

Beginners Guide to Hadith & Sunnah

Description: To truly appreciate the message of the Quran, one has to study the life, actions and words of the Prophet who brought it to us and exemplified it. This lesson is a brief study of *Hadith* and *Sunnah*, the authentic guidance of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

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Published on 14 Dec 2011 - Last modified on 07 Sep 2017

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Objectives

- To realize the importance of the *Sunnah* in understanding and practicing Islam.
- To learn the meaning of *Sunnah* and *Hadith*.
- To appreciate the divine preservation of the *Sunnah*.
- To get familiar with the names of the most important books of *hadith*.

Arabic Terms

- *Hikmah* - wisdom.

It might seem to the new Muslim that the Quran is a sufficient guide for the believer, requiring only personal study and interpretation to implement its teaching and put it into practice. However, doing so may lead one into the same kind of errors that non prophetic interpreters of the Bible propagated to their congregations. To truly appreciate the message of the Quran, one has to study the life, actions and words of the Prophet who brought it to us and exemplified it. Thus Muslims kept records of the doings and sayings of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, which are called 'Hadith' and instituted critical examination of the means by which they have come down to us. If the *hadith* is found to be strong, it is considered a *Sunnah*.

The Meaning of *Sunnah*

Sunnah, in general, refers to the teachings and the way of life of Prophet Muhammad. More specifically, it means what has been authentically related to us from Prophet Muhammad, other than the Quran: his statements, actions, and tacit approvals or permission (of his companions' statements or actions).

The Meaning of *Hadith*

Hadith is any report of Prophet Muhammad's statements, actions, tacit approvals,

manners, or physical characteristics. A *hadith* consists of two parts:

- (a) the chain of narrators.
- (b) the text

To be considered a true report of the Prophet's speech or actions, both the text and chain of narrators must meet strict conditions. We will learn more about them in subsequent levels.

Hadith & Sunnah

Sunnah is contained in the reports that have come to us from the Prophet, that is, the *hadith* literature. We find the *Sunnah* of the Prophet in the books of *hadith*. The statements, actions, tacit approvals, physical description, and manners of Prophet Muhammad are all contained in books of *hadith*. Nothing of importance from his life is missing. A Muslim can know how he prayed, fasted, and lived at home and with his companions. Such a complete and accurate record is not available for any other historical figure.

Importance of the Sunnah

The Quran tells us how important the *Sunnah* is:

- (1) Obeying the Prophet is obeying Allah.

oeHe who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah; but those who turn away " We have not sent you over them as a guardian." (Quran 4:80)

- (2) Divine command to obey the Prophet and warning against disobeying him.

oeAnd obey Allah and the Messenger that you may obtain mercy." (Quran 3:132)

oeAnd whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger will be admitted by Him to gardens (in Paradise) under which rivers flow, abiding eternally therein; and that is the great attainment." (Quran 4:13)

oeAnd whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger " then indeed, for him is the fire of Hell; they will abide therein forever." (Quran 72:23)

oeO you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and do not invalidate your deeds." (Quran 47:33)

- (3) Accepting decisions of the Prophet is part of faith.

oeBut no, by your Lord, they will not (truly) believe until they make you, (O Muhammad), judge concerning that over which they dispute

among themselves, and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit in (full, willing) submission.” (Quran 4:65)

(4) Following the Messenger earns divine love and forgiveness.

oeSay, (O Muhammad!) ‘If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.’” (Quran 3:31)

(5) The Quran calls *Sunnah hikmah* or ‘wisdom.’ *Sunnah* was also revealed by Allah like the Quran.

Allah revealed the Quran and the *Sunnah*:

oeAnd Allah has revealed to you the Book (Quran) and *hikmah* (*Sunnah*).” (Quran 4:113)

Allah counts it His favor that He revealed the Quran and *Sunnah*:

oeAnd remember the favor of Allah upon you and what has been revealed to you of the Book (Quran) and *hikmah* (*Sunnah*).” (Quran 2:231)

The Prophet Muhammad taught the Quran and *Sunnah*:

oe...and teaches them the Book (Quran) and *hikmah* (*Sunnah*)...” (Quran 3:164)

Divine Preservation of *Sunnah*

Allah says in the Quran:

oeIndeed, it is We who sent down the reminder, and indeed We will be its guardian.” (Quran 15:9)

In this verse ‘*reminder*’ refers to everything Allah revealed, both the Quran and *Sunnah*. Allah promises to protect the Quran and the *Sunnah*, and it makes sense. The Quran is Allah’s final revelation and Prophet Muhammad is Allah’s final prophet. Allah commands Muslims to follow the *Sunnah* in the Quran as we have seen above. If the *Sunnah* were not preserved, Allah would not be ordering us to do something impossible, i-e to follow the *Sunnah* that either has not been preserved or does not exist! Since such an expectation contradicts divine justice, Allah must have preserved the *Sunnah*. As we will see, Allah, through human beings, used various means by which He preserved the *Sunnah*.

The Most Important Books of *Hadith*

A beginner must be aware of the most important books of *hadith* that contain the Prophet’s *Sunnah*.

(1) Saheeh Al-Bukhari

This book was written by Imam Al-Bukhari (810 - 870 CE). It is considered to be the most authentic and reliable book after the Quran. Saheeh Al-Bukhari has 2, 602 unrepeated *hadith* in it. It has been translated into English by Dr. Muhsin Khan and was first published in 1976. *Hadith* from Saheeh Al-Bukhari in our lessons are referenced in the footnote as 'Saheeh Al-Bukhari.' The translation is available [here](#).

(2) Saheeh Muslim

Saheeh Muslim was written by Imam Muslim (817 - 875 CE). It has 3,033 *hadith* and is considered the most accurate book after Saheeh Al-Bukhari. It was translated into English by Abdul Hameed Siddiqui and published in 1976 with some brief, but useful commentary. *Hadith* from Saheeh Muslim are referenced in our lessons in the footnotes as 'Muslim.' The translation is available [here](#), but without the commentary.

(3) Riyad us-Saliheen (Gardens of the Righteous)

This is a book by Imam Nawawi (1233 - 1277 CE). It is a collection of Quranic verses and *hadith* arranged according to topic. It has close to 1900 authentic *hadith*. Of all the three books, 'Gardens of the Righteous' is the most appropriate for a beginner. Several translations exist, but without commentary. Perhaps the most useful edition for beginners, because it is the only one with some commentary, is available for sale [here](#). An online translation of book (without commentary) can be read [here](#).

There are other important books which contain many authentic *hadith*. The most common are Abu Dawood, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Majah, and together with Al-Bukhari and Muslim are called, *Al-Kutub Al-Sittah*, or "The Six Books". To detail all of them is outside the scope of this brief introduction to *hadith* literature.

A last note on reading *hadith* is that there is no one book which contains all *hadith*, rather *hadith* are mentioned in various books. It is of grave importance that one not make any judgments while reading *hadith*, as there is more than likely another *hadith* in another book clarifying it. Reading explanations of *hadith*, however, will give the reader a much better understanding of the concepts mentioned in the *hadith*, as the scholars who write these explanations bring together various other *hadith* which shed light on the one at hand. Interpreting specific *hadith*, like the Quran, should be restricted to those knowledgeable in religion. There are other collections, such as *Riyad us-Saliheen* mentioned above, which were, unlike other books of *hadith*, written for a general audience, and they are much easier to understand for all Muslims. Another good starting book is one called [Al-Arba'oon Al-Nawawiyya](#), or 'Forty *Hadiths* Compiled by Al-Nawawi', which mentions some of the most important and basic *hadith* in Islam. An in-depth explanation may also be found [here](#). An online translation of book (without commentary) can be read [here](#).

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