

# ISLAM AT THE CROSSROADS

## CHAPTER 6

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### HADITH AND SUNNAH

Many reform proposals have been advanced during the last decades, and many spiritual doctors have tried to devise a patent medicine for the sick body of Islam. But, until now, all has been in vain, because all those clever doctors -at least those who get a hearing today -have invariably forgotten to prescribe, along with their medicines, tonics and elixirs, the natural *diet* on which the early development of the patient had been based. This diet, the only one which the body of Islam, sound or sick, can positively accept and assimilate, is the Sunnah of our Prophet Muhammad. The Sunnah is the key to the understanding of the Islamic rise more than thirteen centuries ago; and why should it not be a key to the understanding of our present degeneration? Observance of the Sunnah is synonymous with Islamic existence and progress. Neglect of the Sunnah is synonymous with a decomposition and decay of Islam. The Sunnah is the iron framework of the House of Islam; and if you remove the framework of a building, can you be surprised if it breaks down like a house of cards?

This simple truth, almost unanimously accepted by all learned men throughout Islamic history, is -we know well -most unpopular today for reasons connected with the ever-growing influence of Western civilization. But it is a truth, none the less, and, in fact, the only truth which can save us from the chaos and the shame of our present decay.

The term *Sunnah* is used here in its widest meaning, namely, the example which the Prophet has set before us in his attitudes, actions and sayings. His wonderful life was a living illustration

and explanation of the Qur'an, and we can do no greater justice to the Holy Book than by following him who was the means of its revelation.

We have seen that one of the main achievements of Islam, the one which distinguishes it from all other transcendental systems, is the complete harmony between the moral and the material aspects of human life. This was one of the reasons why Islam in its prime had such a triumphant success wherever it appeared. It brought to mankind the new message that the earth need not be despised in order that heaven be gained. This prominent feature of Islam explains why our Prophet, in his mission as an apostolic guide to humanity, was so deeply concerned with human life in its polarity both as a spiritual and a material phenomenon. It does not, therefore, show a very deep understanding of Islam if one discriminates between such injunctions of the Prophet as deal with purely devotional and spiritual matters and others which have to do with questions of society and daily life. The contention that we are obliged to follow the commands belonging to the first group, but not obliged to follow those of the second, is as superficial and, in its spirit, as anti-Islamic as the idea that certain general injunctions of the Qur'an were meant only for the ignorant Arabs at the time of the revelation, and not for the refined gentlemen of the twentieth century. At its root lies a strange underestimation of the true role of the Arabian Prophet.

Just as the life of a Muslim must be directed towards a full and unreserved' cooperation between his spiritual and his bodily Self, so the leadership of our Prophet embraces life as a compound entity, a sum-total of moral and practical, individual and social manifestations. This is the deepest meaning of the Sunnah. The Qur'an says:

مَا أَفَاءَ اللَّهُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرَىٰ فَلِلَّهِ وَاللرَّسُولِ وَلِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ كَيْ لَا يَكُونَ دُولَةً بَيْنَ الْأَغْنِيَاءِ مِنْكُمْ ۚ وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

“Whatever [spoils taken] from the people of those villages God has turned over to His Apostle - [all of it] belongs to God and the Apostle, and the near of kin [of deceased believers], and the orphans, and the needy, and the wayfarer, so that it may not be [a benefit] going round and round among such of you as may [already] be rich. Hence, accept [willingly] whatever the Apostle\* gives you [thereof], and refrain from [demanding] anything that he withholds from you; and remain conscious of God: for, verily, God is severe in retribution. (59:7)

and prophet said:

The Jews have been split up into seventy two sects, the Christians into seventy two sects, and Muslims will be split up into seventy three sects (Sunan abi Daud).

In this connection it may be mentioned that in Arabian usage the number 70 very often stands for many, and does not necessarily denote the actual, arithmetical figure. So the prophet obviously intended to say that the sects and divisions among the Muslims would be very many, even more than those among the Jews and Christians and he added:

...“all of them are destined for the fire with the exception of one”. When the companions asked which one would be the one, the right guided group, he answered:

"that which is based on my and my companions principles". Certain verses of the Quran make this point clear beyond any possibility of misunderstanding:

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

"Nay, by thy Sustainer! They do not [really] attain to faith unless they make thee [O Prophet] a judge of all on which they disagree among themselves, and then find in their hearts no bar to an acceptance of thy decision and give themselves up [to it] in utter self surrender" (*sarah* 4:65).

And:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ  
قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ ۚ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكَافِرِينَ

"Say [O Prophet]: 'If you love God, follow me, [and] God will love you and forgive you your sins; for God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.' Say: 'Pay heed unto God and the Apostle!'" (*sarah* 3:31-32).

The Sunah of the Prophet is, therefore, next to the Qur'an, the second source of Islamic Law. In fact, we must regard the Sunnah as *the only binding explanation* of the Qur'anic teachings, the only means of avoiding permanent dissensions concerning their interpretation and adaptation to practical use. Many verses of the Qur'an have an allegorical meaning and can be understood in different ways. And there are, furthermore, many questions of practical importance not explicitly dealt with in the Qur'an. The spirit prevailing in the Holy Book is, to be sure, uniform throughout; but to deduce from it the practical attitude which we have to adopt is not in every case an easy matter. So long as we believe that this Book is the Word of God, perfect in form and purpose, the only logical conclusion is that it was never intended to be used independently of the personal guidance of the Prophet which is embodied in the system of his Sunnah; and our reason tells us that there could not possibly be a better interpreter of the Qur'anic teachings than he through whom they were revealed to humanity.

And so we come to the very important question as to the *authenticity of the sources* which reveal the life and the sayings of the Prophet to us. These sources are the *ahadith*, the Traditions of the sayings and actions of the Prophet reported and transmitted by his Companions and critically collected in the first few centuries of Islam. Many modern Muslims profess that they would be ready to follow the Sunnah if they were convinced that they could rely upon the body of *ahadith* on which it rests. It has become a matter of fashion in our days to deny, in principle, the authenticity of most of the *ahadith* and, therefore, of the whole structure of the Sunnah.

Is there any scientific warrant for this attitude? Is there any scientific justification for the rejection of *ahadith* as a dependable source of Islamic Law?

We should think that the opponents of orthodox thought would be able to bring forward really convincing arguments which would establish, once and for all, the unreliability of the Traditions ascribed to the Prophet. But this is not the case. In spite of all the efforts which have been employed to challenge the authenticity of *hadith* as a body, those modern critics, both Eastern and Western, have not been able to back their purely subjective criticism with results of truly scientific research. It would be rather difficult to do so, inasmuch as the compilers of the early *hadith* collections, and particularly Bukhari and Muslim, have done whatever was humanly possible to put the authenticity of every Tradition to a very rigorous test - a 'far .more rigorous test than Western historians usually apply to any historical document.

It would go far beyond the limits of this book to dwell in detail on the scrupulous method by which the reliability of Traditions was investigated by the early *muhaddithun*, the learned men devoted to the study of *hadith*, For our purpose it should suffice to say that a complete science has been evolved, the sole object of which is the research into the meaning, the form and the way of transmission of the Prophet's *ahadith*: An historical branch of this science succeeded in establishing an unbroken chain of detailed biographies of all those personalities who have ever been mentioned as narrators of Traditions. The lives of those men and women have been thoroughly investigated from every point of view, and only those have been accepted as reliable whose way of life as well as of receiving and transmitting *ahadith* perfectly responds to the standards stipulated by the great *muhaddithun* and believed to be the most exacting that could possibly be conceived. If, therefore, anyone wishes to contest today the authenticity of a particular *hadith* or of the system as a whole, the burden of proving its inaccuracy falls upon him alone. It is scientifically not in the least justifiable to contest the veracity of an historical source unless one is prepared to *prove* that this source is defective. If no reasonable, that is, scientific argument can be found against the veracity of the source itself or against one or more of its later transmitters, and if, on the other hand, no other contradictory report about the same matter exists, then we are bound to accept the Tradition as true.

Suppose, for example, someone speaks about the Indian wars of Mahmud of Ghazni and you suddenly get up and say, "I don't believe that Mahmud ever came to India. It is a legend without any historical foundation." What would happen in such a case? At once some person well-versed in history would try to correct your mistake and would quote chronicles and histories based on reports of contemporaries of that famous Sultan as a definite proof of the fact that Mahmud *had* been in India. In that case you would have to accept the proof -or you would be regarded as a crank who for no obvious reason denies solid historical facts. If this is so, one must ask oneself why our modern critics do not extend the same logical fair-mindedness to the problem of *hadith* as well.

The primary ground for a hadith being false would be a willful lie on the part of the first source, the Companion concerned, or one or another of the later transmitters. As to the Companions, such a possibility can be ruled out *a priori*. It requires only some insight into the psychological side of the problem in order to relegate such assumptions to the sphere of pure fantasy. The tremendous impression which the personality of the Prophet made on these men and women is an outstanding fact of human history; and, moreover, it is extremely well *documented* by

history. Is it conceivable that people who were ready to sacrifice themselves and all they possessed at the bidding of the Apostle of God would play tricks with his words? Did not the Prophet say:

"Whoever intentionally lies about me will take his place in the Fire"?(Sahih bukhari). This the Companions knew; they believed implicitly in the words of the Prophet, whom they regarded as a spokesman of God; and is it probable, from the psychological point of view, that they disregarded this very definite injunction?

In criminal court proceedings the first question facing the judge is *cui bono* -for whose benefit - the crime could have been committed. This judicial principle, can be applied to the problem of hadith as well. With the exception of Traditions which directly concern the status of certain individuals or groups, as well as the decidedly spurious ~ and by most of the *muhaddithin* rejected -Traditions connected with the political claims of the different parties in the first century after the Prophet's death, there could be no "profitable" reason for any individual to falsify sayings of the Prophet. It was in a just appreciation of the possibility of *ahadith* being invented for some personal ends that the two foremost authorities among the Traditionists, Bukhari and Muslim, rigorously excluded all Traditions relating to party politics from their compilations. What remained was beyond the suspicion of giving personal advantages to anyone.

There is one argument more on which the authenticity of a hadith could be challenged. It is conceivable that either the Companion who heard it from the lips of the Prophet or one or another of the later narrators committed, while being subjectively truthful, a mistake due to a misunderstanding of the Prophet's words, or a lapse of memory, or some other psychological reason. But the internal, that is, psychological, evidence speaks against any great possibility of such mistakes, at least on the part of the Companions. To the people who lived with the Prophet, each' one of his sayings and actions was of the utmost significance, due not only to the fascination which his personality exerted on them, but also to their firm belief that it was God's will that they should regulate their lives according to the Prophet's direction and example. Therefore, they could not take the question of his sayings offhand, but tried to preserve them in their memory even at the cost of great personal discomfort. It is related that the Companions who were immediately associated with the Prophet formed among themselves groups of two men each, one of whom was to be alternately in the vicinity of the Prophet while the other was busy with the pursuit of his livelihood or other matters; and whatever they heard or saw of their Master they communicated to one another: so anxious were they lest some saying or doing of the-Prophet should escape their notice. It is not very probable that, with such an attitude, they could have been negligent as to the exact wording of a *hadith*, And if it was possible for hundreds of Companions to preserve in their memory the wording of the whole Qur'an, down to the smallest details of spelling, then it was no doubt equally possible for them and for those who immediately followed them to keep single sayings of the Prophet in their memory without adding to them or omitting anything from them.

Moreover, the Traditionists ascribe perfect authenticity only to those *ahadith* which are reported in the same form through' different, independent chains of narrators. Nor is this all In order to be *sahih* (sound), a *hadith* must be corroborated at every stage of transmission by the independent evidence of at least two, and possibly more, transmitters -so that at no stage the report should hinge on the authority of one person only. This demand for corroboration is so exacting that in a *hadith* reported through, say, three "generations" of transmitters between the Companion concerned and the final compiler, actually a score or more of such transmitters, distributed over those three "generations", are involved.

With all this, no Muslim has ever believed that the Traditions of the Prophet could have the undisputed authenticity of the Qur'an. At no time has the critical investigation of *ahadith* stopped. The fact that there exist numerous spurious *ahadith* did not in the least escape the attention of the *muhaddithun*, as non Muslim and even some Muslim critics naively suppose. On the contrary, the critical science of *hadith* was initiated *because* of the necessity of discerning between the authentic and the spurious, and the very *imams* Bukhari and Muslim, not to mention the lesser Traditionists, are direct products of this critical attitude. The existence, therefore, of false *ahadith* does not prove anything against the system of *hadith* as a whole -no more than a fanciful tale from the *Arabian Nights* could be regarded as an argument against the authenticity of any historical report of the corresponding period.

Until now, no critic has been able to prove in a systematic way that the body of *hadun* regarded as authentic according to the test-standard of the foremost Traditionists is inaccurate. The rejection of authentic Traditions, either as a whole or in part, is a purely emotional matter, and has failed to establish itself as the result of unprejudiced, scientific investigation. But the motive behind such an oppositional attitude among many Muslims of our time can easily be traced. This motive lies in the impossibility of bringing our present, degenerate ways of living and thinking into line with the true spirit of Islam as reflected in the Sunnah of our Prophet. In order to justify their own shortcomings and the shortcomings of their environment, these pseudo-critics of *hadith* try to obviate the necessity of following the Sunnah: because, if this were done, they would be able to interpret all Qur'anic teachings just as they please -that is, everyone according to his own inclinations and turn of mind. And in this way the exceptional position of Islam as a moral and practical, individual and social code would be utterly destroyed.

In these days, when the influence of Western civilization makes itself more and more felt in Muslim countries, still another motive is added to the negative attitude of the so-called "Muslim intelligentsia" in this matter. It is impossible to live according to the Sunnah of our Prophet and to follow the Western mode of life at one and the same time. But many among the present generation of Muslims are ready to adore everything that is Western, to worship the foreign civilization simply because it is foreign, powerful and materially imposing. This "Westernization" is the strongest reason why the Traditions of our Prophet and, along with them, the whole structure of the Sunnah have become so unpopular today. The Sunnah is so obviously opposed to the fundamental ideas underlying Western civilization, that those who are fascinated by the latter see no way out of the tangle but to describe the Sunnah as an irrelevant, and therefore not compulsory, aspect of Islam -because it is "based on unreliable

Traditions". After that, it becomes easier to twist the teachings of the Qur'an in such a way that they might appear to suit the spirit of Western.

Almost as important as the formal, so to say "legal", justification of the Sunnah through the establishment of the historical dependability of *hadith* is the question as to its inner, spiritual justification. Why should an observance of the Sunnah be regarded as indispensable for a life in the true Islamic sense? Is there no other way to the reality of Islam than through an observance of that large system of actions and customs, of orders and prohibitions derived from the life-example of the Prophet? No doubt, he was the greatest of men; but is not the necessity to imitate his life in all its aspects an infringement on the individual freedom of the human personality? It is an old objection which unfriendly critics of Islam put forward that the necessity of strictly following the Sunnah was one of the main causes of the subsequent decay of the Islamic world, for such an attitude is supposed to encroach, in the long run, on the liberty of human action and the natural development of society. It is of the greatest importance for the future of Islam whether we are able to meet this objection or not. Our attitude towards the problem of the Sunnah will determine our future attitude towards Islam.

We are proud, and justly so, of the fact that Islam, as a religion, is not based on mystic dogmatism but is always open to the critical inquiry of reason. We have, therefore, the right not only to know that the observance of the Sunnah has been imposed upon us but also to understand the inherent reason for its imposition.

Islam leads man to a unification of all aspects of his life. Being a means to that goal, this religion represents in itself a totality of conceptions to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be subtracted. There is no room for eclecticism in Islam. Wherever its teachings are recognized as having been really pronounced by the Qur'an or the Prophet, we must accept them in their completeness; otherwise they lose their value. It is a fundamental misunderstanding to think that Islam, being a religion of reason, leaves its teachings open to individual selection - a claim made possible by a popular misconception of "rationalism". There is a wide - and by the philosophies of all ages sufficiently recognized - gulf between reason and "rationalism" as it is commonly understood today. The function of reason in regard to religious teaching is of a controlling character; its duty is to see to it that nothing is imposed on the human mind which it cannot easily bear, that is, without the aid of mental jugglery. So far as Islam is concerned, unprejudiced reason has, time and again, given it its unreserved vote of confidence. That does not mean that everyone who comes into contact with the Qur'an will necessarily *accept* its teachings; this is a matter of temperament, environment, and - last but not least - of spiritual illumination. But surely no unbiased person would contend that there is anything in the Qur'an *contrary* to reason. No doubt, there are concepts in it beyond the present limits of our understanding; but nothing which offends against man's intelligence as such.

The role of reason in religious matters is, as we have seen, in the nature of a control -a registration apparatus saying "yes" or "no", as the case may be. But this is not quite true of so-called "rationalism". It does not content itself with registration and control, but jumps into the field of speculation; it is not receptive and detached like pure reason, but extremely subjective and temperamental. Reason . knows its own limits; but superficial "rationalism" is preposterous in its claim to encompass the world and all mysteries within its own individual circle. In religious matters it hardly even concedes the possibility of certain things being, temporarily or permanently, beyond human understanding; but it is, at the same time, illogical enough to concede this possibility to science -and so to itself.

An over-estimation of this kind of unimaginative rationalism is one of the causes why so many modern Muslims refuse to surrender themselves to the guidance Of the Prophet. But it does not need a Kant today to prove that human understanding is strictly limited in its possibilities. Our mind is unable, by virtue of its nature, to understand the idea of *totality*: we can grasp, of all things, their details only. We do not know what infinity or eternity mean; we do not even know what life is. In problems of a religion resting on transcendental foundations we therefore need a guide whose mind possesses something more than the normal reasoning qualities and the subjective rationalism common to all of us; we need someone who is inspired -in a word, a Prophet. If we believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God, and that Muhammad was God's Apostle, we are not only morally but also intellectually bound to follow his guidance implicitly. This does not mean that we should *exclude* our powers of reasoning. On the contrary, we have to make use of those powers to the best of our ability and knowledge; we have to discover the inherent meaning and purpose of the commands transmitted to us by the Prophet. But in any case -whether we are able to understand its ultimate purpose or not -we must obey the order. I should like to illustrate this by the example of a soldier who has been ordered by his general to occupy a certain strategic position. The good soldier will follow and execute the order immediately. If, while doing so, he is able to explain to himself the ultimate strategic purpose which the general has in view, the better for him and for his career; but if the deeper aim which underlies the general's command does not reveal itself to him at once, he is nevertheless not entitled to give up or even to postpone its execution. We Muslims rely upon our Prophet's being the best commander mankind could ever have. We naturally believe that he knew the domain of religion both in its spiritual and its social aspects far better than we ever could. In enjoining us to do this or to avoid that, he always had some "strategic" objectives in view which he thought to be indispensable for the spiritual or social welfare of man. Sometimes this object is clearly discernible, and sometimes it is more or less hidden from the untrained eyes of the average person; sometimes we can understand the deepest aim of the Prophet's injunction, and sometimes only its immediate purpose. Whatever the case may be, we are bound to follow the Prophet's commands, provided that their authenticity and their context are fully established.'? Nothing else matters. Of course, there are commands of the Prophet which are obviously of paramount importance and others which are less important, and we have to give the more important precedence over the others. But never have we the right to disregard anyone of them because they appear to us "unessential" -for it is said in the Qur'an of the Prophet:



وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ

"He does not speak out of his own desire" (surah 53:3). That is, he speaks only when an objective *necessity* arises; and he does it because God has inspired him to do so. And for this reason we are obliged to follow the Prophet's Sunnah in spirit *and* in form, if we wish to be true to Islam. We do not regard its ideology as one way among others, but as *the* way; and the man who conveyed this ideology to us is not just one guide among others, but *the* guide. To follow him in all that he commanded is to follow Islam; to discard his Sunnah is to discard the reality of Islam.

Once the objective necessity for a Muslim, to follow the sunnah of his prophet is established he has the right and even the duty to inquire into its role within the religious and social structure of Islam. What is the spiritual meaning of that great detailed system of laws and rules of conduct which are supposed to pervade the life of a Muslim from his birth to the moment of death, and to regulate his behavior in the most important as well as in the most insignificant phases of his existence? Or is there, perhaps, no meaning at all? Was there any good in the prophet's ordering his followers to do everything in the way he did it? What difference can it make whether I eat with the right or with left hand-if both are equally clean? What difference whether I keep my beard or shave it? Are such things not purely formal? Have they any bearing on the progress of man or on the welfare of society? And if not why have they been imposed on us?

It is high time for us who believe that Islam stands and falls with the observance of the sunnah to answer the questions.

There are to my knowledge at least three distinct reasons for the institution of sunnah.

The first reason is the training of man, in a methodical way to live permanently in a state of consciousness wakefulness and self-control. In the spiritual progress of man haphazard actions and habits are like stumbling blocks in the way of a racing horse; they must be reduced to a minimum because they destroy spiritual concentration. Everything we do should be determined by our will and submitted to our moral control. But in order to be able to do so we must learn to observe ourselves. This necessity for a Muslim of permanent self-control has been beautifully expressed by Umar ibn al Khattab:

"Render to yourselves account about yourselves before you are called upon to render account" and the prophet said:

"worship thy lord as if you saw him" (Sahih Bukhari)

It has been pointed out before that the Islamic idea of worship embraces not only the strictly devotional duties but actually the whole of our life. Its goal is the unification of our spiritual and our material selves into one single entity. Our endeavors must be therefore clearly directed towards the life as much as this humanly possible. Self-observation is the first step on this way;

and the surest method to train oneself in self-observation is to get the habitual, seemingly unimportant actions of our daily life under control. Those small things those unimportant actions and habits are in the context of the mental training we are speaking of in reality far more important than the great activities in our life. The great things are always by virtue of their greatness clearly visible and therefore they mostly remain within the sphere of consciousness. But that other those small things easily escape our attention and cheat our control. Therefore they are by far the more valuable objects on which we can sharpen our powers of self-control.

It might be perhaps in itself not important with which hand we eat or whether we shave or keep our beard; but it is psychologically of the highest importance to do things according to a systematic resolve; for by doing so we keep ourselves keyed up to a high pitch of self-observation and moral control. This is not an easy matter for laziness of the mind is no less real than laziness of the body. If you ask a man who is accustomed to a sedentary mode of life to walk a long distance he will soon grow tired and be unable to proceed further. But not so a man who throughout the whole of his life has trained himself in walking. For him this kind of muscular exertion is no exertion at all, it is a pleasant bodily action to which he is accustomed. This is a further explanation why the sunnah covers almost every aspect of human life. If we are constantly called upon to subject all our actions and omissions to conscious discrimination, our power of self-observation grows steadily and in this training proceed, our moral laziness diminishing along with it.

The use of the expression training naturally implies that its result is dependent on the consciousness of its performance. The moment the practice of the sunnah degenerates into mechanical routine it entirely loses its educative value. Such has been the case with the Muslims during the last centuries. When the companions of the prophet and the generations which succeeded them made the attempt to conform every detail of their existence to the example of the master, they did it in conscious surrender to a directive will that would shape their life in the spirit of the Quran. Owing to this conscious resolve they could benefit by the training through sunnah to the full extent. It is not the fault of the system if the Muslims of later times did not make the right use of the psychological avenues it opened. This omission was probably due in a very large measure to the influence of Sufism with its more or less pronounced contempt of the active and its emphasis on the purely receptive energies in man. As the practice of sunnah had been already established as a component of Islamic religious life since the very beginning of Islam, Sufism did not succeed in uprooting it in principle. But it succeeded in neutralizing its active vigor and so to a certain extent its utility. The sunnah remained for the Sufis an ideogram of only platonic importance, with a mystical background, for the theologians and legists, a system of laws; and for the Muslim masses nothing but a hollow shell without any living meaning. But notwithstanding the failure of the Muslims to benefit from the teachings of the holy Quran and their interpretation through the sunnah of the prophet the idea underlying the teachings as well as their interpretation has remained intact, and there is no reason why it could not be put into practice once again. The real objective of the sunnah is not as our antagonistic critics presume, the breeding of Pharisees and dry formalities but of conscious determined deep hearted men of action. Men and women of such

a style were the companions of the prophet. The permanent consciousness inner wakefulness and sense of responsibility in all they did therein lies the secret of their miraculous efficiency and their startling historical success.

This is the first and so to say individual aspect of the sunnah. Its second aspect is its social importance and utility. There can be hardly any doubt that most of the social conflict are due to men's misunderstanding each other's actions and intentions. The cause of such a misunderstanding is the extreme variety of temperaments and inclinations in the individual members of the society. Now different temperaments force different habits on men, and those different habits hardened through the usage of long years, become barriers between individuals. If on the contrary several individuals happen to have identical habits throughout their life, there is every probability of their mutual relations being sympathetic and their minds ready to understand each other. Therefore Islam which is equally concerned with social as well as with individual welfare, makes it an essential point that the individual members of the society should be systematically induced to make their habits and customs resemble each other, however different their social or economic status be in each case.

But beyond this the sunnah in its so called rigidity rendered even a greater service to society it makes it coherent and stable in form and precludes the development of antagonisms and conflicts such as have under the name of social questions cause a considerable confusion in western society. Such social questions arise when certain institutions or customs are felt to be imperfect or defective and are therefore open to criticism and progressive changes. But for the Muslims that is for those who consider themselves bound by the law of the Quran and consequently by the injunctions given by the prophet the conditions of the society must have a settled appearance because they are supposed to be of transcendental origin. As long as there is no doubt as to this origin no need and no desire will arise to question the social organization in its fundamentals. It is only thus that we can conceive a practical possibility for the quranic postulate that the Muslims should be like a solid building. If we apply this principle to our communal life, there should be no necessity for the society to spend its energies on side issues and partial reforms which owing to their very nature, can have only passing value. Freed from dialectical confusion and built on the solid pedestal of the divine law and the life example of our prophet, Islamic society could use all its forces on problems of real material and intellectual welfare, thus paving the way for the individual in his spiritual endeavors. This and nothing else is the real religious objective of the Islamic social organization.

And now we come to third aspect of the sunnah and the necessity of our strictly following it.

In this system many details of our daily life are based on the example set by the prophet. Whatever we do we are permanently compelled to think of a corresponding doing or saying of the prophet. Thus the personality of the greater man becomes deeply embodied in the very routine of our daily life, and his spiritual influence is made a real, ever recurring factor in our existence. Consciously and subconsciously we are led to study the prophet's attitude in this or that matter; we learn to regard him not only as the bearer of a moral revelation but also as the guide towards a perfect life. It is here that we must decide whether we wish to regard the

prophet as a mere wise man among many otherwise men or as the supreme messenger of Allah always acting under divine inspiration. The view point of the holy Quran in this matter is clear beyond any possibility of misunderstanding. A man who is designed as the last of the prophets and mercy to the worlds cannot be but permanently inspired. To reject his guidance, or certain elements of it, would mean nothing less than to reject or underestimate God's own guidance. It would mean further in the logical continuation of this though, that the entire message of Islam was not intended to be a final but only an alternative solution of man's problems and that it is left to our discretion to choose this or some other, perhaps equally true and useful, solution. This easy because morally and practically not in the least obliging principle might lead us anywhere, but surely not to the spirit of Islam, of which it is said in the Quran:

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهِلَّ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ وَالْمُنْخَبِقَةُ وَالْمُؤَفَّقَةُ وَالْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ  
 وَالنَّطِيقَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبُعُ إِلَّا مَا ذَكَّيْتُمْ وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى النُّصُبِ وَأَنْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوا بِالْأَزْلَامِ ۚ ذَلِكُمْ  
 فِسْقٌ ۚ الْيَوْمَ يَبْسُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ دِينِكُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِ ۚ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ  
 عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ۚ فَمَنِ اضْطُرَّ فِي مَخْمَصَةٍ غَيْرِ مُتَجَانِفٍ لِإِثْمٍ ۚ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ  
 غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

"FORBIDDEN to you is carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than God's has been invoked, and the animal that has been strangled, or beaten to death, or killed by a fall, or gored to death, or savaged by a beast of prey, save that which you [yourselves] may have slaughtered while it was still alive; and [forbidden to you is] all that has been slaughtered on idolatrous altars. And [you are forbidden] to seek to learn through divination what the future may hold in store for you: this is sinful conduct. Today, those who are bent on denying the truth have lost all hope of [your ever forsaking] your religion: do not, then, hold them in awe, but stand in awe of Me! Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion. As for him, however, who is driven [to what is forbidden] by dire necessity and not by an inclination to sinning -behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (Quran 5:3)

We regard Islam as superior to all other religious systems because it embraces life in its totality. It takes world and hereafter should and body individual and society, equally into consideration. It takes into consideration not only the lofty possibilities of human nature, but also its inherent limitations and weaknesses. It does not impose the impossible upon us, but directs us how to make the best use of our possibilities and to reach a higher plane of reality where there is no cleavage and no antagonism between idea and action. It is not a way among others, but the way and the man who gave us this teaching is not just one guide among others but the guide. To follow him all he did and ordered is to follow Islam, to discard his sunnah is to discard the reality of Islam.