

## The True Meaning of Rabi' al-Awwal

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The word *rabi'* in Arabic means “the spring season”, and the word *al-awwal* means “the first”; together, “*Rabi' al-Awwal*” means “the first spring season.” There are two stages of the spring season. The first stage is the blossoming or flowering, during which flowers bloom on the trees. The second stage is the ripening, during which the fruits fully develop. The first stage is called “*Rabi' al-Awwal*,” and the second is called “*Rabi' ath-Thani*.” These are two Islamic months, and according to some scholars, these months were named as such because they corresponded to the spring season when the names were being established. Once termed, they retained these names regardless of the season in which they occur. This discussion is taken from Mufti Muhammad Ridwan's book (May Allah prolong his health and life), *The Virtues of the Month of Rabi' al-Awwal and Its Rules*. A similar analysis is found in the famous Arabic dictionary, *Al-Qamus al-Muhit*:

والربيع: ربيعان، ربيعُ الشُّهُور، وَرَبِيعُ الْأَزْمِنَةِ، فَرَبِيعُ الشُّهُور: شَهْرَانِ بَعْدَ صَفَرٍ، وَلَا يُقَالُ إِلَّا: شَهْرُ رَبِيعِ الْأَوَّلِ وَشَهْرُ رَبِيعِ الْآخِرِ.  
وَأَمَّا رَبِيعُ الْأَزْمِنَةِ، فَرَبِيعَانِ: الرَّبِيعُ الْأَوَّلُ الَّذِي يَأْتِي فِيهِ النَّوْرُ وَالْكَمَاءُ، وَالرَّبِيعُ الثَّانِي الَّذِي تُدْرِكُ فِيهِ النَّمَارُ، أَوْ هُوَ الرَّبِيعُ الْأَوَّلُ، أَوْ السَّنَةُ بِنَتْنِ الْأَزْمِنَةِ: شَهْرَانِ مِنْهَا الرَّبِيعُ الْأَوَّلُ، وَشَهْرَانِ صَيْفٌ، وَشَهْرَانِ قَيْظٌ، وَشَهْرَانِ الرَّبِيعُ الثَّانِي، وَشَهْرَانِ خَرِيفٌ، وَشَهْرَانِ شِتَاءٌ.

The word ربيع (*rabi'* - spring) has two meanings: the spring of months and the spring of seasons.

- The spring of months refers to the two months following Safar, known as *Rabi' al-Awwal* (the first spring) and *Rabi' al-Akhar* (the second spring).
- As for the spring of seasons, there are two types: the first spring, during which flowers bloom and truffles appear, and the second spring, during which fruits ripen. Alternatively, the first spring refers to the first season, or the year is divided into six seasons: two months for the first spring, two months for summer, two months for intense heat, two months for the second spring, two months for autumn, and two months for winter.

The great virtue of this month lies in the birth of the last of all prophets, the most beloved of Allah, our Nabi Muhammad ﷺ. His birth illuminated the whole world, marking the most blessed and significant event in human history. This unparalleled honour is exclusive to this month; the occasion of his noble birth alone is sufficient to establish the significance of *Rabi' al-Awwal*. Consequently, this month has a unique superiority and virtue over all other months.

It is important to note that the only virtue associated with this month is the blessed birth of the Prophet ﷺ. There are no other special qualities of *Rabi' al-Awwal* found in the Qu'ran or hadith, nor are there any specific practices proven by the Qur'an, hadith, or the actions of the Sahabah (Companions of the Prophet ﷺ). Therefore, one should refrain from innovating any new acts of worship during this month. To introduce self-prescribed acts of worship during this month is to add to the completed Shari'ah of Allah, which is unlawful. Since this month has a special relationship with the beloved Prophet ﷺ, one should be particularly careful to avoid committing any sins or engaging in actions contrary to the Sunnah out of love for the Prophet ﷺ.

While avoiding sin is necessary at all times, one should be especially diligent during this month, focusing on accepted acts of worship, following the Sunnah, and staying far away from any *bid'ah* (innovated acts). It is an opportune time to renew one's commitment to following the guidelines of the Shari'ah as closely as possible, in line with the very purpose for which the Prophet ﷺ was sent to this world.

All the experts agree that the Prophet ﷺ was born in the Year of the Elephant, in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal, and on a Monday. However, historians and scholars have different opinions regarding the exact date of birth. The 2nd, 8th, 10th, 12th, 13th, and 14th of Rabi'-al-Awwal have all been mentioned by different historians, and each has specified a date based on the evidence they have. Mulla Ali Qari has written in his commentary of *Mishkat, Mirqat al-Mafatih*:

*"He (the Prophet ﷺ) was born in the Year of the Elephant, according to the most authentic and well-known opinion. Qadi 'Iyad claims there is consensus on this. The agreement is that he was born on a Monday in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal."* (Qari 504)

It is clear from Mulla Ali Qari's text that there is a distinction between the day of birth and the date of birth. So now the question arises: why didn't the Sahabah preserve the exact date of birth of the greatest and most beloved person to walk the face of this Earth while they preserved every single saying and action of his? There are many answers to this question.

One simple answer is that although the birth of the Prophet ﷺ was a blessed and auspicious event, there was no *Shar'i* (legal) ruling related to it, so by the decree of Allah, its date was not preserved. The Prophet's statements and actions have pointed out those dates that do have a *Shar'i* significance, and were preserved by the Sahabah. Since there is no command in the Qur'an or hadith pertaining to the birth of the Prophet ﷺ, the Sahabah did not take measures to preserve it.

The only thing that is proven is that he was born on a Monday, and he would normally fast on Mondays. Some people have mistakenly understood that it is *sunnah* to fast on the 12th of Rabi' al-Awwal because of these two facts. While they say that celebrating the birthday of the Prophet (*Eid Milad an-Nabi*) is not permissible, they claim that fasting on this day is *sunnah*, which is also incorrect. This mistake arises from not understanding the difference between the day of birth and the date of birth.

It is established that the Prophet ﷺ would fast on Mondays.

سُئِلَ عَنْ صَوْمِ الْإِثْنَيْنِ فَقَالَ فِيهِ وُلِدْتُ وَفِيهِ أُنْزِلَ عَلَيَّ.

*He was asked about fasting on Mondays, and he said: "On that day, I was born, and on that day revelation was sent down to me."* (Sahih Muslim 2804)

عَنْ مَوْلَى أَسَامَةَ بْنِ زَيْدٍ أَنَّهُ انْطَلَقَ مَعَ أَسَامَةَ إِلَى وَادِي الْقُرَى فِي طَلَبِ مَالٍ لَهُ فَكَانَ يَصُومُ يَوْمَ الْإِثْنَيْنِ وَيَوْمَ الْخَمِيسِ فَقَالَ لَهُ مَوْلَاهُ لِمَ تَصُومُ يَوْمَ الْإِثْنَيْنِ وَيَوْمَ الْخَمِيسِ وَأَنْتَ شَيْءٌ كَبِيرٌ؟ فَقَالَ إِنَّ نَبِيَّ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانَ يَصُومُ يَوْمَ الْإِثْنَيْنِ وَيَوْمَ الْخَمِيسِ وَسُئِلَ عَنْ ذَلِكَ فَقَالَ إِنَّ أَعْمَالَ الْعِبَادِ تُعْرَضُ يَوْمَ الْإِثْنَيْنِ وَيَوْمَ الْخَمِيسِ

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*The slave of Usama ibn Zayd reported that he went with Usama to Wadi al-Qura to collect some money he had there. He used to fast on Mondays and Thursdays, so his slave asked him, "Why do you fast on Mondays and Thursdays when you are an old man?" Usama replied, "The Prophet of Allah ﷺ used to fast on Mondays and Thursdays." He was asked about that, and he said, "The deeds of the servants are presented before Allah on Mondays and Thursdays." (Sunan Abi Dawood 2436)*

تُغْرَضُ الْأَعْمَالُ يَوْمَ الْاِثْنَيْنِ وَالْخَمِيسِ فَأَجِبُ أَنْ يُغْرَضَ عَمَلِي وَأَنَا صَائِمٌ

*"The deeds are presented before Allah on Mondays and Thursdays, so I like my deeds to be presented while I am fasting." (Jami' at-Tirmidhi 747)*

From these narrations, we can establish that the Prophet ﷺ fasted on the day of his birth, which was a Monday, and not the date of his birth. Therefore, fasting on the date of birth, such as the 12th of Rabi' al-Awwal, is not established from the Sunnah. Mondays come every week, unlike the date of birth, which comes only once a year. Similarly, actions are presented every week on Monday, not just once a year. Thus, fasting on the date of birth is not established, and even suggesting that one should fast instead of celebrating *Eid Milad an-Nabi* is incorrect because fasting on the Prophet's date of birth is not something he mentioned.

Among the innovations and unestablished acts that people engage in during the month of Rabi' al-Awwal is setting up food and drink stations. They believe that distributing milk, *sharbat* drinks, and sweets is a great act of reward, and fabricate virtues of this act. This happens due to ignorance of the reality of the Shari'ah and the mistaken belief that *bid'ah* (innovation) is good. They don't realize that instead of doing good, they are actually doing harm. If they distribute these items thinking it is a day of celebration, they should know that the concept of celebrating the Prophet's birthday is contrary to the teachings of the Shari'ah. Any action based on this incorrect concept will also go against the Shari'ah. The only proof needed to avoid these actions is that they are not found in the Qur'an, hadith, or actions of the Sahabah. True love for the Prophet ﷺ demands that we avoid these innovations. If one thinks these are acts of charity, they should also know that restricting the type of *sadaqah* or designating a specific day for it is also an innovation. And if one is doing so to send the reward to the Prophet ﷺ (*isaale thawab*), they should know that specifying an action for *isaale thawab* is not necessary; rather, that can be done any day of the year with any good action.

After the love of Allah, our greatest love should be for the Prophet ﷺ. This love requires that we implement all of the Prophet ﷺ's teachings in our lives. We should read the blessed *seerah* of our Prophet ﷺ, engrave its teachings in our minds, and spread its lessons to others. We should love every *sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ and dislike every *bid'ah*. We should recite *durood* upon him ﷺ at least 100 times daily, as is the bare minimum for a member of the Prophet ﷺ's nation. We call ourselves lovers of the Prophet ﷺ, and if that is true, then the lover should follow every *sunnah* of their beloved and not ignore any of their instructions. May Allah make us dedicated followers of the Prophet ﷺ and grant us the divine ability to act on all his teachings and refrain from all innovations.