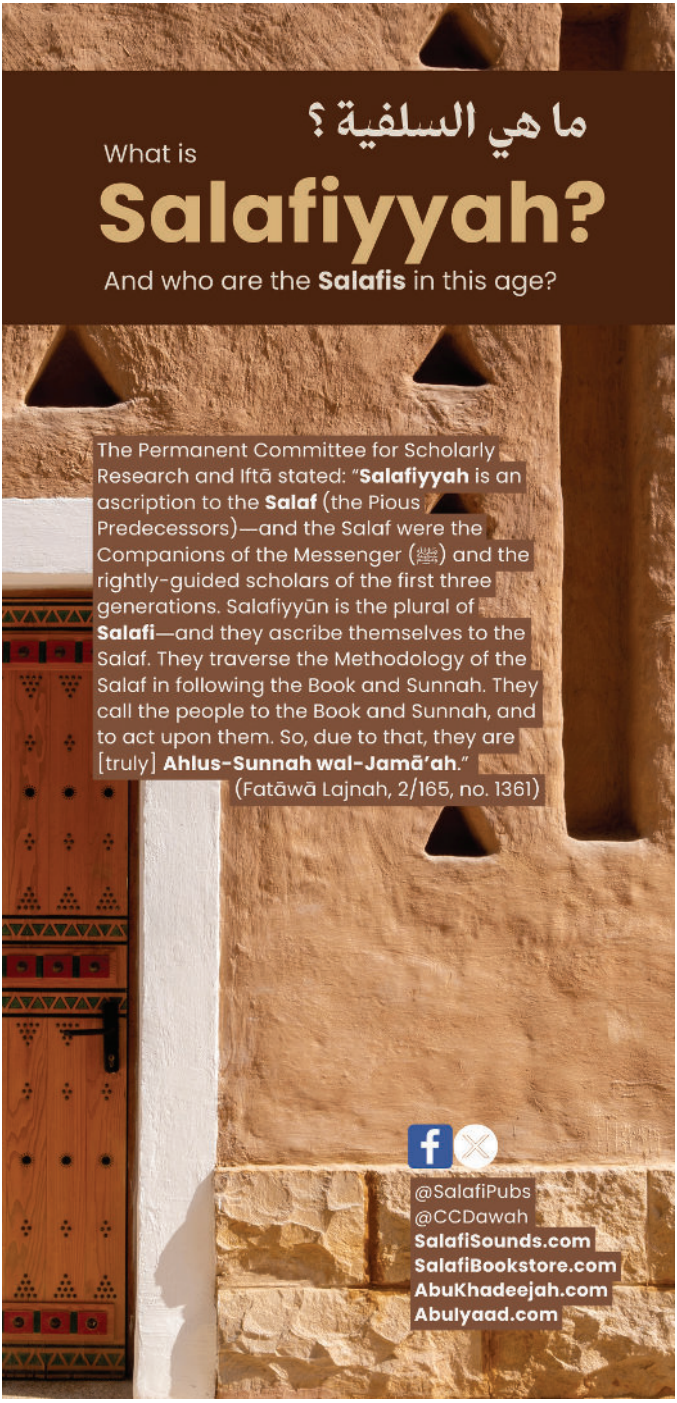
ما هي السلفية ؟
What is
Salafiyyah?
And who are the **Salafis** in this age?
The Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Iftā stated: "**Salafiyyah** is an ascription to the **Salaf** (the Pious Predecessors)—and the Salaf were the Companions of the Messenger (ﷺ) and the rightly-guided scholars of the first three generations. Salafiyyūn is the plural of **Salafi**—and they ascribe themselves to the Salaf. They traverse the Methodology of the Salaf in following the Book and Sunnah. They call the people to the Book and Sunnah, and to act upon them. So, due to that, they are [truly] **Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah**."
(Fatāwā Lajnah, 2/165, no. 1361)
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Salafiyyah Is Not A New Sect: It Is The Path Of The Prophet ﷺ And His Companions

(By Abu Khadeejah ʿAbdul-Wāhid)

As-Salaf As-Sālih is an Arabic term, translated into English as *The Pious Predecessors*, that refers to those who have preceded us from the earliest generations of Muslims. The Prophet (ﷺ) referred to them in his saying:

"The best of mankind is my generation, then those who come after them, then those who come after them."[1]

The Qur'ān, likewise, mentions them with praise, as well as those who follow their Path. Allāh (تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى) said:

"The first and foremost in faith from the Migrants and the Helpers (i.e., the Companions of the Prophet), and those who follow them precisely, Allāh is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him. He has prepared for them Gardens of Paradise under which rivers flow, they will remain therein forever. That is the supreme success."[2]

Those being referred to in these texts are the *Salaf As-Sālih* (the Pious Predecessors). The earliest of these Muslims were the Companions of the Prophet (رضي الله عنهم)—and they were upon a united Creed (*ʿAqīdah*) and Methodology (*Manhaj*) which they had learned from the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The following generations adopted this Way (or *Sunnah*) and held on to it steadfastly. In times of differing, controversy and upheaval, the Prophet (ﷺ) commanded all Muslims to return to his *Sunnah* and the *Sunnah* of his closest Companions for resolution and guidance.[3]

The Salaf did not differ in the foundations (*usūl*) of the Religion.[4] Yes, some differing did occur among the Salaf, but never in the fundamentals. They differed in the subsidiary matters of law related to purification, actions of the prayer, types of permissible foods, etc. based on their varying understandings of the Texts, and it was tolerated.[5] The early Scholars of the

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1. Al-Bukhārī (no. 2651), Muslim (no. 2535).
2. *Surah At-Tawbah* (100).
3. As occurs in a *hadīth* collected by Imām Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (no. 17142), Ibn Mājah (no. 43)—authenticated by Shaikh Al-Albānī.
4. See *Minhāj as-Sunnah* of Ibn Taymiyyah (6/336) and *Sharh as-Sunnah* of Al-Barbahārī (died 329H).
5. See Ibn ʿUthaimīn in *Al-Fatāwa ash-Sharʿiyyah fi al-Masā'il al-ʿAsriyyah min Fatāwa ʿUlamah al-Bilād al-Haram* (p.792)

Salaf (*Ahlul-Hadīth*)[6] authored hundreds of treatises clarifying the Muslim Creed—and though they were separated by land and sea due to the vastness of the Caliphate that stretched from the Indus River in the East to Spain in the West alongside the fact that many of them lived generations apart, their authorships wherein they conveyed and explained the belief and methodology of the first three generations, were in complete agreement.[7]

A true *Sunni* refers all matters of religion and differing between Muslims to the Qur'ān and authentic Sunnah upon the understanding of the Companions (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ)—and this leads the *Ummah* to harmony and unity.

It is from the blessings of Allāh (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ) that the books of the Salaf are still with us, verified from manuscripts and available to study. Thus, one can test the veracity of the Salafi Creed and Methodology by simply reading and studying these texts such as the writings of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 241H), Al-Bukhārī (d. 256H), Al-Lālikā'ī (d. 418H), Abu Hātim Ar-Rāzī (d. 277H), Abu Zurʿah Ar-Rāzī (d. 264H), Al-Barbahārī (d. 329H), Ibn Abī Dāwūd (d. 316H) and many others.

So, who is a Salafi? Simply put: anyone who follows the Salaf in Belief, Methodology, worship, politics, manners, dress code, family life and every other aspect of religious life. Furthermore, the Salafi returns any differing that he encounters (even that which occurs between the scholars) back to the Qur'ān and the authentic Hadīth of the Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) upon the understanding of the Companions—he does not follow his desires, or the opinions of the people of deviation (*ahlul-bidʿah*) and he avoids blind-following and sectarian partisanship (*hizbīyyah*). He is steadfast upon that—and does not claim to be a Salafi (or Sunni) while acting contrary to the principles of Salafiyyah, opposing the Sunnah of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), and following his desires!

There is a misunderstanding among some people who have been led to believe that Salafiyyah is an extremist group or a *new sect* in Islam. This false notion is propagated by misguided, ignorant or modernist [Woke] Muslims, or ill-informed journalists, and unscrupulous and biased academics who seek to malign the Salafis based on sectarian or secular interpretations. Unfortunately, there are people who accept these fallacies and myths without question.

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6. They are *Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah*: i.e., the People of Sunnah and the Main Body. This title was used by the Companions of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) such as Ibn ʿAbbās (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا). See *Sharh Usool Iʿtiqād* of Al-Lālikā'ī (no. 74) and *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr* (2/76).
7. Abu Mudhaffar in *Al-Hujjah fi Bayān al-Muhajjah* (2/224)

So, in response, we say that Salafiyyah is an orthodox and traditional understanding of Islam. It is moderate and balanced, giving ease to people,[8] firmly rooted in the teachings of the Qur'ān and Sunnah based upon the understanding of the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ). These teachings were explained by the scholars of Ahlus-Sunnah and Hadīth of the early centuries. The Salafis hold that the rectification of the Muslims cannot be achieved except by returning back to Islam as it was understood in the earliest times, just as Imām Mālik Ibn Anas (died 179 H رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) stated:

> **"The latter part of this *ummah* will never be rectified except by that which rectified its first part. So, whatever was not religion that day cannot be religion today."**[9]

It is this methodology and its application that protects Salafiyyah from extremism as well as negligence in belief and practice. There are numerous Quranic verses, Hadīths (Prophetic Narrations) and writings from the Salaf that prohibit extremism and exaggeration of all forms including the killing of non-combatants: men, women, children, ambassadors, priests, monks and emissaries. There are clear texts that forbid attacking non-Muslim countries who have pacts and covenants with Muslim nations. In Islamic Law, war is declared only by the ruler of a nation, the head of state, who commands the army—and civilians are not to be harmed. This rules out the idea of insurgencies, terrorist activities and suicide bombings anywhere in the world. The rules of engagement in war are well-known and recorded in the books of jurisprudence. We have expounded upon this in numerous published writings and articles.

Why use the title Salafi? This is a question that Salafis are often asked and the simple answer is: Islam distinguishes the people of truth from the people of misguidance. The Prophet (ﷺ) himself stated:

> "The Children of Israel divided into seventy-two sects, and my nation will divide into seventy-three. All of them will be in the Fire except one." They asked: "And which sect is that, O Messenger of Allah?" He answered: **"What I am upon and my Companions."**[10]

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8. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, **"Let the Jews see that there is leeway in our Religion. Surely, I was sent with the pure and lenient Religion."** See *As-Sahīhah* of Shaikh Al-Albānī (no. 881).
9. Qādi ʿIyād cited it in *Ash-Shifā* (2/87-88). Ibn Taymiyyah stated in *Majmūʿ Al-Fatāwā* (1/353, 27/118) that it is established from Mālik. Shātibi cited it in *Al-Iʿtisām* (1/111) with a slightly different wording.
10. At-Tirmidhī (no. 2641), authenticated by Shaikh Al-Albānī.

In a narration, he said: **"They are the *Jamāʿah.*"**[11] The term *Jamāʿah* refers to the *Main Body* who cling to the truth regardless of their number, small or great. The Companion, ʿAbdullāh Ibn Masʿūd (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) stated:

"Most people oppose the *Jamāʿah*. Verily, the *Jamāʿah* is whatever agrees with the obedience of Allāh, even if you are on your own."[12]

Therefore, the *Jamāʿah* is not the majority, it is those who follow the Book of Allāh, the Sunnah of the Prophet and the Path of the Companions (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ). It was a well-known characteristic of the early Muslims to employ labels to define the sects based on their misguided beliefs. For example, extremists who declare sinful Muslims to be unbelievers and rebel against the tyrannical Muslim rulers are known as *Khawārij*. Those who rejected the first three Caliphs, cursed the wives of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and most of his Companions, and went on to ascribe divinity to the fourth Caliph, ʿAlī Ibn Abī Tālib and his offspring, are known as *Shiʿah* [or *Rāfiḍah*]. Additionally, when innovations appeared, the scholars clarified the Truth in the following ways:

1. They refuted the innovations and sects that deviated from the Creed and Methodology (*Manhaj*) of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and his Companions (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ).

2. They clarified the Truth through citing Qur'ānic verses, authentic Hadīths and the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) alongside reasoned arguments and important sayings of the Salaf.

3. They defended and supported the carriers of the Truth—and they are the People of Sunnah and Hadīth.

The first three generations utilised titles to distinguish the Saved Sect from the deviated groups. These same titles are still used today, such as *Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah*, *Ahlul-Hadīth*, *As'hābul-Hadīth*, *Ahlul-Athar* and *As-Salafiyyūn.* Therefore, whoever claims that ascribing to them is wrong, and a cause of disunity has spoken without knowledge, and his opinion is rejected. Rather, Muslim division and in-fighting has come about [over centuries] due to innovated beliefs and practices that oppose the guidance of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and the Methodology of the early Salaf.

The term **Salaf** dates back to the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) himself, when he said to his daughter, Fāṭimah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا), **"I am for you a blessed Salaf."**[13]

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11. Ibn Mājah (no. 3992), authenticated by Shaikh Al-Albānī.
12. *Sharh Usool Iʿtiqād Ahlis-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah* of Al-Lālikā'ī, no. 160, and Al-Albānī authenticated it in *Takhreej Mishkāt al-Masābīh*, 1/61.
13. Muslim, no. 2450.

Furthermore, the term **Salafi** was used among the early generations. Muhammad Ibn Khalaf, well-known as Wakīʿ (d. 306H), said about Ibn Abī Hanīfah: "Ismā'īl Ibn Hammād Ibn Abī Hanīfah was a true **Salafi**."[14]

Imām Adh-Dhahabī (d. 748H, رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) reported that the great scholar, Ad-Dāruqutnī (d. 385H, رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) said: "There is nothing that I hate more than theological speculation (*ʿilm al-kalām*)." Adh-Dhahabī commented: "The man never engaged in theological speculation or argumentation, he never entered into it—rather he was a **Salafi**."[15]

Shaikhul-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728H رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) said: "There is no criticism upon the one who makes manifest the *Madhhab* (Path) of the **Salaf**, and ascribes himself to it, and attaches himself to it (i.e., calls himself a **Salafi**). Rather, it is obligatory to accept that from him by the consensus [of the Muslims] for indeed, the *Madhhab* of the **Salaf** is nothing except the truth."[16]

Imām Abu ʿAmr Al-Awzāʿī (d. 157H, رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) said: "Keep yourself patiently upon the **Sunnah**, stop where the people [before you] stopped, speak with what they spoke with, and withhold from what they withheld from—and take the path of your **Salaf as-Sālih** (Pious Predecessors) for indeed what sufficed them will suffice you."[17] He also stated: "Follow the narrations of the **Salaf** and their path, even if the people reject you—and beware of the opinions of men even if they are beautified with fine speech."[18]

Al-Imām Ibn Bāz (d. 1420H, رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ) stated: "The **Salaf** are the best of generations—and whoever follows their Path and traverses their Methodology is a **Salafi**—and whoever opposes their Path is from the latter-day opposers." These few narrations should suffice any seeker of truth regarding, firstly: the obligation of holding fast to the Methodology and Creed of the Salaf and, secondly: the permissibility of using the term Salafi as an ascription to the best of generations.

Part of the problem that the Salafis are faced with in these times is that there are deviated and politicised groups that have misappropriated the title 'Salafi' and claimed it for themselves. So, we advise people not to be deceived by mere outward claims, but instead look and see which Muslims today are truly upon the Path of **Salafiyyah**: the Path of the Prophet (صَلَّى ٱللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and

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14. See *Akhbār al-Qudāt*, 2/167.
15. *Siyar Aʿlām an-Nubalā*, 16/457.
16. *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, 4/149.
17. *Sharh Usūl Iʿtiqād Ahlis-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah* of Al-Lālikā'ī (1/147), *Ash-Sharīʿah* of Al-Ājurri, 2/673
18. Reported by Al-Ājurrī (d. 360H) in *Ash-Sharīʿah*, p. 58 (1/139).

his Companions (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ).

We encourage you to visit the websites we have listed to learn more about the *Salafi ʿAqīdah* and *Manhaj* (Creed and Methodology) as well as the names of prominent scholars of Sunnah, Hadīth and Salafiyyah throughout the ages.

Authored by Abu Khadeejah ʿAbdul-Wāhid for Salafi Publications, Birmingham, UK. (2024CE/1446H)