

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
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21420 - Is it obligatory to follow a particular madhhab?

the question

Is it mandatory for a muslim to follow a specific madhab (maliki, hanafi, hanbali,etc)?
If it is so, what madhab is the best? Is it true that Abou Hanifa's madhab is the most followed in the muslim world?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allaah.

It is not obligatory for a Muslim to follow any particular madhhab among these four. People vary in their level of understanding and ability to derive rulings from the evidence. There are some for whom it is permissible to follow (taqleed), and indeed it may be obligatory in their case. There are others who can only follow the shar'i evidence. In Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa'imah this question was answered in a detailed manner, which is worth quoting here in full.

Question:

What is the ruling on following one of the four madhhabs in all cases and situations?

The Committee replied:

Praise be to Allaah, and blessings and peace be upon His Messenger and his family and companions.

Firstly: the four madhhabs are named after the four imams - Imam Abu Haneefah, Imam Maalik, Imam al-Shaafa'i and Imam Ahmad.

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
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Secondly: These imams learned fiqh (jurisprudence) from the Qur'aan and Sunnah, and they are mujtahideen in this regard. The mujtahid either gets it right, in which case he will have two rewards, the reward for his ijtihaad and the reward for getting it right, or he will get it wrong, in which case he will be rewarded for his ijtihaad and will be forgiven for his mistake.

Thirdly: the one who is able to derive rulings from the Qur'aan and Sunnah should take from them like those who came before him; it is not right for him to follow blindly (taqleed) when he is believes that the truth lies elsewhere. Rather he should follow that which he believes is the truth. It is permissible for him to follow in matters in which he is unable to come to a conclusion based on the Qur'aan and Sunnah and he needs guidelines concerning a particular issue.

Fourthly: Whoever does not have the ability to derive rulings himself is permitted to follow one whom he feels comfortable following. If he is not comfortable following him then he should ask until he finds someone with whom he is comfortable.

Fifthly: From the above it is clear that we should not follow their opinions in all situations and at all times, because they may make mistakes, but we may follow their views that are sound and are based on the evidence.

Fataawa al-Lajnah, 5/28

It says in Fataawa al-Lajnah, no. 3323:

Whoever is qualified to derive rulings from the Qur'aan and Sunnah, and has strong knowledge in that regard, even if that is with the help of the legacy of fiqh that we have inherited from earlier scholars of Islam, has the right to do that, so he can act upon it himself and explain it in disputes and issue fatwas to those who consult him. Whoever is not qualified to do that has to ask trustworthy people who so that he may learn the rulings from their books and act upon that, without limiting his asking or his reading to one of the scholars of the four madhhabs. Rather

Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:
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people refer to the four imams because they are so well known and their books are well written and widely available.

Whoever says that it is obligatory for the learned people to follow the scholars blindly in all cases is making a mistake and being inflexible, and is thinking that these learned people are inadequate, and he is restricting something that is broad in scope.

Whoever says that we should limit following to the four madhhabs is also mistaken, because he is restricting something that is broad in scope with no evidence for doing so. With regard to the common (i.e., uneducated) man there is no difference between the four imams and others such as al-Layth ibn Sa'd, al-Awzaa'i and other fuqaha'.

Fataawa al-Lajnah, 5/41

It says in Fatwa no. 1591:

None of them called people to follow his madhhab, or was partisan in following it, or obliged anyone else to act in accordance with it or with a specific madhhab. Rather they used to call people to follow the Qur'aan and Sunnah, and they would comment on the texts of Islam, and explain its basic principles and discuss minor issues according to general guidelines, and issue fatwas concerning what people asked about, without obliging any of their students or anyone else to follow their views. Rather they criticized those who did that and said that their opinions should be cast aside if they went against a saheeh hadeeth. One of them said: "If the hadeeth is saheeh then that is my madhhab." May Allaah have mercy on them all.

It is not obligatory for anyone to follow a particular madhhab, rather we should strive to learn the truth if possible, or to seek the help of Allaah in doing so, then to rely on the legacy that the earlier Muslim scholars left behind for those who came after them, thus making it easier for them to understand and apply the texts. Whoever cannot derive rulings from the texts etc for some reason

Islam Question & Answer

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that prevents him from doing so should ask trustworthy scholars for whatever rulings of sharee'ah he needs, because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“So ask the people of the Reminder [Scriptures — the Tawraat (Torah), the Injeel (Gospel)] if you do not know”

[al-Anbiya' 21:7]

So he has to strive to ask one whom he trusts among those who are well known for their knowledge, virtue, piety and righteousness.

Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa'imah, 5/56

The madhhab of Abu Haneefah (may Allaah have mercy on him) is the most widespread madhhab among the Muslims, and perhaps one of the reasons for that is that the Ottoman caliphs followed this madhhab and they ruled the Muslim lands for more than six centuries. That does not mean that the madhhab of Abu Haneefah is the most sound madhhab or that every ijtihaad in it is correct, rather like other madhhabs it contains some things that are correct and some that are incorrect. What the believer must do is to follow the truth and what is correct, regardless of who says it.

And Allaah knows best.