

The Methodology of the Salaf in Adhering to the Sunnah

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I bring you the story of Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq (رضى الله عنه), which is collected in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, regarding the daughter of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) after his death; there was confusion regarding what she should inherit. Abū Bakr informed them that the Prophets do not leave anything behind to be inherited except for ‘ilm. He then reminded them with a golden statement, which shows how he clung to the Sunnah of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), “I did not leave off anything that the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) used to do by way of action. I fear that if I were to leave anything from the Sunnah of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) that I would deviate.”

And that is Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq. He would not want to leave anything off from the way of the Messenger Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم). So, the Companions knew that salvation lied in clinging to the revelation that came by way of the Messenger Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم). The ṣiḡhār of the Companions and those who came after them knew that salvation also lied in having that correct understanding and following the kibār of the Ṣaḥābah.

This is why al-Imām ash-Shāṭibī (رحمه الله) said in his book al-I’tiṣām, that following the way of the Companions is religion that we worship Allāh (عز وجل) by way of (i.e., the understanding of the Companions). This is why Ḥudhayfah b. Yamān (رضى الله عنه) said addressing the reciters and memorisers of the Qur’ān in his time, that any form of worship that was not done by the

Companions, then that is not worship. Do not worship if it was not done by the Companions. Verily, the early generations (i.e., the Companions that took from the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), from that pure source) did not leave anything, not even a statement for those that would come after them. The shāhihd is that what sufficed them will suffice us.

As Imām Mālik (رحمه الله) said, “This latter part of the Ummah will not come with something that is more in guidance than that of the earlier part of this Ummah.”

There is nothing that we can come with by way of our intellect and understanding that will be better than the way of Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and the [rest of the] Companions (رضى الله عنهم). They were a people that were chosen, more truthful, wanted much more good and feared Allāh much more than us. So, whatever sufficed them and was religion for them, it is religion for us. And whatever rectified them will likewise rectify us.

The Salaf understood this and were extremely diligent in wanting to follow the way of the Companions because they knew that success lied in that. As the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) commanded, “Upon you is my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Khulafā’.” They knew that this was the command of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and in it lied salvation.

Ibrāhīm an-Nakhaī (رحمه الله) said, “If it reached me regarding the Companions of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) when performing the wuḍū’ that they did not go past the fingertip (i.e., even if it was something minute) then I would likewise not transgress and go beyond what they did. It is sufficient to say that it is a sin for those who oppose the way of the Companions of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم).”

Another example that shows the station of the Companions and how the Salaf turned back to their understanding and way of dīn is that Ibn al-Mubāarak (رحمه الله) was asked, “Who is

better of the two: Mu‘āwiyah¹ or ‘Umar b. ‘Abdul-‘Azīz²?” He replied, “The mere dirt that entered the nostrils of Mu‘āwiyah at the time of battle alongside the Messenger Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) is better than ‘Umar b. ‘Abdul-‘Azīz.” And that is not taking anything away from ‘Umar b. ‘Abdul-‘Azīz, but it is to show the station the Companions had, and then those who followed them (the three blessed generations). It is the safest way for us to follow because they were upon ḥaqq, and they died upon that ḥaqq.

This is why Imām al-Awzā‘ī (رحمه الله) said these golden words, “Be patient upon the Sunnah and stop where the people (i.e., the Ṣaḥābah and the three blessed generations) stopped, and say what they said.” Stop where they stopped when it comes to religion and refrain from whatever they refrained from. And whatever they did, you do. So, what they said regarding Allāh (سبحانه وتعالى), His Names and Attributes, regarding the Sunnah of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), then you say that. Do not come with something that we do not find the Ṣaḥābah were upon because your understanding and taqwá is not greater than theirs.

Remember that these are the Salaf who were very close to the time of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and Companions and even then, look at how staunch they were. So, what about our time today? The further we go away from the Book of Allāh and the Sunnah of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) upon the understanding of the Ṣaḥābah, the more fitan we are open to.

Upon you are the narrations of the Salaf, even if it means the people will reject you. And that is what is going to happen in our time today because we are living in confusion, to the degree that people are now confused regarding what is Sunnah and what is not Sunnah. So when

¹ He was from the Companions of the Messenger Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

² He was an individual who had great virtue, but he came after the Ṣaḥābah.

this happens, Alḥamdulillāh, we have principles we return to. May Allāh (سبحانه وتعالى) guide us to them and make us firm upon them.

Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah (رحمه الله) said that there came to Imām Mālik b. Anas (رحمه الله) a person in the Prophet’s Masjid who asked, “Where shall I assume the Iḥrām (to perform ‘Umrah)?” So he replied, “From Dhūl-Ḥulayfah. This is where the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) assumed his Iḥrām.” Then he said, “But I want to go into Iḥrām from this masjid (possibly believing there was more barakah there).” So the Imām said to him, “Do not do this.” The man again said, “I want to make the Iḥrām by the grave (of the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم).” He said to him, “Do not do this, for indeed I fear for you fitnah.” He said, “What possible fitnah can come from this (i.e., it is only a few extra miles from where the miqāt is)?” He said, “And what greater fitnah can there be when you see that you can come with some virtues that the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) missed.” And then he recited the verse,

فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرٍ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

“And let those who oppose the Messenger’s (Muḥammad) commandment (i.e., his Sunnah legal ways, orders, acts of worship, statements, etc.) (among the sects) beware, lest some Fitnah (disbelief, trials, afflictions, earthquakes, killing, overpowered by a tyrant, etc.) befall them or a painful torment be inflicted on them.” [Sūrah an-Nūr 24: 63]

Imām Aḥmad (رحمه الله) said referring to this verse, “Do you know what the fitnah is? Maybe something by way of deviation will enter in his heart and he will be destroyed.”

Turning away from the Sunnah of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and that correct understanding is something that can lead to fitan and deviate the hearts, so we must protect

ourselves from these statements of bāṭil we are hearing today that are being attributed to the Sunnah.

And finally, to show you how the Salaf were in following the Sunnah even in times of hardship, then I bring you the story of Imām Aḥmad (رحمه الله) at the time of the fitnah of Khalqul-Qurʾān when he was being pursued and they wanted to punish him because he did not agree that the Qurʾān was created.

Ibrāhām b. Hānī said, “At the time of the fitnah, Imām Aḥmad took shelter with me, and after three days he requested that he should be moved to another place.” He (Ibrāhām b. Hānī) said, “No, it is not safe for you to move away from this particular place.” He (Imām Aḥmad) insisted to find another place and as he was leaving he said, “When the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was being pursued by the musrikīn of Quraysh and he took shelter in the cave for three days, after three days he left. It is not befitting for us to follow the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) in times of ease and happiness and then we abandon his Sunnah in times of hardship.”

Even though his life was in danger he still left after three days, wanting to follow the way of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم). The salvation lies in following the Sunnah. That which rectified the earlier part of this nation will rectify the latter part. May Allāh make us from those who adhere to the way of the Salaf and die upon that.