

258503 - Types of Actions of Prophet Muhammad

the question

What is the evidence for following the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in his actions, especially since there is a difference of opinion concerning the principle that what matters is the general meaning (not the specific reason for a particular teaching)?

Is the general principle that the Prophet's actions are prescriptive and that the teachings and rulings apply equally to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and his ummah?

Is there consensus on that, and what is the evidence that we should follow the way of the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)?

If the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did something in private and one of the Companions saw him, is he to be followed in that, such as when someone saw him urinating whilst standing? Is there any blame on me for thinking about these things? Iblees whispers to me (and tries to confuse me) when I follow the way of the Prophet?

Summary of answer

The actions of the Prophet Muhammad are of different types: 1- Some of them are prescriptive (meaning that they set an example to be followed and are part of the teachings of Islam); 2- some of them are things that he did because he was a human being (and these things are dictated by human nature), such as eating and sleeping; 3- and some of them are things that may be understood either as being prescriptive or being because he was human, such as his going for Hajj riding, or his lying down after the Sunnah prayer of Fajr.

Detailed answer

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Types of Actions of Prophet Muhammad

[The actions of the Prophet](#) (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) are of different types. Some of them are prescriptive (meaning that they set an example to be followed and are part of the teachings of Islam); some of them are things that he did because he was a human being (and these things are dictated by human nature), such as eating and sleeping; and some of them are things that may be understood either as being prescriptive or being because he was human, such as his going for Hajj riding, or his lying down after the Sunnah prayer of Fajr.

With regard to the actions that were purely prescriptive – such as his prayer, fasting, Hajj and Adhkar – and things that he encouraged his Ummah to do in conjunction with some acts of worship – such as using the Siwak, mentioning the name of Allah when starting to eat, entering the mosque with the right foot first, and so on – the basic principle is that we are to follow him in them, because Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often.” [Al-Ahzab 33:21]

“Say, [O Muhammad], `If you should love Allah , then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.’” [Al `Imran 3:31]

“And whatever the Messenger has given you – take.” [Al-Hashr 59:7]

With regard to natural human actions, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, walking and so on, we are not required to follow his example in that regard.

With regard to actions that could be either prescriptive or human, there is a difference of scholarly opinion concerning them.

It says in Maraqi As-Su`ud [in verse]:

The actions he [the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)] did as a human, such as eating and drinking, are not prescriptive,

when there is no description of how to do these human actions, in which case they could be prescriptive, and there is some scholarly discussion about that.

So doing Hajj riding is part of that, as is lying down after Fajr.

“when there is no description of how to do these human actions” means: eating, in principle, is a human action, but eating with the right hand, eating from what is closest to you and mentioning the name of Allah before starting to eat are matters in which it is prescribed to follow his example.

Shaykh Al-Amin Ash-Shinqiti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“As to whether the actions of the Prophet are human or prescriptive, his actions fall into three categories:

- The first category is actions that are purely human, by which I mean actions that are dictated by human nature, such as standing, sitting, eating and drinking. These actions were not done to prescribe or set an example to be followed. No one says: “I am sitting or standing as a way of drawing closer to Allah and following the example of His Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) because he used to stand and sit”, because he did not do that for the purpose of prescribing or setting an example to be followed. Some of the scholars said that his human actions indicate that those actions are permissible, and others said that it indicates that they are recommended.

What appears to be the correct view is what we have mentioned, which is that he did not do those things for the purpose of prescribing, but they indicate that those actions are permissible.

- The second category is actions that are purely for the purpose of prescription (and form part of the teachings of Islam). These are actions that he did for the purpose of setting an example to be followed and prescribing those actions, such as the actions of the prayer and the actions of Hajj, in addition to which he said: “Pray as you have seen me praying” and “Learn from me your rituals of Hajj.”
- The third category is what is referred to here, namely actions that could be interpreted as being simply human or as being for the purpose of prescribing.

The guideline here is that human nature inherently dictates these actions, but they are connected to an act of worship, in the sense that they happen within the act of worship or are means of doing that act of worship, such as riding to perform Hajj. The Prophet’s riding to perform Hajj may be interpreted as being due to being human, because being human dictates that one must ride (to cover great distances), as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) rode in all his journeys, without that riding being done as an act of worship; rather it was because being human dictated that. Or it may be interpreted as being a prescriptive action, because he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did that in conjunction with performing Hajj, and he said: “Learn from me your rituals of Hajj.”

Minor issues connected to this matter include: Jalsat Al-Istirahah in prayer [a brief sitting after two prostrations in any Rak`ah where there is no Tashahhud]; returning from the `Eid prayer via a route different from the route one took to get to the prayer; lying on one’s right side between the Sunnah prayer of Fajr and the obligatory Fajr prayer; entering Makkah from Kada’ and leaving from Kuda; halting in Al-Muhassab after leaving Mina, and so on.

Concerning all these issues there is a difference of opinion among the scholars, because of the possibility that they may be either due to being human or they may be [prescriptive actions](#).” (Adwa’ Al-Bayan (4/300)

All rulings apply to the Prophet as well as his ummah

The basic principle is that all rulings apply to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) as well as his Ummah, except when there is evidence to indicate that a ruling applies specifically to him. Hence the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) used to follow his example in everything that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did, and they did not ask whether this action was exclusively for him or not. For example, in the Hadith of Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him), we see that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) took off his shoes [during the prayer], and the people also took off their shoes. When he finished the prayer, he said: “Why did you take off your shoes?” They said: O Messenger of Allah, we saw you take off your shoes, so we took off our shoes. He (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Jibril came to me and told me that there was some filth on them. When one of you enters the mosque, let him turn up his shoes and look at them; if he sees some filth on them, let him wipe it on the ground, then pray wearing them.” (Narrated by Ahmad, 17/242, 243; classed as authentic by the commentators on Al-Musnad)

In fact, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) got angry with some of his companions when they interpreted something that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did as being exclusively for him.

It was narrated from `Aishah, the wife of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), that a man said to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): O Messenger of Allah, (sometimes) I wake up Junub (in a state of impurity due to sexual activity or a wet dream), and want to fast. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “(Sometimes) I also wake up Junub and want to fast, so I do ghusl and fast.” The man said: O Messenger of Allah, you are not like us! Allah has forgiven you your past and future sins. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “By Allah, I hope that I am the most fearing of Allah and the most knowledgeable of you all in what I follow.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud, 2389; classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih Abu Dawud)

Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “It is not permissible to say concerning anything that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did that it was exclusive to him unless there is a text to that effect, because he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) got angry with the one who said that, and whatever angered the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is prohibited.” (Al-Ihkam fi Usul Al-Ahkam (4/433))

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “The basic principle is that the rulings that applied to his Ummah also applied to him, except [where the evidence indicates that something applied only to him](#) . Hence Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her) said to him [at Al-Hudaybiyyah]: Go out and do not speak to anyone until you have shaved your head and offered your sacrifice – because she knew that the people would follow his lead.” (Zad Al-Ma` ad)

If it was not an action dictated by being human, then the Prophetic action is an example to be followed

Everything that was narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is subject to the discussion mentioned above. If it was not an action dictated by being human, then it is an example to be followed, unless there is evidence to prove that it applied only to him. It makes no difference whether the action was narrated from a group of the Companions who saw him or only one of them saw him (and narrated it).

The basic principle is that urination is an inherently human action, but the way in which it is to be done – standing or sitting – is a matter that is addressed by Islamic teachings and has to do with following the example of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), because it is narrated that it is prohibited to urinate whilst standing, and this instruction is prescriptive and must be followed. Then it was proven that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did that whilst standing. So in this case we must see how to reconcile between the reports.

Ibn Majah narrated (309) that Jabir ibn `Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) forbade us to urinate whilst standing. But this Hadith was classed as inauthentic. Al-Busayri (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Az-Zawa'id: The [scholars] unanimously agreed that it is inauthentic. Al-Albani said: "It is very inauthentic."

At-Tirmidhi (12) narrated that `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) saw me urinating whilst standing, and he said: "O `Umar, do not urinate whilst standing." So I never urinated whilst standing again after that. This Hadith was classed as inauthentic by At-Tirmidhi and Al-Albani.

Al-Bazzar (may Allah have mercy on him) narrated from Buraydahr (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "It is uncouth for a man to urinate whilst standing." At-Tirmidhi referred to this Hadith and said that it is not known.

Based on that, the prohibition on urinating whilst standing is not soundly narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

But At-Tirmidhi (12) and An-Nasa'i (29) narrated that `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: Whoever tells you that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to urinate whilst standing, do not believe him; he only ever urinated whilst sitting. (Classed as authentic by At-Tirmidhi and An-Nasa'i)

Ash-Shawkani (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Nayl Al-Awtar (1/16): "This Hadith indicates that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not urinate whilst standing; rather it was his practice to sit when he urinating, so urinating whilst standing is disliked."

The fact that it is permissible to urinate whilst standing is indicated by the report narrated by Al-Bukhari (224) and Muslim (273) from Hudhayfah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came to the garbage-

dump of some people, and urinated whilst standing, then he called for water. I brought some water to him and he did Wudu’.

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“The concession allowing this has been narrated from `Umar, `Ali, Ibn `Umar, Zayd ibn Thabit, Sahl ibn Sa`d, Anas, Abu Hurayrah and `Urwah (may Allah be pleased with them).

Hudhayfah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came to the garbage-dump of some people and urinated whilst standing. This was narrated by Al-Bukhari and others.

Perhaps the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did that in order to highlight that it is permissible, and he only did it once. Or it may be that he was in a place where it was not possible to sit.

It was said that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did that because of a pain in the hollow at the back of his knee (popliteal space).” (Al-Mughni (1/108)

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “It is proven from `Umar, `Ali, Zayd ibn Thabit and others that they [urinated whilst standing](#) , which indicates that it is permissible and is not disliked, if there is no risk of it splashing back. And Allah knows best.

There is no proven report from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to indicate that it is prohibited. And Allah knows best.” (Fath al-Bari (1/330)

Get rid of Satanic whispers

[It is essential to beware of waswasah](#) (intrusive thoughts), for it is a disease and an evil thing. Seeking to understand the religion, learning about the Sunnah and following the example of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) does not come under the heading of [Waswasah](#) .

May Allah increase you in knowledge and make you more keen to do good.

And Allah knows best.