

Where Lies The Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad



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Allah (SWT) said:

“There has certainly been for you in the Messenger excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah often.” Qur’an, 33:21

This article is an attempt to draw Muslims attention to where lies the correct Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as displayed by his example. In this writing, a clear distinction made between the Prophet’s method of management, local traditions and the particulars he used to accomplish his work. This classification helps in illustrating what the action of the Prophet (PBUH). In some instances, the means become the goal. Such understanding and practice may lead to stagnation in the Muslim world, something that is far from the teaching of Islam.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) managed his daily work of Da’wah (inviting people to Islam) using the culture and the means available to him in his time. It is evident that the Prophet’s approaches were tailoring the existing mechanisms and customs into meaningful solutions. One must remember that the means and the culture existing during the time of the Prophet may not be the same for other people, times or places.

From this basic understanding, one may merely realize that with different cultures than that of the 7th Century Arabia, and with the availability of various means and technologies, solutions have to be different from that of the Prophet’s. Hence the particulars that the Prophet (PBUH) used in this environment may not become an integral part of his Sunnah. They were only the means to accomplish his plan. The

genuine Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad lies merely in his example of approach and management, utilizing the customs of his people and the available means in his time and place. Let us further expound on this idea.

Illustrating the Concept

a) The Trip to Al-Taif

In explaining this theory let us examine the Prophet's story surrounding his trip to al-Ta'if, which took place during the 10th year after the first revelation of the Qur'an. For many years Quraysh (Muhammad's tribe who rejected him) had been disrupting the Prophet's attempts for Da'wah: making blockades and obstacles, actions of intimidations, mistreatments, and harassments. Quraysh also tortured and killed some of his companions and labeled him as a fool, magician, and liar. They even barred people from speaking to him, including travelers who entered Mecca for business or other purposes. All these evil acts were committed to deterring the Prophet from continuing his teachings.

The continuous hardships, restrictions, and rejections had forced the Prophet (p) to seek other communities, such as the tribes of Thaqeef in al-Ta'if for his call. Al-Ta'if is about 90 miles south of Mecca. Our interest in this trip is to study the Prophet's approach of evading Quraysh's attention as he leaves Mecca for a lengthy journey and where they could plot to kill him in the route provided they learned about his travel.

It was customary in Arabia that when a significant issue of concern addressed, the nobles of the concerned tribe would be involved or at least visible at the scene. Traveling or leaving one's hometown was one of these critical matters.

The genius of the Prophet shines out as he walked out of his home with his servant Zaid ibn Harithah, then known as the son of Muhammad, without his wife or daughter or any of his companions, not even a camel or a horse to carry the travel gear.

This ordinary and straightforward staging, at the least, would send a message to Quraysh's watching eyes that Muhammad was out for a casual stroll, which warrants no primary concern to monitor his movements further. As a result, no one followed the Prophet or attempted to learn more about where he was going. The Prophet's simple approach allowed him to travel to al-Taif and return safe and without Quraysh's knowledge or intervention.

This story illustrates that the Sunnah of the Prophet (p) may not be traveling secretly, or simplicity in travel, but is the making of an approach based on the circumstances, customs and culture relevant to the concerned people or audience. What else other than this subtle planning and management, can we see in this Prophet's actions as a Sunnah?

b) The Migration to Yathrib

Another example displaying the Prophet's well-thought management is evident in his migration to Yathrib, later named Medina. Escaping Quraysh's plot to kill him, the Prophet and his close friend Abu Bakr headed south and hid in a cave called Thawr, instead of traveling north directly to Medina, where Quraysh expected him to join the rest of his companions. They stayed in the cave for three days until Quraysh exhausted all means searching for them.

The people of Medina were out to receive him, patiently waiting for days from morning until noon, expecting his arrival, but he did not arrive until ten days later. The Prophet did not take the usual route into Medina, but instead, he took the long coastal road to evade his captors further.

There is more to the Prophet's migration than those well-thought actions. He hired a travel expert to lead him through the coastal route into Medina. He was able to get all the news of Quraysh during his hide-out as Abu Bakr's daughter used to bring them the news and food to the cave during the night. The prophet also had Abu Bakr's servant grazing a herd of sheep after them to erase their footprints.

Again, what should we take as Sunnah from this example other than outstanding planning and management of his escape and immigration? What makes nations prevail and flourish is actual labor and ventures based on sound-craft and proper management. This laboring and experiments are what Muslims must be concerned with as part of the Sunnah.

Some Muslims engage themselves with many outward issues, such as their outer attire. The way the Prophet dressed, to them, is considered as a Sunnah which they happily practice, yet the Prophet only wore the same style of clothing as did his people, not anything different. The Muslims and non-Muslims wore what was traditional to Arabia at that time. Arabia's dress was tailored to endure the high heat and desert environment. Wearing this type of clothing in cold regions, such as Siberia, Moscow or Alaska can severely harm or even cause death to the person wearing it, which is prohibited in Islam. Since the Prophet did not wear anything unlike what his community did, then the Sunnah of the Prophet for Muslims is to wear what is typical in their own communities, not that of Arabia, 7th century.

The goal of the believer is to be closer to Allah and be successful in life. Yet, to some Muslims, cosmetics and appearance are their goals. Muslims must remember that the means to accomplish things are not the same as the goal. The purpose of any action and that of the promotion of our faith is the success, irrespective of the wear or means used. In fact looking odd because of your dress in the West can be derogatory and hinders the work of Da'wah.

The Prophet Approaches and Al-Hikmah (Wisdom)

The Prophet's approaches discussed above, indeed have the same patterns in the definition of al Hikmah, wisdom, primary teaching of Islam. Wisdom dictates to manage affairs in the right manner, right time and the right place. Realizing these facts, one wonders why many Muslims today place so much importance on the gear and customs that the Prophet utilized during his time. Little or no attention is given to his model of approach, which when followed, would work for every time, place and culture. If you are interested in the complete stories of the Prophet's trip to al Ta'if and his migration to Medina, please visit ["Focus on the Early History Islam \(A Refreshing Look at the Sirah\)."](#) This article talks about other impressive Hikmah stances and actions in the Sirah of the Prophet.

Today's Muslims need not establish in their areas the customs of 7th century Arabia to practice Islam in the 21st century. Muslims practice the precise Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) by constructing approaches based on traditions and logic that their contemporary people identify with; otherwise, backwardness and failures expected. Let us confirm our claim again by examining the way the Prophet (PBUH) determined the timing of Ramadan.

Determination of the Beginning and Ending of the Lunar months

Another meaningful example illustrating the true Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the timing of the lunar month of Ramadan. Surrounding this topic, we find several traditions for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reflecting certain available techniques in the determination of lunar dates. Each tradition or group of traditions, however, takes on a different method than the other.

All the mechanisms in these traditions, however, are inconclusive, reflecting the limited knowledge regarding the science of astronomy in Mecca in the 7th century. For example, a group of traditions points out to the number of days in a lunar month, while others speak about the number of days in a collection of lunar months. Another more accurate method revealing the beginning or ending the month of fast is that which the Prophet (p) pointed out as:

"Sumo le ru'ateh, wa aftiru le ru'ateh..." "Fast when you see the crescent and break your fast when you see the next crescent..."

Seeing the crescent by the naked eye option allows for certainty in this matter, and seems to be the best option available to the Prophet (PBUH). This method, however, is still inconclusive, since the Prophet continued to say:

But if you could not see it, then complete the 30th day [in fasting.] -Bukhari & Muslim

Alongside these traditions, the Prophet points out to the reality of his day and time, stating:

"We are Ummah (a nation) Ummiyah (unlettered) we do not write [in astronomical circles,] nor do we calculate [to arrive at the exact lunar dates.]..."

A myriad of solutions is due in part to the complications that surround seeing the crescent. Modern science states that the birth of the new moon takes place exactly when it is in a straight line between the

Sun and the Earth, where no reflection of the Sun on the Moon is ever possible.

As for seeing the crescent, there are many complications for viewing it. Astronomers say it can take from 14 to 24 hours before the naked eye can see the crescent. They indicate that the difficulty in discerning the crescent is due to several factors, such as its degree over the horizon, the moon's orbit, the glare from the sun and the human eyes condition. Because of these variations, a more difficult observation of the crescent imposes itself on the observer. For this reason, the beginning of Ramadan can be as much off as two days. Please see our posted article, [“The Profound Wisdom of Prophet Muhammad Regarding the Lunar Dates and the Unity of the Muslims,”](#) for more details in this regard.

In our days of technological advances, time is moving fast. Muslims ought to be able to react to its pace and demand. As for the lunar months, today's technology and modern astronomical gear allow for far more accurate determinations of the lunar months' timings. Using these elements to manage Ramadan and Eid timing is indeed a Sunnah. Moreover, solving today's problems with the ever-changing technology, Muslims must be able to adapt, design and engineer new solutions that are flexible, reliable and at the same time workable. The requirements of flexibility, reliability, and workability too are Sunnan.

Taking the Step in Engineering Solutions

The problem of building solutions based on local customs, needs, and technology is that Muslims must renovate their way of handling an issue. Muslims must step out of the box of “cannot deviate from old fatwas,” and retire those ideas. They must begin by analyzing their at-hand problems and step forward by initiating solutions to their difficulties.

Today's Muslims are in dire need of revitalizing their faith (iman), and establishing rationality and eradicating insanity and extremism in this world. Every individual in the community must participate in making the community's vehicle move forward towards security and excellence, not backward into inferiority and ignorance.

Most of the time people are being told what to do and how to do it based on what is in the “box,” causing them to neglect rational thinking, to stay put rather than being active, as is the case for many Muslim societies and nations today. Making superior achievement means being proactive, not passive; breaking through in life means auspicious critical thinking, not incapacitated ideas.

One can read in the Holy Qur'an about man's responsibility of being innovative:

[He] Who created death and life to test you [as to] who of you is best in deed – and He is Exalted in Might, the Forgiving. Qur'an, 67:2

To be “best in accomplishment,” implies there have been competitions and competitors; how could there be competitors without creativity and innovations? Stagnation and idleness have no place in Islam.

Indeed, We created man from a sperm-drop mixture so that We may test him [in life]; and We made him hearing and seeing. Qur'an, 76: 2

The faculties of hearing and seeing are indeed aids for the Muslim in making optimal moves and decisions in pursuit of achieving healthy conditions and a better life.

Then, do they not [ponder, bring out, weigh carefully] and reflect upon the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up by them? Qur'an, 47:24

[Here is] a Book which We have sent down upon you, full of blessings, that they may reflect [deeply think through its theories, investigate and discover its concepts] upon its signs [predictions, expressions, concepts and matters], and that men of understanding may receive admonition. Qur'an, 38:29

The Holy Qur'an contains expressions and inspirations appropriate for every time and circumstance. Only by the purposeful study of its verses can these idioms be realized and utilized. Earnest study of the Qur'an reenergizes people and revitalizes their relationship with their Creator and their surroundings. This proactive living enables people to solve problems and provide solutions.

Muslims must think, invent and then produce work. How else can Muslims expect to grow and advance if they keep re-deploying Arabia's 7th-century customs and technology? Let us see how the Prophet's companions were able to engineer new solutions for problems facing them.

The Collation of the Verse and Suras of the Qur'an

During the life of the Prophet Muhammad (p), the Quranic verses and suras were not collated into one volume, the way we have it today. After the Prophet passed away, the Muslims faced some extreme circumstances that required new thinking and engineering for the Ummah to keep its stature. During the Caliph Abu Bakr's rule, many of the companions of the Prophet, who had memorized the Qur'an killed in the battle of Yamamah. Umar ibn al Khattab, who later became the second caliph, was concerned about losing the Qur'anic revelations and therefore he approached the Caliph Abu Bakr requesting him to collate the Holy Qur'an. The following Tradition, 129 of Sahih Bukhari tells us the rest of the story:

Narrated Zaid bin Thabit Al-Ansari, who was one of those who used to write the Divine Revelation, he said:

“Abu Bakr sent for me after the (heavy) casualties among the warriors (of the battle) of Yamama (where a significant number of Qurra' [those who know the Qur'an by heart] killed). Umar was present with Abu Bakr who said, ‘Umar has come to me and said, The people have suffered heavy casualties on the day of (the battle of) Yamama, and I am afraid that there will be more casualties among the Qurra' at other battle-fields, whereby a large part of the Qur'an may be lost, unless you collect it. And I am of the opinion that you should collect the Qur'an.’

Abu Bakr added, I said to Umar, ‘How can I do something which Allah's Apostle has not done?’ ‘Umar said (to me), ‘By Allah, it is (really) a good thing.’ So Umar kept on pressing, trying to persuade me to accept his proposal, till Allah opened my heart for it and I had the same opinion as Umar.” (Zaid bin Thabit added): Umar was sitting with Abu Bakr and was not speaking. ‘You are a wise young man, and we do not suspect you (of telling lies or of forgetfulness): and you used to write the Divine Inspiration for Allah's Apostle. Therefore, look for the Qur'an and collect it (in one manuscript).’

By Allah, if he (Abu Bakr) had ordered me to shift one of the mountains (from its place) it would not have been harder for me than what he had ordered me concerning the collection of the Qur'an. I said to both of them, ‘how dare you do a thing which the Prophet has not done?’ Abu Bakr said, ‘By Allah, it is (really) a good thing.’ So I kept on arguing with him about it till Allah opened my chest for that which He had opened the chests of Abu Bakr and Umar. So I started locating Qur'anic material and collecting it from parchments, scapula, leaf-stalks of date palms and from the memories of men (who knew it by heart). I found with Khuzaima two Verses of Surat-at-Tauba which I had not found with anyone else, (and they were):-
“Verily there has come to you an Apostle (Muhammad) from amongst yourselves. It grieves him that you should receive any injury or difficulty He (Muhammad) is ardently anxious over you (to be rightly guided).”

The previous story to collate the Qur'an is a live example confirming our concept to engineering solutions based on the circumstances we face in our day and place. Similarly are the collections of the Hadith and the finding of the Science of Hadith after the death of the Prophet. These magnanimous men of the Prophet companions and followers, our guide. They prove to us, again and again, that intellectual thinking, discovering and designing solutions, based on the needs and circumstances are the requisition of our faith for keeping the vehicle of Islam and Da'wah on the road of progress.

Muslims today have fallen behind the nations of the world. This sad condition is the result of failing to recognize the exact model of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Productions and creative thinking are essential when facing difficulties, and for keeping the vehicle of Islam in motion. Muslims must imitate the Prophet's management mechanisms, state of the art plans, place actual labor and work into executing plans. As we have seen, these qualities were significant chief features of his life. Ignoring or dropping such precious Sunnan out of our lives is inevitably a failure in following the example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and will undoubtedly produce dysfunctional, stagnate and passive Muslim nations.

