

Innovation (Bid'ah)

http://www.muftisays.com/blog/Seifeddine-M/1540_12-05-2011/innovation-%28bid%27ah%29.html

“Whoever innovates something reprehensible in this matter of ours that does not belong to it is rejected.” (Bukhari, Muslim)

"In this matter" i.e. religion - Islam. Defining "innovation," Qadi Iyad writes, "Whoever innovates an opinion in Islam that does not have any manifest (zahir) or obscure (khafi) or clear derived substantiation from the Qur'an and Sunna, then it is rejected."

Islam was preferred as a religion, and anyone who attempts to bring into it an unsubstantiated idea has undertaken a disliked practice - disliked because of the implication that Islam is incomplete or defective, and hence has need for some innovation. As for the words "that does not belong to it," they indicate that innovating something that is in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunna (i.e. "which belongs to it") cannot be considered reprehensible. Imam Shafi'i said, "Any innovation that violates the Qur'an or Sunna or a statement [of the Companion - athar] or the consensus (ijma') [of Muslim scholars] is a deviance. And whatever good that has been innovated and does not contravene any of the above is not reprehensible" (Mirqat al-mafatih 1:366, 368).

Thus, according to Islamic law, bid'a is any new way in worship that is done with the intention of attaining more reward, but not proven from the words or the actions - explicit or tacit - of the Messenger (salawaatullahi wasalaamu alaih) or the four caliphs, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali (radiallahu anhum), in spite of them having had the ability to do so (Shatibi, Al-I'tisam).

The Messenger of Allah strongly warned his Umma against innovating something into Islam saying, *"When a people innovate something new into their religion, a sunna to that amount is lifted from them. Hence, holding fast to a sunna is superior to introducing a new innovation* (Ahmad).

This is why extreme caution is required in the issue of bid'a. When there is doubt about whether or not something is a reprehensible innovation, it is superior to leave the action. Ibn 'Abidin, the great Syrian jurist, writes, *"When there is confusion between the ruling of something being a sunna or bid'a, it is preferable that one abandon the [possible] sunna than enact the [possible] innovation"* (Radd al-muthar 1:431)

New methods invented to fulfill human needs have nothing to do with bid'a, because they are not introduced as an act of worship or with the intention of earning reward. Hence, they are permissible as long as they do not violate any command of the Shari'a.

It also can be understood from the above explanation of bid'a that many things were not needed in the time of Allah's Messenger, but were established later to achieve a religious objective, cannot be included in the realm of bid'a (in the legal sense) either, [even though they may be considered bid'a in the literal sense, i.e., "an innovation" or "something new." Many times the later is intended when referencing a certain matter to be a good or bad bid'a, since every action legally considered a bid'a

can only be reprehensible].

Some innovations that do not violate the Qur'an or the Sunna include the establishment of of madrasas with their organized curricula and classrooms and centers and institutions for spreading Islam (da'wa). Also included among these commendable innovations is the codification of sciences like Arabic grammar, syntax, etymology, rhetoric, and literature to better understand and interpret the Qur'an and hadith; the study of philosophy [or other relevant subjects] to repudiate heretical groups; and the use of certain modern weapons for the defense of Muslims.

Examples of [legally] reprehensible innovation include [unnecessary] decoration of masjids or the custom of shaking hands after the prayers. Mulla 'Ali al-Qari writes, "*Some of our scholars [i.e. the Hanafi scholars] have explicitly mentioned that it [shaking hands after prayer] is disliked, and for this reason it is from among the reprehensible innovations* (Mirqat al-mafatih 1:368, see also Radd al-muthar 5:244). [A] Conversely, one must also be cautious of ignorantly labeling something, which may be recommended or permissible, as a bid'a, since that is also detrimental to the faith.

[Excerpt from, Provisions for the Seekers with commentary by Mufti Abdur-Rahman Ibn Yusuf]