

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, most Kind, most Merciful



Surat an-Nisa, 4:59

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

O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and those vested with authority among you. And if you dispute concerning anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you have faith in Allah and the last day. That is better and more favourable in outcome.

Learning Objectives

- To describe the *sunnah* as a primary source of Islamic law.
- To explain the challenges of preserving *ahadith* over time.
- To discuss the role of the *a'immah* (a) and the *ulama* in preserving the *ahadith* of Rasulullah (s).

Key Words

حَدِيث

Hadith

speech; narration; tradition

أَحَادِيث

Ahadith

plural of *hadith*



Faith in Action

Allah says in the Qur'an:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي
يُحِبِّبْكُمْ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ
وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Say: 'If you love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins, and Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.' (Surah Aal Imran, 3:31)

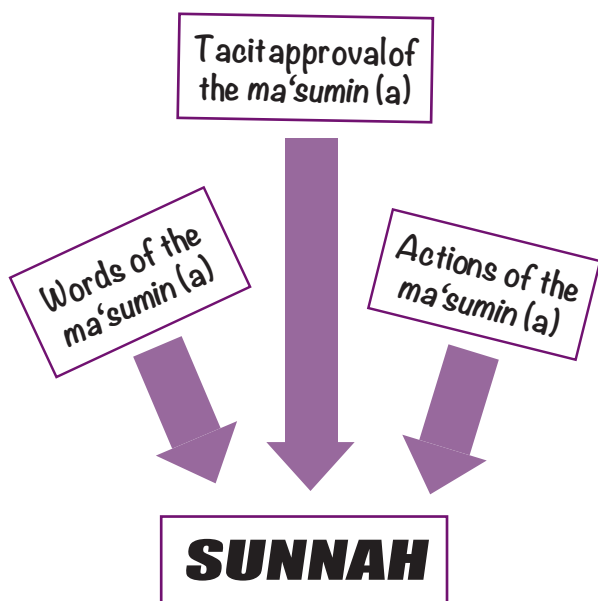
Muslims try to obey the command of Allah in this *ayah* by following the way of Rasulallah (s). Try to learn more about his sayings and actions and follow them in your daily life. Some examples of his *sunnah* include small actions such as brushing your teeth before *salah* and initiating the greeting of *salam*. Following the path of Rasulallah (s) in your daily actions will demonstrate your love for Allah.

The Qur'an is the main source of guidance for Muslims. However, it requires the *sunnah* to explain it. For example, the Qur'an commands us to pray but does not tell us the details about how to pray, the number of *rak'ah* in each *salah*, etc. It is through the *sunnah* that we come to know these things. Rasulallah (s) taught the Muslims how to pray through his words and actions.

Hadith is the term used for narrations regarding Rasulallah (s). Through his sayings he guided the Muslims. He also guided them through his actions; for example, the early Muslims saw how he performed his *salah*. Thirdly, the silence of Rasulallah (s) at an action also shows his approval of the action; this means that if someone performed an action in front of Rasulallah (s) and he did not object to it, then such an action is considered permissible.

The words, actions, and tacit approvals of Rasulallah (s) are known collectively as his *sunnah*. The Qur'an and the *sunnah* of Rasulallah (s) are the first and second primary sources for the derivation of Islamic laws.

The Shi'as believe that after Rasulallah (s) the *a'imma* (a) continued to guide people through their words and actions. This is also considered as part of the *sunnah* because the *a'imma* (a) were appointed by Allah to explain the correct *sunnah* of Rasulallah (s) after him in addition to the correct interpretation of the Qur'an. Therefore, their words, actions, and approvals all indicate the words, actions, and approvals of Rasulallah (s).



Surat an-Nahl, 16:44

بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ
لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

[We sent them] with manifest proofs and scriptures. We have sent down the reminder to you so that you may clarify for the people that which has been sent down to them, so that they may reflect.

According to this verse Rasulallah (s) should explain to us the details of what has been revealed in the Qur'an in brief.

Reliability of the *Sunnah*

We know that Rasulullah (s) lived hundreds of years ago, so how do we know what he said and did?

Rasulullah (s) had some excellent companions such as Abu Dharr and Salman, who memorised and narrated many of his sayings and actions.

A person called Abdullah ibn Amr al-Aas used to record everything that Rasulullah (s) said, but the Quraysh asked him to stop. The Quraysh wrongfully thought he was a normal human being, and so he may say things in anger or in pleasure that will not be accurate. When Abdullah told Rasulullah (s) what the Quraysh told him, Rasulullah (s) pointed to his mouth and said: 'Write! By the one who has power over my soul, nothing but the truth comes out of it.'

This *hadith* clearly shows that Rasulullah (s) always spoke the truth and all his sayings are a source of guidance. It also shows that he encouraged the recording of *ahadith*.



Surat al-Hijr, 15:9



إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ
وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

Indeed We have sent down the reminder [i.e. the Qur'an], and indeed We will protect it.

The challenge of preserving *hadith*

The Qur'an is the word of Allah and He has promised to protect it:

However, when it comes to *hadith*, there are two challenges:

- 1 After the death of Rasulullah (s), the caliphs adopted a policy of actively prohibiting the recording of *ahadith* or destroyed *ahadith* that had already been recorded. The incentive behind such a policy is not very clear. Some scholars believe that this was done to hide some truths; for example, there were *ahadith* in praise of the Ahlul Bayt (a) which, if well-known, would prove that they deserved the *khilafah*. Because of this prohibition and destruction, a lot of authentic *ahadith* were lost.
- 2 Over the years, people made up *ahadith* on their own and falsely claimed they were the words of Rasulullah (s). Some of these were made up to give praise to the rulers to justify their leadership. At times, some people who felt that others were not reciting enough Qur'an forged *ahadith* that talked about the virtues of reciting different *surahs*. As forgery became common, people even made up *ahadith* to improve their own business! Once, an onion seller in a place called Akka was having difficulty selling his onions. He asked a well-known *hadith* scholar, to make up a *hadith* in favour of eating onion.

DID YOU KNOW?

One of the reasons why Shi'a and Sunni differ on their understanding of the *sunnah* of Rasulullah (s) is their disagreement on authenticity of sources of *ahadith*. One of the controversial figures in this regard is Abu Hurayrah. Since he was a companion of Rasulullah (s) for a while, the Sunnis regard him as infallible like all the other (more than 12,000) companions of Rasulullah (s). For Shi'as, Abu Hurayrah is infamously known for having forged a lot of *ahadith*. He spent less than three years of his life with Rasulullah (s) intermittently, but 5,374 *ahadith* have been narrated from him. That means that on average he recorded more than five *ahadith* from Rasulullah (s) every day.

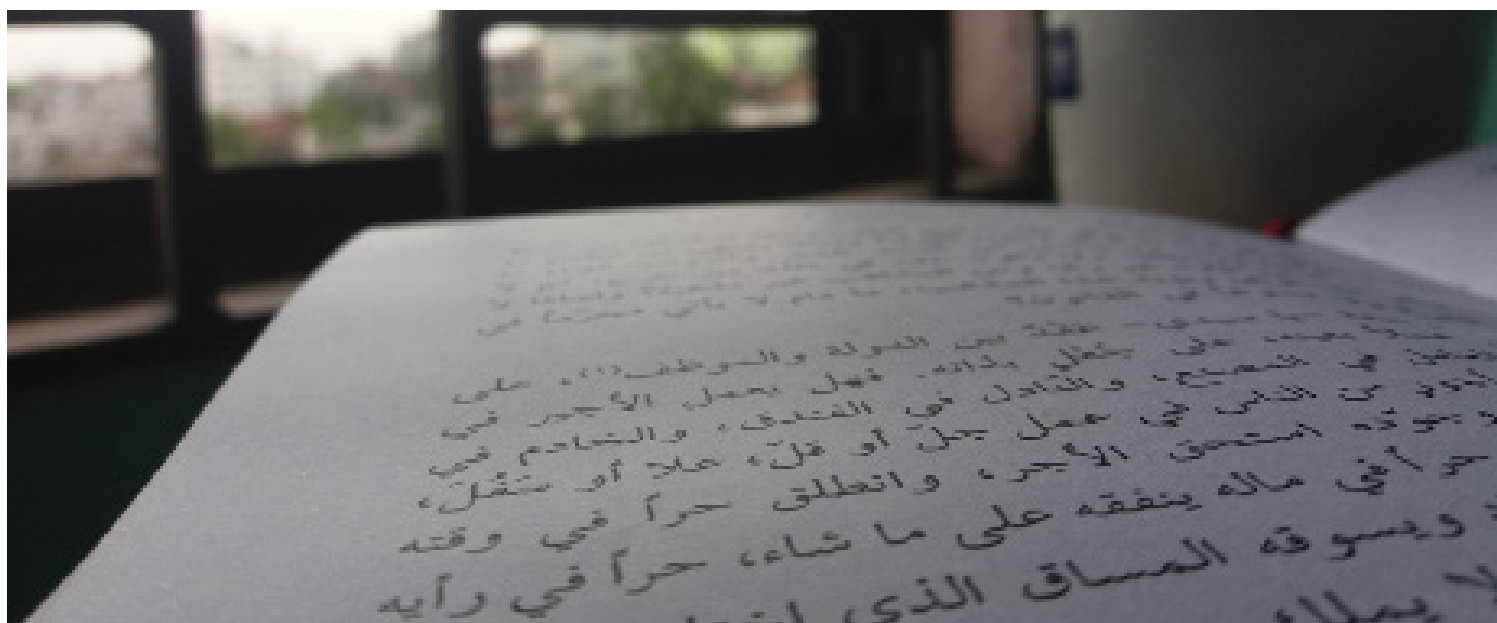


He falsely said that Rasulullah (s) had said: 'One who eats the onions of Akka in Bakka shall have the reward of pilgrimage to Mecca.

To counter these two challenges and preserve the *ahadith* of Rasulullah (s), the Shi'as have had two massive advantages. They believe that after Allah and Rasulullah (s) 'those vested with authority' referred to in the *ayah* at the start of this lesson refers to the *a'immah* (a). Therefore, this is how the Shi'as preserved *ahadith*:

- 1 The *a'immah* (a) were present to verify the *ahadith* of Rasulullah (s) up to 260 AH (start of *al-ghaybat as-sughra*). Even when Imam al-Mahdi (a) went into *ghaybah*, he was still accessible through his special representatives. The *a'immah* (a) themselves wrote *ahadith* and narrated them to their companions. During the time of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a) and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a), the opportunity to teach was greater and lots of *ahadith* were narrated and written down. Shi'a *ulama* insist on using only those *ahadith* that go back to Rasulullah (s) and the *ma'sumin* when deriving Islamic laws.
- 2 The Shi'a and Sunni *ulama* developed a whole science to verify *ahadith*. Every *hadith* must have a chain of narrators that goes back to a *ma'sum*. The *ulama* study the lives of all the narrators of *hadith* to check their characters and their reliability. The value of a *hadith* depends on how reliable its narrators are. *Ahadith* are then categorised based on this. A *mujtahid* must be an expert in the science of *hadith*.

Because the Shi'as insist that any *hadith* must go back to one of the *ma'sumin* whereas the Sunnis accept *ahadith* that also go back to the companions, they have each ended up with different *hadith* compilations and only rely on their own compilations to derive Islamic laws. However, they often use *ahadith* from one another in subjects such as history, *tafsir*, *akhlaq*, etc., as long as it does not contradict their own main *ahadith* and understanding of the Qur'an.

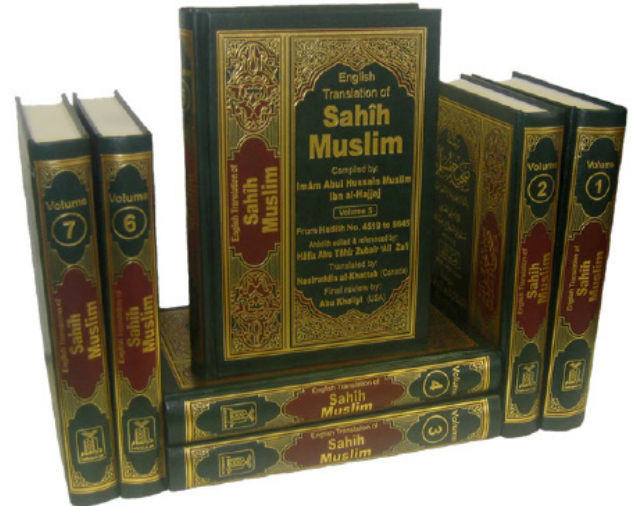


The major Sunni compilations of *hadith*

There are six books of *hadith* which the Sunnis use as primary sources to derive their Islamic laws and understanding of Islam. The majority of Sunnis regard all the *ahadith* in these books to be authentic (*sahih*). The names and people who compiled these *hadith* books are:

- 1 *Sahih Bukhari* by Muhammad ibn Isma'il Bukhari.
- 2 *Sahih Muslim* by Muslim ibn Hajjaj Nisaburi.
- 3 *Muwatta* by Malik ibn Anas.
- 4 *Sahih Tirmidhi* by Muhammad ibn Isa Tirmidhi.
- 5 *Sunan Abi Dawud* by Abu Dawud as-Sijistani.
- 6 *Sunan an-Nisa'i* by Ibn Shu'ayb an-Nisa'i.

Some modern Sunni scholars acknowledge that all the *ahadith* found in these six books may not be authentic, and that some may be forged and others may be weak.



The major Shi'a compilations of *hadith*

Throughout their history, the Shi'as had maintained the excellent habit of recording the *ahadith* of the *ma'sumin* (a). By the time Imam al-Mahdi (a) went into *ghaybah*, the Shi'a *ahadith* were already present in thousands of books and booklets, among which four hundred of them became famous as *usul* for their reliability and general acceptability. The *ulama* started to gather these *ahadith* into comprehensive compilations that were categorised and divided into chapters and sections. This would not be an easy task as someone would have to gather all the *ahadith* in different booklets and places and check them to see if they were authentic and not duplicated.

A great *alim* who took on this challenge was Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni. He lived in Baghdad and was very respected by the people including the ambassadors of Imam al-Mahdi (a). He worked extremely hard on this task for 20 years and finally produced the compilation called *Al-Kafi*. This book alone contains over 16,000 *ahadith*; that is more than all the six books of the Sunnis put together.



DID YOU KNOW?

Shaykh at-Tusi also started the Islamic Seminary of Najaf where thousands of *mujtahidin* have studied through the years, including Ayatullah Sistani.



Thereafter, another scholar, Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babawayh – famously known as Shaykh Saduq – compiled another book of *ahadith*. He called it *Man La Yahduruhu al-Faqih*, which means '[This is a book for] one who has no access to a *mujtahid*'.

A little later, another famous scholar, Shaykh Muhammad ibn Hasan at-Tusi – famously known simply as Shaykh at-Tusi – compiled two more books of *ahadith*: *Al-Istibsar* and *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*.

Collectively, these scholars are often referred to as 'the three early Muhammads'.

Although the scholars tried to include *ahadith* that were authentic, Shi'as make no claims that they are all authentic. It is possible to find *ahadith* in these books that are not authentic. The compilers tried their best to gather the *ahadith* in one place. In every generation, scholars try to critically look at the *ahadith* and try to verify whether they are authentic or not.

Faith in Action

Ahadith enliven the hearts of believers and can be very inspirational. There are many short and beautiful *ahadith* found in books. Try to learn some of these as a family and implement them in your daily life. A good way is to focus on one *hadith* for a particular time such as one week, and then move on to another. Over time, your life and manners will become closer to the *sunnah* of Rasulullah (s).





HIGHER LEVEL

Take a close look at Al-Kafi. You can find some of it online.

Read the first *hadith* in the book of intellect and ignorance. Answer the questions below:

The first paragraph lists the chain of narrators. Write them in order. Which Imam does it go back to?

The second paragraph is the main content of the *hadith*. Summarise what the *hadith* is talking about.

What are the Arabic terms for intellect and ignorance?



KEYPOINTS

- 1 *Sunnah* is the words, actions, and tacit approvals of the *ma'sumin*.
- 2 The *sunnah* is the second primary source for Islamic laws after the Qur'an.
- 3 *Ahadith* were recorded from the time of Rasulallah (s); despite the challenges of forgery and destruction, they have been preserved through the times.
- 4 The Shi'as have the benefit of the guidance of the *a'immah* (a) after Rasulallah (s) and of the *ulama* after *ghaybah*.
- 5 The Sunnis have six main books of *hadith*; they regard them as authentic.
- 6 Shi'as have four main books of *hadith*; Shi'as do not claim any book apart from the Qur'an is completely authentic.





1 Define the terms *hadith* and *sunnah* in your own words. Why are they important?

2 What are the two primary sources that *mujtahidin* use to derive Islamic laws?

3 How have the *ahadith* of Rasulullah (s) been preserved over time?

4 What are two main challenges concerning *hadith*?

5 What are two advantages the Shi'as have that has helped to maintain *ahadith*?

6 True or false:

(a)	Rasulullah (s) did not encourage the writing of <i>ahadith</i> while he was alive.	True / False
(b)	Every <i>hadith</i> found in the four Shi'a books is considered authentic.	True / False
(c)	Sunnis consider every <i>hadith</i> in their six books as authentic.	True / False
(d)	The <i>a'imma</i> (a) narrated a lot of <i>ahadith</i> from Rasulullah (s).	True / False
(e)	To derive Islamic laws, Shi'as only use <i>ahadith</i> that go back to a <i>ma'sum</i> .	True / False
(f)	A <i>mujtahid</i> verifies the integrity of all the narrators of a <i>hadith</i> in order to determine whether the <i>hadith</i> is authentic.	True / False
(g)	Some people made up their own <i>ahadith</i> and claimed that Rasulullah (s) had said it.	True / False
(h)	Shaykh Kulayni spent 20 years of his life gathering the <i>ahadith</i> for his book <i>Al-Istibsar</i> .	True / False
(i)	One should trust all the <i>ahadith</i> narrated by Abu Hurayrah because he has narrated so many	True / False