

Prayer in Congregation

by
Sheikh Abdullah As-Sabt

صلاة الجماعة
للشيخ عبد الله السبت



﴿وَأَرْكَعُوا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ﴾
﴿ And bow down with
those who are bowing ﴾

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For corrections, or correspondence please write to:

Waleed Al-Essa
The *Daar* of Islamic Heritage
P.O. Box 831415
Miami, Florida 33283

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In the Name of Allah,
The Ever-Merciful,
The Bestower of Mercy



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SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION

Code	Arabic	Pronunciation
'	ع	Approximate with "a" as in "a stick".
'	أ	Approximate with "a" as in "a stick".
<i>ā</i>	آ	Pronounce like two a's in succession.
<i>h</i>	هـ	Pronounced as the "h" in "hill".
<i>ḥ</i>	ح	Approximate with "h" as in "heart".
<i>q</i>	ق	Approximate with "q".
<i>s</i>	س	Transliterated "s" should always be read as in "six", and should never be read as in "is".
<i>ṣ</i>	ص	Approximate with a heavy "s".
<i>sh</i>	ش	Pronounced as the "sh" as in "shine".
<i>ṭ</i>	ط	Approximate with a heavy "t".
<i>th</i>	ث	Pronounce as the "th" in "thin".
<i>ṭh</i>	ذ	Pronounce as the "th" in "this".

FOREWORD

All praise be to Allah the Lord of the Worlds, and may Allah bless and save His noble Messenger.

Ṣalāt (prayer) is of the most important of the pillars of the *deen* (religion) and establishing *ṣalāt* like Allah *ta'āla* and thus His Messenger, ﷺ¹, want us to is the best way to get close to the Lord of the Heavens and Earth. This includes establishing *ṣalāt* in *jamā'ah* (congregation).

The *jamā'ah* prayer has great rewards and benefits; however, it is a true pity that these benefits have been missed by slacking off in its performance. The majority of those that pray have also lost the etiquette's of *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* and the proper quest for it, and have thus forbidden themselves great benefit and good.

The factor that has aided in the desertion of the mosques – even though the situation has now changed, and the youth are heading to the mosques – I say that what has aided in the desertion of the mosques is that which is

¹ This symbol reads "*Sallal-lāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*", and means: May Allah bless and save him.

frequently boasted by advising brothers saying that *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* is a *sunnah mu'akkadah* (confirmed regular practice of the Prophet, ﷺ, yet the term is used here to imply that it is optional). This has led to the negligence of prayer in congregation.

Since the evidence that *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* is obligatory is so strong and clear I felt that I should point this matter out to my praying brothers as an advice, and in anticipation of the reward. I do not intend to discuss the *'aḥādeth* (plural for *ḥadeeth*) which explain the benefits of *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah*, nor those that explain the proper way of performing it for other writers have addressed these.

Finally I ask Allah to make us all successful in reaching what He loves, and is pleased by. He is the One that is capable of that. I ask Him that He saves the reward for the Day of greatest presentation.

Abdullah As-Sabt

Kuwait, *Rabee' Al-Awwal* 1401 H.

INTRODUCTION

The *ṣalāt* has a great status in Islam and it has been warned against neglecting its performance. It also has a great trace or mark in the *iṣlāh* (correction, purification, and causing to become one that means well) of the Muslim and in increasing his faith, and for this reason many ' *ibādāt* (acts of worship) have accompanied it like *wudu* ' and walking to the mosque.

I will present the texts that are related to *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah*. After having traced through the evidence, it has become apparent to me that *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* is obligatory upon each and every male Muslim that is capable.

In order to make the matter easier for the reader to follow I have arranged this research by first displaying the evidence that *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* is obligatory. Followed by the evidence of those that claim *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* to be only a voluntary *sunnah* as well as a discussion of that evidence.

I have paid special attention to stay away from the statements of men which are without evidence. The reason for this is that in matters of dispute statements of one person or another which are not substantiated with proof are of equal weight. It is only with evidence that we can select one person's opinion over another's.

EVIDENCE OF THOSE SAYING IT IS OBLIGATORY

A- EVIDENCE FROM THE *QUR'ĀN*

First Evidence: Our Lord, blessed and exalted is He, said in S4, V102 what may be translated as ﴿When you are with them, and stand to lead them in *ṣalāt*, Let one party of them stand up (in *ṣalāt*) with you. Taking their arms with them: When they finish their prostrations, let them take their position in the rear, and let the other party come up which has not yet established *ṣalāt*, and let them establish *ṣalāt* with you﴾.

- 1- In this verse there is an order to establish *ṣalāt*, and the order was repeated once more, ﴿and let the other party ...﴾.
- 2- There is evidence here that the *jamā'ah*, meaning the congregational prayer, is obligatory on all because the obligation did not fall from being upon the second party simply by the congregation of the first.
- 3- Allah has commanded a congregational prayer in a state of war and fear, and if it were only a *sunnah* then it would have been better to abandon the congregational prayer; however,

since Allah has ordered it, and obligations like following the *imām* were relaxed so as to allow the second party to pray behind the *imām as well*, this stands as clear proof that congregational prayer is obligatory.

- 4- This is clear evidence, and there is none amongst Muslims (scholars) that denies the *ṣalāt* of fear ordered in this verse.

Second Evidence: Our Lord, The Exalted, said in S68, V42-43 what may be translated as ﴿The day that a Shin shall be laid bare, and they shall be summoned to prostrate, but they shall not be able to. Their eyes will be cast down – ignominy will cover them, seeing that they had been summoned aforetime to bow in adoration while they were whole [and had refused]﴾.

The evidence here is from several facets amongst them:

- 1- Allah, glorified and exalted is He, punished them because they did not answer the call to prostrate.
- 2- The one that is calling to *ṣalāt* is the one calling *athān*. As has been explained by the *ḥadeeth* of Ibn Abi Maktoom: the Prophet, ﷺ, asked him: "Do you hear '*Ḥayya 'alaṣ-ṣalāt, Ḥayya 'alal-falāḥ*' (Come to the prayer, Come

to prosperity)?" He said yes, then the prophet, ﷺ, said "*fahayhala*" which means something like "then go answer the call". This *ḥadeeth* is *ṣaḥeeḥ* (which means authentic" and is narrated by Abu Dāwood and Aḥmad.

- 3- Points out that one who does not answer the call, has not answered.

Third Evidence: Allah *ta'āla* said in S2, V43, what might be translated as ﴿Establish *ṣalāt* and pay [your] *zakāt* and bow with those who are bowing﴾.

The proof therein is:

- 1- That He, Who is Glorified and Exalted, ordered us to bow, and this is a command to *ṣalāt* because bowing is a pillar of *ṣalāt*.
- 2- His statement which was translated as ﴿with those who are bowing﴾ is an order to bow with those who are bowing, and that is not accomplished except through congregation. So this indicates that *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* is obligatory because the meaning of the verse is not accomplished except through congregation.

B- EVIDENCE FROM THE *SUNNAH*

First Evidence: Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be content with him, narrated that the Messenger of Allah, ﷺ, said "The heaviest *ṣalāt* for the hypocrite is that of *Ishā'* and *Fajr*, and if they knew what was in them they would have attended them even if it meant crawling, and I have a compelling desire to order the *ṣalāt* to be established, then order a man to lead the people in *ṣalāt*, whereupon, I would go with some men carrying bundles of wood to a people not attending the *ṣalāt* and burn their houses on them". Agreed upon by Bukhāri and Muslim, and this was Muslim's version.

This *ḥadeeth* proves that *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* is obligatory because one's house would not be burned down for having left an optional deed.

Those of the opinion that *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* is not obligatory find refuge in a few excuses with regards to this *ḥadeeth* which follow:

- 1- They said this punishment is in reference to those that do not attend the *Jum'ah* (Friday) prayer, and their evidence in this regard is the *ḥadeeth* of 'Abdullāh bin Mas'ood reported by Muslim that the Prophet, ﷺ, said to a people that miss the Friday prayer "I have a compelling desire to order a person to lead the

ṣalāt, whereupon, I would burn the homes of those that have missed the Friday prayer".

This is not in contradiction to the *ḥadeeth* of Abu Hurayrah because Ibn Mas'ood is stating that the burning is for those who miss the Friday prayer, and Abu Hurayrah is stating that the burning is for those that miss *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* and there is no contradiction between the two because the *ḥadeeth* of Abu Hurayrah clearly states the *Ishā'* and *Fajr* and it is likely that what is meant is to show that both cases are worthy of the burning.

- 2- They say: This has been abrogated! My reply is: Where is the proof that this has been abrogated, and who reported it? However, to simply claim abrogation without evidence is a forgery upon Allah which is not backed by any knowledge.
- 3- They say: The prophet, ﷺ, wanted to burn their houses because they were hypocrites, not because they did not attend the prayer in congregation. The best rebuttal of this statement was given by Ibn Al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him, in his statement, "as for your claim that he wanted to punish them because of their hypocrisy, and not for missing the congregation this implies two errors:

The first: Nullifying what the Messenger, ﷺ, confirmed and related to missing the congregation.

The second: Confirming what the Messenger, ﷺ, nullified. For he never punished the hypocrites for their hypocrisy; to the contrary, he used to accept from them what they announced, and left what they concealed between them and Allah.

As such the *ḥadeeth* of Abu Hurayrah remains a strong argument for the obligation of *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah*.

Second Evidence: What Muslim narrated in his *Ṣaḥeeḥ* that a blind man said, "Oh Messenger of Allah, I do not have anyone to guide me to the Mosque", and thus asked the Messenger, ﷺ, to grant him special permission not to attend congregational prayers. As he was leaving, the Messenger called him and said "Do you hear the call? ", he said "yes". He, ﷺ, said "Then answer". Authentic versions narrated by Aḥmad and others came as: It has been narrated by Ibn Maktoom that he said: "Oh Messenger of Allah, I am blind, live far away, and have a guide that does not suit me, so can't you give me consent to pray at home?" He said "Do you hear the call?"

Ibn Maktoom replied "yes"; whereupon, the Prophet, ﷺ, said "I find no excuse for you".

If the blind man has no excuse not to pray in congregation, how can there be an excuse for the one that can see?

Those that conclude *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* to be a *sunnah* say: "This is an order implying preference of prayer in congregation not the obligation of *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah* (prayer in congregation)".

The response to this is that since the command here was expressed in a general sense, no one can say that it is only to be understood in a specific manner without having evidence to substantiate such a claim. Thus evidence is required in order to be able to claim that this command only indicates the preference of prayer in congregation as opposed to being a command which indicates both the preference, and the obligation upon a Muslim to pray in congregation. When the remaining evidence is taken into consideration, however, it is found to confirm that prayer in congregation is obligatory rather than confirming it to be simply preferred and optional.

If supportive evidence were not necessary to conclude that a command implies only preference, then each and every command could

be understood to imply preference, and nothing would remain obligatory.

Third Evidence: Ibn ‘Abbās, may Allah be pleased with him and his father, narrated that the Prophet, ﷺ, said: "Whoever hears the call to *ṣalāt*, and does not respond, then there is no *ṣalāt* for him unless he has a [valid] excuse". This is a sound, and authentic *ḥadeeth*.

Ibn Al-Qayyim wrote in his *Risālat Aṣṣalāt* "... and mind you this chain (referring to the chain of narration of the above *ḥadeeth*) is authentic". This *ḥadeeth* has been narrated by Abu Dāwood, Ibn Mājah, Ad-Dāraquṭni, Al-Ḥākim, Al-Baghawī, Bayhaqī, and has also been traced and judged authentic by the following scholars: Ath-Thahabī, Al-Nawawī, Ibn Ḥajar Al-Asqalānī, Ibn Taymiya, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, and Al-Albāni. Some have spoken about this *ḥadeeth*, claiming that its chain of narration is stopped (literal translation for the Arabic word *mawqooḥ*); however, the authentic chains of narrations which have been traced to the Prophet, ﷺ, contradict their claim.

This *ḥadeeth* states that whoever does not answer the call, there is no *ṣalāt* for him, and this judgment would not be passed to someone who is simply going against an order which implies preference, and not obligation.

Fourth Evidence: ‘Abdullāh bin Mas‘ood said: whoever would be pleased to meet Allah as a Muslim, then let him take care of those *ṣalāt* which are called to because they are of the ways of *hudā* (guidance), and Allah has taught your Prophet the ways of *hudā*. And if you were to establish *ṣalāt* in your homes, like that person staying behind in his home, you would be abandoning the *sunnah* of your Prophet, and if you were to abandon the *sunnah* of your prophet you would surely go astray. And there is not a man amongst you that purifies himself (*yataṭahhar*), and does so properly, then directs himself to one of these mosques except that Allah will write for him with each step he takes a *ḥasanah* (merit), raise him a grade, and drop from him a *sayyi’ah* (demerit). And I have seen us [meaning I recall clearly], where not one of us would stay behind from prayer in congregation except for a hypocrite whose hypocrisy was known. And one that could not come on his own would be carried between two men until he is stood in the row.

In another narration he said "the Messenger of Allah, Ṣalī-
al-
lāhī
ʿalayhi
s-salām, taught us the ways of *hudā*, and amongst the ways of *hudā* is *ṣalāt* in the Mosque in which *Athān* is called". Reported by Muslim.

The evidence in this *ḥadeeth* is that not praying in congregation is considered a sign of confirmed hypocrisy.

It is known that the signs of hypocrisy are those of abandoning something which is obligatory, or doing something which is *ḥarām* (unlawful). And there is not a Muslim in whose heart *īmān* (faith) has established itself, that would want to be like the hypocrites in their attributes.

Fifth Evidence:

- 1- Abu Sa'eed Al-Khudree said that the Messenger of Allah, ﷺ, said, "If there are three let one of them be their *īmām*, and the one with the strongest right to be *īmām* is the one that is the best reciter of the Qur'ān (both in terms of the amount memorized, and ability to recite it properly)".
- 2- Abi Ad-Dardā' said that the Messenger of Allah, ﷺ, said "There are not three in a town where no *Athān* is called, and congregational prayers are not established amongst them except that the Shayṭān will overcome them, so you must stick to *jamā'ah* because the wolf gets the stray one". Authentic *ḥadeeth* narrated by Abu Dāwood and Aḥmad.

Sixth Evidence: Abi Asha‘thā’ Al-Muḥāribī said: We were sitting in the *masjid* (mosque) then the *Mu’ath-thin* (the one that makes the call to prayer) made the call to prayer. Then a man got up from the masjid walking. Abu Hurayrah followed him with his sight until he left the *Masjid*. Then Abu Hurayrah said "as for this person he has disobeyed Abal Qāsim (the Prophet, ﷺ)", Narrated by Muslim.

Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him, judged this man as having disobeyed Abal Qāsim, ﷺ, and Abu Hurayrah would not have passed this verdict without knowledge of the *sunnah* of Abal Qāsim, ﷺ. And whosoever is considered among the disobedient then he has left something which is obligatory.

These, my Muslim brothers are some of the pieces of evidence that oblige the Muslim servant to pray in congregation, and whoever ponders in the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* will find more and more. Each piece of the preceding evidence is enough on its own to prove that *ṣalāt al-jamā‘ah* is obligatory. We also remind our brothers that the Muslim servant is not allowed to reject anything from Allah or his Messenger just because a certain scholar ruled differently. Evidence is an argument against all people. *Imām’s* that have concluded differently are expected to have a valid

excuse² because even they cannot contradict clear evidence from the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. Their teachings that people must follow the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* are well known, and they, may Allah have mercy upon them, did not become *imām*'s except by strong adherence to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. Know this because it is beneficial to you...

Of Allah's bounty upon us with regards to this issue is that the best of people, the companions of the Messenger, ﷺ, have had '*ijmā'*' (consensus) about it. There are no narrations passed down from any one of them giving leave not to pray in congregation. And the following is what has been confirmed of them:

- 1- Ibn Mas'ood said, "and I have seen us, where not one of us would stay behind except for a hypocrite whose hypocrisy was known". (5th evidence)
- 2- Ibn Mas'ood, Abu Musā Al-Ash'arī, 'Ali bin Abi Ṭālib, Abu Hurayrah, 'Ā'ishah, and Ibn Abbās have stated: "Whoever hears the call to *ṣalāt* and does not answer it, there is no³ *ṣalāt*

² Not having been reached by the necessary evidence is an example.

³ Because of the supporting evidence, which is to come on page 23, this *ḥadeeth* is understood as: "Whoever hears the call to *ṣalāt* and

for him unless he has a [valid] excuse". (3rd evidence)

Ibn Al-Qayyim said after he presented the statements of the companions: "These are statements of the companions as you find them, authentic and well known, and there is not one known statement from any of the companions which contradicts this. Each of these pieces of evidence is enough all by itself, so how about when they all enforce one another. Verily in Allah is our success".

These are the statements of the people of knowledge:

- 1- Al-Baghawī wrote in *Sharḥ As-Sunnah* (3/349), "More than one of the companions were of the opinion that whoever hears the call and does not answer, then there is no *ṣalāt* for him".
- 2- 'Atā' bin Rabāḥ said, "There is no excuse for anyone created by Allah in a city or country side not to attend if he hears the call to prayer".

does not answer it, there is no [complete] *ṣalāt* for him unless he has a [valid] excuse".

- 3- Al-Ḥasan Al-Baṣri said, "If his mother forbids him from praying '*Ishā'*' in congregation, out of pity, he should not obey her.
- 4- Al-Awzā'ī said: "There is no obedience to the father in leaving the Friday prayer, or the daily congregational prayers, regardless of whether one heard the call to prayer or not".⁴
- 5- Amongst those that have said that it is obligatory, as well, are Ibn Khuzayma, Ash-Shāfi'i, Al-Bukhāri, Ibn Ḥibbān, Dāwood, *Ahl Adh-Dhāhir*, *Al-Ḥanābila*, Ishāq, most of *Ahl Al-Hadeeth*, and some of the companions of Ash-Shāfi'i.

You now know, may Allah have mercy upon you, the preceding evidence concerning the obligatory status of *ṣalāt al-jamā'ah*, and the statements of those that conclude it to be obligatory from amongst *As-Salaf As-Ṣāliḥ* (the pious predecessors) of our '*Ummah*' (community of believers).

Now what remains for you to know is that **whoever prays alone, then his prayer is**

⁴ What appears most correct to me is that if his inability to hear the call is due to the distance of the Mosque then he is not obliged to attend.

correct; however, he has the *ithm* (sin) of leaving the *jamā'ah* (congregation). As for the acceptance, or rejection, this is up to The Creator, and no one can say that the prayer of Zaid⁵ is accepted while the prayer of Obaid is not.

Let us now turn to show some of the evidence of those that claim that it is *sunnah* (meaning optional here) and not *fard* (obligatory).

⁵ Zeid and Obeid are arbitrary names used here with the meaning of "one person, but not the other."

EVIDENCE OF THOSE SAYING IT IS SUNNAH AND A DISCUSSION OF THAT EVIDENCE

- 1- Ibn 'Umar said that the Messenger of Allah, ﷺ, said, "Prayer in congregation is 27 grades in excess of one's prayer alone".
- 2- Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet, ﷺ, said, "A man's prayer in congregation surpasses his prayer at home or in his business by 27 grades.
- 3- "If you (speaking to two) have prayed during your journey and reached a Mosque congregation then pray with them, it will be a *nāfila* (over the obligatory voluntary prayer) for you. Aḥmad and Tirmithi.
- 4- Abi Musā said that the Messenger of Allah, ﷺ, said, "The one with the greatest reward in the *ṣalāt* is the one who has to walk the furthest to reach it, then the next furthest, and the one that waits for the prayer with the *imām* reaps greater reward than one that prays it and then sleeps. Bukhāri and Muslim.

They said these are all *aḥādeeth* (plural for *ḥadeeth*) that prove that the one that prays alone does get his prayer counted. Therefore these

aḥādeeth cause all the other *aḥādeeth* to carry an implication of a preferred rather than an obligatory nature.

In addition to the above they apologized for not accepting the previous evidence as proof with excuses which we have already mentioned after each piece of evidence.

Your answer to what they have said is that it is not something we disagree about! We also acknowledge that a person can pray alone without a congregation because although prayer in congregation is obligatory it is not a condition for the acceptance of the prayer as we have already explained. Thus if a man were to pray alone, he would get the reward for *ṣalāt* ; however, he would also get the sin for having missed the congregation. There is no contradiction here because the man receives *ithm* for leaving one obligation, and gets reward for doing another.

From this it becomes apparent to us that there is no contradiction being pointed out amongst the *aḥādeeth* because the most that these *aḥādeeth* imply is that one may pray alone; however, they do not give a person leave from praying in congregation. It is also well known that leaving an obligatory part of a deed does not make it

invalid so long as it is not a condition for the acceptance of that deed.

These *aḥādeeth* would be a good response to those that say that prayer in the Mosque is a condition for its acceptance, and that the prayer of a person by himself is not valid. As for those that say that it is obligatory to pray in congregation these *aḥādeeth* are not to be considered a response to them. Try to understand this because it can be beneficial to you. I ask Allah success for myself and for you.

FINAL WORD

Know my praying brother, may Allah make you aware of the truth, that *Shayṭān* has many ways to keep you from praying, and supplicating to your Lord. The beginning of the path is to neglect prayer in congregation, then to neglect *tasbeeh* (saying *subḥānallāh*, *'al-ḥamdulillāh*, and *allāhu-akbar* each 33 times after each prayer along with other supplications), finally neglecting prayer altogether as we have seen.

So how can you allow yourself to lose the reward of 27 grades, and sufficing with one grade only. Have you reached a state that you no longer need *ḥasanāt* (merits) from Allah? There will be a great market for *ḥasanāt* tomorrow (meaning in the future) with the Lord of the Worlds.

So reflect upon this, and think about it, and do not allow the many that *Shayṭān* has overcome to a point that they do not get up to *ṣalāt* except lethargically, do not let them sway you. Beware of letting the *Shayṭān* pull you to his row.

Also know that *sakīnah* (inner peace and tranquility) is not observed at home. ﴿And verily the ones that populate the Mosques of Allah are those that have faith in Allah, and the Final Day﴾. Are you not one of them? Did you know that in a

Bukhāri *ḥadeeth* it is stated that each time one goes to the Mosque or returns from the Mosque Allah prepares something special for him in *Jannah* (paradise)? So are you without need for this?

In this there is clarification for those who have been caused to be successful in their search for good, and have been guided to it. And the last of our supplications is that all praise be to Allah the Lord of the worlds.

Written by Abdullah As-Sabt in Kuwait,

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إنطلاقاً من قول الله عز وجل ﴿وَلَتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ﴾ وقياماً بأمر الدعوة إلى الله وفق منهج أهل السنة والجماعة كما فهمه السلف الصالح، فقد تأسست دار التراث الإسلامي في سنة 1412 هـ الموافق 1991م بمدينة ميامي - ولاية فلوريدا الأمريكية، وهي مؤسسة إسلامية مستقلة تسعى بحول الله وقوته إلى تحقيق أهداف الدعوة السلفية بصفة عامة وتعريف غير المسلمين بالدين الإسلامي ودعوتهم للدخول فيه بصفة خاصة.

The *Daar* of Islamic Heritage (DIH) is a non-profit organization established in the year of the Flight 1412, corresponding to the year 1991, in Miami, Florida. Our objectives are:

- To project a clear image of the religion of Islam in accordance with the *Qur'ān*, and *Sunnah* as understood by *As-Salaf Aṣ-Ṣāliḥ* (our pious predecessors).
- To warn Muslims of all types of *Shirk* (Association), and *Bida'* (Innovations) in religion, and fabricated weak *aḥādīth* which mar the beauty of Islam.
- To refute advent tenets and ideologies such as atheism, communism, and sectarianism.
- To propagate Islam amongst non-Muslims.

The Daar of Islamic Heritage, Inc
P. O. Box 831415
Miami Florida 33283