

## The Importance of following the Sunnah

**“Say: if you truly love Allah, then follow me (Muhammad): Allah will love you and forgive you your sins – for Allah is the oft-Forgiving, most Merciful” (Ali Imran)**

**“Indeed, in the messenger of Allah a good example (uswatun hasana) has been set for the one who seeks Allah and the Last Day and thinks constantly about Allah.” (33:21)**

**“The best talk (speech) is Allah's Book 'Quran), and the best way is the way of Muhammad, and the worst matters are the heresies (those new things which are introduced into the religion); and whatever you have been promised will surely come to pass, and you cannot escape (it).” (Sahih Bukhari)**

**“O you who believe! Obey Allah and His Messenger, and turn not away from him (Messenger Muhammad SAW)” Qur'an 8:20**

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said, **"All my followers will enter Paradise except those who refuse."** They said, **"O Allah's Apostle! Who will refuse?"** He said, **"Whoever obeys me will enter Paradise, and whoever disobeys me is the one who refuses (to enter it)."** (Sahih Bukhari 92:384)

So then should we follow this hadith of the Prophet (S) which seems to be suggesting that we should be rude and oppressive to non-Muslims?

**Do not initiate greetings with the Jews and Christians. When you meet any of them in the road, then make him take its narrowest path.**

Sahih Muslim 2167, Grade: **Sahih**

Clearly this goes against general good manners which we have all been brought up to see as part of the sunnah!

### What is the Sunnah?

The Arabic word *sunnah* lexically means "road" or "practice."

- Is the Sunnah what the Prophet (s) taught during his lifetime or what we would expect the prophet to teach if he were here today?
- Is the Sunnah following the Prophet literally? i.e. Is it following every hadith we come across?
- Or is sunnah following the principles that were behind the rulings of the Prophet – principles which can apply to changing situations?

## UNDERSTANDING THE MADHABS

1. Where did the madhabs come from?
2. Understanding the sunnah
3. Why are there differences in the madhabs?
4. Where did the madhabs end up and why?
5. Practically what differences will we encounter?
6. What should our approach to the madhabs be?

### Tajdid and the madhabs

The imams of the madhabs are often seen as mujaddids – revivalists.

In general, they strove to

1. protect the teachings of Islam (the laws – body of fiqh – rulings) as well as
2. working out a systematic approach to finding Islamic rulings in new situations (ijtihad).

### Imam Malik (711-795 CE 93-179 AH)

Medina was the capital for the early years of Islam and the Radiant City of the Prophet (S). As such the city was saturated with companions (10,000), including many of the scholar-companions and narrators of hadith:

- 'Umar
- 'Uthman
- 'A'isha
- 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar
- 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas
- Zayd bin Thabit

Their successors (tabi'un):

- Sa'eed ibn al-Musayyib
- 'Amrah bint 'Abd al-Rahman
- Saalim ibn 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar
- 'Urwah ibn Al-Zubayr
- Qasim bin Muhammad bin Abu Bakr
- Abû Salama Ibn 'Abdur Rahman Ibn 'Awf
- Sulaymân Ibn Yasâr
- Khârijah Ibn Zayd Ibn Thabit

Their opinions and those of the judges of Medina reflected the teachings of their predecessors, namely all the companions of the Prophet (S) so much so that the norms and customs of that city were the norms and customs endorsed by the Prophet (S).

Note that there were females amongst the learned companions and successors. Of note among the companion jurists are 'A'isha and Umm Salamah.

'Urwah said, "I have never seen anyone more knowledgeable of fiqh than 'A'ishah."

Regarding the successor (tabi'iyah) jurist, 'Amrah bint Abdul Rahman, Al-Zuhri said "Qasim Ibn Muhammad said to me 'I see my boy that you are greedy for knowledge -should I not inform you of the vessel of knowledge? Go and stick to 'Amrah for she was under the guardianship of Aisha.'" Al-Zuhri says, 'I came to her - I found her an ocean - its water never goes.'

(Akram Nadwi, *Al-Muhaddithat: the women scholars in Islam*)

Their followers (taba' tabi'een):

- Al-Zuhri
- Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq
- Hisham bin 'Urwah

These three prominent students of the successors were some of the many teachers of Imam Malik.

## Learning

The imam's grandfather was a companion of the Prophet (s).

Malik's piety, learning and sharpness of intellect were legendary.

He became the leading authority in Medina for fiqh and hadith and acquired sufficient proficiency in knowledge to begin teaching and issuing fatwas from the age of just 17.

Medina was not only the home of the Prophet's way, scholars from all over the Muslim world would come to Medina to visit the Prophet's mosque and learn and teach there.

As such, Imam Malik learnt from 300 tabi'un (immediate students of the companions) and had known about 100,000 hadith.

## The Muwatta

He was actually suggested to him by the 'Abbasid Caliph Al Mansur, and although Imam Malik initially declined, he eventually came around to the idea of compiling a book that preserved a documentation of the practice of Medina. As such the Muwatta was a book of fiqh – rulings, i.e. guidance on how to live one's day to day life in accordance with the sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH).

**Why was this such a radical contribution to the preservation of Islam?**

**Was Medina changing? Why?**

The practice of the virtuous people of Medina could be considered the living teachings of God's Messenger (PBUH), i.e. the *living sunnah* because it was the city in which the Prophet (PBUH) lived for his final ten years and was the capital of the empire for a further 25 years. The people of the city had observed the Prophet and after him, his disciples, studied their ways and teachings, and were thus molded by the Prophet and his disciples.

The Muwatta captured the way of the Prophet by capturing the practice of the scholars and virtuous people of Medina, in advance of Medina changing, as it would with the influx of thousands of lovers and devotees to the light of the Messenger, coming from a myriad of distant cultures.

Malik said, "I showed my book to seventy scholars of Madinah, and every single one of them approved it for me (kulluhum wata ani alayh), so I named it Muwatta - 'The Approved'."

He wrote the Muwatta over the period of his teaching career (40 years), and surprisingly, over time, crafted it to be more and more compact, removing excessive detail and duplication, so that it went from containing 10,000 hadith to under 2000 in its final form. By compacting the book, he made it more accessible and reproducible.

### **Hadith in the Muwatta**

The Muwatta contains 1720 hadiths, of which only 600 have complete chains (musnad) and 222 are mursal, meaning that the name of the companion is missing from the chain.

For example, Imam Malik says: "It reached me that the Prophet (PBUH) prohibited wearing gold rings."

### **Why would Imam Malik include mursal hadith or hadith without a chain at all, when it means you cannot establish their authenticity?**

This is probably because there were so many different chains of narration available for the hadith in Muwatta that it would take up too much space to list them all. At the time muhaddithoon (hadith specialists) were all familiar with these hadith with their chains anyway. And Imam Malik's focus in his book was rulings (fiqh).

In fact, the Mursal hadith and Balagha (i.e. "It reached me that" category of hadith – i.e. with no chain) in Malik's Muwatta' all have complete chains in narrations collected in later hadith books e.g. Sahih Muslim and Bukhari.

Imam Al Shafi'i famously said, "There is not on the face of the earth a book – after the Book of Allah – which is more authentic than the book of Malik."

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd limā fī al-muwattā min al-ma'ānī wa al-asānīd*, vol. 1 (Morocco: Dār al-Nashr, 1387 AH), 76.

## Imam Malik and the Sunnah

In Muwatta, Imam Malik used the following terms for sunnah:

- “The practice or opinion I found the people practicing.”
- “The agreed practice or opinion among us.”
- “The practice or opinion held by the scholars of this city” (*‘ala dhalika adraktu ahl-al ‘ilm bi baladina*)
- “That is the practice with us on which there is no disagreement and the people have always been practicing it.”
- “The practice or opinion held by us” (*as-sunnah ‘indana , al amr ‘indana*)
- “The sunnah of the Messenger of God”
- “The long established sunnah” (*madat as-sunnah*)
- “The practice of the predecessors had been according to this”
- “The decision which is being followed and its recognition is in the hearts of the people and the practice of the predecessors had been accordingly.”

**Why did Imam Malik use these expressions for sunnah rather than just the authentic sayings of the Prophet (PBUH), i.e. hadith?**

**How can what people do be considered the sunnah of the Prophet?**

In Al Muwatta, Imam Malik saw sunnah as the practice and understanding of the companions and their students, i.e. the learned people of Medina.

e.g. Imam Ibn al Qasim (a leading student of Imam Malik) wrote,

“This hadith has come down to us, and if it were accompanied by a practice passed on to those from whom we have taken it by their own predecessors, it would be right to follow it. But in fact it is like those other hadiths which are not accompanied by practice.”

(Guraya, Islamic Jurisprudence in the Modern World p.114)

Because the understanding of the scholar companions and their students encompassed the Qur’an and entire sunnah of the Prophet (S), their opinion held sway over isolated hadiths that may have been misunderstood or had a specific context or mis-related.

Imam Malik would mention solitary authentic ḥadīths but if they went against his knowledge of the sunnah, he would decline to follow them saying things like:

- "I do not know what the reality of this ḥadīth is"
- "We do not know what the proper explanation of it is"
- "This ḥadīth has come down to us, but the practice is not in accordance with it."

In the Muwatta (II.198) he mentions a hadith in which the Prophet was riding a camel with his cousin (Fadl ibn 'Abbas) behind him during the Farewell pilgrimage and a woman came to him (S) and said: **"O Prophet of God, my father is under the Hajj obligation, but he is very old and cannot ride a beast. Should I perform the Hajj on his behalf?"** The Prophet replied, **"Yes"**.

However, Imam Malik then explained that this teaching is not practiced and it does not accord with the people of Medina.

### **So why did Imam Malik include this hadith if he was not going to follow it?**

By including this hadith, Imam Malik was probably indicating that he was aware of the hadith, and that it is authentic, but that despite all this, it is not practiced in Medina. Including hadith offers him a chance to pre-empt any future argument against his rulings based on such hadith by making it clear that he was already familiar with these hadith.

We can see this approach with companions of the Prophet as well, where they might relate a hadith but know that it did not mean following it was an obligation.

E.g. on the authority of Abu-Hurayrah that the Prophet said, **"If a dog licks a vessel, you should wash that vessel seven times and in the eighth time it should be smeared with dust."**

(Sahih Al-Bukhari; Sahih Muslim; Sunan Abu-Dawud; Sunan al-Tirmidhi; Sunan al-Nasa'i; Sunan Ibn Majah; Malik in al-Muwatta', Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal)

Although this Hadith has been narrated by Abu-Hurayrah, he did not act upon it; rather he would go against it by washing a vessel that had been licked by a dog three times only.

(Al-Tahawi, in Sharh Ma`ani al-Āthar; al-Darqutni, in al-Sunan)

Some scholars explain this by suggesting that the seven times may have indicated an ideal whereas three times was acceptable in the sunnah.

### **Imam Malik and Maslahah**

In Muwatta (III.5.6) there is a hadith mentioned in which a woman stood up and offered herself in marriage to the Prophet (S). He remained quiet but another companion stood up and said he'd marry her. The Prophet asked if he could offer anything in dowry to which he replied no, and the Prophet asked if he could find even an iron ring, which the companion also declined. The the Prophet (S) asked, "Do you know anything of the Qur'an?" and he know a certain sura. Thereupon the Prophet said, "I marry you with her on the amount of the Qur'an that you know."

After the hadith, Malik adds: "In my opinion a woman should not be married for less than a fourth of a dinar." (III.9)

### **Why did Imam Malik not endorse this hadith as practice for Muslims?**

On the authority of `Ā'ishah that the Prophet said, "**Any matrimonial contract is invalid unless the guardian (of the woman) is present.**" (Sahih Bukhari)

On the authority of `Ā'ishah that the Prophet said, "**Any matrimonial contract that is made by a woman before obtaining the permission of her guardian is invalid.**"

(Abu-Dawud, in al-Sunan; al-Tirmidhi, in al-Sunan; al-Darimi, in al-Sunan; al-Darqutni, in al-Sunan; al-Hakim al-Nisapuriy, in al-Mustadrak `Ala'l-Sahihayn; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, in al-Musnad)

Although `Ā'ishah reported this Hadith from the Holy Prophet, she did not act upon it; rather she went against it when she gave in marriage her niece, Hafsa bint `Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi-Bakr, to al-Mundhir ibn al-Zubayr, `Ā'ishah's nephew, while the father of the woman, `Abd al-Rahman, was absolutely absent from the matter since he was in Syria.

### **Why did Aisha contradict her own hadith?**

Both of the above examples demonstrate how Imam Malik and Aisha held back from following a hadith if it was against the welfare of the public. The example from Imam Malik shows welfare being used to make a general rule and in this instance A'isha used it to make an exception to the rule.

## **Persecution**

Imam Malik was determined to hold fast to his beliefs in the face of persecution.

When the new Khalif, Al-Mansur was appointed, there was bloodshed in the process as his rivals were eliminated. The governor of Medina forced everyone to pledge allegiance to the new ruler but Malik opposed this arguing that from his interpretation of Islam, people cannot be forced into pledging allegiance.

For this he was arrested and publicly flogged. In fact the flogging was so severe that he was subsequently unable to clasp his hands together in prayer.

## **Making Muwatta official**

Later Al Mansur's son, Caliph Harun Rashid requested that the Muwatta, should be displayed in the Ka'ba, and that all Muslims be imposed to follow Imam Malik within all jurisprudential matters. He refused saying: "Refrain from this as the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) themselves held opposing views on subsidiary issues. The common folk already follow these differing views. Yet all remain on the right path."

## Sayings of Imam Malik

Surely I am only a man. I err and am at times correct; so thoroughly investigate my opinions, then take whatever agrees with the Book (the Qur'an) and the Sunnah, and reject whatever contradicts them. — Imām Mālik (Ibn 'Abdul-Barr, Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm, vol. 2, p. 32.)

Imam Malik رحمه الله said,

“The shield of the scholar is, ‘I don't know’, so If he leaves it down, his attacker will strike him”

Yusuf Ibn Abd al-Barr رحمه الله in his al-Intiqa' fi Fada'il at-Thalatha al-Fuqaha

Al-Haytham ibn Jamil said:

“I heard Imam Malik {May Allah have Mercy upon him} being asked about 48 questions and he replied to 32 of them by saying, ‘I don't know.’”

[al-Jami' al-Bayan il-'Ilm wa-Fadlihi, Volume 2 pg. 25]

Knowledge does not refer to plenty of information; rather, knowledge is a light that Allah puts into the heart of a true believer . Imām Mālik

Imam Malik ibn Anas, Allah have mercy upon him, said:

“Most certainly, it is the duty of a student of knowledge to behave with dignity, tranquility, and reverence, and to follow the way of those who came before him.”

(Related by Hafiz Yusuf ibn Abd al-Barr in his book – Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlihi)