

# Innovative Excuses

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It is with much thought and debate amongst ourselves that we write this article. We understand the hostile reaction that it may cause, but we feel that there are sufficient, and important reasons for putting pen to paper about this subject. Over the past year or so we have been continually criticised by the local hierarchy, who have accused us of being "Wahabis", "followers of Arabs", "modernist Muslims" and of misleading the youth. It is with this constant criticism in mind that we write this article, in order to set the record straight. We ask all of you to keep an open mind; do not approach this subject from an emotional point of view, but rather an Islamic one. We ask the brothers and sisters to look for the 'clear argument', to consider the evidence that is provided herein. Do not let this article be a cause for creating more fitna (trials), but instead an opportunity to see a way forward for some reconciliation. If you do disagree with this article, then let this be a chance to start a dialogue between us and you rather than a war of words. You know our evidence, please show us yours and let us approach the issue with the scholastic behaviour of our predecessors. [Remember that at times, due its inherent power the truth can be somewhat painful at first, but acceptance and submission to it is ultimately the objective of every sincere student of knowledge. As Allaah The Truth says (what means), "**Nay, we fling down the truth against falsehood so it smashes through its mind, and behold, it vanishes.**" al-Anbiya 21:18 - Abu Hanna]

Finally we praise Allaah, and ask for His forgiveness; we witness that there is only one Allaah, and that Muhammad sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam is His last Messenger and slave. May Allaah always guide us closer to the truth, ameen.

Many people today are unaware of the many innovations (bid'ah) that have entered the religion, nor the importance of staying away from them. It is now common to see the people who speak out against innovations, being abused and vilified, and accused of being backed by Saudi Arabia etc. So we felt it our duty, as part of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, to clarify the position of Ahl us-Sunnah wal Jamaa'ah regarding this important subject.

We shall begin by examining the proofs that the deen (religion) is complete, and is therefore in no need of being added to. Next we illustrate the importance of sufficing with and submersing oneself in the Sunnah, along with some strikingly relevant prophecies regarding its abandonment, and a definition of the term 'bid'ah'. In case that is not enough to convince you, we then provide statements of the Sahaabah and scholars from the following two generations to reinforce these principles. With the ammunition in place, we then apply it to refute modern-day justifications for bid'ahs.

## The Deen is complete

Allaah says (what means), "**This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islaam as your religion.**" [al-Maa'ida 5:4] This ayah embodies a clear statement that the deen has been completed and thus has no need of addition or deletion. Also the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, "*There is nothing that Allaah ordered you with except that I have ordered you with it, and there is nothing that Allaah forbade you from except that I have forbidden*

*you from it.*" [Bayhaqi] So the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam fulfilled the trust placed upon him by Allaah completely, explaining the religion to the people in its outward and inward form, making clear the lawful from the prohibited, the encouraged from the discouraged, to the extent that he taught us the manners of using the toilet, having sex with our spouses etc.

Allaah says in His Book (what means), **"And We have revealed to you a Book explaining everything."** [16:89]

**"We have neglected nothing in the Book."** [6:37]

So in the Qur'an are explained the principles of the religion, tawheed in all its categories, and even the manners of sitting in circles, visiting other people's houses, correct clothing and much more.

### The Importance of Sticking to the Sunnah

Allaah says (what means), **"Indeed you have in the Messenger of Allaah an excellent example for the one who hopes in Allaah and looks to the Last Day."** [33:21]

He also says (what means), **"So if you obey him (Muhammad sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam), then you will be guided."** [24:54]

Also the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"I have left behind me two things: as long as you cling to them you will never go astray. They are the Book of Allaah and my Sunnah (life example)."* [al-Haakim] And he also said, *"...and you will live to see great differing, so cling to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly-guided Khalifas after me, even if it be with your molar teeth..."* [Bukhaaree]

The taabi'ee [2nd generation Muslim] Imaam az-Zuhree commented, **"Clinging to the Sunnah is to be saved, as Imaam Maalik said, 'like the Ark of Nuh,' he who embarked upon it was saved, whereas he who did not was destroyed."** [ad-Daarimee, one of the main collections of hadith that deals mainly with the sayings of the Sahaabah and those after them.]

In these narrations are clear evidence that the way of salvation and safety is to closely follow the Sunnah of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, and not to deviate from his path; not accepting the guidance of another individual, nor a corrupted form of the Sunnah. Yet, we are taught that there will come a time when the Sunnah will become so corrupted that this corruption will become accepted as the norm by the general people, and those that call to reviving and purifying the Sunnah will be regarded as strangers and slandered. The Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"Islaam began as something strange and it will return as something strange, the way it began. So Tooba (a tree in Paradise) is for the strangers." He was asked, "Who are the strangers?" to which he replied, "Those that purify and correct what the people have corrupted of my Sunnah."* [at-Tabaraanee in al-Kabeer 6/202]

And what is this corruption of the Sunnah? It is innovation, introducing into the pure religion of Allaah the Most High new ways of worshipping Him which He has not taught us, blemishing His religion with our whims and desires, something which Allaah Himself condemns when He says (what means), **"...or do they have partners that legislate some religion which Allaah has not given permission for?"** [42:21]

And the Companion Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood lamented, "How will it be when the trials overcome you, in which the old grow senile and the young grow up. And the people take the bid'ah as the Sunnah, and when it changes they say the Sunnah has changed." It was then said, "When will that be O Abu Abdurrahmaan?" He replied, "When your speakers are many and your scholars are few, and your wealthy ones are plenty and trustworthy ones are few." [ad-Daarimee]

How true this statement is today, when the innovations have become so widespread in the religion that the people have taken them as the Sunnah. And when the true scholars speak out against the innovations they are looked down upon and called abusive names like 'Wahhaabee', because to the common folk it seems that the scholars are changing the Sunnah. To Allaah we complain of the ignorance of our time!

**Only Allaah has the right to tell us how to worship Him**

Allaah Says (what means), "Follow that which has been revealed from your Lord and do not follow as Friends and Protectors other than Him." [7:3] Ibn Kathir says that in this verse is a categorical statement that the privilege to tell people how to worship Allaah belongs to Allaah alone [paraphrased from his tafseer 2/208].

And how could it be otherwise when the true meaning of ibaadah (worship) is to worship Allaah in a way which He is pleased with - not according to our desires: "...and who is more astray than the one who follows his own whims and desires, devoid of Revelation?" [28:50]

In this regard Rasulallaah sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, "*I warn you of the newly invented-matters (in the religion), and every newly-invented matter is an innovation, and every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in Hellfire.*" [an-Nisaa'ee]

He also used to say at the beginning of his lectures, "*...and the best speech is the speech of Allaah, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, and the worst of all affairs are the newly-invented matters (in the religion).*" [Muslim]

And he commanded us, "*Whosoever does an action which we have not commanded then it will be rejected,*" [Muslim] and also, "*Whosoever introduces into this religion of ours that which is not part of it then it must be rejected.*" [Ahmad]

"And in this hadith is clear evidence that every action which is not legislated in the Sharee'ah (Islamic law) must be rejected." [Jamia al-Usool 1/120 of Ibn Rajab, the eighth century Hanbali scholar well-known for his extensive knowledge and great piety.] So every bid'ah that is introduced in the religion has to be rejected because only Allaah and His Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam have the right to legislate in the Sharee'ah of Islaam. So in the light of these hadith what is the complete Islamic definition of a bid'ah? "*A newly- invented way (in beliefs or actions) in the religion, in imitation of the Sharee'ah, by which nearness to Allaah is sought, not being supported by any authentic proof - neither in its foundations nor in the manner in which it is performed.*" [As defined in 'al-I'tisaam' 1/231 of ash- Shaatibee, the sixth century Maaliki scholar of Usool.]

And in what has preceded is ample evidence for any fair-minded Muslim that all bid'ah is blameworthy and in fact a major sin.

**The claims of the misguided people**

Unfortunately however, the Muslims are in such a state today that the words of Allaah and His Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam are no longer enough to convince them. Certain groups of Muslims have come up with a new belief - the belief of "bid'ah hasanah". They claim that a scholar can introduce a new action of worship in Islaam, as long as it does not contradict any of the principles of Islaam, a belief which has absolutely no foundation in Islaam at all. So we are now forced to resort to the statements of the great Imaams of guidance after the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam in response.

### The sayings of the Companions

Abdullah bin 'Umar said, **"Every innovation is misguidance, even if the people regard it as good."** [ad- Daarimee] This narration is sufficient to demolish the idea of a 'good bid'ah', for you have the like of this Companion from amongst the most knowledgeable Companions of Rasulallaah sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam saying the exact opposite. So who do you choose to follow, Ibn Umar or these modern day shaykhs and mullahs who are Imaams of their own whims and desires?

Abdullah bin Abbaas said, **"Do not sit with the people of innovation, for surely their sittings are a sickness for the hearts."** [ash-Sharee'ah of al-Ajuri p65]

Whenever he sat in a circle of knowledge, Mu'aadh ibn Jabal used to say, **"...and I warn you of what is innovated, for all that is innovated is misguidance."** [ash-Sharee'ah p55 and Abu Dawud with similar wording.]

Abdullah ibn Mas'ood said, **"Follow the Sunnah of Muhammad and do not innovate, for what you have been commanded is enough for you."** [ad-Daarimee]

Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman said, **"Every act of worship which the Companions did not do, do not do it."** [Abu Dawud]

'Amr ibn Salmah said, **"We used to sit by the door of Abdullah ibn Mas'ood before the morning prayer, so that when he came out we would walk with him to the masjid. (One day) Abu Moosa al-Ash'aree came to us and said, 'Has Abu 'Abdurrahmaan come out yet?' We replied, 'No.' So he sat down with us until h (ibn Mas'ood) came out. When he came out we all stood along with him, so Abu Moosa said to him, 'O Abu Abdurrahmaan! I have just seen something in the masjid which I deemed to be evil, but all praise is for Allaah, I did not see anything except good.' He enquired, 'Then what is it?' (Abu Moosa) replied, 'If you live you will see it. I saw in the masjid people sitting in circles awaiting the prayer. In each circle they had pebbles in their hands and a man would say, "Repeat Allaahu Akbar a hundred times." So they would repeat it a hundred times. Then he would say, "Say Laa ilaaha illallaah a hundred times." So they would say it a hundred times. Then he would say, "Say subhaanallaah a hundred times." So they would say it a hundred times.'** (Ibn Mas'ood) asked, **'What did you say to them?' (Abu Moosa) said, 'I did not say anything to them. Instead I waited to hear your view or what you declared.'** (Ibn Mas'ood) replied, **'If only you had ordered them to count up the evil deeds they acquired and assured them that their good deeds would not be lost!' Then we went along with him (Ibn Mas'ood) until he came to one of these circles and stood and said, 'What is this which I see you doing?' They replied, 'O Abu Abdurrahmaan! These are pebbles upon which we are counting takbeer, tahleel and tasbeeh.'** He said, **'Count up your evil deeds. I assure you that none of your good deeds will be lost. Woe to you, O Ummah of Muhammad sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam! How quickly you go to destruction! These are the Companions of your Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam and who are widespread. There are his sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam clothes which have not yet decayed and his bowl which is unbroken. By Him in**

Whose Hand is my soul! Either you are upon a religion better guided than the religion of Muhammad sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam or you are opening the door of misguidance.' They said, 'O Abu Abdurrahmaan! By Allaah, we only intended good.' He said, 'How many there are who intend good but do not achieve it. Indeed Allaah's Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said to us, *"A people will recite the Qur'aan but it will not pass beyond their throats."* By Allaah! I do not know, perhaps most of them are from you.' Then he left them."

Umar ibn Salmah (the sub-narrator) said, "We saw most of those people fighting against us on the day of Nahrawaan, along with the Khawaarij." [ad-Daarimee in his Sunan, 1/79]

Isn't this enough? The companions tell us to follow the way of Rasulallaah sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam and not invent new ways worship? *"Whomsoever Allaah guides to the truth, none can misguide, and whomsoever Allaah misguides, none can guide."* [Muslim]

### The sayings from the second and third generation scholars

Hasan al-Basree said, "Do not sit with the people of innovation. Do not debate with them or listen to them." [ad-Daarimee 1/121]

Abul 'Aaliyah said, "Learn Islam. Then when you have learned Islam, do not turn away from it to the right or to the left, but be upon the Straight Path and be upon the Sunnah of your Prophet and that which his Companions were upon... and beware of these innovations because they cause enmity and hatred amongst you, but stick to the original state of affairs that was there before they divided." [al-Hilya of Abu Nuaym 2/218]

Sufyaan ath-Thawri said, "Innovations are more beloved to shaytaan than sin, since a sin may be repented from but an innovation is not repented from." [Sharh Usool I'tiqaad of al-Laalikaanee (d. 414h) no.238, the great 4th century Imaam who wrote on the belief of Ahl usSunnah.] This is because the innovator believes he is doing something good and therefore sees no need to repent. He also said, "...so cling to the original state of affairs," [al-Hilya 6/376] meaning the way of the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam and his companions.

Imaam al-Awzaa'ee said, "Patiently restrict yourselves to the Sunnah, and pause where the people paused, say what they said, and avoid what they avoided. Take to the path of the Salaf (predecessors), for indeed, what was sufficient for them is sufficient for you." [ash-Sharee'ah p58]

Ibraaheem al-Masayrah said, "He who honours an innovator has assisted in the demolition of Islaam." [Sharh Usool I'tiqaad 1/139]

### The sayings of the Four Imaams

Imaam Abu Hanifah said, "Stick to the narrations and the way of the Salaf, and beware of newly-invented matters for all of it is innovation." [Sawnul Mantaq of as-Suyuti p32]

Imaam Malik said, "He who innovates an innovation in Islaam regarding it as something good, has claimed that Muhammad (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) has betrayed his trust to deliver the message as Allaah Says (what means), **"This day I have perfected for you your religion."** And whatsoever was not part of the religion then, is not part of the

religion today." [al-I'tisaam] He also said, "**How evil are the people of innovation, we do not give them salaam.**" [al-Ibaanah of Ibn Battah (died 387h) no. 441]

Imaam ash-Shaafi'ee said, "**Whosoever considers an innovation to be good has corrected the Prophet.**" [Bulghul Maraam of Ibn Hajar (available in English) p190 footnote 2] And all that has been related from him that contradicts this statement, regarding innovation as being of two types is either weak or baseless as al-Haafidh adh-Dhahabee and others from the scholars of hadith state.

Imaam Ahmad said, "**The fundamental principles of the Sunnah with us are: ... avoiding innovation and every innovation is misguidance.**" [Usool usSunnah (available in English) p.1]

Imaam al-Bukhari said, "**I have met more than a thousand scholars...(then he named the more prominent in each of the lands he visited) and I found that they all agreed on the following points: ...they all used to prohibit bid'ah - that which the Prophet and his Companions were not upon, because of the saying of Allaah, '...and hold fast to the rope of Allaah and do not separate.'**" [From his article on belief, quoted in Sharh Usool I'tiqaad 1/170. Amongst the scholars he met were Ahmad bin Hanbal, Abu Ubaid al-Qaasim, ibn Ma'een, ibn Aasim, ibn Abi Shaybah, and Abu Saalih the scribe of Layth bin Sa'ad]

What we have narrated to you here is a small number of narrations from amongst literally hundreds from the early scholars of Islaam with regard to the sin of innovation. It is unfortunate that the later generations of Muslims have lost contact with our Salaf, for it is through them that we gain the true understanding of the religion, and they were prolific in speaking out against and writing about innovation - even today we have whole volumes of works from them dealing with this topic alone. If only we would turn our attention to the legacy of our Salaf!

### The arguments of the innovators

This is a time when everyone is satisfied with his opinion, hence the multitude of innovations commonly witnessed today, despite the plethora of proofs presented above. Know that every example which the ignorant ones bring, from the actions of the Companions, to support their belief in 'good innovations', is misunderstood and manifests their lack of knowledge and concern for the Sunnah. All of the following examples either have a clear basis in the Sharee'ah, or occurred due to necessity, or from the ijtihaad of the Companion in question - none of them being an innovation. Insh'Allaah we shall mention a few of the more common excuses:

1. When Umar, raddi Allaahu anhu, was the Khalifah, he collected the Muslims to pray in congregation for tarawih prayers, and said, "**What a good bid'ah this is.**" [Bukhari] From this, they derive their belief of a good innovation. Firstly, it becomes necessary to explain the context of what happened. When the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam first emigrated to Madeenah, the Muslims prayed tarawih individually, and then for three nights they prayed in congregation behind the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam. After this, he stopped them doing so saying, "***I feared that it would become obligatory upon you.***" So after this the Muslims would pray individually or in small congregations throughout the rule of Abu Bakr, and the beginning of 'Umar's rule. Then 'Umar came to the masjid and saw the Muslims praying in small groups behind different Imaams, so he collected them together in one congregation behind one Imaam and made the aforementioned statement [Bukhari]. So how can this action of 'Umar be understood to be a new act of worship when the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam did it during his lifetime? Secondly, the Prophet

sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam gave the reason why he stopped the congregational prayer, because revelation was still descending, and he feared that praying in congregation might become obligatory upon his nation and hence make the religion hard upon them.

After the death of Rasulallaah sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam, revelation ceased so this concern was no longer necessary. Hence Umar raddi Allaahu anhu reinstated the tarawih prayer in congregation during his rule because he knew that his action could not be made obligatory upon the Ummah. Thirdly, all the companions agreed upon this action of 'Umar, thus there was a consensus (ijma) on it. And the scholars of Usool (fundamental principles) have stated that ijma cannot occur except when there is a clear text for it in the Sharee'ah.

So what is the correct understanding of 'Umar's words, "a good bid'ah"? The word bid'ah here is to be understood in its linguistic sense, "something new," because tarawih in one congregation was not present during the rule of Abu Bakr and the beginning of 'Umar's rule, hence in that sense it was something new. The Sharee'ah sense (defined earlier) cannot be understood here because it does not fulfil the conditions of being a new act of worship. Abu Yusuf said, **"I asked Abu Hanifah about the tarawih and what 'Umar did and he said, 'The tarawih is a stressed Sunnah, and 'Umar did not do that from his own opinion, nor was there in his action any innovation, and he did not enjoin it except that there was a foundation for it with him and authorisation from the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam.'"** [Sharh Mukhtaar as quoted from him in al- Ibdaa of Shaykh Ali Mahfooz p80]

2. The collection of the Qur'aan into one book after the death of Rasulallaah sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam and the statement of Abu Bakr, **"How can we do that which was not done by the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam."** [Bukhari] The proof, according to them, being that the companions collected the Qur'aan in a book form after the time of the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam without him enjoining it - hence it being an innovation which the companions agreed upon as being good.

Upon closer examination this is actually an evidence against these people, not for them. When 'Umar came to Abu Bakr and said that the Qur'aan had to be collected as a book, he did not argue on the basis of bid'ah hasanah, rather he argued on the basis of necessity - because many of the people who had memorised the Qur'aan by heart were being martyred, and therefore the Qur'aan was in danger of being lost and hence it had to be collected in book form. When Abu Bakr replied, he did not say, **"Oh yes I agree with you, this is a bid'ah hasanah,"** rather he argued that the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam did not do this, so how could they? It was only after the necessity was made clear to him that he agreed.

So, in conclusion, the collection of the Qur'aan as a book was something the companions agreed upon due to necessity, not considering it to a good bid'ah.

3. The hadith, ***"Whoever starts in Islaam a good practice (sunnah), he gets the reward of it and the reward of all those that act on it. And whosoever starts in Islaam an evil practice (sunnah), he gets the evil of it and the evil of all those that act on it."*** [Muslim] The evidence that they derive from this hadith is that people can invent new practices in Islaam which are either good or bad. Of course, if they were to take the hadith in its full context then it is not possible to derive this meaning.

The context of the hadith states that a group of poor people came to the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam so he asked those around him to give charity, but no one came forward - so much so that signs of anger could be discerned on the face of Rasulallaah sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam, so one of the companions stepped forward and gave charity, so the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam said the above hadith.

Firstly, the word 'sunnah' which is used in this hadith cannot be understood to mean the Sunnah of Rasulallaah sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam, because that would imply that there is something bad in the Sunnah; rather it is to be understood in its linguistic meaning of 'practice'.

Secondly, this action the companion did was not something new in Islaam, since giving charity was already legislated from the very first days of Islaam; rather he was simply implementing it, so the statement of the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam "a good sunnah" was said at a time when the people were reluctant to give charity, so one man started to give the charity and others followed him in it. Thus, he revived a Sunnah at a time when the people were reluctant to practice it, and this is the meaning of "a good sunnah." Hence, in the early works of 'aqeedah, this hadith was included under the chapter headings, "The reward of the one who renews the Sunnah." [For example Sharh Usool I'tiqaad 1/50]

The meaning of "a bad sunnah" is similar. It is renewing or starting something that the Sharee'ah has already declared to be bad, and the Prophet sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam gave the example of the two sons of Aadam alayhis salaam wa 'alaa Nabiyina, one killing the other. So upon the murderer was the sin of the killing and the sin of all those that killed after him, without their sins being reduced.

Thirdly, the hadith uses the terms 'good' and 'bad', and the Sharee'ah has already defined in its totality all that is good and all that is bad. This is what is pointed to in the statement of Imaam ashShaafi'ee in his refutation of Istihsaan (declaring something to be good) when he said, "Whoever declares something to be good, he has declared it part of Sharee'ah." [ar-Risaala]

These are just a few of many of the feeble examples that these misguided people bring to support their belief, and it should now be clear that none of them hold any weight, so let us learn from this the great importance of studying the Qur'aan and Sunnah in its context, with the explanation of the Companions - after that, we leave them floundering in the abyss of misguidance that they have dug for themselves, whilst asking Allaah to guide them!

So once this basic subject becomes clear, a subject which no one can deny, then know that all these innovations in the deen such as kissing the thumbs when the name of Muhammad sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam is mentioned, doing dhikr in congregation with one voice, doing dhikr with excessive bodily movements such as swinging the head from left to right or dancing in circles, invoking salaam upon the Prophet sallaallaahu alayhi wa sallam before the adhaan is called, seeking intercession and blessings at the graves of dead 'saints', raising graves and building memorials over them, the 'Eed of the Prophet's birthday and hundreds of others; all of them are a clear denial of the above ayaat, ahaadeeth and narrations of the Salaf, for none of them were practised by the Companions.

We leave you with this hadith: *"...so he who follows my Sunnah has been guided, and he who follows the innovation has been destroyed."* [Ahmad]

And the Saying of Allaah the Most Wise (which means), **"And whosoever contends with the Messenger after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows a way other than the way of the believers (the Companions), We shall leave him in the path he has chosen and land him in Hell - what an evil destination!"** [4:115]

And Allaah Knows Best.