

Questions & Answers on *Mawlid al-Nabī*.

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Introduction

In the month of Rabī al-Awwal, the birth of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is celebrated with great joy and happiness throughout the Muslim world. Known as *Mawlid al-Nabī*, it is a time when millions of Muslims re-kindle the flames of love towards the Best of Creations, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is the period when Muslims devoutly thank their Lord for honouring us with being the humble followers of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

However, a small minority of Muslims do not acknowledge the *Mawlid* and claim it is a reprehensible innovation (*bid'a*). Rather than seeing this event as an opportunity to draw closer to Allāh and His Messenger, they view it as forbidden and *harām*.

This booklet takes the most common questions asked about the *Mawlid* and answers them in a simple manner. We hope that this will allow Muslims to appreciate the value and reward associated with the *Mawlid*.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Companions did not observe the *Mawlid*. If it was permissible, then surely the Companions would have been the first to celebrate it because they were the best of all Muslims. Prove the *Mawlid* is permissible from the Prophet and the Companions.

This style of questioning is wrong and goes against *sharī'a*. What the question really should be is: 'Prove the Prophet and the Companions *prohibited* the *Mawlid*.' This is because in Islamic *sharī'a*, everything is permissible until proven forbidden (*al-asl fi al-ashyā al-ibāha*). It is not the case that everything is forbidden until the Qur'ān and Sunna states it is permissible. Adam (peace be upon him) was instructed he could do anything in paradise, except eat from the tree. In other words, the default state is one of permissibility. In the verse, 'It is Allāh who created for you all that is in the earth' (2: 29), Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) writes that: 'The scholars have deduced from this that everything is permissible in its original state, unless *sharī'a* prohibits it.'ⁱ We can eat what we want, unless *sharī'a* has prohibited it. It is not the case that we cannot eat anything unless *sharī'a* has allowed it. The Muslims that commemorate the *Mawlid* do not have to prove that the *Mawlid* is permissible; the doubters have to prove that it is *harām*. So the *Mawlid* is permissible until proven impermissible, and not the other way round.

There is no mention of the word ‘Mawlid’ or ‘Milād’ in the Qur’ān and so it is obviously no part of Islam. Prove Mawlid from the Qur’ān.

Tawhīd is the foundation of our religion, namely the belief in the oneness of Allāh. But nowhere in the Qur’ān do we find the word *tawhīd*. In fact it is not to be found in *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* or *Sahīh Muslim* either. Just because the Qur’ān does not explicitly mention the word ‘*tawhīd*’, it doesn’t mean we should not act or believe in it. In fact, the Quran is full of *indirect* references to *tawhīd*, the oneness of Allāh. The exact same principle applies to the *Mawlid*. The Qur’ān is full of indirect references to the celebration of the *Mawlid*. For instance:

‘And publicise your Lord’s favours’ (93:11).

And what bigger favour do we possess than the fact that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was sent to us? In another verse, Allāh says:

‘In Allāh’s Favour and His Mercy, in that they should rejoice...’ (10:58).

In this verse, we are ordered to rejoice with Allāh’s *favour* and *mercy*. Mercy, as we know, is one of the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) titles. Just as his prophethood is Allāh’s mercy and favour, so is his birth.

The *Mawlid* today is but the celebration of the life and teachings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and there is ample evidence to suggest that the Companions also did this. In a hadīth narrated by Imām al-Tirmidhī and Imām Dārimī, Ibn Abbās (may Allāh be pleased with him) narrates:

‘Some people from amongst the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) Companions were sitting together when Allāh’s Messenger came out and drew close to them, until he heard them discussing something. One of them said ‘Allāh had taken Ibrahim as a friend’. Another said ‘He spoke to Moses directly’. Another said ‘Jesus was Allāh’s Word and His Spirit’. And yet another said ‘Allāh chose Adam’. The Prophet (peace be upon him) went up to them and said: ‘I have heard your conversation and your marveling at the fact that Ibrahim was Allāh’s friend, as indeed he was; that Moses was Allāh’s devout friend, as indeed he was; that Jesus was His Spirit, as indeed he was; and that Adam was chosen by Allāh, as indeed he was. But truly, I am Allāh’s Beloved, and this is no boast. On the Day of Judgement I shall be the bearer of the Banner of Praise, under which will be Adam and others beside him, and I bear no pride in saying so. I shall be the first intercessor and the first whose intercession shall be accepted on the Day of Judgement, and this is no boast...And I shall be the most honourable in Allāh’s sight from among those people of the earlier and later times, and this is no boast.’

What this hadīth proves is that the Companions used to gather to discuss the *sīrah* of previous prophets. The Prophet (peace be upon him) approved of this and ordered them to remember his *sīrah* too.

Christians celebrate Christmas, which is the birthday of Jesus. You celebrate the *Mawlid*, which is the birthday of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Therefore you resemble the Christians. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever resembles a community becomes like them.'

Just by imitating non-Muslims you do not become like them. Muslims wear hats and so do Jews. Does that mean we are imitating them? Muslim men keep beards and so do Sikhs. Does that mean the hadīth indicates we cannot keep beards? The hadīth is to teach Muslims that Islam is a perfect religion, with a flawless identity and rich heritage. Therefore there is no need to imitate others. Merely copying the non-Muslims is not a sin. It is only wrong when you *intend* to do something exactly like the non-Muslims do.

The *Mawlid* is a commemoration of the Prophet's birth and that is where the similarities with Christmas end. Otherwise they could not be more different. All the acts and practices associated with the *Mawlid* – gathering in the mosque, reciting the Qur'ān, listening to the flawless biography of the Prophet (peace be upon him) – are supported and underpinned by the Qur'ān and Sunna. By commemorating the *Mawlid*, we are not at all imitating the Christians or indeed any other religion.

The *Mawlid* is a *bid'a* (Innovation) and as the Prophet said, 'every *bid'a* is misguidance'.

Muslims who deny the legitimacy of the *Mawlid* quote the above hadīth as well as the Prophet's sayings:

'Whoever works a deed that is not part of our affair will have that deed rejected'

and the hadīth:

'Whoever introduces something new into this affair of ours that is not of it will have it rejected.'

This is *precisely* the hadīth Muslims use to legitimise the practice of the *Mawlid*. Had the deniers of the *Mawlid* paid closer attention to the gilt-edged words of the Beloved Messenger, they would have realised that he said: 'Whoever works a deed *that is not part of our affair* will have that deed rejected.' In other words, the act is rejected (*mardūd*) if it is not part of Islam and alien to its tenets. Automatically, this means that if someone works a deed that is *part of our affair*, then it is not rejected. If actions that were not endorsed by the Prophet and Companions are illegal, then:

*Dotted the Qur'ānic Letters is wrong;
The Successor (*Tābi'ī*) Abū al-Aswad al-Dualī dotted the entire Qur'ān in the time of Mu'āwiya (may Allāh be pleased with him), and the Successor Ibn Sīrīn possessed a Qur'ān originally dotted by the *Tābi'ī* Yāhyā ibn Ya'mar.

*Studying the Islamic disciplines like Arabic Grammar (*sarf* and *nahv*), *tafsīr*, *ilm al-hadīth* and so on are forbidden.
None of these were formally taught in the first generation of Muslims.

*The practice of praying *fajr salāh* with the same ablution of *ishā* is wrong.
The Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Companions were not known to do this. This came about in later times, from the likes of Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab and Imām Abū Hanīfa.

Why are there no disputes about these innovations? Because none contravene the general teachings of the Qur'ān and Sunna. Therefore, just like the *Mawlid*, they are classified as *bid'a hasana* (Good Innovation, or Innovation of Guidance). The reason why the *Mawlid* is an innovation of guidance is because the *Mawlid* consists of thanking Allāh, remembering the *sīrah* of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and reading *na'ts* and *nashīds* in his praise. None of these acts contradict or defy the four sources of *sharī'a*. In fact the *sharī'a* encourages such acts.

Even if all *bid'as* are not forbidden, then *bid'a* in religious affairs certainly are. New innovations outside the sphere of religion are allowed, but they are not allowed in the sphere of *ibāda* (worship). You consider the *Mawlid* a form of *ibāda* and therefore it is a *bid'a* in religion.

Each year on the 23rd of September, Saudi National Day is celebrated with great vigour and verve, where the locals salute the foundation of Saudi Arabia. When commenting on Saudi National Day, Khaled Almaenna, the renowned Editor-in-Chief of *Arab News* wrote:

'...As we reflect once again on the National Day we should also be thankful...for the decades of security and stability that we have enjoyed. While other nations around the world floundered we kept going on.' ⁱⁱ

Those who commemorate the *Mawlid* find this hard to swallow. Does this mean we can have a day to thank Allāh for giving 'security and stability' to Saudi Arabia, but not a time when we can thank Allāh for giving us the greatest blessing of all, the Beloved Messenger (peace be upon him)? Is this not a shallow, hypocritical argument?

In reply, the deniers argue that Saudi National day is a *bid'a* but not in the sphere of religion. Therefore it is perfectly fine. Following this argument, it implies that if the *Mawlid* is turned into a non-religious event – where functions are held outside the mosque, no Qur'ān is recited, no mention is made of the flawless *sīrah* of the Messenger and the place is decorated with balloons – this should be perfectly acceptable, because it is now a non-religious event?! The deniers of the *Mawlid* are confusing themselves by asserting that *Mawlid* as a religious event is *harām*, but as a non-religious event, it is perfectly acceptable.

In each and every possible manner, there is no way we can prove the *Mawlid* from the Prophetic Sunna. Therefore, there is no reward for the *Mawlid* and what you are doing is *harām*.

When a Muslim studies the matter with an open heart and mind, then certainly he/she will be convinced that a basis for the *Mawlid* can be derived from the Prophetic Sunna. Two examples will be offered here, both given by Shaykh Sayyid Zayn al-Sumayt:

1. The Imām and hadīth Master Shaykh al-Islām Hāfiz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) has derived a basis for the *Mawlid* from the Sunna. He writes:

‘It is in the hadīth found in the two rigorously authentic collections [of al-Bukhārī and Muslim]. It states that the Prophet (peace be upon him) entered Medina and found that the Jews were fasting on the day of Āshūra. He asked them regarding this and they replied: ‘It was the day in which Allāh drowned Fir’awn and saved Mūsā, so we fast on this day out of thanks for Allāh, the Exalted.’ So, the Prophet started to fast on that day and ordered the Muslims to fast it as well. Ibn Hajar commented:

‘This hadīth indicates observing thanks to Allāh for His bounties that He gifted, when He repelled harm on a particular day. Thanks to Allāh is obtained from various types of worship, such as prostration, fasting and charity. What bounty is greater than the appearance of this Prophet of mercy?’

From this it is known that gathering for the sake of hearing the story of his birth (peace be upon him) is from the greatest acts that draw one near [to Allāh], for it is a means of showing gratitude to Allāh for the appearance of the possessor of miracles, as well as the opportunity to feed others, pray and send many prayers and salutations and other good deeds. The notable scholars have explicitly stated that performing a *Mawlid* [in a locality] will ensure security for that year and glad tidings in this world in obtaining one’s wants and needs. Actions are only judged according to intentions, and Allāh, the Glorified and Exalted knows best.’

2. The hadīth master, Shams al-Dīn Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429) wrote in his book *Urf al-ta’rif bi al-mawlid al-sharīf*:

‘It has been narrated [in *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*] that Abū Lahab was seen in a dream after his death. He was asked about his condition in the fire, to which he replied: ‘The punishment is lightened for me every Monday night and I drink water from between my fingers the size of this – and he pointed to the tips of his fingers – because of freeing Thuwayba when she brought me the good news of the Prophet’s birth and because of her breastfeeding him.’

So if Abū Lahab, the unbeliever who was condemned in the Qur’ān receives reward for showing delight during the night of the Prophet’s birth, then what is the state of a Muslim monotheist from his own nation

who dresses nicely and gives out love of him? By my life! His reward from Allāh the Generous is nothing more than entering the gardens of Paradise out of His bounty!’ⁱⁱⁱ

The person who started celebrating the *Mawlid* and feeding thousands of people was a cruel king [Sultan Muzaffar of Irbil]. So why should you follow a king instead of the examples of the Companions of the Beloved Messenger?

According to this logic, if a bad man performs a good act then that good act becomes bad. If a bad Muslim builds a well in a poor area for others to use, is drinking from the well now *harām*?

In its present form, the *Mawlid* commemoration can be traced back to the ruler of Irbil, Sultān Muzaffar whose full name was Abū Sa’id Kukabarī Ibn Zayn al-Dīn Alī Ibn Baghtakin. The Islamic historians had nothing but kind words to say about him. Hāfiz Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372), the student of Ibn Taymiyya, wrote:

‘Sultan Muzaffar used to arrange the celebration of the *Mawlid Sharīf* with due honour, glory, dignity and grandeur. In this connection, he used to organise a magnificent festival. He was a pure-hearted, brave and wise Ālim and a just ruler. May Allāh shower His Mercy upon him and grant him an exalted status. Shaykh Abū al-Khattāb Ibn Dhiyah also wrote a book for him on the *Mawlid Sharīf* called *al-Tanwīr fī mawlid al-bashīr al-nazīr* (*Enlightenment on the Birthday of the Bearer of Good News, the Warner*). For this book, Sultan Muzaffar awarded him a gift of one thousand *dīnārs*. Sultan Muzaffar remained the ruler until his death, which occurred in 630 A.H...in short, he was a man of piety and noble disposition.’^{iv}

If you want to get reward for any action, then it must be what the Qur’ān and Sunna says. If it is not the practice of the Prophet (peace be upon him) or his Companions then there is no reward. Since neither the Prophet nor the Companions celebrated the *Mawlid* you will not get the reward for it.

There is no proof for this rule whatsoever. If this rule was true, then the Prophet (peace be upon him) would have never promised a reward for a Muslim who starts a new, good act. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

‘Whoever introduces a good practice in Islam, earns the reward of it and those who act according to it after him, without diminishing their own rewards in the slightest. And whoever introduces an evil practice in Islam, he earns the sin of it and of those who act according to it, without diminishing their own sins in the slightest.’^v

If *Mawlid* celebrations were permissible, then the Prophet (peace be upon him) certainly would have instructed his Ummah to commemorate it.

By the same token, if gathering the Qur'ān into one written document was permissible, then the Prophet (peace be upon him) certainly would have instructed his Ummah to gather it into one document. He did not.

***Mawlid* celebrations are marked by the reciting of verses that transgress the limits of legitimate praise, thus assigning a position of divinity to our Prophet (peace be upon him).**

It is indeed strange that some Muslims see commemorating the *Mawlid* as excessive praise to the Prophet that may in some way undermine our belief in Allāh. If anything, the *Mawlid* affirms the oneness of Allāh. By commemorating the birth of the Prophet (peace be upon him), we confirm that he was born. The one who is born can never reach the rank of Allāh, for the quality of Allāh is that 'He begets not, nor was He begotten' (112:3).

***Eid* is a term reserved for *Eid-al-Fitr* and *Eid-al-Adhā*. By saying '*Eid Milād al-Nabī*' you have added a third *Eid* to our calendar. This is *bid'a*. You cannot just invent another *Eid*.**

You have misunderstood the meaning of *Eid*. '*Eid*' in Arabic comes from the word *ā'da* which means 'to return'. In this respect, *Eid* means any recurring day. Hence, any day on which Allāh has granted His special favour and is celebrated as a day of remembrance and joy can be referred to as an *Eid*.

The Qur'ān clearly called the day Jesus was granted a food of table an '*Eid*':

'Jesus, Son of Mary, said; O Allāh! Our Lord! Send down to us a table-spread (of food) from heaven, so that it may become an *Eid* day for us...' (5:114).

Also, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Indeed the day of Friday is a day of *Eid*.'^{vi} Again, this shows that the word has a wider use than just *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adhā*.

As for the claim that there are only two *Eids* in Islam, what is meant is an *Eid* where specific rituals have to be performed to mark the occasion, namely *Salāt-al-Eid*. *Sharī'a* has not prescribed any specific ritual or prayer on any other *Eid*, other than *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adhā*.

Some people include in these *Mawlid* gatherings *harām* and reprehensible things, such as free mixing of men and women, dancing and singing.

Firstly, such claims have obviously stemmed from people who have never attended a *Mawlid* gathering. If they had, they would know that *Mawlid* gatherings mostly occur in the mosque, where a tight control exists to ensure no free-mixing and certainly no music and dancing.

Secondly, were we to maintain the accusation, is this a reason to scrap such gatherings altogether? In marriage ceremonies throughout the Muslim world, the free-mixing of sexes, music, singing and dancing are becoming an increasing problem, for all Muslim sects and denominations. Does that mean we scrap *nikāh* altogether? Or do we simply educate the culprits? Of course, we do the latter.

There is *ikhtilāf* (dispute) in the date of the birth of the Prophet (peace be upon him), so why choose the twelfth and not any other?

The scholars are almost unanimous that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was born on the 12th of Rabī al-Awwal. Imām Ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī (d. 310/922), the famous Islamic historian, writes that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was born on Monday, the 12th of Rabī al-Awwal, in the Year of the Elephant. Allāma Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1405) gives the same date, as does Ibn Hishām (d. 213/828), Ibn Ishāq (d. 150 /767) and Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849).

The other opinions (the 2nd, 8th, 10th and 17th) are nothing more than minority opinions, as the historian Hāfiz Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372) has pointed out.

Moreover, even if this date is not correct, hypothetically speaking, then this should not stop us from commemorating the *Mawlid*. After all, no one knows the exact date of *Laylat al-Qadr* (either 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th of Ramadān) but that does not stop us from commemorating this special occasion.

Conclusion.

Muslims are being falsely led to believe that the greatest crime possible is to show happiness on the day our Prophet (peace be upon him) was born. The Qur'ān describes the day Yahyā (peace be upon him) was born as a day of 'salām' (19:15) and the day Īsā (peace be upon him) was born as a day of 'salām' too (19:33). Is it possible the day the Final Messenger was born is now not a day of *salām*? Will Allāh punish us for showing joy on the day His beloved was born? On the exact day our Messenger (peace be upon him) was born, all the statues and idols in and around the Ka'ba miraculously tumbled to the ground. At the time of his birth, a shining light appeared by which Sayyida Āmina (may Allāh be pleased with her) could see the palaces of Persia. Allāh alone was behind these acts. Was this not an indication of how important this date is in Islam? The *Mawlid* for Muslims is a time of happiness, reflection and an opportunity to once again reacquaint themselves with the perfect life of the Messenger (peace be upon him). We urge all Muslims to spread the message of love and compassion, in the name of our merciful Prophet (peace be upon him). May Allāh reward us for our sincere intentions, *āmīn*.

ⁱ *Al-Ikhlil fi istinbāt al-tanzil*, al-Hāfiz Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūti, p. 27. Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, Lebanon, 1981.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2006/loi/060923-national-day.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Issues of Controversy*, Shaykh Sayyid Zayn al-Sumayt, pp. 26-7. (www.marifah.net)

^{iv} *Al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya*, al-Hāfiz Ibn Kathīr. Vol. IX, p. 82. Al-Maktaba al-Asriyya, Beirut, Lebanon, 2010.

^v *Sahīh Muslim*, Book of Knowledge.

^{vi} *Musnad Ahmad*, hadīth no. 7682, the reports of Abū Hurayra.