

7 The Sunnah

QUESTION: What do Muslims believe about the second of the two sources, the Sunnah of Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him)?

ANSWER: The Sunnah refers to four matters: the statements of Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him), his actions, his approval (which was often a silent approval) of things which were done in his presence and those actions which he refrained from.

A statement which can be traced back to the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) is called a 'hadeeth' in Arabic.

Muslims give the Sunnah a very high status, and believe that it is something to be followed in everyday life.

Although the Sunnah is not the same as the Quran, Muslims believe that it is also a revelation from Allah, and not something that Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) invented himself.

Allah says in the Quran:

And he (Muhammad) does not speak from his own whims and desires. Indeed it is a revelation, revealed (to him).

Surah an Najam (the 53rd Surah) ayah 3-4

The Sunnah explains many issues from the Quran in more detail. For example, the Quran gives the general command to pray. However, to find the exact details of how to pray, when to do so, when not to do so, etc, a person has to look at the Sunnah.

Muslims believe that the Sunnah has been preserved since the time of Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him). This is despite later people trying to attribute statements to Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) which he did not actually say.

The checking has been done by scholars of hadeeth who have traced the chains of transmission for all hadeeths, and filtered out those ones which cannot authentically be traced back to the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him). This checking is a detailed science in itself, and a person has to study it before he can actually delve into it.

Sadly, some Muslims have tried to play down the importance of the Sunnah, and

instead focus on the Quran only.

Yet Allah tells the Muslims to follow the Sunnah of Muhammad

(may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) when He says in the Quran:

And whatsoever the Messenger gives you, then take it. And whatsoever he forbids you, then stay away from it.

Surah al Hashr (the 59th surah) ayah 7

And it is clear (to everyone hopefully) that the Sunnah is necessary to clarify the issues raised in the Quran, as we mentioned before.

It is impossible to know how to pray, fast, etc without having the detail that the Sunnah provides.

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NEXT TIME: Why does Islam pay so much attention to having the correct belief (aqeedah)? Why should 13 years have been spent teaching this issue?