

An answer to Dr. Zakir Naik's answer regarding Schools of thought

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Composed by M. Yasin Achhodi

In a question posed to Dr. Zakir Naik regarding which school of thought a Muslim should follow, he answered in the following manipulating manner in which a layman can easily be affected with lack of knowledge. His answer will be quoted first followed by the reply. To read his entire article first, [click here](#).

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

1. Muslims should be united

Muslims today, are divided amongst themselves. Such divisions are not endorsed by Islam. Islam believes in fostering unity amongst its followers.

The Glorious Qur'an says:

"And hold fast, altogether, by the rope Which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves." [Al-Qur'an 3:103]

Which is the rope of Allah that is being referred to in this verse? It is the Glorious Qur'an. The Glorious Qur'an is the rope of Allah which all Muslims should hold fast together. There is double emphasis in this verse. Beside saying 'hold fast all together' it also says, 'be not divided'.

Taqleed and following of an Imam has not broken unity. In the Haramayn, it is the Muqallideen who read together and coexist peacefully whereas the ones who are strictly against it decide to make their own gatherings, Jamaa'ah and also groups.

My question: who has broken unity? A Muqallid or a person with his own views of Deen?

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

The Qur'an further says,

"Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger" [Al-Qur'an 4:59]

All the Muslims should follow the Qur'an and authentic Ahadith and ensure that they are not divided among themselves

Why is the remaining verse of the Holy Qur'aan forgotten?

"O you who believe! Follow Allah; follow the Messenger and those of authority (Amr) amongst you." (Surah al-Nisaa Verse 59)

Abdullah ibn Abbas (ra) says that in this verse, 'Amr' refers to the jurists. This explanation is narrated from Mu'aawiyah ibn Salah from Ali ibn Talhah which is a sound chain, Al-Itqaan)

The verse continues, "And if you dispute, then refer to Allah and the Messenger if you really do believe in Allah and in the last day. (Surah al-Nisaa Verse 59)

Allah's statement subsequently "if you dispute..." proves that those of Amr are indeed jurists because He has ordered everyone else to follow them and then proceed to say that "if you dispute..." Hence Allah has ordered those of Amr to refer the disputed issue to the Book of Allah the traditions of the Prophet. The lay person would be unaware of how to refer the disputed issue to the Book of Allah and to the Sunnah and how their proofs would apply to the situations and events. Thus, it is established that the second command, is for the scholars. (Ahkaamul Qur'aan, vol 2, pg 257)

My question: Why state quarter of the verse as proof for not following scholars when the remainder of the verse denies your claim?

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

2. It is prohibited to make divisions in Islam.

The Glorious Qur'an says:

"As for those who divide Their religion and break up Into sects, you have 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." [Al-Qur'an 6:159]

In this verse Allah (swt) says that one should disassociate oneself from those who divide their religion and break it up into sects.

But when one asks a Muslim, "who are you?" the common answer is either 'I am a Hanafi or Shafi or Maliki or Hanbali. Some call themselves 'Ahle-Hadith'.

When a non-Muslim asks, "who are you?" the common answer is "I am a Muslim"
When a Muslim asks, "who are you?" the common answer is, "son of so n so" or "I am a Gujrati/Pakistani/Malaysian" etc. Does this mean that to be a Pakistani is being guilty of the people mentioned in this verse?

I, till today, have not heard "I am a Hanafi" or "Shaafi'ee" being the answer to "who are you?"

Furthermore, Taqleed has not created divisions. This is grave misconception. Ahlus Sunaah Wal Jamaa'ah are proud to follow the Sahaabah. The Islam of the Sahabaah was the complete Islam. They saw Nabi (s) and they saw the Qur'aan in him. The understandings of the Sahaabah is our understanding.

There were differences of opinion in the Sahaabah too. Ibn Abbas (ra) narrates that 'Umar ibn Khattab gave a sermon at Jabiyah and said, "O people! If you want to know about the Qur'aan, go to 'Ubaid ibn Ka'b. If you want to know about inheritance, go to Zaid ibn Thaabit. If you want to know about Fiqh, go to Mu'aadh ibn Jabal. If you want to know about wealth, then come to me for Allah has made me a guardian and a distributor." (Tabarani)

We hear it all the time, "oh you follow them, but we follow Qur'aan & Sunnah." Those who claim to follow the Qur'aan & Sunnah as understood by themselves, please take a moment to observe the following.

Salim ibn Abdullah narrates that Abdullah ibn 'Umar was asked about a person who owed another person some money and had to pay the load at a fixed time. The creditor then agrees to forgive a portion of the load if the debtor pays before the deadline. Ibn 'Umar disliked this agreement and forbade it. (Muwatta Imam Malik)

There is no explicit Hadith of the Prophet which has been offered as proof nor was any proof sought from Ibn 'Umar (ra). It is evident that this ruling was a personal judgement of Ibn 'Umar.

Abdur Rahmaan narrated that he asked Ibn Sireen about entering public baths. Ibn Sireen said that 'Umar used to dislike the idea. (Mataalibul 'Aaliyah by Hafiz Ibn Hajar)

Ibn Sireen, who was one of the most learned followers of the Companions, did not mention any proof except to say that 'Umar used to dislike the idea.

This is despite the fact that there are several Ahadeeth regarding the issue of public baths.

There are plenty more examples available. Now my question: Who is causing the division? The one who follows a jurist like the Sahaabah and those who followed them did? Or the ones who are breaking all bonds and ties from the people of authority, the people of knowledge and telling everyone not to follow those of authority and to follow only Qur'aan & Sunnah no matter how you understand it? Who is this verse more likely to refer to?

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

3. Four Schools of Thoughts

The Islamic world has produced several learned Islamic scholars (Imams), but out of these, four became more famous and their teachings spread in different parts of the world.

It is a misconception that a Muslim should follow any one of these four schools of thoughts i.e. Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali or Maliki. There is no proof whatsoever in the Qur'an or any authentic Hadith that a Muslim should only follow one of these four Imams.

'Umar Ibn Khattab (ra)'s sermon at Jabiyah in which mentioned who to go to for which subjects is also not mentioned in the Qur'aan. It is very easy to say "it is a misconception," maybe if the conception was mentioned, the misconception would not remain. To avoid the possibility of contradictions amongst the scholars of differing Ijtihad over a primary source, the laity were encouraged to follow only one Madhhab and Mujtahideen instead of referring to several. This idea gained domination during the 3rd and 4th century AH. One of the most important reasons for this was that a person can not take the judgement which suits his desires best. According to some jurists for example, Talaq (divorce) takes place whereas according to some, it doesn't. Most people will no doubt follow the jurist which suits their desire best.

Following desires to the extent that they believe Halaal to be Haraam and Haraam to Halaal is disastrous. Disobedience of this nature is fatal and makes religion and law mere shame. For this reason, the acceptance of following only one Madhhab has successfully continued for around 11 centuries in the majority of Muslims. Furthermore to proudly state its acceptance in the eyes of Allah that it is the scholars of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaa'ah, those who do follow the Qur'aan, those who do follow the Sunnah, those who do follow the two as understood by the Sahaabah and those who do follow an Imam are those who Allah has accepted to lead prayers in the Haramayn Shareefayn.

My question: Is Qur'aan & Sunnah your only source of making judgements? If yes, why did the Sahaabah not ask for proof from Qur'aan & Sunnah? Why did some Sahaabah refer to other Sahaabah for rulings? Were they not learned enough?

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

4. Respect all the Great Scholars of Islam.

We must respect all the great scholars of Islam, including the four Imaams, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi, Imam Hanbal and Imam Malik (may Allah be pleased with them all). They were great scholars and may Allah reward them for their research and hard work. One can have no objection if someone agrees with the view and research of any one or more from these four great scholars of Islam.

Again, please refer to following rulings which suit the desires under number 3. I see no other reason why one would object to their ruling.

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

5. All Four Imam said follow the Qur'an and Sunnah.

All the four great Imams said that if any of their Fatwas or teachings contradict Allah's word, i.e. the Qur'an, or the sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) i.e. authentic Hadith, then that particular Fatwa of theirs should be rejected, and the Sunnah of the Prophet should be followed.

To give you an example in this context – Imam Shafi said that when a woman touches a man who is in a state of wudhu, the wudhu of the man breaks. However, this ruling of Imam Shafi contradicts the authentic saying of the Prophet.

Narrated Aisha

The Prophet (may peace be upon him) kissed one of his wives and went out for saying prayer. He did not perform ablution. (Sunan Abu Dawood Vol. 1 Chapter No. 70 Hadith No. 179)

Thus this particular teaching of Imam Shafi contradicts the authentic saying of the Prophet. So I reject this specific ruling of Imam Shafi who himself said, "If I say something, then compare it to the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His messenger and if it agrees to them, then accept it and that which goes against them, then reject it and throw my saying against the wall" – This is a saying of ash-Shafi'ee-rahimaullah. See Al-Majmoo' of an-Nawawee (1/63).

Thus by rejecting this particular teaching of Imam Shafi which contradicts the authentic Hadith, I am practically a better follower of Imam Shafi than those who call themselves 'Shafi'.

The response to this is; This is the opinion of Ibn 'Umar and some other Sahabah. However, when the Sahabah disagree in a matter, their statements are not a proof unless proof is brought from the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (s). As we stated before, Ibn 'Abbas and the reports from 'Aa'ishah contradict the opinion of Ibn 'Umar and those with their opinion. Thus, the opinion of Ibn Umar is not accepted unless supported with proof from the mouth of the beloved Messenger Muhammad (s). This topic itself is a lengthy topic in which one can not lightly accuse Imaam Shafi'ee (Rahimahullah) of going against a Hadeeth.

Furthermore, everyone learning Ahadeeth and extracting rulings from them in the light of Qur'aan is unreal and somewhat impossible. Not many if not all have the ability to do so. Therefore, to say one can follow a different ruling if they find a Hadeeth which contradicts it, is absurd for a common person.

Bearing in mind, does a common person have enough knowledge to know that there is no other stronger Hadeeth that this ruling? Does the layman have enough knowledge to understand why Imam Shafi'ee uses that Hadeeth as Hujjah and Imam Abu Hanifah uses this?

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

Similarly in practice, I claim to be a better follower of Imam Abu Hanifa than those who call themselves 'Hanafi'. I claim to be a better follower of Imam Hanbal than those who call themselves 'Hanbali'. I claim to be a better follower of Imam Malik than those who call themselves 'Maliki'. If being a 'Ahle-Hadith' means following Qur'an and authentic Hadith then I claim to be a better follower of the Qur'an and authentic Hadith than those who call themselves 'Ahle-Hadith'. All these are mere labels (Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maliki, Ahle-Hadith) that are not endorsed by the Qur'an or the Sahih Ahadith.

The only label or title given by the Qur'an and the Sahih Ahadith is MUSLIM.

Very easy to fall for this last statement, yet the solution and answer is even easier. A Muslim is a person who believes in one Allah and believes in Muhammad (s) as the final Messenger. A Hanafi, Shafi'ee, Hanbali, Maliki does not come contradictory to MUSLIM. As the meaning of Hanafi is not the opposite of what makes a person MUSLIM. Being a Hanafi does not take the Shahaadah away from a MUSLIM. In fact, the following (Number 6) helps.

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

6. All the Groups have sub divisions

I personally have no objection if someone calls himself Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maliki or Ahle Hadith. People give different labels to themselves to identify which set of teachings they prefer to follow and to disassociate themselves from those people who follow wrong practices. From history we come to know that all the labels given to different groups, at a later stage the people from that group themselves did not follow their teachings and made new sub-groups. Therefore in all the groups you find a sub-division.

But as far as giving a label to identify what a person practices in Islam is concerned, there can not be better label than what Allah (swt) has given i.e. a Muslim.

We have never labelled ourselves as an entirety 'Hanafi' or 'Shafi'ee'. But to use it to deny Taqleed is using false logic and inaccurate claims. Every title or label has its position. If a person says, "I am a MAN", does this change the fact that he is a Human? The Qur'aan and Hadeeth says we are 'son of Adam', does this mean we can't say we are son of our blood father? When one can claim that this logic is out of context, then how can saying, 'I am a Hanafi' hence not MUSLIM as the Qur'aan labels us be true logic?

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

7. Our Prophet was a Muslim

"Who was our beloved Prophet (pbuh)? Was he a Hanafi or a Shafi, or a Hanbali or a Maliki ?" No! He was a Muslim, like all the other Prophets and Messengers of Allah before him.

This is enough to show the desperateness of trying to deny Taqleed. Was Imam Abu Hanifah , Imam Shafi'ee, Imam Ahmad or Imam Malik before our Prophet (s)? A Muslim is a person of Islam. Unless Hanafi, Shafi'ee, Hanbali or Maliki is a religion, one can not use the above to clarify anything which is trying to be proven. The entire context is off track.

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

It is mentioned in chapter 3 verse 52 of Al-Qur'an that Jesus (pbuh) was a Muslim.

Further , in chapter 3 verse 67, Al-Qur'an says that Ibrahim (pbuh) was not a Jew or a Christian but was a Muslim.

To clarify my above point, I use this quote of Doctor Zakir Naik. Here he has put a MUSLIM in oppose to Christian or Jew. Christianity and Judaism are religions, so this can be used to prove Jesus was a Muslim. Hanafi or Shafi'ee etc is not a religion, it is mere ignorance to use this out of such context.

InshaAllah I will not have to use any more Qur'aan, Hadeeth, Logic or doctor Zakirs own statements to answer the following as InshaAllah one will be able to understand his lack of awareness by reading his following proofs.

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

8. Qur'an says call yourselves Muslims

There is no Qur'anic verse or any authentic Hadith that says you should call yourselves Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maliki or Ahle Hadith.

If anyone poses a Muslim the question who are you, he should say "I am a Muslim, not a Hanafi or a Shafi or a Ahle-Hadith".

In Surah Fussilat chapter 41 verse 33 Allah (swt) says: "Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says, 'I am of those Who bow in Islam (Muslim)?" "[Al-Qur'an 41:33]

The Qur'an instructs, "Say: I am of those who bow in Islam". In other words, say, "I am a Muslim".

The Prophet (pbuh) dictated letters to non-Muslim kings and rulers inviting them to accept Islam. In these letters he mentioned the verse of the Qur'an from Surah Al Imran chapter 3 verse 64:

Say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (submitting to Allah's Will)."[Al-Qur'an 3:64]

9. Lip Service Muslims

Allah knew that even in the Muslim Ummah there will be many people who claim to be Muslims (i.e. claim to submit their will to Allah) but practically will not follow Allah's commands.

Allah refers to such people in the Qur'an as lip service Believers (Al Qur'an 5:41). Thus we can conclude that those who claim to be Muslims but do not follow Qur'an and Sunnah are Lip-Service Muslims. Those who follow the Qur'an and authentic Hadith should not change their label, and stick to the best label given by Allah (swt) i.e. Muslim and which the Prophet also called himself.

This verse is being used once again against the Muqallideen. This time, the Muqallideen are said to not be following the Qur'aan & Sunnah.

Imagine giving a person the Qur'aan, the Ahadeeth and then saying, live your life according to these rulings. Will that person be able to understand what the Qur'aan means by Quroo' in the verse where Allah says, "And those women who are divorced should wait for three Quroo'?"

And what type of (Mukhaabarah) will he know or understand in the Hadeeth where Nabi (s) said, "Whoever does not stop the practice of Mukhaabarah should hear the proclamation of war (against him)."? (Mukhaabarah is a certain type of farming. There were several forms of Mukhaabarah practiced) The Hadeeth is fairly general, how would a lay person distinguish between the permitted ones and the forbidden one?

Then there's one Hadeeth which says, "Whoever has an Imaam, then the Imaam's recitation is his recitation." On the other hand, another Hadeeth says, "There is no Salaah for he who does not recite the Faatihah." How would a common person which Qur'aan and Hadeeth be able to choose which Hadeeth to follow, or what is the middle route, or does it refer to something else, or was the Hadeeth for a particular event only? Obviously one is will have to turn to a learned jurist who has mastered himself in these issues and whom Allah (swt) has blessed unrecognizable wisdom. So when the person asks this jurist/imam, is he now following the Imaam or Qur'aan and Sunnah?

Obviously he is following the Qur'aan and Sunnah as passed on by these scholars as they compiled rulings. And it is common sense that if a person tries to follow all the Madhahib then he will lead to following the rulings which suit him best.

My question is, who is following a more reliable and sound meaning of the Qur'aan and Sunnah and who is taking literal and incomplete perceptions of the Qur'aan and Sunnah. The obvious answer would be the one who chooses to follow a Madhhab is safer from making his own meaning of Deen whereas following a Madhhab is actually following a sound understanding of Qur'aan and Hadeeth.

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

10. The Prophet had said that there would be 73 sects.

Some may argue by quoting the Hadith of our beloved Prophet, from Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith No. 4579. In this Hadith the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, "My community will split up into seventy-three sects."

This hadith reports that the prophet predicted the emergence of seventy-three sects. He did not say that Muslims should be active in dividing themselves into sects. The Glorious Qur'an commands us not to create sects. Those who follow the teachings of the Qur'an and Sahih Hadith, and do not create sects are the people who are on the true path.

According to Tirmidhi Hadith No. 171, the prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, "My Ummah will be fragmented into seventy three sects, and all of them will be in Hell fire except one sect." The companions asked Allah's messenger which group that would be. Where upon he replied, "It is the one to which I and my companions belong".

The answer of Nabi (s) is so strong and true in its wisdom. He did not say, "It is the one who follows Qur'aan & Sunnah." He said, "It is the one to which I and my companions belong." Note, the Sahaabah are mentioned. The Sahaabah passed on the true Islam to the Tabi'een. When the Tabi'een followed the Islam of the Sahaabah, they are included in that sect. Now will you say that the Tabi'een aren't because they followed the Sahaabah and not the Qur'aan and Sunnah? The Tabi'een turned to certain Sahaabah and similarly the Tab' Tabi'een turned to certain Tabi'een for certain issues. Why did they not look directly into Qur'aan and Hadeeth?

A Madhhab is a compilation of rulings, an understanding of Fiqh related issues. The Islaam we follow is the Islaam of the Sahaabah. Do we have a better understanding of Hadeeth and Qur'aan than these great scholars? If one does, they can feel free to be a Mujtahid and have their own Fiqh. As for those who follow a Madhhab, they are following the Islaam of the Sahaabah.

Dr. Zakir Naik wrote:

The Glorious Qur'an mentions in several verses, "Obey Allah and obey His Messenger". A true Muslim should only follow the Glorious Qur'an and the Sahih Hadith. He can agree with the views of any scholar as long as they conform to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sahih Hadith. If such views go against the Word of Allah, or the Sunnah of His Prophet, then they carry no weight, regardless of how learned the scholar might be. A true Muslim will not follow any ruling or teaching of any great scholar of Islam if that particular ruling or teaching contradicts the Qur'an and Saheeh Hadith.

Thus, the only school of thought that a Muslim should follow, is that of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The only Madhab that a Muslim should follow, is the Madhab of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). And Allah knows the Best.

By saying the only school of thought you should follow is Prophet Muhammad, you have clearly showed that you do not understand the meaning of "school of thought." A school of thought is a doctrine, The point of view held by a particular group (dictionary) a set of ideas or opinions which a group of people share about a matter (Cambridge).

The Islaam of Nabi (s) was not a 'point of view.' It was the true Islaam in its state. When the narrations varied after the Sahaabah, that is when the need for school of thoughts emerged. That is when a strong opinion was required. A common person can not conclude the Deen with his own understandings.

[END OF ARTICLE AND ANSWERS]

The following questions were posed very nicely upon the above reply:

Questioner wrote:

Brother mash'Allah nice points. I'm guessing that you believe in madhabs and that we should follow them?let me ask you on what basis?Does following a madhab go against the teachings of Rasulullah?Brother if you have a problem with the statement made by our honorable Zakir Naik then oh well.Till now brother mash'Allah nice points,but what you said is the same exact thing people say to approve of madhabs.Why is this?

Reply:

Questioner wrote:

I'm guessing that you believe in madhabs and that we should follow them?let me ask you on what basis?

On the basis that the Muslims of early years were more knowledgeable, more pious and less affected by Shaytaan than us. If you have the ability to extract rulings from Qur'aan in the light of Ahadeeth so it does not contradict other Ahadeeth being aware of the chains of narrations making sure that when you take one Hadeeth for the ruling, the other Hadeeth is not rejected and a valid reason is available, if you are able to distinguish between different terms used for the same ruling or the same word used in different context for multiple rulings, if you are able to distinguish between a weak chain and a sound chain of narrations, if you are able to distinguish between rulings which were permitted for a certain period of time, if you are able to do all this and more then by all means, Taqleed is not for you.

Now ask yourself, are we capable of even 1% that they spent their entire lives on? If everyone becomes this, what will happen to Muslims? The entire Muslim world will differ in rulings and the entire Muslim population will be stuck in books their entire lives.

Now you tell me, on what basis should we not follow a Madhhab and on what basis should we reject what has been a successful way of life from the time of Sahaabah. Like i said above in reply to Dr Zakir Naik, even the Sahaabah (ra) followed other Sahaabah in Fiqh matters and did not look into Qur'aan & Hadeeth as the Sahaabah they followed in the matter knew the ruling better than them. They did not ask for proof in differences of opinions like we do.

Questioner wrote:

Does following a madhab go against the teachings of Rasulullah?

Following a Madhhab is securing oneself to following a steadfast Fiqh instead of a purpose driven misunderstood perception of what a person makes of Ayaat and Ahaadeeth.

Questioner wrote:

Brother if you have a problem with the statement made by our honorable Zakir Naik then oh well.

Ironic that you used the word honorable. In your honor for him, you have forgotten that he dishonored all the verses I mentioned, the Ahadeeth and events of the Sahaabah i mentioned above and also the ways of the Muslims since the 3rd century AH. I'm afraid he lost all his honor upon this one article. This doesn't change the fact the he speaks very good intellectual things. But once he talks about 'Aqaaid or Taqleed, I can't but help feel sorry for him as do many scholars and highly respected and learned Ulamaa-e-Kiraam.

Questioner wrote:

Till now brother mash'Allah nice points,but what you said is the same exact thing people say to approve of madhabs.Why is this?

What I said is not to approve Madhhabs, to approve Madhhabs, there are much stronger and evident literature available. What I said was a simple answer to everything Dr Zakir Naik has said. Any person attacking Taqleed with Qur'aan and Hadeeth can be answered with their own statements because all their statements are incomplete and very easy to be blinded to a simple minded person.

"The Legal Status of Following a Madhab" by Chief Justice Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani is a book i recommend. If any, read this inshaAllah at the least. If you still do not agree then Innallaha Yahdee Man-Yashaau Wa Yudhillu Man-Yashaa.

And Allah knows best.

The article itself

The following is his entire article article. One can easily notice how he manipulates the mind in thinking that Taqleed holds no value.

1. Muslims should be united

Muslims today, are divided amongst themselves. Such divisions are not endorsed by Islam. Islam believes in fostering unity amongst its followers.

The Glorious Qur'an says:

"And hold fast, altogether, by the rope Which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves." [Al-Qur'an 3:103]

Which is the rope of Allah that is being referred to in this verse? It is the Glorious Qur'an. The Glorious Qur'an is the rope of Allah which all Muslims should hold fast together. There is double emphasis in this verse. Beside saying 'hold fast all together' it also says, 'be not divided'.

The Qur'an further says,

"Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger" [Al-Qur'an 4:59]

All the Muslims should follow the Qur'an and authentic Ahadith and ensure that they are not divided among themselves

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In this verse Allah (swt) says that one should disassociate oneself from those who divide their religion and break it up into sects.

But when one asks a Muslim, "who are you?" the common answer is either 'I am a Hanafi or Shafi or Maliki or Hanbali. Some call themselves 'Ahle-Hadith'.

3. Four Schools of Thoughts

The Islamic world has produced several learned Islamic scholars (Imams), but out of these, four became more famous and their teachings spread in different parts of the world.

It is a misconception that a Muslim should follow any one of these four schools of thoughts i.e. Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali or Maliki. There is no proof whatsoever in the Qur'an or any authentic Hadith that a Muslim should only follow one of these four Imams.

4. Respect all the Great Scholars of Islam.

We must respect all the great scholars of Islam, including the four Imaams, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi, Imam Hanbal and Imam Malik (may Allah be pleased with them all). They were great scholars and may Allah reward them for their research and hard work. One can have no objection if someone agrees with the view and research of any one or more from these four great scholars of Islam.

5. All Four Imam said follow the Qur'an and Sunnah.

All the four great Imams said that if any of their Fatwas or teachings contradict Allah's word, i.e. the Qur'an, or the sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) i.e. authentic Hadith, then that particular Fatwa of theirs should be rejected, and the Sunnah of the Prophet should be followed.

To give you an example in this context – Imam shafi said that when a women touches a man who is in a state of wudhu, the wudhu of the man breaks. However, this ruling of Imam Shafi contradicts the authentic saying of the Prophet.

Narrated Aisha

The Prophet (may peace be upon him) kissed one of his wives and went out for saying prayer. He did not perform ablution. (Sunan Abu Dawood Vol. 1 Chapter No. 70 Hadith No. 179)

Thus this particular teaching of Imam Shafi contradicts the authentic saying of the Prophet. So I reject this specific ruling of Imam Shafi who himself said , " If I say something, then compare it to the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His messenger and if it agrees to them, then accept it and that which goes against them, then reject it and throw my saying against the wall" – This is a saying of ash-Shafi'ee-rahimaullah. See Al-Majmoo' of an-Nawawee (1/63).

Thus by rejecting this particular teaching of Imam Shafi which contradicts the authentic Hadith, I am practically a better follower of Imam Shafi than those who call themselves 'Shafi'.

Similarly in practice, I claim to be a better follower of Imam Abu Hanifa than those who call themselves 'Hanafi'. I claim to be a better follower of Imam Hanbal than those who call themselves 'Hanbali'. I claim to be a better follower of Imam Malik than those who call themselves 'Maliki'. If being a 'Ahle-Hadith' means following Qur'an and authentic Hadith then I claim to be a better follower of the Qur'an and authentic Hadith than those who call themselves ' Ahle-Hadith'. All these are mere labels (Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maliki, Ahle-Hadith) that are not endorsed by the

Qur'an or the Sahih Ahadith.

The only label or title given by the Qur'an and the Sahih Ahadith is MUSLIM.

6. All the Groups have sub divisions

I personally have no objection if someone calls himself Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maliki or Ahle Hadith. People give different labels to themselves to identify which set of teachings they prefer to follow and to disassociate themselves from those people who follow wrong practices. From history we come to know that all the labels given to different groups, at a later stage the people from that group themselves did not follow their teachings and made new sub-groups. Therefore in all the groups you find a sub-division.

But as far as giving a label to identify what a person practices in Islam is concerned, there can not be better label than what Allah (swt) has given i.e. a Muslim.

7. Our Prophet was a Muslim

"Who was our beloved Prophet (pbuh)? Was he a Hanafi or a Shafi, or a Hanbali or a Maliki ?" No! He was a Muslim, like all the other Prophets and Messengers of Allah before him.

It is mentioned in chapter 3 verse 52 of Al-Qur'an that Jesus (pbuh) was a Muslim.

Further , in chapter 3 verse 67, Al-Qur'an says that Ibrahim (pbuh) was not a Jew or a Christian but was a Muslim.

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8. Qur'an says call yourselves Muslims

There is no Qur'anic verse or any authentic Hadith that says you should call yourselves Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maliki or Ahle Hadith.

If anyone poses a Muslim the question who are you, he should say "I am a Muslim, not a Hanafi or a Shafi or a Ahle-Hadith".

In Surah Fussilat chapter 41 verse 33 Allah (swt) says: "Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says, 'I am of those Who bow in Islam (Muslim)?" "[Al-Qur'an 41:33]

The Qur'an instructs, "Say: I am of those who bow in Islam". In other words, say, "I am a Muslim".

The Prophet (pbuh) dictated letters to non-Muslim kings and rulers inviting them to accept Islam. In these letters he mentioned the verse of the Qur'an from Surah Al Imran chapter 3 verse 64:

Say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (submitting to Allah's Will)."[Al-Qur'an 3:64]

9. Lip Service Muslims

Allah knew that even in the Muslim Ummah there will be many people who claim to be Muslims (i.e. claim to submit their will to Allah) but practically will not follow Allah's commands.

Allah refers to such people in the Qur'an as lip service Believers (Al Qur'an 5:41). Thus we can

conclude that those who claim to be Muslims but do not follow Qur'an and Sunnah are Lip-Service Muslims. Those who follow the Qur'an and authentic Hadith should not change their label, and stick to the best label given by Allah (swt) i.e. Muslim and which the Prophet also called himself.

10. The Prophet had said that there would be 73 sects.

Some may argue by quoting the Hadith of our beloved Prophet, from Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith No. 4579. In this Hadith the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, "My community will split up into seventy-three sects."

This hadith reports that the prophet predicted the emergence of seventy-three sects. He did not say that Muslims should be active in dividing themselves into sects. The Glorious Qur'an commands us not to create sects. Those who follow the teachings of the Qur'an and Sahih Hadith, and do not create sects are the people who are on the true path.

According to Tirmidhi Hadith No. 171, the prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, "My Ummah will be fragmented into seventy three sects, and all of them will be in Hell fire except one sect." The companions asked Allah's messenger which group that would be. Where upon he replied, "It is the one to which I and my companions belong".

The Glorious Qur'an mentions in several verses, "Obey Allah and obey His Messenger". A true Muslim should only follow the Glorious Qur'an and the Sahih Hadith. He can agree with the views of any scholar as long as they conform to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sahih Hadith. If such views go against the Word of Allah, or the Sunnah of His Prophet, then they carry no weight, regardless of how learned the scholar might be. A true Muslim will not follow any ruling or teaching of any great scholar of Islam if that particular ruling or teaching contradicts the Qur'an and Saheeh Hadith.

Thus, the only school of thought that a Muslim should follow, is that of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The only Madhab that a Muslim should follow, is the Madhab of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). And Allah knows the Best.