9894 - Is it Sunnah to sit on the floor to eat?

the question

i have a confusion regarding sunnah. two knowledgeable men in usa said two different things. i heard that sunnah is an action that if you do it you are rewarded and if you don;t do it , then there is no sin upon you. so about the issue of following the Prophet in details such as sitting on the floor to eat. the question was posed to two different people here, both knowledgeable, one of them said if you are sitting on the floor to eat with the intention of following the rasool then you will be rewarded for it. the other shaykh said no there is no reward for it because it is a worldly matter. What is the correct opinion ? this is important because if there is no reward i'd rather sit on the table and eat or wear non-sunnah clothes if it is merely a wordly matter.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

1.The Muslim is required to follow the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) because he is the best example for this ummah.

2.The scholars have divided the actions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) into a number of categories:

a.Thoughts and ideas that cross the mind, and physical movements such as how one moves one's limbs and body. These are matters in which there is no command to follow him and there is no prohibition against doing so.

b.Matters which have nothing to do with worship and have to do with human nature, such as how one stands, sits, etc. It is not commanded to follow the Prophet’s example in these matters, but according to the majority of scholars it is permissible to do so.

c.Matters which may move beyond spontaneous human actions to the field of legislation (being

prescribed in Islam) because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) persisted in doing them in a certain manner. These include matters of eating, drinking, dressing and sleeping, especially those concerning which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) gave specific guidance. The correct view is that these are included in matters which are prescribed in Islam. This is the view of al-Shaafa'i and was regarded as more correct by al-Shawkaani in his book Irshaad al-Fuhool. This category includes the matters asked about in the question.

d.Matters which are known to be applicable only to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), such as continual fasting [i.e., fasting for more than one day without breaking the fast at night] and having more than four wives. These apply only to him and not to anyone else.

And there are other categories…

(Irshaad al-Fuhool by al-Shawkaani, p. 160).

3.It was narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to eat (sitting) on the ground.

And it was narrated that he said: “I eat as a slave eats and I sit as a slave sits.”

(Narrated by Abu Ya’laa, 8/318)

This hadeeth was classed as saheeh by al-‘Allaamah al-Albaani (may Allaah have mercy on him) in al-Silsilat al-Saheehah, 544.

It was also narrated that Anas ibn Maalik said: “The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) never ate at a khiwaan or a sikrujjah, and he never had any soft bread.” I said to Qutaadah: “What did he used to eat from?” He said, “A cloth (spread on the floor).”

(Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 5099).

A khiwaan is a kind of tray on which food is placed.

A sikrujjah is a vessel in which appetizers are placed.

In such matters it is not obligatory for the Muslim to follow the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), but he may still do so. If a Muslim eats at a table, there is no sin on him.

With regard to clothing, we are obliged to dress differently from the people of the Book and all other kaafirs, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) issued commands to that effect, and warned against dressing like the kuffaar.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever imitates a people is one of them.” (Narrated by Abu Dawood, 4031)

This hadeeth was classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Irwaa’ al-Ghaleel, 8/49.

And he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas: “This is one of the garments of the kuffaar, do not wear it.”

Narrated by Muslim, 2077.

‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with him) told ‘Utbah ibn Farqad: “Beware of the manner of dressing of the people of shirk.” (Narrated by Muslim, 2069).

Conclusion:

It is mustahabb (recommended, encouraged) for the Muslim to follow the example of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in the matters mentioned in the question, i.e., eating and drinking (seated) on the ground, but there is no sin in eating at a table. With regard to clothing, the Muslim is commanded to dress in Muslim clothes and to dress differently than the mushrikeen.

And Allaah knows best.