced without consideration of individual circumstances. Classical Hanafi opinions were also divided on this matter and, as we argued no standardised method was fixed despite multiple attempts. We cited the case of Bulghar earlier where the local Muslims combined their 'Ishā with Maghrib. Moreover, we highlighted that Maulana Yaqub Qasmi sāhib questioned the one-hour rule as it did not sufficiently demarcate the 'Ishā time according to the legal principles and not to mention the variant timings from season to season. In truth, there is no consensus on this matter but a precaution for consistency and to avoid abuse in the ruling. Concession therefore can be warranted for offering 'Ishā with Maghrib as Maulana Marghub sāhib argues, in exceptional circumstances under the laws of dharurah and hajat. We further suggest the following matters to be considered;

1. The dispensation applies during perpetual twilight period only and not throughout the year.
2. The application of concession is judged by each individual case and not generic. Personal circumstances must consist of genuine constrain. Seeking concession with the intention of fulfilling personal satisfaction or misappropriation is strictly forbidden.
3. When seeking dispensation, one must be sincere and fearful of Allāh's accountability and full transparency of their specific condition.
4. We recommend consulting your case with a reputable mufti to determine your eligibility of such dispensation in which case, the questioner must be honest and sincere in clarifying their personal circumstances.

³⁹ See Maulana Marghub Ahmad Lajpuri, *Shafaq Ghaib Na ho to Maghrib ke Sath Parna*, pdf available at:

[Combining Salahs in absence of Shafaq - MI Marghub.pdf](#)



Below is a summary of the twilight and the rulings.

Important Dates		
The depression of the sun is the same for 'Ishā and Fajr beginning time. 3 degrees difference between the two shafaqs and the two fajrs. Two mainstream opinions 15 and 18 degrees		
Dates	Explanation for 'Ishā	Ruling on 'Ishā
18th August -24th March	During these times shafaq abyadh disappears.	Adopting the original opinion of the disappearance of the <i>shafaq</i> (15 or 18) is necessary.
25th March – 5th May	'Ishā exists and shafaq abyadh disappears after 11pm.	Can pray 'Ishā earlier than 11pm according to 15 degrees or according to <i>sāhibayn</i> opinion of the end of <i>shafaq ahmar</i> .
9th – 18th August		
6th May – 25th May	Shafaq Ahmar does not disappear until much later than 11:00pm or close to midnight and praying 'Ishā can be difficult for some people.	Adopt one of the following positions: a) Pray 'Ishā at its beginning time (if possible, e.g. 11:30pm) b) Pray 'Ishā towards its end time and Fajr at beginning time c) Some have suggested one-hour after Maghrib (though debatable) d) May combine both Maghrib and 'Ishā together in exceptional circumstances.
17th July – 8th August [43 days in total]		
26th May –16th July [52 days]	No 'Ishā time at all, as the two shafaqs do not completely disappear. The sun's depression does not set below 12 – 13 degrees.	Adopt one of the following positions: a) Pray 'Ishā one hour after Maghrib. b) Estimation – half the night (solar midnight), last known time of Salāh, one-seventh or nearest days of the last recorded time. c) Pray any time after 11:00pm d) May combine both Maghrib and 'Ishā together in exceptional circumstances. e) Pray 'Ishā with Maghrib with a short interval in between (preferably 20-30 minutes).





6. Summary and Recommendations

To conclude with the above discussion, the main points can be summarized as follows;

1. The adopted position in the Hanafi legal school for the start of 'Ishā is the disappearance of shafaq abyadh. Praying 'Ishā at the disappearance of ahmar is also a valid position.
2. The degree difference between shafaq ahmar and abyadh and subhu sādiq and kādhib is measured by 3 degrees. Their time duration is equal in length after sunset and before sunrise.
3. Astronomically, it is posited that 'Ishā and Fajr set at astronomical twilight which is when the sun's depression reaches 18 degrees angle below the horizon. This is the general adopted position among the senior Deobandi scholars. Other scholars maintained 15 degrees to mark the beginning of 'Ishā and Fajr. Both are valid positions and can be adopted.
4. During the low latitude months, the start time of 'Ishā and Fajr set according to their normal time and must be read in their stipulated times. Combining won't be permissible.
5. During high latitude months where 'Ishā is extremely late or non-existent then there is no unified position among the local Deobandi Masājid regarding its specific time. Each Masjid adopts a position either suited to their circumstances by following one of the four estimation methods or unconditionally adhere to the advice of the pious predecessors (irrespective if it is one of the four estimated methods or not).
6. The Muslim community are generally advised to follow their local Masjid's timetable for 'Ishā and Fajr beginning times during persistent twilight (see dates above). In extreme circumstances where someone genuinely struggles to pray 'Ishā late then they can pray 'Ishā with Maghrib either by combining them or with a brief interval between the two Salāhs to allow sufficient time for the Sunnah and Nawafil prayers. This varies between each case scenario and we therefore suggest consulting a reputable scholar or a mufti who can advise you accordingly.

Allāh Knows Best

