

The Absolute Truth about Sunnah and Bid'ah	
Author	Abdullah bin Hamid Ali - B.A. (Qarawiyin University), Ph.D. (Graduate Theological Union)
Rulings	<p>Every action has a ruling that is applied to it</p> <p>When a scholar rules on an issue, he is giving his opinion in regard to that matter based on what he believes to be the view of the Creator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No one can declare for certainty what is the truth 100% until we meet Allah
Sunnah Example	<p>Linguistically means a way of doing something, a path, a methodology, an approach, a custom, or habit, whether it is something bad or good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Whoever initiates in Islam a good sunnah, then he gets the reward of it and the reward of the one who does it after him until the Day of Resurrection... Whoever initiates in Islam a bad sunnah, then that person carries the burden of it and the burden of those who do it after him until the Day of Resurrection..."
Different usages of sunnah	<p>The word sunnah itself has many different connotations. People are arguing while not understanding that one person is using sunnah according to one group of scholars' definition and another person is using sunnah according to the definition of another group of scholars</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "You don't have to do that, it's only sunnah." "What do you mean? There are certain things in the Sunnah that are obligatory too."
Usage by hadīth scholars	<p>Sunnah is anything reported about the Prophet whether it be a statement, an action, something indicative of approval of another's action or any description of him, his behavior or physical appearance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They include in their definition behavioral characteristics and idiosyncrasies that he might have had: like how he moved his hand or how he walked. That is a sunnah according to them, as they are reporting about the Prophet
Usage by usūlī scholars	<p>Sunnah is anything which has been transmitted from the Prophet, whether it be a statement, an action, or an expression of approval of another's action, that is fit to be used as a source of Islamic law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - So when they say sunnah, they mean the Sunnah that is a source of law
Usage by fiqh scholars	<p>Sunnah is what has been reported about the Prophet ﷺ whether it be a statement, an action, an approval or authorization of something that does not fall into the category of obligation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When he says sunnah, he means something that is not obligatory

Sunnah of the khulafā'	<p>Sunnah is sometimes a reference to what the Rightly-Guided Caliphs did</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Follow my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs who will be after me” <p>عَلَيْكُمْ بِسْتَنْتِي وَسُنْنَةُ الْخُلَفَاءِ الرَّاشِدِينَ الْمَهْدِيِّينَ مِنْ بَعْدِي</p>
Hadiths of bid'ah	<p>“Whoever introduces in this matter of ours what is not from it, will have it rejected”</p> <p>مَنْ أَحْدَثَ فِي أَمْرِنَا هَذَا مَا لَيْسَ مِنْهُ فَهُوَ رَدٌّ</p> <p>“And beware of newly introduced matters. For verily, every matter that is newly introduced is a [blameworthy] innovation, and every innovation is misguidance”</p> <p>وَإِيَّاكُمْ وَالْمُحْدَثَاتِ ، فَإِنَّ كُلَّ مُحْدَثَةٍ بِدْعَةٌ وَكُلُّ بِدْعَةٍ ضَلَالٌ</p>
Bid'ah	Linguistically means something that is done without a precedent, or something that is completely new
What is considered bid'ah	<p>When the Prophet ﷺ says, “Every innovation is misguidance,” some may take it to mean that every single thing that is new, or that has no precedent, or did not exist during the time of the Prophet and his Companions is misguidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This would mean that cameras are misguidance, or the fan on the ceiling that didn't exist at the time of the Prophet, or the light bulbs that we all benefit from is misguidance - The fact that nobody accepts that these things are a form of misguidance is proof that the hadith is not general - Rather, it is referring to innovation in the din of Islam: innovation in worship/practice
Technical bid'ah	<p>Bid'ah, in its technical sense, applies to acts of worship. And because it does apply to acts of worship, every action in general that has a specific bearing on the din of Islam must return to the classifications of the fuqaha</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They classify actions into five different categories. What we do is either: compulsory, recommended, permissible without dislike, permissible with dislike, or unlawful. These are the rulings of all our actions - And so bid'ah must necessarily be divided in the same fashion: There must be a such thing as a compulsory bid'ah, a recommended bid'ah, a bid'ah which is permissible without dislike, or bid'ah that is permissible but with dislike, and a bid'ah which is unlawful
Two types of bid'ah	<p>Al-Shafi'i: “Innovation is two types: approved innovation and disapproved innovation. Whatever conforms to the Sunnah is approved and whatever opposes it is abominable”</p> <p>الْبِدْعَةُ بِدْعَتَنِي ، بِدْعَةٌ مَحْمُودَةٌ وَبِدْعَةٌ مَدْمُومَةٌ ، فَمَا وَاقَقَ السُّنْنَةَ فَهُوَ مَحْمُودٌ وَمَا خَلَفَ السُّنْنَةَ فَهُوَ مَدْمُومٌ</p>

Gibril Fouad Haddad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imam al-Shafi'i RH divided innovation and innovated matters into "good" and "bad" depending on whether they conformed or not to the guidelines of the Religion. This is authentically narrated from two of his most prestigious students in the latter period of Shafi'i's life - Al-Shafi'i used the statement of 'Umar RA about the congregational night prayers in the month of Ramadan: "What a fine innovation this is!" as proof - It is not enough for something merely to be novel to be a bid'ah; it must also contradict the Religion
Salafis	<p>Salafis quote Imam al-Shatibi, because they assert that there is no such thing as a good bid'ah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In reality, Imam Shatibi's position was not too much different than that of Imam al-Shafi'i
Al-Shatibi	<p>Bid'ah is an expression about a particular matter or a particular way of acting in the din, which is invented in a way that resembles the way that has been prescribed. And the objective of this new way is for one to go overboard in his devotion to Allah</p>
Al-Shatibi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In this definition is the assumption that there is already an [exclusive] way that has been legislated; and when someone comes and takes a different approach regarding that thing, this is the [blameworthy] innovation
Hadith	<p>Some Companions came to the Prophet's wives wanting to do more than what the Messenger had done: One of them said, "As for me, I will pray all night long." Another said, "I will fast continuously and shall not break it." The other said, "I shall never marry." The Prophet ﷺ said:</p> <p>لَكُنْ أَصْلَى وَأَنَامْ ، وَأَصُومْ وَأُفْطُرْ ، وَأَنْزَوْجُ النِّسَاءْ ، فَمَنْ رَغَبَ عَنْ سُنْنِي فَلَيْسَ مِنْ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is an example of an innovation in which a group of the Companions were trying to develop a particular way of doing things, which went against the way of the Messenger
Bid'ah shar'iyyah Example	<p>According to one opinion, legal innovation is in matters of worship, not matters of custom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intentionally adding another rak'ah or extra movement, or adding an extra statement or du'a into the prayer - Bid'ah does not apply to how you get married, business transactions, etc
Al-Shatibi	<p>He interprets the Prophetic statement "Every bid'ah is misguidance," as referring only to matters related to the din</p>
Al-Shatibi Example	<p>A bid'ah is anything that does not have a basis or foundation in the Sacred Law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If it does have a basis it is not called a bid'ah, even if it didn't exist during the time of the Prophet ﷺ in that specific form - The science of nahw wa tasrif (Arabic grammar and word

	<p>conjugation), definitions, legal source methodology, the science of kalam or ‘aqidah, and all the other sciences which serve the Shari‘ah of Islam: even though these are things which did not exist during the first age of Islamic history, the foundation of those things were present in the Law at those times</p>
Necessary “bid‘ah”	<p>The science of Arabic grammar, Arabic language, the methodology of words and so on, are things which help us to understand the Qur‘an and Sunnah, to preserve the Qur‘an and Sunnah, in its meaning, its pronunciations, and its recitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Although they did not exist at that particular time, they had a necessity and cannot be bid‘ah according to Imam al-Shatibi’s definition
Shatibi versus Majority	<p>According to Shatibi, bid‘ah is that which does not have a foundation in Islam, whether it was done in the time of the Messenger or afterwards</p> <p>According to the majority of scholars, bid‘ah is simply what did not exist during the time of the Messenger</p> <p>So the majority defines bid‘ah as what was outside of the time of the Messenger and Imam al-Shatibi defined it as whatever doesn’t have a basis</p>
Action of ‘Umar RA Al-Shatibi Jumhur	<p>‘Umar RA gathered the Companions behind one Imam in the masjid after he saw them praying individually and said, “What a good bid‘ah this is.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imam Shatibi responded to the narration by saying that ‘Umar RA meant it metaphorically, because he had a basis for his actions (because bid‘ah according to Shatibi is that which has no basis) - The majority of the ‘ulama said that what Umar did was a bid‘ah, and the proof that it was a bid‘ah and that there is such a thing as a good bid‘ah is that he said it explicitly
Action of Abu Bakr RA Al-Shatibi Jumhur	<p>He gathered the Qur‘an into one Book</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responded saying it is not a bid‘ah, because Abu Bakr did it and the Messenger of Allah said, “Follow my example and the example of the Rightly-Guided Successors, cling to it with your molars.” So there is a basis for it and it therefore is not a bid‘ah - The majority classified it as a bid‘ah as it happened outside of the time of the Messenger
Inconsistencies	<p>Imam al-Shatibi displays a certain amount of inconsistency in his approach due to his strict adherence to the rulings of Imam Malik RH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imam Malik disapproved of what is known as qirā‘ah jam‘iyah (or reciting the Qur‘an in congregation)

Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imam al-Shatibi declares, "This is a bidah that has no basis" - It does have a basis, because of the hadith in which the Prophet said, "No people gather together in any of the houses of Allah to recite the Book of Allah, to study it with one another, except that mercy covers them ..."
Bid'ah ḥasanah	<p>Those who use Imam al-Shatibi as a proof for their not being a such thing as good bid'ah, have utterly misunderstood his opinion, and have distorted his opinion to the extent that many Muslims deny the concept of bid'ah ḥasanah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Essentially, what the majority call bid'ah ḥasanah is not termed a bid'ah by al-Shatibi so the issue is one of semantics

CAR