

The Status of Sunnah in Islam

Hamad Alfarisi

Department of Fundamental Dental and Medical Sciences, Kulliyah of Dentistry,
International Islamic University Malaysia, 25200, Kuantan, Malaysia.

Email: hamadalfarisi@iium.edu.my (corresponding author)

Noor Mohammad Osmani

Department of Quran and Sunnah, Abdulhamid Abusulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed
Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100, Kuala
Lumpur, Malaysia.

Email: abusajid@iium.edu.my

Zainab Zubi

PhD, Libya.

Email: zenab.B.zoubi@gmail.com

Abstract

In Islam, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has a very high standing status. The Sunnah derived its place from the authority of revelation. The sunnah is a part of the revelation and preserved to explain the Quran and to guide Muslims. The authority of the Holy Quran and the sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was never denied by any jurist. It is a matter of agreement and consensus among Muslim scholars that the revelation is in two parts, the first part is the Quran, and the second part is the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) and it is this part which is explaining what Allah want from us. Accepting the Prophet's decisions and rulings are part of Muslim's faith. Accordingly, this short review aims to highlight the status of Sunnah in Islam by reviewing the available relevant literature. The review showed that Sunnah is located in the heart of Usul-Alfiqh, Al-Fiqh, Quranic sciences, and it is the second source of Islamic law. Further detailed researches are recommended to show how Sunnah is relevant to all aspects of human life.

Keywords: Authority, Islam, Quran, Sunnah

Introduction

In Islam, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has a very high standing status. The Sunnah derived its place from the authority of revelation. The sunnah is a part of the revelation and will be preserved to explain the Quran and to guide Muslims, as Allah said in Surah al-Najim (verses:3&4):

قال تعالى: [وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ (3) إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ (4)] - سورة النجم-

(Nor does he speak out of his own desire, it is nothing but pure revelation that has been revealed by Allah).

Moreover, it has been proven through history that, the strength of Muslims depends on their understanding and adherence to Sunnah. The status of sunnah has remained unchallenged and undisputed throughout the centuries. There have been many differences among Muslims in their juristic opinions, but the authority of the Holy Quran and the sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was never denied by any jurist (Usmani, 1989).

In the last century, some voices start to speak loudly about the authority of Sunnah. Unfortunately, some of those voices start to come from some Muslims who have been affected either consciously or unconsciously by the orientalist's world view. Those who are trying to make Muslims suspicious about the position and the status of Sunnah, they are working to weaken the Muslim nations as they know that the strength and the beauty of Muslim nations are completely dependent on establishing the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) not only theoretically but by implementing it in their lives.

In Arabic language; meaning of Sunnah is a broad. Abu-Mansour al-Azhari said: Sunnah is the praiseworthy straight way (al-Azhari, 2001). According to Ibn-Manthur; Sunnah is the biography, either good or bad biography (Ibn-Manthur, 2014). In compatibility with Ibn-Manthur linguistic definition, it has been mentioned in the Quran:

قال تعالى: [لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ- وَقَدْ خَلَتْ سُنَّةَ الْأَوَّلِينَ (13)] - سورة الحجر-

[*They believe not therein, though the example of the former peoples has gone before them (Surah Al-Hijr, Verse 13)*].

However, the meaning of Sunnah in perspectives of the professional Muslim scholars, it denotes the technical meaning. According to al-Jurjani; Sunnah referring to the way to be followed in the religion without assuming that it is obligatory, the Sunnah that which the Prophet persisted in it, but sometimes with abandonment, if perseverance is a matter of worship, then it is the Sunnah of guidance, and if the perseverance is a matter of habit, then it is the Sunnah of appendices (al-Jurjani, 1985). Similarly, al-Kufawi said: al-Sunnah is a name given to a pleased way in the religion to be followed without obligation (al-Kufawi, 1998). On the other hand, ahl-Alhadith defined Sunnah as: all the legacy of the Prophet (PBUH) including his sayings, acts, declaration, his biography, either before or after the revelation, and his moral and physical characteristics (al-Sebaye, 2008). According to this definition, Sunnah in perspectives of ahl-Alhadith is considered equivalent to al-Hadith. However, ahl-Usul Alfiqh defined Sunnah as: all of what has been transmitted to us of the legacy of the Prophet (PBUH) including his sayings, acts, and declaration (al-Sebaye, 2008).

On the other hand, ahl-Alfiqh, they define Sunnah as: all the proven prophetic legacy that was not obligation, and it is the opposite of the obligatory and of the remaining five Ahkams, and also it is the opposite of heresy or Bida (Forbidden invention in the religion) (al-Sebaye, 2008). Based on the former definitions of Sunnah, Muslim scholars from various specialities have define Sunnah according to their needs from Sunnah. For example; ahl-Alhadith defined Sunnah according to the authenticity, whatever that Sunnah provided law or no, while ahl-Usul Alfiqh defined Sunnah from perspective of its authority in the law. However, ahl Al-Fiqh has viewed Sunnah from point of its meaning pertaining al-Ahkam what is obligatory and what is not.

This short review aims to highlight the importance of knowing the status of Sunnah in Islam and the importance of recognising it as a source of law.

Status of Sunnah in Relation to Al-Quran

Putting an eye on the companions (*Sahabah*) of the Prophet (PBUH) how do they perceived sayings, acts and declarations of the Prophet (PBUH); then we can understand the status of

Sunnah in Islam as a whole, and in relation to al-Quran in particular. The companions received the obligations from al-Quran when verses emphasised about Ahkams, but in many occasions the Quranic verses came with a general (*Aam*) terms and not specified (*Khas*), or they revealed as an absolute (*Mutlaq*) word and not limited (*Muqaid*), for example the Quranic verses pertaining prayer they came as a general instructions without details of how to be performed regarding number of prayers, number of *Rakaat*, and what to be recited and how it begins and how it ends to other detailed prescriptions pertaining its shapes and timings. Same goes to the second pillar of Islam that is al-Zakat, and other fundamentals of Islam. Companions obtained all such detailed regulations and roles and Ahkams by referring to the Prophet (PBUH).

Al-Quran described one of the functions of the Prophet with regard to this matter by saying: قال تعالى: [بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ (44) - سورة النحل- (And We have sent down to thee the Reminder that thou mayest explain to mankind that which has been sent down to them and that they may reflect)- Al-Nahl verse 44.

The function and responsibility of the Prophet (PBUH) in relation to al-Quran has been stated in al-Quran. The prophet (PBUH) has to explain the Quranic verses and to make the Quranic message and law clear, so that mankind can understand and became clear about it (al-Sebaye, 2008). It is a matter of agreement and consensus between Muslim scholars that the revelation is in two parts, the first part is al-Quran, and the second part is the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) and it is this part which is explaining what Allah want from us. Allah made it obligation for Muslims to follow and to obey this part of revelation identically as the obligation and obedience to al-Quran (Ibn Hazem, 1985).

Interestingly, since the Sunnah is an integral part of the revelation, it is preserved as the Quran has been preserved even though there is some difference in the meaning of preservation here, where the Quranic preservation goes to the general as well as to the details, but in the Sunnah it goes to the general without emphasise on the details (Bajaaman, 2004).

The Sunnah and the Islamic Law

Sunnah is the second source of Islamic law, this is a matter of consensus. Imam Shaafee said: the sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) and al-Quran are mirror image to each other, of them is a cut clear statement so Prophet followed as it revealed, and the other was a generalised so Prophet explained it and showed what Allah want from us, and in both of these aspects the Prophet (PBUH) followed the Quran, and to my Knowledge no one of Muslim scholars has any objection about this (al-Shafee, 1940). Based on the consensus among Muslim scholars about the obligation to follow Sahih Al-Sunnah, the sunnah acquired its authority in the Islamic law. عن مالك بن أنس مُرسلاً قال: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: " تَرَكْتُ فِيكُمْ أَمْرَيْنِ لَنْ تَضِلُّوا مَا تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا: (كِتَابُ اللَّهِ وَسُنَّةُ رَسُولِهِ). رَوَاهُ فِي الْمَوْطَأِ

Malik bin Anas, in mursal form of hadith, reported the messenger (PBUH) said: "As long as you hold fast to two things which I have left among you, you will not go astray: Allah's Book and His messenger's Sunnah) He transmitted it in Al-Muwatta. This hadith has other similar narrations reported by al-Kkim, al-Zahabi, al-Bukhari and Muslim (Bajaaman, 2004). Imam al-Shatibi said that: the state of level of Sunnah is considered to be second to Quran, this is based on certain issues; the first is that the Quran authenticity included the general as well as the details, but the authenticity of Sunnah is in general without details. This makes the Quran to be in the first position before Sunnah. The second is that the Sunnah is either explanation or covering more details about al-Quran, and in this view its important of existence is secondary

to al-Quran. The third thing what has been reported in the Prophet's legacy (al-Shatibi, 1997). Doctor Mustafa Al-Sebaye said: it is then must to refer to the Sunnah before implementation of the Quranic law and instructions, because of the possibility of the presence of specification (*Takh-sees*) for some verses by the Sunnah or presence of meaning restriction (*Taq-yeed*) to some verses, or other aspects of the function of Sunnah in relation to the Quran, and according to this, the Sunnah is equivalent to the Quran from the view of facing them to each other looking to both Quranic verses and Sunnah's hadith in order to complement each of them to the other, or to explain if there is a contradiction which is non real, and this a comprehensive understanding about the authority of Sunnah in Islam is no doubt about it in Muslims who believe in the authority of Sunnah in Islam (al-Sebaye, 2008).

Interestingly, there is a well-known debate among ahl-Usul al-Fiqh about the status of Sunnah if there is an apparent contradiction, which should be given the priority? : this debate between ahl-Usul Al-Fiqh indicating one important thing, that is the authority of the Sunnah in Islam and particularly in Islamic law, and it is not just after the Quran in terms of authority, but that debate indicated the obligation to refer to Sunnah, and when the issue comes to the diligence (*Ijtehad*) and understanding of Quran, referring to Sunnah is a must, in order to complement between both if there is some issue of a contradiction (al-Turky, 1977).

The Authority of Sunnah

The Islamic legal theory stated that; the only law-giver is Allah. According to this theory in which we believe as Muslims, no one has the right to legislate over other humans unless that law is permissible by the law of Allah. Allah said in the Quran in surah Yoosuf verses 40 and 67:

قال تعالى: [إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَدِيمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (40)] - سورة يوسف -
 قال تعالى: [إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَعَلَيْهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ (67)] - سورة يوسف -
 (*The command [and the rule] is only for Allah*) -surahYoosuf-verses 40 and 67.

Based on the status of Sunnah in Islam and because it is a part of the revelation, the Sunnah will be included in the Allah's law authority. The word: (*Hujjah*) in Arabic language means authority, and technically, the term: *Hujjiat al-Sunnah* means: the Sunnah is a legitimate evidence in Islamic law that leads one to the ruling of Allah. In al-Quran many verses gave a clear indication about obligation to follow Sunnah (Zarabozo, 2000).

Allah revealed in the Quran in surah Al-Nisaa verse 80:

قال تعالى: [مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ وَمَنْ تَوَلَّى فَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِيظًا (80)] - سورة النساء -
 (*Whoever obeys the Messenger verily obeys Allah*)-surah Al-Nisaa verse 80.

In this verse, Allah clearly states that obedience to the messenger (PBUH) is nothing less than obedience to Allah. Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrated the following hadith, Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: (*Whosoever obeys me, obeys Allah; and he who disobeys me, disobeys Allah; and whosoever obeys the Amir (leader), in fact, obeys me; and he who disobeys the Amir, in fact, disobeys me*) (An-Nawawi, 2009). According to Imam Al-Shaukaani, this is a proof that anything that comes from the messenger (PBUH) actually originated from Allah (Al-Shaukaani, 1964). There are many verses in al-Quran are emphasising and stressing on the obedience toward Prophet (PBUH), in this briefing we cannot go through all of them. At the same time there are many verses in the Quran warning those who are may disobey Prophet (PBUH). In surah Al-Noor verse 63;

[فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (63)] - سورة النور -

(Let those who oppose his orders beware lest a calamity or painful punishment should befall them) surah Al-Noor verse 63.

Imam al-Qurtubi said: jurists point to this verse as a proof that it is obligatory to follow the commands and orders that come from Allah and His Messenger (PBUH). In this verse Allah has given a warning that a punishment shall befall them (al-Qurtubi, 1964). Furthermore, accepting the Prophet decisions and rulings are part of Muslims faith. In surah Al-Nisaa verse 65;

قال تعالى: [فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا
- سورة النساء- (65)]

(But no, by your Lord, they will not actually believe until they make you the judge of what is in dispute between them and find within themselves no dislike of that which you decide and they submit with full submission) surah Al-Nisaa verse 65.

According to al-Quran, Allah has ordered the Muslims to follow and to obey the Prophet (PBUH), and this matter is not open for discussion or debate, it is a matter of believe.

Conclusion

This short review highlighted the status of Sunnah in Islam. The Sunnah is in the heart of al-hadith, al-Fiqh, Usul al-Fiqh and as well as in the Islamic theory of law. No doubt about preservation of Sunnah because it is a part of the revelation. The right way for understanding al-Quran is through the Sunnah. Muslims cannot claim that they are faithful without believing in authority of Sunnah.

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