

## The Secret Why Sunni Sects are in the Majority

One who researches history books and what is recorded by the predecessors will discover beyond any doubt that the reason why the four “Sunni” sects prevailed during those times is that it was due to the will and the management of the ruling authorities; it is for this reason that their followers are numerous, for people follow the creed of their rulers.

Such researchers will also find out that scores of sects came and disappeared because the rulers were not pleased with them, so they melted. Among them is the Awza`i sect, the sects founded by Hasan al-Basri, Abu Ayeenah and Ibn Abu Thuayb, Sufyan al-Thawri, Ibn Abu Dawood, Layth ibn Sa`d, and many others.

For example, Layth ibn Sa`d was a friend of Malik ibn Anas and was more knowledgeable and a better jurist than the latter according to the admission of Imam al-Shafi`i himself.<sup>1</sup> Yet his sect eroded, and his *fiqh* melted and went into oblivion because his contemporary government was not pleased with him. Ahmad ibn Hanbal has said, “Ibn Abu Thuayb is better than Malik ibn Anas except that Malik was more selective when choosing his friends.”<sup>2</sup>

If we refer to history, we will find Malik, the one who established a sect bearing his name, sought to be close to the government and its rulers, making peace with them and following them. He, therefore, became the highly respected man and the famous scholar, and his sect was disseminated through the methods of both terrorizing and attracting people particularly in Andalusia where his student Yahya ibn Yahya went to lengths in befriending the ruler of Andalus. Because of that, he became one of the latter's favorite men. The said ruler rewarded him with the position of judge, since he never appointed anybody as a judge except one of his Maliki friends.

We also find out the fact that the reason why Abu Hanifah's sect was propagated after its founder's death because Abu Yusuf and al-Shaybani, who were followers of Abu Hanifah and among his most faithful students, were at the same time very close to Haroun “al-Rasheed,” the Abbaside caliph.

They played a major role in strengthening the latter's government and supporting and helping it, hence Haroun of the concubines and promiscuity did not permit anyone to be appointed as judge or *mufti*

except with the consent of both of these men who never appointed any judge except if he was a follower of Abu Hanifah's sect.

Abu Hanifah, therefore, came to be regarded as the greatest scholar, and his sect as the greatest sect of *fiqh* implemented, despite the fact that his contemporary scholars went as far as calling him *kafir* and atheist. Among such scholars were both Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Imam Abul-Hasan al-Ash`ari.

Likewise, the Shafi`i sect could not have spread nor gained any momentum had it not been for the support of Abbaside authorities during the time of al-Mu`tasim when Ibn Hanbal retracted his theory that the Holy Qur'an was created, so his star shone during the Nasibi caliph al-Mutawakkil. His sect gained strength and was disseminated when colonial authorities supported Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab during the past century, and when the latter cooperated with Al Saud who immediately lent him their support and assisted him and worked diligently to propagate his sect in Hijaz and the Arabian peninsula.

The Hanbali sect, thus, became the sect attributed to three Imams the first of whom was Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who never claimed that he was a *faqih* but only a scholar of *hadith*, then to Ibn Taymiyyah whom they called "Shaykh al-Islam," mentor of Islam, and "Mujaddid al-Sunnah," the one who revived the Sunnah, and whom his contemporary scholars regarded as *kafir* because he decreed that all Muslims who sought nearness to Allah through the Prophet were polytheists.

Then came in the past century Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, henchman of British colonialism in the Middle East, who also tried to "revive" the Hanbali sect through verdicts which he borrowed from Ibn Taymiyyah. Ahmad ibn Hanbal became a thing of the past because now they call their sect Wahhabism.

There is no room to doubt the fact that the dissemination, fame and prominence of all these sects was through the support and with the blessing of various rulers. And there is also no room to doubt the fact that all those rulers, without any exception, were enemies of the Imams of Ahlul Bayt due to their continuous fear that those Imams threatened their very existence and the abolishment of their authority. They, therefore, were always trying to isolate them from the nation, belittling them and killing anyone who followed their creed.

It goes without saying that those same rulers were always appointing the scholars who were flattering them and who were issuing verdicts conducive to their government and authority, since people always need solutions for their legislative problems.

Since the rulers in all times did not know anything about the *Shari`a*, nor did they comprehend anything about *fiqh*, it was only natural that they appointed scholars to issue verdicts on their behalf and to mislead the public into thinking that politics and religion did not mix.

The ruler, therefore, was a man of politics, whereas the *faqih* was always a theologian as is the case with the president of any Muslim republic: you always find him appointing the scholars who are close to

him, calling them the “republic's *muftis*,” or any such title, who are asked to look into issues related to religious verdicts, tenets, and rituals.

Yet in reality such a person does not issue any verdict or a ruling except according to the directives which he receives from the ruling authority and in agreement with the ruler or, at least, not in opposition to the government's policy or the execution of its programs.

This phenomenon came to exist since the time of the first three caliphs, namely Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman, for although they did not make a distinction between religion and politics, they granted themselves the right to be the legislators in order to legislate whatever served the interests of their caliphate and whatever secured its prestige and continuation.

Since those three caliphs used to meet with the Prophet and be in his company, they learned from him some traditions which were not in contradiction with their policies.

Mu`awiyah, for example, did not embrace Islam except in 9 A.H./630 A.D. according to the most famous and authentic narrative, so he did not accompany the Prophet except for a very short period of time and did not know anything worth mentioning about his Sunnah; therefore, he felt forced to appoint Abu Hurayra and Amr ibn al-As and some of the companions to issue verdicts according to his own liking.

The Umayyads and the Abbasides after him followed such “praiseworthy Sunnah,” or what they labelled *al-bid`a al-hasana*, the good innovation. Each ruler, thus, seated the high judge beside him to appoint the judges whom he regarded as good for the state and who would strengthen and support its authority. You do not need to know, beyond that, except the nature of those judges who preferred to displease their God in order to please their masters and benefactors who had appointed them in their positions.

Having come to know all of that, you can understand the secret why the Infallible Imams from the Progeny of the Prophet were deliberately excluded from public life, and why not even one of them, across the centuries, was appointed as judge or *mufti*.

If we wish to document more facts relevant to the methods whereby the four “Sunni” sects were promoted by the rulers, we need to cite only one example by removing the curtains from the sect established by Imam Malik, a sect which is regarded as one of their greatest, most prestigious, and whose *fiqh* is the broadest. Malik gained fame particularly because of writing his book *Al-Mawta* which, according to “Ahlul Sunnah,” is the most authentic book after the Book of Allah, and there are many scholars who regard it as superior to, and they prefer it over, al-Bukhari's *Sahih*.

Malik's fame was extra-ordinary, so much so that this query came to be a household word: “Can anyone dare to issue a verdict while Malik is in town?” We must also not forget that Malik had issued a verdict prohibiting the transaction of a sale through the use of force, and it was for this reason that Ja`far ibn Sulayman, Medina's governor, whipped him seventy lashes.

Malikis always use this incident to illustrate their man's opposition to the government, a conclusion which is quite erroneous, for those who narrated this incident are the same ones who narrated its sequel, and here are the details:

Ibn Qutaybah has said, "They have indicated that during Abu Ja`far al-Mansour's reign, Malik ibn Anas was whipped by [al-Mansour's governor over Medina] Ja`far ibn Sulayman. Al-Mansour was enraged when he came to know about it; he resented it and was very displeased with it, so he wrote an order expelling Ja`far ibn Sulayman from his position as governor of Medina, ordering him to be brought to Baghdad on a bare hump.

Then he wrote another letter to Malik ibn Anas inviting him to come to meet him in Baghdad, but Malik refused and wrote Abu Ja`far al-Mansour back asking him to excuse him, providing him with some sort of excuse. Abu Ja`far al-Mansour wrote him again saying, "Meet me, then, during the next *hajj* season next year, for I will then be, *Insha-Allah*, performing the rite."

So if the "commander of the faithful" Abu Ja`far al-Mansour, the Abbaside ruler, deposes his cousin Ja`far ibn Sulayman ibn al-Abbas from his post as governor of Medina because of beating Malik, this really makes one quite skeptical and forces him to contemplate.

The reason why Ja`far ibn Sulayman whipped Malik was only to support the caliphate and authority of his cousin the caliph; so, Abu Ja`far al-Mansour ought to have rewarded and promoted his governor rather than deposing and insulting him in such a manner. Instead, he deposed him and ordered him to meet him in the worst manner, chained and riding a bare hump. Then the caliph personally apologized to Malik in order to please him. This is truly strange.

This incident gives the impression that the governor of Medina Ja`far ibn Sulayman behaved like a fool who knew nothing about politics and their intricacies and schemes, and it does not give the impression at all that Malik was the caliph's reliable supporter and the bearer of his standard in both holy shrines; otherwise, he would not have deposed his cousin from the post of governor simply because he had whipped Malik who deserved to be whipped on account of issuing a verdict prohibiting a forced allegiance.

Such incidents happen to us and before our very eyes when some rulers resort to insulting someone or jailing him in order to enhance the prestige and security of the government. Then the same individual reveals his identity to be the relative of a cabinet minister, or one of the friends of the wife's president; the result: the governor is excused from his job and is ordered to take other responsibilities the nature of which is not known even to the governor himself!

This reminds me of an incident which took place during the French occupation of Tunisia. The shaykh of the Eisawi [sufi] *tareeqa* and his men were carrying their banners and raising their voices with their praise-offering chants at night. They passed by some streets before reaching the neighborhood where their shrine was located as was their custom. Upon passing by the residence of the French commander

of the police force, they were met by the latter who went out of his residence and was steaming with anger.

He broke their banners and dispersed them because they did not honor the law of respecting one's neighbor and resorting to calm after 10:00 p.m. When the civil inspector, whom the Tunisians regarded as the equivalent of governor, came to know about this incident, he became very angry with the police officer whom he expelled from his job, giving him three days to leave the city of Qafsa.

Then he invited the shaykh of the Eisawi *tareeqa* to meet him, and he apologized to him on behalf of the French government and sought to please him by giving him generous amounts of money to buy new banners and furniture as a compensation for the broken items. When one of those who were close to him asked him why he had done that, he said, "It is much better for us to keep these savage people busy with carrying banners, senseless escapades, and with eating scorpions; otherwise, they would direct their attention to us and make a morsel out of us because we have usurped their rights."

Let us now go back to Imam Malik to hear him personally detailing the story of his meeting with the caliph Abu Ja`far al-Mansour.

[1.](#) Such admission is recorded on p. 524 of al-Shafi`i's *Manaqib*.

[2.](#) *Tadhkirat al-Huffaz*, Vol. 1, p. 176.

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