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WHO ARE THE

# SALAFIS

AND WHAT DO THEY WANT?

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**"SALAFISM, THE FASTEST-GROWING ISLAMIC MOVEMENT  
IN EUROPE..." [SOEREN KERN, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, 2015]**

In the name of Allāh, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

The Arabic word 'salaf' literally means: a precedent i.e. action(s) or person(s) passed before us. This meaning is found in the Qur'ān and Sunnah: **"When they angered Us, We took retribution from them and drowned them. And We made them a salaf (a precedent) and an example..." [43: 55] "Allāh has pardoned whatever [sins] have 'salaf' (i.e. passed)." [05:95]**

In fact, the Prophet ﷺ described himself as 'salaf;' he said to his daughter Fātimah, **"I can feel my death is near, so fear Allāh and be patient; how good a salaf (i.e. precedent) I am for you."** [Saheeh Muslim]

## **SALAF, SALAFI & SALAFIYYAH**

'Salaf' relates to the early scholars of Islām; more specifically, the first three pious generations:

- Sahābah (companions). The last Sahābi died: 102h.
- Tābi'īn (followers of the Sahābah). The last Tābi'ī died: 180h.
- Atbā' At-Tābi'īn (followers of the Tābi'īn). The last one died: 220h.

'Salafi' simply means a person who ascribes to the way of the Salaf; understanding and implementing the Qur'ān and Hadīth according to what they agreed upon. It is an ascription – like 'Hanafi' is an ascription to the Madhhab of Imām Abu Hanīfah, 'Yemeni' is an ascription to Yemen and 'Badri' is an ascription for those companions who fought in the battle of Badr.

'Salafiyyah' is the call or Manhaj (methodology) of the Salaf. It is based on principles - deduced from the Qur'ān and Sunnah - that were unanimously agreed upon by them.

Ibn 'Uthaymīn [d: 1421h]: "The meaning of 'Manhaj of the Salaf As-Sālih' is following their path in belief, worship and interacting with others, it is a comprehensive term... The sign of a person following the 'Manhaj of the Salaf' is in assuming their manners and living according to their actions in religious and worldly matters..."<sup>(1)</sup>

## **WHY EVERY MUSLIM MUST BE A SALAFI**

We cannot correctly understand and implement the Qur'ān and Hadīth without knowing how the Salaf understood them. For this reason, every Muslim must be a Salafi i.e.

follow the way and understanding of the Sahābah and ensuing generations who followed their methodology.

Every sect - guided or deviated – can cite an Āyah or Hadīth to 'prove' their beliefs. The deviation however, is in the understanding. Therefore, the only way to unify our understanding of the evidences – and thereby save ourselves from deviation - is by limiting it to the understanding and implementation of the most pious Muslims - the Salaf.

## **PRACTICAL EXAMPLE TO SHOW THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOWING THE WAY OF THE SALAF**

- Salafi:** "What evidence do you have for celebrating the Mawlid?"
- Sect-follower:** "I can quote an Āyah to prove this: **'Say, "In the bounty of Allāh and His mercy" - in that let them rejoice'. [10:58]** The Prophet is 'His mercy,' so we are rejoicing his coming as Allāh ordered us in the above Āyah."
- Salafi:** "Did the Sahābah and Salaf understand this Āyah the way you have done? Did they implement this Āyah by celebrating the Mawlid?"
- Sect-follower:** "No they did not."
- Salafi:** "In that case, either they were ignorant about its meaning and you are more knowledgeable than them, or you have wrongly understood and implemented this Āyah."
- Sect-follower:** [unable to reply]
- Salafi:** "Take a principle from me: 'If there was any goodness in this action, the Salaf would have preceded us in doing it'."

## **DID ALLĀH AND HIS MESSENGER COMMAND US TO FOLLOW THE SALAF?**

There are many evidences<sup>(2)</sup> which obligate this upon us, including: **"Whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows a path different to the path of the believers - We will turn him [away to the path] he has taken..." [04:115]**

In this Āyah, we are forbidden from 'opposing the Messenger' as well as the 'way of the believers' i.e. the Sahābah and those who came after them.

The Prophet ﷺ said, describing the saved sect: **"They are those who are upon what I and my companions are upon today."** [At-Tirmidhī] In this Hadeeth, following the 'way of the companions' – not only the Sunnah – is a sign of the saved, guided sect.

He also specified three generations we should follow: **"The best people are those of my generation (i.e. Sahābah), then those who come after them (i.e. Tābi'īn), then those who come after them (i.e. Atbā' At-Tābi'īn)..."** [Al-Bukhārī]

## WHO FOUNDED THE SALAFI MOVEMENT?

Unlike other sects and groups, a distinction of the Salafi call is that there is no founder or leader; it does not go back to any country, school or organisation. For this reason, a Salafi is not stubborn upon any view or actions – unless it is in line with the correct understanding of Islām. In essence, the founder of the Salafi call was the Prophet ﷺ as he obligated following their way upon us, and the Sahābah were the 1st generation of the Salaf.

Absolute truth is found only in the Qur'ān and Sunnah; absolute authority is for Allāh and His Messenger ﷺ alone. The statements and actions of every other person are judged according to the above criteria.

Imām Mālik [d: 179h] said, whilst pointing to the grave of the Prophet ﷺ: "The statements of every person can be accepted or rejected - except the inhabitant of this grave." [Jāmi' Bayān Al-'Ilm]

## MUST WE CALL OURSELVES SALAFI?

We must follow the way of the Salaf and call ourselves Muslims, this is the name Allāh gave us: **"Allāh named you Muslims, from before and in this [revelation]."** [22:78]

However, it is permitted to use the name 'Salafi' or 'Sunni' as a way of explaining the methodology we follow - especially when others ascribe to other movements such as Brailwī, Deobandī, Qādri, Ash'arī etc...

Imām Ibn Taymiyyah [d: 728h]: "There is no blame upon the one who manifests the way of the Salaf and ascribes and affiliates himself to it. This must be accepted from him by consensus, because the way of the Salaf is nothing except the truth." [Majmū' al-Fatāwa, 4/149]

## SOME TENETS OF THE SALAFI CALL

- To accept and implement the Qur'ān and Sunnah above everything else.
- Attaching importance to Tawhīd and the rectification of 'Aqīdah; Da'wah revolves around it.
- Affirming the names and attributes of Allāh without interpreting them away from their apparent meanings without evidence.
- Exalting the Sahābah and following their narrations.
- The Shari'ah is applicable in every time and place. It is the absolute law and nothing is better than it.
- Salāh is valid in every Masjid, behind every Imām whether he is a righteous person of the Sunnah or a sinning innovator, as long as his innovation is not Kufr.
- Imān consists of beliefs, statements and actions, it increases and decreases.
- The hatred and rejection of every Bid'ah (religious innovation), refuting the doubts and warning against the people of innovation.
- Giving precedence to Islāmic narrations and evidences over logic, intellectual and philosophical reasoning.
- Respecting knowledge and its people; respecting the Madhhab of Islam and the great Imams such as Imam Abu Hanīfah, Mālik, Shāfi'ī and Ahmad. At the same time, rejecting blind-following when it contradicts clear evidences.
- Hearing and obeying the authority of the Muslim rulers in obedience to Allāh and not rebelling against them.
- The rejection of indiscriminate Takfīr<sup>(3)</sup>, Tabdī'<sup>(4)</sup> and Tafsīq<sup>(5)</sup>.
- Focusing on the unity of the Muslims and the rejection of all sects, partisanship and groups.
- Affirming the decree of Allāh, and that people also have a choice to do good or evil.
- Calling to noble manners and Islāmic etiquette.

## CLARIFYING MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SALAFIYYAH

- The basis of societal rectification is not by way of politics or violence, rather through Tawhīd and developing Taqwa.
- Politics is a part of Islām i.e. it has laws for governance, rights of the rulers, punishments etc but this does not mean that we use Islām to further political careers and movements.

- Jihād is not individual acts of revenge, rather it is legislated in an organised manner, with a Muslim ruler, to defend a Muslim country from oppression. Neither is every non-Muslim at war with Muslims.
- All acts of Ghuluww (extremism and exaggeration) are forbidden.
- Salafiyyah is rejecting innovations but this does not necessitate insults, unnecessary harshness and inventing sub-sects to further divide the people. Not every sinner or person of innovation is boycotted or treated with harshness.
- Salafiyyah is not uniting the Muslims by accepting sects and innovated beliefs; rather it is unity through rejecting deviant beliefs and clarifying doubts.
- Not every difference of view is a basis for animosity, rather the scholars differentiate between issues of Ijtihād where some differing is acceptable, and clear actions of Bid'ah and deviation.
- Salafiyyah is not a movement that has a restricted number of scholars or a founder. It is a way of life encompassing belief, manners and interactions. This is what alliances are based upon, and not merely upon a person's position with regards to a group of individuals.

## END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>. <http://www.madeenah.com/what-is-meant-by-the-term-manhaj>.
- <sup>2</sup>. Refer to [www.madeenah.com/evidences-for-following-the-way-of-the-salaf](http://www.madeenah.com/evidences-for-following-the-way-of-the-salaf) for a comprehensive list of evidences.
- <sup>3</sup>. Takfīr: Making judgements of Kufr upon Muslims.
- <sup>4</sup>. Tabdīl': Making judgements of Bid'ah upon the people of the Sunnah.
- <sup>5</sup>. Tafsīq: Making judgements of Fisq upon the people of piety.

## BENEFICIAL WEBSITES

[www.Madeenah.com](http://www.Madeenah.com)

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