

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله والصلاة والسلام على رسول الله وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين



Tadwīn al-Sunnah Lesson 1 Overview

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Introduction: The Centrality of Tadwīn al-Sunnah

This lesson serves as an introduction to the study of **Tadwīn al-Sunnah** (تدوين السنة), the process through which the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was preserved, transmitted, and eventually compiled. The subject is foundational within the sciences of ḥadīth, as it directly addresses a core concern for every Muslim: **how the teachings, statements, and actions of the Prophet ﷺ reached us in an authentic and reliable manner.**

The Sunnah, like the Qur'ān, is a form of **wahy** (revelation). While the Qur'ān is **al-wahy al-matlūw** (الوحي المتلّو), recited as worship, the Sunnah is **al-wahy ghayr al-matlūw** (الوحي غير المتلّو), revelation that is not recited but is nonetheless divinely inspired and legally binding. Understanding how this revelation was preserved safeguards a believer's certainty and protects faith from doubt, confusion, and misinformation.

Wahy and the Need for Transmission Integrity

Allah ﷻ revealed His guidance through both the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. While the Qur'ān provides foundational commands, many of its injunctions are **general (mujmal, مجمل)** and require prophetic clarification. For example, Allah ﷻ commands:

أَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ

“Establish the prayer.”

However, the details of prayer—its timings, units (rak'āt), conditions, and integrals—are not specified in the Qur'ān. These were explained practically and verbally by the Messenger ﷺ, who said:

«صَلُّوا كَمَا رَأَيْتُمُونِي أُصَلِّي»

“Pray as you have seen me pray.”

Similarly, regarding ḥajj, the Prophet ﷺ stated:

«خُذُوا عَنِّي مَنَاسِكَكُمْ»

“Take your rituals from me.”

Thus, acting upon the Qur'ān in reality is impossible without reliance upon the Sunnah. This dependency made preservation of the Sunnah not optional, but necessary.

Allah ﷻ Himself affirms this role of the Messenger ﷺ:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ

“And We revealed to you the Reminder so that you may clarify for people what was sent down to them.” (al-Naḥl 16:44)

The Care of the Ṣaḥābah for the Sunnah (‘Ināyat al-Ṣaḥābah bi-l-Sunnah)

Profound Attachment to the Prophet ﷺ

The Ṣaḥābah (رضي الله عنهم) were not ordinary transmitters of information. They were the direct companions of the Messenger ﷺ, deeply connected to him spiritually, emotionally, and practically. Their love and reverence for him translated into extreme care in preserving his words and actions.

Their attachment reached such a level that some of them would **alternate days** attending the Prophet’s gatherings so that nothing would be missed, as one attended while the other worked, later sharing what was learned.

...وَلَقَدْ بَلَغَ حِرْصُهُمْ عَلَى تَتَبُعِ أَقْوَالِهِ وَأَعْمَالِهِ

Delegations from distant tribes would travel to Madīnah to learn directly from the Prophet ﷺ, then return to teach their communities. Women would consult the Mothers of the Believers (أمهات المؤمنين) regarding matters unique to them, ensuring no aspect of the Sunnah was neglected.

Caution and Fear in Narration

Despite their knowledge, the Ṣaḥābah were extremely hesitant to narrate ḥadīth. This hesitation stemmed from their fear of attributing something incorrectly to the Messenger ﷺ.

Anas ibn Mālīk (رضي الله عنه) said that if it were not for his fear of making a mistake, he would narrate more, but he heard the Prophet ﷺ say:

«مَنْ كَذَبَ عَلَيَّ مُتَعَمِّدًا فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ»

When Anas narrated, he would often add: “أو كما قال” (“or as he said”), out of caution.

Ibn Sīrīn reported that Anas would narrate very little, and when he did, his face would change color from fear. Al-Sha‘bī stated that he stayed with Ibn ‘Umar for an entire year without hearing him narrate a single ḥadīth.

‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Laylā said:

“I met 120 from the Anṣār; none of them narrated a ḥadīth except that he wished his brother would suffice him.”

This illustrates their profound **war’** (scrupulous piety) and sense of responsibility.

Preservation After the Prophet’s Death ﷺ

After the passing of the Messenger ﷺ, the Ṣaḥābah intensified their efforts to preserve the Sunnah through two primary means:

1. **Ḥifẓ (Memorization)**

They would travel long distances to verify a single narration, ensuring accuracy and corroboration.

2. **Kitābah (Writing)**

They wrote ḥadīth in **ṣuḥuf** (scrolls) and **ajzā’** (small collections), contrary to claims that writing was entirely absent.

This balance between memorization and writing laid the groundwork for later formal compilation.

The Era of the Tābi‘ūn and the Rise of Systematic Methodology

Emergence of Fitnah and the Need for Scrutiny

With the expansion of Islam and exposure to foreign ideologies, political tensions and theological deviations arose. This period witnessed the beginnings of **wad‘ al-ḥadīth** (fabrication), necessitating stricter methods of verification.

Unlike the Ṣaḥābah—whose integrity was established—the Tābi‘ūn faced a different reality, requiring greater scrutiny.

Development of Isnād and ‘Ilm al-Rijāl

One of the most significant developments in this era was the demand for **isnād** (الإسناد). Narrators were asked:

- From whom did you hear this?
- Who is this person?
- Is he trustworthy?

This practice led to the birth of **‘Ilm al-Rijāl** (علم الرجال), the science dedicated to studying the lives, character, memory, teachers, students, and reliability of narrators.

This system functioned as an internal safeguard placed by Allah ﷻ to protect the religion, ensuring that no claim could go unchallenged.

Rihlah fī Ṭalab al-Ḥadīth (Travel for Knowledge)

Travel for knowledge became a hallmark of Sunnah preservation. This practice is rooted in revelation:

فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِنْ كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ (al-Tawbah 9:122)

The Qur'ānic precedent is exemplified by Mūsā عليه السلام traveling to al-Khiḍr.

Among later examples:

- Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh traveled one month to hear a single ḥadīth.
- Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib traveled days and nights for one narration.

Such sacrifice is incompatible with intentional dishonesty.

Establishing the Default State (al-Aṣl) of the Ṣaḥābah

The lesson emphasizes a crucial methodological principle: **establishing the default state (al-aṣl)** before considering speculative possibilities (iḥtimālāt 'aqliyyah).

The overwhelming evidence from the lives of the Ṣaḥābah—sacrifice, persecution, martyrdom, and devotion—establishes their 'adālah (uprightness). Weak historical reports or speculative political motives cannot override this default.

The example of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (رضي الله عنه) illustrates how later generations, unaware of his immense sacrifices, misjudged him based on limited political contexts.

Conclusion: Foundations for Tadwīn al-Sunnah

This lesson prepares the student to understand **why Tadwīn al-Sunnah was both necessary and inevitable**. It demonstrates that the Sunnah was preserved through a living tradition of devotion, caution, verification, and sacrifice—long before formal compilations emerged.

In subsequent lessons, the course will move from these foundational attitudes and practices to the **actual historical stages of compilation**, beginning from the time of the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم and continuing through the first and second centuries of Islam.