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PREFACE

Sects in Islam or Madhaahib is something which, not a single day passes by without someone mentioning it; yet, I realize, it is a subject which most of us know but little of. I have encountered friends who changed from one Madh-hab to another and when I asked, out of curiosity, the reason for their decision, their replies in majority of cases showed that their change was mainly for social reasons rather than theological. Moreover, I came across Muslims rebuking or insulting Muslims from other Sects, and even “sending them to Hell”; but when listening to their comments, they appeared to know very little of what they were talking about, be it about their own Madh-hab or the other person's Madh-hab.

Remember, Allah Tells us in Surat Al-Hujrat, (49:11):

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ
وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّن نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا
تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْأَسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَن لَّمْ يَتُبْ
فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ (١١)

“O ye who believe! let not some men among you laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor let some women laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames: Ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used of one) after he has believed: And

those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong'' (11).
Translation by Yusuf Ali.

Allah also said in the same Surat, Al-Hujrat (49:13):

..... إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَى اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ (١٣)

"..... The noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing. Allah is The Knower, The Aware." Translation by Yusuf Ali.

When I asked myself of what I knew about Madhaahib, I came to realize that I, like the majority of us common worshippers, knew but little of it. I also came to realize that normally people fall into a particular Madh-hab, not by choice, but by being born into that sect, similar to how they became followers of their particular religion in the first place. I therefore decided to study the origin of Madhaahib, which led me to writing this book-let as a general knowledge, without bias towards any one of them.

This curiosity of mine, coincidentally, came at a time when my dear wife was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in its terminal stage and was given only six months to live. This was in April 2009. Being only the two of us in the house, both retired, and having lived together for forty-four happy years, I decided to cancel all my social commitments, and remain by her side, nursing her, until her departure from this world. At the same time, I also thought I would do myself a lot of good, in this situation, if I occupied myself with this study about Madhaahib.

Now that I have completed my study, I have decided to publish it, however basic it might appear to some, and distribute it to people like me, who know little about Madhaahib.

Since my dear wife's illness was the main impulse which led me to carrying out this small project, I would like, therefore, to dedicate this small book-let to her, who will forever remain dear and near to me.

I pray to Allah, The Almighty to bestow upon her soul His Blessings, Mercy and Forgiveness. AMIN.

INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that Islam started with no sects at all, but only one way: Islam, as it was taught and practised by the Prophet throughout his life, and continued to be so until almost the end of the first four Rightly-Guided Caliphs (Khulafaa ar-Rashiduun). There were, though, differences in interpretation by his companions of a handful of commands even during his lifetime; and these are sometimes regarded as indications to the formation of Madhaahib or Sects. (In fact the Prophet himself said "My Umma will split into seventy three groups"). One such command was when the Prophet dispatched a contingent of his Companions to fight the Jews of Bani Qureidha. He said to them, "None of you should say the Afternoon Prayer (Salaatu al-Asr) except at Bani Qureidha". The contingent left Medina for Bani Qureidha after Mid-Day Prayer (Salat adh-Dhuhr) and the time for al-Asr Prayer came when they were still travelling. One group of the Sahaaba refused to pray, interpreting the Prophet's (pbuh) command as that they must not pray until they reached Bani Qureidha. Another group decided to pray saying that what the Prophet (pbuh) actually meant was to hurry them up so that they arrived at their destination by al-Asr Prayer. When they came back, the Prophet heard both views and accepted the interpretation of both groups as sound reasoning or deductions (Ijtihad).

What Is Madh-hab?

The word madh-hab is derived from the Arabic word 'Dhahaba' meaning "to go." In this particular sense the meaning refers to a mental or intellectual departure from one idea to another, or 'to take as a way', thus forming a separate school of thought, rather than a physical movement of one's body. Madh-hab (Sect) is, therefore, a scholar's theological ruling arrived at by his own reasoned decision or deduction (Ijtihad) from the basic sources of Religious Laws (Qurán, Traditions, Unanimous decision 'Ijmaa').

The Four Rightly-Guided Companions (Khulafaa ar-Raashiduun)

As we know, after the death of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the year 632 CE, Islamic leadership was taken over by his personal companions, the four Rightly-Guided caliphs - Abu Bakr (632-34 CE), Umar ibn Khattab (634-44 CE), Uthman ibn Affan (644-56 CE) and Ali ibn Abi Talib (656-61 CE). These four caliphs ruled by virtue of their personal connection with the prophet (pbuh) and, during most of this period, Islam enjoyed an absolute unity and virtually a total absence of Sects (Madhaahib). This is mainly because of the simple life-style they lived, accompanied with the problem-solving procedures they adopted.

To quote Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips in his book "The Evolution of Fiqh" -page 38, (which he himself quoted from the (Arabic) book al-Madkhal, pp.107), he says:

"Faced with a new problem, the caliph of this period would generally take the following steps in order to solve it:

1. He would first search for a specific ruling of the problem in the Qurán.
2. If he did not find the answer there, he would then search for a ruling on it in the Sunnah, the sayings and actions of Prophet (pbuh).
3. If he still did not find the answer, he would then call a meeting of the major Sahaabah (Prophet's Companions) and try to get unanimous agreement on a solution to the problem. (This unanimity was referred to as Ijmaa').
4. If unanimity could not be arrived at, he would then take the position of the majority.
5. If, however, differences were so great that no overwhelming opinion could be determined, the caliph would make his own Ijtihad (a reasoned decision or deduction), which would then become law. It should also be noted that the caliph had the right to overrule the consensus". End of quote.

Factors Which Led to the Split of Muslims

For several reasons, life did not continue as it was during the Prophet's life-time or that of the first two Rightly-Guided caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar. Only eighteen years after the death of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the Muslims started political disputes between themselves. While the first six years of his rule as the third caliph were good, Uthman ibn Affan's last six years

witnessed a change in his policy. Instead of being simple, humble and fair like his two predecessors, his rule was criticized for nepotism and misuse of public funds. This, naturally, brought about disloyalty among his followers which resulted in his assassination, (better known as The First Fitnah. We will give details of the First Fitnah in due course).

The assassination of caliph Uthman in 656 CE was probably the first ever assassination of a Muslim by fellow Muslims. This crisis spilt over to his successor, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who was accused of failing to bring his murderers to justice. Uthman's assassination, in fact, was the very first cause for the Muslims to split into two groups.- one being the supporters of Ali ibn Abi Talib, and the other, Uthman's sympathizers (the Uthmaniyyuun), led by Muawiyah, the governor of Syria and Uthman's cousin, who wanted to avenge his death.

With regard to Ali's supporters, they developed into two main branches:

1. Those who remained with Ali all along, known as 'Shiát Ali'. (According to 'A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary - Al-Mawrid, 'Shiat' means: sect, denomination, faction, party, group, followers, adherents, partisans, disciples. In this context, 'Shiat Ali' would mean 'the party of Ali or the followers of Ali).
2. Those who later-on dissociated with Ali after the Arbitration and especially after his attack on them at Naharwan. This group, commonly referred to as 'Khawarij', formed their own organization known as

Muhakkimah Party or Jamaát al-Muslimun or Ahl ad-Da'awa. They also referred to themselves as the Muslimiin (The Muslims), as they considered themselves the ones who kept to the teachings of the Prophet (pbuh), and did not deviate from what was being practised by the Prophet. This group is what developed into present day Ibadhi Madh-hab. We will talk more about the Arbitration and Ali's attack against the Khawarij at Naharwan.

The Uthmaniyyun, on the other hand, under the rule of Muawiyah and his descendents, formed the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750 CE) during which came the many Sunni Madhaahib which eventually boiled down to four main Madhaahib. (Details of their development will be given in due course).

Another factor which facilitated the division among Muslims came about when Ali ibn Abi Talib shifted the capital of the Islamic States from Hijaz to Iraq and then Syria. (This policy was inevitable though, because of the expansion of the Muslim Empire).

Considering that Hijaz was the home of the Prophet (pbuh) and the birth-place of Islam, the sources of Islamic Law, naturally, were in abundance, such as the Prophet's (pbuh) Traditions and legal rulings. The few companions who followed Ali and settled in the new land did not have the wealth of either the Prophet's (pbuh) Traditions or legal rulings compared to what was available back home. (The Traditions or Sunnah were the second most important source of legal rulings after the Qurán). When Muawiyah became caliph, the companions and Imaams

were dispersed far and wide, hence losing their capability of Ijmaa (Unanimous decision). Ijtihad (Imaam's reasoned decision) was therefore on the increase when dealing with new cases peculiar to local problems, thus widening the gap of differences between the scholars. Individual Imaam's rulings, old and new, were recorded as new laws, and these records eventually developed into new Schools of Thought under their particular Imaams, which in turn, developed into new Sects or Madhaahib.

Muawiyah ibn Abi-Sufyaan

Before we discuss the various Madhaahib, let us see who Maawiyah really was - his personality, strength, political ambitions and his vision regarding the administration of Islamic State as a caliph.

The following is a quote from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, Muawiyah 1, giving an account of him:

"Muawiyah did not become a Muslim until Muhammad had conquered Mecca and had reconciled his enemies by gifts. Possibly as part of Muhammad's policy of conciliation, Muawiyah was made a scribe in his service. But Muawiyah's contributions to Islamic history are wholly associated with his career in Syria, which began shortly after the death of the Prophet, when he, along with his brother Yazid, served in the tribal armies sent from Arabia against the Byzantine forces in Syria. Upon the death of Yazid in 640, Muawiyah was appointed governor of Damascus by the caliph Umar and gradually gained Mastery over other areas of Syria. By 647 Muawiyah had built a Syrian tribal army strong enough to repel a

Byzantine attack and in subsequent years to take the offensive against the Byzantines in campaigns that resulted in the capture of Cyprus (649) and Rhodes (654) and a devastating defeat of the Byzantine navy off the coast of Lycia in Anatolia (655). At the same time, Muawiyah periodically dispatched land expeditions into Anatolia. All these campaigns, however, came to a halt with the accession of Ali ibn Abi Talib to the Caliphate, when a new and decisive phase of Muawiyah's career began". End of quote.

The reasons which led Muawiyah to halt his attacks against Byzantine and turn his forces and efforts against Ali are, in my view, obvious. He wanted to satisfy his political ambitions; and by acquiring the Caliphate for himself, he became the head of a very powerful Muslim Empire, which he led as a king rather than a caliph. Unlike the caliphs before him, Muawiyah paid more attention to strengthening and consolidating his political powers rather than safeguarding the welfare of the Muslim. In fact, the Caliphate was converted into a hereditary kingship. Many new practices were introduced which conflicted with the traditional teachings. (Some scholars, however, justify these developments on the basis that the Islamic states had grown so much, compared to the time of the Prophet (pbuh), thus demanding a more sophisticated administration than that which was in place in Medina). However, the religious scholars of the time did not see it that way and considered the Caliphate to be drifting away from Islamic practices. As a result, the religious scholars refused to sit in the audiences of the caliphs and fled to outlying areas to avoid conflict. In fact,

Imaams who did not comply with the Caliphate policy were either imprisoned or killed. This dispersion of the Imaams naturally resulted in the loss of coordination between them, which resulted in the loss of Ijmaa and an increase in Ijtihad. Since most Imaams were now functioning independently, they started forming their own separate schools which eventually brought about the sectarian divisions. It is only fair, therefore, to say that Muawiyah was mainly responsible for initiating the establishment of Madhaahib in Islam although many other developments came well after his death but within the Umayyad Dynasty.

The Byzantine Empire



The Byzantine Empire is the term conventionally used to describe the Greek-speaking Roman Empire during the middle Ages, centered at its capital in Constantinople. In certain specific contexts, usually referring to the time before the fall of the Western Roman Empire, it is also

often referred to as the Eastern Roman Empire. There is no consensus on the starting date of the Byzantine period.

The First Fitna

The first war ever to be fought by Muslims against fellow Muslims, or better known as The First Fitna, started in 656 CE, 24 years after the Prophet's (pbuh) death, with the Battle of The Camel, led by Talha, Al-Zubayr and Prophet Muhammad's wife, Aisha bint Abu Bakr, who was observing the fighting while mounted on a camel; hence the title of the battle. Aisha accused Ali of being lax in bringing Uthman's killers to justice. After Ali defeated Aisha's forces, she apologized to Ali and was allowed to return to her home in Medina where she withdrew from public life.

Later Ali was challenged by Muawiyah, who, as we have seen, called for revenge for his cousin, Uthman, also because of Ali's failure to apprehend and punish his murderers. Muawiyah regarded him as an accomplice to the murder and refused his demand for allegiance.

Rivalry between them escalated until, in 657 CE, when Ali marched his forces to the Euphrates border of Syria and engaged Muawiyah's troops in the famous Battle of Siffin. When Muawiyah felt he was no match to Ali's forces, he resorted to a trick in which his soldiers stuck copies of the Holy Qurán onto the end of their spears with the result that Ali's pious supporters refused to fight them. Ali was thus forced to enter into negotiations that resulted in disagreements among Ali's

followers which, as we said earlier, alienated a sizable number of his supporters.

The events that followed after this are well explained by Soud Al-Maáwaly in his book, 'Ibathism - The Cinderella of Islam', Chapter 2, page23. He said:

"When Muawiyah felt he was going to lose the battle he proposed a truce. Among Ali's supporters were some in favour of it and some against. Seyyidna Ali was first hesitant but eventually agreed to it. Those who opposed the truce and subsequent arbitration came to be known as Khawarij. Under the terms of the truce, an arbitration committee was formed comprising two arbitrators, one nominated by each side to settle the question of who should be the Caliph between the two contenders - Seyyidna Ali or Muawiya.

Muawiyah nominated Amr bin Al'Aas, the governor of Egypt to represent him in the arbitration proceedings, and Abu Musa Ash'ari was appointed to represent Seyyidna Ali; Abu Musa was a former governor of Kufa (in Iraq). The two arbitrators met at Tabuk towards the end of 657 CE; they met in private to discuss the issue when Abu Musa, Ali's representative, hinted on deposing both claimants and hold fresh elections, to which Amr bin Al'Aas agreed. When the formal session was held in the presence of a large crowd of followers of both sides, Abu Musa rose to say that, in order to end the conflict among the Ummah (the nation) over the question of the Caliphate, it was agreed to depose his principal Ali. Thereupon Amr bin Al A'as took the stage, and said that since Ali was deposed, the only claimant left in the field

was Muawiyah, and as such the verdict of the arbitrators implied that, as Muawiyah was the only candidate for the office, he was now the caliph.

This was a fraud and betrayal pure and simple, and the meeting ended in great uproar." End of quote.

Soud Al-Maáwaly continued to say in the same chapter:

"When Seyyidna Ali came to know of the results of arbitration proceedings, he repudiated them as sheer betrayal. He accordingly decided to go to war against the people of Sham. Ali apprised the Khawarij of his decision, and wanted them to join his forces, but they refused to participate on the ground that the war was for worldly ends. But despite the defection of the Khawarij, Ali mustered a considerable force. These preparations took a few months, but when Seyyidna Ali was on the point of ordering a march to Syria, the army generals advised him to eliminate the menace of the Khawarij. Therefore he first directed a campaign against them in December 658 CE when he led his forces to Naharwan. The Khawarij were heavily outnumbered and practically wiped out. So Ali won the victory in the battle of Naharwan but that was not the end of the struggle". End of quote.

As things turned out, the expedition to Sham never materialized for lack of support and Ali himself was assassinated in 661CE at Kufa, in the hands of the Khawarij, in revenge for their loved ones.

Muawiyah, by this time, had acquired both Syria and Egypt and, as commander of the largest force in the Muslim Empire, he managed to consolidate his position as

caliph. Muawiyah's rule lasted from 602-680 CE. His campaign, therefore, lasted for the entirety of Ali's reign and its end is marked by stepping down and subsequent assassination of the incumbent caliph, Ali, and eventual assumption of the Caliphate by Muawiyah, thus founding the Umayyad dynasty.

The above conflicts, therefore, now left the Muslim society divided into three groups, namely:

1. Those who remained with Ali ibn Abi Talib all along and who are the present day Shia.
2. Those who were referred to as Khawarij -among whom are the present day Ibadhi but who refute the claim that they are "Khawarij."
3. The Uthmaniyyuun, who were the supporters of Muawiyah, and who later on emerged as the four Sunni Madhaahib.

Formation of Sects (Madhaahib)

Shia Madh-hab

As we have seen, Shia Madh-hab emerged following the political struggle about the succession to Prophet

Muhammad (pbuh), especially so, during the First Fitna when Shiat-Ali were the only group remaining in Ali's support. The Shia, in fact, believe that Ali ibn Abi Talib was the only rightful caliph after the Prophet (pbuh) and rejected the legitimacy of the first three caliphs right from the start. Not only do they reject these three, they also condemn some caliphs, claiming that they had reverted to non-belief. This is the reason why the Shia chose to remain with Ali and his descendents right from the beginning, until now.

Furthermore, the Shia say that, just as a prophet is appointed by God, He alone has the prerogative to appoint an Imaam (Leader of the Islamic society). An Imaam, they say, is a leader whose guidance extends to spiritual and temporal matters. In other words, an Imaam can sanction new laws because he has direct contact with God. This direct contact makes an Imaam infallible and invests in him the prerogative of interpreting the Qurán, thereby gradually revealing its esoteric meaning. (Other Madhaahib reject this doctrine of infallibility).

Shia Branches

The Shia Madh-hab is divided into three branches. The largest are the Twelvers (Ithna-ashary), so named because of their adherence to their Twelve Imaams (Islamic Leaders). Other smaller branches include the Ismaily and Zaidy.

Ithna-ashary

Contrary to all other Muslims who say that the Prophet (pbuh) nominated Abu-Bakr as his successor, the Shia claim that the Prophet (pbuh), with the guidance of God, nominated Ali ibn Abi Talib, who is the prophet's cousin and son-in-law, as well as being head of the Ahl al-Bayt (people of the Prophet's house), and who is also the father of Muhammad's (pbuh) only blood-line. According to them, all Imaams must come from the Prophet's (pbuh) blood-line and there is always an Imaam of the Age, who is the divinely appointed authority on all matters of faith and law in the Islamic community. (The Ismaili and the Zaidi, however, do not hold this belief). The Imaam's place in the society is above that of a ruler, who should only carry out what an Imaam decides as a supreme authority of religion.

The following are two fundamental principles embodied in the Shia doctrine for the appointment of an Imaam. These are *Nass* and *Ilm*.

S.H.M. Ja'fry explains the meaning of these two principles in his book 'The Origins and Early Development of Shiá Islam',-Chapter Eleven, as follows:

1. *Nass*: "Hence *Nass* in fact means transmission of that special knowledge of religion which has been exclusively and legitimately restricted to the divinely favoured Imaams of the House of the Prophet through Ali, and which can only be transferred from one Imaam to his successor as the legacy of the chosen family."

2. **Ilm:** "This means that an Imaam is a divinely inspired possessor of a special sum of knowledge of religion, which can only be passed on before his death to the following Imaam. In this way the Imaam of the time becomes exclusively authoritative source of knowledge in religious matters, and thus without his guidance no one can keep to the right path. This special knowledge includes both external (*dhaahir*) and the esoteric (*ba'tin*) meanings of the Qurán." End of quote.

S.H.M. Ja'fri, in the same book – Chapter Eleven, also explains the qualities of an Imaam, as given by the sixth Shia Imaam Jaáfar ibn Muhammad. He says:

"...Imamate is a covenant between God and mankind, and recognition of the Imaam is the absolute duty of every believer..... . The Imaams are the proofs (Hujja) of God on earth, their words are the words of God, and their commands are the commands of God. Obedience to them is obedience to God, and disobedience to them is disobedience to God. In all their decisions they are inspired by God, and they are in absolute authority. It is to them, therefore, that God has ordained obedience". End of quote.

This assertion implies that, while the cycle of prophet-hood ended with Muhammad (pbuh), the cycle of Imaams began with Ali and continues with amongst his direct descendants. To be a Shia, therefore, one has to accept two principles:

1. Imaams can only come from the Prophet's blood-line.

2. Imaams are God-inspired in all their decisions.

This lineage of the Prophet's blood-line continued without any interruption until the time of the eleventh Shia Imaam. By this time, however, the Shia population had grown so large in size and power that the then Abbasid caliph Al-Mu'tamid was forced to place restrictions on the Imaam and repression on the Shia population altogether. Eventually, the Imaam was poisoned on the order of the caliph in Samara, Iraq and buried there.

As a result of this, the Ithna-ashary believe that the twelfth or the current Imaam, Muhammad ibn Hassan (Muhammad Al-Mahdi), has gone into hiding since then and will return with the Christ to establish the rightful governance of Islam. According to them, Al-Mahdi has been in hiding since 872 CE (living in Occultation). There are many signs that will indicate the time of his return.

As we have seen, the Shia deny the legitimacy of all other caliphs or Imaams and go so far as saying that some of them have reverted to non-belief.

The following is a quote from part of a letter which Shaikh Abdullah Saleh Al-Farsy (1912-1982), a prominent Islamic leader in East Africa and Qadhi (Judge) in Kenya, wrote in 1952 to Ayatullah Muhammad Husain Kashiful Ghitaa of Najaf, Iraq (1876 -1955), saying the following:

“I am of Shafii Madh-hab and a great friend of Ithna-ashary Shia. Sometimes we argue about our differences in sects, and they tell me: Some Sahaba like Abu Bakr, Umar,

Uthman, together with ten others, are destined for the Hell-Fire”.

Shaikh Abdullah asked if this was possible, quoting the following two Verses from the Holy Qurán:

“Surat At-Tawba, (9:100):

وَالسَّابِقُونَ الْأَوَّلُونَ مِنَ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ وَالْأَنْصَارِ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُمْ
بِإِحْسَانٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ (١٠٠)

The vanguard (of Islam)— the first of those who forsook (their homes) and of those who gave them aid, and (also) those who follow them in (all) good deeds— well-pleased is Allah with them, as are they with Him: for them hath He prepared Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein forever: that is the Supreme Felicity". (At-Tawba, 9:100 - Translation by Yusuf Ali).

Sheikh Abdullah continued to say: “Are these not among those who forsook (their homes)? Is this Verse not referring to them?”

And the other Verse, Surat Al-Fat’h, (48:18):

“لَقَدْ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ يُبَايِعُونَكَ تَحْتَ الشَّجَرَةِ فَعَلِمَ مَا فِي
قُلُوبِهِمْ (١٨)

Allah's Good Pleasure was on the Believers when they swore Fealty to thee under the Tree: He knew what was in their hearts ..." (Al-Fat'h, 48:18. Translation by Yusuf Ali).

In his reply, Ayatullah Muhammad Husein Kashiful Ghita said the following:

"... In fact, Allah was not well-pleased with everyone among those companions of the Prophet (pbuh) who forsook their homes; and not everyone is included in Allah's statement which says, '...Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him,...' (At-Tawba, 9:100).

Neither are all companions included in the Verse of the Qurán:

.....وَلِإِخْوَانِنَا الَّذِينَ سَبَقُونَا بِالْإِيمَانِ..... (١٠)

'...and our brethren who were before us in the faith,...'(Al-Hashr, 59:10); because the Holy Qurán is explaining itself (between its various Verses) and confirms itself (between its various Verses).

Therefore it is important to inter-connect and inter-relate some Verses with others so that the truth is revealed with absolute clarity.

Moreover, if the Verse, '...Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him,...' includes all companions, then what would Allah's statement in the following Verse mean?:

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ
 أَنْفَلْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَنْ يَنْفَلِبْ عَلَىٰ عَقْبَيْهِ فَلَنْ يَضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا
 وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ (١٤٤)

'Muhammad is no more than a Messenger: many were the Messengers that passed away before Him. If he died or was slain, will ye then turn back on your heels? If any did turn back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to

Allah; but Allah (on the other hand) will swiftly reward those who (serve him) with gratitude'. (Al-Imraan, 3:144 - Translation Yusuf Ali).

It is important to know who these people were (who wanted to go back on their heels" - End of quote.

Imaam Muhammad Husain continued to say in his reply:

" ...Similarly, the Prophet's Traditions and Sayings clarify the Verses in the Holy Qurán. I therefore invite you to refer to Sahih Bukhari which is authentic beyond doubt, as well as Sahih Muslim, which are two Traditions books well recognized by Shafi'i and others in the four Sunni Madhaahib. Among the various Traditions which give similar meaning are:

The Prophet (pbuh) said:

"I (Muhammad-pbuh) will arrive before them at the trough (water basin) and men among you will rush towards me but will not be able to reach me. I will say: 'Oh God! My Companions!' And I will be told:

'Truly, you do not know what they fabricated after you'. Thereafter a command will be given for them to enter Hell-Fire. I (Muhammad - pbuh) will then say: 'To Hell! To Hell! -For those who reversed and changed the Laws of Islam after me'."

The Prophet (pbuh) also said in another Saying, the meaning or the intention of which means the following:

"A group of my companions will be ordered to enter Hell-Fire. I will say: 'Why are they sent to Hell?' I will be told: 'The truth is that they reverted to infidelity'."

Imaam Muhammad Husain continues to say in his reply to Sheikh Abdullah Saleh Al-Farsy:

"Moreover, let us take the case of Talha and Zubair who are among known companions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and who are among the warriors in Jihad wars and the very first emigrants. Zubair's sword, in fact, many times cleared obstacles off the prophet's path. The question is, are these not the same two companions who fought against the leader of the believers, Ali (a.s.), and misled poor Aisha, the mother of the believers, who mounted on a camel and then mule (during the Battle of the Camel)?"

Imaam Muhammad continues to say:

"Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan, killed among the best of companions during the battle of Siffin, like Amru bin Hamq and Hajr bin Adiy in addition to ten other companions for no reason other than animosity.

Amongst Muawiyah's dirtiest deeds is his fighting Allah and His Prophet by murdering the two victims Hasan and Husain, in addition to a countless mischief he did.

How can you, therefore, count Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan as a companion of the Prophet (pbuh), and include him among those who are blessed with Allah's pleasure?"
End of quote.

This, no doubt, conflicts with all other Madhaahib, Sunni and Ibadhi alike; and points to some of the differences prevalent in the translation of the Holy Qurán and the Prophet's Sayings by Imaams from the various Sects. Besides, the Madhaahib also differ in which Traditions are authentic and which are weak or even fabricated.

There are, of course, other points of significant importance which are disputed between the Shia and other Sects. The following are but a few examples:

1. The most serious is the translation of the Holy Qurán, as we have seen in the Verses above. There are, in fact, many Verses which the Shia translate differently from the rest of the Muslims. They claim that some such Verses have 'inner meaning' which is not understood or agreed upon by other Sects, but only God-chosen Imaams are bestowed with the ability to understand the inner meaning.
2. Disagreement in the authenticity of the Prophet's Sayings. For example, the Shia consider any Tradition where the Prophet (pbuh) is claimed to have absolved all companions from sin is false. They claim that such Sayings must have originated from those who opposed the Ahl al-Bayt.

The following are some of the companions which the Shia say were not sincere and hypocrites:

Abu Huraira

Abu Sufyan

Umar ibn Khattab

Uthman ibn Affan

Khalid ibn Walid
Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan
Etc. etc. etc.

List of Shia Imaams

The following is a list of the twelve "God-chosen" Imaams (according to Shia), from the Prophet's blood-line and which the Ithna-ashary follow:

1. Ali ibn Abi Talib
2. Hassan ibn Ali
3. Hussein ibn Ali
4. Ali ibn Hussein
5. Muhammad ibn Ali
6. Jaáfar ibn Muhammad
7. Musa ibn Jaáfar
8. Ali ibn Musa
9. Muhammad ibn Ali
10. Ali ibn Muhammad
11. Hassan ibn Ali
12. Muhammad ibn Hassan (Al-Mahdi- the hidden Imaam living in occultation since 872 CE).

The Ismaily

The difference which caused a split amongst the Shia occurred after the death of the 6th Imaam, Jaáfar ibn Muhammad. Jaáfar's eldest son, Ismail died before his father, leaving his younger brother Musa as the heir-apparent. When Jaáfar died, the Ismaily insisted that Ismail, though dead, was still the God-chosen 7th Imaam.

The Ithna-Ashary, however, said that his living younger brother, Musa, was the God-chosen 7th Imaam. Each group, therefore, continued with the lineage of their chosen Imaam from there onwards.

This is why the Ismaily are known as 'The Seveners' in the West. Hence their line of Imaam is as follows:

1. Ali ibn Abi Talib
2. Hussein ibn Ali
3. Ali ibn Hussein
4. Muhammad al- Baqir
5. Jaáfar ibn Muhammad
6. Ismail ibn Jaáfar
7. Muhammad ibn Ismail

The Ismaily line of Imaams, nevertheless, continues undivided till Muntasir Billah who died in 1094, after which it divided into the Nizari and Mustali sects.

The Aga Khan is the 49th hereditary Imaam of the Nizari Ismaily Muslims - which remains the only Shia community today led by a present and living Imaam.

Zaidi

Zaidi Shia Madh-hab is named after Imaam Zayd ibn Ali.

Ibadhi Madh-hab

According to Dr.Amr Khalifa Ennami in his book, "Studies in Ibadhism - Al-Ibadhiyah", the Ibadhi

movement started long before the battle of the Camel or the battle of Siffin. He said in Chapter One, page 21:

"The Ibadhi considered their movement a continuation of the opposition which overthrew Uthman b. Affan, the third caliph and caused his death. They regarded that opposition as being a purely Islamic rejection of the innovations introduced by Uthman and his Ummayyad court". He went on to say:

".....Ibadhi understood that the revolt was an Islamic duty carried out by the Companions of the Prophet who wanted to keep to the Sunnah of the Prophet and the example of his two successors". End of quote.

The Ibadhi Madh-hab took its name from Abdullah ibn Ibadh Al-Murri Al-Tamimi, who was a student of the actual founder of Ibadhi Madh-hab, Jabir bin Zaid Al-Azdi. It is improper to talk about Ibadhi without referring to its founder, Jabir bin Zaid.

The following is a quote from a lecture which was given by Shaikh Amor bin Ali Al-Marhuby in London at the 'World of Islam Festival' (April-June 1976) titled 'Oman Before and After Islam, in which he gave the following description on Jabir:

"Jabir bin Zaid was born in the small village of Firq near the old centre of learning of Nizwa. His date of birth is said to be between the years 18 to 21 after Hijra during the period of Khalifa Umar ibn Al-Khattab. Jabir can be said to be the rock foundation of Ibadhism. He spent his childhood in his native town and showed remarkable aptitude for learning. He learned the Qurán at a young

age and dug deep into theology. His thirst for knowledge unquenched, he left Oman and went to Basra which was a great centre of learning at the time. He spent the rest of his life between Basra and Al-Medina, in the course of which he came into contact with the greatest authorities on Islam at the time and from them absorbed all that he could absorb of the tenents of the Islamic religion in all its aspects. He is quoted as having said that he met 70 survivors of the battle of Badar among the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) and that he learned all they had to teach him with the exception of Ibn Abbas whom he called 'Al-Bahar"', that is 'a mine of Islamic knowledge' which was inexhaustible. He acquired a great deal of knowledge from him though, as well as Seyyida Aisha, the wife of the Prophet (pbuh), and from Abi Huraira and Anas ibn Malik, Abi Said Al-Khudhry, Muawiyah and Seyyid Ali ibn Abi Talib among many others. Ibn Abbas is reported to have told people to resort to Jabir whenever they had problems 'for if the people of the East and the West asked him question he would be able to satisfy them'. Referring to the people of Iraq at the time, Ibn Abbas is also reported to have said, ' It is surprising that the people of Iraq need us when they have Jabir with them'. This was when Jabir was in Basra preaching the doctrine of Islam as he had received it from his tutors. He even became a tutor himself in Basra and had many followers, some of whom became great scholars themselves. The Ibadhi of Oman and indeed of many other countries such as North Africa, drank from the fountain of his knowledge." End of quote.

The Ibadhi School took the name of Ibadh because he used to openly propagate its views. These views, which

marked the first changes in the Muslim community, started, as we said earlier, with the opposition to the policies of the third caliph Uthman ibn Affan, such policy as nepotism and misuse of public funds. They wanted to keep to the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh) and the humble and dedicated life which reflected the examples of the first two caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar.

As we said, the Ibadhi did not, at first, use the name Ibadhi; instead they used the terms such as Jamaát al-Muslimin (Community of Muslims), Ahl al-daáwah (the people of the mission), Muhakkimah party or Muslimuun.

All Ibadhi authorities reject the accusation, commonly pointed at them, that they departed from the main stream of Islam. They insist that they have always gone along the fundamental principles as taught by the Prophet (pbuh) and the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs. To quote Dr. Amr Khalifa in his book, "Studies in Ibadhism: Alibadhiyah", he said in Chapter One, page 22:

"They (the Ibadhis) approved of the Caliphate of Ali b. Abi Talib and regarded Talha, al-Zubair, A'ishah and their party as the rebellious party (al-fi'atu al-baghiyah). It is reported that both Jabir b. Zaid and Abu Bilal Mirdas discussed with A'ishah her attitude at the Battle of the Camel and blamed her for her opposition to Ali, who was the legal caliph at that time, and she once more repented. They also approved of Ali and his wars against Muawiyah and regarded both Muawiyah and Amr b. Al-'As and their party as rebellious party which should be fought until they accepted the commands of God. But they (Ibadhi) disapproved of Ali's acceptance of arbitration, ...".

Dr. Amr khlifa continues to say:

"Thus was the view of Ibadhis regarding the early political changes, as they understood them. To them, the Muhakkimah (Jabir bin Zaid's movement) was the only party struggling to resume the just Islamic Imamate as it was during the time of Abu Bakr, Umar, the first six years of Uthman's rule and the early years of Ali before he accepted the arbitration." End of quote.

Following the struggle for the Caliphate, Muawiyah , as we have seen, came out victorious and his very first step was to subdue all the opposition. Accordingly, the sympathizers of the Muhakkimah party or the Ahl al-Da'wa, were obliged to hide their faith and carry out their practices in secret. However, Jabir bin Zaid's position as the Mufti in Basra, provided him with useful cover and enabled him to continue establishing his views by maintaining widespread contacts with other Islamic leaders in other countries. In spite of this effort, the restrictions and oppressions on leaders of the Muhakkimah party continued to restrict the growth of Ibadhi population. Its leaders were imprisoned or executed and most of their records and doctrines were also destroyed. As a result, there is very little record on Ibadhi history today compared to any other Madh-hab. This is also the reason that the Ibadhi population worldwide is very small. Nevertheless, the Ibadhi strongly believe that their doctrine is original in every aspect and conforms to Islamic practice as it was during the Prophet (pbuh) and his immediate successors.

This belief is expressed explicitly in Shaikh Amor bin Ali Al-Marhuby's lecture we mentioned earlier. He said:

"Basra, during the time of Umayyads, became a great centre of Islamic scholarship; and if it is right to assume that Ibadhism as a sect was ever born, then it would be right to assume that its birth took place in Basra. If we concede that Ibadhism was born in Basra, we must haste, however, to point out that it was conceived in Al-Medina. For we have a saying that 'The egg was laid in al-Medina, it was hatched in Basra, and (the bird of knowledge) then flew to Oman.'" (Comment: reference to Oman here is for the reason that the lecture is about Oman. However, wherever Oman is mentioned, it actually refers to Ibadhi Madh-hab). Shaikh Amor continued to say:

"Let us now try to visualize how this 'Bird of Islamic Knowledge' flew to Oman. The metaphor indicates the earliest links between al-Medina and Oman and how the people of Oman drank from the foundation of Islam at its very source." End of quote.

Some Controversial Aspects of Ibadhi Madh-hab

There are several Ibadhi beliefs which are controversial to Sunni. The following are but only a few:

1. Seeing Allah (Rui'yah)

Ibadhis deny the belief that Allah will be seen, either in this world or the next. His Eminence Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad al-Khalili, the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of

Oman in his book, 'The Overwhelming Truth' (Chapter 3 of 'The First Discussion'), argues in great length on the impossibility of seeing Allah. He says that these proofs and evidence are of two types – rational and traditional. In one of the proofs he says; and I quote:

"The rational proofs may be summarized by saying that Allah, Glorified is He, was before the creation of all existence. His Essence did not move nor His attributes change after the creation from what they were before it. So His Essence, Glorified is He, is not attached to anything of his creation, as it is not detached from it. To be so (attached or detached) is an attribute of contingent existents. Hence it was impossible, according to reason and according to tradition, to perceive the reality of His Essence. The furthest extent of the knowledge of Allah's Essence is a sense of inability to perceive Its reality. As it is said: 'Incapacity for perception is perception.'" End of quote.

As for proofs from tradition, Sheikh Ahmed says, some are from the Book (The Holy Qurán) and some are from the Sunnah (Prophet's Sayings). The proofs and evidence from the Book he says are:

لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ
(١٠٣)

The (faculties of) seeing cannot grasp Him, and He grasps all seeing, He is the All-Subtle and All-Aware (al-An'aam, 6.103). The reasoning from this Verse is that Allah, Exalted is He, has praised Himself therein, in the statement that sight cannot reach to Him. The reach of sight is seeing. So

it has become clear from the Verse that inability of sight to see Him is an essential attribute, permanent with Him, because, if He is seen, then His praise will vanish. And when it vanishes it will turn into its opposite, namely dispraise, Exalted be He from any such. From another angle the Verse conveys information from Allah, Glorified is He, about one of His attributes. And information about Allah's attributes cannot change because if it does, it means the information is (at some point in time) untrue.

..... وَمَنْ أَصْدَقُ مِنَ اللَّهِ قِيلًا (١٢٢)

'And who is more true in speech than Allah?' (Al-Nisa', 4. 122)". End of quote.

As for the proofs and evidence from the Hadith, Sheikh Ahmad al-Khalili said in one of the Hadith he gave in his book, and I quote:

"The Hadith that has been narrated by Muslim from Abu Musa Ash'ari he says:

"..... His veil is 'light' - and in one narration 'fire'. If He lifts the veil then the light of His Face will burn whatever it reaches of His creation.

The reasoning from this Hadith on the impossibility of seeing is what it requires of belief in the impossibility of the sight of His servants reaching to Him, Glorified is He." End of quote.

2. That the Qurán is Created

Ibadhi believe that the Qurán is created, and like all creation, it cannot be eternal. Since the argument is lengthy and complicated, we will mention just a few points as presented by the Ibadhi.

The evidence which the Ibadhi give is of two types, rational and traditional. His Eminence Sheikh Ahmad al-Khalili says in 'The Second Discussion - On The Qurán's Being Created,' (Introduction to Chapter 3):

"Because Allah alone brought it (The Qurán) with His power from non-existence into existence, then He revealed it with knowledge, from al-lawh al-mahfuz (the Preserved Tablet) on the heart of His Prophet, and to the intellects of those of His servants whom He has honoured with its memorization."

Sheikh Ahmad has given six rational points in his book, and one of them is:

"The effects of art (i.e. of having been produced) are apparent in the Qurán. Each letter of it needs the other in sequence, its words being composed from them. And each word needs other words to combine as a sentence. The letters are different and none of them is not in need of the other. '*ba*' is different from '*sin*', and '*sin*' is different from '*mim*' and with the combination of these three letters (in a particular sentence) is composed the phrase '*bi-sm*'. Composition is an artwork that points to the artist, and the artist must precede in existence the made art. From what has been said of the distinctness of these letters, and their being absorbed in the composition, (it is clear) that

someone has made this distinctness, and has made each of them different from the other, and composed them with this art of composition, and made this eloquent speech." End of quote.

In addition, Sheikh Ahmed has given a variety of evidences from the Holy Qur'an, but we will pick only one or two.

He said in the same Chapter 3, page 140:

"His (Allah) saying, Exalted is He:

.....وَحَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَقَدَرَهُ تَقْدِيرًا (٢)

'And He created all things, and made them in order.' (al-Furqa'n, 25:2).

This quality is apparent in the Qurán. Because its chapters, verses, sentences, words, letters, vocalizations, recitations and meanings, wisdom and judgements, reports and parables, are (all) in order."

Sheikh Ahmad also said:

"His saying, Exalted is He:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ (٣)

'We have made it an Arabic Qurán, so you will understand.' (al-Zukhruf, 43:3).

The reasoning with this verse in respect of its creation is by two ways. The first is its saying about the Qurán that it is made. The word "made" meaning that it is transferred from one state to the other, which cannot be, except in that which is created. The second is the

reasoning of its being made in the Arabic language with the intention that the addressees may understand it.

Like that verse, are all the verses which make it clear that it is made, for example His saying, Exalted is He:

.....وَلَكِنْ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ نَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا

'But We have made it a light, We guide by it whomever We will from among our servants' (al-Shu'ra, 42.52)." End of quote.

The argument continues on and on quoting verses of the Qurán in which the word 'made' is used to mean create, thus proving that, since the Qurán is made, it is therefore created. In addition, Sheikh Ahmad quoted some Sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) which indicate that the Qurán is created and cannot be eternal.

3. Permanent Staying In The Fire of Muslims Who Commit Major Sins

The third controversial belief between the Ibadhi and Sunni Madhaahib is on the permanent staying in the Hell-Fire (khulu'd fii an-Na'r) for those Muslims who commit major sins and do not repent. The Sunni believe that all Muslims will first receive punishment by entering the Hell-Fire for a period corresponding to the weight of their sins. Having served their sentence, Muslims, without exception, will then be transferred to Paradise. Only non-believers will be liable to eternal punishment in the Hell-Fire.

To quote Sheikh Ahmad again from his book, "The Overwhelming Truth", in Chapter One to 'The Third Discussion,' he said:

"When you realize that the life in the hereafter does not perish, because it is the life of destination, not the life of station, the life of reward, not the life of earning, you will know that the reward of that life is an eternal reward, either success or failure. There is no difference (in this respect) between its reward and its punishment. However, some groups of people hold the view of differentiating between them (in respect of permanence). At the head of these groups are Jews, from whom Allah has narrated this in the context of recounting a series of their errors, and He has criticized this in them, and has asked them to present whatever proof they refer to on the matter. Allah has explained in a clear phrase that the truth is against what they say, where He says:

وَقَالُوا لَنْ تَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ إِلَّا أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَةً قُلْ أَتَّخَذْتُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَهْدًا فَلَنْ يُخْلِفَ اللَّهُ عَهْدَهُ ۗ أَمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (٨٠) بَلَىٰ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَطِيئَتُهُ ۗ فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ (٨١)

"And they say: 'The Fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days.' Say: 'Have you taken a promise from Allah, For He never break His promise? Or is it that you say of Allah what you do not know?' No; those who seek gain in evil, and are surrounded by their sins, are companions of the Fire: They shall abide there forever" (al-Baqarah, 2.80-81).

From this you will know, respected reader, that the belief in the transfer of evil-doers from the punishment to the reward is only an effect of Jewish penetration into Islamic thought." End of quote.

Sheikh Ahmad continues to say in the same chapter: "The belief of us Ibadhi is that whoever enters the Fire from among the monotheists (*muwahhid*) disobedient and the associators (*mushrik*) will remain therein permanently, not for a finite period. In the same way, those who enter Paradise from among the righteous servants of Allah will not come out of it. For both places are places of permanent stay." End of quote.

4. Other Controversial Points

(a) The following is a quote from the book: 'Ibadhi - A Moderate Sect of Islam' - by Ali Yahya Muammar; translated by Ahmed Hamoud Al-Maamiry - page 23; and I quote:

"Other differences are actions associated with the Prophet (pbuh) in some worships for reasons of demonstration or which he did once but never repeated, or those not established that he continued with, are not considered as Sunnah by the Ibadhi; but they are considered as happenings which may occur due to a reason in certain conditions only. In following the example of the Prophet, therefore, they do not consider the following as Sunnah:

(a) Raising hands when uttering Takbir, moving the finger during Tashahud, saying Amin after reciting al-

Fatiha during prayers, adding "as-Salaat Khairun mina an-nawm" in the fajr call for prayers."

(b) Qnuut: Qunuut has many linguistic meanings, such as humility, obedience and devotion. However, it is more understood to be special duá (prayer) which is recited normally during Fajr Prayer. The Ibadhi reject the practice of qunuut to such an extent that they are not allowed to pray behind an Imaam who performs it'. End of quote.

Types of Qunuut: There are many types of Qunuut, and the following is only one example:

"O Allah! Guide me with those whom You have Guided and Strengthen me with those whom You have given strength, Take me to Your care with those whom You have taken to Your care, Bless me in what You have given me, Protect me from the evil You have Ordained. Surely You Command and You are not commanded, and none whom You have committed to Your care shall be humiliated [and none whom You have taken as an enemy shall take glory]. You are Blessed, our Lord, and Exalted".

Sunni Madh-hab

We have seen that by the time Ali ibn Abi Talib became caliph, the Muslims had already split into two groups: -

1. Muawiyah's supporters (the Uthmaniyyuun).

2. Ali's supporters, who also later divided into two groups - those who became Shia and those who became Ibadhi.

Muawiyah's supporters (the Uthmaniyyuun) under Umayyad Dynasty are, therefore, what is left and are the ones who formed the different Sunni Madhaahib. By this time, the Shia and the Ibadhi Madh-hab were already established.

By the time Muawiyah had snatched the Caliphate from Ali, he had already acquired a large empire, as we said, and turned himself into a king rather than remaining the old fashioned caliph. He, in fact, ceased to be a religious leader and left the responsibility to his Islamic scholars (Imaams). The Imaams were posted to distant newly acquired parts of the empire to teach the doctrine of Islam and to deal with all religious cases.



Despite their dispersion, there was still a fair amount of coordination between the Imaams. And since all their sources were from the same origin, the jurisprudence of all four Sunni schools became more or less the same. The differences between them lie not in the fundamentals of faith, but in finer adjustments, which are the result of the independent reasoning of the Imaams, or their students, based on the Qur'an and whatever Traditions they knew.

To quote Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, he said in his book 'The Evolution of Fiqh' on page 54:

"Scholars and students from the various centers of learning began journeying back and forth in search of further knowledge about the conclusions reached by their contemporaries in other parts of the Muslim state. A good example of this is the journey of Muhammad ibn al-Hassan, a prominent student of Abu Haneefa, founder of the Hanafee Madh-hab, from Iraq to Medina in order to study under Imaam Malik, founder of the Malikee Madh-hab, and to memorize his book of Hadeeths, al-Muwatta. Likewise, Imaam Shafi'i, founder of Shafi'i Madh-hab, journeyed first to Hijaz to study under Imaam Malik, then to Iraq in order to study under Muhammad ibn Hassan, and finally to Egypt to study under Imaam al-Layth ibn Saád, founder of the Laythee Madh-hab. {Comment: Imaam Layth (716-791 CE) was born in Egypt but of Persian parentage, formed al-Layth Madh-hab which disappeared shortly after his death}. These journeys resulted firstly in the reconciliation of some of the major differences which had arisen among scholars and ultimately in the combination of some of the schools of

Islamic legal thought, for example, Imaam ash-Shafi'i combined the Fiqh (Islamic Law) of Hijaz with that of Iraq and Egypt and formed a new school of law, the Shafi'i Madh-hab". End of quote.

The Umayyad period is noteworthy for the increase of Ijtihaads given by the various Imaams since Ijmaa became more and more difficult following the dispersal of the scholars. The Umayyad period is also noted for the fabrication of Hadith. And it was during this period when scholars of Islamic Law first divided into clear-cut schools of thought, establishing various Madhaahib which, in later period boiled down to four major Sunni Madhaahib. These are:

1. The Hanafi Madh-hab, founded by Imaam Abu Hanifa an-Nuúman ibn Thabit (699-767 CE).
2. The Maaliki Madh-hab, founded by Imaam Malik (717-801 CE).
3. The Shaafi'i Madh-hab, founded by Imaam Ash-Shafi'i (769-820 CE).
4. The Hambali Madh-hab, founded by Imaam Ahmed Hambal (778-855 CE).

The Hanafi Madh-hab

Imaam Abu Hanifa, who lived in Iraq, was born some 70 years after the Prophet's death (pbuh). As the most outstanding scholar in Kufa, Iraq, the caliphs of the time (Both Umayyad and Abbasid), offered him the position of qadhi (judge) which he refused. As a result, he was beaten by the Umayyad and was imprisoned by the

Abbasids and remained in prison until his death in 767 CE.

Abu Hanifa studied under many teachers; among them were the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) such as Anas ibn Malik, making him a second generation (Taabiun) in oral transmission from the Prophet (pbuh). The Hanafi School is the oldest among the four Sunni Madhahib and has the most followers. It is said to be more liberal than the other three.

As we said earlier, because of the dispersal of Imaams, the principle of Ijmaa became less common and Ijtihad was on the increase. Abu Hanifa, however, devised a method whereby, his decisions were based on unanimous agreement rather than individual ruling by himself. He used the principle of 'group discussion' involving his students. He would present a hypothetical legal problem for brain-storming among his students and then record the answer for future use. The Hanafi Madh-hab, therefore, was established on the principle of preparing for a problem before its occurrence, brain-storming it among the students and come out with an answer. Because of their learning towards hypothetical Fiqh, which often introduced an issue with the question, 'What if so and so happened?' - they became known as the What-iffers or Ahl ar-Ra'i (the opinion people).

The Maliki Madh-hab

Imaam Malik was born in Medina shortly after Abu Hanifa. It is said that the only time he travelled out of

Medina was when he went for Hajj. Therefore, all his knowledge came from within his country of birth which, apparently, influenced most of his ideas. Since he and Abu Hanifa were contemporaries, they shared their knowledge, in one way or another, despite the distance between them. For example, one of Abu Hanifa's main students, on whose teaching a lot of the Hanafi School is based, studied under Imaam Malik as well.

The Maliki Madh-hab, however, differs from the other three Sunni Schools of law, mostly in the subject of Prophetic Traditions, the second most important source from which the Islamic laws are derived. In Maliki Madh-hab, Sunnah includes not only what was recorded in Traditions, but the legal rulings of the four Rightly-Guided companions (Khulafaa ar-Rashidun) as well as the first three generations of Muslims who resided in Medina. As stated earlier, Imaam Malik believed that the living sunnah [i.e. the practice of three generations of the people of Medina], was a stronger evidence of the Prophet's (pbuh) pattern of life than any other Sunna recorded elsewhere.

Imaam Malik was a recognized scholar who taught Ahaadith for forty years in Medina. The Abbasid caliph of the time wanted him to compile a comprehensive code of law based on the Prophet's (pbuh) Sunnah which could be used uniformly throughout the Caliphate. He therefore compiled the book known as al-Muwatta which, he is reported to have said, he showed to seventy jurists of Medina, and every single one of them approved it.

According to Abu Ameenah in his book, 'The Evolution of Fiqh' he said on page 70:

"But, on its (al-Muwatta) completion, Malik refused to have it forced on the people pointing out that the Sahaabah had scattered throughout the Islamic empire and had taken with them other parts of the Sunnah which also had to be considered in any laws imposed throughout the state. Caliph Haaron ar-Rasheed (768-809 CE) also made the same request of the Imaam, but he was also turned down". End of quote.

He went on to say:

"He (Malik) would either narrate to his students Hadeeths and Athars (statements of the Sahaabah) on various topics of Islamic law then discuss their implications, or he would inquire about problems which had arisen in the areas from whence his students came, then narrate appropriate Hadeeths or Athars which could be used to solve them." End of quote.

While Abu Hanifa's School was developed from answers to hypothetical questions and so his Madh-hab became known as 'Ahl ar-Rai', (opinion people), Imaam Malik's method of teaching was based on the narration of Ahaadith and the discussion of their meanings in the context of the problems of the day; and his followers were, therefore, known as the people of Hadith (Ahl-al-Hadith). This is how he compiled his book of Ahaadith, al-Muwatta. Imaam Malik died in the city of his birth in the year 801 CE at the venerable age of 83.

Some Controversial Aspects of The Maliki Madh-hab :

1. Unlike other Sunnis, the Maliki leave their hands to dangle at one's sides while praying instead of folding them below their chest.
2. They do not recite any supplication before the Fatiha in prayers (the Bismillah).
3. They say the ending tasleem only once, like the Ibadhi, (As-salaamuáleikum while turning the head to the right and left instead of saying it twice like in other Sunni Madhahib).
4. Etc.

The Shafi'i Madh-hab

Imaam Muhammad ibn Idris as-Shafi'i was born in Shaam in the year 769 CE. He was taught by students of Abu Hanifa as well as by Imaam Malik himself. He remained a student with Malik until the latter died in 801 CE. He is said to have memorized Imaam Malik's book, al-Muwatta, from cover to cover.

Imaam Shafi'i wrote three sets of books which were the basis for his Madh-hab. The first book, called al-Hujjah (The Evidence), was a combination of knowledge he acquired from both Schools, that of Abu Hanifa and Malik. Later on, he studied in Egypt under Imaam Al-Layth ibn Saád, and, with the new knowledge, he wrote another book called al-Umm (The Essence). He also wrote a third book, which was his final work, in which he replaced the earlier legal decisions with more refined rulings he acquired from his new knowledge. Based on

these scholarships in Iraq, Medina and Egypt, Imaam Shafi'i formed his own separate Madh-hab which he called after his name.

The Hanbali Madh-hab

Imaam Ahmad ibn Hanbal as-Shaibany was born in Baghdad, Iraq, in the year 778 CE. He studied under the students of Imaam Malik as well as under Imaam Shafi'i. Since these two were also students of previous Sunni Imaams, the Hanbali Madh-hab, therefore, represents all the other three Sunni Madhaahib. The Madh-hab, however, has the least number of followers compared to other Sunni Schools.

Although the Hanbali were oppressed at first owing to the Islamic courts being dominated by some other factions, they became stronger after the demise of Imaam Ahmed. They became fearless and very aggressive in the execution of their doctrine. They used to patrol the streets of Baghdad, arresting evil doers such as unchaste women. If they noticed anyone playing chess they would disrupt the game; or if they saw utensils of alcohol or musical instruments, they would smash them.

The Hanbali Imaams had a tendency of declining high governmental posts for fear that this would distract them from worship. It is said that whenever a Hanbali would excel in knowledge, he would submerge himself in worship and gratitude to Allah, embrace the ascetic life and divorce himself from fame, status and worldly life. The Hanbali were, therefore, themselves instrumental in

depriving their School of publicity, resulting in few followers as they are.

The Sunni Points of View V/S Ibadhi Controversial Points:

1 Seeing Allah (Rui'yah)

The position of mainstream Sunni is that the vision of Allah (swt) is possible for the believers in the hereafter. The Ibadhi and the Shi'a believe that Allah (swt) could not be seen at all, even in the hereafter. While the argument is lengthy, it will suffice to mention some few important points as presented by the Sunni.

Quoting the following verse from the Qur'an, amongst others, the Sunni explain that only the disbelievers will be deprived from the vision of Allah; hence by contrast, it implies that the believers will be blessed with the vision.

Surat al Mutaffifin, 83:15:

كَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَّخُجُونَ

“Nay! Surely, they (evil doers) will be veiled from seeing their Lord that Day.” (Translation by Study the Noble Qur’an: Word -for-Word: compiled by ‘Darussalam’ and supervised by Abdul Malik Mujahid).

They also say that the following verse confirms their belief that the believers will be able to see Allah in the hereafter:

Surat Qaf, (50:35):

لَهُمْ مَا يَشَاءُونَ فِيهَا وَلَدَيْنَا مَزِيدٌ

“There they will have all that they desire - and We have more (for them, i.e. a glance at the All-Mighty, All-Majesty).” (Translation by: Study the Noble Qur’an, Word -for-Word: compiled by ‘Darussaam’ and supervised by Abdul Malik Mujahid).

Moreover, A.J.Arberry, in his book, ‘The Doctrine of The Sufis’, Chapter 11: Their Doctrine of Vision, has this to say:

“.... This is because God exists, and everything which exists may (logically speaking) be seen. For God has implanted in us vision: and if the vision of God had not been possible, then the petition of Moses, “O Lord, show Thyself to me, that I may look upon Thee”, would have been (evidence of) ignorance and unbelief. Moreover, when God made the vision dependent on the condition that the mountain should abide firm - for He says, “And if it abides firm in its place, then shalt thou see Me” - and seeing also that its abiding firm would have been

intellectually possible, if God had made it firm; it necessarily follows that vision which was dependent on this was intellectually permissible and possible". End of quote.

In addition, the following Hadith is also in support of Sunni's belief on Seeing Allah (swt) for the believers in the hereafter:

Abu Hurayra (Allah be pleased with him) narrates that the Prophet's companions asked him (saw): "O Messenger of Allah! Shall we see our Lord on the the Day of Resurrection?" He (saw) replied: "Do you have any doubt in seeing the full moon on a clear night?" They replied: "No, O Messenger of Allah." He (saw) said: "Do you have any doubt of seeing the sun when there are no clouds?" They replied in the negative. He said: "You will see Allah (your Lord) in the same way..." (Sahih al-Bukhari).

With regard to whether the Prophet Muhammad (saw) saw Allah in the night of Isra' and Mi'iraj or not, the Prophet's (saw) companions differ in their views. While Abd Allah ibn Abbas and some others confirm that he (saw) saw Allah, Sayyidna Aisha, Abd Allah ibn Masoud and others were of the opinion that he (saw) did not see Allah with the normal eyes during his ascension to the havens, but rather he (saw) saw Him (swt) with his heart.

2 On Whether Qur'an is Created:

The question of whether or not the Qur'an has been created came up as early as in the Abbasid period. The Mu'tazilis who flourished in the cities of Basra and Baghdad during the 8th-10th centuries AD believed in the 'created' Qur'an until when Imaam Ahmad ibn Hanbal came up with an opposite doctrine which remained the belief of all Sunni Muslims until now.

The Sunni, therefore, believe that the Qur'an is uncreated and is eternal. Others say it is created and is an attribute of Allah, Who alone is not created and is Eternal.

3 Whether Punishment in Hell is Temporary or Permanent:

The Sunni believe differently from the Ibadhi, the Shi'a or even the Christians. While these other sects, or religions, believe that the punishment in Hell is permanent, the Sunni say: 'every Muslim will be punished in Hell for a period corresponding to the weight of their sins. Having served their sentence, Muslims without exception, will then be transferred to Paradise. Only non-believers will be liable to eternal punishment in the Hell-Fire.'

Sufism

Although Sufism is not a Madh-hab, I chose to write a little about it, in order to give us a perspective of what Sufism is.

Classic Sufi scholars have defined Sufism as "a science whose objective is the reparation (repair or make good) of the heart and turning it away from all else but God".

Dr. Qadeer Shah Baig, in his article on "Introduction to Sufism" said:

The first and foremost requirement is the purification of the soul. The process is generally a long and difficult one. It consists of the following three stages:-

The carnal soul

In the first stage, one struggles against the carnal soul or nafs al-ammara as it is called by the Sufis. Nafs al-ammara is the tendency in man to disobey God, and to take pleasure in evil deeds and thoughts. This inclines man towards gossip, backbiting, vain talk, pride, selfishness, lust, hatred and jealousy. The struggle to overcome nafs al-ammara involves the purifying of the body, tongue, mind and heart.

- a. The body is purified by keeping it free from dirt, by preserving its members from harm and by not indulging in sexual license.
- b. The tongue must be purified by restraining it from backbiting, malicious gossip and vain talk, or by using it to alter the truth.
- c. The mind must be purified by abstaining it from suspicion, plotting and thinking ill of others.
- d. The heart must be purified by keeping it free from lust, jealousy, greed, selfishness, hatred and pride.

- e. In this stage, a Sufi constantly examines the motives of his likes and dislikes.

The reproaching soul

When he has subjugated the carnal soul, nafs al-ammara, the Sufi enters upon the second stage of purification in which he is able to respond readily to the call of the reproaching soul which is called nafs al-lawwama. It is the nafs al-lawwama which reproaches man for his evil deeds and impels him to acts of mercy and generosity.

The contented soul

After this stage has come firmly established in him, the Sufi enters the third stage which is known as the station of the contented soul, nafs al-mutma'inna. In this stage the Sufi develops to the fullest the tendency to obey God and to act in perfect harmony with his commandments. Here the soul is reconciled with all other stations of the path, such as poverty, patience, gratitude and trust in God. Here the soul finds perfect satisfaction in being governed by the heart, the divine spark in man. Here the Sufi becomes truly free from fear and grief. As God said in the Qurán, "Lo, indeed, the friends of God have no fear, nor are they grieved." Fear and grief are qualities of man, and friends of God are relieved of the burden of these qualities. Fearlessly, and with the strength of faith, they invite man to God, the source of man's creation and the goal of his life.

In this stage, a Sufi is filled with love, mercy, kindness and a burning zeal to help others. In order to

reach this high station, a Sufi must constantly strive to control his ego, to curb his anger and impatience. He must eat less, talk less and deny himself the pleasure of other people's company. Sometimes he withdraws completely from the worldly activities and occupies himself entirely with the remembrance of God and meditation.

As he makes progress spiritually, he is able to extend the length of his periods of seclusion, culminating in retreats of forty day's duration. In this seclusion, the Sufi fasts during the day, breaking his fast after sunset with only a piece of bread and some water. During the nights, he keeps constant vigil and chants a selected verse from the Qurán 125,000 times. The verse usually chanted is: 'There is no God but Thou, the Holy Lord. I am indeed one of the evil doers'. Or, 'Say, He Allah is One. Allah is Sufficient unto Himself'.

The various stages on the mystical path are known as 'maqamat', which can be reached by any Sufi by means of prayer, fasting, meditation and the 'hal' or 'mystical state', which may be vouchsafed to the Sufi by the Grace of God, but is not attainable by the mystic's own efforts. A Sufi may be blessed by an experience which reveals to his soul the reality of the whole universe, from the lowest layer of the earth to the highest heaven. This experience is called mi'raj or the ascension. In this, a Sufi is generally accompanied by the spirit of his sheikh, and comes in contact with the spirits of other sheikhs and prophets. Various stations are also revealed to him with different colours and lights." End of quote.

Causes that led to Sufism

Sufism arose among a number of Muslims as a reaction against the worldliness of early Umayyad Caliphate (661-750); or the Abbasid Caliphate (750-950CE), giving the example of the alleged luxurious life which Harun Rashid used to live compared to the stern simplicity of Abu Bakr and Umar, who lived in a modest house, wore patched clothes and could be approached by any of their followers.

However, the devotional practices of Sufis are different and vary widely. A typical Sufi prefers to live in isolation, away from social atmosphere, practising self-discipline and concentration on God, believing that, by quelling the self and through loving ardour (warm emotion) for God it is possible to maintain a union with the divine in which the human self melts away. Prerequisites to practice include rigorous adherence to Islamic norms (ritual prayer in its five prescribed times each day, the fast of Ramadhan, and so forth). Additionally, the seeker ought to be firmly grounded in devotional practices such as sunnah prayers and dhikr (repetition of divine names). He must, in a sense, become a broken person, stripped of all habits through the practice of solitude, silence and sleeplessness.

Scholars of Sufism are unanimous in agreeing that Sufism cannot be learned through books. To reach the highest levels of success in Sufism, typically, requires that the disciple lives with and serves the teacher for many, many years. They say, "To be a real Sufi, is to be to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) just as Abu Bakr was to him".

One common practice among Sufis is to visit the tombs of saints, great scholars and righteous people. They believe that visitors may invoke blessings upon those interred, and seek divine favour and proximity to God.

We must remember, however, that for a Muslim to avoid the Hell-Fire, it is sufficient for him to live a clean pious life as normally directed in the Pillars of Faith and Imaan (to avoid all that is forbidden and practise all that is good).

Wahabi

This branch of Islam derives its name from its founder, Mohammad Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792), who lived just over 200 years ago, thus making it the latest of all Madhaahib. He was of the tribe of Bani Tamim and was born at Najd in central Arabia. He studied literature and jurisprudence of the Hanafi Madh-hab. However, his teaching was founded on that of Ibn Taimiyya (1263-1328), who was of the school of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Abdul Wahhab also studied law in Medina and then returned to Najd where he undertook the work of a teacher.

{Note: Ibn Taimiyya, though a Hanbali, refused to be bound by any of the four Sunni Madhaahib, claiming the power of a Mujahhid (i.e. a scholar in his own right, who was qualified to make his own deductions from the Qur'an and Sunna)}.

Mohammad Abdul Wahhab believed that Islam had drifted away from the practice as taught by Prophet Muhammad (saw). He therefore sought to restore the

Islamic society, ridding it of cultural practices and wrong interpretations acquired over the centuries. He was particularly against the Shia and Sufi practices of visiting shrines. (The Shia continued to revere the Imaams even after their death and so visited their graves to ask favours of the Imaams buried there). Mohammad Abdul Wahhab was concerned with the way the people of Najd engaged in practices he considered polythetic, such as praying to saints, making pilgrimage to tombs, venerating caves and sacrificing offerings. (Wahhabis consider their doctrine to be the only true form of Islam. They do not consider Shias to be in line with the Islamic Sacred Laws and are particularly hostile to Sufism). Besides, the Wahhabi doctrine is also in conflict with all other Sects with regard to the translation of the Holy Qur'an. They believe that the Qur'an cannot be translated in any way other than what is said literally. For example, when the Holy Qur'an mentions 'the hand of Allah' or 'the face of Allah' or 'Allah is sitting on a throne', what is meant, they say, is exactly that; i.e. Allah has a hand or a face or is sitting on a throne. This, of course, is strongly refuted by all other Muslims.

Mohammad Abdul Wahhab's works, especially Kitab at-Tawhiid, are still widely read by Salafis around the world today, and the majority of Salafi scholars still reference his works frequently.

{Note: Salafi view the first three generations of Muslims, who are Muhammad's (saw) companions, and the two succeeding generations after them, (Tabi'in and Taba'a at Tabi'in), as examples of how Islam should be practised.

The principal tenet of Salafism is that Islam was perfect and complete during the days of Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his companions, but that undesirable innovations (Bida'a) have been added over later centuries due to materialistic and cultural influences. Salafism seeks to revive a practice of Islam that, more closely, resembles the religion during the time of Muhammad (saw)}.

After his death, Mohammad Abdul Wahhab's views flourished and almost all people of Mecca and Medina belong to this school. The term Wahhaby was somehow detested by its members, considering it rather derogative. The more preferred title is Muwahhiduun (Unitarians or Unifiers of Islamic practice), because of their call for 'Tawhiid', (which, actually is not different from all other Muslims). The term Wahhabi, however, is more commonly used and is now accepted even by its own members.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the difference in the interpretation of commands among Muslims started even during Prophet Muhammad's life-time when he sent a contingent

of his companions to fight the Jews of Bani Qureidha. However, no Madh-hab was established until after 656 CE, some 25 years after the Prophet's (pbuh) death. It started with the establishment of Shia Madh-hab, followed immediately by Ibadhi Madh-hab, but which was known by other names, such as, Jamaát al-Muslimin, Ahl al-Dáwah or Muhakkima Party. The various Sunni Madhaahib, as we have seen, were formed as a result of the dispersion of the Imaams during Umayyad Dynasty (661-750 CE), when isolated individual Imaams were compelled to use their own reasoned decisions in order to deal with new local cases. The decisions of individual Imaams were eventually recorded as new Schools of thought or Madhaahib.

We all accept that the Sacred Laws in all Sects are derived from the same four main sources. The only differences lie with the interpretation of the Qurán and in the Imaams' decisions about which Traditions are authentic and strong or which are fabricated and weak. The Imaam's Ijtihad or reasoned decision, naturally, depended on how he interpreted the Qurán or on which Tradition he selected; and this, of course, is what led to the differences in the rulings we now have between Madhaahib.

The Imaams, no doubt, were competent people who acquired that status because of their wealth of knowledge in Sacred Laws and were the most reliable leaders in Islam of the time. It can be argued that, in the same way Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) accepted the opinions of both groups

who were dispatched to Bani Quraidha, the opinions of these scholars must also be respected and taken as correct.

The five sources which all Legal Laws are derived from are given below, in their order of precedence:

Qurán: Revealed to reform human conditions and forbade all customs which were harmful to the society.

Sunnah: The sayings and actions of the Prophet (pbuh).

Ijmaa: A meeting of major Sahaabah or Companions of the Prophet (pbuh) to try to get unanimous agreement on solution to a problem.

Ijtihad: If Ijmaa failed for any reason, the caliph or Imaam would make his own reasoned decision based on his knowledge from the Qurán, Sunnah or previously recorded rulings.

Qiyaas: This is a method of reasoning to form an analogical deduction based on the above four sources. An example of Qiyaas is the prohibition of smoking cigarettes, marijuana or consuming other drugs, including poison, although these are not specifically prohibited in the Qur'an.

The differences between various Madhaahib are numerous, some are serious and others are trifle. Each Madh-hab is defending its beliefs and condemns all other Madhaahib!!

In my view this cannot be right since all of us believe in the same five Pillars of Islam and Six Pillars of Imaan.

Remember what Allah the Almighty tells us in the Noble Qur'an, Surat Al-Hujrat (49:13):

..... إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ (١٣)

“Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)”. (13)
Translation by Yusuf Ali.

And once again He tells us in Surat Aal Imraan, Verse 19:

..... إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الإِسْلَامُ قُلْ

The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will) 19.

I agree that the differences are inevitable and our leaders will always argue against each other. Unfortunately, they always come to the same conclusion: "Agree Never to Agree!" or say: "You believe in your way and I believe in mine!"

What I am trying to say here is about us 'common worshippers'. If only we could leave the arguments and self-defence to our leaders; for they are the experts in these matters. It is our leaders' responsibility to deal with the differences between them. We cannot all pretend to be lawyers; in the same way as we cannot all pretend to be doctors, engineers or experts in other peoples' fields. I believe that questions such as the following should not distract us from our day to day worship to Allah, or tarnish our piety. These questions should not be given priority over the main Pillars of Islam or Imaan. Their

existence, in fact serves only one purpose; that of separating the Muslims! (I must give credit to the Sultanate of Oman and its Muslim leaders, where generally, it is normal for Muslims of different Madhaahib to pray inside any mosque and behind an Imaam of any Madh-hab).

The following are but only a few examples of differences between Madhaahib:

- a. Whether Imaams are God-chosen and are infallible.
- b. Allah will be seen or not.
- c. Qurán is created or eternal.
- d. Whether or not Muslims will remain permanently in Paradise or in Hell.
- e. Whether or not a man and a woman can get married after having sex relation between them before marriage.

If we take, for example, just one controversial point of 'whether Allah will be seen or not'; we will find contradicting Hadiths on the same issue (probably claimed to originate from the same source). The Ibadhi claim that Seyyidna Aisha denied that the Prophet) (pbuh) saw Allah while the Sunni say the opposite. Many sound reports show that the companions differed sharply whether the Prophet saw Allah or not. Ibn 'Abbas related that he did, while Ibn Mas'ud, 'A'isha, Abu Hurayra, and Abu Dharr related reports to the contrary, stating that the verses of Sura al-Najm and other Suras referred to Gibril. It is interesting that every sect claim their

Hadith to be 'SAHIH' (authentic). It is obvious that they cannot be both right.

As common worshippers, the best we can do for ourselves is to avoid all major sins, and try to bring ourselves as close to Allah as we can by worshipping Him in the simplest way possible as directed in the Pillars of Islam. The Holy Qurán does not mention Madhaahib. In fact, it requires us to hold together. Allah (swt) Says in Surat Al-Imraan, Verse 103:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

'Hold fast together to the cable of Allah and be not divided'(103). (Translation by Zafar Ishaq Ansary, (English Version of Tafhiim al-Qur'an).

Allah, once again, says in the same Surat, Verse 105:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ

'Do not be like those who fell into factions and differed among themselves after clear signs had come to them. '(105). Translation by Zafar Ishaq Ansary (English version of Tafhiim al-Qur'an).

The Holy Qur'an clearly tells us what to do to be good Muslims. It says in Surat al- Mu'минуun, Verses 1-11:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ (١) الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ (٢) وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ (٣) وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِلزَّكَاةِ فَاعِلُونَ (٤) وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ (٥) إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَرْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ

فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ (٦) فَمَنْ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ
 (٧) وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ (٨) وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ
 صَلَوَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ (٩) أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْوَارِثُونَ (١٠) الَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ
 الْفِرْدَوْسَ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ (١١)

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Successful indeed are the believers. 2. Those who offer their Salaat (prayers) with all solemnity and full submissiveness. 3. And those who turn away from *Al-Laghw* (evil vain talk). 4. And those who pay the *Zakat* (alms and charity). 5. And those who guard their chastity. 6. Except from their wives or (the slaves) that their right hands possess, for then, they are free from blame; 7. But whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors; 8. Those who are faithfully true to their *Amanaat* (trust) and to their covenants; 9. And those who strictly guard their *Salawaat* (prayers). 10. Those are indeed the inheritors. 11. Who shall inherit the *Firdaus* (Paradise). They shall dwell therein forever. (Translation by: Study the Noble Qur'an, Word -for-Word: compiled by 'Darussaam' and supervised by Abdul Malik Mujahid).

As Muslims, we are required to follow a leader of our choice; we cannot be on our own. But, once we choose a leader we must obey all the rulings of that Madh-hab. We cannot randomly select a rule from one Madh-hab and apply it to a situation in another Madh-hab for convenience. For example, if one Madh-hab forbids getting married to someone you had an unlawful sex relation with, you cannot just say, 'the other Madh-hab is allowing this and therefore I will just go ahead'.

Adherence to a Madh-hab is a conviction which cannot be taken lightly. As a follower of one Madh-hab you have to remain faithful to that particular Madh-hab right through.

In my view, it is better for a Muslim to adhere to the pillars of Islam under any Madh-hab and follow a practice that will bring him close to Allah than worrying himself with what is wrong with other Madhaahib. For example, it is said: "A prayer without a total submission and humbleness (Khushuú) to Allah is of no avail."

As such, any Muslim who performs ablution properly and carries-out his prayer at a prescribed time with total submissiveness and humility to Allah, under any Madh-hab, is likely to be rewarded better than he who prays lazily and without attention to his prayer or to Allah, in any other Madh-hab. This is also true with regard to Fasting or any other rituals.

I fully commend the Sufi when they say:

"A Sufi is filled with love, mercy, kindness and a burning zeal to help others. In order to reach this high station, a Sufi must constantly strive to control his ego, to curb his anger and impatience. Sometimes he withdraws completely from the worldly activities and occupies himself entirely with the remembrance of God and meditation. Additionally, the seeker ought to be firmly grounded in devotional practices such as sunnah prayers and dhikr (repetition of divine names). He must, in a sense, become a broken person, stripped of all habits through the practice of solitude, silence and sleeplessness".

This, of course, is true of any Muslim. Yet, instead of doing just this, we engage ourselves in finding faults with one another's Madh-hab, and neglect what is actually required of us as Muslims.

Since we are fearful of committing major sins out of ignorance, it might be wise for any Muslim to avoid committing, or try to ignore those questions of serious conflict between Madhaahib such as the following:

1. Getting married to someone with whom you committed a grave sin of adultery (Zinaá). If, for example, the Madh-hab which forbids this is correct, then the couple will be committing 'zinaá', not once, but as long as they remain married. This is very serious indeed; for zinaá, as we know, is one of the greatest sins!
2. Believing that some companions of the Prophet (pbuh) will go to Hell. This may jeopardize our own belief since Islam forbids us to decide the destiny of our fellow beings. With the exception of those whose fate is already mentioned in the Qurán, Allah alone Knows who will go to Paradise and who will go to Hell. We humans are not in a position to determine what Allah's decisions are.

This may also be true with all other controversies we mentioned above. As common worshippers, I must say again, we might be wise to keep our minds free of these concerns and limit our performance to what the Pillars of Imaan or Islam tell us.

We are told in Surat Al-Imran (3:114):

يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ
وَيُسْرِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (١١٤)

‘They believe in Allah and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten (in emulation) in (all) good works; they are in the ranks of the righteous.’ (114). Translation by Yusuf Ali.

Allah also Says in Surat Al-Ra’ad, (19-24):

أَفَمَنْ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ الْحَقُّ كَمَنْ هُوَ أَعْمَىٰ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ
أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ (١٩) الَّذِينَ يُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَنْقُضُونَ الْمِيثَاقَ
(٢٠) وَالَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ
وَيَخَافُونَ سُوءَ الْحِسَابِ (٢١) وَالَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِمْ
وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنْفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً وَيَدْرَءُونَ
بِالْحَسَنَةِ السَّيِّئَةَ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ (٢٢) جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٌ يَدْخُلُونَهَا
وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ ءَابَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ
مِّنْ كُلِّ بَابٍ (٢٣) سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ (٢٤)

“He who knows that the Book which has been sent to you from your Lord is the truth, is he like him who is blind to that truth? It is only men of understanding who take heed: (20) those who fulfill their covenant with Allah and do not break their compact after firmly confirming it; (21) who join together the ties which Allah has bidden to be joined; who fear their Lord and dread lest they are subjected to severe reckoning; (22) who are steadfast in seeking the good pleasure of their Lord; who establish prayer and spend both secretly and openly out of their wealth We have provided them, and who ward off evil with good. Theirs shall be the ultimate abode (23). Peace be upon you.

You merit this reward for your patience. How excellent is the ultimate abode! (24). (Translation by Zafar Ishaq Ansary - English Version of Tafhiim al-Qur'an).

Allah (swt) again Says in Surat Luqman, (4-6):

الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ (٤)
أُولَئِكَ عَلَى هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ (٥) وَمِنَ النَّاسِ
مَن يَشْتَرِي لَهْوَ الْحَدِيثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّخِذَهَا
هُزُوعًا أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ (٦)

“Those who establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity, and have (in their hearts) the assurance of the Hereafter. (4) These are on (true) guidance from their Lord; and these are the ones who will prosper. (5) But there are, among men those who purchase idle tales, without knowledge (or meaning), to mislead (men) from the Path of Allah and throw ridicule (on the Path): for such there will be a humiliating Penalty” (6). Translation by Yusuf Ali.

Allah also tells us in Surat Al-Ahzab, (33:35):

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ
وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ
وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّابِغِينَ وَالصَّابِغَاتِ
وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ
أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا (٣٥)

For Muslim men and women— for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves,

for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise— for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward. (35). Translation by Yusuf Ali.

The above verses of the Holy Qur'an describe the exact nature of how a good Muslim should be. As long as we live inside the parameters of this description we will, hopefully, be among those who: "On them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve."فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ...

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