

Introduction of Hadith, it's components and significance in Islamic Literature

Literal Meaning of the Hadith

The literal meaning of Arabic word hadith is “an item of news”, “conversation”, “a tale”, “a story”, “a report”, (this report can be historical or legendary, true or false whether relating to present or past). The secondary meaning of the hadith as adjective is “new” which opposed to qadīm (old).

Technical meaning of the Hadith

ما اضيف الى النبي صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم من قول او فعل او تقرير او وصف خلقى او خلقى

The speech, acts, approval or moral conduct of the Prophet ﷺ is called hadith.

The Sunna (Prophetic Tradition)

Literal Meaning

“In its literal meaning the word sunna stands for the “well known path” or the “well-trodden path” which is followed again and again.”

Ibn Manzur writes the meaning of Sunna as: Sunna means tariqah, dastur.

Technical Definition

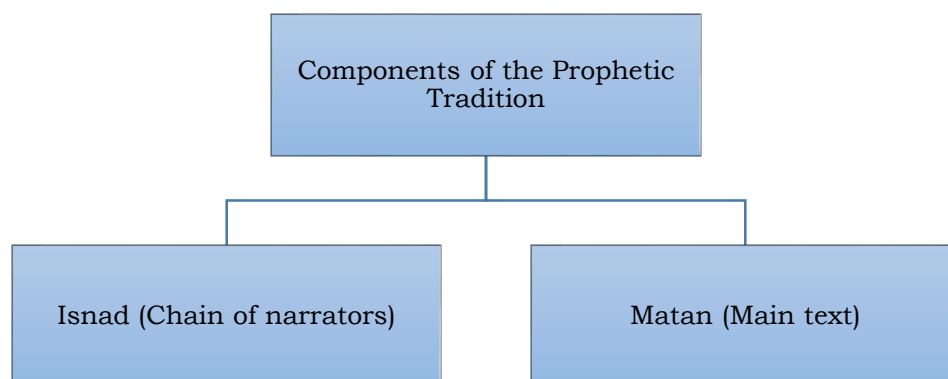
السنة ما اضيف الى النبي صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم من قول، أو فعل، أو تقرير، أو صفة خلقية؛ أو سيرة. سواء كان

ذلك قبل البعثة أو بعدها

The speech, act approval or moral value or good conduct which belongs to the Prophet (upon whom be peace and greetings) is called Sunna. No matter if this speech, act, approval or the conduct is of the after or before the announcement of the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ prophecy.

Components of the Prophetic Tradition

There are mainly two components of Hadith/Sunna.



Isnad means the name of persons mentioned before the text. It is the most significant part of the Deen. As the authenticity of hadith's text is totally dependent on these names. It will be easy to understand this concept with the help of an example.

حَدَّثَنَا الْحَمِيدِيُّ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ الزُّبَيْرِ، قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا سُفْيَانُ، قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ سَعِيدٍ الْأَنْصَارِيُّ، قَالَ: أَخْبَرَنِي مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ التَّيْمِيُّ، أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ عَلْقَمَةَ بْنَ وَقَّاصٍ اللَّيْثِيَّ، يَقُولُ: سَمِعْتُ عُمَرَ بْنَ الْخَطَّابِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ عَلَى الْمِنْبَرِ، قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، يَقُولُ

This part is called isnad and the aforementioned is called the text.

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ،

Significance of Hadith in light of the Qur'an

The verses in which Almighty Allah has declared that Prophet's saying is equally legal than of the Allah:

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ - إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

“And he does not speak out from his own desire, His speech is nothing but a revelation, which is sent to him” al-Najam, 53:3-4

مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ

“Whoever obeys the Messenger ﷺ obeys (but) Allah indeed.” al-Nisā, 4:80

These are not enough Allah has conditioned his love for the Muslims with the obedience of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولَى الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ
إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا

“O believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger ﷺ and those (men of truth) who hold command amongst you. Then if you disagree amongst yourselves over any issue, refer it to Allah and the Messenger.”

The point to be noted that the commands of obeying is about two authorities and by referring to Allah and the Messenger means the Qur’ān and Hadith.

- i) Allah Almighty
- ii) The Prophet ﷺ

وَمَنْ يَعِصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَهُ يُدْخِلْهُ نَارًا خَالِدًا فِيهَا وَلَهُ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ

“But whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger and exceeds His limits, He will admit him to Hell wherein shall he dwell forever; and there is a humiliating torment for him.”

Those who obey Allah and his Apostle:

وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيَخْشَ اللَّهَ وَيَتَّقْهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ

“And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger and fears Allah and adopts God wariness for Him, it is they who will achieve their goal.”

Significance of Hadith in light of Prophetic Traditions

“al-Miqdam bin Ma’dkarib reported the Apostle of Allah as saying:

“Beware! I have been given the Qur’ān and something like it, yet the time is coming when a man replace on his couch will say: Keep the Qur’ān: what you find into be is permissible treat as permissible, and what you find in it to be prohibited treat as prohibited, Beware! The domestic ass, beats of prey with fangs, a find belonging to a confederate, unless its owner does not want it, are not permissible, but if they do not, he has right to mulct them to an amount equivalent to his entertain.” (Abu Dawud, # 4604.)

In this tradition the Prophet has commanded about the matters which are not mentioned in the Qur'ān. He commanded them on his own legal authority.

“Does any of you, while reclining on his couch, imagine that Allah has prohibited only what is to be found in the Qur'ān? By Allah, I have preached, commanded and prohibited many matters as numerous as what is found in the Qur'ān, or more numerous”. (Abu Dawud # 3050).

The Forms of Representative Sovereignty of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ
According to the Qur'ān and Sunna the ultimate sovereignty has been vested in the Prophet ﷺ as:

i) Interpretative Authority (تشریعی حیثیت)

The Prophet ﷺ interpreted the verses of the Holy Qur'ān for the believers. The Qur'ān states about the interpretative capacity of the Holy Prophet ﷺ:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“(They too were sent) with clear proofs and the Books. And, (O Glorious Messenger,) We have revealed to you the Glorious Reminder (the Qur'ān) so that you may explain clearly to people (the message and the commandments) that have been sent down to them and that they may meditate.”

The Qur'ān commands to pray the Salah approximately 700 times but doesn't explain that how? When? And for how many times in a day. All these details are found in Prophetic traditions.

صَلُّوا كَمَا رَأَيْتُمُونِي أُصَلِّي

and pray as you have seen me pray. (Sahih al-Bukhari # 605)

Same is the case in regard of months of Hajj, The specification of punishment of fornication. Similarly Prophet Muhammad ﷺ explained the times of fast's term **بِأَيَّامِ النُّهَارِ** to his companions. It was the duty of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to explain the verses of the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān commands to pray the Salah but doesn't explain that how? When? And for how many times in a day. These details are found in Prophetic traditions.

ii) Legislative Authority (تشریعی حیثیت)

Allah the Almighty has given the status of Legislation to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He has the manifestative authority of Allah in this world. It will be easy to understand this concept in the light of following references.

وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا ۚ

And whatever the Messenger has given you take; and what he has forbidden you-refrain from. Sura 59 verse #7.

Whatever he says or allows becomes the integral part of Islamic law. We can find its examples in many traditions.

1. “Abū Hurayra رضى الله عنه reported that a person came to the Apostle of Allah ﷺ and said: Messenger of Allah, I am undone. He (the Holy Prophet) said: What has brought about your ruin? He said: I have had intercourse with my wife during the month of Ramadan. Upon this he (the Holy prophet) said: Can you find a slave to set him free? He said: No He (the Holy Prophet again) said: Can you observe fast for two consecutive months? He said: No. He (the Holy Prophet) said: Can you provide food to sixty poor people?, He said: No. He then sat down and (in the meanwhile) there was brought to the Apostle of Allah ﷺ basket which contained dates. He (the Holy Prophet) said: Give these (dates) in charity. He (the man) said: Am I to give to one who is poorer than I? There is no family poorer than mine between the two lava plains of Medina. The Apostle of Allah ﷺ laughed so that his molar teeth became visible and said: Go and give it to your family to eat.” (Sahih Muslim # 1111)

No one can grant such relaxation in Law except Holy Prophet ﷺ. Similarly, the gold and silk has been declared prohibited by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

2. The Messenger of Allah said: “Wearing silk and gold has been made unlawful for the males of my Ummah and lawful for its females.” (Tirmidhi # 1730)

We find another example during the address of farewell pilgrimage. When all the Companions knew the answers of the questions but they remain silent.

This was the reverence of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as all of them were aware of Prophetic status.

3. The Prophet (ﷺ) then asked, "Which month is this?" We said, "Allah and his Apostle know better." He kept silent so long that we thought that he would call it by a name other than its real name. He said, "Isn't it the month of Dhul-Hijja?" We said, "Yes." He said, "Which town is this?" We said, "Allah and His Apostle know better." He kept silent so long that we thought that he would call it by a name other than its real name. He said, "Isn't it the town (of Mecca)?" We replied, "Yes." He said, "What day is today?" We replied, "Allah and His Apostle know better." He kept silent so long that we thought that he would call it by a name other than its real name. He said, "Isn't it the day of Nahr?" We replied, "Yes." He then said, "Your blood, properties and honor are as sacred to one another as this day of yours in this town of yours in this month of yours. You will meet your Lord, and He will ask you about your deeds. Beware! Do not go astray after me by cutting the necks of each other. It is incumbent upon those who are present to convey this message to those who are absent, for some of those to whom it is conveyed may comprehend it better than some of those who have heard it directly." (Muhammad, the sub-narrator, on mentioning this used to say: The Prophet then said, "No doubt! Haven't I delivered (Allah's) Message (to you)? Haven't I delivered Allah's message (to you)?" (Sahih al-Bukhari # 5550)