

Core Curriculum

4 Prophethood in Islam

4.6 **The Prophet's Sunnah and Hadith**

INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel! So far we've talked a bit about the Prophet Muhammad (s) himself. We've talked about his life, virtues and relationships. Now we want to look into the sources that tell us about his life.

Where are these sources? What are they? The place to look at is his Sunnah and the means through which we know the Sunnah, namely the hadiths. This lesson will therefore be an introduction to hadith!

BODY OF TEXT

There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often. (Chapter 33, verse 21 of the Holy Qur'an)

The Sunnah is the sum of the actions, sayings and moral character of the Prophet Muhammad (s). The Sunnah is the way we learn about his manners, ethics and religious life. But how do we know what the Sunnah is? The way the Sunnah gets transmitted to us is through the hadiths. If you recall, hadiths are a system of oral transmission that go back to people who were present during the time of the Prophet. These people orally transmitted what they saw or heard from the Prophet unto others.

These oral transmissions were eventually written down.

The same thing goes for the rest of the members of the Ahl al-Bayt (as). When people heard or observed their Sunnah, they related it to others in the form of hadiths.

For a short period of time, the hadiths remained as an oral tradition. However, they were quickly written down in order to preserve them in a centralized and codified way. In the Islamic community, the Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) for example urged their followers and companions to write down their teachings in order to preserve them for future generations. The Imams taught that writing things down was much more effective for accuracy.

Reference to hadiths are very important. Remember that the Qur'an contains the foundational elements of our religion. It is the prime source of our guidance. However, for practical reasons, the Qur'an cannot contain every single detail of Islam.

If that were the case, the Qur'an would have had to be thousands of volumes and we all know that that would not have been practical. For this reason, the Sunnah and hadith were an essential tool in expanding the themes of the Qur'an, or in providing us with details that are not present in the text.

Take for example the issue of prayer or the Hajj pilgrimage. The Qur'an tells us to pray (salāt) and to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. However, the Qur'an does not tell us how many daily units or rakats that we need to pray. Furthermore, the Qur'an does not tell us how we're supposed to perform the Hajj. Or take another example. The Qur'an tells us to marry but never tells us how we're supposed to get married!

So in this sense, the hadiths open many doors for us. They help us understand Islamic law and beliefs better. They also help us understand the Qur'an better for they provide us with the explanations of the Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt (as) as to what specific verses really mean.

But not all hadiths are equal. We have hadiths that are considered reliable and we also have hadiths that are not so reliable. And then there are others that are outright fabrications. Remember that hadiths come through oral transmissions. Most hadith books, when narrating a hadith, also have chains of transmissions in them. This means that within a chain of transmission, we can see who related what to whom. In Islamic terms, a chain of transmission is known as a sanad.

So let's take the first line of transmitters into perspective. The Prophet's hadiths were narrated by two groups of people who were present during his time. On the one hand there were his companions, and the other his Ahl al-Bayt (as). We saw in our previous lesson that there were good and bad companions.

If we see that a hadith is being related by a bad companion - for example, a companion who fought against Imam Ali (as) - then this hadith would be automatically suspicious for us. However, if the hadith is narrated by a good companion whom we trust, then the hadith would have a pass and would be considered reliable.

Obviously there is much more than this in making a hadith reliable, such as the assessment of middle transmitters, but this is a discussion for another time.

With that said, when the Ahl al-Bayt (as) narrate a hadith, we know that this hadith is extremely reliable (that is, once it has been established that the Ahl al-Bayt (as) did actually narrate it!). Why? Because the Ahl al-Bayt were infallible from mistakes and sins.

So referring to the Ahl al-Bayt (as) and what they related is a good way to solve some conflicts and confusions regarding the Prophet's Sunnah. It happens quite often where we read hadiths and we see contradicting sayings from the Prophet. Again, this is where the Ahl al-Bayt become useful.

As Abān bin Taghlib, one of the famous companions of the Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (as) once said, "whenever we see different and contradicting

versions of what the Prophet (s) said, we take the version of Ali (as)” ... so this means that the Ahl al-Bayt are a good way to ensure that what comes to our hands isn't fabricated or changed in meaning.

Again, remember, there is a whole science behind it that studies every single transmitter in a hadith's chain of transmission as well as the content of the hadith. The general name of this science is called 'ilm al-hadīth or the “science of hadīth.” In a future lesson, we will, insha'Allah, go deeper into the science of hadiths.

Some of the major sources of hadiths from the Ahl al-Bayt (as) can be found in some books we have today. Of these books, some of the more popular ones include Kitāb al-Kāfī by Shaykh al-Kulaynī, Man Lā Yahduruhu al-Faqīh, 'Uyūn Akhbār al-Ridā and al-Tawhīd by Shaykh al-Sadūq.

There are also other books from our Sunni brothers and sisters where the hadiths of the Prophet are related mostly through the companions. Among the more popular of these books, they include Sahīh al-Bukhāri and Sahīh Muslim.

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh