

Disunity of the Muslim Ummah

In a world of ever change and uncertainty, we find Muslims on many fronts seem more and more divided. In fact, many of the issues we face as an ummah are linked to the disunity of our hearts.

So, what happened and why are Muslims finding it difficult to unite?

My aim in this article is not to point fingers at anyone or provide a simple solution to a complex problem for the ages. Instead, I'll be highlighting the due importance Islam has given to unity and brotherhood, and what we as the average Muslim citizen of the world can do to create more unity amongst our families and communities, and really begin to feel the true power and strength of brotherhood in Islam.

Below we will take a brief look at just 3 verses of the Quran and 3 sayings of the holy prophet of Allah ﷺ

Firstly, what is unity in Islam? Unity is that we see beyond colour, culture, and tradition and instead appreciate our fellow Muslim as a brother or sister because they believe in Allah, they believe in the truth of Al-Islam. Islam does not expect us to be the same, we are humans we are from different places and belong to different cultures, however, as Muslims our reality is before I am anything, I am a slave of Allah and it's this very belief which is the core of unity in Islam.

Allah عز وجل says:

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ (آل عمران ١٠٣)

And Hold on to the rope of Allah together, and do not be divided and remember the blessing of Allah upon you when you were enemies of one another, and he softened your hearts towards one another so you become brothers through his blessing, and you were on the brink of the fire of hell so he saved you from it, this is how he explains his signs so you may be guided.

This verse shows us that our unity is based on our belief in لا اله الا الله. The verse mentions the rope of Allah, this is either the Quran or the covenant we have with Allah عز وجل as his slaves, both are at the very core of our faith.

Let's ponder on the verse. The Sahabah before Islam were part of a torn lawless society where disputes between clans and tribes would last for years on end. Allah عز وجل shows us in this verse how through Islam they were able to put aside their differences and begin to take one another as brothers. Their hearts were made soft towards one another, why? because of the blessing of Allah through Islam.

Retrospectively, we also learn from the verse and the context of its revelation, that every time the Ummah deviates away from gathering upon the bases of Iman and upon لا اله الا الله old rivalries of ignorance, tribalism and patriotism will manifest to destroy the unity of Muslims, as is clearly evident today. Shaytan will bring up hundreds of reasons for one to disassociate with his fellow Muslim brothers and sisters, rather than finding the one reason of belief in لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله to unite.

How deep is this brotherhood?

Allah عز وجل says:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (حجرات ١٠)

Believers are brothers so reconcile between two of your brothers and be conscious of Allah so you may be shown mercy.

In this verse, Allah does not say believers are like brothers rather Allah عز وجل says: 'Believers are Brothers ...' this shows the depth of the relationship we have with one another is more profound than we could have imagined and really, something we should ponder on in our interactions with our fellow Muslims. The scholars of Quran commentary (tafsir) say the comparison that the Quran draws upon here between blood brothers and Muslim brothers is based on a profound similarity, the relationship we have with our siblings is based upon birth, which is the means of existence in this world, whilst the basis of the relationship we have with each other as Muslim brothers and sisters is based on faith which is the means of eternal life in Jannah.

Also, notice how the Quran uses the dual form when indicating to a disagreement as two is the minimum parties required for a dispute, disagreement or argument, but uses plural when commanding the believers to resolve that dispute meaning. When we see a dispute or hear about one in our communities between two or more parties, then it is the responsibility of all the friends, families of the parties involved and fellow brothers and sisters in Islam to be concerned and to make all efforts to resolve.

In our communities, we sometimes have the exact opposite action when some people in the community will become upset at a reconciliation and will scold their own family or friends for reconciling with the opposite party, or even make attempts to create a dispute between two Muslim brothers. As Muslims, we should always hope to free our Muslim communities from any bad blood.

The mindset we should have toward one another as advised by the prophet of Allah ﷺ

There are many teachings of the Prophet ﷺ which explain the concept of unity in Islam and how we should behave towards one another.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

مَثَلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي تَوَادُّهِمْ، وَتَرَاحُمِهِمْ، وَتَعَاطُفِهِمْ مَثَلُ الْجَسَدِ إِذَا اشْتَكَى مِنْهُ عُضْوٌ تَدَاعَى لَهُ سَائِرُ الْجَسَدِ بِالسَّهَرِ وَالْحُمَّى (رواه مسلم)

The example of fellow believers in their love for one another, in their mercy for each other, and their mutual affection and empathy, is like the body when any limb hurts the whole body is affected with sleeplessness and a fever. (Sahih Muslim)

The hadith portrays an amazing connection we have between Muslims across the globe. Now just think for a moment how many times we hear about the different forms of oppression and suffering Muslims are going through today in 2021 and have been going through over the last decade. How do we feel about it? What have we done to help? Imagine what a Muslim leader who has read, understood and tried to practice this hadith would do.

In my humble opinion, if this hadith was truly understood and practiced by this Ummah the world would be a different place. May Allah guide us towards betterment Amin.

On a more individual level we have the saying of the prophet ﷺ:

المسلم أخو المسلم لا يظلمه ولا يسلمه، ومن كان في حاجة أخيه كان الله في حاجته، ومن فرج عن مسلم كربة، فرج الله عنه كربة من كربات يوم القيامة، ومن ستر مسلماً ستره الله يوم القيامة (رواه البخاري)

The Muslim is a brother to the Muslim, he does not oppress him, he does not leave him to harm's way, the one who is involved in fulfilling his brothers need Allah will fulfil his need, the one who removes a grief from a Muslim, Allah will remove a grief of his from the grief of the day of judgment, and the one who conceals the fault of his fellow Muslim, Allah will conceal his sins on the day of judgement. (Sahih Bukhari)

This hadith clearly outlines the nature of the relationship we have with one another, and how we ought to treat each other and care for our fellow Muslim brothers and sisters.

The hadith also shows the relationship Allah عز وجل has with the believers; Allah promises to help those who help his slaves, to remove grief on the day of judgement from those who helped resolve matters of grief for the slaves of Allah.

Why the Differences?

Now, Islam does not ask us to be the same for we have great differences amongst ourselves; we are from different places, have different skin colour, have different cultures and traditions, have different opinions. In fact, even in regard to rulings of the din there are differences and have been differences from the time of the Sahabah, based on different understandings. We are human and we will always have our differences.

The one who created us tells us the reason of the differences we have; Allah عز وجل says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ
(حجرات ١٣)

O people, we have indeed created you from the male and female and we have made you of different races and tribes so you may recognise each other, verily the most honourable amongst you according to Allah is the most pious amongst you, verily Allah is the most knowledgeable and the all-Knowing.

Just because someone is a different race or from another village, city or country than us, it does not make them less of a brother in Islam than someone who is of the same race or village etc. No race is superior to any other, this was established in Islam over 1400 years ago, an issue which is still highlighted today. We also learn from this verse that the most noble amongst us, and the way in which one can excel, is by way of Taqwa. Taqwa is something intangible and in one's spiritual heart, only Allah knows who is better and has more Taqwa, Taqwa is not something we can judge.

The Prophet ﷺ stated during the farewell Hajj, summarising Unity in Islam and its basis:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، أَلَا إِنَّ رَبَّكُمْ وَاحِدٌ، وَإِنَّ أَبَاكُمْ وَاحِدٌ، أَلَا لَا فَضْلَ لِعَرَبِيٍّ عَلَى عَجَمِيٍّ (1) ، وَلَا لِعَجَمِيٍّ عَلَى عَرَبِيٍّ، وَلَا أَحْمَرَ (2) عَلَى أَسْوَدَ، وَلَا أَسْوَدَ عَلَى أَحْمَرَ، إِلَّا بِالتَّقْوَى (مسند احمد)

O people, verily your lord is one, your father is one (meaning Adam عليه السلام), listen there is no virtue for an Arab over a non-Arab, for a Non-Arab over an Arab, for a red person over a black person, for a black person over a red person, except with Taqwa. (Musnad Ahmed)

In conclusion

The Muslim Ummah globally is going through tough times, like it has done many times before. If you were to analyse every time the Muslim ummah suffered, whether it was at the hands of an outside force or from within, you will find that more often than not the basis of the suffering or loss could be linked to disunity of the hearts.

Today, as the general Muslim citizen uniting countries, governments and Muslim leaders is not in our hands, but what we can do is start treating each other as real brothers and sisters. We can begin to revert to the basis of Muslim unity by removing any scope of tradition, prejudice or anything else which may be clouding our vision.

May Allah enable us to strengthen this divine bond between each individual of the Muslim Ummah. Amin

Your Brother in Islam,

Imam Uthmaan