

Concept of Bidah in Islam

Bid'ah is a word that has been misused so often today, that its definition needs to be explained clearly.

Definition of Bid'ah

Bid'ah, literally means innovation. In special terms it means carrying out actions which displease Allah ta`ala and his messenger.

[Tirmizi chapter II]

Qadi Shawkani writes "In Islam there are two kinds of Bid'ah: Bid'ah Say'iah and Bid'ah Hasana. If a new thing opposes the Qur'an and Sunnah then it is Say'iah, but if it is not against the Shari'ah then it is Hasanah.

(Nayl-ul-Autaar, Qadi Shawkani chapter Salaah Al Taravee).

Imam Nawawi writes that there are certain types of Bid'ah. Two of them are Bid'ah Sayyiah and Bid'ah Hasanah. Bid'ah sayyiah is a Bid'ah that opposes the Qur'an and sunnah and Bidah Hasanah is a Bid'ah that is not against the Qur'an or Sunnah. For example:

To invent the usool (principle) of Hadeeth, usool of Fiqh, usool of Tafsir etc.

[Tahzeeb al Asma wal lughaat word Bid'ah by Imam Nawawi]

Hafidhh ibn Rajjab defines bida to mean new things that have no basis in the Qur'an or Sunnah. If a new practice has evidence from the Qur'an or Sunnah it will not be Bid'ah Shari'ah, but it will be Bid'ah Logaviyya (linguistic).

(Jaami' Al Uloom Al Hukkam page 252 by Hafidhh ibn Rajjab).

Hafidhh Asqalani writes if a new thing is against Islam, it will be bad. If it is not against Islam, it will be hasanah (Good).

(Fathul Bari chap on Taravi by Hafidhh Asqalani).

Hafidhh ibn Taymiyyah writes that bid'ah is always bad, but some scholars say that there are two kinds of bid'ah, that one is good and one is bad. If a new thing has origin in the Qur'an and Sunnah it will be called Bid'ah Logaviyya (verbally) but not Bid'ah in Shari'ah. Only the word bid'ah will be used on the new things. Like, the Qur'an was collected in one book after the Prophet Muhammad [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace], and the congregational Taravi prayer was started in Sayyidna Umar's time but these two things have an origin in the Sunnah. Therefore, it will be called bid'ah verbally.

(Iqtidah al Sirat al Mustaqeem chap on Bid'ah by Hafidhh ibn Taymiyya).

From the above, the conclusion is that if a new thing has been started, and it neither goes against the Qur'an or Sunnah, then it can be declared a 'good' innovation. However, if a new act is initiated against the Qur'an and Sunnah, that will be called bad bid'ah, or a reprehensible innovation.

Definition of BID'AH SAYYIAH

Bid'ah say'iah is a new thing, introduced to and made part of the Deen (Islam) that has no origin what so ever from the Qur'an or the Sunnah of Rasoolallah [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace]

Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim write that there was some companions talking and the Prophet was listening. One of them said: 'I will make prayers (Salaah) all night long.' The second said: 'I will fast (sawm) all the time.' The third said: 'I will never marry.' When our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] heard them say this he said: 'I am the most God conscious of Allah (Ta`ala) than any of you. I pray (Salaah,) I fast (sawm) as well, and I do marry woman too. And who so turns his face from my Sunnah, cannot be of my Ummah'.

[Mishkat Muslim, Bukhari chapter Ihtisam]

The reason why our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] stopped them from doing what they wanted to do was because it was against Sunnah (his way). What ever we do which is against the way of our Prophets [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] Sunnah is a Bid'ah Say'iah.

RasoolAllah [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] stated: "On the Day of Judgement, some people will come to me when I will be standing by Haudh-e-Kauser (Well). They will be grabbed and taken towards the Hellfire. I shall say: "These are my people" but in reply I will be told: "These are the people who introduced innovations after you, so they are unbelievers."

[Bukhari & Muslim, Kitaab-ul-Haudh]

From the above Hadith we learn of the innovations from which we have been warned. Such innovations that make a person Murtad (a non believer.) A few examples of innovations, which cause a person to become Murtad:- A person claiming to be a Prophet, deny giving Zakaat. Perform Haj at a place other than the Ka'ba, or to introduce any other new belief which is in opposition to Qur'an or Ahadith.

A person once sent salaam to Abdullah Ibn Umar radhiAllahu anhu who replied: I do not accept his salaam, as this person has innovated by becoming Qadriyyah (A sect which does not believe in destiny) [Mistake, Kitaab-ul-Iman wa-al-Qadr, transmitted by Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah]

The above narration emphasises the fact that Bid'ah is to hold such an Aqeedah which is in direct opposition to the Qur'an and Sunnah, i.e. to become Qadriyyah, Jabriyya etc.

RasoolAllah [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] stated: "Every innovation leads astray and every creator of the astray goes in the Fire."

[Muslim chapter Al-jumah]

An example of this Bid'ah is given by Hafidhh Ibn Al-Qayyim who writes: 'The one who denies the punishment of the grave is an innovater'.

[Kitaab-ur-Rooh chap10]

PROOF OF BID'AH HASANA

Allah Ta'ala says in the Holy Qur'an:

"And we ordained in the hearts of those who followed him Compassion and Mercy. But the Monasticism which they innovated for themselves which we did not prescribe for them"

Surah Al Hadeed, verse 27"

This verse points out that when something new is invented to please Allah Ta'ala then it is permissible, and Allah Ta'ala gives reward for it. Those who do not fulfil the requirements then Allah Ta'ala will not reward them.

RasoolAllah [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] stated: "The person who introduced a good thing in Islam, shall obtain the reward for it and also the reward for those who adopt it. As for the one who introduces a bad thing (Bid'ah Sayyi ah) he will obtain the punishment for introducing it and also for those who adopt it, will also be punished."

(Sahih Muslim in Kitaab-uz-Zakaat Tirmidhee chapter Eleleven).

This Hadith gives proof of the fact that it is permissible to introduce a good act in Islam, also it gives permission to follow that deed with the intention of reward.

Even our Prophets (Sallallahu'alaihi wa sallams) companions intoduced new things in Islam that the Messenger of Allah himself had not done, and our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace]did not stop them. If by doing something new without the permission of our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace]was Bid'ah then these people would not have done so. Yes it

was important for them to remember that, not to start some thing new which would be against our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] sunnah in any way.

There are many examples, but for the moment we shall highlight two:

Our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] asked Bilal radiAllahu unho "What do you practice that from which you look forward to a lot of reward from Allah Subha Nahu Wata'ala. The reason being I heard your footsteps in Paradise. (junnaah") Bilal radiAllahu unho replaid: "Whenever I do Ablution (Wudhu,) after it I always say a Prayer (Nafil Salaah")

["Bukhari, Kitab Tahajud"]

This new practice that Bilal RadiAllaho unho started by himself was so much accepted by Allah Ta`ala that our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] heard his foot steps in paradise.

Ibn Hajr writes in his commentary to worship at a set time is permissible.

[Fathul bari by Hafidhh Asqalani]

2) In a Masjid in Quba an Imam used to lead congregation prayers in every rakat (cycle) after reciting Surah Al Fatiha and a verse of the Qur'an he also recited Surah Al Ikhlas as well. When our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] asked him: 'Why do you do this? He replied: 'I love reading Surah Al Ikhlas'. Our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] said: 'This love will take you towards paradise'. [Bukhari Kitab as Salaah]

Our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] did not stop either of these two companions, but instead gave them inspiration of the glad tidings they were going to receive.

Imam Bukhari writes Umar [May Allah be pleased with Him] ordered that congregational Taravi prayer should be offered together. When the people started this and Umar saw this he said This is a good bid'ah. [Bukhari Kitab-us Taraweeh]

Umar RadiAllaho unho ordered the people to offer congregational prayers of Taraweeh, and called this "Bid'ah Hasana." From this we can prove two things.

1) After our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] any new thing that was initiated and was not against his sunnah or the Qur'an is called Bid'ah Hasana.

2) To start something new in Islam, which is not already there and does not affect the sunnah then this will be the Sunnah of Umar radiAllahu unho.

This Hadith supports the fact that if a new thing does not oppose the Qur'an or Ahadith then it is a Bid'ah Hasana.

During the Khilafa of Abu Bakr Siddique RadhiAllahu anahu, Umar RadhiAllahu anhu came to Abu Bakr Radiallaho and said: "In the Battle of Yamama many Hufaad of Qur'an have been Martyred. I fear that if the Hufaad continue to die in such battles the Qur'an could disappear. I recommend that you command for the Qur'an to be collected". Abu Bakr RadhiAllahu anhu replied: "How can I do a thing, which was not a practice of (Rasoolallah Sallallahu' alaihi wa sallam)" Umar RadhiAllahu anhu replied: "By Allah this is a good thing." Umar RadhiAllahu anhu mentioned this many times to the Khalifa. Later Abu Bakr RadhiAllahu anhu said: "Allah has opened my heart to the fact that this was not an action of (Rasoolallah Sallallahu' alaihi wa sallam) but this is a good thing". Abu Bakr Radiallahu unhu then told Zaid RadhiAllahu anhu to start collecting the Qur'an who questioned the Khalifa by asking: Abu Bakr Radiallaho Why are you doing something which was not an action of (Rasoolallah Sallallahu' alaihi wa sallam?) Abu Bakr Radiallaho replied: "By Allah this is a very good thing". Zaid RadhiAllahu anhu later said: "Allah Subha Nahu Wata'ala opened my heart to the fact that this was a good thing so I started collecting the Qur'an until it was collected."

(Bukhari in Kitaab Fadhaa il-ul-Qur'an).

The above Hadith goes a long way in proving that the introduction of a good thing (which was not an action of Rasoolallah Sallallahu' alaihi wa sallam) is the Sunnah of the Sahaba RadhiAllahu Ta'ala Ajma'een.

During the time of RasoolAllah Sallallahu' alaihi wa sallam, seven different types of Qir'aat (recitation techniques) were used to recite the Qur'an. But Uthman RadhiAllahu anhu united the people to one type of Qirat. This was a thing not done by the Prophet Sallallahu alaihi wasallam, Abu Bakr nor Umar RadhiAllahu anhum but by Uthman RadhiAllahu anhu.

['Bukhari in Fadhaa il-ul-Qur'an']

Some examples of Bid'ah Hasana.

Punctuation in the Qur'an

Names of Surahs written in the Qur'an

Mihrabs in the Masjid

Minarets of Masjid

Taqleed of the four schools of Fiqh

Fixing congregational prayer times with the clock times

These are all Bid'ah Hasana and have been accepted by the whole of the Ummah.

In the Haramian (Makkah and Madina) they celebrate on the 27th of Ramadan "Lai latul qader", it is not established in Hadith. Is there any set date for Lai latul Qadar or even to congregate for hours on end? To give the Ka'aba a bath twice in a year is not mentioned in the Qur'an.

So why do all these Muslims from the whole world join them in prayer there. In what Hadith does this say that to recite the whole of the Qur'an in Salaah (Taraweh) and finish on the 27th of Ramadan?

In which Hadith does it say that Bukhari is the next book after the Holy Qur'an, or did any of our Prophets [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] companions say this?

In Saudi Arabia they do celebrate their National day. They hang the picture of the King every where even on the Riyals where does this derive from? So then it would be right to say that to assent that Bukhari is the second Highest book (kitab) after the Qur'an is Bid'ah? Usool-Tafsir, Usool-Hadith, Usool-Fiqh, and Asma e Rijal, which companions of our Prophet Salalla ho alhi wasallam started this. So this means that this is also Bid'ah?

Our Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] and his Companions used to call Saudi Arabia "Jaziratul Arab" but the present Government has taken that name out and changed it to Saudi Arabia.

These are some new actions done by the Sihaba and the pious which were not counted as Bidah

Hafidhh Ibn Taimiyyah writes: "Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal would place his hand on the grave of a person who had just died and then supplicate to Allah". He also says: "There were some people from amongst the Salaf who would never narrate a Hadith of (Rasoolallah Sallallahu' alaihi wa sallam) without performing wudhu (ablution)".

[Ibn Taimiyyah in Al-Tawasul page 90]

Hafidhh Ibn Taimiyyah did not refer to the above as innovations even though both acts are not evident from the life of (Rasoolallah Sallallahu alaihi wa sallam,) or the rightly guided Khalifa s. This clearly proves that the Salaf believed that it was permitted to do something which did not oppose the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Messenger (Sallallahu'alaihi wa sallam)

It is in this same book of Hafidhh Ibn Taimiyyah where it mentions many other cases where the Sahaba started things that were not present during the time of (RasoolAllah Sallallahu' alaihi wa sallam)

A few examples of these are:

Abu Hurairah radhiAllahu anhu would do masah (wiping) of his neck during wudhu. Umar radhiAllahu anhu would put water in his eyes and do masah of the ears, Abdullah Ibn Umar radhiAllahu considered it virtuous to walk along the same routes which the Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] used in his lifetime also to stop where the Prophet [May Allah bless Him

and grant Him peace] stopped, and to perform wudhu where (RasoolAllah Sallallahu' alaihi wa sallam) performed it. Abdullah Ibn Umar would also touch with his hands the places where (Rasoolallah Sallallahu'alaihi wa sallam) sat to obtain Baraka (blessings).

[Qaydah Jaleelah page 223 by Hafidhh Ibn Taymiyyah]

All of this is evidence in support of the fact it is permitted to do something not done by the Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] so long as it does not oppose the Sunnah and is intended for reward alone. As this was the practice of the Sahaba radhiAllahu anhum.

The objection, which could arise, is that: 'The Companions had the authority to start something new but we do not.'

Firstly: Not all the things mentioned earlier were started by the Companions.

Secondly, Hafidhh Ibn Taimiyyah writes: "Apart from the Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] no one has the right to introduce anything new to the Deen (Religion) and then call it Sunnah, the Khulafa Rashideen followed the Sunnah, therefore their way is called the way of the Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace]. Wajib is only what Allah has made Wajib and Haraam is only that which Allah and his Messenger has forbidden, the authority of classifying Mustahab (Desirable), Mubaah (permissible), and Makrooh (Disliked), is with the Prophet [May Allah bless Him and grant Him peace] alone. No others have such authority". He continues by saying, "The majority of Scholars do not consider the (above) practice of Abdullah Ibn Umar to be permitted" ["Hafidhh Ibn Taimiyyah]

[Qaydah Jaleelah chap action of Sihabah by Hafidhh Ibn Taymiyyah]

According to Hafidhh Ibn Taymiyyahs statement we can see that the sunnah can only be something that was practised by the Prophet not by anyone else. Some people consider something to be Bid'ah, which was not practised by the Prophet, or His Companions. According to the above statement they cannot say this as the Prophet [May Allah bless him and grant him peace] only had such Authority to do so.

In the following pages we will discuss some of the issues, which are considered as 'Bidah' by some of the Muslims.