

The Four Madhhab's of Islam
with special reference to
the practice of the People of Madina

THE
4 MADHHABS
OF
ISLAM
&

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO THE PRACTICE OF
THE PEOPLE OF MADINA

SHAYKH ABDALHAQQ BEWLEY WITH OTHERS

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The Four Madhhabs of Islam, with Special Reference to the Practice of the People of Madina

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By: Abdalhaqq Bewley, Aisha Bewley and Yasin Dutton
Edited by: Abdassamad Clarke
Typeset by: Muhammad Amin Franklin
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PREFACE

THIS COLLECTION tackles the issue of the four *madhhabs* of Islam in a ground-breaking and thought-provoking way that has rarely been approached in our time in any language let alone English.

The Four Madhhabs of Islam and Their Relationship with the Present Time, by Shaykh Abdalhaqq Bewley, well-known writer on Islamic topics and translator of classical Islamic texts, presents a historical understanding of the origins of the *madhhabs* and their development which allows us to grasp our present situation in a new and liberating way, acknowledging both the interruption in the classical four-*madhhab* picture and the inadequacy of a simple *salafi* response. This leads the author to treat the actual way that Islam has been transmitted over the centuries: in the form of practice backed up by scholarship. Most significantly he leads us to return to the transmission of that practice – the *'amal* – in the first community.

The second contribution by Aisha Bewley, noted translator of numerous classical texts including the *Noble Qur'an, a new rendering of its meanings in English*, focuses upon this often misunderstood term, the *'amal*, or practice, of the People of Madinah.

In his paper, *The Importance of Malik and the Maliki Madhhab Today*, Dr. Dutton, associate professor in Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Cape Town, considers the importance of Imam Malik, especially his magisterial work the *Muwatta'*, in preserving our historically most valid – because closest to the source – transmission of sunnah and hadith.

The authors tackle the matter from different perspectives,

which is useful in order for the reader to come to terms with it, because, unless he or she is already committed to the school of the People of Madinah, they are likely only to have heard the case made for the importance of the hadith.

The fourth contribution, again from Shaykh Abdalhaqq Bewley, derives from his participation in an exchange on an Internet forum in which the participants tried to grapple with the issue of authentically embodying the *din* in this time. This contribution is important because in it the author shows how the *din* reached him (and the other authors) in transmitted practice, generation from generation from the first community and not merely as intellectual propositions or transmitted texts, although backed up by them.

The thesis of this book is that, just as a way based exclusively on scholarship and study of texts is paralysing and inhibiting, and to it can be attributed much of the helplessness of contemporary Muslims, recovery of transmitted practice backed by scholarship is a dynamic and liberating way that can lead to a new flowering of the *din* in every age.

This thesis is not new, but, as Shaykh Dr. Abdalqadir as-Sufi showed in his seminal work *Root Islamic Education*, was also that of key people of knowledge of the Madinan school throughout the ages, most notably but not exclusively Qadi 'Iyad and the historical Murabitun. And in their hands it led to a regeneration of Islam. And that potential for resurgence is the good news which this text brings the reader.

Abdassamad Clarke
The Muslim Faculty of Advanced Studies

THE FOUR MADHHABS
OF ISLAM
- & -

THEIR RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE PRESENT TIME

SHAYKH ABDALHAQQ BEWLEY

ALL MUSLIMS agree that the basis of Islam is the Book and Sunnah and almost all Muslims agree that if someone follows the teachings of any one of the four orthodox *madhhabs* of Islam – the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali *madhhabs* – they will certainly be living within the parameters of the Book and Sunnah. The great majority of Muslims are affiliated to one or the other of these *madhhabs* but for almost all of them this affiliation takes place for purely geographical reasons and very few know very much about the nature of the *madhhab* they belong to. There is a common perception that the *madhhabs* are all more or less the same and only differ in respect of slight legal points such as where you put your hands in the prayer and other things of that nature. But that does not really explain why there should be these four *madhhabs* at all. In order to discover the reason for their existence it is necessary to look at each of them and find out how and why they came into being in the first place.

The first of the four *madhhabs* in historical terms is the

madhhab of Abu Hanifah who was born in roughly 80AH and died in 150AH. The salient fact about Imam Abu Hanifah, may Allah have mercy on him, was that he did not live in Madinah, where the *din* had originally been established; he lived in Iraq and his school developed in Iraq. He grew up in Kufa, was educated there and lived most of his life there, first as a merchant, then as a student and finally as a teacher. Kufa was one of the two great Iraqi cities of the time and Iraq was home to many different religions, sects and beliefs because, apart from containing the capital of the recently defeated Persian empire, it was also the home of various other ancient civilisations. Syriac Christians were dispersed throughout it and they had schools there in which Greek philosophy and the ancient wisdom of Persia were studied. In other words, at the time we are speaking of, Iraq was a melting pot of diverse races, cultures and beliefs and a place rife with confusion and disorder. There were frequent clashes of opinion on the subject of politics and religion. The Shi'a and Mu'tazilites stemmed from there and there were Kharijites in its deserts.

Along with this was the fact that comparatively few Companions had travelled from Madinah and settled in Iraq. Indeed it was an explicit policy of the second *caliph* 'Umar ibn al-Khattab ؓ, to discourage Companions with knowledge from leaving the Hijaz. He did this in order to prevent knowledge of the *din* becoming too dispersed. For this reason most of the great men of knowledge among the Muhajirun and Ansar stayed within the confines of Madinah. Two notable exceptions who did go to live in Iraq were 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, *karama'llahu wajhah*, and 'Abdallah ibn Mas'ud ؓ, but the overall number was in fact very small. What that meant, in real terms, was that the people of Iraq had very limited direct access to the Sunnah, because there were very few exemplars of it who came to them. All these factors meant that the Iraqi environment in which Islam was beginning to take root in the first and second centuries after the Hijrah was a very different one from that of Madinah in which the *din* had originally been established.