



Synopsis of Friday Sermon

Ameer Mustapha Elturk



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on August 23, 2013

Innovations in Islam

Today's khutba discusses the issue of newly invented matters or innovations (*bid'ah*) in *deen* that are neither sanctioned in the Qur'an nor in the Sunnah. It is believed and held that the last Qur'anic *ayah* to be revealed was the third *ayah* of Surat al-Ma'idah, in which Allah says, "Today I have perfected your *deen* for you and completed My blessing upon you and I am pleased with Islam as a *deen* for you" (al-Ma'idah, 5:3). It is to be clearly understood that Allah sent His last and final Messenger with the last and final Book of Guidance to guide the entire humanity to al-Islam—the way of life (*deen*) that pleases Him. The *deen* of Islam is complete in its entirety. Hence there is no question of introducing newly invented matters, and attributing the same to the religion of Islam.

It is common observation that in compliance with the Prophetic practice, the Imam commences his Friday sermon by praising and thanking Allah followed by recitation of a few Qur'anic *ayat* and the *hadith* that says, "Indeed, the best of speeches is the Book of Allah, and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (SAW), and the worst of matters are those that are invented matters. Every newly invented matter is an innovation (*bid'ah*), and every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in the Hellfire." Innovations in worldly matters are good as long as they are for the benefit, well-being, and progress of humanity, but innovations in matters of *deen* lead to misguidance, the consequences of which are disastrous. Hence any innovation (*bid'ah*) in matters of religion is prohibited.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet (SAW) said, "He who innovates something in this matter of ours (i.e. Islam) that is not of it will have it rejected." Imam Nawawi is reported to have said that this *hadith* should be memorized by every Muslim. It follows that no matter how attractive or meritorious a *bid'ah* may appear, it will be not be accepted by Allah (SWT). Therefore, we have to be very careful about what we do. The word *bid'ah* comes from the three letters root word *ba da a'* which means to create something without precedence. One of the attributive names of Allah is *al-Badi'* or the One Who invents and creates something out of nothing. "He is the Originator (*al-Badi'*) of the heavens and the earth, and when He decrees something, He says only, Be! And it is" (al-Baqarah, 2:117).

The term *bid'ah* generally carries a negative connotation and refers to innovations in matters of *deen* that have no basis or foundation as they are not found in the Qur'an or the Sunnah—the two primary sources of Islam.

According to Imam Shafi', "Innovation is of two types: praiseworthy innovation and blameworthy innovation. So whatever agrees with the Sunnah is praiseworthy, and whatever contradicts the Sunnah is blameworthy." And he used as evidence the saying of 'Umar (RA) about night prayer (*tarawih*) in Ramadan: "What a

good innovation this is.” He further said that innovated matters are of two kinds: An innovation that contravenes the Qur'an or the Sunnah or a traceable tradition of the Companions (*athar*) or the consensus (*ijma'*); that innovation is misguidance; and an innovation that brings about that which is good. Such an innovation is not condemned.

Islam being completed and perfected as a way of life does not leave room for innovations to be made in it, especially when such innovations are not sanctioned by Allah (SWT) or His Messenger (SAW). An *ayah* in Surat al-Nur tells us, “Let those who go against his (the Messenger’s) order beware lest some affliction befall them or they receive a painful punishment” (*al-Nur*, 24:63). This *ayah* should prompt us to think that the trials, tribulations, and crises through which the Muslim ummah is passing may well be because of our deviating from the pure teachings of Muhammad (SAW). People come up with strange innovations in *deen* and comfort themselves by labeling these innovations as ‘good innovations’ (*bid’ah hasanah*).

The Qur’an warns the ‘People of the Book’ (Jews and the Christians) from going to extremes in matters of religion. “Say, “O people of the Book! do not go to extremes in your *deen*, asserting other than the truth, and do not follow the whims and desires of people who were misguided previously and have misguided many others, and are far from the right way” (*al-Ma’idah*, 5:77). As a consequence of not heeding to Allah’s words, they fragmented into many sects. We should exercise extreme caution lest we also split into sects, each sect thinking itself to be on the right path. In fact, there is a *hadith* that says, “The Bani Isra’il was fragmented into seventy-two sects. My ummah will be fragmented into seventy-three sects. All of them will be in Hell Fire except one sect. They (the Companions) said: Allah’s Messenger, which is that, whereupon he said: It is one to which I and my companions belong.”

On one occasion, the Prophet (SAW) said, “I enjoin you to fear Allah, and to hear and obey even if it be an Abyssinian slave, for those of you who live after me will see great disagreement. You must then follow my Sunnah and that of the rightly-guided caliphs. Hold to it and stick fast to it. Avoid novelties, for every novelty is an innovation, and every innovation is an error.”

Two main innovations that have crept into our *deen* are *Qur’an Khwani* (reciting Qur’an in a gathering with the intention to pass on the *thawab* of the recitation to a deceased person) and celebrating *Mawlid al-Nabi* (the Prophet’s birthday). Apparently *Qur’an Khwani* appears to be something good but this practice is unprecedented. There is neither an authentic *hadith* nor any incident in the *sirah* to show that the Prophet (SAW) gathered people in his home or in the masjid to recite the Qur’an with the intention to pass on the *thawab* (*isaal-e-thawab*) to a deceased person. Except his daughter Fatima (RA) who outlived him, all his children and many of his closest relatives died before him; but the practice of *Qur’an Khwani* was never practiced in the blessed life of Muhammad (SAW) or his companions.

Reciting Qur’an in itself is a great virtue and source of reward. A *hadith* tells us, “Whoever reads a letter from the Allah’s Book, he will be rewarded for it. And that reward will be multiplied by ten. I am not saying that “*alif, laam, meem*” is one letter, but “*alif*” is a letter, “*laam*” is a letter and “*meem*” is a letter.” There are a few narrations relating to the recitation of the Qur’an and passing on (gifting) the *thawab* thereof to a deceased, but such traditions are either very weak or fabricated. One such *hadith* related by Ali ibn Abi Talib (RA) says, “Those who recite ‘*Qul Huwallahu Ahad*’ eleven times in a cemetery (*maqbarah*) and then send the reward to the dead, the person who sends it will gain the reward equivalent to the reward of all the dead people there.” Obviously, giving, receiving, and exchanging gifts is a good practice, but there is a difference of opinion among the *ulama’* whether *thawab* gained out of reciting the Qur’an can be passed on to a deceased person or not. And Allah knows best. There is no evidence in the *sirah*, however, of people congregating to read the Qur’an for the purpose of sending the *thawab* gained out of it to the deceased. The people who support the *bid’ah* of reciting the Qur’an and passing over its rewards to the deceased often come up with another Prophetic tradition that says, “Read Yasin on your dead people.” This *hadith* is explained by the *ulama* to mean reciting Surat Yasin on the person while he or she is on death bed. Surat Yasin is a reminder of afterlife. The main purpose of reciting the Qur’an is to be guided in this life so that one can lead a good and righteous life in this world and be

among the righteous (*abrar*) after he or she has died. The deceased who is no more living, cannot benefit from the Qur'an any longer.

Moreover, gatherings of *Qur'an Khwani* often end up with people engaging in discussing mundane matters, backbiting, and gossiping over delicious food. Even if the occasion were to be a meritorious one, as perhaps envisioned to be by the innovators, the same does not usually end up being so.

Another *bid'ah* in terms of mourning the deceased is the practice of arranging periodic gatherings to remember and pray for the deceased, be he or she a close relative or a venerated saint. Such gatherings are held three days (Qul/Soyem), ten days (*Daswaan*), or forty days (*Chehlum*) after a person's death. The *Gyarween Shareef* is celebrated on the 11th of every month to send *thawab* (*isaal-e-thawab*) to the deceased saint Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani. Then there is the celebration of *barsi* to commemorate the death anniversary of a close relative or dead saint. There is also the annual celebration of *'Urs* to commemorate the passing away of a saint on a specific date when his admirers, disciples, followers and relatives assemble together at the grave of the saint to obtain spiritual benefit and rejoice. The word *'Urs* has been taken from the tradition that says that the angels say to the pious in the grave, "Sleep with restfulness and comfort just like a bride."

Mourning the dead in Islam is very simple. Men may mourn for one day only, and women (related to the deceased) for three days only provided her husband has no objection to it. On her husband's death, a woman has to mourn for a period of four months and ten days as per the injunctions of the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions. During the period of mourning, a woman is not to wear brightly colored dress, use adornment, wear perfume, do eye makeup, or dye her hands and feet with *henna* except at the end of her menstruation period when she may use cleaning and refreshing agents to get rid of any offensive smell left over from her period.

Basically, the *deen* is easy (*al-deenu yusrun*). We should not make it complicated. The best thing to do for the deceased people is to make *du'a* for them and give charity on their behalf. The family members of the deceased can also fast or perform hajj on behalf of the deceased. It is reported from Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah that his mother died and he said, 'O Messenger of Allah, my mother has died. Should I give charity on her behalf?' He said: 'Yes'. I said, 'What is the best charity?' He said, 'Offering people a drink of water'. Having wells dug to procure clean drinking water is a big act of charity, especially nowadays when multitude of people are deprived of pure water in many third world countries. As long as these wells are up and running, the deceased will reap the benefits of the charitable deed done on their behalf. There can be many other forms of charitable deeds that may be done on the behalf of the deceased.

People who indulge themselves in *bid'ah* should take heed of the numerous Prophetic traditions that disapprove and condemn it. One such tradition says, "Verily I shall proceed you to the fountain (*Al-Kauthar*). Whoever will pass by me shall drink (from it) and never get thirsty. People whom I know and who will know me will certainly come to me for drink but there will be a barrier between them and me. Then I will say, 'Verily, they are of me.' It will be said, 'You certainly do not know what *bid'ah* (innovation) they made after you.' Then I shall say, 'Be off those who made *bid'ah* after me.'"

To avoid falling into the trap of *bid'ah*, we have to make a concerted effort to accustom ourselves to the custom and culture of learning. *Fiqh al-Sunnah* is a good source to learn and comprehend the Prophetic practices. IONA's book store and library have a good repository of authentic Islamic resources. May Allah increase us in knowledge, save us from innovations in matters of *deen*, and be pleased with us. Ameen.

Edited by Dr. Munawar Haque
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