



AHLI SUNNAH WALJAMA'AH IN EDUCATION

¹Muhammad Yusuf Khalid

University College of Teacher's Training Seri Begawan Brunei Darussalam¹

1muhammadyusufkhalid59@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah in education. The term is not discussed publicly in many seminars because there are not much issues to be discussed. But when problems arise like ISIS and Daesh and other new groups in Islam, Muslims start to wonder whether these new groups are in line with the real teaching of Islam or not, and what is Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah the so called real representative of mainstream Islam, in Arabic al-Sawad al-A'zam? It is high time to teach Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah as a subject at tertiary level to give clear picture and definition about who are the groups under Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah's category. And to prevent any group from claiming that such and such group is the real representative of Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah without valid proof and evidence. The paper finds out that Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah is facing at least three main challenges namely the issue of anthropomorphism (tajsim), the issue of rejecting madhab (school of thought) the authority of the imams in jurisprudence and theology, and rejecting the existence of Sufism and Sufi order in Islam.

Key words: *Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah, anthropomorphism (tajsim), anti mazhab and Sufism.*

INTRODUCTION

The term Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah is not commonly discussed in the public because there is no urgent need to do so, but when ISIS and Daesh start to get coverage in social media many Muslims wonder whether these two groups represent real Islam or not and what is the real Islam? Due to this problem, Muslims feel that it is high time to introduce and discuss mainstream Islam which is known as Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah better known in Arabic as *al-Sawad al-A'zam*. Literally, Ahli is an Arabic word that means a member, sunnah can mean either the path of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. or the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH (hadith). jama'ah means the consensus of the Muslim scholars. Generally, when Muslim society follows Hanafi jurisprudence they follow al-Maturidia theology, when they follow Maliki jurisprudence they follow Ash'aria theology, when they follow Shafi'i jurisprudence they follow Ash'aria theology and when they follow Hanbali jurisprudence they follow Athari theology.

According to Abd Qahir al-Baghdadi (429H/1037CE) there are eight groups that represent Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah namely Muslim theologians, scholars of jurisprudence, scholars of the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH (hadith), scholars of exegesis of the Qur'an, the Sufis, those who protect the border of the Islamic states and the public who follow Ahli Sunnah. While Murtada al-Zabidi (1732-1790 CE) said: "*When the term Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah is used generally it means the Ash'airah and the Maturidia groups*".

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

THE FOUR IMAMS IN JURISPRUDENCE AND TWO IMAMS IN THEOLOGY

These classifications that when Muslim society follows Hanafi jurisprudence they follow al-Maturidi (853-944 CE) theology, when they follow Maliki jurisprudence they follow Ash'aria (873-935CE) theology, when they follow Shafi'i jurisprudence they follow Ash'aria theology and when they follow Hanbali jurisprudence they follow Athari theology had been documented for long time, and most of the time are consistent except in Hanbali mazhab where many changes have taken place both in jurisprudence and theology.

These categories or classifications started about 1100 years ago and still in good shape and intact until today. The issue of Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah gets attention of the Muslim scholars when a new or an alien teaching creeps into the main stream of Islamic teaching, for example the issue of anthropomorphism (tajsim) which mostly existed and found among the followers of Hanbali mazhab. Imam Ahmad himself maintained the methodology of *tanzih* (reject anthropomorphism belief) and never deviated from the pure teaching of Islam, but some of those who claim to be the followers of Hanbali mazhab deviated from the pure teaching of Islam and promoted anthropomorphism belief. Abdul Rahman Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-Jauzi (508-587H) who was loyal follower of Hanbali mazhab criticized and advised three of his colleagues regarding the issue of anthropomorphism belief. According to him these three scholars have gone down to the level of lay men and have tarnished the image of Hanbali mazhab, to the extent that every Hanbali follower known to be the follower of anthropomorphism belief because of them. (Ibn al-Jauzi. *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbih*: 30)

The issue did not stop here. When Ibn Taimiah (1263-1328 CE) met Ibn Ataillah al-Sakandari in Egypt, Ibn Ataillah praised him but at the same time wondered why Ibn Taimiah dared to express opinions that even scholars who came before and after him did not dare to do so, and even went against the opinion of his imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and other imams. Ibn Taimiah replied:

“Who soever becomes fanatic with certain school of thought he behaves like those who follow their whims and lust”. (<https://www.alukah.net/sharia/> Retrieved on the 29th.9.2023)

This answer directly or indirectly influenced some Muslims to the extent that they also question the authority of the six imams and started to encourage people to get the rulings directly from the Qur'an and the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. without realizing that to do so one has to master at least 10 Islamic disciplines, in other words, it is easier said than done. Today we hear many times that group of Muslims encourage people to ignore the role of the six imams and calling people to stick only to the Qur'an and the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. since these sources are infallible unlike those imams. Muslims have wasted much time and energy in this particular issue and perhaps it is time to focus on something else which is more productive. And maybe this is also the result of rejecting Sufism which makes some Muslims arrogant as if they are expert Islamic studies. Both imam Ghazali and shaikh Abd Kadir al-Jilani emphasize the importance of being humble and the danger of being arrogant. It is very unfortunate that sometimes Muslims lose their ethics when they get involved in polemic about mazhab (school of thought) so, it is high time to learn about the benefit and the importance of being hamble since it is one of the basic characters of the prophet Muhammad PBUH.

Ibn Taimiah himself did not follow neither the school of imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi neither the school imam Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari in theology, instead he invented his own school of theology where he divided the oneness of Allah (tauhid) into three parts *uluhiyyah*, *rububiyyah* and *asma* and *sifat*. It is worth noting that although Ibn Taimiah is staunch advocate of obeying the verse of the Qur'an and the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. and yet he came up with theory in theology without strong proof not even from the companions of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. and he also moved away from the school of imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal with the same argument, that following the Qur'an and the hadith is the priority and more important than any other source including the opinion of the scholars.

“Ibn Taymiyyah's particular approach and his break with the representatives of the madhhab system created a stir during his own time. In fact, it was his fatwā forbidding the act of traveling in order to visit the grave of the Prophet that led to him being declared an unbeliever and imprisoned in Cairo until he met his death”.

(Ibn Taymiyya and His Times 40 (Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed et al eds., Oxford University Press 2010),

“Ibn Taymiyyah met a great deal of opposition from the jurists of his day. His controversial fatwās were dealt with sternly, leading to multiple imprisonments. However, it was his opinion forbidding travel for the purpose of ziyārah that landed him in the Cairo prison in which he would eventually die. One of the four chief judges of Cairo who issued the verdict for his imprisonment was the Hanbali Aḥmad ibn ‘Umar al-Maqdisī, who declared Ibn Taymiyya’s verdicts al-bāṭinah al-gharībah al-mardūdah (vain, odd and unacceptable) and also declared Ibn Taymiyyah to be a kāfir (disbeliever) for his fatwā on ziyārah”. (Zargar, Cameron.2017. *Origin of Wahabism from Hanbali Fiqh*. UCLA journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law,16 (1). Dealing with the unclear verses and hadiths pertaining to Allah’s Attributes.

Ta’wil and Tafwidh

These two terms regarded as the centre of the discussion or polemic between Ahli Sunnah Waljama’ah and other Muslim groups. The first group of Ahli Sunnah Waljama’ah (salaf) those who lived in the first three centuries Hijrah, prefer the methodology of *tafwidh* while the second group of Ahli Sunnah Waljama’ah (khalaf) those who lived after the first three centuries Hijrah prefer *ta’wil* methodology. These two terms or methodologies are some of the main characteristics of Ahli Sunnah Waljama’ah to avoid anthropomorphism belief compared to other Muslim groups. Because some Muslim group rejected these two methodologies, instead, they prefer to interpret the ambiguous verses of the Qur’an and the text of the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH literally, hence they easily fall into anthropomorphism belief. Ahli sunnah Waljama’ah applies *ta’wil* methodology only when it is necessary. In other words, not every time they find ambiguous verses or word in the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. they apply *ta’wil*.

What is *ta’wil*?

“Ta’wil means choosing from among the several meanings of a word, the one that is compatible with Islam. Not everybody can perform it. Only profound Ahli Sunnah scholars called Ulama rasikhin can perform it. Correctness of ta’wil is assessed by measuring them with tafsirs. If ta’wil contradicts a tafsir, then it is discarded”.

(<http://www.myreligionislam.com/detail.asp?Aid=5929>) Retrieved on the 27th.9.2023).

What id *tafwidh*?

"Imam Nawawi said, "Scholars disagree about the Quran verses and hadiths that deal with the Attributes of Allah, [such as Allah's 'hand' (Quran 48:10), His 'eyes' (52:48), or His 'nearness' (50:16)] as to whether they should be discussed in terms of a particular figurative interpretation (ta'wil) or not. Some say that they should be figuratively interpreted as befits them (ie interpreting His hand for example, as an allusion to His omnipotence). And this is more well known of the two positions of the scholastic theologians. Others say that such verses should not be given a definitive interpretation, but rather their meaning should not be discussed, and the knowledge of them should be consigned to Allah Most (tafwid), while at the same time believing in the transcendence of Allah Most High, and that the characteristics of created things do not apply to Him (Allah). For example, it should be said we believe that "the All Merciful is 'established' (Arabic: istawa) on the Throne." (Quran 20:5) But we do not know the reality of the meaning of that, nor what is intended thereby, though we believe of Allah Most High that "there is nothing whatsoever like unto Him (Quran 42:11)"

(<https://baraka.wordpress.com/2016/01/29/the-unclear-verses-and-hadiths-pertaining-to-allahs-attributes>) Retrieved on the 27th.9.2023

To follow mazhab or not to follow mazhab.

Shaikh Said Ramadan al-Buti wrote an interesting book on the subject "*al-La Mazhabiyyah Akhtar Bid'ah Tuhaddid al-Shariah al-Islamiyyah*" pp 202, also shaikh Abdul Fattah b. Salih Qudaish al-Yafi'e wrote his book "*al-Tamazhub: Dirasah Ta'siliyyah Muqaranah Li al-Masail al-Muta'alliqah Bi al-Tamazhub*" pp 349. These two books are enough to give argument and proof on why following certain mazhab is important for the lay man, and for those who are qualified and confident can choose between following certain mazhab or to follow any scholar, for example imam Ghazali despite his knowledge in theology, jurisprudence, philosophy and Sufism he still followed Shafi'e mazhab and Ash'ariah theology, the same thing with his teacher al-Juwaini although he was given the title of imam al-Haramain but he still followed Shafi'e mazhab.

This is one of the hot issues discussed between Ahli Sunnah Waljama'ah and other Islamic groups. As we mentioned above that the main stream of Islam consists of four mazhabs namely Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'e and Hanbali in jurisprudence and two

mazhabs namely Ash'aria and Maturidia in theology. In other words, those who promote anti mazhab do not follow any one of these scholars, instead they encourage all Muslims to get the Islamic rulings directly from the Qur'an and the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH.

It is true that Allah and His messenger do not ask everybody to follow certain mazhab (school of thought), therefore it is not compulsory to do so, but it is also true that not everybody can get Islamic rulings directly from the Qur'an and the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. by himself. Those who feel capable and confident of doing so, by all means can go ahead. And for those who are unable and not confident it is enough for them to follow any one from the abovementioned imams.

Ibn Taimiah despite his knowledge, skill, piety, courage, leadership and dedication to the cause of Islam, Muslims in general still do not regard him as the founder of the fifth mazhab (school of thought) which can be called as anti mazhab. After all Allah does not say those who do not follow specific mazhab are better than those who follow certain mazhab.

"O, people! We created you from a male and a female, and We made you races and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. The best among you before Allah is the most righteous. Allah is Knowing and Aware".al-Hujurat:13

To be righteous person can be with mazhab or without mazhab, it depends on the capacity and the qualification of a person. To force everybody to reject mazhab is not the right opinion in Islam neither to force everybody to follow mazhab is the right idea. The door of ijtihaad is always open for those who have the qualifications.

Sufism and Sufi order.

Sufism is the spiritual aspect of Islam and must not be confused with jurisprudence (fiqh) and theology (aqidah). These three disciplines in Islam each one has special scope and principles.

"Umar ibn al-Khattab reported: We were sitting with the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, one day, a man appeared with very white clothes and very black hair. There were no signs of travel on him and we did not recognize him. He sat in front of the Prophet, rested his knees by his knees, and placed his hands on his

thighs. The man said, "O Muhammad, tell me about Islam." The Prophet said, "Islam is to testify there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to establish prayer, to give charity, to fast the month of Ramadan, and to perform pilgrimage to the House if a way is possible." The man said, "You have spoken truthfully." We were surprised that he asked him and said he was truthful. He said, "Tell me about faith." The Prophet said, "Faith is to believe in Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and to believe in providence, its good and its harm." The man said, "You have spoken truthfully. Tell me about excellence." The Prophet said, "Excellence is to worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He surely sees you." The man said, "Tell me about the final hour." The Prophet said, "The one asked does not know more than the one asking." The man said, "Tell me about its signs." The Prophet said, "The slave-girl will give birth to her mistress and you will see barefoot, naked, and dependent shepherds compete in the construction of tall buildings." Then, the man returned and I remained. The Prophet said to me, "O Umar, do you know who he was?" I said, "Allah and His Messenger know best." The Prophet said, "Verily, he was Gabriel who came to teach you your religion." Narrated by imam Muslim.

Clearly from the conclusion of the above hadith that Gabriel came to teach religion of Islam to the companions of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. that this religion consists of three basic foundations namely Islam with five pillars, Iman with six pillars and Ihsan with two levels. If Ihsan is removed obviously the religion is incomplete, when the religion is incomplete terrorism will be produced in the name of Islam. It is worth noting that those who reject Sufism do not discuss this hadith in detail especially Ihsan despite the quality of the hadith. If Ihsan is not important Gabriel did not mention in his meeting with the prophet Muhammad PBUH.

Those who teach only Islam and Iman and remove Ihsan means they commit great innovation (bid'ah) because the prophet PBUH. accepted three foundations to be conveyed to the whole humanity. Perhaps those who reject Sufism arguing that the term is un-Islamic interpret Ihsan as moral or ethics or purification of the heart, but the problem with these terms is they are very general unlike Sufism which has clear history, scientists, principles, books and contributions.

Muslim scholars developed the meaning of Ihsan mentioned in the above hadith for many years and eventually it became a complete and independent discipline in Islam known as Sufism or in Arabic tasawwuf. Ahli Sunnah

Waljama'ah accepts the existence of Sufism and Sufi order in Islam, unlike some other groups in Islam that rejected Sufism and Sufi order arguing that the term Sufism is not mentioned in the Qur'an neither in the tradition of the prophet Muhammad PBUH. and the prophet Muhammad PBUH himself was not a Sufi.

The term is indeed new but the essence of the teaching is as old as humanity, in other words, all prophets and messengers of Allah practice the principles of Sufism. What the Sufi masters have done is just made some improvements in terms of system, skill, and management.

Sufism and Sufi order are very big subjects, they need special international seminars alone. Since the issue is controversial many Muslims and non-Muslims alike question whether Sufism exists within Islam or outside Islam. Those who read the history how Islam came to Indonesia know that the Sufis play crucial role in da'wah activities in Indonesia before Islam became majority religion.

It is worth noting that many Muslims use Ibn Taimiah and his student Ibn Qayyim as heroes in rejecting Sufism, without realising that this is a big mistake and misleading. The book like *Fiqh al-Tasawwuf 'Inda Ibn Taimiyah* and *Madarij al-Salikin* by Ibn Qayyim are strong evidence that these two great scholars did not reject Sufism completely, they simply tried their best to purify Sufism from innovations and un-Islamic practices according to them.

Among the factors which lead to the creation of terrorism in the Muslim society is the rejection of Sufism. If the heart is empty from one is ready to commit crime even against his own brothers and sisters in Islam.

Imam Ghazali expressed his opinion about Sufism and Sufis order succinctly after researching about the group of thinkers who were looking for God.

"I continued at this stage for space of ten years, and during these periods of solitude there were revealed to me things innumerable and unfathomable. This much I shall say about that in order that others may be helped: I learn with certainty that it is above all the mystics who walk on the road of God; their life is the best life, their method is the soundest methods, their character is the purest character; indeed, were the intellect of the intellectuals and the learning of the learned and the scholarship of the scholars, who are versed in the profundities of revealed truth, brought together in the attempt to improve the life and character of the mystics, they would find no way of doing so; for to the mystics all movement and all rest, weather external or internal, brings illumination from the light of the lamp of prophetic revelation; and behind the light of prophetic revelation there no other light on the face of the earth from which illumination may be received".

(Imam Ghazali. Deliverance from Error: pp 22)

Since there are hundred influential Sufi masters and all of them have impact on Muslim society in general. The following is the example of the impact of Jalal ad-Din Rumi on humanity globally.

"The ecstatic poems of Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, a Persian poet and Sufi master born 807 years ago in 1207, have sold millions of copies in recent years, making him the most popular poet in the US. Globally, his fans are legion. "He's this compelling figure in all cultures," says Brad Gooch, who is writing a biography of Rumi to follow his critically acclaimed books on Frank O'Hara and Flannery O'Connor. "The map of Rumi's life covers 2,500 miles," says Gooch, who has travelled from Rumi's birthplace in Vakhsh, a small village in what is now Tajikistan, to Samarkand in Uzbekistan, to Iran and to Syria, where Rumi studied at Damascus and Aleppo in his twenties. His final stop was Konya, in Turkey, where Rumi spent the last 50 years of his life. Today Rumi's tomb draws reverent followers and heads of state each year for a whirling dervish ceremony on 17 December, the anniversary of his death". (<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20140414-americas-best-selling-poet>)

Retrieved 2.8.9.2023

If this is the influence of Rumi on humanity I wonder if he does not have influence on Muslim society. If he does not have it means that they do not read his poems. If this is the case how come some Muslims reject Sufism without knowing the meaning and the contributions of Sufism. This implies that Muslim society need to improve their Islamic education. Sufism is just like jurisprudence and theology, they have courses for beginners, intermediates and advanced levels. But what has been going on for long time in many Islamic countries is either they teach Sufism for the beginners only or for retired citizens only in a very traditional methodology.

The vast achievements of Rumi should become an eye opener and motivation for Muslims to explore Sufism more seriously for the betterment of Muslim ummah and humanity globally.

CONCLUSION

Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah is the main stream of Islam or also known in Arabic as *al-Sawad al-A'zam*. As we have discussed eight Islamic groups represent Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah and imam Abu Hanifah, imam Malik, imam Shafi'e, imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal represent Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah in jurisprudence, while imam Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari and imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi represent Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah in theology. Many characteristics differentiate between Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah and other

Islamic groups but this paper discusses only three of them namely the issue of anthropomorphism (tajsim) the issue of following certain mazhab (school of thought) and the place of Sufism in Islam.

It is high time to introduce AhlīSunnah waljama'ah as a subject in the tertiary level so that the society will have background about the subject, and to prevent any group to claim that such and such group also represent Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah without valid proof. The information, including history and sciences of Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah is very rich but still scattered in many books. So, Islamic universities are expected to produce more books on Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and information among the society and to avoid confusion. Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah rejects anthropomorphism belief (tajsim), follows either one of the four imams of mazhab in jurisprudence and follow both or either one of the two imams in theology Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari or Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and Ahlisunnah Waljama'ah accepts, teaches and promotes

Sufism and Sufi order in Islam.

REFERENCES

The Holy Qur'an

Hadith

Al-Baghdadi, Abu Mansur 'Abdul Qahir b. Tahir Muhammad.Nd. *Al-Farq Bain Al-Firqah Wa Bayan al-Firqah al-Najiyah Minhum*. Maktabah Ibn Sina: Cairo.

al-Buti, Muhammad Said Ramadan. 2005. *Al-La Mazhabiyyah Akhtar Bi'ah Tuhaddid al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah*. Dar al-Farabi: Siriya.

Al-Ghazali, Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Muhammad. E. Book. *Deliverance from Error (al-Munqiz Min al-Dalal)*

----- . 2005. *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. Dar Ibn Hazm: Beirut.

Hubaishi, Hisn al-Din Abi al-Ma'ali.2015. *Al-Intisar Li Ahl al-Sunnah Wa Kashf Mazhab 'Ad'iya' al-Salaf*. Dar al-Nur al-Mubin Li al-Nashr Wa l-Tauzi': Jordan.

Ibn Al-Jauziyyah, Abu Abdillah Muhammad b. Abi Bakr b. Ayyub.2003. *Madarij al-Salikin*. Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi: Beirut.

Al-Jilani, Abd Kadir. *Al-Gunyah Li Talib Tariq al-Haq 'Azza Wajalla*. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah: Beirut.

Al-Jauzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abdul Rahman b. Ali b. Muhammad. 1371H. *Da'f Shubah al-Tashbih Bi Akaf al-Tanzih*. Ala-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah; Cairo.

Al-Kabbi, Zuhair Shafiq. 1993. *Fiqh Al-Tasawwuf 'Inda Shaikh al-Islam al-Imam Ibn Taimiyah*. Dar al-Fik a-'Arabi: Beirut.

Kholilurrohman. 2019. *Aqidah Empat Imam Madzhab*. Nurul Hikmah Press.

Zargar, Cameron. 2017. *Origin of Wahabism from Hanbali Fiqh*. UCLA journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law, 16 (1).

Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed et al eds. 2010. *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* 40. Oxford University Press.

Al-Zabidi, Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Husaini. 1995. *Ithaf al-Sadah al-Muttaqin*. Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi: Beirut.

Al-Zir, Walid b. Salah al-Din. 2022. *Walain Saaltahum Li Naqd Istidlal Ibn Taimiah Biayat "Walain Saaltahum" al-Thamaniyah*. Dar al-Mihal Li al-Tiba'ah Wa al-Nashr.

<http://www.myreligionislam.com/detail.asp?Aid=5929>

<https://baraka.wordpress.com/2016/01/29/the-unclear-verses-and-hadiths-pertaining-to-allahs-attributes>

<https://www.alukah.net/sharia/>

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20140414-americas-best-selling-poet>