



The Prophetic Sunnah: A Second Source of Knowledge in Islam

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ABSTRACT

The prophetic *Sunnah* is considered the secondary source of knowledge in Islam. The holy Qur'an which is the primary source of knowledge in Islamic worldview has confirmed the necessity and the importance of the *Sunnah* in its various chapters; on the ground that the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) who is the founder of the *Sunnah* is an infallible and a chosen prophet by Allah to all mankind. Therefore, the prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) never acts according to his own desire, but he is always acting with the guidance of revelation from God. Based on this tangible fact, it is an undeniable fact that the prophetic *Sunnah* is an authentic secondary source of knowledge in Islam. Which is also able to provide valid knowledge not only in religious sciences, but, it is also able to provide us accurate knowledge of natural sciences and humanities. Thus, the objective of this article is to explore vis-a-vis the importance of the prophetic *Sunnah*, and provide the raison d'etre on the relevance of the *Sunnah* for our contemporary life. Yet, for the sake of academic paper the Quranic approach will be applied, that is by searching the validity and the relevance of the prophetic *Sunnah* to human life according to Quranic worldview. Lastly, the article will provide a brief conclusion followed by some suggestions and some recommendations.

Keywords: Holy Qur'an, the Prophetic Sunnah, Prophet Muhammad, Knowledge, Allah.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The prophetic *Sunnah* and the holy Qur'an are like two pairs of scissors in Islamic worldview. The both sources are always complementary to each other, and in fact, they tend to act like identical twins due to their strong ties and because of their solid relations. Furthermore, the *Sunnah* sometimes can provide the details of general terms used by the holy Qur'an, and it is able to give a deep explanation to some unclear general messages and vague meanings of some Quranic verses. Therefore, the prophetic *Sunnah* is worthy to be considered as the secondary source of knowledge after the holy Qur'an. In the most serious note, there are some judgments and some issues that can not be found in the holy Qur'an, but the solutions of such issues can only be realized in the prophetic *Sunnah* and in the deeds of prophet Muhammad(p.b.u.h). Hence, the application of the prophetic *Sunnah* as the secondary source of knowledge in Islam is vital for every Muslim, and the denial of the validity of the *Sunnah* can be considered as *kafir* (infidel). Based on this fact, this academic article aims to justify via-a-vis the importance of the prophetic *Sunnah* and its relevance to human life.

PROPHETIC SUNNAH AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE IN ISLAM

1. Definition of SunnahWhat is Sunnah?

Literally, $Sunnah^{[1]}$ means a path, way, method and course of conducts. That means Sunnah is a clear path and established course of conduct, the pattern of life a precedent and custom. [2]

Technically, *Sunnah* means an established conduct that has been practiced by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). This practice has passed from one generation to another until today. In this regard, it also denotes the acts,

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sayings and approvals of the messenger of Allah.

2. Types of Sunnah

What are the Types of Sunnah?

According to Abdul Karim Zaidan, there are three types of Sunnah, namely:

- 1. Verbal Sunnah
- 2. Practical Sunnah
- 3. And tacit approval of the prophet [3]
- 4. Verbal Sunnah: these are the teachings that the Prophet conveyed to us by his words. An example of this would be when he said "actions are only by their intentions" and when he said "There is no prayer for one who has not read *fatiha* (the opening chapter of the Qur'an).
- 5. Practical Sunnah; these are the matters that the prophet taught us through his actions. [4]

He showed us how to perform the pilgrimage through his practical action. For example; he said "Take from me the rites of Hajj". Likewise, he taught us how to conduct our prayers by performing his prayers. He commanded us: "Pray as you have seeing me praying.". This information was then conveyed to later generations by the companions who had observed the prophet directly. Such Hadith are often related with wordings like:

"The prophet used to do such and such". Exactly, like Aisha's statement: "Allah's messenger (peace be upon him) used to pray at night thirteen units of prayer. Then, when he heard the call for the morning prayer, he would offer two brief units" Another example is Ibn 'Umar's statement: "Allah's messenger used to deliver two sermons, sitting down between them"

3. The third category of the Sunnah is the tacit approvals of the prophet. These are

The matters [6] argued Zaidan that the prophet concurred with through his silence about them for example: "speaking what is good is better than silence, and silence is better than speaking evil"[7]

Another example is the journey to fight the tribe of Qurayzah The Prophet gave an order to Muslims not to pray 'Asr except at the tribe of Qurayzah .As the time for 'Asr prayer arrived, some held the opinion that they should not perform the prayer before reaching their destination, others took the contrary opinion .The Prophet (SAW) endorsed both opinions

In nutshell, Sunnah is an authentic source of knowledge in Islam, because the sayings, actions and the tacit approvals of the prophet Muhammad are no doubt based on revelation. This fact is supported by the following Quranic verses:

"By the Star when it setteth, Your comrade erreth not, nor is deceived; Nor doth he speak of (his own) desire. It is naught save an inspiration that is inspired" [8]

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3. Kinds of Sunnah with Respect to the Channels of the Ahkam:

- 1. Sunnah which is aimed to be a binding law: This kind of Sunnah includes the sayings, acts and tacit approval of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) through which he intended the lying down of the law or the explanation of the ahkam(law) laid down by the Qur'an. This in turn consists of the largest part of the Sunnah
- 2. *Sunnah* which is specific to the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w): This kind of *Sunnah* includes those acts which are specific to the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). the number of these acts is very limited. For example; the number of his marriages (11 wives), marriage without dowry and not eating out of charity (sadaqah)
- 3. Sunnah that related to ordinary physical acts performed by every human being: such as drinking, eating, walking. Such acts are not meant to lay down laws. If one imitates the prophet (s.a.w) in these acts out of love for him and with the intention to get reward, he will be rewarded for this But the etiquettes and manners prescribed by the messenger of Allah for the performance of such acts are part of that which is meant to be a binding law
- 4. Acts based on human experience: This may include acts that pertain to his experience as a human being, such as organizing of the army, tactics of war and trading skill. These acts don't become precedents of law, because their basis is skill and experience rather than revelation. However, if they are still relevant to one's situation they might be followed.

4. Status of the Sunnah with Respect to the Qur'an

What is the Status of the Sunnah with respect to the Qur'an?

As a matter of fact, *the Sunnah* is the second source just next to the Qur'an which is the first source. As such, there will be no Islam without the adoption of the *Sunnah*. Furthermore, the *Sunnah* is basically an elaboration and commentary on the Qur'an. Because some *ahkams* are found in the Qur'an in general, in an undetermined or unelaborated form. Hence, the *Sunnah* will take over and elaborate those *ahkams* in details.

Meanwhile, the *Sunnah* is a concrete implementation, a tangible form and the actual embodiment of the Qur'an. It might lay down some rules that are not mentioned in the Qur'an. In this regard, Qur'an says

"That which Allah giveth as spoil unto His messenger from the people of the townships, it is for Allah and His messenger and for the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, that it become not a commodity between the rich among you. And whatsoever the messenger giveth you, take it. And whatsoever he forbidden, abstain (from it). And keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is stern in reprisal" [9]

5. Kinds of Knowledge that can be obtained from the prophetic Sunnah

Since the prophetic *Sunnah* is the second source of knowledge after the holy Qur'an, it therefore contains various knowledge, ranging from worship, obligations, prohibitions, law, manners, ethics and leadership,

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social sciences, natural sciences and humanities etc.

1. Knowledge of Worship

From the Sunnah we can learn the rulings and the way how to perform '*Ibadah*. (worship) As a matter of fact, the issue of *Ibadah* is not elaborated in details in the holy Qur'an, they are expressed in general form, Henceforth the *Sunnah* has emerged and shouldered the responsibility of deep elaboration of those general term in details. For example, the way of performing the prayer or the way of performing *Hajj*. (pilgrimage). These '*Ibadah* are not actually elaborated in details in the holy Qur'an, but the *Sunnah* has provided more details about these two pillars of Islam.

2. Knowledge of Halal and Haram (lawful and unlawful actions)

Indeed, the knowledge about halal and haram (lawful and unlawful) can also be derived from the *Sunnah al- Nabawiyyah al- Sharifah*, such as food, drinks clothes and transactions that are legalized by the *shariah*. The *Sunnah* also clarifies the illegal foods, drinks, clothes and transactions it might even add some prohibitions that are not included in the Qur'an, because the prophets always acts according to revelation not on his own desire.

3. Knowledge of Law

According to the Oxford dictionary of current English, law is the system of rules which a particular country or society recognizes as regulating the actions of its members and which it may enforce by the imposition of penalties. [10]

Unlike conventional law, Islamic law, or Sharī'ah in Arabic language argues Sayed, literally means path toa watering place. Technically, it means the all-embracing divine guidance from Almighty Allāh to mankind to lead him to salvation. It includes all the divine messages taught by all the messengers of Allāh throughout the ages up to the time of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to whom it was revealed in its final and perfect form.

This means the Shari'ah derived its code from revelation, which is authentic and absolute, because it is from God, the only Transcendent and the Infinite Wisdom. Based on above definition, the Shari'ah was also given to previous prophets to teach their followers, but the followers of the previous revelation changed many of its authenticity. As such the revelation of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) confirmed its final and perfect form.

According to Sayyid Qutub, Shari'ah is an Arabic word meaning the path to be followed. Literally, it means the way to a watering place. It is the path not only leading to Allah the most High, but the path believed by all Muslims to be the path shown by Allah, the Creator Himself through His messenger Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) [11].

This implies that in Islām only Allah alone is the sovereign and it is He Who has the right to ordain path for the guidance of mankind.

This implies that the Sharī'ah is a comprehensive law that touch upon all aspects of human life from his birthday to his demise, it is unlike common law which mainly derived its rules and regulations from human reason and which is relative, the source of Shari'ah is the holy Qur'an and the prophetic *Sunnah* respectively.

So, the *Sunnah* as a source of knowledge about the Islamic law, has touched on family law, criminal law, commercial law, procedural law and international law in detail.



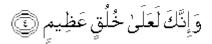


4. Knowledge about Manner of Conduct

It is an undeniable fact that the biography of the prophet (s.a.w) is the model of individual moral conducts. This fact has been attested by the holy Qur'an when Allah says that:

"Verily in the messenger of Allahye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much" [12]

Or in surah al- Qalam when Allah says that:



"And lo! thou art of a tremendous nature." [13]

Based on the above Quranic verses, it is obvious that the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) was a perfect model in implementing and embodying the teachings and principles of the Qur'an. He was a good example in establishing family and treating well the wives as well as the children, on top of that he was an excellent model in dealing with people, hard-working, with other nebulous characters such as patience, forbearance and perseverance.

5. Knowledge of da'wah (Islamic call)

From the prophetic Sunnah, we can learn how the prophet Muhammad commence his *da'wah* and his methodology in calling people to Islam started with nothing and ended with hundreds of thousands of followers after two decades only.

6. Knowledge about nation building and social reformation

There's no doubt that the prophetic *Sunnah* is a reliable source of knowledge on nation building and social reformation, with particular reference to the way he managed to establish a nation and changed almost primitive society dominated by tribaism and rivalries among different tribes and social classes to a civilized and strong state characterized by unity, fraternity, cooperation and brotherhood. He managed to eliminate idolatry and establishing strict monotheism (*Tawhid*), and completely eliminated terrible social values in dealing with the weak social classes, such as women, slaves, poor people, black people, etc.

7. Knowledge of Human Embryo

What did the Prophet Say about the Human Embryo?

A new branch of medical science, embryology, which studies development of the embryo in the mother's womb, has advanced greatly in the last few years. Now, it has become possible for embryologists and specialists to picture the embryo inside its mother's womb and trace the different stages of its growth. There are pictures of embryos in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth weeks of growth. But what concerns us here is the picture of the embryo at the beginning of its sixth week of growth in its mother's womb. What can we see? We can see the nose fused with the mouth and eye. The hand looks like a tiny oar, and the head looks fused with the body. This is how the embryo looks at the beginning of the sixth week of growth. But as soon

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as the sixth week is over, the head stems off the body, features of the eyes show clearly, and so do features of the nose, mouth, arms, and legs. This is how the embryo looks at the end of the sixth week of growth. If we multiply six (the number of weeks) by seven (the number of the days of each week), we get the number (42), which represents the age of the embryo in days after its sixth week of growth. In this context, Ibn Mas'ud, the venerable companion, quoted Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as saying: "When the semen (i.e. fertilized ovule) is forty-two days old, Allah's sends to it an angel that gives it its (due) form, makes its hearing, sight, skin, flesh, and bones. Then, it (the angel) says: 'O Lord! A male or a female?' Your Lord decrees what He pleases; and the angel writes down (what the Lord decrees). Then, it (the angel) says: 'O Lord! What about its age?' Your Lord decrees what He pleases; and the angel writes down (what the Lord decrees). Then, it (the angel) says: 'O Lord! What about its sustenance?' Your Lord decrees what He pleases; and the angel writes down (what the Lord decrees). Then, the angel comes out with the Scroll in its (the angel's) hand, adding nothing (to the Scroll) and omitting nothing (from it)." (Muslim) Notice the obvious conformity between the above-mentioned authentic Prophetic hadith and the modern science of embryology, particularly pictures of the embryo at the end of its sixth week of growth in its mother's womb. In this context, Allah, All-Mighty, says in the Quran: {Nor does he (Muhammad) speak from [his own] inclination. It is indeed a Revelation revealed.} (53: 3-4) Source: Nabulsi.com

IS THE PROPHETIC SUNNAH RELEVANT TO OUR CONTEMPORARY LIFE?

To answer this question, we ought to reassess the meaning of prophetic *Sunnah* and its importance to human life. Indeed, the owner of *sunnah* (*Rasullullah S.A.W*) has been repeatedly mentioned in the holy Qur'an as a unique messenger of Allah who is not acting on his own desire but supported by revelation and Qur'an also stated that, whoever follows Muhammad and obeys his teaching he is automatically obeying Allah. Based on this fact and based on many other facts, the prophetic *Sunnah* is undoubtedly relevant to our contemporary life.

Thus, the relevance of Prophetic *Sunnah* in the present-day is rational particularly for Muslims; that is because of some obvious evidence from the sealed of revelation (Al-Qur'an). According to the holy Qur'an. in Surah An-Nisa' verse 80,

"Whoever obeys the Messenger verily obeys Allah; but if any turn away, We have not sent you to watch over their (evil deeds)." [14]

In this verse, Allah clearly states that it is obligated for us to obey Allah's Messenger, or else it will be counted as disobedience not only to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) but also to Allah. Moreover, this verse is so clear that it can not be interpreted in any other way.

Next, the other raison d'etre that makes the prophetic *Sunnah* relevant for us in this modern day is simply because *Sunnah* is the second primary source of Islam. As the Prophet S.A.W said,

"As long as you hold fast two things which I have left among you, you will not go astray: God's Book and His Messenger's *sunnah*."

As clearly stated in the hadith, *Rasulullah* includes the *sunnah* in his words for us to hold onto after his death. Although we did not exist at the same time with *Rasulullah* S.A.W, yet, his teachings still remained with us as a guide for Muslims to live on. For example, performing five daily prayers are an obligation as a Muslim. In Al-Qur'an, there was general information given in some of the verses, but there was no explanation on how to perform the prayers, and also how to perform the ablution which is important for us before starting the prayers. Through the *sunnah*, we can do the prayers exactly like Prophet Muhammad S.A.W did.

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Lastly, the relevance and the significance of the prophetic *Sunnah* in our contemporary life can be seen through the characteristics of the *sunnah* itself. The first characteristics of sunnah that made it valid to this modern life is comprehensiveness (syumuliyyah). This also proves the relevance of hadith and *sunnah* covers all aspects of life starting when we were an embryo until after our death. Other than that, this method is to ensure that a man live his life according to the guidance that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has taught us. The second characteristic that makes the Prophetic *sunnah* relevant to contemporary life is the balance of the *sunnah* (mutawazin). This means that the *sunnah* focuses on field and counts heavily on the equilibrium of oneself, for example balancing between *rohani* (soul) and *jasmani* (physical), mind and heart and worldly matter and and hereafter. The third characteristic of *sunnah* is reality (waqi'iy). Prophetic *sunnah* doesn't interact with human beings as if they are an angel, in fact, the *sunnah* recognizes every human's needs and desires, and also the frail nature of human itself. And the last characteristic of the *sunnah* that makes it relevant to contemporary life is simplicity (muyassar). The privilege of this characteristic of Prophetic *sunnah* is to make it easy for the followers, and Muslims to practice every teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

As Muslims we know that when Allah and his Messenger decree something for us, it will always benefit us, even if we do not realize it. Whoever adhered to the *Sunnah* will attain the ultimate benefit as stated in *Surah An-Nisa' verse 13*,

"Whoever obeys Allah and his Messenger will be admitted to gardens beneath which rivers flow to live there (forever), and that will be the great achievement." [15]

In this verse, it can be said that human beings will not be at a loss if we obey Allah and His Messenger but we will get the ultimate benefits that are very valuable. The sweetness of the *sunnah* will also be tasted during this live. The Prophet's way is perfect in such a way that it produces physical, spiritual, and psychological benefits.

Some other examples of relevance of the prophetic *sunnah* are sleeping and waking up early. Our sleeping pattern plays an important role in our ability to function effectively during the day. Starting the day off by praying Dhuha prayer (Prayer during the sunrise) gives us *barakah* (blessings)and a good mind to go through the day. However, in order to wake up early, it is important to sleep early as our body requires enough rest. Aisha said about the Prophet,

"He used to sleep early at night, and get up in its last part to pray, and then return to his bed." [Bukhari]

We have to work hard to manage our time and complete all the things and sleep early in order to be consistent in adhering to this *sunnah*. Other than that, some of the *Sunnah* is speaking good or keeping silent. The Prophet (PBUH) said,

"He who believes in Allah and Hereafter, if he witnesses any matter he should talk in good terms about it or keep quiet." [Muslim]

Unfortunately, in this modern day, we often waste our precious minutes by talking about unnecessary and trivial things that will not benefit us in knowledge. The beauty of this particular *sunnah* will help us save time and reduce the amount of energy used to talk about irrelevant matters. This energy and time could be well spent on something beneficial, such as reading Qur'an or only speaking things that give benefits to us and others in *dunya* and *akhirah*.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the relevance of prophetic *Sunnah* to human life in Islam is obvious in the principle of relationship among people which is based on *Hablun minallah wa hablun mina al-Nass*. As such, a good Muslim should build his tie and relationship on these two values and strengthen the

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relationship between the Creator and other humans. Likewise, the prophetic *Sunnah* has also taught us how to tolerate when we are involved in *Muamalat*, (interaction or transaction) which are very important in human life, especially regarding how we should handle our businesses and pay zakat. Moreover, *Munakahat* (Marriage dimensions) has also proved the relevance of prophetic Sunnah to our modern life, because, through the prophetic *Sunnah*, we can learn the healthy beneficial relationship between husband and wife.

Finally, there is no doubt that the prophetic *Sunnah* is relevant to our contemporary life in the field of *Ibadaat* (worship) such as congregational prayer or sunrise prayer (*solat duha*) *Sunnah* prayers and Sunnah fastings etc..

CONCLUSION

Obviously, The Prophetic Sunnah is no doubt the second source of knowledge in Islam after the holy Qur'an. Indeed, the Sunnah in Islamic worldview refers to the teachings and practices of the prophet Muhambmad (P.B.U.H) it serves as a noteworthy source of guidance for Muslims in subjects of worship, life, ethics, faith and daily routine activities. In the most serious note, down the centuries the prophetic Sunnah is an important source in Islamic tradition because it provides guidelines and examples to Muslims on how to apply the teaching of Islam and the deep understanding of the holy Qur'an; it helps Muslims to understand the message of the holy Qur'an much better. It can also provide a deep explanation of some general messages of the holy Qur'an. Meanwhile, there are three types of Sunnah namely, Sunnah qawliyyah that refers to the sayings and statement of the Prophet, Sunnah Fi'livyah, that refers to the actions and deeds performed by the prophet, and lastly, Sunnah al taqririyyah which refers to the actions done by others during the time of the prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), approved by the prophet himself by staying silent on it, indicating that he does not oppose the actions. Furthermore, the prophetic Sunnah also plays an important role in giving impact to the Muslim daily life; for instance; Sunnah is able to help Muslims to improve their body health. This body improvement has been attested by many scientists and researchers. For instance, some scientists have found factual accuracy from the Sunnah in their research, and they called that as " Sunnah Medicine" the saying of the prophet on the importance of Zamzam water and its health benefit to human beings is such an example of Sunnah medicine.

In short, In Islamic worldview, the Prophetic *Sunnah* is a source of knowledge and it is in fact the second source of knowledge after the holy Qur'an. As a matter of fact,, there is much knowledge that can be acquired from the prophetic *Sunnah*, such as Knowledge of worships (*Ibadaat*), knowledge of transaction and economics (*Mu'amalat*), knowledge of human embryos, etc. Therefore, it is very important to apply the prophetic *Sunnah* in our daily life, on the basis that Muhammad (p.b.u.h) is the seal of prophets and his actions and deeds are based on revelation from God, and the prophet Muhammad never behave according to his whims and desires.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

- 1. There is no doubt that the prophetic *Sunnah* is relevant to our contemporary life. Therefore, we need to observe the deeds and the actions of prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) in our routine activities; for the sake of salvation and happiness in dunya (worldly life) and in Al-*Akhirah* (hereafter).
- 2. Based on above fact, in Islamic worldview, the denial of the authenticity of the prophetic *sunnah* is considered *Kafir* (Infidel)
- 3. The prophetic Sunnah is very compatible with modern science. The benefit of having a naps afternoon, the benefit of performing congregational prayers, and the development of the human embryo discussed by the prophetic *Sunnah* and modern sciences are such examples of the compatibility of modern sciences and prophetic *sunnah*.
- 4. Finally, according to the holy Qur'an "Whoever follows the prophet Muhammad, he has surely followed Allah" it means that the Prophet Muhammad is the perfect model that each and every

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Muslim should emulate, and his *Sunnah* is the best guidance to lead mankind to heaven. On top of that, the above Quranic verse indicates that the prophet Muhammad is the seal of all prophets and it also means that the holy Qur'an (which is the biggest miracle of prophet Muhammad) is the final revelation of Allah.

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