

profound trust and love for one's fellow Muslims. This in turn obviates the possibility of injurious animosity or enmity that results in bloodshed: "No one of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." When there is a breakdown in understanding, or ambitions and intrigues go unchecked, all of the tragedies related to such ills unfold. The disbelievers show outward unity for obvious material advantages, while in reality they have deep inward distrust of one another and even greater animosity and disdain. Allah warns us not to be like the hypocrites who do deeds only to be seen by men and who say that the true Muslims are in fact deluded by their Deen. Herein lies the root of weakness and dissonance, the split of one's outer and inner beings.

How then can disunity persist in the light of Revelation coupled with comprehension. It cannot. If neither understanding (*fiqh*), which is reality articulated by the Messenger, nor intellect, which is the interface and interpreter of reality, are present, the absence of these two elements engenders fear of creation and antagonistic hearts. "*The analogy of the present life is as the rain which We send down from the skies: By its mingling with the produce of the earth arises what you and the animals consume.*" (10:24) This is a wonderful sign whereby spontaneous creation – a belief universal at that time – is negated & Allah informs us that water must mix with the already existing foliage in its seed form in order for the flora and fauna to flourish. In the same way, when Revelation comes down from the sky as pure, nourishing unseen rain, it too must mix with the already existing seeds of understanding present in the fertile soil of the intellect for spiritual nourishment and sustenance to be produced.

There is a dynamic and creative tension that arises when the intellect becomes the recipient of divine wisdom and revelation. It is this tension (the mingling of Revelation and human understanding) which brings about profound and exhilarating transformation the likes of which are so powerful that in the 7th century a spiritual force was released upon the world whose effects are still being felt today. As a Persian poet said: "**Muhammad in living form; he looked at people and a hundred doors swung open. And then his form went away and this praising sound flooded the world.**" Those who do

not use the God-given tools of reflection and perception are in the fire of separation and not the garden of unity, both in this world and the next.

Because of our widespread hypocrisy, we are, more often than not, unable to examine our own lack of perception. Does this imply that the Muslims of today are hypocrites who no longer use their intellects and this is what has caused the deep disunity everywhere. Let us look into the Quran and let the Quran be the judge. Let us be reminded that hypocrisy is not an absolute state with definite borders. Just as there are varying degrees of split-personalities from borderline schizophrenia to complete disassociation, there is also a continuum of hypocrisy to which even the great Omar feared personal susceptibility. Indeed, Hasan al-Basri said: "**Only the hypocrite feels safe from hypocrisy and only the believer fears it.**" Let us not be plumed with conceit.

No thoughtful person ever came to the end of their life, and had time & a little space of calm from which to look back upon it, who did not know and acknowledge that it was what they had done unselfishly and for others, and nothing else, that satisfied them in retrospect, and made them feel that they had played the correct role. People grow by having responsibility laid upon them, the burden of other people's business. Their powers are put out altruistically, and they get bountiful returns in kind. They are like people, multiplied. Each counts manifold. People who live with an eye only upon what is their own are dwarfed beside them – seem fractions while they are integers. The trustworthiness of people trusted seems often to grow with the trust. 2:245 **Who is it that will offer up unto God a goodly loan, which He will amply repay, with manifold increase?**

The first and foremost matter at hand is personal change. **None of us can expect to bring guidance to others if we have not applied in our own selves that very guidance and become an example of it.** If someone asks for guidance, light that unlit candle he holds; you cannot light his candle if your own is **not** lit. We must look upon our lost brothers & sisters as less than Pharaohs in their inequities & shortcomings and therefore speak to them in "a soft and gentle way," that perhaps they might return to Allah's path. Let us be lights in a dark & dismal world. Paramedics too busy in the midst of a global emergency to squabble over who is right or wrong, concerning matters of relative insignificance given the time & situation, lest those we wish to save die from our own neglect.

Hold Fast

...to the Rope of God

Why

do the Muslims
who have
clear delineations
of truth and falsehood
and such
clear injunctions
to remain "whole"
and not to
fragment and splinter,
display such
absolute fragmentation
and division
in the present day?

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Unity is a concept so descriptive of the Islamic teaching that if one word could sum up the essence of Islam it would most certainly be unity (*tauhid*) in Arabic. The very first injunction in the Quran is that we should only worship One Lord. (2:21) The first prohibition in the Quran is that we do not associate anything with the unity and essential Oneness of God (2:22). The key to the Garden is the testimony of unity, *La ilaha illa Allah*. The prayer of the Muslims is performed in unified ranks. The obligatory act of charity unifies the hearts of the poor with the wealthy and frees them from the bitter separation of resentment. The act of fasting spiritually and morally unites the Muslims during a cosmic phenomenon that takes place in the lunar month of Ramadan each year.

Hajj, the final pillar of Islam, is the greatest testimony to the unity of the Muslims, indeed of all humankind. The Hajj unifies spiritually the entire Muslim Ummah. Moreover, all of the earth's inhabitants are physically united on the plain of Arafat. Geographically, Arafat is a plain, an area of earth with no distinguishing elevation or depression; in other words an equalizer. The stripping away of garments of difference is an obligation that if not adhered to invalidates the Hajj itself. On that great day, before One God, one humanity, stripped of all social, ethnic and material differences, stands, alone yet together, humbled before their Lord, in the greatest collective act known to humankind.

The Inner/Outer Ummah

It is clear that the first pillar of Islam is a statement of unity of God and the final pillar is a statement of the fundamental unity of humankind; between the two are three compelling social and spiritual acts: prayer, charity and fasting. Together they serve to manifest the truth to all humankind of the first and last pillars. The way of the Prophet (peace) is the way of a man whose outward and inward are unified; he is a Muslim, one who is submitted

inwardly and outwardly and therefore whole--the word *salima*, from which we get Muslim, Islam, peace and submission, denotes in its most primal meaning the idea of wholeness or soundness. Prophet Muhammad's sunnah unifies the behaviour of the Muslims in their spiritual (inward) and moral (outward) character. In practicing this behaviour one is reconnected with his or her essential nature (*fitra*) and thus allowed to exist authentically and avoid the utter chaos of undifferentiated or inauthentic being i.e. The self is unified with its heart as Allah's Khalifa.

Why then does unity break down with unbelievable predictability?

"O you who believe, hold firmly, all of you together, to the rope of Allah and do not separate and become divided, and remember the blessing of Allah upon you that you were enemies and it is He who unified the hearts and by His blessing you became brothers." (3:103)

Prophet Muhammad (p) said: "What I fear for my Ummah is misguided leaders and should the sword be raised in the midst of my Ummah it will not be lowered until the Day of Rising. The Last Hour won't come until persons from my Ummah join forces with the idolaters, even such that some among them will worship idols."

Allah says: *"O you who believe, surely this Ummah of yours is one Ummah and I am your Lord so be conscious of me."* (23:52). The unity of the Ummah is a reality whether we act in accordance with it or not. Allah has made us one Ummah, and anyone who testifies to Allah's unity and the truthfulness and the finality of His last messenger is a member of that body and can not be excised from it unless he himself chooses to sever this sacred bond through open apostasy. Therefore, if we fight among ourselves, we fight as a dysfunctional family fights and remain bonded by the blood of Iman in spite of the inability to fulfill the primary function of the family: to provide a protected environment in which inner and outer growth can occur.

If we look at the Ummah now as a psychologist would at a dysfunctional family or a doctor would at a diseased person, the first thing to determine is the cause of dysfunction. Moreover, cause can only be understood by reflecting upon what the Knower of hearts of humankind

has revealed. When Allah says: "Hold fast to the rope of Allah" it is the Quran which is implied. In order to comprehend our disunity in a way that moves beyond understanding and initiates the healing process, we must listen to what the Quran diagnoses as the root cause of disunity among people. *"In Truth you are stronger than them because of the terror in their hearts from Allah, and that is because they are a people who have no understanding. They will not fight you together except from behind fortified townships or from behind walls. Their ferocity among themselves is fierce; you consider them united but their hearts are in fact divided; and that is because they are a people who do not use their intellects."* (59:14)

The Quran elucidates the causal relationship between lack of understanding, fear of creation and disunity, contrasting it with understanding, fear of Allah and unity. When Allah tells us that our Ummah is One Ummah, He seals the sign with a reminder to therefore be conscious of Him. Allah is the binder of hearts through the gift of Islam. But in order to preserve that unity, we must be fearfully aware of Allah. Become more concerned with how others perceive us and we lose correct understanding (*Fiqh*). Abu Hanifah used to describe the creed or *Aqeedah* of the Muslims as *Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar* – the greatest understanding. The science of sacred law is also called *fiqh*. If the two understandings are present, the first existentially as creed and the second experientially as practice, Islam flourishes and is **not** reduced to a utopian concept relegated to the glorious legacy of past literary, scientific and architectural achievements. When the creed exists as a thought structure that does **not** impinge on behaviour, cognitive dissonance, (more commonly known as hypocrisy), occurs and culminates in people alienated and separated from their own selves, precluding any possibility of unity with their brothers and sisters.

If people truly take it upon themselves to practice the teachings of Islam this engenders a

Surely this Ummah of yours is

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Ummah...

(Quran Al-Muminun, 52)