

Bida'ah

The highest goal of the Muslim's life is to achieve the pleasure of Allah the Supreme. Such pleasure can not be achieved if we do not comply with His orders. It is impossible for human beings to know how to please Allah(swt) without a [Messenger](#) telling them how to worship Him. Therefore we must comply with the orders of Allah without addition or reduction. However, Muslims have indeed reached the bottom of the intellectual decline, meaning Muslims are extremely ignorant of thier Deen. Consequently, they added and removed things from their Deen, without realising it. Their acts of worship have become polluted with *Bida'as*. It is this term we want to address here.

Linguistically, the word *Bida'ah* means to come up with something that does not have a precedence. The closest word to it in the English language is 'innovation'.

The word *Bida'ah* has been used in many ahadeeth. Some of these ahadeeth forbid us from practicing any *Bida'ah* and warn us against it. The Prophet(saw) said,

"Be warned from innovations" {Ibn Maja}

He(saw) also says,

"Every innovation is Bida'ah and every Bida'ah is a misguidance(Dalalah) and every misguidance is in hell-fire" {Muslim}

Though this hadeeth clearly mentions the word *Bida'ah*, it does not specify the Shariah meaning of this term. The hadeeth that Muslims narrate indicates the meaning of it more clearly. The Prophet(saw) says,

"Every matter that does not have our approval(command) is rejected." {Bukhari}

This hadeeth tells us that any matter, regardless of its notion, must be approved by the shariah. Otherwise it is to be rejected and must not be followed or taken.

However, technically speaking, there are matters that this hadeeth applies to

but not categorised as *Bida'ah*. In other words, it is Haram to perform these actions, but technically they do not fall under the category of *Bida'ah*. In other words, these matters which Islam did not bring are rejected, and Haram to follow but do not fall under the category of *Bida'ah*. Take for example, contracts. Any type of contract that does not meet the conditions the Shariah has specified is an invalid one. Thus, any person involved in such a contract has committed haram, though the action is not *Bida'ah*, it is a haram action. On the other hand, if one wants to pray the Maghrib salah two Raka'at instead of three, then a *Bida'ah* is committed. Notice in the above example that *Bida'ah* occurred in an action that exists already in the Shariah. Also the way to undertake this action is also set and specified for us by the Shariah. In other words, the *Bida'ah* occurs in *Ibadah* (worship). Ash Shatibi states in his book *al-Itisam*, p37

"Bida'ah, then is made up method in the matters of the Deen in order to match the Shariah [method]. The purpose of this innovated method is to accomplish the same as what the Shariah method accomplished."

Therefore, the person who commits Zina, for example, is one that committed haram, but not *Bida'ah*. This is due to the fact that Zina is not part of the Deen to start with and therefore committing such an act would fall under the category of Haram, not the category of *Bida'ah*. Similar is calling for Kufr ideas, such as nationalism, democracy and other ideas of freedoms. They are not *Bida'ah*, but Kufr ideas.

Returning to the example of Zina, what action is there that was done in Zina that has no precedence? And let us ask the same about contracts and other aspects of Islam. But when we look at worships, we find there is a difference. *Ibadah*, such as salah, zakah, jihad, haj etc, are given to us by Allah to indicate a relationship. This relationship is between Allah and His slaves who want to express their gratitude, faithfulness and respect and love. This relationship is one that human beings have nothing to do with. They cannot realise its meaning other than it is a form of worship that their Creator set for them and at the same time have the deep conviction that Allah does not do something or orders to do something that is meaningless. So, it is a relation that humans do not comprehend the being of the other party involved in it, though they comprehend the existence of the third party. This is contrary to all other relations humans have, that being with themselves or with others. No wonder, then that this relationship is a special one that humans must fulfil as it comes to

them without any changes or expansions or creativity. This is not to say that other rules of Islam are subject to change and or/expansions.

Therefore, humans must take this relationship details with submission and follow these details. They must not try to reason with it. Hence we find a rule that specifies the acts of worship as *Tawqifiyah* i.e taken as is. When someone alters these acts of *Ibadah* in any fashion then he/she has committed *Bida'ah*.

At this point we have to understand that the acts of worship are given to us in the Quran and Sunnah. So if an order in the Quran requires us to supplicate to Allah, then we supplicate. Now depending on whether this command is general, specific, restricted or otherwise, we obey it accordingly. For example, Allah in surah Baqarah says in translation,

"And say Mohammed, Supplicate to me, I shall answer your supplication."

In this Ayah Allah orders us to supplicate without telling us the specific wordings, the situation, format, or position for supplication. It is a general statement without any restrictions. So, if people supplicate during bad or good times, individually or in groups standing up or sitting down, using the wording used in the divine texts or different ones, having the hands up or not, is not called *Bida'ah*. However, if the person chooses to raise the hands in dua', due to the many hadiths that the Messenger raised his hands while performing dua' then that person must raise them in the fashion the Prophet did. If he raises them in a different way, that person committed *Bida'ah* for he invented a new method in the Deen. Also, one may not say that it is *Bida'ah* to supplicate after the Salah in a group where the Imam is doing dua' out loud and others are saying Ameen. This is so because such an act is included in the general order of supplication. However, if that dua' is made as part of prayer, then that is an act of *Bida'ah* because it becomes an addition in the Deen, i.e a new method in the Deen.

The point is that we have to stick to the text. If the text is general, then whatever fits under that generality is allowed unless there is a Daleel to specify it.

Another point to keep in mind is that *Bida'ah* is *Bida'ah* which is Haram. There is no good *Bida'ah* or bad one. Those who differentiate between them refer to

the saying of Omar(ra) when he gathered peopole to pray 20 rakah of Taraweeh that it was 'good *Bida'ah*'. The question that arises is did Omar(ra) commit a *Bida'ah* in his doing? Indeed not. The fact of the matter is that the Sahaba, as well as the Ummah were recommended to pray Taraweeh, which is nothing but a nightly prayer. What applies to nightly prater (*Qiyamul Layl*) applies to Taraweeh. In *Qiyamul Layl*, there is not a set number of Rakat that we have to adhere to. Hence, when Omar(ra) asked people to pray 20 Rakah he did not come up with a new way of worship. Rather, he followed the command that existed long before. The other point in this respect is that how could the Sahaba agree on *Bida'ah*? That is impossible. The Sahaba from whom we got the Quran and the Shariah could never agree on an act of disobedience or a *Bida'ah*. As for the statement itself that Omar(ra) uttered, it was said in the linguistical sense, not in the Shariah one.

Muslims must study Islam carefully and accurately in order for them to worship Allah in the manner that pleases Him without falling in the trap of *Bida'ah* for "*every Bida'ah is Dalalah and every Dalalah is in hell-fire.*"