

ITTIBA: TO FOLLOW AND IMITATE HIM IN EVERY WAY

There is a very important difference between Ita'at (obedience) and Ittiba (emulation or imitation). Ita'at (obedience) needs an order to obey. In the absence of an order or instruction, no obedience can be demanded. But Ittiba (emulation or imitation) is a sign of love. No instruction or order is necessary. The one being emulated may not even be aware that he is being imitated. Emulation or imitation (Ittiba) is a sign of love. It is the surest sign of love because by emulation, the emulator wishes to be identified with the one he is emulating. He wishes to be known, not as himself but as a shadow of the one he is emulating. Those who love the original, also love to see the imitation because it reminds them of the original. Their love for the original spills over onto the imitator. They love the imitator, not for himself but for the one he is imitating. That is why the One who loves Muhammad ﷺ told him to tell his people to imitate him and said that if they did that, then the One who loves him, will love them too.

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحِبُّكُمْ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ
غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Aal-Imraan 3:31 Say (O Muhammad to mankind): "If you (really) love Allah then follow me (make my Ittiba), Allah will love you and forgive your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

I remind you and myself that the most important emulation of Rasoolullah ﷺ is in his biggest Sunnah which was his mission in this world i.e. propagation of Islam. While every Sunnah is important because it is part of the whole, i.e. his entire life, but he associated us with his mission and honored us by saying that it is his mission and the mission of those who follow him, to invite others towards Allah ﷻ. What greater honor than to introduce people to their Creator and Sustainer and to invite them to thank Him and worship Him as it is His right to be worshipped and to live our lives with one purpose only, which is to please Him? That is the essence of Islam and the reason to live. To worship Allah ﷻ alone and to live our lives only to please Him. Those who know Allah ﷻ, know that this will make their lives successful in this world and the next.

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُو إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ
وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

Al-Yusuf 12:108 Say (O Muhammad SAW): "This is my way; I invite unto Allah with sure knowledge, I and whosoever follows me. And Glorified and Exalted be Allah (above all that they associate as partners with Him). And I am not of the Mushrikûn.

Finally, Allah ﷻ told us that to follow Rasoolullah ﷺ is the best way and his entire life, in all its aspects, is the best example for anyone who looks forward to meeting Allah ﷻ on the Day of Judgment and remembers Allah ﷻ a great deal. That is the definition of a Muslim. In short, the answer to the question, "Who is a Muslim?" is, "The one whose life resembles the life of Muhammad ﷺ." The bonus of course is that the life of Rasoolullah ﷺ is also the best way to live in this world because of which you would become the most beloved and influential person in your community. After all, show me anyone who is compassionate, courageous, helpful, charitable, has the best manners, generous and hospitable, cheerful and friendly and I will show you someone who is the beloved of all those he encounters. That is the secret of influence.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ
الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

Al-Ahzaab 33:21 There is surely a good example for you in the Messenger of Allah, for one who hopes (to meet) Allah and the Hereafter and remembers Allah abundantly."

Ittiba of the Sunnah is Fardh: There is a great misconception that Ittiba of Sunnah is left to our fancy. It is not. Allah ﷻ emphasized that not only is it Fardh but it is the only way to earn the love of Allah ﷻ and His Forgiveness when we meet Him. Those who discount the Sunnah, especially those who are dismissive about it and decry it as being unimportant, only display their gross ignorance and depending on what they say, may end up committing Kufr and exiting Islam altogether. The Sunnah is the fabric of Islam. It is the tapestry into which is woven the entire template of Islamic

culture and tradition. Our tradition is not the tradition of our ethnicity or nationality or family or tribe, but it is the tradition of Muhammad ﷺ. That is why we need to know what that is and to live it in our lives as a sign of our allegiance to him and love for him.

Types of Sunnah are different because Rasoolullah ﷺ emphasized some things and simply did others without emphasizing. [E.g. Miswak vs Beard.] Ittiba is an expression of love. We display that which we are proud of and which we believe adds value to us. Ittiba differentiates us, defines us, gives a sense of belonging and associates us with the Asl and reminds others about the actual. The imitator is delighted when people forget him and remember the one he is imitating. That is the essence of love.

MUHABBAT: TO LOVE HIM ABOVE ALL THINGS AND EVERYONE ELSE

To love Rasoolullah ﷺ is not only a part of Imaan (Islamic faith) but a conditional requirement of it. Without the love of Rasoolullah ﷺ you can't call yourself a Muslim because Allah ﷻ defined Muslims as those who love Rasoolullah ﷺ more than they love even themselves. This is the defining criterion of the Muslim i.e. one who loves Muhammad ﷺ and emulates him (does his Ittiba). Allah ﷻ said:

النَّبِيُّ أَوْلَىٰ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجُهُ أُمَّهَاتُهُمْ

Al-Ahzaab 33:6 *The Prophet is closer to the Believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers.*

Allah ﷻ made this even more clear and warned those who have any doubts in the matter of loving Rasoolullah ﷺ by promising them His punishment and stating that there is no guidance for the one who doesn't love Muhammad ﷺ more than he loves anyone and anything else. Allah ﷻ associated His Own Majesty and Grace with the love of Rasoolullah ﷺ and demanded that not only must one love Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ more than he loves anyone and anything else but must prove and demonstrate that in his life. This is done, not by singing Nasheeds and Qawwalis but by emulating (Ittiba) Rasoolullah ﷺ in every aspect of life and following his Sunnah.

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ
وَأَمْوَالٌ اقْتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِينُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ
إِلَيْكُمْ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ
بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ

At-Taubah 9:24 Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that ye have gained; the commerce in which ye fear a decline: or the dwellings in which ye delight - are dearer to you than Allah, or His Messenger, or the striving in His cause; then wait until Allah brings about His decision (punishment): and Allah guides not the rebellious.

Finally, Allah ﷻ told us that this condition that Muslims must love Muhammad ﷺ is not one sided but a reciprocation of the love that Rasoolullah ﷺ has for them. It is something that can't really be reciprocated fully because you can't ever repay anyone for what they do. Because they do it selflessly, not seeking any reward whereas you are only trying to return what you already received, unasked. However, honor demands that we try our best to reciprocate the goodness we received. Allah ﷻ said:

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ
بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَؤُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

At-Taubah 9:128 Now has come to you a Messenger from amongst yourselves: It grieves him that you should perish: ardently anxious is he over you: to the Believers is he most kind and merciful.

It is this love that Rasoolullah ﷺ has for His Ummah, those he knew personally and those who came after him that will be the basis of his Shafa'at on the Day of Judgement. This is what will make him intercede for us when his intercession will be instrumental and the basis of Allah ﷻ's forgiveness. We ask Allah ﷻ for this for us all.

Let me close by giving you some examples of how Rasoolullah ﷺ expressed his love for us and how his Sahaba loved him.

Anas ibn Malikؓ reported: Rasoolullah ﷺ said, "I wish I could meet my brothers." The Sahaba asked, "Are we not your brothers?" Rasoolullah ﷺ said, "You are my Sahaba, but my brothers are those who have faith in me although they never saw me." Musnad Ahmad (Hasan).

I ask Allah ﷻ to include us among those who Rasoolullah ﷺ called his brothers/sisters.

That is also why it is essential not to do what Rasoolullah ﷺ didn't do and not to create innovations in Islam (Bida'at). Those who do will forfeit their right to his intercession.

Anas ibn Malikؓ reported: Rasoolullah ﷺ said, "Some of my companions will come to me at my fountain until I recognize them. They will be taken away from me, then I will say: "My companions!" It will be said: "You do not know what they innovated after you." Muttafaqun Alayhi (authenticity agreed upon) according to Al-Bukhari and Muslim

I want to end with the story of the Shahada of one of the most famous of the Sahaba of Rasoolullah ﷺ Khubaib ibn Adiyؓ who was taken captive and escorted in a procession to the place set for his death. Khubaibؓ's death was to be in revenge for Quraysh losses in the Battle of Badr. When they arrived Khubaibؓ said to them, "If you would, leave me to pray two rakaats before my death."

This the Quraysh allowed. Khubaibؓ prayed two Raka'at. Then Khubaibؓ faced the Quraysh leaders and said, "By Allah ﷻ, if you thought that I asked to pray out of fear of death, I would think the prayer not worth the trouble."

Then the Meccans set about dismembering Khubaybؓ's body while he was still alive and taunting him in the process saying, "Would you like Muhammad to be in your place while you go free?"

With his blood flowing, he replied, "By God, I would not want to be safe and secure among my family while even a thorn hurts Muhammad."

Such were those who loved Muhammad ﷺ. They are our standard and our inspiration.