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Question 26: Is celebrating the birthday of the saints {awliya'} of God a kind of polytheism and innovation {bid'ah}?

Reply: Although honoring the memory of meritorious servants of God by celebrating their birthday is an indisputable issue from the perspective of learned men, in a bid to remove any kind of doubt in this regard, we shall examine the proofs supporting its legitimacy.

Holding ceremonies is a means of expressing love

The Holy Qur'an invites the Muslims to love the Holy Prophet (S) and his *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a):

﴿ قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ ﴾

"Say, I do not ask of you any reward for it except the affection for {my} relatives."¹

There is no doubt that holding a ceremony in commemoration of divine saints is a manifestation of the people's love and affection to them, an act which is confirmed by the Holy Qur'an.

Holding ceremonies is a way of paying tribute to the Prophet (S)

The Qur'an considers the act of honoring the station of the Messenger of Allah (S) and helping him as a criterion for uprightness and felicity.

﴿ فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ مَعَهُ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴾

"Those who believe in him, honor him, and help him and follow the light that has been sent down

with him, they are the felicitous.”[2](#)

It is so evident from the quoted verse that honoring the Messenger of Allah (S) is a wholesome and acceptable act from the viewpoint of Islam, and holding a ceremony, which refreshes the splendid memory of the Prophet (S) and hails his lofty station is something which pleases God. This verse mentions four attributes of the righteous:

- a. Faith: ﴿بِهِ ءَامَنُوا فَالَّذِينَ﴾ ***“Those who believe in him”***;
- b. Following his light: ﴿مَعَهُ أُنْزِلَ الْنُّورَ وَاتَّبَعُوا﴾ ***“And follow the light that has been sent down with him”***;
- c. Helping him: ﴿وَنَصَرُوهُ﴾ ***“And help him”***; and
- d. Honoring the station of the Prophet (S): ﴿وَعَزَّزُوهُ﴾ ***“And honor him”***.

Therefore, honoring and paying homage to the Prophet (S) alongside faith, assisting him and following his orders, is an expedient affair, and commemorating the Holy Prophet (S) corresponds to *“honoring him”*.

Holding of ceremonies is the same as following and obeying God

God hails the Holy Prophet (S) in the Glorious Qur’an, and states:

ورفعنا لك ذكرك

“Did We not exalt your name?”[3](#)

This noble verse shows clearly that God wishes that the splendor and magnificence of the Prophet (S) prevail in the world and He Himself hails him in the verses of the Qur’an.

Following our heavenly book, we also hail the lofty station of that model of perfection and virtue by holding splendid ceremonies. In doing so, we express an extent of our loyalty and obedience to the Lord of the worlds.

It is obvious that the aim of the Muslims’ holding such ceremonies is nothing but exalting the Holy Prophet (S).

Sending down revelation is not less significant than sending down table–spread {ma'idah}

The Glorious Qur'an thus quotes a prophet of God, 'Isa (Jesus) ('a) as saying:

قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ اللَّهُمَّ رَبَّنَا أَنْزِلْ عَلَيْنَا مَائِدَةً مِنَ السَّمَاءِ تَكُونُ لَنَا عِيداً لِأَوَّلِنَا وَآخِرِنَا وَآيَةً مِنْكَ وَارْزُقْنَا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿١٠٦﴾

“Said Jesus son of Mary, ‘O Allah! Our Lord! Send down to us a table from the sky, to be a festival for us, for the first ones and the last ones among us and as a sign from You, and provide for us; for You are the best of providers’.”⁴

Hadrat 'Isa ('a) requests a heavenly table–spread from God to celebrate the day of its coming down. Now, when a revered prophet like Jesus ('a) celebrates the day of sending down the heavenly table–spread, which brings physical enjoyment to people, can we say that Muslims' celebration of the day of sending down divine revelation or the birthday of the Holy Prophet (S), who is the savior of mankind and the cause of human societies' survival, an act of polytheism {*shirk*} or innovation in religion {*bid'ah*}?!

The Muslims' Practice

The followers of Islam have been holding such ceremony for a long time with the aim of refreshing the memory of the Holy Prophet (S).

In *Tarikh al-Khamis*, Husayn ibn Muhammad ad-Diyar Bakri thus writes:

The Muslims of the world always hold ceremonies during the month of birth of the Prophet, hold banquets, give charity during the nights, express merriment, multiply their good deeds, and take to reciting poems on his birth, and making known his all-encompassing blessings and graces to all.⁵

The things we have mentioned verify the general ruling of the permissibility and merit of commemorating eminent sacred personages which is consistent with the viewpoint of the Qur'an and the practice of Muslims, and the groundlessness of the supposition that holding ceremonies in commemoration of the beloved of God is *bid'ah*; for, *bid'ah* is something, the particular or general permissibility of which is not inferred from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, whereas the general judgment of the mentioned issue can be noticed in the Qur'anic verses and perennial practice of the Muslims.

In the same vein, holding such ceremonies is intended to express honor and respect to the meritorious servants of God with the belief in their servitude to and neediness of the Lord of the worlds.

Therefore, the said practice is completely compatible with the principle of monotheism and unity of God.

As such, it is evident that the claim of those who say that holding ceremonies in commemoration of eminent sacred people is tantamount to committing polytheism and associating others with God is baseless and unfounded.

- [1.](#) Surah ash-Shura 42:23.
- [2.](#) Surah al-A'raf 7:157.
- [3.](#) Surah al-Inshirah 94:4.
- [4.](#) Surah al-Ma'idah 5:114.
- [5.](#) Husayn ibn Muhammad ad-Diyar Bakri, Tarikh al-Khamis (Beirut), vol. 1, p. 223.

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