# Significance of the Sunna

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# Obey God and the Messenger, so that you may be shown mercy (granted a good, virtuous life in this world, and eternal happiness in the Hereafter).[[1]](#endnote-2) (1)

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# 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.6[[2]](#endnote-3) (2)

# *6. This verse alone would be enough to proclaim the infallibility of God's Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, and the importance of following his Sunnah, even if there were no other verse of equal importance.*

# *Love is the very substance of existence and the link amongst all its parts. With all His essential Qualities originating in His very Essence, and Attributes, Names and acts, the Creator of existence is absolutely perfect. Any perfection is loved because of itself. Since God is All-Perfect, and the source of all perfection in existence, He is worthy of love above everything else. Being the All-Loving, He loves Himself in a way suitable for His all-sacred and all-holy Essence. This love is the origin of existence or the universe. That is, due to His sacred love of Himself, He has created the universe and loves all of His creatures beyond all comparison. This infinite love is focused, first of all, on the Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, as he is both the seed and most illustrious fruit of creation: one who has manifested God with his whole life and the Religion he preached. He made God known to people and loved by them, thus realizing the purpose for God's creation of the universe. Humanity has the loftiest position and is expected to respond to God's love of creatures, including, in particular, humanity itself, with a recognition and love for Him. Love of God requires loving His most beloved servant and Messenger – the Prophet Muhammad – because the door to the love of God opens through him. Loving him shows itself by following him and designing one's life according to the religion he preached. People cannot be sincere in their claim of love unless they follow the practices of the Prophet Muhammad in their daily life and practice Islam. The following verse confirms this point.*

# The Command to Follow the Sunnah and Its Manners

# 3:131

Say (to them, O Messenger): “If you indeed love Allah, then follow me, so that Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. (Al Imran 3:31) (3)

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).(4)

93. Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, stood up among us to admonish us and said, ‘O people! You will be gathered to Allah the Almighty barefoot, naked and uncircumcised. “We will bring the creation back into existence as easily as We originated it in the first instance.” (al-Anbiya 21:104) The first of creatures to be clothed on the Day of Rising will be Ibrahim. Men of my community will come and will be taken to the left. I will say, “O Lord, my Companions!” and it will be said, “You do not know what innovations they introduced after you.” I will say the same as the righteous servant (Isa) said, “I was a witness over them so long as I remained among them; and when You took me back, You were Yourself the Watcher over them. Indeed, You are Witness over everything. If You punish them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the All-Glorious with irresistible might, the All-Wise.” (al-Maedah 5:117–118) I will be told, “They never stopped turning back on their heels from the time you left them.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Anbiya, 8, Riqaq, 45; Sahih Muslim, Jannah, 58). (5)

#### THE MEANING OF SUNNAH

The word Sunnah, denoting such things as the visible part of the face, appearance, path, character and nature, has acquired a particular meaning in the Islamic scholarly tradition and has been used to refer to the path pursued by the Prophet in his life and in his actions. The term encompasses the willful actions or deeds of Allah’s Messenger; similarly, it also includes his morality, character and humanity. He is the greatest example for humanity, in his every aspect and manner. There are models of behavior for human beings in his every deliberate and unintentional action.

Alongside the widely accepted literal meaning of the word Sunnah*—*“a way,” “road” or “path”*—*is its being used to refer to a thing’s distinctive characteristics. The words, actions and behavior of the Prophet have become a path followed by human beings and the ostensible, pronounced characteristics of the religion have become known through the Sunnah.

The Sunnah are the words, practices and approvals*—*collectively*—*of Allah’s Messenger, while the hadiths are the duly reported narrations that convey these words, actions, and approvals (*taqrir*). The Sunnah has been identified and recorded by means of the hadith. The Sunnah can only be known for certain in our day through the hadith. In other words, the Sunnah is known via the narrations of hadith scholars. Such being the case, in periods succeeding the Age of Happiness, the words Sunnah and hadith have more often than not been used interchangeably.

The word having a meaning opposite to the term Sunnah is *bid’a*, meaning something introduced later or an innovation contrary to religion. Over time, Sunnah also assumed sociological signification, with those dedicated to the way of the Prophet being known as *ahl al-Sunnah* (those devoted to the Sunnah) and opponents being called *ahl al-bid’a* (people of innovation in religion).

#### SCOPE OF SUNNAH

The word Sunnah has acquired different meanings across different disciplines. Every discipline has employed the term with a meaning suitable to its own particular methodology. Jurists have used Sunnah as the antithesis of *bid’a* as well as those narrations which serve as the source of legal rulings. According to them, hadith and Sunnah are in this sense synonymous. In books of Islamic jurisprudence, however, Sunnah is used to mean those religious commandments which are not religiously obligatory or necessary for human beings.

In Islamic legal theory, or methodology of *fiqh*, Sunnah represents the communications of the Prophet, outside the Qur’an, conducive to functioning as demonstrative evidence. Moreover, not being restricted to its evidential nature, Sunnah has also been defined as everything, other than the Qur’an, issuing from Allah’s Messenger.( Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat*, 4:1; M. Fethullah Gülen, *Muhammad: The Messenger of God*, 316)

The practice of the Companions has also been called Sunnah, for their practice could well be conveying a Prophetic practice that has not reached us in the form of a hadith.( Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat*, 4:2)  For this reason, the words and sayings of the Companions have been related by scholars of hadith (*muhaddithin*) along with their list of transmitters, like the hadith. The Companions’ devotion to the Sunnah led them to either seeking a particular practice of the Prophet in their every act, or to determining their way via independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) in accord with the Sunnah. Moreover, Allah’s Messenger himself enjoined his community to follow the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs who succeeded him: “Hold fast to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Caliphs.”( *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, Ilm, 16)

#### HADITH QUDSI

Among the revelations communicated to the noble Prophet, the words of which cannot be recited in worship, are the words ascribed to Allah. The Prophet conveyed these words from his Lord, to the people. These Traditions are referred to as *Hadith Qudsi* or Divine Hadith. For instance, Allah’s Messenger stated that Allah said, “My mercy prevails over My wrath.”( *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Tawhid, 15) These words are those belonging to Allah verbatim. However, as this statement was not revealed to the Prophet as part of the Qur’an, it is not a Qur’anic verse. Due to its wording not being communicated through revelation, it is also not of a miraculous nature with respect to its wording. As a result, it cannot be recited in place of the Qur’an during the Prescribed Prayer.

The words narrated by Allah’s Messenger as the words of Allah are juristically subject to the rules which apply to hadith. By means of adding His words among those of His Messenger, Allah the Almighty demonstrates the value and regard He places upon him and his Sunnah.

#### IMPORTANCE OF ADHERENCE TO THE SUNNAH

Those who best know the Sunnah’s importance are the Companions. They preferred adherence to the Sunnah to everything else. When Abu Bakr was appointed caliph, the Prophet’s daughter Fatima went to him and requested her share in the Prophet’s inheritance. Despite his loving the Prophet’s relatives more than his own, he reminded Fatima of something he had heard from Allah’s Messenger. He had heard something from the Messenger, which Fatima had not: “We, the community of the Prophets, do not bequeath anything. Whatever we leave is charity.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Khums, 1)  He thus declined Fatima’s request. Such was his faithfulness to the Sunnah that it had overcome even his own sentiment.

The Companions preferred the Sunnah to their own views and opinions. If there was a hadith in relation to a particular matter, they immediately followed it, and when they were made aware of a hadith that they had hitherto not known, they would instantly abandon their own views and adhere to that hadith. During his caliphate, Umar had embarked on an expedition to Syria for the purpose of inspecting the army. When he heard that pestilence had broken out in Amwas, he was undecided as to whether or not he should return to Medina. Abdu’r-Rahman ibn Awf said to him: “I heard the Messenger say: ‘If you hear that pestilence has broken out in a place, do not enter it. If you are in such a place already, do not leave it.’” Upon hearing these words, Umar returned without hesitation. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Tibb, 29)

Known for his sagacity and knowledge, Ali said in reference to wiping over indoor boots during the ritual ablution: “If the religion were based on opinion, it would be more important to wipe the under part of the shoe than the upper but I have seen the Messenger of Allah wiping over the upper part of his shoes.” ( *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Tahara, 63) With these words, he has drawn attention to the transcendental nature of religion and has expressed the importance of adherence to the Sunnah.

The Prophets are exempted by Allah from all kinds of sin and wrongdoing. Allah has sent down upon them His blessing and mercy and has commanded the believers to entreat Him for the Prophets and demonstrate their attachment to them with the following Qur’anic verse:

Surely Allah and His angels bless the Prophet (He always treats him with His special mercy, with the angels praying to Him to grant him the highest station of praise with Him, and for the decisive victory of his Religion). O you who believe, invoke the blessings of Allah on him, and pray to Allah to bestow His peace on him, greeting him with the best greeting. (Love and follow him with utmost sincerity and faithfulness, and give yourselves to his way with perfect submission). (al-Ahzab 33:56)

Deeming the fulfillment of the injunction in this verse a religious obligation, Muslim scholars have asserted that saying “peace be upon him” (*alayhis- salam*) when the names of Prophets are mentioned and “upon him be peace and blessings” (*sallallahu alayhi wa sallam*) at the mention of Prophet Muhammad’s name, is indispensable.

Invoking the peace and blessings of Allah upon Allah’s Messenger at the first mention of his name is necessary (*wajib*), while recommended and rewarded (*mustahab*) at repeat mentions. Furthermore, such expressions of praise and devotion as “our master”, “noble Messenger” and “most illustrious Prophet”, in prefix to his name, at each and every invocation is demonstration of our reverence and respect to him.(6)

**Why is practicing the Sunnah so important?[[3]](#endnote-4)**

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) (7)

**References**

1. **3:132/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal** [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. **3:31/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

   **(3)3:131/The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

   **(4)Nawawi, Imam. Riyad As-Salihin; The Gardens of the Righteous: A collection of authentic hadiths. Tughra Books Press, Inc. 2014**

   **(5) Nawawi, Imam. Riyad As-Salihin; The Gardens of the Righteous: A collection of authentic hadiths. Tughra Books Press, Inc. 2014**

   ##### **(6)Tekines, Ayhan. “An Introduction to Hadith” Tughra Books Press. January 2013.**

   **(7)THE YOUNG PERSON’S GUIDE TO LIVING ISLAM by ASLI KAPLAN** [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)