



Welcoming a Newborn: Sunnah Practices and the Importance of a Good Name in Islām

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The birth of a child is truly a moment of great joy and happiness for parents. However, this joy becomes even more meaningful when it is guided by the teachings of Sharī'ah. Many customs and practices exist in society, but not all of them are in accordance with Islām.

A believer is required to follow only those actions that are approved by Sharī'ah and to avoid practices that have no basis in the Qur'ān or the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ. Allāh ﷻ has commanded us to follow His guidance, as well as the example of His Messenger ﷺ and the noble companions (RA). True success lies in adhering to these teachings in all aspects of life, including the birth of a child.

This article will outline the role of parents from the moment of childbirth through to the naming of the child, highlighting a number of authentic sunnah practices established in the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ. Unfortunately, many of these practices are often neglected today, and in some cases even denied or discouraged, despite being part of our Dīn. At a time of such joy and blessing, it is important that we revive and uphold these beautiful sunan.

1. Gratitude and Responsibility at the Time of Birth

When the actions after childbirth are mentioned, the focus is often placed only on certain sunnah practices. However, an even more important aspect is sometimes overlooked, and that is showing gratitude to Allāh ﷻ and being content with His decree.

At the time of birth, parents and family should first thank Allāh ﷻ for this great blessing. The safe arrival of a child is a favour from Allāh ﷻ, and it should be remembered that this child is not something they own, but an amānah placed in their care.

From that moment, a responsibility begins. Parents will be accountable for how they fulfil this trust, not only in providing for the child's physical needs, but also in nurturing their dīn and īmān.

At the same time, parents should show contentment with whatever Allāh ﷻ has decreed, whether it relates to the child's gender or any other condition. Love and care should be shown equally in all cases. Parents should also exercise patience if the child is born with any illness, disability, or physical condition, recognising that such situations are a test from Allāh ﷻ and a means of immense reward. The birth should be shared with happiness and gratitude, and others should congratulate without making any distinction.

This mindset of gratitude, contentment, and responsibility should come first, as it gives real meaning to the sunnah practices that follow.

2. The Adhān in the Newborn's Ear

Among the beautiful practices taught in Islām at the time of a child's birth is the pronouncing of the adhān in the ear of the newborn. This practice is established from the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and has been recognised and upheld by the scholars of this Ummah.

عَنْ عُبَيْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ أَبِي رَافِعٍ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، قَالَ رَأَيْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ أَذَّنَ فِي أُذُنِ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ عَلِيٍّ - حِينَ وَلَدَتْهُ فَاطِمَةُ - بِالصَّلَاةِ

Abū Rāfi' (RA) reports that when Ḥasan (RA), the son of Fāṭimah (RA), was born, he saw the Prophet ﷺ reciting the adhān in his ear. (Sunan Abī Dāwūd: 5105)

The scholars mention that the adhān should be given in the right ear of the child, while the iqāmah may be given in the left ear. Another narration from Ḥusayn (RA) states:

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: "Whoever is blessed with the birth of a child and he gives the adhān in the child's right ear and the iqāmah in the left ear, the child will not be harmed by Umm al-Ṣibyān (evil spirits that affect children)." (Abū Ya'lā in Musnad (6/180), no. 6747; Ibn al-Sunnī in 'Amal al-Yawm wa al-Laylah (p. 220), no. 623; al-Bayhaqī in Shu'ab al-Īmān (6/390), no. 8619; and Ibn 'Adī in al-Kāmil (9/24), from al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī (RA)).

This should be done after the child is cleaned. The baby may be gently held while the adhān is called. It is preferable, though not necessary, to face the qiblah. The adhān should be given in a soft and calm manner, without the need to raise the voice as is done for congregational prayer. If it is delayed for any reason, it may still be carried out later.

According to all four schools of thought, this practice is regarded as sunnah, although there is a narration from Imām Mālik (RA) in which it is described as mustaḥabb. Regardless, this clearly reflects the importance that the four Imams placed on giving the adhān and iqāmah in the ear of a newborn.

In our times, some people claim that this practice has no basis in Islām, while others go to the extreme of labelling it a bid'ah (innovation). However, as is evident from the narrations mentioned and the statements of the scholars, this is a well-established practice that should not be neglected.

There are many wisdoms behind this practice. The first words that reach the ears of the child are words that proclaim the greatness and oneness of Allāh ﷻ. In this way, the child begins life with the message of tawḥīd. Just as a person is encouraged at the time of death to recite لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ, the newborn begins life with these same words of īmān.

The scholars have also mentioned that these words carry spiritual benefit for the child, even if it is not outwardly perceived. The adhān serves as a protection, driving Shayṭān away at a time when he seeks to influence the child from the very beginning. Through this, the child is strengthened upon the natural disposition of Islām.

Ibn al-Qayyim (RA) highlights that this practice reflects the importance Islām places on instilling correct belief from the very start of a person's life. It is not merely a ritual, but a meaningful act that connects the child to faith from the very first moments.

Despite its significance, this sunnah is often neglected today, and in some cases even overlooked. Reviving it is a simple yet powerful way of bringing barakah into the life of the child and ensuring that their journey begins upon the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ.

3. Taḥnīk

Taḥnīk refers to placing a softened piece of date, or something similar, into the mouth of a newborn by gently rubbing it on the palate (roof of the mouth). This is a well-established sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانَ يُؤْتِي بِالصَّبِيِّانِ فَيَبْرِكُ عَلَيْهِمَا وَيَحْنِكُهُمَا

‘Ā’ishah (RA) reported that newborn infants would be brought to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, and he would supplicate for them and perform taḥnīk (rubbing their palates) with dates (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 2147).

Another narration states:

عَنْ أَبِي مُوسَى، قَالَ وَلَدَ لِي غُلَامٌ فَأَتَيْتُ بِهِ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَسَمَّاهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَحَنَنْتُهُ بِتَمْرَةٍ

Abū Mūsā (RA) reported: “A child was born to me, so I brought him to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. He named him Ibrāhīm and performed taḥnīk (rubbing his palate) with dates.” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: 2145)

The practice of taḥnīk is regarded as recommended and from the sunnah. The preferred substance for taḥnīk is a date, and if it is not available, then any natural sweet item may be used.

It is also reported that Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (RA) performed taḥnīk for his child using a date brought from Makkah, reflecting the continued practice of this sunnah among the early generations (Tuḥfat al-Mawdūd).

Taḥnīk should be performed as soon as possible after the child is born and it should not be unnecessarily delayed for days or weeks. It is preferable that taḥnīk be performed by a pious and righteous person, with the hope of attaining barakah for the child and that the child grows upon righteousness (‘Umdat al-Qārī). However, if such a person is not available, the parents or any Muslim may perform it.

4. ‘Aqīqah and Shaving the Head

From the noble sunnah is the practice of ‘aqīqah, which is performed on behalf of the newborn, preferably on the seventh day after birth. It is a means of expressing gratitude to Allāh ﷻ and seeking protection and goodness for the child.

Salman ibn ‘Āmir (RA) reports that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

مَعَ الْغُلَامِ عَقِيقَتُهُ فَأَهْرِيقُوا عَنْهُ دَمًا وَأَمِيطُوا عَنْهُ الْأَدَى

“Along with a boy there is an ‘aqīqah, so shed blood on his behalf, and remove injury from him.” (Sunan Abī Dāwūd: 2839)

It is also established from the sunnah that two animals are sacrificed for a boy and one for a girl. Umm Kurz (RA) reported that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: “For a boy, two sheep, and for a girl, one sheep, and it does not matter whether they are male or female.” (Sunan al-Nasā’ī: 4218)

The meat of the ‘aqīqah may be eaten, shared with family and friends, and distributed to others. ‘Ā’ishah (RA) said regarding the meat of the ‘aqīqah that it should be cut into pieces, then eaten and given to others (Ibn Abī Shaybah). Similarly, the early scholars such as Ibn Sīrīn (RA) and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (RA) treated it like a sacrifice, where some would be eaten and some given to others. (Narrated by al-Bayhaqī in al-Sunan)

Alongside the 'aqīqah, it is from the sunnah to shave the head of the child on the seventh day. Samurah ibn Jundub (RA) reports that the Prophet ﷺ said: "A boy is in pledge for his 'aqīqah; sacrifice is made for him on the seventh day, his head is shaved, and he is given a name" (Sunan Abī Dāwūd). It is preferable to begin shaving from the right side.

After shaving, it is recommended to give charity equal to the weight of the child's hair in silver.

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ عَلِيٍّ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ، عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ، قَالَ: عَقَّ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَنِ الْحَسَنِ بِشَاةٍ وَقَالَ:
يَا فَاطِمَةُ اخْلِقِي رَأْسَهُ وَتَصَدَّقِي بِزَنَةِ شَعْرِهِ فِضَّةً

Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn reports that 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (RA) said: "The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ performed the 'aqīqah for al-Ḥasan with one sheep and said: 'O Fāṭimah, shave his head and give charity equal to the weight of his hair in silver.'" He said: "So it was weighed, and it was the weight of a dirham or slightly less." (Jāmi' at-Tirmidhī: 1519)

The seventh day is also the preferred time for naming the child, bringing together these sunnah acts of 'aqīqah, shaving the head, and naming the child as part of a complete and blessed beginning to the child's life.

5. Khatnah (Circumcision - Boys Only)

From the noble sunnah is the circumcision of a male child. It is from the practices of fiṭrah taught by the Prophet ﷺ, although there is no fixed day or specific age prescribed for it. Rather, it should be carried out at a time when the child is healthy and able to undergo the procedure, and it should be completed before the boy reaches puberty (bāligh age).

الْفِطْرَةُ خَمْسٌ - أَوْ خَمْسٌ مِنَ الْفِطْرَةِ - الْخِتَانُ، وَالِاسْتِحْدَادُ، وَتَقْلِيمُ الْإِبْطِ، وَتَقْلِيمُ الْأَطْفَارِ، وَقَصُّ الشَّارِبِ

Abū Hurayrah (RA) narrates that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: "The fiṭrah consists of five practices: circumcision, shaving the pubic hair, plucking the armpit hair, clipping the nails, and trimming the moustache". (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: 5889)

This highlights that circumcision is not merely a cultural practice, but a well-established aspect of Islām connected to purity and natural disposition. Care should be taken to ensure the child's well-being, and the procedure should be done at an appropriate time when it is safe and manageable.

6. Child Naming

From the important rights of a child in Islām is that they are given a good and meaningful name. The naming of the child may be done immediately after birth, or it may be delayed until the seventh day, as mentioned in some narrations. Both are permissible. An easy way to determine the seventh day is to count the day of birth as the first day. For example, if a child is born on a Monday, then the seventh day will be the following Sunday.

In the days of 'Aqīqah, the term "day" refers to the Islamic (Shar'ī) day, and a Shar'ī day is from true dawn (ṣubḥ ṣādiq) until sunset. Each night is considered part of the following day. Based on this, if a child is born after sunset, then the next day will be counted as the day of the child's birth.

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ emphasised the importance of good names and encouraged the Ummah to choose names with good meanings. He ﷺ said:

إِنَّكُمْ تُدْعَوْنَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ بِأَسْمَائِكُمْ وَأَسْمَاءِ آبَائِكُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا أَسْمَاءَكُمْ

“You will be called on the Day of Qiyāmah by your names and the names of your fathers, so give good names”. (Sunan Abī Dāwūd: 4948)

A good name is not merely a label, but something that carries meaning and identity. It reflects the child’s dīn and may have an influence on their character and upbringing. For this reason, care should be taken to choose names that are pleasing and appropriate.

The Prophet ﷺ also guided us regarding the best types of names. He ﷺ said: “The most beloved names to Allāh are ‘Abdullāh and ‘Abdul Raḥmān” (Sunan Ibn Mājah: 3728). In another narration, he ﷺ encouraged naming children after the Prophets (AS):

تَسَمُّوْا بِأَسْمَاءِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَأَحَبُّ الْأَسْمَاءِ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ وَعَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ وَأَصْدَقُهَا حَارِثُ وَهَمَامٌ وَأَقْبَحُهَا حَرْبٌ وَمُرَّةٌ

“Call yourselves by the names of the Prophets. The names most beloved to Allāh are ‘Abdullāh and ‘Abdul Raḥmān, the most truthful are Ḥārith and Hammām, and the most disliked are Ḥarb and Murrah”. (Sunan Abī Dāwūd: 4950).

At the same time, Islām discourages names that carry bad meanings, are inappropriate, or go against Islamic values and identity. A name should reflect dignity, goodness, and a connection to the faith.

Unfortunately, it has become increasingly common for people to name their children after famous actors, actresses, or personalities who have no connection to Islām, simply because they are seen as “heroes”, or in the pursuit of choosing something “unique” and different. This is deeply concerning and not appropriate for a Muslim.

In light of the aḥādīth of the Prophet ﷺ, it is clear that names should be chosen with care, meaning, and purpose. Yet, many are turning away from this guidance and instead choosing names linked to individuals whose lives may be filled with sin and disobedience. Rather than honouring the names of the Prophets (AS), the companions (RA), and the pious predecessors, preference is being given to those who hold no religious value.

What is even more worrying is that some of these names have no real meaning, while others may even carry negative or inappropriate meanings. Despite this, people overlook these concerns simply because the names are associated with fame.

This is a dangerous trend. A name is part of a child’s identity and carries significance in both this world and the hereafter. We must ensure that we choose names in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ, selecting those that are meaningful, dignified, and connected to our dīn.

Lastly, if the ‘aqīqah is not performed on the seventh day, it may still be carried out later without any dislike. Some scholars have mentioned that if it is missed on the seventh day, the slaughtering may be done on subsequent multiples of seven, such as the fourteenth or twenty-first day.

May Allāh ﷻ enable us to raise such children who become a means of salvation and Ṣadaqah Jāriyah (continuous charity) for us.

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