

The Practice of the Holy Prophet (S) and Muslim Leaders in Dealing with Ideological Opponents

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Sayyid Sadiq Sayyid Husayni Tashi

**Translated by
Murtaza Bachoo**

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Authors(s):

[Sayyid Sadiq Sayyid Husayni Tashi](#) [1]

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Translator(s):

[Murtaza Bachoo](#) [3]

This article illustrates the practice of the Holy Prophet (S) and the first Caliphs in dealing with opponents, and demonstrates that using differences as a pretext to declare other Muslims as kaafir and justify their persecution and killing has never been a practice of these great personalities.

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The Practice of the Holy Prophet (S) and Muslim Leaders in Dealing with Ideological Opponents

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Abstract

In recent times, some Islamic factions have taken their literal understanding of certain religious doctrines as a pretext for accusing other Muslims of infidelity, to the point of legitimizing and even sanctifying their killing. In justifying their actions, they have cited the example of the leading figures of Islam, in particular the Holy Prophet (S), the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the founders of the various schools of thought, as well as other prominent scholars. However, as this paper will argue, a more thorough analysis of their example reveals that such extreme measures were never sanctioned by these great personalities.

Keywords: Takfir, sirah, Wahhabi, religious precedents in Islam, impermissibility of killing Muslims.

Introduction

Throughout its tumultuous course, the history of Islam has been witness to many a heated theological

debate and argument. In many of these, the opposing sides would set up founding principles particular to themselves, thereby providing the basis for the formation of a new sect or school of thought; in the process, they would link their debates to the polarization between *tawhid* (monotheism) and *shirk* (polytheism). Whenever a sect found fault with the arguments of its opponent, it dwelt upon their logical erroneous consequences and attempted to label them as polytheistic in nature.

Such antagonistic currents, taking their cue from the extremist views of particular individuals, would sometimes end in violence and bloodshed. At the same time, it can be said that all sectarian warfare and internecine conflicts that have historically taken place within the Islamic world were the result of the stratagems and guile of the corrupt rulers of the day, who cunningly used existing differences and instigated factionary antagonisms to secure their self-interests.

In recent times, some Islamic factions have taken *tawhid* as a pretext to carry out extreme measures such as mass murder and severe repression. In justifying their actions, they have cited the example of the Muslims [of the past] and the Companions [of the Prophet], maintaining that their deeds are nothing but the continuation of the policies adopted by those Pious Predecessors (*salaf al-salih*) in their theological disputes and polemical debates. In perpetrating their inhuman acts, this group claims to base itself solely on the words and deeds of the Pious Predecessors.

They put forth the example of the Prophet (S), the policies of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the speech and actions of the Imams of the Islamic schools of thought (*madhahib*) as well as some other Islamic scholars, to try to explain their own actions with respect to Muslims who are, from their perspective, *mushrik*.

This attempt to find textual authority for themselves— given the vagueness inherent in trying to apply the meaning of a text to a concrete reality, and in this case, to a particular group of Muslims—were, for the most part, “proving-the-given” and hence, invalid. This led the Wahhabi thinkers to further study the relationships between Islamic sects and intra-Muslim conflicts. Using fallacious arguments they concluded that they themselves were the true successors of the Pious Predecessors.

With these few introductory comments, we can conclude that a proper study of the life and example of the Prophet (S), the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a) and Islamic scholars not only gives us definite criteria and principled proofs for a number of civil and legal codes, but also allows us to critique certain deviant ideologies. This, then, can become the basis on which such groups can be opposed. Proving that the actions of this deviant group are diametrically opposed to the example of the Prophet (S) is tantamount to taking away from them their proverbial religious fig leaf—thereby enlightening the general populace of Muslim communities.

According to the Wahhabis, the following four groups have the necessary validity to act as sources in deriving Islamic rulings (*ijtihadat*):

- 1) The example of the Prophet (S), who was a pious man, and whose words and deeds form the exact,

detailed, and error-free basis for the Law;

2) The example of the Companions and their followers, who were considered the Pious Predecessors that accurately applied the said Law;

3) The example of the Imams of the four schools of thought; and

4) Scholars (such as ibn Taymiyyah), who were considered the 'true followers' of the Pious Predecessors.

Hence the study of the example of the Prophet (S) and the Pious Predecessors plays a central and foundational role in the discussion on the legal consequences of *tawhid* and *shirk*.

The Practice of Theological Debates amongst the Muslims during the Lifetime of the Prophet (S)

A. The Prophetic sirah in dealing with polytheists

Our discussion surrounding the debates within the Islamic society is particular to the issues of *tawhid* and *shirk*. However, a study of the Prophetic *sirah* in dealing with the polytheists and those who had not accepted Islam, can, in its own capacity, divest all pretexts from the Wahhabis in justifying their unpleasant behavior.

The *sirah* of the Prophet (S)¹ before and after *hijrah* contains two different facets, each of which has to be examined independently.

1. The Prophetic sirah before Hijrah

The Prophet (S) was extremely kind and gentle in his dealings with the polytheists. Throughout the period of his stay in Mecca and some neighboring cities, he was never observed to display violent behavior towards them, and in fact, he would even prohibit others from expressing such behavior. To the same extent that the polytheists would persecute and provoke him, he would tolerate and accept it patiently. He would even humbly supplicate for their guidance from the Lord, and would consider their behavior to be a result of their ignorance.

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud narrates that he himself would witness the Prophet (S) being brutally tortured by his people, and yet, while wiping the blood off his face, he (S) would pray, "O Lord! Forgive my people for they are ignorant."²

In the midst of difficult moments, the Prophet (S) was not seen to curse his people even once.³ When the disbelievers wounded him on his holy face with their stones, he went off to a mountain far away from their view, and retreated into a corner. When Lady Khadijah ('a) went to see him, she observed the

blood trickling down his holy face and how he would prevent it from falling on the ground with his hands. She said, "May my parents be sacrificed for you, let the blood fall onto the ground." To this he responded, "I fear the anger of the Lord may overcome its inhabitants."⁴

A similar event occurred on the day of the battle of Uhud. Regarding the event, Imam Sadiq (‘a) has narrated, "By Allah, had even a drop of this blood fallen onto the ground, the punishment of Allah would certainly have descended."⁵

After his uncle, Abu Talib, passed away, the polytheists intensified their persecutions towards him. Once, he had left Mecca for the city of Ta’if where he encountered a hostile reception from its residents. While blood was flowing from his feet, he sought refuge in a garden under the shade of a tree. Instead of cursing the people of Ta’if, he raised his hands in supplication and prayed,

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَشْكُو إِلَيْكَ مِنْ ضَعْفِ قُوَّتِي وَ قِلَّةِ حِيلَتِي وَ نَاصِرِي وَ هَوَانِي عَلَى النَّاسِ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ

*"O Lord, I complain to you regarding the weakness of my strength, the lack of my stratagems, the shortage of my supporters, and my debasement amongst the people; O the most Merciful of the merciful."*⁶

With this in mind, how can a pretext for the violent actions perpetrated by certain sects be derived from the interactions of the Holy Prophet (S), who dealt with the obstinate and ill-natured polytheists of Mecca in such a kind manner?

2. The Prophetic sirah after Hijrah

A study of the prophetic *sirah* in dealing with the polytheists and the disbelievers is necessary from two perspectives:

1. A study of the Prophet's war objectives.
2. A study of the Prophet's dealings with the hypocrites.

A historical review of the Prophet's battles demonstrates that he never permitted the Muslims to go to war without the polytheists cowardly initiating it. When the polytheists of Mecca confiscated the property belonging to the Muslims, the Prophet (S) ordered the caravan of Abu Sufiyan to be seized. Then, upon encountering the Meccan army, he issued the command for *jihad* to confront their advance. Similarly, in the battle of Uhud, it was the polytheists who had initiated the battle to make amends for their losses in Badr.

In the battles against the Jews of Medina, their treachery and broken pledges were the principal causes (that lead to the issuing of the command for *jihad*). Likewise, the conquest of Mecca started only after the polytheists broke the terms of the agreement of *Hudaybiyyah*.

After establishing an Islamic government in Medina, the Prophet never took the initiative to kill the polytheists there. On the contrary, his interaction with them was one of love and affection.

During the battle of Uhud, when the enemies had broken his teeth and bruised his blessed face, his companions asked him to curse the polytheists. Instead, he responded, "I wasn't raised to be a curser; I was raised to be a caller and a mercy. O Allah, guide my people, for certainly they are ignorant."⁷

He threw the drops of blood streaming down his face into the air, and not a single drop fell back to the earth. Imam Sadiq (‘a) said, "By Allah, had even a drop fallen down on the earth, the punishment would certainly have descended."⁸ The same Imam (‘a) narrates, "The Prophet never attacked the enemy by night."

When the Prophet entered Mecca with a large number of soldiers, Sa’d ibn Ubadah, the standard bearer, was crying out, "Today is the day of war. Today your dear ones will be imprisoned." When news of this reached the Holy Prophet (S), he instructed ‘Ali (‘a) to take the standard from Sa’d and call out a message of love and friendship. ‘Ali (‘a) did so and called out, "Today is the day of forgiveness."⁹

Various narrations have been reported with respect to the Prophet's (S) verbal interactions with the disbelievers, polytheists and hypocrites. For the sake of brevity, these will not be mentioned in this article. Clearly, if the Prophet (S) dealt with obstinate hypocrites and disbelievers in such a manner, how can he be considered a propagator of the violent actions meted out by some Muslim sects against others?

B. The Prophet's dealings with the hypocrites

An important principle used by the Prophet (S) in dealing with the hypocrites was to deal with them according to their outer behaviour and to refrain from probing into their hidden objectives. This is not to be misconstrued as being neglectful of their state; rather it should be interpreted as the love and kindness that is inherent within the nature of prophethood.

The true dispositions of various hypocrites, such as ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy and Jalas ibn Suwayd, had become apparent for the Prophet (S) from the wars and incidents that involved the Muslim society. In particular, the abhorrent actions of ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy in the battles of Uhud, Bani Mustalaq and Tabuk had become evident for everyone and many verses of the Qur’an had been revealed with respect to him. Despite all these indications, the Prophet (S) did not grant ibn Ubayy's son the permission to kill his father. He also warned ‘Umar from doing the same.¹⁰

The Prophet's (S) restraint from killing the hypocrites is among the important issues which have grabbed the attention of Islamic scholars and the founders of the four schools of thought. Most of them, such as Imam Shafi’i, Imam Abu Hanifah and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, have not permitted killing hypocrites and *Zindiqs* based on this Prophetic practice.¹¹ They have defined a hypocrite to be one who is a disbeliever in his heart but manifests his faith by his tongue. Clearly, one who considers himself to be a Muslim and

attests to the *shahada* (Islamic testimonies) is not more of a sinner than the likes of ‘Abdullah ibn Ubayy, who inflicted multiple blows to Islam and yet the Prophet (S) did not hasten to bring about his death.

Similarly, some hypocrites had intended to assassinate the Prophet (S) upon his return from the battle of Tabuk, yet the Prophet (S) did not grant Usayd ibn Hudhayr, who sought authorization to kill them, the permission to do so. He explained that were he to do so, the people would say, “Muhammad went to war along with his people, and after becoming victorious, by the will of God, he has now proceeded to kill his own people.”¹²

As can be seen, the Prophet (S) did not execute hypocrites (with the intention of avoiding its social repercussions) nor did he display the slightest reaction with respect to them; for this reason, the violent actions perpetrated by the followers of some Islamic sects and schools of thought against followers of others would be viewed with severe opposition by the Prophet (S). After all, the effects and repercussions of these violent actions are far greater than the response meted out to the hypocrites after the battle of Tabuk. In reality, such violent acts only lead to the negative portrayal of Islam.

The Practice of the Rightly Guided Caliphs in Ideological Confrontations

The Practice of the Rightly Guided Caliphs in Ideological Confrontations (tawhid and shirk)

A. Abu Bakr's practice

Abu Bakr's practice can be summarized from his wars against two groups of Muslims:

1. Those who turned away from prophethood and the finality of Prophet Muhammad (S), thereby becoming apostates.
2. Those who refused to pay *zakat* (the Islamic taxes).

The followers of Musaylamah “the impostor”, not only split away from the Muslim community and turned away from Islamic teachings but also rejected Islam explicitly. They had rejected Islam as the final religion and embraced *bid'ahs* (innovations) within the religion. Having not sufficed themselves to these issues, they went on to spread corruption within the society and hence, were the cause of corruption on earth.

From Abu Bakr's reasoning in granting permission to confront those who had refused to pay *zakat*, we can conclude that, in his view, these people had deviated from the path followed by the general Muslim population. Consequently they had failed to observe the rights of the phrase “there is no god but Allah” as it ought to be observed. However, the important point lies in the fact that despite his consent to confront them, he emphasized over and over again that he did not consider them to be apostates, and hence

was opposed to killing them. He also made apparent his repulsion to the manner in which Khalid ibn Walid had dealt with them. [13](#)

B. The second caliph's practice

The second caliph's campaign to confront ideological opponents can be classified into two categories:

1. His confrontations with the polytheists beyond the Muslim borders after the conquests of Iran and Rome.
2. His confrontations with ideological opponents within the Muslim community.

From the manner in which he reacted in both these cases, one can derive a certain inclination within him towards compromise and an aversion to violence. His flexibility in dealing with some of the Iranian prisoners is, in itself, evidence towards this claim. In the book *Al-'Aqd al-Farid* (3rd and 4th century) it has been reported:

When Hurmuzan was brought as a prisoner in the presence of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, he invited him to Islam. Hurmuzan refused the invitation and consequently 'Umar ordered his execution. When he was put to the sword, he said, "If you were to request some water for me O Amir al-Mu'minin, it would be better than killing me thirsty." So he granted him his request. When the vessel was within his hands, he asked, "Am I safe until I drink?" 'Umar responded in the affirmative, to which he dropped the vessel from his hands, crying out, "O Amir, fulfilling a covenant is a clear light." 'Umar said, "You are reprieved until I look into your matter. Lift the sword from him." When the sword was lifted, Hurmuzan said, "I now testify that there is no god but Allah..." [14](#)

In this incident, 'Umar gave precedence to fulfilling a covenant over killing an infidel combatant from Egypt. This decision itself demonstrates a kind of casualness and flexibility in his view vis-à-vis confronting the polytheists.

Even in his confrontations with ideological and political opponents within the Muslim community, the second caliph did not put the sword to use, choosing only to suffice himself with some decisive responses. His confrontation with Ahnaf ibn Qays and imprisoning him for the purpose of ascertaining his beliefs, speaks of a kind of precaution observed by the second caliph in his communal decisions.

C. The practice of Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Ali ('a)

A study of Amir al-Mu'minin's ('a) practice revolves around three important areas:

1. A study of the Imam's ('a) practice vis-à-vis the *Ghulat* and the reasons for it.
2. A study of the Imam's ('a) response to the extremist ideologies of the *Khawarij*.

3. A study of the Imam's ('a) response to the *Jabriyyah* and *Qadriyyah* ideological tendencies within the Muslim society.

It is no secret that the beliefs of the *Ghulat*, their explicit apostasy, their confession to having turned back from Islam, and their insistence on committing this shameful deed were the causes of their punishment at the hands of Imam 'Ali ('a). From this perspective, they bear no resemblance to any other Islamic sect, for the only sect that was recognized to have exited the folds of Islam in the explicit textual rulings of Imam 'Ali ('a) and the pure Imams ('a) are the *Ghulat*.¹⁵

Similarly, according to authentic and explicit narrations, agreed to by both the Shi'a and the Ahl al-Sunnah, the Holy Prophet (S) ordered the *Khawarij* to be fought, and Imam 'Ali ('a) did so. However, never did the Imam nor did the rest of the companions accuse them of being infidels. Rather, they considered them to be within the folds of Islam. On this issue, Ibn Taymiyyah writes:

*The Khawarij were the first to accuse Muslims of being infidels due to their sins. They would call those who opposed them infidels and would consider shedding their blood and confiscating their property to be permissible... They are the ones whom the Prophet (S) ordered to be fought, and Amir al-Mu'minin ('a) did so... And never did 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) call them infidels, nor did Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas and the other companions. Rather, they considered the Khawarij to be Muslims despite fighting against them. 'Ali ('a) did not fight them until they shed unlawful blood and looted property belonging to Muslims. Then he fought them to defend against their oppression and hatred, and not because he considered them to be infidels. It is for this very reason that their families were not taken captives and neither was their wealth acquired as war booty.*¹⁶

Such an analysis by Ibn Taymiyyah of Imam 'Ali's ('a) approach vis-à-vis the *Khawarij*—considering that he (i.e., Ibn Taymiyyah) is a recognized ideological father of Wahhabism— demonstrates the crooked nature of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and his followers' understanding of the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah. It also demonstrates Imam 'Ali's ('a) patient, logical and non-violent approach in dealing with deviated Islamic sects.

Despite maintaining a hard line against those who advocated predestination or freewill, the Imam never considered them to have exited the folds of Islam. One day a man posed a question to Imam 'Ali ('a) regarding predestination. Initially, the Imam ('a) refused to answer the question. After much insistence from the man, the Imam ('a) eventually responded, "Since you have refused to accept my response, then (know that) surely it is an affair between the two affairs, not determinism, nor delegation." Upon hearing this, the man said, "So and so believes in *istita'at* (personal autonomy)."

After summoning that person, the Imam ('a) said to him, "You either possess *istita'at* with Allah or without Him. Beware of selecting either one, for you will become an apostate."¹⁷ In the view of the Imam ('a), belief in any one of these two options—each of which is concealed within the belief in delegation—was tantamount to apostasy. At the same time, though, the Imam ('a) did not consider the

believers of the view of ‘delegation’ and refuters of the Divine Will to have fallen out of the folds of the Muslim *ummah*. He (‘a) said, “For every community there is a *Magian*, and the *Magian* of this community are those who say there is no Divine will.”¹⁸ As such, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) considered them to be within the Muslim *ummah*.

The Practical Approach of the Companions in Theological Confrontations

The companions also never opted for violence, killing and looting as a method of confronting their ideological opponents. They would not even accuse a particular person of being an infidel simply due to his beliefs.

Although in the view of many of the companions, the Mu‘tazilah beliefs were attributed to those of disbelief and polytheism, they did not accuse their leaders of being disbelievers. Neither did they decree the shedding of their blood to be lawful. Rather, the companions and the *Tabi’in*¹⁹ prayed behind them, despite recognizing them as callers towards error and deviated beliefs.²⁰

It thus becomes clear that in the companions’ system of rights, assuming apostasy and polytheism within the beliefs of some Islamic sects does not grant the license for calling the followers of that sect infidels nor for killing them or plundering their property. Rather, in their view, normal social interactions and relations should persist even with the followers of such sects.

The Practical Approach of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) in Confronting Deviated Islamic Sects

Following the practice of Amir al-Mu‘minin (‘a), the Imams adapted a principle of severely rejecting the deviated beliefs of such groups while being lenient with their followers.

Despite severely opposing some of the deviated tendencies within Muslim society—to the extent of calling them disbelief and polytheism²¹—the Imams did not consider their followers to have fallen outside the folds of the Muslim *ummah*. Rather, they explicitly declared them to be a part of the Muslim community, choosing to refer to them as a deceived and deviated group.

In response to a letter from Hasan al-Basri, Imam Hasan (‘a), on the one hand, considered denial of Divine decree and destiny to be a form of disbelief, yet on the other, did not label believers in this doctrine to have exited the Muslim *ummah*.

Regarding this group, Imam Radha (‘a) narrates from the Holy Prophet (S), “Two groups from my *ummah* have no share from Islam: the *Murji’ah* and the *Qadariyyah*.” In this statement, the term ‘Islam’ undoubtedly refers to faith (*iman*), since the only sect considered by the Imams to have left Islam are the

Ghulats.

Bearing in mind all the available evidences, we reach the following conclusion: in the view of the Imams, *takfir* (calling someone an infidel) and declaring various Islamic sects as apostates is an unacceptable practice. Furthermore, killing and looting their property is by no means permissible. Of course the Imams envisioned a special manner of dealing with them, which needs to be discussed separately under the heading of “*The Imams’ (‘a) Accepted System of Rights in Theological Confrontations.*” The manner of socially interacting with those inclined towards deviated ideologies and sects has been thoroughly explicated in the words and actions of the Imams (‘a).

All the heads of the various Islamic schools of thought—be they theological or jurisprudential—highly revered the Shi’a Imams. In fact, many of them were amongst their students. This, itself, speaks to the Imams’ inclination towards co-existence and religious forbearance between the various sects. Had the Imams considered these individuals to be apostates, none of them would have remembered the Imams with kind words. They would not have been proud of being their students either.

The Imams did not call the leaders of the predestination movement infidels during the time when the Umayyads were clearly supporting the belief in predestination. Nor did they consider the Mu’tazilahs and the *Qadariyyah* to have exited the folds of Islam during the Abbasid rule. Whenever a scholar from the Mu’tazilahs or the *Qadariyyahs* was killed during the time of the Imams, it was at the hands of the oppressive rulers and for political purposes.

There were periods when oppressive rulers were seeking to justify their actions through Divine decree by advocating the belief in predestination. There were also periods wherein they sought to justify their hideous actions through some of the ambiguous verses of the Qur’an. They would promote issues surrounding the eternal nature of the Qur’an, its inner reality and the belief in freewill. In both cases, the infallible Imams (‘a) chose to maintain unity amongst the Muslims and mutual understanding between various sects. This practice is clearly observable from the various discussions that took place between the Imams and the other theological and jurisprudential schools of thought.

For example, it has been narrated in *al-Kafi*:

(Narrated) from Abd al-Karim ibn ‘Utbah al-Hashimi, who said, “I was seated by Abu ‘Abdillah in Mecca when a group from the Mu’tazilahs entered in his presence. Amongst them were ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd and Wasil ibn ‘Ata... and a group from their leaders... then he said, ‘O ‘Umar, leave him! Don’t you see that had I pledged allegiance to you companion, the one whom you invited me to pledge allegiance to, then... so you ventured towards the polytheists, who do not accept Islam nor do they pay jizyah. Do you or your companion have any knowledge, through which you practice the sirah of the Prophet (S) with respect to the polytheists and his (S) wars?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ Imam (‘a) said, ‘Then what do you do?’ He responded, ‘We invite them to Islam. If they refuse, we invite them to pay jizyah.’ He (‘a) said, ‘And even if they are Magians, who are not Ahl al-Kitab (people of the book)?’ He said, ‘We do the same.’ He (‘a) said, ‘Even

if they are the polytheistic Arabs and idol worshippers?’ He said, ‘We do the same.’ ”

This debate clarifies the practice of the Imam (‘a) vis-à-vis the Mu’tazilahs, and their (i.e., the Mu’tazilahs) practice vis-à-vis the polytheists. Although the Imams (‘a) considered the Mu’tazilah belief regarding the power of Allah and man's freewill to be contaminated with polytheism, they interacted with them as they would with any other Muslim. They also lectured them about their manner of dealing with the polytheists after obtaining power.

A Study of the Practices of the Founders of the Four Schools of Thought with the Other Sects

Upon studying the evidences found in the books written by the *Ahl al-sunnah* scholars, we conclude that the founders of all the four schools of thought refrained from *takfir* with regard to followers of other schools. They never permitted killing and looting from them either. In fact, their recommendations were quite contrary to this.

For example, the only difference that Ibn Hajar recognizes to exist between the *Ahl al-sunnah* scholars and founders of the various other schools of thought, is in the debate over whether *ahadith* narrated from followers of other schools of thought can be considered authentic or not? He accepts as indisputable the impermissibility of *takfir* and applying the ruling of apostasy, especially in the case of the Shi’as.^{[22](#)} Ibn Hazm Andulisi states that in the view of the Shafi’is, disagreement over beliefs does not warrant the grounds for *takfir*. In regards to this, Imam Shafi’i has stated:

A Muslim cannot be considered an infidel for any reason, neither for holding opposing beliefs nor anything else, unless the ummah comes to a consensus that he is an infidel. In this case, it would be based on their consensus.^{[23](#)}

Ibn Hazm considers this policy to have been accepted by Dawud Zahiri as well.

Jahm ibn Safwan, the founder of the *Jahamiyyah* sect, whose beliefs were severely rejected by the heads of all the schools of thought, was never the subject of *takfir*. In fact, the permission to kill him was never authorized by any of them. His killing was the result of a purely political issue, whereby Jahm had come in conflict with the ruler of his time and had fought against him.^{[24](#)} Imam Hanbal offered prayers for his corpse and he was buried in a Muslim graveyard.

Suyuti lists the names of many of the heads of the *Jahamiyyah* and the Mu’tazilahs, whom Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Bukhari, Muslim and others have extensively quoted from. Had they been condemned to apostasy, none of the narrations reported by them would have been deemed authentic. Similarly, Zahabi also lists many of the narrators who were either Shi’as or Mu’tazilahs, and holds the narrations reported by them to be authentic in the view of the leaders of the various schools of thought.^{[25](#)}

Ahmad ibn Hanbal states that if we were to reject the narrations reported by the *Qadariyyah* narrators, many of the narrators from Basrah would have to be cast aside. However, amongst them, we find many scholars and elders that even Bukhari and Muslim have reported from.^{[26](#)}

Some of the leaders of the four schools of thought, such as Imam Shafi'i and Abu Hanifah, have ruled that *takfir* and killing people with deviated beliefs is not permissible. Moreover, they also have placed the value of their testimonies in the court of law to be equal to that of the rest of the Muslims. In *Tarikh al-Jahamiyyah wa al-Mu'tazilah*, it is stated, "It has been reported from Imam Shafi'i... he said, 'I do not reject the testimony of the whimsical (*ahl al-ahwa'*) except for the *Khatabiyyah*, for they believe in the permissibility of lying.'"^{[27](#)} By the *Khatabiyyah* he intends the *Ghulats*, who in the view of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are apostates and permissible to execute. In the view of the Shafi'is though, only their testimonies are to be rejected. They cannot be killed.

In the same book, the author states, "As for Abu Hanifah, Al-Hakim—the author of *al-Mukhtasar*—has reported in his book *al-Muntaqa*, Abu Hanifah did not consider anyone amongst the people of the *qiblah* (Muslims) to be an infidel."^{[28](#)}

Ibn Taymiyyah states, "Not only is the discontentment of Ahmad ibn Hanbal vis-à-vis *takfir* of one Islamic sect by another an established fact, even Ab al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, the founder of the Asharites, has himself stated in his book, *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*, "After the Prophet (S), the Muslims disagreed over issues, in which some considered others to be astray, while some sought to disassociate themselves from others, except that Islam brings them together and is common to all of them."^{[29](#)} With these words, Ash'ari does not consider any of the ideological disagreements to be grounds for exiting Islam.

The Views of Muslim Scholars

In this section we will demonstrate the contradiction between the system of rights accepted by the Wahhabis and the views of scholars from various centuries, starting from the fourth century to the latter centuries. In this manner we will establish the practice of Islamic communities in adopting a peaceful system of rights in their theological dealings.

Islamic Rights in the Relationships Existing between Islamic Schools of Thought from the Viewpoint of Ibn Taymiyyah

Contrary to common Wahhabi mentality, Ibn Taymiyyah was severely opposed both to *takfir* (of opponents) and to violence. He considered the Shi'as and the Mu'tazilais to be better than the Asharites in many respects, while no one, not even the Wahhabis condemn the Asharites to apostasy and permit killing them. The Asharites are a sect which has branched out from the Hanbalis, while the Shi'as and the Mu'tazalites which are two opposing camps, were respected as Muslims by Ibn Taymiyyah. He also opposed any sort of violence against them due to their beliefs. With regards to preferring the Shi'as over the Asharites, Ibn Taymiyyah writes,

It is known to everyone who believes in Allah and His Prophet (S), that the [qadari] Mu'tazilahs and the Shi'as—the ones who affirm legal obligations and prohibitions, as well as the Divine rewards and punishments—are better than those who equate a believer to an infidel, or a good-doer to an evildoer, or a true prophet to a false prophet. Rather, the latter are more worthy of being censured than the Mu'tazilahs, as mentioned by Khilal in the book al-Sunnah wa al-Raddu 'ala al-Qadariyyah. [30](#)

In this excerpt, Ibn Taymiyyah gives precedence to the Shi'as over the Mu'tazilahs and considers their beliefs to be more acceptable. This is in addition to giving them precedence over the Asharites, even though respecting the Asharites and showing leniency to them are amongst the undisputable beliefs of the Hanbalis and the Salafis. In fact, Ibn Taymiyyah has penned an article under the title of *“the Principle of the Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jama'ah in Showing Mercy to the People of Bid'ah and the Sinners, and Joining them in Congregational Prayers.”* In this article he severely rejects the use *takfir* and responding violently to opposing sects. Moreover, he explicitly mentions the Shi'a school of thought in quite a few places and considers *takfir* and fighting against them to be opposed to the practice of the Pure Predecessors.[31](#) After demonstrating convincing proofs and arguments, he draws the following conclusion:

The *takfir* of a Muslim due to his sins is not permissible, nor is it permissible due to an issue that he is mistaken in, such as the issues in which the Muslims oppose each other... Thus it is not permissible for any one of these groups to call another “infidel”, nor is it permissible to shed their blood or seize their property, even if a *bid'ah* has occurred in one of the groups. How could it be (permissible) if the accusing group itself contains one who practices *bid'ah*?[32](#)

Muhammad Rashid Ridha states with regards to Ibn Taymiyyah's article:

This article is among the most valuable ones written by Shaykh al-Islam, and the most beneficial in intra-faith literature... and his methodology of rejecting those who practice bid'ah, by expounding the truth through proofs and issuing rulings against that which opposes the truth vis-à-vis the beliefs which contain shirk, kufr and bid'ah. He achieved this without resolving on the takfir of any particular individual implicated of fanciful interpretations (shubhatu ta'wil), let alone the takfir of an entire school of thought which upholds the pillars of the religion. [33](#)

Rashid Ridha notes that while Ibn Taymiyyah demonstrates elements of polytheism and infidelity in the beliefs of some of the groups which practice *bid'ah*, he does not call any one of them infidels. He neither considers them to be cases for the application of harsh laws.

Ibn Taymiyyah has presented arguments along these lines within his writings in a very scattered manner. In some of his writings he has rejected the use of intellectual principles in theology as a criterion for *takfir*. He also suggests that the harsh approach of the Salafis vis-à-vis the Shi'as and the Mu'tazilahs is actually aimed at atheists like the Qaramitahs, who have guised themselves under these two schools of thought for advancing their evil goals.[34](#) In other words, he considers the actual target of

the Salafis' ill-treatment to be the Qaramitahs, not the Shi'as or the Mu'tazilahs.

Among the words of Ibn Taymiyyah which are striking, is an allusion to the following principle:

ملازمة المذهب ليس بمذهب

The necessary concomitant of (the beliefs of) a school of thought is not a part of it.

We will devote an independent section to analyze and discuss this principle. He believes that some Islamic sects are called infidels or polytheists by others because the doctrines of the accused sect seem to be affiliated with polytheism or infidelity. However, Ibn Taymiyyah believes that the necessary concomitants of a school of thought are not a part of that school unless the followers explicitly state it to be so (for example, if they not only proclaim their belief in absolute freewill, but also proclaim its necessary concomitant, which is the belief in multiple creators).

Thus, if a group were to advocate a doctrine to defend the general nature of God's justice—a result of which may be polytheism—they cannot be counted as polytheists or infidels since this partial result or concomitant is not a part of their school of thought and cannot be recognized as one of their doctrines.

Ibn Taymiyyah was also a supporter of unity within the Muslim *ummah* and opposed to violence within the *ummah*. In one of his writings he states:

The *Ahl al-Sunnah* do not call a Muslim an infidel because of his sins or his *bid'ahs*, nor do they prohibit praying behind them. Among the principles of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* is that they pray the congregational, 'id, and Friday prayers. They do not forsake the Friday and congregational prayers like the people of *bid'ah* do from amongst the *rafidhah* and others.^{[35](#)}

He also states: “*And certainly the companions, may Allah's pleasure be with them, would pray behind those whom they knew to be vicious... and the companions and the Tabi'in would pray behind Ibn Abi 'Ubayd even though he was accused of atheism and was an inviter towards error*”.^{[36](#)}

Ibn Hazm Andulisi and Religious Forbearance

Ibn Hazm, a fifth-century scholar, was known to have traversed the path of the Zahiri sect; yet, he severely rejected the *takfir* of Muslims at the hands of each other. In fact, he advocated a policy of religious forbearance within the various schools of thought. He also identified some of the prominent figures amongst the *Ahl al-Sunnah* who have played leading roles on this issue and have endorsed this doctrine. This, in itself, is an indication of the extensive and in-depth manner in which this inclination has penetrated Muslim thought. It is in complete contradiction to the violent tendencies advocated by certain sects, such as the Wahhabis.

In his book *Al-usul wa al-furu'*, Ibn Hazm narrates the views of Imam Shafi'i and Dawud Zahiri in great detail, giving them precedence over all the other examples. He then proceeds to argue the validity of their views.

A group of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* has believed that a Muslim cannot be called an infidel for any reason—not for his beliefs or anything else—unless the *ummah* comes to a consensus over his infidelity. In this case it will be based on their consensus. This is the view of Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i and Dawud.^{[37](#)}

He rejects the views of those who oppose this doctrine via two arguments:

1. The Prophet (S) explained all the doctrinal elements of Islam in full detail. He made sure that these were conveyed to the people with complete perfection. He also clarified all the doctrines, opposing which can cause one to become an infidel. When we refer to the doctrinal matters which are under dispute between the Muslims today, we do not find them to be amongst the doctrines which were stated by the Prophet (S) to affect one's faith. Examples of contemporary doctrines include the creation of the Qur'an or its being eternal, predestination and freewill, and other similar doctrines which were not under discussion during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (S). Now, if someone were to consider opposition to any one of these doctrines as the basis of exiting Islam, it would imply that the Prophet (S) failed to convey many of the fundamental doctrines of Islam for mankind. In effect, it would imply that he has rendered the religion futile.

2. Moreover, he states, "if *takfir* was permissible based on the interpretation of another person's words, then the one who does *takfir* would be closer to being an infidel due to the magnitude [of the sin or injustice] done in interpreting the words of the accused, especially if the accused has not articulated that particular interpretation. Otherwise, such doctrines are also found in the words of the accuser, based on what they can be interpreted as, though he does not articulate them, while they too are grounds for *kufr*." This explanation by Ibn Hazm is an allusion to the principle "the concomitant of a school of thought is not a part of the school of thought."^{[38](#)} In other words, all the *takfirs* within the Muslim *ummah* occur due to the concomitants which are attributed to the opposing school, without their explicit acceptance of those concomitants.

Ibn Hazm also believes that if in certain cases Muslim scholars have authorized the *takfir* of their opponents, it does not imply the permissibility of killing them. Neither does it imply the necessity of separating them from their spouses and other rulings of the like. It only implies a rejection of the doctrines of their opponents. Therefore, although Ibn Hazm accepts the multifarious views espoused regarding the essence of *takfir*, he says, "the main principle in this book is the consensus of the *ummah* that an evildoer cannot be separated from his wife, nor a heretic from his. The evildoer cannot be killed, as an infidel can be killed, and this invalidates the claims of those who engage in *takfir* of Muslims."^{[39](#)}

Ibn Hazm also uses the notion of "consensus" as a proof for his claim and states:

And the proof of one who does not call another an infidel except through consensus, is that the one for

whom the covenant of faith has been established through the consensus of people, cannot be stripped from him except through their consensus.^{[40](#)}

Finally, Ibn Hazm interprets the *takfir* on the part of some prominent *‘ulama* towards their opponents in a figurative sense. He states that none of them, having declared their opponents to be infidels, have then gone on to give a fatwa to kill the opponents, separate them from their wives or prohibit eating the meat slaughtered by them. Rather, individuals like Ahmad ibn Hanbal, having declared Jahm ibn Safwan to be an infidel, went on to pray for his corpse and the Muslims buried him in a Muslim graveyard. This issue demonstrates that the killing of Jahm was not due to his apostasy; rather it was a result of certain political considerations.

Ibn Qayyim and the Legal Consequences of Theological Debates

Ibn Qayyim, who is a renowned Hanbali scholar, much like his teacher Ibn Taymiyyah, was opposed to the *takfir* of Muslims at the hands of one another. Like Ibn Hazm, he interprets the views of some of the leading scholars in their *takfir* of the followers or the founders of certain schools of thought in a figurative manner. He recognizes them as being referents of the following verse, “Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down, it is they who are the faithless.” He states that the term *kufr* in this verse is not synonymous with apostasy, such that it would have special legal consequences for itself. Rather it is a figure of speech, in a similar manner to which ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas, the great companion has stated about it, “It is not a *kufr* that leads to excommunication when he performs it and is then implicated of *kufr* for it; and he is not like the one who has disbelieved in Allah and the Last Day. Tawus and ‘Ata’ have also endorsed this view.”^{[41](#)}

Many other Muslim scholars have also sought to follow the policy of unity amongst Muslims. For example, Imam Fakhr al-Din Razi states, “And what we espouse is that we should not call anyone from the people of the *qiblah* (Muslims) an infidel.”^{[42](#)} Similarly, Ghazali, despite taking a very harsh position vis-à-vis his opponents, announces his conformity with the practice of Imam ‘Ali (a) and states:

Surely the judges appointed in Basrah by ‘Ali, may God brighten his face, sought his permission with respect to judging according to the testimony of the people of Basrah amongst the Khawarij and people other than them. He ordered them to accept it, as it was before the war, because they fought upon a [particular] interpretation, and rejecting their testimony would contribute to their obstinacy and lead to a renewal of conflict.^{[43](#)}

In this manner, Ghazali opts for the policy of unity between the Muslims. It is hoped that this brief article has shed light on the practice and precedents set by the leading figures of Islam.

¹ That is, in dealing with the polytheists [Tr.].

² Sahih Bukhari, vol. 9, p. 20.

³ Dhalikum Rasulallah, p. 184.

⁴ Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 18, p. 242–243.

- [5.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 96.
- [6.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 19, p. 17.
- [7.](#) Safinat al-Bihar, vol. 1, p. 412.
- [8.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 96.
- [9.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 21, p. 105.
- [10.](#) Al-Nifaq wa al-Munafiqun fi 'ahdi rasulillah (S), p. 231.
- [11.](#) Ibid, p. 237.
- [12.](#) Ibid, p. 236.
- [13.](#) Refer to the book Tarikh-e Islam: 'Ahd-e Khulafa-e Rashid.
- [14.](#) Al-'Aqd al-Farid, vol. 2, p. 50.
- [15.](#) Miqbas al-Hidayah, vol. 2, p. 393.
- [16.](#) Al-Rasa'il wa al-Masa'il, vol. 2, p. 376-378.
- [17.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 5, p. 57.
- [18.](#) Ibid, vol. 5, p. 120.
- [19.](#) Those who did not see the Holy Prophet (S) but saw his companions.
- [20.](#) Al-Rasa'il wa al-Masa'il, vol. 2, p. 377. "The companions and the Tabi'in prayed behind Ibn Abi Ubayy though he was accused of apostasy and calling towards error."
- [21.](#) Jami' al-Usul, vol. 10, p. 526.
- [22.](#) Lisan al-Mizan, vol. 1, p. 10.
- [23.](#) Al-Usul wa al-Furu', p. 128.
- [24.](#) Tarikh al-Jahamiyyah wa al-Mu'tazilah, p. 18.
- [25.](#) Refer to the book Mizan al-I'tidal wa al-Tadrib fi Sharh al-Taqrib.
- [26.](#) Tarikh al-Jamhiyyah wa al-Mu'tazilah, p. 76.
- [27.](#) Ibid., p. 98.
- [28.](#) Ibid., p. 98.
- [29.](#) Muwafiqat Sarih al-Ma'qul li Sahih al-Manqul, vol. 1, p. 49.
- [30.](#) Al-Rasa'il wa al-Masa'il, vol. 2, p. 302.
- [31.](#) Ibid, vol.2, p. 375-385.
- [32.](#) Ibid, vol. 2, p. 378.
- [33.](#) Ibid, vol. 2, p. 385.
- [34.](#) Tarikh al-Jamhiyyah wa al-Mu'tazilah, p. 75 and 101. Muwafiqatu Sarih al-Ma'qul li Sahih al-Manqul, vol. 1, p. 49 onwards.
- [35.](#) Al-Rasa'il wa al-Masa'il, p. 376.
- [36.](#) Ibid, p. 377.
- [37.](#) Al-usul wa al-furu, p. 178.
- [38.](#) Ibid, p. 128 onwards.
- [39.](#) Ibid, p. 178 onwards.
- [40.](#) Ibid, p. 178 onwards.
- [41.](#) Sharh al-Qayyim, Ibn Qayyim Jawziyyah.
- [42.](#) Tarikh al-Jamhiyyah wa al-Mu'tazilah, p. 98.
- [43.](#) Ibid, p. 98.

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