

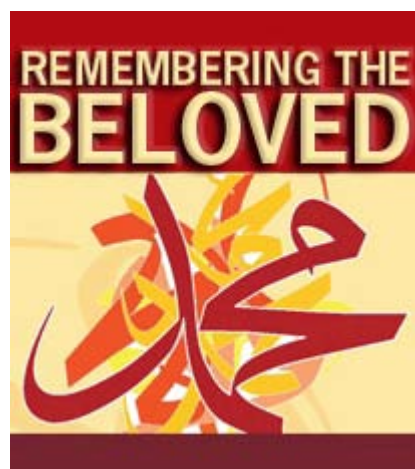
In the Spirit of the Sunnah

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[Introduction to Hasan Al-Banna]:

Hasan Al-Banna is one of the co-founding directors of the Islamic Institute for Development and Research. He graduated with a BA in Arabic and Law from the University of London, studied Arabic and Literature from the European Institute of Islamic Sciences and is currently pursuing post-graduate studies at Al-Azhar University, in Islamic Jurisprudence. He will be addressing us on the topic of 'In the Spirit of the Sunnah'. I invite him to the stage.



[Opening du'a]

My dear, respected teachers, shayūkh, brothers and sisters in Islam and humanity,

Al-Salām 'alaykum wa rahmat Allahi wa barakātuahu.

It's indeed a pleasure to be with you today. May Allah count this blessing of ours in our balance of good deeds. Allah subhāna wa ta'āla (swt) says in the Qur'ān,

But verily, Allah (swt) in his legacy, in his mannerisms, in his character, in his good life – in

his Sirah you have the best of models, you have the best of examples, he is a fine example

and role model.

Role models are to be emulated, to be followed. We have Allah (swt) asking us to follow. He,

we know, is the *Khātim Al-Anbiyā'* and *Mursalīn*. He is the seal of all the Prophets and Messengers, and also the best.

Al-Ghazi, a classical Scholar said, '*Our Prophet is better than all the other Prophets and Messengers*'. Imam Al-Busayri says that '*he (saw) surpassed all other Prophets in his physical beauty and character.*' No other Prophet came near to him in knowledge and honour. It is from our belief, Scholars say, that we believe that Allah (swt) created the Prophet (saw) as the best of creation, the best human being to walk this Earth. The Scholars say that mankind has never seen such a creation in the past, and nor will you see such a human creation.

His life is our role model. His life is our Sunnah. Sunnah in the Arabic language means *Al-Tarīq*, a path, a *manhaj*, an approach, a methodology. We find this meaning in the Qur'ānic verse, '*you will never find in the Sunnah of Allah, any change.*' The Scholars define Sunnah in different ways, 'Ulamā' Al-Usūl, the theologians of Islām define Sunnah as everything that has been narrated to us by the sayings of the Prophet (saw), his actions and his approvals. Perhaps some Companions undertook an action that the Prophet (saw) approved of. The Scholars of Ahādīth add two further items, his description (Sifa) as we heard in the first presentation – what he looked like, his physical beauty, and the events surrounding his life (Sirah). The Jurists, the fuqahā', the legal jurists in Islām, view Sunnah as a secondary source of Islāmic legislation. Everything that we do as Muslims must be based on the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Also, Sunnah is used as a Hukum, as a ruling – we have acts which are obligatory, we have acts which are harām, acts which are recommended and acts which in this light, scholars use the term Sunnah – it's a praise worth action which is recommended for one to do. We see the different approaches of understanding this Sunnah. The Sunnah covers all aspects of the Rasūl's (saw) life. Be it legal or otherwise.

How do we as Muslims, interact with the Sunnah? How do we understand this Sunnah and how do we implement this Sunnah?

It is indeed sad to say that our interaction with the Sunnah is very limited, shallow, narrow and to an extent, a legal interaction with the Sunnah. We have reduced the Sunnah to a few items and acts of worship where the Sunnah is a living reality – which is an embodiment of certain principles and values that the Prophet (saw) promoted. The Sunnah is not limited to certain acts of worship be it length of the beard, the siwāk, praying Sunnah prayers, and many other acts which are part of the Sunnah.

And yet the Sunnah is a comprehensive path. It should cover everything to do with our life from our birth to our death – even before we came to existence and after we leave, it should cover all scenarios in our life – home, work, mosque, play – it covers all aspects of our life.

In the Sunnah we find examples. In the first presentation we heard Abdul-Rahman mentioning about the Prophet (saw) resting. We find guidance on resting from the Sunnah.

I was thinking whilst listening to that, that if our British Muslim boxer Amir Khan stipulated to every single opponent he defeated that they had to convert to Islam, we would increase the number of Muslim boxers that we have.

The Sunnah addresses all dimensions of life – be it the spirit, the intellect, the physical body, it is a role model for everyone – not just for the old, the shayūkh or the knowledgeable, for the young, the old, the women, the men, for the poor, the rich – all sections of society, the Sunnah provides guidance.

The Sunnah is also a path of balance. It balances between the spirituality and the body – between the intellect and emotions, between ideals and realities, between theory and practice, between this dunyā and the ākhira, between adherence and creativity, the Sunnah adopts this middle path, and thus we see the Prophet (saw) when he heard of the three companions who, when told about the Prophet's worship, one of them said, 'I'm going to fast all day and all night.' One said 'and I will stand and never sleep.' And the third said 'I will refrain from marrying women.' The Prophet, upon hearing this was far from praiseworthy, 'I am the one who is most pious amongst you all, I am the one who fears his Lord more than all of you, yet I fast and I break my fast; I sleep and I wake up in the night and pray. I also marry women. Those who neglect my Sunnah are not from amongst my Ummah.'

The Sunnah here is not referring to a few acts of worship; the Sunnah here is referring to this balanced approach to our lives. The Prophet's du'ā, what does it teach us? 'Oh Allah give us the good of this world and the hereafter.'

The Sunnah of the Prophet (saw) is a realistic Sunnah. It acknowledges that human beings are weak, are prone to forgetfulness; we eat, we sleep, we get tired, we have ups and downs in our lives, we have passions, we have desires, and thus it interacts with us with this in mind.

When Hanzala, a famous Companion of the Prophet (saw) said, 'Hanzala has become a hypocrite, Hanzala has become a hypocrite.' When the Prophet asked him why, he said 'Oh Prophet, when I am in your presence, I remember Al-Ākhira, I remember Allah, I remember the day of Judgement, tears drop from my eyes, I feel I am in the presence of the divine, yet when I leave you, I go home, I play with my children, I speak to my wife. I feel as though my Imān has become weak, thus I feel I have become a hypocrite.'

Listen to what the Prophet (saw) said to him, 'Oh Hanzala, if you remain in the state that you are, that you do when you are with me, then the Angels will be giving to you salām when you are on the streets – you will become an angel. But oh Hanzala, there is a time for this and a time for that.'

The Sunnah of the Prophet (saw) was a path of ease. There is nothing in the Sunnah of our beloved which enforces hardship upon people. There is nothing.

The Prophet (saw) was sent as rahmatan lil 'ālimīn – as a mercy to mankind.

Thus when he sent Abu Musa and Mu'ād ibn Jabal radī Allahumā to Yemen to invite people to Islām – he instructed them to ‘make things easy for people, don’t overload them’ – don’t over complicate matters.

In another Hadīth he said ‘make things easy, don’t complicate, don’t place burdens upon people,’ and this is in line with the Qur’ānic guidance of what Allah wants from us, as human beings, as Muslims.

Allah wishes to lighten our burden.

There are many Sunnahs of the Prophet (saw) at many levels –acts of worship. There are also the Sunnahs of the values and principles that the Prophet (saw) embodied in his life. And I will suffice myself with mentioning three Sunnahs which were are in need of prioritising today, the Muslim Community as a whole, we as individuals need to embody these Sunnahs and prioritise them in our interaction with others.

These are the Sunnahs of LMC, no not London Muslim Centre [audience laugh], but the Sunnah of Love, Moderation and Co-existence. The Sunnah of muhabba, the Sunnah of wasatiyyah, and the Sunnah of ta’āīsh.

The Prophet (saw) was a Prophet of love, and I think two or three weeks ago, at this venue, there was a talk, there was a seminar, organised under this title. And what a suitable title indeed it was. The Prophet was a Prophet of Love. He (saw) bestowed his love upon all of Creation.

Did you not see the Prophet (saw) prolonging sujūd – a situation where a servant is closest to his Creator – because his two grandchildren Hasan and Husseyn are on his back? He doesn’t want to upset them – let them have a good time. This is how he treated them.

In many Ahādīth we read, ‘I am the person who looks after the orphan, and provides for him.’ In another Hadīth, ‘the one who looks after the widow or a poor person is a mujāhid – is a warrior in the path of Islām.’

Ibn Masūd relates that once they went on a journey with the Prophet (saw). The Prophet left them for a while, they found a flock of birds and they took the young ones. The Prophet returned after a while and he realised that the mother bird was flapping its wings, and he said to the Companions ‘why has distressed this bird by taking its young ones? Return it at once.’ This was his love for animals because they’re from the makhluqāt of Allah (swt).

The Sunnah of moderation – we as Muslims have been placed as a middle-path nation – Ummatan wasata. The best of matters are those in which the middle path is approached. Even the Radical Middle Path.

The Sunnah categorically condemns all forms of extremism and excessiveness. The Prophet (saw) says, ‘Beware of being excessive in your din.’ Don’t place burdens upon yourself, don’t make life difficult for yourselves.

And what does the Sunnah teach us about those that exceed the limits? The Prophet says in a Hadīth of Bukhārī, ‘Those who indulge in tannatu’ have been destroyed.’ Tannatu’ is the

term for those we say have exceeded the limits in their actions and their sayings.

This is why we find the Prophet (saw) even condemning excessiveness and extremism in worship itself. When we found that Mu'ād Ibn Jabal prolonged his prayer once, to the extent that some people went to the Prophet (saw) and complained. What did he say to them? Did he say 'you need to have more khushu'? You should think that this is Allah you are standing in front of, why do you want to speed the prayer?

No, he said, 'Oh Mu'ād, are you putting people on trial?' And he repeated this three times. In another Hadīth in a similar scenario, the Prophet (saw) said, 'there are many amongst you who frighten people, who drive people away, who make people dislike good deeds because of your over excessiveness – your over eagerness to do more.'

So return to the Prophetic Sunnah is to return to a Sunnah of moderation, of co-existence, of pluralism, of celebrating diversity. This is not only acknowledged by Islām but the Prophet (saw) provides us with the best model for this. He is indeed Usrat Al-Hasana.

Thus we find the people in the very first pact, or very first constitution, as some legal jurists claim, in the mīthāq of Medina, the Prophet (saw) built the first Islāmic Society in Medina and drew up a pact. He made a memorandum of understanding. This laid down the principles of co-existence, pluralism, multi-culturalism, multi-faith, citizenship, all these heavy-loaded big political words which we might use for political conveniences today.

We find in Ishāq narrating in the Sīrah he mentions an event where the delegation of the Christians of Mejarān, came to see the Prophet (saw) in his masjid. The time for prayer came for the Christians and they decided to pray in the mosque itself. Some of the Companions attempted to prevent them from praying in the mosque. The Prophet (saw) said, 'Leave them. Leave them to pray.'

In his book, Al-Amwāl, by Abu Ubayd, he mentioned numerous incidents events and studies in which the Prophet used to help others, regardless of their race, religion, gender or colour. Whoever they may be.

There was a specific Jewish family that the Prophet used to give sadaqa and charity to. He borrowed money from Jewish people. Why? Were there not enough rich Companions to borrow from? No, he wanted to teach his Ummah that 'this is my Sunnah.'

The Sunnah that we not only acknowledge, but we live. We strive to give to others. The Prophet received gifts and accepted help from non-Muslims, at times of war and peace, as long as of course, it was not harmful to the Muslims.

Once he stood up when a funeral procession passed by; the Companions said to him, 'Oh Prophet, the funeral procession is of a Jewish person.' The Prophet (Saw) said, so what – 'Is this not a human soul that Allah (swt) has created?'

Our approach to this Prophetic Sunnah is not based on any politically correct initiative, or to secure funding from local authorities and governments.

But this is because our faith, our Islām, our Prophetic Sunnah teaches this. Islām emphasises the dignity of mankind. It respects the human soul regardless of its colour or religion.

'And thus we ordered the son of Adam.'

Islām respects the differences in religion, and considers it as a matter of divine precision.

The Qur'ān says *'those who want to believe, believe, those who want to disbelieve, let disbelieve.'*

It is not the duty of the Muslims as we see in the Prophetic Sunnah to call non-believers to account for their disbelief; not to punish those who go astray. The dunyā is not the dunyā of judgement. It's not Yawm Al-Qīyāma.

He, Allah the Almighty says,

'If they were to argue with you, to question you, say to them Allah is the All-Knower. He knows everything you do, and Allah will judge between you all on that day of judgement, upon those areas which you disagree upon.'

This is the Prophetic Sunnah. The Prophetic Sunnah ordains justice, resulting from living with each other regardless of whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims.

Islām and the Prophetic Sunnah detest oppression and oppressors. Even if the oppressor is a Muslim and the oppressed is a non-Muslim. The Prophet (saw) says in a Hadīth, 'let the supplication of an oppressed person, even if he be a disbeliever, be accepted by Allah (swt).'

There is no boundary between that du'ā of that oppressed person even if he be a non-Muslim, and acceptance of that du'ā.

This is the Prophetic Sunnah. A Sunnah of love, a Sunnah of moderation, and a Sunnah of co-existence; we are in dire need of receiving this Sunnah of the Prophet (saw). Why? Let us return to that which we started with. With the Prophet, the best of models.

For this we need to learn about Sīrah, to learn about the Prophet (saw); how can we love him, how can we follow him, and how can we adopt this Sunnah if we don't even know about him? If we don't know about events that took place in his life? Learn something useful. Do things that will draw you closer to the Prophet (saw). Who cares what Pat and Sonya and Keith are up to in Eastenders? Who cares? What does it matter? Learn the events of the Prophet (saw), learn what his nephews and nieces and grandchildren did, because he (saw) is the best of creation.

As the Prophet's personal poet, Hasan ibn Thābit said,

'More handsome than you, the world's eyes have never seen.

More beautiful than you, no woman has ever given birth to.

You were created, free from any defect and weakness;

you were created as You (swt) wished.'

[Closing du'a]