
***Determining the Constituents of the Sunnah of Prophet
Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the Light of the Qur'ān:
An Appraisal***

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ABSTRACT

The term Sunnah has been used both for Allah Himself and his messengers in the Qur'ān. The way Allah dealt with people where the messengers (rasuls) were sent is called Sunnatullāh by the Qur'ān. Likewise, the same term is used in the Qur'ān for Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as in following the trodden path (Sunnah) of his forefather Prophet Abraham, Alaihissalam. It implies that the word Sunnah cannot be applied to things related to theoretical knowledge like faith, etc. Its ambit remains the practices and actions linked to practical things only. In the case of the Qur'ān, we find that there is complete agreement among all Muslims on what constitutes the book of Allah, based on ijma (unanimity, thorough understanding, consensus) and tawatur (uninterrupted continuity, without any gap). There seems to be no unanimity on what constitutes the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). There are, therefore, several approaches towards Sunnah adopted by Muslims. This paper is based on Qualitative Methodology to determine the criterion of what constitutes the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and which practices include the precincts of the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Keywords: *Al-Hikmah, Hereafter, Practices, Tazkiya*

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1.1 Introduction

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was given the task as the Messenger of Allah to convey His religion – the religion of Islam – to his companions and the whole of humanity. He thoroughly ensured that he fulfilled this onerous responsibility. It was the same religion that was revealed to Prophet Ibrahim.¹

ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنْ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۚ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

"Then We revealed to you: 'Follow the religion of Ibrahim', and he wasn't among the polytheists."

The last sermon of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was delivered in Arafat near Makkah on the Ninth day of Dhul-Hijjah, 10 AH. (623AD). Being the last sermon, in mentioning the crux of Islam's teachings, he also said that he is leaving behind two things – The Qur'ān and his Sunnah. Whoever would follow these two will never go astray.² Also, near his imminent death, the Prophet (peace be upon him) reportedly said that he repeated the same fact.³

تركت فيكم أمرين لن تضلوا ما مسكتكم بهما كتاب الله وسنة نبيه

"I have left behind two things; you will never go astray as long as you hold fast onto them, i.e., the Qur'ān and the Sunnah".

1.2 Literature Review

A quantitative study by Sadika Kebbi⁴ analyses the misinterpreted or orally transmitted Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on ordinary Muslims' daily life. The survey was done on women in Tripoli, Lebanon. The writer noticed how promoting some kinds of hadiths and Sunnah as a Modus Operandi shapes the Muslims' religious practices and everyday lives in Tripoli.

We see a gap in the definition of the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his Hadith. Both terms are used interchangeably, whereas the two are distinctly different, with different established domains. The article further juxtaposes Hadith, Sunnah, and the Seerah as a theory.

The writer mentions the Muslim scholar Jamal el Banna, who claims that Sunnah is Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) deeds and not his sayings. The writer, however, concludes by pointing out that Sunnah remains a recipient of emotions by its proponents, consequently empowering sectarianism over the fine, nature-based face of Islam. We see a clear gap here in establishing what, in essence, is the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) based on.

In an article jointly by Abidah Sulaiman, Ezad Azraai Jamsari, Mohd Azmir Mohd Nizah⁵, the writers have rightly stressed the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the source of Muslim guidance without which Muslims would not know how to pray, fast, or perform the rituals of pilgrimage.

The Sunnah is placed along the lines of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) sayings and actions. They mention the approach of the earlier people who put Sunnah as

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everything which comes from the Prophet (peace be upon him), with the exemption of the Qur'an, in terms of his sayings, deeds, and tacit approval. The muhaddithun regard Hadith and Sunnah as synonymous.

The article also comments on the approach of Western scholars who claim Sunnah has no position in Western scholarship. They maintain that the Qur'an is sufficient to guide human life. The article stresses the epistemology of the Sunnah as the source of Islam in the view of Muslims, but there is a gap where the basis for Sunnah to be established is not apparent. This creates objections (by the West) and the Qur'anists. The article by Nur Islami Mohd Fahmi Teng, Nashrah Adilah Ismail, Nazrul Hadi Ismail, and Thuraya Ahmad⁶ on the eating practices based on Sunnah is based on Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) being sent as a messenger to guide in all spheres of life, which includes our diet too. The way the Prophet (peace be upon him) took care of his diet by eating also comes within the ambit of following his Sunnah. The article mentions that because of this diet, the Prophet was never diagnosed with any disease throughout his lifetime. The article establishes eating practices as eating smaller quantities, eating slowly while upright, etc., as Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). It does not dilate on why adopting these diet practices constitutes Sunnah. A gap crops up in establishing the validity of these practices linked with Sunnah.

An article tries to cope with multicultural values in its Society and tries to reconcile it with the morality Qur'an dictates for such an arrangement. The title reads "Multicultural Values in The Noble Qur'an and The Prophet Muhammad's (S) Sunnah (the Prophet's tradition)⁷, but we see within the article that there is mention of the Qur'an with the Hadith, which implies the two terms Hadith and Sunnah have been used interchangeably. This is the prevalent narrative amongst most Muslims. In contrast, Hadith and Sunnah are quite different in that the former has got to do with verbal things and the latter practices. There seems to be a gap in defining two essential terms in Islam – Hadith and the Sunnah.

An interesting development that should be encouraged is utilizing virtual reality technology in learning through Educational Games that contain Islamic religious education.⁸ The noble endeavor presents through the media to the young generation the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and enlists activities considered the Sunnah.

This paper tries to cope with the gap filling by establishing a clinical approach toward what constitutes the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

1.3 The approach of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had a brilliant and balanced approach to redefining the customs and lifestyles of the Arab Quraish. They constituted the lineage of Bani Ismail. Following the Sunnah (established practices) of the Abrahamic faith,

the traditions of pre-Islamic days (jahiliyyah), which were not at odds with Islam's core message of monotheism, were retained. Those who remained linked with the Abrahamic faith were sustained. Those customs which became disfigured and lost their original essence were restored to their original shape and incorporated into the folds of Islam. Those customs which were downright misleading and misguided with respect to the teachings of Allah were rejected. This remains the fundamental guiding light for an Islam-based civilization for each time and era.⁹

1.4 Definition of Sunnah

The definition of Sunnah in Arabic is a 'well tread upon path' - something to do with actions. Sunnah intrinsically applies to the practical affairs of life.

The term Sunnah has been used both for Allah Himself and his messengers in the Qur'ān. The way Allah dealt with people where the messengers (rasuls) were sent is called Sunnatullāh by the Qur'ān. And it is used in its literal sense where Allah follows the same path with each messenger sent to their people.¹⁰

سُنَّةٌ مِّن قَد أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ مِن رُّسُلِنَا وَلَا تَجِدُ لِسُنَّتِنَا تَحْوِيلًا

"This was Our tradition with Our Messengers who lived before you, and you will find no change in Our tradition."

Likewise, the same term is used for Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as in following the trodden path (Sunnah) of his forefather Prophet Abraham, Alaihisalam. It implies that the word Sunnah cannot be applied to things related to theoretical knowledge like faith, etc. Its ambit remains the practices and actions linked to practical things only.

1.5 How do Muslims Perceive the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

In the case of the Qur'an, we find that there is complete agreement among all Muslims on what constitutes the book of Allah, based on ijma (unanimity, total agreement, consensus) and tawatur (uninterrupted continuity, without any gap). There seems to be no unanimity on what constitutes the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). There are at least three approaches towards Sunnah adopted by Muslims. One approach is popular among Muslims; a tiny minority accepts the other, and a third approach is less known even though it is academically sound. Each approach has its arguments that are presented from within the Qur'ān and are countered from within the Qur'ān. The difference lies in reference to the context in understanding the verses. The third view places the Sunnah with the Qur'ān. Like the Qur'ān, the Sunnah remains an entirely authentic and independent pillar source of Islamic understanding. Like the Qur'ān, the Sunnah meets the conditions of unanimity (ijma') and uninterrupted continuity (tawatur) in transmitting it quite the same way as the Qur'an does.

The only difference is that while ijma' and tawatur in the case of the Qur'an were

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achieved verbally, in the case of Sunnah, it was done practically. All companions followed the Prophet (peace be upon him) in how he prayed (ijma'), for example. Their generation didn't leave this world without adequately communicating the Sunnah practices to the next generation. This process continued uninterrupted (tawatur). These religious practices formed a part of the Din, which the Almighty required His last messenger to adopt from his ancestor Ibrahim's, Alaihissalam, religion. As mentioned above, the reference to the context in understanding the context of Sunnah shall remain decisive in deciphering the essence of Sunnah.

What then constitutes Sunnah? These must come under the purview of religious practices. What are those religious practices? If we look at ourselves in the mirror, we see we possess a physical body. We eat all day long throughout our lives, embody morality, and know what is right from wrong. These aspects of our whole encompass the spheres of our lives in matters of¹¹

- Worship,
- Social Interaction,
- Edibles,
- Customs and Etiquette

Therefore, owing to ijma and tawatur, the practices under Sunnah remain universal in their implementation and practice. Whichever part of the world one travels to, if the person comes across a Muslim or Muslim community, the person will observe the same practices among Muslims in matters of religion. Regardless of the sect, caste, color, or creed, all Muslims follow Sunnah as, like the Qur'ān, it is also thoroughly entrenched and an integral part of our lives.

Therefore, Sunnah is defined as the practices or actions the Prophet (peace be upon him) did in matters of religion and passed it on to his Companions (the Sahabas).

1.6 Critical Analysis

Qur'ān and Sunnah have (had to) reach us with all clarity as part of Allah's Last Testament and aspirations. The definition of Sunnah, as described in that these are the practices in matters of religion and passed it on to the Sahaba (may Allah be pleased with them all), seems plausible and prudent. Qur'ān declares itself a Reminder (Tazkirah).¹²

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

"Indeed, We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it."

The question arises; 'Reminder' of what? It is the reminder of the Hereafter. Qur'ān's domain remains the 'Reminder of the Hereafter'. From wherever we pick up the Qur'ān for pondering, it will be seen presenting its case of the Hereafter.¹³

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ ۗ شَهِدْنَا ۗ أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

"When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves, [He said to them,]

'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes indeed! We bear witness.' [This,] lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed we were unaware of this,'"

Indeed, after presenting the case of resurrection and meeting the Lord, it plainly but effectively puts the onus on us to pay heed to this reminder or not:¹⁴

كَلَّا بَلْ لَا يَخَافُونَ الْآخِرَةَ كَلَّا إِنَّهُ تَذَكِّرُهُ فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَّرَهُ

"No, indeed! Rather they do not fear the Hereafter. No indeed! It is indeed a reminder. So let anyone who wishes would remember it."

Also, it would remain most pertinent to mention the Qur'ān verse of Surah Qamar, mentioned four times in the same Surah, after the plight of the believers and wilful non-believers of the four messengers.¹⁵

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

"Certainly, we have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of Reminder. So, is there anyone who will be Reminded?"

The next question that comes to mind is what criterion, or criteria, has Allah laid for one's salvation (or damnation) in the Hereafter? Philosophers, intellectuals, dreamers, sages, pundits, and Dalai Lamas have ventured into this domain for centuries, in fact, thousands of years, into this domain to find out the purpose of human existence. Allah, the Creator, Sustainer, and Provider of all mankind, has spoken and commented on this elusive answer.

Allah's Infinite mercy manifests itself that He has spoken to us. We do not have to go to the top of the mountains or the depths of the oceans or the jungles or caves or adopt monasticism and shun the worldly bounties to achieve this nirvana or communion with Allah. Allah has sent each of us His personal 'email'. When the email is accessed, downloaded, saved, opened, and reflected upon, it clearly states the criterion (not criteria) of salvation in the Hereafter. The criterion remains our 'Purification (and Development)' called Tazkiya.¹⁶

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا

"By the soul and Him who fashioned it and inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and vices: one who purifies it is felicitous, and one who betrays it fails."

Also, it is very clinical to mention Qur'ān's verse from Surah Jumma below.¹⁷ The importance of this verse can be envisaged from the fact that it has been mentioned four times in the Qur'ān in (2:129) (2:159) (3:164) and (62:2) mentioned here:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

"It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] an apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error."

Based on the above discussion, we see that the singular purpose of mankind is to

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achieve Tazkiya (Purification) in life to achieve Allah's Eternal Kingdom of Paradise.¹⁸

وَمَنْ يَأْتِهِ مُؤْمِنًا قَدْ عَمِلَ الصَّالِحَاتِ فَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمُ الدَّرَجَاتُ الْعُلَى
جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا، وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ مَنْ تَزَكَّى

“But whoever comes to Him with faith, and he has done righteous deeds, for such shall be the highest ranks. The Gardens of Eden, with streams running in them, to abide in them [forever], and that is the reward of him who keeps pure.”

Allah has spoken to mankind through His Qur'an and Sunnah (through His prophets), enabling them to achieve this purpose of life – purification. If we now look at the Sunnah, since we have established that the Qur'an's verbal injunctions are to achieve purification, we can clearly see that the practices juxtaposed with Qur'anic teachings are in sync in achieving this cherished target.

If we apply the three aspects that define our existence as a moral human being or a homo sapien– a wise man- we observe that clipping our nails is Sunnah, as Allah does not want us to have a beastly appearance. Trimming our mustache is Sunnah, as Allah does not want us to carry an arrogant demeanor. When asked about edibles, Allah says in the Qur'an to eat pure (tayyibaat) things; hence the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) shows us the way.¹⁹

الْيَوْمَ أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ الطَّيِّبَاتُ ۗ

“On this day, all pure things are lawful for you (as food).”

We bid farewell to the deceased by purifying the body with water and shrouding it in two pieces of unstitched white sheets amongst prayer (dua) to Allah to cleanse the soul of sins (to purify the soul) before burial. This whole act constitutes the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Likewise, the two Eid prayers - Eid al-Fitr & Eid al-Adha are celebrated by glorifying the name of Allah six additional times in the Eid prayer.

The Qur'an Verse mentioned above (62:2) 20 speaks of our Tazkiya through Al-Kitab and Al-Hikmah. Al-Hikmah is the act of wisdom that Allah claims He has bestowed each soul with and mentions in the Qur'an as a reminder in Surah Bani Israel Verse 23-39. Verse 23 mentions worshipping One Allah, and after 'reminding' us of ten moral acts, which may also be akin to the Torah's 'ten commandments,' Allah rounds it off in Verse 39 as²⁰

ذَلِكَ بِمَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ رَبُّكَ مِنَ الْحِكْمَةِ ۗ وَلَا تَجْعَلْ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ فَتُلْقَى فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَلُومًا مَدْحُورًا

“These are among [precepts] that your Lord has revealed to you of wisdom. Do not set up another Allah besides Allah, or you will be cast into hell, blameworthy, banished.”

Offering Eid prayers is Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). While we worship One Allah²¹ and glorify Him in the Eid prayers, this constitutes part of 'wisdom' (Al-

Hikmah) which enables us to achieve Tazkiya (Qur'ān 62:2).²² Here, too, we see Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) leads us to the purpose of our existence. It is the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and established that one takes a bath after sexual intercourse, menstruation cycles, and sexual discharge. These acts lead us to our purification. Similarly, we wash our mouths, hands, and teeth. Using the twig of the tree used for cleansing teeth (miswak) does not constitute Sunnah. It is not the 'usage of the twig of a tree' which is Sunnah, but rather the act of cleansing one's teeth. This is, in today's world, managed through toothbrushes and toothpaste. The purpose here is cleanliness, not the instrument used. Likewise, using soap instead of soil to cleanse our hands. The purpose is to achieve cleanliness (purification). In matters of marriage, the institution of marriage comes under the Sunnah of the prophets. This means the prophets safeguarded their modesty through the institution of marriage and avoided every possibility of adultery. Allah declares adultery an evil and shameful deed, an impurity.²³

وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الزِّنَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

“Do not approach fornication. It is indeed an indecency and an evil way.”

Adultery remains an evil and impure act, and marriage is declared the pure way of establishing sexual relations with one's spouse. It is declared lawful by Allah. The institution of Zakat which comes under the Sunnah of Abraham, Alaihissalam, and is followed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him); too is established to purify us through our wealth.²⁴

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

“Take charity from their possessions to cleanse them and purify them and bless them. Indeed, your blessing is a comfort to them, and Allah is all-hearing, all-knowing.”

The word Zakat means to purify. It has been used for the purification of wealth because it purifies the soul, it purifies wealth, and it purifies feelings. The Sunnah established it is for the purification of our wealth.

Being Allah-conscious (Taqwa) also leads us towards Purification – Tazkiya. Allah-consciousness means knowing one's limits with respect to Allah's expectations of us. In other words, the word Taqwa used in the Qur'ān means the person should remain cognizant of their precincts, which keeps the person purified in the eyes of Allah.

إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ ۚ وَمَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّىٰ لِنَفْسِهِ ۚ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ

“...You can only warn those who fear their Lord secretly and maintain the prayer. Whoever purifies his self, purifies only for his own sake, and to Allah is the return.”

Also, the same significant relationship between fearing Allah as in Taqwa and Purification (Tazkiya) in the Qur'ān.²⁵

وَسُبْحٰنَئِهَا الَّذِي يُوْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّىٰ

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“The Allah wary shall be spared it - he who gives his wealth to purify himself.”

The Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) emerges very evident and self-explanatory in its manifestation and implementation. All actions and practices that constitute Sunnah have to pertain to our purification in matters of our Taqwa and in matters of adhering to Halal matters.

It implies, therefore, using planes, trains and automobiles have no contradiction with what constitutes Sunnah. The attire we wear has no bearing with Sunnah. Both the Qur’ān and Sunnah stresses on modesty in our dressing and gaze in gender interaction.²⁶

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ
وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۗ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ

“Tell the faithful men to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Allah is indeed aware of what they do. And tell the faithful women to cast down their looks and to guard their private parts, and not to display their charms, except for what is outward, and let them draw their scarfs over their bosoms.”

There is neither an Islamic dress code nor one based on Sunnah. All dresses of the world remain permissible based on the above natural injunctions. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has a very apt saying which is synonymous with the Qur’ān injunction as above:

*Ibn Abbas reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace, and blessings be upon him, said, “Verily, every religion has a character, and the character of Islam is modesty”.*²⁷

As the person of Muhammad bin Abdullah (peace be upon him, pre-messenger hood) born and bred in Makkah, his attire remained the same when he became Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). The stress remained on modesty and purification of dress and body. If a Muslim attire a dress attributed to the Prophet (peace be upon him), it can only be in his affinity towards the Prophet (peace be upon him) and not as a Sunnah. In the same way, one may want to use a miswak instead of a toothbrush, travel horseback instead of an automobile, or use a sword in combat instead of a G3 Machine gun.

It remains the biggest challenge of these times within the Muslims to decipher what constitutes the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and what does not constitute Sunnah. Comprehending and accepting the verdict of the Qur’ān and Sunnah with its reference to the context is the real challenge of the current times we are living in. The Muslims, first, must look inwards before venturing outwards to other communities for their proposed salvation.

As mentioned at the very onset, the religious obligation as the Prophet and Messenger

of Allah for Muhammad (peace be upon him) was to convey the religion of Allah without any blemish to the Quraish of Makkah and the surrounding tribes, including the Jews and Christians. This responsibility was so onerous Allah says in the Qur'an while addressing the Quraish in Chapter 69, Surah Haqqa, that had the Prophet misquoted Allah speaking in His name, He would sever his jugular vein.²⁸

وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقَاوِيلِ لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ

“Had he faked any sayings in Our name, we would have surely seized him by the right hand, and none of you could have held Us off him.”

This verse, apart from telling the addressees the seriousness of the message, also communicates how Allah owns His message! This implies, then, that the message of Allah is clarion, clear cut, without ambiguity, and each Arabic word in the Qur'an carries only one meaning and not shades and nuances of different meanings as envisaged and propagated by some Scholars in their exegesis.²⁹

الرء تِلْكَ آيَاتِ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ

“Alif, Lām, Rā. These are the signs of the Manifest Book.”

It needs to be appreciated from Allah's point of view that His message to His servants is fully delivered and transferred before the Prophet's (peace be upon him) passing away. This remains the verbal instructions in the form of the Qur'an and the practices (actions) in the form of the Prophet's Sunnah (based on Abraham's Sunnah – the age-old practices of the prophets).

Let us look at the Hadith and try juxtaposing its status with the Qur'an and Sunnah. The first aspect is to define Hadith. What constitutes a hadith? It is a claim that the Prophet (peace be upon him) did or said something which was seen by one or more than one companion and reported further till it eventually reached a Muhaddith (collector of Hadith) who arranged it in a book form. The famous six books on hadith (apart from many others) are called Al-Sihah al-Sittah.

It needs to be seen and appreciated dispassionately that the books of hadith mostly appeared in the second and third-century Hijrah. The famous compilers of hadith like Imam Bukhari era were 187H to 247 H. Likewise, Imam Muslim's era was 194H to 252H. Similarly, Imam Tirmidhi died in 279H. Imam Nasai was born in 214H and died in 303H. Imam ibn Majah died in 273H, and Imam Duad died in 275H. Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal lived from 164H to 241H. Imam Malik was born in 90H and passed away in 172H. His book Al Muwatta Imam Malik is considered the first book on Hadith. Imam Bukhari is known to have selected some seven thousand ahadith for his book out of a total of seventy thousand he collected.

1.7 Conclusion

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a respected personality even before his messenger hood. He was declared trustworthy and truthful (Ameen & Sadiq, respectively) when he was Muhammad bin Abdullah. On being bestowed the

Determining the Constituents of the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)...

messenger hood, his companions noticed his actions, sayings even tacit approvals and mentioned it further to others.

The pragmatic approach lies in deciphering what the Prophet (peace be upon him) did in matters of his messenger hood – Divinely directed by Allah and what he did as an ordinary person.³⁰

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ إِلَهٌُ وَاحِدٌ فَاسْتَقِيمُوا إِلَيْهِ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ۗ وَذُرِّيَّةَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Say, ‘I am just a human being like you. It has been revealed to me that your Allah is the One Allah. So be steadfast toward Him and plead to Him for forgiveness.’ And woe to the polytheists”.

This distinction would (should) determine what constitutes Sunnah and what does not. The domain of Sunnah must be linked with our Tazkiya (Purification). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) practiced and extended actions that make us ‘Tayyab’ (pure). If everything that Prophet (peace be upon him) did is considered a part of Islamic guidance to be followed, then many practical problems will also arise. Many Muslims won't travel on cars, trains, and planes because the prophet traveled on the backs of camels, horses, and donkeys. Many followers of the prophet, in that case, would insist that they would go for the cure he practiced and would ignore the progress made in modern medical science; Muslim soldiers might insist that instead of guns, tanks, and planes, they would prefer to use swords, etc. for Jihad and so on. The followers of this approach feel convinced that these and similar verses give an excellent reason to believers to conclude that to please Allah, a Muslim must follow and emulate the Messenger of Allah in all aspects of his life in the manner he prayed, the way he dressed, the way he ate, traveled, spoke, slept, etc.

Allah invites us to become seekers of the truth. This scribe has authored a book in Urdu, literally translated into English as the “Traveler in the Quest for Truth (an Autobiography)”. I have tried to establish that the Author (myself) is a common man who remains embarked on a journey of seeking the Truth. Since the Author as a common man, can maintain this glorious journey, each soul on earth, irrespective of caste, color, creed, or religion, can and should become a traveler in the quest for truth.³¹ The principles to remain on this glorious journey are universal. One must develop to rise above prejudice, re-evaluate childhood concepts at a rational level, shun all forms of the arrogance of being superior based on one's religion, etc., and remain aware of social pressures like Prophet Abraham remained aware and resilient.



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¹⁴ Al Qur'an 73:53-55.

¹⁵ Al Qur'an 54:17,22,32,40.

¹⁶ Al Qur'an 91:7-10.

¹⁷ Al Quran 62:2.

¹⁸ Al Qur'an 20:75-76.

¹⁹ Al Qur'an 5:5.

²⁰ Al Qur'an 17:39.

²¹ Al Qur'an 17:23.

²² Ibid.

²³ Al Qur'an 17:35.

²⁴ Al Qur'an 9:103.

²⁵ Al Qur'an 35:18.

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