9055 - Celebrations commemorating some of the scholars

the question

What is the ruling on celebrations held in commemoration of one hundred days or forty days since the death of one of the scholars?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Among the innovated matters that have appeared in some Muslim societies are celebrations to commemorate some of the dead, especially the scholars. These celebrations take place on the anniversary of the death of the person who is being commemorated, and they may take place a year or more after his death.

These celebrations vary from one person to another. If he was one of the common people or one of those who was thought to have knowledge even though he was ignorant, on the fortieth day after his death, his family commemorate his death, calling it “al-arba’een” (forty). They bring people together in a special tent or in the house of the deceased, and they bring Qur’aan-readers to recite Qur’aan, and they prepare a meal like a wedding feast, and they adorn the place with lights and comfortable furnishings. They go to great expense, and their purpose in doing this is to show off. No doubt this is haraam, because it involves wasting the money of the deceased for no legitimate purpose. It beings no benefit to the deceased himself and results in loss for his family. This is the case if there is no one among the heirs who is too young to be in charge of the money, so what do you think if there is someone like that among them! They may even finance that by means of a loan which involves riba (interest) – we seek refuge with Allaah from His Wrath. (al-Ibdaa’, p. 228)

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: “One of the things that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) taught was to offer condolences to the family

of the bereaved, but it is not part of his teachings to gather together to mourn and read Qur'aan for him (the deceased), whether that is at the grave or elsewhere. All of that is bid'ah and a reprehensible innovation." (Zaad al-Ma'aad, 1/527)

'Ali Mahfooz (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "What people do nowadays of offering food to the people who come to offer their condolences, and going to great expense on the nights of mourning, and subsequent occasions such as Friday nights and the forty-day anniversary of the death (al-arba'een), all of that is reprehensible bid'ah which goes against the practice of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and the righteous salaf after him." (al-Ibdaa', p. 230).

This celebration or commemoration is an innovation and a bid'ah, which was not narrated from the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) or from his companions (may Allaah be pleased with them) or the righteous salaf (may Allaah have mercy on them). The Sunnah in this case is to make food for the family of the deceased and to send it to them, not for them to have to make food and invite people to come and eat it. When news of the death of Ja'far ibn Abi Taalib (may Allaah be pleased with him) came, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "Make food for the family of Ja'far, because there has come to them that which will preoccupy them." (Narrated by Ahmad in his Musnad, 1/205. Also narrated by Abu Dawood in his Sunan, 3/497, Kitaab al-Janaa'iz, hadeeth no. 3132. Also narrated by al-Tirmidhi in his Sunan, 2/234, Abwaab al-Janaa'iz, hadeeth no. 1003; he said it is a hasan hadeeth. Also narrated by Ibn Maajah in his Sunan, 1/514, Kitaab al-Janaa'iz, hadeeth no 1610. Also narrated by al-Haakim in al-Mustadrak, 1/372, Kitaab al-Janaa'iz; he said, it is a hadeeth whose isnaad is saheeh although they (al-Bukhaari and Muslim) did not narrate it, and al-Dhahabi agreed with him in his Talkhees).

Jareer ibn 'Abd-Allaah al-Bajali said: "We used to consider gathering with the family of the deceased and making food to be a form of wailing." (Narrated by Ibn Maajah in his Sunan, 1/514, Kitaab al-Janaa'iz, hadeeth no. 1612. Al-Busayri said in Zawaa'id Ibn Maajah (2/35): "This is a saheeh isnaad; the men of the first isnaad are according to the conditions of al-Bukhaari, and the men of the second isnaad are according to the conditions of Muslim.")

But if the person whose death is being commemorated was one of the scholars, on the anniversary of his death, one or two years later, then they hold special celebrations. A group of researchers agree to write about his life and character, or his method of writing, and everything that has to do with him, then they present that research on that day, and publish his books, or the most important and most famous of them, and they are distributed in the marketplaces to keep his memory alive, or so they say, and to make known the efforts he made to spread and publish knowledge and so on.

If he was a king, ruler or president, this occasion is celebrated and the most senior of those who are present speak of his legacy and work in government, and some books about him may be published on this occasion. Some people may go to his grave and recite wird over it, or recite al-Faatihah for his soul, All of that is bid'ah for which Allaah has not revealed any authority.

There is nothing inherently wrong with publishing the books of a scholar, or writing his biography or writing about his methodology, or printing his books. These things should be done if he deserves that. But that should not be done specifically at a certain time, or be accompanied by celebrations, festivals and speeches etc. The same applies to kings and rulers.

Celebrations held to commemorate the death of scholars, rulers and some common folk are an innovation, and that is sufficient to condemn them.

There was no one who had more knowledge than the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and there was no one whose way of calling others to Islam was better. No one had a nobler status or a higher rank than he did (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), for he is the best of all creation. But despite that the Sahaabah did not commemorate his death, even though no person has ever been more dearly loved than the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was loved by the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) or the Taabi'een or the righteous salaf (may Allaah have mercy on them). If there had been any good in doing so, they would have done it before us.

Respecting the scholars is not done by holding celebrations in their memory; it is done by striving

to benefit from the things they have written, by publishing and reading and commenting etc.

This applies if they are deserving of that, by virtue of their having lived according to the way of the righteous salaf, and kept away from the way of the deviant sects or the influence of the west, etc.

The memory and narrations of the scholars of the righteous salaf and those who came after them, and the knowledge that they presented to the people, have been preserved. The scholar may have died and departed from this world, but his knowledge remains and is passed down by the people from one generation to the next.

Because of the benefit that people gain from their knowledge, they pray for mercy for them and pray that they may be rewarded. This is the greatest way in which their memory can be kept alive.

But organizing celebrations in their memory, or seeking blessing by visiting the places where they lived and taught, and their relics, or circumambulating their graves – all of that is bid'ah, some of which may even reach the degree of shirk. We seek refuge with Allaah from that.

If these scholars, whose memories are celebrated and from whom people seek blessing by visiting the places where they lived and taught, were alive, they would denounce these things that are being done.

But some people have been misled by their own whims and desires and by the Shaytaan, and by those who advocate bid'ah for worldly purposes or to gain leadership over the people. So they have slipped in the maze of bid'ah from which there is no escape apart from returning to the Book of Allaah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and adhering to them, and to that on which the scholars of this ummah are agreed, and giving up all newly-invented innovations which are evil in and of themselves and which lead to even greater evils and disasters.

We ask Allaah to guide us and them to the Straight Path, the path of those with whom Allaah is pleased, the Prophets, the Siddeeqeen, the martyrs and the righteous. May He keep us far away from the path of those with whom He is angry and those who have gone astray, for He is Able to

do all things.