

Unity of the Muslims and the School of Ahl al-Bayt

As we come to the end of our discussion, we find that Sunnites and Shi'ites do not disagree on any fundamental point in Islam, and that the mercenary writers, whose goal is to divide Muslims, can not substantiate any of their accusations. They have tried to spread falsehood and deliberately mislead some uneducated Muslims. The vicious campaign which they have waged is opposed to the Holy Qur'an and the authentic hadiths of the Prophet. To prove this, we only need to read the first five verses from the second chapter of the Qur'an, in which the Almighty has defined the meaning of *Al-Muttaqin* (the righteous).

"Alif Lam Mim. This is the Book whereof there is no doubt, a guidance to those who are righteous, who believe in the unseen, and offer prayer, and spend of what We have provided them, And who believe in that which is revealed to thee (Muhammad) and that which was revealed before thee, and who are certain of the Hereafter. They follow the guidance (which comes) from their Lord; and they are the ones who will prosper."

These Qur'anic verses inform us of the requirements which, if a person fulfills them, he will be of the righteous people, and whoever is righteous, is a Muslim and a believer.

These requirements are the following:

1. To believe in the unseen (as we believe in the Creator and the Hereafter without seeing them).
2. To offer the five daily prayers.
3. To spend, in the way of God, a portion of the wealth God had provided us (by paying Zakat).
4. To believe in that which God has revealed to His Messenger Muhammad.
5. To believe in that which was revealed to all Messengers before Muhammad.

6. To believe in the Hereafter.

Thus, whoever meets these six requirements, as indicated by the first verse, will be righteous, and as indicated by the last verse, will be well-guided and successful.

Here, we can say that every Muslim who is committed to the principles of Islam will meet all the requirements.

True Muslims do not disagree on any Islamic principle, and all of them believe in that which the Almighty revealed to Muhammad and the previous Prophets.

Authentically reported statements of the Prophet are in accordance with the Holy Qur'an. The following seven hadiths clearly point this out.

1. Al-Bukhari, in his *Sahih*, part 1, page 19, and Muslim, in his *Sahih*, part 1, page 66, recorded that Talhah Ibn Ubaydullah reported that a Bedouin had the following dialogue with the Messenger:

The Bedouin: What is Islam? *The Messenger:* Five daily prayers. *The Bedouin:* Do I have to add to them any prayer? *The Messenger:* No, unless you volunteer. And fast in the month of Ramadhan. *The Bedouin:* Do I have to add to it any other fast? *The Messenger:* No, unless you volunteer. Then he mentioned to him the prescribed charity. *The Bedouin:* Do I have to add to it? *The Messenger:* No, unless you volunteer. *The Bedouin:* By God, I shall not add to these; nor shall I subtract from them. *The Messenger:* The bedouin has succeeded if he is true.

2. Muslim, in his *Sahih*, recorded that Abu Hurayrah reported that a Bedouin said to the Prophet: "Advise me of a deed that if I accomplish, I will be admitted to Paradise." The Messenger said: "Worship God, ascribe no partner to Him, offer the prescribed prayer, give the prescribed charity, and fast the month of Ramadhan." The Bedouin said: "By God, in Whose hand is my soul, I shall not add to these, nor shall I subtract from them." When he turned his back, the Messenger said: "Whoever desires to look at a man from the people of Paradise, should look at this man."

3. Muslim also recorded that Abadah Ibn Al-Samit, while he was on his deathbed, said to the people around him: "I have reported to you all the beneficial Hadiths I heard from the Messenger except one. I shall report it to you while my soul is being taken by God. I heard the Messenger of God say:

"Whoever testifies that there is no God but the Almighty, and that Muhammad is Messenger of God, God shall protect him from Hell."

4. Muslim also recorded that 'Ubadah Ibn Al-Samit reported that the Messenger of God said: "Whoever says: I bear witness that there is no God but the Almighty, alone without partner; that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger; that Jesus is His servant and Messenger and the Son of His maid, and word, which He (Allah) had given to Mary and a spirit from Him, that Paradise is a reality and Hell is a reality, God shall admit him into Paradise through any of its eight gates He chooses.

5. Muslim also recorded that Mu'adh Ibn Jabal reported that the Messenger said: "What is due to God from His servants is that they worship Him, ascribe to Him no partner; and what is due to God's servants from Him is that He will not punish anyone that does not ascribe to Him a partner."

6. Al-Bukhari, in his *Sahih*, recorded that Abu Hurayrah reported that the Messenger said to a questioner: The Iman (faith) is to believe in God, His Angels, His meeting, His Messengers, and to believe in the resurrection. He said also to the questioner: Islam is to worship God, ascribing to Him no partner; to offer the prescribed prayers; to pay the prescribed charity, and to fast the month of Ramadhan.

7. Muslim recorded, in his *Sahih*, that 'Umar reported that the Messenger said to a questioner: "Islam is to testify that there is no God but the Almighty and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; to offer the prescribed prayer; pay the regular charity; fast the month of Ramadhan, and visit the Ka'bah.

The same questioner asked the Prophet to inform him about Iman. The Prophet said to him: To believe in God, His Angels, His Book, His Messengers, the Day of Judgement, and to believe in: "Qadar," pleasant and unpleasant.

These authentic hadiths, plus many other reliable hadiths which I did not quote, agree with the Qur'an and indicate that whoever believes in God, His Angels, His scriptures, His Messengers, the Hereafter, worships God alone by offering the prescribed prayer, fasts the month of Ramadhan, pays zakat, and performs the pilgrimage if he has the financial and physical ability, will be considered a Muslim in good standing.

There is no real difference between the Shi'ites and Sunnites concerning articles of the Faith of Islam. There is a disagreement between the two schools in two areas.

1. The Caliphate.
2. The Islamic rule when there is no clear Qur'anic statement, nor is there a hadith upon which Muslim schools have agreed.

The disagreement about the caliphate should not be a source of division between the two schools. Muslims agree that the Messenger did not appoint Abu Bakr as the first Caliph. They agree that his caliphate came through election. Election implies choice and freedom, and that every Muslim has the right to elect or not elect the nominee. Whoever refuses to elect him does not oppose God or His Messenger because neither God nor His Messenger appointed the nominee.

Election, by its nature, does not compel any Muslim to elect a specific nominee. Otherwise, the election would be a coercion. This means that the election would not lose its own nature. It would be a dictatorial operation. It is well known that the Prophet said: "There is no validity for any allegiance given by force."

Imam Ali refused to give his allegiance to Abu Bakr for six months. He gave his allegiance to Abu Bakr

only after the death of his wife Fatima Al-Zahra, Daughter of the Holy Prophet. (Al-Bukhari, his *Sahih*, part 5, page 177).

If refusal to give allegiance to an elected nominee was prohibited in Islam, Imam Ali would not have allowed himself to delay in giving his allegiance. The well known companions, Abdullah Ibn 'Umar and Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas, refused to give their allegiance to Imam Ali for the duration of his caliphate. (Ibn Al-Athir, his history *Al-Kamil*, part 3, page 98). But the Imam did not punish the companions, nor did he call them transgressors.

If it was permissible for a Muslim, who was a contemporary of a caliph, to refuse to give his allegiance, it would be more permissible for a person who came in a later century to believe or not believe in the qualifications of that elected caliph. In doing so, he would not be sinning.

The Disagreement About Islamic Rules

As to the disagreement among the Mujtahids (the high Islamic scholars) in their verdicts, it is permissible by all Islamic schools. Therefore, we see that the imams of the four schools did not agree with each other in their verdicts concerning many Islamic rules. Had they been always in agreement, there would be only one Sunni school rather than four.

If it is permissible for Muslims to follow the four schools, the school of Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq would have more right to be followed. Both Abu Hanifah and Malik were students of Imam Ja'far. Al-Shafi'i was a student of Muhammad Ibn Al-Hassan Shalbani who was a student of Abu Hanifah, and Imam Ahmad was student of Al-Shafi'i.

Thus, the four imams were either students of Imam Ja'far or students of his students.

It would be extremely curious to impose on Muslims the duty of following the verdicts of one of the four imams and prevent them from following the verdict of Imam Ja'far who was the teacher of the four imams.

Certainly this does not agree with the Qur'an because the Qur'an declares that the Almighty had completed his religion before the death of the Messenger of God. The Holy Qur'an declares that in the following verse:

"Today I have completed your religion for you, and have perfected my favor upon you and chosen Islam as your religion." (5: 10)

Since the religion had been completed before the death of the Messenger, it would be unfair to impose on the Muslims to follow one of the four schools which came over one hundred years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

Abu Hanifah was born 80 years after the Hijra and so was Malik Ibn Anas. These two are the oldest of the four imams. They did not become imams the day they were born. It took each of them at least forty years or more to reach the degree of Ijtihad. This means that the school of Abu Hanifah was formed 120 years after the death of the Messenger and so was the school of Malik. The other two schools came decades after the Hanafi and Maliki schools.

This means that the imposition on Muslims to follow one of the four schools is an innovation which has no support from the Book of God or the hadiths of the Prophet. No one reported that the Messenger of God ordered Muslims to follow any of these schools.

Had this imposition been legitimate, all devotional works of the companions (including the four caliphs) would be nullified and unaccepted because they were not Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, or Hanbali. And what should one say about the Prophet's worship?!!! He also was not a follower of any of the four schools.

It would have been more logical to say that it is permissible for any Muslim to follow any imam he considers (after serious research) to be the most knowledgeable among them whether that imam is related or not to the four schools.

The School Of Ahl Al-Bayt

We are certain that the Prophet neither commanded Muslims nor recommended that they follow any of the four imam's verdicts. There is no reported statement by the Prophet that he commanded us to follow one of the four imams (Abu Hanifah, Malik, Shafi'i, or Ibn Hanbal).

However, the Sunnites and the Shi'ites recorded in their authentics that the Messenger commanded Muslims to follow the members of his House.

Al-Tirmidhi and others from the authors of the *Sihah* (authentics) reported that Zayd Ibn Arqam reported that the Messenger of God said:

"Certainly I am leaving for you that which if you follow, you will never go astray after me: the Book of God, a rope extended from heaven to earth, and the Members of my House. They will never part with each other until they come to me on the Day of Judgement while I am standing at the Hawd (basin). Be careful how you treat the two after me." Al-Tirmidhi, his *Sunan*, part 5, page 329)

Al-Tirmidhi also said:

"There are on this subject hadiths of Abu Dharr and Abu Sa'id and Zayd Ibn Arqam and Hudhayfah Ibn Usayd."

This hadith clearly indicates that the Messenger commanded Muslims to follow the Book of God and the instructions of the members of his House concerning Islamic law. He informed us that the instructions of

the Members of his House always agree with the Qur'an. He declared that the Qur'an and his Itrah (Members of his House) will never part with each other until the Day of Judgement.

Muslim scholars may argue about the indication of this hadith that the Prophet Muhammad appointed the members of his House to be the caliphs after him. But it is not logical to argue about the indications of this hadith that the Prophet wanted Muslims to follow the instructions of the Members of his House concerning Islamic rules.

It is needless to emphasize the authenticity of this hadith after it was reported by about twenty companions. [Ed. Please see Hadith al-Thaqalayn, a study of its tawatur] The Sunnite Muslim scholars say it is mandatory to follow one of the four schools and their verdicts. Yet it was never reported that the Prophet said that the duty of Muslims is to follow the verdicts of these four schools. Knowing this, we find no justification for the refusal of the Sunni scholars to follow the instructions of the Members of the House of the Holy Prophet Muhammad after the Prophet Muhammad himself testified that the members of his House are allies of the Qur'an and will never part with it.

The least that the Muslims should do toward the teachings of the members of the House of the Holy Prophet Muhammad is to consider their teaching equal to the four schools (if not better).

The fact is that the followers of the four schools took a negative attitude towards the teachings of the Imams from the House of the Prophet without knowing their teachings. They thought, without any research, that their teaching is not worthy of consideration and respect. This tells us that the followers of the four schools did not agree with their imams, and that they were more kingly than the kings. Abu Hanifah was a student of Imam Ja'far, and he believed that Imam Ja'far was the most knowledgeable in Islamic law among all the people of his time.

The Abbasid Al-Mansur commanded Abu Hanifah to prepare for Imam Ja'far a number of questions concerning Islamic law and to ask the Imam those questions in the presence of Al-Mansur. Abu Hanifah prepared forty difficult questions and asked Imam Ja'far about them in the presence of Al-Mansur. The Imam not only answered all the questions but also informed him of the opinions of the Iraqi scholars and the Hijazi scholars. Abu Hanifah commented on this episode saying:

"Certainly, the most knowledgeable among people is the most knowledgeable of their different opinions."

Abu Hanifah described his feeling (when he entered the palace of Al-Mansur and found Imam Ja'far with him) by saying:

"When I saw Imam Ja'far, I felt that his personality commands more respect than that of the caliph himself. Yet the caliph was ruling the Muslim world, and Imam Ja'far was a private citizen." (Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zahra, *Al-Imam Al-Sadiq*, page 27)

Imam Malik was also one of the students of Imam Ja'far, and it is reported that Malik said:

"I used to come to Ja'far Ibn Muhammad and went to him for a long time. Whenever I visited him, I found him praying, fasting, or reading the Qur'an. Whenever he reported a statement of the Messenger of God, he was with ablution. He was a distinguished worshipper who was unconcerned with the material world. He was of the God-fearing people."

Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal reported the famous hadith of *Thaqalayn* (the two valuables) through more than one source. He reported through his channel to Zayd Ibn Thabit that the Prophet said:

"Certainly I am leaving for you two Caliphs: The Book of God, a rope extended between the heaven and the earth and the members of my House. They will never part with each other until the Day of Judgement" (Imam Ahmad, his *Musnad*, part 5, page 181).

Imam Ahmad also reported through his channel to Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri that the Messenger of God said:

"Certainly I am about to be called upon (by God), and I will respond (by departing from this world), and I am leaving for you the two valuables: The Book of God and the members of my House. The Book of God (which) is a rope extended from heaven to earth and the members of my House. The Almighty informed me that the two will not part with each until they meet me near the Basin. Beware how you treat them after me (same source, part 3, page 17).

Imam Ahmad also reported this hadith through his channel to Zayd Ibn Arqam (same source, page 371).

Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zahra who was one of the outstanding Sunni contemporary scholars said:

"The Muslim scholars of various Islamic schools never agreed unanimously on a matter as much as they agree on the knowledge of Imam Ja'far and his virtue. The Sunni imams who lived during his time were his students. Malik was one of them and those who were as contemporary as Malik such as Sufyan Al-Thawri and many others. Abu Hanifah also was his student in spite of their being close in age, and he considered Imam Ja'far the most knowledgeable in the Muslim world." (the same source, page 66).

Imam Al-Shafi'i was truly attached to the members of the House of the Prophet. His love and adherence to their way is well known and conveyed by scholars who were in the place of confidence of Muslims.

Imam Al-Razi recorded in his commentary on the following Qur'anic verse:

"Say (to the Muslims) 'I ask from you no reward (on my endeavor in leading you to the right path) except your love for my close relatives.'

Imam Al-Shafi'i in his poetry said:

"Members of the House of the Prophet, your love is a Divine duty on mankind. God revealed it in His Qur'an. It is of your high distinctions that whoever does not pray on you has no prayer." He also said "If the love of the members of the House of the Prophet is *Rafd* (rejection), let mankind and the Jinns testify that I am a rejecter."

My Humble Effort In The Path Of Islamic Unity

In 1959, I attempted to begin a campaign in this direction. I visited Egypt and met the late President Jamal Abdul Nassar. I discussed with him and separately with the late Shaykh Al-Azhar, Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut (on the first day of July), the matter of reconciliation between the Sunnite and the Shi'ite schools. I spoke to each of the two leaders about the necessity of solving this problem and about the way through which it can be solved.

This problem, I said, had started during the Umayyad era and continued through the Abbasid and the Turkish era. We still suffer a great deal through this problem, which continues to separate Muslims and spread suspicion among them and make them reciprocate false accusations.

The Shi'ite Imami Ja'fari (the followers of the Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq) are not seeking a privilege or superiority. They want the Muslim world to know that the teachings of Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq and the rest of the members of the House of the Holy Prophet are not less valuable and sound than the teachings of the four imams. The teachings which the Shi'ite Imami Ja'fari follow deserve and command the respect of all Muslims. Those who follow these teachings are sound Muslims and true believers like the followers of the four schools. I said that a declaration by Shaykh Al-Azhar in this direction will be a sound step in the way of Islamic unity.

Shaykh Al-Azhar asked me: "Would it not be sufficient for solving this problem to teach the Ja'fari Madhhab (school of thought) at Al-Azhar?" I replied in the negative and mentioned to him two reasons:

1. Teaching of the Ja'fari Madhhab does not indicate that Al-Azhar and its shaykh believe in the soundness of such a Madhhab. Al-Azhar can decide to teach the Marxist theory. This would not indicate that you believe in the soundness of that theory.
2. Teaching of the Ja'fari Madhhab at Al-Azhar may make a few hundred students of Al-Azhar aware of this Madhhab. This is not our goal. Our goal is to inform millions of Muslims of the soundness of the teachings of the members of the House of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. This would not be accomplished except by issuing a verdict of equality between the Ja'fari Madhhab and the four Madhhabs. Such a declaration should be published and announced through all Islamic media. This may inform millions of Muslims at once about this truth which has been ignored for hundreds of years.

The grand Shaykh responded to this suggestion immediately. On the following day his son-in-law and secretary, Mr. Ahmad Nassar, visited me and brought the good tidings; the Grand Shaykh had responded to my suggestion and issued a verdict about the subject. I went with him to the Grand Shaykh, thanking him for his historical achievement. The Shaykh read to me the text of the verdict before publishing it.

On the seventh of July, 1959, the Middle East radio station and the Egyptian and the Lebanese press published the text of the verdict of the Grand Shaykh.

Shaykh Al-Azhar issued his verdict in a form of an answer to a question that was directed to him as follows:

"Some people view that in order to have religiously sound devotions and transactions, it is imperative to follow one of the four known Islamic schools: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Hanbali, or Maliki. This excludes the two Shi'ite schools: Imami (Ja'fari) and Zaydi. Shaykh Shaltut in answering this question stated the following:"

"It is permissible for a "non-mujtahid" (the one who is not qualified to give his own opinion in Islamic law) to follow the opinion of the "the 'Ulama" (the Muslim scholars), whose knowledge and piety are known, provided such an opinion reaches its followers in a correct and nearly certain way, directly or indirectly.

"We should not be concerned with a view expressed in some books which claims that the four schools are the only ones to follow, and that it is not permissible for a Muslim to move from one school to another.

"The word Shi'a (Shi'ite) by which the followers of Ali (son of Abu Talib) are known, is derived from the word "mushayya'ah" which means to follow . . . There are groups related to Ali, and they are the well guided ones. Of these Shi'a is the group which is known by the name of Ja'fari or Imami Ithna-Ashari. This well known school follows principles that are taken from the Book of God and the teachings of His Messenger which reached them through their Imams in both fundamental belief and Islamic law.

"The difference between the Ja'fari and Sunni schools is not greater than the difference among the Sunni schools themselves. They (the Ja'faris) believe in the fundamental principles of Islam as they are stated in the Glorious Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet. They also believe in all the rules whose inclusion in the religion of Islam is self-evident and whose recognition is required for being a Muslim and the denial of which excludes the person from Islam. The Madhhab of these Ja'fari Shi'ites in the Islamic laws is completely recorded and well-known. It has its own books, conveyers (who reported the statements of the Prophet and the Imams), and the supporting evidence of what they convey. The authors of these books and those from whom these authors had received the (hadiths) are well-known, and their scholarly and jurisprudential ranks are respected among Muslim scholars."

From this explanation, it becomes evident that:

1. Islam does not command any of its followers to follow a particular Islamic school. On the contrary, it establishes for every Muslim the right to follow, at the beginning, any one of the correctly conveyed Madhhabs, whose verdicts are recorded in their respective books. It is permissible also for anyone that follows one of these schools to shift to another, any other school, and he is not sinning by doing that.
2. The Ja'fari school which is known as the Madhhab of the Ithna-Ashari, Imami Shi'a is a sound school. It is permissible to worship God according to its teachings like the rest of the Sunni schools.
3. Muslims ought to know this and get rid of their undue bigotry to particular schools. The religion of God

and His law do not follow, nor are they bound to, a particular school. All the founders of these schools are Mujtahids (qualified to give verdict) reward-deserving from God, and acceptable to Him. It is permissible for the non-mujtahid to follow them and to accord with their teachings, whether in devotion or transactions.

This recognition should have taken place during the second century after the Hijra when the four Islamic schools were at the state of formation. The School of Imam Ja'far is the School of the House of the Prophet Muhammad who declared it to be inseparable from the Qur'an, and that the adherence to the Qur'anic teaching and their teaching represents security against straying. This is the School of Imam Ali who was declared by the Prophet to be the gate of the city of knowledge.

The fact is that the Umayyad and Abbasid policies viewed that recognizing the School of the House of the Prophet is dangerous to them.

However, the Declaration of Shaykh Al-Azhar is a positive step and in the right direction. It is true that it came very late but it is an indication that some of the contemporary Islamic scholars have a new and sound way of thinking. Should this step be followed by other positive steps, the Muslim World may regain its brotherhood and unity.

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