

The differences between Bid'ah (Innovation) and Maslaha Al Mursalah (That which is of public benefit)

With the example of the Celebration of the Prophet's birthday.

الحمد لله رب العالمين و العاقبة للمتقين و لا عدوان إلا على الظالمين و أصلي و أسلم على عبده و رسوله محمد و على اله و صحبه و سلم.

All praise is due for Allah ta'ala for his favours that are obvious and hidden. From the greatest favours he has given to mankind is that he has send a Messenger to show them the straight path, the path which the Prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous have proceeded upon from beneficial knowledge and righteous deeds.

My dear brothers and sisters, beneficial knowledge is supposed to be the basis of all righteous deeds as it is upon the Muslim to speak and act based upon what the Messenger ﷺ brought to us. Any action of worship that is not based upon such criteria is rejected. The **Messenger of Allah ﷺ** said:

”من عمل عملاً ليس عليه أمرنا فهو رد“

“Whoever does an action that is not from our actions it is rejected.” [Bukhari and Muslim]

Al Allamah Muhammad Ibn Saalih Al 'Uthaimeen said:

“And from this Hadeeth there are benefits: **That the one who has innovated in this matter-meaning: Islam- that which is not from it, it (the action he/she innovated) is rejected, even if such a person has a good intention.**” [An Nawawi, Al Uthaimeen: 32]

Such innovations do not refer to innovations in technology such as microphones, cell-phones, cars etc. Rather these innovations, which are called *bid'ah*, refer to actions of worship which the Prophet ﷺ and his companions (رضي الله عنهم) did not do. Hence a *bid'ah*, as **Imam Ash Shatibi** defined it in his book *Al 'Itisaam* is:

“***Bid'ah* is an innovated way in the religion which resembles the *Sharee'ah* (legislation) wanting by it that which the legislation intends.**” [Shatibi: 24]

This shows us that in most cases innovation is done in order to either achieve specific or general goals of the Sharee'ah. Also, in most cases, it is done in order to gain closeness to Almighty Allah. **Shaikh Ul Islam Ibn Taymeeyah** said:

“And the point, and Allah knows best, is to say that **the people don’t innovate anything (in the religion) except that they see it as something beneficial because if they thought it was an evil they would not have innovated it...**” [Hilali:96]

This is indeed true of the many deviant sects that existed in the past and are present today. The Khawarij such as ISIS slaughter Muslims and excommunicate them in the name of establishing a state based upon the Sharee’ah. The Raafidah Shee’ah curse most of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ in the name of respecting the Prophet’s household. There are many other examples that could be mentioned but this is not the treatise to mention them in.

The focal point of this issue is that acts of worship, however good the intentions of those who perform them may be, do not coincide with that which the Prophet ﷺ came with from this noble and complete religion. Therefore, such acts must be condemned as they are additions from mankind to that which Allah has already perfected. Allah said in Surah Maidah:

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

“This day I have completed your religion and have completed my favours upon you and am pleased with Islaam as a religion” [5:3]

Therefore, it is upon the Muslim to know that Allah’s religion neither requires any additions nor subtractions in order for it to be complete. Rather, Islam is complete and encompasses every area of our lives from purification to prayer and from business transactions to festivals. Hence I conclude this section with the statement of Imam Malik Ibn Anas¹ who said: “Whatever was not religion at that time is not religion today.”

¹ The Imam of Madeenah in Fiqh and Hadeeth at his time. He died in the year 180 after the Hijrah.

Section: The difference between Maslahah Al Mursalah And Bid'ah.

As for *Maslahah Al Mursalah* (that which is of public benefit) it has similarities with innovation because both occurred after the death of the Messenger ﷺ and both have no specific evidence for them. [Al Jaizani: 33] However, there are primary differences between that which is a *Bid'ah* and that which is a *Maslahah Al Mursalah* of which two shall be mentioned:

1. A *Bid'ah* is that which is either is **included with an existing form of worship or is an entirely new form of worship**. As for the *Maslahah Al Mursalah*, **it exists in order to facilitate an established and pre-existing act of worship**. Hence, with a *Bid'ah*, the aim is to perform a specific act which has no legislative evidence whereas the *Maslahah Al Mursalah* is a means to assist an act of worship established by legislation.

2. A *Maslahah Al Mursalah* didn't occur during Prophethood because either **the requirements from such an action weren't met to necessitate it or there was something to prevent it from occurring when the Prophet ﷺ was alive**. As for a *Bid'ah*, it didn't occur because the Prophet ﷺ simply left it off although its occurrence was possible and there was nothing preventing such an actions from occurring. [Al Jaizani:35]

Shaikh Ul Islaam Ibn Taymeeyah said:

“Whatever he people see as beneficial one must look at as to why it is needed:

If the reason is that a new situation occurred after (the death of) the Prophet ﷺ without any negligence² from him, in that case it would be lawful to innovate something **wherein there is a need for it**.

Likewise, **if the requirements of his action were established during the time of the Prophet ﷺ but he abandoned it because of a reason that ceased when he died**.³

However, as for that which was not innovated because of a need, or that the reason for that need was because of the sins of some of the servants of Allah. Then in that case it is unlawful

² In order words he didn't leave off any action of good that could have served Islam and the Muslims.

³ For example, he abandoned praying the Taraweeh prayer in Ramadaan in congregation fearing that the people would have made it compulsory. However, when he died the fear of it becoming compulsory ceased and therefore 'Umar Ibn Khattab (رضي الله عنه) gathered the people to pray behind one Imam.

to innovate. **Therefore, every matter wherein the requirements were present during the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ even if it is seen as beneficial but he didn't do it, it is known that there is no such benefit (in that action).**" [Hilali: 96]

Therefore, although both *Bid'ah* and *Maslahah Al Mursalah* were both done after the death of the Prophet ﷺ the aforementioned points regarding the differences between the both are important in distinguishing between that which is a *Bid'ah* and that which is not. These points are of major significance as they prevent the Muslim from calling a *Bid'ah* a *Maslahah* and a *Maslahah* a *Bid'ah*.

Section: Is celebrating the Prophet's Birthday a Maslahah Al Mursalah or a Bid'ah?

Now that the principles have been clarified for the esteemed reader it is appropriate that an example be utilized to bring further clarification to that which was written. From the many examples that could have been chosen, the Celebration of the Prophet's Birthday is quite appropriate as there are those who claim that one can celebrate the Prophet's Birthday⁴, to gain love and respect for the Prophet ﷺ thereby fulfilling a legislative aim that brings about public benefit (*Maslahah Al Mursalah*). And the refutation of such speech comes in several angles:

1. Celebrations in Islam are from its legislation just as how the Qibla, the prayer and fasting are from its legislation. [Ibn Taymeeyah 1:471] **These celebrations are done in order to come closer to Allah ta'ala, to glorify and exalt him and to thank him with what he has blessed us with from guidance, wealth and sustenance.** Hence, to bring about a new celebration other than that of the two Eids needs to be established in the legislation. Additionally, if the aims of such celebrations is that which was aforementioned in this paragraph then how can a celebration be established wherein the fulfilment of such aims are either not paramount or non-existent?

2. The first celebrations of the *Mawlid* (the Prophet's birthday) took place about five centuries after the Prophet ﷺ died. Furthermore, it was invented by the *Fatimids* who were from the most astray of sects called the *Baatinee Shee'ah* and with the *Mawlid* they celebrated the birthday of 'Ali, Faatimah, Hussein and other than them from the people of the household. Hence, those who initiated this "*Maslahah*" were not even scholars of *Ahlus Sunnah* but rather enemies of *Ahlus Sunnah*.

3. **The aim of those who celebrate the *Mawlid* is to commemorate and honour him on that particular day** (12th Rabee' Ul Awwal). Otherwise, the legislative aims of loving the Prophet ﷺ and honouring him can be met at any other time of the year by reading his Seerah and most importantly practicing and teaching his Sunnah. Likewise, as aforementioned, most Muslims who participate in acts of innovation do it in order to achieve a legislative goal. Hence, **there is no difference between those who celebrate the *Mawlid* quietly by reading the Seerah**

⁴ Provided that there are no oppositions to the legislation.

and those who celebrate it otherwise in terms of their intent. Al Allamah Muhammad Ibn Saalih Al ‘Uthaimen said:

“And it is of no doubt that **those who celebrate the Prophet’s birthday want by it to exalt the Messenger ﷺ and to show their love to him and to re-ignite their aspirations in order for them to obtain feelings (of love for Islaam) in this celebration for the Prophet ﷺ all of this is from worship. Loving the Messenger ﷺ is from worship.** Rather, one’s Imaan is not complete until the Messenger ﷺ becomes more loved toward a person than himself, his children, his parents and all of mankind. *And respecting the Messenger ﷺ is from worship, and likewise having feelings toward the Messenger ﷺ is from the religion also because its consequence is that a person leans toward the legislation.* Therefore, *celebrating the Prophet’s birthday ﷺ in order to come closer to Allah and respecting his Messenger ﷺ is from worship.* Therefore, if it is worship it is unlawful to innovate within the religion that which is not from it. Hence, celebrating the Prophet’s birthday is innovation and unlawful.” [Fatawa Uthaimen: 2:299]

4. The *Mawlid* is an unlegislated act of worship, that which has no evidence from the Qur’an and Sunnah. As for putting together the Qur’an or adding vowels to it these are means toward a legislated and established form of worship which is reading the Qur’an.⁵ **Al Allamah Ibn Uthaimen** said:

“And an example of this is that they say that from the good *Bid’ah* is putting together the *Mushaf*, and writing *Hadeeth* and building schools for students of knowledge etc. We say to them that these are not *Bid’ah*, it is good without doubt but it is not *Bid’ah*. This is a means to a legislative aim. We did not innovate an act of worship from ourselves but rather we were ordered with something and we saw that the closest means of achieving (that legislative aim) was that action therefore we did it. And there is a difference between the means and the aim, because all the examples that they say are good (*Bid’ah*) fall under that category meaning that they are a means toward legislative aims.” [Uthaimen 311-312]

5. There was nothing that prevented the Celebration of the *Mawlid* during the Prophet’s time although the requirements for establishing such an act were present. However, it was neither

⁵ It is certainly a travesty when one can make an analogy between a means of preservation for the book of Allah with the celebration of the Mawlid. May Allah help us.

done by him nor the best, most pious and closest people to him on the face of the earth at that time. And there is a famous principle that says that the basis of worship is prevention until there is legislative evidence. **Shaikh Ul Islam Ibn Taymeeyah** said:

“The pious predecessors didn’t do it (the *Mawlid*) although the requirements for it were established and there was nothing that prevented it, and if it was something that was good then the *Salaf Us Salih* were more deserved of doing such good because they had the most love and respect toward the Messenger ﷺ ...” [Al Ansari:49]

Likewise, according to the scholars, when the Prophet ﷺ leaves off an act of worship with nothing to prevent such an act, his abandonment of that act is seen as *Sunnah*.⁶[Hilali: 97] In other words, from the Prophetic Sunnah is those acts of worship that he never performed, and since he never performed them we as Muslims should not engage in performing them either.

6. Those scholars who held the opinion that the celebration of the *Mawlid* was lawful, once it didn’t contain evils which opposed the *Sharee’ah*, had the opinion that it was a *Bid’ah Hasanah* (Good Bid’ah) and not from the *Masalih Al Mursalah*. Shaikh ‘Abdul ‘Azeez Ibn Baaz said:

“(Some of the later scholars) made it (the celebration of the *Mawlid*) lawful once it did not contain any evils such as extremism regarding the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, free-mixing between men and women, the use of musical instruments and other than that which the pure legislation renders as evil and they see this as *Bid’ah Hasanah*...” [Ibn Baaz: 107]

Secondly, **Ibn Hajar Al ‘Asqalani mentioned in his verdict regarding the celebration of the *Mawlid* that it is an innovation which none of the Salaf did, However, he said that its celebration, once it didn’t contain evils which opposed the *Sharee’ah*, was lawful and is considered a *Bid’ah Hasanah* (good innovation).** [Al Ansari:80]

It is known to many that there is no such thing as a good *Bid’ah* as the Prophet ﷺ said that all innovation is misguidance. And the word all (كل) refers to everything in its generality. Therefore, to separate innovation in acts of worship into good innovation, bad innovation and according to the five rulings of the *Sharee’ah*⁷ has no basis whatsoever.

⁶ This is called Sunnah Tarkeyyah by the scholars.

⁷ Waajib (an order), Haraam (unlawful), Mustahab (liked), Makrooh (disliked) and Mubaah (lawful)

Additionally, taking into account that Ibn Hajar and other scholars who made it lawful mentioned that the *Mawlid* was a good innovation, the argument of it being a *Maslahah Al Mursalah* does not enter the spectrum. Rather, the focal point of the argument regarding the permissibility or impermissibility of the *Mawlid* is as to whether or not there is such a thing called a *Bid'ah Hasanah*.

7. That the statement: “The ends justify the means,” is not from the principles which the Muslims abide by. Although the goal of the *Mawlid* is to gain and express love for Allah and his Messenger (صلى الله عليه و سلم) the means used to obtain that goal is an innovated act of worship⁸ which has no basis in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Rather, from the principles of Islam is the statement: “The means take the ruling of its aims,” meaning that the aims of the *Sharee'ah* must be met by legislative means. Therefore, one cannot justify stealing and extorting wealth from the rich in order to give *Zakaat*. Although the *Zakaat* is compulsory the means by which it was obtained was unlawful and hence the ruling on giving *Zakaat* in such a manner is that it is unlawful.

With the issue of innovation, the matter is even more dangerous as the person who does an innovation perceives that he is doing an action that is encouraged by the legislation. For this reason, many of the *Salaf* have clarified that *Bid'ah* is worse than sins as sins are known to be wrong and the sinner may repent. However, innovation has with it doubtful matters which may make one who is partaking in it defend it and stubbornly hold onto its practice thinking that he/she is doing an act that is pleasing to Allah. Therefore, in retrospect, if we look at the books of the *Salaf* we would find severe warnings against the people of innovation, their books, their gatherings and their speech.

⁸ It is an innovated act of worship according to the scholars who see it as unlawful as well as those who make it lawful.

Conclusion and advice.

Without doubt, bearing in mind the differences between *Bid'ah* and *Maslahah Al Mursalah* it can be definitely said that the celebration of the *Mawlid* is indeed a *Bid'ah*. It was initiated five centuries after the Prophet ﷺ via the enemies of *Ahlus Sunnah*. Likewise, although the requirements to do such an act of worship were present it was not done by the best of nations to walk the face of the earth and if it were good they would have preceded us in that matter.

Likewise, I advise brothers who are writing regarding this issue to desist from delving into such detailed arguments and terminologies without the required legislative knowledge as it is a major sin to do so. Additionally, when an opinion comes from a scholar it doesn't necessitate that it is a valid opinion. There are many scholars who made mistakes and had unusual opinions; of them are those who said that music, masturbation and wine which was not made out of grapes were all lawful. But although these opinions came from our great scholars it doesn't mean that they are to be enacted upon. Imam Adh Dhahabi said in his biography of Qatadah who died in the year 117 after the Hijrah:

“Then verily from the major Imams of knowledge if they have many correct opinions, and it is known that he goes toward the truth, and has wide knowledge, and his intelligence is apparent, and his righteousness and his abstinence (from the world) and his following of the Sunnah (is apparent) his mistake is forgiven... ***and we do not follow him in his innovation and mistake and we hope that he has repented from this.***” [Bakr Abu Zaid: 82]

Lastly I ask Allah to guide and protect us from all evil which are apparent and hidden and to aid Islam and the Muslims.

و صلى الله عليه نبينا محمد و على اله و صحبه و سلم

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