

Institution of annual *Jalsa* is not an unlawful novelty ***Islam allows use of modern means for its propagation and defence***

by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

Translated from Urdu by Dr Zahid Aziz

(Translator's Note: In 1892 Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad called on his followers to hold a gathering at the end of December every year, among its stated objectives being that members would gain in spiritual knowledge and understanding, strengthen fraternal bonds, plan ways and means of the propagation of Islam, and dedicate themselves afresh to the cause of the Movement. Some of the literalist Ulama, who had no eye for the great objects of the Movement, denounced the holding and organization of such meetings as un-Islamic, and pronounced that, according to Islam, a journey was only allowed to one of the three sacred mosques of Islam, or one or two other places, all other travel being prohibited to a Muslim. Today it is inconceivable how such absurd rulings could have been issued, especially in view of the fact that the same Ulama now travel to all parts of the world, attending conferences and meetings.

Here we reproduce selected extracts from the reply given by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to these critics, published on December 17th 1892. This reply was also included as an appendix in his book *Ā'īnah Kamālāt-i Islām*. This translation was first published in *The Light*, November-December 1992 issue. It has been revised and expanded here. Note that in this translation sub-headings have been added, and the ellipsis ... is used to indicate break points where the translation omits a section of the original text.)

Last year it was decided, according to the opinion of the majority of friends, that members of our Jama'at should come to meet this humble servant at least once a year, in order to derive benefit as regards the needs of the religion and to hold consultations regarding the propagation of Islam. At that time of discussion, it was also decided as being appropriate that the best date for coming to Qadian for this purpose would be December 27th because it is during the holidays, and people in employment are free at this time. Also, being in the winter, these days are suitable for travelling. As a result, our sincere members were pleased to agree to this view, considering it the best course of action. Therefore, on December 7th 1892, I sent a letter consisting of a printed announcement to all members, the summary of its contents being that one of the main aims of this gathering (*Jalsa*) is that every sincere person should get the opportunity to benefit spiritually by a face-to-face meeting, to increase his religious knowledge, and to develop his understanding of matters spiritual.

Now we have heard that some person, in order to prove that such work is tantamount to adding a novelty (*bid'at*) into Islam, in fact a sin, has requested a religious judgment from a Maulvi Rahim Bakhsh, imam of the Cheenia-wali mosque in Lahore, as to what is the teaching of Islam about travelling from afar to such a meeting on an appointed day ...

In reply to this request, Maulvi Rahim Bakhsh has produced a lengthy writing, referring to a hadith which is not relevant to the subject, the summary of which is that it is an unlawful innovation (*bid'at*), rather a sin, to go to attend such a gathering, and that to propose the holding of such meetings is a later invention for which there is no basis in the Quran and *Sunnah*. Moreover, the man who creates such an institution in Islam is to be condemned (*mardūd*).

Reply

Fair-minded people should now answer truthfully whether the existence in Islam of such maulvis and muftis is a sign of the tribulations of the end of the world (*qiyamat*) or not. O good man, do you not know that travelling for the sake of religious knowledge is not only allowed, but is incumbent according to the Quran and the Holy Prophet, so much so that the one who intentionally neglects it is guilty of a serious sin, and to insist on refusal deliberately is an act of disbelief in some cases? Do you not know that it has been urged with great emphasis (in Hadith) that “the seeking of knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim male and female”, and it has been said: “Seek knowledge, even though it may be in China”. Now considering that I wrote in my announcement, in the clearest and plainest words possible, that this journey (to the *Jalsa*) shall be undertaken by every sincere one with the intention of seeking knowledge, just think how far from honesty, integrity, justice, virtue and piety it is to pronounce the ruling that the man who institutes such a practice in Islam must be condemned. ...

Open and read the *Sahih Bukhari*, and see the glad tidings given for a journey undertaken to seek knowledge. It is as follows: “Whoever undertakes a journey to seek knowledge, Allah eases for him the way to paradise”. O you unjust maulvi, show some fairness, and consider that you have called your brother a condemned one, who, like you, professes the *Kalima*, belongs to the people of the *Qibla*, and believes in Allah and the Messenger, and you have declared him as utterly deprived of the mercy of God and the intercession of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, ... giving the reason that I had issued such an announcement and invited people to the *Jalsa*. Open your eyes and read what that announcement of December 7th 1892 says. It calls our community together for the purposes of acquiring knowledge, seeking solutions to the problems faced by the religion, helping the cause of Islam, and meeting one’s brothers. Does it mention any festivity, entertainment, music or song? ...

Fixing a date

If there is misgiving in someone’s heart as to why a particular date has been fixed for this religious gathering, and whether such practice is traceable to the Holy Prophet or his Companions, the reply is that you should look in *Bukhari* and *Muslim*. Bedouins used

to come to the Holy Prophet to ask questions about religious matters at times when they were free, and some of them came to him in particular months when they were free. There is a report in *Bukhari* that a delegation from the tribe of Abdul Qais came to the Holy Prophet and said that as they come from afar, they can only attend his company during a certain month. The Holy Prophet accepted what they said. This hadith shows that those who wish to meet their spiritual guide in order to seek knowledge or for religious purposes can appoint a certain date in accordance with their free time, when they can attend conveniently and without loss to themselves. This is just the case with December 27th because it is during the holidays and those in employment can easily come at that time. ...

Bukhari has included a special chapter in his *Sahih* about appointing a date for holding a class for receiving religious education. Its title is "He who appoints certain days for those seeking knowledge", indicating that this practice is traceable to some Companions. In support of this, Bukhari quotes a report to the effect that Abdullah (Ibn Mas'ud) had fixed Thursday as the day on which to give religious instruction, and on that day people used to attend his lecture.

Quran allows organisation and arrangement

It must also be remembered that Allah has instructed us in the Holy Quran to make plans and arrangements, and ordered us to put into action the best devised schemes which we consider to be expedient for the service of Islam and to be effective in overcoming the opponents. In this regard, He says: "And prepare for them (the enemy) whatever force you can" (8:60), in other words, make every kind of preparation that you can against the opponents of the faith, and exert all the strength that you can for the propagation of Islam. ...

Modern methods must be used as times change

Those who ponder over this verse can realise that, in accordance with the hadith "Actions are judged by intention", to devise some suitable system for the service of Islam is not an unlawful novelty or evil. As with the changing times Islam faces ever newer types of problems, or the opponents attack us in new types of ways, so we have to adopt new means as well. Therefore, if we conceive of some method or remedy to combat these attacks which is appropriate for the present time, that constitutes the making of a plan, and has nothing to do with bringing innovations into Islam.

It is possible that, due to the enormous changes of the times, we may face certain new problems of a kind which even the Holy Prophet Muhammad did not face in the same form. For instance, we cannot fight wars of the present day in the earlier ways

which are in the *Sunnah* because the techniques of warfare have completely changed in this age. Weapons used previously are now ineffective, and new weapons have been invented for fighting. Now if Muslim rulers were to consider the taking up and deployment of these weapons to be an unlawful novelty, and, listening to maulvis like Rahim Bakhsh, believe it to be a sin and evil to use these modern implements of war, and argue that this is a manner of fighting never undertaken by the Holy Prophet Muhammad, nor the Companions, nor the next generation, the only result would be that they would lose their already decrepit kingdoms with ignominy and the enemy would be triumphant. Therefore, wherever the making of plans and arrangements is required, for example whether in case of physical or spiritual warfare, whether the battle is by the sword or the pen, the verse quoted above is sufficient for our guidance. ...

Foolish friends invite ridicule upon Islam

Every Muslim ought to pray that God rid Islam soon of those maulvis who show such treachery. For, this is a critical time for Islam, and these foolish friends wish to make Islam a target of ridicule and mockery by making statements which every person, with his light of reason, finds to be untrue. May Allah have mercy on Imam Bukhari! He has also included a chapter regarding this in his book, in which he writes: "Ali, may God be pleased with him, said: Tell people things which they understand; or do you like to have Allah and His Messenger rejected?" In the commentary on *Bukhari*, this is explained as follows: "Speak to people according to the scope of their understanding", in other words, explain to people those injunctions of Allah and the Messenger which they can comprehend and which appear to them to be reasonable; otherwise, you will needlessly have them repudiating Allah and the Messenger.

Now it is obvious that when an opponent of Islam hears that the maulvis have issued a ruling declaring all travel to be unlawful (for a Muslim) except to the Sacred Mosque, the Mosque of the Holy Prophet, the Aqsa Mosque, and one or two other places, he will ridicule Islam and get the chance to find fault with the teaching of the Holy Prophet. He will not be aware that this pronouncement is merely the mischief of a maulvi, out of a grudge, or his ignorance; he will directly attack the Holy Prophet Muhammad. ...

Many maulvis, for the sake of their livelihood, travel all around the east and the west, ostensibly for preaching. Yet such journeys are not considered objectionable, nor does anyone issue rulings that they have added novelties into Islam, or that they are evil-doers and sinners. But when this humble servant, having been appointed to call to the truth by Divine permission and command, invites his followers to come for the

purpose of gaining knowledge, such travel is declared unlawful, and for this act I am dubbed a reprobate. Is this the way of virtue and godliness?

Progress is not unlawful innovation

Regrettably, these unwise people do not even know that planning and organisation does not fall in the category of innovations. Every time and age requires new ways of organisation. If new types of problems arise, what can we do other than devise new types of plans? When the true *Sunnah* has been safely preserved, and for the defence of that very *Sunnah* we need to use certain means, will they be called innovations? God forbid, certainly not.

An innovation (*bid'at*) is one which in essence deviates from, and is contrary to, the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet, and the doing of which has been condemned and warned against in the teaching left behind by the Holy Prophet. If merely modern ways of working and new types of schemes are called innovations, then the number of innovations in Islam will be countless. The fields of grammar, literature and theology, and the writing of Hadith and its compilation, would all be innovations. Likewise, travelling by railway train, wearing manufactured clothing, sending letters by mail, learning news by telegram, and fighting with guns and cannons, would all be in the category of innovations. In fact, to use guns and cannons will be not only an innovation but a major sin because, according to an authentic hadith, it is strictly forbidden to kill anyone by means of fire.

Who could be a more strict follower of the *Sunnah* than the Companions of the Holy Prophet? Even they did not consider the *Sunnah* to have the meaning which Rahim Bakhsh has given it. They carried out many new works of planning and organisation which were neither done by the Holy Prophet nor mentioned in the Holy Quran. Just consider the new institutions established by Hazrat Umar, a list of which would fill a book. He introduced the *Hijri* calendar for Islam, appointed police constabulary for the security of cities, set up a proper office for the public treasury, devised rules and regulations for joining military service and obtaining leave from that service, prescribed codes of behaviour for the conduct of war, prepared special instructions for dealing with financial law suits, and promulgated many regulations for the safety of the public. ...

I did nothing new of this kind. All I did was to propose a gathering for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, holding consultations on how to support the cause of Islam, and meeting of the brethren. ...

Lastly, I wish to announce that if Maulvi Rahim Bakhsh still does not rescind his ruling, I place him under oath in the name of Allah that if he is a seeker after truth, he must come to see me in Qadian for a clarification of this matter. I will pay his travel expenses and will place books before him, and show him the Quran and Hadith, to prove that his ruling is entirely false and an enticement by the devil.

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