

# Innovation in Islam (part 2 of 2): Is this a bidah?

**Description:** A continuation of the ways to recognise a *bidah* action or belief, a short list of common *bidahs* and the words of the scholars concerning oea good *bidah*".

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## Objectives:

- To be able to recognise a *bidah*.
- To know some common *bidahs* and be able to add to the list.
- To know the opinion of some respected scholars.

## Arabic Terms:

- *Deen* - the way of life based on Islamic revelation; the sum total of a Muslim's faith and practice. *Deen* is often used to mean faith, or the religion of Islam.
- Eid - festival or celebration. Muslims celebrate two major religious holidays, known as *Eid-ul-Fitr* (which takes place after *Ramadan*) and *Eid-ul-Adha* (which occurs at the time of the *Hajj*).
- *Eid ul-Adha* - oeFeast of the Sacrifice".
- *Hajj* - A pilgrimage to Mecca where the pilgrim performs a set of rituals. The *Hajj* is one of the five pillars of Islam, which every adult Muslim must undertake at least once in their life if they can afford it and are physically able.
- *Itikaf* - the practice of secluding oneself in the mosque with the intention of becoming closer to Allah.
- *Ramadan* - The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is the month in which the obligatory fasting has been prescribed.
- *Shaban* - the name of the 8th month of the Islamic lunar calendar.
- *Shirk* " a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.

- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.

## How do we know if an act of worship is really an act of *bidah*?

### 3. Quantity of worship:

Another way to recognize the difference between a *Sunnah* and a *bidah* is based on the quantity of worship. If a person decided to pray five *rakahs* of prayer for the *Dhuhr* prayer this would be a *bidah*. We know that this prayer consists of four *rakahs*; this is what is legislated and to introduce an extra unit of prayer would be considered an innovation, a *bidah*.



### 4. Manner of performance of worship:

Another way of distinguishing between something that originates in the Quran and the *Sunnah* and an innovation is to look at the manner of performance. That is, how do we perform the act of worship, is it in accordance with what the *deen* of Islam teaches, or have we overstepped the boundaries and added something to a religion that has already been perfected. An example of this is making ablution before prayer in an incorrect order, such as beginning with washing the feet instead of finishing with this.

### 5. Time of worship:

The time we perform an act of worship is also important. If a worship is performed according to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and the specified time, then it does indeed please our Creator. However if a person takes it upon himself to change the specified time then that person has fallen into the sin of *bidah*. For example, sacrificing sheep in the month of *Ramadan* with the intention of seeking a reward similar to the reward for sacrificing on *Eid ul-Adha* then this would be considered an innovation.

### 6. Place of worship:

The place in which the act of worship is performed should also be in accordance with what has been legislated. If, for example a person was to make *itikaf* in his home this would not be acceptable. The place for *itikaf* is the mosque, thus performing it in any other place would be considered a *bidah*.

## A list of common innovations

- Seeking help from the occupants of the grave. This *bidah* is of particular importance because it also encompasses *shirk*, the greatest sin in Islam.

- Sitting in groups and saying words of remembrance of Allah, such as Allahu Akbar, in unison.
- Taking the birthday of the Prophet as an *Eid*.
- Fasting on the fifteenth of the Islamic month of *Shaban* and spending that night in prayer.
- Celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him.
- Reciting Quran to benefit the deceased (this includes hiring people to recite Quran).
- Wiping over the back of the neck when making ablution.
- The family of the deceased preparing food for others who visit.

## What is a good *bidah*?

On occasions you might hear of something called a ‘good *bidah*’. According to Sheikh Ibn Uthaymeen, may Allah have mercy on him, “... there is no such thing in Islam (in the religious sense) as a good *bidah*.”<sup>[1]</sup> The sheikh also emphasised that “...with regard to ordinary matters of habit and custom, these are not called *bidah* (innovation) in Islam, even though they may be described as such in linguistic terms. But they are not innovations in the religious sense, and these are not the things that the Prophet was warning us against”. In addition to this noted Islamic scholar Imam Ibn Rajab<sup>[2]</sup> said, “Any words from our righteous predecessors considering something as a good *bidah* were meant in a linguistic sense and not the Islamic sense”.

In conclusion *bidah* is a newly invented belief or action in the *deen* of Islam by which closeness to Allah is sought but it is not supported by any authentic proof either in its foundations or in the manner in which it is performed.<sup>[3]</sup>

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Endnotes:

<sup>[1]</sup> Majmoo’ Fataawa Ibn ‘Uthaymeen, vol. 2, p. 291

<sup>[2]</sup> Ibn Rajab is a noted Islamic scholar of the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, proficient across many Islamic sciences including *tafsir*, *hadith* and *fiqh*.

<sup>[3]</sup> This definition is adapted from *Innovation in Light of the Perfection of the Shariah* by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Salih al-Uthaymeen.

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