

Bid‘ah

Imam A. M. Khattab

B*id‘ah* – this is an overused word and it behooves us to know what is bid‘ah, and what is not. Translated into English, the word means “invention”, or “a habit”, or “adding to religion something which is not part of it”.

There are four sources to turn to in learning and understanding Islam. The first source is the Qur’an, the second source is the hadith, the third source is the *qiyas* or analogy, and the fourth source is the consensus of the Muslim scholars. Of course, the Qur’an is the first source and when it solves our problem, we need not look into any other source.

The hadith is not as powerful or authoritative as the Qur’an. The word *hadith* means the “utterances” of the Prophet. The term “sunnah” includes both the utterances (hadith) as well as the actions of the Prophet. Sunnah can be subdivided into:

- 1) *Sunnah Qawliya*, which is something uttered by the Prophet.
- 2) *Sunnah Al- Fi ‘liyya* which is something *done* by the Prophet – his actions.
- 3) *Sunnah Taqriyya* which means that the Prophet found the Muslims, or the people in general, doing a certain thing at the time when he received the message of Islam, and he did not forbid it. It means that he approved or condoned it and that is called *Sunnah Taqriyya*.

This source of Islam, namely the hadith, is a very complex source. Even the ulama,¹ sometimes, don’t dare talk about hadith. What I am saying now is something I have said before: hadith as a source of Islam is a very thorny subject. Some of our people here,² when they hear me talking about hadith with which they have some disagreements, consider themselves like a captive audience with no right to talk, or ask a question, or argue with me. This is not true, and I would like anyone here who disagrees with something I am saying, whether in the matter of hadith or any other topic, to come and take my place here at the podium to give his or her views. Maybe we will all learn something we don’t know.

Hadith is a very, very difficult topic even for Muslim scholars who have studied theology all their life. Sometimes, I myself dare not quote hadith because I cannot assure its authenticity. Quite a lot of hadith have been added to the generally accepted body of hadith even in our present time. That is why I consider this topic so sensitive. Therefore, I am extending an invitation to anyone who is more knowledgeable in this field to take my place and enlighten us with his or her views in this field. I may benefit myself because I am still a student. I don’t claim that I know everything, and I would like

¹ Scholars

² Referring to some members of the audience

to learn more. And especially when it comes to hadith I would like to see someone who is very well versed in that area to come to the podium and talk to us about hadith, and help us distinguish between those that are authentic and those that are not.

Hadith have been compiled in books by Bukhari and Muslim, and these are considered to be the most authoritative books of hadith. But, I have read them and I have come across ahadith which do not make sense to me, personally, and I believe that the Prophet would never have said them. So, if someone can argue that point, and feels that he or she can benefit the public, I welcome that person to talk to us about the hadith of the Prophet, to analyze them, and to tell us which is right and which is wrong, which is acceptable and which is not. I say this because I know that there are some people who feel that I insult the hadith of the Prophet. But I don't consider every hadith related to, or attributed to the Prophet to be authentic, and that is why I say I would like to learn more.

The term "bid'ah" means "inserted in". Whenever someone does something different than the norm in the practice of religion, some others will declare the practice to be bid'ah and, as a result, among Muslims, that word has come to connote something bad. Bid'ah can be divided into two kinds. There is *bid'ah hasana*³ and *bid'ah sayyiah*.⁴ The Prophet, peace be upon him, said in this respect: "Anyone who makes a good bid'ah, or establishes a good habit, he will be rewarded for it, and he will have part of the reward of those who act upon it, till the Day of Judgment. And if anyone makes a bad bid'ah, or establishes a bad habit, he will be punished for it and he will have a part of the punishment of those who follow his footsteps, till the Day of Judgment." This hadith need not be interpreted literally, but it could mean that the Prophet is trying to make it very difficult for people to insert things for which they have no foundation.

If we look at the history of the earlier Muslims, we find that they limited bid'ah to practices of religion, not to the ornaments of life, or items that can benefit us in life. What Islam is concerned with is bid'ah which may lead to a change of belief. The definition of "nasaara",⁵ according to Islam, is one who says *La ilaha Illallah al-Maseeh Rasoolullah*.⁶ That

statement is called the *kalima* in the Urdu language. There is a kalima for the Jews; there is a kalima for the Christians, and there is a kalima for the Muslims. For the Jews: *La ilaha Illallah Musa Rasoolullah*.⁷ For the Christians it is *La ilaha Illallah al-Maseeh Rasoolullah*, and for the Muslims it is *La ilaha Illallah Muhammad-ur Rasoolullah*.⁸ That is the kalima in the three monotheistic religions and, as Muslims, we recognize that to be the definition of these three religions. But what is going on nowadays?

Bid'ah has crept in. An invention in the religion has taken place, at some time or the other, because the Christians say, "Jesus is the Son of God", and the Jews say, "Uzair⁹ is the Son of God." Islam, and the Qur'an, refute that, and considers this a type of bid'ah. And this is an example of an invention or bid'ah in religion that is prohibited in Islam. The "bid'ah" of having electricity in your house has nothing to do with religion. The "bid'ah" of driving a car has nothing to do with religion; these are things related to the advancement and progress in life, and to building up new civilizations. As a result, the labeling of anything of that sort as "bid'ah" has nothing to do with halal¹⁰ or haram.¹¹ In fact, it is encouraged in Islam to use such "bid'ahs" to advance oneself.

What is happening nowadays among the Muslims? In some areas of the Muslim world, people are following the lead of Christianity and Judaism in what we call *awliyāt-ul Allah*. That is something going on everywhere nowadays. For example, there are some people in Egypt who, when they go to Hajj, consider that their Hajj is not complete unless they visit a certain grave. That grave is the grave of a man whose name was As-Sayyed Badawi, in the city of Tanta, in Egypt. What about those people who performed Hajj before As-Sayyed Badawi was born? The same is happening in India. I have known people returning from Hajj who then visit the grave of Khawaja Mohiyuddin Chisti, in the belief that, unless they visit that grave, their Hajj is incomplete.

If you visit the grave of Imam Shafi'i in Egypt, you will find people writing their complaints or requests on a piece of paper and throwing it over the fence surrounding his grave.

prophet"

⁷ "There is no god but one God, and Musa (Moses) is His prophet"

⁸ "There is no god but one God, and Muhammad is His prophet"

⁹ Ezra

¹⁰ That which is permitted or allowed

¹¹ That which is forbidden or sinful

³ Good bid'ah

⁴ Bad bid'ah

⁵ In Arabic the word "nasaara" means "supporter of Jesus"

⁶ "There is no god but one God, and Maseeh (Jesus) is His

The paper is like an application and they are asking Imam Shafi'i to do those things for them. That is an invention in religion which sometimes will lead to *kufri*¹² or *shirk*, and is the type of bid'ah prohibited in Islam. Similar practices are going on everywhere among Muslims. Maybe we could say the people are ignorant and they don't know – they have that excuse. But it should be clarified to them, and when you attempt to do so, you get in trouble with them. When I was a student in high school, I used to get to the *mimbar* in the Jum'ah¹³ prayer and speak on a topic of that sort. Half of the congregation in the mosque would be in an adversarial mood because the people had inherited such practices from their fathers and forefathers.

You know, we have until now, even in Toledo, people who have *Mawlood Shareef* or reciting the *mawlid* of the Prophet.¹⁴ That *mawlid* is an invention – bid'ah. There is nothing in Islam which says that the Prophet *ever* celebrated his birthday. There is nothing in Islam which says that AbuBakr, or Omar, or 'Usman, or Ali celebrated the birthday of the Prophet. But we do it now. If it is a matter of remembering the Prophet [on his birthday] and we take advantage of that occasion by talking about him, and trying to follow in his footsteps, then it is good. But we don't do that. Instead, we gather to chant descriptions of the Prophet from very old books printed during the time of British imperialism. These descriptions are about the height of the Prophet, his rosy cheeks, and golden moustache, and all that. Who has seen him to describe him that way – if he was tall or short, or this, or that? The only description we find in the Qur'an is a description of his high moral character. The Qur'an says very clearly: "You are a man of high morals."¹⁵ But the Qur'an did not describe his physical body. The Qur'an, not even the hadith – there is no hadith which says that, when the Prophet was born, his umbilical cord was cut by the angels. Yet, they read that nonsense in what they call *mawlid*. And these stories are passed on from one generation to the next. That is bid'ah.

Look at Christianity. We have to learn a lesson from it. In the 1960s, it was prohibited for the Catholics to eat meat

on Fridays, so they ate fish. The Pope in Rome issued a decree, in the 1960s, legitimizing consumption of meat on Fridays. So, from our Muslim viewpoint, we ask: was that prohibition to eat meat on Fridays originally an order of God, or an order of somebody else? If it was the order of God, then God alone could change it. A provincial law cannot cancel a federal law; the higher authority cancels the lower authority. So, has the Pope the power to cancel an order of God? No. Something similar happened three days ago. If anyone has been following the news, you have learned that the Pope has issued a new decree.¹⁶ It used to be said, according to the Christians, that only the Christians are saved because Jesus died for their sake. As of 72 hours ago, the Muslims and the Jews are included too – they are saved also. That is a new decree issued by the Pope three days ago. How will the Pope save us if we are thieves, or killers – how will he save us? That is an invention. That is bid'ah. That's an illustration of inserting something in religion which is not part of it. The Qur'an is very clear: "No one will bear the sins of the other."

Sometimes we read stories in some Muslim books about *shafa'ah*. *Shafa'ah* means "intercession". These books relate that, on the Day of Judgment, the people will go to Moses and ask him for *shafa'ah* and he will say, "I cannot do that; go to somebody else." They will go to Jesus and Jesus will say, "No, no. It is not my business. Go to someone else." They go to Ibrahim and Ibrahim will say, "No, no, no, no, I cannot do that job." Then they will go to Muhammad, and Muhammad will say, "I am the intercessor and I am the one who will forgive your sins." *That is nonsense*; it is not in Islam because this is completely against the principle of the Qur'an which says that no one will take with him anything except what he had offered.¹⁷ Muhammad will not be of benefit for you, Jesus will not be of benefit for you, Moses will not be of benefit for you. Only your actions and your deeds in this life will be of benefit to you. So when you read such books written by Muslims, just discard them. Throw them away. Our number one source is the Qur'an. Anything which is in conflict with the Qur'an, get rid of it: that is a general rule in Islam. When the Qur'an prohibits something, no one can legitimize it, and when the

¹² See sermon on *Shirk and Explanation of Related Terms* (#2)

¹³ Friday. *Mimbar* is the platform where the imam stands to deliver the sermon.

¹⁴ A celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad by singing some songs

¹⁵ 68:4

¹⁶ Issued by Pope John Paul in the year 1994

¹⁷ 53:39. Elaborated by the hadith: "Actions will be judged only according to the conscious intentions which prompted them; and unto everyone will be accounted only what he consciously intended."

Qur'an makes something legitimate, no one can prohibit it, because God is the highest authority and if He issues a law, no power on earth can change that law, otherwise it will fall in the area of bid'ah.

Another bid'ah is a change in the form of worshipping. We know that there is nothing in the Qur'an which describes the prayer for us. All the Qur'an says is: *aqemus-salah* (establish the prayer). But the Qur'an does not describe what form the prayer should take. Here the action of the Prophet and the hadith clarify for us how we should perform our prayers. The Prophet said: "Pray as you have seen me pray." So whatever the Prophet had done, we follow his footsteps and this is called prayer.

The term *prayer* in English is a general term and it could mean "words of supplication uttered in any language". "Uttering words of supplication in any language" is called *du'a* in Arabic. On the other hand, the term "prayer" could be used in English to mean the "salah" which, according to Islamic jurisprudence, is strictly defined and consists of fixed rituals of standing up, bowing, prostrating, sitting, and so on, and reciting the "prayer" in Arabic. As a result, when we talk to Christian people and we mention the word "prayer" they think that our prayer is like theirs. If we change the form of our prayer (salah) from what the Prophet did, then it would be considered bid'ah or inserting something which is not part of the religion.

Is the form of the prayer in Christianity, nowadays, the same as that prayed by Jesus, or, is the current practice a new invention? Did Jesus have an organ or piano in his house of worship? There was no such thing as an organ or piano at that time. This means that what they have nowadays is bid'ah. It is an invention in the religion. As we understand it, in the Qur'an, there was a form of prayer imposed upon Jesus. Even in his infancy – while he was in the cradle – Jesus said, as the Qur'an tells us, "I am the slave of God. He gave me the Book, and made me a prophet. He made me blessed wherever I am. He recommended me to *establish prayer* and to pay the poor due as long as I live." So a form of prayer was imposed upon Jesus. What is the form of the prayer, practiced by the followers of Jesus, in the churches, nowadays? Songs and hymns. And when Jimmy Swaggart or Copeland says something that the people like, they applaud and even that is supposed to be a part of their prayer.

You know, here we are not in prayer.¹⁸ In this room, we are not in prayer. We are giving a lecture, we can joke, and we can laugh. When we move there, we are in prayer.¹⁹ You have to behave yourself. Your behavior there will be completely different from what it is here. But, in the church, you are in prayer while the hymns and songs, the organ, and the music are going on. And when the priest is giving the talk, and the congregation likes something he said, the people applaud it. This is a change in the form of prayer, and that is called bid'ah. And the Qur'an refers to a people who used to do similar actions in the Ka'bah at some point in time: "Their prayer at the house of God was no more than whistling and clapping of hands."²⁰

Another bid'ah takes the form of legitimizing what God prohibited, or prohibiting what God has made legitimate. With regard to meat, what is legitimate and what is prohibited? Can we eat the meat of a donkey? Can we eat dog meat? Can we eat the meat of the bear or the lion? There is a Qur'anic verse [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"And they say, 'such-and-such cattle and fruits of the field are sacred; none may eat thereof save those whom we will to do so' – so they falsely claim; and they declare that it is forbidden to burden the backs of certain kinds of cattle and there are cattle over which they do not pronounce God's name—falsely attributing the origin of these customs to Him. But He will requite them for all their false imagery. And they say, 'All that is in the wombs of such-and-such cattle is reserved for our males and forbidden to our women; but if it be stillborn, then both may have their share thereof.' God will requite them for all that they falsely attribute to Him: behold, He is wise, all-knowing" [6:138-139].

We claim that we eat halal meat from Detroit. Everyone of us here knows that whenever we want to buy halal meat, we go to the slaughterhouse in downtown Detroit, at the Eastern Market, and get halal meat. I say to you there is no such halal meat because all the "halal" meat there is slaughtered by the Jews. The Jews don't eat the hind of the cow. It is prohibited for them. So they eat the front and sell the hind to the Muslims, whereas everybody is led to believe that those animals are slaughtered by Muslims. And if you

¹⁸ While sitting in the sermon room and listening to his sermon

¹⁹ Imam is pointing to the prayer room under the dome, adjacent to the sermon room

²⁰ 8:35

don't believe me, go and ask. I suggest you buy your meat from Kroger²¹ and it is halal meat. I know some people will not like my saying that. But you are welcome to give a lecture here about what you believe, if you support it and back it up with legitimate references. The Qur'an said it very clearly. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"Forbidden to you are carrion and blood and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than God's has been invoked..." [5:3].

These are the four things which are prohibited for the Muslims. Everything else is halal.²² Everything is spelled clearly in the Qur'an and in the hadith. The Qur'anic verse says "The dead animal is prohibited." If so, then, what about the fish? We don't slaughter it. Why do we eat it? The Qur'anic verse says "Blood is prohibited." Why do we eat the liver? It is full of blood. In this instance, the ulama point to the hadith of the Prophet when he said: "Two dead are legitimate for us, the fish and the locusts; and two blood are legitimate for us, the liver and the spleen." So that is why we eat these items. Some people were inquiring of our kitchen staff: "Is that halal meat?" I told the ladies to tell them: "Yes, it is kosher pork!"²³ You know that the letter "K" means kosher. Mistakenly, every Muslim thinks that wherever there is that K, then, it is halal according to Islam. But there is a kosher Pepsi Cola. Is that slaughtered according to the Islamic Law?

The letter "K" and kosher is a business. It means that a Jewish rabbi blessed the Pepsi Cola so it has become kosher. A Jewish rabbi uttered some words over the oven where the meat was cooked rendering it kosher, and hence, according to the unwary Muslims, it has become "halal". But any Jew who comes to the Islamic Center will never eat meat even if it is slaughtered by Muslims. Why? The rabbi has to utter words on it – has to bless it – and we have no rabbi here, so there is a problem. Yet we, the Muslims, when we see that K and kosher, we pronounce it "halal meat". What halal? Leave pork and pork products aside, and everything is halal. Halal is any animal which has had its main vein in the neck cut, so the blood is drained, whether it is cut by a Muslim, by a Christian,

or by a Jew; it is halal for you; it is legitimate for you. And the Qur'an put it very clearly: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"And the food of those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime is lawful to you, and your food is lawful to them" [5:5].

What clearer statement do you want? But in the area of prohibiting what God legitimized, and legitimizing what God prohibited, we insert "bid'ahs" sometimes, and then we claim that is the religion, thereby causing some trouble and dividing the Muslims among themselves; and, as a result, they become different groups. Everyone is following the bid'ah he inserted, or the bid'ah which was inserted for him. And this reminds us of the Prophet, peace be upon him, when he drew on a paper one straight line, and drew little lines around that straight line, and he said: "That straight line is the way of God – straight. These little lines here and there are the distorted ways and the 'bid'ahs', and on each line there is a devil to propagate it." Then he read the Qur'anic verse: [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

"And know that this is the way leading straight unto Me: follow it, then, and follow not other ways, lest they cause you to deviate from His way" [6:153].

Yesterday we had *hafla* here.²⁴ It was a very interesting one. Some people, in some Muslim countries, refer to it [the *hafla*] as bid'ah, because the Prophet didn't do it. But, in fact, we have to understand that bid'ah is not one kind, but two kinds: the *bid'ah hasana* and *bid'ah sayyia*, as I said before. What we had last night is what I call *bid'ah hasana* – a good bid'ah. I wish everyone in this community will do the same.²⁵ It is Qur'anic bid'ah.

Someone in this community hired a shaykh from Detroit. That shaykh came here twice a week to teach the children how to read Qur'an – the way it should be read – with *tajweed*. That does not mean that the children memorized the Qur'an. They didn't. But the idea is that a child should read the Qur'an once, from cover to cover, when he is a child. Even if he cannot read Arabic, he is to repeat it after his father or mother. If father or mother is not free for that job, they should hire some reciter of the Qur'an to do it on their behalf. In the case of yesterday's *hafla*, the mother and the father both are capable of reading Qur'an in Arabic, but they hired the

²¹ A supermarket

²² Note that Imam is talking to his immediate audience in the context of Toledo and Kroger

²³ Imam states sarcastically. The Islamic Center has a kitchen where food is served every week, and the meat and chicken is obtained in the supermarket, and not from the "Halal Slaughterhouse of Detroit".

²⁴ In the Islamic Center

²⁵ Imam states in a hoarse whisper

shaykh to teach the children Qur'an with tajweed. And when the children finished the Qur'an, the parents made hafla. And that hafla had no Ilyas Haddaad,²⁶ had no dancing, had nothing other than people gathered together to congratulate those two children for a good action they have done even before reaching their teens. The children read the Qur'an before the public, in the right way, as the Qur'an should be read. And they are non-Arabic speaking kids. It was very impressive. And imagine the parents – they are very proud that their kids read the whole Qur'an, so they rented the hall from the Islamic center at \$350.00, provided food for around 350 people to celebrate that action. That is hafla. In the Arabic language we call it hafla; you are commemorating some action which will make some impression upon others. As soon as the children read the Qur'an, people congratulated them and the family for that well-done job. I congratulated the shaykh who taught them, because he drove from Detroit to here,²⁷ twice a week, and that is a service for the Qur'an.

If we Muslims take that lead, what type of an impression will it have upon our children when they start their life that way? Children learn by emulation; they don't learn by instruction. You can say 100 words to a child and he will never listen to you if you are not acting the same way. And that celebration which happened last night, in fact, was very impressive. It is a service for the Qur'an, it is a service for children, and it is a service for the new generation whom, we are afraid, one day, might melt into the larger society.

I am mentioning this just to attract your attention and bring into focus what I am going to say now. I consider the Muslim community of Toledo to be still newborn, though we have been here since 1954. People measure age by achievements. We constructed a very good building, but in my view, this is not an achievement. That building is for an aim or a goal. It is not a goal in itself. We have not achieved the goal yet. This reminds me of the story of a shaykh, like me, who

was going around villages giving talks and lectures and *khutbas*²⁸ in every mosque, and one day he passed by a cemetery. He said let me read *Fatihah*²⁹ for the deceased people here. He went and found that there was a grave with a plaque on it, inscribed: This is the grave of Mister So-and-So who was a general in the army, and who fought on various battlefields, but he died while he was one day old. Then he went to the second grave. O, that is the grave of the President So-and-So who controlled and governed this country for 50 years, but he died while he was two days old. So the shaykh wondered how this man governed this area for that number of years but died when he was two days old. He went to the mayor of the city and asked him to explain how this took place? The mayor told him that in his city they measured the age of their people by what they achieved. The army general achieved victory in the battlefield once, so we consider that he died while he was one day old. That President built the High Dam,³⁰ and he opened a canal. So, two days is what we consider his age; he was in control of his country for 50 years but he achieved these two projects, so we consider that he died while he was two days old. So the shaykh said to him: "I have decided to stay in this city, and when I die, bury me in this cemetery and write on my grave: 'This is the grave of the big scholar Mister So-and-So who traveled through deserts, and over the seas, and in the air, giving speeches here and there, but he died before his birth.'" Means he did not achieve anything.

That is why I say we are very proud in Toledo because we have built a very big mosque. It is the largest mosque in America. But this is not our goal. Our goal is bigger, larger. The infant is supposed to become a young man, the young man is supposed to become an old man. We have to grow. We have to put the goal in front of us and work for it. This Center is to sponsor programs for our benefit, for the benefit of our families and children, and for the benefit of the larger society around us.

²⁶ An Arab musical band

²⁷ To Toledo. About sixty miles one way

²⁸ Sermons

²⁹ The opening chapter of the Qur'an

³⁰ Aswan Dam in Egypt