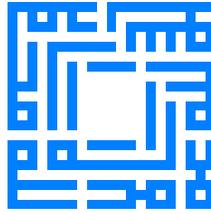




**Advanced Level Topics of Study for:
The Meaning of Bid'a**



The Meaning of Bid'a

By GF Haddad

Two of the best works to date on the precise definition of bid'a are 'Abd al-Hayy al-Lucknawi's Tuhfa al-Akhyar - with its commentary by his student Shaykh 'Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghudda - and Sayyid 'Abd Allah Mahfuz al-Haddad's al-Sunna wa al-Bid'a in which the latter adduces more than three hundred and fifty narrations of the Prophet ﷺ and the Companions -- Allah be well-pleased with them -- in refutation of the "Salafi" author Muhammad al-Shuqayri and his book entitled al-Sunna wa al-Mubtada'at. In the latter book al-Shuqayri displays blind fanaticism and attacks the scholars of the Community as innovators on the misconceived basis of the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ:

Every new matter (kullu muhdathatin) is an innovation (bid'a), every innovation is misguidance (dalala), and every misguidance is in the Fire.¹

Al-Shuqayri misconstrued the above hadith in disregard of the Prophet's ﷺ hadith concerning the variances of scholars:

If the judge (al-hakim) rules by exerting his mind and hits the mark, he has two rewards; if he rules by exerting his mind and misses the mark, he has but one reward.²

Yet the near-totality of the scholars, including Ibn Taymiyya, have understood, in the light of the hadith of the mujtahid's reward and contrary to the claims of latter-day "Salafis," that the findings of ijtihad on the principles of the Sunna is part of the Law and not an innovation in the Religion. As Sayyid 'Ali ibn Muhammad Ba 'Alawi said in his introduction to al-Haddad's al-Sunna wa al-Bid'a:

All of the imams are correctly guided and have their reward with Allah for their inferences and individual exertions in their diligent pursuit of the truth.... As for the likes of [Muhammad al-Shuqayri] the author of al-Sunan wa al-Mubtada'at, their entire knowledge is limited to one hadith of the Prophet ﷺ, "Every new matter is an innovation," while they toss away every other hadith of his that indicate the procurement of every good and provide the rulings that concern all new matters.... what is meant by the hadith "Every new matter is an innovation" is the innovation that contravene the texts of the Law. That, and that alone, is the innovation of misguidance.³

Sayyid 'Ali and Sayyid 'Abd Allah go on to cite several verses of the Qur'an as proofs for the lexical understanding of words denoting universal inclusivity such as kull ("every"), each of which allowing for exceptions to the rule of all-inclusiveness, which indicates, among other lexical facts, that kull in Arabic may mean "most" or "very many" and not necessarily "all without exception":

* (We opened unto them the gates of all (kull) things((6:44) except the gates of divine mercy.

* (Destroying all (kull) things by commandment of its Lord((46:25) except the dwellings, and also the mountains, the heavens, and the earth;

* (And she has been given (abundance) of all (kull) things((27:23) except Sulayman's (throne;

* (And that man has only that for which he makes effort((53:39) although there are proofs that reach the level of mass transmission in meaning (tawatur ma'nawee) whereby the Muslim can benefit from the deeds of others among his brethren and the supplication of the angels, in evidence of which Ibn Taymiyya gathered over twenty proofs which were quoted by al-Jamal in his supercommentary on Tafsir al-Jalalayn for this verse.

* (Those unto whom men (al-nas) said: Lo! the people (al-nas) have gathered against you((3:173), in which case both mentions of al-nas patently refer to a limited number and not to the totality of human beings.

* (Lo! you (idolaters) and that (ma) which you worship beside Allah are fuel of hell((21:98) but 'Isa (, his mother, and the angels, although they were all worshipped beside Allah, are not meant by this verse.

* (And consult with them upon the conduct of affairs((3:159). Ibn 'Abbas said: "That is: in some of the affairs."4 The Prophet ﷺ did not consult them for law-giving and legal rulings.

* (That every (kull) soul may be rewarded for that which it strives (to achieve)((20:15), "every soul" in the sense of what Allah does not forgive, but as for what He forgives, it is excluded from the expression of universality.

The terminology of the scholars of usul for the lexical and juridical rule applied in the above examples is "the universal [mentioned] in the sense of the specific" (al-'umum bi ma'na al-khusus). Following are examples of this rule in the hadith:

* The Prophet ﷺ sent a military detachment under the command of one of the Companions after ordering those who were with him to obey him faithfully. In the course of the expedition the commander became angry with them. He lit a fire and ordered them to enter it. They refused, saying: "We have fled to Allah's Messenger ﷺ to get away from the fire (fararna ila Rasulillahi min al-nar)!" When

the Prophet ﷺ heard about the incident he said: "Had they entered it they would not have come out of it until the Day of Resurrection. Obedience is only in good matters."⁵

* Similarly, the verse (Obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority) (4:59), although couched in absolute terms, is meant in absolute terms for Allah and His Messenger ﷺ but in conditional terms for (those of you who are in authority) as stipulated by the Prophet's ﷺ hadith: "No obedience whatsoever is due to creatures in disobedience of Allah."⁶

* The Prophet ﷺ said: "Every human being shall be consumed by the earth but for the coccyx ('ajbal-dhanab)."⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr said: "The letter of this hadith and its general meaning necessitate that human beings are all undifferentiated in this case, except that it was narrated that the earth does not consume the bodies of Prophets and martyrs."⁸

* The Prophet ﷺ forbade the abandonment (al-hajr) of one Muslim by another for a period of over three days.⁹ Yet he ordered the Muslims to ostracize the three Companions who had stayed back during the campaign of Tabuk, and this ostracism lasted for fifty days as narrated by Ka'b ibn Malik al-Ansari - one of the three - in Bukhari's Sahih.¹⁰ Thus the hadith of prohibition bears specific interpretations.

* The Prophet ﷺ said: "Truly, this black seed (al-habba al-sawda') is a cure for every (kull) disease except death."¹¹ The consensus of the commentators is that the universal was named in the sense of the specific in this hadith to mean that many diseases are cured by the black seed, although an all-inclusive wording was used.

* The Prophet ﷺ said: "None shall enter Hellfire who prays before sunrise and before sunset."¹² This hadith is worded all-inclusively although it is not meant to include those who abandon the prayers of zuhr, maghrib, and 'isha'. Ibn Hajar confirmed al-Tibi's ruling that sound germane narrations must be taken together as one hadith, the general being modified in light of the specific (yuhmalu mutlaquha 'ala muqayyaduha) so that practice can conform with the totality of their contents.¹³

Following are some illustrations of the Companions' innovations on the basis of individual ijtihad on the principles of the Sunna:

* The Prophet ﷺ said to Bilal -- Allah be well-pleased with him -- at the time of the dawn prayer: "O Bilal, tell me about the deed for which you are most hopeful for reward in Islam, for, truly I heard the sound of your sandals in Paradise." He replied: "I did not do anything for which I am more hopeful of reward except the fact that I never perform ablution in the day or night without praying what I must pray after such ablution."¹⁴ In another version Bilal says: "I never raised adhan except I prayed two rak'as afterwards, nor did I ever lose my ritual purity except I

performed ablution then prayed the two rak'as I owed Allah," whereupon the Prophet ﷺ said bihima, meaning "With these two acts [you entered Paradise]."15 Ibn Hajar said: "This hadith signifies that ijthad is permissible concerning timing in acts of worship."16

* Similar to the above evidence is the hadith of the Companion Khubayb ibn Isaf or Yasaf al-Ansari -- Allah be well-pleased with him -- who, when he was captured by the disbelievers of Quraysh, asked to pray two rak'as before his execution as narrated in two places by Abu Hurayra -- Allah be well-pleased with him -- in Bukhari's Sahih. Abu Hurayra then added: "Khubayb was the first to innovate (sanna) the two rak'as for each and every Muslim who is to be executed by his enemies." The general rule for acts of worship, particularly prayer, is spelled out by the Prophet ﷺ in his hadith al-salatu khayru mawdu'in fa aqil minha aw istakthir: "Prayer is an immense good. Therefore, pray a little, or [if you can] pray a lot."17 Although this hadith is weak, it is agreed upon among the jurists of Ahl al-Sunna that the best type of physical worship ('ibada al-badan) is prayer on the evidence of the divine order (Bow down and prostrate yourselves, and worship your Lord, and do good((22:77) as elucidated by the Prophet's ﷺ hadith: "Know that the best of your good deeds is prayer."18

* The Companion Rifa'a ibn Rafi' al-Zurqi's innovated invocation at the time the Prophet ﷺ was leading the sunset prayer and said: "May Allah hear whoever praises Him!" whereupon Rifa'a said: "Our Lord! To You belongs all praise, abundant, excellent, and blessed!" Later, the Prophet ﷺ asked who had said this and declared that the angels were competing to be the first to write it down.19 Ibn Hajar said: "From this hadith can be inferred the permissibility of innovating (jawaz ihdath) an invocation inside sala other than what is received from the Prophet ﷺ as long as it does not contradict what is received from the Prophet ﷺ . "20

* Similar to the above evidence is the hadith whereby a Companion came late to join the ranks of the people at prayer and opened his prayer with the words: Allahu akbar kabeeran wa al-hamdu lillahi katheeran wa subhan Allahi bukratan wa aseela

Allah is greater and truly great! Praise belongs to Allah abundantly! Glory to Allah morning and evening!

After prayer the Prophet ﷺ asked who had said this. The man identified himself saying: "O Messenger of Allah! I did not intend by it other than good." The Prophet ﷺ said: "I saw the gates of heaven open because of those words." Ibn 'Umar added in his narration: "I never stopped saying them since I heard the Prophet ﷺ say this."21

There are numerous additional verses and sound hadiths that similarly illustrate the above principles. It is therefore a mark of profound ignorance of the foundations of the Law and of the Islamic sciences - in fact a patent

contravention of the practice of the Salaf and Khalaf of Ahl al-Sunna - to interpret the hadith "Every new matter is an innovation" in the absolute sense and refuse to subject it to the established rules provided by the Sharee'a in such a case.

Imam al-Nawawi in Sharh Sahih Muslim said of the hadith "Every new matter is an innovation":

This is an universal rule understood specifically (ammun makhsus). What is meant by it is new matters that are not validated by the Sharee'a. That - and that alone - is what is meant by innovations (al-bida').²²

Similarly, Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi in his commentary on al-Tirmidhi's narration of the hadith "Beware of newfangled matters" (iyyakum wa muhdathat al-umur) said:

Know - may Allah teach you! - that a newfangled matter is one of two kinds: a new matter that has no foundation except lust and whim, and this is definitely invalid; or, a new matter that corresponds to something already there, and that is the Sunna of the Caliphs and the great Imams. Nor do the terms "new matter" (muhdath) and "innovation" (bid'a) in themselves denote blameworthy terminology nor blameworthy meanings. For Allah said: (Never comes there unto them a new reminder (dhikrun muhdath) from their Lord but they listen to it while they play) (21:2), and 'Umar -- Allah be well-pleased with him -- said: "What a wonderful innovation (bid'a) is this!"²³ The only blameworthy innovation is what contravenes the Sunna, and the only blameworthy new matter is what leads to misguidance.²⁴

NOTES

1. Narrated from Jabir by al-Nasa'i with a fair chain and from Ibn Mas'ud by Ibn Majah with a weak chain. The hadith is sound in Muslim's narration from Jabir with the wording: "Every new matter is an innovation and every innovation is misguidance" without mention of the Fire. Ibn Taymiyya stated in his epistle Minhaj al-Usul in Majmu' al-Fatawa (19:191) that the phrase "every misguidance is in the Fire" is not a sound (saheeh) narration from the Prophet ﷺ. See the discussion of the various narrations of that hadith adduced by Abu Ghudda and the latter's confirmation of Ibn Taymiyya's remark in his appendices on al-Lucknawi's Tuhfa al-Abrar (p. 139-144).

2. Narrated from both 'Amr ibn al-'As and Abu Hurayra by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad. 3. In Al-Haddad, al-Sunna wa al-Bid'a (p. 5-6).

4. Narrated by Sa'id ibn Mansur, al-Bukhari in al-Adab al-Mufrad, and Ibn al-Mundhir with a fair chain as stated by al-Suyuti in al-Durr al-Manthur for this verse.

5. Narrated from 'Ali by Bukhari and Muslim.
6. Narrated from 'Ali, Ibn Mas'ud, and 'Imran ibn Husayn by Ahmad in his Musnad with sound chains.
7. Narrated from Abu Hurayra by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, al-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah, Ahmad, and Malik in al-Muwatta'.
8. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, al-Tamhid (18:173). See Appendix 25, "The Prophets in Barzakh" (p. 455).
9. Narrated from Anas by Bukhari, al-Tirmidhi, Malik, Abu Dawud, and al-Nasa'i.
10. The hadith is translated in Shaykh Hisham Kabbani's Encyclopedia in the section listing the hadiths of the Companions' kissing of the Prophet's ﷺ hand.
11. Narrated from 'A'isha and Abu Hurayra by Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad through nineteen chains. Al-Zuhri said: "The black seed is black cumin (al-shuneez)." It is also named Indian cumin, fennel-flower; corn cockle, and wild savager.
12. Narrated from 'Amara ibn Ru'ayba al-Thaqafi by Muslim, al-Nasa'i, Abu Dawud, and Ahmad.
13. In Fath al-Bari (1959 ed. 11:271 #6080).
14. Narrated from Abu Hurayra by Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad.
15. Narrated from Burayda al-Aslami by al-Tirmidhi (hasan saheeh ghareeb) and al-Hakim, who declared it saheeh and al-Dhahabi concurred.
16. In Fath al-Bari (1959 ed. 3:63 #1098).
17. Al-salatu khayrun mawdu'un. Narrated from Abu Dharr by Ahmad in his Musnad with three weak chains although al-Zayn declares one of them fair (16:259 #22189), by al-Quda'i in Musnad al-Shihab (1:378 #651), al-Hakim who declared it saheeh but al-Dhahabi pointed out that its chain contains Yahya ibn Sa'id Abu Zakariyya al-Sa'di al-Basri who is weak as per Ibn 'Adi in al-Kamil fi al-Du'afa' (7:244 #2142), by al-Bazzar in his Musnad and, as part of a very long hadith, by Abu Nu'aym in al-Hilya and Ibn Hibban in his Sahih with a very weak chain as stated by al-Arna'ut (2:76 #361); also narrated from Abu Hurayra by al-Tabarani in al-Awsat with a weak chain as indicated by al-Haythami, and from Abu Umama by Ahmad and al-Tabarani in al-Kabir (8:217 #7871) with a weak chain as stated by al-Haythami in Majma' al-Zawa'id (1:159). Ibn Hajar indicates its weakness in Talkhis al-Habir (1964 ed. 2:21 #542) and Fath al-Bari (1959 ed. 2:480 #946). 18. Narrated as part of a longer hadith from Thawban with sound chains by Ibn Majah and Ahmad. Malik cites it in his Muwatta'.

19. Narrated from Rifa'a by Bukhari, al-Nasa'i, Ahmad, and Malik.

20. In Fath al-Bari (1959 ed. 2:287 #766).

21. Narrated from Ibn 'Umar by Muslim, al-Tirmidhi (hasan saheeh ghareeb), al-Nasa'i with two chains, and Ahmad with several chains in his Musnad. One of al-Nasa'i's versions has: "I saw twelve angels compete for it," while two of Ahmad's versions have: "I saw your words ascend to heaven until a door was opened and they entered." 22Al-nawawi, Sharh Sahih Muslim (1972 ed. 6:154).

23. Narrated from 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abd al-Qari by Bukhari and Malik in his Muwatta'.

24. Ibn al-'Arabi, 'Arida al-Ahwadhi, Book of Knowledge, Chapter entitled "Concerning Conformity to Sunna and the Avoidance of Innovation" (Ma ja'a fi al-akhdhi bi al-Sunna wa ijtinab al-Bid'a).

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