

Publisher's Preface

This book can best be described as an inquiry of an explorer of the truth into the delicate yet essential question of: “Who is better qualified to the claim of being a follower of Islam's Prophet in spirit and in practice?” Just as it is mandatory to follow the Qur'an, it is equally essential to follow the Prophet, peace be upon him. While the Qur'an is the Almighty's revelation, the Prophet's statements and actions, without any doubt, are also guided by the Almighty, and he cannot err:

“Nor does he speak out of desire. It is naught but revelation that is revealed” (Qur'an, 53:3-4),

hence the importance of taking the Sunnah (the Prophet's traditions and statements) very seriously.

Both major schools of Islamic law, the Sunni and the Shi'a, differed with regard to the important issue of the spiritual as well as the temporal succession of the Prophet of Islam. This difference resulted in the Muslims' ideological division after the Prophet's death. Here is an interesting fact for your consideration:

Both Sunni and Shi'a groups agree all along with regard to the importance of the Qur'an and of the Sunnah, accepting them as the bases upon which they establish the implementation of their faith. Despite this fact, however, the Sunnis arrogated to themselves the title of “Ahlul Sunnah,” or “the people of the Path,” and the rest of the world passively gave in to this assumption and accepted it as a fact.

In his *Dictionary of Islam*, Thomas Hughes¹ points out: “... hence it comes to pass that although the Shi'as, even to a greater degree than the Sunnis, rest their claims upon traditional evidence, they have allowed their opponents to claim the title of traditionists, and consequently Mr. Sale² and many European writers have stated that the Shi'as reject the tradition.”

In our times, the freedom of thought and expression, coupled with a spirit of independent inquiry, has helped men and women to free themselves from misbeliefs, whims, and superstitions.

Amazingly, the distinct task of separating the truth from the myth on an issue of such a great importance, namely the question of who the genuine followers of the Sunnah of the Prophet are and who followed in his footsteps — Ali and his friends, or the *sahaba* (the friends of the Prophet) who opposed the Prophet's cousin after his death — had to be pioneered by the author of this book who grew up as a Sunni.

After several years of independent inquiry as to who was right ___ Ali or his opponents ___ he gave up the beliefs of his ancestors and accepted the Twelve Imams of the Shi`as as his “rightly guided” leaders after the Prophet. The author of four previously published books (Pyam-e-Aman had published the English translation of his first book titled *Then I was Guided*), Dr. Muhammad al-Samawi al-Tijani is a great scholar and Arabist.

As a student of comparative religion, he has tirelessly pursued his quest for the truth, and he continues to write what he calls, in the beginning of his first book, “a story of a journey..., a story of a new discovery... in the field of religious and philosophical schools.”

The question of who Ahlul Sunnah are and who are not is critical to any believer, both in the context of history as well as in the practice of religion today. It is also important because those who labelled themselves as the “traditionists” viewed all others as “heterodox” in contrast to their claiming themselves to be the “orthodox.”

This resulted in violence and coercion as the rulers of the time used such accusations to oppress the masses as they demonstrated their power and ruthless control over their destiny. Western Islamists picked up the jargon from the writers of the “majority sect” and divided the Muslim world in their writings into “Orthodox” and “Heretical,” referring to the Sunnis and the Shi`as respectively.³

This hypothetical dichotomy is misleading and completely baseless. It is also due to the lack of understanding about the world of Islam. Western writers fail to observe that, other than the belief in the issue of Imamate, the Sunnis have far greater differences within their own four sects (or schools of thought) system compared to their differences with the Shi`as.

The views of the Hanafis regarding theological questions, for example, may well coincide with those of the Shi`as while remaining in an uncompromising contradiction to many doctrines espoused by, say, the Hanbalis, the Shafi`is, or the Malikis.

In sharp contrast to the evidence of “irreconcilable differences” between the four Imams who had established the afore-mentioned Schools of Sunni Thought, even with regard to issues of minor as well as major importance, a total consensus exists among the Twelve Imams of Ahlul Bayt (People of the Prophet's House) on each and every doctrinal aspect of the faith.

In his celebrated treatise titled *Kitab al-milal wal nihal* (the book of religions and religious sects), al-Shahristani,⁴ a Muslim thinker who lived during the Medieval times, gives an account of the Muslim sects (*firaq*, singular: *firqa*) and their disagreements on four fundamental issues: *Tawhid* (Oneness of God and His Divine Attributes), *Adl* (justice), *Iman* (faith or conviction), and lastly Revelation, the Prophetic mission, and the right to be the leader (Imam) of the Muslim community.

A revealing picture that emerges from his work shows that, unlike the usual European concept of a religious sect, the Muslim *firaq*, with their different views on issues, allow a dialogue between scholars

and followers of different theological persuasions. This offers hope that in the new “information era,” with people coming closer to and eager to communicate with one another and ready to adapt to change, the Muslim world may achieve its homogeneous synthesis, notwithstanding the minor variants, in a not too distant future, *Insha-Allah*.

Dr. Tijani's book, written in Arabic, is a voluminous work. We had to selectively though discreetly omit certain parts of it both to ensure economy and to make it more palatable to the English speaking readers. The first two chapters have been rewritten by Br. Yasin T. al-Jibouri in order to incorporate full accounts of important events that took place just before the Prophet's death to provide the reader with the context of the author's comments.

We are grateful to Br. Yasin T. al-Jibouri (P.O. Box 5132, Falls Church, VA 22044) for translating the original Arabic text of this book into English. He, by the way, has translated, written, or edited as many as twenty-three books and is a great asset to our community. Without his help, the publication of this book may not have become possible. Our special thanks to Br. Nasir Shamsi who has so far edited fifteen of the books published by Pyam-e-Aman and persevered in reviewing and editing this book. May Allah *Ta'ala* reward them both on behalf of all those who will *Insha-Allah* benefit from this book, and on our own.

Pyam-e-Aman

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¹ Born in Berkshire on October 20, 1822 and died in Brighton, England, on March 22, 1896, Thomas Patrick Hughes was a jurist, reformer, and novelist. He attained fame following the publication in 1857 of his novel *Tom Brown's School Days*. His other famous works include: *Tom Brown at Oxford* (which he wrote after studying at Oxford from 1842 to 1845 and which was published in 1861), *A Layman's Faith* (1868), and *The Manliness of Christ* (1879). His *Dictionary of Islam* was published by Rupa & Co. of Calcutta, India, in 1885.

² Rev. George Sale is the British scholar, traveller and Arabist who, in 1734, produced one of the earliest English translations of the Holy Qur'an, a translation which remained in circulation for 127 years. Tr.

³ The Western Islamists misjudged, in fact exploited, the differences in the Islamic world. They tried to apply the dichotomous division of Christianity between the “Orthodox” and “Heretical” to the Muslim world. Needless to say that the Christian sects maintain totally divergent views in respect of their basic beliefs viz: Oneness of God, Sonship of Jesus and Divine Trinity. In sharp contrast, the Muslims, notwithstanding their differences on certain issues, have consensus with regard to their basic beliefs such as “Tawheed”, Oneness of God, the Prophethood of Muhammad and the Finality of his Prophethood, and the Day of Judgment.

⁴ Nicknamed “Abul-Fath,” Muhammad ibn Abd al-Kareem al-Shahristani was born in Shahristan, Khurasan, in 469 A.H./1076 A.D. and died in 548 A.H./1153 A.D. He was the most prominent Sunni historian of religions and philosophical trends in the Middle Ages. His famous book *Kitab al-milal wal nihal* was published in Cairo, Egypt, in 1288 A.H./1871 A.D.

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