

Esaal e Sawaab

To put simply, Esal e Sawab is nothing other than to ask Allah for the forgiveness of our sins, and to raise the spiritual status of the deceased. This may be achieved through various practices, such as the offering of du'as [supplications], to recite the Qur'an, to offer Qurbani [at Eid al Adha], and also, to perform a compulsory Hajj [fard] on the behalf of the deceased.

As this chapter will seek to demonstrate, Insh Allah, by using the Qur'an and the Sunnah as evidence, and by examining the fatwawa's of the scholars of Islam, we shall indeed discover that this is not an innovative practice [bid'a], but something that has been practiced by Muslims throughout the centuries, and secondly, which is permissible.

Evidence from the Qur'an

Allah (Almighty.) has ordered the Muslims (believers) that you pray for your parents as follows:

O' My Lord [Allah (Almighty.)], have mercy on my parents like they have bought me up through my childhood.

(Surah Isra, Verse 24)

Allah (Almighty.) has praised those Muslims who ask for forgiveness of the deceased. They ask for forgiveness in the following manner:

O' Allah (Almighty.) forgive us and forgive our Muslim brothers and sisters who have passed away.

(Surah Hashir, Verse 10)

The above mentioned verses demonstrate that if anyone prays on behalf of another person, the latter will receive the [spiritual] benefits - Allah Willing. This also demonstrates that if it was the

wrong action Allah would not have ordered us to pray for other people, nor would He have stated that those who ask for forgiveness for the deceased, receive praises from Allah.

Evidence from the Sunnah

Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim write that:

A man came to the Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] and said 'My mother has suddenly died and she did not leave any will, but I suspect that if she did that then she would have told me to give something to charity. Now if I offer something in charity on her behalf, will she get the reward?' Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] said 'Yes'. Then the man said that I make you, the Prophet, as my witness, that I offer my garden full of fruits to charity.

(Bukhari Muslim, Chapter Al-Wasiha)

This hadith, as can be clearly read, proves that to offer a charity on behalf of the deceased will result in the deceased obtaining a benefit.

Imam Bukhari writes that:

Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] has said, The status of the deceased is raised (during their time in the grave), and the deceased ask Allah (Almighty.) why has this happened, Allah (Almighty.) replies that your son has prayed for your forgiveness. (Al-Adab, Al-Mufid Chapter Excellency of the Parents by Imam Bukhari)

From this particular hadith, it can be understood that not only charity, but the offering of prayers (making duas) and the giving of alms, will also benefit the deceased.

After providing evidence from the primary and secondary sources, we shall now move onto the evidences provided by some of the scholars on this topic.

Hafidhh Ibn Taymiyyah writes:

From the authentic Hadith, there is evidence pointing out that the deceased person will gain rewards from all the good deeds carried out on his/her behalf by others. Some people raise the objection that a person can only gain reward from their own actions, and refer to the Qur'an [for evidence]. This is not correct. Firstly, because a Muslim receives the reward of those deeds that he /she has never done themselves [for example]: like Allah says in the Qur'an that the Angels of the Throne of Allah, glorify Allah and ask for forgiveness on behalf of all the Muslims. It is also evident from the Qur'an: [that] Allah (The Almighty) ordered Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] to pray for his Ummah, since his du'a is the peace of mind for the Ummah. In the same way the d'ua is offered in the funeral prayer, also when visiting the grave and offering d'ua for the deceased.

Secondly, we know that Allah (Almighty.) rewards us through the deeds of other people, which are carried out on our behalf. An example is where the Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] said "Whenever a Muslim prays for other Muslims, Allah (Almighty.) appoints an Angel to say Amin", i.e., the angel asks Allah (Almighty.) for the acceptance of the prayer. Sometimes Allah (Almighty.) blesses the participants of the funeral prayer in response to the prayer from the deceased and vice versa.

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Hafidhh Ibn Qayyam writes:-

"If a Muslim recites Qur'an, performs Hajj, offers du'a, gives in charity on the behalf of the deceased, then the deceased gets the benefits of it. Some innovators say that the deceased do not get any such reward, which is wrong according to the authentic Hadith. The proof is in the Qur'an that Allah (Almighty.) has praised those who ask for forgiveness for their Muslim brothers. Authentic Hadith proves that Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] replied to a question saying that to offer alms on behalf of a deceased person earns benefit. Some individuals suspect that the earlier Muslims did not do Esal-e-Sawab. This is because of their own ignorance or lack of knowledge. The earlier Muslims did not do these to show off. The Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] himself gave permission to offer Alms, so it is right to say that Esal-e-Sawab is right. The ayah in the Qur'an which states that only the own deeds are rewarded, means that he is righteous to get rewarded, which means that he is righteous to receive reward, but a present from someone else is also rewarded to the deceased by Allah (Almighty.).

(Kitab-ur-Rooh; by Hafidhh Ibn-ul-Qayyam Chapter 16)

Qadi Shawkani writes:

According to the Sunni faith, a deceased receives rewards from others praying, performing Hajj, offering Alms, but the “Mutazala” refuse to accept this. if it is wrong to offer these to the deceased, then Islam would not have allowed us to say “Salaam” (peace be to you) to the deceased when visiting or entering the graveyards. (Nal-Al-Autar, chapter: Janaiz by Qadi Shawkani).

These above references prove our argument for Esal-e-Swab and that the suspicion that people harbour in that it has no basis in either the Qur’an or the Sunnah, is not true.

Origins and Development

The origin of Esal-e-Swab is in the Qur’an but it is carried out in different manner in different communities. For example, to preach Islam to invite others to the Deen is proven but the methods are different for different situations. For example Islamic circles are held on Saturday’s or Sunday’s some but it is not mentioned in the Qur’an or Hadith that they should be held on these evenings. In the same way, the origin of Esal-e-Swab is in the Qur’an and Hadith and to call it an innovation is not right. Now we will discuss a few things concerning with Esal-e-Swab to which according to some people are, innovations

1) When a person dies, Muslims offer Alms, “Sadaqa”, on his behalf and pray in congregation. In these gatherings Islamic teachings are preached; This serves as a way to preach or spread Islam. Through these gatherings, the deceased receive benefit because Muslims pray for his/her forgiveness and others get knowledge of Islam. The poor get benefit from these Alms or charity. As you can see if you look at it from any angle, it is not an innovation.

2) Some people raise the question that a day should not be fixed for this, in that fixing such a day is “Haram” in Islam. The answer to this question is that “fixing a day” is Haram, Esal e sawaab will be haraam if it is said that outside of this day it will not be Esal-e-Sawab, (like Qurbani, Hajj and Salaah times are fixed), but Esal-e-Sawab on a fixed day is just for convenience of relatives and friends for “Du’a”. Like any Islamic conference, the date of it is fixed in advance. Alternatively, like Salaah “Jamat” time is unlike fixed. No one can become an innovator because of this. in the same way, to fix a day for “Du’a” for the deceased is not an innovation.

In Islam is it permissible for a person to fix a time, or date for voluntary (Nafal) prayer?

Imam Bukhari writes one day after the Fajar prayer, the Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] asked Bilal [May Allah bless him and grant him peace], tell me what good deeds you do because I heard your foot steps in Jannat. Bilal replied the only thing I do is after I make Wudu I pray Nafal how much Allah (Almighty.) wills me to do.

(Bukhari: Chapter of Salaah)

Hafidhh Asqalani writes in his commentary on this Hadith. We can understand from this Hadith that it is permissible for a person to fix a time for his/her voluntary prayer. (Fath-ul-Bari Book of Salaah)

There is a prayer (Du'a) said for the deceased for this we can fix a time that suits our self. We can give charity for them, keep fast for them and also we can get together and read Qur'an for them. For the people who get together and read Qur'an, we could be hospitable by providing for them by giving food and drink. This is all done with the intention of Sawab (blessings). For example, when Islamic circles are held, there are usually refreshments held after and this is carried out with the intention of blessings. This is one way of doing Esal-e-Sawab. There are many other ways of doing Esal-e-Sawab. One of them is urs.

URS

Urs, is done annually for a saint by his disciples (Mureeds). They hold this Urs in the mosque near the grave of the saint. They recite the Qur'an and various scholars give lectures on different topics of Islam. The audience are allowed to question the scholars on anything they wish. At the end a du'a is said and then hospitality is done for the people. The hospitality is solely done for the blessings.

Some people consider this an innovation (bidah) and regard it to be forbidden (haram). They object to this and ask questions such as "Why once a year?" The other objection they have towards this is that the Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] curses those who build mosques on the grave. Therefore, the objection they hold is that if a mosque is not allowed to be built on the graves, how can we hold a gathering such as urs there. The answer to the first question regarding "Why once a year?" is:

Imam Tabari, Hafidhh-Ibn-Kathir and Qurtabi write:

The Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] used to go to the graves of the martyrs of Uhd once a year and also recite the verse of the Holy Qur'an on excellence of patience. The Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] used to pray for them. When the beloved Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] passed away himself, the Khalifs, Abu-Bakr [May Allah bless him and grant him peace], Umar [May Allah bless him and grant him peace], Usman [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] and Ali [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] used to do the same thing.

[Tafsir Tabari, Tafsir Ibn-Kathir and Tafsir Qurtabi by Imam Tabari, Hafidhh Ibn-Kathir. Imam Qurtabi commentary of Surah Ra'd Verse 20.]

From all this we can conclude or understand that going to the grave of a saint once a year is permissible and is not an innovation (bidah). Also to lecture in a gathering is just another way of doing Dawah (work propagating Islam).

As for the answer to the second question. To build a mosque on the grave. The meaning of the Hadith is not to prostrate to the grave. There is proof in the Qur'an of building a mosque for saints near the grave.

Allah says in the Qur'an

They said, build over their cave any building. Their lord knows well about them. Those who prevailed in their affair said, we swear that we shall erect over them a mosque.

(Surah Al-Kahaf-V 21)

Imam Tabari, Hafidhh-Ibn-Kathir and Imam Qurtabi writes:

When the people of the cave went into the cave, some people said, who were close to the entrance of the cave, build a mosque so we can worship Allah (THE ALMIGHTY) The people who said this were Muslims.

[Tafsir Tabari, Tafsir Ibn-Kathir Surah Kahf Verse 21]

Therefore, from this we can prove that building a mosque near the grave of a pious person is permissible.

Hafidhh Asqalani writes:

If a person built a mosque near the graves of pious people, and that person's intention is solely for the blessings of Allah (Almighty.), and at the time of prayer, not to prostrate or face the grave, it is permissible to build a mosque near the grave of a saint and is not forbidden.

[Fath-ul-Bari, Chapter of Masajid]

From the above we can understand the true meaning of the Hadith which points out not to prostrate to the graves. It does not mean not to build a mosque near the graves. It basically means not to face the graves whilst praying.

Imam Tabari and Hafidhh-Ibn-Kathir write, in the 88th year of Hijra, the room of Aisha [May Allah bless Her and Grant Her peace] where there are graves of the Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] Abu-Bakr [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] and Umar [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] were joined to the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace]. (Tareeh Tabari and Tareeh Hafidhh Ibn-Kathir, Chapter of Government (Valid-Ibn-Abdul-Malik by Imam Tabari and Hafidhh Ibn-Kathir)

At the time of this, some companions and students (Tabeen) were alive and since then, no one has objected to this, which means it is allowed to have a mosque near the grave.

Some people assert that it is not allowed to visit the grave with that the intention that someone wants to see the grave. We ahle sunnah say that it is right to go and visit the grave with the intention that you are going to see the grave. The evidence is as follows.

Qadi Shawkani writes that:

After the Prophet's (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) death, Bilal settled in Syria. He had a dream where he saw the Prophet (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) and the Prophet said what kind of friend are you that you do not come and visit my grave? The next morning, Bilal made a journey to Madina to see the Prophet's (May Allah bless him and grant him peace) grave. At that time the companions were alive and they did not object to this. This narration is authentic.

[Nal lul Autar chap on Hajj by Qadi Shawkani].

Vows

Some people make false accusation, that Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l Jama in making vows to pious people (Anbiyaa and Awliyaa), but the Ahl-us-Sunnah make vows only for Allah and no one else. Vow is worship. We believe that if someone worships something other than Allah he is a Mushrik, and a Kafir, that is, a non-believer.

Then the following question is raised: What is the meaning when the Ahl-us-Sunnah Jamaat go to the graves of the pious and make Vows to them?

When the Ahl-Sunnah-wa'l Jama makes Vows like this to Allah they do it in the following manner. 'O Allah, if You make our sick people better, we will feed ten poor people, and the Sawaab (Deeds) from it we will give to so and so pious person'. Sometimes the person makes a Vow to Allah and then slaughters a sheep and gives the meat to the poor and then makes Du'a that the Sawaab from this goes to pious people who have passed away.

Some people say that this is Kufr and Shirk.

Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab Najdi wrote:

'Vows is Kufr for the pious'.(Kashf-al-Shubhat Chapter on Vows by Shaykh Najdi)

He did not differentiate the Vows of worship and the Vows of gift. The Vows of the pious mean the gift of Sawaab (Deeds) not Vows of worship that can only be for Allah.

Imam Ahmad Rad'a writes:

When we slaughter an animal for Aqiqah, the slaughtering of the animal is for Allah and the meat is for the people. Or when we have visitors we slaughter the lamb, cow, chicken, etc. We do it not for worship but for the hospitality of the visitors. So in the same way when a person goes to the pious graves or slaughter an animal, the intention is for the meat to be given to the poor and the Sawaab to go to the pious grave. We cannot think that any Muslim can make Vows as worship for any pious person or slaughter animals to respect and worship of the pious. But if somebody does it with the intention of worship there is no doubt that he is a non-Muslim.

[Fatawa Radhaviyyaa, by Moulana Ahmad Raza Khan Rahmatullah, Fatawa Shaami, Fatawa Aalam Ghiri, chapter of Vows]

Some people have raised the question that is it Bid'ah to read the Qur'an and say Du'a on food during an Esal-e-Sawaab gathering.

There are certain aspects to the above question. Firstly we believe that the food is not part of the Esal-e-Sawaab gathering. Imam Ahmad Raza Qadri writes:

If someone puts food before an Esal-e-Sawaab meeting and he has the intention of reading Qur'an and du'a on it, then this is allowed. If someone states that the deceased cannot get sawaab because there is no food in the Esal-e-Sawaab then they are wrong. (Fatawa Radawiyah Chapter on Janaza)

Secondly, we cannot say that having food before the Esal-e-Sawaab gathering is bid'ah, as Prophet [May Allah bless him and grant Him peace] put food, milk and water in front of him, and then he did du'a and read something on the food.

Hafidhh Ibn-Kathir writes :

One day Prophet [May Allah bless him and grant Him peace] was invited to someone's house. Prophet [May Allah bless him and grant Him peace] accepted the invitation and he bought a lot of companions with him to the house. There was a very short amount of food for the people. The Prophet [May Allah bless him and grant Him peace] said to bring the food out. Prophet [May Allah bless him and grant Him peace] read whatever Allah wanted on the food and du'a was also done on the food and the food was given to the people. After the people had eaten the food, there was still the same amount of food left as it was before the people started to eat.

(Tareekh Ibn Kathir & Siraat un Nabi Chapter of Mujizat)

From this narration it proves that to do Du'a on food is not an Innovation but it is Sunnah and is only done for the purpose of Barakah [blessing] and so the food does not be short.

The meaning of Esal-e-Sawaab gatherings is to spread Islam and teach Islam and to offer food to the people who join the gathering is not bid'ah.

(Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Surah Al-Shuara, under verse 214)

Hafidhh-Ibn-Kathir writes:

When Allah Almighty revealed this verse of the Qur'an which states ' O Beloved, warn your nearest Kinsmen', the Prophet [May Allah bless him and grant Him peace] said to Ali 'O Ali, sacrifice a goat and cook that meat and bring milk and fruit with the cooked to my house for a party'. At the party, Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant Him peace] said 'I am a Prophet of Allah, I have been sent to guide you to the right path, so become a Muslim'. When the family heard this, they started to laugh and they left the house. This happened for three days continuously.

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From the above references it is clear that, to prepare food for blessings is allowed and to hold the gatherings for the spread and teaching of Islam and to invite people to eat the blessed food is not bid'ah.

In our times especially in the western countries, Muslims have become very lazy and they do not attend the Mosque to perform Salaah. Therefore, it is good to organise a gathering and to prepare food for the gathering and to invite Muslims and offer them food and to teach about Islam and their duties. The people who carry out this job are the praiseable people because they are spending their money and time in Allah Almighty's way. Their intention is to please Allah Almighty and it is very surprising that people say that this is bid'ah and you will get bad deeds if you do this and this is a waste of money. We pray for all the Muslims who have passed away for their forgiveness and we also pray for those people who organise different kinds of gatherings to guide and remind Muslims for their duties and we also pray to Allah Almighty that may He accept and reward this work. (Amin)

Imam Tabari and Hafidhh-Ibn-Kathir write, in the 88th year of Hijra, the room of Aisha [May Allah bless Her and Grant Her peace] where there are graves of the Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] Abu-Bakr [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] and Umar [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] were joined to the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless him and grant him peace]. (Tareeh Tabari and Tareeh Hafidhh Ibn-Kathir, Chapter of Government (Valid-Ibn-Abdul-Malik by Imam Tabari and Hafidhh Ibn-Kathir)

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From the above references it is clear that, to prepare food for blessings is allowed and to hold the gatherings for the spread and teaching of Islam and to invite people to eat the blessed food is not bid'ah.

In our times especially in the western countries, Muslims have become very lazy and they do not attend the Mosque to perform Salaah. Therefore, it is good to organise a gathering and to prepare food for the gathering and to invite Muslims and offer them food and to teach about Islam and their duties. The people who carry out this job are the praiseable people because they are spending their money and time in Allah Almighty's way. Their intention is to please Allah Almighty and it is very surprising that people say that this is bid'ah and you will get bad deeds if you do this and this is a waste of money. We pray for all the Muslims who have passed away for their forgiveness and we also pray for those people who organise different kinds of gatherings to guide and remind Muslims for their duties and we also pray to Allah Almighty that may He accept and reward this work. (Amin)