**The Way of the Prophet**

A SELECTION OF HADITH

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Preface

The Greatness of the Prophet's Way

Allah's bounties and favors upon humankind are countless and unending; but, His greatest blessing has been His Guidance to enable humanity to understand His Reality, to recognize their Creator and the scheme of things He has designed for them, including the role and place of the humans within it. This Guidance, among other things, spells out the ideals and objectives of human life and the values, norms and rules of conduct that can establish justice ('adl) in human affairs and lead to the good life here and success and salvation in the Hereafter (Qur'an 6: 73; 29: 44).

The creation of the heavens, the earth and all that lies in between is a basic premise on which the entire Islamic vision of life rests. This is how a leading Muslim thinker expounds this foundational principle:

It has been asserted again and again in the Qur'an that God created the heavens and the earth "in Truth". This covers a wide range of meanings:

First, that the heavens and the earth have not been created just for the fun of it. This state of existence is not a theatrical farce. This world is not a child's toy with which to amuse oneself as long as one wishes before crushing it to bits and throwing it away. Creation is rather an act of great seriousness. A great objective motivates it, and a wise and benevolent purpose underlies it. Hence, after the lapse THE WAY OF THE PROPHET

of a certain stage it is necessary for the Creator to take full account of the work that has been done and to use those results as the basis for the next stage.

Second, it means that God has created this entire system of the universe on solid foundations of Truth. The whole of the universe is based on Justice, Wisdom and Truth. Hence, there is no scope in the system for falsehood to take root and prosper. The phenomenon of the prosperity of falsehood which we observe is to be ascribed to the will of God Who grants the followers of falsehood the opportunity, if they so wish, to expend their efforts in promoting unrighteousness, injustice and untruth. In the end, however, the earth will throw up all the seeds of untruth that have been sown, and, in the final reckoning, every follower of falsehood will see that the efforts he devoted to cultivating and watering this pernicious tree have all gone to waste.

Third, it means that God has founded the universe on the basis of right, and it is on account of being its Creator that He governs it. His Command in the Universe is supreme since He alone has the right to govern it, the Universe being nothing but His creation. No one else has any right to enforce his will.'

The need and provision of hidayah is a logical requirement of the creation of the universe in Truth and the endowment of humans with free will and the opportunity to choose between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, and justice and oppression.

The Qur'anic paradigm is very clear.

Men and women, as Allah's vicegerents, were endowed with intellect and with knowledge, both the 'names of all things', along with the capacity to differentiate and choose between good and evil. Inculcated within every human being is the potential for both virtue and God-consciousness (taqwā) and evil and disobedience (fujür). The test lies in whether we voluntarily and

1. Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdi, Towards Understanding the Qur'an (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1989), Vol. II, pp. 243-44, with slight revisions.

PREFACE

Consciously opt for the guidance (hidayah) that leads to success in life. Many verses of the Qur'an illuminate different aspects of this paradigm (2: 31; 64: 3; 87: 1-3; 91: 7-10; 95: 4). The challenging assignment of stewardship and vicegerency (istikhlaf) on the earth was combined with the light of Divine guidance (hidayah), clearly marking out the road to success and salvation (Sürah al- Baqarah 2: 38-39).

The Islamic paradigm of guidance is founded on three pillars:

a. First, creation of the universe and all that is in it, is done by the Creator on the basis of Truth, and, as an integral part of that, the creation of human beings in the best of molds, endowing them with the intellect and capacity to acquire knowledge using reason and resorting to imagination, innovation, experimentation, discretion and wisdom (Hikmah).

b. Divine revelation (wahy) in the form of the Book (al-Kitāb) revealed through Allah's prophets, and final revelation in its complete form through the last Prophet Muhammad in the form of the Noble Qur'an, preserved in its original form as the Word of God, to serve as the source of guidance for all times and places.

C. The life-example (uswah) of the Prophet, a human being selected (istifa) and guided by Allah ὲ, so as to provide the Model for all human beings in all aspects of their lives.

The human intellect is the starting point for benefiting from Divine guidance through use of the faculties to learn, think, reflect, discuss, discern, judge and resolve and then to act righteously. All those endowed with intellect have the responsibility to make this effort and to pursue the right path (Qur'an 3: 190-191; 10: 5-6; 51: 20-21). Only the mentally-impaired are deemed to be exempted from this and are thus excused.

The role of intellect in discovering, understanding and responding to Allah's guidance has been described by the Qur'an

as an integral part of this process. In Sürah al-Jathiyah, the dis- course begins with:

حمن تنزيل الكِتَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ

Hã. Mim. This Book is a revelation from the Most Mighty, the Most Wise. (Sürah al-Jathiyah 45: 1-2)

Then the people are invited to reflect on the signs of Allah around them:

إِنَّ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا يَاتِ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَفِي خَلْقِكُمْ وَمَا يَبُثُ مِن دَابَّةٍ وَايَتٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ وَاخْتِلَافِ الَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَمَا أَنزَلَ اللهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِن رِزْقِ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَاحِ وَآيَاتُ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

Behold, for those who believe there are [myriad] signs in the heavens and the earth and in your own creation; and in the animals which He spreads out over the earth and in the succession of night and day, and in the provision that Allah sends down from the sky wherewith He gives life to the earth after it had been lifeless, and in the change of the winds: [in all these] there are signs for people who use reason. (Sürah al-Jathiyah 45: 3-5)

Finally they are treated to a kind of shock therapy by asking them why they do not use their intellect to see the Reality:

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ تَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَ اللَّهِ وَمَا يَتِهِ يُؤْمِنُونَ

These are Allah's Signs that we rehearse to you in Truth. In what kind of discourse after Allah and His Signs will they, then, believe? (Sūrah al- Jathiyah 45: 6)

It is through intellect and understanding that the Qur'an brings humankind to the Divine revelation (10: 24; 21: 10). The centerpiece of this guidance is the Qur'an, the unadulterated Word of God, preserved in its fullness. This is the principal source of Divine guidance (Qur'an 2: 1-2; 3: 138; 10: 57; 17: 9-10).

The Qur'an has not been revealed as an abstraction. It has been revealed through Archangel Jibril to the Prophet

Muhammad to be communicated to the whole of mankind. It is on the Prophet's testimony that we believe in it as the Revealed Word of God. It is he who was assigned to convey it to mankind as it was revealed to him and also to explain it, live by it, purify the believers through it, translate it into the lives of people and society, organize and lead a movement in history to transform individuals and communities to become the living symbols of this guidance and the upholders of this Divine message for mankind for all eternity.

The role of the Prophet is pivotal in this process of guidance. The Qur'an is the ultimate guide and the source of light; the Prophet Muhammad is the model, the authentic interpreter and teacher of the Book and a living embodiment of the Qur'anic vision of life and society. It is the life-example of the Prophet Muhammad, a human being like all humans, except that he received Divine revelation and was guided by Allah to be the perfect and noble model (uswah hasanah) for all humanity. The Mother of the Believers 'A'ishah is reported to have said that he was the embodiment of the Qur'an. This is what the Sunnah is.

The Qur'an clearly spells out the status, authority and role of the Prophet so as to illumine the entire process of Divine guidance:

يأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمُ الرَّسُولُ بِالْحَقِّ مِن رَّبِّكُمْ فَتَامِنُوا خَيْرًا لَّكُمْ وَإِن تَكْفُرُوا فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

O People! Now that the Messenger has come to you bearing the Truth from your Lord, believe in him, it will be good for you. If you reject, know well that to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth.

Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise. (Sürah al-Nisa' 4: 170)

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ こ وَإِن كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ يَومَ اخَرِينَ مِنْهُمْ لَمَّا يَلْحَقُوا بِهِمْ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

He it is Who has sent to the gentiles a Messenger from among themselves, one who rehearses to them His verses, purifies their lives, and imparts to them the [meanings of the] Book and the Wisdom although before that

They were in utter error; and [He has also] sent him to those others who have not yet joined them. He is the Most Mighty, the Most Wise. (Sarah al-Jumu'ah 62: 2-3)

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ ....

Indeed we sent Our Messengers with Clear Signs, and send down with them the Books and the Balance that people may uphold justice. (Sūrah al-Hadid 57: 25)

يَتأَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَدَاعِيَا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا

O Prophet! We have sent you forth as a Witness, a Bearer of good tidings, and a Warner, as one who calls people to Allah by His leave, and as an Upright Shining Lamp. (Sürah al-Ahzab 33: 45-46)

The life of the Prophet is a noble example, a perfect model, a beautiful and balanced life story, a framework for human conduct and a standard for emulation:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَى خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

And [O Prophet] you are certainly on the most exalted standard of moral excellence. (Sürah al-Qalam 68: 4)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ )

We have sent you [Muhammad] forth as nothing but a mercy to people of the whole world. (Sürah al-Anbiya' 21: 107)

And that is why he is the model and guide for all and for all times to come:

لقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

Surely there was a good example for you in the Messenger of Allah, for all those who look forward to Allah and the Last Day and remember Allah much. (Sürah al-Ahzab 33: 21)

The prescription and the criterion for success here and hereafter consists in (a) belief in Allah and His Prophet%, and (b) a life-long effort to follow and obey them and to strive hard to fulfill the mission and the assignment given to human beings as Allah's vicegerents on the earth (Sūrah al-Nisa' 4: 13-14).

Those who follow Allah and His Messenger will be in the best of company in the life to come.

وَمَن يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُوْلَبِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ والصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أَوْلَبِكَ رَفِيقًا ذَلِكَ الْفَضْلُ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ عَلِيمًا

He who obeys Allah and the Messenger - such shall be with those whom Allah has favored the Prophets, those steadfast in truthfulness, the martyrs, and the righteous. How excellent will they be for companionship? That is a bounty from Allah, and Allah suffices to know the truth. (Sürah al-Nisa' 4: 69-70)

The Prophet Muhammad is the only authentic and authorized representative of Allah for all ages. In the Islamic scheme of authority no one else other than the Prophet Muhammad enjoys the power to speak in the name of Allah stating what Allah 5 wants from the believers. Everyone, howsoever high or low, is subject to the guidance and value framework laid down by Allah and His Prophet Muhammad. This establishes the principle of equality of all before the law. This discredits the concept of theocracy wherein a certain class of men of religion is given the power to speak in the name of God. The principle of the finality of Prophet Hood in the person of Muhammad is the greatest guarantor of human dignity and equality.

As Muhammad is the only intermediary by dint of his being Allah's Messenger, it is important to clearly understand the foundations of the relationship believers have with him. The five most important of these are as follows:

1. Faith in the Prophet

Faith (iman) in the Prophet Muhammad as Allah's Prophet and Messenger. To accept all that he received from Allah as

Allah's revelation i.e. the Book, and to believe in all the articles of faith as spelled out by Allah and His Prophet : belief in Allah, His angels, His Books, His prophets, the Day of Judgment, and life after death.

Faith in Muhammad is much more than a formal acknowledgement of his Prophet hood as Allah's Messenger. It involves an unwavering belief in its truthfulness, an unshakable trust in his integrity and an unflinching commitment to follow in his footsteps in order to seek Allah's pleasure, success in this life and salvation in the life-to-come. It is to have a faith of conviction, confidence and understanding, both in one's person and in the path he has shown. This requirement to hold fast to him was not meant solely for his Companions who had the honor of seeing him, but is also for those who came later. Holding fast to him is the everlasting path of success. His pleasure with us, his teachings and his example are the gateway to Allah's good pleasure. This faith is characterized by a sense of complete satisfaction of mind, heart and soul with Allah, His Prophet and the path spelled out by them. This has been summed up by the Prophet in these words:

ذَاقَ طُعْمَ الإِيمَانِ مَنْ رَضِيَ بِاللهِ رَبَّا وَبِالْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا وَبِمُحَمَّدٍ رَسُولاً. صحيح مسلم. كتاب الإيمان، ٤٩

He has tasted the real flavor of faith who is content with Allah as the Lord, with Islam as the Way of Life and with Muhammad as Prophet and Guide. Muslim, Book of Faith, Hadith no. 49.

2. The Prophet as Guide

The second foundation is to accept the Prophet Muhammad as the guide, the model, the lawgiver under Allah's authority, the ultimate arbiter in all matters amongst the Muslims for all times to come. He alone can speak on behalf of Allah and for that purpose his word and conduct are protected under Allah's grace.

قل إنما أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ يُوحَى إِلَى أَنَا إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ فَمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا

Say [O Muhammad]: I am no more than a human being like you; one to whom Revelation is made: Your Lord is the One and Only God! Hence whoever looks forward to meet his Lord, let him do righteous works, and let him associate none with the worship of his Lord. (Sürah al-Kahf 18: 110)

The authority and the functions of the Prophet are clearly stated in the Qur'an as under:

الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيُّ الْأُتِي الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِندَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَنَةِ وَالْإِنجِيلِ يَأْمُرُهُم بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ فَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزْرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ مَعَهُ أَوْلَبِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

[Today this Mercy is for those who follow the ummi Prophet, whom they find mentioned in the Torah, and the Gospel that they have. He enjoins upon them what is good and forbids them what is evil. He makes the clean things lawful to them and prohibits all corrupt things and removes from them their burdens and the shackles that were upon them. So those who believe in him and assist him, and succor him and follow the Light which has been sent down with him, it is they who shall prosper. (Sürah al-A'raf 7: 157)

Numerous verses of the Qur'an establish the Prophets the final authority in all matters of the Muslims (4: 64-65; 53: 1-4; 59: 8).

3. Love of the Prophet

Accepting the authority of the Prophet is not merely a legalistic or formal relationship. It is an intensely personal, spiritual and reverential relationship rooted in faith, love and reverence. This brings us to the third foundation of this relationship - that of love, trust, reverence and devotion. This is a unique dimension of the relationship between the Muslims and the Prophet who is their greatest benefactor and a mercy unto mankind. His own feelings towards the believers set the tone for this profoundly personal relationship.

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُم بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

There has come to you a Messenger from Allah from among yourselves, who is distressed by the losses you sustain, who is ardently desirous of your welfare and is tender and merciful to those that believe. (Sürah al- Tawbah 9: 128)

Love for him and preferring him to everyone else is a cardinal virtue and a natural dimension of this relationship (Qur'an 9: 24; 33: 6). As the Prophet has said:

لَا يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّى أَكُونَ أَحَبَّ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ وَلَدِهِ وَوَالِدِهِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ. صحيح مسلم، كتاب الإيمان، ٦٣

No one can be a true believer unless I am closer and dearer to him than his children, parents and all other persons. Muslim, Book of Faith, Hadith no. 63.

In Makkah and Madīnah, during the life of the Prophet, one could see, feel and breathe this bond of love and affection between the Prophet and his Companions each loving the other. This bond was not specific to the lifetime of the Prophet, but integral to the sum and substance of imān and represents an eternal feature of the Islamic ethos. The Companions valued his pleasure much more than their own, would be hurt by what hurt him and preferred what he preferred. They would gladly sacrifice their wealth, even their lives, to protect him and fulfil his commands and wishes. This relationship was much more intense than simple kinship as it was spiritual, emotional and ideological. It also indicated their commitment to him: to his teachings, to his message and to his mission. His personality remains pivotal to the lives of Muslims, and the fruits of this relationship can be seen in the entire lifestyles of the faithful

And their efforts to dedicate themselves scrupulously to the

Fulfilment of his mission by following in his footsteps.

So following the Prophet is a logical consequence of love for Allah. The counterpart of this equation and the greatest prize that can be thought of and yearned for is that the believers who follow the Prophet ﷺ are loved by Allah.

قُلْ إِن كُنتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

[O Messenger], tell people: "If you indeed love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you and will forgive you your sins, Allah is all-Forgiving, All-Compassionate. (Sürah Al 'Imran 3: 31)

It is this intense personal relationship of love and reverence for Allah and His Prophet that characterizes the Muslim psyche. That is why the Prophet Muhammad is central to the life of Muslims men and women, young and old, individuals and communities.

4. Obedience of the Prophet

This brings us to the fourth foundation of the Muslims' relation- ship with the Prophet and that is obedience (ta'ah). It is a logical demand of all the above three foundations of faith, authority and love. That is why the test of a Muslim's acceptance of the Prophetic authority with trust and love, lies in following the letter and spirit of his instructions (Qur'an 3: 132; 24: 52; 33: 71), and obedience to the Prophet has been proclaimed to be synonymous with the obedience of Allah (Sürah al-Nisa' 4: 80). The test of iman, loyalty and authority and love of the Prophet lies in obeying his directives and commands.

5. Emulation of the Prophet

This obedience to Allah and His Prophet has been the hallmark of Muslim life and identity. However, obedience relates primarily to following Divine laws and commands and the Prophet's instructions and directives. But the Islamic paradigm of relationship with Allah and His Prophet has another unique dimension, or something that goes beyond obedience. It is itțibā or imitation and emulation of the life-example of the Prophet, or seeking to come into conformity with the Prophetic ideal. This makes the role of the Prophet Cardinal to this process of

Divine Guidance transforming the lives of men, women and communities through the Way set by the Prophet. That brings us to the fifth foundation, which completes the process that imparts to the life of Muslims its distinct hue and color.

It is important to understand this subtle difference between ta'ah (obedience) and ittibā' (emulation). Obedience (tā'ah) is in respect of laws, instructions and rules of conduct. But the relationship with the Prophet goes beyond obedience: it is emula- tion of his model, casting one's life in the moulid or life-pattern set by the Prophet. This calls for something more than ta'ah. It is ittiba' or the enthusiastic following of his personal example, emulating his conduct and behavior. Allah's commands are to be obeyed; the Qur'anic edicts are to be followed, but it is only the life-example of the Prophet that can be emulated. This is the process through which one strives to pattern one's life and conduct to the life-example (uswah) of the Prophet

The Companions of the Prophet not only obeyed his commands and instructions, they also emulated his life and behavior, his mode and manner and even the very style of everything he did from worship to governance in its full measure. They did not stop at following what he commanded and avoiding what he forbade. They lovingly and cheerily observed each and every one of his acts, assimilating every fine detail of his behavior and manners into their own lives. They strived hard to refashion their own lives in complete harmony with his.

Allah's love for the believers is the result not merely of their love of Allah and obedience (tā'ah) to Allah and His Prophet but also emulation (ittiba') of the Prophet, casting themselves in the life-pattern of the Prophet (Sürah Al Imran 3: 31).

2. For a very candid discussion on ta'ah and ittibā', see Mawlānā Amin Ahsan Işlāhī, Tazkiyyah Nafs (Urdu), Pakistan, 5th edition, 2008, pp. 113-123.

These are the five foundations upon which the relationship of the Muslim with the Prophet of Allah rests. That is why his Way (Sunnah) is central to the lives of Muslims, for each individual as well as to the Ummah as community and nation. The Sunnah fashions their identity, providing the common elements in the lives and behavior of the Muslims regardless of whenever or wherever they may be.

Thus the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the Message and the Messenger are inseparable. That is why the Sunnah gives the life of a Muslim its real identity and direction. It is a spiritual phenomenon based on faith and love, but it is also a sociological process that imparts unity, homogeneity and commonality to the lives of Muslims individually and collectively, in every place and in every period from the days of the Prophet to the end of days. It is adherence to the Sunnah that is the most powerful and solidifying force in the Muslim's life, character and identity. That makes the Sunnah not just a norm, but a living reality that has ensured a remarkable degree of continuity and solidarity in Muslim life, something that is unparalleled in the history of human societies and civilizations. With rites and rituals from birth to death, personal conduct to social behavior, how to greet and meet, principles and norms of family life, social conduct, economic dealings and dynamics of governance, every sphere of life is illumined with the light of the Sunnah.

The Sunnah constitutes the everlasting framework for Muslim life and behavior; it is the sheet-anchor and mainstay of Islam and Muslim life. This was guaranteed by the command of Islam: عَلَيْكُمْ بِسُتَّتِي )You must follow my Sunnah (Way)) and مَنْ رَغِبَ عَنْ سُنَّتِي فِلَيْسَ مِنِّي )Whoever detests my Sunnah does not belong to me (i.e. among my followers or my community)). He is also reported to have said:

تَرَكْتُ فِيكُمْ أَمْرَيْنِ لَنْ تَضِلُّوا مَا تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا: كِتَابَ الله وَسُنَّتَ رَسُوْلِهِ. موطأ مالك، كتاب الجامع، ١٣٩٥

I am leaving behind with you two things. You will never go astray if you firmly adhere to them: the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger. Muwatta' Imam Malik, Book of the Congregation, Hadith no. 1395.

The Qur'an is the paramount source of guidance; the Sunnah is the application of that guidance to all aspects of individual and collective life. It is the key to understanding the Qur'anic guidance and the process through which it is translated into reality in our lives.

The Sunnah is the most authentic explanation and elaboration of the Word of God. As the Prophet was the living example of Divine guidance, his Sunnah shows us how to live in accordance with the Divine command. The Sunnah makes the hidayah revealed in the Book easy to understand, follow, and put into practice.

The Qur'an and the Sunnah represent two sides of the same coin; they are inseparable. That is the reason why the Qur'an says:

مَّن يُطِعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اله ...

He who obeys the Messenger thereby obeys Allah (Sürah al-Nisa' 4: 80).

And the Prophet reiterates the same when he says:

مَنْ أَطَاعَنِي فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللهَ وَمَنْ عَصَانِي فَقَدْ عَصَى الله البخاري، كتاب الأحكام، ٦٦٠٤

Whoever obeys me obeys Allah and whoever disobeys me disobeys Allah. Bukhari, Book of Laws, Hadith no. 6604.

The Sunnah is not only the unifying force of the Muslims, but it also defines, highlights and operationalizes the nature of spirituality in Islam which permeates every aspect of the worldly life and relations over and above the formal acts of worship.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr brings this into sharp focus:

The sunnah is central to all aspects of Islamic spirituality, for it is through the emulation of the sunnah of the Prophet that the Muslim is able to gain certain of the virtues which are possessed in their fullness by the Prophet. The Muslims see the Prophet through his sunnah - how he acted, spoke, walked, ate, judged, loved and worshipped. The sunnah is, therefore, in a sense the continuation of the life of the Prophet for later generations.

A modern scholar of Islam steeped in the mystical tradition describes the importance of the Sunnah in the following words:

It is inconceivable that these virtues (of the sunnah) could have been practiced through the centuries down to our time if the founder of Islam had not personified them in the highest degree; it is also inconceivable that they should have been borrowed from elsewhere and one cannot imagine from where since their conditioning and their style are specifically Islamic. For Muslims the moral and spiritual worth of the Prophet is not an abstraction or a supposition; it is a lived reality and it is precisely this which proves its authenticity retrospectively.+

Annemarie Schimmel, a keen observer of the Islamic ethos, regards imitation Muhammadi, an imitation of the Prophet's actions and activity, as the principal force that has shaped Muslim identity:

But it was through this imitation of Muhammad's actions as transmitted through the Hadith, that Islamic life assumed a unique uniformity in social behavior, a fact that has always impressed visitors of all parts of the Muslim world. [...] It is this ideal of the imitation Muhammad that has provided Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia with such a

3. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'Sunnah and Hadith' in Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), Islamic Spirituality (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997), 2 vols., Vol. 1, pp. 97-110, quotation at p. 98.

4. Frithjof Schuon, Islam and the Perennial Philosophy, trans. by J.P. Hobson (London: Al-Tajir World of Islam Trust, 1976), p. 29.

Uniformity of action: wherever one may be, one knows how to behave when entering a house, which formulas of greeting to employ, what to avoid in good company, how to eat, and how to travel. For centuries Muslim children have been brought up in these ways.s

Two more aspects of the Sunnah deserve to be mentioned. The first is that it covers all aspects of human life, from faith and worship to individual and collective life, from personal hygiene to social manners and mores, from individual piety to public morality, from family relations to economic and political dealings, from the depths of spiritual experience to the length and breadth of socio-economic life and the problems of good governance. The Sunnah provides guidance for all these dimensions of life and imparts to them a unity of purpose and vision. It is through the instrumentality of the Sunnah that all aspects of life are welded together into a comprehensive, holistic, integrated and harmonious Weltanschauung.

The other historic contribution of the Sunnah relates to its role in bringing about a complete reconciliation between the moral and the material, the spiritual and the mundane sides of life. Prayer and progress no longer represent different worlds: they are integrated into an organic whole. Devotional and spiritual matters are fully taken care of and the questions of daily life and social conduct have been permeated with a moral and spiritual ideal.

The Prophet has bequeathed a model that treats life as a compound entity, a sum total of moral, spiritual, practical, individual, social, political and cultural manifestations. Life is not divided into the sacred and the secular, that-worldly and this-worldly, the spiritual and the mundane. The Sunnah shows how this integrated model of life can be actualized in both individual and collective behavior. This is not to assert that

5. Annemarie Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 32, 55.

Life is free from tensions, lapses and disappointments; these are indeed part of the human existence. The Sunnah shows how these human situations are to be faced with faith, fortitude and fraternal support and cooperation. The Sunnah helps us to engage in a process of interaction between our ideals and reality to discern the ways and means that can represent a plausible blend of the two. The Sunnah is, therefore, a norm, a process, and a methodology, all rolled into one, and herein lies the historical dynamic that the Sunnah has played in Muslim life and history. That is why the Sunnah, in the words of Muhammad Asad, constitutes 'the iron-framework of the House of Islam' and that 'to follow him all he commanded is to follow Islam; to discard his Sunnah is to discard the reality of Islam."

It is this effort to follow the Prophet and to bring one's life and behavior into consonance with his life and behavior that makes a Muslim's whole life a conscious, disciplined and meaningful exercise to pursue what is right and just and to avoid what is wrong and unjust.

Every saying (qawl), action ('amal) or actions that had his tacit approval (taqrir) is a Sunnah and every Sunnah is a gem of virtue and piety. It radiates light that can illuminate our whole lives. But there is yet another very important dimension that must not be ignored. It is the totality of the life-model of the Prophet in which all the Sunan (plural of Sunnah) taken together go to make up what may be described as the grand Sunnah i.e. his role as dā'iyah ilā Allah, one who calls people to the path of their Creator, or namely, the totality of his mission to imbibe the Divine message, convey it to others, live by it and strive to establish it in its entirety (iqamat al-Din or establishing the Islamic order). This grand Sunnah begins from the moment he received the Divine Call in Hira' and shared it with his wife, the Mother of the Believers, Sayyidah Khadijah and his nearest relatives and friends. His efforts, throughout the Makkan and the Madīnan periods until he breathed his last, centered round

6. Muhammad Asad, Islam at the Crossroads (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1993 [1934]), pp. 82, 97.

This message (da'wah). He lived, he strived, and suffered for only one purpose: witness (shahadah) of Truth and establishment of the Din in all areas of human existence.

If all of his Sunan are taken together, they go to make a beautiful mosaic, with a clear pattern and design. It is this struggle for sharing and establishing Din that constitutes his grand Sunnah. It is this prophetic mission for which he was raised by Allah and for which he strived all his life. It was a historic mission that he fulfilled; it is this mission that he has bequeathed to the Ummah, and to humanity at large, as our mission and destiny. Iqbal beautifully identifies this defining role of the Prophet in his Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam. Reflecting on the experience of the historic event of the Mi'raj (Ascension) in the Prophet's life, Iqbal writes:

'Muhammad of Arabia ascended the highest heaven and returned. I swear by God that if I had reached that point, I should have never returned.' These are the words of a great Muslim saint, 'Abdul Quddus of Gangoh. In the whole range of Sufi literature it will probably be difficult to find words which, in a single sentence, disclose such an acute perception of the psychological difference between the prophetic and the mystic types of consciousness. The mystic does not wish to return from the repose of 'unitarian experience', and even when he does return, as he must, his return does not mean much for mankind at large. The prophet's return is creative. He returns to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals. For the mystic the repose of 'unitary experience' is something final; for the prophet it is the awakening, within him, of world-shaking psychological forces, calculated to completely transform the human world. The desire to see his religious experience transformed into a living world- force is supreme in the prophet."

7. Muhammad Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Lahore:

Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1977, p. 124.

This missionary effort, spread over the twenty-three years of his prophetic ministry, directed towards sharing the truth, bearing witness to it and engaging in a ceaseless effort to transform the world constitutes the grand Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, the final Messenger and the Seal of the Prophets. All of his sayings and actions taken in their entirety were directed towards sharing the Divine message with humanity. He spared no individual and collective effort to transform the human condition so as to bring it into harmony with the Divine Will. He strived night and day to infuse the lives of the people with the light that has been bestowed upon him. He spent every effort to produce a new people, a new society and a new history so as to fulfil the task assigned to him as the Prophet of Allah. While we must make every effort to learn, understand and live in accord with each and every Sunnah of the Prophet, we must be equally mindful of pursuing the grand Sunnah of the Prophet, in order to continue the Prophetic mission that was the be-all and end-all of his life and effort. The Qur'an obligates Muslims, individually and collectively, to bear witness to the Truth before humanity, just as the Prophet was a witness unto them:

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا ....

And it is thus that We appointed you to be the community of the middle way so that you might be witnesses to all mankind as the Messenger was made to be a witness to you. (Sürah al-Baqarah 2: 143)

८ وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ هُوَ اجْتَبَدَكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الَّذِينِ مِنْ حَرَجٌ مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هُوَ سَمَّنكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِن قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَوَةَ وَاتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَنَكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ

You strive in the cause of Allah in a manner worthy of that striving. He has chosen you for His task), and He has not laid upon you any hardship in religion. Keep to the faith of your father Abraham. Allah named you Muslims earlier and even in this [Book] that the Messenger may be a witness over you, and that you may be witnesses over all mankind.

So establish Prayer, and pay Zakāt, and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protector. What an excellent Protector; what an excellent Helper! (Sürah

al-Hajj 22: 78)

The Way of the Prophet is the translation of Intikhab-e-Hadith, a collection of the sayings of the Prophet compiled in 1956 by the late Mawlānā 'Abd al-Ghaffar Hasan, who was then head of the training department of the Jama'at-i-Islāmī Pakistan.

The respected Mawlānā was a key resource person in the training programmers of the Islamic Movement in the 1950s.

This collection grew out of the teaching sessions in Hadith that Mawlānā 'Abd al-Ghaffar Hasan used to conduct on a regular basis. In my student days from 1950 to 1956, I had the good fortune of learning at his feet most of the Ahadith contained in this collection. He used to live with us during these training programmers, spending all his time not only in formal lectures but in long-lasting sessions explaining the meaning and implications of these gems of wisdom. His effort was not confined to teaching us these Ahadith. He was always eager to ensure that we imbibed these Ahadith in our souls and articulated them in our conduct. His style of teaching and training was remarkable - clear, direct, affectionate, and friendly. He would generously welcome our questions and was never offended even if some of them were stupid. He always tried to explain difficult points in a very simple and pleasant manner with words that would sink directly into our hearts. For those of us who experienced this, it was the best and most enjoyable period of our lives.

This collection was originally made with a purpose. Within a span of some four hundred Ahādīth, an effort was undertaken to give the course participant a feel for the immeasurable richness of the Prophetic guidance. This course was meant primarily for the students and workers of the Islamic Movement who were undertaking modern education and who had had no opportunity to learn the traditional Islamic sciences. After introducing them to the basic terms and concepts of Usül al-Hadith, including a brief account of Hadith compilation and criticism, the sayings of the Prophet, dealing with different aspects of life were taught, together with short explanations. The participants were asked to memorize some of the shorter Ahadith. This present collection, with explanatory notes, reproduces what was taught to us.

I have given this background to highlight the major distinctions of this collection: its comprehensiveness and its educative role as a training manual for the workers of the Islamic Movement. However, its usefulness goes far beyond its immediate audience.

In its present form, it can best be described as a beautiful handbook of Hadith, making the radiant gems of Prophetic wisdom available to a wider public. With admirable brevity, it helpfully gives the sum and substance of the Prophet's Way, of the Sunnah. It is important too in the sense that the collection as a whole brings into sharp focus the grand Sunnah of the Prophet that I have tried to highlight in this preface. This has been a very popular compendium of Hadith: in Pakistan, some thirty editions of this collection have been published.

It is my hope that the publication of the English translation will be a blessing for young Muslims in the English-speaking world. For non-Muslims it also provides a window into the life and mission of the Prophet of Islam. At a time when Islam is constantly misrepresented, particularly in the West, this short collection of the sayings of the Prophet can enable all and sundry to get a clearer picture of Islam from the words of none other than the Last Prophet of Allah. May Allah give the best of rewards to the late Mawlana 'Abd al-Ghaffar Hasan for whom this constitutes a perpetual benefit (Sadaqah jāriyah). May Allah also reward his grandson Dr. Usama Hasan, who has ably translated this book into modern English, and all our colleagues at the Islamic Foundation and Kube Publications who have helped to bring out this noble collection in the best of forms?

Islamabad

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Khurshid Ahmad