

Taqlīd and the Stagnation of the Muslim Mind

THE ORIGINS AND BEGINNINGS OF *TAQLĪD*

Allah Most High chose the Muslims to be the Ummah of mission (*risālah*), exemplary good (*khayriyyah*), the golden mean (*wasatiyyah*), and witnessing (*shahādah*) to humanity. Along with these responsibilities came the capacity for renewal, *ijtihād*, and interpreting the Shari‘ah correctly. As a result, there is a certain inseparable mutuality between the Ummah’s roles as a median community cum civilizational witness for humanity and its other role as a moral and ethical exemplar, and between its capability for *ijtihād* and effecting reform. In order to facilitate these roles, Allah endowed the Qur’an and the Sunnah with the necessary flexibility in every aspect of Islam: its belief system, methodology, the Shari‘ah, and organization.

Thus, it was only natural for the early generations of Muslims, both on an individual and a community level, to offer a unique picture to the world: the complete liberation of the human mind from all forms of mental slavery and idolatry. Further protection against falling from this exalted position was the provision made for avoiding mistakes, deviations, and misinterpretations: Only those statements that could be proven by acceptable, or supported by valid, testimony were to be believed. A look at the Companions’ *ijtihād*, whether they were learned *qurrā’* (Qur’anic reciters) or common people, will suffice to illustrate the amazing transformation that Islam achieved.

Why do we not see this situation today? What has happened to the penetrating and enlightened mind, inspired by Islam, that freed our ancestors from their idols and the obstacles blocking their progress? How did such a mind return to its former prison and fetters, robbed of any chance to renew

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and reform the Ummah through *ijtihād*? In a word, the answer is *taqlīd*, an illness that entered the Muslim mind and fed on it until it returned to its prison. This paper is a study of *taqlīd*, one designed to reveal why it has overtaken the Ummah.

TAQLĪD AND THE UMMAH'S CRISIS

Muslims and non-Muslims alike are amazed that one of history's most advanced civilizations could fall into such a state of overwhelming wretchedness, ignorance, backwardness, and decline. Why are there so many crises in the Ummah's thought? Why, when the Ummah possesses sufficient natural, human, spiritual, and civilizational resources, does its vision remain cloudy and its list of priorities confused? The answer(s) to such questions has not been found, despite the innumerable studies dealing with the overall problem by means of different methodologies and despite the fact that their results and conclusions about the causes have been identified, published, and analyzed.

But the amazement and frustrations remain. A civilization that placed such emphasis upon literacy and knowledge remains largely illiterate. An Ummah that received such clear divine guidance remains mired in a morass of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and outright confusion.

Other questions are waiting to be answered: How did the Ummah of unity and *tawhīd* become divided into so many sects and subsects? Why does the Ummah, blessed with all of the means and resources necessary for economic prosperity, continue to suffer from abject poverty? Why does the Ummah, blessed with all the means of dominance and invincibility, remain subjected to continuing political and military humiliation? Why does the thought of its people, to whom all the sources of guidance were revealed, remain awash in fallacy and delusion?

Unfortunately, our situation is even worse, for we see parts of our Ummah trying to defend these aberrations by presenting them as wholesome, ascribing them to others, trying to find scapegoats, or even attempting to downplay their importance by explaining that such things are natural and common.

TAQLĪD: A NATURAL (ORIGINAL) CONDITION OR A DEVIATION?

Allah has blessed this Ummah with an *ʿaqīdah* (creed), a *Shariʿah*, and a *minhāj* (method). This *ʿaqīdah* gives Muslims a clear perception of life and

the universe based on the principle of pure *tawhīd* in harmony with the *fiṭrah* (the pattern on which Allah has made humanity¹), in balance with all that exists and in explanation of all civilization's elements: *istikhlāf*,² *ibtilā'*,³ *tamkīn*,⁴ *tadāfu'*,⁵ *taskhīr*,⁶ *takrīm*,⁷ *amānah*,⁸ *'ibādah*,⁹ and *shuhūd*.¹⁰

The Shari'ah is a blessing because of its universality, comprehensiveness, perfection, effectiveness in preserving all of the necessities of existence, and provision of what is needed to build a civilization and its identity. The Shari'ah, moreover, comprehends all of the elements that give Islamic life its particular color and taste, and also contributes to achieving Islam's higher objectives. As such, the Ummah will achieve success and felicity in this life and in the Hereafter, and the Muslims will fulfill their role as Allah's vicegerent, only if the Shari'ah's objectives, purposes, and principles are clearly understood and appreciated.

The *minhāj* of Islam is a blessing, for the Prophet said: "It is the shining path whose night is as clear as its day." Thus, one who uses his/her reason and senses cannot go astray, for following the *minhāj* leads an individual to felicity, society to the common good, and the Ummah to its goals of *wasāṭiyyah* and *shahādah*.

Islam's *'aqīdah*, Shari'ah, and *minhāj* can be applied only by a mind illuminated with sure knowledge of and faith in Allah, able to understand its purposes and principles, conscious of Islam's premises so that they may be connected intelligently, and capable of achieving the highest degree of discernment. This is why Islam is so determined to free the human mind from its previous and present fetters. The Qur'an even states that if this is not accomplished at the outset, His Ummah will fail to perform *ijtihād*, carry out reform, give guidance, or follow in the prophets' footsteps: "Those were the ones who received Allah's guidance; so emulate the guidance they received" (6:90). Thus, we can say that the Muslim mind's present state is unnatural, for it has accepted, without proof, many concepts and practices that have led to reason's arrest and petrification.

For the Ummah, *taqlīd* represents a blameworthy innovation (*bid'ah*) as well as a deviation (*dalālah*) from the straight path. No researcher or scholar has ever found a valid text from either the Qur'an or the Hadith, or even an argument based on pure reason, to support Islam's approval of *taqlīd*, for the very idea is alien to Islam's view of humanity. Islamic teachings clearly state that all assertions must be supported by verifiable evidence or proof. If these elements are absent, the statement must be rejected. This applies to all statements (a fact has to be verifiable), a claim (it also to be verifiable), a ruling (it must have either valid testimony or evidence), or a com-

mand or a prohibition (they must have an issuing authority based either in revelation or existence and thus subject to empirical validity). If such conditions are not met, the assertion has to be rejected. These are the basic landmarks in the methodology of the Muslim mind.

TAQLĪD: FOR MUSLIMS OR NON-MUSLIMS?

A Muslim, or one who has been liberated from all shackles and fetters by the grace of Allah, has a free mind and a clear conscience. Thus, he/she will accept only the truth – that which is supported by proper evidence. Non-Muslims, those who have remained chained to and enslaved by their continuous idolatry (*shirk*), have been and remain easy prey for any sort of falsity. Of them, Allah has stated:

When it is said to them: “Follow what Allah has revealed,” they say: “On the contrary, we shall follow the ways of our fathers.” What? Even though their fathers were devoid of wisdom and guidance? (2:170)

and:

In the same way, We never sent a warner before you to any people except that the wealthy ones among them said: “We found our fathers following a certain religion; and certainly we shall follow in their foot-steps.” (43:23)

And they said:

O Lord! We obeyed our chiefs and our great ones, and they led us astray from the right path. (33:67)

Sometimes an overbearing person will deceive others so as to influence them and, in the name of religion, gain control of their thinking. This is usually done by claiming one of the uniquely divine attributes, like that of legislation. Calling those who follow such people deluded, Allah has said: “They take their priests and anchorites to be their lords, in derogation of Allah” (9:31).

Commenting on this verse, Hudhayfah related a hadith in which ‘Adī ibn Ḥātim (a convert from Christianity) said to the Prophet: “But we didn’t actually worship them, O Messenger of Allah.” The Prophet replied: “But did they not make what was *ḥarām* for you *ḥalāl* and what was *ḥalāl* for you *ḥarām*? And did you not follow what they told you?” ‘Adī replied: “Yes,” to which the Prophet said: “This is how you worshipped them.”¹¹

Such evidence has caused Muslim scholars to agree that *taqlid* is wrong and must be avoided. Counter-arguments that these verses were directed toward only the non-Muslims' use of *taqlid* are rejected on the grounds that any similarity between a *muqallid* (one who follows blindly) in matters of *kufr* (unbelief) and a *muqallid* in anything else is not *kufr*, but only following the customs of deceased Muslims that may or may not have conformed with the Shari'ah.

In addition, Muslim scholars are generally agreed on the blameworthiness of *taqlid* in general, even if they differ on its degree and various forms. Obviously, one who follows an unbeliever is not the same as one who follows a sinner. Likewise, one who follows an ignorant person on a question of daily life is not the same as one who follows an ignorant person on a matter of religion. Still, a Muslim should not be involved in any sort of *taqlid*, as Allah has explained to humanity what may protect and preserve it from this: "Allah will not mislead a people after He has guided them, in order to make clear to them what they are to avoid" (9:115).

A Muslim must never accept anything without proof or believe anything without evidence of its validity. Allah has emphasized this by linking a Muslim's legal competence with his/her ability to use reason. Thus, if he/she becomes incapable of reasoning according to Islamic norms and values, his/her competence is invalidated.

Any supposition unsupported by sound evidence (*zann*) is subject to certain rules, for there are some matters in which it, in the absence of anything better, is acceptable. Generally speaking, however, any supposition is to be rejected, for a Muslim is expected to actively seek out what is certain and not to rest until he/she is satisfied that the evidence is conclusive. Among the early Muslims this was a self-evident fact, and none of them ever accepted, used, cited, or fell back on *taqlid*.

SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

Allah has divided the sources of knowledge into two basic categories: a) revelation (*wahy*), as He has said in the Qur'an: "He revealed to you the Book (the Qur'an) and *hikmah* (the Sunnah), and He taught you that which you did not know" (4:113); "He taught Adam the names of all things" (2:31); and "Recite in the name of your Lord Who created, created humanity from a blood clot! Recite, for Your Lord is the Most Noble, the One Who taught by means of the eternal pen (of revelation); Who taught humanity what it did not know" (96:1-5); and b) the universe (*al-kawn*), for He has told us that:

Verily in the creation of the heavens and Earth, in the alternation of night and day, in the ships that glide through the ocean with what benefits humanity, in the water Allah sends down from the sky to revive the earth after it was dead and to scatter throughout it every manner of beast, in the changing of the winds, in the clouds made subservient between the heavens and Earth, are signs for a people who reason. (2:164)

Allah has even informed humanity how it can attain knowledge from these two sources: “Allah brought you forth from you mothers’ wombs when you knew nothing; and then He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence” (16:78); “It is not given to any human that Allah should speak to him/her except through revelation, or from behind a screen, or by sending a messenger who reveals, by His leave, what He wills. Surely He is Most Sublime, Most Wise” (42:51); and “Likewise, We have revealed to you a spirit by Our command, when before you did not know what the Book was nor what faith was” (42:52).

However, one can benefit from these means only if his/her mind is enlightened and capable of digesting and then developing from this information the theories and conclusions necessary for living in an Islamic manner. Apparently, it is not unusual for the mind to gain no benefit from the information that the senses provide, for Allah has said: “And they must have passed the town on which was rained a shower of evil; did they not see it?” (25:40); “Deaf, dumb, and blind, they are void of wisdom” (2:171); and “Many are the jinn and men We have made for Hell. They have hearts that do not understand, eyes that do not see, and ears that do not hear. They are like cattle – nay, even more misguided. Indeed, such people, they are the heedless ones” (7:179).

We notice that *taqlīd* is not presented as a third source of knowledge. In other words, it is not an alternative to either revelation or science. Thus, its use is unacceptable even if, in a rare instance, it leads to what is right or correct. Instead, individuals are asked to discover the truth through the faculties that Allah gave them so that they could explore, observe, and contemplate His creation. Allah has taught humanity to seek proof and search for evidence. In order to emphasize this and inform humanity that it should not give up this quest even in matters having to do with Him, He has said: “... so that humanity, after the coming of the prophets, should have no proof against Allah” (4:165). It is as if Allah wanted to explain to humanity that it must make every effort to find the necessary evidence to support its position(s). Thus, if Allah expects this sort of verification from humanity in its dealings with Him, what of its dealings on an individual level?

HOW DID MUSLIMS SINK TO
THE LEVEL OF *TAQLĪD*?

The Ummah did not suddenly plunge to the depths of *taqlīd*. On the contrary, we can trace the beginning of its gradual fall to the Tābī‘ūn’s era and as taking place in three phases: a gradual strengthening of the people’s reliance upon the learned scholars’ opinions, a deemphasis among the people on learning and scholarly pursuits, and a general hardening of hearts.

The major factor initiating the first phase was the individual Muslim’s lack of interest in acquiring true learning and hard evidence. Instead, they grew more dependent on the scholars’ reputations in the belief that such trust could replace his/her duty to seek evidence and proof for what the scholars taught.

Of course, the *qurrā’* and *fuqahā’* with which the early generations of the Muslims were blessed were greatly respected for their learning and piety, and deservedly so. However, the average Muslim soon forgot how these people used to ask the Prophet if he had spoken on his own authority (which could be disputed) or on that of revelation (which would immediately end all controversy). When the Prophet gave his own opinion, he would often encourage his Companions to help him make the correct decision. Sometimes he would even do what they suggested. Many hadiths report that he said: “Come on, people. Tell me what to do.” A similar case is found in his telling ‘Umar and ‘Amīr: “Use *ijtihād*.” Indeed, this encouragement motivated the *uṣūlī* scholars to debate whether the Prophet’s *ijtihād* was subject to error or not, for he taught them never to accept anything he said or did until they were certain that it was based on revelation. *Taqlīd* could not exist in such an environment. As a matter of fact, the Muslims of that time considered it to be a trait of hypocrites and non-Muslims.

This state prevailed from the hijrah until around the last Companion’s death in 99 AH. After this, deviation began to creep in as some Muslims seeking *fatāwā* began to feel somewhat awed in the presence of such great ‘*ulamā’* and *mujtahidūn* as ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (101 AH), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (110 AH), and Ibn Sīrīn (110 AH). Their vast knowledge, when joined with the gap between the generation of the Companions and that of the Tabī‘ūn, gradually caused them to seem somewhat larger than life. This awe instilled within the common people a certain reluctance, born of admiration, esteem, and perhaps not a little awe, to ask them for evidence corroborating their legal rulings and opinions. At this stage, however, the majority of questioners still demanded proof, a practice that the scholars knew was their duty to provide and therefore did not resent.

But by the time of the third generation, learning and scholarly pursuits were no longer priorities for most Muslims, as they were more occupied with making a living. Thus, very few people attended the scholars' sessions to discuss knowledge or study and reflect on the textual evidence presented. Instead, when they had questions they would satisfy themselves with an answer (minus the requisite proof) from the scholars. This new practice permeated the intellectual environment and laid the groundwork for *taqlīd*.

The third stage was characterized by the Muslim masses accustoming themselves to accepting legal opinions without listening to either arguments or evidence, and by the legal scholars becoming comfortable with making pronouncements and providing no justification for doing so. In such an atmosphere, the following questions began to be asked: Is *taqlīd* permissible for an individual who is not a Shari'ah scholar? Who is a scholar? Who is required to seek evidence? Who cannot search for evidence on his/her own? Such questions divided the scholars of this period (circa 128 AH).

One group of scholars maintained that scholars still had to explain their evidence and that it was the questioner's duty, as stated in the Shari'ah, to demand this evidence. This group also claimed that it was *ḥarām* for scholars not to explain their proof, for doing so would seriously hinder the questioner's ability to make up his/her own mind. Another group of people, however, held that it was permissible for a non-scholar to follow a scholar: in other words, that *taqlīd* was *ḥalāl*. This opinion led to the widespread saying: "An 'ammī has no *madhhab* of his own; his *madhhab* is the *madhhab* of his mufti."

Thus, *taqlīd* was given a certain amount of legitimacy, even though, at least in theory, the 'ulamā' agreed that it was blameworthy and prohibited. Despite this, however, its popularity continued to spread, a development that would have very serious consequences for the Muslims' psychological disposition and mentality. At this point, *taqlīd* began to create a serious gap in the Muslim mind, for its acceptance led to generations of Muslims relying on unsubstantiated opinions and resulted in the creation of a mentality and a proclivity for slavish imitation.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF TAQLĪD

Realizing that the Ummah needed to change course, some people have sought a cure. Among those suggested were codifying a certain *madhhab*, giving it government support, and then requiring all citizens to follow it; and supporting only those *madhāhib* followed by a significant number of Muslims.

Several factors led the *‘ulamā’* to such ideas. One was the split between the Ummah’s intellectual and political leadership that accompanied the deepening crisis of thought. Those in charge of the Muslims’ affairs (*ulu al-amr*) were divided into two mutually opposed parties: the rulers (who had the power) and the *‘ulamā’* (who had the legal proofs and arguments).¹² This polarization shattered the two group’s former complementarity and replaced it with a ruinous conflict over legitimacy and earning the Ummah’s allegiance and support.

Under such circumstances, the rulers began to think of codifying the legal texts and declaring a state *madhhab*. The Abbasid ruler al-Manṣūr (d. 158 AH/755 AC) considered forcing his subjects to follow Mālik’s *Al-Muwatta’*. Fearing that people would no longer deal directly with the Qur’an and the Sunnah if this policy were implemented, and that one solution might not be applicable to all locations, Mālik discouraged the idea. Several rulers attempted to lend state support to a particular legal school, but in each case the scholars opposed the idea because they feared that it might lead to *taqlīd*.

Another factor that led to *taqlīd*’s increasing influence was the growing belief in fatalism (*jabr*). This attitude helped *taqlīd* gain even more adherents, and it became increasingly common for political leaders to justify their mistakes and aberrations by citing this doctrine. Quite simply, if their actions and decisions had been determined beforehand, they could not be held accountable for them and their subjects had no justification to revolt. In effect, it gave rulers *carte blanche* to rule the Ummah as they saw fit. As *taqlīd* was to their advantage, many rulers and court-supported scholars favored it despite the traditional *‘ulamā’*’s opposition.

Thus, *taqlīd* cleared the way for fatalism, which prepared the ground for tyranny, injustice, and despotism. The “great ones,” to use the Qur’anic expression, accustomed themselves to giving orders, and the “lowly ones,” by the same logic, learned to submit. This result, which should clarify for the Ummah once and for all the vital and inseparable relationship between *taqlīd* and despotism, is even mentioned in the Qur’an: “Thus did he (Fir‘awn) make fools of his people, and they obeyed him” (43:54) and “Fir‘awn said: ‘I only show you that which I see myself, and I only guide you to the path of [what is] right’” (40:29).

In conclusion, both the Qur’an and history show us that those who engage in *taqlīd* soon lose sight of the truth of what they are following and do not think of the consequences. Through this voluntary cessation of independent thought, such people hand over their destiny to whoever is able to

establish control over them, even if this new leader leads them and the entire Ummah to destruction.

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Among *taqlīd*'s most obvious consequences are the following:

First: The spread of indifference and the will to follow. *Taqlīd* has created within the Muslim's psychological makeup feelings of his/her inability to accept responsibility. As the Shari'ah's essence is the acceptance of personal and communal responsibility, we can understand the extent of *taqlīd*'s negative effect upon the Ummah.

Second: *Taqlīd* and partisanship for a specific legal school have led to the spread of public debates on theological and legal topics. This, in turn, has led to further polarization and increasing disunity. The end result has been the emergence of popular factions and heretical sects dedicated to destroying Islam and the Ummah. An even more dangerous result was that this *taqlīd*-based mentality and fiqh-based partisanship gradually replaced the mentality of free inquiry that the Qur'an had instilled in the early Muslims.

Third: This *taqlīd*-based mentality has also manifested itself among the previous generations of Muslims in their uncertainty regarding any legal decision for which there was no clear ruling. It has filled contemporary Muslims with doubts about how to conduct themselves in different spheres of Islamic activity without an opinion from the classical scholars. Amazingly enough, the most important thing today is that the opinion cited should be old; the writer's reputation or the work's value does not matter.

Muslims who have grown up in such an intellectual void can hardly be expected to engage in any serious analysis of Islamic subjects, whether they agree with the content or not. Instead, the Ummah has defaulted on this duty and has left it to the Orientalists, despite the latter's obvious biases and preferences, and to their clones among Muslim students.

All of this has contributed to the creation of a very significant gap in our thought, which I call the "vacuum of *ijtihād*." Out of fear of making an error, it seems that Muslims have declared *ijtihād* out of bounds for themselves, in effect leaving it to either non-Muslims or westernized/secularized Muslims who no longer understand or practice Islam's fundamental tenets. In short, it is wide open to the depredations of well-meaning but unqualified people, as well as those who are hostile to Islam.

Fourth: The negative environment engendered by *taqlīd* led to a consumptive syndrome, for Muslims began to retreat into their historical intellectual legacy in order to consume all that it had to offer. When the European awakening began, Muslims looked in all directions for a path that would lead them to the place that they felt they deserved. However, when the legacy's keepers were unable to provide direction, several groups decided to imitate the West, based on the belief that such a step would meet with success. However, they met with an identity crisis of such proportions that committed Muslims set out to find their historical identity while westernized Muslims searched for a geographical or cultural identity. Such a development was only possible after *taqlīd* had caused the Ummah's personality to melt away by laying the foundations for its backwardness and introducing into it a state of civilizational absence despite its former civilizational preeminence.

Fifth: The Ummah's *taqlīd*-based mentality resulted in a worldview dominated by expedience. This, in turn, actually made *taqlīd* a method for avoiding innovation (*bid'ah*). As it was generally felt that *ijtihād* would lead to error or one's adherence to the unacceptable, *taqlīd* became attractive as a prudent alternative.

Sixth: Among *taqlīd*'s more disastrous side effects is its quasi-sanctification of the status quo, regardless of whether or not it adheres to the Shari'ah. As *taqlīd* is the consort of custom, the *muqallidūn* who become more accustomed to certain social conditions tend to block any movement for change or reform. Thus, *taqlīd* impedes social reform and represents a mentality that must either be significantly altered or destroyed before meaningful change can occur.

CONCLUSION

The curse of *taqlīd* continues to obstruct the Ummah's attempts at self-revival and self-reform. *Taqlīd*'s negative and crippling effects cannot be overcome by changing the methods by which it is practiced or the people whom it venerates. Nor can we expect to accomplish anything by transforming issues of *taqlīd* into institutions that make a virtue of abandoning creative thought for the principle of following others and designating certain people as custodians of backwardness in the sacred name of *taqlīd*.

NOTES

1. See Qur'an 30:30.
2. *Istikhlāf*: Allah's appointment of humanity as His *khalīfah* (vicegerent) on Earth. See Qur'an 2:30; 10:14; 27:26; 35:39.
3. *Ibtilā'*: trial by affliction or through abundance. See Qur'an 3:186; 21:35; 89:15-16.
4. *Tamkīn*: Allah's aid in establishing people in the world, be it politically, financially, professionally, or otherwise. This concept carries with it the responsibility of the individual and his/her society to reciprocate by establishing prayer and doing good deeds. See Qur'an 22:41; 6:6; 7:10.
5. *Daf'* and *tadāfu'*: checking and balancing one group of people, or individual, checking another. See Qur'an 22:40; 2:251.
6. *Taskhīr*: Allah's subjection of nature and its laws to humanity for its benefit. For this favor, it is essential that humanity shows its gratitude (*shukr*). See Qur'an 22:36-37; 14:32; 16:12, 14; 22:65; 35:13.
7. *Takrīm*: the honor and favor bestowed on humanity by Allah. See Qur'an 17:70.
8. *Amānah*: the trust that Allah gave to humanity; the innate ability to choose between good and evil. This trust sets humanity at the pinnacle of Allah's creation. See Qur'an 33:72.
9. The purpose of humanity's creation is *'ibādah*. See Qur'an 51:56.
10. *Shuhūd*: the concept or civilizational witnessing that Allah has made obligatory on His Ummah. See Qur'an 2:143; 3:140; 4:135, 5:8; 22:78.
11. This hadith was related by several Qur'anic commentators. The original hadith is found in al-Tirmidhī's collection.
12. In his commentary on the Qur'an, *Al-Manār* (4:203-4), Rashīd Rīdā wrote: "It is well-known that the *mufasssīrūn* give two interpretations to the term *ulu al-amr*: one is that they are the rulers or the governmental authorities, and the second is that they are the scholars, in particular the *fūqahā'* or the legal authorities. It is equally well-known that there were no governmental authorities in the time of the Prophet and no group of people called *fūqahā'*. So the intended meaning of *ulu al-amr*, as in the verse: 'When an issue of public security or agitation comes to them, they spread it abroad. But if they would refer it to the Prophet or to the authorities among them, those who derive meaning from it would come to know of it' (4:83), is the people of wisdom and importance in the Ummah who have the Ummah's interests at heart, who are capable of protecting those interests, and whose opinions are widely accepted by the Ummah at large."