

The Prophetic Sunnah in the Perspective of Ahl al-Sunnah and Shi'ah

The Prophetic Sunnah is whatever said or done or approved by the Messenger of Allah (God's peace and benediction be upon him and his Progeny), that is considered the second source after the Qur'ān for their rulings, rituals ('ibādāt) and doctrines ('aqīd).

But Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jam'ah add to it another source, which being the sunnah (conduct) of the four Rightly — Guided Caliphs (al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidun) who are Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Ali, according to a hadith narrated by them as follows:

“Adhere to my sunnah and the sunnah of the rightly — guided successors after me. Hold on to it and cling to it stubbornly.”¹

The clearest evidence for this lies in their following of 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb's conduct (sunnah) in performing Salāt al-Tarāwih (amusement prayer) of which the Messenger of Allah (s) has forbidden. Sahih al-Bukhārī, Vol. VII, p. 99, “bāb mī yajuz min al-ghadab wa al-shiddah li-amr Allāh”² Some of them even dare to add to the Prophetic Sunnah the sunnah of the Companions as a whole (whoever of them), according to a hadith narrated by them:

“Verily, my Companions are like the stars (nujūm) whichever of them you follow, you shall be guided rightly,” beside the hadith: “My Companions are safety for my *Ummah*.”³

But Hadith al-Nujūm is verily incompatible with reason ('Aql), logic (mantiq) and scientific reality since the Arabs were never guided in their desert travelling, by merely following any one of the stars. But in fact they were guided by following certain specific stars, having known names. Besides, this hadith is not supported by the consequent events and practices that were exercised by the Companions after the demise of the Messenger of Allah (S), as some of them have apostatized,⁴ beside differing in numerous issues that entailed disparagement between each other,⁵ cursing each other,⁶ and killing each other.⁷

Moreover some of the Companions were chastised for imbibing wine, perpetrating adultery and robbery, beside other crimes; so how can any sane man accept such a tradition commanding to follow such

people? And can that one following Mu‘a‘wiyah, who renegaded against his time Imam — Amir al-Mu‘minin, through warring against al-‘Imam ‘Ali (‘a), be guided? How can he be guided while knowing that the Messenger (S) has called him the imam of the tyrant band (al-fi‘ah al-baghiyah)?[8](#)

How can he be among those rightly-guided when he follows the example of ‘Amr ibn al-‘As, al-Mughirah ibn Shu‘bah and Bisr ibn Artah who murdered the innocent, for the sake of supporting the rule of the Umayyads? You also, the intelligent reader, when reading the hadith ‘my companions are like the stars’, you will come to realize that it is fabricated, since it is addressed to the Companions, so is it reasonable that the Messenger(S) says:

“O my Companions follow the guide of my Companions”?

Whereas the hadith "O my Companions, adhere to the Imams from among my household, since they guide you after me" is nearer to truth, due to having many evidences supporting it in the Prophetic Sunnah.

Besides, the Imamiyyah Shi‘ah hold that those meant by the hadith "Adhere to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly-guided successors after me" being the Twelve Imams from Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), to whom the Messenger of Allah (s) has commanded his *Ummah* to adhere and follow, in the same way they adhere to and follow the Book of Allah.[9](#)

And since I have committed myself not to argue but with the evidences used by the Shi‘ah from the Sihh of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jam‘ah, so I sufficed with these examples, whereas the Shi‘ah books are replete with many other evidences that are more explicit and indicative.[10](#)

But the Shi‘ah never claim that Ahl al-Bayt Imams (‘a) are entitled to legislate, or that their Sunnah is of their ijthad, but they hold that all the rulings and precepts they follow are derived from the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of his Messenger ... the Sunnah which the Messenger of Allah has taught to ‘Ali, who in turn has taught to his sons, as it is a knowledge they inherit one from the other, having for this a large number of evidences reported by the ‘ulam of Ahl al-Sunnah in their Sahih, Musnads and Ta’rikhs. The question that insistently raised all the time is: Why have al-Sunnah wa al-Jam‘ah never acted according to the content of those traditions, which they consider Sahih (veracious)...???

After all this, the Shi‘ah and Sunnah disagree concerning the interpretation of the traditions that are authentically reported from the Messenger of Allah (S), as previously explained in the statement about the dispute between them in respect of the exegesis (tafsir) of the Qur’an. They disagree in regard of who are meant by the rightly-guided successors (al-Khulaf al-Rashidun), that are referred to in the Prophet’s hadith which is approved by both the sects. Ahl al-Sunnah interpret it to mean the Four Caliphs who assumed the rostrum of caliphate after the Messenger of Allah, while the Shi‘ah interpret it to mean the twelve successors, who are the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them).

So we see this disagreement so common concerning whatever is related to the persons that were excupated by the Qur’an and the Messenger, or whom he (S) commanded to follow, like the following

hadith uttered by him (S):

"The 'ulamā' of my *Ummah* are superior to the prophets of Banu Israel," or "The 'ulamā' are the inheritors of the prophets."¹¹

Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah take this tradition to include all the *Ummah* 'ulamā' as a whole, while the Shiah specify it to the Twelve Imams, the reason making them to prefer them ('a) over the prophets, with the exception of Ulu al-'Azm (of resolution) among the messengers. In fact reason ('Aql) inclines more to this specification, for:

First: the Qur'ān has made the knowledge of the Book be inherited by those whom Allah has chosen from among His bondmen, the fact indicating the specification. Besides, the Messenger of Allah (S) has specified his Ahl al-Bayt with particular traits, never making any partners to share them in these traits, when he called them Ark of Salvation, and Imams of Guidance, and Beacons of Darkness, and the Second Thiq (precious asset) that safeguards against deviation and astrayal.

The fact manifested from this is that the claim of Ahl al-Sunnah contradicts this specification that is confirmed by the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Sunnah. Besides, reason is never content with it due to its implying the obscurity and ignorance for the real 'ulamā', far from Allah has removed cleanness and cleansed, and not distinguishing them from the (courtly) 'ulamā' imposed upon the *Ummah* by the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd rulers. How far is it between those 'ulamā' and Ahl al-Bayt Imams, for whom history books never reported their learning under any teacher, except that the son was getting knowledge from his father. Despite this fact, Ahl al-Sunnah 'ulamā' have reported in their books, wonderful narrations, especially concerning al-'Imām al-Bāqir, al-'Imām al-Sādiq, and al-'Imām al-Ridā who managed, through his knowledge, in dumbfounding forty judges al-Ma'mūn gathered for (debating with) him, while he was only a boy.¹²

The point affirming the distinguishment of Ahl al-Bayt from others, lies in the obvious disagreement among the four schools of thought of Ahl al-Sunnah, regarding numerous fiqhi issues, while no difference is there among the Twelve Imams of Ahl al-Bayt concerning even one issue.

Second: If we approve the claim of Ahl al-Sunnah in generalizing these verses and traditions on all the *Ummah* 'ulamā', this will necessarily lead to the multiplication of the opinions and schools of thought throughout long generations, to the extent that thousands of schools (madhāhib), would find way into the scene. Discerning the triviality of this view and its goal of disintegrating the unity of creed and faith, Ahl al-Sunnah hastened to close the door of ijtihād since time immemorial.

Whereas the opinion held by the Shi'ah calls to the unity and to gather round known Imams, upon whom Allah and the Messenger have imparted all sorts of knowledge that are necessary for all Muslims throughout all ages and times. After all this, no claimant can fabricate any lie against Allah and the Messenger, or innovate a new school compelling people to follow and believe in it. The two sects differ regarding this issue in the same way they differ concerning al-Mahdi, in whom they both believe. But for

the Shi'ah he ('a) is known of definite father and grandfather while in the perspective of Ahl al-Sunnah he is still unknown, and will be born at the end of the Time. For this reason many of them have alleged to be al-Mahdi each, and al-Shaykh Isma'il the author of al-Tariqah al-Mudaniyyah, has said to me personally that he was the Awaited al-Mahdi, in front of a friend of mine, who was one of his followers, but he was enlightened and guided to truth afterwards.

But in the perspective of the Shi'ah, none of their newborn dares to claim this. And even if anyone of them names his son 'Mahdi,' he does so only for seeking auspiciousness and blessing, in the same way as done by anyone of us when calling his son Muhammad or 'Ali. Besides, the reappearance of al-Mahdi is considered by them in itself as a miracle, since he was born twelve centuries ago, and disappeared.

Then, after all these facts, disagreement may appear amongst Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jam'ah, in respect of the meaning of the authentic veracious (sahih) hadith in the view of both the sects, even when the hadith being irrelevant to individuals, like the following one:

"The disagreement of my *Ummah* is a blessing," which is interpreted by Ahl al-Sunnah that any difference in the fiqhi rulings regarding one issue is a blessing for the Muslim individual, in a way that he can select any rule proper for him and keep pace with the solution he likes. In this way it will be a blessing (rahmah) for him since when finding al-'Imam Malik, for instance, being strict regarding one issue, it is permissible for the Muslim person to imitate (take the opinion of) Abu Hanifah, who being lenient in it.

But in the perspective of the Shi'ah, they interpret the hadith in another way, reporting that when al-'Imam al-Sadiq ('a) was asked about the hadith "The disagreement of my *Ummah* is a blessing, he said: The Messenger of Allah said the truth! The inquirer then said: If their disagreement is a blessing, so their agreement should be indignation! Al-Sadiq replied: It is not the way you think or they think (i.e. in this interpretation), but what the Messenger of Allah (S) meant is that: Their frequenting to each other, that is one of them travels to the other, going out and betaking himself to him to gain knowledge from him, inferring for this, as an evidence, Allah's saying:

Of every troop of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware. " (9: 122)

Then he added to it saying: When they differ concerning religion, they will turn to be the party of Iblis (Satan). This, as can be clearly seen by all, being a reasonable and convincing interpretation, is inviting toward unity in creed and belief not disagreement in it. [13](#)

Thereafter, the hadith as conceived by Ahl al-Sunnah is unreasonable, since it calls to disagreement, disunity and multiplicity of opinions and schools, the fact contradicting the Holy Qur'an that calls us towards unity, agreement and to gather round one thing, when Allah, Subhānuhu, says:

“And lo! This your religion is one religion and I am your Lord, so keep your duty unto Me.” (23:52)

He also says:

“And hold fast, all of you together, to the cable of Allah, and do not separate.” (3: 103).

In another verse He says:

“...and dispute not one with another lest ye falter and your strength depart from you...” (8:46)

And is there a dispute or separation worse than dividing one *Ummah* into several schools, parties and sects, contradicting and deriding each other, or rather even charging each other with disbelief and infidelity to the extent that each deeming the blood (killing) of the other as lawful, the event that actually took place throughout consecutive ages, as recorded in history books. So we were warned by Allah — the Glorified — against the untoward consequences our *Ummah* will verily face when being separated and in dispute, when the Almighty said:

“And be ye not as those who separated and disputed after the clear proofs had come unto them.” (3: 105)

He also said:

“Lo! As for those who sunder their religion and become schismatics, no concern at all hast thou with them.” (6: 159).

In another place He said:

“...and be not of those who ascribe partners (unto Him). Of those who split up their religion and became schismatics, each sect exulting in its tenets.” (30:31-32)

It is worth mentioning that the meaning of schismatics (*shiya'*) has nothing to do with the Shi'ah, as wrongly conceived by some naive and simple-minded people, when one of them came to advise me saying: "O brother, for God's sake! Forget about the Shi'ah, as Allah detests them and has warned His Messenger against being one of them! I said: How is that? He said: (the verse): "Lo! As for those who sunder their religion and became schismatics, no concern at all hast thou with them." I tried hard to persuade him that the word schismatics (*shiya'*) means clans or parties, and has nothing to do with Shi'ah. But he unfortunately insisted on his opinion and was never convinced, since his master, the mosque (prayers) leader has taught him in this way, warning him against the Shi'ah, so he was not ready to accept other than that.

Returning to the topic, I want to say that I was at a loss before being guided when reading the hadith "The disagreement of my *Ummah* is a blessing" and comparing it with the hadith: "My *Ummah* will separate into seventy-two sects, all being in hell-fire, except only one." [14](#) I used to wonder. How can

the disagreement of the *Ummah* be a blessing, while at the same time causing (people) to enter the fire??

But after reading the interpretation of al-'Imam Ja'far al Sadiq for this hadith, my perplexity has vanished and the enigma was solved, with knowing afterwards that the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt are the Imams of guidance and beacons for darkness, being truly the interpreters of the Qur'an and Sunnah, be meritorious for what the Messenger of Allah (S) said in their regard:

"The parable of my Ahl al-Bayt among you is that of the boat of Noah; whoever gets aboard it is saved and whoever stays away from it is drowned. So don't outstrip them, for then you shall perish, and don't fall short of them, for then you shall perish. Don't teach them for they are more knowledgeable than you." [15](#)

Also al-'Imam 'Ali ('a) said the truth when he uttered the following statement:

"Look at the people of the Prophet's family. Adhere to their direction and follow their footsteps, because they would never let you out of guidance, and never throw you into destruction. If they sit down you sit down, and if they rise up you rise up. Do not go ahead of them, as you would thereby go astray, and do not lag behind of them as you would thereby be ruined." [16](#)

In another sermon, he ('a) describes the position and worth of Ahl al-Bayt ('a) by saying:

"They are life for knowledge and death for ignorance. Their forbearance tells you of their knowledge, and their outward of their inward, and their silence of the wisdom of their speaking. They do not go against right nor do they differ (among themselves) about it. They are the pillars of Islam and the asylums of (its) protection. With them right has returned to its position and wrong has left its place, and its tongue is severed from its root. They have understood the religion attentively and carefully, not by mere heresy or from relaters, because the relaters of knowledge are many but its understanders are few." [17](#)

Al-'Imam 'Ali has verily said the truth, as he is the gate of the city of knowledge. And there is a great difference between that who comprehends religion with consciousness and observance, and that who comprehends it through hearing and narrations.

Those who hear and narrate are so many, as a large number of Companions enjoyed the company of the Messenger of Allah (S), hearing and reporting from him numerous traditions unconsciously and unknowingly. This led to changes in the meaning of the hadith, in a way that it might give the opposite of what the Messenger (S) meant of it, or leading sometimes to disbelief due to the difficulty in realizing the real meaning of the hadith by the Companion. [18](#)

Whereas those who comprehend and observe knowledge being very few. Man may exhaust his entire life in seeking knowledge, but might not gain but only scanty of it, or may specialize in one of the fields of knowledge or one of its arts, without being able to have full command of its branches as a whole. But the fact commonly known is that Ahl al-Bayt Imams ('a) were thoroughly acquainted with, and grasping miscellaneous sciences, as proved by al-'Imam 'Ali, according to the reports confirmed by the

historians. This fact is further proved by al-’Imām Muhammad al-Baqir, and Ja’far al-Sadiq too, under whom thousands of shaykhs have learnt different sciences and fields of knowledge, including philosophy, medicine, chemistry and natural sciences, and others.

1. Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad, Vol. IV, p. 126.
2. Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. VII, p. 99, “bāb mā yajuz min al-ghadab wa al-shiddah li-amr Allāh”
3. Sahih Muslim, “kitāb fadā’il al-Sahābah”; Musnad Ahmad, Vol. IV, p. 398.
4. In the case of those whom Abu Bakr fought, who were called later on the apostates (Ahl al-Riddah).
5. It is obvious in the case of ‘Uthmān, who was continuously reviled and defamed by most of the Sahābah, till being slain by them.
6. It is exactly as done and practised by Mu’awiyah, who kept on giving his orders to curse and slander ‘Ali.
7. Like the Battles of al-Jamal, Siffin and al-Nahrawān, and others.
8. According to the hadith: “May God have mercy on ‘Ammār, he shall be killed by the rebellious gang.”
9. Sahih al-Tirmidhi, Vol. V, p. 328; Sahih Muslim, Vol. II, p. 362; al-Nasā’i in al-Khasa’is and Kanz al-‘ummī, Vol. I, p. 44; al-’Imām Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad, Vol. V, p. 189; al-Hakīm in his Mustadrak, Vol. III, p. 148; Ibn Hajar in al-Sawā’iq al-muhriqah, p. 148, Ibn Sa’d in al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā, Vol. II, p. 194; al-Tabarāni, Vol. I, p. 131.
10. I cite for this only one example: It is reported by al-Saduq in al-’Ikml, with his sanad reaching back to al-’Imām al-Sadiq, from his father, from his grandfather, that he said: The Messenger of Allah (S) said: Verily, there will be twelve Imams after me, the first of them being ‘Ali and the last one is al-Qa’im (al-Mahdi). These are my (true) successors and executors.
11. . Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. I, “kitāb al-’ilm”; Sahih al-Tirmidhi”, kitāb al-’ilm”.
12. Al-’Iqd al-farid, ibn ‘Abd Rabbih; al-Fusul al-muhimmah, of Ibn al-Sabbagh al-Maliki, Vol. III, p. 42.
13. Basmalah in the salāt is makruh (reprehensible) according to the Malikis, obligatory according to the Shafi’is, mustahabb (commendable) according to the Hanafis, while the Hanbalis hold that it should be read inaudibly even in the audible (jahri) prayers.
14. Sunan Ibn Majah, “kitāb al-fitan”, Vol. II, hadith No. 3993; Musnad Ahmad, Vol. III, p. 120; al-Tirmidhi in his Kitāb al-’Imān.
15. Ibn Hajar, al-Sawā’iq al-muhriqah, pp. 136, 227; al-Suyuti, al-Jāmi’ al-saghir, Vol. II, p. 132; Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad, Vol. III, p. 17, and Vol. IV, p. 366; Hilyat al-’awliyy, Vol. IV, p. 306, Mustadrak al-Hakīm, Vol. III, p. 151; Talkhis al-Dhahabi; al-Tabarāni in al-Mu’jam al-saghir, Vol. II, p. 22.
16. Nahj al-balaghah, Khutbah No. 97.
17. Ibid., Khutbah No. 239.
18. The example for this can be found in what is reported by Abu Hurayrah who said: “Allah has created Adam with the same shape of him” (in an incomplete and ambiguous way). But al-’Imām Ja’far al-Sadiq (‘a) elucidated the matter by saying: The Messenger of Allah (S) passed by two young men, and heard them reviling each other, one saying to the other: May Allah disfigure your face and that of whoever resembles you. Thereat the Messenger of Allah said to him: “Allah created Adam with the same shape of him.” That is, with your slandering whoever resembling him, you have in fact defamed Adam as he is the one who is like him.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/be-truthful-muhammad-al-tijani-al-samawi/prophetic-sunnah-perspective-ahl-al-sunnah-and-shiah#comment-0>