

The Ruling on Prayer Beads

From the Major Scholars

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Question:

What is the ruling on using the *masbahah* (prayer beads)?

Praise be to Allâh

Some scholars say that it is permissible to use the *masbahah*, but they say that it is preferable to do *tasbeeh* on one's fingers; others say that it is *bid'ah* (reprehensible innovation).

Shaykh al-Islâm Ibn Taymiyah said in *al-Fataawa* (22/187): "Some of them might show off by putting their prayer-mats over their shoulders and carrying their *masbahahs* in their hands, making them symbols of religion and prayer. It is known from the *mutawaatir* reports that neither the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allâh be upon him) nor his Companions used these as symbols. They used to recite *tasbeeh* and count on their fingers, as the *hadeeth* says: "*Count on your fingers, for they will be asked, and will be made to speak.*" Some of them may count their *tasbeeh* with pebbles or date stones. Some people say that doing *tasbeeh* with the *masbahah* is *makrooh*, and some allow it, but no one says that *tasbeeh* with the *masbahah* is better than *tasbeeh* with the fingers." Then he (may Allâh have mercy on him) goes on to discuss the issue of showing off with the *masbahah*, saying that it is showing off with regard to something that is not prescribed by Islâm, which is worse than showing off with regard to something that is prescribed.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al-'Uthaymeen (*al-Liqa' al-Maftooh*, 3/30) was asked whether using the *masbahah* for *tasbeeh* is *bid'ah*, and his reply was: "It is better not to do *tasbeeh* with the *masbahah*, but it is not *bid'ah*, because there is a basis for it, which is the fact that some of the Sahaabah did *tasbeeh* with pebbles. But the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allâh be upon him) taught that *tasbeeh* with the fingers is better, as he said, '*Count with the fingertips, for they will be made to speak.*' Doing *tasbeeh* with the *masbahah* is not *haraam* or *bid'ah*, but it is better not to do it, because the one who does *tasbeeh* with the *masbahah* has shunned something better. Using the *masbahah* may also be contaminated with some element of showing off, because we see some people carrying *masbahahs* that contain a thousand beads, as if they are telling people, 'Look at me, I do a thousand *tasbeehs*!' Secondly, those who use the *masbahah* for *tasbeeh* are usually absent-minded and not focused, so you see them doing *tasbeeh* with the beads, but their gaze is wandering all over the place, which indicates that they are not really concentrating. It is better to do *tasbeeh* with one's fingers, preferably using the right hand rather than the left, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allâh be upon him) used to count his *tasbeeh* on his right hand. If a person counts his *tasbeeh* using both hands, there is nothing wrong with that, but it is better to use the right hand only."

Shaykh Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani said in *Al-Silsilat al-Da'eefah* (1/110), where he quotes the (weak) *hadeeth* "*What a good reminder is the subhah [masbahah],*"

"In my view, the meaning of this hadeeth is invalid for a number of reasons:

Firstly, the *subhah* [*masbahah*] is *bid'ah* and was not known at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allâh be upon him). It happened after that, so how could he (peace and blessings of Allâh be upon him) have encouraged his Sahaabah to do something that was unknown to them? The evidence for what I have said is the report narrated by Ibn Waddaah in Al-Bid' wa'l-Nahy 'anhaa from al-Salt ibn Bahraam, who said: 'Ibn Mas'ood passed by a woman who had a [*masbahah*] with which she was making *tasbeeh*, and he broke it and threw it aside, then he passed by a man who was making *tasbeeh* with pebbles, and he kicked him then said, "You think you are better than the Sahaabah, but you are following unjustified *bid'ah*! You think you have more knowledge than the Companions of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allâh be upon him)!" Its *isnaad* is *saheeh* to al-Salt, who is one of the trustworthy (*thiqah*) followers of the Taabi'een.

Secondly, it goes against the guidance of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allâh be upon him). 'Abd-Allâh ibn 'Amr said, *'I saw the Messenger of Allâh (peace and blessings of Allâh be upon him) counting the tasbeeh on his right hand.'*"

He also said (1/117): "If there is only one bad thing about the *masbahah*, which it is that it takes the place of the Sunnah of counting on the fingers, even though all are agreed that counting on the fingers is preferable, then that is bad enough. How rarely I see people counting their *tasbeeh* on their fingers!

Moreover, people have invented so many sophisticated ways of following this *bid'ah*, so you see the followers of one of the [Sufi] *tareeqahs* wearing the *masbahah* around their necks! Or some of them counting with the beads whilst talking or listening to you! Or another one - the like of whom I have not seen for some time - riding his bicycle through a street crowded with people, with the *masbahah* in one of his hands! They are showing the people that they are not distracted from the remembrance of Allâh for even an instant, but in many cases this *bid'ah* is a cause of their neglecting what is obligatory (*wajib*). It has happened many times - to others as well as myself - that when I greet one of these people with salaam, they answer only by waving and not by saying the words of the greeting. The bad results of this *bid'ah* are innumerable, and no one can say it better than the poet:

'All goodness is in following that which went before (the salaf)

All badness is in the innovations of those who came later.'"

And Allâh knows best.