Meaning and Place of *Hadith* in Islam

*Hadith* is an Arabic word, which literally means statement, talk, story, conversation or communication. It also means new. “*Hadith is a talk and which may be brief or elaborated.*” Technically *Hadith* means the narration of the sayings, doings or approvals (Taqrir) of Muhammad (peace be upon him). *Taqrir* implies that someone did in front of the Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Muhammad (peace be upon him) observed it and did not condemn it. It means that the person received the tacit approval of Muhammad (peace be upon him) in connection with a particular action.

Different questions are raised while elucidating the importance of *Sunnah* in Islam. These questions are to be answered in an Islamic, logical and scientific way. Some of the objections and questions that are raised by the critics of Islam are; there is no need to imitate the life of Muhammad (peace be upon him) even though he is the greatest of men. This imitation puts chains on the freedom of an individual. Is there no other system than the system of orders and prohibitions, actions and customs, approvals and disapprovals derived from Muhammad (peace be upon him)? Our future attitude towards Islam will be determined by one process i.e., how we will meet these objections raised against the *Sunnah*?

One thing must be borne in mind that Islam is the religion that gives greatest importance to the reason. Islam is always open to the critical inquiry of reason. We have been ordered to follow the *Sunnah* and the important question is that we have to understand what the reason behind its imposition is.

Islam is the complete way of life. It brings unity in all aspects of life. We must accept the teachings of the *Qur’an* and the Muhammad (peace be upon him) in their totality, if not done so; these teachings will lose their importance and value. To know the importance of *Hadith* in Islam, then it is very important for us to know the position and importance of the person whom we are strictly observing and following. One thing is very clear that human intellect has varied limitations and also Islamic teachings rest on transcendental truths; therefore for their elucidation and explanation, guide is important and the very guide who possesses more than normal reasoning qualities and that guide is no one except Muhammad (peace be upon him). If we know that *Qur’an* is the Word of Allah and Muhammad (peace be upon him), His Messenger, then morally and intellectually, we are bound to follow Muhammad
(peace be upon him). At the same time we have to make use of our brain and intellect and we have to discover the real meaning and purpose of the Hadith sent down to us by the Messenger. Further, it gives one more message that whether our intellect is able to discover its real meaning or not, still we have to obey Muhammad (peace be upon him).

At different places, Qur’an has explained the position of Muhammad (peace be upon him)

"O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you differ on something, refer the matter to Allah and the Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the Day of Judgement. That is best and you will have an excellent end." (4:59)

"But no, by your Lord, they will not [truly] believe until they make you, [O Muhammad], judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit in [full, willing] submission." (4:65)

"And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from." (59:7)

In these Ayats, the position of Muhammad (peace be upon him) becomes ample clear and it can said that if we believe in Islam, than we have to obey Muhammad (peace be upon him). If we declare that we love Allah, and then it is obligatory on us to follow Muhammad (peace be upon him), otherwise our declaration is absolutely meaningless and worthless. Qur’an also explains the duty of Muhammad (peace be upon him) that is to explain what is revealed to him, to enjoin what is lawful and forbid what is unlawful, to rehearse them the signs of Allah. Those who do not believe what Messenger of Allah has explained and conveyed to them, Allah in the Qur’an has clarified their position.
“And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the way of the believers - We will give him what he has taken and drive him into Hell, and evil it is as a destination.” (4:115)

The Ayat clearly highlights the importance of following Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muslims firmly believe that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is best among them. He knew the domain of religion far better than anyone in the World both in its spiritual and social aspect. His vision was very much clear while transferring orders or prohibitions. Sometime these orders and prohibitions are clearly visible and sometimes more or less visible before our eyes. At times, we can discover the innermost aim of his order and at other times only superficially. Whatever the case is, we have to follow him, for it is without a doubt said in the Qur’an.

وَمَا يَنَاطِقُ عَنِ الهَوَى إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحِي يُوحَى

“Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed.” (53:3, 4)

Now it is very apparent that he does not speak anything of its own, but he does so only when Allah orders him to do so. Further, what he says is also revelation that it is also from Allah. It implies that we are duty bound to follow him both in letter and in spirit. Thus it is now established, the necessity for a Muslim to follow Muhammad (peace be upon him).

One can never get guidance from the Qur’an only, for it deals only with the broad principles of the Islam. These principles were explained and elucidated by Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) either by his deeds, sayings or approvals. It can be cleared by this example. One of the most important institutions of Islam is Salah. In the Qur’an, no detail about this institution is provided. Therefore, it was none other than Muhammad (peace be upon him), who by his own deeds provided details of the Salah and showed how to perform it.

If Muslims have to live in a state of consciousness and self-control, then Sunnah is to be followed in order to train ourselves. For instance, we have been ordered to eat with the right hand or to grow the beard. The reason is to lead a person towards self-control. It seems these things have no importance, but in a deeper sense, these are psychologically of the highest importance. The little and small things are more valuable because these can sharp our powers of self-control. Laziness of the mind leads to the laziness of the whole body; same happens if these
small things are not observed. The very instance the practice of following the *Sunnah* degenerates into mechanical routine, it entirely loses its value, same has happened with the Muslims, therefore Muslims have to follow *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah* in their real spirit. There is no room in Islam to reject or disregard the *Sunnah*. In short, we can say *Sunnah* is inevitable like *Qur’an*. 