**The Sunnah Acts of Prayer**



**29:45**. Recite and convey to them what is revealed to you of the Book, and establish the Prayer in conformity with its conditions. Surely, the Prayer restrains from all that is indecent and shameful, and all that is evil. Surely God's remembrance is the greatest (of all types of worship, and not restricted to the Prayer). God knows all that you do. (1)



**17:79**. And in some part of the night, rise from sleep and observe vigil therein (through Prayer and recital of the Qur'ān) as additional worship for you;34 your Lord may well raise you to a glorious, praised station (of nearness to Him, and give you leave to intercede with Him, as He wills, on behalf of His servants, in the Hereafter). (2)

92. Jabir, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “The metaphor of me and you is that of a man who lights a fire and the grasshoppers and moths begin to fall into it and he chases them away from it. I pull you by your belts back from Hell while you are doing your best to slip from my hand.” (Sahih Muslim, Fadail, 19). (3)

What is Sunnah?

This is the general term used for the words God’s Messenger conveyed, his behavior, habits, and his approval on certain subjects. His approval usually meant the Prophet’s practice of remaining silent at the time of an incident or when later explained to him by other members of the community. In brief, the Prophet’s traditions and way of life on a whole is collectively referred to as the *Sunnah* of the Prophet.

The *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is divided into two categories, the *sunnah mu’akkadah* and *sunnah ghayr mu’akkadah*. *Sunnah mu’akkadah* refers to the traditions that the Prophet continuously practiced and very rarely abandoned, for example the *Sunnah* prayers of the morning, noon, and evening prayers.

*Sunnah ghayr mu’akkadah* are the traditions that the Prophet practiced most of the time and abandoned occasionally; for example, the first *Sunnah* prayers of the late noon and night prayers.

The *sunnah ghayr mu’akkadah* also includes the traditions of the Prophet’s good manners and actions, his manner of dressing, his eating and drinking habits, his manner of sitting, and even how he walked. Although practicing these traditions of the Prophet bears great reward and abandoning these *sunnah*s is not considered a sin, those who choose not to practice the traditions of the Prophet may be deprived of his intercession on the Day of Judgment.

Why is practicing the Sunnah so important?

The Prophet’s Sunnah constitutes an important dimension the Islamic faith. The best way of Islamic living can be found in every aspect of the life of the Prophet, who is “*an excellent example (for everybody) to follow*” (Ahzâb 33:21). Truly observing the sunnah, or practices, of the Prophet means doing as he did in not only the obligatory practices of Islam but also the non-obligatory matters. If the Prophetic traditions were made compulsory, without doubt every one of us would have repeatedly sinned hundreds of times every day. For example, washing our hands before and after a meal, eating and drinking with our right hand, brushing our teeth, praying before going to sleep and on waking up, and being kind to others are all *sunnah*s, or practices of the Prophet. These are just a few of the hundreds of the Prophetic traditions that all of us may perform daily of our own choice, but can you imagine if all the traditions were deemed compulsory? It is quite likely that we would not have been able to practice every one of the *sunnah*s with the care and accuracy required, so often we would probably have abandoned these obligatory duties and therefore sinned throughout the whole day.

It is evident that God Almighty deemed the Prophet’s traditions not obligatory, but optional due to His compassion and mercy for humans, His desire to establish ease for His devoted servants, and in order not to make our religion difficult to practice. The *Sunnah as-saniyyah* is the actions and behavior of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, his way of life. How could having such an excellent character, a polite manner of speaking and kindness like his possibly be classified as insignificant?

The Sunnah of the Prophet is like a compass that guides Muslims in every aspect of their lives, continuously indicating the direction of the path of excellence and in total accuracy. The conduct of the Prophet who said, “My Lord educated me,” the most excellent behavior that he continued to display throughout the course of his life, was the course of conduct chosen by the Creator. Whoever neglects this guidance to the path of excellence will stray towards destruction.

A person must comply with the *Sunnah as-saniyyah* to obtain affection for God, for we must live and behave in a manner that pleases Him in order to be blessed with sincere devotion and affection for God. The most excellent, most perfect morals and exceptional example of humanity was portrayed in Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. A person who is heedless to the Sunnah will be deprived of the affection of God and of His Messenger. The Prophet related in one of his traditions: “Whoever adheres to my Sunnah during the time of corruption will be blessed with the reward of a hundred martyrs,” clearly portraying the importance of abiding by the Prophet’s traditions.

In many verses of the Qur’ân, the Prophet was defined as the most excellent example for mankind:

*Assuredly you have in God’s Messenger an excellent example to follow.* (Ahzâb 33:21)

*You are surely of a sublime character, and do act by a sublime pattern of conduct.* (Qalam 68:4)

*Say (to them, O Messenger): “If you indeed love God, then follow me, so that God will love you and forgive you your sins.” God is All- Forgiving, All-Compassionate.* (Âl ‘Imrân 3:31)

*There has come to you (O people) a Messenger from among yourselves; extremely grievous to him is your suffering; full of concern for you is he, and for the believers, full of pity and compassion.* (Tawbah 9:128)

The Sunnah Acts of Prayer

As in any form of worship, the prayers also consist of sunnah acts. Complying with the Sunnah is clear evidence of affection for Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of God. Although abandoning a Sunnah does not invalidate the prayer, frequently abandoning the Prophet’s traditions due to mere laziness could lead to the deprivation of his intercession in the hereafter.

The principle sunnah acts of the prayer are:

1. Reciting the *adhân* and *iqâmah* for the five prescribed prayers, and the Friday prayers. 2. Men raising the hands to the ears and women to shoulder level while pronouncing the opening *takbîr* of the prayer.

3. Placing both hands below the navel for men with the right hand grasping the left one at the wrist, and placing both hands on the chest for women.

4. Before the recitation of *Al-Fâtihah*, reciting the supplication of *Subhânaka* and *A‘ûdhu-Basmala* after placing the hands on the navel or chest. (The Hanafis recite the opening supplication of *Subhânaka*, but one can recite another supplication that the Prophet used to begin his prayers).

5. Saying “Amîn” when hearing or reciting *Al-Fâtihah* during the prayer.

6. Saying “Allâhu akbar” while going into the bowing position.

7. Saying “Subhâna Rabbiyal-‘Azîm” (“All-Glorious is my Lord, the Mighty”) at least three times while in the bowing position.

8. Saying “Subhâna Rabbiyal-A‘lâ” (“All-Glorious is my Lord, the Most High”) at least three times while in the prostrating position.

9. Saying “Sami‘allâhu liman hamidah” (“God hears him who praises Him”) while rising from the bowing position, and “Rabbanâ lakal-hamd” (Our Lord, to You is all praise”) when reaching the standing position.

10. Holding the knees with fingers spread out while bowing, or for women, placing both hands on the knees.

11. Not bending the knees while bowing, facing the ground, and keeping the head and back parallel to the ground. Women may bend their legs and bow arching their backs slightly.

12. When going to prostration, placing the knees on the ground, followed by the hands, and then the face.

13. When rising from prostration, first lifting the face from the ground, followed by the hands, and then the knees.

14. Saying “Allâhu akbar” when going into and rising from prostration.

15. Placing both hands on the front of the thighs facing the *qiblah* between the two prostrations.

16. While in the sitting position, men must sit in the kneeling position with the outer side of the left leg and foot on the ground and the right foot straight with the heel pointing up and the toes downwards. Women sit on the left hip with both legs directed towards the right.

17. Reciting the Salât ‘alan-Nabî (i.e., supplications *Allâhumma salli* and *Allâhumma bârik*) after *at-tahiyyât* in the last sitting.

18. Giving greetings towards the right shoulder first by saying “As-salâmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullâh,” and then repeating the greetings towards the left shoulder.

19. Establishing a *sutra* when praying in an open area, or where there is the possibility of people passing. *Sutra* is an object placed in front of the individual praying as a barrier between him and passers- by so that people will not come between him and the *qiblah*. (4)

**References**

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**(4) The Young Person’s Guide to Living Islam, Asli Kaplan Tughrabooks**