



## The Mawlid: A Time to Celebrate

By Dr. Muhammad Abduh Yamani

Every year, when the month of Rabi al-Awwal comes around once again, bringing in its train the night of the twelfth, it seems to us as if the whole world is perfumed by the memory of the birth of the Final Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him. Countless millions of Muslims in every corner of the earth fix their thoughts on his birth, by re-reading his biography and learning from his unique values and qualities. For he was the Unlettered Prophet, in whose human essence were combined and perfected every noble and generous trait of character: the best of all role-models, of whom Allah Himself has said: "Truly, yours is a tremendous character."

Without the slightest doubt, the best way of commemorating this most noble of all birthdays is in reciting the story of his life, to adults and to children, in order to accustom them to the love of Allah's great Messenger.

My own mother, may Allah show her soul mercy, used to put us in the habit of sitting down and reading the *sira* books. Even though she herself could neither read nor write, she knew much of the *sira* by heart, and would constantly encourage her family and neighbours to become intimately familiar with the beautiful life-story of the Prophet.

No-one could deny that gathering to listen to the career of the Master of the Messengers is one of the most desirable of all activities. It can yield a whole range of blessings and benefits, as long as it takes place in a proper Islamic atmosphere without any reprehensible innovations or distortions. Needless to say, the life of the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, can and should be commemorated at any time of the year. Nonetheless, when he is remembered in Rabi al-Awwal, people's attachment to him grows even stronger, for the simple reason that it was in this month that he was born. At this special time, when the impulse to gather for this purpose is at its strongest, one feels an

overwhelming sense of connection between our time and his, as the present reminds us of the past, and helps us to bring to mind and relate to events which took place many centuries ago.

The love of the Prophet, and the joy which his birth and career have brought to us, bring every imaginable kind of good thing to a true Muslim. Even an unbeliever can benefit from his birth. The idolator Abu Lahab, one of the greatest enemies of Islam, was pleased when one Monday he heard the news that Muhammad had been born: and he freed his slave-girl Thuwaiba who had brought him the news. We are told that because of this deed his punishment in the grave is reduced every Monday. This hadith, which is narrated by Imam Bukhari, inspired Imam Shams al-Din al-Dimashqi to write:

*If an unbeliever, condemned by the Quran to eternal pain,  
Can be relieved every Monday through his joy at Ahmad,  
Then what must a true servant of God hope to gain,  
When with the truth of Tawhid he felt joy at Ahmad?*

The Prophet himself, may Allah bless him, used to commemorate his birthday, thanking his Lord for His great kindness to him. He would express this commemoration by fasting, as we are told in a

hadith narrated by Imam Muslim. The methods by which his birthday may be celebrated vary widely, but the objective is the same: whether in fasting, giving food to the poor, gathering for the remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah or calling down blessings upon His Messenger, and listening to the story of his virtues and mighty achievements.

Allah has commanded us Muslims to rejoice at the things by which His grace and mercy comes to us. In the Holy Quran we read: 'Say, by Allah's grace and mercy; and let them be made joyful by this!' (Yunus, 58.) And we have never received any mercy greater than the Prophet himself: 'We sent you only as a mercy to the worlds.' (Anbiya, 107.)

The Blessed Prophet was keenly aware of the connection of the flow of time with the great religious events of the past. Whenever the time of year recalled such an event, he would seize the opportunity to commemorate it, and call to mind its significance.

There are many examples of this. For instance, when he first arrived at Madina, he found the Jews fasting on the Day of Ashoura. When he enquired about this practice, he was told, 'They fast on this day because Allah rescued their prophet on this day, and drowned their enemy, so that they fast it in gratitude to Allah for this blessing.' And the Prophet remarked: 'We have even more right to Moses than have they!', and ordered that the Muslims should fast on that day as well.

For all these reasons, every year during the month of the Mawlid I devote my time to the great books of the Sira, spending some time enjoying their shade and cool breezes. I recall to my mind the episodes and events of his unique career from the time when the light of Muhammad first shone upon the world: the Arbitration at the Ka'ba, the Beginning of Revelation, the trials and sufferings endured while calling men to Allah, the Hijra, the great and heroic battles against paganism and misguidance, the creation of the Islamic State, the Farewell Pilgrimage, and finally, the moment when revelation to earth came to its conclusive end with the demise of the Blessed Prophet and his passing-on to the Highest Companion in Heaven.

During this month, I spend as much time as I can in this blessed

company. This is despite the fact that these astonishing and moving events remain in my thoughts and reflections during the entire year, forming a constant guide, reference and inspiration, as I remember the actions and deeds of him whose every action and deed had the purpose of educating the human race.

Once, my wife came to me while I was engrossed in my reading. She looked at the book before me, and saw that it was about the Mawlid, open at the page where the greatest of all *sira* writers Ibn Ishaq says: 'Allah's Messenger, may He bless and keep him, was born on Monday, during the twelfth night of Rabi al-Awwal, in the Year of the Elephant.'

She asked me this interesting question: 'Why was he born during that month, rather than during Ramadan, the month when the Quran was revealed, or in one of the Sacred Months, which Allah rendered sacred on the day He created the heavens and the earth? Or even in Sha'ban, the month which contains the blessed Night of Mid-Sha'ban?'

She stopped, and looked at me for an answer. I looked again at the book, and searched for a clue, but without success. So I asked her to give me a little time to allow me to read and do some thinking.

I fell silent and began asking myself: Why did the Almighty Creator decree that this noble Prophet should come into the world on Monday the twelfth of Rabi al-Awwal? Why this date in particular? There must be some exquisite wisdom in this choice: but where and what?

I pulled out the great works of *Sira*, and turned their pages. I read the words of the scholars and historians of Islam, trying to unearth the secret of this divine decision. After hours of reading and contemplation, the books gave me four subtle indications which together point to the answer.

Firstly, in a hadith we read that Allah created the tree on Monday. This can be taken to mean that the creation of sustenance, fruits and all the good things of the earth upon which the children of Adam depend for their life, and which give them medicines to heal them, and whose very sight brings them rest and joy: all this was decreed to come into existence on this day.

The Prophet, upon him be peace, also came into the world on this day, as a cause of rapture and joy. He is associated with it in other ways also: according to Ibn Abbas, 'Allah's Messenger was born on a Monday, became a Prophet on a Monday, and raised up the Black Stone on a Monday.'

Secondly, we should recall that the Arabic name of the month of his birth signifies the season of spring: the time of rebirth and renewal. Shaykh Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Siqilli writes: 'Every human being is associated in some way with his name and circumstances in time. When we look at the season of spring, we see that it is the time when the Blessed Lord splits open the earth to reveal His bounty within, without which His servants could not subsist. Seeds split open and produce countless kinds of plant, which make all who see them rejoice. Though silent, they mutely proclaim the news of the imminent and delightful ripening of their fruit. Now, the Birthday of the Prophet, may Allah bless him, resembles this closely. His birth in the month of this name gives good tidings of the greatest forms of sustenance and protection for the believers. It proclaims Allah's mercy, the greatest of which is His granting guidance, through His messenger, to the Straight Path.'

Thirdly, Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf al-Salihi writes: 'Can you not see that the season of spring is both the most beautiful and moderate of seasons, free of both bitter cold or stifling heat, or exaggerated length in its days or nights? It is the time of year when people feel most refreshed and whole, so that they can enjoy the pleasure of prayer at night, and of fasting during the day. All of this symbolises and resembles the moderation and healthfulness of the Sunna and the Law which the Prophet brought.'

Fourthly, it would seem to be the case that the Wise God sometimes wishes to ennoble times through events, not events through times. A time otherwise left vacant can thereby be filled with a special quality from which people can derive benefit.

Obviously, if the Blessed Prophet had been born in Ramadan, or one of the Sacred Months, or in the holy month of Sha'ban, some people might think that it was he himself who was being

ennobled by these times because of their great merit. But it was Allah's wise decree that he be born in Rabi al-Awwal in order to ennoble that month, and to display Allah's care and good providence for His Prophet. As an Arab poet has written:

*Allah gave good news of you to the heavens, and they were adorned,*

*The soil of the earth turned to musk when it heard of you.*

*A day whose dawn is part of history,*

*And whose evening is made luminous by Muhammad!*

To sum up what I have been trying to say: celebrations of the Mawlid are nothing other than a revival of the memory of the Chosen One. When this is done in the context of an Islamically-learned circle of knowledge and remembrance, in which the manners of our Islamic religion are observed, it is something which the great scholars approve of strongly. It provides a superb opportunity to link us to the Sira, to his miracles and beautiful character, and to the magnification of the Prophet whom Allah has commanded us to follow and emulate in all things.

Only by knowing his virtues and good qualities can we have perfect faith in him.

Only by listening to his life-story will we acquire a true and deep love for him.

As Allah Himself has stated: 'We tell you the stories of the Messengers, in order to make firm your heart.'

O Allah, make firm our hearts in Islam! Make our faith true and deep, and bestow upon us real love for Your Prophet!

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