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Why School of Ahlul-Bayt?

بِسْمِ اللَّـهِ الرَّحْمَـٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The purpose of this article is merely to demonstrate that Shi'a views about the special importance and the leadership of Ahlul-Bayt do not come out of the blue. In this way, I hope to contribute to better understanding among Muslims and hence help to reduce some people's hostility against the followers of the Members of the House of the Prophet (S).

The fact that we (Shi'a) have adopted a creed which differs from that of the Ash'arites as far as the fundamental beliefs are concerned, and differs from the four schools of Sunni jurists as far as the laws, rites, and observances are concerned, is not due to any sectarianism or prejudice. It is rather the theological reasoning which has led us to adopt the creed of those Imams who belong to the Ahlul-Bayt of the Holy Prophet, the Messenger of Allah (S).

We have, therefore, wholly and solely bound ourselves to them in our observances as well as our beliefs; in the derivations of our knowledge of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet; and in all our material, moral and spiritual values on the grounds of theological and logical proofs. We have done this in obedience of the Holy Prophet and in submission to his Sunnah.

Had we not been convinced by these proofs to disallow all Imams except the Ahlul-Bayt, and to seek to draw near to Allah only through them, we might have inclined towards the creed of the majority for the sake of unity and fraternity. But incontrovertible reasons command a believer to follow the truth regardless of all other considerations.

The majority of the Muslims are unable to produce any argument to show which one of their four different jurists is the best. It is impossible to follow all of them, and therefor, before one can say that it is "compulsory"to follow them, one has to prove which one must be followed. We have pondered over the arguments of the Hanafis, the Shafi'is, the Malikis and the Hanbalis with the eyes of a seeker of truth and we have searched far and wide, but we have found no answer to this, except they were all acclaimed as very great jurists and honest and just men. But you are fully aware that jurist's capacity,

honesty, justice and greatness are not monopoly of these four persons only. Then, how can it be "compulsory"to follow them only?

We do not think that anyone can hold that these four Imams are in any way better than our Imams, the pure and holy descendants of the Prophet (S), the Ark of Salvation, the Gate of Repentance, through whom we can attain protection against disagreement in religious matters; for they are the emblems of guidance, and the leaders towards the straight path.

But alas, after the demise of the Holy Prophet (S), politics began to play its part in the affairs of religion and you know what took place in the heart of Islam as a result. During all these periods of trials, the Shi'a continued to hold fast to Qur'an and the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt whom the Holy Prophet left among us as the two most weighty things (al-Thaqalain).

There have been some extremists sects (al-Ghulat) which appeared every now and then in course of the history of Islam; nonetheless, the main body of the Shi'a have never deviated from this path since the time of Imam 'Ali and Fatimah (peace be upon them) up to the present day.

The Shi'a existed when Ash'ari and all the four Sunni Imams were unborn and unheard of. Up to the first three generations since the Holy Prophet's time, Ash'ari and the Sunni Imams were unknown. Ash'ari was born in 270 AH and died in 320 AH; Ibn Hanbal was born in 164 AH and died in 241 AH; Shafi'i was born in 150 AH and died in 204 AH; Malik was born in 95 AH and died in 169 AH; Abu Hanifa was born in 80 AH and died in 150 AH.

The Shi'a, on the other hand, follow the path of Ahlul-Bayt which include Imam 'Ali, Fatimah, al-Hasan and al-Husayn (peace be upon them all) who were all contemporaries of the Holy Prophet (S) and raised in his House.

As far as the knowledge of the Imams of Ahlul-Bayt is concerned, it is sufficient to say that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) was the teacher of the two Sunni Imams, i.e., Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man , and Malik Ibn Anas. Abu Hanifa said: "Except for the two years Nu'man would have starved,"referring to the two years he had benefited from the knowledge of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as). Malik also confessed straightforwardly that he had not met anyone learned in Islamic Jurisprudence better than Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as).

The Abbasid Caliph, al-Mansoor, commanded Abu Hanifa to prepare for Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) a number of hard questions concerning the Islamic Law and to ask the Imam those questions in the presence of al-Mansoor. Abu Hanifa prepared forty difficult questions and asked Imam Ja'far about them in al-Mansoor's presence. The Imam not only answered all the questions but also informed about the opinions of the Iraqi as well as the Hijazi Scholars. Abu Hanifa commented on this episode saying:

"Certainly, the most knowledgeable among people is the most knowledgeable of their different opinions."

Sunni reference:

● Shaikh Muhammad Abu Zahrah in his book "al-Imam al-Sadiq", p27

Abu Hanifa described his feelings (when he entered the palace of al-Mansoor and found Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) sitting with him) by saying:

"When I saw Imam Ja'far, I felt his personality commands more respect than that of the Caliph himself. Yet the Caliph was ruling the Muslim World, and Imam Ja'far was a private citizen."

Sunni reference:

● Shaikh Muhammad Abu Zahrah in his book "al-Imam al-Sadiq", p27

Malik (the other Sunni Imam) said:

"I used to come to Ja'far Ibn Muhammad (as) and went to him for a long time. Whenever I visited him, I found him praying, fasting, or reading the Qur'an. Whenever he reported a statement of the Messenger of God, he was with ablution. He was a distinguished worshipper who was unconcerned with the material world. He was of the God fearing people."

Sunni reference:

● Shaikh Muhammad Abu Zahrah in his book "al-Imam al-Sadiq", p66

Shaikh Muhammad Abu Zahrah who was one of the outstanding Sunni contemporary Scholars said:

"The Muslim Scholars of various Islamic Schools never agreed unanimously on a matter as much as they agree on the knowledge of Imam Ja'far and his virtue. The Sunni Imams who lived during his time were his students. Malik was one of them and those who were as contemporary as Malik such as Sufyan al-Thouri and many others. Abu Hanifa also was his student in spite of their being close in age, and he considered Imam Ja'far the most knowledgeable in the Muslim World."

Sunni reference:

● Shaikh Muhammad Abu Zahrah in his book "al-Imam al-Sadiq", p66

The ties of unity and fraternity can be strengthened and disagreement ended if all Muslims agree that to follow the Ahlul-Bayt is a must. In fact many grand Sunni scholars have acknowledged the Shi'a school as one of the richest Islamic schools for they very reason that the knowledge of the Shi'a school of thought is derived from the Ahlul-Bayt of the Prophet (S) whose supreme knowledge and purity are confirmed in Qur'an.

These Sunni scholars have even issued Fatwa that the Sunnis are allowed to follow the Twelver Shi'ite Jurisprudence. Among these grand scholars are Shaikh Mahmood Shaltoot, the head of al-Azhar University (in 1950's and 60's).

Moreover, disagreement between the various schools of Sunni thought is by no means less than the lack of conformity between the Shi'a and the Sunnis. A large number of writings of scholars of both sides will bear this out.

Since based on the tradition of Two Weighty things Ahlul-Bayt carry as much weight in the eyes of Allah as the Holy Qur'an, the former have the same qualities as the latter. Just as the Qur'an is true from beginning to end without any shadow of doubt, and just as it is incumbent upon every Muslims to obey its commandments, so are Ahlul-Bayt perfect and sincere guides whose commands must be followed by all.

Therefore there can be no excuse to escape from accepting their leadership and following their creed and their faith. The Muslims are bound by these sayings of the Holy Prophet to follow them and no one else. Just as it is impossible for any Muslims to turn away from the Holy Qur'an or to adopt any set of rules which is at variance with it, so when the Ahlul-Bayt have been unequivocally described as equal in weight and importance to the Holy Qur'an, the same attitude has to be adopted with regard to their orders, and it cannot be permissible to turn away from them in order to follow any other persons. After mentioning the tradition of Two Weighty Things, Ibn Hajar holds that:

"These words show that those members of the Ahlul-Bayt who posed these distinctions were superior to all the people."

Sunni reference: al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar, p136

The Messenger of Allah said:

"Whosoever wishes to live and die like me and enter that heaven (after death), which my lord has promised me, namely, the ever lasting heaven should acknowledge 'Ali (as) as his patron after me, and after him he should acknowledge the sons of 'Ali, because they are the people who will never leave you outside the door of guidance nor will they let you enter the door of misguidance."

Sunni references:

- Kanz al-Ummal, by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, v6, p155, Tradition #2578
- Also abridged Kanz al-Ummal on the margin of Musnad of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal v5, p32

Again the significance of leadership of Ahlul-Bayt has been confirmed by the following beautiful analogy of the messenger of Allah:

The Messenger of Allah said: "Regard the Ahlul-Bayt among you as the head to the body, or the eyes to the face, for the face is only guided by the eyes."

Sunni references:

● Is'af al-Raghibeen, by al-Saban

● al-Sharaf al-Mua'abbad, by Shaikh Yusuf al-Nabahani, p31, by more than one authority

Also:

The Messenger of Allah said: "My Ahlul-Bayt are the protected place of refuge about the dispute in religion."(Mustadrak Hakim)

These traditions, therefore, leave no room for any doubt. There can be no other way except to follow the Ahlul-Bayt and give up all opposition to them.

The Messenger of Allah said: "Acknowledgment of Aale-Muhammad (the family of Muhammad) means salvation from the fire, and love for them is a passport for crossing the bridge of the Siraat, and obedience to them is a protection from divine wrath."

Sunni references:

● Kitab al-Shafa, by Qadhi 'Ayadh, published in 1328 AH, v2, p40

● Yanabi al-Mawaddah, al-Qundoozi al-Hanafi, section 65, p370

Abdullah Ibn Hantab related:

The Messenger of Allah addressed us at Juhfa saying: "Do I not have authority over you more than yourselves?"They all said, "Yes of course."Then he said: "I shall hold you answerable for two things, namely, the Book of Allah and my descendants."

Sunni reference:

● Ihyaa al-Mayyit, by al-Hafidh Jalaluddin al-Suyuti

● Arba'in al-'Arbain, by Allamah al-Nabahani

Therefore the reason we have adopted the faith of the Ahlul-Bayt to the exclusion of all others is that Allah himself has given preference to them only. It is sufficient to quote the poem of al-Shafi'i (one of the Sunni Imams) about Ahlul-Bayt which goes as follows:

Members of the House of the Prophet, your love is a Divine duty on mankind. God revealed it in His Qur'an. It is enough among your great privileges that whoever does not bless you, his prayer is void.

If the love of the members of the House of the Prophet is Rafdh (rejection), let mankind and the Jinns testify that I am a Rafidhi (rejector).

The above poem of Shafi'i are too well known among the Arabic speaking people to require any

reference. But for the benefit of those who insist on reference see:

- Tafsir al-Kabir, by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, v27, p166, under the commentary of verse 42:23 of Qur'an.

- al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar, p88, in connection with the verse 33:33 of Qur'an.

Brother/Sister in our prayers, and I am sure that in your prayers also, we say:

"I declare that Muhammad is the servant of God and His Messenger. O Lord, send Your blessings upon Muhammad and his family"

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