Bid‘ah:
A Study of its Usage and Legal Application

Based on Al-I‘tsam
by Imam Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d. 790 H)

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Introduction

The notion of “bid’ah” in Islam is one that is confusing to many. There are a number of reasons for this which are not the concern of this paper, but suffice it to say, there is very little clarity presented on the more nuanced aspects of this concept, and unfortunately there are few works in English, if any, that attempt to tackle the concept of bid’ah accurately and with serious depth.

Fortunately, however, we have an excellent and well-researched work on the subject in Arabic by the eminent pre-modern scholar, Imam Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Musa ibn Muhammad al-Lakhmi al-Shatibi (d. 790 H), called al-I’tisam. Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi was a Maliki Ash’ari jurist and scholar, particularly known for his contributions in the fields of usul al-fiqh (principles of jurisprudence) and fiqh (jurisprudence). He is the author of al-Muwafaqat, an authoritative work on the subject of usul al-fiqh.

This paper is primarily based on Imam al-Shatibi’s definitive study of bid’ah in his seminal work, al-I’tisam, but will also draw on other sources to support some of his conclusions. The aim is to present a coherent and satisfactory examination of the concept of bid’ah, with a treatment of all its important aspects, while keeping it as short and digestible as possible.

There are two aspects to the study of bid’ah: its usul (principles) and its furu’ (peripherals). Study of its usul deals with the formulation of a theoretical framework or criteria by which to determine what constitutes bid’ah and what does not. Study of its furu’ deals with examples of bid’ah, determined by the principles from its usul.

1 In his biography of al-Shatibi, the Maliki historian Abu l-‘Abbas Ahmad Baba (d. 1036 H) said: "[He has] a valuable work on innovations and bid’ahs in one volume at the peak of excellence." (Nayl al-Ibtihaj, Kulliyat al-Da’wat al-Islamiyyah: Tripoly, 1:49)

‘Allamah Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri (d. 1352 H) said: "[Many] works have been compiled on the refutation of bid’ahs...The pithiest and greatest [of them] to know the bases of refuting bid’ahs is al-I’tisam bi l-Kitabi wa l-Sunnah by al-Shatibi al-Maliki in two volumes." (al-‘Arf al-Shadhi, Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi: Beirut, 4:136)

And ‘Allamah Shabir Ahmad al-‘Uthmani (d. 1369 H) said: "Al-Shatibi in this book of his [i.e. al-I’tisam] verified all that is related to the exposition of bid’ah, its definitions, its types and its rulings, and its being blameworthy misguidance, and he eliminated all the doubts the innovators attach to it in a way that cannot be outdone, so all praise is to Allah and from Him is reward." (Fath al-Mulhim, Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-‘Arabi: Beirut, 5:331)

2 A note about methodology: In most cases when bid’ah is discussed, a taqlidi (imitative) approach is taken, in which scholars are haphazardly quoted with no real effort to reconcile apparent inconsistencies or base the statements on scriptural proofs. Al-Shatibi’s approach is tahqiqi (critical) in which a serious effort is made to appreciate the reality of the concept with integrity and care, and to understand the issue in light of the available evidence and the statements of the authorities with full academic rigour.
Imam al-Shatibi’s book stands out as the only work that takes a serious and in-depth look at the subject of usul al-bid’ah, of which he was acutely aware. He mentions towards the beginning of al-I’tisam:

"Rarely has a work been compiled on it [i.e. bid’ah], and whatever has been compiled on it is inadequate in these areas [i.e. of usul al-bid’ah].”

Towards the end of his lengthy work, he mentions two such books, one by Muhammad ibn Waddah (d. 287 H) called al-Bida’ wa l-Nahy ‘anha and another by Abu Bakr al-Turtushi (d. 520 H), called Kitab al-Hawadith wa l-Bida’.

He writes: "I saw that the topic of bid’ah was greatly neglected in the speech of the ‘ulama’, except for brief transmissions as done by Ibn Waddah, or side issues are produced that will not satisfy the thirsty. Rather, complete understanding of it as is required, I did not find, despite my intense search for it, besides what Abu Bakr al-Turtushi wrote about it, but it is meagre in proportion to what is required with respect to it; and besides what the people [i.e. scholars] wrote with respect to the seventy two sects which is [only] one section from the sections of the topic and a part of its parts. Thus, I took up the task myself to pay the attention to it [that it deserves], that perhaps Allah will bring benefit thereby to its writer, its reader, its distributer, its copyist, the one seeking benefit from it and all Muslims."

It is hoped the following study of bid’ah, which aims to tackle the concept primarily from a theoretical perspective, will serve as a useful and comprehensive treatment of this important subject, and will help to bring clarity to readers struggling to understand it. I have attempted to simplify technical discussions as far as possible.

**Lexical and Shar’i Meanings of Bid’ah**

There are many words commonly used by Muslims which were originally designated by the Arabs for a certain meaning and were then, with the advent of Islam and the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), appropriated by the Shar‘i‘ah for other meanings, which then became the popular meanings of those words amongst the Muslim scholars and masses. Examples include the popular common words like salah, zakah, sawm, jihad and hajj. For instance, “sawm” in the Arabic language means “restraint” (imsak), but was appropriated by Islam to mean: “avoiding food, drink and conjugal relations from dawn to dusk with the intention of fasting,” and this eventually became its popular and well-known meaning amongst Muslims.

It is important to appreciate this distinction in our discussion on bid’ah, as bid’ah too, like many other words employed in the Shar‘i‘ah, has both a lexical meaning – assigned by the Arabs – and a Shar‘i‘ definition – coined by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and popularised by the early Muslims. Without understanding this distinction, it would be difficult to make sense of the term in its early usage, as will be explained later.

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4 Ibid. 3:17
For further clarity on this dual nature of many words used in the Shari'ah, consider the following illustration:

The word *kufr* as co-opted and popularised by the Shari'ah means: “Denial of what the Messenger (Allah bless him and grant him peace) brought,” (إنكار ما جاء به الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم)\(^5\) and this is borne out by many texts of the Shari'ah\(^6\), and is how most learned and lay Muslims understand the word *kufr*. Literally, however, *kufr* can have a number of other meanings, including rejection, ungratefulness and concealment. Thus, in one place of the Qur’an, a derivative of the word *kufr* is in fact used positively, where Allah says:

> فَمَنْ يَّكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّه فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقى

> “Whoever rejects (yakfur) false deities and believes in Allah, he has indeed grasped the firmest hand.” (Qur’an 2:256)

Hence, although “*kufr*” is never used positively in its Shar'i meaning, when used in its literal sense as in this verse, it can have both positive and negative connotations. It will be shown that the same is the case with bid'ah.

**The Linguistic Meaning of Bid’ah**

Linguistically, bid’ah means: “an invention without a past precedent”\(^7\). For example, in the following verse of the Qur’an it is used in its linguistic meaning:

> قُلْ مَا كُنْتُ بِدْعَةً مِّنَ الرُّسُلِ

> “Say: I am not something unprecedented (bid’) amongst the messengers.” (Qur’an 46:11)

Imam Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 H) explains this as follows: “Meaning, I am not the first of the messengers of Allah which He sent to His creation. Before me there were many messengers from Him sent to nations before you.”\(^8\)

Thus, according to this linguistic definition, anything that came into existence without precedence in the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is bid’ah in relation to him. Hence, cars, computers, calculators, microphones, spectacles, and so on, are all bid’ah in the linguistic sense. It is already clear that according to the linguistic meaning, bid’ah is not necessarily unfavourable and blameworthy.

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\(^6\) For example, in a hadith recorded in *Sahih Muslim*, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) asks Umm Ma’bad: “Who planted this tree, a Muslim or a Kafir?” She said: “A Muslim.” He said: “No Muslim plants a tree, which a human being or an animal or a bird then eats from, except that it will be charity for him till the Day of Resurrection.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Qadimi Kutub Khanah, 2:15) This hadith shows a person is identified as either a Muslim or a Kafir, the latter being one who does not affirm the message of Islam.

\(^7\) Al-’I’tisam, 1:41

The Shar'i Meaning of Bid'ah

According to the Shari'ah – which is determined by its usage in the recorded sayings of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the early Muslims – bid'ah is best defined as:

“Adopting as religion (din) that which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his companions did not adopt as religion.”

الدين بما لم يتدين به النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ولا أصحابه

A similar definition given by some scholars is:

“Adding or subtracting from the religion (din) after the time of the Sahabah.”

The most important aspect of this definition is that it is restricted to innovations in religion. With this definition, which is its dominant meaning in the usage of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the early Muslims, bid'ah is, in its entirety, reprehensible, blameworthy and sinful, and cannot be described as good under any circumstance. Moreover, as al-Shatibi explains, bid'ah in its Shar'i usage includes religious innovations in four different areas: actions (af'al), omissions (turuk), statements (aqwal) and beliefs ('aqa'id).

Before supplying proof for this meaning of bid'ah, and demonstrating that the distinction between the lexical and Shar'i meanings of the term is a necessary distinction, I will first elaborate somewhat on the Shar'i definition.

Two Types of Proscriptions in the Shari'ah

Imam al-Shatibi explains that those things that are prohibited or discouraged in the Shari'ah are of two types:

1. Direct violations (mukhalafah khassah): these are actions, beliefs, omissions or statements that violate clear injunctions of the Shari'ah. These can be either haram (unlawful) or makruh (undesirable). Examples of haram are murder and injustice, and an example of makruh is overspending (israf) in decorating masjids. Even if these actions are done in inventive ways, though they may be regarded as “bid'ah” linguistically, according to the Shari'ah they will fall under the general prohibition of those acts, and will not necessarily be classed as “bid'ah.”

2. Opposition to the Shari'ah by introducing something new into the religion which is not from it. This is what is known customarily and legally as bid'ah.

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9 Shaykh Muhammad ibn Pir 'Ali al-Birgivi, al-Tariqat al-Muhammadiyyah, Bombay, p. 9

10 Al-I'tisam, 1:55

11 Ibid. 1:42
It is clear from this distinction that bid'ah is different from direct violations. Thus it may happen that there is no opposition to a clear injunction of the Shari'ah in a certain matter, but merely because it is something new that is introduced into the religion, it is classed as bid'ah. Proscriptions of the first category are not necessarily bid'ah because, as al-Shatibi, says: “Violations – in their capacity as violations – are not instituted by anyone as paths which are permanently adopted in a manner resembling legislation” which is the nature of bid'ah in the Shari'ah.

However, these two categories are not mutually exclusive. Thus, it may be that something is a direct violation and is also categorised as bid'ah because it is adopted as religion. An example given by al-Shatibi is the use of chandeliers (thurayya) in masjids, which is regarded as overspending (israf) and thus, makruh. If someone was to purchase a chandelier specifically for the purpose of it being installed in a masjid, believing it to be spending in Allah’s path (infaq fi sabil Allah), this will constitute bid'ah (as it is akin to believing that spending on a cause detested by Islam is spending in Allah’s path). However, importantly, this is not because of the initial undesirability of this practice, but because of the belief attached to it. Another example is the bid’ah of the Qadariyyah who rejected Allah’s foreordainment (qadr), as, although this opposes the clear injunctions in the Qur’an and Sunnah which oblige belief in Allah’s foreordainment, since it is adopted as religion, not only is it a direct violation, but also a bid’ah.

Ritualistic (ta’abbudi) and Non-Ritualistic (‘adi) Matters

The most important element in the Shar’i definition of bid'ah is that it is an innovation “in religion.” In order to understand the definition, therefore, Imam al-Shaibi explores this aspect a little further. His discussion can be summarised in the following points:

- There are two types of matters related to the Shari ‘ah: umur ta’abbudiyyah (ritualistic matters) and umur ‘adiyyah (non-ritualistic matters).

- In ta’abbudi (ritualistic) matters, the reason and purpose behind them is not understood (ghayr ma’qul al-ma’na) i.e. they are carried out ritualistically; while in ‘adi (non-ritualistic/explicable) matters, the opposite is the case: the purpose and reason are understood (ma’qul al-ma’na).

- Ta’abbudi laws dominate in a category of affairs known as ‘ibadiyyat or “religious matters,” that is those things which are essentially part of religion; they generally comprise of ritual acts of worship like prayer, fasting, hajj, etc. and articles of faith, like belief in Allah, the afterlife, and so on.

- ‘Adi laws dominate in a category of affairs known as ‘adiyyat or “mundane matters” which are not intrinsically part of religion, but originally part of the world, like marriage, buying and selling, eating and drinking etc.

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12 Ibid. 1:76
13 Ibid. 2:418
14 Al-I’tisam, 2:401
15 The primary distinction between ’ibadiyyat or “religious matters” and ’adiyyat or “mundane matters” is that in the latter, even if they are performed in total compliance with the Shari’ah,
Although this is a general observation, it is not a hard-and-fast rule. Thus, at times non-ritualistic rules are found in religious matters and ritualistic rules are found in mundane matters. For example, the number of rak‘at of salah, the period of fasting, the number of rounds of tawaf, the value of Zakat and so on are all ta‘abbudi laws within ‘ibadiyyat; the laws of inheritance where specific shares are stipulated for the heirs of the deceased are examples of ta‘abbudi laws within ‘adiyyat. The command to spread Islam, preserve its texts and laws, teach and learn, and so on are examples of ‘adi (non-ritualistic/explicable) laws within ‘ibadiyyat; and the condition of consent in monetary transactions and marriage and the laws of cleaning one’s garments and body are examples of ‘adi laws within ‘adiyyat.

The reason for mentioning this distinction is that bid‘ah only arises in ritualistic or ritualised (ta‘abbudi) matters, as these are what constitutes religious innovations; whereas, innovations in non-ritualistic, mundane or explicable (‘adi) matters, although they may be sinful, they will not be classed as bid‘ah in its Shar‘i usage so long as they are not ritualised (meaning, adopted in a religious way).

Imam al-Shatibi writes:

“As for matters that are ta‘abbudi in nature, their desired objective is pure submission, without any addition or subtraction.”

He also supplies some evidence for this from the Sunnah. Thus, all ta‘abbudi laws must be adhered to as they are without any changes.

In al-I’tisam, after listing several examples of laws that are ta‘abbudi in acts of worship, al-Shatibi concludes:

unless there is an intention of “complying with the command of Allah” (imtithal li amr Allah), they bring no reward (thawab); whereas, ‘ibadiyyat are intrinsically rewarding. (al-I’tisam, op. cit. 2:218)

16 Although a general purpose of submitting to Allah’s command and glorification of Him may be understood from this and further examples, the detailed purpose of the law is not understood, in the sense that the law cannot be generalised and applied to different situations. This is what is meant by ta‘abbudi.

17 The reason being that the purposes of these laws are understood. For example, the command to teach has the purpose of transferring the knowledge of Islam to people who do not have that knowledge; and this purpose can be achieved by a large number of means and is not restricted to a specific form, as will be discussed later. Hence, it is ‘adi.

18 For a more complete discussion, see al-Shatibi, al-Muwafaqat, ed. Abu ‘Ubaydah Mashhur ibn Hasan Al Salman, Dar Ibn ‘Affan, 2:513-528

19 Ibid 2:526
"You know from the intention of the Lawgiver that He has not entrusted any ta'abbudi law to the opinions of [His] slaves, so nothing is left besides stopping at the limit He has set, and adding to it is bid'ah just as subtracting from it is bid'ah."  

Thus, in the ta'abbudi aspects of 'ibadiyyat – matters intrinsic to religion – any addition or subtraction is inescapably a bid'ah. Innovations in these matters are therefore bid'ah in themselves.

In 'adiyyat and 'adi aspects of 'ibadiyyat, however, since these are not originally part of religion or are not ritualistic elements of religion, innovations in them will only be classed as bid'ah when regarded as religious or when they are ritualised. For example, 'aqiqah is a celebration established in the religion for expressing joy at the birth of a child. Thus, it is performed for this 'adi reason, but is also performed ritualistically, as part of religion, since it is established in the Sunnah. If someone decided to express joy by another form of celebration, this would be an innovation in 'adiyyat. Such an innovation would not, however, be regarded as bid'ah, for the very reason that this would not be an innovation in religion but in worldly affairs. However, if it is accompanied by the belief that it is part of religion, in just the same way as 'aqiqah, that is, it is ritualised, it will also be deemed bid'ah. Thus, al-Shatibi says:

"Adiyyat in their capacity as mundane (or non-ritualistic) affairs contain no bid'ah in them; but bid'ah enters into them when they are ritualised or assigned a ritualistic function." 

This is why, al-Shatibi suggests, the Sahabah would not abolish the customs and cultures of the non-Arab converts to Islam, unless they violated the laws of the Shari'ah. However, with respect to matters of worship and ritual, they were extremely careful that no innovation infiltrates them. In sum, if something does not have a comprehensible purpose (ghayr ma'qul al-ma'na), it cannot be added to, subtracted from or changed in any way. If something has a comprehensible purpose, based on that purpose, there can be developments and changes. For example, the purpose of sadaqah or charity is to alleviate the suffering of needy people, which is a comprehensible objective. Thus, this can be accomplished in a number of different ways that achieve that objective. On the other hand, the purpose of praying two rak'ahs in Fajr is incomprehensible so to create changes in that, by, for example, changing it to three rak'at, is an example of bid'ah.

Means or Wasa'il

"Means" or wasa'il only arise in matters which are not ta'abbudi, as the cause and reason behind something that is adopted as a means is, by definition, understood. Imam al-Shatibi explains this rule, and illustrates it with the following example:

20 Al-I'tisam 3:58
21 Ibid. 2:461
22 By "incomprehensible" is meant that a detailed understanding of its purpose is unavailable to us, such that it is not possible to make any deductions or analogies based on it. It is not meant that a general objective or purpose cannot be discerned.
"If there was someone who journeyed towards the obligation of hajj by flying in the air or walking on water, he will not be regarded as a person of bid'ah by his movement in this way, because the objective is only to arrive at Makkah in order to fulfil the obligation." 23

Thus, the aspect of “travel” in hajj is ‘adi (non-ritualistic/explicable) as it has the objective of arrival at Makkah. Therefore, this can be done in various ways that are used to achieve this underlying goal, and will not be regarded as bid’ah. Means are, thus, in principle, non-ritualistic. Hence, something that is consciously adopted as a means is not classed as bid’ah, although depending on its nature and objective, it may be sinful or blameworthy.

An Example

As a simple illustration of bid’ah in ‘adiyyat, al-Shatibi discusses the following example:

If someone were to avoid a particular lawful food item, it may be for a number of reasons. It may be for medical purposes or due to personal dislike or unavailability; or it may be that there is some doubt over its lawfulness, so out of scrupulousness, the person chooses to avoid it. All of these reasons are valid because they are either worldly – ‘adi – reasons or a legitimate Shar’i reason.

However, if the person were to avoid it ritualistically or religiously, meaning, for no other reason but because he believed that by avoiding that particular food item, he would draw closer to Allah or it will bring him reward or it will be beneficial for his afterlife and so forth, this will make it bid’ah. As al-Shatibi says: “If the omission is carried out religiously, that is innovation in religion.” (إن كان الترك تدينا فهو الابتداع في الدين) And then he says, reiterating the central definition of bid’ah in the Shari’ah:

"The one who practises something besides the Sunnah religiously, that is precisely [the definition of] one who practises bid’ah." 24

The above explanation conveys the basic understanding of bid’ah. What remain are the proofs for this conception of bid’ah, and some further details.

Proofs for the Definition of Bid’ah

Imam al-Shatibi provides extensive textual documentation from the Qur’an, Sunnah and sayings of the early Muslims as evidence of the blameworthy character of this definition of bid’ah in the second chapter of his book, but I will suffice with a small selection of

23 Ibid. 1:331-2

24 That is, the religious example set by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his foremost companions.

25 Al-I’tisam, 1:54
clear texts in this section to demonstrate that what is described above is indeed the definition of bid'ah.

Hadith One

In a hadith recorded by both al-Bukhari and Muslim in their Sahihs, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

من أحدث في أمرنا هذا ما ليس منه فهو رد

"Whoever introduces into this matter of ours what is not from it, it is rejected."

Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali wrote in his commentary of al-Nawawi’s collection of forty hadiths, Jami’ al-Ulum wa l-Hikam, under the explanation of this hadith:

وفي بعض ألفاظه: من أحدث في ديننا ما ليس منه فهو رد

"And in some of its wordings, 'Whoever introduces into this religion of ours what is not from it, it is rejected.'"


Thus, the meaning of “matter” in the narration is “religion.” Worldly innovations, therefore, like new cities, technologies and crafts are excluded, as these are mundane activities (‘adiyyat) which are also essentially part of the world. It is this that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) referred to in his famous statement recorded in the Sahih of Imam Muslim: “You are more learned of the matters of your world” (أتم علم بأمور..., which, based on the context in which this statement was said, means: in those things that are permissible (mubah) in the religion, which are based on experiment and experience, like medicine, industry, and so forth, you are free to select and innovate your own methods, and are not restricted by my example.27

Also excluded from what this hadith describes are new acts of sin which are in clear violation of the laws prescribed in the Shari’ah, like theft in a new way (e.g. credit card fraud); as these fall not under “innovations in religion” but direct acts of violation, unless they are consciously adopted as religion. Thus, what this hadith declares as “rejected” is precisely the Shar‘i definition of bid’ah described earlier.

Hadith Two

In another hadith, narrated with an authentic chain by al-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud and others, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

عليكم بسنتي وسنة الخلفاء الراشدين المهديين عضوا عليها بالواجد وإياكم ومحمدات الأمور فإن كل محدثة بدعكة وكل بدعة ضالة

“Hold fast to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly-guided caliphs. Bite onto them with the molar teeth. And beware of newly introduced matters, for verily, every newly introduced matter is bid’ah and every bid’ah is misguidance.”

“Matters” in this narration is contrasted with the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his successors, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman and ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with them all). “Sunnah” in its Shar'i usage means “a path adopted in the religion” (الطريقة المسلوكة في الدين), in particular, that of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his righteous successors, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman and ‘Ali (may Allah be pleased with them all).” Hence, in this hadith the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) defined bid’ah as all matters of religion not found in the Sunnah, precisely the Shar'i definition explained above. Moreover, in this hadith he censured all bid’ahs, without making any exception.

**Statement of Imam Malik**

Imam al-Shatibi narrates in his book:

روى ابن حبيب المالكي: قال ابن الماجشون: سمعت مالكا يقول: من ابتدأ في الإسلام بدعة يراه حسنة فقد زعم أن محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم خان الرسالة لأن الله يقول اليوم أكملت لكم دينكم فما لم يكن يومئذ ديننا فلا يكون اليوم ديننا

Ibn Habib al-Maliki (d. 238) narrated: Ibn al-Majishun (d. 214) said: I heard [Imam] Malik (d. 179) say:

“Whoever innovates into Islam a bid’ah (innovation), deeming it good, then verily he has claimed that Muhammad (Allah bless him and grant him peace) betrayed the role of Messenger, because Allah says: ‘Today I have completed for you your religion.’ (5:3) Thus, whatever was not religion at that time, is not religion today.”

Ibn Habib and Ibn al-Majishun are both well-known authorities and transmitters of the Maliki school.

In another version of this statement, Imam Malik begins with: “Whoever innovates into this ummah something that its predecessors were not upon…” As clear from the context and time in which this was said, “predecessors” refers to the Sahabah. Thus, all religious matters innovated after the Sahabah are, in Malik’s usage, bid’ah, and none of them can be described as good. Hence, we are provided with a very clear early formulation of the definition of bid’ah.

**Statement of Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman**

It is reported from the Sahabi, Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman (may Allah be pleased with him):

كل عبادة لم يتعبدها أصحاب رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فلا تعبدوها - أو تبتدعوها - فإن الأول لم يدع للآخر مقالاً... حذوا طريق من كان قيلكم


29 *Al-I’tisam* 1:64

30 Ibid. 2:306
“Every ritual the companions of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) did not render in worship [to Allah], do not render it in worship [to Allah] – or do not innovate it – for, verily, the early ones did not leave any voice for the latter ones…Adopt the path of those who came before you.”\(^{31}\)

**Statement of 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud**

Ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

إتبعوا ولا تبتدعوا فقد كفيتم

“Follow, and do not innovate, for verily, you have been sufficed.”\(^{32}\)

In some versions there is the addition, “follow our footsteps” (اتبعوا آثارنا).\(^{33}\)

Similar pronouncements can be found in Muhammad ibn Waddah’s *al-Bida' wa l-Nahy 'anha* and al-Shatibi’s *al-I’tisam*.

The rationale behind the latter two statements is the following. The Sahabah superseded the ummah in the acquisition of virtue and reward. Thus, in the words of Ibn Mas'ud their example is sufficient for us. Furthermore, any accretion would be regarded as bid'ah as it would be to claim that non-Sahabah are more aware of religious virtue and more desirous of acting upon it than the best of generations, that of the Sahabah. This is why Imam Malik is reported to have said in condemnation of bid'ah: “Do you think the people today are more desirous of virtue than those who have passed?!” (أترى الناس اليوم كانوا أرغب فى الخير ممن مضى)\(^{34}\)

The pious ruler, widely regarded as the reviver of the first Islamic century, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, also said something to this effect in a statement which will be quoted a little later.

Al-Shatibi’s contemporary, Haifz Ibn Kathir (d. 774), expressed this principle under his explanation of verse 46:11 of his Qur’anic commentary as follows:

أما أهل السنة والجماعة، فيقولون في كل فعل وقول [أي مما اتخذ دينا أو يتعبد به] لم يثبت عن الصحابة رضي الله عنهم إلا في الصلاة، لأنهم لم يتركوا خصلة من خصال الخير إلا وقد بادروا إليها

“As for the Ahl al-Sunnah wa l-Jama’ah, they say with respect to every action and statement [which is adopted as religion or is ritualised], not established from the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them), ‘It is bid'ah,’ because had it been virtuous, they would have beaten us to it, since they did not leave a trait from the traits of virtue except they hastened towards it.”\(^{35}\)

\(^{31}\) Ibid. 3:53

\(^{32}\) Al-Haythami says in *Majma’ al-Zawa'id* after quoting this narration: “Al-Tabrani narrated it in *al-Kabir* and its men are the men of the *Sahih*.” (*Majma’ al-Zawa'id*, Dar al-Fikr: Beirut, 1:434)

\(^{33}\) *Al-Bida' wa l-Nahy 'anha*, Muhammad ibn Waddah, Dar al-Safa: Cairo, p. 17

\(^{34}\) *Al-I’tisam*, 2:276

There are, thus, a number of clear statements from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), the Sahabah and the early Muslims that any innovation into the religion after the Sahabah equates to bid’ah, which is precisely the definition of bid’ah outlined above.

**Proofs for the Detestability of Bid’ah**

There are many strong and unequivocal condemnations of bid'ah found in the hadiths and statements of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the early Muslims.

**Hadith One**

In a hadith recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim in their Sahih, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

“Whoever introduces therein an innovation or shelters an innovator, upon him is the curse of Allah, the Angels and all of mankind. Allah will accept neither a compulsory nor a voluntary deed from him on the Day of Resurrection.”

**Hadith Two**

In a hadith recorded in Sahih Muslim, Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates that the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) would say in his sermons:

“The best speech is the Book of Allah and the best example is the example of Muhammad. The worst of affairs are their newly-invented ones, and every bid'ah is misguidance.”

In imitation of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), Muslim leaders from both early and later times repeat this formula in their sermons.

**Statements from the Early Muslims**

Al-Lalaka’i, Muhammad ibn Nasr and al-Bayhaqi transmit with an authentic chain from ‘Abd Allah ibn ’Umar (may Allah be pleased with him):

"Every bid'ah is misguidance, even if people deem it good.”

This shows that in the usage of Ibn 'Umar there is no situation in which bid'ah can be good. Hence, whenever it is conclusively proven that a certain matter described as “bid'ah” is good, this is according to a different usage of the term.

Al-Darimi narrates with an authentic chain from the eminent Tabi’i, Hassan ibn ‘Atiyyah (d. 130):

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“No people innovate a bid'ah into their religion, except Allah removes from their sunnahs the like of it, and then He will not return it to them till the Day of Resurrection.”

Note the explicit usage of the phrase "in their religion," and the absence of any exception, supporting the conclusion that bid'ah in the Shar'i ah refers exclusively to religious innovations and that they are all blameworthy with no exception.

It is reported from the famous ascetic, Fudayl ibn 'Iyad (107 – 187):

“Whoever sits with a champion of bid'ah, he will not be given wisdom.”

It is clear from these statements that bid'ah was invariably used negatively by the early Muslims, as were its derivatives, “ahl al-bid'ah,” (people of bid'ah) "sahib al-bid'ah" (champion of bid'ah) and “mubtadi’” (innovator). Even those Muslims today who mistakenly defend the view that bid'ah in its conventional and Shar'i usage can be both praiseworthy and blameworthy do not use these terms positively. This is a clear proof that in the Muslim conscience, bid'ah has always been thought of as a negative principle and never a positive one, when used in its normal context. Whenever bid'ah was mentioned by the early Muslims without any qualification, it was the Shar'i meaning that was intended.

Imam al-Shatibi collected all the negative consequences of bid'ah documented in the hadiths and statements of the early Muslims with their original references. Some of these consequences are as follows: No worship will be of benefit for the practitioner of bid'ah; protection is removed from his gatherings; respect for him helps in destroying Islam; he is cursed by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him); he grows distant from Allah; it prevents prophetic intercession; it lifts and removes the blessed sunnahs; the innovator incurs the sin of those who imitate him; it is feared that he will be deprived of repentance; he will be disgraced and incur the wrath of Allah; he will be removed from the fountain on the Day of Resurrection; it is feared he will be counted amongst the disbelievers and die a disbeliever; his face will be blackened on the Day of Resurrection and he will be punished in the Fire; the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) disassociated himself from him; it is feared he will be punished even in this world, let alone the afterlife.  

All this – and more – is clear proof that bid'ah, in its popular, generic, Shar'i usage, is always blameworthy, and as the statements of Ibn 'Umar and Imam Malik clearly show, there can be no good in it. Al-Shatibi lists several principles why the condemnations of bid'ah must be understood as general and inclusive without any exceptions. Some of these principles are as follows:

1. The hadiths condemning bid'ah in its totality are frequent, explicit and make no exception. When explicit and general texts are recurrent in this manner, a

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37 Al-I’tisam 1:149

38 Ibid. 1:183
principle of jurisprudence states that it must be accepted at face value and may not be restricted or qualified.

2. The early Muslims invariably used the term negatively, as they did “ahl al-bid’ah,” “sahib al-bid’ah” and “mustadidi” which shows that these terms were never conceived in the Muslim conscience as having any goodness in them. In fact, the prominent Maliki scholar, al-Qarafi, related consensus on the condemnation of bid’ah, quoting from Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayranawi and others. Thus, bid’ah, in its conventional usage, must be blameworthy in totality with no exception.

3. In its conception, bid’ah is to deem something good in religion which was nonexistent in the early period, while goodness and virtue in religion is only determined by revelation to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), and was practised and observed most fervently by his companions, so even on this rational basis alone, no bid’ah – that is, religious innovation – can possibly be good.

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz expressed this principle as follows, as transmitted by Ibn Waddah:

“You must adhere to the Sunnah, because it is a protection for you by the permission of Allah. And know that the people did not innovate a bid’ah except there has passed before it that which is a proof against it and an admonition therein, for verily, the Sunnah was only instituted by one who knew what is in variation from it of error, slip, stupidity and extremism. So be content for yourself with what the people [i.e. the Sahabah] were content with for themselves, for they are the foremost (Qur’an 9:110)...For, if guidance was what you are upon then you have beaten them to it...Whereas, verily, they are the foremost. Indeed they have spoken on it with what suffices.”

Proofs for the Distinction between the Lexical and Shar’i Meanings of Bid’ah

One of the reasons for confusion over the concept of bid’ah is that sometimes bid’ah was used in its linguistic meaning by the early Muslims. I will present two well-known examples of this, and then demonstrate that these statements must be understood unconventionally and linguistically.

Statement of ‘Umar

Al-Bukhari narrates in his Sahih from ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Abd al-Qari that he said: "I went out with ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (Allah be pleased with him) on a night of Ramadan to the mosque, when behold, the people were in isolated groups, one man praying on his own and another leading a group in prayer. So ‘Umar said: 'I think it would be better if

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39 Al-‘I’tisam 1:313

40 ‘I’tisam 1:63-4; the editor states Ibn Waddah transmitted it with a sahih chain of narrators.
these [separate groups] were gathered under one reciter.’ Then he made a resolve, so he gathered them under ‘Ubayy ibn Ka’b. Then I came out with him on another night, while their reciter led the people in prayer. ‘Umar said: ‘A blessed bid’ah this is!’ (Fath al-Bari, Hafiz Ahmad ibn ‘Ali ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, Dar al-Salam: Riyad, 1421 H/2000 CE, 4:317-8).

To understand ‘Umar’s usage of bid’ah in this sentence, it is necessary to know a little about the history of this prayer. Imam al-Shatibi quotes from Abu Dawud’s Sunan from Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: “We fasted with the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) during Ramadan, but he did not stand with us [in prayer] in any part of the month until seven [nights] remained. Then he stood with us until a third of the night had passed. When the sixth [remaining night] came, he did not stand with us. When the fifth [remaining night] came, he stood with us until a half of the night passed. So we said, ‘We wish you had led us in supererogatory prayers during the whole of tonight.’ He said, ‘When a man prays with an imam until he leaves, he is reckoned as having spent a whole night in prayer.’ When the fourth [remaining night] came he did not stand with us. When the third [remaining night] came, he gathered his family, his wives, and the people and prayed with us until we were afraid we would miss success (falah) [meaning, the predawn meal or suhur].”

Al-Shatibi then states: “However, when he (Allah bless him and grant him peace) feared it would become obligatory on the ummah he withheld from it. Thus, in the Sahih [it is narrated] from ‘A’ishah (Allah be pleased with her) that one night Allah’s Messenger (Allah bless him and grant him peace) prayed in the mosque and the people followed him in prayer. The next night he also prayed and the people increased. On the third or fourth night they gathered, but Allah’s Messenger (Allah bless him and grant him peace) did not come out to them. When morning came he said, ‘I saw what you were doing and nothing but the fear that it might be enjoined on you, stopped me from coming.’ (And that was in the month of Ramadan.)

Al-Shatibi goes on to explain that, therefore, the reason the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) abstained from the continued practice of this special night prayer in Ramadan was for fear that revelation will make it incumbent on the Muslims if they were to observe it continuously. With the demise of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), this barrier no longer remained as revelation had come to an end. Hence, the original ruling of the desirability of Tarawih throughout the month returned, which was only hampered in the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) for a temporary fear that ended with his death. Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) probably did not attend to reviving this prayer due to his other commitments and the short period of his caliphate. ‘Umar referred to it as bid’ah “by consideration of the apparent situation” (باعتبار ظاهر الحال), from the perspective that Allah’s Messenger (Allah bless him and grant him peace) eventually left it out and it so happened that it was not revived as a continuous practice in the time of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), not that it is bid’ah in the real sense. This is therefore an example of bid’ah being used in its linguistic meaning, not in its Shar’i meaning of an actual innovation in religion. Furthermore, the practices of the righteous caliphs form part of the Sunnah as explicitly mentioned in hadith, so by definition, it cannot be bid’ah in its Shar’i meaning.

42 Al-I’tisam, 1:324
43 Ibid. 1:324-5
44 Ibid. 1:326-7
Statement of al-Shafi'i

Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali writes in his Jami' al-'Ulam wa l-Hikam:

وقد روى الحافظ أبو نعيم بإسناده عن إبراهيم بن جنيد
حدثنا حرملة بن يحيى قال: سمعت الشافعي (رحمه الله تعالى) يقول: البذعة
بدعتان: بدعة محمودة وبدعة مذمومة، فما وافق السنة فهو محمود وما خالف السنة فهو مذموم. واحتج بقول عمر: نعمت البذعة هذه.

"Hafiz Abu Nu'aym narrated with his chain from Ibrahim ibn Junayd: Harmalah ibn Yahya narrated to us, he said: I heard al-Shafi'i (Allah have mercy on him) say: 'Bid'ah is two bid'ahs: praiseworthy bid'ah and blameworthy bid'ah. Thus, whatever agrees with the Sunnah, it is praiseworthy and whatever conflicts with the Sunnah, it is blameworthy.' And he adduced as evidence the statement of 'Umar: 'What an excellent bid'ah this is!'"\(^{45}\)

It should, firstly, be noted that this statement of Imam al-Shafi'i is irreconcilable with Imam Malik’s earlier statement that there can be no good in bid'ah if we suppose they meant the same thing by the word "bid'ah." (Imam Malik was senior to al-Shafi'i, and amongst his teachers.) It must, therefore, be the case that they used bid'ah in different ways. Al-Shafi'i used it linguistically as proven by his citation of the statement of ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him). His usage of bid'ah here was linguistic, and inclusive of religious and worldly innovations; whereas, Malik used it in itsShar'i usage. It is due to this irreconcilability if a uniform meaning of the word "bid'ah" is assumed that the distinction between a lexical and Shar'i definition of bid'ah is necessary. Without this distinction, it would not be possible to reconcile such apparently conflicting statements.

Moreover, it is clear from al-Shafi'i’s methodology that he disallows innovation in religion. Thus, bid'ah in its Shar'i meaning, i.e. innovations introduced into religion (even if there is no direct opposition to the Sunnah) is unanimously rejected. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani wrote:

وأجاب الشافعي عن قول من قال ليس شيء من البيت مهجورا بأننا لم ندع استلامهما هجرا للبيت وكيف يهجره وهو يطوف به ولكننا نتبع السنة فغلا أو تركا ولو كان ترك استلامهما هجرا لفما كان ترك استلام ما بين الأركان هجرا ولا قائل به

"Al-Shafi'i replied to the statement of the one who says nothing of the House is abandoned [so we ought to salute all four corners of the Ka'bah] that we do not omit salutation of the two corners in abandonment of the house – and how is it being abandoned when the Tawaf includes them? – but we follow the Sunnah, both in performance and in omission..."\(^{46}\)

It is clear from this statement that al-Shafi'i did not allow accretions of a religious nature to what is established in the Sunnah.

Statements of Major Scholars

Major pre-modern scholars besides al-Shatibi explained the distinction between the lexical and Shar'i meanings of bid'ah. Three of them are quoted below.

\(^{45}\) Jami' al-'Ulam wa l-Hikam, p. 600

\(^{46}\) Fath al-Bari, 3:599
Ibn Kathir (d. 774 H) wrote in his commentary of verse 2:117 of the Qur’an:

"Bid’ah is of two types: sometimes it is Shar'i bid'ah, like his (Allah bless him and grant him peace) statement: ‘For indeed every innovation is bid'ah and every bid'ah is misguidance,’ and sometimes it is linguistic bid'ah like the statement of the Commander of the Believers, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), about his unification of them on the Tarawih prayer and their continuous [practice of it]: ‘An excellent bid'ah this is!’”

Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d. 852 H) said:

"As for ‘bida’, it is the plural of ‘bid'ah’, which is everything that has no precedent that came before [it]. Thus, linguistically, it includes that which is praised and dispraised. And in the convention of the Shari‘ah it is specified to what is dispraised; and if it is used in a praiseworthy matter, that is according to its linguistic meaning.”

Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali (d. 795 H) said:

"Thus, all who innovate something and attribute it to the religion, and it has no basis in the religion to which it is referred, it is misguidance, and the religion is free from it. The matters of belief, actions and outward and inward speech are equal in this. As for what has occurred in the speech of [some of the] Salaf in deeming some ‘bid'ahs’ good, that is only linguistic bid'ahs not Shar'i bid'ah."

Similar statements distinguishing the lexical and Shar'i meanings of bid'ah can be found in the writings of Muhammad al-Birgivi (d. 981 H), Ibn Hajar al-Haythami (d. 974 H) and many scholars of the later period. Al-Shatibi’s extensive scholarly treatment of the texts of the Shari‘ah and the usage of the term by the early Muslims conclusively...

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47 *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, p. 191
49 *Jami’ al-Ulum wa l-Hikam*, p. 597
51 *Kitab al-Fatawa al-Hadithiyah*, pp. 205-6
demonstrates the true nature of bid’ah in the Shari’ah, so if used otherwise it is either as a metaphor or due to ignorance of the reality of bid’ah.\textsuperscript{52}

**Answering Objections**

Some people contend that the condemnation of religious innovations is restricted to those innovations that directly clash with the Shari’ah. Otherwise, they are not blameworthy, and in fact may be permissible or even recommended. Al-Shatibi answers their doubts in the third chapter of his book. Three of their most commonly used evidences will be presented below followed by their replies:

**Hadith of Jarir ibn ’Abd Allah al-Bajali**

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said as recorded in *Sahih Muslim*:

من سن سنة حسنة كان له أجرها وأجر من عمل بما لا ينقص ذلك من أجرهم شيئا ومن سن سنة سيئة كان عليه وزرها ووزر من عمل بما لا ينقص ذلك من أورارهم شيئا

“Whoever institutes a good sunnah, he will have its reward and the reward of those who practise it, and that will not decrease from their rewards in the least. And whoever institutes a bad sunnah, he will have its sin and the sins of those who practise it, and that will not decrease from their sins in the least.”

The proponents of the view that innovations in religion need not be blameworthy or discouraged argue that this hadith proves that not only can a new practice that is introduced into religion be good but may also be the cause of an immense amount of reward.

The reply to this argument is that this conclusion is contradicted by the context in which this statement was said.\textsuperscript{53} The full context as narrated by Jarir ibn ’Abd Allah al-Bajali is that a group of people came to the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) dressed in wool, and they were desperately in need. He, therefore, invited the people to spend in charity, upon which a man emptied a purse of silver and others followed suit. It was then that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) made this statement.

*Sadaqah* (charity) is established in the Shari’ah and from the Sunnah, but one particular aspect of it was not being practised. Furthermore, voluntary charity is not restricted to any ritualistic (*ta'abbudi*) law, as its purpose – which is to alleviate suffering – is understood and is comprehensible. Hence, the hadith does not refer to inventing something new into the religion, but about applying an *'adi* law to a situation that demanded it. Mufti Taqi Usmani writes in his commentary of this hadith:

“This is with respect to what is established as being good from the Qur’an and Sunnah, but the people have left it or they have not attended to one of its aspects, as has occurred here, since the virtue of charity is established from the Qur’an and Sunnah, but the one who attended to this particular cause and produced charity first, inviting others to it, attained this virtue. As for what is not established as a righteous deed from the

\textsuperscript{52} Al-’Itisam, 1:45

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. 1:304
Qur’an or the Sunnah, inventing such a deed is innovation that has no connection to this hadith.\textsuperscript{54}

Furthermore, it should be noted that “sunnah” in this hadith is used in its linguistic meaning of “path,” “way” and “method,” which can be both good and bad as described in the hadith. However, according to its Shar’i meaning – which is its dominant usage amongst Muslims – it refers to the religious example set for us by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his closest companions, and thus can only be positive.

The Innovations of the Early Muslims

The proponents of the view that religious innovations may be good contend, secondly, that the Sahabah and early Muslims introduced many innovations in religion, including the compilation of the Qur’an and writing down knowledge. Thus, they argue, if inventing new practices in religion is for a good purpose, it is praiseworthy.

The answer to this is that these are not bid’ah, as they are innovations in ‘adi matters. These particular examples fall under what al-Shatibi refers to as \textit{al-masalih al-mursalah} (unspecified benefits). There are two major differences between these acts introduced by the Sahabah and the early Muslims and what is regarded as bid’ah in the Shari’ah:

1. The basis of these innovations is understood and comprehensible. In other words they are \textit{ma'qul al-ma’na} or ‘adi, and are not \textit{ta’abbudi}.

2. They are adopted as means and not as ends, based on the principle that “whatever an obligation is not complete without, that itself is obligatory.”

A group of the Sahabah compiled the Qur’an into one volume in the time of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) for fear that the Qur’an will be lost if left to oral transmission alone as many of the memorisers of the Qur’an died in battle. Thus, for the purpose of \textit{hifz al-shar’} (preserving the Shari’ah), the Sahabah undertook this action. \textit{Hifz al-shar’} is something the purpose of which can be comprehended, and it can be practised in a variety of different ways, depending on the situation and on the resources that are available. Furthermore, its basis can also be traced to \textit{tabligh al-shar’} (conveying the Shari’ah), which is from the established teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah. This is also a non-ritualistic (‘adi) instruction, as its purpose – that is, to facilitate the message reaching others – is understood. The same reasoning also applies to compiling knowledge.\textsuperscript{55}

In sum, these “innovations” were not in \textit{ta’abbudi} matters, and therefore do not fall under the meaning of bid’ah as intended in the Shari’ah. A clear indication of this is that they were adopted as means (\textit{wasa’iil}) and not as ends in themselves which is the nature of bid’ah.

The Scholars’ Division of Bid’ah into Good and Bad

A third proof presented by the proponents of the view that religious innovation may be good is that certain major scholars divided bid’ah into the five juridical categories,

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Takmilah Fath al-Mulhim}, Mufti Taqi Usmani, Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi: Beirut, 5:407

\textsuperscript{55} For more details, see \textit{al-I’tisam} 3:12-7
namely, *fard, mustahabb/mandub, mubah, makruh* and *haram*. Al-Shatibi discusses the statements of two prominent scholars: al-Qarafi (d. 684) and his teacher 'Izz al-Din ibn 'Abd al-Salam (d. 660), as both were major scholars of *usul al-fiqh*.\(^{56}\) He demonstrates that there is clear inconsistency in their exposition of bid'ah which comes down to a conflation of the literal and Shar'i meanings of the word. I will summarise some of his conclusions below.

It should be noted that al-Qarafi imitated 'Izz al-Din ibn 'Abd al-Salam in this categorisation, and it is clear al-Qarafi did not make any distinction between a literal definition of bid'ah and a Shar'i definition. It appears that to him they are both the same.

Both al-Qarafi and al-'Izz state that the method of identifying the ruling of an innovation (bid'ah) is to subject it to the laws and principles of the Shar'iah (قواعد الشريعة).\(^{57}\) Thus, if the laws prove that an innovation is *wajib* it is *wajib*, or if they prove that it is *haram* it is *haram* and so forth. Al-Shatibi’s first point in response is that if something is proven to be *makruh* or *haram*, they are classed as direct violations and not bid'ah in religion.

More importantly however, al-Qarafi, one of the major scholars who promoted this view, falls into a contradiction when he says: “The scholars (al-ashab) as far as I have seen are agreed on condemning bid'ah”\(^{58}\) quoting Ibn Abi Zayd (d. 386), the prominent Maliki jurist, and others, but then says: “The truth is that it is divided into five types,”\(^{59}\) which if taken literally would imply al-Qarafi is openly violating the consensus he himself transmitted! Al-Shatibi takes al-Qarafi to task for this and states he clearly “violated consensus.”\(^{60}\)

A second inconsistency in al-Qarafi’s discussion on bid'ah is where he states: "If it [i.e. bid'ah] is considered in a general sense, in terms of it being an innovation (bid'ah), and ignoring anything that requires it, it is detested; *for verily, all good is in imitation and all evil in innovation*”\(^{61}\) Al-Shatibi points out that this is incongruent with his earlier exposition as it would imply a combination of two conflicting rulings in some matters, that of detestability and of obligation. However, this difficulty is avoided if we simply make the distinction between the lexical and Shar'i meanings of bid'ah as outlined earlier.

In examining 'Izz al-Din ibn 'Abd al-Salam’s statement, al-Shatibi observes that the examples of “obligatory” innovations he produced fall under the category of *al-masalih al-mursalah* explained above, which, he states, al-'Izz mistook as bid'ah because of their absence in those specific forms in the earlier period. Al-Shatibi also inspects some of the other examples he uses. I will look at a few representative examples below.

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\(^{56}\) This view was also famously expressed by al-Nawawi in imitation of 'Izz al-Din ibn 'Abd al-Salam. Both the scholars al-Shatibi discusses, 'Izz al-Din and al-Qarafi, were senior to al-Nawawi.

\(^{57}\) *Al-I’tisam* 1:319

\(^{58}\) *Al-I’tisam* 1:313

\(^{59}\) Ibid.

\(^{60}\) Ibid. 1:322

\(^{61}\) Ibid. 1:319
In the examples of *mandub*, al-'Izz includes the Tarawih prayer which was examined earlier in the discussion of 'Umar’s statement, “An excellent bid’ah this is!”

Al-'Izz also refers to Islamic schools (madrasahs) as an example of *mandub* bid’ahs. The reply to this is that building madrasahs is not based on a *ta'abbudi* (ritualistic) rule, and is therefore not bid’ah. Madrasahs are built with the objective of conveying knowledge, an important injunction of the Shari'ah. Conveying knowledge has a comprehensible purpose which is to pass on the inherited sciences of the religion to those who are ignorant of them, hence this is an ‘adi ruling. It is known that in order to convey knowledge it is more effective to have the equipments, books, instruction manuals, instructors and students in one place. And since a madrasah facilitates the interaction of all of these things, it follows that it is sensible to build one. Al-Shatibi does however make a caveat, that madrasahs would be bid’ah in one of two situations:

It would be bid’ah if transferring knowledge in the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his illustrious companions was restricted ritualistically to one place. But this is not so, as we find examples in their lifetimes, of knowledge being taught in houses, markets, mosques, during a journey etc.

Secondly, if it is believed madrasahs are the only place where knowledge can be acquired as a religious conviction, and they are ritualistically adopted in this way, that would then make them bid’ah. However, it is generally the case that people are not susceptible to the misunderstanding that madrasahs are literally something that originates in the example of the early generations, because the reason for constructing them (i.e. the facilitation of instruction) is understood and comprehensible to the general mind. Therefore it is a completely ‘adi – non-ritualistic – matter, and there is little danger of it becoming *ta'abbudi* in the minds of some. (The issue of a fear of something being interpreted by the common people as a *ta'abbudi* restriction will be discussed later.)

Al-'Izz also mentioned “every act of kindness without precedent in the first era.” (كل إحسان لم إهدى) as an example of a bid’ah that is *mandub*. Al-Shatibi replies that this example requires making the following distinctions:

1. If the “act of kindness” is limited by a *ta'abbudi* restriction, as for example in Zakah and Sadaqat al-Fitr, a change will certainly constitute bid’ah.

2. If there is no *ta'abbudi* restriction in “the act of kindness,” it would fall under the general order in the Qur’an and Sunnah to be good and kind to others. And since “kindness” and “being charitable” is a principle that is comprehensible and explicable, this command can be enacted in unprecedented ways. However, al-Shatibi says, there are two conditions to this: First, the normal rules of the Shari'ah apply, that the wealth is lawful, the charity is not followed up by injury (*adha*) and so on; second, that there is no insistence on a specific form that gives the impression that that particular form is established from the Sunnah, for example, always giving charity publicly on a particular day with no ‘adi reason (أن المشار إليه بدعة مذمومة). Since this gives the impression of an innovated *ta'abbudi* restriction, it would be cautioned against due to imitation of bid’ah. This will be discussed in more detail below under the
section of relative bid‘ah. Of course, if there is an actual belief of a \textit{ta’Abbudi} restriction, that would fall under the literal definition of bid‘ah.\footnote{Al-I’tisam 1:347-8}

As an example of bid‘ah that is \textit{mubah}, al-Izz cites handshaking after Fajr and ‘Asr, which was a common practice in his time. Al-Shatibi replies that if handshaking after these two prayers is not done with the intention that there is a religious connection between handshaking and those prayers it will certainly not be a “true bid‘ah” in the way described above. However, with persistence on it it will become a type of bid‘ah referred to as “relative bid‘ah,” that is, a practice in which there is a fear that by persistence on it, it will eventually be added to the prayers \footnote{Kitab al-Fatawa, al-Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salam, Dar al-Ma’rifah: Beirut, p. 46-7}, the reason being that there is no overtly ‘\textit{adi}’ reason for this specific practice. This principle will be discussed below under the section of relative bid‘ah.

Moreover, this is an example of where ‘Izz al-Din ibn ‘Abd al-Salam contradicts himself. When he was asked specifically about this practice, of shaking hands after Fajr and ‘Asr, he said in his \textit{Fatawa}: “Shaking hands after Fajr and ‘Asr is from the bid‘ahs, except for one who arrives [from a journey at that time]...” \footnote{Al-I’tisam 2:44}. He goes on to explain that this is not from the example of the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) and “all good is in imitation of the Messenger.”\footnote{Al-I’tisam 2:124}

\textbf{The Nature of the Evidences Furnished by the People of Bid‘ah}

People who engage in bid‘ah do not recognise what they do as bid‘ah. On the contrary, by definition, the practitioner of bidah believes what he is engaged in to be praiseworthy and established in the religion. Thus, they will invariably furnish “proofs” for their bid‘ahs from the sources of the Shari‘ah. Al-Shatibi devotes an entire chapter to explaining the kinds of proof presented by the people of bid‘ah. He shows that there is always a progression from personal whim and opinion to seeking out the evidence, as opposed to allowing the evidences to explain themselves based on the understanding of the earlier generations. The primary distinguishing characteristic of the evidences they supply is that they are always unclear (\textit{mutashabih}). An example he gives is the bid‘ah of the Mu‘tazilah of their belief that the Qur’an is created, as opposed to the belief of the Ahl al-Sunnah that it is uncreated. They quote the verse, “Allah is the Creator of all things,” (39:62) as proof of this claim, which is an unclear form of evidence.\footnote{Al-I’tisam 2:44}

Al-Shatibi explains that on such shaky grounds, anyone can support any conclusion they like from the scriptural texts. For example, a Christian can take support from the verse, “And His word that He cast upon Maryam,” (4:100) as proof that ‘Isa (peace be upon him) is a partner with Allah (Great and Glorious is He).\footnote{Al-I’tisam 2:124} He further says: “Likewise, it is possible for every person who follows the ambiguous evidences or distorts the applications [of the evidences] or interprets verses in a way they were not understood by the pious Salaf or holds fast to weak hadiths or takes evidences on face value to draw support for every action, statement or belief that agrees with his objective from a verse
or hadith that did not intend that at all. The proof for this is that every sect that has
become famous for its heresy (bid'ah) draws support from verses or hadiths. 66

I will take a look at some of these invalid arguments which are used by the people of
bid'ah in the section on “examples” below.

**True Bid'ah and Relative Bid'ah**

In the fifth chapter of *al-I’tisam*, al-Shatibi discusses an important categorisation of
bid'ah which was alluded to earlier. Bid'ah – in its Shar'i usage – divides into two types:
bid'ah haqiqiyyah and bid'ah idafiyyah. Bid'ah haqiqiyyah (true bid'ah) is bid'ah as
explained above.

Bid'ah idafiyyah (relative bid'ah) is a kind of innovation that was also regarded as
“bid'ah” by the early Muslims. In its basic conception, it is a matter that consists of two
elements: one that is established in the Shari’ah and a second element that is
innovation. That is, its specific procedure, conditions, details and times are not proven in
the Shari’ah, though they are required as these specifications are performed in such a
way as to give the impression that they are part of religion. This is best demonstrated by
means of examples:

Voluntary (nafl) practices like dhikr, optional prayer and optional fasts are recommended
and praiseworthy, and these voluntary acts of worship have the inherent property of
“flexibility” (tawsi’ah). If one performs voluntary worship (i.e. recitation of Qur’an, dhikr,
supplication, fasting and prayers) with a sequence or number that is not exactly
established from the Sunnah, even with continuity (dawam), that individual is acting
within the remits of the flexibility allowed for by the voluntary nature of these acts of
worship. This is as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said in a hadith
recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim in their Sahih: “You should do [voluntary] deeds as
much as you are able” (ما تطيقون عليكم من العمل) which he said specifically in the context of
voluntary prayer performed by an individual with continuity. This is of course with the
condition that this prayer does not adversely affect one’s self or his responsibilities to
others, as explicitly mentioned in the hadiths.

Voluntary worship was originally intended to be performed in isolation, not in public.
Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “The best of your prayer is in
your homes except the prescribed prayers.” (全能 مصلحتكم في بيوتكم إل مكتوب). Thus, in the early
period, voluntary worship was not done publicly except rarely, unlike wajib and sunnah
prayers (e.g. ‘Id and Tarawih prayers). If, however, a particular form of optional worship
is done with insistence (iltizam) and continuity (mudawamah) publicly, it will become
what is known as “bid’ah idafiyyah” (relative bid'ah), even if the person doing it does not
have the intention of specifying that act to that form and time. The reason for this is that
those acts that are performed in this way – i.e. specific forms of worship done in public –
are precisely how the early Muslims would practise sunnah and wajib acts. Thus, an
impression may easily be created that the voluntary act is sunnah or wajib, which if in
fact believed would make it a “true bid'ah” (bid'ah haqiqiyyah); but if only the impression

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66 Ibid. 2:125
is created and the public are made susceptible to that belief, it would be counted as bid'ah idafiyyah.\(^{67}\)

This is why the Sahabah left out acts that are originally permissible for fear of it being treated as sunnah. For example, 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) forbade the people from following the traces of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and searching for places where he prayed, as recorded in the \textit{Musannaf} of 'Abd al-Razzaq.\(^{68}\) However, if one were to do this merely as an expression of love or longing for the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), and not as a sunnah act, it would certainly be permissible and not bid'ah. But 'Umar forbade it for fear of it being treated as a sunnah. After listing a number of other examples, al-\textsc{Shatibi} states: “And all of this is a path to not treating what is not sunnah as sunnah.”\(^{69}\)

An example from the teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is the hadith recorded in the \textit{Sahihs} of al-Bukhari and Muslim:

\begin{quote}
لا يتقدم من أحدكم رمضان بصوم يوم أو يوم
\end{quote}

“None of you should fast one or two days before Ramadan.”

One of the reasons given for this by the commentators is that there is a fear of such voluntary fasts being joined to the obligatory fast, so people may begin to believe that these voluntary fasts are also obligatory.

After explaining a number of examples, al-\textsc{Shatibi} puts down a basic statement defining this principle:

\begin{quote}
كل عمل أصله ثابت شرعا إلا أن في إظهار العمل به أو المداومة عليه ما يخشى أن يعتقد أنه سنة فتركه مطلوب فى الجملة من باب سد الذراع
\end{quote}

“Every action the basis of which is established in the Shari'ah but in publicising its practice or maintaining continuity therein is feared that it will be believed that it is sunnah, it is required that it be totally abandoned as a path to blocking the means.”\(^{70}\)

From the definition, it is clear that the principle is subjective, as it is contingent on a "fear." If what is feared is actualised in some of the common people, there is no doubt the bid'ah would be true bid'ah (bid'ah haqiqyyah) for those individuals, and bid'ah idafiyyah for those who persist on it without that belief. Additional specifications in the performance of a voluntary act, like doing so in congregation, out in public, with continuity, and under people who are followed as religious authorities, combine to make a voluntary action bid'ah idafiyyah, unless there is a very clear 'adi reason for doing so.\(^{71}\)

\(^{67}\) For al-\textsc{Shatibi}'s discussion of this example, see ibid. 2:232-5

\(^{68}\) Ibid. 2:236

\(^{69}\) Ibid. 2:237

\(^{70}\) Ibid. 2:333

\(^{71}\) As discussed earlier in the example of madrasahs.
The reason is that it is easy to see how laypeople will begin to believe what is not sunnah or wajib as being sunnah or wajib.

In sum, “bid’ah idafiyyah” can be understood as behaving in the way a person advocating “true bid’ah” would behave, as an individual normally will only insist and persist publicly on a non-sunnah act in a very specific way if he believes it to be sunnah.

Proofs

Below I will look at a few examples where bid’ah idafiyyah was censured by the early Muslims and in the statements of later jurists.

Ibn Waddah narrates from al-Sha’bi that ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab would beat those who openly fasted the entire month of Rajab. Ibn Waddah explained: “Its purpose is for fear that they would adopt it as a sunnah just like Ramadan.”

If a person fasts the entire month of Rajab as his private practice, that would fall under the general recommendation of optional fasts (unless it adversely affects his other obligations). However, if a group did this publicly, there is an imminent fear of it being treated as sunnah. Since this group fasted the entire month of Rajab openly (and the narration mentions that they were known by the collective title “Rajabiyyun”), ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) forbade them from doing so as it may lead to true bid‘ah.

Ibn Waddah narrates from Khalid al-Ashajj:

“We were in the mosque of Madinah and a storyteller told us tales, and he began to select the verses of prostration from the Qur’an and prostrate and we prostrated with him. Then an old man emerged and he opposed us, saying: ‘If you are on something, verily you are superior to the companions of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace).’ We inquired about him, and we said, ‘Who is this old man?’ They said, ‘It is ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar.’”

Reading the verses of prostration and prostrating upon doing so is established in the Sunnah. However, specifying them for recitation and then doing that in congregation creates the impression that this procedure is sunnah, even if it is not believed so. Hence, the act is not “true bid‘ah” but “relative bid‘ah” and was condemned by Ibn ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him).

Al-Darimi narrates in his Sunan with a good chain that a group of Muslims would perform dhikr in a particular way, with the head of the circle instructing the people to recite certain numbers of different forms of dhikr. Ibn Mas‘ud condemned them, saying:
“These are the companions of your Prophet widely-available...By the One in Whose hand is my soul, indeed you are on a religion which is more guided than the religion of Muhammad or you have opened the door to misguidance [by practising innovation].”

Reciting any number of dhikr is to be commended, but when it is done openly and in congregation under the guidance of one who is regarded as a religious authority, that particular number and form may be conceived by the ignorant as being sunnah. Hence, Ibn Mas'ud condemned it as bid'ah.

In all of these examples, although it cannot be ascertained with certainty that the people practising these acts did so with the belief that they are specifically part of the Sunnah, but because they imitated or resembled the way a person who does believe this would behave, the Sahabah forbade them from practising them.

The prominent early Hanafi jurist and muhaddith, Abu Bakr al-Jassas al-Razi (305 – 370 H), comments on a ruling transmitted from the founders of the Hanafi madhhab, that it is prohibited to fix a particular chapter of the Qur'an to a particular rak'ah of prayer. Since his explanation is both lucid and instructive, I will quote the full Arabic text followed by its translation:

قال أبو جعفر: ويكره أن يتخذ شيء من القرآن لشيء من الصلوات

وذلك لأنه لو أباح ذلك لم يؤمن على مرور الأوقات أن يظن الناس مسنونا أو واجبا كما قد سبق الآن إلى ظن كثير من الجهال في مثله

حتى إذا ترك قراءة سورة الجمعة في ليلة الجمعة وقراءة الحرف اليميني في يوم الجمعة استنكره ففقد أهل العلم حياله من وصائنه أن يلحق به ما ليس منه

وكم روى عن بعض السلف كراهية صوم سنة أيام من شوال مع ما روي فيه من الحديث خوفا أن تكون المداومة عليها سببا لإلحاقها بالفرض

كما روي عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه قال: إن يصوم يوم جمعة إلا أن يكون قبله يوم وإلا أن يوافق يوما كان يصومه أحدنا

"Abu Ja'far [al-Tahawi] said: It is makruh (prohibitively disliked) to adopt a part of the Qur'an for a specific part of the prayers.

"And that is because if that was to be permitted, it would not be assured that with the passage of time people will believe it is sunnah or wajib; as has occurred today in the understanding of many of the ignorant people in the like of it, so when the recitation of Surat al-Jumu‘ah is left out on the night of Friday, and Alif Lam Mim Tanzil al-Sajdah [is left out] on the day of Friday, they find it strange. Thus, the people of knowledge intended to preserve the religion and protect it from adding to it what is not from it.

"[This is] just as was narrated from some of the Salaf [their] hatred of fasting six days of Shawkal [consecutively, immediately after Ramadan] despite what is narrated in hadith [of its desirability], for fear that persistence on it will be a cause for it being appended to the obligatory [fast of Ramadan].

“[And it is] just as was narrated from the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) that it is prohibited to fast on Friday, unless [one keeps a fast] the day before it, and unless it coincides with a day one of us used to fast [anyway].”75

Imam al-Nawawi was asked about the persistent practice of some people of reading Surat al-An’am in the last rak‘ah of Tarawih on the seventh night of Ramadan. He replied:

فإنبغي لكل مصل اجتناب هذا الفعل وينبغي إشاعة إنكار هذا ليس سنة بل هو بدعة مكروهة وللكراهتى أسباب منها إيهام كوفا سنة...فينبغي لكل مصل اجتناب هذا الفعل وينبغي إشاعة إنكار هذا فقد ثبتت الأحاديث الصحيحة في النهي عن محدثات الأمور وأن كل بدعة ضلالة ولم يُنقل هذا الفعل عن أحد من السلف.

“This is not a sunnah but a detestable bid‘ah and for its detestability are reasons: from them is the impression of it being sunnah...Thus, every worshipper should refrain from this practice and should relay its condemnation, for indeed it is established in authentic hadiths that newly-invented matters are prohibited and that every bid‘ah is misguidance, and this practice has not been transmitted from any of the Salaf.”76

Examples

In this section, I will take a brief look – in light of the principles of bid‘ah outlined above – at some common practices about which people are unsure whether they constitute bid‘ah or not. I hope that in the course of analysing these examples, further light is shed on some important principles relating to bid‘ah, specifically, and the method of drawing proof from the Shari‘ah, generally. The first two practices are examples that al-Shatibi himself addressed in quite some detail. Although, he briefly makes mention of the third example, he does not elaborate on it as he does the first two.

Example One: Loud Group Dhikr in Unison

Al-Shatibi discusses the practice of “loud group dhikr in unison” (ذكر جهرا في هيئة الاجتماع على صوت واحد) which is basically a congregational recital of dhikr in one voice. Some people do this as a specific ritual practice, i.e. in a ta’abbudi way, to attain reward and closeness to Allah. My purpose here is not to give an unequivocal ruling on this practice but to use it as an example to illustrate faulty, ambiguous (mutashabih), evidences used by people of bid‘ah.

Some argue that this is included in the general evidences recommending dhikr. For example, the Qur’an says:

با أثنا الذين آمنوا اذكروا الله ذكرًا كثيرا

“O you who believe, make mention of Allah, with excessive dhikr” (33:41)

وأذكروا الله كثيرا لعلكم تفلحون

“And make mention of Allah much so that you are successful.” (8:45)

75 Sharh Mukhtasar al-Tahawi by Jassas, ed. Dr. Zaynab Muhammad Hasan, Dar al-Siraj: Madinah, 1431 H/2010 CE, 8:525-6

76 Fatawa l-Imam al-Nawawi, ‘Ala’ al-Din ibn al-‘Attar, 1:25-6
However, al-Shatibi explains that this is based on the mistaken assumption that the
generality of a word implies the permissibility of everything that can be imagined to
occur from its meaning (إعلان اللفظ يشعر بجواز كل ما يمكن أن يفرض في مدلوله وقوعا). However, this is not the
case in matters of ritual. In brief, this form of evidence attempts to put in practice
absolute statements (mutlaqat) before examining their restricted application as
established from the early Muslims (muqayyidat). 77

To understand the invalidity of such an argument, consider the following example. A
verse of the Qur’an states:

“O you who believe! Bow down in ruku’ and in prostration and worship your Lord.”
(22:77)

Based on the command in this verse to bow down, can one deduce the recommendation
or obligation of performing standalone ruku’ outside of Salah, as the verse gives a
general command to bow? The answer is that this is precisely the mistaken type of
reasoning explained above, as in such ritualistic matters one must take into consideration
the restricted application first before applying the generalities. Furthermore, if a
standalone ruku’ was a valid interpretation and application of the general command in
the verse, would not the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the Sahabah be
the first to have comprehended this meaning and acted upon it? If we were to take this
invalid form of argumentation to its extreme, one may just as well deduce from the
words “worship your Lord” any form of ritual worship, like yoga, believing that this a
fulfilment of this command! But, of course, all Muslims recognise that this is incorrect.
The reason is that it is based on this faulty reasoning.

Thus, in ritual acts, it is wrong to approach general evidences to prove specific practices.
It is necessary to find specific evidence. Hence, in this case, group dhikr in unison would
not be bid’ah if the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) and Sahabah
performed dhikr in this way.

The above was an analysis of what would not count as proof for the validity of this
practice. If it was established that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and
Sahabah did engage in this practice of performing loud group dhikr in unison, that would
be a valid support for believing that it is sunnah and not bid’ah. There are some
authentic hadiths which do suggest that groups of Sahabah did dhikr. A hadith in Sahih
Muslim for example states that angels convey the news of “gatherings of dhikr” in which
the people are saying Allahu akbar and subhan Allah.

However, al-Shatibi argues that this hadith and those like it are ambiguous as they do
not clarify whether this was done audibly or quietly, in unison or individually. Thus, it
may easily apply to what was known to be a common practice amongst the Sahabah, of
gathering in one place while each of them performed individual worship, whether
recitation of Qur’an, recitation of dhikr, or optional prayer. 78

77 Al-I’tisam 2:62
78 Al-I’tisam 2:94-5
Some scholars have, however, understood the meaning of loud group dhikr in unison from this hadith, for example ‘Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi. 79

However, for lay Muslims it is advisable to follow the most cautious path, based on the prophetic advice:

\[
\text{دع ما يريبك إلى ما لا يريبك}
\]

“Leave that which causes you to doubt for that which does not cause you to doubt.”

There are many forms of dhikr established in the Sunnah, like reciting tahlil, takbir, tasbih, tahmid, hawqalah and other litanies which may be practised privately and inaudibly, and there is no doubt in the sunnah-status of this practice. 80 This accepted sunnah can easily replace the forms of dhikr in which there is doubt.

Because the flipside of the benefit attained from performing this doubtful form of dhikr is that one would be engaging in bid‘ah haqiqiyah in the situation that this was in reality not a practice of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the Sahabah, the danger in practising it far outweighs the benefits of performing it.

It should be noted that the above discussion applies only to the situation in which loud group dhikr in unison is done ritually (ta‘abbudan), as a formal form of dhikr. However, some Muslim scholars and teachers use it as a means of instruction, as loudly reciting some forms of dhikr together is a useful way to make people learn certain formulae. If done in this way there is no harm as this has a comprehensible purpose (ma‘qul al-ma‘na) and is adopted as a means. Furthermore, many Sufi disciplinarians justify their use of this practice by stating that it is a means to improve concentration in the heart of the spiritual novice, so as to achieve a state of remembrance that came naturally to the Sahabah merely by accompanying the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). In order to compensate for the loss of the effect of that companionship, the Sufi teachers prescribe these practices, only as a means. 81 In this case, too, since it is not performed ritualistically but as a means, it cannot be regarded as bid‘ah.

Example Two: Audible Group Du‘a after Salah

Another practice al-Shatibi discusses is the continuous practice of group du‘a after the obligatory prayers. In the case of group du‘a itself, where one person leads the congregation in du‘a by reciting the supplications audibly and the others say “amin,” we don’t have the immediate problem that we did with audible group dhikr in unison. With the latter there is a question over its very existence in the early period. However, audible group du‘a is established from the Salaf. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

\[
\text{لا يجمع ملاً فيدعو بعضهم ويؤمن سائرهم إلا أحجام الله}
\]


80 For a comprehensive collection of dhikrs established from the Sunnah, see al-Adhkar min Kalam Sayyid al-Abrar by Muhyi al-Din al-Nawawi

81 See for example, Mawlana Manzur Nu’mani, Tasawwuf kiya hey pp. 17-26
“A group does not congregate, one of them supplicating and the rest of them saying amin, except Allah answers them.”

Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf al-Kandhlewi has a section in his celebrated Hayat al-Sahabah devoted to the instances where the Sahabah performed group du’a. Al-Shatibi also accepts that group du’a in general is approved.

The issue here, however, is doing it perpetually after the congregational Salahs, such that an impression is created that it is sunnah at that time and that it is attached to these prayers. The evidence from the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his companions shows that there is flexibility (tawsi‘ah) in the practice of group du’a. Thus, if done on some occasions in a manner that does not give the impression of it being restricted to a specific time or place, this would faithfully represent an adherence to the evidence of this flexibility. However, when it is insisted on at one particular time without proof, the general evidence does not support the practice. Rather, the opposite is true because “insisting on matters that are not insisted on in the Shari‘ah, its nature is that legislation will be understood, especially with those taken as authorities [i.e. imams] and in the places where people gather like masjids” (لاقف الشريع وخصوصا مع من يبدى له في مجاميع الناس كما المساجد). Thus, drawing on the general proofs encouraging group du’a for practising it specifically after Salah is a type of faulty evidence which al-Shatibi says is an example “distorting the proofs from their places.”

The general encouragement towards group du’a has a particular application of flexibility. But if acted upon at a specific time and place, in conjunction with a particular worship, sticking fervently to it so it appears as if a desired goal in the Shari‘ah (maqsud bi al-shar‘), then the general evidence does not support it. This is what al-Shatibi says is known as “two different applications” (ikhtilaf al-manatayn), where the application of the evidence is flexibility, and what the claimant is attempting to prove – i.e. adopting du’a after Salah audibly for the attendees always just as sunnahs are performed – is restricted and specified. Thus, the evidence is invalid. This practice would therefore be an example of “relative bid‘ah.”

One person in al-Shatibi’s time who was in favour of perpetual group du’a after the obligatory prayers argued that there is no prohibition of group du’a, and there is general encouragement towards it, and the omission of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and Sahabah of this practice specifically after the prayers is not a proof of its detestability. Al-Shatibi replies that the person is right that there is no prohibition of group du’a and there is general encouragement towards it, which is why he says if done occasionally after the obligatory prayers there is no problem as this would fall under the general recommendation. But if done perpetually it will give the impression to laypeople

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82 Majma‘ al-Zawa‘id, 10:267
83 Hayat al-Sahabah, Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf Kandhlewi, ed. Bashshar ‘Awad Ma’ruf, Mu’assasat al-Risalah, 4:443-6
84 Al-I’tisam 2:313
85 Ibid. 2:59-60
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid. 2:262
that it is a sunnah at that particular time which is a ritualistic (\textit{ta'abbudi}) restriction. Thus, it falls under bid'ah idafiyyah.

Furthermore, with respect to the omission of the early generations, al-Shatibi explains that there is detail to this with respect to ritualistic matters that were omitted by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and Sahabah. In such scenarios, there are two possibilities:

1. There was no stimulant (\textit{ma'na muqtadi lahu}) in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) for determining that ritualistic ruling. For example, as was mentioned earlier the shares of inheritance fixed for the heirs of the deceased are ritualistic (\textit{ta'abbudi}) in Islam. However, there is a particular scenario in which only the grandfather of the deceased and his brothers remain, which was not addressed by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) because there was no need to address this scenario at the time. Thus, the Sahabah and the later scholars issued a ruling on this scenario based on the general patterns they saw in the rules of inheritance. Such an innovation in ritualistic matters is allowed as it is based on a new circumstance which the Shari'ah needs to address.

2. The stimulant was present, yet the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the Sahabah did not endorse it or practise it. This is equivalent to the Shari'ah purposely choosing to restrict that action within those limits. Thus any change would be bid'ah.\textsuperscript{88}

It is in this vein that al-Shafi'i said, as mentioned earlier, "we follow the sunnah, both in performance and in omission." Similarly, Mulla 'Ali al-Qari said:

\begin{quote}
والشيعة كما تكون في الفعل لكون في الترك أيضاً فمن واعظ على فعل لم يفعله الشارع فهو مبتدع. \\
"Adherence – just as it is in performance, it is in omission too – so whoever persists [ritualistically] on a practice the lawgiver did not do, he is an innovator."\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

For example, some people in the time of al-Shatibi argued that group du'a is more likely to be accepted as mentioned in hadith, and this can be combined with the general recommendation of du'a after Salah, and thus it is argued group du'a should be practised after Salah. It is precisely this thinking in ritualistic matters that makes it bid'ah as this reason was present in the early period\textsuperscript{90} and the Sahabah would be more deserving of comprehending it and being the first to act upon it.\textsuperscript{91}

**Example Three: The Annual Mawlid Celebration on Rabi' al-Awwal**

Al-Shatibi discusses many examples of bid'ah idafiyyah that he says are close to bid'ah haqiqiya, like inventing an Adhan and Iqamah for the ‘Id prayers. He also answers the question of ‘Uthman’s (may Allah be pleased with him) introduction of a second Adhan

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{88} \textit{Al-I’tisam}, 2:263-5
\item \textsuperscript{89} \textit{Mirqat al-Mafatih Sharh Mishkat al-Masabih}, Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah: Beirut, 1:94-5
\item \textsuperscript{90} \textit{Al-I’tisam} 2:274
\item \textsuperscript{91} Ibid. 2:267
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
for Jumu'ah. The basic reply is that before 'Uthman’s time, the Adhan was called immediately before the sermon. Although this was sufficient when the Muslims were small in number, as the population grew in 'Uthman’s time, an earlier call to prayer was required. Thus he patterned Jumu'ah after the normal prayers where Adhan was called at its start time, and maintained the later Adhan established from the Sunnah. Thus, this was an addition due to changing circumstances that called for a reasoned response. Furthermore, the practices of the early caliphs form part of the Sunnah as explicitly mentioned in hadith, so by definition, it cannot be bid’ah in its Shar'i meaning.

Another type of bid’ah idafiyyah al-Shatibi discusses is what is called taqyid al-mutlaq (restricting the absolute). For example, a person selects a day of the week, say Wednesday, or a date of the month, like the 23rd, which has not been specified in the Shari'ah, and then begins to always fast on those days, not because the person has more energy (nashat) or free-time (faragh) or due to convenience (wifaq), but only due to resolve, planning and determination (tasmim). This is different from a person who has a daily habit of awrad or optional worship, as this is based on convenience, and not ultimately on determination and planning. Taqyid al-mutlaq is a form of relative bid’ah.

Although al-Shatibi does not present it as an example of this particular principle, the annual mawlid celebration performed in the month of Rabi’ al-Awwal is an example of taqyid al-mutlaq. Remembering the birth of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) just as remembering any aspect of his life is praiseworthy and beneficial, but when it is done permanently on a particular day of the year without any non-ritualistic or comprehensible ('adi) basis, it very easily creates the impression that that particular day is superior for this practice, but there is no proof for this from the sources of the Shari'ah or the example of the early generations. Thus, if it is performed in this way without any particular belief attached to it, it would be a relative bid’ah (bid’ah idafiyyah). However, in the case of the annual mawlid celebration, the fear of it being ritualised has actually been realised, and many Muslims in fact believe that a particular day or month of the year is religiously superior to any other time for that remembrance. Many Muslims adopt it literally as a formal religious festival or “‘Id,” which is why al-Shatibi included “adopting the day of the prophetic birth as an ‘Id” amongst a number of actions he listed as examples of bid’ah in al-I’tisam. He also said in his collection of fatwas:

“Esteimishing the mawlid in the way that is customary amongst the people is an innovated bid’ah and every bid’ah is misguidance.”

The reason he adds “in the way that is customary amongst the people” is that if the restrictions customarily bound to the mawlid celebration, like the date, were removed, and it consisted only of a remembrance of the prophetic biography or the prophetic birth, this would certainly not be an innovation in religion. Many Muslims actually believe that

92 Al-I’itisam 2:305
93 Ibid. 2:293-4
94 Ibid. 1:46
since he was born on a particular day of Rabi‘ al-Awwal, it is better and preferable to do this remembrance on this day of Rabi‘. This would make the act for those Muslims bid‘ah haqiqiyah as the stimulant for this practice (ma‘na muqadtaliahu) was present in the time of the Sahabah. Thus the implication of this reasoning is that the Sahabah failed to recognise the virtue of that day, and the reward of recollecting the birth on that date, and the later people were able to comprehend that virtue. And this is absurd.

I will end with a quote on this issue from a Maliki contemporary of al-Shatibi, Abu ‘Abd Allah al-Haffar (d. 811 H). As the passage is long, I will avoid quoting the Arabic text. At one point in his statement, al-Haffar errs in his reasoning, which I hope readers will now be able to appreciate. (I will highlight the error in an endnote.) Al-Haffar writes:

“The pious predecessors, and they are the companions of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and grant him peace) and their successors, would not congregate on the night of mawlid for worship, and they would not practise more therein than the rest of the nights of the year because the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) is not to be venerated except in a way his veneration has been legislated.96 His veneration is from the greatest of nearing acts to Allah, but nearness is sought to Allah (Great is His Majesty) only by what is legislated. The proof that the Salaf would not add therein anything extra to the rest of the nights is that they differed over it [i.e. the date of his birth]. It was said that he (Allah bless him and grant him peace) was born in Ramadan and it was said in Rabi‘, and the day [of Rabi‘] in which he was born has been disputed according to four opinions. Hence, if worship was established in the night of the day in which he was born due to the birth of the best of creation (Allah bless him and grant him peace), that would indeed be known and famous, and no disagreement would arise therein. However, an excess in veneration has not been legislated. Do you not see that Friday is the best day on which the sun rose, and the best that is done on a virtuous day is fasting, yet the Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) forbade fasting on Friday despite its great excellence? This proves that no worship is to be established in a time or place unless it is legislated and what is not legislated is not to be done, since the latter part of this ummah will not bring greater guidance than what the first part of it brought. And if this door was to be opened, a group will indeed come and say the day of his migration to Madinah was a day in which Allah honoured Islam so congregate in it and worship, and others will say the night in which he was taken on a night journey he acquired glory the extent of which cannot be imagined so worship is to be established therein. This will not stop at a limit. All good is in following the pious Salaf, for which Allah chose them. Thus, what they did, we do, and what they left, we leave. Once this is established, it is apparent that to congregate on this night is not required in the Shari‘ah. Rather, one is ordered to leave it.”97

96 This is where al-Haffar slips, as “veneration” or “respect” is a comprehensible (‘adi) matter, and is not ritualistic (ta’abbudi). People may demonstrate their respect,adoration and love for the Prophet (peace be upon him) in different ways. Yes, if this matter is performed in such a way that a ritualistic restriction is clearly understood or a ritualistic restriction is actually believed, as is the case with the annual mawlid celebration, that is when it is no longer ‘adi and becomes an addition into religion. This is similar to the example of sadaqah discussed earlier. The valid points to take from al-Haffar’s statement are what he continues to say, “The proof that the Salaf...”

97 Al-Mi‘yar al-Mu‘rib, 7:99-100