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Islāmic Unity

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INTRODUCTION

Of the three things which the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ once asked Allāh ﷻ, 'Let not my Ummah perish due to their enemies subduing them,' and let not my Ummah perish due to famine,' were both readily granted. The third, 'Let not my Ummah fight amongst themselves,' Allāh ﷻ, in His infinite wisdom, did not grant. Muslim, at-Tirmidhī, al-Hākim

Does this mean that whatever we do we will never be united? or that we shouldn't bother about trying to be united?

The Qur'ān tells us,

***“And hold fast, all together, by the Rope of Allāh
(which stretches out for you),
and be not divided among yourselves;
and remember with gratitude Allāh's favour on you;
for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love,
so that by His Grace, you became brethren.”***

Qur'ān, Āl `Imrān 3:103

Here, Allāh ﷻ instructs us that we all have a duty to not be divided. This is because our goal is one, to hold fast onto the Rope of Allāh i.e. Islām. How can we all do this and still be divided? Would those who have separated cut themselves off from this Rope?

The question now is, how can Allāh ﷻ give an order for something which the Prophet ﷺ has said that Allāh ﷻ has refused to grant?

The answer is a slight rewording of the question. How can man fulfil that command which the Prophet ﷺ has said that Allāh ﷻ has refused to grant for free?

It can be thus understood that trying to stay unified is a command of Allāh ﷻ that man has to obey just as any other command. It is a test.

Man is responsible for himself to make sure he does not go against this command of Allāh ﷻ. He is bound to try to do this as he is bound to perform his prayers. Even if the actions of people around him are not conforming to this he will still remain bound to it.

But how is a person to remain united if there are so few to be united with?

The answer to this is again given by the Qur'ān,

***“Upon oath on (the essence of) Time,
Verily Man is in loss,
Except those who have Faith, and do righteous deeds,
and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth,
and of Patience and Constancy.”***

Qur'ān, al-`Aşr, 103:1-3

And also in the verse,

***“You are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind,
enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong,
and believing in Allāh.”***

Qur'ān, Āl `Imrān 3:110

Allāh ﷻ commands us that we should call towards this act of good. He also informs us of the best way,

***“Invite (all) to the Way of your Lord with wisdom
and beautiful preaching;
and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious:
for your Lord knows best who have strayed from His Path,
and who receive guidance.”***

Qur'ān, an-Naḥl 16:125

This book has this as its aim. It is a compilation of guidelines from the Qur'ān and Sunnah, and also of advices and reasoning derived from peoples' experiences. We hope it will be of practical benefit to all.

THE PROBLEMS

Disunity is caused in many different areas by the attitudes of people. The causes are generally the following,

1. Assumption that one is better than others,
2. Ignorance of the views of others,
3. Ignorance of the commands of Allāh regulating one's own views,
4. Ignorance of the Objective.

A look at the above causes indicates that the main cause of disunity is ignorance. The solution would therefore be education, and not only education but also the acceptance of the results.

The primary source of education for man is the Qur'ān. A study of the Qur'ān (not just a quick read through the translation) should be done by all. Every person should ponder over the meaning of the Qur'ān's Message. Wherever they get stuck or are unsure of anything then they should ask their local scholars for help.

By doing this, many misconceptions will be removed. One will automatically note that the concept of equality is commanded and also the Objective is repeatedly brought to light. This automatically removes the causes of disunity if people were to apply Allāh's commands fully upon themselves.

Thereafter it becomes imperative that people climb out of the boxes they have built around themselves and at the very least try to communicate to other Muslims around them. Many a times they will see that what they may have thought to be the incorrect views of others were purely their own misconceptions.

We can now study the various areas where differences usually occur.

DIFFERENCES IN BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Religion

In this area we know that besides Islām no other religion can be correct. This is what Allāh Himself says,

***“If anyone desires a religion other than Islām
(submission to Allāh), never will it be accepted of him;
and in the Hereafter he will be among those who have lost.”***

Qur’ān, Āl `Imrān 3:85

We affirm that there can be no compromise in religion between a Muslim and one who refuses, but how does that affect a Muslim’s mannerisms towards and interaction with non-Muslims?

The Qur’ān has given us guidelines on what our outlook should be and how we should behave with them.

***“Fight in the cause of Allāh those who fight you,
but do not transgress limits; for Allāh loves not transgressors.
And slay them wherever you catch them,
and turn them out from where they have turned you out;
for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter;
but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque,
unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them.
Such is the reward of those who suppress faith.
But if they cease, Allāh is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.
And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression,
and there prevail justice and faith in Allāh; but if they cease, let
there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.”***

Qur’ān, al-Baqarāh 2:190-193

In those countries where they are not fighting us or turning us out, it would be transgression of Allāh’s law for Muslims to fight or in anyway harm local non-combatants and civilians.

How should we then deal with them? Can Muslims peacefully live under their rules or not?

The same verse answers that,

And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allāh; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.”

Qur’ān, al-Baqarāh 2:193

This means that as long as Muslims are able to practice their faith, they are able to live under the rule of non-Muslims. Moreover the practical example of the Messenger ﷺ and his companions ﷺ is also available for us to benefit from. The incidents of Abū Jandal ﷺ (al-Bukhārī and Muslim) and Abū Baṣīr ﷺ (al-Bukhārī and Ibn Ḥibbān) are famous that the Messenger ﷺ instructed them to remain with the Makkans after the truce of Hdaybiyah even though it meant persecution for them.

Thereafter the Qur’ān teaches us what our outlook should be in regards to non-Muslims,

“You are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allāh.”

Qur’ān, Āl `Imrān 3:110

It is obvious that this order will never be successfully carried out by ourselves if our mannerisms and character are to be despised. The Prophet’s example is revered even amongst non-Muslims,

“The day of Mohammad’s greatest triumph over his enemies was also the day of his grandest victory over himself. He freely forgave the Koraysh [sic] all the years of sorrow and cruel scorn in which they had afflicted him and gave an amnesty to the whole population of Mekka... The army followed his example,

and entered quietly and peacefully: no house was robbed, no women insulted... Through all the annals of conquest there is no triumphant entry comparable to this one."

Stanley Lane-Poole, The Speeches and Table-Talk of the Prophet

And what was the result of this? Many of the Arabs of the entire Arabian peninsula, not only the conquered people of Makkah accepted Islām. Is this not a good enough example for us to follow?

Sects

Firstly Islām is, by definition, belief in Allāh ﷻ alone being worthy of worship and belief in the Messenger Muḥammad ﷺ as the Final Prophet.

People who believe in this are classified as Muslims. People who do not believe in this are not Muslims, and are to be treated as such. Aggression does not have to be taken out against them, but rather as we would treat any other non-Muslim we should also give them Da`wah towards true Islām.

Sects have long been a major source of many differences of the Ummah. It is obvious that only one can be correct.

The Messenger ﷺ has stated,

"The Israelites were divided into seventy-two sects. My Ummah will be divided into seventy-three sects. All but one will be for the Fire."

The Companions ﷺ asked, "Which one will that be O Messenger of Allāh?"

The Messenger ﷺ replied, "That which I and my companions are on."

at-Tirmidhī, al-Ḥākim, aṭ-Ṭabarānī, Ibn Mājah

This is one of the traditions which form the basis for the title, “*Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamā`ah*” or the people of the Prophet’s example and of consensus.

We can safely say that those who do not consider themselves as followers of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions ﷺ, have axed themselves from this one successful group. However treatment of them should again be of non-hostility but of an open, warm invitation towards the truth. Even though the *Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamā`ah* is on the right path, we all should remember not to be condescending in our mode of address to them.

Muslims who fall under the category of the *Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamā`ah* are still divided into many categories. Who is correct? Who should be followed?

The different categories within the *Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamā`ah* are not classified as different sects but rather as different ideologies within a single sect. The difference is that each, no matter how hostile towards the others, must ultimately concede that the others are still within the successful group.

Ideologies

Differences in ideologies mainly affect a person’s own actions and outlook. However, there are instances where beliefs are also affected by the ideologies one has. Here it is imperative for people to follow the guidelines of the Qur’ān and Sunnah. One should read for oneself what the Qur’ān says and accept that as our beliefs. One should also read upon what has been correctly transmitted from the Messenger ﷺ and adopt articles of belief from that too as our own. Whatever is not condoned by these two sources we should remain silent over.

Thereafter unanimous offerings of the Mataqaddimīn (earlier/classical scholars) should also be researched (e.g. al-`Aqidah by Imām aṭ-Ṭaḥāwī, which the Fīṣabilillāh title “Īmān” is based upon, Sharḥ al-`Aqā'id by Imām an-Nasafī, the works of al-Ghazālī and others. Many of these books have the added perspective of also tackling philosophical issues).

Works of the later scholars can also be researched. There are however times when either circumstance and/or emotions have moulded their opinions to be of a much more stringent stance than necessary. It is therefore advisable that one should keep an open mind when studying them.

Schools of Thought

This is another point of contention between many. It is acknowledged that at one time there may have been more than twenty different schools of thought, although it is generally accepted now that there remain four schools of thought which can be followed. These are the four Madhāhib. They are the Ḥanafī, Mālīkī, Shāfi`ī and Ḥambalī Madh-habs.

There are many different opinions between the different scholars on so many different issues, but always the difference is between the status of an action within permission or prohibition, that is to say that some may deem something as necessary while others would say that it is strongly encouraged, or at times some say an act is strongly emphasised whereas others may say it is permitted. It is an extremely rare event to find one school of thought saying something is necessary while another says it is impermissible.

In any case differences between the schools of thought are considered as issues of jurisprudence in which there is indeed scope to accommodate the differences of opinions. This is why all of the schools of thought are considered correct according to Islāmic guidelines, and are worthy of being followed.

Many questions arise from this. e.g. Is it necessary to follow a school of thought, or can one directly look at the Qur'ān and Sunnah and judge for oneself? Can a person act upon all of them? Why should a school of thought be followed, why is it not sufficient to follow the Prophet's example?

Whatever answer is given to these questions, first and foremost it is important to remember that these remain issues of jurisprudence. Under no circumstance would anyone be justified in labelling someone else who has a different opinion to oneself as a non-Muslim or as mislead. This applies not only to what one calls them but also how one regards and treats them.

Unfortunately, all too often one hears some people label the followers of a school of thought as following their Imām more than the Prophet ﷺ. And also its opposite, that those who do not follow a school of thought as being arrogant and thinking themselves as better than all who came before them. Both these statements are far from the truth.

If a person follows an Imām's interpretation of the Prophet's example they are not following the Imām for his greatness but because they wish to follow the example of the Prophet using the Imām's (and his students' and followers') educated interpretation of the Qur'ān and Sunnah. This is not prohibited in Islām but encouraged, not only practically, as can be understood from the fact that despite the many thousands of Şahādah there were only a few (whose personal opinions

would be considered as proof, and who would be constantly asked questions and) whose whole example would be followed, but also directly by the approval of the Prophet ﷺ.

This is known from the incident of Mu`ādh ibn Jabal ؓ. When he was sent to the people of Yemen the Messenger asked him how he would judge/arbitrate between them (the words 'rule' or 'order' is not used in the narration). When he replied that he will use the Book of Allāh ﷻ thereafter the example of the Prophet ﷺ, and if he could not find the answer in the above he would use his opinion via analogy, (Remember this was while the Messenger ﷺ was still alive) the Messenger did not say to send someone to find out from himself or from any of the other companions, but allowed that the people of Yemen follow the Ijtihād (analogy) of Mu`ādh ؓ. at-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd

It should equally be noted that those who do not wish to follow a Madh-hab don't, not because of arrogance, but because of the ideal that only the Prophet ﷺ should be followed and that can be gaged by the abundant knowledge that is available of him.

One of the reasons given for this ideology is the Qur'ānic injunction,

***O you who believe! Obey Allāh, and obey the Messenger,
and those charged with authority among you.
If you differ in anything among yourselves,
refer it to Allāh and His Messenger,
(that is) if you do believe in Allāh and the Last Day:
that is best, and most suitable for final determination.***

Qur'ān, an-Nisā' 4:59

It can be answered that this verse is relating to a military excursion, and if analogy is to be used then it can be used both ways and may not equal the rank of a clear, authentic Aḥādīth.

So who is right?

The different opinions are sent back and forth to each side of the argument with answers and questions that are both logical and valid. It is not the intention nor the place of this book to answer this question. We will however proceed to draw a few suggestions for the sake of unity.

1. People who do not possess the fundamental requirements of analysing knowledge, must first study them before trying to make their own decisions. e.g. extensive knowledge of Arabic syntax, grammar and vocabulary, The principles of the sciences they wish to study, e.g the fundamental laws of Tafsir and of the classifications of Aḥādīth etc. This is because it adds validity to one's opinion, without which it would not equal more than guesswork.
2. One must acknowledge that one's own research is not absolute. It may be possible that an authentic narration which is the basis of one's own research is matched by many acceptable narrations for an opposing view.
3. A person must understand that the findings of his research are not incumbent upon others to follow. This is to avoid contradiction, ('Why follow an Imām or school of thought when research leads to this?' *'Okay but why should I follow you?'*) and also unnecessary arguments (e.g. 'Brother when you travel you should read Ṣalāh with your shoes on.' *'Has it been prohibited to remove them whilst offering Ṣalāh?'*)
4. One must avoid belittling others and their research. Whether the others are contemporaries or Imāms. This applies equally to both followers of Madh-habs and non-followers.

On the other end of the scale there are many people who follow a school of thought as interpreted by an individual who is governed by emotions or by someone who almost entirely bases a verdict on the situation (e.g. that is not permitted because it is not appropriate, etc). Here it may be appropriate to see if the verdict is verified by trying to find out the reasoning such a person has used. (This must be done in a polite manner) and having this verified by a second opinion.

Because the key to a healthy community is unity, it is again pointed out that under no circumstances can this be a justifiable reason to disregard or even mentally belittle other Muslims. The bottom line is that neither is a person who follows a school of thought nor is a person who does not follow one, going to enter heaven just because of following or not following a madh-hab. It is thus an issue that people should get past and take a pro-active step in trying to achieve Allāh's pleasure.

Contemporary Issues

The more the world moves forward, the more complex contemporary issues rise. The problem is, whichever way one turns, one is likely to find different opinions on almost everything. Who should we follow?

This question is an overgrown branch of the previous issue of following a school of thought. This is because the principles of the schools of thought are used to make decisions even today, this is why like Islām, it's schools of thought are dynamic and applicable when used fully. But even through the interpretations of one set of principles different conclusions can be reached as classifications very quickly blur and different principles will need to be adhered to.

For a lay man, following the research of a competent local scholar is the

answer. If one is capable of research then one should research the issue, thereafter have one's findings verified by a competent scholar, and through discussion learn more. (Politeness will almost always bear good results).

In the situation that there are many different opinions, one can either stick to one scholar, or find out the specialist subjects of the local scholars for a more reliable opinion in specific fields. If one wishes to research then one can use the latter option and have one's own research verified by the specialist.

The thing what one must not do is keep on asking different scholars until one arrives at a scholar that has the answer one is looking for and accept that without reasoning. This is misusing Islām's guidelines and following one's wishes.

DIFFERENCES IN NATIONALITY

This problem has two major aspects. One is caused by "patriotism" or "nationalism" to a country. The other is caused by a superiority complex when regarding other races.

Patriotism and Nationalism

In the days of the Prophet ﷺ there was a great degree of patriotism that many had towards their own tribes. The Quraysh were notorious in this, as they would consider themselves above the others. Similarly other tribes would be proud of particular traits that they were famous for (e.g. archery, swordsmanship, poetry, etc).

The Prophet ﷺ did not try to get rid of the concept of nationalism or tribalism altogether. As it can be legitimately used to recognise and understand people.

***“O Mankind! We created you from a male and a female,
and made you into nations and tribes,
that you may know each other (not to despise each other).
Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allāh is
the most righteous of you. And Allāh has full Knowledge
and is well-acquainted (with all things).”***

Qur’ān, al-Ḥujurāt 49:13

At the same time, in the same verse, Allāh ﷻ is stating what can make a person excel, that is righteousness.

In regards to being from a particular country, and assuming that such a thing is a valid reason to be proud, to a degree can be accommodated. This is because the Prophet ﷺ has praised many nations for specific reasons. e.g.

The Messenger ﷺ has said of Salmān ؓ’s nation (the Persians) that if faith was at a distance of the stars, there would be people from amongst them that will obtain it.

at-Tirmidhi

Of the people of Yemen the Messenger ﷺ has said, “They are soft of heart and gentle of nature. Faith is Yemen, and wisdom is Yemeni.”

at-Tirmidhi

The Messenger ﷺ has also said,

“Love the Arabs for three reasons: because I am an Arab, because the Qur’ān is in Arabic, and because the language of Heaven will be Arabic.”

al-Ḥakim, al-Bayhaqī, at-Ṭabarānī

All the same the Messenger ﷺ also said,

“O people hear well! Truly your Lord is one and truly your father is one. Know that no Arab has superiority over any non-Arab, nor does any non-Arab have superiority over any Arab; neither does the white man hold any status over the black man, nor does the black man hold any status over the white man, except by piety.”

Musnad Aḥmad

This is a perfect demonstration from the Prophet ﷺ to show the functionality of nationalities in Islām. This is to say that we should mutually accept the good points of a people, but not consider ourselves to be better than others because of it.

This is especially applicable today. e.g. in England it needs to be applied to those born locally when they address anyone who may have immigrated from a third world country.

This also applies when in some areas people, who may have their origins in one country, may not see eye-to-eye with descendants of another nationality. e.g. in some places people of Indian and Pakistani origin may be at loggerheads. Sometimes it is not even to such an extent but where each party simply stands apart from the other. This is something which has no legitimacy in Islām or Islāmic teachings, but rather serves no other purpose but causes rift within communities. The fault is equally both's not each other's.

There are numerous ways of resolving this. The most practical is to take one's own pro-active steps to bridge the gap. A simple way to start this is by keeping a warm and welcoming attitude and initiating greetings. These are of the Prophet ﷺ's own example,

When he addressed a person he turned his whole body towards that person (he did not only turn his face nor look from the corner of his eye, as this is considered impolite, and sometimes, it even denotes pride. Rasūlullāh faced the person he spoke to, with his chest and body.)

ash-Shamā'il al-Muḥāmmadiyyah of Imām at-Tirmidhī

And also from his saying,

“None of you will enter Heaven unless you believe, and none of you can believe unless you love one another. Shall I not tell you of a thing that if you do you will love each other? Spread Salām amongst yourselves.”

Muslim, at-Tirmidhī, al-Ḥakīm

Race and Colour

Islām is a religion that does not take into account the colour of a person's skin. All that is required from a person is that he submits to God. This is not at all affected by the colour of one's skin. As in nationality Islām commands total brotherhood which covers all races, and calls for equality between all.

“The Believers are brothers: so make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allāh, that you may receive Mercy.”

Qur'ān, al-Ḥujurāt 49:10

We quote what the Prophet ﷺ has said,

“O people hear well! Truly your Lord is one and truly your father is one. Know that no Arab has superiority over any non-Arab, nor does any non-Arab have superiority over any Arab; neither does the white man hold any status over the black man, nor does the black man hold any status over the white man, except by piety.”

Musnad Aḥmad

The famous quote of Malcolm X serves as a reminder for this,

“Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this ancient Holy Land, the House of Abraham, Muhammad, and all the other Prophets of the Holy Scriptures. For the past week, I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of *all colors* . . .

“There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans. But we all participated in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could

exist between the white and the non-white.

“America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and eaten with people who in America would have been considered ‘white’ – but the ‘white’ attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen *sincere* and *true* brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color...

“During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug) – while praying to the *same God* – with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the *words* and in the *actions* and in the *deeds* of the ‘white’ Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana....

“I could see from this, that perhaps if white America could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept *in reality* the Oneness of Man...”

The Autobiography of Malcolm X with the assistance of Alex Haley, pp. 454-455

One can also see light in the memorable quote of Professor Ramakrishna Rao,

“The principles of universal brotherhood and doctrine of the equality of mankind which he proclaimed represents one very great contribution of Muhammad to the social uplift of humanity. All great religions have preached the same doctrine but the Prophet of Islam had put this theory into actual practice and its value will be fully recognised, perhaps centuries hence, when international consciousness being

awakened, racial prejudices may disappear and greater brotherhood of humanity come into existence.”

Mohammed The Prophet, by Ramakrishna Rao, Professor of philosophy Hyderabad

The step forward in this is to make sure that each and every one of us sees others regardless of colour or appearance, as a human like us. That everyone is part of the Muslims Ummah like us, are striving towards the same God as we are. They are our companions: they are equal to us: they have feelings like us. Only when this is acknowledged can there be a realisation of the decree of Allāh ﷻ (“**The Believers are brothers...**” Qur’ān, al-Hujurāt 49:10) and the message of Prophet ﷺ, “None of You can be a true believer, until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”

al-Bukhari, Muslim

We, upon acting upon this duty and seeing the best of all our brothers, will understand that the quest of equality within Islām is not an enforced duty but rather a bestowed privilege.

DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL STATUS AND RANK

Contempt because of caste is a very evil concept that attacks the ideal of equality. As draconian as it is comparable to the old oppressive feudal system, it unfortunately is very much prevalent in many of today’s societies. The good news is that it is a dying entity, as it is more often found amongst the older generation of immigrants; but unfortunately it is not dying without a trace.

People are still inclined towards the wealthy (as financial affluence has taken over the caste system) in a vain hope that they may become friendly with or benefit from them. We see all too often that people who have absolutely no bearing or constructive input are being put on

to committees of Masājid and religious institutes only because of their being wealthy. Such lechery is despised in Islām.

“Accursed are the servants of the Dirham and accursed are the servants of the Dīnār*.”

at-Tirmidhī, at-Ṭabarānī

* The Dirham and the Dīnār were monetary forms of silver and gold respectively

This is not to say that all wealthy people are stupid or incompetent. Certainly not. There are many who do follow the examples of Khadijah رضي الله عنها, `Uthmān رضي الله عنه and `Abdur-Raḥmān رضي الله عنه, whose input are to be valued. But what is meant to be highlighted here is a message, not only for the wealthy but what is equally applicable to the less well-off, that a person’s wealth does not give added weight to his/her opinion over the opinions of others, especially not if the opinions given are in any way counter-productive.

The importance of maintaining a good counsel to achieve a range of views centred around aims common to the entire Muslims community cannot be over-emphasized. This is, perhaps, the easiest and most efficient way of avoiding having countless mini groups (which separate race, nationality, masājid, etc) aiming to benefit only a handful of people. The undesired effects of such mini groups are all too obvious, as they, almost unreservedly, aim to better their own scope of people, disregarding all others. This will cause rift and disunity.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENDER AND SEXUALITY

The Role of Our Sisters

It is through the benevolence of Allāh that more are beginning to realise what Islām has said all along about the role of women in Islām, that is of equality.

***“And whosoever does deeds of righteousness,
whether male or female, and has faith,
these will enter Paradise and not the least injustice
will be done to them.***

Qur’ān, an-Nisā’ 4:124

Islam does not mistake equality of worth for sameness in roles. Since it is obvious that men and women have been created differently both physically and psychologically, it is also clear that both have been made for distinct, though equally important, roles. In Islām, Allāh dignifies both men and women in their distinctiveness, not sameness, while maintaining that in the most meaningful sense of equality – equality before the Creator – they both are the same, as the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said clearly,

“Women are the twin halves of men.”

at-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd

So what does this say for them? Can they learn? Can they work? What are the limitations set upon them?

Islām does indeed allow our sisters to learn and become contributing members of our society. This would be them following the example of the female Ṣaḥābiyyāt. This would also include “non-Islāmic” sciences with which they could benefit the community.

The same restrictions apply to women as do to men (including proactive segregation of the sexes). It is only due to some scholars thinking that women are not able to observe the rules of Ḥijāb properly whilst studying, that there is a difference of opinion on whether or not it is appropriate for them to study in colleges and universities. It is emphasized that they do not study away from home. The verse that enjoins Ḥijāb on women is preceded by a verse that first advises men of their modesty:

“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them. And Allāh is well acquainted with all that they do.”

Qur’ān, an-Nūr 24:30

After this, Allāh says:

“And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband’s fathers, their sons...”

Qur’ān, an-Nūr 24:31

The verse is then concluded with a general address to both men and women:

***“...And turn unto Allāh together,
O believers, in order that you may succeed.”***

Qur’ān, an-Nūr 24:31

Regarding women working, Islām does allow this with the above restrictions. Islām, however, does say that they should not have to if the purpose is to earn money for the family, (as this is the responsibility of either the husband, father, son, or brother). Islām does not restrict permission for a woman to work only out of financial necessity, but allows for women to pro-actively help the community, encouraging them to take up meaningful posts, as opposed to working for the sake of working.

Sexuality

Islām, like all other major religions, strongly forbids the malpractices of homosexual relationships, whether it be between men or between

women. It is not only shameless, but unnatural, as it destroys the very fabric of society, the family.

Islām does not discriminate against any individual, but Islām has a set of laws which like any legal system it implements. In the legal system of Islām it sees homosexuality as a crime, not as a defect for people to merely laugh at or ridicule.

Islām does not, however, discriminate against the person guilty of a homosexual persuasion, but it does so against the action. If such a person was to turn away from such filthy practices then Islām would not stop other Muslims from working with such a person and accepting him/her in its united fold.

DIFFERENCES DUE TO INTERACTION

The Family

The fact that each and every one of us are individuals makes it obvious that there are always going to be differences between ourselves and others. Even the family that we have, with all our closeness and similarities, will have differences within its members. This difference can be in ideology, tastes, outlook, values, etc, which all add up to give us an individual personality. Even though we share genes does not mean that we are uniformed.

But lets face it, any arguments or rifts between family members are hardly ever caused by just the mere possession of a different personality. More often arguments are usually set off by a chain of reactions of the family members to each other's responses.

If we are the one's in the seat of authority, it still does not mean we need to become dictatorial. We should first differentiate between

situations when something needs to be said and situations which can be ignored. Situations in which something needs to be said would include Islāmic, moral, social, medical and other issues which affect not only the individual but also others. Other than this, issues such as tastes and outlook, only need to be engaged if it is a serious issue, not merely because of personal dislike.

If a person were to enforce too many rules on others, or regulates everything, it will cause them to become rebellious. If a person enforces no rules, then there will be no development. If a person is too strict it will cause them to snap, and if a person is too lax no values would be impressed on to them.

It is imperative that loving and wanting the best for our family members is met with the correct amount of strictness and authority. This too should be put forward in a caring and understanding manner rather than sheer force or harshness.

If we are not in the position of authority, then we should accept any criticisms and suggestions, even if they are against us, provided that they break no Islāmic rulings. We should try to accept any rules that they put on us as being done for our betterment not for spite. If whatever is imposed goes against Islāmic or moral rulings, then politely we must decline from following them.

Whatever our actions or responses are in the situations presented to us, the best way of avoiding arguments and rift is the maintaining of good manners and polite words. **DO NOT LOSE YOUR TEMPER!**

There are situations, and we pray that Allāh protects us all from them, when due to custom or keeping face that those with authority over us wish to force us to do something. We in these situations with Ḥaqq being on our side can decline from obeying these un-Islāmic orders.

But what does that leave of the family ties? It is at this stage when we need to try and keep trying that our manners and love for our family members make it impossible for them to hate us.

MISCELLANEOUS PROBLEMS

Jealousy

A major cause of disunity is jealousy. The definition of jealousy (Ḥasad) is, *'To be want a good thing taken away from another, irrespective of whether or not one receives the good thing oneself.'* Mukhtār aṣ-Ṣiḥāḥ

The Prophet ﷺ has said,
“Beware of jealousy! Indeed jealousy eats away good deeds like a fire eats away dried wood.”

Please note that jealousy does not have to be against a physical benefit, it could just as easily be perpetrated against a person's privileges or status. The act of jealousy is abhorred by Allāh ﷻ, as not only does it include harbouring ill-feelings towards others, but also that it shows a lack of gratitude on one's part towards Him.

The alternative to jealousy, is that one person prays to Allāh ﷻ that He allows that person to benefit from and benefit others by what he has. This will have the following added advantage:

The Messenger ﷺ has said,
“There is no du`ā' made by a Muslim for his brother in his absence to which the angels do not say, “And the same for you! And the same for you!” Ibn Ḥibbān, Abū Dāwūd, Faṭḥ al-Bāri, and al-Bukhārī in Ādāb al-Mufrīd

In this way not only will a person gain reward for wishing others well, but will also receive the du`ā' of the angels.

Spite

This is a very draconian and backward attitude, that just because we do not like someone for personal reasons we are willing to sacrifice from the greater goals of whatever group of community we may be serving in.

Yes it is true that it may be necessary at times to not like a person because of his actions, (The Messenger ﷺ has said, "Whoever loves for Allāh, and hates for Allāh, and gives for Allāh, and withholds for Allāh, such a person has perfected his Dīn." at-Ṭabarāni) it should not happen that one is be a source of detriment to others because of one's inability to work together. (This does not mean that one is hypocritical and only shows niceties for personal benefit)

The Prophet ﷺ has mentioned,
"Love your friend with moderation. Perchance they become your enemy one day. And hate your enemy with moderation. Perchance they become your friend one day."
at-Ṭirmidhi, at-Ṭabarāni, al-Bayhaqi
al-Bukhārī narrates this in Ādāb al-Mufrīd, but does so from `Ali ؑ not the Prophet ﷺ

Arguments

Many times what starts off as small joking arguments or heated discussions regress into more serious rifts. If ever involved in such confrontations (which would be better altogether avoided) one must be conscious of what is happening before the "point of no return". Once one can sense that an issue is becoming too serious one immediately must put one's foot down and cause both sides to brake in an amicable manner. Putting forward the point that friendship should not be sacrificed by a mis-aimed joke or views which too parties can agree to disagree on.

Behaviour Through Anger

In anger a person is prone to making the worst decisions of any situation; be it a situation of marriage, responsibility, work, or anything else in which the situation can be resolved through deliberation.

This was what spurred the Prophet ﷺ to give the advice, “do not become angry” three times to the same individual who came and asked him for advice, (al-Bukhārī and at-Tirmidhi) and also to instruct people to sit if anger is affecting them while they are standing, and to lie down if sitting.

Ibn Ḥibbān, Abū Dawūd

The Qur’ān gives praise to those who can drink (control) their anger and at in that heat still forgive,

***“Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity,
or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men;
for Allah loves those who do good.”***

Qur’ān, Āl `Imrān 3:134

Backbiting

***“And do not backbite one another. Would any of you love to
eat the flesh of your dead brother? You would abhor it!
Therefore fear Allāh. Indeed Allāh is Oft-returning, Merciful.”***

Qur’ān, al Ḥujurāt 49:12

The Prophet ﷺ asked (the companions),

“Do you know what is backbiting?” They replied; “Allāh ﷻ and His Prophet ﷺ know best.” He said; “You saying something about your brother that he dislikes.”

Someone asked; “What about if what I say is the truth about my brother?” The Prophet ﷺ replied; “If what you say is the truth about

him then you have backbit him. If it is not the truth about him then you have slandered him.”

Muslim

The Qur’ān further says,

***“O believers abstain from suspicion,
for indeed much suspicion is a sin. And spy not.”***

Qur’ān, al Ḥujurāt 49:12

The Prophet ﷺ has said,

“Beware of suspicion, for indeed suspicion is the greatest lie. Do not spy or eavesdrop. Do not fall into rivalry and do not envy, hate or turn away from one another. Be the servants of Allah, as brothers.”

al-Mu’aṭṭā of Imām Mālik

The Prophet ﷺ has further said,

“O assembly of those who have believed with their tongues but Imān has not yet entered their hearts! Do not backbite any Muslim and do not search for their faults. For he who searches for the faults of others, Allāh will reveal his faults, and whoever's faults Allāh reveals, Allāh will disgrace him in his own home.”

Abū Dāwūd

The Prophet ﷺ has even described the punishment of such people,

“When I was taken up (in Mi`rāj) I passed by a group of people who had nails of copper and who were clawing at their faces and chests. I asked; ‘O Jibril! Who are these people?’ He replied, ‘These are the people who consume the flesh of others and attack their honour.’

Abū Dāwūd

Backbiting is a major sin that has been compared to sins as severe as fornication (aṭ-Ṭabarānī, al-Bayhaqī). Unfortunately, it is now almost part of our character and something which we have no moral objection to. We can gage this by evaluating some of our lengthy conversations with our friends when “chilling out”, where we perhaps will be shocked to

learn how precious few minutes have been spent which have not become sins. But we try to explain it away, justify it, or even trivialise it by saying that “the truth hurts”, or “these are the facts, plain and simple”, or even “I’m ready to say it to his face, so it ain’t backbiting”.

Besides the fact that backbiting and all its forms are major sins, it is also one of the most common causes of rift and division. It is also important to note that one cannot think that “not talking only listening” or staying regretfully silent will stop someone from being active in the sin, The Prophet ﷺ has said regarding this,

Not Caring

Allah ﷻ says of the hardened heart,

“When the suffering reached them from Us, why then did they not learn humility? On the contrary their hearts became hardened, and Satan made their (sinful) acts seem alluring to them. But when they forgot the warning they had received, We opened to them the gates of all (good) things, until, in the midst of their enjoyment of Our gifts, on a sudden, We called them to account, when lo! they were plunged in despair!”

Qur’ān, al-An`ām 6:43-44

Whether this attitude of not caring is towards an individual or as one’s outlook the Prophet ﷺ has said,

“None of You can be a true believer, until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”

al-Bukhārī, Muslim

Whatever reason one may have for their outlook, not having a concern for one’s Muslim Brotherhood is akin to breaking away from them. This is not becoming of a Muslim.

Stubbornness, Pride and Arrogance

Allāh ﷻ says in the Qur'ān,

“As to those who reject Faith, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe. Allāh has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a veil; and for them is a great penalty.”

Qur'ān, al-Baqarah 2:6-7

The Messenger ﷺ further mentions,

“He who has the weight of a dust speck of pride in his heart will not enter heaven.”

One companion asked, “If a person likes to wear beautiful clothes and shoes (will that be considered as pride)?”

The Prophet ﷺ said, “Allāh is beautiful and loves beauty. Pride is when a person is arrogant towards the truth (or trivialises it), and holds people in contempt.”

Muslim and at-Tirmidhī

The only way to self-rectification and also towards unity through what one is responsible for in regards to oneself, is the acceptance of one's own mistakes, the overlooking of the shortcomings of others, and the active steps towards fulfilling Allāh's commands.

One must realise that in order to achieve unity one must truly want it. Speaking about it is not enough. A much more pro-active role is needed from everyone, on a personal level and as importantly on a communal level. We pray to Allāh that He unites us all in His love through His love.

The following excerpt has been included as a thought provoker, and a point of reflection.

Words for thought

We conclude with a short episode from Muhammad Asad's "The road to Mecca". Leopold Weiss (Muhammad Asad), before accepting Islām, wrote of his observations of a group of people performing Ṣalāh.

They would bow together in the direction of Mecca, rise again, and then kneel down and touch the ground with their foreheads; they seemed to follow the inaudible words of their leader, who between the prostrations stood barefoot on his prayer carpet, eyes closed, arms folded over his chest, soundlessly moving his lips and obviously lost in deep absorption; you could see that he was praying with his whole soul.

It somehow disturbed me to see so real a prayer combined with almost mechanical body movements, and one day I asked the Hajji:

"Do you really believe that God expects you to show Him your respect by repeated bowing and kneeling and prostration? Might it not be better only to look into oneself and to pray to Him in the stillness of one's heart? Why all these movements of your body?"

As soon as I had uttered these words I felt remorse, for I had not intended to injure the old man's religious feelings. But the Hajji did not appear in the least offended. He smiled with his toothless mouth and replied:

"How else should we worship God? Did He not create both, soul and body, together? And this being so, should man not pray with his body as well as his soul? Listen, I will tell you why we Muslims pray as we pray. **We turn towards the Kaaba, God's holy temple in Mecca, knowing that the faces of all Muslims, wherever they may be, are turned to it in prayer, and that we are like one body, with Him at the centre of our thoughts.**"

Muhammad Asad, *The road to Mecca*, p87-88