

THE SUNNAH OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

as a source of guidance

by Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi

الضراط
المستقيم

After the Qur'ân, the word sunnah or sunnat is one of the most famous words in Islamic terminologies. The "sunnah of the Prophet" covers three things: 1. the sayings of the Prophet (*hadith*); 2. the actions of the Prophets; 3. the passive approval of an action performed in presence of the Prophet.

Among the sources of Islamic laws, the sunnah occupies second place after the Qur'ân. The Muslims, since the very first days of Islam, have looked upon the sunnah of the Prophet as a bonafide source of guidance, and a supplement to the Qur'ân and its practical manifestation.

Unfortunately, some people have appeared among the Muslims from time to time who have tried to minimize the importance of the Prophet's sunnah; more disturbing is the fact that they do so in the name of promoting the Qur'ân. After reading their writings, one is left with the impression that the Prophet of Islam was just a simple 'mail-man'; that his work was just to deliver the Qur'ân from God to mankind. Whatever he said to explain the laws of the Qur'ân and whatever he did to set an example of following God's commandments—sunnah—has no value at all.

A similar attitude, although in a very subdued form, is also found among some 'born-again' Mus-

sunnah of the Prophet for them has no value.

Fortunately, those who talk against the sunnah of the Prophet accept the Qur'ân as the final authority. So let us turn to the Qur'ân and see what it has to say about Prophet Muhammad (sal-lal lahu 'alayhi wa alihi wa sallam).

1. THE ROLE OF THE PROPHET:

The Qur'ân is a book of guidance which was sent for the entire human world till the end of time. As such, it only deals with the general issues, and mentions only the basic principles underlying the Islamic way of life. The Qur'ân is more like a constitution than a book of law. The details were left to the Prophet. This is quite clear from the following verses of the Qur'ân:

He raised up among the common people a Messenger from among themselves to recite to them His revelations, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the wisdom. (62:2)

And We have revealed to you (O Muhammad) the Reminder (that is, the Qur'ân) so that you may clarify to the people what has been revealed to them, and so that they may reflect. (16:44)

You have a good example in Allah's messenger for whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day, and remembers God oft. (33:21)

Your Guardian is only Allah, the Messenger...And whosoever makes Allah, the Messenger...as his guardians (then he is among the party of Allah), and the party of Allah is the victorious. (5:55-56)

These verses definitely prove that Prophet Muhammad was not just a 'mail-man' whose only job was to deliver the Qur'ân to us. He was a Messenger of God, the medium of Allah's revelation, the teacher of the Qur'ân and wisdom, the spiritual guide, the perfect example for the believers, and he is also, besides Allah, the guardian of the believers.

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lims: whenever they come across an Islamic requirement which they do not like, they immediately say, "Is this in the Qur'ân?" They would not accept anything unless and until it comes from the Qur'ân; and the

2. OBEDIENCE TO THE PROPHET

The Qur'ân has time and again ordered the Muslims to obey Allah. It is very obvious that "obeying Allah" means following the Qur'ân. And the same Qur'ân has also repeatedly ordered the Muslims to obey Prophet Muhammad. What does obeying the Prophet mean? It means to follow the sunnah.

The Qur'ân is not only silent on the details of things which can change over time, it is also silent on the rules of worship which can never change. For

example, the Qur'ân in twenty-five different places commands the Muslims to say the daily prayer (salat), but not once has Allah explained how the Muslims are to say their prayers. (Interestingly, the only exception to this is *salâtu 'l-khawf*, the prayer said in the battlefield or when one is in danger.) This silence on the part of the Qur'ân, I believe, was for the specific purpose of forcing the people to go to the Prophet, ask him for details and follow his example.

Now the verses about obedience to the Prophet:
Say: "If you love Allah, then follow me; (if you do

PROPHET MUHAMMAD

*as seen by Lamartine
a nineteenth century French historian*

Never has a man set for himself, voluntarily or involuntarily, a more sublime aim, since this aim was superhuman: to subvert superstitions which had been interposed between man and his Creator, to render God unto man and man unto God; to restore the rational and sacred idea of divinity amidst the chaos of the material and disfigured gods of idolatry, then existing.

Never has man undertaken a work so far beyond human power with so feeble means, for he (Muhammad) had in the conception as well as in the execution of such a great design no other instrument than himself, and no other aid, except a handful of men living in a corner of the desert. Finally, never has a man accomplished such a huge and lasting revolution in the world...

If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the true criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws, and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples and dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the inhabited world, and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs, and the souls. On the basis of a Book, every word of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blended together peoples of every tongue and of every race. He has left us—as the indelible characteristic of this Muslim nationality—the hatred of false gods and the passion for the One and Immaterial God...The conquest of one-third of the earth to his dogma was his miracle; rather it was not the miracle of a man but that of reason.

His life, his meditations, his heroic revilings against the superstitions of his country, and his boldness in defying the furies of idolatry, his firmness in enduring them for thirteen years at Makkah, his acceptance of the role of public scorn and almost of being a victim of his fellow countrymen: all these and finally, his migration, his incessant preaching, his wars against odds, his faith in his success and his superhuman security in misfortune, his forbearance in victory, his ambition, which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire, his endless prayers, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death—all these... (served) to affirm conviction which gave him the power to restore a creed...

Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?

Histoire de Turquie, Paris 1854.

so) Allah will love you and forgive for you your sins." (3:31)

Say: "Obey Allah and the Messenger. And if you turn away (from this order), then (be sure that) Allah does not love the unbelievers." (3:33)

When Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter, any believing man or any believing woman do not have any choice in their affairs; whosoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has gone astray into manifest error. (33:36)

O you who believe! Obey Allah, obey the Messenger...Haven't you seen those who think that they believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you? Yet (in a dispute) they desire to summon one another to the judgement of taghut. (4:59-60)

The Qur'an quotes a messenger to Allah as follows: Fear Allah and obey me. (26:110) This has been quoted from various messengers and prophets about eleven times in the entire Qur'an. Whoever obeys the Messenger, has surely obeyed Allah. (4:80)

These verses teach us the following:

(a) Obeying Prophet Muhammad is a proof of loving Allah; and the reward of obeying the Prophet is Allah's love and forgiveness.

(b) Disobeying the Prophet pushes one into the group of unbelievers.

"The proof of loving Allah is the obedience to Prophet Muhammad."

(c) When Prophet Muhammad has decided a matter, no Muslim man or woman has any right to decide in that matter according to his or her own whims.

(d) Obeying Prophet Muhammad has been mentioned side by side with obeying Allah. Actually, obeying the Prophet is same as obeying Allah.

Following the Qur'an is obeying Allah, and following the sunnah is obeying Prophet Muhammad. And this is not polytheism or *shirk* because obedience to the Prophet is based on obedience to the Qur'an—*whoever obeys the Messenger has surely obeyed Allah.* (4:80)

3. CONSEQUENCES OF OBEYING OR DIS-OBEYING THE PROPHET

Another way of understanding the importance which the Qur'an attaches to the sunnah of the Prophet is by studying those verses which describe the rewards of obeying the Prophet and the dire consequences of disobeying him.

(A) Reward for Obeying the Prophet:

Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, Allah will admit him to the gardens beneath which rivers flow, they shall abide in it—that is the great achievement. (4:13)

Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, then they are with those on whom Allah has bestowed favours from among the prophets, the truthful ones, the martyrs, the good-doers—they indeed are good companions. (4:69)

The believing man and the believing woman are friends of each other—they bid good, forbid evil, establish prayer, give alms and obey Allah and His messenger. They are the ones upon whom Allah will shortly shower mercy. Allah is Powerful, Wise. (9:71)

These verses leave no doubt in mind of an unbiased reader that obeying Prophet Muhammad is as important as obeying Allah. Rather, the proof of loving Allah is the obedience to Prophet Muhammad. Interestingly, Allah has combined the obedience to Prophet Muhammad almost everywhere with the obedience to Himself!

(B) Consequence of Disobeying the Prophet

The following verses describe the dire consequences of disobeying the Prophet:

Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, and steps beyond the limits, Allah will cause him to enter the Fire, in it shall he abide, and he shall have an abasing chastisement. (4:14)

Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, Allah will admit him in the gardens beneath which rivers flow; and whoever turns away (from this obedience), Allah will chastise him with a painful chastisement. (48:7)

Surely Allah curses the unbelievers and has prepared for them a blaze in which they shall abide forever...The day (on which) their face will be turned towards the Fire, they shall say:

"If only we had obeyed Allah and obeyed the Messenger!" (33:66)

The last part of the last verse leaves no room for the fancy of those who say that obeying Allah and obeying the Prophet both refer to the Qur'ân only. If it had been so, then there was no need to everywhere talk about obeying the Prophet after obeying Allah.

4. RESPECTING THE PROPHET

The following verses show how Allah wanted the Muslims to behave in presence of the Prophet; and also throw light on the high regard that Allah has for him:

O you who believe! Do not step ahead of Allah and His Messenger. Surely Allah is Hearing, Knowing. (49:1) Obviously, Allah does not have a body; so this verse is talking about the shari'ah and commandments, it says that do not decide anything by yourself before Allah and His Messenger.

O you who believe! Do not raise your voice over the Prophet's voice; and do not talk loudly to him as you talk to one another—lest your deeds become forfeited while you won't even realize it. (49:2)

Those who lower their voices in the presence of the Messenger of Allah, they are the ones whose hearts Allah has tested for piety—for them is the forgiveness of Allah and great reward. (49:4)

Do not make the calling of the Messenger among yourselves like your calling one another. (24:63)

5. CONCLUSION

All the verses quoted above prove that the Qur'ân and the sunnah of the Prophet go together, they are not opposed to each other. It is incorrect to assume that the order asking the Muslims to follow the Prophet means following the Qur'ân, because that purpose has already been achieved by the command which orders the Muslims to obey Allah. So there is no any way of obeying the Prophet except by following his authentic sunnah.

It is necessary to mention here that when we are defending the sunnah of the Prophet of Islam, it does not mean that every single narration found in the collection of the sunnah, both of the Shi'ahs as well as the Sunnis, are to be taken as authentic. Not, not at all. One has to examine every single narration and prove its authenticity and validity of its contents before following it. Fortunately, the Muslim 'ulamâ from the early days of Islam have worked on this, and at present we have the apparatus and means to distinguish the authentic narrations from the unauthentic ones. A brief study of *Usulu 'l-fiqh* (the Principles of Jurisprudence), *Ilmu 'r-Rijâl* (the science dealing with the narrators of hadith), and *Dirâyatu 'l-hadith* (the science of hadith) will be enough to prove my statement.

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The Faith of the Prophet before the Prophetic Mission

by Ja'far Subhani



For quite some time, the question of the faith of the Prophet before his appointment to the prophetic mission (at the age of forty) has been a matter of debate between the Shi'ah and Sunni scholars. They have raised the following issues and given reply to each one of them:

1. Did the holy Prophet profess any religion before his appointment to the prophetic mission?
2. Supposing that he was the follower of a religion, was it his own religion?
3. If he was the follower of any other religion was that religion revealed to him independently and he followed it independently or he was reckoned to be one of the followers of that religion?
4. If he acted on that religion independently or as a follower, to which of the former Prophets did that religion belong?