

## OBLIGATION OF FOLLOWING THE SUNNAH ﷺ

The noble Companion, Abu Hurairah (رضي الله عنه) narrated that Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said:

ما أمرتكم به فخذوه وما نهيتكم عنه فانتهوا

**“Whatever I command you with, take it, and whatever I have forbidden for you, keep away from it.”**

Reported by Muslim, Ibn Mājah and Ahmad

Following the *Sunnah* of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) and holding fast to that which he came with, and obeying Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ) is a requirement of the Religion. The Prophet (ﷺ) is to be believed and followed in everything that was revealed to him: in belief (*‘aqeedah*), worship, transactions, manners, and other than that. All of this enters under the heading of ‘following the Prophet of God,’ and it is not restricted just to matters of Creed.

Therefore, his commands are acted upon, his prohibitions are avoided, and his sayings are affirmed as being true—and Allah is worshipped in the manner that he (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught the people.

From that which is known from the Islamic texts is that following the Messenger (ﷺ) is from the necessities of the second part of the testimony of faith (*shahādah*), i.e., **‘I testify that Muhammad is the servant and Messenger of Allah’**. For this reason, a deed is not considered as being accepted by Allah the (Most High) until it fulfils two conditions:

Firstly: That it must be done sincerely for Allah alone (*ikhlaṣ*).

Secondly: The deed must be in accordance with the *Sunnah* such that the Messenger (ﷺ) is emulated in that action—and there are many verses and Prophetic narrations that command us with this.

So, *ikhlaṣ* (sincerity) is a necessity of the first part of the testimony of faith, i.e., **‘None has the right to be worshipped except Allah’**, just as following the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is a necessity of its second part, **‘Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’**. Allah (the Most High) stated in the Qur’an:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ  
وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

**“Say, if you [really] love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”**

Surah āli-‘Imrān 3:31

Following the Messenger Muhammad (ﷺ) in that which he came with of revelation from Allah, is obligatory, and a must. Truth and guidance are not known except by the path of the Messenger (ﷺ), and by that which he was sent with of the *Two Revelations*, and they are the Qur’an and *Sunnah*. Therefore, following the Messenger (ﷺ) is one of the two foundational conditions for a righteous deed to be accepted.

Shaikhul-Islām Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul-Wahhāb (رحمته الله) stated in his book *The Three Fundamental Principles* (p. 7), “The meaning of the testimony of faith that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (the second part of the *shahādah*) is: to obey him in that which he has commanded, to believe in that which he has informed us of, to keep away from that which he has forbidden, and not to worship Allah except with that which he (peace and blessings be upon him) has legislated.”

The narration of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) at the beginning of this article is built on two sentences:

- i) ‘Whatever I have commanded you with, take it.’
- ii) ‘Whatever I have forbidden for you, keep away from it.’

The first sentence calls to acting upon all the commands of the Allāh's Messenger (ﷺ) and the second sentence contains a prohibition of falling into what he (ﷺ) has made unlawful.

This narration is in harmony with the saying of Allah (the Most High):

وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا

**“And whatever the Messenger gives you, take it—and whatsoever he forbids you from, abstain from it.”**

Surah al-Hashr 59:7

So, the narration (*ḥadeeth*) is the same as the *āyah* (verse) in meaning, and both the *ḥadeeth* and the *āyah* encompass

two general principles: (i) To obey the Messenger (ﷺ) in everything that he has commanded with, and (ii) to stay away from that which he has forbidden

The Messenger (ﷺ) was the one who conveyed the message from Allah, so whatever he brought from commandments and prohibitions, were not from himself, rather they were from Allah, just as He (the Most High) stated in the Qur’an:

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

“He (Muhammad) does not speak of his own desire—it is only revelation that is inspired.”

Surah an-Najm 53: 3-4

So, the Qur’an is the revelation from Allah, and the *Sunnah* likewise is the revelation from Allah, and the Messenger (ﷺ) is the conveyor of the Book and the *Sunnah*.

Obedience to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) in that which is reported in the *Sunnah* is obligatory, just as obedience to Allah is obligatory in that which is commanded in the Qur’an. You should not distinguish between the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Prophet (ﷺ) such that you act upon the Qur’an and abandon the *Sunnah* (i.e., the Prophetic guidance) because to abandon the *Sunnah* is deviation and heresy. Whoever says that he will act upon the Qur’an but not upon the *Sunnah*, then he is a denier of the Book and *Sunnah*. That is because the Qur’an states: **“And whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it. And whatsoever he forbids you, abstain from it...”** (Surah al-Hashr 59:7) There are many verses similar to this in the Book of Allah.

If a person does not believe at all in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ), then he has disbelieved in the Qur’an and in the verses that command with obedience to the Messenger (ﷺ). Therefore, whoever disbelieves in the *Sunnah*, even if he claims to be a believer in the Qur’an, then [in reality] he is a disbeliever in both. Allah (the Most High) has made the *Sunnah* binding upon us:

فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

**“And let those who oppose the Messenger's**

commandment beware, lest some affliction should befall them or a painful torment be inflicted on them.”

Surah an-Noor 24:63

Allah (the Most High) also said:

قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ

“Say [to them]: Obey Allah and obey the Messenger...”

Surah an-Noor 24:54

Furthermore, the *Sunnah* is a clarification and an explanation of the Qur’ān. There are numerous verses in the Qur’ān that are general in meaning but the *Sunnah* clarifies and explains them to make them clear. This is true for the pillars of Islam such as prayer (*ṣalāh*), *zakāh*, fasting and Hajj. Their rulings and details are all clarified in the *Sunnah*. The one who says that he will act upon the Qur’ān but not the *Sunnah*, then he will not know how to pray or how many *rak’ahs* (units) to pray! He will not know the minimum threshold for *zakāh* or how to pay it—this is only known from the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ).

#### CATEGORIES OF SUNNAH

The instruction of the Messenger (ﷺ) are of two types:

- That which he obligated (*wājib*): the abandonment of an obligation is a sin and punishable.
- That which he recommended (*mustahabb*): the abandonment of a recommendation is not a sin and therefore not punishable except if a person leaves what is recommended in order to turn away from the *Sunnah* in rejection or belittlement. The Prophet (ﷺ) stated:

النِّكَاحُ مِنْ سُنَّتِي فَمَنْ لَمْ يَعْمَلْ بِسُنَّتِي فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي

“Marriage is from my *Sunnah*, so whoever does not act on my *Sunnah* is not from me.”

Reported by an-Nasā’ī, no. 1846, *sahih*.

He (ﷺ) also said: “I have left you upon an affair, if were you to hold on to it, you will never go astray after me: the Book of Allah and my *Sunnah*.” Here, the term *Sunnah* is referring to the *Hadeeths* (Narrations) of the Prophet (ﷺ) which refer to his sayings, his actions and his tacit approvals (i.e., what was done in his presence

which he did not disapprove of).

The great scholar of *Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamā’ah*, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (رحمَهُ اللهُ) died 241 AH) stated: “That which is necessary from the *Sunnah* and binding is that whoever abandons even one part of it has not accepted any of it and not believed in it, and he is not from its people.”

Foundations of the *Sunnah* of Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal

Meaning: a person is not from *Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamā’ah* if he rejects any part of the *Sunnah* or denies it after knowing that the scholars of *ḥadeeth* have verified the narration as being authentic (graded *ṣaḥeeḥ* or *ḥasan*). Therefore, it is not permissible to reject any part of the *Sunnah* and believe that it can be abandoned, regardless of whether it is a belief, a pillar, an obligation, or a recommended deed no matter the times you live in and the so-called ‘advancement of science and civilisation’.

In conclusion, the *Sunnah* of the Messenger (ﷺ) must be followed in every affair. There are those affairs in the *Sunnah* that are obligatory and others that are recommended—and all of them must be accepted as revelation, and we must believe that all of it is from Allah as long as it is authentically reported from the Prophet (ﷺ). Knowing who the scholars of *Hadeeth* are is vital in understanding the religion, as it is through these scholars that we come to know what is authentic and what is not. The *Sunnah* is a protection from misguidance and differing, just as the Messenger (ﷺ) stated: “Whosoever from you lives for long will see a great deal of differing, so stick to my *Sunnah* and the *Sunnah* of the Rightly Guided Caliphs after me—hold onto it, and bite on to it with your molar teeth. And beware of newly introduced affairs for every newly introduced affair is a *bid’ah* (innovation) and every *bid’ah* is misguidance.”

Reported by Abu Dawood, no. 4607, At-Tirmidhi, no. 2676, *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

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## THE OBLIGATION OF FOLLOWING THE SUNNAH OF THE MESSENGER MUHAMMAD

In light of the Qur’an & Sunnah

صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ

“Say, if you [really] love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” Surah āli-‘Imrān 3:31



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