

عَنْ أَبِي نَجِيحٍ الْعَرَبِيَّ بْنِ سَارِيَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ
 قَالَ، وَعَظَّنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَوْعِظَةً
 وَجِلَّتْ مِنْهَا الْقُلُوبُ، وَذَرَفَتْ مِنْهَا الْعُيُونُ. فَقُلْنَا:
 يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، كَأَنَّهَُا مَوْعِظَةُ مُودِعٍ فَأَوْصِنَا. قَالَ:
 أَوْصِيكُمْ بِتَقْوَى اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَالسَّمْعِ وَالطَّاعَةِ وَإِنْ
 تَأَمَّرَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَبْدٌ فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ يَعِشْ مِنْكُمْ فَسِيرِي اخْتِلَافًا
 كَثِيرًا، فَعَلَيْكُمْ بِسُنَّتِي وَسُنَّةِ الْخُلَفَاءِ الرَّاشِدِينَ الْمُهَدِّينَ،
 عَضُّوا عَلَيْهَا بِالنَّوَاجِدِ. وَإِيَّاكُمْ وَمُحَدَّثَاتِ الْأُمُورِ فَإِنَّ كُلَّ
 بَدْعَةٍ ضَلَالَةٌ - رَوَاهُ أَبُو دَاوُدَ وَالتِّرْمِذِيُّ، وَقَالَ: حَدِيثٌ
 حَسَنٌ صَحِيحٌ.

It was narrated on the authority of Abu Najih al-Irbad bin Sariyah رضى الله عنه who said: The Messenger of Allah, (ﷺ), delivered an admonition that made our hearts fearful and our eyes tearful. We said, "O Messenger of Allah, it is as if this were a farewell sermon, so advise us." He said, "I enjoin you to have Taqwa of Allah and that you listen and obey, even if a slave is made a ruler over you. He among you who lives long enough will see many differences. So for you is to observe my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly-principled and rightly-guided successors, holding on to them with your molar teeth. Beware of newly-introduced matters, for every innovation (bid'ah) is an error." [Abu Dawud & Al-Tirmidhi, who says it is an authentic hadith]

Background

In one of the narrations of this hadith, it is mentioned that the Prophet, (ﷺ), gave this talk after the Fajr prayer. Based on other hadiths, it was the practice of the Prophet, (ﷺ), to give admonition to his companions from time to time, however, without burdening nor boring them. Ibn Rajab points out the characteristics of the Prophet's, (ﷺ), speeches and admonitions: brief, concise, and conveyed in beautiful understandable manner.

The admonition consists of three main issues:

1. To have taqwa of Allah where it is Allah's Advice to all mankind.
2. To listen and obey the leaders for it will lead to better management of the affairs of the community, of peace and unity. However, the hadith lays a fact that rightly-guided leadership will be the first Islamic concept to be violated.
3. The hadith anticipates a historical fact: i.e. the Muslim disunity and split into groups and sects due to heresies. It indicates the main principle to be followed in such situations: adhering to the sunnah.

The emphasis, then, in the advice given in the hadith is to adhere to the sunnah and to avoid bid'ah (heresy).

Lessons

Introductory statements about adhering to the sunnah

The Prophet's, (ﷺ), actions may be classified as follows:

1. Those that are specific to the Prophet, (ﷺ), such as continuous fasting (wisal).
2. Actions that are related to the culture of his time, such as the turban, unbuttoning the top shirt button, keeping long hair, using a walking stick.
3. Actions resulting from spontaneous or haphazard actions. For example, the Prophet ﷺ used to stop at particular places during a journey or take a certain route for a journey.
4. Actions that the Prophet, (ﷺ), performed intentionally for the purpose of ibadah.

Scholars state that Muslims are only obliged to follow the last type of action.

Note: An act is considered an ibadah if there are authentic hadiths mentioning that the act is an ibadah, or that it will be rewarded, or that the one who does it is praised, or that the one who does not perform it is blamed or cursed or will be punished.

Scholars stated that to consider an action as a sunnah, two conditions must be met. Not only are the outward actions of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam, to be imitated, but the intention of the act must be the same. For example, wearing a turban should not be done with the intention of performing an ibadah. If one has the intention of merely following the Prophet, sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam, then one will be rewarded for that intention only.

Imam Shatibi states the principle that if there are two ways to perform an ibadah, one being easier than the other, then it is obligatory to take the easier way. For example, if on a cold winter's night there is an option of using cold or hot water, then one takes the easy option, i.e. using the hot water. This principle is derived from the Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah, Ayah 185.

Another principle that Imam Shatibi states is that when one does a preferable action or mustahab, one should not commit oneself to doing it in a set manner. For example, one should not say that he shall read two juzu' a day, or will fast every Monday and/or Thursday on a continuous basis without stopping from time to time.

The reasons one should not commit oneself to non-obligatory acts are because:

1. It is not made obligatory by shari'ah.
2. It goes against the general principles of the shari'ah (al-Baqarah: 185).
3. If one commits himself to do non-obligatory ibadah on a regular basis, it comes close to being a vow (nazar) which is not a preferable act (makruh).
4. If one makes a commitment and sticks to it, one might get fed up with the action later on and stop doing it altogether.

Therefore, it is better to do good deeds based on one's personal capacity, encouraging oneself to continue performing the deed.

Imam Shatibi has established that there are two types of bid'ah:

1. Genuine bid'ah - Any form of ibadah for which there is no evidence in the Qur'an nor from the sunnah.
2. 'Relative' bid'ah. Any form of ibadah for which there is a general evidence from the Qur'an and/or sunnah but no explicit/specific evidence. An example is the du'a in congregation. There are general evidences for making du'a, but there is no explicit/specific evidence to perform it in congregation on a continuous basis.

Imam Ahmad Zarouq (899H) adds a third category which is: un-agreed upon heresy or bid'ah khilafiyah. This is an acceptable form of ibadah to some scholars and it is bid'ah according to other scholars such as the later given example.

General rules and principles to differentiate between bid'ah and sunnah
(extracted by Imam Shatibi)

1. An ibadah (ritual of worship) cannot be formulated unless there is evidence from wahy (revelation). Another way of saying this is that ibadah is restricted by the shari'ah. The evidence for this is the hadith of Aishah which states that the Prophet, sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam, said, "Whoever performs an action that is not according to our way will be rejected." (al-Bukhari) [See Hadith 5]
2. If there is a beneficial act that existed during the time of the Prophet, sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam, yet the Prophet, sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam, did not perform it as a act of ibadah, then we cannot perform it as an act of ibadah.

An act of ibadah may be performed due to a number of reasons:

- a. If an act is considered a need to motivate people because of their laxity and carelessness, then that act is a bid'ah and cannot be performed. For example, Abdul Malik bin Marwan gave the Eid khutbah before the prayer because people left after the prayers.
- b. If the act is considered a need due to the natural circumstances of the people and there was no need during the time of the Prophet, (ﷺ), then it is considered as maslahah mursalah. For example, the compilation of the Qur'an, the use of the mihrab, the existing schooling system, the use of loudspeakers during the adhan, etc.
3. If the Prophet, (ﷺ), performed an act and then stopped due to a certain reason, we may perform that act provided the reason no longer exists. For example, the Tarawih prayers - the Prophet, (ﷺ), stopped performing them after a time because he was afraid that it would be made compulsory. After his death, there is no way that the Tarawih prayers will become compulsory as the time of wahy has passed.
4. Avoiding any act of worship that the Prophet, (ﷺ), did not perform is considered a sunnah (sunnah tarkiyyah).
5. Performing an act which has been made into an ibadah by:
 - a. Generalising evidences that relate to a specific ibadah. In other words, removing the limits of an act that has been limited by the shari'ah. An example is that there are certain adhkar whose number of repetitions have been limited by the Prophet, (ﷺ)- for example, the adhkar after prayers. To remove these limits, i.e. make more than the specified number of repetitions, is a bid'ah.
 - b. Specifying a general evidence to a particular act. In other words, limiting an act that is unlimited by the shari'ah. An example is to specifically fast on Friday and pray on Friday evening. Other examples are to call the adhan for the Eid prayer (by using the general hadith for the adhan) and performing a certain set of dhikr for a certain time/day. These acts are considered bid'ah.

6. Connecting an act of ibadah to an unrelated action (either a natural action or a act of ibadah) and making them appear as a continuous action, might be a bid'ah or lead to bid'ah, depending on the situation:

- ? Intentionally. This is a bid'ah.
- ? Unintentionally. If the connection is repeatedly made in public, then it could lead to a bid'ah (because people might think the actions were related). An example is that at the time of Imam Malik, it was reported that the muadhin would purposely clear his throat before giving the adhan. When he was made to stop by Imam Malik, he would then purposely hit a stick against the side of the minaret before giving the adhan. Imam Malik stopped him from doing this as well, and said, "Do not do something which has not been practised by the Prophet, (ﷺ), nor by his companions." Another example is to stand up immediately after performing the fardh prayers to perform the sunnah prayers where people without knowledge may get confused. A third example is to start fasting the six days of Shawal from the second day of Eid.

Any non-obligatory action which is permitted by the shari'ah but by repeatedly performing in public makes it appear to be a fardh, then that action should be stopped occasionally. An example is the recitation of Surah as-Sajdah and Surah al-Insan in the Friday Fajr prayer. Another is that the Companions (Abu Bakr and Umar) occasionally did not perform udhiah.

Not everybody who commits a bid'ah will be considered a mu'tadi' (the one who commits a heresy). Some of them will be excused. This principle also applies to one who commits acts of kufr (disbelief) i.e. not everyone who commits kufr is a kafir. The excuses are:

- . Someone lives in a place where there is no scholar who can establish the evidence, remove misconceptions and offer guidance.
- a. Someone who is a new Muslim. That person is excused until he knows about the issues involved.
- b. If there are misconceptions related to the situation, that person is excused until these are removed.
- c. The un-agreed upon acts.

It is important to differentiate between innovation that is kufr or leads to kufr, and one that isn't. Any innovation which is not kufr or does not lead to kufr is worse than a ma'siat (sin) but with regards to the Hereafter, it falls under the same category of ma'siat, i.e. the innovator may be punished or he may be forgiven and not punished. [Note: according to Ibn Taimiyyah, *there are 10 reasons why one isn't punished, among which are:*

- a. One's rewards outweigh his sins.
- b. Trials and hardship undergone in this world.
- c. Intercession of the Prophet, (ﷺ).
- d. Intercession of a good Muslim.
- e. Punishment in the grave.

There are two opinions about one who commits a bid'ah:

- . Only the action committed with the bid'ah will not be accepted.
- a. All deeds will not be accepted from that person, provided the person is not excused or has not repented.

Clarification of the second opinion:

Imam Shatibi argues that you will not find someone committing an innovation in only one action, i.e. if one commits a bid'ah in the prayers, it is most likely that he will be committing bid'ah in zakat, hajj, etc.

Imam Shatibi states that this opinion may be interpreted in three ways:

- a. The statement is taken at face value, i.e. all deeds, obligatory (fard) or recommended (sunnah), will not be accepted.
- b. That the bid'ah is a basic belief that can negate all of a person's actions. For example, the Rafidah's bid'ah of rejecting the Companions' results in not accepting the hadith and claiming that the Qur'an is incomplete.
- c. The manifestation of an innovation is a sign of a person not having a sound grounding in the shari'ah, not 'respecting' the shari'ah or placing the intellect ahead of the shari'ah.

Based on Hadith 5 of Imam al-Nawawi's collection it seems that the first opinion is sounder in the case of those who follow the sunnah in general.

Conclusion

In order to adhere to the sunnah and to be able to refrain from heresy (bid'ah), a Muslim needs to fully understand and apply these principles pinpointed by our great scholars. Doing so can also minimize disputes and quarrels among Muslim community members over many debatable issues every now and then.