

Which School of Thought Should A Muslim Follow?

Q13. There are four schools of thoughts and we can follow any one of them. Is it permissible to follow two schools of thought to suit the situation ? For example, the Shafi school of thought considers 2.25 pm as the time for Asr prayers in our town while the Hanafi school of thought has fixed time at 3.08. So can we follow any of these two timings to suit our necessity ?

**M. A.
Hazarika, Seujpur, Dibrugarh**

1. Muslims should be united

Muslims today, are divided amongst themselves. Such divisions are not endorsed by Islam. Islam believes in fostering unity amongst its followers.

The Glorious Qur'an says:

“And hold fast, altogether, by the rope Which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves.” [Al-Qur'an 3:103]

Which is the rope of Allah that is being referred to in this verse? It is the Glorious Qur'an. The Glorious Qur'an is the rope of Allah which all Muslims should hold fast together. There is double emphasis in this verse. Beside saying 'hold fast all together' it also says, 'be not divided'.

The Qur'an further says,

“Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger” [Al-Qur'an 4:59]

All the Muslims should follow the Qur'an and authentic Ahadith and ensure that they are not divided among themselves.

2. It is prohibited to make divisions in Islam.

The Glorious Qur'an says:

“As for those who divide Their religion and break up Into sects, you have no part in them in the least: Their affair is with Allah: He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did.” [Al-Qur'an 6:159]

In this verse Allah (swt) says that one should disassociate oneself from those who divide their religion and break it up into sects.

But when one asks a Muslim, “who are you?” the common answer is either ‘I am a Hanafi or Shafi or Maliki or Hanbali. Some call themselves ‘Ahle-Hadith’.

3. Four Schools of Thoughts

The Islamic world has produced several learned Islamic scholars (Imams), but out of these, four became more famous and their teachings spread in different parts of the world.

It is a misconception that a Muslim should follow any one of these four schools of thoughts i.e. Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali or Maliki. There is no proof whatsoever in the Qur’an or any authentic Hadith that a Muslim should only follow one of these four Imams.

4. Respect all the Great Scholars of Islam.

We must respect all the great scholars of Islam, including the four Imaams, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi, Imam Hanbal and Imam Malik (may Allah be pleased with them all). They were great scholars and may Allah reward them for their research and hard work. One can have no objection if someone agrees with the view and research of any one or more from these four great scholars of Islam.

5. All Four Imam said follow the Qur’an and Sunnah.

All the four great Imams said that if any of their Fatwas or teachings contradict Allah’s word, i.e. the Qur’an, or the sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) i.e. authentic Hadith, then that particular Fatwa of theirs should be rejected, and the Sunnah of the Prophet should be followed.

Refer:

- a. Eeqaadh al-Himam, Al Fulaanee (Imam Abu Hanifa)
- b. Al-Majmoo’ of an-Nawawee (1/63) (Imam Shafi)
- c. Jaami ‘Bayan al-Ilm, Ibn Abdul-Barr (Imam Malik)
- d. Eeqaadh al-Himam (Imam Hanbal)

To give you an example in this context – Imam shafi said that when a women touches a man who is in a state of wudhu, the wudhu of the man breaks.

However, this ruling of Imam Shafi contradicts the authentic saying of the Prophet.

Narrated Aisha

The Prophet (may peace be upon him) kissed one of his wives and went out for saying prayer. He did not perform ablution. (Sunan Abu Dawood Vol. 1 Chapter No. 70 Hadith No. 179)

Thus this particular teaching of Imam Shafi contradicts the authentic saying of the Prophet. So I reject this specific ruling of Imam Shafi who himself said , “ If I say something, then compare it to the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His messenger and if it agrees to them, then accept it and that which goes against them, then reject it and throw my saying against the wall” – This is a saying of ash-Shafi’ee-rahimaullah. See Al-Majmoo’ of an-Nawawee (1/63).

Thus by rejecting this particular teaching of Imam Shafi which contradicts the authentic Hadith, I am practically a better follower of Imam Shafi than those who call themselves ‘Shafi’.

Similarly in practice, I claim to be a better follower of Imam Abu Hanifa than those who call themselves ‘Hanafi’. I claim to be a better follower of Imam Hanbal than those who call themselves ‘Hanbali’. I claim to be a better follower of Imam Malik than those who call themselves ‘Maliki’. If being a ‘Ahle-Hadith’ means following Qur’an and authentic Hadith then I claim to be a better follower of the Qur’an and authentic Hadith than those who call themselves ‘ Ahle-Hadith’. All these are mere labels (Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maliki, Ahle-Hadith) that are not endorsed by the Qur’an or the Sahih Ahadith.

The only label or title given by the Qur’an and the Sahih Ahadith is MUSLIM.

6. All the Groups have sub divisions

I personally have no objection if someone calls himself Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maliki or Ahle Hadith. People give different labels to themselves to identify which set of teachings they prefer to follow and to disassociate themselves from those people who follow wrong practices. From history we come to know that all the labels given to different groups, at a later stage the people from that group themselves did not follow their teachings and made new sub-groups. Therefore in all the groups you find a sub-division.

But as far as giving a label to identify what a person practices in Islam is concerned, there can not be better label than what Allah (swt) has given i.e. a Muslim.

7. Our Prophet was a Muslim

“Who was our beloved Prophet (pbuh)? Was he a Hanafi or a Shafi, or a Hanbali or a Maliki ?” No! He was a Muslim, like all the other Prophets and Messengers of Allah before him.

It is mentioned in chapter 3 verse 52 of Al-Qur’an that Jesus (pbuh) was a Muslim.

Further , in chapter 3 verse 67, Al-Qur’an says that Ibrahim (pbuh) was not a Jew or a Christian but was a Muslim.

8. Qur’an says call yourselves Muslims

There is no Qur’anic verse or any authentic Hadith that says you should call yourselves Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali, Maliki or Ahle Hadith.

If anyone poses a Muslim the question who are you, he should say “I am a Muslim, not a Hanafi or a Shafi or a Ahle-Hadith”.

In Surah Fussilat chapter 41 verse 33 Allah (swt) says: “Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says, ‘I am of those Who bow in Islam (Muslim)?’ “[Al-Qur’an 41:33]

The Qur’an instructs, “Say: I am of those who bow in Islam”. In other words, say, “I am a Muslim”.

The Prophet (pbuh) dictated letters to non-Muslim kings and rulers inviting them to accept Islam. In these letters he mentioned the verse of the Qur’an from Surah Al Imran chapter 3 verse 64:

Say ye: “Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (submitting to Allah’s Will).”[Al-Qur’an 3:64]

9. Lip Service Muslims

Allah knew that even in the Muslim Ummah there will be many people who claim to be Muslims (i.e. claim to submit their will to Allah) but practically will not follow Allah’s commands.

Allah refers to such people in the Qur’an as lip service Believers (Al Qur’an 5:41). Thus we can conclude that those who claim to be Muslims but do not follow Qur’an and Sunnah are Lip-Service Muslims. Those who follow the Qur’an and authentic Hadith should not change their label, and stick to the best label given by Allah (swt) i.e. Muslim and which the Prophet also called himself.

10. The Prophet had said that there would be 73 sects.

Some may argue by quoting the Hadith of our beloved Prophet, from Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith No. 4579. In this Hadith the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, "My community will split up into seventy-three sects."

This hadith reports that the prophet predicted the emergence of seventy-three sects. He did not say that Muslims should be active in dividing themselves into sects. The Glorious Qur'an commands us not to create sects. Those who follow the teachings of the Qur'an and Sahih Hadith, and do not create sects are the people who are on the true path.

According to Tirmidhi Hadith No. 171, the prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said, "My Ummah will be fragmented into seventy three sects, and all of them will be in Hell fire except one sect." The companions asked Allah's messenger which group that would be. Where upon he replied, "It is the one to which I and my companions belong".

The Glorious Qur'an mentions in several verses, "Obey Allah and obey His Messenger". A true Muslim should only follow the Glorious Qur'an and the Sahih Hadith. He can agree with the views of any scholar as long as they conform to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sahih Hadith. If such views go against the Word of Allah, or the Sunnah of His Prophet, then they carry no weight, regardless of how learned the scholar might be. A true Muslim will not follow any ruling or teaching of any great scholar of Islam if that particular ruling or teaching contradicts the Qur'an and Saheeh Hadith.

Thus, the only school of thought that a Muslim should follow, is that of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The only Madhab that a Muslim should follow, is the Madhab of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). And Allah knows the Best.

11. Time for Asr Salah

As far as your specific query regarding the timing of Asr Salah is concerned, it is mentioned in Sunan Abu Dawood Vol. 1 Chapter No. 147 Hadith No. 393,

Narrated Abdullah Ibn Abbas

The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said : Gabriel (pbuh) prayed the Asr Salah with me when shadow of everything was as long as itself..... On the following day he prayed the Asr Prayer with me when his shadow was twice as long as himself..... Then turning to me he said : Muhammad, this is the time observed by the prophets before you, and the time is anywhere between these two times.

It is mentioned in Sunan Abu Dawood Volume No. 1 Chapter No. 158 Hadith No. 426,

Umm Farwah said :

The Apostle of Allah (pbuh) was asked : Which of the actions is best ? He replied: Observing prayer early in its period.

Therefore it is preferable to pray early (i.e. at the beginning of the prescribed period for Salaah).

For all the Salaah except Isha, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said it is preferable to pray early.

Narrated Saiyar bin Salama :

The Prophet loved to delay the Isha... and he disliked sleeping before it and speaking after it.

(Sahih Al-Bukhari Vol. 1 Hadith No. 522)

However, if a person is unable to pray at the early hour, it is permitted to pray at any time within the prescribed period for Salaah.

Only If all the Muslims read the Qur'an with understanding and adhere to Sahih Hadith, Insha-Allah most of these differences would be solved and we could be one united Muslim Ummah.

And Allah Knows the Best.