

# The Quran and its Message

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Joseph A Islam [www.quransmessage.com](http://www.quransmessage.com)

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

## TIME-BOUND SUNNA

*Joseph A Islam*

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A 'sunna' by virtue of its definition refers to a well established, well trodden line of conduct or practice. The Sunna can be a reference to a particular individual's practice or one of a community.

A prophetic practice refers to the practical responses of a Prophet in his capacity as a guide sent by God to deal with the circumstances that he is presented with **during his ministry**. In such a capacity, a Prophet makes use of Divine guidance revealed to him and implements them in the best possible manner to his circumstances.

For purposes of this article, the types of sunna being addressed are not those particular practices that were prescribed by the Quran such as establishing salaah or paying the zakat, but rather, those practices that find no direct support in the Quran but are attributed to the Prophet by later compilations such as those found in [Islamic secondary sources](#). These include personal customs and etiquettes of the Prophet including what he wore, how he slept, how he ate, what transportation he utilised and his wider responses to specific circumstances presented during his ministry.

Therefore, a Prophetic Sunna by its own nature can **only exist** if it satisfies the presence of two very necessary components.

- (1) The presentation of a **specific set of circumstances** for the Prophet to apply a judgment or impart an action.
- (2) The application of such judgment based on Divinely guided principles that he received as part of Divine inspiration.

Keeping the above components of the Sunna in view, Prophet Muhammad<sup>(pbuh)</sup> applied a **timeless** Divine document (The Quran) with guiding principles to a particular set of circumstances that he was being presented with.

What resulted was a **time specific** 'Sunna'.

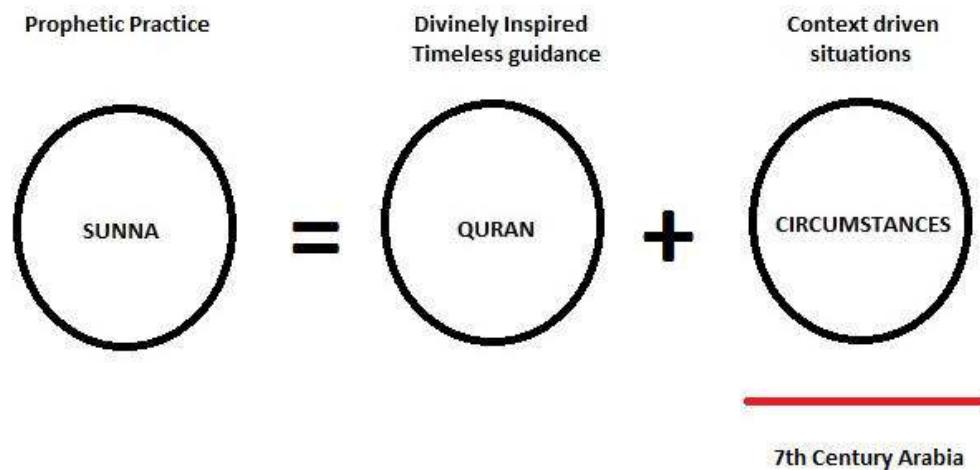


Illustration - Joseph Islam

Therefore, for the Prophet's Sunna to have any intrinsic relevance, the circumstances of 7th century Arabia that the Prophet faced would also inevitably need to exist.

If the Prophet applied the same timeless guidance (i.e. Quran) to a different situation in a different culture at a different time slice of history, the outcomes could potentially be very different.

Nothing demonstrates the requirement of time bound circumstances to **legitimise the Sunna** than the instructions to the Prophet to consult with **other believers** whilst making decisions.

### 003:159

"It was by the mercy of God that you (Muhammad) were lenient with them, for if you had been rude and harsh of heart they would have dispersed from round about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them **and consult (Arabic: watamiru) among yourselves**. And when you have decided, then put thy trust in God. Indeed! God loves those who put their trust (in Him)"

Thus, the Prophet would have applied guiding principles from the Quran to his particular circumstances at times **after consultation with his own people**. If one removes the circumstances and the people of the time, the Sunna by itself retains no intrinsic purpose and cannot exist.

It is not by accident that we find absolutely **no mention in the Quran** of 'Muhammad's Sunna' as a directive to be followed by believers in a timeless capacity. The term 'Prophetic Sunna' as a religious requirement binding on all believers for all times is a misnomer.

Only the **timeless** Quranic directives inspired by God to Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> remain binding on humankind. Not only does the Quran legitimise **no other source** to be used in authority with the Quran [1], the 'Sunna of Muhammad' is a term alien to the Quran. [2]

#### 006:114

"Say: "Shall I seek for judge other than God? - when He is the One who has sent to you the Book, **explained in detail (Arabic: Mufassalan)**." They know full well, to whom We have given the Book, that it has been sent down from your Lord in truth. Never be then of those who doubt"

The Quran only makes use of the term 'Sunna' in two forms, none of which refer to Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> [2]

- (1) Sunnatu-lawalina (ways of the former people)
- (2) Sunnata-Ilahi (ways of God)

#### 004:064

"**We sent not a messenger, but to be obeyed**, in accordance with the will of God. If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come unto thee and asked God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God indeed Oft-returning, Most Merciful"

It is clear that **all Prophets** were to be obeyed by their communities and here, Prophet Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> was no exception.

Whilst Divinely inspired core messages have always been a consistent part of all Prophetic ministries, ("Nothing is said to you that was not said to the messengers before you... 41:43), many Prophetic responses **were specifically tied to the circumstances** that they were being subjected to.

To apply ancient context specific solutions to a different culture, period and circumstances could potentially result in catastrophic outcomes. To recognise this point is absolutely crucial to understand the true nature of the 'Sunna' and how it is to be understood in light of the Quran and its time specific circumstances.

Those prophetic practices and beliefs that are to be followed by believers **as part of religion** are clearly cited by the Quran. As an example, we note:

#### 016:123

"So We have taught thee the inspired (Message), "**Follow the ways (Arabic: Millata) of Abraham the True in Faith, and he joined not gods with God.**""

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

To assert the applicability of the Sunna of Muhammad <sup>(pbuh)</sup> as a **religious requirement** in the 21st century remains unwarranted. **The circumstances of 7th century Arabia to legitimise the Sunna are no longer prevalent.**

The prophet rode a camel, wore an Arab garb appropriate for his climate, ate in a manner conversant with his period, dealt with contemporaries of a particular culture and concluded on

matters that were presented to him reflecting his place in history. His actions would have remained a reflection of his particular period.

Only the **timeless** Quran and its guiding narratives are incumbent on believers to follow. This is made evidently clear in many verses in the Quran as cited in the example below.

#### **006.155**

"And this is a Book which We have revealed as a blessing: **so follow it (Arabic: fa-ittabi'uhu) and fear (God) / be righteous so that you may receive mercy"**

#### **Related Articles:**

- (1) [The Quran Stands Alone As Sole Religious Guidance](#)
- (2) [Understanding the term 'Sunna' from a Quran's Perspective](#)
- (3) [The Difference Between Hadith and Sunna](#)
- (4) [Does 'Hikmah' \(Wisdom\) Mean Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad? <sup>\(pbuh\)</sup>](#)
- (5) ['Take What the Prophet Gives You' - Support for the Sunna](#)
- (6) [Obey Allah \(God\) and the Messenger](#)
- (7) [How the Quran Describes Itself](#)
- (8) [Islamic secondary sources](#)

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