287792 - How the Salaf Attained Strong Faith

the question

I am always amazed at how the Salaf (early generations) were and how they attained such a high level of faith. When I read about the Karamat (miracles, extraordinary events) that happened to them, I wonder how they were able to reach this high level? How were they able to rid their hearts of the love of worldly gains?

Summary of answer

The way to attain a high level of faith as our righteous forebears the (Salaf) did is, firstly, by persevering in seeking to understand what Prophet Muhammad brought, then by persevering in doing what he enjoined and in refraining from what he forbade. All of that is to be done with true sincerity, having no interest in worldly gain, and hoping for the Hereafter.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

You have asked about a momentous matter, but it is easy for one for whom Allah makes it easy. Discussing how the Salaf were, and speaking about the great righteous deeds to which they committed themselves, so that they were able to attain this high level of faith , is a discussion that would be very lengthy and could fill many books, but it could all be summed up by noting two essential matters on which all the affairs of the Salaf were based, and whoever adheres to them, there is the hope that he will attain something similar to what they attained, and become one of their group. We ask Allah to make these two things easy for us and for you, and to make us and you steadfast in adhering to them, until we meet Him when He is pleased with us. These two things are:

- The first thing is being keen to follow what the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon

him) brought, and to persevere in adhering to it.

In order to attain high status before Allah, may He be Exalted, He has stipulated a condition that must be met, namely following that which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) brought. Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Say, [O Muhammad], `If you should love Allah , then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.’” [Al `Imran 3:31]

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted, has enjoined us to follow the Messenger, obey him, take him as an ally and love him, and has enjoined that Allah and His Messenger should be dearer to us than all others. He has guaranteed that, through obedience to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and loving him, we may attain the love and honour of Allah. Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Say, [O Muhammad], `If you should love Allah , then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.’” [Al `Imran 3:31]

“And if you obey him, you will be [rightly] guided.” [An-Nur 24:54]

“and whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger will be admitted by Him to gardens [in Paradise] under which rivers flow, abiding eternally therein; and that is the great attainment.” [An-Nisa’ 4:13]

There are many similar verses in the Quran. No one has the right to drift away from that which is established in the Sunnah, stated in the teachings of Islam, proven in the Quran and Sunnah, and was what the early generations of the ummah adhered to.” (Majmu` Al-Fatawa (1/334)

This following cannot be imagined to have happened without learning and understanding that which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) brought. The first step in following Islam is to learn about it from its authentic sources, and to persevere in doing so.

It was narrated from Humayd ibn `Abd Ar-Rahman: I heard Mu`awiyah saying in a speech: I heard the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say: “If Allah intends good for a person, He causes him to understand Islam.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 71 and Muslim, 1037)

It was narrated from `Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The best of you are those who learn the Quran and teach it.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 5027)

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Included in the meaning of the words “The best of you are those who learn the Quran and teach it” is teaching both the letters and their meanings; in fact learning its meanings is the first intended purpose of teaching its letters (and how to recite it). That is what increases faith .” (Majmu` Al-Fatawa, 13/403)

The way of the early generations was to persevere in learning what the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) brought, then after that they persevered in acting upon what they had learned.

It was narrated that Ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said: If one of us learned ten verses, he would not go beyond them until he learned their meanings and put them into practice. (Narrated by At-Tabari in his Tafsir, 1/74)

It was narrated from Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: We lived for a short time of our lives when the youngest among us would learn about faith before learning the Quran. A Surah would be revealed to Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), so he [the youngest among us] would learn what that Surah said was lawful and prohibited, and what limits it said were to be adhered to, the way you learn the Quran. Then he said: I saw men, one of whom would learn the Quran and recite everything in it, from beginning to end, not knowing what therein was a command and what was a prohibition, or what limits were to be adhered to, reciting it rapidly like broadcasting seeds. (Narrated by Al-Hakim in Al-Mustadrak (1/35) He said: “This is a Hadith which is authentic according to the conditions of the two shaykhs [Al-Bukhari and Muslim],

and I do not know of anything wrong with it; Adh-Dhahabi agreed with him)

It was narrated that Abu `Abd Ar-Rahman As-Sulami (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Those of the companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) who taught us the Quran told us that they used to learn ten verses from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and they would not learn the next ten until they had learned what those ten verses contained of knowledge and dictated of actions. They said: So we learned knowledge along with how to act upon it. (Narrated by Ahmad in Al-Musnad (38/466); classed as sound by the commentators on Al-Musnad.)

- The second thing is the way in which they followed the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), for they followed him with sincerity that was not contaminated with any corrupt intention, and with certain faith that was not mixed with any doubt.

When they learned what the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) brought, they learned it with a sincere intention, and they learned it with certain and steadfast faith . When they acted upon what they had learned, they were entirely sincere in that, and they strove against their evil inclinations, against the impulse to show off, against aiming for worldly gain by means of their knowledge and worship, all of that in accordance with the words of Allah, may He be Exalted (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who have believed, fear Allah and be with those who are true.” [At-Tawbah 9:119]

Shaykh `Abd Ar-Rahman As-Sa `di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“and be with those who are true” that is, those who are true in word, deed and conduct, those whose words are true and whose deeds and conduct cannot be but based on truth, devoid of laziness and apathy, free of bad intentions, and based on sincerity and good intentions. For truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise.

Allah, may He be Exalted, says elsewhere (interpretation of the meaning): “This is the Day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness.” [Al-Ma’idah 5:119] (Tafsir As-Sa`di, p. 355)

Ibn Rajab (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Virtue cannot be attained by doing a lot of physical deeds; rather it is attained by making those deeds sincerely for Allah, may He be Glorified and Exalted; by making them sound and correct in accordance with the Sunnah; and by making one’s emotions and feelings in the heart sincere and connected to Allah.

The one who has more knowledge of Allah and of His religion and its rulings and teachings, and has more fear of Him, love of Him and hope in Him, is better than one who is not like that, even if the latter does a lot of righteous deeds and physical actions.

Hence some of the early generations said: Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) did not surpass them by fasting and praying a great deal, rather it was by means of something that he had in his heart… Mention was made to Abu Sulayman of how long the Children of Israel lived and how hard they strove in doing righteous deeds, and that some of the people envied them for that.

He said: All that Allah wants of you is sincerity of intention , and sincerely seeking that which is with Him – or words to that effect.

Ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said to his companions: You fast and pray more than the companions of Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), yet they were better than you.

They said: Why is that?

He (may Allah be pleased with him) said: They had less interest than you in worldly gain, and greater desire for the hereafter.” (Majmu` Rasa’il Ibn Rajab, 4/412-413)

In conclusion, the way to attain a high level of faith as our righteous forebears (may Allah be pleased with them) did is, firstly, by persevering in seeking to understand what the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) brought, then by persevering in doing what he enjoined and in refraining from what he forbade. All of that is to be done with true sincerity, having no interest in worldly gain, and hoping for the hereafter. The core of the matter is beseeching

Allah, may He be Exalted, seeking guidance and steadfastness from Him, for the entire matter is in the hand of Allah, may He be Exalted. You should seek out times when supplications are more likely to be answered, such as the last third of the night, for the Salaf used to seek out these times.

It was narrated from Ibn Shihab Az-Zuhri, from Al-Agharr and Abu Salamah ibn `Abd Ar-Rahman, that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Our Lord, blessed be His Name, comes down to the lowest heaven every night when the last third of the night remains, and says: `Who will call upon Me, that I may answer him? Who will ask of Me, that I may give him? Who will ask Me for forgiveness, that I may forgive him?’ And that continues until the break of dawn.” Hence they preferred to pray at the end of the night, rather than at the beginning.

Narrated by Imam Ahmad in Al-Musnad (13/35); classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Irwa’ Al-Ghalil (2/196)

And Allah knows best.