

Fast 5: Sunnah and Hadith

- The Holy Prophet is told to declare to people:

“If you love Allah, **follow me**: Allah will love you, and grant you protection from your sins.” — 3:31

And it goes on to say after this (3:32), and also repeats in other places:

“Obey Allah **and the Messenger**.”

This shows that Muslims must follow the sayings and example of the Holy Prophet.

- The terms *Sunnah* and *Hadīth* refer to the practice and the sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. These are the second and, undoubtedly, secondary source from which the teachings of Islam are drawn.
- In its original sense *Sunnah* indicates the doings and *Hadith* the sayings of the Prophet. But in effect both cover the same ground and are applicable to his actions, practices, and sayings. *Hadith* is the narration and record of the *Sunnah*, i.e. the record of the sayings and doings of the Holy Prophet. It also contains some other matter.
- The Holy Quran generally deals with the broad principles or essentials of religion, going into details in rare cases. The details were supplied by the Holy Prophet himself, either by showing in his practice how an injunction was to be carried out, or by giving an explanation in words.
- Since Islam covered the whole sphere of human activity, hundreds of points had to be explained by the Holy Prophet by his example in action and word. On the moral side, his was the pattern which every Muslim was required to follow. The Quran says:

“Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much.” — 33:21.

- The transmission of the practices and sayings of the Holy Prophet, from one person to another, thus became necessary during the Prophet’s lifetime. In fact, the Holy Prophet himself used to give instructions about the transmission of what he taught. For example, after giving people some teachings, he said:

“Remember this and report it to those whom you have left behind.”

“He who is present here should carry this message to him who is absent.”

- The Companions of the Holy Prophet, while translating his sayings into practice, endeavoured also to preserve them in memory as well as on paper. They were conscious of the fact that these things must be preserved for future generations. When one of the Companions complained to the Holy Prophet of his inability to remember what he heard from him, the Holy Prophet's reply was: "Help yourself with your right hand", and he motioned with his hand as if writing.
- Generally Hadith was committed to memory by people. It was occasionally, when there was need for it, that a person wrote it down.
- After the death of the Holy Prophet, many matters for decision had to be referred by Muslims to the Quran or to some judgment or saying of the Holy Prophet. Many of his judgments and sayings therefore became well known. Also, large numbers of converts who had never seen the Prophet himself, were anxious to know all there was to know about the great Teacher. Everyone who had seen him would thus become a source of knowledge for the later converts, and since the incidents were fresh in the memories of the Companions they would be conveyed with fair accuracy to the new generation.
- The Holy Prophet had laid the duty, on those who saw him and listened to his words, of carrying what they saw and heard to those who were absent, to those who came after him. Many of the Companions, men and women, made the preservation of the Sayings and Practice of the Holy Prophet as the first object of their lives. They became, as it were, centres to whom people resorted from different quarters of the kingdom of Islam to gain knowledge of Islam and its Prophet.
- After the passing of the generation that had seen and heard the Holy Prophet, Hadith reports continued to be taught by one generation of teachers to the next. In the second century of Islam, written collections of Hadith started to be compiled. These initial collections were incomplete because each of the compilers only had access to Hadith reports taught at particular centres of learning, not to all available reports.
- In the third century of Islam, several complete Hadith collections were compiled. One type classified the reports under the names of the Companions who had reported them. The other type classified the reports by the subject they related to. It is this type which are the most useful and the best known, and there are six such main collections.

In the next study we will discuss the Hadith collections.