88102 - Defining a set number of times to send blessings on the Prophet

the question

My question is regarding Sufism. As I mixed with a group of them before I knew their reality. After I heard to Sheikh Munajjid -may Allah bless him- in his series of the Correct Aqeedah (beliefs), I knew some of their extremists' beliefs. I started to doubt them, and I would like to know the truth. All praise be to Allah for the knowledge He blessed you with.

My questions are:
1- This group sends salah and salam upon prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) 3000 or 4000 times a day. They say: "the more you send salah and salam upon the prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the more you love him and the more you become closer to him. And the more you do this, the greater your chance becomes to see him in your dream" is what they are claiming correct? Is it permissible? Is it included in the Zikr (mentioning Allah) generally? Are there any evidences for it?
2- How can we understand the difference between what the prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said about great reward of mentioning Allah a lot like saying Subhan Allah wa behamdih (Exalted be Allah, Allah praise be to Him) hundred times, and the other Hadeeth of Ibn Masood (may Allah be pleased with him) when he entered the mosque and found a group of people counting Zikr by stones. Then he ordered them to count –by doing that innovation- their sins. May Allah reward you!.

Detailed answer

Firstly:

Sending blessings on the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is one of the greatest acts of worship. Allah has enjoined it and praised those who do it, and He has made it a cause of forgiveness of sins and meeting one's needs.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Allah sends His Salah (Graces, Honours, Blessings, Mercy) on the Prophet (Muhammad), and also His angels (ask Allah to bless and forgive him). O you who believe! Send your Salah on (ask Allah to bless) him (Muhammad), and (you should) greet (salute) him with the Islamic way of greeting (salutation, i.e. As-Salamu ‘Alaykum)”

[al-Ahzaab 33:56]

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever sends blessings upon me, Allah will send blessings upon him tenfold.” Narrated by Muslim (384).

It was narrated that Ubayy ibn Ka’b (may Allah be pleased with him) said: When two-thirds of the night had passed, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would say: “O people, remember Allah, remember Allah. The first Trumpet is about to sound, and will soon be followed by the second; death has come with all that it entails, death has come with all that it entails.” Ubayy said: I said: O Messenger of Allah, I send blessings upon you a great deal; how much of my prayer (du`a) should be for you? He said: “Whatever you wish.”

I said: One quarter? He said: “Whatever you wish, and if you do more it is better for you.”

I said: Half? He said: “Whatever you wish, and if you do more it is better for you.”

I said: Two thirds? He said: “Whatever you wish, and if you do more it is better for you.”

I said: Should I make all my du`a for you? He said: “Then your concerns will be taken care of and your sins will be forgiven.” Narrated by al-Tirmidhi (2457); classed as hasan by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Jala’ al-Afhaam (79): Our Shaykh Abu ‘Abbaas (i.e., Ibn Taymiyah) was asked about the meaning of this hadeeth. He said: Ubayy ibn Ka’b had a du`a that he used to say for himself, and he asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) whether he should make one-quarter of it sending blessings on him, and he said … because whoever sends blessings on the Prophet, Allah will send blessings on him tenfold, and if Allah sends blessings on a person He will take care of his concerns and forgive him his sins.

It says in Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi: “how much of my prayer (du`a) should be for you?” means: how much instead of my du`a for myself. This was stated by al-Qaari. Al-Mundhiri said in al-Targheeb: What it means is: I say a lot of du`a; how much of my du`a should I make sending blessings on you? I said: Should I make all my du`a for you? i.e., should I devote all the time that I used to spend in saying du`a for myself to sending blessings on you?

“Then your concerns will be taken care of and your sins will be forgiven” – concerns means everything that a person seeks in this world and in the Hereafter. What it means is: if you spend all the time of du`a in sending blessings on me, you will be given what you hope for in this world and in the Hereafter. End quote.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in al-Radd ‘ala al-Bakri (1/133): This is the ultimate that a person can say in du`a for himself to bring good things and ward off harmful things, for du`a involves attaining what one wants and warding off what one fears.

One of the commentators on al-Masaabeeh said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not impose a set limit on that for him, lest that close the door to doing more. So he still left the choice up to him, whilst encouraging him to do more, until he said: Should I make all my du`a for you? He said: “Then your concerns will be taken care of”, meaning all your concerns, whether they have to do with religious or worldly affairs, because sending blessings on him includes remembering Allah and venerating the Messenger, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), which is similar to saying du`a for himself. Quoted by al-Sakhaawi in al-Qawl al-Badee’ (133).

Al-Tirmidhi (484) narrated from ‘Abd-Allah ibn Mas’ood that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The closest of people to me on the Day of Resurrection will be those who send the most blessings on me.” Classed as hasan by al-Albani in Saheeh al-Targheeb wa’l-Tarheeb.

It says in Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi: “The closest of people to me” means the nearest to me or those who are most entitled to my intercession” because sending a lot of blessings is based on veneration,

which in turn stems from complete love, and that results in Allah loving that person. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): “Say (O Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم to mankind): “If you (really) love Allah, then follow me (i.e. accept Islamic Monotheism, follow the Qur’aan and the Sunnah), Allah will love you and forgive you your sins” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:31].

No one doubts the virtue of sending blessings on the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

The saying of those whom you mention that “the more you send blessings on him the more you love the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the closer you become to him” is correct, for the more one mentions a thing the more he loves it.

Their saying that “the more you send blessings on him the greater your chances become of seeing him in a dream” may also be correct in real terms but there is no evidence to prove that. What really matters is not seeing the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in a dream, but rather following his Sunnah and walking in his footsteps, and giving love of him precedence over oneself and precious things. Many people saw him in real life but they were among the most opposed to him and his way.

If sending blessings on the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is a prescribed act of worship, as stated above, then it is not permissible to stipulate a set number of times for it, because no such number has been narrated in sharee’ah, whether it is one thousand or three thousand or whatever number is fabricated by the Sufis. Stipulating such numbers is blameworthy innovation (bid’ah) because it is adding something to Islam that is not part of it. The scholars have stated that acts of worship must be prescribed in sharee’ah in terms of their principle, description, number, manner, place and time, in the sense that it is not permissible to limit it to a place, time or manner that is not narrated in sharee’ah.

It should be noted that every bid’ah is misguidance, even if people think it is good. Innovation is dearer to Iblees than sin, because there is no repentance from it. Maalik (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Whoever introduces an innovation into Islam and thinks it is good is claiming that Muhammad betrayed the message.

It should be said to those who stipulate sending blessings three thousand times: What made you choose this number, and what is so special about it? Whatever good he mentions about it may be answered by saying: Did the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) fail to guide his ummah to this goodness, when he was the one who cared most for them and was the most compassionate towards them? Why did he not tell Ubayy ibn Ka'b – as in the hadeeth quoted above – about this particular number?

In fact when choosing these numbers, many of the Sufis rely on dreams or mere myths, and they tell their mureeds (followers) that they are not fit to do more than that, and that doing more depends on the permission of the Shaykh who knows what he is doing and even knows his secrets, and other kinds of falsehood by means of which they control their followers.

There is the fear that the good deeds of this innovator may be lost, or that his hasanaat may be lost, and he will not attain anything good from his worship, especially if he does that in spite of the knowledge that he has. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever introduces anything into this matter of ours that is not part of it will have it rejected." Narrated by al-Bukhari (2697) and Muslim (1718).

Hence you see that in many cases, their dhikr has no effect on them and how they interact with others, and they also neglect the adhkaar that are prescribed in sharee'ah and for which the Lawgiver has given a set number, such as saying Subhaan Allah wa bi hamdih (Glory and praise be to Allah) one hundred times, morning and evening.

See also the answer to question no. 11938

Secondly:

The hadeeth of Ibn Mas'ood referred to above is that which was narrated by al-Daarimi (204) from 'Amr ibn Salamah who said: We were sitting at the door of 'Abd-Allah ibn Mas'ood before Fajr prayer, when he came out. We walked with him to the mosque, then Abu Moosa al-Ash'ari came to us and said: Has Abu 'Abd al-Rahmaan come out to you yet? We said: No. So he sat with us until he came out, and when he came out we all stood up. Abu Moosa said to him: O Abu 'Abd al-Rahmaan, just now I saw something in the mosque that I have never seen before, but I do not

think it was anything but good. He said: What was it? He said: If you live, you will see it. He said: In the mosque I saw some people sitting in circles waiting for the prayer. In every circle there was a man, and in their hands they had pebbles. He would say: Say Allahu akbar (Allah is Most Great) one hundred times, and they would say Allahu akbar one hundred times. He would say: Say Laa ilaaha ill-Allah (there is no god but Allah) one hundred times, and they would say Laa ilaaha ill-Allah one hundred times. He would say: Say Subhaan-Allah (Glory be to Allah) one hundred times, and they would say Subhaan-Allah one hundred times. He said: What did you say to them? He said: I did not say anything to them; I was waiting to see what you think and I waited for your command. He said: Why did you not tell them to count their bad deeds and guarantee to them that their good deeds would not be wasted? Then he moved on and we moved on with him until he came to one of those circles, and he stood over them and said: What is this that I see you doing? They said: O Abu 'Abd al-Rahmaan, these are stones with which we count the takbeers ('Allahu akbar'), tahleel ('Laa ilaaha illa-Allah') and tasbeeh ('Subhaan-Allah'). He said: Count your bad deeds, for I guarantee to you that none of your good deeds will be lost. Woe to you, O ummah of Muhammad! How quickly you have become doomed! His companions are still alive and his cloak has not worn out, and his vessel is not yet broken. By the One in Whose hand is my soul, you are either following a way that is more guided that the way of Muhammad or you are opening the door to misguidance. They said: By Allah, O Abu 'Abd al-Rahmaan, we intended nothing but good. He said: How many of those who intended good did not achieve it. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told us that some people would recite the Qur'aan and it would not go any further than their collarbones. By Allah, I do not know, perhaps most of them are from among you. Then he turned away from them and 'Amr ibn Salamah said: I saw most of those circles on the side of the Khawaarij fighting us on the day of al-Nahrawaan.

This does not contradict the reports in the Sunnah that stipulate a set number for some adhkaar, because what is regarded as blameworthy is two things:

Specifying a set number which is not narrated in sharee'ah

Or adhering to a specific manner or a specific time with no evidence, like these people who were denounced by Ibn Mas'ood (may Allah be pleased with him). Using pebbles and having a person who says "Say Allahu akbar one hundred times, and say Subhaan-Allah (Glory be to Allah) one hundred times," describes a manner that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not do.

Al-Shaatibi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Bid'ah (innovation) refers to something that is newly invented in matters of religion that appears similar to that which prescribed, by which people intend to go to extremes in worshipping Allah.

This includes adhering to certain ways and manners of worship, such as reciting dhikr in unison, or taking the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as an Eid, and so on.

It also includes doing certain acts of worship at certain times for which there is no basis in sharee'ah, such as always fasting on the fifteenth of Sha'baan (yawm al-nusf min Sha'baan) and spending that night in prayer.

End quote from al-I'tisaam (1/37-39).

This story of Ibn Mas'ood indicates that what the Sufis do in the hadrahs, where they adhere to a specific number for dhikr, and are directed by their Shaykh, in addition to the fabricated manners such as standing, sitting and the ritualistic movements that they make, is false.

But the matter is more serious than that; the wrong actions are not limited to these innovations, rather they go beyond that and include forms of shirk in belief and action, such as calling upon the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and believing that the awliya' ("saints" or close friends of Allah) and righteous people possess the power to bring benefits or cause harm.

We ask Allah to guide those Muslims who have gone astray, and to help us and you to obey Him and attain His pleasure.

And Allah knows best.