206 - Characteristics of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah

the question

Can you tell me the characteristics of jama'ah Islam that we must follow?

Summary of answer

Characteristics of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah are: 1- they follow the truth, 2- they obey the commandments of Allah, 3- they will be victorious until the Last Hour, and 4- they are patient and resist others with patience.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is the Muslim's duty to follow the truth and to join the victorious group, the people of Sunnah and Jama`ah (Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah) who are followers of the pious predecessors (al-salaf al-salih), loving them for the sake of Allah whether they are in his own country or elsewhere, and cooperating with them in righteousness.

The attributes of the victorious group

The attributes of the victorious group are related in a number of sahih hadiths, for example:

- The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "My ummah is an ummah which carries out the commands of Allah; those who let them down or differ from them do not harm them and they will keep adhering to this path until the Day of Judgement."
- Mu'awiyah and 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with them) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: 'A group of my ummah will continue victoriously adhering to the truth until the Last Hour begins.'"

- Al-Mughirah ibn Shu‘bah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) say: “Some people of my ummah will remain victorious over the people until the decree of Allah reaches them.”
- ‘Imran ibn Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) said that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “A group of my ummah will continue fighting for the truth, and will prevail over those who oppose them, until the last of them will kill al-Masih al-Dajjal (the Liar or Anti-Christ).”

From these hadiths we may understand the following:

1. The Prophet’s words “A group of my ummah will continue . . .” indicate that this is a section of the ummah, not the entire ummah. This also indicates that there will be other groups and sects.
2. His words “those who oppose them will not harm them” indicate that there will be other groups who oppose the victorious group in the way they practice the religion. This also concurs with the Hadith which describes the ummah being divided into seventy-two groups or sects who oppose the one group that is following the truth.
3. Both hadiths offer glad tidings to the people who are following the truth. The Hadith that speaks of the victorious group speaks of their victory in this world.
4. The words “until the decree of Allah reaches them” refer to the wind or breeze that will come and take the soul of every believing man and woman. This does not contradict the Hadith “A group of my ummah will remain victoriously supporting the truth until the Day of Resurrection,” because that Hadith means that they will continue to follow the truth until that gentle breeze takes their souls just before the Day of Resurrection, when many other Signs of the Last Hour have already manifested themselves.

Characteristics of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah

From the hadiths quoted above, and other reports, we can derive the following characteristics of the victorious group :

- They follow the truth. They are described variously as “following the truth,” “following the commandments of Allah,” “following the true religion,” etc.

All of these phrases indicate that they are adhering to the true religion with which Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was sent.

- They obey the commandments of Allah, which means:

a. They are distinguished from the rest of mankind by carrying the banner of Da`wah towards Allah.
b. They undertake the mission of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil.

- They will be victorious until the Last Hour.

The hadiths say that “they will be victorious until the decree of Allah comes,” “they victoriously support the truth,” or “they will be victorious over those who oppose them.”

This victory includes:

a. Being open and not hiding: they are well-known and prominent and have the upper hand.
b. Adherence to true religion, righteousness, following Allah’s commands and fighting against His enemies in jihad
c. Victory by defeating others

- They are patient and resist others with patience.

Abu Tha‘labah al-Khashani (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “After you there will come days of patience, in which the patience required will be like having to hold a burning coal in one’s hand.”

Who are the people of the victorious sect?

Al-Bukhari said: “They are the people of knowledge (the scholars).”

Many scholars said that the victorious group is the scholars of Hadith .

Al-Nawawi said: “It is possible that this group is scattered among all types of believers. Some may be brave fighters, or jurists, or scholars of Hadith, or ascetics, or people who enjoin good and forbid evil, and other types of good people.”

Al-Nawawi also said: “It could be a group of different types of believers, including those who are brave and skilled in warfare, faqihs, scholars of Hadith, Quranic commentators (mufassirin), those who enjoin good and forbid evil, ascetics and devoted worshippers.”

Ibn Hajar, may Allah have mercy on him, explained the matter as follows: “They do not have to all be in one city; they could be gathered in one country or dispersed across the world. They may be gathered in one city or in a part of it. It is possible that one group may exist, then disappear, then be replaced by another group, and so on, until the Day of Judgement, when all will disappear except for one group in one city, who will disappear when the breeze decreed by Allah comes.”

The scholars’ discussion of this group does not specify one type of people, or one city or country, except for the last group, which will be in al-Sham (the territory comprising modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine) and will fight the Dajjal, as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said.

No doubt those who are involved with the sciences of Shari`ah – `aqidah, fiqh, Hadith and tafsir, studying and teaching – are the people who are most qualified to be called the Victorious Group, and they should be at the forefront of Da`wah and jihad, and enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil, and refuting the people of bid`ah, all of which must be accompanied with sound knowledge based on the Revelation.

We ask Allah to make us among them. May Allah bless our Prophet Muhammad.

And Allah knows best.