

What is the meaning of the word Sunnah? How is it to reject a Sunnah considering It to be Arabian Culture?

Darulifta Ahlesunnat

(Dawateislami)

Question

What do the scholars of Islam say about the following matter: Some people claim that the scholars promote Arab culture and call it Sunnah. They say, 'Dress like this, eat like this, drink like this, this is the Sunnah way'. So, should we not live our lives following our own culture instead of following Arab culture?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْجَوَابُ بِعَوْنِ الْمَلِكِ الْوَهَّابِ اللَّهُمَّ هِدَايَةَ الْحَقِّ وَالصَّوَابِ

The answer to this will become clear if we answer the following three questions.

1. What is the command of Islam regarding following the Holy Prophet ﷺ? What is the importance of a Sunnah?
2. What is the proper definition of Sunnah and what does it include? Can beards and turbans be completely written off as just a part of Arab culture?
3. Those who discourage others from following the Sunnah by writing it off as Arab culture, how do they themselves act?

The answers are as follows:

1. Every part of the blessed life of the Prophet ﷺ is an example worthy to be followed, with which honor can be gained in the world and hereafter. It has been commanded in the Holy Quran:

﴿وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ، وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا﴾

Translation from Kanz-ul-Iman: "And whatever the Prophet grants you, accept it and what he forbids you from, refrain from it" (Chapter 28, Surah Hashr, Verse 7)

Therefore, when any Muslim learns that our beloved Prophet ﷺ has performed such an act and in such a manner, being a

Muslim, he should love it and put in all his efforts to carry it out. In the Holy Quran, we have been commanded to follow the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم. It is stated:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ﴾

Translation from Kanz-ul-Iman: O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey His Messenger. (Chapter 5, Surah Nisa, Verse 59)

One aspect of obedience and following He صلى الله عليه وسلم is to follow him in all aspects of life. He صلى الله عليه وسلم himself encourages us to follow his Sunnah and states in this regard:

عليكم بسنتي

Translation: You must adhere to my Sunnah. (Sunan Abi Dawood, Book of Sunnah, Chapter of Adherence to the Sunnah, Hadith No. 4607, Vol. 4, p. 200, Publ. Lahore)

Further, it has been stated about those who turn away from the Sunnah:

من رغب عن سنتي فليس مني

(Sahih Bukhari, Kitab al-Nikah, Hadith No. 5063, Vol. 7, p. 2, Publ. Beirut)

2. Generally, the meaning of Sunnah isn't clear to people, which is why they assume that just a few foods and clothes are Sunnah. If they are followed, it is good, otherwise there is no issue. However, that isn't the case.

Types of Sunnah

Some Sunnah are related to worship, such as the Rak'aat offered before and after the Fard Rak'aat in the 5 daily prayers, the methods of offering Qiyam, Ruku', Sujood etc., which Tasbeeh should be recited in which unit, how many times it should be recited, the method of carrying out other worships such as Hajj. This all has been explained according to the Sunnah.

Some Sunnah are related to characteristics. For example, meeting others with a cheerful demeanor, forgiving others, patience and forbearance, treating family members in a good manner, interacting with children lovingly, etc. These are all Sunnah.

Some Sunnah are relevant to social relations. These include integrity, honesty, truthfulness, inviting others towards good, and prohibiting from bad.

Some Sunnah are those which The Messenger ﷺ himself commanded and practically showed us how to and how not to do. Such as what he stated regarding eating and drinking; when you eat, recite Bismillah, eat with the right, eat from in front of you, recite Bismillah before drinking, recite الحمد لله after drinking, drink using your right hand, don't drink while standing, don't drink straight from the container, don't breathe into the container, etc.

After reading all the categories of Sunnah listed above, anyone with basic knowledge can answer these questions: Are the Sunnah related to worship, such as Salah, part of Arab culture? Are the Sunnah related to one's characteristics specific to any region such that only the people of this region should possess them? How can the Sunnah related to society such as integrity, truthfulness, etc. be specified for an era or specific area? How about the Sunnah that he taught? Did he teach them specifically to the Arabs? Are only the Arabs going to follow them? The answer is No. Rather, all these Sunnah are taught to all the Muslims without designation of any region or group. All Muslims will act upon them, regardless of region and

There are a few Sunnah acts that may seem as if He era. ﷺ was doing according to some specific cultural or regional practices; however, He declared them to be part of the religion. From amongst these Sunnah are growing the beard, trimming the mustache, using a miswak, and tying a turban. Regarding the beard, He ﷺ has stated, that trimming the mustache and growing the beard is part of our religion. In one instance, he said about the beard "My lord has commanded me to do this". So, The Messenger ﷺ has included the beard from the commands of his lord and matter of Islam. Similarly, The Messenger ﷺ stated about the turban that this is part of the

religion and a sign of Islam. He has even stated that this is the distinguishing factor between Kufr and Iman. Furthermore, it increases the reward of Salah. About the Miswak, he has stated that the Salah offered after using the miswak is 70 times greater than the Salah offered without having used the miswak. Therefore, even though the beard, turban, and Miswak are things that were used in his area before Islam, since they have been declared as part of the religion and a command of the lord, they cannot be shoved away by being called Arab culture. Rather, whatever The Messenger ﷺ has made part of religion, though it also may be part of some culture, it has also become part of Islam.

As for the food, vehicles, and clothes that He ﷺ used as per the need of that area and time but didn't command to follow them, nor mentioned any reward for them, if one decides to leave those things and wear the clothing required in his area and time, there is no issue. And people usually do this. That being said, if one still follows The Messenger ﷺ in these matters out of love for him, he will attain reward according to his intention.

Regarding the beard being part of the religion, it is narrated in *Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah*:

جاء رجل من المجوس إلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، وحلق لحيته، وأطال شاربه، فقال له النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: «ما هذا؟» قال: هذا في ديننا، قال: «في ديننا أن نجز الشارب، وأن نعفي اللحية»

Translation: A Zoroastrian came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. His beard was shaved, and his mustache was grown out. The Messenger ﷺ said: "What is this?" He replied: "This is part of our religion." The Messenger ﷺ said: "A part of our religion is Trimming the beard and growing the mustache." (Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah, Book of etiquettes, Chapter of what a man was commanded regarding growing the beard, Hadith No. 25502, Vol. 5, p. 226, Publ. Riyadh)

Considering the beard from the commandments of Allah, it has been narrated:

ودخلا على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم وقد حلقا لحاهما، وأغفيا شواربهما، فكره النظر إليهما، فقال: ويلكما! من أمركما بهذا؟ قالا: أمرنا بهذا ربنا يعنينا كسرى فقال رسول الله: لكن ربي قد أمرني بإعفاء لحيتي وقص شاربي

Translation: (Two ambassadors of the king of Iran) came to the Messenger صلى الله تعالى عليه وسلم in the state that their beards were shaved, and their mustaches were grown out. He disliked looking towards them and stated: “Woe unto you! Who commanded you to do so?” They replied: “Our lord.” They meant Khosrow. Then Rasool Allah said: “However, my lord has commanded me to grow my beard and trim my mustache.” (Tarikh Tabari, Sunnah of the 6th Hijri, Vol. 2, p. 556, Publ. Beirut)

About the Turban, it is stated in *Musnad Abu Dawood al-Tayalisi* and *Sunan al-Kubra Lil-Bayhaqi*:

قال: إن العمامة حائزة بين الكفر والإيمان

Translation: The Messenger of Allah صلى الله تعالى عليه وسلم has stated: “Undoubtedly, the Turban is a distinguishing factor between Kufr and Imaan.” (Sunan al-Kubra Lil Bayhaqi, Book of Racing and Archery, Hadith No. 19736, Vol. 10, p. 24, Publ. Beirut)

It is stated in Kanz al- ‘Ummal that the Messenger of Allah صلى الله تعالى عليه وسلم tied a Turban on Ali رضى الله تعالى عنه and then stated:

هكذا فاعتصموا! فإن العمامة سيما الإسلام، وهي حائزة بين المسلمين والبشر كين

Translation: Tie your turbans this way. Indeed, the turban is the sign of Islam and a distinguishing factor between Muslims and polytheists. (Kanz al- ‘Ummal, Book of Livelihood and Habits, etiquette of tying the Turban, Hadith No. 41911, Vol. 15, p. 483, Publ. Beirut)

Rasool Allah صلى الله تعالى عليه وسلم has stated about offering Salah with a Turban:

ركعتان بعمامة خير من سبعين ركعة بلا عمامة

Translation: The 2 rak’ah offered with a Turban is better than 70 rak’ah without a Turban. (Jami’ al-Saghir, Chapter of the Letter Ra, Hadith No. 4498, Vol. 1, p. 435)

In relation to offering Salah after using the Miswak, it is stated in *Musnad Ahmed B. Hanbal*, *Musnad al-Bazzar*, *Sahih Ibn. Kuzaimah*, *Shu'b al-Iman*, and *Sunan Kubra Lil Bayhaqi*:

عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه قال: فضل الصلاة بالسواك على الصلاة بغير سواك سبعين ضعفا

Translation: The Messenger of Allah صلى الله تعالى عليه وسلم stated: “The virtue of the Salah offered after using a Miswak over the Salah without using a Miwak is 70 times.” (Musnad Ahmed B. Hanbal, Musnad Aisha Siddiqah, Hadith, 26340, Vol. 43, p. 361, Publ. Beirut)

3. By now, it has become crystal clear which practices are part of the Sunnah and aren't specific to any region. If for the sake of argument, we were to accept that the beard, turban, and the Islamic manners of eating and drinking are part of the 'Arab culture, and one that one should act according to the culture of his area, then the objection can be made that pants, coats and button-down shirts aren't part of the eastern culture. Then why are those who scream “Culture” when it comes to Islamic matters themselves dressed in pants and coats even though they are from the East? Furthermore, if one should abide by the local culture, then such people should also know that eating with forks, spoons, and on dining tables wasn't part of the Eastern culture. It has come to such a point that some people, in the name of teaching etiquette, teach whether the fork should be kept right side up or upside down, what should be held in the right hand, and how the cutlery should be kept after eating. For clothing, it is even taught that such a tie should be worn with such shirts, how a tie should be tied, and how to match clothing.

All the above-mentioned things were introduced here by the English. These were never part of our culture. Our question to the people who drive others away from the Sunnah, labeling it Arab culture is, will they leave their Western lifestyle and return to their original cultural lifestyles? Will they abandon the use of forks, spoons, and dining tables and eat according to their own culture? If not, and it is obvious that they will never, then this only means that they don't have an issue with Arab and non-Arab culture, rather

their issue is with the propagation of Islam teachings. If one can adopt the Western culture whole-heartedly, why are the Muslims who adopt the way of their Prophet ﷺ stopped?

The matter at hand is that when one desires to adopt a certain culture, he will accept it regardless of its origin, and when it comes to the Sunnah, is it ignored. Therefore, those who reject the Sunnah, writing them off as Arab culture should leave their Western appearance and habits and prove that there is no contradiction in their words and actions, whereas the Muslims will adhere to the Sunnah no matter what.

We pray to Allah that he grants us the ability to accept every command of Islam without complaint and to follow the Sunnah.

وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ صَلَّى اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ

(Allah Almighty knows best and His Messenger ﷺ knows best.)

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Ref No: Fsd-8681

Date: 29th Jumad al-Oola 1445 AH/14th December 2023



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