

Question : Why do you spread a white sheet (cloth) in the middle of your gathering for the evocation (sitting for the wazifa)? What do you reply to people who says this practice is a bid'a (innovation)?

Answer :

The reason for this cloth during the recitation of the wazifa in congregation is that before the blessed zawiya of Fes was built, the zikr assembly took place in a corridor in the house of Seyyidina Ahmed Tidjani (may ALLAH sanctify his precious secret). Because many people used this corridor, in order to guarantee the purity of the place, Seyyidina Ahmed Tidjani (may ALLAH sanctify his precious secret) used to put a cloth upon which he and his companions would sit.

Subsequently, this custom was maintain, even after the construction of the blessed Zawiya, and became a meritorious act during the recitation in congregation. It is not a condition of validity: that is to say whether we put a cloth or not has no consequences on the validity of the zikr. Laying a cloth also symbolizes honouring the presence of the angels by putting that which brings additional purity and, for the Tidjani disciple, it also honours the presence of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the four Caliphs (may ALLAH be pleased to them) because he believes that at the seventh bead (of the recitation of the Djawharatou-l-Kamel), their spirits are present, by the grace of Divine Power.

The honorific gesture of laying a cloth was performing by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his companions (may ALLAH be pleased to them). Indeed, it is a fact that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) spread out his noble "rida" (the cloth used to cover the upper part of the body) for his "milk sister", Shayma, when she came to visit him. In the same way, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) did the same thing for Dahiya El Kelbi (may ALLAH be pleased with him) when he came in search of Islam.

It is also a fact that Abu Bakr Siddiq (may ALLAH be pleased with him) spread out a cloth for the angels as is related by Sha'rani in the book "**AhoudMohamediyya**". He also recounted in the book "**Tanbiyh El Moughtarine**" that Ibrahim ibn Adham (may ALLAH be pleased with him) said: "It has been said that 'Othman ibn Affan (may ALLAH be pleased with him) used to spread out his "rida" outside the door of the toilet: "Please sit here until I return (talking the scribe angels)."'"

Thus, spreading a cloth (sheet) to honour the presence of pure and noble beings, such as angels who attend these circles of evocations is not reprehensible, neither from the logical point of view, nor from the point of the Law, as it is related by Muslim that, according to Abu Hurayrah (may ALLAH be pleased with him), the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said (or words to that effect): "**ALLAH has roaming angels of great merit. They are constantly searching for circles evoking God. As soon as they find a gathering where God is evoked, they sit down with them.**"

However, are the people who claim to be disturbed, really worried about innovation or is it sickness of the heart that leads them to reject without trying to understand. They should meditate the words of Imam Shafi'i (may ALLAH be pleased with him) who said rejection or opposition without profound knowledge is a form of association (Shirk)."

If they are truly sincere, then why do they worry about a cloth being spread out during a meritorious act and not about the carpets and mats upon which they pray during the obligatory prayers, when the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) himself and his companions (may

ALLAH be pleased with them) performed their prayers on the bare earth directly on the ground and explained that it was preferable, saying (or words to that effect): “**The worshipper is never more loved by God than when He sees him prostrated with his face to the earth (on the ground).**”(Related by Tabarani in Mou’jam El Aousat according to Houdheyfa (may ALLAH be pleased with them).

In the same way, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) reprimanded a servant who did not want to put his forehead on the ground.

Actually, Oum Salama (may ALLAH be pleased with her) declared: « The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) saw one of our servants by the name of Aflah sighing during the prostration and said to him: “**O Aflah, may your face be covered with earth!**” (Reported by Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibban) For this reason, in the Shiite school of Law, it is preferable to prostrate on material of natural origin such as stones, and so they would be justified in saying of us (Sunni people) that we innovate when we prostrate on mats and carpets.

In addition, why do they not question the tradition of changing the cover of the Ka’ba, because Ibn Ishaq mentioned that the Ka’ba had first been covered during the pre-Islamic period (Jahiliya) by Toubbaa, As’ad el Himyari who had dreamt that he should cover it. And so he covered it with leather. Later, he dreamt that he should cover it with a red, striped, Yemenite (Akhbar Makkah d’Al Azraki) cloth. Following the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) did not change the cloth of the Ka’ba, leaving it as it was, but a woman accidentally burnt it with incense and this is the only for which he covered it with a Yemenite cloth. Later, the Caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman (may ALLAH be pleased with them) covered it with Kibati (a thin white cloth).

It is said that, twice a year, Mu’awiya used to cover the Ka’ba. On the day of ‘Achura, he covered it with an embroidered cloth and at the end of Ramadan, with Kibati. Over the course of time, the Ka’ba has been covered with white, green and black cloth and this is still the case today. In fact, King Saoud ibn Abdou-l-Aziz implemented the creation of a special institution in charge of the cover for the Ka’ba, worthy of its honourable status, and a factory was built for this purpose, although there is no prophetic recommendation on this subject.

Consequently, those who want to criticize and judge should be very careful not to be themselves criticisable and reprehensible regarding this issue, because the Law (Shari’a) has rules that each and every one must respect in order not to judge and condemn according to their own unhealthy inclinations and before using words such as “innovation” they should know the meaning, implications and consequences of this. No need to elaborate on this subject, this is amply sufficient for anybody endowed with understanding.

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