

Al-Albani Unveiled

Who are the Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah?

MANY PEOPLE TODAY LIKE TO CLASSIFY THEMSELVES AS BELONGING TO THE SAVED SECT (FIRQAṬIN-NĀṢIYYAH) - AHL AS-SUNNAH WA'L JAMA'AH, but do these people really know which is the Saved Sect, from the many sects we have today? The following is intended to clarify some misconceptions by way of definitive proofs from the Qur'an and Sunnah, and as well as quotes from the profoundly learned Classical Scholars of Islam. Know that there is only one Saved Sect in Islam, and this is the original pristine form of Islam that has been transmitted to us by Allah Subhana Wa Ta'ala in his Qur'an, his Rasul (Peace and blessings upon him), the blessed Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) and the great scholars of Islam (Allah's mercy be upon them all) who have been following their Straight Path for more than one thousand years of Islam's history. The first question that should be raised is: ***What differentiates one sect from another sect?*** The answer to this is simple and definitive! Know that the chief characteristic that distinguishes one sect from another, lies not in the differences of opinion that its scholars have attained by making *ijtihad* from the sources of the Shari'ah (this leads to the formation of the Madhhabs), but rather the actual belief (*aqid'ah* or *i'tiqad* in Arabic) that the scholars and laity of this sect in question are clinging onto - since the founding of their respective sect.

According to the unknown author of the book *Belief and Islam* (pp. 78-9), the faith of the People of the Sunnah and Jama'ah was spread as follows:

"Nowadays, some mouths frequently use the name of 'Salafiyah'. Every Muslim should know very well that in Islam there is nothing in the name of the Madhhab of Salafiyah but there is the Madhhab of the *Salaf as-salihin* who were the Muslims of the first two Islamic centuries (i.e; the Companions, their successors and the followers of the successors) which were lauded in a Hadith sharif. The ulama of Islam who came in the third and fourth centuries are called *Khalaf as-sadiqin*. The *i'tiqad* (belief) of these honourable people is called the Madhhab of *Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah*. This is the Madhhab of Imam, tenets of faith. The Imam here by the *Sahaba al-Kiram* (may Allah be pleased with them all) and by the *Tabi'un* (Allah's mercy be upon them all) was the same. There was no claim to difference between their beliefs. Today most Muslims in the world are in the Madhhab of *Ahl as-Sunnah* (i.e; most Muslim's faith to be Sunni's). All the seventy-two heretical groups (see later for the actual Hadith and its commentary) of *bid'ah* appeared (mainly) after the second century of Islam. Founders of some of them lived earlier, but it was after the *Tabi'un* that their books were written, and that they appeared in groups and defied the *Ahl as-Sunnah*.

Rasulullah (Peace and blessings be upon him) brought the beliefs of Ahl as-Sunnah. The Sahaba al-kiram (may Allah be pleased with them all) derived these teachings of Imam from the source (the Qur'an and Sunnah). And the *Tabi'un* (successors), in their turn, learned these teachings from the Sahaba al-kiram. And from them their successors learned, thus the teachings of Ahl as-Sunnah reached us by way of transmission and *tawatur* (through many undeniable chains of transmission). These teachings cannot be explored by understanding them, for realizing that they are right and for knowing their value. All the scholars of Hadith held the beliefs of the Ahl as-Sunnah. The Imams of the four Madhhabs in deeds, too, were in this Madhhab. Also, al-Maturidi and al-Ashari (Allah's mercy be upon them), the two Imams of our Madhhab in beliefs, were in the Madhhab of the Ahl as-Sunnah. Both of these Imams promulgated this Madhhab. They always defended this Madhhab against heretics and materialists, who had been stuck in the bogs of ancient Greek philosophy. Though they were contemporaries, they lived in different places and the ways of thinking and behaving of the offenders they had met were different, so the methods of defence used and the answers given by these two great scholars of Ahl as-Sunnah were different. But this does not mean that they belonged to different Madhhabs (rather they were both of the Ahl as-Sunnah). Hundreds of thousands of profoundly learned ulama and awliya (friends of Allah) coming after these two exalted Imams studied their books and stated in consensus that they both belonged to the Madhhab of the Ahl as-Sunnah. The scholars of the Ahl as-Sunnah took the nass (Qur'an and Sunnah) with their outward meanings. That is, they gave the ayaat and Hadiths their outward meanings, and did not explain away (*ta'wil*) the nass or change these meanings unless there was a *darura* (necessity) to do so. And they never made any changes with their personal knowledge or opinions. But those who belonged to heretical groups and the *la-Madhhabi* (those who do not belong to one of the four Madhhabs) did not hesitate to change the teachings of *Iman* and *Ibadat* (worship) as they had learned from (the books of) Greek philosophers and from sham scientists, who were Islam's adversaries."

Let us now see what the definition of Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah was according to the classical scholars of this aed, Victorious sect (*Ta'ifatul-Mansoorah*) of Islam.

(1) **Shaykh al-Islam Ahmad ibn Hajar al-Haytami** (d. 974/1567; R.A.)

Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-Haytami defined the Sunni Muslims as follows in his book *Path al-jawad*:

"A *mutbadi* (innovator) is the person who does not have the faith (*aqid'ah*) conveyed unanimously by the Ahl as-Sunnah. This unanimity was transmitted by the two great Imam's Abu'l Hasan al-Ashari (d.324/936; Rahimahullah) and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d.333/944; Rahimahullah) and the scholars who followed their path." Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-Haytami also said in his book *Fatawa al-Hadithiyyah* (pg. 205): "Man of *bid'ah* means one whose beliefs are different from the Ahl as-Sunnah faith. The Ahl as-Sunnah faith, is the faith of Abu'l Hasan al-Ashari, Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and those who followed them. One who brings forth something which is not approved by Islam becomes a man of *bid'ah*."

(2) **Imam Ahmad Shihab ad-Din al Qalyubi** (d.1069/1659; R.A.)

Imam al-Qalyubi wrote on the fourth volume of his marginalia to the book *Kanz ar-raghibin*:

"One who departs from what Abu'l Hasan al-Ashari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (Allah's mercy be upon them) reported is not a Sunni. These two Imam's followed the footprints of Rasulullah (Peace be upon him) and his Sahaba (may Allah be pleased with them all)."

(3) **Imam Abdullah ibn Alawi al-Haddad** (d. 1132 AH; Rahimahullah)

Imam al-Haddad stated in *The Book of Assistance* (pg. 40):

"You must correct and protect your beliefs and conform to the pattern of the party of salvation, who are those known from among the most Islamic factions as the "People of the Sunnah and Jama'ah" (Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah). They are those who firmly adhere to the way of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him), and of his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them all).

If you look with a sound understanding into those passages relating to the sciences of faith in the Book (Qur'an), the Sunnah, and the saying of the virtuous predecessors, whether they be Companions or followers, you will know for certain that the truth is with the party called the **Ashari** (NB: the Maturidi's are also upon the truth), named after the Shaykh Abu'l Hasan al-Ashari, may Allah have mercy on him, who systematized the foundations of the creed of the people of the truth, and recorded its earliest versions, these being the beliefs with the Companions and the best among the followers agreed upon."

(4) **Imam Abdal Ghani an-Nablisi** (d.1143/1733; Rahimahullah)

Imam an-Nablisi stated in his book *al-Hadiqat an-Nadiyya* (vol. 2, pg. 103):

"Jama'ah is *rahma*, that is, the union of Muslims on truth brings Allahu ta'ala's Compassion. *Tafriqa* is *adhab*, that is, separation from the Community of Muslims brings about punishment from Allahu ta'ala. Hence, it is necessary for every Muslim to unite with those who are on the right path. He must join and believe like them even if they are only a small group. The right path is the path of as-Sahaba al-Kiram. Those who follow this path are called Ahl as-Sunnah Wa'l Jama'ah. It should not confuse us that many heretical groups appeared after the time of as-Sahaba al-Kiram. *Al-Imam al-Bayhaqi* (d. 458/1066; Rahimahullah) said, 'When Muslims go astray, you should follow the right path of those who came before them! You should not give up that path even if you are left alone on the path.' *Najm ad-Din al-Ghazzi* (d. 1061/1651; Rahimahullah) wrote: 'Ahl as-Sunnah Wa'l Jama'ah are those ulama who keep the right path of Rasulullah (Peace and blessings be upon him) and as-Sahaba al-Kiram. *As-Sawad al-Azam*, that is, the majority of Islamic scholars, have followed this right path. The *Firqaṭin-Nāṣiyyah* which was defined to be the group of salvation among the seventy three groups is this true Jama'ah.' The Qur'an al-Karim declares, *'Do not disunite!*' This ayat means *'Do not disunite in i'tiqad, in the teachings of beliefs!*' Most ulama, for example, *Abdullah ibn Masood* (may Allah be pleased with him), interpreted this ayat as above and said that it meant, *'Do not deviate from the right path by following your desires and corrupt ideas.*' This ayat does not mean that there should be no disagreement in the knowledge of *fiqh*. It forbids separation which causes discord and dissension in the knowledge of *i'tiqad* (see Imam al-Qurtubi's opinion later). The disagreement in the knowledge (*of fiqh*) derived through *ijtihad* in the field of practices (*amal*) is not a discord, because such disagreement has brought to sight the rights, the fards and the subtle teachings in *amal* and *Ibadat* (worship). As-Sahaba al-kiram (Allah be pleased with them all), too, differed from one another in those teachings that explained the daily life, but there was no disagreement among them in the knowledge of *i'tiqad*."

(5) **Allamah Sayyid Ahmad at-Tahtawi** (d. 1231/1816; Rahimahullah)

Allamah Sayyid Ahmad at-Tahtawi, a great Hanafi *fiqh* scholar of Egypt, wrote on the subject of 'Zabayih' in his *Hashiya al-Durr al-Mukhtar*:

"According to the majority of scholars of *tafsir*, the ayat, *'They parted into groups in the religion,'* referred to the people of *bid'ah* who would arise in this Ummah. In a Hadith reported by Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), Rasulullah (Peace and blessings be upon him) said to Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), *'The ayat about the partitions into groups in the religion refers to the people of bid'ah and to the followers of their nafs who would arise in this Ummah.'* Allah declared in the 153rd ayat of *Surah al-An'am*, *'This is My Straight path, so follow it! Follow not other ways, lest you be parted from His way!'* (that is, Jews, Christians, and other heretics departed from the right path; you should not part like them!). In the 103rd ayat of *Surah Al-Imran*, Allah declares, *'And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of Allah, and do not separate'* (see later for a brief commentary). Some scholars of *tafsir* said that *Allah's rope* meant *Jama'ah*, unity. The command, *'Do not separate'*, shows that it is so and the *Jama'ah* are the possessors of *fiqh* and *ilm* (knowledge). One who descends from *fiqhah* (scholars of *fiqh*) as it is so and the *Jama'ah* are the possessors of *fiqh* and *ilm* (knowledge). And those who descend from *fiqhah* have been on the right path and have held on to the Sunnah of Rasulullah (Peace and blessings be upon him) and on to the path of al-Khulafa ar-Rashideen, the Four Khaliphs (may Allah be pleased with them). As-Sawad al-Azam, that is, the majority of the Muslims, are on the path of *fiqhah*. Those who depart from their path will burn in the fire of Hell. O believers! Follow the unique group which is protected against Hell! And this group is the one that is called *Ahl as-Sunnah Wa'l Jama'ah*. For, Allah's help, protection and guidance are for the followers of this group, and His wrath and punishment are for those who dissent from this group. Today, this group of salvation comes together in the Four Madhhabs, namely the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali."

It is very important to have unity in the Ummah, and to achieve this goal of unity it is incumbent that the whole Ummah has the correct and preserved *aqidah* of the *Salaf as-salihin* (may Allah be pleased with them all); since Allah will no doubt ask us about our *aqidah* if it is not in conformity with the divine revelation and what his Messenger (Peace and blessings be upon him) transmitted to us. The way of the *Salaf as-salihin* is the way of the saved sect of the Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah. And we should all know that the Jama'ah is the sect which has the most correct and united *aqid'ah* out of all other *Jama'ah's*. To know what is the real *Jama'ah*, is one must look into the Qur'an and Hadith for evidence. If one was to look deeply in to this matter with an open and scholarly mind, one will come to the conclusion that this great *Jama'ah* is the one which is composed of the foremost scholars of Qur'anic commentary, Hadith, fiqh and other Islamic sciences; it is no doubt the *Jama'ah* which has had the greatest following throughout Islamic history in terms of scholars and laity, and this alone is the main body of Islam which represents the views of the great mass of believers (as-Sawad al-Azam) as we shall see from the Hadith evidence below. Let us now see what Allah ta'ala has said about unity and schism in the Holy Qur'an.

Qur'anic Evidence

(1) **Surah al-Imran** (3:103):

"And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of Allah and be not divided."

Imam Sayf ad-Din al-Amidi (d. 631/1233; Rahimahullah) said in his *Ihkam fi usul al-ahkam* (The profiency on the fundamentals of legal rulings, pg. 295) with regard to the above Qur'anic verse:

"Allah has forbidden separation, and disagreement with consensus (*ijma*) is separation."

Hence, if Allah has forbidden separation then surely we must all unite on the unanimously accepted *aqid'ah* of our pious predecessors.

And I have already quoted Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (Rahimahullah) as saying: *"This unanimity (in aqidah) was transmitted by the two great Imam's Abu'l Hasan al-Ashari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (Allah's mercy be upon them) and the scholars who followed their path."*

Mahmoud Ayoub wrote in *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters* (vol. II, 275-6):

'Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373; Rahimahullah) interprets the *'rope of God'* in verse 103 as *'The covenant of God,'* citing in support of this interpretation verse 112 below (in Surah al-Imran). Another view, he adds, is that *'The rope of God'* here refers to the Qur'an, as reported on the authority of Ali (Allah be pleased with him) who said that *'The Qur'an is God's strong rope and the straight way.'* He cites another Hadith, on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (Allah be pleased with him), where the Prophet (Peace be upon him) declared, *'The book of God is God's rope stretched from heaven to earth.'* Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud (Allah be pleased with him) reported -that the Messenger of God (Peace be upon him) said, *'Surely this Qur'an is God's strong rope, manifest light, and beneficial source of healing. It is protection for those who hold fast to it, and a means of salvation for those who abide by it.'*

Ibn Kathir interprets the injunction, *'and do not be divided'* to mean strict adherence to unity among Muslims. He reports on the authority of Abu Hurayrah (Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said, **'God will be pleased with three acts from you, and wrathful with three others. He wishes that you worship Him alone without associating any thing with Him; that you hold fast all together to the rope of God and be not divided; and that you show loyalty to those whom God has set in authority.'** (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, II, pp. 83-4)

Qurtubi (d. 671/1273; Rahimahullah) agrees with **Tabari** (d. 923 CE; Rahimahullah) and **Ibn Kathir** regarding the meaning of the *'rope of God'* in verse 103. He cites with approval the famous traditionist **Ibn al-Mubarak** (d. 181/797; Rahimahullah) who said, *'Surely unity is God's rope; therefore hold fast all together to its firm handle'* (see Qur'an 2:256). Qurtubi adds that *'God enjoins concord and forbids disunity, for in disunity is perdition, and in unity salvation.'*

Qurtubi offers two possible interpretations of the phrase *'And be not divided'*:

'Be not divided in your opinions as were the Jews and Christians divided in their religions' and 'Be not divided in following different false religions and purposes. Rather, be brothers in God's religion.'

As a jurist, Qurtubi observes that, **'There is no indication in this verse of the prohibition of disagreement in the branches (furu') [of fiqh] in this reality is not dissension. This is because true dissension is one wherein concord and unity become virtually impossible. As for disagreement in judgements based on personal effort (ijtihad), it is due to differences in deducing obligations (fara'id) and the minutiae of law.'** On page 279, **Imam al-Razi** (d. 606/1210; Rahimahullah) was quoted as saying in conclusion to his commentary on the above ayat:

'If a person going down into a well must hold fast to a rope in order that he may not fall in, so also the Book of God, His covenant, religion and obedience to Him, as well as unity and harmony among the people of faith are means of security for anyone who holds fast to them from falling into the bottom of Hell.'

(2) Surah al-Imran (3:105):

"And be not like those who separated and disputed after the clear proofs had come unto them: For such there is an awful doom."

(3) Surah al-Imran (3:110):

"Ye are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoy the good and forbid the evil; and ye believe in Allah"

(4) Surah Al-An'am (6:159):

"As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, thou has no part in them in the least: Their affair is with Allah: He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did."

(5) Surah Al-Mu'minin (23:52-53):

"And verily this Ummah of yours is a single Ummah and I am your Lord, so keep your duty unto Me. But they have broken their religion among them into sects, each sect rejoicing in its tenets."

(6) Surah Al-Rum (30:32):

"Those who split up their Religion, and become Sects, each sect exulting in its tenets."

(7) Surah Al-Nisa (4:115):

"He that disobeys the Apostle (Muhammad) after guidance has been made clear to him and follows a way other than that of the believers, We appoint for him that unto which he himself hath turned, and expose him unto Hell - a hapless journey's end!"

(8) Surah Al-An'am (6:133):

"This is My Straight path, so follow it. Follow not other ways, lest ye be parted from His way."

This has he ordained for you, that ye may ward off (evil)."

Hadith Evidence

(1) **Imam Abu Dawood** (Rahimahullah) has quoted the well known Hadith concerning the division of the Muslim Ummah into seventy-three sects in his *Sunan* (3/450, English ed'n):

Abu Amir al-Hawdhani said, "Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with him) stood among us and said, 'Beware! The Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) stood among us and said: 'Beware! The People of the Book before (you) were split up into 72 sects, and this community will be split up into 73, seventy-two of them will go to Hell and one of them will go to Paradise, and it is the majority group (Jama'ah).'

Another version of the above Hadith has been reported by Hafiz Ibn Kathir (Rahimahullah) in *The Signs before the day of Judgement* (pg. 14):

"Afw Ibn Malik reported that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said, 'The Jews split into 71 sects: one will enter Paradise and 70 will enter Hell. The Christians split into 71 sects: 71 will enter Hell and one will enter Paradise. By Him in whose hand is my soul, my Ummah will split into 73 sects: one will enter Paradise and 72 will enter Hell.' Someone asked, 'O Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him), who will they be?' He replied, 'The main body of the Muslims (al-Jama'ah). Afw Ibn Malik is the only one who reported this Hadith, and its isnad is acceptable.'" And in another version of this Hadith the Prophet (Peace be upon him) goes onto say that the saved sect, "...Are those who follow my and my Sahaba's path" (Tirmidhi, vol 2, pg. 89)

Shaykh al-Islam Ahmad al-Sirhindi (d. 1034/1624; Rahimahullah) who is regarded by many people in the Indian sub-continent as a great renovator of the Tenth Islamic Century (*Mujaddid alf Thani*) who wrote in his *Maktabat* (Vol. 3, Letter 38):

"It was declared in a Hadith that this Ummah would part into 73 groups, 72 of which would go to Hell. This Hadith informs us that the 72 groups will be tormented in the Fire of Hell. It does not inform us that they will remain in torment eternally. Remaining in the torment of Hell Fire eternally is for those who do not have Iman. That is, it is for disbelievers. The 72 groups, on account of their being split up, will go to Hell and will burn as much as the corruptness of their beliefs. One group, the 73rd, will be saved from Hell Fire because their belief is not corrupt. If among the members of this one group there are those who committed evil deeds and if these evil deeds of theirs have not been forgiven through repentance or intercession, it is possible that these, too, will burn in Hell as much as their sins. All of those who are in the 72 groups will go to Hell. But none of them will remain in Hell eternally. Not all of those who are in this one group will go to Hell. Of these only those who have committed evil deeds will go to Hell. The 72 reported groups of *bid'ah* ah, which will go to Hell, should not be called disbelievers, because they are Ahl al-Qibla (people of the Qibla in prayer). But, of these, the ones who disbelieve those facts in the Deen that are indispensably required to be believed, as well as those who deny the rules of the Shari'ah which every Muslim has heard and knows, become disbelievers."

In another letter (vol. 1, letter 80) he said:

"There is no doubt whatsoever that the sect that made conforming to the conduct of the Prophet's Companions (may Allah be pleased with them all) necessary, that alone is the Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jama'ah."

Shaykh Abdal Qadir al-Jilani (d. 561/1166; Rahimahullah) stated in his commentary to the above Hadith in *Ghunyat at-Talibin* (pg. 90),

"The Believer should adapt himself to the Sunnah and to the Jama'ah. The Sunnah is the way shown by Rasulullah (Peace be upon him). The Jama'ah is composed of the things done unanimously by the Sahaba al-Kiram who lived in the time of the four caliphs called *Khulafa' ar-Rashidin* (and others in their path). A Muslim must prevent the multiplication of the men of *bid'ah* and keep away from them, and should not greet them (as given in many Hadith on this issue). Ahmad ibn Hanbal (Rahimahullah), the Imam of our Madhhab, said that greeting a man of *bid'ah* meant loving him since it had been declared in a Hadith, *'Disseminate (your) greeting (salaam)! Love one another in this way!'* He also said, (pg. 143): *"The title, Ahl as-Sunnah, which the innovators have expressed for themselves is not appropriate for them."*

Although Ibn Taymiyya was accused of holding certain corrupt points in his *aqid'ah* which, led to so many scholars to denounce him for his heresy, he never the less hit the right point when he described those who are the real Sunnis in his *Aqeedat-il-Wastuyyah* (pg. 154):

" Their creed is the religion of Islam which was sent to be guided by Allah through the Prophet (Peace be upon him). But the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said, 'My Ummah will get divided into 73 sects and each one will go to Hell save one and that one is the Jama'ah.' Also in one Hadith he said, 'They are those people who will follow this path which I and my Sahaba follow today.' Therefore they have caught hold of Islam unalloyed from every adulteration and these are the people of Ahl as-Sunnah Wa'l Jama'ah. This group includes the truthful, the martyrs and the virtuous; it includes the minarets of guidance, lamps in the darkness and owners of such superiorities and virtues who have been already mentioned. It includes the saints and also those Imams on whose guidance Muslims are unanimous. It is this successful group about which the Prophet (Peace be upon him) has said: 'One group from my Ummah will always remain dominant with truth; the opponents will never be able to harm its members or afflict them upto the Doomsday.'"

(2) **Imam Muslim** (Rahimahullah) has collected a number of variant Hadith on the saved sect. He has related a longer version of the last Hadith quoted above:

"Abul Rahman Ibn Shamasah al-Mahri said: 'I was in the company of Maslama bin Mukhlad and Abdullah ibn Amir ibn al-A'as (may Allah be pleased with them)'. Abdullah said, *'The Hour shall come only when the worst type of people are left on the earth. They will be worse than the people of pre-Islamic days. They will get what ever they ask of Allah.'* While we were sitting Uqba ibn Amir, and Maslama said to him, 'Uqba, listen to what Abdullah says.' Uqba said, 'He knows, so far as I am concerned, I heard the Prophet (Peace be upon him) say: *A group of people from my Ummah will continue to fight in obedience to the Command of Allah, remaining dominant over their enemies. Those who will oppose them shall not do them any harm. They will remain in this condition until the Hour over takes them.'* (At this) Abdullah said, 'Yes. Then Allah will raise a wind which will be fragrant like musk and whose touch will be like the touch of silk; (but) it will cause the death of all (faithful) persons, not leaving behind a single person with an iota of faith in his heart. Then only the worst of men will remain to be overwhelmed by the Hour.'" (*Sahih Muslim*, 3/4721, English ed'n, see also *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 9/414, English ed'n)

Imam Nawawi (d. 676/1277; Rahimahullah) said in his *Sharh Muslim* (vol. 2, pg. 143):

"The group of people (mentioned in the above Hadith) consists of scholars, jurists, authorities on Hadith, those who enjoy Good (Maroof) and forbid Evil (Munkar) and all such persons who do good deeds. Such righteous persons may be found spread all over the world."

Imam al-Tirmidhi (Rahimahullah) said:

"The explanation of al-Jama'ah according to the people of knowledge: They are the people of fiqh, knowledge and Hadith." (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, 4/2167; Ahmad Shakir ed'n)

Imam Bukhari (Rahimahullah) stated in his *Sahih* (vol. 9, chapter. 10, English ed'n),

"The statement of the Prophet (Peace be upon him): 'A group of my followers will remain victorious in their struggle in the cause of the Truth.' Those are the religious(ly) learned men (Ahl ul-ilm)."

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (Rahimahullah) said about this group:

"It is not the people of Hadith, then I do not know who they may be." (*Sahih Muslim Sharif-Mukhtasar Sharh Nawawu*, vol. 5, pg. 183, W. Zaman)

Qadi Iyad (Rahimahullah) said in *ash-Shifa* (pg. 188):

"In a Hadith from Abu Umama (Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said, *'A group of my community will remain constant to the truth, conquering their enemy until the command of Allah comes to them while they are still in that condition.'* He was asked, *'Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him), where are they?'* He replied, *'In Jerusalem.'*"

(3) **Imam Muslim** (Rahimahullah) has related in his *Sahih* (3/4553) under the chapter heading **Instruction to stick to the main body of the Muslims in the time of the trials and warning against those inviting people to disbelief**, a Hadith on the authority of Hudhaifa ibn al-Yaman (Allah be pleased with him), who said:

"People used to ask the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) about the good times, but I used to ask him about (the) bad times fearing lest they overtake me. I said, 'Messenger of Allah, we were in the midst of ignorance and evil, and then God brought us this good (time through Islam). Is there any bad time after this good one?' He said, 'Yes. I asked, 'Will there be a good time again after that bad time?' He said, 'Yes, but therein will be a hidden evil.' I asked, 'What will be the evil hidden therein?' He said, 'That time will witness the rise of) the people who will adopt ways other than mine and seek guidance other than mine. You think you good points as well as bad points.' I asked, 'Will there be a bad time after this good one?' He said, 'Yes. (A time will come) when there will be people standing and inviting at the gates of Hell. Whoso responds to their call, they will throw them into the fire.' I said, 'Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him), describe them for us.' He said, 'All right. They will be a people having the same complexion as ours and speaking our language.' I said, 'Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him), what do you suggest if I happen to live in their time?' He said, 'You should stick to the main body of the Muslims and their leader.' I said, 'If they have no (such thing as) the main body of the Muslims and have no leader?' He said, 'Separate yourself from all these factions, though you may have to eat the roots of trees until death comes to you and you are in this state.'"

(NB: It is not likely that there will be an absence of a Jama'ah, since I have already quoted the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: **'A group of people from my Ummah will continue to fight in obedience to the command of Allah, remaining dominant over their enemies. Those who will oppose them shall not do them any harm. They will remain in this condition until the Hour over-takes them.'**)

(4) **Abu Hurayra** (Allah be pleased with him) reported the Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) as saying:

"Who (ever) defected from the obedience (to the Amir) and separated from the main body of the Muslims - then he died in that state - would die the death of one belonging to the days of Jahiliyya (pre-Islamic ignorance). And he who is killed under the banner of a man who is blind (to the cause for which he is fighting), and who gets flared up with family pride and fights for his rights - is not from my Ummah, and whoso from my followers attacks my followers (indiscriminately) killing the righteous and the wicked of them, sparing not (even) those staunch in faith and fulfilling not his obligation towards them who have been given a pledge (of security), is not from me." (*Sahih Muslim*, 3/4557 & 4555; English ed'n)

Imam al-Bayhaqi (d. 458/1066; Rahimahullah) stated in his: *The Seventy-Seven Branches of Faith* (pg. 42-3), under the fifth branch of faith (*50 - Holding firmly to the position of the majority*): "God Most High has said: *Hold fast, all together, to the rope of God, and do not be disunited.* [3:103]. Muslim (Rahimahullah) relates on the authority of Abu Hurayra (Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said, *'Whoever is disobedient, and departs from the majority, and then dies, has died in a state of Jahiliyya.'* He also relates the following Hadith on the authority of Ibn Shurayh (Allah be pleased with him): *'After I am gone, there will come days of corruption and turmoil. When you see people damaging the unity of the Community of Muhammad (Peace be upon him), you must fight them, whoever they may happen to be.'*

Abdal Hakim Murad (the translator of the above book) said in the footnote to the fiftieth branch of faith: "Orthodoxy in Islam is defined as the doctrine of ahl al-sunna wa'ljama'a, the people of the Sunna and the Community. To know whether a doctrine or practice is orthodox or heretical, the Muslim is required to find out whether it is recognised by the majority of Muslim scholars (see later for Imam al-Munawi's commentary). Thus even without looking into their theology, he will know that sects such as the Isma'ili, the Khariji, the Wahhabi's, the Twelver Shi'a and others (not to mention anti-Islamic groupings such as the Ahmadiyya and the Bahais) are to be repudiated."

(5) **Ibn Abbas** (Allah be pleased with him) reported the Prophet (Peace be upon him) as saying:

"One who followed in his Amir (the ruler of the true Islamic state; which is absent today) something which he disliked should hold his patience, for one who separated from the main body of the Muslims even to the extent of a handspan and then he died,