

*"It is said that the star in the crescent is Rahman in Rahim, one a light, the other a womb carrying a radiance of its reflection in the moon."*

From a poem by Jabriel Hanafi.



The beginning of Ramadan is established by the first sighting of the moon after the 'new moon' (as is the case for every month of the Islamic calendar). During Ramadan particularly, the moon marks the progress of the month for those who are fasting.

Ibn 'Umar reported that, the Messenger of Allah, p.b.u.h., said:

*"The month is (sometimes) twenty-nine nights, so do not keep the fast until you see (the new moon), and if it be veiled to you (by cloud, etc.), then complete the number thirty."*

The crescent was probably taken over from ancient Persia as a symbol, and appears quite early on as a decorative motif in Islamic art. It was once believed that the Ottoman Turks adopted the crescent for their flags after capturing Constantinople in 1453 but (according to Encyclopaedia Britannica) the Turks had actually been using the symbol for at least a century before that, because it appeared on the standards of their infantry under Sultan

Orhan (mid 14th C). According to legend, the sudden appearance of the moon had once saved the city of Byzantium from a surprise attack. The crescent moon became associated with the

Ottoman Empire, appearing on military flags and the tops of minarets and was eventually adopted by the world of Islam in general; by about the eighteenth century it had won general acceptance as a sign of Muslim identity. Today it can be seen on the flags of many countries where Islam is predominant, including Algeria, Azerbaijan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Pakistan, Tunisia and Turkey. It is also the symbol of the Red Crescent, the Muslim version of the Red Cross.

*'God set the sun to be a lamp to give light to the people of the earth and likewise He has set the Spirit (ruh) in the body to give light to the body thereby, so that when it departs at death, the body is darkened, just as the earth is darkened when the sun disappears. □ The He set the Intellect ('aql) to be as the moon which shines in the heavenly vault, at one time waxing and at another waning. □ At its beginning it is small, being the new moon, just as the intelligence is but small when man is little, but increases like as the moon increases to the night of its fullness, after which it begins to decrease ...'*

*(Ibn 'Arabi, Shajarat-al-kawn)*