

IMPORTANCE OF THE PROPHET'S TRADITION IN THE REVIVAL OF ISLAM

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 in-telligentsia" in this matter. It is impossible to live according to the Sunnah of our Prophet **a** 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 Quran in such a way that they might appear to suit the spirit of Western civilization.

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 **a**? 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 nor not. Our attitude towards 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 Quran or the Prophet **a** we must accept them in their completeness; otherwise they lose their value. It is a fundamental mis-understanding 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 Quran 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 Quran 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 **a**. 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 dealing with 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 Quran is the Word of God, and that Muhammad **a** 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 **a**. 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

