118225 - Commentary on two hadiths which speak of the prohibition on innovation and newly introduced matters

the question

In the [online] reading library, vol. 2, hadith section, in a commentary on *Riyadh as-Salihin* by Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him), no. 18, in the chapter on the prohibition on innovations and newly introduced matters, it was narrated that Jabir ibn ‘Abdillah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Every innovation is misguidance, and all misguidance leads to the fire.” Narrated by Muslim. And the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever does an action that is not in accordance with this matter of ours, it will be rejected.” Narrated by Muslim. I hope that you can explain these two hadiths and how they are connected to one another.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

These two hadiths are among the most important hadiths on the issue of innovation (bid`ah). They are the texts on which the scholars based their definition of innovation and defined its limits and guidelines. If we take into consideration all the narrations of the two hadiths along with other hadiths, we will be able to understand this issue more precisely.

Dr. Muhammad Husayn al-Jizani (may Allah preserve him) said:

In the Sunnah there are several hadiths which point to the correct understanding of the word bid`ah (innovation) from a religious point of view. These hadiths include:

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The hadith of al-`Irbad ibn Sariyah (may Allah be pleased with him), in which the Prophet

(blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Beware of newly introduced matters, for every newly introduced matter is an innovation, and every innovation is misguidance.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud, 4067)

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The hadith of Jabir ibn `Abdillah (may Allah be pleased with him), according to which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said in his khutbah: “The truest of speech is the Book of Allah and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The worst of matters are those which are newly introduced, for every newly introduced matter is an innovation, every innovation is misguidance, and all misguidance leads to the fire.” (This version was narrated by an-Nasa’i in his *Sunan*, 3/188)

As is clear from these two hadiths, innovation (bid`ah) is that which is newly introduced. In order to understand this idea, we should examine what is meant by newly introduced as mentioned in other hadiths. Regarding that there is

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The hadith of `A’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), in which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever introduces into this matter of ours anything that is not part of it, it will be rejected.” (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 2697, and Muslim, 1718)

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According to another report: “Whoever does an action that is not in accordance with this matter of ours, it will be rejected.” (Narrated by Muslim, 1718)

If we reflect on these four hadiths, we will learn from them the definition of bid`ah and what it really is from the Islamic perspective.

From the Islamic perspective, bid`ah is defined by three unique characteristics, and a thing cannot be regarded as bid`ah according to the teachings of Islam unless it has the three characteristics,

which are:

1. It is newly introduced.
2. This newly introduced thing is attributed to the religion of Islam.
3. This newly introduced thing has no basis in the religious texts, whether in a specific sense or in general terms.

There follow further examples of these three characteristics:

1.. Being newly introduced

The evidence for this guideline is the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him, “Whoever introduces…” and “Every newly introduced matter is an innovation.”

What these hadiths refer to is introducing something that is newly invented and unprecedented. This includes every newly introduced thing, whether it is blameworthy or praiseworthy, in the field of religion or otherwise.

Because the introduction of new things may happen in worldly matters or in religious matters, there should be two other characteristics of the newly introduced thing:

2.. Being attributed to the religion of Islam

The evidence for this guideline is the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), “into this matter of ours.” What is meant by this “matter” is his religion and teachings.

What is meant by innovation (bid`ah) is that the newly introduced thing is attributed to Islam in one way or another. This is something that may be achieved in one of three ways:

1. Seeking to draw close to Allah by means of something that He did not prescribe;
2. drifting away from the teachings of Islam;

- and a third way may be added, which is the means that could lead to innovation.

By defining innovation in this manner, we exclude new inventions and newly introduced matters

pertaining to worldly life, that have nothing to do with religion. We also exclude sins and evil practices that have been introduced, that were not known before. Such things cannot be described as bid`ah, unless they are done by way of seeking to draw close to Allah, or are done in such a way that they give the impression that they are part of religion.

3.. Not having any basis in the religious texts, whether in a specific sense or general terms

The evidence for this guideline is the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), “that is not part of it” and “that is not in accordance with this matter of ours.”

This characteristic excludes newly introduced matters having to do with religion for which there is a basis in the religious texts, either in a general or specific sense.

Things that were introduced in religion for which there is a basis in the religious texts in general terms include that which is done on the basis of the general interest, such as when the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) collected the Quran.

A matter that was introduced in this religion and was based on the religious texts in a specific sense was the introduction of praying Tarawih in congregation at the time of ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), which was based on a specific religious text. Another example is reviving Islamic teachings that have been abandoned; examples of that may vary greatly from one time and place to another. Another example is remembering Allah in times and places where people are heedless of His remembrance.

With regard to the linguistic meaning of the word *ihdath* (introducing new things), it is valid to describe things that are based on the evidence of religious texts as newly introduced, because these things were originally Islamic practices, so doing them again after they have been abandoned or become unknown is introducing them as new in a relative sense.

It is important to note that any newly introduced thing for which there is evidence in the religious texts to prove that it is sound cannot – from an Islamic point of view – be called newly introduced and it is not an innovation (bid`ah), because according to Islamic teachings, things can only be

called newly introduced innovations when there is no evidence for them in the religious texts.

There follows confirmation of these three guidelines from the words of the scholars:

Ibn Rajab said: If someone introduces something new and attributes it to Islam when there is no basis for it in the religious texts, it is misguidance and has nothing to do with Islam. (*Jami` al-`Ulum wa'l-Hikam*, 2/128)

He also said: What is meant by innovation is that which is introduced for which there is no basis in the religious text to support it. As for that for which there is a religious text to support it, it is not regarded as innovation in a religious sense, even if it is regarded as innovation in a linguistic sense. (*Jami` al-`Ulum wa'l-Hikam*, 2/127)

Ibn Hajar said: What is meant by the words "Every innovation is misguidance" is what is newly introduced with no evidence from the religious texts in either a specific or general sense. (*Fat-h al-Bari*, 13/254)

He also said: This hadith – meaning the hadith "Whoever introduces into this matter of ours anything that is not part of it, it will be rejected" – is regarded as one of the fundamentals and basic principles of Islam. If someone invents anything in religion for which there is no reference in any of the basic teachings of Islam, no attention should be paid to it. (*Fat-h al-Bari*, 5/302).

From the above, we may define what is meant by innovation (bid`ah) in Islamic teachings: it is that to which all the three guidelines mentioned above apply. These guidelines may be summed up by saying:

Innovation is that which is newly introduced into the religion of Allah, for which there is no religious text which may support it in either general or specific terms.

More concisely: it is that which is newly introduced into the religion without any evidence. (End quote from *Qawa`id Ma`rifat al-Bid`ah*, p. 18-23)

See also the answers to questions no. 11938 and 864.

And Allah knows best.