



Living the Sunna: Part I

By Imam Muhammad Magid with Samuel Ross

Muhammad. His name in Arabic means “the one who receives bounteous praise.” But could any amount of praise suffice? An Arab poet writes, “The essence of beauty itself is his nature... His light dawned on the horizon, and his radiant guidance suffused the world”.¹ The warmth of his light melted the hearts of the Arabs, a people hardened from violence and tribalism. It gave life to countless civilizations that rose from peoples previously undistinguished in human history. Even now, across the chasm of fourteen centuries, his light continues to shine, a beacon for all those seeking guidance.

Due to his exalted nature, God connects our love of the Prophet (salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) to our love of Himself stating: “Say, (O Muhammad, to mankind): If you love God, follow me; God will love you and forgive you your sins. For God is Oft-Forgiving, Most-Merciful” (3:31). Indeed, the Prophet counseled us, “None of you truly believes until I am more beloved to him than the members of his household, his wealth, and the whole of mankind”²

How can we make sense of this overwhelming statement? One way is to recognize that our love of the Prophet is in fact the love of nobility itself, for in the Prophet was the fullest realization of man’s potential for perfection. When we love him, we love who God wants us to, and who we can – in principle – be.

Let us take a moment then to assess our own level of love for the Prophet Muhammad. To what extent can we say that we love him? What is the proof of our love? This article, the first in series of two, will, insha’Allah, be dedicated to assessing our level of love for him and to helping us increase it that we might draw near to the one whom God called a “mercy to all the worlds” (21:107).

When assessing our love for someone there are at least three signs we can identify. The first is our desire to know as much as we can about him or her. Consider the example of a married couple that calls each other constantly just to know how the other spouse is doing, or a sports fan who has memorized every statistic about his or her most beloved player. How much can we say that we know about the Prophet? Though we may be familiar with the main aspects of his “resume” – when he was born, which battles he fought, whom he married, etc. – how well do we feel we know his character and personality? Can we think of examples of his forbearance, his justice, his generosity, his humility, and his patience? How much

¹ Imam Busiri, “The Burda”, translation by Hamza Yusuf.

² Sahih Muslim, Book 1, No. 70.

do we know about his relationship with his wives, children, family, and God? For the events of his “resume” are only the scaffolding of a rich and beautiful life.

A second sign of our love is the extent to which we try to please him or her. Again, consider the married couple that tries to surprise each other with notes of affection; buys gifts for one another; prepares one another’s favorite foods, etc. To what extent are our hearts preoccupied with pleasing the Prophet Muhammad? God-willing, we will one day have an opportunity to see him again in the Hereafter. Will he be pleased with us when we meet him? One way we can determine if our actions would please him is to listen to the hadith of Aisha (‘alayha rahmah), who said that the Prophet’s character was the Qur’an. To what extent do we strive to implement the Qur’an in our daily lives?

A third sign of our love is that we long to be like him or her. Again, consider the sports fan who dons his favorite player’s jersey and practices imitating his or her every move. To what extent do we long to be like the Prophet Muhammad? It is important to note however the danger of merely becoming a spectator. We don’t want to just be the Prophet’s “fans”, restricting our imitative love to the outward aspects of his sunnah. For to do so only brings us as close to him as a sports fan is to his beloved player; he may wear the same jersey but be completely out of shape underneath. Rather, we want to be the Prophet’s devoted followers, who “train” the way he “trained” and “play” the way he “played.” Our love for the Prophet can only be called true love if it drives us to the difficult task of pursuing real inward change. In this manner, the Prophet’s sunnah is like the devotional love song, whose beauty can only be known if we perform it. As long as it lingers as mere words on a page, our hearts and the hearts of others will never be moved.

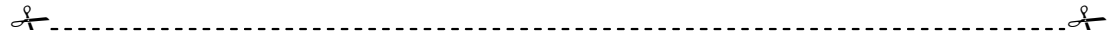
In asking these questions, let us throw open our homes, our workplaces, our relationships, and our hearts for inspection. Let us ask ourselves: If the Prophet Muhammad visited us would he feel loved? Would he feel as though his sunnah, which God called “an exalted model of character” (68:4), was being enacted?

By comparing ourselves to his exalted example, we can identify our shortcomings and the areas of our life which we need to work upon. Below are some exercises we can use to help us to draw near to him. Please feel free to cut them out and use them in your home, office, car, etc. May God help us to be among those whose love for the Prophet brings us near to him in this world and the next. Ameen.

We look forward to incorporating your feedback and questions into our future columns. Please send all correspondence to: foodforthespirit@isna.net. Please also visit us at our website where you can download this and previous columns at: <http://www.isna.net/foodforthespirit>

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Week 1: Humility

The Prophet said, “No one will enter paradise if he/she has an atom’s weight of pride.” [Sahih Muslim #263].

The Prophet treated people from all segments of society, whether young or old, rich or poor, equally. Once for example the Prophet (SAW) entered the Masjid and noticed that the poor woman who used to clean it was missing. When he asked about her and was told that she had died, he replied, "Why did you not inform me?" He then asked to be shown where her grave was and prayed over her. [Al-Bukhari Vol. 1 Book 8 Number 448].

He did not regard himself as above any particular group nor did he restrict his social interactions. Once when he was sitting with his companions a man approached, nervous about meeting a man of the Prophet’s stature. The Prophet recognized this and replied, “I am but the son of a lady who used to eat dried meat in Mecca”. [Ibn-Majah, Number 3312].

Are there persons or segments of society with whom we feel uncomfortable or even avoid interacting with because of their age, social status, or any other worldly classification? If so, let us seek them out, pray for them, and spend time with them. Conversely, do we find ourselves acting on our best behavior with people deemed by society to be more “important” than others? If so, let us remember the counsel of the Prophet that the only difference between human beings is their piety and make du’a that God help us to see and live the reality of this.