

Bid`ah (innovation in the religion) classified into five categories?

Article taken and slightly adapted from: alifta.net

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

Question: Imaam an-Nawawee (*May Allaah the Most High have mercy on him*) in his commentary on the subject of Bid`ah (innovation in the religion) classified it into five categories: First: Waajib (obligatory) innovation, such as the proofs devised by Mutakallims (scholars searching for answers to creedal issues using logic) to refute atheistic arguments. Second: Mandub (commendable) innovation, such as composing books. Third: Mu`bah (permissible) innovation, such as enjoying certain varieties of food. Fourth: Haraam (forbidden) innovation. Fifth: Makrooh (disliked) innovation. These last two categories are clear. How is this classification to be understood in light of the Prophet's (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*) statement, **Every Bid`ah leads to misguidance**¹? Please, clarify the meaning of Shaykh an-Nawawee's words. May Allaah bless you.

Shaykh Bin Baaz (*May Allaah the Most High have mercy on him*): This classification that you quoted from an-Nawawee's classification of Bid`ah into five categories has been approved by a group of scholars, who said that Bid`ah can be classified as; Waajib, Mandub, Mu`bah, Haraam, and Makrooh. Other scholars are of the view that all forms of Bid`ah are misguidance. They do not approve of any classification of Bid`ah and quote the Prophet's (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*) statement in this regard:

"Every Bid`ah leads to misguidance."

This is what the authentic Hadeeths of Allaah's Messenger (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*) convey and what Muslim narrated on the authority of Jaabir ibn `Abdullah al-Ansaaree (*May Allaah the Most High be pleased with them both*) who said, "The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*) used to say in the Friday sermon,

And then, the best of speech is embodied in the Book of Allaah, and the best of guidance is the guidance given by Muhammad. And the most evil of matters are their innovations and every Bid`ah is a misguidance.²

¹ Aboo Daawood and Ibn Maajah

² Saheeh Muslim, an-Nisaa'ee, Aboo Daawood, Ibn Maajah, Musnad Ahmad, ad-Daarimee

Bid`ah (innovation in the religion) classified into five categories?

This meaning has been reiterated in several Hadeeths related from `Aaishah³ (*May Allaah the Most High be pleased with her*), Al-`Irbaad ibn Saariyah (*May Allaah the Most High be pleased with him*), and others.

This is the sound opinion, which disregard such classifications of Bid`ah set by an-Nawawee and other scholars. Thus, all kinds of Bid`ah are forms of misguidance. Moreover, Bid`ah is confined to matters of the religion, not to worldly permissible things. For example, types of food that were unknown at the time of the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*) are not regarded as Bid`ah according to Sharee`ah (Islamic law) even if it is linguistically included in the meaning of Bid`ah. Linguistically speaking, Bid`ah signifies an unprecedented thing. Allaah (*Exalted be He*) describes Himself,

[The Originator of the heavens and the earth.]⁴

I.e. He created heaven and earth without any previous example. The term 'Bid`ah' applies to any invented matter in Islaam that has no basis in the Qur'aan and Sunnah. This is the correct view accepted and affirmed by a group of scholars, who refuted the arguments of the advocates of the above classification.

As for the act of composing books and producing evidence to refute the atheists and enemies of Islaam, this is not Bid`ah. It is ordained by Allaah and His Messenger (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*). The Glorious Qur'aan and the Sunnah provide profound statements that refute the enemies of Islaam. From the time of the Sahaabah (Companions (*May Allaah the Most High be pleased with them*)) until now, Muslims have answered their enemies using what has been explained in the Book of Allaah and the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allaah (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*) and presented various proofs. According to Sharee`ah, this act is not seen as Bid`ah, but it is a duty and a form of struggle in the cause of Allaah. This also applies to building schools, bridges, and other useful facilities for Muslims. Indeed, Sharee`ah enjoins upon us to seek knowledge and such institutions help achieve this goal. This also applies to endowments dedicated to the poor as Sharee`ah orders us to be kind to the needy. Building homes and bridges for people is a form of doing good and obedience to Allaah. These are lawful acts, not Bid`ah. Although they are innovations in a linguistic sense, they are not so in the legal sense of the word. In this context `Umar (ibn al-Khattaab - (*May Allaah the Most High be pleased with him*)) gathered people to perform Salaat-ul-Taraaweeh (special supererogatory night Prayer in Ramadhaan) every night behind one Imaam (after they had been praying it in small groups led by different Imaams) and then commented, "How good is this innovation!" He meant Bid`ah in its linguistic sense, not its legal meaning. Taraaweeh is a confirmed Sunnah that was performed and encouraged by the Prophet (*May the peace and*

³ Umm-al-Mumineen `Aaishah, the Mother of The Believers (*May Allaah the Most High be pleased with her*)

⁴ سورة البقرة – Soorah al-Baqarah [2:117]

Bid`ah (innovation in the religion) classified into five categories?

blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him). It is not a Bid`ah but an act of confirmed Sunnah.

However, `Umar (*May Allaah the Most High be pleased with him*) called it an innovation in the sense that it was performed in an unprecedented manner. At the time of the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*), people in the Masjid (mosque) would spread out in groups. Two men would pray behind an Imaam, while others would pray in small groups. Additionally, the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*) led them for three nights then abandoned this practice, saying,

"I fear that the optional night prayer might be made compulsory upon you."⁵

So, he abandoned it, lest it would become obligatory upon Muslims. Thus, when the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*) died, `Umar (*May Allaah the Most High be pleased with him*) commanded them to observe it.

To conclude, the night prayer during Ramadhaan is a confirmed Sunnah, not a Bid`ah in the legal sense. Thus, it is known that anything innovated in Islaam, not ordained by Allaah is Bid`ah and a misguidance. This is totally unacceptable.

⁵ Saheeh al-Bukhaaree, Saheeh Muslim, Aboo Daawood, Imaam Maalik's al-Muwattaa