

**THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD**  
*(salla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam)*  
**AS A SERVANT**

by  
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for the Milad al Nebi  
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*Allahumma inna nasalaka mujibati rahmatika  
Wa'aza'ima magfiratika, wa salamata min kulli itmin,  
wal-ganimata min kulli birrin, wal-fawza bil-jannati min-an-naar.*

O Allah, we ask You for words which will make certain Your Mercy,  
actions which will make certain Your Forgiveness,  
freedom from every offence, a supply of every virtue,  
entering Jannah and safety from the Naar.

**Overview**

Dear brothers and sisters: Insh'Allah today I will speak to you about a very important topic that can and will bring you closer to awareness of the Divine Presence—Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*). Perhaps it may seem to be a very simple and obvious subject, but believe me, it is not as

simple as it seems. Nor should anyone think that they fully grasp its significance and arrogantly dismiss it as “obvious.” I will draw for you relationships between service, worship, and the healing of society and individuals, and point to the significance of fulfilling the *amaanah*. Insh’Allah I will also try to give you some practical guidance in how to make service a reality. It is my ardent hope and prayer that when you leave this conference you will have developed more possibility to consciously walk in the presence and live in the presence of Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*).

### ***Contemporary Situation***

I ask you also to think of our Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) as a contemporary figure: a person who is available to guide us from direct observation and experience of this world, in which we strive to be Muslims, *mu’min*, people of the *siraata-l-mustaqeem*. We might ask ourselves, “What is a world like, in which people do not have, at the core of their hearts, a deep commitment to service?” For that may be the world in which we find ourselves. There is a great sickness in the global society of today. Look at what is happening in families. Look at the statistics on murders and molestations, domestic violence and the spread of AIDs, etc. But we can find comfort and direction in our Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) and in the sharee’ah by coming to understand the subtle relationship between worship and healing through service. The practices that enable us to realize these relationships are both inward and outward. On the one hand, we have worship (including prayer); and on the other hand, we have service and good deeds.

**WA AQIMI-S-SALĀTA TARAFAYI-N-NAHĀRI WA ZULAFAM-MINA-LLAYLI INNA-L-ḤASANĀTI YUDḤIBĀNA-S-SAYYI’ĀTI  
DHĀLIKA DHĪKRĀ LI-DH-DHĀKIRĪN.**

**And establish the *salah* at the two ends of the day and in the watches of the night. Surely good deeds cancel bad deeds.  
This is a reminder to those who remember. (Surah Hud, 114)**

The healing of our sociological and stress-related emotional and mental illnesses lies in the concern for others that comes from sincere worship and from service: service that extends beyond one’s family to one’s community, to all of humanity. Service is a *shifa*—not just for our local community, but for the global community. It is also an invitation to non-Muslims to regard Islam favorably. Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta’aalaa*) reveals in the Qur’an:

**MAÑY-YASHFA‘ SHAFĀ‘ATAN ḤASANATAÑY-YAKUL-LAHU NAṢĪBUM-MINHĀ WA MAÑY-YASHFA‘ SHAFĀ‘ATAN SAYYI’ATANÑY-  
YAKUL-LAHU KIFLUM-MINHĀ WA KĀNA-LLĀHU ‘ALĀ KULLI SHAY’IM-MUQĪTĀ.**

**Whoever intercedes in (or serves in) a good cause becomes a partner in it: and whoever recommends and helps an evil**

**cause shares in its burden: and Allah has power over all things. (4:85)**

### ***Service, Zakat, and Tazkiyah***

Service is a pillar of Islam. We have institutionalized it through *zakat*, a term which (we must remind ourselves) derives from the same root as *at-tazkiyah* (purification). Islam undertakes the huge task of educating people in a process of purifying the self, of changing the character traits that incline us toward vindictiveness, possessiveness, or selfish ambition, toward exploiting others or engaging in unethical behavior. It calls people to brotherhood and sisterhood, benevolence and beneficence, love, friendship, care, concern, and self-sacrifice.

It is said that Allah (*Subḥānahu wa taʿālaa*) has written each person's truth upon the heart, but that truth has been veiled by forms of selfhood. Worldliness and selfness (*ṣifat* and *nafsani*) cover over the truth that is recorded within us. If we can cleanse the heart from selfishness, then we will come to know our own reality. From that, we will know the reality that is Allah. As the *hadith* states, "One who knows oneself knows one's Lord." *Zakat* contributes to our purification by engaging us in providing monetary assistance. Our *tazkiyah* is further deepened if, in addition to paying *zakat*, we use our hands in service to others.

### ***Service and Worship***

Allah (*Subḥānahu wa taʿālaa*) warns us continuously in the Qur'an to eschew evil and promote good. The repetition of this warning emphasizes that those persons who do not attend to the needs of others are failing to understand faith, *'ibaadah/* worship in all their meanings. Look carefully at the relationship in Arabic of the words that Allah uses to awaken us to the *Haqq*.

(*'abda*) "to serve as a servant"

(*nasaf*), "to serve God"

(*wafaq*), "to be useful"

(*ta'aawana*) "to help, assist, or support one another; to cooperate"

(*shafaa'a*) from which are derived words meaning "to advocate," "intercede for," or "rally to a cause"

*Khidma*, the word we usually use for service, also means to work and employ. Its derivatives include the word for a "manservant," in the sense of being a friend and companion. Additionally, *khidma* implies to serve in the interests of truth for the sake of truth. *'Ibaadah* also means to serve, but we use it to mean worship. It means something more, however, than the word "worship." Worship and service are interchangeable as *'ibaadah*. Ultimately, everything we perform as service is worship, and service and worship become synonyms. Another aspect of service is to venerate and adore. The *'abd*: not just someone who serves, but someone who venerates and adores. What is another meaning of *'abd*? "Human being" or "person." The attitude and activities of *'abada* define us. *Ma'bad* is a place of worship, or house of God. Allah says in the Quran, **"I am as near to you as your jugular vein."** Where is this house of God? Here, in us, human beings. It is not where we pray. It is where we pray: in ourselves. As Muslims, we can pray anywhere: in a house, on the ground, under a tree, in a car, in an airplane. Who is praying? Yes. HU is praying.

The words I listed above all mean service from different points of view. Even in English, we use the phrase "worship service." If we perform

worship service, then we should be worshipful servants. In contrast, the one who does not perform such worship-full service was described in a *hadith* of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) when he said:

***One who wakes up without the feeling of concern for the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim.***

Does that mean that we should only concern ourselves with the affairs of Muslims? No. The *amaanah* was a responsibility that we took for all of Allah’s creation.

### ***The Amaanah and Our Inborn Capacity to Fulfill It***

Islam says, “Be conscious of the community, take your role in it, and encourage others to do so.” Of course, we all know that on occasion, taking time to serve disrupts our plans or causes us strain. But the fact is we will encounter greater strain if we try to slip through life as non-participants. We have no choice but to participate in God's creation. The grass, insects, birds, and creatures are within our realm of responsibility. To assist in fulfilling this trust, Allah has [placed] within us a desire to protect and to nurture. Each one of us has the capacity to care. Out of that, Allah has created in us the possibility to come near to Him, to build in this world a sense of union and unity; a sense of mutual trust and forgiveness; a sense of compassion, mercy, and love.

Because the *amaanah* encompasses the whole of creation, it requires collective as well as individual consciousness. Every act, every decision, every aspect of life must come to stimulate awareness of the collective need and good. No amount of oil, no amount of power, no amount of money, no amount of land can justify inhuman actions. Yet, many or most of us have met or heard about people who have been targets of genocide. Until we internally feel that this is unacceptable, and we broadcast through our intention the unacceptability of this kind of action, it cannot change. (I do not mean to imply that we can change it singlehandedly, but we have to be part of that change.) The focus, then, for the *ahl al ihsan* (the people of *ihsan*) is to understand that our interior life has a light. It has a power. It broadcasts on a frequency that can resonate with and change the mentality of others. But we do not serve for the result. *Khidma* is offered without expectation of reward or change. In that way, it becomes part of a greater developmental process.

### ***Service Fulfills the Amaanah through Unconditional Love***

We must learn to see service as a way of restoring the *amaanah* to those who were once entrusted with it. We have to admit: we have inherited a great challenge. How are we to serve in ways that extend beyond our immediate circle, to people we don’t even know? Since Islam in its essential truth requires beneficence, sympathy between peoples, and cooperation in undertaking social responsibility, the basis of the ethical code of Islam is found in a form of self-awareness. At root, our ethics reflect a type of self-awareness on well-being not only of my self, but of others. To place others before ourselves, we need to disengage from self-centered preoccupations, and recognize that we are essential parts of a greater family, society, and world. We must consciously decide to sacrifice, based on our inherent higher human sensitivity. Such sensitivity can only be fully developed when there is infrastructural support vis a vis *Sharee’ah*, the examples and encouragement within the community, family, *tekkia*, and through meeting each moment of life with unconditional love. Each of us has a quality and quantity of unconditional love, which needs to be developed and expressed.

For many people, “love” can be associated with any strong emotion or desire—good or bad, material or immaterial. Unconditional love, in contrast, is courageous, constructive, confident and directed by and toward spiritual goals, with the understanding that all other human goals and desires will be fulfilled if we stay on this track. We see such love when Muslims—even those living in the poorest countries, and from the farthest distances—assist others in times of need. Love allows us to turn our attention to the needs of those around us, and to focus on the circumstances that demand our skills, intellect, and generosity. A tremendous power exists in the faith and vulnerability of such love. It is a power capable of “moving mountains.” Such love is a gateway to the Infinite.

### ***Prophet was a Perfect Servant, Without Assuming Perfection***

We are all familiar with the *hadith*, narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar (ra), that Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: “**The names dearest to Allah are Abdullah and Abdur Rahman.**” (Sahih Muslim Hadith 1002) We know, too, that Allah reveals in Surah an-Nisaa:

**LAŃY-YASTAŃKIFA-L-MASĪHU AŃY-YAKŪNA ʿABĀDAL-LI-LLĀHI WA LĀ-L-MALĀAʿIKATU-L-MUQARRABŪNA.**

**The Messiah (Jesus (*alayhi-s-salaam*)) never disdained to be an ʿabdu-Llaah, nor do the angels who are nearest to Allah. (4:172)**

Potentially, we all have another name: ‘Abdullah. If we live by the injunctions of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*), we too will become willing and contented servants. To fully understand the importance of being “Abdullah,” we must consider it in light of the Prophet’s statement: “**I was sent to perfect good character.**” (al-Muwatta Hadith 47.8) At the root of service to Allah lies the individual—not just any individual, but an individual of refined character, who in turn strives to help build the characters of other people.

**WA TAʿĀWANŪ ʿALĀ-L-BIRRI WA-T-TAQĀWĀ**

**Help one another in furthering righteousness and piety. (Qur’an; Sura Maaa-’idah 5:2)**

The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) exemplified the qualities of an ʿabd, one who was ʿaabid, and one whose *khidma* was perfect. That example, which is still alive in the hearts of Muslims, must increasingly translate into practical activity for there to be a healing and a transformation in the lives of Muslims. Unless and until the world has, at its core, service and worship, we cannot expect major progress in the human condition. Unfortunately we often deceive ourselves into believing we are worshipful servants by our symbols of piety, whether in form or attitude. Muslims can perform prayer five times a day; we can make *dhikr*; we can quote Qur’an and *hadith* (all of which are essential). Yet how many hours pass in which we initiate action, engage in discussion, or make decisions—without relying on *du’a*? What does it take for us to remember to make *du’a*, to have it spontaneously at our fingertips or on the tip of our tongue, always affirming the Divine Presence?

When we look at the example of the Prophet (*ṣalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*), we see a life that is in fact *duʿaa*. All his actions, words, and thoughts were powerful intentions and supplications—supplications that we still make today, and through which we keep the model of the Prophet (*ṣalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) before us. In this model, we see a life of piety, practical action, selfless service, deference to Allah, privacy in worship, humility in public, concern for all people (Muslim or not). This is the example and leadership we have today still in the Prophet (*ṣalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*), but also in the lives of the *awliyyaaʿ*, the spiritual descendants of the Prophet in whom he continues to live, speak, and act out the example.

### ***With What Shall We Serve – Excess? Absence of Pride/Ego***

Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) states in Surah al-Baqarah:

**LAYSAL-BIRRA AÑ TUWALLŪ WUJŪHAKUM QIBALA-L-MASHRIQI WA-L-MAGḤRIBI WA LĀKINNAL-BIRRA MAN ĀMANA BILLĀHI WAL-YAWMI-L-ʾĀKHIRI WAL-MALĀʾIKATI WAL-KITĀBI WAN-NABIYYĪNA WA AʾATĀ-L-MĀLA ʿALĀ HUBBIHI DHAWĪ AL-QURBĀ WAL-YATĀMĀ WAL-MASĀKĪNA WA-BĀNA-S-SABĪLI WAS-SĀʾILĪNA WAFĪ AR-RIQĀBI ...**

**It is not piety that you turn your faces to the east or to the west. True piety is this: to believe in Allah, in the Last Day, the angels, the scripture, and the prophets, to give of one's substance, however cherished, to kin, the orphan, the needy, the traveler, the beggar, and to ransom the slave... (2:177)**

What are the resources we draw from in serving? What are our extra assets, our bounties, our strengths? Service is a relationship between equals—equals in potential, equals in the eyes of Allah and the Prophet (*ṣalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*), not equals in skills or worldly wealth or gain. This is the parity described by the Prophet (*ṣalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) when he said, **“Two brothers are likened to a pair of hands, one of which washes the other.”** In fact, we serve less with our assets and strengths than with ourselves. We draw from all that has shaped us—from all of our experiences. Our limitations serve. Our wounds serve. Even our struggles with darkness can serve. But we need to learn how to extract the opportunity and the positive lessons from life.

### ***Conclusion***

If the goal of inward life is somehow to reach the Divine Presence, knowing that God is both immanent and transcendent; if it is to gain a vision of reality beyond all objectification; if it is to perceive this world as a drop in the ocean of God's presence—then the key lies in service to Allah. It is possible to create an environment where naturally—through cooperation, discourse, *muraaqaabah*, *dhikr*, community life—individuals come to operate out of love, love of God, and searching for the truth. All the constructive energies of the people are mobilized towards the well-being of the people. In this way, the goals and activities of individuals in that community and society are harmonized, and their sense of cooperation is awakened. The individual and collective energies work for the service not only of the community but of

humankind, for the sake of God.

When the members of the *ummah* (or the members of any community, for that matter), feel that they are personally responsible for the things that transpire in that community, that is a doorway to spiritual, personal, and communal healing. It enables the eradication of illnesses that plague the world today. The reality we must strive for is the understanding that *khidmah* is a responsibility, and that through it, we strengthen our faith; our worship becomes more meaningful, and we find ourselves conscious of our nearness to the Prophet and to the Divine Presence—Allah. Yet, we need to understand how to draw near to the Prophet, how to love him more than our kith and kin. The answer to this lies in two areas: the emotional attachment with the life of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), obviously something that intrigued and motivated a corpus of stories about his conception and his birth from at least the 4<sup>th</sup> century after the Hijra; and also an understanding of the light of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) which preceded the creation. What follows are two stories that address these; I do not offer them as historically accurate by the measurement of the validity of Hadith, but rather popular and oft repeated stories that address the love of and understanding of who this final Prophet was. I will continue this later this year in our dars on the Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) *inshaa’a-Llaah*.

## THE STORIES

Despite the existence of a number of scholarly works focusing on the birth of the Prophet, the growth and circulation of narratives on this subject may not have been most fundamentally shaped by the titled works of identifiable scholars. There is reason to believe that the *mawlid* tradition drew from a rich and extensive body of narrative material that probably originated with popular preachers and storytellers, never achieving the level of formal authentication required for acceptance by the scholarly elite. Some of this material, while decried by many authorities, achieved a level of standardization and dissemination constituting a form of de facto canonicity. As we shall see, some narratives rejected by scholars working within the classical paradigm of textual criticism nevertheless remained strikingly stable and widely circulated over a period of many centuries. At an even more popular level, episodes and embellishments must have been continuously generated in the semi-extemporaneous performances of gifted storytellers. Such material, to the extent that it is preserved at all, remains accessible only through isolated samples or citations; much of it must have escaped textual fixation and (at least in its medieval forms) is forever lost to scholarship. However, enough material remains to provide the basis for some firm generalizations about the nature of the popularly circulated story of the Prophet’s birth and life.

The most influential text in the development of the *mawlid* genre may well be one whose ostensible author is unknown to history, the *Kitab al-Anwar* attributed to one Abu’l-Hasan al-Bakri. The earliest manuscript of the work dates to 694 AH/1295 CE; the earliest citation, which matches the text of preserved manuscripts, appears in a work whose author died in 289 AH/902 CE.<sup>18</sup> Judging from its content, Bakri’s *Anwar* seems to have been intended for a popular audience, or at least for purposes of edifying entertainment; its accounts of events in the Prophet’s life are more remarkable for their dramatic and diverting qualities than for their fidelity to the best-authenticated sources.

A reference to the works of al-Bakri in one of the *fatawa* of Ibn Taymiya suggests that his name was associated with the activities of popular storytellers. However, as it appears in citations and manuscripts over the course of centuries and across the Islamic world, the work is far from being the product of spontaneous and informal storytelling activities. Rather, it is a fairly stable text whose uniformity and consistency

over many centuries of transmission suggest that it enjoyed a certain degree of authority with those who retold it. The literary quality of the book may be reflected in a comment by al-Dhahabi, who complained of the wide popularity of al-Bakri's works in the booksellers' market; at least some of them were clearly literary texts reproduced by copyists.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, al-Bakri's sira work was the object of a great deal of learned opprobrium; it was denounced by scholars as eminent as al-Dhahabi, Ibn Kathir, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, al-Qalqashandi, and al-Safadi.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike rejoicing in the Prophet, love for him had a well-established and incontestable status in Islamic law. Love of the Prophet is not merely a natural response to his many exquisite qualities of person and character; rather, it is universally recognized to be a legal obligation of Muslim believers. Authoritative *hadith* texts establish that a true believer must love the Prophet more dearly than his spouse, his children, and even himself. While the obligation to love is usually an underlying assumption rather than an explicit subject of *mawlid* texts, it is sometimes overtly invoked. *"God has made the love [of the Prophet] an individual obligation (min al-furud al-'ayniya),"* remarks the anonymous author of a *mawlid* preserved in Damascus; *"the one who has no love [of the Prophet] has no faith."* *"Among the greatest of the individual obligations and the firmest requirements of the religion is the love of God's greatest Beloved . . . "* begins another *mawlid* text. Muhammad Salih al-Dasuqi (d. 1246 AH/1830 CE) argues that the more someone listens to the *mawlid*, *"the more the love of the Prophet establishes itself in his heart; from [love of the Prophet] arises his veneration and exaltation (ta'zimuhu wa-ijlaluhi), which are among the greatest branches of the faith."*<sup>53</sup>

Muslim authorities never doubted that the Prophet was worthy of a surpassing love, because of his inherent beauty, his incomparable moral virtues, and his incalculable benefactions to humankind. However, these qualities could be grasped by the individual believer and translated into the requisite emotion only through exposure to knowledge about the Prophet's life and character. This line of reasoning is adumbrated in the Shu'ab al-iman of Ahmad ibn al-Husayn al-Bayhaqi (d. 458 AH/1066 CE) which, although it predates the rise of Sunni *mawlid* ceremonies, nevertheless suggests how the imperative to love the Prophet could justify the devotional recitation of tales about his life and birth.

Al-Bayhaqi's fourteenth "branch of faith" is the love of the Prophet (*hubb al-nabi*). After presenting eleven *hadith* texts illustrating that love of the Prophet is integral to true faith, al-Bayhaqi writes, al-Halimi said:

*The root of this matter is that he ponder the praises (al-mada'ih) of the Messenger of God and his inherent good qualities, then his good deeds on behalf of God's religion and the debt that is owed to him by his community (ma yajibu lahu min al-haqq 'ala ummatihi), both by custom and by divine law. Anyone who comprehends all of this and is of sound mind will realize that [the Prophet] is more worthy of love than a father who is inherently good, kindly, and tender towards his child, and than an inherently satisfactory teacher who devotes himself to teaching and exerts himself in educating. As to how to develop that love herein follows a list of the subjects of study or contemplation that one might use to achieve this level of awareness of the Prophet's lovable qualities; first in the list is "the nobility of his origins and the purity of his birth."*

Al-Bayhaqi remarks that he composed his work *Dala'il al-nubuwa wa-ma'rifat ahwal sahib al-risala min waqt wiladatih ilahal wafatih* ("The Proofs of Prophecy and the Knowledge of the States of the Messenger from the Time of his Birth until the Circumstances of his Death") of reports that serve to elucidate the points set out by al-Halimi. Following these remarks, al-Bayhaqi inserts a section containing traditions

about the Prophet's birth. The material on this subject that he provides for contemplation anticipates to a large extent the content of later *mawlid* works.

*...forgiveness for him and for his community; now I have heard the angels giving each other the glad tidings, and for that reason I rose up and moved." Istihya'il called to her, "Be still and ask forgiveness; Muhammad has been born." So she lay down in the sea and began to glorify God, declare His unicity, and praise the Lord of the Worlds.*

*... Sufis also seem to have played a central role in the development narratives on this subject. Among the earliest figures to whom significant ideas about the Light of Muhammad are plausibly attributed is the Iranian mystic Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283 AH/896 CE). A fourth-century AH/tenth-century CE source transmits from Sahl a report that when God willed to create Muhammad, He brought forth light out of His own light and diffused it throughout His kingdom. When it reached the (veil of) Majesty ('azama), it prostrated itself. God created from its prostration a column of light as dense as glass and as far across as the seven heavens; its interior was visible from its exterior. In it, Muhammad worshiped God for a million years, without a body or a form, but by the nature of faith and insight into the unseen. [This was] before the beginning of creation, which is Adam, by a million years. [God] created Adam from the light of Muhammad; Muhammad's body is from Adam, and Adam's clay is from the column in which Muhammad worshiped his Lord. [God] created Adam from the light of Muhammad; He created the mystical masters (muradun) from the light of Adam, and the mystical seekers (muridun) from the light of the mystical masters.<sup>46</sup>*

*The idea of the pre-existence of the Prophet Muhammad (or of his primordial light) was a controversial one. Perhaps surprisingly, given its early and lasting appeal to Sufis, one of its most vigorous detractors was AbuHamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH/1111 CE). In his *Nafkh al-ruh wa'l-taswiya*, he comments on the hadith in which Muhammad states that **"I am the first of the prophets to be created (khalqan), and the last of them to be sent."** al-Ghazali argues that in this context, the word *khalq* does not, in fact, have its ordinary meaning of "bringing into existence" (*takwin*); rather, it refers to God's determining (*taqrir*) the existence of Muhammad. "Before [the Prophet's] mother gave birth to him," al-Ghazali affirms, "he was not created and did not exist" (*lam yakun makhluqan mawjudan*). Al-Ghazali likens the priority of the Prophet Muhammad in God's plan to the image of a house that pre-exists its construction in the mind of the builder. Although the finished house is the last stage of its physical construction, it is the finished house that is first pre-figured in the imagination of the architect. Muhammad has priority over all other prophets, because of his unique relationship to the ultimate aim of human existence, which is eternal felicity....*

*The earliest occurrence of this narrative in the literary sources appears to be in Kharkushi's *Sharaf al-Mustafa*; it is brief, and is presented anonymously.<sup>92</sup> Early in the development of formal Sunni *mawlid* texts, however, the narrative seems to have crystallized in a very consistent form and become attached to the name of Jabir. The narrative runs as follows: From Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ansari: I asked the Messenger of God about the first thing God created. He said, "It is the light of your Prophet, Jabir. He created it, then created every good thing from it, and after that He created everything [else].<sup>96</sup> When He created it, He made it stand before Him in the station of closeness (*maqam al-qurb*) for twelve thousand years. Then He divided it into four parts; He created the Throne from part, the Footstool from part, the bearers of the Throne from part, and the keepers of the Footstool from part. He made the fourth [part] stand in the station of love for twelve thousand years, then divided it into four parts. He created the cosmos (*al-khalq*) from part, the Tablet from part, and Paradise from part. He made the fourth part stand in the station of fear for twelve thousand years, then divided it into four parts. He created the*

*angels from part, the sun from part, the moon and the stars from part, and made the fourth part stand in the station of hope for twelve thousand years. Then He divided it into four parts. He created the intellect from part, clemency and knowledge from part, infallibility and providence (al-'isma wa'l-tawfiq) from part. He made the fourth part stand in the station of modesty (al-haya') for twelve thousand years. Then He looked at it, and the light exuded sweat. 124,000 drops of light dripped from it, and God created from each drop the soul of a prophet or a messenger. Then the spirits of the prophets breathed (tanafassat), and God created from their breaths the light of the saints, the blessed, the martyrs, and the obedient among the believers until the Day of Resurrection. So the Throne and the Footstool are from my light, the cherubim are from my light, the spiritual ones (al-ruhaniyun) of the angels are from my light, the angels of the seven heavens are from my light, the Garden and the delights it contains are from my light, the sun, moon, and stars are from my light, the intellect, knowledge, and providence are from my light, the spirits of the prophets and the messengers are from my light, and the martyrs and the righteous are from the products of my light.*

*Then God created twelve veils, and made the light – that is, the fourth part – stand in each veil for a thousand years; they are the stations of servanthood (maqamat al-'ubudiya). They are the veils of magnanimity (karama), felicity (sa'ada), awe (hayba), compassion (rahma), kindness (ra'fa), clemency (hilm), knowledge ('ilm), dignity (waqar), serenity (sakina), patience (sabr), truthfulness (sidq), and certainty (yaqin). That light worshiped God in each veil for a thousand years. When the light emerged from the veils, God mounted (rakkaba) it in the earth; it illuminated it from the east to the west like a lamp on a dark night. Then God created Adam in the earth and installed the light in him, in his forehead. Then it was transferred from him to Seth and from him to Enoch, and it continued to be transferred in this way from a pure one to a clean one until God brought it to the loins of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, and from him to the womb of Amina. Then He brought me forth into the world and made me the master of the messengers, the seal of the prophets, a mercy to the worlds, and the leader of those with luminous blazes on their foreheads and extremities (al-ghurr al-muhajjalin). That is the way the creation of your prophet began, O Jabir."97*

**O you people, adore, serve your Lord Who created you, and those who came before you, that you may have the chance to learn righteousness.**

**O my people, serve, worship Allah. You have no other God but Him.**

*Wa Llahu lahu ul-haqqi wa huwa yahdi-s-sabeel.  
Hasbuna Llahu wahdahu wa ni<sup>c</sup>mal-wakeel.  
Wa salli <sup>c</sup>ala sayyidina Muhammadin wa alihi wa sa<sup>h</sup>bihi ajma<sup>c</sup>een  
wal-hamdu li-Llahi Rabbi-l-<sup>c</sup>aalameen.*

Truth belongs to Allah; it is He who shows the way.  
Allah, alone, suffices us, and what a fine Guardian is He!  
Blessings upon our Master Muhammad  
and his family and companions altogether  
and praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

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