



فرع المنظمة العالمية لخريجي الأزهر
ببريطانيا (المملكة المتحدة)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPHETIC SUNNAH

**The Speech of His Eminence Prof. Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar
in the Anniversary of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Birth Ceremony 1440 AH – 2018 CE**

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In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. All praise is due to Allah and may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon our Master Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, his Household, Companions and those who follow his guidance.

Your Excellency, Mr. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt!

Dear Attendees! Alsalaamu Alaykum wa Rahmatu Allah wa Barakatuh! (May Allah's Peace, Mercy and Blessings be upon You!)

It is my pleasure to extend to you, to the dignified people of Egypt, and to the Arab and Muslim nation my deepest and kindest congratulations on the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet of mercy, the Messenger of peace, our Master Muhammad Ibn Abd Allah, may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him and all his fellow Prophets and Messengers.

This anniversary leads every Muslim, everyone who gets acquainted with this dignified Prophet and his biography and anyone who pays him due reverence, to recall the memories of greatness

and great people who changed the course of history, rescued humanity and corrected its course of action and who were the means for dispelling the darkness on earth guided by the Divine Guidance.

We, believers in Muhammad (PBUH), his Sunnah, teachings and guidance, owe this highly esteemed prophet – whose birthday anniversary is celebrated now by about one billion and half followers from the four corners of earth – a large debt of gratitude. This is because his (PBUH) greatness was not restricted to one aspect of human greatness which draws eyes and seizes minds. Rather, he (PBUH) had all aspects of greatness which require all respect and reverence in all times and places.

Although it is impossible, in this very time limited speech, to explore even one of unlimited aspects of the greatness of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which have all been combined in this perfect human being, I hope my words can highlight an old but ever renewed issue related to this blessed occasion. This issue is none but the calls that used to cast doubts about the significance, authenticity and authority of the Prophet's Sunnah as well as

the transmitters of Sunnah from among the Prophet's Companions, their followers and those who followed them. These calls further call for excluding the Sunnah altogether as a source of legislation and legal ruling and relying only on the Qur'an, with regard to all Muslims' action, acts of worship and transactions. In case there is no specific Qur'anic text, then Muslims, according to these calls, become not bound with any command or prohibition.

In the modern history, this call appeared for the first time in India, in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century; with the participation of famous figures; some of whom ended with claiming prophethood, and some pledged loyalty to colonization, and some were misled to denying the Sunnah. They denied the Prophet's (PBUH) hadiths, whether *mutawatir*ⁱ or not. They further denied any legislative effect for the Sunnah in Islam, arguing that that Qur'an is the sole source of legislation. In doing so, they disregarded the unanimous agreement of Muslims that the Sunnah should remain a second reference besides the Qur'an, or three quarters of Islam will be lost. Furthermore, breaking ties between Qur'an and Sunnah will make the Quran vulnerable to manipulation; as its verses, rulings and legislation will be tampered with. *Salah* (prayer), the second pillar of Islam after the declaration of the two *shahadahs*ⁱⁱ, is cited a case in point in this regard. Although its obligation is well established by the Qur'an, there is no single verse in the Qur'an, as a Whole, that teaches the Muslim how to pray, or the number of its units, bowings, or prostrations, from the very beginning of *takbirat al-Ihram*ⁱⁱⁱ till *taslim*^{iv}. These details and others cannot be known or proved except through the Sunnah, the second source of legislation in Islam. When one of the seniors advocates of these calls was asked in a debate to bring forth a proof from the Qur'an that explains how prayer is performed so that Muslims can follow, he said, while being in difficult dilemma: "The Qur'an only orders us to perform prayer, but the way performing these prayers, i.e. bowing and prostrations, etc., is left to the head of state assign it depending on consultations with his advisors, according to time and place"^v.

Many of those who were close to colonialism in India followed the same trend. They denied the Jihad verses, prohibited confronting colonial

powers, denied all what western culture denied even if it was a religious obligation, and approved all that which was approved by this culture even if they went against Islam and the unanimous agreement of the Muslim scholars.

Soon After, these calls were communicated to Egypt and a doctor, who was working at Tura prison, fanatically adopted this view and published two articles about it in Al-Manar periodical in 1906 and 1907 titled "*Islam is the Qur'an Alone*". His argument gained support from some writers who opposed the prophetic Sunnah.

Those people, regardless of their places, times, and lines of thought, have a common theme which is: casting suspicion and doubt about the Hadith narrators and belittling the great scholarly efforts made by Muslim scholars, who spent their whole lives for only one purpose which is distinguishing the authentic and non-authentic from these prophetic traditions through an astonishing and unique investigation of the biographies of narrators; their ethical and scholarly behaviours; their reliability, accuracy, and honesty as well who is trustworthy and who is not. This strict and accurate investigation led them to establish an independent field of inquiry which came to be known as the '*ilm al-Isnad* (the science of narration), or '*ilm al-Rijal* (the science of biographies or biographical evaluation).

This science is unprecedented in the history and it was not known to non-Muslims at any time. The renowned European scholars who studied the prophetic Sunnah gave testimonies in support of the same. The German orientalist Aloys Sprenger acknowledged the unsurpassable feat of Muslim biography in these words, "The glory of the literature of the Muslims is its literary biography. There is no nation, nor has there been any which like them has recorded the life of every man of letters. If the biographical records of the Muslims were collected, we should probably have accounts of the lives of half a million of distinguished persons." In addition, the celebrated English orientalist Margoliouth said, in one of his lectures about this science: "But though the theory of the *Isnad* has occasioned endless trouble, owing to the inquiries which have to be made into the trustworthiness of each transmitter, and the fabrication of traditions was a familiar and at times easily tolerated practice, its value in making for accuracy cannot be questioned, and the

Muslims are justified in taking pride in their science of tradition.”

Though it was so hard to declare, these fair testimonies came out only after long and strenuous efforts of study and investigation by Western scholars. They came to testify this after they became sure that history knows no one else other than Muhammad – either a prophet, a leader or a hero – that all the incidents of his life, including his actions, statements, travels, manners and habits, even the form of his dress, facial features, and the way he used to talk, walk, eat, drink, sleep and deals with his family, friends and enemies and other matters, are recorded in biographical and historical works.

I conclude my speech with turning back to the man of this ceremony, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), to ask and reveal my astonishment and surprise: How could the Prophet – fourteen centuries ago – ever know that some Muslims would come one day, and call for abandoning his Sunnah claiming to rely sufficiently on the Quran?! He knew this and warned us against those people and their attitude while it were a matter of the Unseen. It is authentically reported that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: “Soon there will come a time that a man will be reclining on his pillow, and when one of my Ahadith is narrated he will say: ‘The Book of Allah is (sufficient) between us and you. Whatever it states is permissible, we will take as permissible, and whatever it states is forbidden, we will take as forbidden.’ Verily, whatever the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) has forbidden is like that which Allah has forbidden.”^{vi} Is this not evidence proving his true prophethood, and a miracle that can never be muted over days and nights?!

Thanks to all of you, and many happy returns. May Allah’s Peace, Mercy, and Blessings be upon you all!

Ahmad Al-Tayyeb
The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

Rabi` Al Awwal 11, 1440 AH
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ⁱⁱ That is, testifying that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad (PBUH) is the Messenger of Allah. (translator)

ⁱⁱⁱ Saying ‘Allah Akbar’ as a sign of the beginning of prayer. (translator)

^{iv} Pronouncing ‘As Salaam AlaykumwaRahmatu Allah’ as a sign for ending one’s prayer. (translator)

^v See *Dirasat fi al-Ahadith al-Nabawiyyah*, by Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami, Al-Maktab al-Islami, (1980 /1400.), p. 29.

^{vi} Recorded by Al-Tirmidhi.

ⁱ *Mutawatir hadith* refers to the hadith that was narrated by a great number of narrators, whose agreement upon a lie is impossible, and also precludes the possibility of their ever committing lying about such personalities.