77243 - The saheeh Sunnah is wahy (Revelation) from Allah

the question

Firstly: I apologize for asking such a question, and so that there will be no room for doubt about my intention I will say that I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and I am completely content with Allah as my Lord, Islam as my religion and Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as my Prophet.
I am asking about the Sunnah, because there are many reports of a single hadeeth. For example, we may find in Saheeh al-Bukhaari a hadeeth that appears in a form different than that in which it appears in Saheeh Muslim. Why isn't the Sunnah like the Holy Quran? What is the difference between the Sunnah and the Holy Quran? Is the Sunnah part of the Wahy that was revealed to the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) or is it just his words and deeds? Is it one of the characteristics of Prophethood or what?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

It is essential that it be established in the mind and heart of every Muslim that the Sunnah – which is the words, deeds and approval that are attributed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) – is one of the two parts of divine Revelation that were revealed to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The other part of the Revelation (Wahy) is the Holy Quran.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Nor does he speak of (his own) desire.

4. It is only a Revelation revealed”

[al-Najm 53:3-4]

It was narrated from al-Miqdaam ibn Ma’di Yakrib (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

“Verily I have been given the Quran and something similar to it along with it. But soon there will be a time when a man will be reclining on his couch with a full stomach, and he will say, ‘You should adhere to this Quran: what you find that it says is permissible, take it as permissible, and what you find it says is forbidden, take it as forbidden.’ But indeed, whatever the Messenger of Allah forbids is like what Allah forbids.”

Narrated by al-Tirmidhi (2664). He said: It is hasan ghareeb with this isnaad. It was classed as hasan by al-Albaani in al-Silsilah al-Saheehah (2870).

This is what was understood by the righteous salaf (may Allah be pleased with them):

Hassaan ibn ‘Atiyah said in al-Kifaayah by al-Khateeb (12):

Jibreel used to bring the sunnah down to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as he used to bring the Quran down to him. End quote.

Narrated by al-Daarimi in his Sunan (588) and by al-Khateeb in al-Kifaayah (12). It was attributed by al-Haafiz in al-Fath (13/291) to al-Bayhaqi, and he said: With a saheeh isnaad.

The importance of the Sunnah is first of all that it explains the Book of Allah and is a commentary on it, then it adds some rulings to those in the Book of Allah.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And We have also sent down unto you (O Muhammad) the Dhikr [reminder and the advice (i.e. the Quran)], that you may explain clearly to men what is sent down to them, and that they may give thought”

[al-Nahl 16:44].

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr said in Jaami’ Bayaan al-‘Ilm wa Fadlihi (2/190):

The commentary of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on the Quran is of two types:

1 – Explaining things that are mentioned in general terms in the Holy Quran, such as the five daily prayers, their times, prostration, bowing and all other rulings.

2 – Adding rulings to the rulings of the Quran, such as the prohibition on being married to a woman and to her paternal or maternal aunt at the same time. End quote.

Secondly:

As the Sunnah is the second of the two parts of Revelation, it is inevitable that Allah will protect it, so as to preserve the religion from distortion and additions or subtractions.

Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) said in al-Ihkaam (1/95):

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, We, it is We Who have sent down the Dhikr and surely, We will guard it (from corruption)”

[al-Hijr 15:9]

“Say (O Muhammad): “I warn you only by the Revelation (from Allah and not by the opinion of the religious scholars and others). But the deaf (who follow the religious scholars and others blindly) will not hear the call, (even) when they are warned [i.e. one should follow only the Quran and the Sunnah (legal ways, orders, acts of worship, and the statements of Prophet Muhammad , as the Companions of the Prophet did)]”

[al-Anbiya’ 21:45]

Allah tells us that the words of His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are all

Wahy (revelation), and Wahy is undoubtedly Dhikr, and Dhikr is preserved according to the text of the Quran. Thus it is correct to say that his words (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are all preserved by Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and He has promised that none of them will be lost to us, because that which Allah preserves can certainly not be lost at all; it has all been transmitted to us and Allah has established proof and left us with no excuse. End quote.

Thirdly:

Once it is established that the Sunnah is part of the divine revelation, it is essential to note that there is only one difference between it and the Quran, which is that the Qur'aan is the word of Allah, may He be exalted, which was revealed verbatim to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), whereas the Sunnah may not be the words of Allah, rather it is only His Revelation, so it need not necessarily come to us verbatim, but the meaning of it comes to us.

Once we understand this difference, we see that the point in transmission of the Sunnah is to convey the meanings, not the exact same words that were uttered by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Islam tells us that Allah only preserves the words of the Quran in full, and He preserves the general meanings of the Sunnah, and that which explains the Book of Allah, not the exact words and phrases.

However, the scholars of this ummah throughout the early centuries strove to preserve the sharee’ah and the Sunnah. They have transmitted to us the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as he said them, and they distinguished between the reports that were right and wrong, true and false.

What the questioner sees of multiple reports of a single hadeeth does not mean that there is any shortcoming in the preservation and transmission of the Sunnah. Rather the reports vary for numerous reasons, and once they are understood the answer will become clear.

Fourthly:

Reasons for multiple reports:

1-Multiple incidents

Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) said in al-Ihkaam (1/134):

The existence of different versions does not represent a fault in the hadeeth if the meaning is the same, because it is proven that when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) uttered a hadeeth he would repeat it three times, so each person would narrate it according to what he heard. This difference in the reports does not mean that the hadeeth is weak, if the meaning is the same. End quote.

2-Reporting the meaning

This is the most common reason for there being multiple versions of a single hadeeth. What matters in transmission of a hadeeth is that the meaning be conveyed. As for the wording, it is not the matter of worship as is the case with the Quran.

For example, the hadeeth “Actions are but by intentions” is also narrated as “Action is by intention” and “Actions are but by intention” and “actions are by intention.” The reason for these multiple versions is that the meaning was narrated. The source of the hadeeth is one, namely Yahya ibn Sa’eed from Muhammad ibn Ibraaheem from ‘Alqamah from ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him). It may be noted that the meaning that is understood from these sentences is the same, so what does it matter if there are multiple reports?

In order to be more certain that the narrator had transmitted the correct meaning of the hadeeth, the scholars would not accept a report of similar meaning unless it came from a scholar of the Arabic language, then they would compare his report with that of another trustworthy narrator; then they would be able to spot the mistake in narration if there was any mistake. There are many such examples but this is not the place to discuss them in detail.

3 – Narrator’s shortening of the hadeeth

i.e., the narrator memorized the hadeeth in its entirety, but he quoted only part of it in one place, and narrated it in full elsewhere.

For example: Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated the story of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forgetting two rak'ahs of Zuhr prayer. The entire story was narrated from Abu Hurayrah, and it is one story. This indicates that the difference in reports is due to some narrators shortening it. See Saheeh al-Bukhaari, 714, 715, 1229.

4 – Mistakes

One of the narrators may have made a mistake, so he narrated the hadeeth in a way that it was not narrated by others. It is possible to spot the mistake by comparing the reports with one another. This is what was done by the scholars in the books of Sunnah and takhreej.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in al-Jawaab al-Saheeh (3/39):

But Allah has preserved for this ummah that which He revealed. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Verily, We, it is We Who have sent down the Dhikr and surely, We will guard it (from corruption)"

[al-Hijr 15:9]

So there is no error in the interpretation of the Quran or in the transmission of hadeeth or interpretation thereof. Allah guaranteed that there would always be in this ummah those who would explain it and highlight evidence against the errors of those who err and the lies of those who lie. This ummah will not agree on misguidance, and there will remain among them a group who will adhere to the truth until the Hour begins. For they are the last of the nations and there is no Prophet after their Prophet and no Book after their Book. When the nations before them changed, Allah sent a Prophet to show them the way with commands and prohibitions, but there will be no Prophet after Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and Allah has guaranteed to preserve the revelation that He has sent down. End quote.

The Sunnah, as we explained at the beginning, is revelation (wahy) from Allah, which explains to the people that which was revealed to them in the Book of Allah, may He be exalted, and it teaches them the rulings that they need to practise their religion. Even if the details or the basic

principles are mentioned in the Book of Allah, we say: in this sense the Sunnah is one of the attributes of Prophethood and one of the missions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The people still regard the Sunnah in this manner, whether it is mentioned in books or in oral reports which may differ in some wording or in different contexts. None of that gives cause to doubt its status or worry that it has not been preserved properly or to dispute its validity as evidence or to say that the people have no need of it, despite the many difference among people about theoretical and practical issues.

The great scholar Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghani ‘Abd al-Khaaliq (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

We do not find in the books of al-Ghazaali or al-Aamidi or al-Bazdawi, or any of the scholars of usool who follow their method of writing, any suggestion or hint of any dispute with regard to this matter. They are the ones who examined all the books and madhhabs of the earlier scholars and studied the disputes, even the odd views, and they took great care to refute them.

Then he quoted from the author and commentator of al-Musallam: The Quran, Sunnah, scholarly consensus and analogy are he valid foundations of Islam, as is discussed in the field of ‘ilm al-kalaam. But the scholars of usool focused on the validity of scholarly consensus and analogy, because there were too many foolish people who tried to undermine their validity, such as the khawaarij and Raafidis (may Allah humiliate t hem). As for the validity of the Quran and Sunnah, the ummah is unanimously agreed on that, which is why there was no need to discuss their validity. End quote.

See: Hujjiyyat al-Sunnah (248-249).

And Allah knows best.