

## Authority of the Sunnah

### **1. Definition of the Sunnah, and the History of the Sunnah, and the Efforts of the Scholars in verifying the Sunnah.**

For the above issues, please see the following article: The Sunnah.

One thing that must be mentioned here is that many Muslims get confused between the general term of Sunnah, which includes all the sayings and actions of the Prophet, and between the term Sunnah when used in fiqh issues where it means "recommended". For example, since the Prophet used to pray 2 rak'at before fajr prayer, we say that it is Sunnah for us to pray these 2 rak'at, which means that it is recommended to pray these 2 rak'at and not obligatory.

In this article we are discussing the Sunnah in the general sense, and not in the fiqh sense. We are talking about the Sunnah as a source of Islamic legislation. Therefore, when we say it is obligatory to follow the Sunnah, we are talking about the Prophets commands for us in the Sunnah and not about the recommended actions such as the 2 rak'at before fajr for example. Please make sure that you understand the difference here.

### **2. What does the Authority of the Sunnah mean?**

In Arabic, the wording is Hojjiyat As-Sunnah. This basically means that the Sunnah can be used as evidence in Shariah, and that Allah (subhanah wa taala) has ordered us to follow the Sunnah and avoid anything it has prohibited for us. In other words, this means that it is obligatory on every Muslim to believe in what the Sunnah tells us, and to act according to the Sunnah in all aspects of our life and ensure that we do not commit any actions that contradict the Sunnah.

### **3. The Sunnah and its place in relation to the Holy Qur'an:**

The Sunnah can be divided into three parts:

1. **Confirming Sunnah.** This is the part of the Sunnah that confirms what is in the Qur'an, and reinforces it.
2. **Explanatory Sunnah.** This part of the Sunnah explains the holy Qur'an and the various Shariah injunctions that come in the holy Qur'an. It includes four parts: expanding on what is mentioned only briefly in the holy Qur'an, explaining difficult verses or issues, putting limits on general statements in the Qur'an and finally specifying generalities in the Qur'an.
3. **Sunnah that brings new legislation.** This part of the Sunnah is the one that brings new legislation, and new Shariah that is not in the holy Qur'an.

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### 4. Evidence of the Authority of the Sunnah from the Qur'an:

- و أطيعوا الله و أطيعوا الرسول و احذروا فإن توليتم فاعلموا أنما على رسولنا البلاغ المبين (المائدة: 92)
- يا أيها الذين آمنوا أطيعوا الله و أطيعوا الرسول و أولي الأمر منكم فإن تنازعتم في شيء فردوه إلى الله و الرسول إن كنتم تؤمنون بالله و اليوم الآخر (النساء: 59)
- و ما آتاكم فخذوه و ما نهاكم عنه فانتهوا (الحشر: 7)
- فلا و ربك لا يؤمنون حتى يحكموك فيما شجر بينهم ثم لا يجدوا في أنفسهم حرجا مما قضيت و يسلموا تسليما (النساء: 65)
- و أنزل عليك الكتاب و الحكمة و علمك ما لم تكن تعلم و كان فضل الله عليك عظيما (النساء: 113)
- قل إن كنتم تحبون الله فاتبعوني يحببكم الله و يغفر لكم ذنوبكم و الله غفور رحيم (آل عمران: 31)
- ثم جعلناك على شريعة من الأمر فاتبعها و لا تتبع أهواء الذين لا يعلمون (الجاثية: 18)
- منيطع الرسول فقد أطاع الله و من تولى فما أرسلناك عليهم حفيظا (النساء: 80)
- قل أطيعوا الله و أطيعوا الرسول فإن تولوا فإنما عليه ما حمل و عليكم ما حملتم و إن تطيعوه تهتدوا و ما على الرسول إلا البلاغ المبين (النور: 54)
- وإذا دعوا إلى الله ورسوله ليحكم بينهم إذا فريق منهم معرضون (النور: 48)
- لا تجعلوا دعاء الرسول بينكم كدعاء بعضكم بعضا قد يعلم الله الذين يتسللون منكم لواذا فليحذر الذين يخالفون عن أمره أن تصيبهم فتنة أو يصيبهم عذاب أليم (النور: 63)
- لقد كان لكم في رسول الله أسوة حسنة لمن كان يرجو الله و اليوم الآخر و ذكر الله كثيرا (الأحزاب: 21)

The verses mentioned above can be translated as:

1. Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and beware (of evil): if ye do turn back, know ye that it is Our Messenger's duty to proclaim (the Message) in the clearest manner. (5: 92).
2. O ye who believe! obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination. (4: 59).
3. So take what the Messenger assigns to you, and deny yourselves that which he withholds from you. And fear Allah; for Allah is strict in Punishment. (59: 7).
4. But no, by thy Lord, they can have no (real) Faith, until they make thee judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against thy decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction. (4: 65).
5. But for the Grace of Allah to thee and His Mercy, a party of them would certainly have plotted to lead thee astray. But (in fact) they will only lead their own souls astray, and to thee they can do no harm in the least. For Allah hath sent down to thee the Book

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and Wisdom and taught thee what thou knewest not (before): and great is the Grace of Allah unto. (4: 113).

6. Say: "If ye do love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins; for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (3: 31).
7. Then We put thee on the (right) Way of Religion: so follow thou that (Way), and follow not the desires of those who know not. (45: 18).
8. He who obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah; but if any turn away, We have not sent thee to watch over their (evil deeds). (4: 80).
9. Say: "Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger: but if ye turn away, he is only responsible for the duty placed on him and ye for that placed on you. If ye obey him, ye shall be on right guidance. The Messenger's duty is only to preach the clear (Message). (24: 54).
10. When they are summoned to Allah and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, behold, some of them decline (to come). (24: 48).
11. Deem not the summons of the Messenger among yourselves like the summons of one of you to another: Allah doth know those of you who slip away under shelter of some excuse: then let those beware who withstand the Messenger's order, lest some trial befall them, or a grievous Penalty be inflicted on them. (24: 63).
12. Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah. (33: 21).

The verses mentioned here are just some of the verses relating to the authority of the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings be upon him). Anyone who has read the holy Qur'an knows that Allah (subhanah wa taala) repeats his command to us to follow the Prophet, and obey him, and stay away from anything that he forbids, many times in the holy Qur'an. All these verses point to the fact that we must abide by and follow the Sunnah, and that we cannot obey Allah (subhanah wa taala) without following the Sunnah because Allah (subhanah wa taala) himself in the holy Qur'an asks us and requires us to follow the Sunnah.

### **5. Evidence of the Authority of the Sunnah from the Hadith:**

Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings be upon him) has warned us in many hadith of the fact that some people will come who will deny the Sunnah and claim to follow the holy Qur'an only. Subhan Allah, we see this has come true today with some of these deviant groups.

Please read the hadith below:

قوله صلى الله عليه وسلم: "ألا هل عسى رجل يبلغه الحديث عني، وهو متكئ على أريكته فيقول بيننا وبينكم كتاب الله، فما وجدناه من حلال استحللناه وما وجدناه فيه حراما حرماناه، وإن ما حرم رسول الله كما حرم الله" (سنن الترمذي، كتاب العلم، 38/5)

قوله صلى الله عليه وسلم: "كل أمتي يدخلون الجنة إلا من أبي، قالوا: يا رسول الله ومن أبي؟ قال: من أطاعني دخل الجنة ومن عصاني فقد أبي" (البخاري مع الفتح 174/15 ح 7280)

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قوله صلى الله عليه وسلم: "دعوني ما تركتكم فإنما أهلك من كان قبلكم سؤالهم و اختلافهم على أنبيائهم, فإذا نهيتكم عن شيء فاجتنبوه, وإذا أمرتكم بشيء فأتوا منه ما استطعتم" (البخاري مع الفتح 176/15 ح 7288)

قوله صلى الله عليه وسلم: نضر الله عبدا سمع مقالتي فحفظها و وعها و أداها, فرب حامل فقه غير فقيه, و رب حامل فقه إلى من هو أفقه منه" (سنن ابن ماجه 86/1 ح 2306)

These hadith can be translated as follows:

1. There will be a man to whom my hadith will reach him, while he is sitting comfortably, and he will say between me and you is the book of Allah, whatever we find in it that is halal we will make it halal, and whatever we find in it haram we will make it haram. Then the Prophet says: whatever the messenger of Allah has made haram is as if Allah has made it haram.
2. All of my Ummah will enter heaven except those who refuse (or reject), so they asked him: oh messenger of Allah, who is the one who refuses? The Prophet said: whoever obeys me will enter heaven and whoever obeys me he has refused.
3. Do not ask me about what I didn't mention, because what has caused the destruction of the previous nations was their questioning and disagreement with their Prophets. If I forbid you from doing something, avoid it, and if I order you to do something do as much of it as you possibly can.
4. May Allah make bright (beautiful, happy) the face of the one who listens to my saying, and he memorizes it, understands it and delivers it to others. How many people may carry knowledge while they are not knowledgeable, and how many people carry knowledge to those who are more knowledgeable than them.

Again the evidence from the Sunnah points to the same fact, which is that it is obligatory for Muslims to follow the Sunnah. We must abide by it, follow its orders and avoid whatever it forbids us from. We cannot claim to be obeying Allah if we do not follow the Sunnah.

### **6. Evidence of the Authority of the Sunnah from the Consensus of the Scholars:**

Since the belief in the authority of the Sunnah is one of the basics of Islam, and one of the foundations of this religion, Muslims have agreed on this fact in the early generations and the later generations as well. This consensus has been reported by many scholars including: Al-Shafi'ee, Ibn Abd Al-Barr, Ibn Hazm, Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn Al-Qayyim.

No Muslim scholar has raised any doubt about the authority of the Sunnah as a source of Shariah. The only doubts were raised by deviant groups who obviously had very little knowledge of Islam, because the overwhelming evidence of the Qur'an and the Sunnah clearly settles this issue. These deviant groups simply wanted to create a new Shariah based on their own opinions and desires. Therefore, they wanted to destroy the Sunnah which is a major source of the Shariah in order to replace it with whatever they want. We will discuss these deviant groups in more detail later on.

### 7. The Sunnah is Part of the *wahy* (Revelation from Allah):

The Sunnah can be divided in this regard into the following parts:

- A part that was directly revealed to the Prophet by meaning only (the part revealed by exact wording is the holy Qur'an).
- A part that the Prophet said or did out of his own with no revelation, and this part is divided into 2 sub-parts:
  - Either the revelation asserts the action or saying of the Prophet, and in this case it becomes the same as the part that was directly revealed to the Prophet.
  - Or the revelation comes with an alternative idea to what the Prophet said or did, and in this case we take the revelation and work by it.

Therefore, as we can see that with regard to anything related to the religion of Islam, the Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is immune from making a mistake (*ma'soom*). This means that the entire Sunnah of Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is according to the will of Allah (subhanah wa taala), since it is either directly revealed by Allah (subhanah wa taala), or it is asserted by Allah (subhanah wa taala), or else it has been corrected by the revelation from Allah (subhanah wa taala).

This is obvious to any Muslim, after all, Allah (subhanah wa taala) has promised to protect this message, the message of Islam. And it is not possible for Allah (subhanah wa taala) to allow the messenger who is delivering His message to make any mistake in delivering it, otherwise it would not be protected.

The following is some evidence from the holy Qur'an that the Sunnah is part of the revelation and that the Prophet does not make mistakes in delivering the message of Allah (subhanah wa taala):

ما ضل صاحبكم و ما غوى و ما ينطق عن الهوى إن هو إلا وحي يوحى (النجم: 2-4)

من يطع الرسول فقد أطاع الله (النساء: 80)

These verses can be translated as follows:

1. Your Companion is neither astray nor being misled, Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) Desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him. (53: 2-4)
2. He who obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah; but if any turn away, We have not sent thee to watch over their (evil deeds). (4: 80)

In fact, all of the verses we mentioned above to prove the authority of the Sunnah are evidence that the Sunnah is indeed from Allah (subhanah wa taala). After all, since Allah (subhanah wa taala) requires us to follow the Sunnah, then it must be from the revelation of Allah (subhanah wa taala). And in all cases, we are required to follow it and therefore it is equivalent in its importance to the revelation.



### 8. Impossible to rely solely on the holy Qur'an:

In addition to all what was mentioned above, any rational Muslim who has the slightest knowledge about the Qur'an and the Sunnah knows that most of the details of the religion of Islam were revealed to us through the Sunnah and not through the holy Qur'an. For example, the holy Qur'an mentions in many places that Muslims should pray, and perform rukoo' and sujood. However, without the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings be upon him), we would be unable to perform the prayers since all the details of how to pray are from the Sunnah and not the Qur'an.

This obviously proves that part of the revelation came to the Prophet by meaning only, and it includes such things as how to pray. The Prophet ordered us to pray as we have seen him pray, and the Prophet must have learned this through revelation from Allah (subhanah wa taala). In addition to prayers, also the details of the zakat were revealed in the Sunnah and not the Qur'an.

Therefore, if anyone from those deviant groups tells you they only follow the Qur'an and not the Sunnah, you should ask them immediately if they pray. If they say yes they do pray, then tell this ignorant person that they are following the Sunnah in praying as the Qur'an does not describe any of the details of the prayers. In fact, almost all matters of fiqh rely very heavily on the Sunnah especially for the details. The holy Qur'an only mentions general statements, and they are explained in the Sunnah in detail.

Finally, there are many verses of the holy Qur'an that were explained to us by the hadith from the Prophet. Without the hadith, we would lose large parts of the Qur'an because we have no way of understanding it. After all, didn't Allah (subhanah wa taala) reveal the following verse:

لا تحرك به لسانك لتعجل به، إن علينا جمعه و قرآنه، فإذا قرأناه فاتبع قرآنه، ثم إن علينا بيانه  
(القيامة 16- 19)

These verses can be translated as follows:

"Move not thy tongue concerning the (Qur'an) to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect it and to promulgate it: But when We have promulgated it, follow thou its recital (as promulgated): Nay more, it is for Us to explain it (and make it clear)." (75: 16-19). In these verses, Allah (subhanah wa taala) is instructing Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings be upon him) not to hurry by repeating the Qur'an as it is being revealed to him. Allah tells the Prophet that it is up to Him to collect it into the Prophet's heart and make him read it as it was revealed to him. Allah further instructs the Prophet that if it is being revealed to you, then just listen to it. Finally Allah says: and then it is up to us to make its meaning clear to you.

The *mofasssireen* (scholars who explain the verses of the Qur'an) have said that Allah is telling the Prophet that the meanings of the verses being revealed to him will be explained to the Prophet and their meanings will be made clear to him in his heart.

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This verse makes it clear that Allah (subhanah wa taala) did not simply reveal the words of the verses of the holy Qur'an to the Prophet. Allah (subhanah wa taala) also revealed the meanings of these verses into the heart of the Prophet. Therefore, the hadith of the Prophet in explaining the verses of the Qur'an is part of the revelation of the Qur'an. However rejects the Sunnah is rejecting part of the revelation.

### **9. The Ruling on those who Deny the Authority of the Sunnah:**

The scholars of Islam have agreed that the one who denies the authority of the Sunnah and rejects it and its rulings has committed *kufr* disbelief, and that he is no longer within the realm of Islam, and that his prayers, fasting and zakat are of no benefit to him.

The scholars of Islam have very detailed rulings in this regard, but we will not mention them here in order not to make this too long. However, it is very easy to find in any basic book about the Sunnah and the Authority of the Sunnah. Among the scholars who have made this ruling are: Ibn Hazm, Ayoub Al-Sikhtiany, Imam Al-Shatibi, Imam Al-Soyooti, Imam Al-Shawkani and others.

Some of the verses of the Qur'an that provide evidence about this ruling:

فلا وربك لا يؤمنون حتى يحكموك فيما شجر بينهم ثم لا يجدوا في أنفسهم حرجا مما قضيت ويسلموا تسليما (النساء: 65)

وإذا قيل لهم تعالوا إلى ما أنزل الله وإلى الرسول رأيت المنافقين يصدون عنك صدودا (النساء: 61)

قل أطيعوا الله واطيعوا الرسول فإن تولوا فإن الله لا يحب الكافرين (آل عمران: 23)

ومن يعص الله ورسوله فقد ضلّ ضلّالا مبينا (الأحزاب: 36)

وما آتاكم فخذوه وما نهاكم عنه فانتهوا واتقوا الله إن الله شديد العقاب (الحشر: 7)

These verses can be translated as follows:

1. But no, by thy Lord, they can have no (real) Faith, until they make thee judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against thy decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction. (4: 65).
2. When it is said to them: "Come to what Allah hath revealed, and to the Messenger": thou seest the Hypocrites avert their faces from thee in disgust. (4: 61).
3. Say: "Obey Allah and His Messenger": but if they turn back, Allah loveth not those who reject Faith. (3: 32).
4. It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger, to have any option about their decision: if anyone disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path. (33: 35).
5. So take what the Messenger assigns to you, and deny yourselves that which he withholds from you. And fear Allah; for Allah is strict in Punishment. (59: 7).

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Therefore it is clear to any Muslims, after reading these verses of the holy Qur'an, that obedience of the Prophet is indeed obedience of Allah (subhanah wa taala). It is also clear that Allah (subhanah wa taala) has said that people will not believe until they judge in all disputes according to the judgment of the Prophet, and they should not have any doubts about the Prophet's decision and judgment.

May Allah (subhanah wa taala) save us from being misguided, and may Allah (subhanah wa taala) guide those people who fell into this misguidance back into the fold of Islam. If they do not repent, not even their prayers, fasting or zakat will help them since they are rejecting the clear commands of Allah (subhanah wa taala).

### **10. Conclusion:**

In this article we have discussed the meaning of the authority of the Sunnah. We said that this authority means that the Sunnah can be taken as evidence in all matter of religion in Islam. We also said that this authority means that it is obligatory for us to follow all commands in the Sunnah, and it is obligatory for us to avoid everything forbidden by the Sunnah.

We also discussed the fact that many fiqh scholars use the term Sunnah to describe recommended actions. As we know all actions have one of five rulings: obligatory, recommended, allowed, disliked and forbidden. Some fiqh scholars use the term Sunnah for recommended actions because these are actions the prophet used to do but did not command the Muslims to do. These include praying 2 rak'at before fajr, and 2 after maghrib and so on. However, the Sunnah in general is the sayings and actions of the Prophet, and it is a source of shariah legislation. This is the Sunnah that we mean in our discussion.

We then discussed the evidence of the authority of the Sunnah from the holy Qur'an, the Sunnah and the consensus of the scholars. We then mentioned that the Sunnah is part of the revelation from Allah (subhanah wa taala), and we proved this by saying that for example we pray according to the Sunnah, and obviously our method of prayer was a revelation. We then continued to prove that the Sunnah is part of the revelation by proving that it is impossible to be a Muslim and rely solely on the holy Qur'an.

Finally, we also mentioned the ruling on those who reject the authority of the Sunnah, and we said that the scholars of Islam have agreed that their ruling is that they have committed an act of disbelief and that they are no longer in the realm of Islam. Their prayers, fasting and zakat cannot help them as they have rejected a main source of these forms of worship, the Sunnah.

May Allah (subhanah wa taala) guide us all to the right path.



## Question and Answer Details

Name of Questioner	Muhammad - United States
Title	The Authority of the Sunnah
Question	Dear scholars, As-Salamu `alaykum. What do you think about the group of people who reject the authority of Sunnah and claim Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was sent only to deliver the Qur'an? Also they say Allah promised to protect only the Qur'an and not the Sunnah or Hadith. In other words, why do we have to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and not just follow the Qur'an? Jazakum Allah khayran.
Date	01/Dec/2003
Name of Counsellor	IOL Shari`ah Researchers
Topic	Sciences of Hadith

## Answer

**Wa `alaykum As-Salamu wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh.**

**In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.**

**All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.**

Dear brother in Islam, we would like to thank you for the great confidence you place in us, and we implore Allah Almighty to help us serve His cause and render our work for His Sake.

Answering the question in point, the eminent Muslim scholar, **Sheikh Muhammad Al-Hanooti**, member of the North American Fiqh Council, states:

"Allah the Almighty has informed us that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in general has the authority to emphasize the Qur'an or to elaborate it through Sunnah. The majority of schools say the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) has the power to add a law which has no precedent in the Qur'an. To say the Qur'an is the only source is imperfect and incomplete."

In this context, we'd like to cite the fatwa issued by **Sheikh M. S. Al-Munajjid**, a prominent Saudi Muslim lecturer and author on the importance of Sunnah as a primary source of Islam. He states:

"The question may appear strange and somewhat surprising to committed, practicing Muslims. How can something which is so obviously one of the bases of Islam becomes a matter for discussion and debate? But since the question has been asked, we will present, with the help of Allah, the principles and bases of the importance of the Sunnah as well as the obligation to follow it. By so doing, we will also refute the doubters and the misguided group who call themselves "Qur'aniyyin" (the Qur'an has nothing to do with them!)"

**Proof of the importance of the Sunnah:**

1) The Qur'an speaks of the importance of the Sunnah, for example:

(a) Allah says: **"He who obeys the Messenger has indeed obeyed Allah..."** (an-Nisa': 80) Allah

described obedience to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as being a part of obedience to Him. Then He made a connection between obedience to Him and obedience to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): **“O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger...”** (an-Nisa’: 59)

(b) Allah warns us not to go against the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), and states that whoever disobeys him will be doomed to eternal Hell. Allah says: **“...And let those who oppose the Messenger’s commandment beware, lest some *fitnah* (trial, affliction, etc.) befall them or a painful torment be inflicted on them.”** (an-Nur: 63)

(c) Allah has made obedience to His Prophet a religious duty; resisting or opposing it is a sign of hypocrisy: **“But no, by your Lord, they can have no Faith, until they make you [Muhammad] judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept (them) with full submission.”** (an-Nisa’: 65)

(d) Allah commands His servants to respond to Him and His Messenger: **“O you who believe! Answer Allah (by obeying Him) and (His) Messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life...”** (al-Anfal: 24)

(e) Allah also commands His servants to refer all disputes to him: **“(And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger...”** (an-Nisa’: 59)

2) The Sunnah itself indicates the importance of the Sunnah. For example:

(a) At-Tirmidhi reported from Abu Rafi` and others that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: **“I do not want to see any one of you reclining on his couch and, when he hears of my instructions or prohibitions, saying ‘I don’t accept it; we didn’t find any such thing in the Book of Allah.’”** Abu `Isa said: This is a good authentic hadith. (See: *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, Shakir edition, no. 2663)

Al-`Irbad ibn Sariyah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: **“Would any of you think, reclining on his couch, that Allah would only describe what is forbidden in the Qur’an? I tell you, by Allah, that I have warned and commanded and prohibited things that are as important as what is in the Qur’an, if not more so.”** (Reported by Abu Dawud, *Kitab al-Khiraj wal-imarah wal-fay`*)

(b) Abu Dawud also reported from al-`Irbad ibn Sariyah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) led us in prayer one day, then he turned to us and exhorted us strongly...(he said), **“Pay attention to my Sunnah (way) and the way of the Rightly-guided caliphs after me, adhere to it and hold fast to it.”** (*Sahih Abi Dawud*)

3) The scholars’ consensus (*ijma`*) affirms the importance of the Sunnah. Ash-Shafi’i (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “I do not know of anyone among the Companions and Successors who narrated a report from the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) without accepting it, adhering to it and affirming that this was Sunnah. Those who came after the Successors and those whom we met did likewise: they all accepted the reports and took them to be Sunnah, praising those who followed them and criticizing those who went against them. Whoever deviated from this path would be regarded by us as having deviated from the way of the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the scholars who followed them, and would be considered as one of the ignorant.

4) Common sense indicates the importance of the Sunnah. The fact that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is the Messenger of Allah indicates that we must believe everything he said and obey every command he gave. It goes without saying that he has told us things and given instructions in addition to what is in the Qur'an. It is futile to make a distinction between the Sunnah and the Qur'an when it comes to adhering to it and responding to it. It is obligatory to believe in what he has told us, and to obey his instructions."

Excerpted, with slight modifications, from: [www.islam-qa.com](http://www.islam-qa.com)

Elaborating on the authority of the Sunnah and its significance as a primary source of Islam, only second to the Qur'an, we'd like to cite the following:

"The Qur'an is a miracle both in its external qualities and esoteric meaning. Its purpose is to expound the truth of the Absolute and the law of the Absolute. It is in essence the Truth and the Law. To glean the gems of knowledge and wisdom, so enormous in number, and so embedded in Qura'nic phraseology, to discern the specific from the general; to expound the meanings of the concise and the esoteric, to emphasize the basic content and the main purpose, to uncover the obscurities, to indicate reasons and justification, to crystallize and concretize the tenets, to prescribe the obligatory functions and the voluntary disciplines, in short, to provide a detailed commentary of the Divine Book without the aid of the divinely guided Teacher who presented the Qur'an would have been an impossible task.

Then again, it is not enough to believe in the Unity or Oneness of Allah or in the conception of reality of the Absolute and the dependence of all things on the Absolute as the first testimony of the Islamic faith '*La Ilaha Illallah*' requires but also to believe in the Prophethood of Muhammad who brought the Message for without it the Qur'an will lose its authenticity.

#### **The Qur'an lays down the role of the Prophet:**

**"Verily, it is the mercy of Allah that He has raised amongst them a Prophet who recites the verses before them, purifies them and teaches them the Book and wisdom." (Al-Baqarah: 129)**

The teaching could be done through the medium of lectures and sermons and by laying down ordinances and compelling their observance and by penalizing omission and transgression. But the Prophet could not leave his followers to interpret and follow the teachings in their own ways, to determine their import, each according to his own lights and capabilities and to drift in uncertainty.

A much more effective way is by enacting the teachings in one's life and presenting a model for emulation by others. Then alone the meaning and purpose of the teaching can be unambiguous and the words of the preacher can carry weight. Before attempting it, it was necessary, however, to lay down the highest standards of good conduct and disposition, of piety and devotion, of chastity and honor, of benevolence and kindness, of generosity and sacrifice, of toleration and contentment, of steadfastness and patience, in short, all of the virtues and goodness and to imbibe all those virtues and to himself reach the pinnacle.

The Prophet, therefore, appeared as a model par excellence and as the human norm for both of his individual and collective functions. But man is mortal and the human model could not exist forever. It was, therefore, imperative that every word uttered by the noble personage, his every action and movement, his every gesture or inclination, should be faithfully recorded for the guidance and

posterity.

All other Prophets appeared in prehistoric times. It is the good fortune of the world that the Prophet of Islam appeared in a historical time when the art of writing had been developed and everything could be recorded. As the personality of the Prophet is a beacon light for the world and a blessing to mankind, so his Traditions, his Sunnah, his way of life is a guiding light. And to follow his teachings and injunctions and to emulate his example is indeed felicity and good fortune and the key to Heaven.

As `A'ishah says, the Prophet was, indeed, the Qur'an in action. The sayings and actions of the Prophet, known as his Traditions, Hadith or Sunnah, constitute an explanation of the obscure in the Qur'an, the amplification of the concise and the abstract therein, the exegesis of its difficult content and manifestation of what is hidden or esoteric in it. As Imam Shafi'i says: "Sunnah is the exegesis and connotation of the ordinances of Allah." It provides detailed specifications for what is determined in generality by the Qur'an. It is also concerned with secondary obligations which facilitate primary ones.

According to the Quran itself, the Prophet was possessed not only of the *Kitab*, the written 'book' but also of the *Hikma*, the wisdom, whereby ultimate principles can be applied to the details and episodes of ordinary life. Consequently, his actions and sayings, transmitted by chains of reliable narrators, form a kind of commentary and supplement to the Quran.

The Traditions cover the entire gamut of human life. The spontaneous utterances of the Prophet are not only brilliant, illuminative and decisive, they are replete with wisdom and reflect an overwhelming passion to reform humanity. They were not meant only for the society of the day, but are meant for all time and for the whole brotherhood of mankind. Conditions, values and thinking change from time to time and age to age, but these sayings are of eternal character overpassing time and space. There is nothing illogical or irrational in them, there is no contrariness or inconsistency. No mortal unless inspired and illumined by Divine Light could be their author. "If Islam offers, as a manifestation the element of truth, of beauty and power, the Prophet for his part incarnates serenity, generosity and strength."

Obedience of the Prophet is as important and as obligatory as obedience to Allah. In fact, obedience to the Prophet is obedience to Allah. This is stated in several Qur'anic verses: (See 4: 110; 4: 59; 4: 80; 8: 20; 8: 27; 47: 33; 49: 15; 48: 13; 33: 36)

From the foregoing verses of the Qur'an, it would be evident that belief in the Prophet is as incumbent as belief in Allah and the angels and the scriptures; that obeying the Prophet is as necessary as obeying the commandments of Allah. And that acceptance of the interpretations and decisions of the Prophet is binding. If the sayings and actions of the Prophet are not to serve as rulings, the belief in the Prophet would not have been made compulsory nor obedience of his injunctions would have been treated as a mark of faith.

The Sunnah served not only as an extension or supplement to the Qur'an as a source of law, but also served to give shape and dimension to the entire structure of Islam. It generates a particular kind of attitude to life and approach to human problems and it was through them and the message of the Qur'an that the Prophet changed the thinking of his followers and their mental outlook, their vision and approach, their habits and manners, their customs and laws, their norms of war and peace, their standards and bases of economy, their culture and civilization; in fact, he succeeded in effecting a complete metamorphosis of man and his society. This could not be accomplished just by promulgating law and ordinances. Religion is not a mere code or compilation of laws. It is something deeper and

more extensive. It governs, guides, directs and adorns [one's] entire life in all its complexity. It cannot take root nor can flourish unless there is a complete intellectual and emotional involvement.

The social, cultural, moral and intellectual regeneration and the complete revolution was the direct result of not only the message of the Qur'an, but also the impact of the august and beloved personality who delivered the message and of the lofty standard of piety, dignity and behavior set up by him and of the sittings, assemblies and concourses held by him in which flowed, like an unending stream, the nectar of wisdom, soul-stirring teachings and sublime preaching. It was the amalgam of all these that developed the temper of Islam in which were embodied not only laws, rules and regulations, but also the motivating factors, incentives and inspiration for their rigid application and for catching their spirit, meaning and purpose.

These Traditions also open a window through which the personal life of the Prophet and his household and daily routines and way of living can be viewed. How can one, in quest of truth, leave this door and go elsewhere for receiving instruction in decorous behavior, ethics and humanities? They also open a window on the lives of the Companions—how they followed their great master, dedicated their lives to the service of religion and held aloft the banner of Islam."

Excerpted from, <http://muslim-canada.org/muspersonallaw4.html>, with slight modifications.

*Sources:*

*Pages 1-8*

[http://www.al-islami.com/islam/authority\\_of\\_sunnah.php](http://www.al-islami.com/islam/authority_of_sunnah.php)

*Pages 9-14*

[www.Islamonline.net](http://www.Islamonline.net)

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