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Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)

Think of It This Way

Quran wants that every faithful should lead a life filled with the light of knowledge and wisdom. The holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) and the chaste Imams (as) had the same desire. But at the same time it has been emphasized that of all faculties of knowledge, religious studies should be at the top in priority. Thorough understanding of religion should have preference. It is important to know that awareness of sharia in day to day transactions is fundamental.

Let us also clear this misconception that tafaqqa (expertise in the knowledge of shari'a) is limited to awareness of a few issues of cleanliness, prayers, fasting, etc. Rather in the context of life in this world, it is the competency to know and scrutinize the everyday transactions of individuals and the society at large.

You see diin (religion) is a system that guides every move of its believers. And the purpose of gaining expertise in diin is that an individual has thorough knowledge of all commands related to his and others' everyday transactions. As stated earlier, tafaqqa is not limited to the rules of worship. Rather it covers ethics, citizenship, politics, government, economics, trade, agriculture, defense, international relations, industry etc.

In regards to this awareness the intellectual of Islam, Imam Ali (as), once declared from the podium:

"وان من الحق ان تفقهوا."

"It is sensible to be well versed in religious laws."[1]

It is possible that some people who have trouble getting out of their limited thought process may have the impression that the journals compiled by the marajae seem to be limited to worship related issues. Yes, on the surface it appears that way. On the other hand since these journals are the means in writing to make general public aware of issues related to their everyday transactions, it just makes sense to cover such issues.

However, as far as the larger and classical collections of jurisprudence (fiqh) are concerned, they have the most appropriate solutions for just about every problem related to the individual as well as the society. There are detailed discussions with proper arguments relevant to the different branches of social sciences. However, this treasure is of use to only those scholars who take the pains to study them and not for the average man.

The special reason, rather the real reason, for keeping the journals of marja'e brief is that after the demise of the holy Prophet (S), there was a well thought out revolution that changed the face of politics and government. It did not leave any room for the Shia sect. The result is that until now any time constitution experts have gathered to show off their knowledge of the law they have only looked at the four sects of jurisprudence (fiqh). No one except a handful has paid any attention to the fifth fiqhi sect. So this neglectful attitude of the worldly people has created a lot of hurdles and has not given the opportunity to the Shia fiqh to thrive.

On the other hand history says that at different times and places in the world Shias themselves got the seat of the government. It is true. But wherever they got the power they did rule but not on the basis of Shia fiqh. In other words no effective idealistic government came into being that could enforce the sharai rules and regulations. Such as: Idrisi government in Morocco; Alawis' rule in states around Qazvain Sea; the kingdom of Aal-Boia in Iraq and Persia; reign of Banu Hamdan in Syria; Fatimi rule in Egypt; empires of Safavis, Qacharis and Pahalvis in Iran; administrations of Aadil and Qutub in South India; the state of Awadh in North India, etc.

OK, that is correct. But it relates to only a few segments of the history of Shias. You see, in this world wherever strong personalities showing affiliation with virtuous Ahlul Bayt took reins, a vibrant civilization and captivating culture came into being. Literature flourished. Creativity blossomed. Such values set in that are still nonexistent in many societies. However, in spite of all this the rules and regulations of Shia fiqh were enforced only loosely. In other words common Shia person did not get the fiqhi mindset. The result is that the rules and regulations relevant to everyday life stayed frozen. They were neither enforced nor disseminated to general public.

There were different reasons and circumstances responsible for such situations but it is best not to discuss them openly here.

Anyway, let us get back to our topic. Some people claim that Quran and other treatises strongly condemn taqleed, obedience and following. Qur'an says in Surah Aaraf:

وَإِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً قَالُوا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهَا آبَاءَنَا وَاللَّهُ أَمَرَنَا بِهَا قُلْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ أَتَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

"When these people commit a shameful act, they say, "We have seen our elders do these deeds and Allah has ordered us to do so." Tell them, Allah never orders doing bad deeds. Do you in the

name of Allah say such things that you have no knowledge of?"[2]

And this is not the only verse. There are others such as in Surah al-Ma'ida:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَإِلَى الرَّسُولِ قَالُوا حَسْبُنَا مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا ۚ أَوَلَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

"And when they are told to come towards the constitution that came from Allah and follow the Prophet, they say, "whatever we have seen our ancestors do, suffices for us." Will they continue to follow their ancestors, even if those ancestors had no knowledge and were totally ignorant of the true path?"[3]

Now let us look at the portion of Surah Shu'ara where Prophet Ibrahim (as) talks to his community:

وَاتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ أَصْنَامًا فَنَظَلُّ لَهَا عَاكِفِينَ قَالَ هَلْ يَسْمَعُونَكُمْ إِذْ تَدْعُونَ أَوْ يَنْفَعُونَكُمْ أَوْ يَضُرُّونَ قَالُوا بَلْ وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا كَذَٰلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ

"And recite to them the story of Ibrahim. When he said to his father and his people: What do you worship? They said: We worship idols, so we shall be their votaries. He said: Do they hear you when you call? Or do they profit you or cause you harm? They said: Nay, we found our fathers doing so."[4]

Next let us benefit from a few verses of Surah Zukhruf:

وَقَالُوا لَوْ شَاءَ الرَّحْمَٰنُ مَا عَبَدْنَاهُمْ مَا لَهُمْ بِذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ أَمْ آتَيْنَاهُمْ كِتَابًا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ فَهُمْ بِهِ مُسْتَمْسِكُونَ بَلْ قَالُوا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ مُهْتَدُونَ

"And they* [*the polytheists*] *say, "If compassionate Allah did not want, we would not worship these idols." They are not aware of the root cause of the problem and talk nonsense. Do they have some sort of a document from us that they use as justification for their idol-worshipping? Their only argument is that they have seen their ancestors stay on this course and now they are simply following on their footsteps."[5]

At this juncture we submit to our esteemed readers that the critics of taqleed are split into two groups. One group is composed of heavy weight old timers who are well known scholars and their writings are laced with classical arguments. The second group consists of emotional reformists of the current age who are sick and tired of soul wrenching environment and those who are maintaining the status quo. God knows how long these poor souls have been living in this misery. When they do not see light at the end of the tunnel, they explode. They become so sensitive that they get into arguments with everyone

around them.

But you see, sensible people always try to solve problems; they try to put out fires and not put fuel on the fire. When a storm comes, they try to save the boat. If someone wants to reform a system, he needs to have patience.

Anyway, we will meet these upcoming intellectuals later on. For now let us make a humble submission to the great scholars.

Dear elders of the society. Keeping Allah's presence in mind, kindly tell us whether the sacred verses we have referred to, condemn the same taqleed that is mandatory in Shia Fiqh and these censure those taqleed practicing Shias who are true followers of Ahlul Bayt? Is it not true that these verses really address infidel and polytheist groups? Also the thoughts and deeds these verses refer to, is there any trace of them in a Shia follower (muqallid)?

These verses reflect the nature, psyche, character, language, feelings, ideas and traditions of a nation that is far from civilization, totally lacks wisdom, and is stubborn of the highest order. Or in reference to these Quranic verses a picture comes to mind of a group of people whose intellect is frozen and they have lost sagacity and awareness.

Similarly there are other verses such as Surah Al-Baqara:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوَلَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ وَمَثَلُ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا دُعَاءً وَنِدَاءً صُمٌّ بُكْمٌ عُمْيٌ فَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

"When they* [*the polytheists*] *are told that they should obey Allah's commands, their response is that they are following their ancestors' ways. Now if their ancestors failed to use their senses and stayed off the right path, will they still follow them? These people who refuse to adopt God-sent track, are like animals that only listen to herdsman's holler. They are deaf, dumb and blind. That is why they understand nothing."[6]

Let us submit one more time.

Dear friends, let us be fair. Does the picture of ways and style these verses paint, have any semblance to under discussion faculty of taqleed and Ijtihad? Is slandering of this human guidance system a rational thing to do?

Next, there is an argument that the word "taqleed" is nowhere to be found in Quran. OK, the question is. Is the objective the word or the meaning? It is quite obvious that every learned individual will focus on the meaning. This objective is readily achieved by several other words such as consult (ruju), derive (akhaz), style (andaz), question, education, and guidance that lead to taqleed. All these words have

been used in Quran

Isn't it interesting that all the above verses are used as an argument against taqleed; whereas same sacred verses are teaching us the value of taqleed. Who to follow? When to obey? Following ignorant leads to darkness while following truly learned people leads to enlightenment.

1. Usul al-Kafi, vol 1, p 36, published Maktaba Islamia, Tehran
2. Surah Al-Aaraf, 7: 28.
3. Surah al-Ma'ida,.5:104.
4. Surah Shu'ara, 26: 69-74.
5. Surah Zukhruf, 43: 20-22.
6. Surah Al-Baqara, 2:170-171.

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