293349 - The innovation of tas-heer (waking people for sahoor) and the mu'adhdhin saying "Eat sahoor" or the musahharaati going around the streets to wake people for sahoor

the question

Some mu'adhdhins raise their voices at the time of sahoor and shout over the loudspeakers "As-sahoor, as-sahoor, as-sahoor", repeating the word with the aim of waking people up for sahoor. There are others (called musahharati) who go around in the streets, beating drums and waking people up for sahoor. Some people wait for them to do that so that they can have their sahoor. What is the ruling on these actions? Is there any reward in that?

Detailed answer

Tas-heer means reminding people to have sahoor from the tops of the minarets, by saying "Tasahharu (Eat sahoor)" or "Qoomu li's-sahoor (Get up for sahoor)", or by going around in the streets and singing nasheeds or using drums, and so on. All of that comes under the heading of bid'ah or innovations that have been introduced.

If that involves entertainment and musical instruments, then it is even more sinful and reprehensible, because musical instruments are haraam, and the prohibition on them at times of virtue is even more emphatic, and using them to wake people up to do an act of worship is even worse. This is darkness upon darkness.

Ibn al-Haaji al-Maaliki (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his book al-Madkhil (2/253): The mu'adhdhins should be told not to do the things that they have introduced during the month of Ramadan of tas-heer (reminding people to have sahoor), because that was not done at the time of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and he did not enjoin that, and it was not done by people in the past. All goodness is in following them (the salaf or righteous predecessors), as noted above.

Especially when they get up to remind people of sahoor after midnight, because there is no benefit in sahoor unless a person eats it in order to give himself strength to fast during the day, and that cannot be achieved unless it is done shortly before dawn breaks, as it was narrated in the hadith that Zayd ibn Thaabit said: We ate sahoor with the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), then he got up to pray. I (the narrator) said: How long was there between sahoor and the adhaan? He said: As long as it takes to recite fifty verses.

If a person eats sahoor at this time, then in most cases he will not feel hungry until after Zuhr, and if he gets hungry at that time, then it will not be long until iftar, so this act of worship will become easierfor him. Hence they called sahoor a blessed lunch, because the time of sahoor is close to the time of lunch, yet despite that he will attain the reward of fasting, whilst still having physical energy and having time to pray qiyaam al-layl. That is because if he eats sahoor in the middle of the night, he will become too lazy to pray qiyaam, as the vapour from his food will reach his brain and make him foggy-minded and sleepy. In contrast, if he eats sahoor close to the time of dawn, once he has finished sahoor, he will be busy purifying himself to offer the obligatory prayer, then after finishing the prayer, he will be focused on reciting his wird, then after that he will go about his daily business. Thus he will be able to pray tahajjud at night, and fasting will be easy for him during the day, and he will be in a good state. End quote.

He (may Allah have mercy on him) said: You should understand that there is no basis for tas-heer in Islamic teachings, and for that reason the customs of people in various regions differ in that regard. If it were part of Islamic teaching, their customs would not differ regarding it.

Do you not see that in Egypt, they wake people for sahoor from the mosques by means of the mu'adhdhins saying: "Have sahoor, eat and drink" and other well-known sayings of theirs, and they recite the verse from Soorat al-Baqarah, in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous" [al-Baqarah 2:183] and they repeat that many times, then drink follows that, or so they claim, and they recite the passage from Soorat al-Insaan, in which Allah, may He be exalted, says: "Indeed, the righteous will drink from a cup [of wine] whose mixture is of Kafur… Indeed, it is We who have sent down to you, [O

Muhammad], the Qur'an progressively" [al-Insaan 76:23]. The Holy Qur'an should not be used in innovated ways. And they do other things referred to above, such as reciting qaseedahs (odes) and so on.

They also wake people for sahoor using drums and the like, going around the house and beating on the drums. This is according to their customs and traditions, and all of that comes under the heading of innovation.

The people of Alexandria, the people of Yemen, and some of the people of the Maghreb (North Africa) wake people for sahoor by knocking on people's doors and calling out to them to get up and eat. This is another type of innovation, similar to what is mentioned above.

The people of Syria wake people for sahoor by beating drums, playing flutes, singing, dancing and playing. This is extremely abhorrent, because the month of Ramadan was ordained by the Lawgiver – blessings and peace be upon him – for the purpose of prayer, fasting, reading Qur'an and praying qiyaam, but they responded with the opposite of what they should do of honouring and respecting the month. Verily to Allah we belong and unto Him is our return.

Some of the people of the Maghreb do something akin to what the people of Syria do: when the time for sahoor comes, they beat drums on the minarets, and repeat it seven times, then they play the flutes seven times, or five times, then when they stop, eating becomes haraam at that point, in their view.

What is very strange is what they have of customs and observances in this regard, because they beat drums and play flutes at times of celebration, and they walk through the streets doing that, then when they pass by the door of a mosque they fall silent and tell others to be silent, and they tell one another: Respect the house of Allah, may He be exalted. So they refrain until they have gone past the mosque, then they resume what they were doing. Then when the month of Ramadan begins, which is the month of fasting, praying qiyaam, repentance and turning back to Allah, may He be exalted, giving up every reprehensible action, they pick up the drums and flutes and take them to the top of the minaret in this holy month, and do the opposite of what is mentioned above.

This will show you that tas-heer is undoubtedly an innovation, because if it were narrated (from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)), it would have a well-known format and it would not differ from one land to another, as described above.

So whoever of the Muslims is able to should change this, and that is required in particular of mu'adhdhins and imams, who should change what happens in their regions, if they are able to do that… If they are not able to do that, then they should at least change it in their cities, and if they are not able to do that then in their own mosques.

End quote from al-Madkhil (2/255).

For more information on the prohibition on using musical instruments, please see the answers to questions no. 5000 and 2184.

The prescribed alternative is the first adhaan, that is given before Fajr.

Al-Bukhaari (621) and Muslim (1093) narrated that Ibn Mas'ood (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "No one of you should let the adhaan of Bilaal – or the call of Bilaal – prevent him from eating sahoor. Rather he gives the call to prayer at night, so that the one who is praying qiyaam may rest and the one who is asleep may wake up."

An-Nawawi said in Sharh Muslim (7/204): What this means is: he only gives the adhaan at night so that you may know that dawn is not far off, so that the one who is striving in praying qiyaam may go and rest, so that he can wake up energised, or so that the one who has not yet prayed Witr may do so, or so that one who wants to get ready for Fajr prayer, such as purifying himself, may do so, and other matters that are connected to the approach of dawn.

The words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), "and the one who is asleep may wake up" mean: so that he may also prepare himself for dawn, such as praying tahajjud as much as he wants, or praying Witr if he has not yet done so, or eating sahoor if he wants to fast, or doing ghusl or wudoo', or other things that he may need to do before Fajr. End quote.

This is the Sunnah that is prescribed and is appropriate for this great act of worship, not innovations and invented matters, or playing about.

And Allah knows best.