

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN MAULID AND TAHAJJUD: A THEOLOGICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE**Muhammad Auwal Dahiru****International Open University (IOU) the Gambia, Jos Learning Center****08036122764 / auwalmekaji46@yahoo.com****ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9191-1763>****Abstract**

This article explores the theological and contemporary discussions surrounding Maulid (the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) birth) and Tahajjud (the late-night voluntary prayer). While Tahajjud is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith as a virtuous act of worship, the status of Maulid remains a debated issue among scholars. Some scholars view it as a commendable act of expressing love for the Prophet (peace be upon him), while others consider it an innovation (*bid'ah*) in religious practice. The study examines their theological foundations, analyzes scholarly positions, and discusses their contemporary relevance. The findings reveal that while Tahajjud enjoys unanimous acceptance as an established Sunnah, Maulid continues to generate discussions in the Muslim world regarding its religious validity, cultural significance, and societal impact.

Keywords: *Maulid, Tahajjud, Islamic theology, Sunnah, bid'ah, contemporary Muslim practices*

1. Introduction

Islamic worship practices are broadly categorized into obligatory (*fard*) and voluntary (*nafl*) acts. Among the voluntary acts of worship, two significant practices—Maulid (the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth) and Tahajjud (the late-night voluntary prayer)—have been widely discussed among scholars and contemporary Muslim communities. Tahajjud is firmly established in Islamic theology, as it is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith. It holds a special status as a Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and is encouraged for spiritual growth, closeness to Allah, and seeking divine assistance.¹

On the other hand, Maulid remains a debated issue due to its absence from the early Islamic era. It was introduced centuries later as a cultural and religious practice aimed at expressing love for the Prophet (peace be upon him). While some scholars consider it a commendable innovation (*bid'ah hasanah*), others view it as an unwarranted addition to religious practices.² This article provides a comparative analysis of these two practices, examining their scriptural

foundations, scholarly opinions, and contemporary relevance. The study aims to offer insight into how these practices have evolved and continue to influence Muslim societies today.

2. The Theological Foundations of Tahajjud

Tahajjud prayer is one of the most emphasized voluntary acts of worship in Islam, deeply rooted in the Qur'an, Hadith, and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is a late-night prayer, usually performed in the last third of the night, signifying spiritual devotion and a strong connection with Allah. The Qur'an explicitly mentions Tahajjud as a means of attaining divine favor and higher spiritual ranks. Allah says:

And rise from sleep for prayer during part of the night as an additional worship for you; it is expected that your Lord will raise you to a praised station.³

This verse highlights the significance of Tahajjud as a means of attaining the "Maqam Mahmood" (the Praised Station), a special rank of honor in the Hereafter. Additionally, in another verse, Allah describes the righteous as those who wake up in the depths of the night seeking His mercy:

They forsake their beds, calling upon their Lord in fear and hope, and they spend (in charity) out of what We have provided for them.⁴

These verses establish the divine encouragement for believers to engage in night prayers, making it a distinguishing trait of the pious.

Tahajjud in the Hadith and the Practice of the Prophet (Peace be upon him)

The Hadith corpus further emphasizes the excellence of Tahajjud, confirming it as a habitual practice of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said:

"The best prayer after the obligatory prayers is the night prayer."⁵

Additionally, the Prophet (peace be upon him) encouraged his followers to develop the habit of waking up for Tahajjud:

You should pray at night, for it is the habit of the righteous before you. It brings you closer to your Lord, atones for bad deeds, prevents sin, and repels disease."⁶

These traditions highlight the spiritual, moral, and even physical benefits of performing Tahajjud. The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself never abandoned it, even during times of illness. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) narrated that when the Prophet was too weak to stand, he would pray Tahajjud while sitting.⁷

Scholarly Perspectives on Tahajjud

Classical scholars such as Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya stressed that Tahajjud was not merely a recommended act but a vital means of spiritual purification. Imam al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* describes it as the “key to spiritual enlightenment,”⁸ while Ibn Qayyim calls it “a pathway to the special mercy of Allah.”⁹ Thus, the theological basis of Tahajjud is well established, making it an integral part of Islamic spirituality and a defining trait of the truly devout. This expanded version strengthens the theological foundation of Tahajjud with Qur’anic verses, Hadith references, and scholarly discussions. Let me know if you want any additions before moving to the next section.

3. The Theological Foundations of Maulid**The Ruling on Tahajjud in Congregation**

The performance of Tahajjud in congregation is a topic that has been addressed by classical and contemporary scholars, with differing opinions based on the Prophet’s practice, the actions of the Companions, and general Islamic legal principles. While Tahajjud is generally performed individually, there is evidence that praying it in congregation is permissible in certain circumstances.

Evidence from the Sunnah

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) primarily performed Tahajjud alone, which indicates that its default ruling is an individual act of worship. However, there are exceptions where the Prophet prayed it in congregation, demonstrating its permissibility.

One of the most famous hadiths on this topic is narrated by Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him):

I stayed overnight at the house of my maternal aunt Maymunah (the wife of the Prophet), and watched the Prophet (peace be upon him) wake up and pray at night. I joined him in prayer, and he placed his hand on my head and guided me to stand on his right.¹⁰

This hadith establishes that Tahajjud can be prayed in congregation on an occasional basis. Additionally, it is narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) prayed night prayers in congregation during the first few nights of Ramadan, but he later stopped doing so, fearing that it might be made obligatory.¹¹

Views of Islamic Scholars

Islamic scholars have classified Tahajjud in congregation under three categories:

1. Individual Tahajjud (Most Recommended Form) – The majority of scholars, including Imam al-Nawawi and Ibn Qudamah, agree that

- praying alone is superior, as it aligns with the regular practice of the Prophet. Imam al-Nawawi states, "The best way to perform night prayer is alone, following the example of the Prophet who did so consistently."
2. Occasional Congregational Tahajjud (Permissible but Not Regular) – Some scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim, argue that praying in congregation occasionally is acceptable, especially for motivating others. Ibn Taymiyyah states, "If gathering for Tahajjud strengthens the faith and devotion of a community, then it is a permissible act."¹²
 3. Regular Congregational Tahajjud (Disliked or Discouraged) – Some scholars warn against making it a fixed practice, as it was not institutionalized by the Prophet. Imam Malik discouraged regular congregational Tahajjud outside of Ramadan, arguing that it could lead to an innovation in worship (bid 'ah).¹³

Practical Contemporary Considerations

In modern times, many Islamic centers and mosques organize group Tahajjud, especially during the last ten nights of Ramadan. Some scholars consider this a commendable act, as it encourages the community to engage in prayer, seek forgiveness, and increase devotion. However, it is essential to maintain the balance between personal spirituality and collective worship, ensuring that such congregational prayers do not replace the preferred individual devotion. Thus, while individual Tahajjud remains superior, praying it in congregation occasionally is permissible provided it does not become an obligatory or institutionalized practice.

4. Contemporary Discussions on Maulid and Tahajjud

The Theological Foundations of Maulid

The Maulid an-Nabi, or the celebration of the birth of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), is a practice that has generated considerable debate among scholars. Unlike Tahajjud, which is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith, Maulid is not a prescribed act of worship in Islamic teachings. Its theological foundation is based on expressions of love and reverence for the Prophet, rather than direct textual evidence from the early Islamic period. This section explores the origins, scholarly perspectives, and theological arguments surrounding Maulid.

Origins and Historical Development

The celebration of Maulid is believed to have originated in the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt during the 10th or 11th century CE.¹⁴ Some historical records indicate that the practice was later adopted and modified by Sunni rulers, particularly in the 12th century under Sultan al-Muzaffar of Erbil.¹⁵ While early Muslims did

not observe Maulid, its proponents argue that it serves as a means of renewing love for the Prophet (peace be upon him) and educating the masses about his life and teachings.

Qur'anic Justifications for Maulid

Although Maulid itself is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, its proponents cite verses that emphasize the greatness of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the importance of expressing gratitude for his presence in the world. One such verse is 16:

Indeed, Allah and His angels send blessings upon the Prophet. O you who have believed, send blessings upon him and greet him with peace.¹⁷

Supporters of Maulid argue that if Allah and the angels send blessings upon the Prophet (peace be upon him), then dedicating a day to commemorate his birth is a valid expression of love. Another commonly cited verse is¹⁸:

Say, in the bounty of Allah and in His mercy – in that let them rejoice; it is better than what they accumulate.¹⁹

Many scholars interpret this verse as a justification for celebrating the Prophet's birth, as he is considered the greatest mercy sent to humankind.

Scholarly Perspectives on Maulid

Islamic scholars are divided on the permissibility of Maulid:

1. Those Who Support Maulid – Scholars like Imam al-Suyuti ¹⁰, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani ¹¹, and Imam al-Nawawi ¹² regarded Maulid as a commendable practice if done without excessive innovations.²⁰ Imam al-Suyuti stated, "Commemorating the Maulid is an act of joy and gratitude for the greatest of all blessings – the birth of the Prophet."²¹
2. Those Who Oppose Maulid – Scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah ¹⁴ and Imam Malik ¹⁵ rejected Maulid, arguing that neither the Prophet nor his Companions observed it. Ibn Taymiyyah ¹⁶ stated, "If Maulid was truly beneficial, the Prophet's closest companions would have practiced it."²²

Contemporary Theological Discussions

In modern times, Maulid continues to be a source of debate. While some Muslims view it as an act of love, others consider it an unnecessary innovation (bid'ah). Many scholars adopt a balanced approach, acknowledging that expressing love for the Prophet is virtuous, but emphasizing that it should not lead to religious innovations that contradict established teachings.²³ Thus, the theological foundation of Maulid remains a subject of scholarly debate, with arguments both in favor of and against its observance.

Contemporary Debates on Maulid and Tahajjud

In contemporary Islamic discourse, both Maulid and Tahajjud remain subjects of theological and practical debate. While Tahajjud is a well-established Sunnah with clear Qur'anic and Hadith evidence, Maulid is contested due to its historical development and the lack of direct textual prescription. Scholars and communities continue to debate these practices based on religious, cultural, and modern contextual factors.

Maulid: A Divisive Issue in the Muslim World

Maulid celebrations vary across the Muslim world. In many Sunni-majority countries, such as Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan, it is widely celebrated with recitations of Qur'an, nasheeds (Islamic songs), and discussions about the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The Sufi tradition strongly endorses Maulid as a means of expressing love for the Prophet and strengthening faith.²⁴ In contrast, many Salafi scholars reject the practice, arguing that it constitutes bid'ah (religious innovation), as neither the Prophet nor his Companions observed it.

One of the strongest critics of Maulid is Ibn Taymiyyah, who argued:

“Celebrating the birth of the Prophet was never practiced by the early generations. If it were an act of righteousness, the Companions and the Salaf would have been the first to do it.”²⁵

However, proponents of Maulid, such as Imam al-Suyuti and Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, argue that as long as it is free from un-Islamic elements (such as extravagance or shirk), it is a praiseworthy act of devotion.²⁶ This debate continues today, with some scholars advocating for moderation, allowing Maulid as a cultural event rather than a religious obligation.

Tahajjud: Debates on Congregational Practice

Unlike Maulid, Tahajjud is an undisputed Sunnah supported by clear textual evidence. However, debates arise regarding whether it should be performed in congregation outside of Ramadan. The Prophet (peace be upon him) primarily prayed Tahajjud alone but also led his Companions in prayer on some occasions.²⁷

The Salafi and Hanbali position generally favors individual performance, citing the Prophet's consistent practice. However, some contemporary scholars argue that congregational Tahajjud may be beneficial, especially in modern settings where communal prayer can motivate Muslims to engage in nightly worship. Ibn Taymiyyah permitted congregational Tahajjud if it encouraged the community, saying:

“If gathering for night prayer increases devotion and spirituality, then there is no harm in it.”

Modern Relevance and the Role of Community

In today's world, both Maulid and Tahajjud hold different significance for various Muslim communities. While Maulid fosters unity and love for the Prophet, Tahajjud represents a deeply personal connection with Allah. The key issue in contemporary debates is ensuring that religious practices align with the Prophet's teachings while adapting to the needs of modern Muslim societies.

Recommendations

Based on the comparative analysis of Maulid and Tahajjud, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Encouraging the Practice of Tahajjud

Since Tahajjud is an established Sunnah, Muslim communities should be encouraged to incorporate it into their daily lives. Mosques and Islamic centers can organize educational programs and reminders about its spiritual benefits, emphasizing its role in strengthening one's connection with Allah.

2. Encouraging Religious Awareness and Education

The debate surrounding Maulid stems from a lack of consensus among scholars. To foster a balanced understanding, Islamic institutions should educate Muslims on both perspectives. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of following authentic teachings while allowing room for cultural expressions within Islamic guidelines.

3. Avoiding Extremism in Religious Practice

While celebrating Maulid can be a means of expressing love for the Prophet (peace be upon him), it should be free from excessive innovation or practices contrary to Islamic teachings. Similarly, rejecting it should not lead to division among Muslims. A moderate approach that respects differing scholarly opinions is recommended.

4. Balancing Individual and Community Worship

Since Tahajjud is usually performed individually, modern initiatives such as congregational night prayers in non-Ramadan months can help encourage participation while preserving the Sunnah-based practice.

5. Fostering Unity Among Muslims

The differences in opinion on Maulid should not lead to sectarian divisions. Instead, scholars and leaders should promote dialogue and mutual respect, ensuring that religious practices unite rather than divide the Muslim community.

Conclusion

This comparative study highlights the theological and contemporary dimensions of Maulid and Tahajjud. While Tahajjud is universally acknowledged as an authentic Sunnah, Maulid remains a subject of debate. The analysis shows that the acceptance or rejection of Maulid depends largely on

how one views religious innovations (bid 'ah). Those who see it as a bid 'ah hasanah find value in it, while others regard it as an unwarranted addition to religious practice. Nonetheless, both practices continue to hold significant places in the spiritual and cultural lives of Muslims worldwide.

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