

Ilm Essentials

Purification of the Heart

Lesson 9

Understanding Bidah

Of-Quoted Narration

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- “Beware of matters newly begun
 - ▣ For every matter newly begun is an innovation
 - Every innovation is a misguidance
 - And every misguidance is in the Fire” (Muslim)
- Outward purport is that any new matter is innovation
 - ▣ Would include microwaves, airplanes, paper currency, internet, etc.
 - Logically, the hadīth does not apply to literally everything
 - This is confirmed by the scholars of the past
- Usage of the word “every” also confirms this

Understanding “Every”

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- Sometimes “every” can be absolute
 - ▣ “Every soul will taste death” (Quran 21:35)
- Sometimes it can be restricted
 - ▣ “Every son of Ādam is a profuse sinner” (Tirmidhī)
- “A man can have nothing, except what he strives for” (Quran 53:39)
 - ▣ Yet man can benefit from the duā and intercession of others, the janāzah salāh and sadaqah given on his behalf, etc.
- “But when they forgot what they had been reminded of, We opened up to them the doors of everything” (Quran 6:44)
 - ▣ Yet the doors of mercy were not opened

Defining Terms

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- ❑ Necessary to define terms based on the scholars of that science
 - ▣ And not merely linguistically
- ❑ Otherwise we can say salāh means duā
 - ▣ Sunnah means custom, etc.
 - What is the common understanding of “daīf”
 - Because people use it literally
- ❑ This is why most traditional texts begin by defining a term both linguistically and technically before speaking about it
 - ▣ Similar to what we have been doing

Duality of Meaning

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- Linguistically, bidah does not have a negative connotation
 - ▣ Since Allah Most High himself is Al-Badī'
 - Umar said, “What an excellent bidah this is!”
- Pre-Islāmic Arabs often used the term negatively
 - ▣ For example calling the Prophet’s (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) condemnation of shirk a bidah
 - Allah Most High revealed, “Say: I am not a new one among the messengers” (Quran 46:9)
- Clearly used by the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) in a negative connotation in the hadīth

Duality of Meaning

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- Similar to the term sunnah
 - ▣ Generally used with a positive connotation
 - But can also be negative
- “Whoever establishes a good sunnah (sunnah hasanah) in Islām that is followed in practice afterward, will have recorded a reward equal to the reward of anyone who practices it, without any of their rewards being at all diminished
 - ▣ Whoever establishes an evil sunnah (sunnah sayyi’ah) in Islām that is followed in practice afterward, will have recorded against him a burden equal to the burden of anyone who practices it, without any of their burdens being at all lessened” (Muslim)

Sahābah and Literal Bidah #1

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- Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) said “Bilāl, tell me which of your acts in Islām you are most hopeful about, for I have heard the footfall of your sandals in Paradise”
- ▣ He replied “I have done nothing I am more hopeful about than the fact that I do not perform ablution at any time of the night or day without praying with that ablution whatever has been destined for me to pray” (Bukhāri and Muslim)

Sahābah and Literal Bidah #1

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- Salient points
 - ▣ Bilāl was regularly doing something “innovated” in regard to worship
 - Was extremely hopeful about this innovated act
 - Was not chastised for doing something “wrong”
 - ▣ Before this act was confirmed through the sunnah, it had already landed Bilāl in Jannah
- Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī says in Fath al-Bārī that this hadīth shows permissibility to use personal reasoning (ijtihād) in choosing times for acts of worship
 - ▣ Since Bilāl reached the conclusions he mentioned by his own inference, and the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) confirmed him therein

Sahābah and Literal Bidah #2

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- “When we were praying behind the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) and he raised his head from bowing and said, ‘Allah hears whoever praises Him’
 - ▣ A man behind him said, ‘Our Lord, Yours is the praise, abundantly, wholesomely, and blessedly therein’
 - When he rose to leave, the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) asked ‘who said it’
 - ▣ When the man replied that it was he, the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) said, ‘I saw thirty-odd angels each striving to be the one to write it’” (Bukhāri and Muslim)

Sahābah and Literal Bidah #2

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- Salient points
 - ▣ Narration is about the mandatory salāh
 - Which is not only an act of worship, but arguably the most important form of worship
 - Previous example was about nafl worship
 - ▣ Shows that the sahābah felt like they had leeway to do things not taught by the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam)
 - And to make them publicly known
- Ibn Hajar says in Fath al-Bārī that this hadīth indicates the permissibility of initiating new expressions of dhikr in the prayer other than the ones related through hadīth texts
 - ▣ As long as they do not contradict those conveyed by the hadīth

Sahābah and Literal Bidah #3

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- Aishah narrates that the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) dispatched a man at the head of a military expedition who recited the Quran for his companions at prayer, finishing each recital with al-Ikhlās
- ▣ When they returned, they mentioned this to the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) who told them, “Ask him why he does this”
 - And when they asked him the man replied, “because it describes the All-merciful, and I love to recite it”
 - The Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) said to them, “Tell him Allah loves him” (Bukhāri)

Sahābah and Literal Bidah #3

13

□ Salient points

- Narration is again about the mandatory salāh
 - Not sunnah to do this, which is why it is not considered mustahabb, yet it is acceptable, and even a means of salvation for the one who did it
 - Highlights the idea that after sunnah is not bidah, rather there is an intermediate category
 - Also the answer to “But why do it if the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) never did”
- Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) did not say it was a bidah
 - Confirmed the act as permissible and even virtuous
 - Illustrates his sunnah regarding acceptance of forms of obedience and acts of worship
- For acts which clearly do not contradict the sharīah
 - Necessary to ask the person their intention
- Scholars infer from it that every act for which there is evidence in sharīah and which does not oppose an unequivocal primary text or entail harmful consequences is not included in the category of reprehensible bidah
 - But rather is “of the sunnah”
 - Even if there should exist something whose performance is superior to it

Sahābah and Literal Bidah #4

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- Abdullāh ibn Umar narrates that a saḥābī came late to ṣalāh
 - ▣ Upon arriving to the row he started his prayer with the following words, “Allāhu akbaru kabīran wa ‘l-hamdulillāhi kathīran wa subhān Allāhi bukratan wa asīlā”
- The Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam), after completing the prayer, asked the people who had said this
 - ▣ The saḥābī said, “Oh Rasūlullāh! I did not intend by it other than good!”
 - The Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) said, “I saw the gates of heaven open because of those words”
 - ▣ Ibn Umar added, “I never ceased saying these words since hearing the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) say that” (Ahmad, Muslim and Tirmidhī)

Sahābah and Literal Bidah #4

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□ Salient points

▣ In a fard salāh

- But also having to do with a fard act of the salāh

▣ Still not all the sahābah then rushed to try and “innovate” adhkār and other acts

- Shows they had some nuanced understanding of sunnah and bidah

- And what is permissible and what is preferable

Sahābah and Literal Bidah #5

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- Umar entered the masjid and saw the different groups praying
 - ▣ He gathered them together
 - Ubayy ibn Ka'b said that this has never been done
 - Umar replied “ni'mati 'l-bidatu hādhihī” (Bukhārī)
- Example from after the passing of the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam)

Other Accepted Bidah

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- ❑ Compiling the Quran
 - ❑ Unifying on one mushaf
 - Adding the dots and vowels to the letters
- ❑ Tarāwīh in congregation
- ❑ Two adhān for jum'ah
- ❑ Translating the Quran
 - ❑ Buying and selling Qurans
 - Color-coded Qurans
- ❑ Bathrooms in the house
- ❑ Long duā in witr
- ❑ Having lines to straighten the rows
- ❑ Khutbah in other than Arabic
- ❑ Classifying hadīth

Understanding Bidah

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- ❑ Clearly taking the approach that bidah is “anything not done by the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam)” will not work
 - ❑ “Whoever invents something in this matter of ours that is not a part of it, will have it rejected” (Bukhāri)
- ❑ Rather we can understand that whatever is attested to by the sharīah as being good is acknowledged as good (inferable sunnah)
 - ❑ And whatever is attested to by the sharīah as being a contravention and bad is rejected as a blameworthy innovation (bidah)
- ❑ Establishes the idea of bidah hasanah and sayyi’ah
 - ❑ Some broke down bidah into five categories

Understanding Bidah

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- “There are two types of bidah: the praiseworthy and the blameworthy
 - ▣ Whatever is in accordance with the sunnah is praiseworthy and whatever vies with it is blameworthy
 - A new matter that contradicts the Quran, the sunnah, ijmā of the scholars or the sayings of the early generations (āthār) is a misleading innovation
 - ▣ And whatever is invented that is good and does not contradict any of these then it is a matter that is not blameworthy” (Imām ash-Shāfi’ī)
- Based on this understanding we can counter-oppose sunnah and bidah
 - ▣ With the former being those things in harmony with the way of the sunnah and the early generations
 - And bidah being those things done in a manner that contradicts the Prophetic teachings

Understanding Bidah

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- But if you take a linguistic definition of bidah
 - ▣ Need to understand that between sunnah and bidah lies the entire category of nawāfil
 - Indicated by “My servant draws near to Me with nothing more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him, and My servant keeps drawing nearer to Me with voluntary works until I love him...” (Bukhāri)
- Explains why the early generations would fast every day, pray all night, finish the Quran daily and perform other worship that we don't find in the sunnah

Bidah Is a Matter of Sharīah

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- Who gets to decide what is and isn't a bidah
 - ▣ Bidah is a matter of fiqh
- Some room for different opinions
 - ▣ “Bidah...refers to something which did not exist and was then invented. And, in most cases, innovations conflict with Divine Law by implying a need for human additions or deletions
 - Even an invented practice which did not contradict the sharīah or imply any change was disliked by the majority of early scholars
 - They used to avoid any innovation, even though some types were allowable
 - ▣ It is thus clear that the early generation of Muslims cautiously avoided all innovations which even had the remotest connection to the religion for fear of changing the religion to the slightest degree
 - However, there were some new practices which did not contradict the sharīah or change it; these practices were allowed (Imām Abd ‘r-Rahmān Ibn al-Jawzī)

General and Specific Acts

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- There are certain acts of worship which the sharīah has declared recommended or highly encouraged, but without specifying a particular procedure or method for it
 - ▣ Rewards have been promised but the actual method of implementation has not been prescribed
 - For example giving sadaqah or sending salawāt
 - ▣ The method has been left to the convenience of the people
- If a permissible act is performed without deeming it necessary for everyone to perform, then it is not an innovation
 - ▣ It becomes an innovation, however, if it is regarded as a sunnah, when it is not
 - Or binding on all the Muslims, such that those who do not perform it are considered blameworthy
 - Or if a particular method is fixed or considered superior to other methods

Summary

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- Bidah is an innovation in the dīn which did not exist in the time of the saḥābah and tābi'īn and is not in conformity with the principles of the sharīah
 - ▣ Will only apply to those things which have no basis in the sharīah
 - As understood by the traditional scholars
 - ▣ The way of the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) was to accept new acts initiated in Islām that were of the good and did not conflict with established principles of sharīah, and to reject things that were otherwise
 - New matters in Islām may not be rejected merely because they did not exist in the first century
 - Must be evaluated and judged according to the comprehensive methodology of sharīah
 - ▣ Certain matters which are permissible, or recommended, can become bidah based on a person's intention or understanding of that act
 - ▣ Permissible to specify acts of worship for oneself, which are not specified by the sunnah (i.e. 30 rakāh every day or a certain type of worship on the 15th of Sha'bān)
 - But to then generalize that specific way for others would make it a bidah

Questions and Discussion

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