



Islamic Studies Correspondence Course

Islamic Creed

Tawheed-Islamic Monotheism

Part 2

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Meaning of the 'Sunnah'

Sunnah in the Arabic language (without any religious context) means a way or method that can have two states, either good or bad. It is derived from the word: "Sanan," which is Arabic for: a road or a path.

Such meaning is mentioned in the hadith of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) in which he said, "Whosoever does a good Sunnah will get the reward for it and the reward of others who followed him in doing the same thing until the day of judgment. And whosoever does a bad Sunnah will have the punishment of doing it and the punishment of others who followed him in practicing it" (Muslim).

In its technical sense, the word 'sunnah' has several meanings. In hadith terminology it denotes any saying, action, approval, or attribute, whether physical or moral, ascribed to the Prophet, whether before or after the beginning of his prophethood. This meaning is used and applies in the usage of hadith scholars.

In the terminology of *usul al-fiqh* or principles of jurisprudence, sunnah denotes a saying, action, or approval related from the Prophet or being issued from him other than the Qur'an.

In the terminology of *fiqh* or jurisprudence, sunnah denotes whatever is firmly established as is demanded from one in the Religion, on the basis of a legal proof but without being obligatory. Which the continued abandonment of it constitutes disregard (*istikhaf*) of the Religion and or sin according to some scholars. However, some jurists have made a distinction between what they called "Emphasized sunnah" (*sunnah mu'akkada*) or "sunnah of Guidance" (*sunnah al-huda*), such as what the Prophet ordered or emphasized in word or in deed, and other types of sunnah considered less binding in their legal status, such as what they called "Non-Emphasized sunnah" (*sunnah ghayr mu'akkada*) or "sunnah of Habit" (*sunnah al-'ada*).

The above meanings of sunnah are used as a distinguishing ruling as related to the other four of the five legal categories for human actions - *fard* (obligatory), *sunnah* (Desired), *mubah* (indifferent), *makruh* (disliked), *haram* (prohibited). It is also used to mean the opposite of "innovation" (*bid'a*).

The term Sunnah is also called to "name a religious ruling that is based on a legal evidence whether from the Qur'an, the Prophet's sayings, or Ijtihad by the Companions, such as the collection of Qur'an in one book and unifying the reading of the Qur'an on one *Harf* (reading narration).

These differences in looking at Sunnah are dependent on the faculty of scholars, just like any area of science where definitions vary.

As for the definition of Sunnah in the terminology of Aqeedah then there are two usages:

1. General usage which is used to mean that which is contrary to 'bidah' (innovations).

a) Islam is free from innovations

b) That which the prophet and his companions were upon regarding to all affairs of the religion.

2. Specific usage which is used contrary to the Shia.

a) It is to believe that Allah is pleased with all of the companions, honoring and respecting them all, while establishing and affirming the correctness of the rightly guided caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthmaan, Ali) and having belief that their status in virtue, nobility and honor is in accordance to their arrangement as being caliphs. Abu Bakr the most virtuous, then Umar, then Uthmaan, then Ali. Ahlus Sunnah love the family of the Prophet, his wives and his children. As regards to the Shia then they have gone to extremes in regards to Ali, some believe that Ali is God, some believe that Ali will come back to life, others believe that Ali was the caliph after the prophet Muhammad, while believing that Ali was the best of all the companions. Some believe that that the caliphs before Ali took the leadership by force and that their caliphate is incorrect.

So whoever established and affirmed the first three caliphates in order and considered Ali the fourth, they are called 'Sunni' and whoever denied the first three caliphs before Ali are called 'Shia'

In general, we can define the Sunnah as whatever the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) and his companions said, did or approved of to be way of life for us. Without any additions, alterations or deletions.

What is 'Bid'ah?

"Linguistically bid'ah (innovation) means 'a newly invented matter'.

The technical or religious definition of bid'ah is: "A newly invented way [beliefs or action] in the religion, in imitation of the Sharee'ah (prescribed Law), by which nearness to Allaah is sought, [but] not being supported by any authentic proof - neither in its foundations, nor in the manner in which it is performed". (al-I'tisaam of ash-Shaatibee (1/37)

Bid'ah is any type of innovation in Islam. Though innovations in worldly matters, such as science, medicine and technology are acceptable and encouraged, such as technological inventions, computers, watches, etc...given they do not violate the Shariah. Bid'ah within the religion is evil, sin and wrongdoing. Bid'ah has been dispraised in the Quran as well as in the Sunnah

Religious innovation means inventing a new way of worshipping Allah that was not originally included in the Quran and Sunnah which was revealed to Muhammad.

When a religious innovation is committed, the majority of the time the innovator is assuming that the Sunnah is not good enough, that he must resort to something "better." Even though this statement would be an admission of disbelief - there are some innovations that contain shirk and there are some which allow someone to remain a Muslim, while his action is rejected (regardless of any sincerity it might have had)

Emphasizing the dangers of innovations the Prophet Muhammad used to warn his nation every Friday in the Jumah khutbah in his statement: 'Indeed the best of speech is the speech of Allah and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad and verily the worst affairs are the newly invented affairs in the religion and every newly invented affair in the religion is a misguidance and every misguidance is in the hellfire.'

The Messenger (sallallaahu alaihi wasallam) also warned against the People of Innovation, from befriending, supporting or taking from them saying: "Whoever innovates or accommodates an innovator then upon him is the curse of Allaah, His Angels and the whole of mankind." (Reported by Bukhaaree (12/41) and Muslim (9/140))

In his footsteps, we find the Noble Companions and the Taabi'een after them warning from the danger of innovations upon the Ummah, its people and their unity, since it is innovations which have divided the Ummah and split it asunder.

Some sayings of the Companions:

Abdullaah ibn Umar (RA) states, "every innovation is misguidance, even if the people regard it as good." (ad-Daarimee)

Abdullaah ibn Mas'ud (RA) said, "follow the sunnah of Muhammad and do not innovate, for what you have been commanded with is sufficient for you." [ad-Daarimee]

Hudhayfah bin al-Yaman said, "every act of worship that the Companions did not do, do not do it" [Abu Dawood]

The sayings of the Second and Third generation scholars:

Abu Aaliyah said, "learn Islaam. Then when you have learned Islaam, do not turn away from it to the right or to the left. But be upon the Straight Path and be upon the Sunnah of your Prophet and that which his companions were upon. And beware of these innovations because they cause enmity and hatred amongst you, but stick to the original state of affairs that was there before they divided." [al-Hilya of Abu Nu'aym 2/218]

Sufyaan ath-Thawree, "innovations are more beloved to Satan than sin. Since a sin may be repented from but an innovation is not repented from" [Sharh Usul I'tiqaad of al-Laalikaa'ee (d.414) no.238]

This is because the innovator believes that he is doing something good and therefore sees no need to repent.

Imaam al-Awzaa'ee said, "patiently restrict yourselves/adhere to the sunnah, stop where the people stopped, say what they said, avoid what they avoided. Tread the path of the salaf, for indeed what was sufficient for them is sufficient for you." [ash-Sharee'ah pg. 58]

The sayings of the Later Imaams:

Imaam Abu Haneefah said, "stick to the narrations and the way of the salaf, and beware of the newly invented matters for all of it is innovation" [Sawnul Muntaq of as-Suyutee pg.32]

Imaam Maalik said, "he who innovates an innovation in Islaam regarding it as something good, has claimed that Muhammad (ﷺ) has betrayed his trust to deliver the message as Allaah says, 'this day have I perfected for you your religion'. And whatsoever was not part of the religion then, is not part of the religion today." [al-I'tisaam]

He also said, "how evil are the People of Innovation, we do not give them salaam" [al-Ibaanah of ibn Battah (d.387) no.441]

Imaam Ahmad said, "the fundamental principles of the sunnah with us are:.avoiding innovations and every innovation is misguidance" [Usul as-Sunnah of Imaam Ahmad pg.1]

Imaam Bukhaaree said, "I have met more than a thousand scholars.(then he mentioned the names of the more prominent in each of the lands that he travelled in) and I found that they all agreed on the following points: they all used to prohibit bid'ah - that which the Prophet and his Companions were not upon, because of the saying of Allaah, 'and hold fast to the rope of Allaah and do not separate'" [Imaam Bukhaaree's article on belief as quoted in Sharh Usul I'tiqaad 1/170. From amongst the scholars he met were: Ahmad bin Hanbal, Abu Ubaid al-Qaasim, ibn Ma'een, ibn Aasim, ibn Abee Shaybah.]

*In Volume Two we will go into further detail about the Meaning of the Sunnah and Bidah (innovations).

Who are the ones who adhere to and unite upon the true Islamic Creed and follow the Sunnah and avoid and abandon 'bidah' innovations?

They are the ones who have joined and come together upon the 'shahadatain' which is the basis of the Muslim's belief. They unify upon the Quran and the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad in all of their affairs upon the understanding of the noble companions. Which comprises articles of faith and belief/aqeedah, acts of worship, manners, statements, actions and dealings. They seek to understand these two main sources as the companions of the Prophet understood them. They live their lives in accordance to these three sources (Quran, Sunnah, understanding of the Companions). They compare their beliefs, actions and saying with these three sources if they are in agreement they live by them, if they are in disagreement then they leave them

off and rectify them. These are the true Muslims. They are called 'Ahlis Sunnah wa al jam'ah, ahl hadeeth, the saved sect, the victorious sect, salifiyoon, etc...

What are some of their characteristics?

1) They take their Islam from what came in the Quran, authentic Sunnah, consensus, and Qiyas. They make the Quran and Sunnah first and foremost and precedent upon their desires, intellects, personal views and opinions.

2) They hold firmly and tightly upon the clear decisive proofs 'Muhkam' and always refer the analaguos 'Mutashaabih' proofs to the decisive proofs.

3) They attach great importance to the Book of Allaah; its recitation, memorization, understanding, and implementation along with its correct tafseer (explanation). Likewise they attach great importance to the Hadeeth (Prophetic narrations), by their knowledge and understanding of it, and their distinguishing the authentic narrations from the weak and false ones. These two - the Qur'aan and the authentic hadeeth - are the root source of acquiring the 'aqeedah (beliefs) and ahkaam (rulings). Furthermore, they couple their knowledge with action, according to the level of their knowledge.

4) They enter into the Religion completely. They have faith (certainty of belief) in all of the Book, having faith in the textual promises and threats that are mentioned in it. They also have faith in those verses affirming Allaah's Attributes and those that negate any resemblance of Allaah to His creation. They combine having faith in al-Qadr (Pre-Decree and Predestination) along with affirming the fact that the slave possess free will and choice in action. They also combine knowledge along with worship, strength along with mercy, and utilising the necessary worldly means along with having zuhd (renouncing the world).

5) They follow the Sunnah (Prophetic guidance) and abandon innovations in the Religion. Likewise, they shun sectarianism and ikhtilaaf (differences) in matters of Religion.

6) They follow the guidance of the trustworthy Scholars; the Sahaabah (Companions), and all those who traverse their path - following them in matters of beliefs, actions and da'wah (calling to Allaah). They keep away from those that oppose the path of the Companions.

7) They adhere to the middle position. Thus, in matters of i'tiqaad (beliefs), they hold a middle position between those sects that go into extremes. Likewise, in acts of worship and sulook (conduct), they adhere to a middle position between those who exceed the limits and those who fall short.

8) They strive to gather the word of the Muslims upon the truth, and to unify their ranks upon tawheed (to single out Allaah alone for worship) and ittibaa' (following the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, the Companions and the Pious Predecessors of this Ummah), and seek to eliminate all avenues that lead to differing and splitting between them. From this standpoint, they do not distinguish themselves from the rest of the Muslims - in matters concerning the usoolud-deen (fundamentals of the Religion) - with any other name, except that of the Sunnah and the Jamaa'ah. Likewise, they do not form walaa (love, loyalty and allegiance) or 'adaa (enmity and disalliegence) with anyone, upon a bond other than Islaam and the Sunnah.

9) They call to Allaah, and towards enjoining the good, forbidding the evil, Jihaad, reviving the Sunnah, reviving the Religion, and establishing the Sharee'ah (Prescribed Law) of Allaah and His Rule, in every matter - large or small.

10) They have insaaf (fairness) and 'adl (justice). So they observe the right of Allaah - the Most High - when dealing with people. When doing so, they neither look towards their own self-interests, nor that of their group. This is why they do not exploit others, nor do them wrong, nor do they belittle those who deserve esteem whosoever they may be.

11) They possess a uniformity in understanding, and a similarity in their stances - even though there are great distances between their respective lands and times. This is from the fruits of them possessing a single source for the Religion, and a single unified methodology for its acquisition.

12) They possess ihsaan (kindness), rahmah (mercy), and husnul-khalq (good manners) towards all people.

13) They give naseehah (sincerity) to Allaah, His Book, His Messenger, and are sincere and give sincere advice to the Muslim leaders and the general body of Muslims.

14) They are concerned with the affairs of the Muslims, aid them, fulfill the rights towards them, and prevent any injury from reaching them.

Questions for Part 2

(Please detach these pages with the questions, complete them, and return them back to imacd)

Multiple choice questions. 5 points each.

1. The word Sunnah in the Arabic language means:
 - a) The best way
 - b) The worst way
 - c) The only way
 - d) A way or method that can have two states, either good or bad. It is derived from the word: "Sanan," which is Arabic for: a road or a path.
 - e) Trimming the moustache
2. In the technical sense the word 'Sunnah' has ____ meanings:
 - a) Twenty
 - b) Thirty
 - c) One-hundred
 - d) Four or five
3. According to the scholars of Hadith the word 'Sunnah' means:
 - a) Any saying, action, approval, or attribute, whether physical or moral, ascribed to the Prophet, whether before or after the beginning of his prophethood.
 - b) Any saying, belief, action invented after the Prophet Muhammad's death
 - c) Anything done by the Prophet Muhammad that is not in the Quran
 - d) Anything that the polytheists did during the Prophet Muhammad's time
4. The scholars of 'Fiqh' or Islamic Jurisprudence use the word 'Sunnah' to mean:
 - a) Something that is not recommended to do
 - b) Something that is disliked to follow
 - c) Whatever is firmly established as is demanded from one in the Religion, on the basis of a legal proof but without being obligatory. (desired/ recommended)
 - d) Whatever is firmly established in the religion and is obligatory
5. According to the scholars of Aqeedah, the word 'Sunnah' means:
 - a) Allah is pleased with all of the Prophet Muhammad's companions
 - b) Those who arrange the four rightly guided caliphs in order (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali)
 - c) Those who respect, honor and love all of the Prophet Muhammad's family and companions
 - d) Those who disrespect the Prophet Muhammad's companions and slander Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman
 - e) A, B, and C only
 - f) All of the above
6. What is the meaning of Bidah linguistically?
 - a) a newly invented matter
 - b) a praiseworthy practice
 - c) a new technological invention
 - d) something great
7. The technical or religious definition of Bidah is:
 - a) Practice of the companions
 - b) Practice of disbelievers
 - c) Practice of the Shia
 - d) A newly invented way [beliefs or action] in the religion, in imitation of the Islamic Law, by which nearness to Allaah is sought, [but] not being supported by any authentic proof - neither in its foundations, nor in the manner in which it is performed.

8. When a religious innovation is committed, the majority of the time the innovator is assuming that the Sunnah is not good enough, that he must resort to something "better."
 - a) True
 - b) False
 - c) I don't know
9. Every innovation is a misguidance and every misguidance leads one to the Hellfire
 - a) True
 - b) False
10. The Prophet Muhammad warned his followers from falling into innovations every Friday during the sermon
 - a) True
 - b) False

Grade_____/50)

True or False Questions. 5 points each.

1. Imam Abu Hanifah said this great statement: "stick to the narrations and the way of the salaf, and beware of the newly invented matters for all of it is innovation"
 - a) True
 - b) False
2. Imam Malik said: "he who innovates an innovation in Islaam regarding it as something good, has claimed that Muhammad has betrayed his trust to deliver the message as Allaah says, 'this day have I perfected for you your religion'. And whatsoever was not part of the religion then, is not part of the religion today."
 - a) True
 - b) False
3. Imam Al Bukhari met more than a thousand scholars who all used to prohibit 'Bidah'
 - a) True
 - b) False
4. The only way to have true Islamic Unity is if all Muslims unify upon the testimony of faith, follow the Prophet Muhammad based upon the understanding of his companions and stay away from all types of 'Bidah'
 - a) True
 - b) False
5. The only way to have true Islamic Unity is if all people, with their different beliefs, practices and innovations group together and dance and chant.
 - a) True
 - b) False

Grade_____/25)

Short answer questions. 5 points each. Please answer each question with complete sentences, with proper grammar, punctuation and spelling.

1. Why should a Muslim only take their Islam from the Quran, Sunnah, Consensus and Qiyas? And not take it from other places or sources?

2. Why can Islamic unity never truly be realized if it that unity is not based upon the correct 'Aqeedah'?

3. It is important for a Muslim who is adhering to the correct 'Aqeedah' to have fairness and justice, please explain.

4. Following the sunnah unites Muslims, while following bidah creates dissension and confusion amongst the Muslims, explain.

5. From the fundamentals of the Aqeedah of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'aah is to have mercy, kindness and good manners with all people. Please explain with examples.

Grade _____/25)

Total grade: _____/100

*Please detach these pages with questions on them and return them to iMacD for grading. Those who score 90% or more will receive the next course.
May Allah grant you success in seeking beneficial knowledge.