

In the Messenger of Allah, we have an “Excellent Example”

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Some Muslims site the following Ayah (along with 53:3-4 dealt with in another document) to advocate giving books of Hadith (with respect to the Sunnah) the very high status they now hold among Muslims:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا
“Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an **excellent example/pattern** for him who hopes in Allah and the latter day and remembers Allah much”
(33:21).

Muslims therefore rightly say that we need to follow this “excellent example”, they also say that we can follow this example by following what people reported about him in the books of Hadith, however the above ayah certainly refers to the Qur’an.

The first and most important point that we must note is that the Qur’an is complete and fully detailed in its guidance for Muslims. This is the clear conclusion of another document. Now as a result of the fact that the Qur’an is complete and fully detailed for our guidance, it is logical to conclude that Allah would also include the example of the prophet Muhammad that would be excellent. So let us look at some examples of what Allah tells us in the Qur’an: -

فُلنِ إِنَّمَا أَدْعُو رَبِّي وَلَا أُشْرِكُ بِهِ أَحَدًا

“Say: I only call upon my Lord, and I do not associate (another thing) with Him”
(72:20)

Muhammad associated nothing with Allah.

وَإِذَا تُلتَى عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ لَّ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا إِنَّا بِقُرْآنٍ غَيْرِ هَذَا أَوْ بَدَّلَهُ ۗ
فُلنِ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَن أُبَدِّلَهُ مِن تِلْقَاءِ نَفْسِي ۗ إِن أَتَّبِع إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ ۗ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِن
عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ

“But when Our Clear Ayaat are recited to them, those who rest not their hopes in meeting with Us, say ‘Bring us a Qur’an other than this, or change this’. Say: ‘It is not for me, of my own accord, to change it. I follow naught but what is revealed to me; surely I fear, if I disobey my Sustainer, the punishment of a mighty day’.”
(10:15)

Muhammad follows nothing except that which Allah reveals to him.

قُلْ أَيُّ شَيْءٍ أَكْبَرُ شَهَادَةً ۖ قُلِ اللَّهُ ۖ شَهِيدٌ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ ۖ وَأُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ
لَأُنذِرَكُمْ بِهِ وَمَنْ بَلَغَ

Say, "What thing is greatest in testimony?" Say, "Allah is witness between you and me; and this Qur'an has been revealed to me that with it I may warn you and whomsoever it reaches."
(6:19)

Muhammad warns by the Qur'an.

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ ۖ وَلَا تَكُنْ لِلْخَائِنِينَ خَصِيمًا
"Surely We have revealed the Book to you with the truth that you may judge between people by means of that which Allah has shown you; and be not an advocate on behalf of the treacherous."
(4:105)

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ ۖ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُمْ
بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ ۖ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ ...
وَأِنْ أَحْكَم بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَاحْذَرْهُمْ أَنْ يَفْتِنُوكَ عَنْ بَعْضِ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ
إِلَيْكَ ...

And We have revealed to you the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth...

And judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations and beware of them, lest they tempt you away from some of what Allah has revealed to you....
(5:48-49)

Muhammad judged only by the Qur'an.

أَفَعَيِّرَ اللَّهُ أَتْبَغِي حَكْمًا وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكِتَابَ مُفَصَّلًا ۖ وَالَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ
يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ مُنَزَّلٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ ۖ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ
"Shall I then seek a Ruler other than Allah? When He it is Who has revealed to you the Book (which is) distinctly elucidated;"
(6:114)

Muhammad seeks no one else to make rules and laws for him other than Allah.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَدْعُو رَبِّي وَلَا أُشْرِكُ بِهِ أَحَدًا

قُلْ إِنِّي لَا أَمْلِكُ لَكُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا رَشَدًا

قُلْ إِنِّي لَنْ يُجِيرَنِي مِنَ اللَّهِ أَحَدٌ وَلَنْ أَجِدَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مُلْتَحَدًا

إِلَّا بَلَاغًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرِسَالَاتِهِ ۗ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَإِنَّ لَهُ نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدًا فِيهَا أَبَدًا

“Say: “I call only upon my Lord and do not associate anyone else with Him.” Say: “I have no control over any good or evil that befalls you.” Say: “No one can protect me from Allah and I will never find any refuge apart from Him. My mission is only to make known His Messages.” “As for one who disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he shall abide in the Fire of Hell, remaining in it timelessly, for ever and ever.””

(72:20-23)

Muhammad’s only mission is to proclaim the message, and Muhammad also seeks refuge in no one else other than Allah.

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ ۖ وَهُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ

“Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, concerned over you; to the believers (he is) compassionate. But if they turn back, say: Allah is sufficient for me, there is no god but He; on Him do I rely, and He is the Lord of mighty power.”

(9:128-129)

Muhammad was concerned about the welfare of the souls of his people and he was compassionate with the believers.

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا

يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۗ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

“Say, “People of the Book! Let us come to an agreement: that we should worship none but Allah and not associate any partners with Him and not set up mortals as gods besides Allah.” If they refuse, say, “Bear witness that we are Muslims.””

(3:64)

Muhammad took part in interfaith dialogue calling other peoples to accept Allah alone. And there is more...

Muslims read these ayahs from the Qur'an, but they still insist that they are following the example of the Prophet. Let us see if this is accurate:

- The Prophet followed **only** the Qur'an.
 - Are Muslims following anything else besides the Qur'an? If they are, then they are NOT following the example of the Prophet.
- The Prophet warned and taught **only** by the Qur'an.
 - Are Muslims using anything else besides the Qur'an to teach and warn? If they are, then they are NOT following the example of the Prophet.
- The Prophet judged **only** by the Qur'an.
 - Are Muslims using anything else besides the Qur'an to judge? If they are, then they are NOT following the example of the Prophet.
- The prophet sought **no one else** as a source of rules and commands other than Allah.
 - Are Muslims seeking any other sources of rules and commands other than Allah (for example, Hadith, scholars' fatwas etc...)? If they are, then they are not following the example of the prophet.
- Etc...

We must consider that the Prophet Muhammad was born into an Arab culture with many man-made traditions – he wore the clothes that they wore; he had a beard and so did the kuffar among the enemies of the Muslims; he ate as they did, with his hands and they probably always sat on the floor and they probably wore turbans or cloths on their heads etc...

The question is: are we to follow such cultural examples that the prophet followed? Are these the things that will make us better Muslims? Or is there another aspect of the example of the prophet that we must follow (mentioned above)? The answer is obvious.

As a point of interest and relevance to the discussion of Sunnah (example) and it being followed, we must note that Allah commanded the Prophet Muhammad and all of us through him that we all must follow the Prophet Ibrahim:

قُلْ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ ۖ فَاتَّبِعُوا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Say: ‘Allah speaks the Truth: follow the religion of Ibrahim, the sane in faith; he was not of the Pagans.’”

(3:95)

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ حَنِيفًا وَمِمَّا يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

شَاكِرًا لِّأَنْعَمِهِ ۖ اجْتَبَاهُ وَهَدَاهُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

وَأَتَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً ۖ وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنْ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۖ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Surely Ibrahim was an exemplar, obedient to Allah, upright, and he was not of the polytheists. He showed his gratitude for the favours of Allah, who chose him, and guided him to a Straight Way. And We gave him Good in this world, and he will be, in the Hereafter, in the ranks of the Righteous. So We have taught you the inspiration, ‘Follow the ways of Ibrahim the True in Faith, and he joined not gods with Allah.’”
(16:120-123)

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِّمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَاتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۗ وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ
إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا

“Who could have a better religion than someone who submits himself completely to Allah and is a good-doer, and follows the religion of Ibrahim, a man of pure natural belief? Allah took Ibrahim as an intimate friend.”
(4:125)

فَدَكَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ...
لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيهِمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ...

There has already been for you an **excellent pattern/example** in Abraham and those with him,...

There has certainly been for you in them an **excellent pattern/example** for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day...
(60:4,6)

In Ibrahim we have an excellent example to be followed.

So it is required of us to follow Ibrahim. The question is how do we follow him? The Qur’an does not point us to any other books that we must seek in order to follow the best example of Prophet Ibrahim, where are his books of Hadith? Does this mean that today we cannot follow his best example?

We must again consider, is it the cultural patterns of the days of Ibrahim (clothes, eating habits etc...) that we must follow or some other part of his example?

Allah tells us of the EXEMPLARY conduct of the Prophet Ibrahim in the Qur’an that we are supposed to follow. We are not left to search other obscure sources for this information...

قَالَ أَفَتَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنْفَعُكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَضُرُّكُمْ
أَف لَّكُمْ وَلِمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ ۗ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

“He said: What! Do you then serve besides Allah what brings you not any benefit at all, nor does it harm you? Fie on you and on what you serve besides Allah; what! Do you not then understand? ”

(21:66-67)

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ لِأَبِيهِ آزَرَ أَتَتَّخِذُ أَصْنَامًا آلِهَةً ۗ إِنِّي أَرَاكَ وَقَوْمَكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ
“Lo! Ibrahim said to his father Azar: Take you idols for gods? For I see you and your people in manifest error.”
(6:74)

قَالَ لَقَدْ كُنْتُمْ أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ
“He said, ‘Indeed you have been in manifest error - you and your fathers.’”
(21:54)

وَكَيْفَ أَخَافُ مَا أَشْرَكْتُمْ وَلَا تَخَافُونَ أَنَّكُمْ أَشْرَكْتُم بِاللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزَّلْ بِهِ عَلَيْكُمْ سُلْطَانًا ۚ فَآيُ
الْفَرِيقَيْنِ أَحَقُّ بِالْأَمْنِ ۗ إِن كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ
“And how should I fear what you have set up (with Him), while you do not fear that you have set up with Allah that for which He has not sent down to you any authority; which then of the two parties is surer of security, if you know?”
(6:81)

Ibrahim was brave in speaking the truth to the family, people and elders around him.

إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ لِمَ تَعْبُدُ مَا لَا يَسْمَعُ وَلَا يُبْصِرُ وَلَا يُعْنِي عَنْكَ شَيْئًا
يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِي أَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا سَوِيًّا
يَا أَبَتِ لَا تَعْبُدِ الشَّيْطَانَ ۗ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ عَصِيًّا
يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَنْ يَمَسَّكَ عَذَابٌ مِّنَ الرَّحْمَنِ فَتَكُونَ لِلشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيًّا
قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ أَنْتَ عَنْ آلِهَتِي يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ ۗ لَئِن لَّمْ تَنْتَهَ لِأَرْجَمَنَّكَ ۗ وَاهْجُرْنِي مَلِيًّا
قَالَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكَ ۗ سَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكَ رَبِّي ۗ إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِي حَفِيًّا
وَأَعْتَزِلُكُمْ وَمَا تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَأَدْعُو رَبِّي عَسَىٰ أَلَّا أَكُونَ بِدُعَاءِ رَبِّي شَقِيًّا

“Remember when he said to his father, ‘Father, why do you worship what can neither hear nor see and is not of any use to you at all? Father, knowledge which never reached you has come to me, so follow me and I will guide you to the right path. Father, do not worship Satan. Satan was disobedient to the All-Merciful. Father, I am afraid that a punishment from the All-Merciful will afflict you, and turn you into a comrade of Satan.’ He said, ‘Do you forsake my gods, Ibrahim? If you do not stop, I will stone you. Keep away from me for a good long time.’ He said, ‘Peace be upon you. I will ask my Lord to forgive you. He has always honoured me. I will separate myself from you and all you call upon besides Allah and I will call upon my Lord. It may well be that, in calling on my Lord, I will not be disappointed.’”
(19:42-48)

Ibrahim openly speaks the truth and even leaves his family and people and their idolatry and their enmity to Allah.

وَمَا كَانَ اسْتِغْفَارُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَن مَّوْعِدَةٍ وَعَدَّهَا إِيَّاهُ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ أَنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ لِلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُ
إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ حَلِيمٌ

“Ibrahim would not have asked forgiveness for his father but for a promise he made to him, and when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of Allah, he renounced him. Ibrahim was tender-hearted and forbearing.”

(9:114)

Ibrahim renounces his own father once it becomes clear to him that his father is an enemy to Allah.

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَحَلِيمٌ أَوَّاهٌ مُنِيبٌ

“Most surely Ibrahim was forbearing, tender-hearted, oft-returning (to Allah).”

(11:75)

وَمَا كَانَ اسْتِغْفَارُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ إِلَّا عَن مَّوْعِدَةٍ وَعَدَّهَا إِيَّاهُ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ أَنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ لِلَّهِ تَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُ
إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَوَّاهٌ حَلِيمٌ

“And Ibrahim asking forgiveness for his father was only owing to a promise which he had made to him; but when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of Allah, he declared himself to be clear of him; most surely Ibrahim was very tender-hearted forbearing.”

(9:114)

Ibrahim was merciful and tender-hearted.

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا سَلَامًا ۖ قَالَ سَلَامٌ ۗ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَن جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ
حَنِيذٍ

“And certainly Our messengers came to Ibrahim with good news. They said: Peace. Peace, said he, and he made no delay in bringing a roasted calf.”

(11:69)

He was a good host to his guests. And there is more...

Thus by reading the Qur'an we see a man who worshipped ONLY Allah and who openly proclaimed the truth and stood for it and renounced all around him who opposed it and even travelled away from them and their idolatry. He stood up to and criticized the elders and customs and religions of his time, but at the same time he was soft hearted and merciful. This is the example, the BEST example we are to follow and not what he wore and how long his beard was or anything like this.

In the Muslim world today we see most Muslims following other texts in addition to the Qur'an, implying that it is incomplete and insufficient for guidance, and giving scholars the authority to give religious fatwas etc... This is a far cry from the

examples of the prophets who followed only the revelation that came with them, that judged only by the revelation that came with them and questioned the authorities.