



The Authority of the Prophetic Sunnah: Foundations, Views, and Implications with an Emphasis on the Prophet's Consultations (PBUH)

Mohammadebrahim Roshanzamir^{*}

Associate Professor, Department of Quranic Sciences and Hadith, Razavi
University of Islamic Sciences, Mashhad, Iran.

Mohsen Nouraei

Associate Professor, Department of Quranic Sciences and Hadith, Faculty of
Theology and Islamic Studies, University of Mazandaran, Babulsar, Iran.

(Received: November 2025, Accepted: April 2026)

DOI: 10.22034/hsr.2026.52293.1139

Abstract

The Prophetic Sunnah, after the Holy Qur'an, is the second authoritative source for deriving Islamic teachings; however, its scope and degree of authority have long been subjects of debate among Islamic scholars. In this regard, three main viewpoints can be identified: "The absolute authority of the Sunnah, the authority of the Sunnah in religious matters but not in non-religious affairs, and the differentiation of authority based on the Prophet's threefold roles,

^{*} Corresponding Author: roshanzamir@razavi.ac.ir.

prophetic mission, judiciary, and governance." Using a descriptive-analytical method and a critical approach, this study seeks to present a rational explanation of the Prophet's consultations based on the theory of differentiating these roles. The findings indicate that consultation holds different positions in each of these three domains; in the context of the Prophet's mission, consultation has no place because the mission is sacred in nature; in the judicial role, consultation is clearly relevant, since judicial rulings are issued on the basis of hearing evidence and outward judgments, making consultation functional; but in the domain of governance and leadership, consultation differs from the previous two. Here, consultation represents the application of collective reasoning in non-revelatory matters and in the system of governance. Therefore, it is not merely educational or ceremonial but an effective and decisive element in decision-making. This analysis shows that the Prophet's consultations are not only compatible with his infallibility and exalted status, but also reflect the rational dimension of the Prophetic practice.

Keywords: Prophetic Practice, Authority of the Sunnah, Roles of the Prophet (PBUH), Consultation, Islamic Governance.

Statement of the Problem

Regarding the authority of the Prophetic Sunnah, that is, the authority of the Prophet's sayings, actions, and tacit approvals, different viewpoints have been proposed. Accepting any of these positions entails specific and unavoidable consequences for other fields of Islamic studies, such as theology and Qur'anic exegesis. Accordingly,

216 beyond the evidence and methods used to establish each claim,

attention to the implications of the chosen view is also important. Those who consider all the Prophet's sayings, actions, and approvals authoritative in every matter must accept the inevitable consequence of this view, namely, the authority of the Sunnah in both religious and non-religious affairs. They are compelled to regard governmental and judicial rulings issued by the Prophet as unchangeable and to interpret his consultations with individuals as merely formal, serving only educational and pedagogical purposes.

By contrast, those who restrict the authority of the Prophet's words and actions to religious matters must likewise accept the implications of their view and treat governmental and judicial rulings, as well as any opinions expressed by the Prophet in non-religious affairs, as non-binding, going so far as to interpret the Prophet's consultations as arising from need and a search for the correct course.

However, the implications of the theory that differentiates the Prophet's three roles (mission, governance, judiciary, and leadership) differ from the two previous views and present fewer challenges. This research seeks to answer the following questions: 'What are the foundations of the authority of the Prophet's Sunnah, and how can these viewpoints be analyzed in light of their theoretical premises and implications?'

1. Literature Review

Numerous articles have been written on the authority of the Prophetic Sunnah and the Prophet's consultations. Heidari Khorasani (1998 AD/1377 SH), in the article "Consultation in the Prophet's Practice," **217**

argues that the Prophet's consultations were not merely an ethical virtue but a necessary and obligatory governmental method; despite not needing consultation, the Prophet consulted to teach this commendable practice. Soltani Renani (2009 AD/1388 SH), in "Consultation in the Prophetic Practice," maintains that the Prophet's consultations demonstrate that consultation in Islam is a rational matter requiring every Islamic ruler to consult and accept the superior opinion.

Roshanzamir (2012 AD/1391 SH), in "The Authority of the Sunnah from the Perspective of *Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah*," critiques *Abū Rayyah*'s view that the Prophet's statements in worldly affairs lack authority. Fatemeh Rezadad (2016 AD/1395 SH) argues that all of the Prophet's statements, even those related to human experience and skills, are not devoid of legislative implication and indicate one of the five legal rulings, though some indicate primary and others secondary rulings. Marzieh Balkhari (2017 AD/1396 SH), in "The Qur'anists School and a Critique of Its Claim of the Non-Authority of the Sunnah," critiques the Qur'anists' position and responds to their arguments such as the Prophet's *Ijtihad*, the possibility of deriving rulings directly from the Qur'an, and denying the Sunnah's role in understanding Qur'anic verses.

Mohammad Javad Arasta (2016 AD/1395 SH), in "Rational Grounds for the Necessity of Consultation in Islamic Governance with Reference to Imam Khomeini's Practice," uses rational arguments (the practice of rational agents, collective wisdom, prevention of religious
218 despotism, and avoidance of individual error) to demonstrate that

consultation is obligatory for the Islamic ruler. Morteza Haeri (1927 AD/1306 SH), in "The Authority of the Prophet's Sunnah from the Perspective of the Qur'ān," holds that every statement of the Prophet, Qur'anic or non-Qur'anic, is divine instruction and authoritative. Vafa Hasanpour (2024 AD/1403 SH), in "Belief in the Revelatory Nature of the Prophetic Sunnah in the Works of Islamic Scholars," examines whether the Sunnah can be separated from revelation and concludes that Islamic scholars regard the Sunnah as revelatory.

None of these articles, nor discussions in books and other writings on the authority of the Sunnah and the Prophet's consultations, have fully examined the foundations of the Sunnah's authority, scholarly viewpoints, and their implications, particularly the Prophet's consultations, based on the differentiation of the Prophet's roles.

2. Foundations of the Authority of the Prophet's Sunnah (PBUH)

Regarding the authority of the Prophet's sayings, actions, and tacit approvals, three viewpoints exist:

2-1. First View: The Comprehensive Authority of All the Prophet's Words and Actions

Some scholars hold that the Prophet fully occupied the position of legislation, and that all aspects of his conduct, speech, silence, and approval, regardless of whether issued as Messenger, ruler, or judge, are authoritative; consequently, following them is obligatory for the community (Abū Zahw, 1958: 15; 'Abd al-Khāliq, n.d.: 279-282; Salafī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 293-330).

Some researchers, despite acknowledging the Prophet's human nature, consider all aspects of his conduct, even social customs such as dress, eating habits, and social etiquette, to fall within the sphere of legislation. They argue that if one attributes the Prophet's actions to human nature and prevailing Arab customs, this could lead to excluding some of his statements or approvals from legislation, which would ultimately undermine the authority of the Sunnah. Since no action is devoid of one of the five legal rulings, the Prophet's ordinary actions, if not indicating recommendation or obligation, at least indicate permissibility (Nasiri, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 115-117).

2-1-1. Implications of This View

Some implications include:

- A) All of the Prophet's sayings, actions, and tacit approvals, even apparently ordinary behavior, are considered part of the Sunnah, making adherence obligatory.
- B) Governmental and judicial rulings issued by the Prophet are not based on ordinary human considerations such as expediency or circumstantial evidence but on divine command, and therefore no one has the right to oppose them (Salafi, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 307).
- C) Although the Messenger of God (PBUH) had no need for consultation, God nevertheless commanded him to consult with his companions, while guiding him and managing affairs in a way that made him independent of their opinions, so that believers after him would follow his example and adopt consultation as a model in their religious matters (cf. Ṭabarī, n.d.: 4, 101; Ālūsī, n.d.: 2, 318; Rāzī,

n.d.: 5, 126).

D) The Prophet (PBUH) not only had no need for consultation, but the full authority of all his sayings, actions, and indications would imply that he should not rely on the opinions of others. Given that his judgment is aligned with divine revelation, he would not be permitted to act on opposing views. Therefore, if he sometimes consulted others, it was not for decision-making but for other purposes such as honoring companions, persuading them, or similar aims.

2.1.1.1. Critique

A) The concern that acknowledging the influence of human nature and prevailing customs of the Prophet's time on some of his actions might lead to excluding certain sayings or approvals from the sphere of legislation, and thereby gradually undermining the authority of the Sunnah, is unfounded. The discussion concerns those ordinary sayings and actions for which there is no indication of revelatory origin; wherever such an indication exists, they are unquestionably authoritative. Many of the Prophet's sayings and actions have clear origins and are beyond doubt; only a small portion of the Sunnah may be open to uncertainty, which can be resolved through reflection. Even if some ambiguity remains, it does not affect the vast body of clear Prophetic teachings.

B) One cannot attribute matters to revelation merely out of concern about doubt arising in a small part of the Sunnah. Just as it is impermissible to deny any part of revelation without reliable evidence, it is equally impermissible to label something as

revelatory when there is no proof of its revelatory nature, especially since attributing ordinary Prophetic behavior to revelation may lead to undesirable consequences.

C) The Prophet (PBUH) not only consulted but also acted on the companions' opinions, even when they differed from his own. A prominent example is the consultation during the Battle of *Badr*, where he sought advice regarding whether to fight, the location of the battlefield, and the treatment of prisoners. After arriving near the first well, he asked: "Advise me regarding this location." *Ḥubāb ibn Mundhar* stood and argued that the place was unsuitable, adding that since no specific revelation had designated it and the matter was strategic, they should advance to the last well closer to the enemy and camp there. The Prophet responded: "Your opinion is correct." (Ibn Hishām, 1963 AD/1383 AH: 2, 257)

Other examples include his consultation in the Battle of the Trench (*Aḥzāb*) (Ibn Athīr, 1966 AD/1386 AH: 2, 179), regarding dealing with the Jews of Medina (*Banū Qurayzah and Banū Naḍīr*) (Suyūṭī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 2, 90), at *Ḥudaybiyyah* on various issues (Ibn Kathīr, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 2, 142), in the expedition of *Ṭā'if* (Ibn Athīr, 1966 AD/1386 AH: 3, 267), and in the expedition of *Tabūk* (Ḥalabī, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 3, 142).

During the Battle of *Uḥud*, the Prophet consulted whether to remain in Medina or go out to face the enemy; although he personally preferred staying, he accepted the companions' view to go out (Ibn Hishām, 1963 AD/1383 AH: 3, 26). The companions themselves

222 followed this noble practice, consulting not only with the Prophet

but also with one another. The Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt likewise upheld this practice (Minqarī, 1962 AD/1382 AH: 92; Ḥurr ‘Āmilī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 8, 428; Majlisī, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 75, 101; Ṣadūq, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 2, 77; Nūrī, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 8, 347) and encouraged Muslims to consult in their speech and conduct (Barqī, 1951 AD/1371 AH: 2, 600).

Historians have recorded dozens of instances of the Prophet’s consultations in cultural, economic, political, social, and even personal and family matters. These examples show that consultation is not limited to governance but is a guiding principle across all aspects of social and individual life. Imam *Riḍā* (AS) said: "The Messenger of God used to consult his companions, then resolve upon what he intended." (Barqī, 1951 AD/1371 AH: 2, 601; Ḥurr ‘Āmilī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 12, 44)¹

D) If the Prophet’s consultations were merely educational, without serious intent to act on them, this would imply that consultation was only a formal act, which is incompatible with the integrity of prophets. Such artificial behavior would not have escaped the companions’ notice; once recognized; it would not only lose its educational value but could produce the opposite effect.

E) The Prophet acted upon these consultations even when they conflicted with his own view, and when outcomes were unfavorable, he did not reproach the companions.

F) If people had known the Prophet’s view beforehand, they would not have expressed contrary opinions, especially since they

1. Prophet consulted with his companion, then definitely decided.

sometimes asked whether revelation had been sent on the matter and only gave their opinions once assured that no revelation had been revealed.

G) The claim that prophets and divine saints had no need for consultation even without revelation, because they possessed complete knowledge of all benefits and harms, lacks evidence; numerous Qur'anic and hadith indications suggest otherwise.

2-2. Second View: Authority of the Prophet's Words and Actions in Religious Matters but Not in Worldly Affairs

Another group attributes two roles to the Prophet, prophetic mission and human nature, and assumes that his sayings and actions are revelatory and authoritative only in religious matters. In worldly affairs, however, his words and actions are neither revelatory nor authoritative; moreover, prophets' knowledge of worldly matters is considered comparable to, and sometimes less than, that of ordinary people. In other words, the Prophet's worldly behavior is not regarded as Sunnah at all.

Shāh Walī Allāh Dehlawī, discussing the types of the Prophet's knowledge, writes that what has been transmitted from the Prophet and recorded in hadith collections is of two kinds:

1) Matters whose manner of expression reflects the communication of the prophetic message, about which the Qur'an says: "...Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, refrain from it..." (al-Ḥashr: 7) Knowledge concerning the hereafter, the

224 unseen realm, and similar matters is based on revelation, while legal

rulings and acts of worship are partly based on revelation and partly on the Prophet's Ijtihad. The Prophet's Ijtihad, however, is akin to revelation, since God corrects him if he errs and guides him back to the correct path.

2) Matters that are not of the type of conveying the prophetic message. Concerning these, the Prophet (PBUH) said: "I am only a human being; when I command you regarding your religion, and then take it; but when I command you based on my own opinion, I am only a human."

Likewise, in the story of pollinating the date palms, the Prophet said:

"I only expressed a conjecture; do not hold me accountable for conjecture. But when I relate something to you from God, then take it, for I do not lie about God."

Included in this category are matters the Prophet stated on the basis of experience, such as medical advice, the recommendation to acquire black horses with white markings on their foreheads (Adopt the black horse with a white blaze), ordinary and incidental actions, measures taken to achieve limited expediencies (such as commanding the preparation of an army, determining its banner and insignia), and specific judicial decisions based on evidence and oaths (Dehlawī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 1, 240).

Mahmūd Abū Rayyah considers the Prophet's commands in religious matters to rank second after the Qur'an and the established practical Sunnah, but he does not regard the Prophet's commands in

worldly affairs as authoritative. His view may be summarized as follows:

- 1) The Prophet's commands in worldly matters reflect his personal opinion and are "Guiding Directives," not binding legislative commands. Since guiding directives do not require intention of seeking nearness to God, they are neither obligatory nor recommended; thus, no act can be deemed obligatory or recommended without specific evidence.
- 2) The Prophet (PBUH) is impeccable in religious matters and in receiving revelation, but not in worldly affairs.
- 3) In some non-religious matters, the Prophet believed something that was later shown to be otherwise, or he experienced doubt, for example, during the expedition of *Tabūk* he believed the slander of hypocrites; he affirmed certain statements of his wives; in the incident of *Ifk* (the Slander), he remained uncertain for a time until revelation clarified the truth; he advised against pollinating date palms, which led to crop damage; and other similar cases.
- 4) The Prophet himself acknowledged that people were more knowledgeable than he in certain worldly matters and that obedience to him in such matters was not obligatory; he admitted the possibility of error in matters related to worldly life.
- 5) In certain cases, such as selecting the campsite at the Battle of *Badr* or negotiating to give one-third of Medina's dates to some enemies, he accepted opinions contrary to his own (Abū Rayyah, n.d.: 16).

226 According to this view, the Prophet (PBUH), in worldly affairs,

like other human beings, required consultation in order to make decisions.

2-2-1. Critique

This view, which contradicts the position of many Sunni scholars and all scholars of the Ahl al-Bayt school, is primarily based on the narration of the "Pollination of the date palms," reported with slight variations in Sunni sources. In addition to weaknesses in its chain of transmission, its content itself clearly indicates its inaccuracy:

- A)** How can it be accepted that such a simple and obvious matter would remain hidden from an Arab who had dealt with date palms throughout his life?
- B)** Some have excused this by arguing that the Prophet resided in Mecca, where date palms were not prevalent, and thus he was unaware of pollination practices. This is unconvincing, since date palms did exist in Mecca to an extent sufficient for people to be familiar with their characteristics. Even if, hypothetically, we accept that the Prophet lacked such knowledge, could a wise ordinary person express a definitive opinion about something he did not understand? How much less conceivable would this be for the Prophet (PBUH), whose mission was to teach wisdom to humanity?

2.3. Third View: The Authority of the Prophet's Revelatory Words and Actions

Some scholars of the Ahl al-Bayt school, as well as some Sunni scholars, maintain that the Prophet (PBUH) possessed multiple roles: the role of messenger and intermediary of revelation, the role of leader **227**

and ruler, and the role of judge. They argue that these distinct roles, which are the source of his sayings, actions, and approvals, render them diverse in nature, each with its own ruling: some are authoritative, others are not.

The fundamental difference between this view and the second theory lies in this: although proponents of this view, like those of the second, do not consider the Prophet's statements and actions in non-religious matters to be revelatory in the absence of evidence, they differ in that if there is evidence indicating revelatory origin, even in non-religious matters, they consider them authoritative. If no such evidence exists, they regard such statements as those of a wise and prudent human being whose knowledge of worldly affairs surpassed that of his contemporaries, or at least equaled the wise among them, and who never acted contrary to wisdom and expediency.

According to this view, the Prophet's consultations were limited to specific contexts; in such cases, he not only consulted but also committed himself to the outcome of consultation.

3. The View of Ahl al-Bayt Scholars on the Prophet's Distinct Roles

Shahīd Awwal (the First Martyr) writes that the Prophet's intervention in affairs sometimes occurred in his capacity as a conveyor and clarifier of God's ruling, this is the issuing of legal opinion; sometimes in his capacity as leader and ruler, such as in matters of jihad or management of the public treasury; and sometimes in his

the basis of testimony, oath, or confession (Makkī ‘Āmilī, n.d.: 1, 214; Delbari, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 113).

Mīrzā Nā’īnī likewise classifies matters relating to social order, governance, and political administration into two categories:

- 1) Explicit and clearly designated legal rulings whose obligations are fully specified and unchangeable until the Day of Judgment, requiring obedience;
- 2) Matters whose rulings have not been specifically determined in the Sharī‘ah; these are entrusted to considerations of public interest and to the discernment of the guardian jurist (or his general deputy) and may vary according to time and place. Even during the presence of the impeccable Imam (AS), rulings concerning such secondary matters were dependent on the judgment of the one vested with divine authority (Nā’īnī, 1981 AD/1360 SH: 98; Delbari, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 113).

Boroujerdi also holds that commands and prohibitions issued by the Prophet (PBUH) and the Imams fall into two categories:

- 1) Commands and prohibitions issued in the exercise of authority and governance, similar to the directives of social leaders to their followers, such as commands in the battlefield and matters of worldly administration.
- 2) Commands and prohibitions issued in the capacity of conveying God’s ruling, such as the command to perform prayer or ritual bathing, where the exercise of authority is not at issue; rather, like a jurist conveying God’s ruling to a follower, they were transmitters of divine law (Boroujerdi, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 1, 97; Delbari, 2007

AD/1386 SH: 114).

Imam Khomeini, in discussing the principle of "No harm" (*Lā Ḍarar*), writes that the Prophet (PBUH) held multiple offices within the community: "The office of conveying religious rulings, the office of leadership and governance of society, and the office of adjudication. He further adds that in narrations, wherever the words "Judgment," "Commanded," and "Ruled" appear, they generally carry the meaning of a governmental ruling rather than a purely legal/religious ruling, except metaphorically." (Khomeini, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 109; Khomeini, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 1, 50-56; Montazeri, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 1, 463; Subhani, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 52; Delbari, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 114)

Based on this, he considers the hadith of "*Lā Ḍarar*" to be a sovereign or governmental ruling (Khomeini, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 86, 113; Subhani, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 51; Delbari, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 114). Elsewhere, he describes the Prophet as possessing three roles: "Prophethood and messengership, governance and management of people's affairs, and the position of judicial authority." (Khomeini, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 1, 50-51)

Ṣadr, in *Iqtisādunā*, writes: "The legislations by which the Prophet, as the guardian of authority, filled the 'area of discretionary space' are not permanent rulings, because such rulings were issued by the Messenger of God in his capacity as ruler and guardian of the Muslims, not in his capacity as a conveyor of divine law." (Ṣadr, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 401; Mehrizi, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 4, 42; Delbari, 2007

Martyr Motahhari also considers the Prophet to have three roles: explaining divine rulings and instructions, judging, and general leadership of society (Motahhari, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 48).

4. The View of Sunni Scholars Regarding the Different Roles of the Prophet

Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt, in a general classification, divides the Sunnah into two categories: "legislative and non-legislative." He regards non-legislative Sunnah as consisting of three types:

- 1) Matters related to ordinary human needs, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, meeting others, and the like;
- 2) Matters related to personal or social experience and custom, such as reports concerning agriculture, medicine, or the length of clothing;
- 3) Matters dependent on human planning under specific circumstances, such as positioning military forces in battle, organizing ranks, ambush, retreat, and similar actions that depend on particular conditions and specialized skills.

These three categories do not constitute binding legal rulings requiring performance or avoidance; rather, they are human matters in which the Prophet's practice is not legislative or a source of legislation.

The fourth category is legislative Sunnah, which itself is divided into general and specific:

- General legislative Sunnah refers to what was issued by the Prophet as Messenger for the purpose of conveying revelation, such as explaining concise Qur'anic passages, specifying general texts, qualifying absolute statements, clarifying rulings on worship, lawful

and unlawful matters, beliefs, ethics, and related issues. This type of legislation continues universally until the Day of Resurrection.

- Specific legislative Sunnah refers to instructions issued by the Prophet as the leader and public head of the Muslim community, such as dispatching armies, distributing public treasury funds, collecting revenues, and generally anything related to governance and public administration for society's welfare. What the Prophet issued as a judge also falls under this category. Besides his roles as Messenger and leader, the Prophet was also a judge who adjudicated disputes based on evidence, oaths, or confessions (Shaltūt, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 499-500).

5. Characteristics of Instructions Arising from the Prophet's Different Roles

5-1. Characteristics of Instructions Stemming from the Role of Messengership

A) Instructions from this role are direct commands of God, and the Prophet's role is only to convey the revealed message to people; he has no personal input in them: "He does not speak from desire; it is nothing but revelation revealed." (al-Najm: 3-4) In such cases, obedience to the Prophet's words and actions is obligatory, and no one may object, whether they understand the wisdom behind them or not.

B) Error, meaning lack of correspondence with reality, has no place in this category.

C) These commandments are permanent and not restricted to a specific time or place; they remain valid as long as their subject and conditions remain, unless the Lawgiver explicitly states their temporariness or evidence indicates it.

D) The Prophet did not consult anyone about these instructions. Motahhari states that since the Prophet here is merely the conveyor of God's ruling, consultation about God's ruling is not possible. Did the Prophet ever consult his companions on how to perform the sunset prayer? Rather, when issues arose and people spoke to him about them, he would say: "This matter is not up to me; it is from God and cannot be otherwise." (Motahhari, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 47)

E) In implementing divine law, the Prophet showed no favoritism and did not heed recommendations. An example is his firmness in applying punishment to a woman from the *Banū Makhzūm* tribe who committed theft. People asked who would dare speak to the Prophet; only *Usāma ibn Zayd* did. The Prophet said: "Among the Children of Israel, if a noble person stole, they let him go, but if a weak person stole, they cut off his hand. By God, even if Fatimah had done so, I would cut off her hand." (Bukhārī, 1993 AD/1410 AH: 6, 127; similar in Muslim, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 3, 1316)

5-2. Characteristics of Instructions Stemming from the Role of Judgment and Adjudication

A) The obligation to obey the Prophet in judicial rulings stems from his being appointed by God to judge between people; disobeying is forbidden, but his judicial ruling is not itself a revealed divine

ruling. Motahhari explains that when the Prophet judges between people, his judgment is not revelation. Two people dispute, and the Prophet rules according to Islamic standards. It is not that Gabriel reveals which party is right, except in exceptional cases; generally, his judgments are based on outward evidence, as others judge, though at a higher level. The Prophet himself said he was commanded to judge based on appearances (Bukhārī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 6, 127; similarly in Muslim, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 3, 1316).

- B) The Prophet's judicial decisions were based on evidence, documentation, and outward proofs.
- C) In this category, the possibility of error, non-correspondence with reality, exists. Although the Prophet was divinely appointed to judge and possessed superior ability in evaluating evidence, the outcomes of such judgments are not necessarily identical with God's decree, even if grounded in divine principles. Divine assistance is exceptional rather than the constant rule.
- D) The durability of rulings arising from the Prophet's judicial function depends on whether the underlying evidence and indications are later proven erroneous.
- E) Consultation in judicial matters, seeking testimony from witnesses, is inherent in judging on the basis of evidence. Motahhari reiterates that when the Prophet judged between people, his judgment was not revelation. Rather, a claimant and defendant appear, the claimant presents two just witnesses, and the Prophet rules accordingly. This is a judgment he issued, not something revealed to him (Motahhari, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 48).

It is clear that there is no necessary connection between holding the office of adjudication by divine command and the Prophet's judicial rulings being revelatory. The Prophet, by divine instruction, was responsible for judging among people and was obligated to rule on the basis of evidence and outward indications. In a report attributed to him, he said: "Indeed, I judge between you according to clear proofs and oaths, and some of you are more skilled than others in presenting arguments. So if I assign to someone something from his brother's property, in reality I have assigned him a piece of fire." (Kulaynī, 2009 AD/1429 AH: 14, 656) It is also reported that prophets judged on the basis of evidence and oaths (Kulaynī, 2009 AD/1429 AH: 14, 656-658).

Likewise, the judgments of the Ahl al-Bayt after the Prophet were based on the same principle. Interestingly, it sometimes became evident that these judgments did not correspond to reality. In a narration from Imam *Bāqir* (AS), it is reported that the Commander of the Faithful (Ali) judged a man guilty of theft based on the testimony of two witnesses and ordered his hand cut off. Later, the two witnesses brought another man and said that he was the real thief and that they had mistaken him for the first man. Ali ruled that the two witnesses must pay half the blood money and that their testimony against the second person would not be accepted (Kulaynī, 2009 AD/1429 AH: 14, 576). Thus, in the office of adjudication, consultation means using testimony and evidence to uncover the truth.

5-3. Characteristics of Instructions Arising from the Role of Authority and Governance

Another office of the Prophet was leadership of the Islamic

community and administration of Muslim affairs. This position is distinct from the roles of messengership, prophethood and adjudication. Obedience to instructions stemming from this aspect of the Prophet is obligatory for all.

The characteristics of instructions arising from the Prophet's role as ruler and leader include:

A) Statements stemming from governance are based on Ijtihad and consideration of public welfare; the Prophet made decisions according to circumstances and the interests of the people.

B) In this category, the possibility of error, non-correspondence with reality, exists; others might reach conclusions different from those reached by the Prophet on the basis of available evidence. Although in matters concerning the welfare of the Muslim community the Prophet sometimes benefited from divine assistance, this is an exception rather than a constant rule.

C) Commandments arising from the Prophet's leadership role are subject to change and substitution. They endure as long as the specific temporal and spatial conditions under which they were issued remain, the determination of which lies with the ruler. For example, to encourage companions to participate in jihad, the Prophet issued a governmental ruling that whoever killed an enemy combatant could keep that person's personal belongings such as clothing and sword. Differences in the conditions for reviving barren land in Medina during the Prophet's time and in Iraq during the time of Ali, as well as Ali's taxation of horses, are cited as evidence supporting this claim.

236 Allamah *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* writes that regulations issued from the seat of

authority are enacted according to the needs of the time and are implemented accordingly. Their persistence or cessation depends on temporal circumstances and necessities, and they inevitably change with the advancement of civilization and shifts in interests and harms (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, n.d.: 181).

Most of the matters on which the Prophet consulted people concerned the administration and leadership of the Islamic community.

5-4. Characteristics of Statements and Actions Arising from the Prophet's Human Aspect

Undoubtedly, the Prophet's speech and actions were not limited to the three roles mentioned by Motahhari and others (ʿĀmilī, n.d.: 215; Fāḍil Miqdād, 1983 AD/1403 AH: 158; Qummī, n.d.: 493; Māmḳānī, 2008 AD/1429 AH: 1, 68; Montazeri, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 1, 463; Qarāfī, 1997 AD/1418 AH: 1, 357). The Prophet also engaged in ordinary activities that could not be considered legislative. In other words, beyond the previously mentioned roles, the Prophet possessed a fourth dimension: his human aspect, something he repeatedly emphasized: "Say: I am only a human being like you, to whom revelation is given..." (al-Kahf: 110)

A review of the lives of prophets shows that in ordinary matters they lived like other human beings: "They slept, ate, interacted with people, worked, and had personal preferences and inclinations. Sometimes these ordinary behaviors took distinctive forms. Reports describe aspects of the Prophet Muhammad's manner of walking (cf. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 38), eating (ibid: 84), sitting (ibid: **237**

118), naming his mounts, weapons, and belongings (ibid: 170), performing household tasks (ibid: 104 and 114), liking certain foods or fruits (ibid: 118, 222, 226, 240 and 242), preferring particular colors (ibid: 114), disliking others (ibid: 178), avoiding some foods (ibid: 242), and how he mounted animals (Majlisī, 2009 AD/1430 AH: 20, 222), all of which indicate personal taste, preference, and individual character."

Therefore, ordinary statements and actions of the Prophet, without evidence indicating legislative intent, do not carry a specific normative meaning for the Muslim community. Some of the Prophet's sayings and actions stem from this human dimension.

Conclusion

After a comparative examination of the three main approaches concerning the authority of the Prophetic Sunnah and a historical-hadith analysis of the Prophet's consultations, this study shows that the theory distinguishing the Prophet's different roles provides a more coherent and rational framework for analyzing the authority of the Sunnah. Relying on this framework helps resolve certain apparent tensions in interpreting the Prophetic practice, such as the tension between the Prophet's revelatory knowledge and his consultation with companions.

The theory of absolute authority, by overlooking the diversity of the Prophet's roles, offers an unsatisfactory explanation of consultation and tends to treat it as merely formal, whereas historical

238 evidence indicates that consultation was genuine and accepted by the

Prophet. Conversely, restricting authority only to purely religious matters weakens the status of the Sunnah and ignores valid indications in some non-ritual domains.

According to the third theory, consultation should not be interpreted in a single uniform way. Its nature, position, and purpose differ across the three roles of messengership, adjudication, and governance. In the role of messengership, due to its sacred and revelatory nature, there is no place for consultation; the Prophet is only the conveyor of revelation. In adjudication, consultation means hearing evidence and testimony, since fair judgment is based on outward indications. In governance, however, consultation is compatible with revelatory awareness and prophetic infallibility because it functions as a rational and effective mechanism in decision-making and wise governance. Numerous historical examples, including consultation during the battles of *Badr* and *Uḥud*, attest to this. In such cases, the Prophet did not merely consult symbolically but accepted advisory opinions, even when they differed from his initial view. This interpretation provides a more precise understanding of the Prophetic model and prevents reducing consultation to something merely pedagogical or symbolic.

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