

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

THE SEVENTY-THREE SECTS

Are the Majority of Muslims Innovators?

‘My nation will split-up into seventy-three sects, all of them in the Fire save one: that which I and my Companions are upon.’ [Hadith]



The Qur’an goes to great lengths to stress the importance, necessity and obligation of comprehensive Muslim unity. For instance, it says: *And hold fast, altogether, to the Rope of Allah and be not divided.* (3:102) It also insists: *And be not of the idolaters. Those who split up their religion and become sects, each party rejoicing in what it has.* (30:31-2) Elsewhere:

And dispute not with one another lest you lose heart and your strength departs. (8:46) It further ordains: *The believers are but brothers. Therefore make peace between your brethren.* (49:10)

Given such verses, and given the numerous exhortations in the Prophet's *Sunnab*, peace be upon him, about the obligation of Muslims unity (and the virtues, rank and honour of the Muslim nation or *ummab*), the hadiths that speak about the *ummab* splitting into seventy-odd sects, all save one destined for Hell, seem to contradict the spirit of what has just preceded. It is understandable, then, why some scholars deemed such hadiths to be 'problematic', struggling to fit it into the overall ethos of excellence that this *ummab* is described with in the sacred texts. For what merit is there in a nation so riddled with divisions and schism and where, seemingly, the great bulk of its followers are heading for the Fire?

The paper is divided into ten sections so as to aid the flow of theology and thought: the *ummab*'s virtues; the actual hadiths; their authenticities; the meaning of splitting-up; are most Muslims innovators?; confusion about the *jamā'ab*; mark of the saved sect; the *salaf* and *salafis*; salafism today; and lastly, the saved-sect syndrome.

I. THE UMMAH'S MERITS AND VIRTUES

The Qur'an states that the Muslim *ummab* - that is to say, those who have responded to the call of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and have faith (*īmān*) in what he was sent with - is the best of all nations: *You are the best nation ever raised for mankind; you enjoin the good, forbid the evil and believe in Allah.* (3:110)

The same notion can be heard reverberating in the words of the Prophet, peace be upon him, such as when he said: 'You are the last of seventy-nations; you are the best of them and the most honoured of them in the sight of Allah.'¹

One hadith informs us: 'We are the last, but will be the first on the Day of Judgement; for we shall be the first to enter Paradise.'²

Another hadith offers this glad-tiding: 'The people of Paradise comprise of one hundred and twenty ranks; eighty of them are from this *ummah*, and forty from the other nations.'³ Thus, more than half the inhabitants of the blissful Garden - two-thirds, in fact - are from this blessed nation. Ibn Kathīr, the hadith master, historian and Shāfi'ī exegetist, wrote:

This *ummah* only achieved such pre-eminence due to its Prophet Muhammad, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him. For he is the noblest of all Allah's creation and the most honoured of His Messengers.⁴

Something of the size and magnitude of this *ummah* can be gauged by the following hadith. Ibn 'Abbās relates that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Nations were presented to me and I saw a prophet with one or two followers; another prophet who had a few followers; and yet another with no followers. I then saw a huge multitude of people filling the horizon, and hoped that this was my nation. But it was said to me that this is Moses and his people. I was then told to look, and I saw another great multitude of people filling the horizon. I was told to look here, and here as well, and [again] I saw huge multitudes who filled the horizon. It was then said to me: These are your nation. Along with them, seventy-thousand will enter Paradise without reckoning or punishment.'⁵

Zooming in with the theologian's lens, we pick-up a further detail. For in one addition to this hadith the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'I asked my Lord for increase, so He increased it. Thus with every thousand there would be another seventy-thousand.'⁶ Hence the numbers that will enter Paradise from this *ummah*, without reckoning, is enormous (a literal take on this hadith puts the number at $70 \times 70,000 = 4,900,000$); whilst those

entering Paradise upon their deeds being reckoned and weighed-up is far greater still.

II. HADITHS ON THE UMMAH SPLITTING-UP

There are a number of hadiths in the hadith canons and other collections related about the splitting-up or *iftirāq* of the *ummah*. Among them:

(i) Abu Hurayrah relates that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: ‘The Jews split-up into seventy-one or seventy-two sects. The Christians split-up into seventy-one or seventy-two sects. And my *ummah* shall split-up into seventy-three sects.’⁷

(ii) Mu‘āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān relates that the Prophet, peace be upon him, stood up among us, saying: ‘Indeed those who came before you from the People of the Book split-up into seventy-two sects; and indeed this nation will split-up into seventy-three sects, seventy-two are in the Fire and one in Paradise: they are the Main Body (*al-jamā‘ah*).’⁸

(iii) ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr relates that Allah’s Messenger, peace be upon him, said: ‘Verily, the Children of Israel split-up into seventy-two sects; and my *ummah* will split-up into seventy-three sects, all of them are in the Fire save one.’ They asked: Who are they, O Allah’s Messenger? He said: ‘That which I and my Companions are upon (*mā anā ‘alayhi wa aṣḥābī*).’⁹

(iv) Abu Umāmah relates that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: ‘The Jews divided into seventy-one sects; seventy in the Fire, one in Paradise. The Christians divided into seventy-two sects, seventy-one in the Fire; one in Paradise. This *ummah* will divide into seventy-three sects; seventy-two in the Fire, one in Paradise.’ They asked: Describe them for us. He replied: ‘The Great Majority (*al-sawād al-a‘ẓam*).’¹⁰

Without doubt, “the Main Body” is “the Great Majority” which is the same as “that which I and my Companions are upon.”¹¹

III. DISCUSSION OF AUTHENTICITY

While it is true that some of the aforementioned hadiths, and others beside them, are not free of defects in their chains of transmission, or *isnāds*, they collectively reinforce each other to yield a final grading of sound (*ḥasan*) or authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) - as per many a hadith scholar and verificationist. The chains of others, however, are deemed authentic in and of themselves. So let us now turn to the verdicts of authenticity which hadith scholars have proffered about the *iftirāq* hadiths:

(i) After recording the first hadith, al-Tirmidhī (whose *Sunan* is one of the six hadith anthologies to be canonized in Sunni Islam) declares:

The hadith of Abu Hurayrah is a *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ* hadith.¹²

(ii) Al-Ḥākim offers this gloss to the same hadith:

These chains stand as a proof for the authenticity of this hadith.¹³

(iii) On being asked about the *iftirāq* hadiths and what the belief of each sect is, Ibn Taymiyyah began his response by declaring:

The hadith is authentic and widely-accepted (*ṣaḥīḥ maṣbūḥ*) in the *Sunan* and *Musnad* collections, like the *Sunan* of Abu Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, and others.¹⁴

(iv) Ibn Kathīr mentions something similar:

For they are the Saved Sect (*al-firqat al-nājiyyah*), as occurs in the hadith related in the *Musnad* and *Sunan* collections via routes of transmission that strengthen one another.¹⁵

(v) Al-Irāqī stated in his hadith verification to Imam al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm al-Dīn*:

Recorded by al-Tirmidhī, from the hadith of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr, grading it *ḥasan* that: ‘My *ummah* will split-up into seventy-three sects, all of them in the Fire save one.’ They asked: Who are they, O Allah’s Messenger? He said: ‘That which I and my Companions are upon.’ Abu Dāwūd, via the hadith of Mu‘āwiyah; and also Ibn Mājah, by way of the hadith of Anas and Awf b. Mālik that: ‘They are the Main Body.’ And their chains are excellent.¹⁶

(vi) In more recent times, al-Albānī has done a thorough job documenting, sourcing and meticulously analyzing the hadiths and their various chains and showing how they are authentic.¹⁷ Further, he said about the hadith of Abu Umāmah, the fourth hadith, that it is *ḥasan*.¹⁸

(vii) Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūṭ said that the hadith of Abu Hurayrah has a *ḥasan* chain; the same with the hadith of Mu‘āwiyah. As for the hadith related by ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr, the third hadith, he states that,

its chain contains ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ziyād al-Ifriqī, who is weak. Nonetheless, it is strengthened by what comes before it and after it.¹⁹

IV. UNDERSTANDING THE SPLITTING-UP

There is a scholarly view which holds that the seventy-two sects refer to the non-Muslim nations to whom the call of Islam must be given (*ummat al-da‘wab* is the technical term), while the saved-sect refers to the nation or community who have responded to the call of Islam (*ummat al-ijābab*); in other words, the Muslims:

It has been said that what is meant by *ummah* in this hadith is the *ummat al-da‘wab*, which includes all those to whom the Prophet, peace be upon him, was sent; those who believe and those who do not. What is intended by the one [saved sect] is the *ummat al-ijābab* - specifically those who have truly believed in the Prophet,

peace be upon him, and died upon such a belief. This is the sect saved from the Fire.²⁰

Despite the obvious anomaly of including the Jews and Christians among “my *ummah*,” after telling us they are distinct nations, a more majoritarian view has it that “my *ummah*” refers specifically to the Muslim nation. The committee of senior scholars of Saudi Arabia, whose words were just cited above, stated at the onset of the same fatwa:

What is intended by the term *ummah* in this hadith, is the *ummat al-ijābah* [the Muslims] who will divide into seventy-three sects; seventy-two of them being deviant innovators whose innovations do not expel them from the fold of Islam. So they will be punished for their innovation and heresy, except those whom Allah forgives and pardons, but will eventually enter Paradise. Now as to the one Saved-Sect, it is *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah*: those who follow the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and cling to what he and his Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, were upon. The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said of them: ‘There will not cease to be a faction from my *ummah* established manifestly on the truth, not being harmed by those who oppose them, until Allah’s order comes.’²¹ As for those whose innovations expel them from the fold of Islam, they are part of the *ummat al-da‘wab* [disbelievers] who shall be in Hell for eternity. This, then, is the preferred view.²²

Imam al-Bayhaqī also clarifies that the seventy-two sects refer to Muslims that have deviated from the path of orthodoxy:

The report is taken to mean that they will be punished in the Fire for a while, not for eternity. The argument against their excommunication (*takfiribim*) is taken from the Prophet’s words, peace be upon him, ‘My *ummah* will split-up.’ So he made them all part of his *ummah*, despite their splitting.²³

Al-Khaṭṭābī explained:

His words: “my *ummah* will split-up into seventy-three sects,” in it is a clear indication that these sects are not beyond the pale of the religion; for the Prophet, peace be upon him, included them all as part of the *ummah*.²⁴

V. ARE THE MAJORITY OF MUSLIMS DEVIANT?

Though it is consoling to learn that the seventy-two sects are Muslims, are we to then lament over the seemingly obvious implication that the great majority of Muslims are misguided, deviant innovators? If, on the face of it, the affair looks bleak, the reality is very different. In a delightful synopsis to the vexing question, Ibn Taymiyyah says:

The saved-sect is described as being *abl al-sunnab wa'l-jamā'ab*. They are the overwhelming multitude and the great majority (*al-jumbūr al-akbar wa'l-sawād al-a'zam*). The remaining sects are followers of aberrant opinions, schism, innovations and [deviant] desires. None even comes near to the number of the saved sect, let alone its calibre. Rather, each such sect is extremely small (*bal qad takūnu l-firqatu minbā fi gbāyati l-qillab*).²⁵

Thus, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, the total number of innovators among the *ummah* is incredibly small in comparison to the numbers of the saved sect. Ṣāliḥ al-Maqbalī, a Yemeni scholar who died at the beginning of the twelfth Islamic century, wrote:

The difficulty lies in his words: “all of them are in the Fire, except one.” For it is known that they [Muslims] are the best nation, and that it is hoped that they will constitute half the inhabitants of the Garden, along with them being like a white hair on a black ox or a black hair on a white ox - as elucidated in certain hadiths. Some people have suggested this portion [of the hadith] is weak, saying

that it is an addition which isn't confirmed [in authenticity]. Others have interpreted it saying the saved sect are the righteous ones of each sect; which is an invalid statement.²⁶

He then says:

In summary: the people consist of the masses (*'āmmab*) and the elite (*kbāṣṣab*). As for the masses, the later generations are like the earlier ones. Thus women, slaves, shepherds, farmers, merchants, and their likes, are of those who have nothing at all to do with the elite. There is no doubt at all that the last of them are free of being innovators, just as the first of them are free.²⁷

He went on to divide up the elite into four groups: (i) The true innovators; those who originate an innovation and do their utmost to aid and spread it. (ii) Those who follow such innovators, aiding them and adding to their numbers via teaching and writing. However, their aim might have been to follow the truth, but the reality of the innovation was unclear to them. (iii) Those poor in knowledge and research who, being content with what was handed down to them of useful and useless knowledge, have fallen into innovations. (iv) The true scholars, rightly-guided and rightly guiding. He then declares:

The first group of the elite are definitely innovators (*mubtadi'ab*); the second, possibly innovators; the third judged as though they are innovators ... From the elite is a fourth group, many from the earlier generations and fewer from the later ones, who accept the Book and the *Sunnab* and follow it ... These are the true Sunnis and the saved-sect, to whom the masses turn. [This group further includes] whoever your Lord wills from the aforementioned three groups of the elite, according to the extent of their knowledge of the innovation and their intention.²⁸

Shaykh al-Maqbali winds up the discussion with these words:

Therefore if you understand all that we have mentioned, then the troubling question - the destruction of most of this *ummah* - need not be asked. For the numerical majority, past and present, are the masses; and likewise the elite of earlier generations; and possibly the middle two groups. Similarly, those from the first group whose innovation was unclear to them, then God's mercy will save them from being innovators according to the requital of the Afterlife. For God's mercy abounds for each Muslim.

However, we have been discussing the implications of the hadith and who it refers to, and that the individuals from the innovated sects, even if the sects are many, then their total number does not amount to even a thousandth part of all the Muslims. So consider this carefully and you will be safe from believing that this hadith is at variance with all those hadiths which speak about the virtues of this *ummah* of many mercies.²⁹

Al-Maqbalī's thesis delighted Shaykh al-Albānī, who went on to reproduce much of it in his *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah*.³⁰

VI. THE JAMA'AH, THE TRUTH, THE CONFUSION

Despite the above, some people are struck with insufferable anxiety when told that the saved-sect encompasses the greater part of the *ummah*. Their mental block, or some of it, stems from failing to understand the words of certain scholars in their explanation of who the *jamā'ah* is. For instance, take the words of the venerable Companion, 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ūd:

The *jamā'ah* are the adherents to the truth, even if you are alone (*al-jamā'ah abl al-baqq wa in kunta waḥdaka*).³¹

Or the statement of Ishāq b. Rāhawayh:

If you were to ask the ignorant about the Great Majority (*al-sawād al-a'zam*) they would reply: 'the majority of people'. They do not

know that the *jamā'ab* is the scholar who adheres to the narration of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his path. So whoever is with him and follows him, is the *jamā'ab*.³²

Some imagine that *salaf*-reports of this nature bespeak of the saved-sect being a small clique of people with all other Muslims being deviant and misguided. But as the above discussion has shown, this is not so. So how are we to understand such words? Reflecting over another explanation of the *jamā'ab*, this time by Imam al-Tirmidhī, may help to shed further light on the matter:

The explanation of the *jamā'ab* according to the scholars is that they are the people of jurisprudence, knowledge and hadith (*bum abl al-fiqh wa'l-'ilm wa'l-ḥadīth*). I heard al-Jārūd b. Mu'ādh say; I heard 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn saying; I asked 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak who the *jamā'ab* was, and he replied: Abu Bakr and 'Umar. It was said to him that Abu Bakr and 'Umar have passed away, he said: so-and-so and so-and so. He was told that they too have passed away. So 'Abd Allah b. al-Mubārak said: Abu Ḥamzah al-Sukkari is the *jamā'ab*.³³

Of course, when Ibn al-Mubarak responded by saying that Abu Bakr and 'Umar were the *jamā'ab* in their time, he wasn't negating right-guidance from the rest of the Companions. Likewise, when he pointed to the pious Khurasānī scholar Abu Ḥamza al-Sukkari as being the *jamā'ab*, he wasn't denying the orthodox credentials of other scholars of the same era - those such as Sufyān al-Thawrī, al-Awzā'ī, Mālik, Abu Ḥanīfah or Ibn 'Uyaynah. Such a reading would beggar belief! Instead, what this narration brings to the fore is the pivotal role of the scholars in illuminating right-guidance and orthodoxy. The masses, by virtue of them following the scholars, are part of the *jamā'ab*; not separate from it. In this sense the *jamā'ab* is *al-sawād al-a'zam* - the Great Majority. It is the scholars, though, who are the actual leaders of the *jamā'ab*. Mentioning that an elephant is a huge beast with

big floppy ears, or long trunk, is not to deny the less significant aspects of the creature. Similarly, explaining that the scholars are the *jamā'ab* is to showcase its most essential feature: it is not to deny the 'insignificant' other. Furthermore, mentioning a specific scholar by name as being the *jamā'ab* is simply a way of pointing out that such scholars are those who best exemplify the *jamā'ab* in their respective times or areas and are most worthy of being emulated. Other scholars also epitomize the *jamā'ab*, but perhaps not quite to the same degree.

Another point borne out by such *salaf*-reports is that truths, religious truths, are not determined by sheer numbers - the masses, or majority of people. For although social and administrative affairs may be settled by a popular vote, religious truths cannot. Deciding piety from iniquity, guidance from misguidance, lawful from unlawful is the job of Revelation; not the whims, sentiments or emotions of the masses.

VII. IJMA' THEOLOGY: THE MARK OF THE SAVED-SECT

The Arabs say: *kullun yadda'ī waṣlan bi laylā / wa laylā lā tuqirru labum bi dbākā* - "Every person claims a connection to Layla; But Layla does not accept it from any of them."

Today, it is common to see or hear of groups, organizations and websites who claim that their understanding of Islam alone is the *true* or *sabib* one! More often than not, each of these claimants to the truth can be seen hurling invectives against one another, denouncing each other as innovators. Much of this cantankerous bickering is done under the name of following Islam's early religious scholars - affectionately called the *salaf* or "[pious] predecessors" - and the claim of policing what they imagine to be pristine orthodoxy. But does Layla accept it from them?

Yet more than a claim, more than even a name, the saved-sect (*al-firqat al-nājiyah*) is identified with what may be termed as *ijmā'* theology: a set of

fundamental beliefs and practices rooted in the Qur'an, the *Sunnab* and the consensus or *ijmā'* of the Muslim scholars. What is meant by Qur'an and *Sunnab* are those verses or hadiths that are categorical (*qaṭ'i*) in their meaning - i.e. they are univocal, having only one legitimate interpretation or reading. As for those verses or hadiths that are open to more than one legitimate reading, or issues about which no consensus exists, they do not constitute orthodoxy's fundamentals (*uṣūl*), from which it is not lawful to split or differ. Instead, they make-up its *furū'*, its details and positive law, and are issues wherein differences are not just tolerated; but are welcomed and celebrated. Ibn Taymiyyah hit the nail on the head when he observed about the innovated sects:

The distinctive mark of these sects is their splitting from the Book, *Sunnab* and scholarly consensus (*ijmā'*). Whosoever speaks with the Book, *Sunnab* and scholarly consensus is from *Ahl al-Sunnab wa'l-Jamā'ab*.³⁴

Al-Bayhaqī stipulates:

We have already stated in the book *al-Madkhal*, and elsewhere, that the blameworthy differing is whatever differs from the Book, the authentic *Sunnab* or a scholarly consensus.³⁵

Further on, he wrote:

Indeed the Companions were united upon the issues of *uṣūl*. It is not related from any one of them that they differed with what we have indicated in this book. As for the *furū'* issues where there is no explicit text (*naṣṣ*) from either the Book or the *Sunnab*, then some of them agreed to it while others did not. Now what they were unanimous about, none differed over. But what they differed over, then the Lawgiver permitted this type of differing to them where they were required to employ juristic inference (*istinbāṭ*) and legal reasoning (*ijtihād*).³⁶

Islam's religious reality has possibly its finest summary in these lines from Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah:

The religion of the Muslims is built on following the Book of Allah, the *Sunnab* of His Prophet and what the *ummab* is agreed upon. These three are infallible fundamentals (*fa hādbibi'l-ibalātha biyā usūl ma'sūmab*).³⁷

Along with the Book and the *Sunnab* as being the first two fundamentals, Ibn Taymiyyah explains that for *Abl al-Sunnab wa'l-Jamā'ab*:

Scholarly consensus is the third fundamental that is depended on in matters of knowledge and faith. With these three fundamentals they weigh-up all that people say and do, inwardly or outwardly, in terms of religion. The consensus that can be [most] accurately ascertained is what the pious predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) were united upon, for after them differences increased and the *ummab* dispersed.³⁸

As for statements such as:

It should be known that the hallmark of the innovators is: forsaking ascription to the predecessors (*fa 'ulima anna sbi'āra abl al-bid'ab huwa tarku'n-tiḥāl al-salaf*),³⁹

then this boils down to the same thing too: ascription to the *ijmā'* of the *salaf*. Hence, whatever the *salaf* agreed upon, whether in terms of beliefs, actions, or methodology for deriving religious rulings, then this constitutes the *madbhab* ('path', 'school') of the *salaf* and deserves to be called the *salafi* way - the way the *salaf* took as a united body. As for what the *salaf* differed in, then there is no one unified path, no *salafi* way; just legitimate differences of opinion. One who is versed in the juristic art of weighing-up proof-texts (i.e. *tarjīḥ*) does so, following the view he believes is most

likely correct. Those who are not, simply follow a scholar who they trust in the issue and accept his judgement; as per: *Ask the people of knowledge if you do not know.* (21:7) For this is a matter for which there is no *salafī* way, no unanimous agreement of the *salaf*, no *ijmā'*. So it is not a matter that defines what is or is not the saved-sect. In other words, orthodoxy or right-guidance is not violated by such legitimate differing.⁴⁰

This one, simple piece of understanding has been lost on many of today's teachers, preachers, callers and seekers - with crippling consequences for Muslim unity and social harmony, and bitter fruits for individual spiritual growth. *So will any take heed!* (54:17)

VIII. THE SALAF AND THE SALAFIS

The term "*salaf*" has been mentioned in this paper a few times, and I have translated it simply as 'predecessors'; Islam's earliest religious authorities: the Companions (*ṣaḥābah*); their Followers (*tābi'in*); and the Followers of the Followers (*atbā' al-tābi'in*); and those early Imams that traversed the same path in terms of the all-important *uṣūl*. A celebrated hadith states: 'The best of people are my generation, then those who follow them, then those who follow them.'⁴¹

The term *salaf* tends to invoke affection in the hearts of believers, unlike the term "*salafī*" - which is covered in misunderstanding, controversy and even contempt. Some say that the term *salafī* is a newly-contrived name, having its roots in the teachings of certain contemporary scholars. Others claim that the term's origins began with Ibn Taymiyyah back in the eighth century. The truth of the matter, though, is that the term goes back to the fourth century, or even earlier. The historian Ibn Ḥayyān, who died in the first decade of the fourth Islamic century, said about Ismā'īl b. Ḥammād, the grandson of Imam Abu Ḥanīfah:

They said that Ismā'īl b. Ḥammād b. Abu Ḥanīfah was a true *salafī* (*kāna salafīyyan ṣaḥīḥan*).⁴²

May Allah have mercy upon, and be pleased with Isma‘il, his father and his grandfather.

Al-Sam‘ānī, who passed away in the middle of the sixth century, explains the ascription as follows:

Salafī: ... This is an attribution to the *salaf* and a following of their ways.⁴³

The celebrated historian, hadith master and Shāfi‘ī jurist, Imam Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, from the eighth century, wrote:

Salafī: one who is upon the way of the predecessors (*man kāna ‘alā madbbab al-salaf*).⁴⁴

He says in his biographical entry to Ibn Khurrazād:

I say: trust is part of the faith, and precision is included in being meticulous. Thus what a hadith memoriser (*ḥāfiẓ*) requires is: to be God-fearing, intelligent, a grammarian, lexicologist, pious, shy, *salafī* ...⁴⁵

About Ibn Hubayrah, Imam al-Dhahabī wrote:

He was versed in the [Ḥanbalī] school, Arabic and prosody, and was *salafī*.⁴⁶

After citing al-Daraqūṭnī’s words, ‘Nothing is more despicable to me than rational theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*),’ al-Dhahabī remarked:

I say: the man never indulged in *‘ilm al-kalām*, nor debating, nor argumentation in such matters. Rather, he was *salafī*. Abu ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī heard this statement from him.⁴⁷

And of Ibn al-Şalāḥ, he wrote:

He possessed remarkable majesty, solemnity, gravity, eloquence and beneficial knowledge. He was firm in faith, wholly *salafī* and of correct creed. He sufficed from [false] argumentations [in those areas where] feet usually stumble. He believed in Allah and what came from Allah, in terms of His Names and Attributes.⁴⁸

About Abu'l-Bayān Nabā b. Muhammad b. Maḥfūz, al-Dhahabī stated the following:

Shaykh Abu'l-Bayān, may Allah be pleased with him; shaykh of the Bayāniyyah [sufi] order. He was of great status, a scholar who acted on his knowledge, a renunciant (*zābid*), deeply devout, an imam of the [Arabic] language, a jurist of the Shāfi'i school, *salafī* in creed and a caller to the *Sunnah*. He authored, compiled, wrote much poetry and his litanies (*adbkār*) are listened to and printed. His grave, in the Bāb al-Şaghīr graveyard, is visited.⁴⁹

The eighth century historian, Şalāḥ al-Dīn al-Safadī, said in his biography of Qāḍī 'Ilm al-Dīn al-Akhnā'i:

He was a lover of narrations, *salafī* in approach (*kāna muḥibban li'l-riwāyah salafī al-ṭariqah*).⁵⁰

He described the worldly renunciant (*zābid*), Abu Ishāq al-Kinānī, in the following terms:

He was righteous, benevolent, abundant in invoking God (*dbikr*), *salafī* in creed (*salafī al-mu'taqad*).⁵¹

Ibn Ḥajr al-'Asqalānī wrote of the fourth century Mālikī jurist, Muhammad b. al-Qāsim al-Miṣrī:

He was the chief of the Malikīs in Egypt, and one who had best memorised the school (*madbbab*) among them. He was versed in history, highly cultured, along with being religious and deeply devout. He authored *Abkām al-Qur'ān*, *Manāqib Mālik*, *al-Ruwāt 'Anbu*, *al-Manāsik*, *al-Zābi fi'l-Fiqh*, and other writings. He was *salafi* in creed.⁵²

These quotes from Islam's biographical sources show how the description of someone being *salafi* is not a new phenomenon. Its roots may be traced back one thousand years or more. The appellation, when it was applied, was applied to scholars who - after the development of the Ash'arī and Māturīdī theological schools, whose intent was to defend Sunni orthodoxy through the use of *'ilm al-kalām*⁵³ - continued to adhere to the details and method of the *salaf* in terms of doctrine and beliefs (*'aqidab*). Hence the designation, *salafi*.

Such *salafi* scholars were marked by two traits in particular: rejecting *'ilm al-kalām* (or much of it) as a valid theological tool and, what flowed from it, shunning figurative interpretation (*ta'wil*) in terms of understanding the Divine Attributes (*ṣifāt*). For according to such scholars, both these matters were fiercely repudiated by the unanimity of the *salaf* - as per the reports related from them. Being *salafi* never meant rejection of following a *fiqh* school (*madbbab*), or even sufism (*taṣawwuf*) for that matter.

By sufism, I mean the science that concerns itself with purifying the heart, rooting in it sincerity, and guiding the seeker to the stations of *iḥsān* and of spiritually witnessing Allah (*mushābadab*). In other words, sufism is the science of the soul, tethered as it should be to the Book, the *Sunnab* and to the legacy of the *salaf*. Imam al-Dhahabī wrote:

How beautiful was the sufism of the Companions and Followers.
They never probed into such phantasms or whisperings. Instead,
they worshipped Allah, were humble before Him, and relied upon

and trusted Him. They possessed immense awe and fear of Him, waged jihad against His enemies, hastened to obedience of Him and shunned vain talk. And God guides whomsoever He wills to the path that is straight.⁵⁴

Sketching the contours of this *taṣawwuf ‘amali*, or “practical sufism”, al-Dhahabi also said:

The perfect spiritual wayfaring (*sulūk*) entails being circumspect in [regards to the lawfulness of] one’s food and speech; guarding one’s tongue; making *dhikr* continuously; not mixing with others too much; weeping over one’s sins; reciting the Qur’an calmly and distinctly while pondering its meanings; detesting one’s ego (*nafs*) and rebuking it for Allah’s sake; increasing in the prescribed fasts; praying *tabajjud* regularly; being humble with others; maintaining ties of kinship; being tolerant and large-hearted; smiling a lot; spending on relatives and dependants; speaking the truth, even when bitter, mildly and without haste or frustration; enjoining the good; having a forgiving nature; turning away from the ignorant; guarding the frontiers; waging jihad; performing pilgrimage; only eating what is lawful at all times; and seeking God’s forgiveness abundantly in private. Such are the marks of the *awliyā* and the traits of the Muhammadans (*ṣifāt al-muḥammadiyyīn*). May God cause us to depart from this world loving them.⁵⁵

IX. TODAY’S SALAFISM

Today, elements of fiction may be found running throughout much of the current *salafī* discourse, including the belief that most of the *ummah* are deviant and how only a tiny clique of diehards make it into the saved-sect. Some of the interpretations that are hammered out under the *salafī* tag as representing the way of the *salaf* can be shown, not just to be erroneous, but at times to even go against a consensus of the *salaf*. Furthermore, the current *salafī* movement[s] is bedeviled by vicious intra-group polemics and staggering levels of schism and in-fighting. Surely there comes a point

during discord and schisms in which God-fearing people ask themselves: Can these divisions really be the result of us being graced by Heaven? Ibn Taymiyyah offers this pause for thought:

All that brings about discord (*fitnah*) or division (*furqah*) cannot be part of the religion.⁵⁶

And this too:

Know that from the great essentials which make up the sum total of the religion (*jummā' al-dīn*) is: the joining of hearts, uniting the word and reconciling between people. Allah, Exalted is He, says: *Fear Allah and set right the relationships between yourselves* (8:1) And He said: *Hold fast, altogether, to the rope of Allah and be not divided.* (3:103) He further said: *And be not like those who fell into division and dispute after clear proofs had come to them* (3:105). The likes of these texts, that order unity and harmony and forbid division and discord, abound.⁵⁷

That noted, and returning to *Abi al-Sunnab*'s hallmark of *ijmā'* theology, if we hold a candle up to some of today's *salafi* 'truisms', to assess them in the light of time-honoured orthodoxies, we see a fair number of them to be no more than half-truths or urban myths. Consider the following:

(i) **Rejection of *taqlid* and obligating even the layman to know the proofs for religious rulings:** The equation that still defines much of the *salafi* call is this: *taqlid* is blind-following, and blind-following is unlawful! Contrast this with the orthodox position on *taqlid* - following qualified scholarship without asking for proof - typified here by Ibn Qudāmah:

It is the stance of some of the *Qadariyyah* that the lay people are obliged to investigate proofs, even in *furū'* issues. But this is futile by the consensus of the Companions.⁵⁸

While it is true that not all *salafis* reject this type of *taqlid*, and that many have moved on from this clear-cut unorthodoxy, there are still many who have not. Encouraging the seeking of sacred knowledge is one thing. But the conviction that the unversed layman must engage with the proof-texts, or can dabble in the juristic art of weighing-up evidences, has opened up a Pandora's box of religious anarchy in our time against legitimate juristic authority. Fatwa-faker, mischief-makers now abound in our midst.

(ii) **Censuring *ijtibādī* issues that are legitimately differed over:** No doubt, *inkār al-munkar* - "censuring wrongdoing" - is an important part of faith, as per the hadith: 'Whoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he cannot do so, then with his tongue; and if he cannot do so, then with his heart - and that is the weakest of faith.'⁵⁹ Yet as Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī explains:

The wrong that is required to censure is that which is agreed upon [as being wrong] (*mā kāna mujma'an 'alayh*). As for whatever is differed in (*al-mukbtalafih*), then as one of our colleagues has stated: One cannot censure someone who is a *mujtabid* in it, or a *muqallid* following a *mujtabid* in those areas wherein *ijtibād* is permitted.⁶⁰

Imam al-Nawawī wrote:

The one commanding [good] or forbidding [wrong] ought to have knowledge of what is being commanded or forbidden, which will vary in different situations. Concerning clear-cut duties and well-known prohibitions - like prayer, fasting, adultery, drinking wine, etc. - then every Muslim has knowledge about them. But in issues that are intricate and connected to *ijtibād*, the lay people cannot enter into it, nor is it for them to censure. Instead, it is left to the scholars. Scholars only censure what is agreed upon. As for what is differed in, there is no censure of it.⁶¹

Although legitimate differences cannot be a cause for censure - in terms of rebuke, accusations of opposing the *Sunnab*, or declaring people to be deviant - scholars may, however, clarify what they see as errors of *ijtihad*. Ibn Taymiyyah stated:

It is not lawful to censure issues of *ijtihad*, except by explaining the proofs and clarifying the goal. There cannot be censure based on mere *taqlid*. This is the act of ignoramuses and those of [false] desires.⁶²

If nothing else, today's *salafis* are notorious for sticking the proverbial boot in where it does not belong. Intolerance of juristic views which differ from their own, or harbouring unjustified aversions against them, is now their trademark. This travesty of a mindset towards scholarly differences - and ultimately, towards scholars themselves - is a significant reason for hearts to lose whatever illuminations they may hitherto have received. Vital to a believer's religious integrity, then, is to show to others as much courtesy as one can garner. Ibn 'Aqil says that the courtesy called for in censuring wrongdoing is that:

One who does not know if the act done by his Muslim brother is permitted or not by the *shari'ah*, then it is unlawful to command or forbid him.⁶³

(iii) **Refusing the principle, 'Differences of opinion in the *furū'* are a mercy for the *ummah*'**: One will be hard pushed to find this well-known juristic principle mentioned in contemporary *salafi* literature and learning. When it is mentioned, its tone is usually dismissive or derisory. For although the hadith saying, 'Differences of opinion in my nation are a mercy - *ikhtilāfu ummatī rahmah*' is not authentic in respect to its chain of transmission,⁶⁴ its meaning is sound. Here is a sample of what orthodox scholarship has to say on the matter. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr wrote:

Scholarly differences of opinion, from the Companions and Imams who came after them, is a comprehensive mercy.⁶⁵

Imam al-Nawawī wrote:

Realise, to learn the *madbbab* of the *salaf* with the proofs is a most essential need. For their differing in *furū'* issues is a mercy.⁶⁶

So thoroughly was this principle accepted by classical scholarship, that in the sixth century Ibn Qudāmah could parade it among the beliefs of Sunni orthodoxy in his credal tract, *Lum'at al-Itiqād*:

Differing in the *furū'* is a mercy. Those disagreeing are praised for their differences and rewarded for their *ijtibād*. Their differing is a comprehensive mercy, their agreement a decisive proof.⁶⁷

Certain sections of today's salafism vehemently denounce this pure Sunni principle claiming that: 'This is the most corrupt statement there could be. For if differing is a mercy, then unity must be a punishment: and no Muslim holds this.'⁶⁸ More than a thousand years have passed since al-Khaṭṭābī deconstructed the emptiness of this claim and clarified the origins of this erroneous thinking when he wrote:

Two men have objected to the hadith, 'Differences in my *ummah* are a mercy.' The first was utterly confused about his faith: 'Amr b. baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ. The other, well-known for his gibberish nonsense and his libertinism: Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawsilī ... Al-Jāḥiẓ said: 'If differing is a mercy, it implies that agreement must be a punishment.'... The reply to this futile objection is that if something is a mercy, it is not necessary for its opposite to be a punishment. No one deems this a logical necessity, nor even voices it, except an ignorant person or one feigning ignorance. In fact, Allah, Exalted is He, says: *Of His mercy has He appointed for you night and day,*

that you may rest therein. (28:73) His calling night a mercy does not entail that the day is a punishment. This is clear, wherein there is no doubt.⁶⁹

Thus, just as night and day are both a mercy from Heaven - the one *that you may rest therein*; the other *that you may seek His favours, and that you may be thankful* - then the same holds for agreement in the *uṣūl* and differing in the *furū'*: both are a mercy. Let us leave the last word to Imam al-Shāṭibī:

In the existence of differences in the *furū'*, Allah has granted this *ummah* a leeway. This is the door He opened to the *ummah* in order for it to enter into this mercy. How could they possibly not be meant by: *those to whom your Lord has shown mercy.* (11:119)? Hence their differing in the *furū'* is like their agreement in it [the *uṣūl*]; and all praise is for Allah.⁷⁰

(iv) **Testing people (*imtiḥān*) concerning their stance about other people, or about issues that are open to legitimate differing, and splitting the ranks of the Muslims because of it:** In the absence of the 'differing-is-a-mercy' rule, the seeds of schism being sown into the soil of any group mentality becomes inevitable - contemporary salafism exemplifying this all too well. *Imtiḥān*, in this context, means to test people with issues or personalities about which scholarly differences exist. For example, someone holds an issue to be an innovation (*bid'ah*), or an individual to have deviated from the path of orthodoxy, and then tests others: 'What is your opinion?' Those agreeing with his view are held in high esteem and their Sunni credentials confirmed; but those who differ are rebuked, denounced, warned against and boycotted - even if the affair is not from the *uṣūl* and is the subject of legitimate scholarly difference.

Pointing to the historic controversy surrounding how irreligious or wicked Yazīd b. Mu'āwiyah really was or wasn't, Ibn Taymiyyah wrote:

It is required to exercise restraint in this and to avoid mentioning Yazīd b. Mu'āwiyah and testing the Muslims with him. For doing so is among the innovations that contravene *Abī al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah*.⁷¹

Furthermore:

Rather, the names that are permissible to call oneself by - such as an ascription to an Imam like Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi'ī and Ḥanbalī; or a Shaykh like Qādirī or 'Adawī; or a tribe like Qaysī or Yemānī; or a city like Shāmī, 'Irāqī or Miṣrī - then it is unlawful for anyone to test people with them, or to form allegiance or enmity around them. Rather, the noblest of people in Allah's sight are those who have the most piety; whatever group they belong to.⁷²

About whether or not the non-Muslims will also see Allah in the Afterlife, as the believers most certainly will, Ibn Taymiyyah stated:

It is imperative for the scholars not to make this issue a test or a distinction (*sbi'ār*) with which to prefer their brothers over their opponents. The likes of this is from what Allah and His Messenger abhor.⁷³

No doubt, one does test and examine people to ascertain whether or not they are fit for purpose: for example, selecting someone for marriage; or choosing a business partner; or when appointing a religious teacher; etc. In such cases, it is required to inquire into the character, trustworthiness or religious credentials of the person. But as for day-to-day affairs, then the default status between Muslims is *'adālah* - that is, their being "upright" and "trustworthy" is assumed, unless proven otherwise.

Again, writing of how a believer's loyalty and enmity can only be centered around the agreed-upon issues, Ibn Taymiyyah says:

It is not [lawful] for anyone to set up for the *ummah* an individual, calling to his way, or forming loyalty or enmity around him, except if it be the Prophet, peace be upon him. Nor may any speech be set up for them around which loyalty or enmity is formed, except if it be the Speech of Allah or of His Messenger or that which the *ummah* has agreed upon. Rather, this is from the practices of the innovators; those who affiliate themselves to a particular person or opinion, creating divisions in the *ummah* because of it, basing their loyalty and enmity around such an opinion or ascription.⁷⁴

Though it is true that some *salafi* shaykhs have tried to call attention to the unity crippling consequences of the *imtibān* virus, it looks to be a case of doing too little, too late! Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah could almost be depicting contemporary salafism when he said:

How is it permitted for the *ummah* of Muhammad, peace be upon him, to divide and differ to the extent that a person aligns himself with one faction and is hostile to another, based upon conjecture and caprice, without a decisive proof from Allah. Indeed, Allah and His Prophet, peace be upon him, are free of those who act in this way. This is the practice of the innovators, like the *Khawārij*, who split the unity of the Muslims and made lawful the blood of those who opposed them.⁷⁵

And while most *salafis* today are categorical in their denunciation of violent extremism or shedding peoples' blood for political ends, many have made it their mission to attack peoples' honour.

(v) **Declaring people who have not contravened any of the clear-cut *uṣūl* to be innovators:** Given what has preceded, one should hardly find this surprising. Blurring the distinction between legitimate differing (*ikhtilāf*) and splitting (*iftirāq*) from Sunni orthodoxy has now become something of a calling card for today's salafism.

The distinction between the permissible *ikbtilāf* and between the censured *iftirāq* is this: *iftirāq* only occurs in the all-important fundamentals (*uṣūl*); those issues that have been established by a decisive text (*dalīl qaṭʿī*), or by a scholarly consensus (*ijmāʿ*). *Ikbtilāf*, by contrast, is valid in the *furūʿ* and stems from the *ijtibād* of a qualified jurist, wherein the one who errs is still rewarded. So it is unlawful to label a Muslim as being an innovator, except if he violates one or more of the important *uṣūl* and the proof has been established against him. Ibn Taymiyyah wrote:

Which is why the scholars of Islam concur upon declaring as an innovator one who contravenes the likes of these *uṣūl*, contrary to someone who differs in issues of *ijtibād*.⁷⁶

Again, he writes:

The innovation which would cause one to be counted among the followers of sectarian desires (*abl al-abwā*) is that which is well-known to the scholars for being in opposition to the Book or the *Sunnab*, like the innovation of the *Khawārij*, *Rāfiḍab*, *Murjiʿab* and *Qadariyyab*.⁷⁷

Issues of *uṣūl* include belief in: punishment of the grave; not denigrating any of the Companions nor their veracity (*ʿadālah*); the Beatific Vision of Allah for the dwellers of Paradise; the Prophet's intercession (*shafāʿab*); the miracles of the saints (*karāmāt al-awliyā*) when conveyed by sound and trustworthy reports; people of major sins (*abl al-kabāʿir*) not abiding in the Fire forever, provided they died upon *tawḥīd*; not rebelling against legitimate Muslim state authority, even if it is corrupt and oppressive; and the layman acting on a scholarly fatwa without needing to know the proof for it. These are issues based upon *qaṭʿī* proofs, or about which there is a consensus. So these and their like form the dividing line between *Abl al-Sunnab* and *abl al-bidʿab*. These and their like are part of the great *uṣūl* upon which the *ummab* should be nurtured and united.

As for issues of *furū* 'that are not at all indicative of deviancy, but are now treated as though they are violations of orthodoxy that warrant censuring, warning against, or having gratuitous aversions to, then tragically the list is rather lengthy. For instance, using *dbikr* beads is seen by large numbers of *salafīs* to be a deviancy of some sort - despite al-Şuyūṭī or al-Shawkānī declaring:

It is not related from any of the *salaf* or the later scholars (*kbalaf*) that they forbade the permissibility of *dbikr* beads. Rather, many of them would use it to count upon and did not view it as being disliked (*makrūb*).⁷⁸

Ibn Taymiyyah said about *dbikr* beads:

As for counting upon a string of beads or something similar, there were some who held it to be disliked and others who held that it was not. If the intention in doing so is sound, then it is something good and not disliked (*fa buwa ḥasan ghayr makrūb*).⁷⁹

Honouring the fifteenth night of Sha‘ban (*laylat al-nisf min sha‘bān*) with optional acts of devotion is yet another case of making a mountain out of a molehill. On being asked about this very issue, Ibn Taymiyyah gave the following fatwa:

If a person offers prayer in the middle night of Sha‘bān, whether individually or in a specific congregation, as was done by groups among the *salaf*, then this is superb.⁸⁰

After explaining at length the difference the early jurists had on the issue, Ibn Rajab concludes:

Hence it befits a believer to devote himself in this night to Allah’s remembrance and to petition Him to pardon his sins, conceal his

faults and lift any hardships. This should be preceded by offering sincere repentance; for Allah, Exalted is He, relents to those who turn to Him in repentance.⁸¹

Or take the act of supplicating to Allah by means of the Prophet's rank and status, known as *tawassul bi'l-nabi*. This practice is usually regarded by *salafis* to be a perfect example of irrefutable misguidance. And yet here is Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal urging:

Let him use the Prophet as a means, upon whom be peace, in his supplication (*innabu yatawassalu bi'l-nabi sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam fi du'ai'hi*).⁸²

Al-Shawkānī stated:

In this hadith is a proof for the permissibility of *tawassul* with the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, to Allah, Majestic is He; along with the belief that the Doer is Allah; that He is the Granter and Withholder; and that whatever He wills, happens and what He does not will, doesn't happen.⁸³

Shaykh Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb explained:

Some grant dispensation for making *tawassul* with the righteous; some restrict it to *tawassul* with the Prophet, peace be upon him. The majority disapprove of it and consider it to be disliked. This issue, though, is an issue of law (*fa bādbih'l-mas'alab min masā'il al-fiqh*); although what is correct in our view is the majority view, which is that it is disliked. Yet we do not censure those who do so, since there is no censuring in matters of *ijtihad*. Our censure is directed at those who call on created beings greater than they call on Allah; who set out for graves, humbling themselves at the shrine of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, or others, seeking the removal of afflictions, relief from distress, or fulfillment of their needs.

So where is this in comparison to those who call upon Allah in all sincerity, not calling on another with Him, while at the same time saying: 'I ask You [Allah] by Your Prophet', or 'by the Messengers', or 'by Your righteous servants'? Or [in comparison] to those who set out for the grave of Ma'rūf to make supplication (*du'ā*) there sincerely to Allah, not calling on anyone else beside Him. So how does this compare with what we are discussing?⁸⁴

Of course, Shaykh Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb wasn't the first to censure that act of *istighāthab* - calling on the righteous in their graves, imploring them for the fulfillment of a need or the removal of some harm. The same censure resonates in the words of the great Ḥanbalī polymath of the fifth Islamic century, Ibn 'Aqīl, who wrote:

They are, in my view, unbelievers by such contrivances; such as venerating graves and venerating them in ways that the *sharī'ah* forbids by lighting candles at them; kissing them; scenting them; imploring the dead inmate with their needs, by writing notes on paper requesting: 'O my master, fulfill such and such for me'; or taking earth from them as a blessing; pouring fragrances over them; setting out on a journey specifically for them; and casting rags on trees in imitation of those who worshipped al-Lāt and al-'Uzzah.⁸⁵

As part of his exegesis to the verse: *They worship besides Allah that which neither harms nor benefits them, saying: 'These are our intercessors with Allah.'* (10:18), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī says that the Makkan idolaters

fashioned these idols in the likeness of their prophets and saints, claiming that if they busied themselves in worshiping these idols they would act as intercessors with Allah. Likewise in these times is how many people labour in venerating the graves of their saints, believing that by such veneration they will act as intercessors for them with Allah.⁸⁶

The practice of repeating certain *dhikrs* a fixed number of times is given a harsh dressing down too in *salafī* circles. It is worth, then, considering the words of Ibn al-Qayyim:

Among the experiences of the spiritual wayfarer (*min tajribāt al-sālikin*), which have been tested and found to be sound, is that whoever habituates himself to [reciting]: ‘O Living, O Sustainer! There is no [true] God but You (*yā ḥayyu yā qayyūm lā ilāha illā anta*) will be bequeathed life to his heart and mind because of it. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah sanctify his soul, was greatly drawn to doing so.

He said to me one day that these two names of God - the Living (*al-ḥayy*) and the Sustainer (*al-qayyūm*) - are immensely effective in injecting life to the heart. Indeed, he indicated to me that they were God’s greatest names. I also heard him say: Whoever habituates himself to reciting forty times each day, between the *ṣunnab* of Fajr and its *farḍ*, ‘O Living, O Sustainer, there is no God except You, with Your mercy I seek relief (*yā ḥayyu yā qayyūm lā ilāha illā anta bi raḥmatika astaghīth*), will breathe life into their heart such that it will never die.⁸⁷

The point here is that although the above invocation has been related in some hadiths, the idea of specifically reciting it forty times between the two stated prayers has not! Yet using specific invocations and *dhikrs* initiated by our righteous *salaf* and imams has never been considered wrong; as long as they do not conflict with a specifically legislated *Sunnab* for that time or occasion, and provided one does not believe that they are part of the *Sunnab*. Without a doubt, one first strives to give life to the textually-reported *dhikrs*, making them the bedrock of our remembrance of Allah. The rule of thumb used in such cases is this: Acts that have a textual basis and which the texts stipulate in general terms of desirability, even if the actual practice has not been specifically related in the texts, are judged to be praiseworthy.⁸⁸

Then there is reciting the Qur'an with the intention of gifting the reward of it to the deceased (*iṣāl al-thawāb*). The very mention of it will often incense *salafis* and make them extremely uppity. Yet with all the fervent protests, the practice is undoubtedly within the bounds of orthodoxy. In fact, according to Ibn al-Qayyim:

Scholars have differed about bodily acts of worship like fasting, prayer, reciting the Qur'an and *dhikr*. The opinion of Aḥmad and the majority of the *salaf* is that their benefits do indeed reach the deceased.⁸⁹

Ibn Qudāmah, a century or so earlier, goes even further:

There is a consensus of the Muslims [about it]. For in every age and place they gathered to recite the Qur'an and gift the rewards of it to their deceased, without it being objected to.⁹⁰

Ibn Taymiyyah was asked if it was permissible to recite *lā ilāha illa'llāh* seventy-thousand times and then gift the reward of it to the deceased, and if there was an actual hadith to this effect. He replied:

If someone recites *lā ilāha illa'llāh* in this way seventy-thousand times, or more, or less, and then gifts the rewards of it, Allah will benefit the deceased by it. However, there is no [specific] hadith, sound or weak, to this effect. And Allah knows best.⁹¹

The intent here was not to plough through each issue comprehensively. Rather it was to establish that such issues, far from being the practices of deviants and innovators, are normative practices of orthodox Islam. That they are seen as “dodgy” serves to show just how far some have distorted the *fiqh* of the *salaf*. It also highlights the need for those who reject such practices to perhaps question their own sources of learning. Yet some will still insist on trying to nail jelly to the wall!

True, not all *salafis* hold all these views. True, some of them have moved on from a number of these views. Yet it is equally true that such views still colour much of salafism today.

X. THE SAVED-SECT SYNDROME

As can be seen, there are a number of significant fallacies running through contemporary salafism which need to be put to bed. And while the intent to follow the *salaf* is truly noble, one cannot but hark back to Ibn Mas'ūd's famous words: *wa kam min murīdin li'l-kbayr lan yuṣībahu* - 'How many people intend the good, but never reach it.'⁹² Ibn Taymiyyah likewise has something poignant to say here:

Many of the later people do not know the reality of the speech of the *salaf* and the leading scholars. Of them are those who revere the *salaf* and say that they follow them, but then oppose them in ways they do not realise.⁹³

Observing the rules governing legitimate differing, and the guidelines that distinguish between valid *ikhtilāf* and blameworthy *iftirāq*, is essential to being true to the path of the *salaf*. Distinguishing between an innovation and being an innovator is just as vital too. Indeed, the scholars have long differentiated between the two. The rule in this regard runs something like this:

Kullu man waqa'a fi'l-bid'ab lā yubadda'u - 'Not everyone who commits an innovation is branded an innovator.'⁹⁴

This is so, along with the fact that scholars differ over the exact definition of innovation (*bid'ab*) and what comes under its rubric. That aside, yes, one who violates one of the clear-cut *uṣūl* and thus commits a *bid'ab*, and still persists in it even after the proof is established upon him, is ultimately judged to be an innovator (*mubtadi*). This is something scholars have no dispute about. Ibn Taymiyyah wrote:

Which is why the scholars of Islam concur upon declaring as an innovator one who contravenes the likes of these *uṣūl*, contrary to someone who differs in issues of *ijtibād*.⁹⁵

He also said:

Yes, whoever opposes the clear Book, the beneficial *Sunnab*, or what the *salaf* of this *ummab* concur upon - opposing it without a justifiable excuse - then they are treated just like innovators are treated.⁹⁶

But one who is known for adhering to the Book, *Sunnab* and *ijmā'*, and errs while exercising *ijtibād*, even if he ends up innovating, is rewarded for his *ijtibād* and is not judged to be an innovator. Ibn Taymiyyah again:

Many of the *mujtabid* scholars from the *salaf* and the *kbalaf* said and did things that amounted to *bid'ab*; but they never knew that it was *bid'ab*. [They did so] either from acting upon a weak hadith that they believed to be authentic, or interpreted a verse contrary to how it was intended to be understood, or gave an opinion in an issue for which the clear-cut proofs (*nuṣūṣ*) hadn't reached them. But when someone fears his Lord as much as is possible, he enters into Allah's words (2:286): '*Our Lord! Do not take us to task if we forget or err.*'⁹⁷

As for someone about whom scholars differ; some of the learned judging him to be an innovator, while others do not, those declaring him to be so cannot impose their view on others. Why is this? Because it is an issue of legitimate differing. Shaykh al-Albānī's words in this respect are decidedly instructive:

It is not a condition at all that one who declares a specific individual to be a disbeliever and has established the proof against him,

that everyone else must side with him in that pronouncement of disbelief (*takfir*). For it could be open to scholarly interpretation, and thus another scholar may be of the view that it is unlawful to declare that individual to be a disbeliever. The same applies when declaring a person to be a sinner (*tafsiq*) or an innovator (*tabdī*). This is from the trials of the present age and from the hastiness of some youths who lay claim to knowledge.

This is a wide door, in that one scholar could hold a matter to be obligatory, while another may hold that it is not - just as scholars before differed, and those who come after will too. For in matters of *ijtibād* one cannot impose his view upon others ...

As for a scholar who sees another scholar declaring someone to be a disbeliever, sinner or innovator, but doesn't agree with him, he cannot be compelled to follow that scholar (*fa lā yalzamubu abadan an yutābi'a dhālika'l-'ālim*).⁹⁸

The idea of *ilzām* - “compelling” others to follow one's *ijtibādī* opinion, or “imposing” one's view upon others - is utterly alien to the *Sunnab* and to the way of the *salaf*. Instead, orthodoxy has historically taken a more sober and benign approach: *qul kalimataka wa'msbi* - ‘say your piece and move on’ - pretty much sums it up. Imam Mālik, the venerable scholar of Madīnah, *dār al-bijrab wa'l-sunnab*, said:

Yukbbiru bi'l-sunnab fa in qubilat minbu wa illā sakat - ‘Inform him of the *Sunnab*, if he accepts it [all well and good]; if not, then remain silent.’⁹⁹

Imam Aḥmad urged something similar:

Akbbirbu bi'l-sunnab wa lā tukbāšim - ‘Tell him of the *Sunnab*, but do not get into argumentation.’¹⁰⁰

The *bid'ab* of *ilzām*, like that of *imtiḥān*, is, nevertheless, very much part of the current "saved-sect syndrome". This is the syndrome which effaces the critical distinction between splitting from the *uṣūl* and differing in the *furū'*; or between a thing being *the* Islamic opinion and being *an* Islamic opinion. This is the syndrome which nurtures an intolerance for anything that comes from outside of itself: self-referential, bigoted, closed-minded. This is the syndrome which inflicts delusions of self-righteousness in the minds of its victims, convincing them that they alone are rightly-guided; that they alone are the saved-sect. This mixture of truth, fiction, bravery, bigotry, ego, ignorance, hostility, hubris and conceit makes for an explosive cocktail of misguidance and mayhem. Little wonder then why Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn lamented:

Salafism (*salafīyyah*) is: following the way of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his Companions. They are our *salaf* who preceded us and who have precedence over us. So following them is salafism.

As for taking salafism to be a specific method which singles-out certain people, and considers as deviant any Muslim who differs from it, even if the truth is with the latter - making salafism into a partisan thing - then there is no doubt at all that this is contrary to salafism.

The *salaf*, all of them, called to Islam and to unifying around the Book of Allah and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger, peace be upon him. They didn't declare as deviant those who differed with them because of a [valid] interpretation - except, of course, in the [*uṣūl* of the] *'aqīdah*; for here they held that those who differed from it to be misguided. As for issues of action [the *furū'*], then the affair is far far lighter.

However, some people that have taken the *salafī* approach in the present time declare anyone who differs with them, even if the

truth be with the latter, to be misguided. Some have taken it to be a method of bigotry and partisanship (*manbajan hizbiyyan*), like the methodologies of other partisan groups ascribed to Islam. This is what is rejected, and which cannot be approved of.

So it is said: Look at the way of the pious *salaf* and what they did in terms of their methodology, and the openness of their hearts in regards to differing - in that which *ijtihad* is permitted. To such an extent that they even differed in major issues; issues of [*furu'* of the] '*aqidab*'; as well as in issues of actions. Thus we find some of them, for instance, denied that the Messenger, peace be upon him, saw his Lord, whereas others affirmed it. Some said that the actual deeds would be weighed on the Day of Judgement, while others believed it is the scrolls in which the deeds are written that would be weighed.

You see this of them, also, in issues of *fiqh*. They differed hugely in [the details concerning] marriage, inheritance, trade and commerce and other matters. Yet they never declared one another to be deviant.

Thus salafism, with the meaning of a specific party, with specific distinctions, where other than them are considered to be deviant, then we say: they are not from salafism in the least. Salafism is to follow the path of the *salaf* - in terms of beliefs, statements and actions, as well as in unity, agreement, love and compassion; just as the Prophet, peace be upon him, remarked: 'The example of the believers in their mutual love, affection and compassion is like that of a single body: when one part of the body pains, the entire body suffers in insomnia and fever.'^{101 102}

Finally, while it is indeed praiseworthy to have a healthy fear of God (and of the Hellfire) in terms of avoiding innovation - since: 'Every innovation is misguidance, and all that misguides is in the Fire'¹⁰³ - yet there must be a sense of balance and proportion.

Again, while faith certainly entails fearing the Fire and doing what we can to avoid entering it - for one hadith states: 'Save yourself from the Fire by giving even half a date in charity'¹⁰⁴ - yet there must be justice and giving to each thing its due.

Moreover, sincerity to Allah, and seeking salvation from the Fire, demand that we pay just as much attention to other matters that facilitate freedom from the Fire. For instance, the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'One who says about a believer that which he is not, will be made to reside in the pus of the people of Hell until he retracts what he said.'¹⁰⁵ Consider also the hadith: 'Indeed, Allah forbids the Fire to all those who are warm-natured, friendly and easy-going.'¹⁰⁶

Thus, as we fear the threat of the Fire in terms of not sharing in the *bid'ab* of the seventy-two sects, we should fear the Fire in all that is forbidden. We cannot obsess over averting our faces from the Fire in one issue, and have scant concern for avoiding it in ten other issues. This would be like taking one step forward, but ten back. After all: *al-'āqil lā yubnī qaṣran wa yabdīmu miṣran* - 'The intelligent one doesn't build a palace, yet destroy the city!'¹⁰⁷

CONCLUSION

The primary reason for this paper was to consider what it means when the hadiths speak of the *ummah* dividing into seventy-three sects (*firaq*), for which we saw that it refers to the Muslim *ummah* splitting. Moreover, we noted how Islamic orthodoxy lies in "That which I and my Companions are upon" - *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah*, to give it its formal theological name; or Sunni Islam, as the even shorter tag.

We then asked: What is the fate of the majority of Muslims? Here we noted that even though seventy-two of the seventy-three sects are threatened with Hell, the majority of the *ummah* are not considered to be innovators.

In fact, the number of innovators, added together, only amounts to a tiny fraction of the total number of this blessed *ummah* - may Allah increase it in virtue and nobility.

Scholarly words about the *jamā'ah* being a tiny handful of people, or *Ahl al-Sunnah* being rare, in no way diminishes the above. What they impress on us is that it is the scholars who are the true guides and beacons for the masses. It is sound scholarly knowledge that determines orthodoxy from heterodoxy - and such knowledge, compared to the widespread ignorance of the masses, is rare. The act of the masses swinging under the scholarly umbrella keeps them safe from the storm of innovations and brings them into the safety of the *jamā'ah*.

The paper then went on to discuss how scholarly consensus, *ijmā'*, is the pivot around which orthodoxy revolves. Issues for which a consensus has been reached - be they issues of belief (*'aqīdah*) or issues of action (*fiqh*, *ahkām*) - form Islam's all-important fundamentals (*uṣūl*). Opposing them would be to split from *Ahl al-Sunnah*. Issues over which valid differences exist are referred to as the branches or *furū'*. It is here that differences of opinion among the jurists is seen as a mercy. In short, the *uṣūl* is Islam's *magisterium*.

The term *salaf* and *salafīs* was then discussed: the one referring to Islam's earliest religious authorities; the other describing those who follow their approach in matters of religion. The venerable *tābi'ī* and scholar of Syria, Imam al-Awzā'ī, said: '*alayka bi āthār man salaf wa in rafadaka'l-nās wa iyyāka wa āra'a'l-rijāl wa in zakbrafūbu laka bi'l-qawl*' - 'Adhere to the narrations from the *salaf*, even if people reject you; beware the opinions of men, even if they beautify it for you with their speech.'¹⁰⁸

Respect for the *salaf* is perfectly conventional among Muslims; not so for those known today as *salafīs*. For today's salafism has, as we saw, enough

seeds sown into it to create perpetual schism. Trading insults with great gusto is what *salafis* are usually associated with. Routinely haemorrhaging their own unity, splintering into tinier and tinier factions, is another. Any veneer of credibility contemporary salafism does have is largely based on associating it with the fundamental Islamic principle: the obligation upon Muslims to follow the [*ijmā'* of the] *salaf*.

That salafism today has blurred the distinction between *mujma'* *'alaybi* or "agreed upon" issues and between *mukhtalifibi* or "differed over" issues, has proven incredibly lethal. Maverick preachers, possessing only a faint grasp of legal and theological doctrines, are now unleashed on the general masses. Zealous teachers, ill-equipped to navigate the complex nuances embedded in classical Muslim scholarship, continue to erode and devalue *ijmā'* theology. And salafism, today, in the final account, obsessed with externals, lacking the spiritual and intellectual depth historically typifying orthodoxy. How such a state of affairs came to characterise today's salafism is a question that must be passed over here.

Three things, then, need attending to urgently by today's *salafis*: (i) Being clear about the difference between the *uṣūl* and the *furū'*. (ii) Training the soul to be tolerant and at ease in areas of *ijtihad* and legitimate differing. (iii) Not filtering the entire Islamic scholastic legacy through the prism of a small band of past scholars, and a tinier clique of current ones. This task calls for sincerity, sound learning and, above all, reining in the ego.

We started with a discussion about the virtues of this blessed *ummah*. So it seems only appropriate to end on the same note. Speaking about Muslim unity - one of Islam's great principles - Ibn Taymiyyah offers this insight into his own commitment to honouring it:

The first of what I will commence with from this principle is what relates to me. So you all know, may Allah be pleased with you all,

that I wish no harm at all, neither inward nor outward, to anyone from the general public, let alone my colleagues. I do not harbour ill-will against anyone, and nor do I blame anyone in the slightest. Rather, in my estimation, they are deserving of honour, esteem, love and respect: over and over; each one according to what they deserve.

And a person is either: someone who sincerely strives their best to reach the truth, and is correct; or [sincerely strives but] errs; or is sinful. So the first is rewarded and thanked. While the second is rewarded for his striving to ascertain the truth, and is excused and forgiven his error. As for the third, then may Allah forgive us, and him, and all the believers.¹⁰⁹

Āmīn. O Allah, āmīn!

ENDNOTES

1. Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, no.3001, where he said: 'This hadith is *ḥasan*.'
2. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no.855.
3. Al-Tirmidhī, no.2546, who graded it *ḥasan*.
4. *Tafsīr Qur'ān al-'Azīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1987), 1:399-400.
5. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no.5752.
6. Aḥmad, 2:359. Ibn Ḥajr graded the chain excellent (*jayyid*), *Fatḥ al-Bārī Sbarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1989), 11:500.
7. Abu Dāwūd, no.4596; Ibn Mājah, no.2992; al-Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, nos.10, 441-43; al-Tirmidhī, no.2640, who said: 'The hadith is *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*.'
8. Abu Dāwūd, no.4597; Ibn Mājah, no.3992; Aḥmad, no.16490.
9. Al-Tirmidhī, no.2641, saying it is *ḥasan gharīb*; al-Ḥākim, no.444.
10. Ibn Abi 'Āsim, *Kitāb al-Sunnah*, no.68; al-Lālakā'i, *Sbarḥ Uṣūl I'tiqād Abl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah*, no.151.
11. Cf. al-Ājurri, *Kitāb al-Sbarī'ah*, 14-15.
12. *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1999), 600, no.2640.
13. Al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak 'alā'l-Ṣaḥīḥayn* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 1997), 1:207, no.443.

14. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* (Riyadh: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1991), 3:345.
15. *Tafsīr Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1987), 2:481-82.
16. *Al-Mughnī 'an Ḥaml al-Asfār* (Riyadh: Maktabah Tabariyyah, 1995), 2:884-85, no.3240.
17. Al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1995), 1:1:402-10, nos.204, 205; *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1987), 3:480, no.1492.
18. Al-Albānī, *Kitāb al-Sunnah ma'abu Zilāl al-Jannah* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Islāmī, 1980), no.68.
19. As per his verification and critical edition to Ibn Abī'l-'Izz, *Sbarḥ al-'Aqīdat al-Tabāwīyyah* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1999), 1:400.
20. *Fatāwā li'l-Lajnat al-Dā'imah li'l-Buḥūth al-'Ilmiyyah wa'l-Iftā'* (Riyadh: Dār al-Maw'id, 2002), 2:157-58, no.4246, then presided over by Shaykh Ibn Bāz.
21. Al-Bukhārī, no.3639; Muslim, no.1921.
22. *Fatāwā li'l-Lajnat al-Dā'imah*, 2:157.
23. *Al-Itiqād wa'l-Hidāyatū ilā Sabil al-Rasbād* (Damascus & Beirut: al-Yamāmah, 2002), 357.
24. *Ma'ālim al-Sunan* (Aleppo: Maṭba'ah al-'Ālamiyyah, 1934), 4:295.
25. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 3:345-46.
26. Al-Maqbalī, *Al-'Alam al-Sbāmīkib fi Itbār al-Haqq 'ala'l-Abā' wa'l-Masbāyikib* (Egypt: n.p., 1910), 414-15.
27. *ibid.*, 417.
28. *ibid.*, 417-18.
29. *ibid.*, 419.
30. *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah*, 1:1:413, in which he remarks: 'These words are superb and demonstrate the man's learning, virtue and penetrating insight.'
31. Al-Khaṭīb, *al-Faqīh wa'l-Mutafaqqib* (Saudi Arabia: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1996), 2:404, no.1176.
32. Abu Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), 9:239.
33. *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī*, 498, as a gloss to hadith no.2167: 'Indeed God will not unite my *ummah* upon misguidance, and the hand of Allah is over the *jamā'ah*.'
34. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 3:345.
35. *Al-Itiqād*, 354.
36. *ibid.*, 355.
37. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 20:164.
38. *ibid.*, 3:157.
39. *ibid.*, 4:155.

40. By legitimate differing (*kbilāf al-sā'igb*), I mean a difference of opinion which fulfills the following conditions: (i) The opinion stems from a qualified jurist capable of deriving religious rulings. (ii) The opinion must not oppose a text that is unambiguous in meaning and unquestionable in authenticity (*qaṭ'i al-thubūt wa qaṭ'i al-dalālah*). (iii) It must not contravene an *ijmā'*. (iv) It should not oppose a clear-cut and obvious analogy or *qiyās*. (v) It must not violate an established principle of the religion. (vi) It must not be a *sbādbdb* or "aberrant" opinion.

Cf. al-Zarkashī, *al-Manībūr fi'l-Qawā'id* (Kuwait: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa'l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 1985), 2:140; Shanqīṭi, *Natḥ al-Wurūd 'alā Marāqī al-Su'ūd* (Jeddah: Dār al-Manārah, 1999), 636-38.

41. Al-Bukhārī, no.2652; Muslim, no.2533.

42. *Akbbār al-Qudāt* (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, n.d.), 342.

43. *Al-Insāb* (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah, 1976), 7:104.

44. *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1993), 5:21.

45. *ibid.*, 13:380.

46. *ibid.*, 20:426.

47. *ibid.*, 16:457.

48. *ibid.*, 23:142.

49. Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1995), 38:68

50. Al-Safādī, *al-Wāfi bi'l-Wafāyāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā al-Turtāth al-'Arabī, 2000), 2:194.

51. *ibid.*, 5:231.

52. *Lisān al-Mizān* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyyah, 2002), 7:452, no.7322.

53. Defining the orthodox type of *kalām*, Ibn Khaldūn wrote: "This is the science that entails arguing in defence of the articles of faith, through using rational proofs, in refuting the innovators who have deviated in their beliefs from those of the *salaf* and *Ahl-al-Sunnab*." *Muqaddimab* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1998), 440.

54. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā*, 18:510.

55. *ibid.*, 12:90-91.

56. *Al-Istiqāmab* (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa'ūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1983), 1:37.

57. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatawā*, 28:51.

58. Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *Rawḍat al-Nāẓir* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, 1993), 3:1019.

59. Muslim, no.49.

60. *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wa'l-Ḥikam* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1998), 2:254.

61. *Sbarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001), 2:21.

62. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 35:212-13.
63. Cited in Ibn Muflīḥ, *al-Ādāb al-Sbar'iyyab* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1996), 1:188.
64. Cf. al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-Qadīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 1:212; al-Sakhāwī, *al-Maqāsīd al-Ḥasanab* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), 47, no.39; al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa'īfab* (Riyadh: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1992), 1:141, no.57.
65. *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm wa Faḍlībi* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 2:78.
66. *Al-Majmū' Sbarḥ al-Mubadḍbab* (Jeddah: Maktabah al-Irshād, n.d.), 1:19.
67. *Lum'at al-'Itiqād* (Kuwait: Dār al-Salafiyyah, 1986), 35.
68. Al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa'īfab wa'l-Maḍū'ab* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1992), 1:141, quoting with approval the words of Ibn Hazm, *al-Iḥkām fī Usūl al-Aḥkām*, 5:64.
69. Cited in al-Nawawī, *Sbarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 11:77.
70. *Al-Itiṣām* (Saudi Arabia: Dār Ibn 'Affān, 1996), 2:677.
71. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 3:414.
72. *ibid.*, 3:416.
73. *ibid.*, 6:504.
74. *ibid.*, 20:164.
75. *ibid.*, 3:419.
76. *ibid.*, 4:425.
77. *ibid.*, 35:414.
78. Al-Suyūṭī, 'Al-Minḥah fi'l-Subḥah', in *al-Ḥawī li'l-Fatāwī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988), 1:5; al-Shāwkānī, *Nayl al-Awṭār* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2000), 2:673.
79. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 22:506. He then goes on to rebuke those who use them to make a show of their piety and act ostentatiously.
80. *ibid.*, 23:131.
81. *Laṭā'if al-Ma'ārif* (Riyadh: Dār Ibn Khuzaymah, 2007), 329.
82. A well-known statement cited by many Ḥanbalī authorities and authors, like: Ibn Muflīḥ, *al-Furū'* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 2003), 3:229; al-Buhūtī, *Kashshāf al-Qina'* (Riyadh: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 2003), 682.
83. *Tuḥfat al-Dbākīrīn* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1988), 180.
84. *Mu'allifāt al-Shaykh al-Imām Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wabbāb* (Riyadh: Jāmi'ah Muḥammad b. Sa'ūd, 1978), 2:41.
85. Quoted with approval by Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbis Iblīs* (Cairo: Dār Ibn al-Haytham, 2004), 388-89.
86. *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 17:63.
87. *Madārij al-Sālikīn* (Riyadh: Dār Taybah, 2008), 2:29. The same advice about

reciting it forty times is given again at 4:136.

88. See: Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām fī Usūl al-Aḥkām* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1984), 1:47; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, 20.

89. *Kitāb al-Rūḥ* (Riyadh: Dār Ibn Taymiyyah, 1992), 159.

90. *Al-Mughnī* (Riyadh: Dār ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 2007), 3:522.

91. *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 24:323.

92. Al-Darīmī, *Sunan* (Karachi: Qādamī Kutub Khānah, n.d.), 1:79-80, no.204.

93. *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 12:87.

94. See: *Su‘ālāt al-Ḥalabī li’l-Shaykh al-Albānī* (Saudi Arabia: Dār ‘Abd Allah Bu Bakr Barakāt, 2009), 2:104, where Shaykh al-Albānī expresses it in these words: *laysa kullu man waqa‘a fī’l-bid‘ab waqa‘ati’l-bid‘ab ‘alayhi*.

Of course, the exact same rule applies to declaring a Muslim a disbeliever: *kullu man waqa‘a fī’l-kufr la yukaffaru* - ‘Not everyone who commits disbelief is branded a disbeliever.’

95. *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 4:425.

96. *ibid.*, 24:172.

97. *ibid.*, 19:191-92.

98. Cited in al-Ḥalabī, *Manhaj al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (Amman: Dār al-Athariyyah, 2010), 180-82.

99. Cited by al-Dhahabī, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā*, 8:108.

100. Quoted in Ibn Mufliḥ, *al-Ādāb al-Sbar‘iyyah*, 1:221.

101. Al-Bukhārī, no.6011; Muslim, no.2586.

102. *Liqā‘ al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*, no.1322.

103. Al-Nasā‘ī, *Sunan*, no. 1578.

104. Al-Bukhārī, no.1417; Muslim, no.1016.

105. Abu Dāwūd, *Sunan*, no.3597. It is *ṣaḥīḥ*, as per al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma‘ārif, 1995), no.438.

106. Al-Tirmidhī, no.2488, who said: ‘The hadith is *ḥasan gharīb*.’

107. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 17:420.

108. Cited in Ibn Qudāmah, *Lum‘at al-Itiqād*, 11; from al-Khaṭīb, *Sharafu Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth*, 7.

109. *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 28:52-53.

