

to break this oath and threatening the errant wives with divorce.

In any case, whether the Koranic passages concern Muhammad's honey or his *honeys*, Allah is going to great lengths to ensure that his prophet is not unduly inconvenienced by demanding wives. Readers of the Koran have two choices: they can either see passages like this as evidence that Muhammad was a false prophet who found that playing the prophetic game redounded to his earthly advantage, or they can see his life as pivotal and exemplary: the medium through which Allah revealed his commands to the human race. In the latter case, Muhammad would be by far the most important person who ever lived—and for Muslims, he is.

Muhammad the “excellent example”

In light of Allah's tender solicitude for his prophet, it's no wonder the Koran and Islamic tradition are clear that Muhammad is the supreme example of behavior for Muslims to follow. **The Koran calls him “an excellent model of conduct” (33:21)** and repeatedly instructs Muslims to obey him (3:32; 3:132; 4:13; 4:59; 4:69; 5:92; 8:1; 8:20; 8:46; 9:71; 24:47; 24:51; 24:52; 24:54; 24:56; 33:33; 47:33; 49:14; 58:13; 64:12).

But aside from transmitting his revelations, the Koran provides only the sketchiest of information about Muhammad's words and deeds—to say nothing of his silences. So how are Muslims to find out how to “emulate

THE HADITH ILLUMINATES THE KORAN

Weeping willow

“The Prophet used to deliver his *Khutba* (religious talk) while standing beside a trunk of a date-palm. When he had the pulpit made, he used it instead. The trunk started crying and the Prophet went to it, rubbing his hand over it (to stop its crying).”²²



and imitate their Prophet”? If Muhammad is the one who “commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure)” (7:157), how are Muslims to find out what he said?

This is one of the foundations for the authority of the Hadith—a voluminous collection of sayings of Muhammad, along with descriptions of his actions and related matters. The Hadith is verbose and detailed where the Koran is oblique and allusive, and together they form the foundation for Islamic legal reasoning. The Hadith, of course, also elucidates the Koran in many particulars—and in both, Muhammad is at the center, the standard by which all behavior is measured.