

What is a wahhabi? essay sample

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The most extremist pseudo-Sunni movement today is Wahhabism (also known as Salafism). While many may think that Wahhabi terror is a recent phenomenon that has only targeted non-Muslims, it will surprise many to know that the orthodox Sunni Muslims were the first to be slaughtered in waves of Wahhabi massacres in Arabia hundreds of years ago. One only has to read the historical evolution of Saudi Arabia to know the gruesome details of the tragedy – a tragedy in which thousands of Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims perished at the hands of Wahhabi militants.

The extremist interpretations of Wahhabism, although previously confined to small pockets of people in Arabia, has survived to this day under the protection, finance, and tutelage of the Saudi state religious organs. This has transformed Wahhabism – and related Salafi groups that receive inspiration and support from them – from a regional to a global threat to be reckoned with by the world community. To a Wahhabi-Salafi, all those who differ with them, including Sunni Muslims, Shi'ite Muslims, Christians, and Jews, are infidels who are fair targets.

Do the majority of Sunnis support Wahhabism? Are Sunnis and Wahhabis one and the same?

Because Wahhabis claim to be “ true Sunnis,” it is difficult for one who is unfamiliar with Wahhabism to distinguish it from orthodox Sunni Islam. If a Wahhabi is asked if he/she is Sunni, he/she will always reply in the affirmative. When asked if they are Wahhabis, they reply with an emphatic “ no” as they consider it an insult to what they believe and stand for: “ Purity of worship and reverence to God alone. The authentic carriers of Islam from

the time of the Prophet (s)[1] until now.” Calling them Wahhabis implies that they learned ideas from a man – Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab – instead of the Qur’an and Sunnah – the two great sources of Islam. Irrespective of what they think, they are not following the Islamic sources authentically, but the wrong interpretations of the founder of the Wahhabi movement who appeared in the 1700s. Sunnis and other Wahhabi detractors have labeled them as Wahhabis to differentiate them from orthodox Sunnis.

Wahhabis as Salafis: deceptive semantics

Wahhabis differentiate themselves from orthodox Sunnis by labeling themselves Salafis, which refers to the word salaf – the time period in which the early Muslims lived in the first 300 years after the Hijra, or emigration, of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622. The Companions (Sahaba), those who followed the Companions (Tabi’een), and those who followed those who followed the Companions (Taba al-Tabi’een) who lived in the time period of the Salaf are exemplars par excellence of what Muslims should be, as Prophet Muhammad (s) had praised these Muslims as being the best of Muslims. Therefore, it has been the aim of every Muslim since the time of Prophet Muhammad (s) to adhere to and to follow the footsteps of the adherents of the salaf. This means that when a Wahhabi calls himself a Salafi, he claims to be a genuine follower of pristine Islam. This, however, is far from the truth.

Orthodox Sunni Muslims believe that they are the true bearers of pristine Islam since the time period of the Salaf. Because there were time gaps between the noble period of the Salaf and centuries that followed, the

authentic positions of the early Muslims were passed by scholars in those times and afterwards to later generations via meticulous, systematic, and methodological means of preservation. The knowledge was passed from qualified scholars to other qualified scholars through the centuries, who passed it to the masses. This uninterrupted chain of knowledge from the time of the Salaf until now has been authentically preserved by the orthodox Sunnis. Orthodox Sunnis, therefore, have roots in the Salaf, and are represented today by the four surviving authentic schools of Islamic jurisprudence: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali schools (madhahib).

The Wahhabis, by calling themselves Salafis, not only claim to follow the footsteps of the early Muslims, but also use semantics to fool and allure less informed Muslims into accepting Wahhabism. Wahhabis say, “ You must follow the Muslims of the Salaf.” (This is undoubtedly true.) Then the Wahhabi semantics: “ Therefore you must be a Salafi and nothing else. Following anything else means you’re following a path that is different from the Muslims of the Salaf.” By such deceptive semantics, the less informed Muslims believe that Salafis must truly represent the pristine interpretations of the early Muslims of the Salaf. After all, the word Salafi sounds like Salaf, so it must truly be representative of it. Far from it. When the less informed goes beyond semantics and blind faith and investigates what a Salafi believes, the truth unveiled is that the understanding of Salafis (Wahhabis) is different and contradictory to the understanding and positions of the pious Muslims who lived in the Salaf – and the majority of Muslims who have ever lived (Sunnis).

Wahhabi-Salafi variety

The Wahhabi-Salafis believe that Sunnis have been vehemently wrong for the past 1, 000+ years and aim to bring the Muslims out of a state of ignorance (jahilliyya) that has existed, in their minds, since the time of the pious adherents of the Salaf. Even if the majority of orthodox Sunni Muslims were strong today, indeed if they ruled an empire that stretched far to every corner of the globe, it would still be a failure to Salafis because to them the foundations of such a political system would have been based on reprehensible innovation (bid'a) and blasphemy (kufr).

To the Salafi, the presence and power of Sunni orthodoxy, in all of its manifestations as illustrated throughout Islamic history, is just as impure as the rising European hegemony in all of its manifestations since the demise of the Muslim Ottoman Empire. To the Salafis, a minority in this world, the world is an abode of blasphemy, ruled and occupied by infidels that demands reformation through both non-violent and violent means to bring about a supposedly pure Islamic world system.

Wahhabi-Salafis come in various strains, some being more extreme than others. The variety in strains is due to differences in approach of bringing the Muslims back to a state of strengthened belief based on the example of the pious ancestors. It must be emphasized that although all Wahhabis are called Salafis, all Salafis are not purely Wahhabi. “Salafi Muslims” include those like Syed Qutb who wish to eradicate the supposed current state of ignorance (jahiliyya) and bring Muslims back to a state of purity – a purity reminiscent of the purity of Muslims who lived in the time period of the Salaf.

However, all Salafi Muslims, whether they are Wahhabi or Qutbi, admire with exaggeration the role models Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab and Ahmad Ibn Taymiyah, whose hard-line interpretations have inspired revolutionaries today. Therefore, although all Salafis are not Wahhabis, they admire many of the same role models – role models who have been rejected and condemned by masses of orthodox Sunni scholars for their unauthentic representations of pristine Islam. It can also be said that all Wahhabis consider themselves to be Salafis and prefer to be called by this name (instead of Wahhabi), even though differences exist between Salafi groups.

Although there are differences in approach among Salafis, they have nonetheless allied themselves in an attempt to make the Salafi vision a reality by both non-violent and violent means.

An example of this are the Salafi-oriented Deobandis and their alliance with the Wahhabis. The alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood (and its various factions and offshoots) and the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia was strengthened during the 1950s and 1960s in the struggle of the Muslim Brotherhood against Egypt's Nasserist regime. Saudis had provided refuge for some leaders of the Brotherhood, and also provided assistance to them in other Arab States. The Wahhabi-Salafi alliance was further strengthened as a response to the growing threat of Shi'ah power when the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran revolted and overthrew the U. S.-allied Shah in 1979.

Lastly, the alliance made itself manifest in the holy struggle (jihad) against the atheist/Communist Soviets in Afghanistan. Salafis of all strains worked together as the "righteous Sunnis" to counter the Shi'ah-Communist threat,

from proselytizing to killing to make their Salafism prevail. Indeed, Salafis have used both proselytizing and revolutionary means to express their message using both political and apolitical approaches. So-called “Sunni terrorism” today is perpetrated by radical Salafis who desire to replace “infidel” governments with myopic “scholars” who adhere to their fanatical interpretations and ideologies. Their tentacles are spread to all corners of the globe, including Bosnia, Albania, Indonesia, Philippines, Uzbekistan, England, Malaysia, South Africa, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Salafis have demonstrated the havoc they are capable of wreaking in recent decades.

Wahhabis as neo-Kharijites

The Wahhabis are especially notorious for reviving the ways of the Khawarij (or Kharijites). They originated in the time of the caliphates of Uthman and Ali, among the closest companions to Prophet Muhammad. They were the earliest group of fanatics who separated themselves from the Muslim community. They arose in opposition to Ali – Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law – because of his willingness to arbitrate with Mu’awiyah, governor of Damascus at that time, over the issue of the caliphate. The Khawarij, meaning “those who exited,” slung accusations of blasphemy against Ali and Mu’awiyah – and those who followed them – saying that the Qur’an, and not them, had the ultimate authority in the matter. Ibn al-Jawzi, an orthodox Sunni scholar, in his book *Talbis Iblis* (The Devil’s Deception) under the chapter heading “A Mention of the Devil’s Delusion upon the Kharijites,” says that Dhu’l-Khuwaysira al-Tamimi was the first Kharijite in Islam and that

“[h]is fault was to be satisfied with his own view; had he paused he would have realized that there is no view superior to that of Allah’s Messenger...”

Furthermore, the orthodox Sunni scholar Imam Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi discusses the Kharijite rebellions and their bloody massacres of tens of thousands of Muslims in one of his books. He explicitly mentions the Azariqa, one of the most atrocious Kharijite movements led by Nafi’ ibn al-Azraq from the tribe of Banu Hanifa – the same tribe where the heretic Musaylima the Prevaricator (or Liar) who claimed prophethood alongside Prophet Muhammad came from. Just as the Khawarij threw accusations of blasphemy on Ali and Mu’awiya, Wahhabis throw accusations of blasphemy against Sunnis and Shi’ites.

The Al-Sa`ud and Muhammad ibn `Abdul-Wahhab – the founder of Wahhabism

Wahhabism is named after the its founder, Muhammad ibn `Abdul-Wahhab (1703-1792), and has its roots in the land now known as Saudi Arabia. Without this man, the al-Sa`ud , one of many clans spread over the Arabian peninsula, would not have had the inspiration, reason, and determination to consolidate the power that they did and wage “ jihad” on people they perceived to be “ polytheists” – those who attribute partners in worship to Almighty God. How intimately close was al-Sa`ud’s association with Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab? Robert Lacey eloquently illustrates this association:

Until [Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab's] coming the Al Sa`ud had been a minor sheikhly clan like many others in Nejd, townsmen and farmers, making a comfortable living from trade, dates and perhaps a little horse-breeding, combining with the desert tribes to raid outwards when they felt strong, prudently retrenching in times of weakness. Modestly independent, they were in no way empire builders, and it is not likely that the wider world would ever have heard of them without their alliance with the Teacher.[2]

The al-Sa`ud are originally from the village of ad-Diriyah, located in Najd, in eastern Arabia situated near modern day Riyadh, the capital of Sa`udi Arabia. Ancestors of Sau'ud Ibn Muhammad, whom little is known about, settled in the area as agriculturists and gradually grew in number over time into the clan of al-Sa`ud .

Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab was raised in Uyainah, an oasis in southern Najd, and was from the Banu Tamim tribe. He came from a religious family and left Uyainah in pursuit of Islamic knowledge. He traveled to Mecca, Medina, Iraq, and Iran to acquire knowledge from different teachers. When he returned to his homeland of Uyainah, he preached what he believed to be Islam in its purity – which was, in fact, a vicious assault on traditional Sunni Islam.

The orthodox Sunni scholar Jamil Effendi al-Zahawi said that the teachers of Ibn `Abdul-Wahhab, including two teachers he had studied with in Medina – Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Sulayman al-Kurdi and Shaykh Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi – became aware of his anti-Sunni Wahhabi creed and warned Muslims from him. His shaykhs, including the two aforementioned shaykhs, used to

say: “ God will allow him [to] be led astray; but even unhappier will be the lot of those misled by him.”[3]

Moreover, Ibn `Abdul-Wahhab’s own father had warned Muslims from him, as did his biological brother, Sulayman Ibn `Abdul-Wahhab, an orthodox Sunni scholar who refuted him in a book entitled al-Sawa’iq al-Ilahiyya fi al-radd `ala al-Wahhabiyya [“ Divine Lightnings in Refuting the Wahhabis”]. Ibn `Abdul-Wahhab was refuted by the orthodox Sunni scholars for his many ugly innovations. Perhaps his most famous book, Kitab at-Tawheed (Book of Unity of God) is widely circulated amongst Wahhabis worldwide, including the United States. His book is popular in Wahhabi circles, although orthodox Sunni scholars have said that there is nothing scholarly about it, both in terms of its content and its style.

Ibn Taymiyah: the Wahhabi founder’s role model

It is worth giving an overview of a man named Ahmed Ibn Taymiyah (1263-1328) who lived a few hundred years before Muhammad ibn `Abdul-Wahhab. The Wahhabi founder admired him as a role model and embraced many of his pseudo-Sunni positions. Who exactly was Ibn Taymiyah and what did orthodox Sunni scholars say about him? Muslim scholars had mixed opinions about him depending on his interpretation of various issues. His straying from mainstream Sunni Islam on particular issues of creed (`aqedah) and worship (`ibadat) made him an extremely controversial figure in the Muslim community.

Ibn Taymiya has won the reputation of being the true bearer of the early pious Muslims, especially among reformist revolutionaries, while the majority of orthodox Sunnis have accused him of reprehensible bid'ah (reprehensible innovation), some accusing him of kufr (unbelief).[4]

It behooves one to ask why Ibn Taymiyah had received so much opposition from reputable Sunni scholars who were known for their asceticism, trustworthiness, and piety. Some of Ibn Taymiyah's anti-Sunni and controversial positions include:

- (1) His claim that Allah's Attributes are "literal", thereby attributing God with created attributes and becoming an anthropomorphist;
- (2) His claim that created things existed eternally with Allah;
- (3) His opposition to the scholarly consensus on the divorce issue;
- (4) His opposition to the orthodox Sunni practice of tawassul (asking Allah for things using a deceased pious individual as an intermediary);
- (5) His saying that starting a trip to visit the Prophet Muhammad's (s) invalidates the shortening of prayer;
- (6) His saying that the torture of the people of Hell stops and doesn't last forever;
- (7) His saying that Allah has a limit (hadd) that only He Knows;
- (8) His saying that Allah literally sits on the Throne (al-Kursi) and has left space for Prophet Muhammad (s) to sit next to Him;

(9) His claim that touching the grave of Prophet Muhammad (s) is polytheism (shirk);

(10) His claim that that making supplication at the Prophet Muhammad's grave to seek a better status from Allah is a reprehensible innovation;

(11) His claim that Allah descends and comparing Allah's "descent" with his, as he stepped down from a minbar while giving a sermon (khutba) to Muslims;

(12) His classifying of oneness in worship of Allah (tawheed) into two parts: Tawhid al-rububiyya and Tawhid al-uluhiyya, which was never done by pious adherents of the salaf.

Although Ibn Taymiyah's unorthodox, pseudo-Sunni positions were kept away from the public in Syria and Egypt due to the consensus of orthodox Sunni scholars of his deviance, his teachings were nevertheless circulating in hiding. An orthodox Sunni scholar says:

Indeed, when a wealthy trader from Jeddah brought to life the long-dead 'aqida [creed] of Ibn Taymiya at the beginning of this century by financing the printing in Egypt of Ibn Taymiya's *Minhaj al-sunna al-nabawiyya* [italics mine] and other works, the Mufti of Egypt Muhammad Bakhit al-Muti' i, faced with new questions about the validity of anthropomorphism, wrote: "It was a fitna (strife) that was sleeping; may Allah curse him who awakened it."

It is important to emphasize that although many of the positions of Ibn Taymiyah and Wahhabis are identical, they nonetheless contradict each

other in some positions. While Ibn Taymiyah accepts Sufism (Tasawwuf) as a legitimate science of Islam (as all orthodox Sunni Muslims do), Wahhabis reject it wholesale as an ugly innovation in the religion. While Ibn Taymiyah accepts the legitimacy of commemorating Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Mawlid) – accepted by orthodox Sunni Muslims as legitimate – Wahhabis reject it as a reprehensible innovation that is to be repudiated.

Ibn Taymiyah is an inspiration to Islamist groups that call for revolution.

Kepel says, “ Ibn Taymiyya (1268-1323) – a primary reference for the Sunni Islamist movement – would be abundantly quoted to justify the assassination of Sadat in 1981...and even to condemn the Saudi leadership and call for its overthrow in the mid-1990s”.[5]

Sivan says that only six months before Sadat was assassinated, the weekly Mayo singled out Ibn Taymiyya as “ the most pervasive and deleterious influence upon Egyptian youth.” Sivan further says that Mayo concluded that “ the proliferating Muslim associations at the [Egyptian] universities, where Ibn Taymiyya's views prevail, have been spawning various terrorist groups.” Indeed, a book entitled *The Absent Precept*, by `Abd al-Salam Faraj – the “ spiritual” leader of Sadat's assassins who was tried and executed by the Egyptian government – strongly refers to Ibn Taymiyya's and some of his disciples' writings. Three of four of Sadat's assassins willingly read a lot of Ibn Taymiyya's works on their own.[6]

Ibn Taymiyah is also noted to be a favorite of other Salafi extremists, including the Muslim Brotherhood's Syed Qutb. Ibn Taymiyyah's student, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, is also frequently cited by Salafis of all colors.

Ibn Taymiyah's "fatwa" of jihad against Muslims

What is also well-known about Ibn Taymiyah is that he lived in turbulent times when the Mongols had sacked Baghdad and conquered the Abassid Empire in 1258. In 1303, he was ordered by the Mamluk Sultan to give a fatwa (religious edict) legalizing jihad against the Mongols. Waging a holy war on the Mongols for the purpose of eliminating any threat to Mamluk power was no easy matter. The Mongol Khan Mahmud Ghazan had converted to Islam in 1295. Although they were Muslims who did not adhere to Islamic Law in practice, and also supported the Yasa Mongol code of law, they were deemed apostates by the edict of Ibn Taymiyah. To Ibn Taymiyah, Islamic Law was not only rejected by Mongols because of their lack of wholesale adherence, but the "infidel" Yasa code of law made them legal targets of extermination. The so-called jihad ensued and the Mongol threat to Syria was exterminated. Wahhabis and other Salafis to this day brand the Mongol Mahmud Ghazan as a kafir (disbeliever). Orthodox Sunni Muslims, however, have praised Mahmud Ghazan as a Muslim. Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani writes:

In fact, Ghazan Khan was a firm believer in Islam. Al-Dhahabi relates that he became a Muslim at the hands of the Sufi shaykh Sadr al-Din Abu al-Majami' Ibrahim al-Juwayni (d. 720), one of Dhahabi's own shaykhs of hadith....

During his rule he had a huge mosque built in Tabriz in addition to twelve Islamic schools (madrassa), numerous hostels (khaniqa), forts (ribat), a school for the secular sciences, and an observatory. He supplied Mecca and Medina with many gifts. He followed one of the schools (madhahib) of the Ahl al-

Sunna [who are the orthodox Sunnis] and was respectful of religious scholars. He had the descendants of the Prophet mentioned before the princes and princesses of his house in the state records, and he introduced the turban as the court headgear.[7]

Muhammad ibn ‘ Abdul-Wahhab would later follow Ibn Taymiyah’s footsteps and slaughter thousands of Muslims in Arabia.

Orthodox Sunni scholars who refuted Ibn Taymiyah’s pseudo-Sunni positions

Ibn Taymiyah was imprisoned by a fatwa (religious edict) signed by four orthodox Sunni judges in the year 726 A. H for his deviant and unorthodox positions. Note that each of the four judges represents the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence that Sunni Muslims belong to today. This illustrates that Ibn Taymiyah did not adhere to the authentic teachings of orthodox Sunni Islam as represented by the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence. There is no evidence to indicate that there was a “ conspiracy” against Ibn Taymiyyah to condemn him, as Wahhabis and other Salafis purport in his defense. The names of the four judges are: Qadi [Judge] Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Ibn Jama’ah, ash-Shafi’i, Qadi [Judge] Muhammad Ibn al-Hariri, al-`Ansari, al-Hanafi, Qadi [Judge] Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr, al-Maliki, and Qadi [Judge] Ahmad Ibn `Umar, al-Maqdisi, al-Hanbali.

Some orthodox Sunni scholars who refuted Ibn Taymiyya for his deviances and opposition to the positions of orthodox Sunni Islam include: Taqiyy-ud-Din as-Subkiyy, Faqih Muhammad Ibn `Umar Ibn Makkiyy, Hafiz Salah-ud-Din al-`Ala’i, Qadi, Mufassir Badr-ud-Din Ibn Jama’ah, Shaykh Ahmad Ibn Yahya

al-Kilabi al-Halabi, Hafiz Ibn Daqiq al-`Id, Qadi Kamal-ud-Din az-Zamalkani, Qadi Safi-ud-Din al-Hindi, Faqih and Muhaddith `Ali Ibn Muhammad al-Baji ash-Shafi'i, the historian al-Fakhr Ibn al-Mu`allim al-Qurashi, Hafiz Dhahabi, Mufassir Abu Hayyan al-`Andalusi, and Faqih and voyager Ibn Batutah.

Najd – A place not so holy

Najd, in Saudi Arabia, is where the founder of Wahhabism came from. It was a mostly barren and dry land inhabited by Bedouins who used to graze animals. With sparse water, it is not the most comfortable of places since its climate has extremes of heat and cold in the summer and winter seasons. Najd has a notorious reputation in the orthodox Sunni community for originating seditions (fitan) long before Muhammad ibn `Abdul-Wahhab came. Indeed, it is known to have harbored many trouble mongering individuals who challenged the Muslims both spiritually and physically. The orthodox Sunni Iraqi scholar Jamal Effendi al-Zahawi says:

Famous writers of the day made a point of noting the similarity between Ibn `Abdul-Wahhab's beginnings and those of the false prophets prominent in Islam's initial epoch like Musaylima the Prevaricator, Sajah al-Aswad al-Anasi, Tulaiha al-Asadi and others of his kind [14].

Fenari says that although Najd is closest to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, it has only been dispraised by Prophet Muhammad (s) in authentic traditions. He raises another interesting point that while many Arabian tribes were praised by Prophet Muhammad, the Banu Tamim – the most well known tribe of Central Arabia where Muhammad ibn `Abdul Wahhab was from – is

praised only once. Moreover, authentic traditions that “ explicitly critique” the Banu Tamimites are far more numerous. Ibn al-Jawzi, an orthodox Sunni scholar, documents the evolution of the Kharijite movements and illustrates how the tribe of Banu Tamim played a leading role in it. Imam Abd al-Qahir also states that the Tamimites – and the Central Arabians in general – were intimately involved in the Kharijite rebellions against the Muslims, contrasting their immense contribution to the minimal contribution of members of the tribes of Medina and Yemen.

It is from Banu Tamim where a man name Abu Bilal Mirdas came from, who, although being a relentless worshipper, turned out to be one of the most barbaric Kharijite fanatics. “ He is remembered as the first who said the Tahkim – the formula ‘ The judgment is Allah’s alone’ – on the Day of Siffin, which became the slogan of the later Kharijite da’wa.” It is reminiscent of what Wahhabis say today – that they strictly adhere to nothing but the Qur’an and Sunnah – although it is merely a jumble of words without coherent meaning. Najda ibn Amir of the tribe of Banu Hanifa was a Kharijite whose homeland was Najd, and the best known woman among the Kharijites was a Tamimite named Qutam bint `Alqama. It is fascinating to see that fanatics of all types came from a region where the fanatic Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab came from.

The Wahhabi assault on graves and the massacre of Muslim communities in Riyadh and Karbala

With the ferocious zeal of a “ divine” mission, aimed at terminating what they perceived as the filthy polytheistic scum of Arabia, the Wahhabi army

led by Muhammad ibn Sa`ud first destroyed graves and objects in Najdi towns and villages that were used for what they condemned as “ polytheistic practices.” The Wahhabi movement mustered supporters who rallied behind their cause, increased the size of their army, and successfully united most of the people of Najd under the banner of Wahhabism by 1765.

The assault and “ jihad” of Wahhabism did not stop after the death of Muhammad ibn Sa`ud in 1765, but continued with unrelenting and barbaric force under the leadership of his son, Abdul-Aziz, who captured the city of Riyadh in 1773. Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahhab died a year earlier but left four sons who continued spreading Wahhabism and strengthened the Wahhabi family’s alliance with the Al-Sa`ud .[8] Later, in 1801, the Wahhabi army marched to Karbala with a force of 10, 000 men and 6, 000 camels.[9] Upon reaching Karbala, they mercilessly and indiscriminately attacked its inhabitants for eight hours, massacring about 5, 000 people. Moreover, they severely damaged Imam Hussein’s mosque, looted the city, and left the carnage-laden city with its treasures on 200 camels.[10]

This holocaust won the Wahhabi criminals the unforgiving hatred and wrath of the Shi’ite and Sunni Muslims, who, until this day, curse them passionately. The Shi’ite Muslims consider Imam Hussein, a grandson of Prophet Muhammad (s), one of the most sacred figures and his tomb one of the most sacred sites on earth. Every year, thousands of Shi’ites gather at the site to commemorate the death of Imam Hussein. Visiting Karbala one is indeed filled me with awe and spiritual strength even as a devout Sunni. Shi’ite wrath, of course, didn’t mean much to the Wahhabis. The Shi’ites,

along with the Sunnis, had already been labeled as “ blasphemers” for practicing tawassul and tabarruk. What are these practices? Are they part of Sunni Islam or not?

Tawassul and Tabarruk

Nuh Keller, an orthodox Sunni scholar, defines tawassul as “ supplicating Allah by means of an intermediary, whether it be a living person, dead person, a good deed, or a name or attribute of Allah Most High”. I remember doing tawassul in 1989 at Imam Abu Hanifah’s tomb, the noble and renowned Islamic scholar whose ijtiḥad the majority of Sunni Muslims follow. Although I had not studied much about Islam and the practices of tawassul at that time, I had been told by trustworthy Muslims that using pious individuals as intermediaries when asking Allah for something was a blessed opportunity that I couldn’t afford to miss. I had also visited the tomb of the great sufi and saint Abdul-Qadir Jilani and performed tawassul over there. An example of tawassul is: “ Oh Allah, I ask you to cure my illness by means of the noble status of Imam Abu Hanifah (s).”

When doing tawassul, the source of blessings (barakah) when asking Allah through an intermediary is Allah – not the intermediary. The intermediary is simply a means to ask Allah for things. Although it is not necessary for a Muslim to use a pious intermediary when asking Allah, it is recommended because it was a practice of Prophet Muhammad (s), the Companions (ra), and of the great scholars of Islam (ra). It is not only prophets and saints (in their graves) that are used as means to asking Allah. A Muslim can also ask Allah through relics (tabarruk) that belonged to pious people, and may even

use amulets with verses on the Qur'an on them as a means of asking God for protection from evil. It is not the means that provides protection, but Allah.

Wahhabis reject a type of tawassul accepted by orthodox Sunni Muslims

Although Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Wahhabis believe that tawassul by one's good deeds, a name or attribute of God, or intercession by someone who is alive and present is permissible, Wahhabis accuse Sunnis (and Shi'ites) of committing shirk (attributing partners in worship to God) when doing tawassul through an intermediary who is not alive or present (in the worldly life). That is, to a Wahhabi, tawassul through an intermediary who has died and is in his grave is ugly blasphemy. This is critical to know because this is the primary reason why Muhammad ibn `Abdul-Wahhab and the Al-Sa`ud criminals that collaborated with him massacred many Muslims in the Arabian peninsula. Muslims had been doing this form of tawassul for over 1, 000 years but the Wahhabis believed it was blasphemy that had to be exterminated by the sword. What Wahhabis were doing in actuality was massacring orthodox Sunni Muslims, even though they foolishly believed they were fighting against evil blasphemers that didn't deserve to live.

Wahhabis were not following the footsteps of the pious Salaf, but the footsteps of Ibn Taymiyyah who a couple of hundred years before them denounced that particular form of tawassul as sinful. Wahhabis today forbid Muslims from doing tawassul through Prophet Muhammad, and have enforced strict rules around his grave in Medina, Saudi Arabia. It is for this reason that Wahhabis forbid Muslims from visiting the graves of pious Muslims, and have destroyed markings on graves to prevent Muslims from

knowing the specific spots where saints are buried. Yet, it is interesting to note the hypocritical nature of the Wahhabis when they had refused the demolishing of the grave of Ibn Taymiyah in Damascus, Syria to make way for a road. Somehow, this is not “polytheism” to them, but it is “polytheism” for the majority of the Islamic community.

The flawed Wahhabi understanding of tawassul: confusing the means with the Giver

Wahhabis wrongly accuse orthodox Sunnis of committing shirk (polytheism) when asking God for something using an intermediary, whether the means is a pious human being in his grave, objects (tabarruk), or seeking protection from God using amulets with verses of the Qur’an written on them (ruqya). The Wahhabi believes that asking God for something through a means is the same as worshipping the means itself. That is, for people who do tawassul through a pious saint in his grave is asking the pious saint – and not God – for things. People who do tabarruk through a relic of Prophet Muhammad (s) are asking the relic – and not God – for blessings, and people who wear ruqya are asking the ruqya itself for protection – and not God. When a Muslim visits the Prophet Muhammad’s (s) grave and calls on the Prophet (s), “Oh Prophet,” (Ya Rasulallah), the Wahhabis accuse such a person of worshipping the Prophet (s) and refuse to accept the understanding that the Prophet himself is a means to asking God for things. Such an act to Wahhabis drives a Muslim out of the realms of the religion of Islam. In sum, the Wahhabis believe that such people are worshipping creation alongside

God, and are therefore guilty of polytheism – attributing partners in worship to God.

The now deceased former Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abdul-Aziz ibn Abdullah Ibn Baz, defends Ibn Abdul-Wahhab's accusation of polytheism that he had heaped on the Muslim masses and his resorting to " jihad" by saying that Muslims had gone astray because they had " worshipped" things are than God:

The people of Najd had lived in a condition that could not be approved of by any believer. Polytheism had appeared there and spread widely. People worshipped domes, trees, rocks, caves or any persons who claimed to be Auliya (saints) though they might be insane and idiotic.

There were few to rise up for the sake of Allah and support His Religion. Same was the situation in Makkah and Madinah as well as Yemen where building domes on the graves, invoking the saints for their help and other forms of polytheism were predominant. But in Najd polytheistic beliefs and practices were all the more intense.

In Najd people had worshipped different objects ranging from the graves, caves and trees to the obsessed and mad men who were called saints.

When the Sheikh [Ibn Abdul-Wahhab] saw that polytheism was dominating the people and that no one showed any disapproval of it or no one was ready to call the people back to Allah, he decided to labour singly and patiently in the field. He knew that nothing could be achieved without jihad (holy fighting), patience and suffering [*italics mine*].[11]

Orthodox Sunnis, however, have never claimed to worship the means, but only God. Because Wahhabis didn't tolerate this, they massacred thousands of Muslims who they saw as being "polytheists" in Arabia. In actuality, they were Sunni Muslims who were following Islam in its purity as taught by the pious ancestors that lived in the time period of the Salaf.

Wahhabis attribute a place and direction to Allah

While accusing the masses of Muslims of being polytheists, Wahhabis themselves have differentiated themselves from other Muslims in their understanding of creed. Due to the Wahhabis' adherence to an unorthodox, grossly flawed literal understanding of God's Attributes, they comfortably believe that Allah has created or human attributes, and then attempt to hide their anthropomorphism by saying that they don't know 'how' Allah has such attributes. For example, Bilal Philips, a Wahhabi author says:

He has neither corporeal body nor is He a formless spirit. He has a form befitting His majesty [*italics mine*], the like of which no man has ever seen or conceived, and which will only be seen (to the degree of man's finite limitations) by the people of paradise.

Discussing each part of his statement will shed light into his anthropomorphic mind. Bilal Philips says that "Allah has a form befitting His majesty..." What he confirms in his mind is that Allah definitely has a form. He even specifies the kind of form by saying: "He [Allah] has neither corporeal body..." meaning that Allah has a form that is not like the forms of creation, and then says, "nor is He a formless spirit. Then he says, "He has

a form befitting His majesty...” The problem with such statements to a Muslim is that they express blatant anthropomorphism. What Bilal Philips is doing here is foolishly attributing a “ form” to God that, in his mind, nobody has ever seen. Therefore, Bilal Philips believes that God has some type of form, or non-corporeal body. No orthodox Sunni Muslim scholar has ever said such a perfidious thing.

Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, one of the greatest mujtahid Sunni imams ever to have lived, refuted such anthropomorphic statements over a thousand years before Bilal Philips was born. The great Sunni Ash`ari scholar, Imam al-Bayhaqi, in his *Manaqib Ahmad* relates with an authentic chain that Imam Ahmed said:

A person commits an act of disbelief (kufr) if he says Allah is a body, even if he says: Allah is a body but not like other bodies.

Imam Ahmad continues:

The expressions are taken from language and from Islam, and linguists applied ‘ body’ to a thing that has length, width, thickness, form, structure, and components. The expression has not been handed down in Shari’ah. Therefore, it is invalid and cannot be used.

Imam Ahmed is a pious adherer of the time period of the Salaf that was praised by Prophet Muhammad (s). How can Bilal Philips claim to represent the pious forefathers of the Salaf? He not only contradicts them but is vehemently refuted by them. The great pious predecessors had refuted ignoramuses like Bilal Philips in their times long ago.

Blatant anthropomorphism is also illustrated by the Wahhabi Ibn Baz's commentary on the great work of Imam Abu Ja'afar at-Tahawi called "Aqeedah at-Tahawiyyah" (The Creed of Tahawi), a work that has been praised by the orthodox Sunni community as being representative of Sunni orthodoxy. The now deceased Ibn Baz was Saudi Arabia's grand Mufti.

Article #38 of Imam Tahawi's work states:

He is beyond having limits placed on Him, or being restricted, or having parts or limbs. Nor is He contained by the six directions as all created entities are.

Ibn Baz, in a footnote, comments:

Allah is beyond limits that we know but has limits He knows.

In another footnote, he says:

By hudood (limits) the author [referring to Imam Tahawi] means [limits] such as known by humans since no one except Allah Almighty knows His limits.

Ibn Baz deceptively attempts to represent the noble Sunni Imam al-Tahawi as an anthropomorphist by putting his own anthropomorphic interpretation of Imam Tahawi's words in his mouth. It must be emphasized that not a single orthodox Sunni scholar understood Imam Tahawi's statement as Ibn Baz did.

Ibn Baz's also shows anthropomorphism in a commentary by the great Sunni scholar Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani. Ibn Baz says:

As for Ahl ul-Sunna – and these are the Companions and those who followed them in excellence – they assert a direction for Allah, and that is the direction of elevation, believing that the Exalted is above the Throne without giving an example and without entering into modality.

Another now deceased Wahhabi scholar, Muhammad Saleh al-Uthaymeen, blatantly expresses his anthropomorphism. He says:

Allah's establishment on the throne means that He is sitting 'in person' on His Throne.

The great Sunni Hanbali scholar, Ibn al-Jawzi, had refuted anthropomorphists who were saying that Allah's establishment is 'in person' hundreds of years ago:

Whoever says: He is established on the Throne 'in person' (bi dhatihi), has diverted the sense of the verse to that of sensory perception. Such a person must not neglect that the principle is established by the mind, by which we have come to know Allah, and have attributed pre-eternity to Him decisively. If you said: We read the hadiths and keep quiet, no one would criticize you; it is only your taking them in the external sense which is hideous. Therefore do not bring into the school of this pious man of the Salaf – Imam Ahmad [Ibn Hanbal] – what does not belong in it. You have clothed this madhab [or school of jurisprudence] with an ugly deed, so that it is no longer said 'Hanbali' except in the sense of 'anthropomorphist'

Sulayman ibn `Abdul Allah ibn Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, the grandson of the Wahhabi movement's founder, says:

Whoever believes or says: Allah is in person (bi dhatihi) in every place, or in one place: he is a disbeliever (kafir). It is obligatory to declare that Allah is distinct from His creation, established over His Throne without modality or likeness or exemplarity. Allah was and there was no place, then He created place and He is exalted as He was before He created place

Just as Bilal Philips affirms a form to Allah in his mind, and Ibn Baz confirms limits to Allah in his mind, al-Uthaymeen confirms that Allah is literally sitting 'in person' on the Throne in his mind. All of them have loyally followed the footsteps of Ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad ibn `Abdul-Wahhab – the two arch-heretics who were instrumental in causing tribulation (fitna) and division among the Muslim masses because of their reprehensible, unorthodox interpretations of the Islamic sources.

Wahhabi anthropomorphists say: Allah is in a direction, Allah has limits, Allah is literally above the Throne, and that Allah is sitting 'in person' on the Throne. To a Muslim, the fact is that the Throne is located in a particular direction and a certain place. By understanding Allah to be above the Throne literally as the Wahhabis do, they are attributing Allah with created attributes and, as a result, are implying that a part of the creation was eternal with Allah. This opposes what the the Qur'an and the following hadith authentically related by al-Bukhari says:

Allah existed eternally and there was nothing else [*italics mine*].

Sunni orthodoxy clears Allah of all directions and places. To a Sunni, Allah has always existed without the need of a place, and He did not take a place

for Himself after creating it. Orthodox Sunni scholars have said exactly what was understood by Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Companions (ra). Imam Abu Hanifah, the great mujtahid Imam who lived in the time period of the Salaf said: “ Allah has no limits...”, period. And this is what Sunni orthodoxy represents.