

Introduction

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Beneficent

All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the universe. May the best of blessings and greetings be upon our leader and master Muhammad, who was sent as a mercy to the universe, he is the master of the foremost ones and the last ones; he was purified from all disgraces. May Allah's choicest blessings and greetings also be upon the illustrious and purified *ahl al-bayt*, the standards of guidance, light of those in darkness and the Imams of the Muslims.

This work consists of some questions which I prepared for Muslim researchers – especially those Sunnis who maintain that they alone hold fast to the true practice of the Prophet (S.A.W.) They are severe in their disapproval of other Muslims and call them derogatory names. New organizations have sprung up in several Islamic countries in the name of defending the *sunna* of Muhammad (S.A.W.) and in the name of "the helpers of the *sunna*" and "the helpers of the companions".

Numerous books have been published to insult and condemn the Shi'as, their Imams and to ridicule their scholars. These ideas have been propagated, by international means of communications, to every part of the world – Muslim and non-Muslim – to the point where people today speak [only] of the Sunnis and the Shi'as.

On many occasions, I meet some young, truthful, Muslim scholars who enquire and ask questions about the Shi'as, i.e., the true and false [notions] about them. They are perplexed in reconciling what they observe while living amongst their Shi'a friends with what they hear and read about them. They do not know where the truth lies.

I have spoken to some of them and have presented them with copies of my book "Then I was Guided". Praise be to Allah, the majority of them, after researching and debating, are guided to the truth and follow it. This, however, does not suffice for those youths whom I meet coincidentally or for those who do not have such opportunities to meet and therefore remain confused regarding the conflicting ideas they are exposed to.

Despite the convincing proofs and irrefutable arguments [cited] in "Then I was Guided", and "With the

Truthful ones", these two books are not sufficient to combat the frenzied attacks and crude allegations [instigated] by various means of propaganda that some of the wicked sources have financed by their petro dollars.

Despite all this, however, the voice of truth will emerge in the midst of this discomfiting uproar and it will be a glowing light shining in the gloom of darkness since the promise of Allah is true, and it will certainly manifest itself.

Allah says: ***"They seek to extinguish Allah's light by their mouths, but Allah will perfect this light even though the disbelievers hate that" (61:8).*** Allah further explains that their acts will fail and will rebound on them: ***"Verily, those who disbelieve spend their wealth in hindering [people from] the path of Allah, they will continue to spend; then they will regret therein. Ultimately, they will be overcome and the disbelievers will be gathered in hell" (8:36).***

Due to this, it is essential for the scholars, writers and thinkers to explain to the lay persons what is difficult for them [to comprehend] and to guide them to the right path. The most exalted says:

"Those who seek to conceal the clear [signs] which We have revealed and guided – after we have clearly explained it for the people in the book – Allah will curse them as will those who are entitled to curse. Except those who repent, make amends and make clear [that which they sought to hide]. Towards them I shall turn, for I am the Forgiving, the Merciful" (2: 160).

Why don't the scholars discuss this topic diligently and sincerely for Allah's sake? Why [should they not do this] when the most Glorious has revealed the clear signs and guidance, perfected His religion and completed His favors on humankind? When the Prophet (S.A.W.) has fulfilled Allah's mission to him, proclaimed His message and advised the *umma*, then why this disunity, enmity, hatred and calling derogatory names and each party considering the other to be a disbeliever?

In my role, I have to take an unequivocal position here and to declare to all Muslims, that there can be no salvation, no safety, no unity, no happiness, and no paradise unless we return to the two basic sources: Allah's book and the Prophet's household (peace be upon them). [Nothing can be attained] unless we embark on the ship of salvation, the ship of the *ahl al-bayt* (S.A.W.).

This statement is not something that I have conjured up; rather, it is the word of Allah in the noble Qur'an and His Prophet (S.A.W.) in the honorable Prophetic *sunna*. The Muslims today have two options to attain the desired unity:

The first approach: The *ahl al-sunna wa'l -Jama'a* accept the *madhab* (school of thought) of the household of the Prophet which is the *madhab* that the Ithna'ashari Imami Shi'as follow. This *madhab* would then be classified as a fifth *madhab* to them (the Sunnis), and they could then treat its jurisprudential texts in the same way that they do with the other four Islamic schools. They should not disparage it nor deride those who embrace it.

They should give the educated students the freedom to choose the *madhab* which they are satisfied with. And, by the same token, it is incumbent upon every Muslim – Sunni and Shi'a – that they recognize the other Islamic *madhabs*, such as the Ibadiyya and the Zaydiyya. This approach is a remedy for many of the conflicts and differences that affect our *umma*, but it still does not present a complete cure for the historical discord we have endured for centuries.

The second approach: The Muslims should unite under a common creed as dictated by Allah and His Prophet (S.A.W.). They should do so in one way and on the right path, which is to follow the Imams of the *ahl al-bayt*, [they are] those from whom Allah has removed all filth and has purified them completely. Indeed, all Muslims – Shi'as and Sunnis – agree upon their acts and their superiority in their piety, virtue, asceticism, character, knowledge and good deeds.

Since the Muslims differ regarding the companions, they should leave what they differ on in favor of what they agree upon in compliance with the *hadith* of the Prophet (S.A.W.): "Keep away from what casts doubt in you in favor of what does not make you doubtful".

By doing this, the Muslim *umma* would come together and unite based on a fundamental rule that forms the pivot around which everything revolves, [a principle] established by the Prophet (S.A.W.) when he said: "I leave amongst you two weighty things, if you stick to them, you will never go astray: the book of Allah and my *ahl al-bayt*" [cited in] *Sahih Muslim*.

Since this *hadith* is accepted by both sects, in fact by all Muslims regardless of their different *madhab*, why is it that a faction amongst them does not act in accordance to it? If all the Muslims were to follow this *hadith*, such strong Islamic unity would be fostered between them that no breeze could shake it, no storm destroy it, no propagation could refute it, and no enemy of Islam could thwart it.

In my view, this is the only solution towards the salvation and safety of the Muslims. Any other approach is futile and [is tantamount to] embellished words. Whoever studies the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions, as well as studies history and reflects upon it with a sound mind will certainly agree with me.

The first approach has failed since the first day the Prophet (S.A.W.) left us when the companions differed amongst themselves resulting in the division of the Muslim *umma* and the destruction of the bonds of solidarity. The *umma* has failed throughout the centuries to revert to the second approach which is the adherence to the book and the Prophet's household (S.A.W.).

This is due to the propaganda spread earlier by the Umayyad and 'Abbasid dynasties, and, in our times, because of the defamation, misrepresentation and condemnation of the followers of the *ahl al-bayt* of the Prophet. There remains for us then nothing else but a clear approach and a disclosure of the truth for all who wish to know it. This can be done in the style of the noble Qur'an in its challenge: "**Come forth with your proof if you are indeed telling the truth**" (2: 111).

Clear proof and argument will never be subjugated by force or wealth; neither can they be refuted by

warnings and threats. [This is true] for free human beings who have pledged themselves to Allah alone. They have never deviated – and will never do so – from the truth, even if they lose their lives. If only the modern day scholars of the *umma* were to organize a conference to examine these matters with open hearts, astute minds, and pure consciences. They would, by doing so, serve the Muslim *umma*, assemble its scattered fragments, heal its wounds, unite its ranks and bring together its [different] views.

This unity will come, [whether they] like it or not, for Allah, Glory be to Him, has reserved, for that purpose, an Imam from the progeny of al-Mustafa (the chosen one) who will fill the earth with justice and equity, just as it was filled with oppression and tyranny. This Imam is from the purified loins.

It is as though Allah, great is His wisdom, tests this *umma* throughout its life span until, when the time is near, He reveals to it the errors it has committed and gives it an opportunity to return to the truth and follow the original path which Muhammad (S.A.W.) called to when he supplicated: "O Allah, guide my people for indeed they do not know."

Until that time comes, I present my book, "Ask those who know". It is a collection of questions and answers based on the views and the teachings of the Imams of the *ahl al-bayt* (S.A.W.). Hopefully, the Muslims in every Islamic country will benefit from it and work towards the concordance of views in preparation of the coveted unity.

My success is from Allah. Upon Him I rely and to Him I turn. My Lord, expand my breast and make my affairs easy for me [to handle]. Loosen the knots on my tongue so that my words can be understood. I ask Him, Glory be to Him, the most exalted one, to accept my work and make it [a source of] virtue and blessing, for it is only a stone in the building of a united body.

I say this because the contemporary Muslims are still very far away from realizing basic human rights and working harmoniously with each other. I realized this first hand during my travels and numerous visits to the Muslim countries or in the countries where there are Muslims [residing]. The latest was in the Indian subcontinent which has a population of over 200 million Muslims, a quarter of whom are Shi'as and three quarters are Sunnis.

I had heard a lot about them, but what I witnessed really perplexed and astonished me. It also made me fearful. I was saddened and I wept over the path this *umma* has taken. Were it not for my hope, wishes and faith, despair would have overcome my heart.

Immediately after my return from India, I sent an open letter to an Indian scholar who the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-Jama'a* in that subcontinent refers to, Abu'l- Hasan 'Ali al-Nadawi. I promised him that I would publish this letter and his reply. So far, however, I have not received a reply. I have published my letter in the introduction to this book in its original form so that it acts as an historical testimony which will bear witness for us in front of Allah and the people, that we are amongst those who enjoined unity.

Muhammad al-Tijani al-Samawi

May the blessings and peace of Allah be on the most honorable of the Messengers and on his purified household.

Open letter to Sayyid Abu'l-Hasan al-Nadawi, an Indian scholar

Peace, Mercy and Blessings of Allah, the Exalted, be upon you:

I am Muhammad al-Tijani al-Samawi, a Tunisian whom Allah has favored with guidance and success. I have embraced the school of the *ahl al-bayt* of the Prophet after lengthy research, having previously been a Maliki. I was a follower of the famous Sufi *tariqa* (path) in North Africa, the Tijaniyya order.

I came to recognize the truth during a successful visit to the Shi'i *'ulama'* (scholars); I have written a book about that visit which I called "Then I was Guided". It was printed in India by "*al-Majma' al-'ilmi al-Islami*" in different languages and, for the occasion (of publishing), I was invited to visit India.

Dear Sir, I came to India for a short visit. I had hoped to meet your honorable self when I heard about you and learnt that you were a councilor amongst the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-Jama'a*. However, the immense distances (of travelling) and lack of time prevented me from doing that. I had to be content with visiting the cities of Bombay, Poona, Jabal Pur and other cities in Gujarat. I was greatly pained by what I saw in India, i.e., enmity and hatred between the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-Jama'a* and their Shi'a Muslim brothers.

I had heard that they wage war sometimes and fight each other and [even] spill innocent blood on both sides in the name of Islam. However, I did not believe this, thinking that it was slander. What I witnessed and heard during my visit could make [one] perplexed and astonished. I was certain that there are despicable plans and dangerous conspiracies being instigated against Islam and the Muslims so as to destroy all of them, Sunnis and Shi'as.

What made this belief of mine even more certain, and my knowledge even more entrenched, was a confrontation which occurred between myself and a group of Sunni scholars. The honorable Shaykh 'Aziz al-Rahman, the Mufti of *al-Jama'a Islamiyya* was leading them (in this). The meeting was held in their mosque in Bombay and took place after their invitation.

I had just settled down with them when disdain and derision, insults and curses, against the followers of the household of the Prophet began. By this, they wanted to provoke and incite me, since they had known that I had composed a book [in which] I invited people to embrace the school of the *ahl al-bayt*, peace be upon them.

I understood their intentions and controlled my temper. I therefore smiled at them saying: "I am your guest, you are the ones who invited me; I came to you in haste responding to your call. Did you invite me to insult and revile me? Are these the manners which Islam has taught you?"

They replied to me in an arrogant manner saying that in my life I had never been a Muslim, even for a day, because I was a Shi'a and the Shi'as have nothing to do with Islam. They swore to that.

I said: "Fear God, O brothers, for our Lord is one, our Prophet is one, our book is one, and our *qibla* is one. The Shi'as believe in one God and they practice Islam in accordance with [the teachings of] the Prophet and his family, they pray, give *zakat* and go for pilgrimage to the house of God. How is it permissible for you to consider them to be infidels?"

They replied: "You do not believe in the Qur'an, you are hypocrites, you dissimulate (*taqiyya*) and your Imam has said: "Dissimulation is [part of] my religion and that of my father." You are a Jewish sect which 'Abd Allah b. Saba' the Jew had founded."

I said to them smiling: "Let us leave the Shi'as [aside] and let us talk about me personally. I was a Maliki like you and I was satisfied, after lengthy research, that the *ahl al-bayt* are most right and most worthy of following. Do you have proofs which you can dispute with me? Or do you want to ask me what are my arguments and proofs so that we can understand each other?"

They said: "The *ahl al-bayt* are the wives of the Prophet, you do not know anything of the Qur'an."

I said: "*Sahih* al-Bukhari and *Sahih* Muslim report differently from what you mention." They said: "All that is in al-Bukhari and Muslim and other Sunni books which you base your arguments upon are [due to] the Shi'as interpolating and inserting in our books".

I replied to them laughingly: "If the Shi'as can interpolate your books and your *Sahih* works, then there is no importance or value to [your books] nor to your school which is based on [these books]." They kept quiet and were dumbfounded. One of them intended to make fun and to provoke me again. He said: "One who does not believe in the Caliphate of the rightly guided Caliphs of our Sayyid Abu Bakr, Sayyid 'Umar, Sayyid 'Uthman and Sayyid 'Ali and Sayyid Mu'awiya and Sayyid Yazid, may God be pleased and happy with them, then he is not a Muslim."

I was astonished at this talk which I had never heard in my life, since it meant that anybody who did not believe in the Caliphate of Mu'awiya and his son Yazid was to be considered an infidel. I said to myself: "It is understandable that the Muslims be pleased with Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman, this is a natural thing. As for [being pleased with] Yazid, I have never heard of it except in India." I turned to all of them and asked them: "Do you all agree with his view?" They all replied: "Yes."

At that point, I knew that there was no point in continuing the conversation. I understood that they wanted to provoke me so that they could exact revenge (for conversion), they might perhaps even kill me on the pretext of my having abused the companions, who knows?

I saw evil in their eyes and I asked my friend who had brought me to them to take me away immediately. He took me; he was hurt and apologized to me for what had occurred. This innocent person had wanted to know the truth through this meeting. As a matter of fact, he is a well behaved young man, Sharaf al-

Din, owner of an Islamic printing press and publishing house in Bombay. He was a witness to what had transpired between us in this aforementioned discussion. He did not hide his disappointment with these people who considered themselves to be amongst the prominent scholars.

I left them whilst angry and sorry at the condition which the Muslims had reached, especially by those posing as the centre of preaching and calling themselves scholars. I said to myself: "If the '*ulama*' are at this level of blind fanaticism, what will the condition and ignorance of the masses be like?" I knew then how the fighting and wars in which blood was spilled illegally, honor and dignity disgraced, had started in the name of protecting Islam.

I cried over the path taken by this wretched and ill-fated people which Allah, Glory be to Him, has entrusted with the responsibility of guidance. The Prophet of God (S.A.W.) has also entrusted it with the responsibility of transmitting light into the dark hearts, if they need the glow of light. At any one time, there are in India alone 700 million persons who worship [other gods] apart from God, the most exalted. They consider the cow, statues, and idols to be sacred.

Instead of unifying the efforts of Muslims so as to guide and preach to them and to bring them out from darkness to light so that they should submit to the Lord of the universe, we see that the Muslims today, especially in India, are themselves in need of guidance and reformation.

Because of this, sir, I am sending my letter to you asking you in the name of God, who is the most Merciful and Beneficent, and in the name of the noble Prophet and in the name of the greatness of Islam, according to the saying of the most High: ***"And hold tight to the rope of Allah, all of you and do not differ."***

I ask you to adopt the stance of a brave Muslim who is not scared, for Allah's sake, of the sternest critics and is not swayed by fanaticism or sectarianism, a position which Satan and his friends would like.

I invite you to a stance which is sincere and clear; you are the one whom Allah has entrusted with responsibility as long as you talk in the name of Islam in that region. Allah will not be pleased with you if you adopt the stance of a contented spectator with what is happening here and there, a tragedy the price of which the innocent Shi'a and Sunni Muslims are paying. God is going to ask you on the Day of Judgment about every small or big deed, and you will have to account for every single thing because those who know and those who do not know are not equal.

As long as you consider yourself to be amongst the '*ulama*' of India, there is no doubt that your responsibility is immense. A word from you could be for the betterment of the *umma* in India just as it could be for the destruction of the future civilization. So have fear of God, O people of understanding!

As Allah, Glory be to Him, gave the scholars an elevated status after the angels, the most High says: ***"Allah bears witness that there is no God but He and the angels and those bestowed with knowledge are undertaking their affairs with justice."*** And if He, Glory be to Him, is instructing us all to ***"undertake your measurement with equity and do not defraud the scales"*** and if the

commentators talk of the need to deal justly in material scales, which has limited value, how about dealing justly when creedal issues [are at stake] which can take one between truth and falsehood and on which depends the guidance of mankind and salvation of the whole of humanity?

Allah, the Most High said: ***"When you judge, do so in a just manner"*** and He also said: ***"O David, We have made you a Caliph on earth so judge between people on [the basis of] truth, do not follow desires, for they will take you away from the path of God."***

And the Prophet of God (P) said: "Speak the truth even if it be against you; speak the truth even if it is bitter."

My Dear Sir, I invite you to the book of God and to the *sunna* of His Prophet. Speak it clearly and loudly, even if it is bitter; it will be a testimony for you in front of Allah. By your Lord, do you consider the Shi'as to be non-Muslims?

Do you truly believe they are infidels? Is the following of the household of the Prophet, who believe in the unity of one God, and glorify Him more than any other sect – because of their belief that He is above any resemblance (with human beings), corporealism and bodily traits, tantamount to disbelief? They believe in His Prophet Muhammad (P) and extol him more than any other sect due to their belief in his complete infallibility even before the call to prophecy – do you consider them to be infidels?

Those who take Allah, His Prophet, and believers as friends and desire what the family of the Prophet desires and accept them as their friends (as Ibn Manzur has introduced them in his *"Lisan al-Arab"* in his [section on] the origins of the Shi'a), do you consider them to be non-Muslims?

Are these Shi'as who undertake prayers as their best undertaking and they pay the *zakat* as well as an additional one fifth of their property in obedience to Allah and His Prophet and fast the month of Ramadan and other [extra] days and go for pilgrimage and glorify the signs of God, who respect the friends of God and dissociate themselves from the enemies of Allah and Islam, do you consider them to be polytheists?

Do those who believe in the Imamate of twelve Imams from the *ahl al-bayt* from whom Allah has removed all filth and purified them completely and believe that the Prophet of God (P) has designated them (as al-Bukhari and Muslim and others have reported from the Sunni *Sahih* works), are these, in your view, deviants from Islam?

Were the Muslims ever ignorant of the Imamate and never accepted it whether at the time of the Prophet or after his death so that we should attribute the belief in and origins of the Imamate to the Persians and Zoroastrians?

Do you now say that one who does not accept the Imamate of Yazid b. Mu'awiya to be an unbeliever, a person whose immorality is known to the rank and file Muslims? Yazid's vileness and debaseness can be discerned from what the Muslims have agreed on, i.e., his allowing his army and soldiers to do as they pleased in al-Medina al-Munawwara so as to extract allegiance to him by force and to admit that

they (the people) are his slaves.

They killed 10,000 of the best companions and the followers and defiled the honor of pure women and young Muslim girls so that they bore children from fornication, a number which nobody but Allah knows. It is enough for his eternal shame, dishonor, and disgrace that he killed the master of the youths of paradise and enslaved the children of the Prophet, and hit the teeth of al-Husayn with his cane, composing the famous ode:

"If only my ancestors at Badr would witness..." He also said: "The Banu Hashim played with the kingdom, no news came and no revelation descended."

It is clear that he did not believe in the prophecy of Muhammad nor in the noble Qur'an. Is it proper that you agree to consider as an infidel one who dissociates himself from Yazid and his father Mu'awiya who was cursing 'Ali and ordered his cursing? He [even] killed any prominent companion who refused (to curse) as he did with Hujr b. 'Adi al-Kindi and his companions.

He (Mu'awiya) established a *sunna* [which was] followed for seventy years even though he was aware of the saying of the Prophet (P): "One who curses 'Ali curses me, and one who curses me curses Allah."

This has been reported in the *Sahih* works of the *ahl al-sunna*. Additionally, he [performed] acts which opposed [the teachings of] Islam, like his killing of the innocent and upright ones so as to get *bay'a* for his son Yazid by force and coercion, and his killing of al-Hasan b. 'Ali through Ju'da, the daughter of Ash'ash and many other crimes which the Sunni historical works mention and are testified by the followers of 'Ali.

I do not think, dear sir, that you will agree to all this and if you do, then we can bid farewell to Islam and forget the world. There will remain no standards of judging, nor reasoning, nor law, nor logic, nor proof.

Allah, the most Glorious and Exalted, says: "**O you who believe, have fear of God and be with the truthful ones.**" By God, the 'alim of Pakistan may God forgive his sins, Abu'l-A'la al-Mawdudi, may God have mercy on him, has spoken the truth when he says in his book entitled "*al-khilafa wa'l mulk*" on page 106 reporting from al-Hasan al-Basri:

There were four traits in Mu'awiya, any one of which was enough to disgrace him:

1. His seizing of the matter (Caliphate) without consulting the Muslims although there were, amongst them, eminent companions and overwhelming light.
2. His appointing his son, the drunkard and winebibber who wore silk and played with drums, to be the Caliph after him.
3. His recognizing Ziyad as his brother – the Prophet of God (P) said: "The child belongs to the bed (legal father), the adulterer is to be stoned."

4. His killing of Hujr and the companions of Hujr. Woe unto him for what he did to Hujr and his companions (he repeated this three times).

May God have mercy on Abu'l-A'la al-Mawdudi, for he came out openly with the truth. Had he wished, he would have added forty-four more traits but he, may God have mercy on him, deemed this to be a sufficient crime against Mu'awiya. The meaning of a sinful word is well known (perishing in fire).

Maybe al-Mawdudi was sensitive to the feelings of the people who had learnt from their predecessors to revere and respect Mu'awiya and to be pleased with him and even to his son Yazid. I heard that for myself from your scholars in India. There is no power nor strength except in God, the Almighty, the most Great.

Maybe Mawdudi was sensitive to the feelings of the people who had learnt from their predecessors the sanctification and respect of Mu'awiya and to be pleased with him and even for his son Yazid I heard for myself from your scholars in India. There is no power nor strength except in God, the Almighty, the most great.

I was also sensitive to the feelings of those who had invited me so as to revile me, I did not mention anything of this to them in fear of myself.

I appeal to you, sir, to adopt a clear stance, seeking, through it, the pleasure of Allah, the Most Exalted, for Allah does not shirk from the truth. I do not ask from you that you concede [their wrongdoing] so as to get even with them nor to publish their disgraces, for history will bear witness to that.

What is requested from you is for you to concede and teach your followers that those who do not accept the Imamate of these people nor befriend them are also true Muslims deserving respect, there is no doubt about it. And for you to say that the Shi'as have been oppressed throughout history because they did not follow or accept the Imamate of the troublesome, cursed ones for whom Allah has cited examples in the Qur'an.

By your Lord, what is the crime of the Shi'as? The Prophet of God commanded the Muslims to follow his household after him to the point that he likened them to Noah's ark, one who climbs in it is saved and one who stays behind is destroyed. What is the sin of the Shi'as if they obey the order of the Prophet when he said: "I leave behind me two weighty things, the book of God and my family, the *ahl al-bayt*: if you cling to them you will never be led astray after me." In addition to the Shi'a books, the *Sihah* of the *ahl al-sunna* testify to that.

Instead of thanking them and giving them preference, precedence, and deeming them to be superior over others we insult them and label them as infidels and dissociate ourselves from them, due to their compliance to the Prophet's (P) commands, which is neither fair nor logical.

Let us cast aside, sir, the foolish and false talk which is based neither on proof nor evidence and does

not deceive the educated children of our community. The claims that the Shi'as have a special Qur'an or that the bearer of the message is 'Ali or that 'Abd Allah b. Saba', the Jew, is the founder of Shi'ism or other absurd and prejudiced allegations, which Allah bears witness to, are due to the imaginations of the enemies of Islam and the enemies of the *ahl al-bayt* and their Shi'as, which only blind fanaticism and complete ignorance have invented.

I am asking you, honorable sir, where do the scholars of India stand compared to the scholars of al-Azhar who issued a ruling allowing [people] to embrace the *madhab* of Imami Shi'as thirty years ago? Among the prominent notable '*ulama*' of al-Azhar are those who view the Ja'fari legal school, which the Shi'as practice, as being more inclusive, rich and more close to the soul of Islam than the other Islamic schools which are actually dependent upon it.

Among the leaders of these nobles is al-Shaykh Muhammad Shaltut, may God have mercy on him. He was the head of al-Azhar during his time. Don't the '*ulama*' of his caliber know Islam and Muslims? Are the Indian scholars more knowledgeable and cognizant than them? I do not know what you will say to that.

My noble Sir, I have strong hopes in you and my heart is open to you with love, kindness, and yearning. I was, like you, veiled from the truth and from the *ahl al-bayt* and their Shi'as in the past. Allah, Glory be to Him, guided me to the truth against which there is nothing but going astray. I freed myself from the chains of fanaticism and blind imitation and I knew that most Muslims are still covered with rumors and false (claims).

The allegations prevent them from reaching the truth so as to enable all of them to climb to the ship of salvation and to cling firmly to the rope of Allah. There is, as you know, no difference between the Sunnis and the Shi'as except what arose after the Prophet due to the Caliphate. The basis of the difference was their belief in the companions, may God be pleased with them. They differed amongst themselves until they cursed some; they even waged war and killed each other.

If differences concerning them [warrants] being cast out of the fold of Islam then the companions are most guilty of this crime, God forbid. I do not believe that you would be happy with that. Justice therefore dictates that you should not be happy with the out casting of the Shi'as from Islam. Just as the Shi'as devoted themselves to revere and respect the *ahl al-bayt*, similarly, the Sunnis devoted themselves to the respect of the *sahaba* and to revere all of them.

What a difference between the two positions. If the Shi'as are in error (due to that), then the Sunnis are more in error since all the companions prefer the *ahl al-bayt* over themselves and send blessings on them as they send blessings on the Prophet. We do not know of any companion (R) who either preferred himself or saw himself superior, whether in knowledge or in actions, over the *ahl al-bayt* of the chosen one.

The time has come to lift the darkness of history over the Shi'as of *ahl al-bayt* and to get close to them

and to accept them as brothers and to co-operate with each other towards virtue and piety. Enough blood has been shed and sedition instigated in this community.

Sir, maybe Allah, Glory be to Him, will unite the different views through you and will gather the diverse traits, mend the cracks and will cure the wounds. Maybe, because of you, He will extinguish the flames of *fitna* and will disgrace Satan and his party.

You will become triumphant in God's eyes especially as, according to what I hear, you are amongst the descendants of the pure family. Act so that you may be gathered with them ("Indeed, this is a single community and I am your Lord, so worship Me"). **"And say: 'Act and Allah and His prophet and the believers will see your actions'."** May God grant you and us success. May God make you and us among the sincere workers towards His noble path.

With this letter, sir, I am enclosing a copy of my book 'Then I was Guided', which I wrote especially on this topic, as a gift from me to you, hoping that you will accept it.

May the peace, mercy and blessings of Allah the Almighty be with you.

Yours sincerely,

Muhammad al-Tijani al-Samawi al-Tunisi

Ask those who know if you do not know

This noble verse instructs the Muslims to refer to the people who know in all [things] which perplex them so that they may discern the path to the truth because Allah, having taught them, has nominated them for that [purpose]. Their knowledge is deeply rooted and they know the interpretation of the Qur'an.

This verse was revealed to introduce the *ahl al-bayt* (S.A.W.). They are Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, al-Hasan and al-Husayn. This [occurred] in the time of prophecy, since, after the Prophet and up to the coming of the hour [of reckoning], the [aforementioned] five are the people of the blanket, in addition to them are nine Imams from the progeny of al-Husayn whom the Prophet of God (S.A.W.) designated on many occasions and he called them the Imams of guidance and light of those in darkness and "the people who know". [He also called them] "those deeply embedded in knowledge and those to whom Allah, Glory be to Him, has bestowed the knowledge of the book."

These narrations are well established, true and repeatedly narrated (*mutawatir*) by the Shi'as since the time of the Prophet (P) and some Sunni scholars and commentators have also reported them, confirming that they were revealed concerning the *ahl al-bayt*, (S.A.W.). I cite from these (Sunni scholars) by way of example:

1. Al-Imam al-Tha'labi in his *Tafsir al-Kabir* on the meaning of chapter 16 (*al-Nahl*).
2. *Tafsir al-Qur'an* of Ibn Kathir in the 2nd volume, p. 570.
3. *Tafsir* of al-Tabari in volume 14, p. 109.

4. *Tafsir* al-Alusi called *Ruh al-Ma'ani* in volume 14, p. 134.
5. *Tafsir* al-Qurtubi in volume 11, p. 272.
6. *Tafsir* al-Hakim, called *Shawahid al-Tanzil*, volume 1, p. 334.
7. *Tafsir* al-Tustari called *Ihqaq al-Haqq*, in volume 3, p. 482
8. *Yanabi' al-Mawadda* of al-Qunduzi al-Hanafi, p. 51 and p. 140.

The apparent meaning of the verse suggests that the *ahl al-dhikr* refers to the people of the book, i.e. Jews and Christians. It therefore becomes necessary for us to make it clear that they are not [the ones] intended in the noble verse.

Firstly: Because the noble Qur'an has mentioned in a number of verses that they altered the word of God and they wrote the book with their hands, claiming that it was from God so as to purchase a small price. It also bore witness to their lies and turning the truth upside down. Given this state of affairs, it is not possible for the Qur'an to instruct the Muslims to refer to them on issues which they do not know about.

Secondly: Al-Bukhari has reported in his *Sahih* in "The Book of Testimony" under the chapter "The *ahl al-shirk* (polytheists) aren't to be asked", volume 3, p. 163. Abu Hurayra narrated, he said: "The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: 'Do not believe the people of the book and do not consider them as liars but say: 'We believe in God and what was revealed'".

This means we should not to refer questions to them, rather, [we should] abandon and ignore them because [the command] neither to believe them nor to consider them as liars would nullify the goal [of questioning], i.e., awaiting the correct reply.

Thirdly: Al-Bukhari has reported in his *Sahih* in "The Book of Unity" in the chapter: "Everyday He is concerned [with matters]" volume 8, p. 208,

Ibn Abbas said: "O Muslims! How come you ask the people of the scriptures, although your book which was revealed to His Prophet has the most recent information from Allah and you recite it, a book which has not been distorted? Allah has revealed to you that the people of the scriptures have changed with their own hands what was revealed to them and they have said: 'This is from Allah' in order to get some worldly benefit thereby." Ibn 'Abbas added: "Isn't the knowledge revealed to you sufficient to prevent you from asking them? By Allah, I have never seen any one of them asking (Muslims) about what has been revealed to you."

Fourthly: Among the people of the book, if we ask the Christians today they will claim that Jesus is God whilst the Jews will consider them to be liars and will not accept him even as a Prophet. Both of them belie Islam and the Prophet of Islam and they call him a liar and an antichrist. Bearing this in mind, it is incomprehensible that Allah would command us to ask them if we accept that the *ahl al-dhikr* from the apparent [meaning] of the verse refers to the people of the book amongst the Jews and Christians. This does not contradict [the view] that it was revealed for the household of the Prophet as is established amongst the Shi'as and Sunnis from authentic reports. It is understood from this that Allah,

Glory be to Him, the Most Exalted, bestowed the knowledge of the book, which does not neglect anything in it, to these Imams whom He has chosen among His slaves so that people can refer to them on the commentary and interpretation [of the Qur'an]. Therein lies their guidance – if they obey God and His Messenger.

As Allah, Glory be to Him, and sublime is His wisdom, wished the people to submit to the selected ones amongst them, He chose them and taught them the knowledge of the book so that the leadership could be facilitated and the affairs of the people organized due to that. If they were absent from the lives of the people, the opportunity would be open for (false) claimants and ignorant ones. Everyone would then follow his vain desires and the matter would be confusing for the people since everyone could claim to be the most learned.

I will prove this view because I am satisfied that the *ahl al-bayt* are the *ahl al-dhikr*. I shall pose some questions for which there are no answers for the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-Jama'a* or if there are answers, they are contrived ones, not based on any sound proof acceptable to a researcher. As for their true replies, these are with the pure Imams who have filled the earth with knowledge and cognition, actions and uprightness.

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