

Who are Ahl As-Sunnah wa Al-Jama'ah?

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Praise be to Allah, and may peace and blessings be on the Prophet and upon his family, his Companions, and those who followed him on their guidance.

It is well-known that salvation and prosperity in the worldly life and in the Hereafter are dependent upon following the truth and treading upon the path of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. However, the situation has become such that every person claims to be a part of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, while (other) people seek to reclaim this noble title – alleging that it was taken from them centuries ago. Due to this, it has become necessary for the people of Islamic knowledge to clarify this term and this title. Also, to explain who it applies to, and to disclose the characteristics of the ones who are entitled to be described by it. In the following words, one can find an explanation regarding some of the distinct attributes of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah and their characteristics; it also contains a standard or criterion which will help the Muslim recognize who Ahl As-Sunanh wa Al-Jama'ah are, so that he can pursue (the path) they pursued and travel upon their way, and adhere to their manhaj (methodology) – in order to be included in their group. The purpose of these words is not to compile the principles and beliefs of Ahl As-Sunnah wa Al-Jama'ah, as one can expect to find that in the books of 'Aqeedah; rather, the intent here is to acquaint the reader with the differences between Ahl As-Sunnah wa Al-Jama'ah and the other sects, and to understand what distinguishes them from the others.

The word Sunnah in the name means what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was upon – from his knowledge, actions, beliefs, guidance and manners. It refers to everything he (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came with.

The word Jama'ah is connected to the word Sunnah. Al-Jama'ah are the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and those who follow them proficiently, and it includes those who traverse on their path and follow their course.

Thus, Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah are the most keen in following the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and knowing and understanding his affairs, and most of them are in agreement with the manhaj of the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them). This does not mean that whoever claims to be upon the manhaj of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah – by naming his faction “Salafee”, or if he names his group “Ahl al-Hadeeth”, or “Ahl al-Athar” – that he is as so. What is taken into account is their manhaj, their devotion to following it, and their adherence to it – not merely creating names and their popularity.

Thus, all of them claim this; however, their affiliation to this title is not considered

valid from anyone except for the one who establishes the forthcoming attributes and characteristics. Thus, these characteristics distinguish between one who fulfills the title (with his actions) and between one who merely claims to be a part of it, while in fact he deviates from it. I have outlined these characteristics into paragraphs in order to facilitate its understanding, comprehension and its implementation – insha Allah ta’ala.

1) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah**: their source for their core beliefs is the Book of Allah and the Sunnah (narrations) of His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Also, what the Salaf as-Salih (pious predecessors) were upon and how they understood the texts of the two revelations (Quran and hadeeths). Thus, they do not give precedence to intellect, nor kashf, nor (their personal) perception, nor dreams over the texts. They also do not put forth the words of a shaykh or a walee over the words of Allah, may He be exalted, nor over the words of His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

2) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah** do not attribute their beliefs to a particular person nor to a particular sect; on the contrary, their attribution of their beliefs is to the Sunnah and the Salaf; therefore, they do not attribute their beliefs to al-Ash’aree, nor to al-Matreedee, nor to al-Jahm, nor to al-Ja’d, nor to Zayd, nor to ‘Ubayd, nor do they attribute themselves to the Mu’tazilah, nor to al-Murjiah, nor to al-Qadariyyah. They only attribute themselves to the Sunnah and to the Sahabah.

3) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah** do not attribute the matters of manners and purification of the soul to a person nor to an order (group). Thus, they do not attribute them to al-Jeelanee, nor to ar-Rifa’ee, nor to al-Qadiree, nor to at-Teejanee, nor to the Naqshabandee order, nor to the ‘Alawiyah order, nor to the Shadhiliyyah, nor to other than them. Rather, the source of their conduct, purification (of the soul), and manners is the one who said: **“I was only sent to perfect good manners”**, and whose **“character was the Quran”**, may peace and blessings be upon him. Just like they don’t distinguish themselves from the rest of the Ummah with a name in matters of the principles of the religion except with the name as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah, they do not distinguish themselves in matters of personal conduct and purifying the soul with a name except as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah.

4) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah** worship Allah – as He commanded – with devotion and concentration, and by humbling themselves to Him; they do not innovate acts of worship on their own, nor according to their desires, nor according to other people. They also do not worship Him by striking and hitting, beating the drums, dancing, and swaying back and forth.

5) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah** do not direct any act of worship to other than Allah, may He be exalted, such as du’a, seeking assistance, slaughter, making vows, or other acts of worship, as is the case with some of the groups and sects, as opposed to Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah.

6) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah** encourage the visitation of graves; that is because it makes one remember the Hereafter, and for one to send peace on its inhabitants, and

to make du'a for them; not for the purpose of seeking blessings from them, nor to make du'a to the person in the grave instead of Allah, the Most High, nor to seek assistance from (the one in the grave), nor to wipe one's hands on the grave, or make tawaf around it, or offering a sacrifice next to it, and other such acts.

7) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** confirm all the attributes of Allah 'azza wa jall that He confirms for Himself and what His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) confirmed for Him – without denying any of them nor distorting them (to mean something else). As for the rest of the groups, they deny His attributes; or they confirm some of them and misinterpret others.

8) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** hold the belief that eeman (faith) comprises of both speech and action, and that it increases and decreases. They do not separate the actions of the limbs from eeman like the Murjiah; nor do they declare the people of the Qiblah (i.e. Muslims) as disbelievers due to misdeeds or due to major sins like the Khawarij.

9) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** do not declare disbelievers those who oppose them from other sects nor due to mere differences; an exception is for groups and sects that have been formed upon principles of disbelief, such as the Isma'eelis and the Nusaris.

10) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** declare themselves free from the disbelievers, atheists, polytheists, and apostates – while being hostile towards them and detesting them. On the other hand, they love the believers and they are loyal to them while assisting them – all according to the level of their eeman and righteous actions.

11) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** love the Sahabah (Companions) of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and they believe all of them were people of honor and uprightness. They seek nearness to Allah by loving them and loving the household of the Messenger, including his wives who are the mothers of the believers. They declare themselves free from those who curse them and show hostility towards them; they also absolve themselves from those who go to extremes concerning them by raising their status over being humans, or claiming they were infallible.

12) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** take the opinions concerning Fiqh which are in accordance with the consensus of scholars and what is proved by the Quran and the authentic Sunnah. They also hold into consideration the sayings of the Sahabah, the Tabi'een (Successors), and the generations that followed them – and they follow the senior scholars from the Muslims such as: Abu Haneefah, Malik, ash-Shafi'ee, and Ahmad, including those who followed them from the scholars and those who specialized in Fiqh and the imams (of the Ummah); they were those (scholars) that are followed and who follow the Sunnah, and who are known in the Ummah for their virtue and goodness.

13) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah**: the Muslims are all equal concerning the obligations of the Sharee'ah; they do not recognize generality and exclusivity in regards to acts of worship, nor the elite (acts of worship). Nor do they recognize a difference between (the rules of the) Sharee'ah and the implementation of it. On the contrary, the religion

is one according to them, and it is one legislation from One Lord, and it was revealed to one Prophet for all people.

14) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** are the people of mediation and balance in regards to everything. They are in the middle, between extremism and laxity, between excessiveness and negligence, and between over simplification and over-doing.

15) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** are of the most keen in unifying upon the truth and unifying the ranks; from their core beliefs is: performing Jihad; they also believe in establishing (regular) prayers and Jumu'ah (prayers) behind a righteous person or disobedient one. They also consider the validity of praying behind the people of innovation and those that commit acts of disobedience. Thus, they are the most keen of people in unifying and those who hate division the most. A person who attributes himself to (this title) can fall into making a mistake due to him not understanding the manjah correctly or how to apply it; thus, not everyone who attributes themselves to (Ahl as-Sunnah) have been brought up on their principles or follow their path (correctly). The reason being that the honor of this title has caused people who are not actually from them to enter among them.

16) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** has among them an 'alim (scholar), faqeeh (jurist), khateeb (orator), and da'ee (caller to Islam). Also included is he who commands the good and forbids the evil, along with a doctor, engineer, merchant, and a worker – a wealthy person or a poor person, a black person and a white person, an Arab and a non-Arab – thus, their manhaj is not limited to a specific group of people. They do not distinguish between social classes, nor do they make religion, knowledge, and lineage, or authority a monopoly over a people while excluding others. They also establish the belief of the saying of Allah: {Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the one with the most taqwa} (al-Hujurat 13).

17) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** has among them a worshiper and an ascetic; also, among them is a sinner and also one who commits major sins; thus, they are not infallible or protected from committing mistakes and sins. These mistakes and sins do not expel them from being part of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah; in fact, they might even fall into some fragments of innovation. However, how quick is their return to the truth when they come to know of it. Thus, this does not expel them from being part of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah.

18) **Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah** are in pursuit of the truth and they show mercy to the creation, but they hate sins while being kind to the ones who commit them. Likewise, they detest innovations but they feel pity for those who commit them.

Thus, these are the people named Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, and these are some of their features and characteristics. We ask Allah by His grace and favor to be included among them, and to unite the Ummah upon what they united upon