



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Civilizational Impact of Eliminating Harm in Sunnah (the Prophetic Tradition)

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| Received: Oct 19, 2024 Accepted: Dec 12, 2024 | This article explores the perspective of Sunnah (Prophetic tradition) on safeguarding public spaces, such as roads, gardens and parks, from the detrimental effects of tampering and vandalism. It emphasizes the significant civilizational impact of maintaining these spaces in light of the Prophet Muhammad teachings and guidance. The article examines the Prophetic directives that encourage the elimination of obstacles and discourage acts of vandalism in public spaces. It reveals the Islamic perspective on these actions, highlighting their status as both a religious duty and a societal obligation. The Sunnah clearly links these acts of kindness to divine reward and recompense, elevating them to the level of charity that benefits all of humanity. In conclusion, the article underscores the importance of preserving public spaces as a fundamental aspect of Islamic civilization. It recommends the development of a university-level educational program to raise awareness about road etiquette and the significance of protecting these spaces from harm. |
| Keywords Eliminate Harm Sunnah Civilizational Impact Transitive Benefit Charity (Şadaqah) Road | |
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Mind Map of the Article

INTRODUCTION

The Sunnah (Prophetic tradition) prioritizes the elimination of harm, establishing guidelines and regulations to safeguard both individual and societal well-being. It underscores the significance of well-maintained public spaces, such as roads, parks, and gardens, as essential elements of a civilized society.

The Sunnah underscores the paramount importance of public spaces, particularly roads and pedestrian pathways. It mandates the creation of safe, comfortable, and secure environments for all, as outlined in Hadith (Al-Bukhārī, no. 2465).

The Prophetic teachings advocate for the elimination of hazards from Muslim public spaces, such as gardens, parks, and similar areas. By prioritizing the safety and comfort of users, these teachings reflect a commitment to social responsibility and empathy.

Divine Law sternly prohibits and warns against harming individuals in public spaces and frequented areas, as explicitly stated in verse 58 of Chapter 33.

The Prophetic teachings offer a multifaceted approach to the elimination of harm from roads, ranging from prohibitions against throwing harmful objects to the encouragement of actively removing and clearing harmful obstacles. These acts are often linked to divine rewards and considered a form of charity that benefits both the individual and society.

A comprehensive study and analysis of these Prophetic texts is essential to fully appreciate their significance, explore their various nuances, and understand their innovative approach to addressing the issue of harm on roads.

This article seeks to contribute to this understanding by clarifying the relevant Sunnah texts, affirming their role in addressing the elimination of harm, and emphasizing their distinctive and noble nature.

2. Definitions

2.1. The Arabic word إِمَاطَة ('imāṭah) encompasses a range of meanings, including moving aside, removing, taking away, shifting, and leaning (Mu'jam Al-Lughah Al-'Arabiyah Al-Mu'āṣirah, 3/2146, 2008). Its linguistic root is intrinsically linked to the concept of a road, as exemplified in the phrase فلان أماط الأذى عن الطريق (fulān 'amāṭa al-adhā 'an al-ṭarīq), which translates to “So and so moved aside the harm from the road.” This connection extends to the elimination of objects, as illustrated in the phrase فلان أماط الشيء عن كذا (fulān 'amāṭa al-shay' 'an kadhā), meaning, “So and so removed the thing from such and such.” Furthermore, the word is associated with the idea of unveiling or uncovering, as seen in the phrase أماط اللثام عن الحزن الذي يعتره (amāṭa al-lithām 'an al-ḥazan alladhī ya'tarīh), which translates to “He removed the veil from the sadness that afflicted him.” (Majma' Al-Riyāḍ Lillughah Al-'Arabiyah Al-Mu'āṣirah, 1/305, 2022)

2.2. The term الأذى (al-'adhā), which translates to ‘harm’, refers to anything that causes pain or suffering to a person’s soul, body, or possessions, and it is intended to be eliminated. While some harm is physical, affecting the body, other harm is psychological, impacting human dignity. Psychological harm is often considered the most painful and leaves a profound impact on the soul. (Tafsīr Ibn 'Arafah, 1/269, 2008)

Consequently, the concept of harm is a broad term that encompasses anything that can cause harm or damage to humans, animals, or environment. Such actions are inherently unreasonable, illogical, and incompatible with civilized human behaviour. In fact, they are antithetical to progress and civilization.

2.3. The phrase إِمَاطَة الأذى عن الطريق ('imāṭah al-'adhā 'an al-ṭarīq), which translates to “eliminating harm from the road” refers to the removal and elimination of any obstacle that could potentially harm or inconvenience passersby. This includes objects such as stones, thorns, fallen trees, mud, dirt, foul-smelling substances, holes, or narrow road passages. Additionally, it encompasses the removal of obstructions caused by vendors setting up shop in the middle of public roads. In essence, any impediment that hinders a person’s movement or causes discomfort falls under the purview of this act.

2.4. “Eliminating harm from the road” in the Prophetic Sunnah: The Prophetic Sunnah provides guidelines and commandments, rooted in the teachings of Prophet Muḥammad, that prioritize the safety of passersby. They emphasize the importance of respecting roads, preserving their civilized appearance, and promoting positive behavior through the promise of divine reward and the threat of divine punishment for those who disregard these principles.

3. Eliminating Harm from the Road Is an Islamic Objective

3.1. The principles of faith serve a higher purpose than merely instilling belief in Allāh, love for Him, and reverence for Him. They are designed to elevate humanity by inspiring practical, applied

behaviour that positively impacts society. This includes alleviating suffering, removing harm, maintaining public spaces, and contributing to the development of a civilized society.

Faith motivates individuals to actively eliminate harm from their paths. In fact, it compels them to advocate for and implement solutions to various forms of harm. This is because believers are aware of the different types of harm and understand the interconnectedness between doctrinal beliefs and practical actions.

As a result, the theological dimension has elevated the act of eliminating harm to a religious obligation, a branch of faith that yields rewards both in this world and the hereafter. Simultaneously, the civic dimension recognizes eliminating harm as a societal responsibility essential for preserving the integrity and progress of society. By addressing issues that distort the societal image and hinder progress, individuals contribute to the development of a civilized society.

3.2. Eliminating harm from the road is part of faith

The Prophetic Sunnah elevates the act of eliminating harm from the path to a fundamental aspect of faith, recognizing it as a manifestation of the third pillar of faith: righteous actions. Faith, a multifaceted concept, encompasses beliefs of the heart, expressions of the tongue, and actions that impact the world. Among these actions, eliminating harm holds a significant place. Prophet Muḥammad emphasized the importance of safeguarding others from physical, emotional, and psychological harm, elevating such acts to a religious duty. He said, “Faith has over seventy branches or over sixty branches, the most excellent of which is the declaration that there is no god but Allāh, and the humblest of which is the, removal of what is injurious from the path: and modesty is a branch of faith.” (Muslim, no. 35, 1/390, 1972)

The Hadith suggests the following profound insights:

1. Islamic faith is a comprehensive system with various dimensions, ranging from the sublime to the seemingly mundane.
2. The Hadith implies that believers differ in their levels of faith, with some excelling in certain aspects while others may excel in others.
3. Eliminating harm from the road is highlighted as a righteous act that contributes to one’s faith.
4. The act of eliminating obstacles from people’s paths is seen as a tangible manifestation of one’s faith.
5. The Hadith suggests that a true believer is characterized by acts of kindness and compassion, such as eliminating harm from the paths of others.
6. Good morals and good habits are among the acts and degrees of faith.
7. Good morals and noble habits are integral components of acts of faith and of its degrees.

Table-1: Classification of the branches of faith mentioned in the Sunnah and their status within faith

| Branches of Faith | Classification | Status |
|--|----------------|---|
| Monotheism: There is no god but Allāh (Tawḥīd: lā ‘ilāha ‘illā Allāh) | Verbal | The first pillar of faith and the highest of its degrees |
| Modesty (ḥayā’) | Moral | A complement of faith (a practical expression of one’s belief in Allāh) |
| Eliminating harm from the road | Action | A complement of faith (a practical expression of one’s belief in Allāh) |

4. Encouraging the Elimination of Harm from Public Spaces, Safeguarding Such Areas, and the Promise of Divine Reward for Such Noble Actions

4.1. The Prophet’s Sunnah elevated the act of eliminating harm from the road to a virtuous deed, equating it to charitable giving. By eliminating obstacles that could potentially harm people or animals, individuals ensure the safety and well-being of passersby. This act of kindness is akin to providing direct charity, as it protects others and shields them from harm. Prophet Muḥammad

emphasized the significance of this act, stating that “There is a (compulsory) ṣadaqah (charity) to be given for every joint of the human body (as a sign of gratitude to Allāh) every day the sun rises. To judge justly between two persons is regarded as ṣadaqah, and to help a man concerning his riding animal by helping him to ride it or by lifting his luggage on to it, is also regarded as ṣadaqah, and (saying) a good word is also ṣadaqah, and every step taken on one's way to offer the compulsory prayer (in the mosque) is also ṣadaqah and to remove a harmful thing from the way is also ṣadaqah.” (Al-Bukhārī, no. 2989, 4/56, 2001)

The Hadith offers the following profound insights:

1. Eliminating harm from the road is a charitable act that can elevate one's standing in the hereafter.
2. The Hadith highlights the multitude of ways to achieve righteousness, emphasizing that good deeds, no matter how small, can lead to significant rewards.
3. The Hadith draws attention to the virtue of actions that benefit Muslims and alleviate their suffering.
4. Charity extends beyond monetary donations. Acts of kindness, such as eliminating harm from the road, are considered forms of charity that bring one closer to Allāh.
5. The Hadith encourages individuals to actively seek opportunities to help others and contribute to the betterment of society.

As stated in the Hadith of Prophet Muḥammad, the Sunnah has identified six actions that are rewarded with charity, offering protection from punishment and granting entry into Paradise (Ibn Ḥibbān no. 3377, 8/171, 1988):

1. Reconciling differences, fostering peace, and eliminates enmity, benefiting both individuals and society,
2. Helping someone lead or mount their animal,
3. Helping someone carry their belongings,
4. Kind words are a sign of good manner and a powerful tool that can mend relationships and bring joy to others.
5. Walking towards mosques is a commendable act due to the great reward behind it,
6. Eliminating harm from the road. This selfless act benefits the community by protecting people from harm and ensuring their safety., removing harm from the path is a significant act of kindness.

By highlighting the importance of eliminating harm from the road among these six actions, the Prophet Muḥammad emphasizes its significance in both the individual and communal well-being. This underscores the Prophet's keenness on eradicating harm and fostering a harmonious society.

4.2. Eliminating harm from the road is a charity which benevolence extends to other creations

Charity encompasses more than just monetary donations. It encompasses various acts of kindness that benefit both oneself and others.

Non-monetary charity comes in two forms:

The first is that which involves extending kindness to others, which becomes a charity for them. Sometimes, actions such as eliminating harm from the road and striving to bring benefit to others may be better than monetary charity, as highlighted by Prophet Muḥammad (Al-Tirmidhī, no. 1956, 4/339, 1975)

The second form of charity benefits the individual directly, such as acts of remembrance like glorifying, praising, and seeking forgiveness from Allāh, as well as walking to mosques (Ibn Rajab, 66/2, 2001).

Table-2: Types of charitable actions of public and private benefit, and the reward for the doer as mentioned in the Hadith

(Muslim, no. 1007, 2/698, 1972) and (Al-Tirmidhī, no. 1956, 4/339, 1975)

| Actions | Type of Benefit | Reward |
|---|-----------------|-------------------|
| Takbīr (to declare Allāh is Greatest by saying, “Allāhu Akbar”) | Personal | Charity (ṣadaqah) |
| Tahmīd (to praise Allāh by saying, “Alhamdulillah”) | Personal | Charity (ṣadaqah) |
| Tahlīl (to declare that there is no god but Allāh by saying, “Lā ‘ilāha ‘illā Allāh”) | Personal | Charity (ṣadaqah) |
| Tasbīḥ (to glorify Allāh by saying “Subḥān Allāh”) | Personal | Charity (ṣadaqah) |
| Smiling at your brother | Transitive | Charity (ṣadaqah) |
| Enjoining of what is right and forbidding of what is wrong | Transitive | Charity (ṣadaqah) |
| Guiding a man in the land of misguidance | Transitive | Charity (ṣadaqah) |
| Being the eyesight for a man who has poor eyesight | Transitive | Charity (ṣadaqah) |
| Eliminating stones, thorns, or bones from the road | Transitive | Charity (ṣadaqah) |
| Filling your brother’s bucket from your bucket | Transitive | Charity (ṣadaqah) |

4.3. Eliminating harm from the road is among the best of deeds: Prophet Muḥammad says, “The deeds of my people, good and bad, were presented before me, and I found the removal of something objectionable from the road among their good deeds, and the sputum mucus left unburied in the mosque among their evil deeds.” (Muslim, no. 553, 1/390, 1972)

The Hadith offers the following profound insights:

1. The act of eliminating harm from the road is highlighted as a noble and virtuous deed. It is considered one of the easiest ways to draw closer to Allāh and seek His reward.
2. Actions are categorized as good or bad based on their consequences and the intentions behind them.
3. Good deeds, no matter how small, bear and develop goodness, and vice versa.
4. People are invited to do more good deeds, even if looked at as insignificant, such as eliminating harm from the road.
5. Good deeds should not be belittled, no matter how small; sins as well should not be underestimated, no matter how minor.
6. People are encouraged to do what brings benefits to people, and to avoid anything that harms or inconveniences them harm.

Further affirming this, the Prophet’s Sunnah established comprehensive guidelines and regulations for Muslim public spaces, mandated rights for the roads and outlined rules for maintaining parks and gardens. Prophet Muḥammad said, “Avoid sitting on the paths.” They (his Companions) said, “Allāh’s

Messenger, there is no other help to it (but to sit there as we) hold our meetings and discuss matters there.” Thereupon Allāh’s Messenger said, “If you have to sit at all, then fulfil the rights, of the path.” They said, “What are their rights?” Thereupon he said, “Keeping the eye downward (so that you may not stare at the women), refraining from doing some harm to the other, exchanging mutual greetings (saying al-salām ‘alaykum to one another), and commanding the good and forbidding the evil.”

4.4. The reward for eliminating harm from the road is Paradise and forgiveness: Prophet Muḥammad said, “Whoever eliminates a harmful obstacle from the path of a Muslim, Allāh will reward them with a merit. And for every merit, Allāh promises admission into Paradise.” (Al-Ṭabarānī, 32,1,14, n.d.)

He also said, “A person while walking along the path saw the branches of a tree lying there. He said, ‘By Allāh, I shall remove these from this, so that these may not do harm to the Muslims,’ and he was admitted to Paradise.”

These two Hadiths convey the following profound insights:

1. Allāh is incredibly generous; He rewards even the smallest acts of kindness with immense blessings.
2. A single good deed can have the potential to atone for numerous sins.
3. Throwing harmful things in the path of Muslims is feared to be punishable.
4. Actions that benefit the community are considered acts of worship that can lead to divine forgiveness and reward.
5. The Hadiths encourage positivity, high aspirations, and community engagement.

5. The Prophetic Commandments and Guidance to Maintain Roads by Eliminating Harm from Them

The noble Prophetic Sunnah serves as a beacon, illuminating the path towards a more humane and compassionate society. It mandates individuals to support one another, embodying virtues and adhering to principles that benefit all. By fostering a sense of community and promoting ethical behavior, the Sunnah safeguards society from the spread of epidemics and deadly diseases, which can arise from the various types of harm that plague public spaces.

Allāh has entrusted man with human, moral, and societal duties, and has made them guardians of cultivating the Earth. This divine mandate encompasses a wide range of responsibilities, including caring for the environment and protecting it from harm. In this sense, man is obligated to remove obstacles and hazards from their paths and gathering places.

The Prophetic Sunnah has urged the removal of harm from the roads, and has emphasized the importance of cooperation among members of the same community. Since they are all partners in the same society, they must all care for its cleanliness and eliminate all forms of harm from it. Among the profound teachings of Prophet Muḥammad is the advice he imparted to ‘Abū Barzah al-‘Aslamī who said to asked the Prophet, saying, “I do not know whether I would survive after you, so confer upon me something by which Allāh should benefit me.” Thereupon Allāh’s Messenger said, “Do this and that and remove the troublesome things from the paths.” (Muslim, no. 2618, 4/2022, 1972)

By studying this noble Hadith, we gain the following insights:

1. The Hadith underscores the individual’s responsibility to contribute to the well-being of society. Removing harm symbolizes cooperation, solidarity, and a commitment to protecting others from harm and danger.
2. The opposite of removing harm is putting obstacles and harm in the path of Muslims, and exposing them to dangers is a great evil

3. The Prophet's companions' eagerness to seek knowledge and apply it in their lives highlights the importance of continuous learning and the practical application of Islamic teachings.
4. Removing harm from roads is a simple yet impactful act that requires minimal effort and resources.
5. It is important to educate the youth about their responsibilities towards their community, including the duty to maintain public spaces and remove harm from them.

Table-3: Classification of harmful substances on the road, and the required actions

| Harmful substances on the road | Directly connected to causing harm | Required Action |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| stones | (√) | move aside |
| fallen trees | (√) | eliminate |
| pits | (√) | backfill |
| trash | (√) | remove |
| thorn branches | (√) | eliminate |
| stinking carcasses | (√) | take away |

The table reveals the following:

1. The number of types of harm related to roads is 6/6, i.e., 100%.
2. The necessary action to be taken towards such harm is elimination (*'imāṭah*) 6/6, i.e., 100%. This indicates the great danger of harm on the road, especially to passersby, and to society in general.

5.2. Practical application of the Prophet's teachings regarding eliminating harm from the road

The Companions, following the footsteps of Prophet Muḥammad, were dedicated to maintaining public spaces and upholding the sanctity of roads. They actively removed obstacles and hazards, ensuring the safety and ease of movement for all. History records the exemplary conduct of Ma'qil Ibn Yasār, who embodied the spirit of community service by eliminating harm from the road and safeguarding the well-being of others. Qurrah Ibn 'Iyās al-Māzinī said, "I was traveling with Ma'qil Ibn Yasār when we came across something harmful, so he eliminated it or moved it from the road. I saw something similar, took it, and moved it.

He took my hand and said, 'O my nephew, what compelled you to do what you did?'

I said, 'O my uncle, I saw you do something, so I did the same.'

He said, 'Well done, O my nephew. I heard the Messenger of Allāh say, 'Whoever eliminates a harmful obstacle from the path of a Muslim, Allāh will reward them with a merit. And for every merit, Allāh promises admission into Paradise.'" (Al-Ṭabarānī, no. 502, 20/216, 1994)

From this practical application of the Prophet's teachings regarding eliminating harm from the road, the following profound insights are learned:

1. A keen awareness to remove harm from the path of Muslims whenever it is seen.
2. Muslims should not neglect or be careless in eliminating harm.
3. Islam has not overlooked any aspect of human life without providing guidance and attention.
4. The ethics of dealing with roads are outlined by the values of Islamic law.

5.3. Prohibition against harming people in public places and parks

The Sunnah has emphasized the preservation of public places frequented by people, and has forbidden harming them or destroying them in any way. Therefore, any action that could lead to the disruption or disfigurement of public places is forbidden in Islamic law. Hence, the Prophet has warned against relieving oneself of urine or excrement in a place where people pass by or seek shade

from the sun, and has used it as a place to sit and rest, thus inviting a curse. Prophet Muḥammad said, “Be on your guard against two things which provoke cursing.” They (the companions present there) said. “Messenger of Allāh, what are those things which provoke cursing?” He said, “Easing on the thoroughfares or under the shades (where they take shelter and rest).” (Muslim, number 269, 1/226, 1972).

Islamic law has issued a stern warning against anyone who harms people in public places such as roads, parks, and other common areas, as exemplified in verse 33:58 of the Quran.

6. Civilizational Impact of Eliminating Harm

6.1. The Sunnah emphasizes the civilizational significance of eliminating harm from the road, aiming to cultivate a refined and harmonious society. This ideal society is characterized by cooperation, mutual support, and a genuine concern for the well-being of others. The keenness of Sunnah to achieve the civilizational impact of eliminating harm from the road is evident through:

1. The Prophet’s teachings unequivocally prohibit harming Muslims in any form, whether through words, actions, or physical contact.
2. Islamic law places great emphasis on cleanliness and purity, forbidding acts that could harm individuals physically, spiritually, or morally.
3. Islamic law provides a comprehensive moral framework that encompasses all aspects of human life. It mandates the removal of harm from public spaces and prohibits actions that could corrupt society.
4. The Sunnah strongly affirms individual rights, forbidding the surrender of what is rightfully due.
5. Islamic law prioritizes the protection of individuals and society as a whole from all forms of harm.
6. The Sunnah encourage actions that foster love, harmony, and prohibits any behavior that could cause harm the others.

6.2. Actions that hinder the progress and modernization of roads in contemporary societies

People sometimes engage in actions that go against the progress and civilization of a country, harming society and the nation. For example:

1. Littering from vehicles, including discarding tissues, empty cans, food scraps, and other waste, which disregards the rights of fellow road users and undermines shared community responsibility.
2. Littering in public areas by discarding food and drink waste, demonstrating a disregard for public cleanliness and hygiene.
3. Street vendors obstructing roads with handcarts or large vehicles, narrowing passageways for pedestrians, impeding traffic flow, and causing inconvenience to pedestrians.
4. Littering in market areas, including discarding fruit peels and other waste, which poses a risk of physical harm to pedestrians.
5. Spilling liquids in markets, damaging clothing and vehicles.
6. Engaging in reckless driving stunts and car drifting, which disrupts public peace, endangers lives, and reflects a lack of social responsibility.
7. Irresponsible actions, such as excessive speeding, failing to stay in lanes, and using mobile phones while driving, result in accidents causing numerous fatalities.

Undoubtedly, those who engage in such harmful behaviours not only harm themselves and their communities but also tarnish the reputation of their nation. Moreover, they are committing sins by doing such actions.

6.3. The consequences of neglecting to eliminate harm from the road

Neglecting to eliminate harm from the road can lead to serious consequences, including endangering lives and causing long-term health issues. Some of the most significant risks include:

1. Spread of diseases
2. Air pollution
3. Soil pollution
4. Water pollution
5. Visual pollution
6. Pest Infestation and spread of harmful insects and rodents
7. Creating a negative, uncivilized perception of a community

The aforementioned prophetic sayings and exhortations concerning the elimination of harm from the road highlight several key points:

1. Eliminating harm from the road is one of the objectives of faith.
2. Eliminating harm and preserving the path are linked to the reward and recompense in the afterlife.
3. The Prophet's guidance underscores the importance of maintaining public spaces, such as roads, clean and free from hazards.
4. The act of removing harm contributes to the creation of a more civilized, harmonious, and sustainable society.

In line with these prophetic teachings, King Faisal University has adopted environmental sustainability as a core value, reflecting a commitment to preserving the environment and mitigating harm. By prioritizing sustainability, the university aims to contribute to a more sustainable future.

7. CONCLUSION

The researchers have delved into the concept of removing harm from the path, as outlined in the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad. Their comprehensive study has yielded several significant findings and recommendations, which are presented below:

7.1. Findings

1. The Sunnah of Prophet Muḥammad promotes the concept of sustainable development of human societies by encouraging individuals to preserve public spaces and eliminate harm from the roads.
2. Eliminating harm from the road is one of the objectives of faith and a practical branch of belief in Allāh.
3. Eliminating harm from the road is a collective responsibility that contributes to the overall well-being of society and protects it from degradation.
4. Damaging or defacing public spaces, such as roads, is considered an incriminating act in Islam.
5. Eliminating harm from the road in Islam is not only linked to reward and recompense; it is also considered a form of charity that benefits others.
6. The Sunnah of the Prophet is keen to highlight the civilized aspect regarding eliminating harm from the road.
7. The Prophetic tradition promotes actions that foster love, harmony, and it discourages any behaviour that could harm others.

7.2. Recommendations

1. Organizing international conferences and seminars to raise global awareness about the importance of road safety, maintenance, and protection, particularly in light of increasing rates of damage and vandalism.
2. Developing a comprehensive university program to educate future generations about road ethics, the importance of road safety, and the legal and ethical consequences of damaging or vandalizing public infrastructure.

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