

Authority Of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ): Qur'anic And Rational Perspectives

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Abstract:

Qur'an and Sunnah both constitute the very basis of Islamic thought, life and law. But in the modern times there has arisen a controversy over the validity of Sunnah as a source of *shari'ah*. Some Muslim scholars have proposed to sideline the Prophet's practices and commands in determining form and nature of something Islamic. According to them, the Qur'an is enough to guide the Muslims hence the Book of Allah is to be reinterpreted time to time to save the divine message from turning 'obsolete' and 'outdated'. But considering the Qur'anic statements, concerning the position of the Prophet's guidance through his sayings and doings, Islamic law is unthinkable without Hadith and Sunnah. Logical arguments may also not allow us to do away with the Prophet's legacy in the form of his utterances and practices.

Introduction

Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) utterances and practices constitute a basis of Islamic thought, life and law along with the *Qur'an*. But in the modern times (19th and 20th centuries) some Muslim thinkers rose to claim that the only source of Islamic guidance was the *Qur'an*, which should be reinterpreted in the light of new situation, and Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) life-example was no longer valid.

In order to resolve the controversy over the position of the authority of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in Muslims' life today, the revelation and reason may

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be considered the most reliable arbiters. This paper represents a humble attempt to highlight the Qur'anic verdicts on the matter, on the one hand, and advance logical arguments so as to reach a rational conclusion, on the other.

Qur'anic Stand

Rashad Khalifa (d.1995) argues: "The Prophet's sole mission was to deliver the Qur'anic, and nothing but the Qur'an. It is an historical fact that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) instructed his followers to take from him only Qur'an, nothing but *Qur'an*....."¹ He seeks to convey the message that the *Qur'an* is sacred hence it is to be retained and anything else given by the Prophet (ﷺ) is human and non-sacred hence it is to be neglected.

It is to be seen whether this approach is tenable in the light of the *Qur'an*. The *Qur'an* has spelled out in no uncertain terms at a number of places the position of the Prophet (ﷺ) in the Islamic scheme of life. Below are given some of those *Qur'anic* declarations:

Divinely-Inspired

It seems that the basis for accepting the *Qur'an* as all-time valid source of guidance is its being revealed word of Allah. It is certainly a non-controversial criterion. But how does one know that the *Qur'an* has come down from Allah? Is it not that it is stated in the *Qur'an* (e.g. 12:3; 17:82; 27:6; 76:23 etc.). It is, then, quite logical to accept the *Qur'anic* statements referring to the conceptual or practical explanation of the *Qur'an* provided by the Prophet as having descended from Allah. The *Qur'an* announces:

- a) *Qur'anic* principles as well as their methodological and practical forms have both originated from Allah:
Verily, it is We who have sent down the *dhikr*, and We shall most certainly safeguard it. (Al-Hijr:9)
Ibn Hazm (d.456 A.H.) explains that the term *dhikr* referred to in the above-quoted *ayah* covers both the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ).²
- b) Not only the Qur'an but also its application in life provided through the Sunnah came down from Allah:

.....And remember Allah's favours on you, and also what He sent down to you in the form of *al-Kitab*, and *al-Hikmah*. (Al-Baqarah :231)

.....And no harm can they cause to you. For Allah has sent down to you *al-Kitab* and *al-Hikmah*, and taught you what you knew not..... (Al-Nisa':113)

In these two *ayat* reference has been made to two things as having been revealed to the Prophet, *al-Kitab* and *al-Hikmah*. Are these two synonymous with one another and the same thing i.e. the *Qur'an*?

Muhammad B. Idris al-Shafi'i (d.204 A.H.) elaborates that *al-Kitab* signifies the *Qur'an*, and *al-hikmah* denotes the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ).³

Syed Maududi (d.1979) says:

It is, therefore, not right to assume that the revelation of *al-kitab* and *al-Hikmah* refers to the revelation of the Book alone to the Prophet (ﷺ). The correct meaning of this Quranic statement is that besides the *Qur'an* wisdom was also revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ). It was this wisdom through which he had to precisely understand the spirit and purpose of the Qur'anic messages, and translate them into human life in the best way possible.⁴

Syed Maududi further argues:

The Qur'an says: "And he to whom *al-hikmah* was granted received indeed a benefit overflowing."⁵ Does *al-hikmah* here mean that he is given the Book? About Luqman. Allah says: "We bestowed *al-hikmah* on Luqman."⁶ Does it mean that he was given the Book? Indeed, the Qur'an neither uses the term *al-kitab* for *al-hikmah*, nor uses the word *al-hikmah* for *al-kitab*. The word *al-kitab* has invariably been used for the Qur'anic *ayat* and the word *al-hikmah*, wherever it has occurred in the Qur'an, certainly alludes to that wisdom through which the Prophet was capable of understanding the truth and of applying in his thought and life the right approach. It could be available within the Book, without the Book, as well as along with the Book.⁷

- c) The Prophet's (ﷺ) speeches represented the divine-will.
Nor does he (the Prophet) speak out of desire; it is no less a *wahy* sent down to him. (Al-Najm :3-4)

Rashad Khalifa feels disturbed to see that the above Qur'anic statement is interpreted to encompass everything the Prophet (ﷺ) uttered, and not only the Qur'an.⁸

The key word occurred in the above *ayah* is *nutq* (speech). It may not, without any good reason, be limited to only the Qur'an. The Prophet's *nutq* comprised both the Qur'an as well as the non-Qur'anic statements he made throughout his life to interpret the former. Did the Prophet (ﷺ) all the time speak only the Qur'an? No, he not only had the responsibility to read the Qur'an but also had the sacred duty to communicate the divine message with full elaboration to man.⁹

Ibn Hazm (d.456 A.H.) maintains that the *ayah* 53:3-4 talk about all the speeches of the Prophet, that could be classified into two categories: the Qur'an and the Prophet's own statements.¹⁰

Syed Maududi in his *tafsir* of the two *ayah* explains:

A question arises as to which speeches of the Prophet (ﷺ) have been referred to as having been revealed in the *ayah* 53:3-4. Is it applicable to all that, which the Prophet (ﷺ) uttered or to only some of them? The answer is that it applies first of all to the Qur'an and then to other utterances of the Prophet which were of three kinds.

The gist of what Syed Maududi elaborates on as to the three categories of the Prophet's speeches is given here below:

The first kind of Prophet's utterances consisted of the explanation of the Qur'anic messages and instructions which were revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ). It is these sayings of the Prophet that are classified as *wahy khafi* (covert revelation). The second category of speeches is related to his endeavor of establishing a full-fledged Islamic civilization. And the third type comprised those sayings, which he said in his personal and private capacity. This third category was also guided by the light of revelation.¹²

d) The Prophet's life-example itself was vouchsafed to the Prophet (ﷺ) from high or realm.

Follow (O Muhammad!) what is revealed to you from your lord.....

(*Al-Anam*, :106)

This *ayah* exhorts the Prophet (ﷺ) not to look towards any source but to follow the revelation from Allah. It proceeds from here that he had to incorporate into his private as well as public life only what was approved by Allah. His life is on record, which furnishes complete information about what he said and did. Logically, all of his sayings and doings should be deemed as divine-revelation as the Prophet was not supposed to have said or done anything against what was instructed to him by Allah. It is obviously on the basis of this strong ground that 'ulamā' are unanimous over the two categories of *wahy* the Prophet (ﷺ) received: 1) the Qur'an, and 2) practical details available in the sunnah and *Hadith*.

e) Interpretation of Qur'anic passages was also supplied by Allah:

Do not move your tongue with the Qur'an to make haste therewith. It is for us to collect it and to promulgate it. When We have promulgated it, follow its recital; Nay more, it is for us to explain (*bayān*) it.

(*Al-Qiyamah* :1-19)

In this statement the Prophet (ﷺ) was assured that he would receive two things from Allah: the Qur'an and its *bayān* (explanation).

Syed Maududi argues:

What is proven beyond any doubt from this *āyah* is that the Prophet (ﷺ) received *wahy* not only in the form of the Qur'an but also another category, which has been mentioned in the Qur'an. If the meaning and interpretation of the Qur'anic precepts, edicts and principles, specific terms and words were included into the Qur'an, it was unnecessary to say that the interpretation of the Qur'an was also Allah's responsibility. It would, then, have to be accepted that the interpretation of the Qur'an revealed by Allah was besides the words of the Qur'an. This is another evidence of *wahy khafi* (Sunnah).¹³

Obligation

It has over and over again been reiterated in the Qur'an that obedience to the Prophet is as obligatory as that to Allah.

- a) Disobedience to the Prophet amounts to denial of the truth.
Say: Obey Allah and His Apostle, but if they turn back, Allah loves not those who reject the truth. (*Ali-Imrān* :32)
- b) Allah's mercy sought by every Muslim is conditioned to obedience to the Prophet (ﷺ):
And obey Allah and His Messenger so that you might obtain mercy. (*Ali-Imrān*, 132)
- c) Obedience to the Prophet should be wholehearted and unconditional.
O you who have attained to faith, obey Allah and obey the Prophet, and those charged with authority among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Apostle, if you do believe in Allah and the last Day. (*Al-Nisa* :59)

This *ayah* refers to three objects of obedience: Allah, the Prophet, and *uli al-amr* (authority). But it is clear from the *ayah* that those charged with the authority deserve to be obeyed only as long as they remain obedient to Allah and the Prophet (ﷺ):

Ibn Qayyim (d. 751 A.H.) says that the obedience to those charged with authority is not independent but has been made subject to the obedience to the Prophet (ﷺ).

Ibn Jarir al-Tabari quotes Maimun b. Mihrin (d. 117 A.H) as having said: Reference to Allah is reference to His Book; and reference to the Prophet means reference to Muhammad the Apostle during his life-time, and to his Sunnah after his demise.¹⁵

Syed Maududi explains:

Firstly, it is clear from the *ayah* that the Messenger is not included in the *uli al-amr*; he is rather a distinguished identity who occupies a position next to Allah but superior to *uli al-amr*. Secondly, dispute with those in authority is a possibility but that with the Prophet is an impossibility. Thirdly, in a situation of disagreements the final verdict

is vested with Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ). Obviously, if the competent authority was only Allah, it was meaningless to mention the Prophet as the second source to be referred to. When reference to Allah means reference to His Book alone, reference to the Prophet signifies reference to his person during his life-time and to his life-example after that period.¹⁶

- d) It is the dictate of the scruples to accept the leadership of the Prophet without any hitches:
Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and be scrupulous.
(*Al-Mā'idah*, :92)
- e) Obedience to the Prophet is a pre-requisite for true faith:
Obey Allah and His Messenger, if you are really believers.
(*Al-Anfāl*, :1)
- f) It is unbecoming for Muslims to turn away from their obedience to the Prophet.
O you who have attained to faith, obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not turn away from him when you hear him. (*Al-Anfāl*, 8:20)
- g) The only way to strengthen unity among Muslims is firm commitment to Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ)
And obey Allah and His Messenger; and fall into no disputes, lest you lose heart and your power depart; and be patient, for Allah is with those who are patient. (*Al-Anfal* :46)
- h) Obedience to the Prophet (ﷺ) leads one aright.
Say: Obey Allah and Obey the Prophet. If you obey him you will be led aright. (*Al-Nur* :54)
- i) One's good acts will yield fruits only when they are in tune with the principles approved by Allah and the practical examples shown by the Prophet (ﷺ):
O you who have attained to faith! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and do not cause your deeds to become vain.
(*Muhammad* :33)

Criterion for Islamicity

Islamic life is not mere a philosophy but a practical form to be demonstrated in daily life, individual as well as social. A question arises as to which concept and form of life is Islamic and what is aimed at by Islamic life. The Qur'an explains about the purpose and standards of Islamic life.

- a) The ultimate target of Islamic life is to grow close to Allah. To achieve this target one is advised to follow into the footprints of the Prophet (ﷺ):
Say: if you do love Allah, follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. (*Ali-Imran* :31)
- b) Muslims have no other option but to pattern their life on the Prophet's model. You have indeed in the messenger of Allah a beautiful model for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day. (*Al-Ahzab* :21)
- c) Only the Prophet's model can ensure the cultivation of piety and righteousness: That (Mercy) I will ordain for those who are pious, and practice regular charity, and those who believe in our messages - those who follow the Messenger.....(*Al-'Araf*,156-7)

Universality

The Qur'an's message is relevant for the entire mankind cutting across all time-space barriers (*Al-Anam*, :19). So is the case with the verdicts, approvals and prohibitions of the Prophet (ﷺ). They are all universal. This is what the Qur'an itself emphasizes on.

- a) Say: O mankind! I am the Prophet of Allah to you all. (*Al-Araf*:158)
- It may be argued that the mankind mentioned in this *ayah* is the one that existed during the Prophet's life-time. There is no way to confine the humanity addressed by the Prophet to the 7th century. The following Qur'anic statement helps the define and determine the scope of the mankind:

On that account: We ordained the children of Israel that if anyone killed a person... It would be as if he killed the entire humanity. And anyone who saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the entire mankind..... (*Al-Ma'idah* :32)

This divine-ordinance was declared long before the last Prophet's appointment but the entire humanity mentioned goes beyond the time of the statements as the word used is comprehensive. Likewise, *ayah* 7:158 uses the same term, 'the entire mankind' which would most certainly refer to all people right from the Prophet's era until the Last Day of the human world.

b) The Prophet's (ﷺ) teachings carry all-time validity:

We have not sent you (O Muhammad!) but as the mercy for all the worlds. (*Al-Anbiya*, :107)

The Prophet (ﷺ) as the mercy here means the Prophet as the guide because the guidance is the most sublime grace and mercy. As for the possible meaning of the word "worlds" in plural form, Muhammad Asad puts it as all mankind.¹⁷ In general usage "world" is a substitute of civilization. "Islamic world" and western world", for instance, refer to Islamic civilization or community and western region, civilization or people respectively. Thus, the message of the above *ayah* is that the Prophet's teachings are meant for the communities during his own period and the people and culture in the time to come until the end of the life on earth.

Finality of Decision

Prophet's verdicts and judgments are not like other human's decisions, which can be revoked, altered, appealed against, and rejected. The Qur'an makes it clear that the decisions made by the Prophet (ﷺ) are inviolable.

a) Resistance against the Prophet's decision is not allowed:

But nay, by your Lord, they can not attain to faith unless they make you (O Prophet!) the judge in all their disputed matters, and find in their souls no resistance against your decision, but accept them wholeheartedly. (*Al-Nisa*, :65)

According to Ibn Qayyim (d.751 A.H.), this *ayah* communicates three clear messages: 1) Perfection of faith is subject to one's sincere commitment to the Prophet (ﷺ). 2) Disputed matters must be resolved only in the light of the Prophet's decisions, and 3) The Prophet's verdict is final and irrevocable.¹⁸

b) Muslims have no other option but to submit to what the Prophet (ﷺ) says:

It is not for believer, man or woman, to have freedom of choice in matter that has been decided by Allah and His Messenger.

(*Al-Ahzab* :36)

The above *ayah* came down when the Prophet's proposal to Zainab Bt. Jalash, his own cousin, to marry Zaid B. Harithah, his adopted son and freed slave, was turned down by Zainab and her brother who had both withdrawn their rejection after the *ayah* was revealed.¹⁹

Syed Maududi says:

Although this *ayah* was revealed in response to a particular issue, the ruling conveyed therein serves to be fundamental basis for Islamic laws encompassing the entire Islamic scheme of life. According to this principle no Muslim individual, group, institution, court, parliament or state is entitled to have freedom of choice in a matter for which there is already a ruling from Allah and His Apostle. To be Muslim is to voluntarily surrender to Allah and the Prophet (ﷺ). If an individual or a nation claims to be Muslim and also reserves the right to dissent, it is a contradictory approach. No right-thinking person will ever imagine placement of the two opposite approaches together.²⁰

Ultimate Success

It is the end-result of an idea or an act, which refers to the very nature of an idea or an act. Negative outcome speaks negatively of a strategy applied; good result proves the efficacy of a method. Whether the sunnah and *Hadith* of the Prophet (ﷺ) are of any significance is dependent on the outcome of their application into day-to-day life. The Qur'an sheds ample light on the ultimate result of sincerity of commitment to Allah and His Apostle.

- a) To act upon the Prophet's teachings amounts to submission to Allah. He who obeys the Messenger obeys Allah. (*Al-Nisa* :80)
- b) To follow into the Prophet's footprints is to ensure grand and real success. He who obeys Allah and His Messenger will indeed attain great achievement. (*Al-Ahzab* :70)

And those who obey Allah and His Apostle and fear Allah and become God-conscious will be the achievers. (*Al-Nūr* :52)

- c) Obedience to the Prophet (ﷺ) is guaranteed by blissful life. Those who obey Allah and His Messenger will be admitted to the paradise. (*Al-Nūr* :13)
Allah will grant him who obeys Allah and His Apostle entry into gardens of bliss. (*Al-Fatha* :17)

Warning

That when Allah says something, He means it is an established fact. The Qur'an warns of grave consequences of disbelief and rejection of the truth. There are also warnings in the Qur'an to those who rebel against the Prophet (ﷺ). There are many such *ayat* in the Book. Few of them are given here below:

- a) Those who disobey Allah and His Messenger, and transgresses His limits will be consigned to fire..... (*Al-Nisa* :14)
b) If anyone disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong path. (*Al-Ahzāb* :36)
c) One who rebels against Allah and His Apostle for him is hell-fire to abide therein beyond the count of time. (*Al-Jinn* :23)

It seems unwise on the part of those claiming to be followers of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to ignore these clear warnings and continue to subscribe to the idea that the teachings of the Prophet in the form of *sunnah* and *Hadiith* are irrelevant and outdated. The message explicitly conveyed in the above-quoted *ayat* is that Muslims can not afford to avoid the Prophet's guidance.

Major Arguments Suggesting Otherwise

Scholars propounding the idea of invalidity of the Prophet's teachings refer to the Qur'anic *ayat*, e.g., 3:20; 5: 92 & 99; 13:40; 16: 35; 24:54; 29:18; 36:17; 42:48; 64:12 suggesting that the Prophet (ﷺ) had been assigned only one duty of delivering the divine-message in the form of Qur'an. Muhammad Aslam Jairajpuri announces:

And the only duty of the Prophet (ﷺ) was the communication of

the divine - message. The Qur'an articulates: "your duty is but to convey the message. (*Al-Shūra* :48); "If you turn away, the duty of Our messenger is but proclaim the message clearly and openly. (*Al-Taghabūn* :12); your duty is to make the message reach them. It is upon us to call them to account. (*Al-R'ad* :40).²¹

Learned scholar has cleverly picked up the above-quoted portions of certain Qur'anic *ayat* isolating them from the context in which they had been revealed. The addressees of all such places in the Qur'an are the disbelievers, not the faithful. Syed Maududi resolves the confusion:

Ignoring the context of these *ayat* and original purport of the message the author describes here the Prophet's position in such a way as to make the Prophet, God forbid, appear merely a message-bearer or a post-man. If he would read these sentences in the light of the context in which the relevant passages were revealed, he would know that what was said there was not related to the Prophet's followers but to the disbelievers who persisted in their rejection of the Prophet's teachings. It were the latter who were told that the Prophet's duty was to convey the divine message, and after this communication they would not have an excuse that no guide was ever sent to them.²²

The Prophet's duties towards his followers have been elucidated, among others, in *ayāt* 2:129 ; 151; 3:164 and 62:2, according to which the prophet had to communicate the revealed words to his followers, educate them in Islamic scheme of life, and cause them to effect practical change in their thought and behavior.

Logical Arguments

In this part of the discussion some logical arguments will be taken into consideration to see whether the stance taken by anti-*Hadith* movement is tenable.

No Time Frame

It is claimed that the Prophet's explanation of the Qur'an and its enforcement into a full-fledged Islamic civilization were both relevant only to his own time, but they can not be considered valid for all the time. Ghulam Ahmad Parvez replaces

the Prophet (ﷺ) with *markaz-i-millat* (central advisory council of *Ummah*) that would have exclusive right to legislate and determine the detailed scheme of life only on the basis of the Qur'anic fundamentals.

In 1960 justice Muhammad Shafi, a judge in high court, Lahore, Pakistan dealt at length in his verdict of a case with the position of the Prophet's decisions and statements advising Muslims that the only source of law was the Qur'anic and at every period of time principles of the Book could be interpreted differently keeping the Prophet's sunnah and *Hadith* aside.

The above two stances clearly confine the Prophet's authority to his own time, blocking its extension beyond the 7th century A.D. This view controverts the Qur'anic declarations concerning the Prophet's position, which in no wise could be considered time-bound. At nowhere the Qur'an mentions that the life-example of the Prophet is valid only for his own period. It is a universally accepted rule that an appointee is entitled to continue holding his position either until the date specified in the appointment letter or in its absence until he enjoys the confidence of his superior authority. The Qur'an also serves to be the appointment letter to the Prophet (ﷺ). When it says the Prophet is to be obeyed; his decisions are to be accepted wholeheartedly; his life-conduct is the criterion of Islamic life; and deliberate negligence of his teachings will result in the person concerned being punished severely, it does not state the time-limit of this position of the Prophet (ﷺ). Thus, by not, articulating the extent of time Allah has made it clear that the position the Prophet was granted through the Qur'an still holds and will remain in place for all the time to come.²⁵

Right of Explanation

A statement irrespective of its subject matter, background, place, and time requires to be explained by its original speaker for its precise and appropriate understanding. The original speaker's explanation is the only valid explanation. Anyone other than the original speaker in no wise enjoys privilege to create another interpretation running counter to the one provided by the latter. The only reasonable right of other is to elucidate the original statement further in the light of the original explanation. It is also to be ensured here that any extension of the message and

meaning conform to the first interpretation.

What has been stated above is an established rule of human world. The Qur'an was put into the mouth of the Prophet and he was the first to speak it. As the first bearer of the Qur'an the Prophet had, undoubtedly, elaborated every single message of it. And that elaboration of the Qur'an is the only valid elaboration. The difference of time cannot alter its validity. The Prophet's Sunnah and *Hadith* constitute the explanation of the Qur'an. To render the Sunnah and Hadith obsolete and invalid, the Qur'an will have to be replaced with another Book. As long as the Qur'an is the same, its explanation made by the Prophet (ﷺ) should remain valid.

Finality of the Prophethood

It is an unanimously agreed fact that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is the Last Prophet. What does it mean? It signifies that whatever he has delivered to the mankind either in the form of the Qur'an or in the form its explanation i.e. Sunnah and *Hadith* is final. The claim to re-interpret the Qur'an or to replace the Prophet's sayings and doings with new set of regulations amounts to rejection of the Prophet Muhammad's position as the last Prophet and to demand of a new one.

Any abrogation, annulment, revocation, suspension of or alteration in the last Prophet's teachings could be carried out only by a Prophet. Non-prophetic figures do not have any right to claim for themselves what is reserved exclusively for the members of the prophethood, an institution instituted by Allah.

Legislation of a law or an amendment in it could be carried out only by the ruler or the legislative assembly. Only philosophers could be deemed fit to talk on the merits or demerits of a philosophy propounded either by their contemporaries or predecessors. A non-physician can not be allowed to comment on matters related to the medicine. If an individual having nothing to do with the engineering proclaims for himself the right to analyze mechanical formula, he will most certainly be declared insane. Likewise, only Prophet who is always a divinely appointed authority is the appropriate person to retain or supersede the teachings of a fellow-prophet. Individuals who rise and start proposing changes in the Last Prophet's teachings have no entitlement to do so. To enable themselves to replace the

Prophet's rulings they will have to earn the title of the Prophethood first.

Some suggest that the Prophet's teachings related to devotional matters such as *salah*, *zakah*, fasting, *hajj* etc. and a few social matters like marriage, divorce and maintenance etc. should be considered final, but those concerning other socio-political aspects are to be regarded as time-bound hence irrelevant for a time other than the one in which they were promulgated.²⁶

This bifurcation of the Prophet's teachings into universal and temporary is highly outrageous. Neither the Qur'an nor the reason substantiate this idea which seems to have been devised in the face of the difficulty posed by the uncontested final authority of the Prophet (ﷺ). In order to support the concept of half-hearted prophethood four pious caliphs are cited to have undone certain decisions of the Prophet (ﷺ) in their respective periods.

But this is not true. Ibn Qayyim says: "Not even a single case from the life of Abu Bakr al-Siddique, that goes against the Qur'an and Sunnah, (*Nass*) could be quoted."²⁸ A letter sent by the second caliph to one of his judges justice Shurayf clarifies the stand of 'Umar B. al-Khattab:

If you find a provision in the Qur'an decide the matter according to it and do not look towards anything else; but if you do not find in it any guidance related to a case that has been brought to you, resolve it in the light of the Prophet's Sunnah.....²⁹

Ibn Jarir al-Tabari has recorded the first speech of 'Uthman following his election to the caliphate. The opening sentence is:

Behold, I am a follower (of the Prophet's and two caliphs' traditions) and not an inventor. You have three rights over me after I hold fast to the Book of Allah and the sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ).....³⁰

The fourth caliph 'Ali's letter to the general public including apostates and Christians speaks unequivocally of his approach to the Prophet's Sunnah.

I invite you to the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ).³¹

The concept of the finality of the prophethood necessitates the acceptance of all the teachings of Muhammad (ﷺ) even after his physical demise just as during his life-time he was in each and every capacity the Prophet and but the Prophet.

Issue of the Unity of Ummah

Those interested to see the *Sunnah* and *Hadith* either fully or partially invalidated have come up with the idea of a central authority holding the same position as Allah and the Prophet. Ghulam Ahmad Parvez outlines this scheme:

Obedience to the political leadership (*imam*) is the obedience to Allah and the Prophet. Who can say that submission to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq's rulings was not submission to Allah and to the Prophet. The leader is not only obliged to precisely enforce the laws the details of which are in the Qur'an but is also allowed to legislate by laws on the matters whose details have been left undetermined by the Qur'an. In this legislation he is entitled to seek advice from the Islamic community as well as benefit from the rulings of his predecessors.³²

This suggestion betrays lack of appreciation of the divinely appointed authority of the Prophet (ﷺ). It also seems to have ignored the natural consequences of the practical implementation of the said philosophy. According to it every ruler or government in Muslim lands is entitled to enjoy the privilege of being vested with the power of uncontested authority to administer the socio-political and religious-cultural affairs of a nation. Thus every Muslim country across the globe will have its own set of laws governing public and private life of its citizens.

Apart from this a different government in a nation under the banner of different party nomenclature can in no wise be restrained from quashing the so called Islamic laws developed by its predecessor on the pretext that the fundamental principles of the Qur'an were misinterpreted so as to suit the party-manifesto. This situation will not essentially be different from what is being practiced in the today's world, where no two countries are similar in meaning, purpose, form, and application of their laws.

This is not an ideal situation, which Islam cherishes. It believes in the unity of faith, action, and realization. Any suggestion or attempt to cause disunity should be deemed as undesirable. The only viable way to bring in and maintain unity in the Muslim ummah, despite differences of geographical boundaries, is to accept the all-time sanctity of the Prophet's authority in its comprehensive terms.

The present directionless situation in the Muslim community is blamed on its adherence to "outdated" rulings of the Prophet (ﷺ). It is, therefore suggested that the present situation may be reformed only by freeing Muslims from their subservience to the Prophet (ﷺ).

This is not the factual description of the existing states of the ummah. With an exception of a few nations, political authorities of most of the Muslim countries treat both the Qur'an as well as its prophetic application as taboo, and consider any individual who sincerely rises to advise the government to base the system on the two sacred sources of Islam *persona non grata*. As a matter of fact, wherever there is a sincere adherence to the Prophet's teachings in life, there is a sense of unity and fraternity. Undoubtedly, Muslims today have split upto into many entities that are always at daggers drawn against one another, but it is not Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) that could be held responsible for this problem. The chief factor leading to this division is rather its negligence on the part of Muslim individuals and societies. This is exactly what the Prophet had (ﷺ) already explained to his people.

I am leaving among you two sources - the Book of Allah and Sunnah of His Prophet - which, if you hold fast to them, will never let you go astray.³³

Items of Practical Significance

The Qur'an is the Book of life. It enshrines injunctions to be acted by its adherents. There are devotional rites to be observed: *salah, zakah, fasting, hajj* etc., social obligations to be accomplished: marriage, divorce, parents-children relationship, neighbourly dealings etc., political principles to be incorporated into legislation and assertion of authority: sovereignty of Allah, justice etc., economic provisions to be adhered to: ownership of Allah, honesty, equitability etc.

We are exhorted to give practical effect to these Qur'anic decrees which if unimplemented will remain mere theories. But the Qur'an, save one or two matters, does not provide necessary details of its injunctions for practical purpose. Shah Shahadullah Farada elucidates the point:

The special grace shown to the believers in the final message of Allah

to mankind is that Allah has not only sent an authoritative Book in which the principles of faith and practice are laid down, but in order to make the "Straight path" more clearly distinguished and easier to travel, has also sent a living example to show the perfect expression of these principles in human life; in other words, Allah has granted us that special grace of sending both the principles and their application. The Qur'an is the verbal message, and the Prophet is the human message - the projection of the verbal message into the sphere of human behaviors. Allah has stated that those who look forward to meeting Him and to the Last Day, and who remember him much, will certainly accept this human message.³⁴

Rashad Khalifah, who rejects the entire anthology of *Sunnah* and *Hadith* including the highly authentic ones as invention and fabrication, has painstakingly created a novel idea about the devotional matters. He says:

The Qur'an, however, teaches that Abraham is the founder (of Islam), and that all religious practices, i.e. *salah*, *zakah*, fasting and *hajj* (pilgrimage), were revealed through Abraham, then transmitted to us generation after generation.³⁵

This statement seeks to derive the message home that *salah*, *zakah*, fasting, and *hajj* etc. have nothing to do with the last Prophet's *Sunnah* but have come down to the humanity from Ibrahim (*alaihissalam*), who, according to Rashad kalifah, was the originator of Islam. Neither the Qur'an nor the Prophet (ﷺ) have ever claimed that these religious practices were first time started by the last Prophet (ﷺ) but historically, on the eve of the prophet Muhammad's appointment as the Prophet there were no traces of any traditions established by the Hebrew patriarch, either among the Jews or the Arabs who had, undoubtedly maintained centuries-old practices of *hajj* but not in its original and pure form. It is the last Prophet who is reliably believed to have re-introduced the uncorrupted form and method of long forgotten rites of worship and devotion. The presently available system of *salah* can in no wise be traced back beyond the prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) own practices.

As has been quoted earlier, Ghulam Ahmad Parvez is of the view that

everything unspecified by the Qur'an should be left at the discretion of an authority of the time to decide the nature, form, manner, and method of its application. Devotional matters are no exception to this formula. What could, then, happen to the Islamic system of worship is anybody's guess.

The question here is not only of a detailed prescription of the Qur'anic edicts but also of their application. It is not enough to prescribe a system, as it is also equally important to develop a mechanism to enforce it on the ground. If a system is developed a fresh with no divine sanction behind it, no government, no organization or central council can ever succeed in its sincere implementation. The driving force behind the application of the Islamic system of life as exhorted by the Qur'an and prescribed by the Sunnah and *Hadith* is not merely its elaborative form but people's deep love, and true respect of and sincere belief in the Prophet's person and his teachings as well.

Isolation of the Qur'anic injunctions meant to be practised in human life from the Prophet's life example will most certainly render them spiritless like spent cartridges.

Conclusion

To conclude the discussion two statements made by the two towering personalities in the Muslim world of the time - Syed Maududi and Muhammad Asad - are being quoted here below:

Syed Maududi explains how important is the life model of the Prophet (ﷺ) for the believers:

Allah adopted another method, that is, he selected a human being as the last Prophet and caused him to initiate and accomplish a movement of change and reformation, in which the main actor was not the Book but the living man who had been appointed to lead the movement. Under His supervision and guidance Allah helped that person to form and enforce a comprehensive system of thought and virtuous life, of culture and civilization, of law and order, of politics and economy in order to produce an exemplary model of permanent nature for the entire humanity which if interested in its prosperity should pattern its

system of life on that very model. Any defect in the model would certainly result in the guidance to the right path being defective. Allah, therefore, got that prototype built up under His own direction; He not only granted its architect the design of the architecture but also explained to him everything related to it; He not only taught him the necessary wisdom of the task but also supervised him in his role to develop every part of the structure; He guided him in his work not only through explicit revelation (*wahy jali*) but also through implicit inspiration (*wahy khafi*); He immediately corrected him if there occurred even a slightest mistake in his setting of a brick so as not to allow even the slightest flaw to appear in the edifice meant to serve as the original model for the mankind.

Muhammad Asad does not find any wisdom behind and justification for keeping the Sunnah away from Muslims' life as he believes that nothing will remain Islamic without the practical guidance given by the Prophet (ﷺ):

Observance of the Sunnah is synonymous with the Islamic existence and progress. Neglect of the Sunnah is synonymous with the decomposition and decay of Islam. The Sunnah was the iron-frame work of the house of Islam; and if you remove the frame work from the building, can you be surprised if it breaks down like a house of cards?

Thus, without Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) authority, which is today represented by authentic *Hadith* and *Sunnah* an Islamic life, at both individual and social level, is inconceivable, for the Qur'an and Sunnah are both complementary to and inseparable from each other.

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