

THE OBLIGATION OF FOLLOWING

The Sunnah
of the
Messenger
Muḥammad

صَلَّى اللّٰهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ

In Light of the Qur'ān
and Sunnah



OBLIGATION OF FOLLOWING THE SUNNAH OF THE MESSENGER MUḤAMMAD ﷺ

The noble Companion, Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) narrated that Allāh’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 Aḥmad

Following the Sunnah of Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) and holding fast to that which he came with, and obeying Allāh 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 (‘aqīdah), 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 Allāh is worshipped in the manner that he (ﷺ) 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 Muḥammad is the servant and Messenger of Allāh**’. For this reason, a deed is not considered as being accepted by Allāh (the Most High) until it fulfils two conditions:

Firstly: That it must be done sincerely for Allāh alone (ikhhlās).

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

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

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

Sūrah Āli-‘Imrān 3:31

Following the Messenger Muḥammad (ﷺ) in that which he came with of revelation from Allāh, 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’ān and Sunnah. Therefore, following the Messenger (ﷺ) is one of the two foundational conditions for a righteous deed to be accepted.

Shaykh al-Islām Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (رحمته الله) stated in his book The Three Fundamental Principles (p. 7), “The meaning of the testimony of faith that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh (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 Allāh except with that which he (ﷺ) has legislated.”

The narration of Allāh’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 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 Allāh (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.”

Sūrah al-Hashr 59:7

So, the āyah (verse) is the same as the narration (ḥadīth) in meaning, and both the ḥadīth 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 Allāh, so whatever he brought from commandments and prohibitions, were not from himself, rather they were from Allāh, just as He (the Most High) stated in the Qur'ān:

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۖ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

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

Sūrah al-Najm 53: 3-4

So, the Qur'ān is the revelation from Allāh, and the Sunnah likewise is the revelation from Allāh, and the Messenger (ﷺ) is the conveyor of the Book and the Sunnah.

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

If a person does not believe at all in the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ), then he has disbelieved in the Qur'ān 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'ān, then [in reality] he is a disbeliever in both. Allāh (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.”

Sūrah al-Nūr 24:63

"Whoever does not act on my Sunnah is not from me."

Reported by al-Nasā'i, no. 1846, ṣaḥīḥ.

Allāh (the Most High) also said:

قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ

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

Sūrah al-Nūr 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 Islām such as prayer (ṣalāh), zakāh, fasting and Ḥajj. 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 (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).

CATEGORIES OF SUNNAH

The instructions of the Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) are of two types:

- i. That which he obligated (wājib): the abandonment of an obligation is a sin and punishable.
- ii. That which he recommended (mustaḥabb): 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 (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) stated:

النَّكَاحُ 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 al-Nasā'i, no. 1846, ṣaḥīḥ.

He (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) 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 Allāh and my Sunnah.” Here, the term

Sunnah is referring to the Ḥadīths (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 Ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-Jamā'ah, Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal (رحمته الله) 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 Aḥmad ibn Hanbal

Meaning: a person is not from Ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-Jamā'ah if he rejects any part of the Sunnah or denies it after knowing that the scholars of ḥadīth 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 Allāh as long as it is authentically reported from the Prophet (ﷺ). Knowing who the scholars of ḥadīth 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 Abū Dāwūd, no. 4607, Al-Tirmidhī, no. 2676, ṣaḥeeḥ.

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