

Mawlid: a fatwa to dispell misconceptions

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We find nowadays publications filled with lies and deception which mislead many Muslims into thinking negatively about the honorable Mawlid of the Prophet. These publications claim that to celebrate the Mawlid is an act of innovation that goes against Islam. This is far from the truth, and it is therefore necessary for those who

can speak clearly to help clarify and reverse the doubts surrounding this most blessed day. It is with this humble intention that I present the following proofs in support of celebrating our beloved Prophet's birthday.

The Prophet said, "He who innovates something in this matter of ours that is not of it will have it rejected." He also said, "Beware of innovations, for every innovation (*kul bida`*) is misguidance."

Those opposed to Mawlid cite this saying and hold that the word *every (kul)* is a term of generalization, including all types of innovations, with no exception, and that therefore, celebrating Mawlid is misguidance. By daring to say that, they accuse the scholars of Islam of innovation. At the top of the list of those they have accused, then, is our Master `Umar (r). Those in opposition to Mawlid quickly reply to this, "But we did not mean the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad."

It follows, then, that the meaning of *every (kul)* cannot be taken in its general sense. Therefore, although the Prophet may not have said to celebrate his blessed birthday, it is nonetheless not innovation to do so. For, as the following examples show, there were many actions and practices instituted by his close followers after his time that are not deemed innovation.

Compiling the Qu'ran.

(From a Prophetic saying related by Zaid Ibn Thabit.(r)) "The Prophet died and the Qu'ran had not been compiled anywhere. `Umar (r) suggested to Abu Bakr (r) to compile the Qu'ran in one book. When a large number of Companions were killed in the battle of Yamama, Abu Bakr wondered, "How could we do something that the Prophet did not do?" `Umar said, "By Allah, it is good." `Umar persisted in asking Abu Bakr until Allah expanded his chest for it (Allah made him agree and accept these suggestions) and he sent for Zaid Ibn Thabit and assigned him to compile the Qu'ran." Zaid said, "By Allah if they had asked me to move a mountain, it would not have been more difficult than to compile the Qur'an." He also said, "How could you do something that the Prophet did not do?" Abu Bakr said, "It is good, and `Umar kept coming back to me until Allah expanded my chest for the matter." The saying is narrated in Sahih Al Bukhari.

The Maqam of Ibrahim (as) in relation to the Ka'ba.

(Al Bayhaqi narrated with a strong chain of narrators from Aisha.) “The Maqam during the time of the Prophet and Abu Bakr was attached to the House, then `Umar moved it back.” Al Hafiz Ibn Hajar said in Al Fath, “The Companions did not oppose `Umar, neither did those who came after them, thus it became unanimous agreement.” He was the first to build the enclosure (maqsura) on it, which still exists today.

Adding the first call to prayer on Friday.

(From Sahih Al Bukhari, from Al Sa'ib bin Yazid.) “During the time of the Prophet (s), Abu Bakr (r) and `Umar (r), the call to Friday prayer used to occur when the Imam sat on the pulpit. When it was Othman's (r) time, he added the third call (considered third in relation to the first adhan and the iqama. But it is named first because it proceeds the call to the Friday prayer.)”

Salutations on the Prophet composed and taught by our Master `Ali (r).

The salutations have been mentioned by Sa'id bin Mansoor and Ibn Jareer in Tahzeeb al Aathar, and by Ibn Abi Assim and Ya'qoob bin Shaiba in Akhbar `Ali and by Al Tabarani and others from Salamah Al Kindi.

The addition to the tashahhud by Ibn Mas'ud.

After “wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh,” and the Mercy of Allah and Blessings, he used to say, “assalamu `alayna min Rabbina,” peace upon us from our Lord. Narrated by Al Tabarani in Al Kabir, and the narrators are those of the sound transmitters, as it has been mentioned in Majma' Al Zawa'id.

The addition to the tashahhud by Abdullah Ibn `Umar.

He added the basmalah at the beginning of the tashahhud. He also added to the talbia, “labbaika wa sa'daika wal khayru bi yadayka wal raghba'u ilayika wal `amalu” This is mentioned in Bukhari, Muslim, et al.

These are some of the developments instituted by the Prophet's Companions, the scholars, and the honorable members of his nation, which did not exist during the time of the Prophet, and which they deemed good. Are they, then, misguided and guilty of bad innovation?

As for the claim that there is no such thing in religion as good innovation, here are some sayings of the brilliant scholars of Islam belying this claim.

Imam Nawawi said in Sahih Muslim (6-21)

“The Prophet’s saying every innovation is a general-particular and it is a reference to most innovations. The linguists say, “Innovation is any act done without a previous pattern, and it is of five different kinds.” Imam Nawawi also said in Tahzeeb al Asma’ wal Sifaat, “Innovation in religious law is to originate anything which did not exist during the time of the Prophet, and it is divided into good and bad.” He also said, “Al-muhdathat (pl. for muhdatha) is to originate something that has no roots in religious law. In the tradition of religious law it is called innovation, and if it has an origin within the religious law, then it is not innovation. Innovation in religious law is disagreeable, unlike in the language where everything that has been originated without a previous pattern is called innovation regardless of whether it is good or bad.”

Shaykh Ibn Hajar Al Asqalani, the commentator on Al Bukhari, said,

“Anything that did not exist during the Prophet’s time is called innovation, but some are good while others are not.”

Abu Na’eem, narrated from Ibrahim Al Junaid, said, *“I heard Ash-Shafi’i saying, “Innovation is of two types; praiseworthy innovation and blameworthy innovation, and anything that disagrees with the Sunnah is blameworthy.”*”

Imam Albayhaqi narrated in Manaqib Ash-Shafi’i that **Ash-Shafi’i** said,

“Innovations are of two types: that which contradicts the Qu’ran, the Sunnah, or unanimous agreement of the Muslims is a innovation of deception, while a good innovation does not contradict any of these things.”

Al `Izz bin Abdussalam said, at the end of his book, Al Qawa’id,

“Innovation is divided into obligatory, forbidden, recommended, disagreeable and permissible, and the way to know which is which is to match it against the religious law.”

Clearly we see from the opinions of these righteous scholars, that to define innovations in worship as wholly negative without exception is ignorant. For these pious knowers, among them Imam Nawawi and Ash-Shafi'i, declared that innovations could be divided into good and bad, based on their compliance or deviance with religious law.

Moreover, the following Prophetic saying is known even to common Muslims, let alone scholars: "He who inaugurates a good practice (*sunnatun hasana*) in Islam earns the reward of it, and of all who perform it after him, without diminishing their own rewards in the least." Therefore it is permissible for a Muslim to originate a good practice, even if the Prophet didn't do it, for the sake of doing good and cultivating the reward. The meaning of inaugurate a good practice (*sanna sunnatun hasana*) is to establish a practice through personal reasoning (*ijtihad*) and derivation (*istinbat*) from the rules of religious law or its general texts. The actions of the Prophet's Companions and the generation following them which we have stated above is the strongest evidence.

The ones prejudiced against celebrating the Prophet's birthday have paved the way for their falsehood by deceiving the less-learned among the Muslims. The prejudiced ones claim that Ibn Kathir writes in his Al Bidaya wal Nihaya (11-172) that the Fatimide-Obaidite state, which descends from the Jew, Obaidillah Bin Maimoon Al Kaddah, ruler of Egypt from 357-567 A.H., innovated the celebration of a number of days, among them, the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. This treacherous lie is a grave insult to the scholarship of Ibn Kathir and the scholarship of all Islam. For in truth, Ibn Kathir writes about the Prophet's birthday in Al bidaya wal nihaya [13-136] "The victorious king Abu Sa'id Kawkaburi, was one of the generous, distinguished masters, and the glorious kings; he left good impressions and used to observe the honorable Mawlid by having a great celebration. Moreover, he was chivalrous, brave, wise, a scholar, and just." Ibn Kathir continues, "And he used to spend three hundred thousand Dinars on the Mawlid." In support, Imam Al Dhahabi writes of Abu Sa'id Kawkaburi, in Siyar A'laam al nubala' [22-336] "He was humble, righteous, and loved religious learned men and scholars of Prophetic saying."

Following are some sayings of the rightly guided Imams regarding the Mawlid.

Imam Al Suyuti, from *Alhawi lil fatawi*, wrote a special chapter entitled “The Good Intention in Commemorating the Mawlid,” at the beginning of which he said, “There is a question being asked about commemorating the Mawlid of the Prophet in the month of Rabi’ Al Awal: what is the religious legal ruling in this regard, is it good or bad? Does the one who celebrates get rewarded or not?” The answer according to me is as follows: To commemorate the Mawlid, which is basically gathering people together, reciting parts of the Qu’ran, narrating stories about the Prophet’s birth and the signs that accompanied it, then serving food, and afterwards, departing, is one of the good innovations; and the one who practices it gets rewarded, because it involves venerating the status of the Prophet and expressing joy for his honorable birth.

Ibn Taymiyya said in his book *Iqtida’ Al Sirat Al Mustaqeem* (pg. 266) “Likewise, what some people have innovated, in competition with the Christians in celebrating the birth of Jesus, or out of love and veneration of the Prophet ﷺ; and he continues “ﷺ; at the predecessors didn’t do, even though there is a reason for it, and there is nothing against it.” This is a saying of someone who set fanaticism aside and sought to please Allah and his Prophet. As far as we are concerned, we commemorate the Mawlid for no other reason but what Ibn Taymiya said, “Out of love and veneration of the Prophet.” May Allah reward us according to this love and effort, and may Allah bless the one who said, “Let alone what the Christians claim about their Prophet, and you may praise Muhammad in any way you want and attribute to his essence all honors and to his status all greatness, for his merit has no limits that any expression by any speaker might reach.”

In the same source previously mentioned, Al Suyuti said, “Someone asked Ibn Hajar about commemorating the Mawlid. **Ibn Hajar** answered, “Basically, commemorating the Mawlid is an innovation that has not been transmitted by the righteous Muslims of the first three centuries. However, it involves good things and their opposites, therefore, whoever looks for the good and avoids the opposites then it is a good innovation.’ It occurred to me (Al Suyuti) to trace it to its

established origin, which has been confirmed in the two authentic books: Al Sahihain. When the Prophet arrived in Medina he found that the Jews fast the day of Aashura; when he inquired about it they said, “This is the day when Allah drowned the Pharaoh and saved Moses, therefore we fast it to show our gratitude to Allah.’ From this we can conclude that thanks are being given to Allah on a specific day for sending bounty or preventing indignity or harm.” Al Suyuti then commented, “What bounty is greater than the bounty of the coming of this Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy, on that day?”

“This is regarding the basis of Mawlid. As for the activities, there should be only the things that express thankfulness to Allah, such as what has been previously mentioned: reciting Qu’ran, eating food, giving charity, reciting poetry praising the Prophet or on piety which moves hearts and drives them to do good and work for the Hereafter.”

These are the derivations that those opposed to Mawlid call false conclusions and invalid analogies.

Imam Mohammed bin Abu Bakr Abdullah Al Qaisi Al Dimashqi.

Jami’ Al Athar fi Mawlid, Al Nabiy Al Mukhtar, Al lafz al ra’iq fi Mawlid khayr al khala’iq, and Mawlid al sadi fi Mawlid Al Hadi,

Imam Al `Iraqi.

Al Mawlid al heni fi al Mawlid al sani.

Mulla `Ali Al Qari.

Al Mawlid Al rawi fil Mawlid al Nabawi.

Imam Ibn Dahiya.

Al Tanweer fi Mawlid Al basheer Al Nadheer.

Imam Shamsu Din bin Nasir Al Dimashqi.

Mawlid al Sadi fi Mawlid Al Hadi. He is the one who said about the Prophet’s estranged uncle, Abu Lahab, “This unbeliever who has been dispraised, “perish his hands” [111: 1], will stay in Hell forever. Yet, every Monday his torment is being reduced because of his joy at the birth of the Prophet.” How much mercy can a servant expect who spends all his life joyous about the Prophet and dies believing in the Oneness of Allah?

Imam Shamsu Din Ibn Al Jazri.

Al Nashr fil Qira'at Al `Ashr, `Urf Al Ta'reef bil Mawlid al shareef.

Imam Ibn Al Jawzi

Imam Ibn Al Jawzi said about the honorable Mawlid, "It is security throughout the year, and glad tidings that all wishes and desires will be fulfilled."

Imam Abu Shama

Imam Abu Shama (Imam Nawawi's shaykh) in his book Al ba'ith ala Inkar Al bida` wal hawadith (pg.23) said, "One of the best innovations in our time is what is being done every year on the Prophet's birthday, such as giving charity, doing good deeds, displaying ornaments, and expressing joy, for that expresses the feelings of love and veneration for him in the hearts of those who are celebrating, and also, shows thankfulness to Allah for His bounty by sending His Messenger, the one who has been sent as a Mercy to the worlds."

Imam Al Shihab Al Qastalani

Imam Al Shihab Al Qastalani (Al Bukhari's commentator) in his book Al mawahib Al Ladunniya (1-148) said, "May Allah have mercy on the one who turns the nights of the month of the Prophet's birth into festivities in order to decrease the suffering of those whose hearts are filled with disease and sickness."

There are others who wrote and spoke about Mawlid, such as Imam Al Sakhawi, Imam Wajihu Din bin `Ali bin al Dayba' al Shaybani al Zubaidi, and many more, which we will not mention due to the limited space available. From these many evidences, it should be clear by now that celebrating the Mawlid is highly commendable and allowed. Surely we cannot simply shrug off as heretics the scholars and dignitaries of this nation who approved the commemoration of the Mawlid and wrote countless books on the subject. Are all these scholars, to whom the whole world is indebted for the beneficial books they have written on Prophetic sayings, jurisprudence, commentaries, and other sorts of knowledge, among the indecent who commit sins and evil? Are they, as those opposed to Mawlid claim, imitating the Christians in celebrating the birth of Jesus? Are they claiming that the Prophet did not convey to the nation what they should do? We leave answers to these questions up to you.

And yet we must continue to examine the errors which those opposed to Mawlid utter. They say “If celebrating the Mawlid is from the religion, then the Prophet would have made it clear to the nation, or would have done it in his lifetime, or it would have been done by the Companions.” No one can say that the Prophet did not do it out of his humbleness, for this is speaking evil of him, so they cannot use this argument.

Furthermore, that the Prophet and his Companions did not do a certain thing does not mean they made that thing prohibited. The proof is in the Prophet’s saying, “Whoever establishes, in Islam, a good practice...” cited earlier. This is the strongest evidence that gives encouragement to innovate whatever practices have foundations in religious law, even if the Prophet and his Companions did not do them. Al Shafi’i said, “Anything that has a foundation in religious law is not an innovation even if the Companions did not do it, because their refraining from doing it might have been for a certain excuse they had at the time, or they left it for something better, or perhaps not all of them knew about it.” Therefore, whoever prohibits anything based on the concept that the Prophet did not do it, his claim has no proof and must be rejected. Thus we say to the rejecters of Mawlid: based on the rule you have attempted to found, that is, that whoever does anything that the Prophet or his Companions did not do is committing innovation, it would follow that the Prophet did not complete the religion for his nation, and that the Prophet did not convey to the nation what they should do. No one says this or believes this except a heretic defecting from the religion of Allah. To the doubters of Mawlid we declare, “Based on what you say, we convict you.” For you have innovated in the basics of worship a large number of things that the Prophet did not do nor did his Companions, the Generation after the Companions, or the Generation after them. For instance:

- Congregating people behind one Imam to pray Salat al Tahajjud after Salat Al Tarawih, in the two Holy Mosques and other mosques.
- Reciting the Prayer of Completion of the Qu’ran in Salat al Tarawih and also in Salat al Tahajjud.

- Designating the 27th night of Ramadan to complete reading the entire Qu’ran in the two Holy Mosques.
- A caller saying, after Salat al Tarawih, in the Qiyam prayer, “May Allah reward you.”
- Founding organizations which did not exist in the time of the Prophet, such as Islamic universities, societies for committing the Qu’ran to memory, and offices for missionary work, and committees for enjoining good and forbidding evil. We are not objecting to these things, since they are forms of good innovation. We merely list these innovations to point out that those who oppose Mawlid clearly contradict their own rule stating that anything that neither the Prophet nor his Companions did is innovation. And since they claim that all innovation is bad, they themselves are guilty.

Yet another claim they make is to say that those who commemorate the Mawlid are mostly indecent and immoral. This is a vulgar statement and it only reflects the character of the one saying it. Are all the distinguished scholars that we have mentioned, from the point of view of those opposed to Mawlid, indecent and immoral? We won’t be surprised if this is what they believe. This is a most serious slander. We say, as the poet said, “When Allah wants to spread a virtue that has been hidden, He would let a tongue of an envious person know about it.”

Those opposed to Mawlid, may Allah guide them, have confused some expressions, and claim that some religious scholars associate partners with Allah. Take for example the plea of Imam Al Busiery to Prophet Muhammad, “Oh, most generous of creation, I have no one to resort to, save You, when the prevailing event takes place.” They must examine carefully the saying of Imam Al Busiery: *inda hulul il amim, when the prevailing event takes place*. What is *al Amim*? It means that which prevails over the whole universe, and all of creation, in referring to the Day of Judgment. Imam Al Busiery is asking intercession from the Prophet on the Day of Judgment because on that Day we will have no one to resort to, or appeal to. Imam Al Busiery seeks his intercession to Allah through the Prophet, for when all other Messengers and Prophets will be saying, “Myself, myself,” the Prophet will be

saying, “I am the one for it, I am for it [the Intercession]” It becomes even more clear now that the doubts of those opposed to Mawlid are unfounded, just as their charges of associating partners with Allah are unfounded. This is due to their blindness, both physical and spiritual.

Another similar example can be found in the well-known saying transmitted by the distinguished Imam Al Kamal bin Al Hammam Al Hanafi, author of Fath il Qadeer fi manasik al Farisi, and Sharh al Mukhtar min al sada al ahnaf. When Imam Abu Hanifa visited Medina, he stood in front of the honorable grave of the Prophet and said, “O, most honorable of the Two Weighty Ones (humankind and jinn)! O, treasure of mankind, shower your generosity upon me and please me with your pleasure. I am aspiring for your generosity, and there is no one for Abu Hanifa in the world but you.” Again, we must not misinterpret this entreaty, but realize its true meaning.

Yet another misconception those opposed to Mawlid hold can be seen in their statements such as these: “What occurs during Mawlid is mixing between men and women, singing and playing musical instruments, and drinking alcohol.” I myself know this to be a lie, for I have attended many Mawlids and have not seen any mixing, and never heard any musical instruments. And as for drunkenness, yes, I have seen it, but not that of worldly people. We found people intoxicated with the love of the Prophet, a state surpassing even the agony of death, which we know overcame our master Bilal at the time of his death. In the midst of this sweet stupor he was saying, “Tomorrow I shall meet the loved ones, Muhammad and his Companions.”

To continue, those opposed to Mawlid say, “The day of the Prophet’s birth is the same day of the week as his death. Therefore, joy on this day is no more appropriate than sorrow, and if religion is according to one’s opinion, then this day should be a day of mourning and sorrow.” This kind of lame eloquence, is answered by the Imam Jalal al Din al Suyuti, in Al hawi lil fatawi (pg.193), “The Prophet’s birth is the greatest bounty, and his death is the greatest calamity. Religious law urges us to express thankfulness for bounties, and be patient and remain calm during calamities. Religious law has commanded us to sacrifice an animal on the birth of a child [and distribute the meat to the needy], which is an expression of gratitude and happiness

with the newborn, while it did not command us to sacrifice at the time of death. Also, it prohibited wailing and showing grief. Therefore, the rules of Divine Law indicate that it is recommended to show joy during the month of the Prophet's birth, and not to show sorrow for his death.”

Furthermore, Ibn Rajab, in his book Al lata'if, dispraising the rejecters of Mawlid based on the above argument, said, “Some designated the day of Aashura as a funeral ceremony for the murder of Al Hussein. But neither Allah nor His Prophet commanded that the days of the prophets' great trials or deaths should be declared days of mourning, let alone those with lesser rank.”

We conclude this article with a saying of the Prophet, which has been narrated by Abu Ya'la, from Hudhaifa and about which Ibn Kathir said, “It's chain of transmission is good.” Abu Ya'la said, “The Prophet has said, “One of the things that concerns me about my nation is a man who studied the Qu'ran, and when its grace started to show on him and he had the appearance of a Muslim, he detached himself from it, and threw it behind his back, and went after his neighbor with a sword and accused him of associating partners with Allah.’ I then asked, “Oh, Prophet of Allah, which one is more guilty of associating partners with Allah, the accused or the accuser?” The Prophet said, “It is the accuser.””

Completed, with all Praises to Allah and salutations and peace be upon our master Muhammad and the family of Muhammad and his Companions.

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