

The Concept of Holding Fast (اعتصام I'tasaam) to the Rope of Allah (swt)

(Translated)

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Many preachers and individuals cite the saying of Allah (swt): ﴿وَاَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا﴾ **“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided”** [TMQ Surah Aali ‘Imraan: 103] when urging unity, calling for the abandonment of factionalism, in reconciliation meetings between conflicting parties, and so on. These citations are correct in terms of the verse's indication, but often they do not grasp its full meaning, so they think that i'tisaam (اعتصام holding fast) is merely gathering together and not separating—and herein lies the error. For the verse calls for i'tisaam (وَاَعْتَصِمُوا) **“hold firmly”** and forbids separation (وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا) **“and do not become divided”**. The command to hold fast to the rope of Allah (swt) is the great command that encompasses much good, and gathering together and not separating is a part of it. To clarify this, it is necessary to explain the meaning of i'tisaam and the practical form of holding fast to the rope of Allah (swt) upon which Muslims must be.

‘Ismah (عصمة) means protection (منعى man‘ah) in the sense of preservation and safeguarding, and i'tisaam (اعتصام) is to seek refuge or to be in a state of preservation and protection from evil. He (swt) said: ﴿وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ النَّاسِ﴾ **“And Allah will protect you from the people”** [TMQ Surah Al-Ma'idah: 67], meaning He will prevent, protect, and preserve you from your enemies, so do not fear or grieve, for none of them will reach you with harm.

And He (swt) said: ﴿قُلْ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ سُوءًا أَوْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ رَحْمَةً﴾ **“Say, ‘Who is it that can protect you from Allah if He intends for you an evil or intends for you a mercy?’”** [TMQ Surah Al-Ahzab: 17], meaning, who is it that can prevent you from Allah?

And He (swt) said: ﴿قَالَ سَأُولِي إِلَى جَبَلٍ يَعْصِمُنِي مِنَ الْمَاءِ قَالَ لَا عَاصِمَ الْيَوْمَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ﴾ **“He said, ‘I will take refuge on a mountain to protect me from the water.’ Nuh (as) said, ‘There is no protector today from the command of Allah except for whom He gives mercy’”** [TMQ Surah Hud: 43].

The word (يَعْصِمُنِي) “ya‘simunee” means ‘protects me’ or ‘prevents it from reaching me’. This statement was on the tongue of the son of the Prophet of Allah, Nuh (as) when he thought that taking refuge on a mountain would prevent the water of the flood from reaching him and that no harm would befall him. The reply of Nuh (as) was: ﴿لَا عَاصِمَ الْيَوْمَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ﴾ “Laa ‘aasima al-yawma min amri Llaah”, meaning “There is no preventing protector today from the command of Allah” which He (swt) decreed to drown all those who did not embark on the ship as believers with Nuh (as) and to destroy them.

From this also comes the concept of the ‘ismah (عصمة infallibility) of the Prophets, which means that Allah (swt) has placed in the Prophets a divine faculty that prevents them from committing sin and inclining towards it, despite having the ability to do so. It is the protection of Allah (swt) for His Prophets (as) and Messengers (as) from falling into major sins (kaba’ir) and transgressions, or from error in conveying the revelation, so that their proof remains sound and their call pure.

Thus, ‘Ismah (protection) is about providing a defense and safeguarding. In His (swt) saying: ﴿وَاَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ﴾ **“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah”** [TMQ Surah Aali ‘Imraan: 103], Allah (swt) commands the believers to take the rope of Allah as a protection (عاصم ‘aasim) for them from the evils and dangers they fear. The evils and dangers that may afflict the believers are many, including the aggression of the disbelievers and their violation of the

believers' blood and lands; the internal strife and disagreements that tear them apart; the infiltration of false ideas and beliefs that lead them to disbelief and misguidance; and the seepage of the customs, behaviors, and lifestyles of the disbelievers into the Muslim society, leading to the corruption of their sons and women and the disintegration of their families.

The command of Allah (swt) ﴿وَاَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ﴾ **“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah”** came after a warning against falling into disbelief after having believed, because the preceding verses were a warning against disbelief after Iman. Allah (swt) said before it: ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَطِيعُوا قَرِيبًا مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ يَرُدُّوكُم بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ كَافِرِينَ * وَكَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ وَأَنتُمْ تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ وَفِيكُمْ رَسُولُهُ * وَمَنِ يَعْتَصِم بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ هُدِيَ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ * يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ *﴾ **“O you who have believed, if you obey a party of those who were given the Scripture, they would turn you back, after your belief, to being unbelievers. * And how could you disbelieve while the verses of Allah are recited to you and His Messenger is among you? And whoever holds firmly to Allah has [indeed] been guided to a straight path. * O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared and do not die except as Muslims in submission to Him. * And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided”** [TMQ Surah Aali ‘Imraan: 100-103].

Thus, in the first verse, Allah (swt) forbids the believers from obeying any party from the People of the Book and clarifies that obeying them leads to disbelief. In the second verse, He admonishes the believers against reverting to disbelief by taking legislation from the People of the Book, while they have the Book of Allah, in which guidance and light are recited to them, and among them is His Messenger to whom they can refer to solve any human problem that occurs. The verse also clarifies that whoever holds firmly to Allah, i.e., seeks protection and support in Allah, is upon a straight path. And the third verse urges them to fear Allah so that death does not come to them while they are in a state of disobedience or disbelief, which can occur through obeying the disbelievers. Then comes the verse of holding firmly (i’tisaam) to clarify for them the practical picture that protects the society and the Ummah from these evils. It explains that this practical picture entails two matters: first, holding firmly to the rope of Allah (swt), and second, being all together (jamee‘an), meaning as a collective (al-jamaa‘ah). So what is the rope of Allah that protects them? And what is the meaning of “all together” or “collective” that prevents them?

The word “rope” (حبل habl) is a polysemous (مُشْتَرَكٌ mushtarak) term with multiple meanings, some literal and some metaphorical.

Its original linguistic meaning is the means by which one reaches a desired goal or need. Among the literal meanings used by the Arabs for habl are: a tie or bond; something twisted from fibres or the like for tying or leading; the “rope of the shoulder” (حبل العاتق habl al-‘aatiq), which is a ligament between the neck and the shoulder; and there is also the “rope of the jugular vein” (حبل الوريد habl al-wareed) and the “rope of the arm” (حبل الذراع habl al-dhiraa’).

Among the metaphorical meanings of habl used by the Arabs is “covenant” or “pledge” (‘ahd), as in His (swt) saying: ﴿ضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةُ أَيْنَ مَا تَفَقَّوْا إِلَّا بِحَبْلِ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلِ مِّنَ النَّاسِ﴾ **“Disgrace has been stamped upon them wherever they are found, except under a covenant from Allah and a covenant from the people”** [TMQ Surah Aali ‘Imraan: 112], meaning under a pledge and protection. And in the narration concerning the Ansar at the Pledge of Al-‘Aqabah: (إِن بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ الرِّجَالِ حَبَالٌ، وَإِنَّا قَاطِعُوهُا) **“Verily, between us and the men are ropes, and we will cut them,”** meaning covenants and agreements.

In this verse, “the rope of Allah” (حبل الله habl Allah) refers to Allah’s covenant or to the Noble Quran. Allah’s covenant is that which Allah (swt) has commanded to be fulfilled in His saying: ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ﴾ **“O you who have believed, fulfill all contracts”** [TMQ Surah Al-Ma‘idah: 1]. The “contracts” (al-uqood) here are the covenants that Allah has made binding upon His servants. Every Muslim who testifies that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah has thereby accepted Allah’s covenant and obligated

himself to fulfill it. Its requirement is the application of the Shariah rulings that Allah has revealed in His Book, the Noble Quran, and the Sunnah of His Prophet (saw).

Some Quranic commentators (mufasirun) have said that the intended meaning of His saying: ﴿يَحْبِلُ اللَّهُ﴾ **“to the rope of Allah”** is the Quran, as the term “rope of Allah” has been used for the Quran in numerous ahadith. Among them is the hadith narrated by At-Tirmidhi from Al-Harith Al-A'war, from Ali (ra), marfu'an (attributed to the Prophet) regarding the description of the Quran: «هُوَ حَبْلُ اللَّهِ الْمَتِينُ، وَصِرَاطُهُ الْمُسْتَقِيمُ» **“It is the strong rope of Allah and His straight path.”**

And from Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (ra) who said: The Prophet (saw) said: **«إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَأْدِبَةُ اللَّهِ»** فاقبلوا مأدبته ما استطعتم، إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ حَبْلُ اللَّهِ وَالنُّورُ الْمُبِينُ، وَالشِّفَاءُ النَّافِعُ، عَصِمَةٌ لِمَنْ تَمَسَّكَ بِهِ، وَنَجَاةٌ لِمَنْ اتَّبَعَهُ، لَا يَزِيغُ **“Indeed this Quran is the banquet of Allah, so accept His banquet as much as you are able. Verily, this Quran is the rope of Allah, the clear light, and the beneficial healing. It is a protection for whoever holds fast to it and a salvation for whoever follows it. It does not deviate so as to require correction, nor does it bend so as to be straightened. Its wonders do not cease, and it does not wear out from much repetition”** [Narrated by Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn and Al-Bayhaqi in Shu'ab al-Iman. Al-Mundhiri said in At-Targhib wat-Tarhib: It is authentic (saheeh)].

In summary, “the rope of Allah,” upon whatever meaning it is understood, necessitates holding fast to the Book of Allah, the Noble Quran, which is the strong rope and the straight path.

Holding fast to the rope of Allah means that the Muslim takes protective refuge in Allah's covenant and His Book, for it is what protects him and prevents him from falling into trials and misguidance. Clinging to the Book of Allah (swt) means applying the Shariah rulings pertaining to the individual, the rulings pertaining to the jama'ah (الجماعة the community), and the rulings pertaining to the state. Thereby, the Book of Allah (swt), the Noble Quran, becomes the protecting safeguard against trials and evils—protecting the individual from the trials of disbelief, misguidance, and innovations; protecting the Ummah from any threat targeting the Ummah and the state; and protecting society from the infiltration of corrupt and deviant behavioral patterns that prevail in the societies of disbelief. The verse has clarified the practical form that must be embodied in the Islamic Ummah for this holding fast to be achieved and for protection from evils to be attained—namely, that they be “all together,” meaning as al-jama'ah (the unified community). This leads to an inquiry into the meaning of “al-jama'ah,” which is the second point in this research.

Allah (swt) said: ﴿اجْمِيعَا وَلَا تَفْرَقُوا﴾ **“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided”** clarifies the practical form of the Ummah through which prevention and protection from every evil, trial, and aggression is achieved. As for “jamee'an” (اجمعا - all together), it means a unified, gathered community. The meaning is: be unified in holding fast to it. And al-jama'ah (الجماعة the community) signifies the state of unification and the absence of division. Although the word “jamee'an” alone is sufficient to denote a single unified community, the verse emphasized this by prohibiting division ﴿وَلَا تَفْرَقُوا﴾ **“and do not become divided.”** Thus, the verse has commanded the believers that the community which unifies upon the covenant of Allah (swt) and His Book, the Noble Quran, is their protection and safeguard against the evils of division, fragmentation, and their dangers, because division brings them every trial and evil and entices enemies against them.

Allah (swt) has commanded the believers to be mutually affectionate and unified and has prohibited division, for division is destruction and unification is salvation, as stated in several Prophetic narrations, including the hadith of An-Nu'man ibn Bashir, that the Prophet (saw) said: «الجماعة رحمة والفرقة عذاب» **“The unified community (al-jama'ah) is mercy and division is torment”** [Narrated by Ahmad, At-Tabarani, and Al-Bayhaqi]. And from 'Umar (ra) who said: The Prophet (saw) said: «مَنْ أَرَادَ بِحُبُوحَةِ الْجَنَّةِ فَعَلَيْهِ بِالْجَمَاعَةِ» **“Whoever desires the**

spaciousness of Paradise, then let him adhere to the unified community (al-jama'ah)"
[Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, Ahmad, and An-Nasa'i].

The Shariah evidences in the Book of Allah ﷻ and the Sunnah of His Prophet (saw) have detailed the Shariah vision of the jama'ah (الجماعة the community) through which protection from every evil is achieved. Its essence is that "al-jama'ah" is the Ummah, or a part of the Ummah that has a single Imam or ruler for the Muslims at its head, who rules them by the Shariah rulings of Islam, receives the pledge of allegiance (bay'ah) from the Ummah, and obedience to him is obligatory.

Thus, the term al-jama'ah is a political term related to the state and its leadership. This term has a specific Shariah meaning clarified by the authentic ahadith, which explain that in the absence of the Imam or Khaleefah (Caliph), the jama'ah does not exist. When the Ummah gives the pledge of allegiance to a Khaleefah, then the jama'ah comes into existence. As long as the Ummah has not pledged allegiance to an Imam or Khaleefah, al-jama'ah does not exist, and there is only disunity (furqah). Consequently, the term al-jama'ah has acquired a specific Shariah meaning—a Shariah reality. Therefore, wherever the term al-jama'ah, defined by the definite article "al-" (indicating a specific entity) or attached to the Muslims (in the form of "jama'at al-Muslimeen (جماعة المسلمين community of Muslims)" or "jama'at al-Mu'mineen (جماعة المؤمنين community of believers)" or "jama'atukum (جماعتكم your community)", appears in the Shariah texts, it denotes this Shariah reality and not the mere linguistic meaning.

In what follows, we mention the most important ahadith that command adherence to the jama'ah or clarify its attributes, from which the Shariah meaning of the term al-jama'ah becomes clear:

Fadaalah ibn 'Ubayd reported that the Prophet (saw) said: «ثَلَاثَةٌ لَا تَسْأَلُ عَنْهُمْ: رَجُلٌ فَارَقَ الْجَمَاعَةَ، وَعَصَى إِمَامَهُ، وَمَاتَ عَاصِيًا» **Three people you should not ask about: a man who separates from al-jama'ah (the community), disobeys his Imam, and dies in a state of disobedience** [Narrated by Ahmad with a sound chain, and this wording is his; also by Al-Bazzaar and Ibn Hibbaan]. And from Abu Hurayrah, from the Prophet (saw), that he said: «مَنْ خَرَجَ مِنَ الطَّاعَةِ وَفَارَقَ الْجَمَاعَةَ فَمَاتَ، مَاتَ مِيتَةَ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ» **Whoever abandons obedience and separates from al-jama'ah and dies, dies the death of the Jaahiliyyah (pre-Islamic ignorance)** [Narrated by Muslim, An-Nasaa'ee, Ibn Maajah, and Ahmad]. The evidence in these two ahadith is that the Messenger (saw) considered the one who disobeys the Imam and abandons obedience to him as one who has separated from al-jama'ah. This means that al-jama'ah is the Ummah or a group from the Ummah that is headed by an Imam whose obedience is obligatory. Obedience is only obligatory to the Imam or the Khaleefah who implements the rulings of the Shariah. However, if there is a ruler who does not implement Islam, then he is not an Imam at all, and consequently, there is no jama'ah, because the Imamah (leadership) or the Khilafah (Caliphate) is the general leadership for all Muslims in the world, for establishing the rulings of the Shariah domestically and carrying the Islamic Dawah externally. The 'ulema used to call the lands that were headed by the Imam or the Khaleefah, who had taken the pledge of allegiance (bay'ah), Daar al-'Adl (the Abode of Justice), and they called the lands that were not under the authority of the legitimate Imam Daar al-Baghy (the Abode of Rebellion), even if their leader implemented Islam therein—so how about if the leader of rebellion implements the rulings of disbelief and the systems of disbelief?

And in the hadith of Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamaan (ra) when he asked the Prophet (saw) about evil and tribulations, it contained the statement of the Prophet (saw): «دُعَاةٌ إِلَى أَبْوَابِ جَهَنَّمَ، يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، صَفُّهُمْ لَنَا؟ فَقَالَ: هُمْ مِنْ جِلْدَتِنَا، وَيَتَكَلَّمُونَ بِأَلْسِنَتِنَا، قُلْتُ: فَمَا تَأْمُرُنِي إِنْ أَدْرَكَنِي ذَلِكَ؟ قَالَ: تَلْزِمُ جَمَاعَةَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَإِمَامَهُمْ، قُلْتُ: فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ جَمَاعَةٌ وَلَا إِمَامٌ؟ قَالَ: فَاعْتَزِلْ تِلْكَ الْفِرَقَ كُلَّهَا، وَلَوْ أَنْ تَعْصُ «Callers to the gates of Hellfire; whoever responds to them towards it, they will cast him into it.' I said: 'O Messenger of Allah, describe them for us?' He said: 'They are from our skin (i.e., of our origin/race) and speak with our tongues.' I said: 'So what do you order me if I encounter that?' He said: 'Adhere to

al-jama'ah (the community) of the Muslims and their Imam.' I said: 'And if there is no jama'ah for them and no Imam?' He said: 'Then abandon all those factions, even if you have to bite onto the root of a tree, until death overtakes you while you are upon that'" [Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

This hadith commands adherence to al-jama'ah of the Muslims and their Imam—thus it couples al-jama'ah with the Imam. Then Hudhayfah asks about the scenario where there is no jama'ah for the Muslims—which is the state of there being no Imam (**"if there is no jama'ah for them and no Imam"**). Hudhayfah's question shows that the Companions (ra) understood that the Muslims are not in a jama'ah when they do not have a single Imam at their head. In such a case, they would be in a state of division into multiple states, and the gravest tribulation is that these states are led by "callers to the gates of Hellfire"—meaning rulers who do not apply Islam but rather apply the rules of disbelief (kufr), and who use their media and institutions to call for and promote the culture of disbelief in the lands of the Muslims. In this situation, the meaning of al-jama'ah does not apply to any of them.

And the understanding of the Companions (ra) was that the al-jama'ah (the community) does not exist unless the Ummah is unified upon an Imam or a Khaleefah. Ibn Katheer mentioned in his Taareekh that 'Amr ibn Hurayth asked Sa'eed ibn Zayd (ra)—who was one of the ten promised Paradise—saying to him: "Did you witness the death of the Messenger of Allah (saw)?" He said: "Yes." He asked him: "When was Abu Bakr given the pledge of allegiance?" Sa'eed said: "On the day the Messenger of Allah (saw) died. The Muslims disliked to remain even part of a day without being in a Jama'ah." The meaning of this is that the Companion Sa'eed ibn Zayd held the view that the Ummah is not in a Jama'ah except after pledging allegiance to an Imam. This is what 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (ra) affirmed, as narrated by Tameem al-Daaree (ra), who said: People began building tall structures during the time of 'Umar (ra), so 'Umar said: **«بَا مَعْشَرَ الْعَرَبِ، الْأَرْضُ الْأَرْضُ، إِنَّهُ لَا إِسْلَامَ إِلَّا بِجَمَاعَةٍ، وَلَا جَمَاعَةَ إِلَّا بِإِمَارَةٍ، وَلَا إِمَارَةَ إِلَّا بِطَاعَةٍ»** "O company of Arabs, (stick to) the ground, the ground! Verily, there is no Islam except with al-jama'ah, and no jama'ah except with a leadership (Imarah), and no leadership except with obedience" [Narrated by Al-Daarimee]. This is also indicated by the consensus of the Muslims in the first century, as they named the year 41 AH "The Year of al-Jama'ah." This was the year in which Al-hasan ibn 'Alee—may Allah be pleased with them both—relinquished the Khilafah to Mu'aawiyah ibn Abee Sufyaan, uniting their word upon Mu'aawiyah, and the Muslims thereby had a single Khaleefah. Prior to that, they had two Khulafā', so they were not all one Jama'ah. May Allah have mercy on 'Abdullaah ibn al-Mubaarak (who was from the Taabi'u at-Taabi'een, the 'alim of his time, and the amir of the pious in his era) when he said:

إِنَّ الْجَمَاعَةَ حَبْلُ اللَّهِ فَاعْتَصِمُوا ... مِنْهُ بِعُرْوَتِهِ الْوُثْقَى لِمَنْ ذَانَا

كَمْ يَدْفَعُ اللَّهُ بِالْسلْطَانِ مُغْضِلَةً ... فِي دِينِنَا رَحْمَةً مِنْهُ وَذَنْبَانَا

لَوْ لَا الْخِلَافَةُ لَمْ تَأْمَنْ لَنَا سُبُلٌ ... وَكَانَ أَضْعَفُنَا نَهْبًا لِأَقْوَانَا

"Indeed, al-jama'ah is by the Rope of Allah, so hold fast ... to its firmest bond, for the one who submits to our Deen.

How much Allah resolves a predicament through the Sultan ... in our Deen as a mercy from Him and in our worldly life.

Were it not for the Khilafah, our roads would not be safe ... and the weakest among us would be prey for the strongest."

Thus, the blameworthy division that Allah has prohibited in His saying, **«وَلَا تَفْرَقُوا»** **"and do not be divided"**, is the splitting of the Ummah into multiple entities and states. This meaning is established in the authentic ahadith that forbid the multiplicity of leaders (Imams) and prohibit Muslims from having more than one Khaleefah or more than one ruler:

It is narrated from Abu Hurayrah (ra) that the Messenger of Allah (saw) said, **«إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْضَى لَكُمْ ثَلَاثًا، وَيَسْخَطُ لَكُمْ ثَلَاثًا: يَرْضَى لَكُمْ أَنْ تَعْبُدُوهُ وَلَا تَشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا، وَأَنْ تَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفْرَقُوا، وَأَنْ تَتَّصِحُوا لَكُمْ ثَلَاثًا، وَيَسْخَطُ لَكُمْ ثَلَاثًا: قِيلَ وَقَالَ، وَكَثْرَةُ السُّؤَالِ، وَإِضَاعَةُ الْمَالِ»** **"Indeed, Allah is pleased with**

three matters for you and is displeased with three things for you. He is pleased for you: that you worship Him and do not associate anything with Him, that you all hold fast to the rope of Allah and do not become divided, and that you give sincere advice to whom Allah has entrusted your affairs. And He is displeased with three things for you: gossip (he said, she said), asking too many questions, and squandering wealth” [Narrated by Muslim].

And it is narrated from ‘Arfajah ibn Shurayh (ra) that he said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (saw) say, «مَنْ أَتَاكُمْ وَأَمْرُكُمْ جَمِيعٌ عَلَى رَجُلٍ وَاحِدٍ، يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَشُقَّ عَصَاكُمْ، أَوْ يَفْرِقَ جَمَاعَتَكُمْ، فَاقْتُلُوهُ» **“Whoever comes to you while your affair is unified under one man, intending to split your unity or divide your community, then kill him”** [Narrated by Muslim].

As for his (saw) statement, «وَأَمْرُكُمْ جَمِيعٌ عَلَى رَجُلٍ وَاحِدٍ» **“while your affair is unified under one man,”** means: while you are a united community (jama'ah) under one Imam (leader), agreed upon. So, whoever intends to divide this community, to split and sever the affair of this Ummah, and to appoint for it more than one Imam, then kill him. This is a prohibition against the Ummah having more than one Imam, meaning more than one state.

And from Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-Aas (ra) that the Prophet (saw) said, «وَمَنْ بَايَعَ إِمَامًا فَأَعْطَاهُ صَفْقَةَ يَدِهِ، وَثَمَرَةَ قَلْبِهِ، فَلْيُطِغْهُ إِنْ اسْتَطَاعَ، فَإِنْ جَاءَ آخَرٌ يَنْزِعُهُ فَاضْرِبُوا عُنُقَ الْآخَرِ» **“Whoever pledges allegiance to an Imam, giving him the clasp of his hand and the fruit of his heart, then let him obey him if he is able. But if another comes to dispute (his authority), then strike the neck of the other”** [Narrated by Muslim]. From this hadith, we grasp the meaning of al-jama'ah (the unified community) which Allah has commanded us to hold fast to, and we realize the obligation of adhering to the jama'ah. We also understand that the punishment for whoever seeks to breach it, separate from it, or transgress against it is execution. This is because it is forbidden for any person to pledge allegiance for the Khilafah after the Khilafah has been established for a Khaleefah, even if the second is better than the first, and for this reason, he is ordered to be killed.

This hadith is narrated at length by Muslim, wherein he mentioned at its beginning the trials, tribulations, and reprehensible matters that can occur in the absence of al-jama'ah, then he commanded fulfilling the pledge of allegiance to the Khaleefah and obeying him. Abdullah ibn Amr (ra) said: We were with the Messenger of Allah (saw) on a journey, and we stopped at a place. Among us were those fixing their tents, those practicing archery, and those tending to their camels, when the caller of the Messenger of Allah (saw) called out: “As-Salatu jami'ah” (Salah in congregation). So we gathered to the Messenger of Allah (saw), and he said: «إِنَّهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ نَبِيٌّ قَبْلِي إِلَّا كَانَ حَقًّا عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَدُلَّ أُمَّتَهُ عَلَى خَيْرٍ مَا يَعْلَمُهُ لَهُمْ، وَيَنْذِرَهُمْ شَرًّا مَا يَعْلَمُهُ لَهُمْ، وَإِنْ أَمَّتْكُمْ هَذِهِ جَعَلَ عَافِيَتُهَا فِي أَوَّلِهَا، وَسَيَصِيبُ آخِرَهَا بَلَاءٌ وَأُمُورٌ تُتَكْرَرُ فِيهَا، وَتَجِيءُ فِتْنَةٌ يَرْفِقُ بَعْضُهَا بَعْضًا، وَتَجِيءُ الْفِتْنَةُ فَيَقُولُ الْمُؤْمِنُ: هَذِهِ مُهْلِكَتِي، ثُمَّ تَنْكَشِفُ، وَتَجِيءُ الْفِتْنَةُ فَيَقُولُ الْمُؤْمِنُ: هَذِهِ هَذِهِ. فَمَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يَرْحُزَ عَنِ النَّارِ، وَيَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ، فَلْيَتَّهِ مَنِئَتَهُ وَهُوَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ، وَلْيَأْتِ إِلَى النَّاسِ الَّذِي يُحِبُّ أَنْ يُؤْتَى إِلَيْهِ، وَمَنْ بَايَعَ إِمَامًا فَأَعْطَاهُ صَفْقَةَ يَدِهِ، وَثَمَرَةَ قَلْبِهِ، فَلْيُطِغْهُ إِنْ اسْتَطَاعَ، فَإِنْ جَاءَ آخَرٌ يَنْزِعُهُ فَاضْرِبُوا عُنُقَ الْآخَرِ» **“There was no Prophet (as) before me except that it was incumbent upon him to guide his Ummah to the best of what he knew for them and to warn them against the worst of what he knew for them. Indeed, your Ummah has had its well-being placed in its beginning, and its end will be struck by tribulation and matters you will deny. There will come trials that will thin one another out. A trial will come and the believer will say, ‘This will be my destruction,’ then it will be lifted. Then another trial will come and the believer will say, ‘This one, this one.’ So whoever loves to be saved from the Fire and to enter Paradise, then let death come to him while he believes in Allah and the Last Day, and let him come to the people with that which he loves to be done to him. And whoever pledges allegiance to an Imam, giving him the clasp of his hand and the fruit of his heart, then let him obey him if he is able. But if another comes to dispute his authority, then strike the neck of the other”** [Narrated by Muslim].

Therefore, the hadith guides that holding firmly to the unification of the Ummah and protection from tribulations and ordeals—some of which make others seem lighter—and the reprehensible matters through which people are destroyed, is achieved by not permitting the

Ummah to have more than one state and one Imam. So, whoever comes and wants to become a Khaleefah and establish a state for the people after the Ummah already has a state and a Khaleefah who has been pledged allegiance to rule by the Book of Allah (swt), the Noble Quran, and the Sunnah of His Prophet (saw), must be repelled, even by killing if the situation requires it, whoever he may be. And if a pledge of allegiance is given to a second Khaleefah and a second state is established that contends with al-jama'ah and the first state, then it will become a gateway to tribulations and ordeals, and a gateway to tribulations that make each other seem lighter, as a result of disunity and the absence of al-jama'ah. And it is as if the hadith was speaking about the Ummah in this time, where there is no Imam over them ruling by Islam; rather, there are dozens of rulers and separate states. This has caused the Ummah to lose its dignity, increased its humiliation in the world, and allowed the disbelievers to dominate it from every side, violating the sanctity of blood and lands in the east and west of the Muslim lands.

And holding firmly to the rope of Allah by establishing al-jama'ah (the community) headed by an Imam who applies the Shariah is the characteristic of the saved sect (al-firqah an-naajiyah) mentioned in the hadith of division (افتراق iftiraaq). This is a hadith in which the Prophet (saw) warns against disunity (التفرق at-tafarruq), which is the opposite of unification (al-jama'ah). The hadith has been narrated through several chains (riwaayaat), none of which are free from weakness in their chain of transmission (sanad). Some of its narrations—perhaps among the best in terms of chain—are those that mention “al-jama'ah” as the attribute of the saved sect. The wording of the hadith is: «أَلَا إِنَّ مَنْ قَبْلَكُمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ افْتَرَقُوا عَلَى ثِنْتَيْنِ وَسَبْعِينَ مِلَّةً، وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ الْمِلَّةَ سَتَفْتَرِقُ عَلَى ثَلَاثٍ وَسَبْعِينَ، ثِنْتَانِ وَسَبْعُونَ فِي النَّارِ، وَوَاحِدَةٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ، وَهِيَ الْجَمَاعَةُ» **“Indeed, those before you from the People of the Book split into seventy-two sects, and this Ummah will split into seventy-three sects; seventy-two are in the Fire, and one is in Paradise, and it is al-jama'ah.”** In another narration, it is said: «كُلُّهَا فِي النَّارِ إِلَّا وَاحِدَةً» **“...all of them are in the Fire except one.”** It was asked: “Who are they, O Messenger of Allah?” He said: «مَا أَنَا عَلَيْهِ وَأَصْحَابِي» **“That which I and my Companions are upon.”** It was narrated by Imam Ahmad, Abu Daawood, At-Tirmidhee, Ibn Maajah, and Al-haakim.

And this hadith of division (al-iftiraaq) and the saved sect (الفرقة الناجية al-firqah an-naajiyah) is not from the clearly authentic, rigorously established (saheeh) ahadith, nor is it from those whose authenticity has become manifest and widespread among the Imams of hadith preservation (al-a'immah al-huffaaz). There is indeed a difference of opinion among the huffaaz regarding its established textual authentication (thuboot). Some of them lean towards weakening it (taq'eef) due to various aspects, while others lean towards strengthening it (taqweet), and this latter view is the more famous and apparent one among the later huffaaz. This hadith has been narrated from the reports of Abu Hurayrah, Anas ibn Maalik, 'Abdullaah ibn 'Umar, and Mu'aawiyah ibn Abee Sufyaan—that is, from a group of the Companions—from the Prophet (saw). The greatest issue lies in the addition (az-ziyaadah) that came in some narrations, which is his statement: «كُلُّهَا فِي النَّارِ إِلَّا وَاحِدَةً» **“All of them are in the Fire except one.”** Ibn Hazm and a group went so far as to reject it (at-ta'nfeeh), while Ibn Taymiyyah and a group went towards strengthening it. It should be known that the Imams of jurisprudence and fundamentals of fiqh (أئمة الفقه والأصول a'immah al-fiqh wal-usool) who accepted the hadith with the phrase «كُلُّهَا فِي النَّارِ إِلَّا وَاحِدَةً» **“All of them are in the Fire except one”** did not understand it according to its apparent, literal meaning that occurs to the minds of the common people—namely, that it implies declaring Muslims as disbelievers (at-takfeer) and eternal damnation in the Fire. Instead, they considered it a threat (wa'eed) directed at acts of disobedience and innovation ('isyaan wa-bid'ah).

Here, there is a matter that must be taken into consideration in our research: it is not important to arrive at a definitive conclusion regarding the authenticity of this hadith or its lack thereof. For reaching such a certainty does not yield a decisive result in establishing the issues intended in this research, because division is a reality within the Ummah today, and there is no scope for bypassing or denying it, even if the Prophet (saw) had not informed us of it.

And the hadith does not specify the time when this division occurs. Therefore, scholars in every historical period have considered division to be present in their own era. Some attempted to enumerate the sects, with some viewing any difference of opinion as constituting a sect, thereby reaching a number of around seventy. Others considered that the number was only meant to indicate multiplicity. This reflects their differing understandings of the concept of division (tafarruq). Most of them viewed division as the existence of innovations, ideas, schools of thought, and groups. And since the hadith clarifies that the saved sect (al-firqah an-naajiyah) is al-jama‘ah, some ‘ulema interpreted al-jama‘ah as the great majority (as-sawaad al-a‘zam) and the general body of the Ummah. Given that the hadith speaks about the division of the Ummah of Muhammad (saw) and does not refer to groups that have left Islam—as they are not part of the Ummah—it is not necessary to say that al-jama‘ah, which is the saved sect, implies that the other sects are disbelievers. Instead, they are sinful for their departure from the Imam. This is why the ‘ulema of the Sunnah did not declare most of the theological and political sects that proliferated in various periods as disbelievers, as Ahl as-Sunnah constituted the great majority. This interpretation was correct in the early centuries when the Imam of al-jama‘ah was from Ahl as-Sunnah.

And it has been clarified that “al-jama‘ah” is the Ummah under a single Imam, and that division (tafarruq) is the existence of more than one Imam or leader for the Muslims. It appears that this understanding is what led Muslims in the early eras to use the term “Ahl as-Sunnah” (People of the Sunnah) and not “Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama‘ah” (People of the Sunnah and the Community) to denote the largest body of Muslims, which stood in contrast to the proponents of theological schools (kalaam) such as the Mu‘tazilah, the Jabriyyah, and the Qadariyyah, or in contrast to political groups like the Imamiyyah and the Zaydiyyah. In the era when theological schools became widespread, the Khaleefah and the state adopted the theological opinions of those factions. It is known that a number of Abbasid caliphs adopted Mu‘tazilite views on theological issues. Thus, the leadership of the Ummah or the Khaleefah was not in the hands of “Ahl as-Sunnah”; Ahl as-Sunnah were a part of al-jama‘ah but not its Imams. However, after the Caliphs retracted their opinions, abandoned the views of the Mu‘tazilah, and adopted the opinions of “Ahl as-Sunnah,” people began using the term “Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama‘ah,” because the leadership of al-jama‘ah, or the Khilafah, had come into the hands of those who adopted the opinions of Ahl as-Sunnah. Ahl as-Sunnah thus became the ruling representatives of al-jama‘ah. Consequently, the use of the term “Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama‘ah” began at a later time, and it is most likely that the Ash‘arees were the first to employ this term.

Upon examining the reality of the Ummah today, we find that the division (tafarruq) which stands in opposition to the political and legal concept of al-jama‘ah is clearly present. This is manifested by the existence of Muslims within dozens of political entities and their failure to unite under a single Imam or Khaleefah. In fact, there is no Imam or Khaleefah for the Muslims at all, because no leader in any entity has been pledged allegiance to for ruling by Islam—whether he is called a president, a king, an emir, a Wali al-Faqeeh (Guardian Jurist), the head of a movement, or anything else. Muslims today are not in a state of al-jama‘ah, and the jama‘ah—in its political-legal sense—does not exist in any of these entities.

Given that Muslims are divided into more than seventy entities or quasi-entities today—including 57 states that are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, in addition to the existence of about twenty separatist entities or quasi-entities within these states and in other countries—the image of division mentioned in the hadith about splitting into sects is clearly evident in the Ummah today. Therefore, it is absurd today to apply the term al-jama‘ah to any group in any country due to the absence of al-jama‘ah. The correct designation is to say only “Ahl as-Sunnah” (People of the Sunnah).

And since the hadith of the saved sect (Al-Firqah An-Naajiyah) clarifies that the saved sect is al-jama‘ah, it aligns with the verse of holding fast: ﴿وَاَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا﴾ **“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided”** [TMQ Surah Aali ‘Imraan: 103]. This verse clarifies that salvation and protection from various tribulations,

and from the domination or aggression of the disbelievers against the Ummah, is achieved by holding fast to the rope of Allah through establishing a jama'ah headed by an Imam who applies the Shariah. This concept also aligns with the authentic hadith: «وإنَّما الإمامُ جُنَّةٌ يُقاتلُ مِن ورائِهِ ويَنقِى بِهِ» **“Indeed, the Imam is a shield; fighting is done behind him and he provides protection”** [Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Hurayrah (ra)]. It likewise aligns with the ahadith that prohibit the multiplicity of Imams (Shariah rulers of the community).

And if the Companions (ra) disliked remaining even part of a day without being in a jama'ah after the death of the Prophet (saw), and thus hastened to pledge allegiance to a Khaleefah until they unified upon pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr (ra), then it is all the more fitting for Muslims today that their paramount cause be the establishment of al-jama'ah and working to install a single Imam and Khaleefah to rule by the Book of Allah (swt) and the Sunnah of His Messenger (saw). For they profess one Deen, worship one Lord (swt), their Messenger (saw) is one, and their Book is one. And only through this will they attain inviolability and holding fast to the rope of Allah (swt), and their might and status among the peoples will be restored.