

Celebrating the Birthday of the Prophet and the Concept of Good Bidah

Bismillah Alhamdulillah was salaatu was salamu `alaa Rasoolillah.

Every year there seems to be recurring debates on the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet. My advice regarding this is to not engage in these long debates. In my experience it is better to just give the advice with proof and as for the one who wants to argue that is it correct to participate in such acts, it is for them to present proof of their basis. The Quran and the Sunnah are a done deal and there is nothing we can do to change it or add to it. Doing so would be making up our own religion and furthermore has severe consequences.

In the Quran there is one *Ayah* that is clear that nothing is to be added to our religion:

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

"This Day I have perfected your Deen for you, completed My favors upon you and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" [Surat al-Maidah 5:3]

The Meaning of Bidah

It is very important to understand the *Shari'* meaning of the word **Bidah**, which means to add something to the *Deen* - in the matter of worship (only). And this is what the above *Ayah* is referring to when Allah SWT says "...perfected your Deen for you". Our *Deen* is perfect because every form of worship has been established for us to follow. Cars were not used during the time of the Prophet (sallAllahu alayhi wasallam), so the fact that we build cars and use them to drive to the Masjid now is not considered a *bidah*, because we are not using it as worship. Neither are building schools, compiling books, and the like. But celebrating the Prophet's birthday for instance; praising him on that day and partaking in other rituals on that day IS a form of worship that IS a *bidah*. This act of worship was never done by the Prophet (sallAllahu alayhi wasallam), nor by the Sahaba or Tabi'een, and they loved the Prophet (sallAllahu alayhi wasallam) the most. And we certainly are not better than them to add or make up anything in regards to worship or the religion.

As far as the concept of "good *bidah*" in the *Shariah*, there is no such thing. *Bidah* is *bidah*, and as we know from the hadeeth, "Every innovation is misguidance and going astray" (Abu Dawood, at-Tirmidhee)

In another hadeeth the Prophet (sallAllahu alayhi wasallam) said "...every *dhalalah* (innovation) is misguidance and all misguidance is in the Hellfire." (an-Nasa'ee)

Imam Shafi'ee and Ibn Katheer, may Allah have mercy on them both, viewed *bidah* as categories:

Blameworthy Bidah

- *Bidah say'a*: anything added to the Deen regarding worship (prohibited)

Praiseworthy Bidah

- *Bidah hasanah*: reviving a Sunnah that has been forgotten or neglected (like *Hijama*, giving sadaqah...)
- *Bidah hasanah*: performing an act of worship that was done by the Prophet himself, but not normally done by the people (like staying up hours at a time for *Tahajjud*)

Imam Shafi'ee approved the last category and referred to it as praiseworthy *bidah* but this type of *bidah* is referring to *bidah* in its linguistic meaning, not the *Shar'i* meaning. The *Shar'i* meaning of *bidah* refers to an invented act of worship that has no foundation or basis in the *Sharia* - it was never done before in the Sunnah. This is the blameworthy type. Imam ash-Shaatibee in *Al-I'tisaam* (1/37) defined *bidah* in the *Sharia* as "A newly invented way [beliefs or action] in the religion, in imitation of the *Sharia* (prescribed Law), by which nearness to Allah is sought, [but] not being supported by any authentic proof - neither in its foundations, nor in the manner in which it is performed."

The linguistic meaning of *bidah* refers to an invented act of worship that does have a foundation and basis in the Sunnah that can be referred back to. For instance, Omar (radiy Allahu anhu) gathered the people to pray *Taraweeh* and this not a *bidah* because the Prophet (sallAllahu alayhi wasallam) prayed *Taraweeh* - Omar did not make it up. Also about collecting the *Mushaf* as one book, Allah SWT Himself refers to the Quran as "al-Kitab" (pages put together in between 2 covers), and "The Book" (Al-Quran) already exists in the heavens, it only came down to the Prophet (sallAllahu alayhi wasallam) in parts and stages. Furthermore the Prophet (sallAllahu alayhi wasallam) used to command that the revelation be written down, and there is no difference in separate writings and one collection, but having one collection is better and good as Abu Bakr (radiy Allahu anhu) came to see after his initial contemplation.

We see in this *Ayah* how Allah SWT refers to a "compiled" Quran:

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ

"This is the Book (the Quran), wherein there is no doubt..." [Surat al-Baqarah 2:2]

The point to realize here is that what is referred to as *bidah hasanah*, are not *bidah* at all if referring to the *Shar'i* definition of *bidah*, (they are acts that are already from the Sunnah) and the term *Dhalalah* in the hadith "every *dhalalah* is misguidance" refers to the *Shar'i* definition of *bidah*.

Allah SWT knows best.

Dr. Ibrahim Dremali