

The biggest sign of Islam is brotherhood

Mirza Yawar Baig

Rasoolullah ﷺ once asked the Sahaba to name the biggest sign of Islam. Someone said Salah. Someone said Zakat. Someone said Hajj. Rasoolullah ﷺ negated them all. They then asked him, 'Please tell us Ya Rasoolullah ﷺ, what is the biggest sign of Islam? Of being Muslim?' He replied, 'Muhabbah'. Mutual brotherly love for one another.

I ask you and I ask myself, where should we place ourselves in terms of this criterion of being Muslim; of displaying the sign of Islam in our lives, words, action and society.

As we come to the greatest month of the year, Ramadan Al-Kareem I want to remind myself and you to correct our position with respect to Allah ﷻ, his Messenger ﷺ and our own brothers and sisters and all other people who inhabit and share this earth with us.

Allah ﷻ said about this relationship of brotherhood:

إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ

Anbiya 21: 92. Truly! This, your Ummah [Brotherhood] is one Ummah, and I am your Rabb, therefore worship Me (Alone).

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

Mu'minoon 23: 52. And verily! This your Ummah is one Ummah, and I am your Rabb, so have my Taqwa.

The first Ayah refers to the basis of our belief – At-Tawheed – the belief in the Oneness of Allah ﷻ and worshipping only Him, alone, without ascribing partners in any of His attributes. Allah ﷻ is telling us in this Ayah that this belief is the common factor that makes us one Ummah. And He honored us by reminding us that what makes us one Ummah is our relationship with Him as our Rabb. He then orders us to worship Him alone – which is our Aqeeda. What makes us one therefore is not our color, race, tribe, family, name or any other

criterion but the fact that we worship Allahﷻ.

In the second Ayah of Sura Al-Muminoon Allahﷻ uses exactly the same words to define us, the Ummah of Rasoolullahﷺ as ONE PEOPLE and says, 'therefore have my Taqwa. Taqwa is the sign that we love Allahﷻ and that is what Allahﷻ used to define us when He said:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ

Al Baqarah 2:165 But those who believe, love Allâh the most (above all else).

Allahﷻ once again mentioned us as one Ummah and told us to keep His Taqwa as the sign that we are Muslims.

Today we live in a world where we are not simply divided in thought and belief despite believing in Allahﷻ and Rasoolullahﷺ but we kill each other on the basis of those differences and call each other Kafir and declare Muslims to be out of Islam. Let us see if there is any basis for this and if any Muslim has the authority to call another Muslim, Kafir and declare him to be an apostate and worthy of being killed.

This is what Christians did in Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries and through the Crusades where they primarily fought one another over religious doctrine. It was for the rooting out of heresy (Kufr) that the Inquisition was launched and was aimed primarily against all those who stood against Catholicism with the Pope of Rome as its head. Unbelievable tortures, rending living people asunder, dismemberment and burning alive of all those who resisted this doctrine or who were even suspected became commonplace. Europe was truly a Dark Continent in the Dark Ages. But the news is not this. The news is that Europe woke up to the crippling danger of infighting and ended this by leaving a religion that preached division. There is no concept of Universal Brotherhood in Christianity, Hinduism or any other religion except Islam. Universal Brotherhood of humanity and Universal Brotherhood of Faith. Yet Europeans realized the need for it and when the religion didn't offer it, they left the religion.

In the words of Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (R), 'Europe developed after leaving their religion and Muslims regressed after leaving theirs.' Christianity and the Church became subservient to protect their possessions and whatever was left of their power and authority because common people simply ignored the priests and the church. Churches became empty and the once great cathedrals of Europe became tourist attractions. The tragedy is that we Muslims stand at a crossroads today despite having a religion that preaches brotherhood. A crossroads that will decide if Europe's history will also become ours with the people ignoring and rejecting Ulama and the way of a religion that seems to be meaningless.

If you feel offended by my statement go and talk to the mother who lost her son, the wife who lost her husband, the child who lost her father because someone randomly slaughtered them while they were standing in Salah in the masjid. Ask them what they think of the Islam that got their men killed for no fault other than that they were praying to Allah ﷻ. Alhamdulillah we don't hear of such incidents in our country but they are happening in Pakistan and in the Middle East almost on a weekly basis. Shias gun down Sunnis, Sunnis gun down Shias while both claim to believe in Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ. Salafis call others Kafir. Barelwis call others Kafir. Shias call Sunnis Kafir. Everyone calls Salafis Kafir. Every sect is trying to send everyone else out of Islam. Every sect believes that Jannah is their personal piece of real estate and only they will go there with their friends. But the last time I checked Allah ﷻ had not transferred ownership of Jannah to the Salafis or Barelwis or Shia or anyone else. So what is the basis of our arrogance of arrogating to ourselves this right to decide who will go to Jannah and who won't. Who is a Muslim and who isn't?

Allah ﷻ mentioned the issue of differing on matters and warned us. He said:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا كَذَلِكَ

يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

A'al Imraan 3: 103. *And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah (i.e. this Qur'an), and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allah's Favor on you, for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren (in Islam), and you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His Ayat (signs) clear to you, that you may be guided.*

Allah ﷻ mentioned the issue of differing with each other and warned us against converting those differences into opposition of one another and forming into clans, groups, cults and sects. Allah ﷻ reminded the Sahaba of the time when they used to oppose one another and harbored enmity against each other over trivial things. Enmity that divided them as people and made their own life miserable. What is life if one has to look over one's shoulder fearing an enemy all the time? Allah ﷻ told them that they were one the brink of a pit of Fire and that it was Islam which came with its message of brotherhood which saved them. Islam joined them together and made erstwhile enemies into beloved brothers.

Allah ﷻ didn't tell them not to differ in opinion but not to differ in such a way that hearts are broken, feelings are hurt and people feel insulted. Today we convert difference of opinion into opposition and attack the person instead of dealing with the thought or idea that we may differ on. A difference of opinion merely means that more than one mind is engaged in thinking about the matter. That several intelligent people are interested in finding a solution. But when intelligence leaves the arena and egos take over, when solving the problem is not the objective any more but dominating the discussion takes precedence, then intelligent difference of opinion turns into ignorant egoistic posturing and opposition. Intelligent difference of opinion is welcome, desirable and results in bringing people together. Opposition draws them apart, raises walls, breaks hearts and kindles hatred instead of love. That is what Allah ﷻ warned us against.

There was difference of opinion even among the Sahaba on very fundamental and important matters, where people understood things differently. But they never abused one another or called each other Kafir or refused to pray behind one another. Let me mention two incidents:

1. The Sahaba disagreeing about when to pray Asr when they were told to pray Asr in the land of the Banu Qurayza
2. Salman al-Farsiؓ disagreeing with Omar ibn al-Khattab about obeying the Amir because he had more cloth than others from the cloth that was given to the people of Badr.
3. The behavior of the Sahaba after the battle of the camel. Neither Ayesha (R) nor Ali bin Abi Talibؓ ever condemned each other. Those who curse Sayyida Ayesha (R) should ask themselves on what basis they do it, when Aliؓ never did it.

In these incidents you see a difference of opinion on the most important matters of Ibaadah and obedience to the Amir. Yet the Sahaba didn't quarrel. They considered each other's positions and either came to an agreement on one or agreed to differ yet remain friends and brothers to one another. Even when their disagreement on an issue resulted in conflict, they didn't castigate or condemn each other but maintained decorum, dignity and respect for one another and helped each other even in the conflict. This was the secret of their success and strength – brotherhood. Allahﷻ mentioned this and said:

وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ وَاصْبِرُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

Anfal 8: 46. And obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not dispute (with one another) lest you lose courage and your strength depart, and be patient. Surely, Allah is with those who are As-Sabirin (do their best and rely on Allah ﷻ)

Allahﷻ told us to make up and resolve our differences. Rasoolullahﷺ told us that to resolve differences is better than Nafl Ibaadah. Allahﷻ said:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَصْلِحُوا ذَاتَ بَيْنِكُمْ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

Anfaal 8:1 So fear Allah and reconcile all matters of difference among you, and obey Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad), if you are believers.

Allah ﷻ prohibited secret meetings and talking to each other excluding others who may be present and said:

لَا خَيْرَ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِّنْ نَّجْوَاهُمْ إِلَّا مَنْ أَمَرَ بِصَدَقَةٍ أَوْ مَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ إِصْلَاحٍ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

Nisa 4:114 There is no good in most of their secret talks save (in) him who orders Sadaqah (charity in Allah's Cause), or Ma'roof (all good), or conciliation between mankind; and he who does this, seeking the good Pleasure of Allah, We shall give him a great reward

Rasoolullah ﷺ told us that reconciling between people is better than observing voluntary fasts, offering voluntary prayers and giving voluntary charity.

It was narrated that Abu'l-Dardaؓ said: Rasoolullah ﷺ said: "Shall I not tell you something that is better than the status of (voluntary) fasting, prayer and charity?" They said: "Yes." He said: "Reconciling in a case of discord, for the evil of discord is the shaver." Al-Tirmidhi said: It was narrated that Rasoolullah ﷺ said: "It is the shaver, and I do not say that it shaves hair, but that it shaves (i.e., destroys) religious commitment." (Abu Dawood, 4273; al-Tirmidhi, 2433).

It was narrated from Umm Kalthoom bint 'Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'et (R) that she heard Rasoolullah ﷺ say: "He is not a liar who seeks to reconcile between people and says good things." (Bukhaari, 2490)

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrahؓ said: Rasoolullah ﷺ said: "Do not hate one another, do not envy one another, do not turn away from one another. Be, O slaves of Allah, brothers. It is not permissible for a Muslim to forsake his brother for more than

three days." (Bukhaari, 6065; Muslim, 2559)

It was narrated that Abu Ayyoob al-Ansaari رضي الله عنه said: Rasoolullah ﷺ said: "It is not permissible for a Muslim to forsake his brother for more than three days, each of them turning away when they meet. The better of them is the one who gives the greeting of salaam first." (Bukhaari, 2757; Muslim, 2560)

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah رضي الله عنه said: Rasoolullah ﷺ said: "The gates of Jannah are opened on Monday and Thursday, and everyone who does not associate anything with Allah is forgiven, except a man who has had an argument with his brother. It is said: 'Wait for these two until they reconcile, wait for these two until they reconcile, wait for these two until they reconcile.'" (Muslim, 2565)

Al-Nawawi said: "Wait for these two" means wait until they have reconciled and love has been restored between them.

It was narrated from Abu Kharaash al-Sulami رضي الله عنه that he heard Rasoolullah ﷺ say: "Whoever forsakes his brother for a year, it is as if he has shed his blood." (Abu Dawood, 4915. Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Targheeb, 2762)

Allah ﷻ is witness, this is the cancer that is eating us from within – a cancer that we know the cure for but don't apply. What is that cure? Forgiveness. Returning evil with good. Responding, not reacting. Acting intelligently, not reflexively. Allah ﷻ said:

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ
وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ

وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا ذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ

Fussilat 41: 34. The good deed and the evil deed cannot be equal. Repel (the evil) with one which is better (i.e. Allah ordered the faithful believers to be patient at the time of anger, and to excuse those who treat them badly), then verily! he, between whom and

you there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a close friend. 35. But none is granted it (the above quality) except those who are patient, and none is granted it except the owner of the great portion (of the happiness in the Hereafter and in this world of a high moral character).

It is essential therefore to develop four qualities in ourselves:

1. **Humility:** Remember that you are not receiving Wahi. Nobody has an absolute hold on the truth. So apply the principle of the Sharia, the principle of all the Imams of this Ummah – I am right with the possibility of being mistaken and my brother is mistaken with the possibility of being right. So we listen with an open mind to whatever argument our brother may offer while remaining firm on our own position. If, however the other person gives us evidence to change our position then we must be prepared to do so.
2. **Listening:** Be an active listener. First seek to understand; before you seek to answer. Without understanding your answers can't be relevant anyway but all too often we are so caught up with answering, scoring points, being one up on the other that we lose sight of what the substance of the argument is. Active listening consists of first telling the speaker what you understood him to be saying. Then and only when the speaker is satisfied that you understood him correctly, should you put forward your argument. This is a very powerful conversation technique that I have used in very hostile negotiations with great success. Read my book, 'It's my Life' for more details.
3. **Objectivity:** Separate the argument from the person. Remember that you are trying to solve a problem or understand a matter or come to a common understanding. You are not in a prize fight trying to put the other person down. So it is not you versus him but you and him versus the issue. So always maintain decorum, manners, Adab and consideration for the other. Always remind yourself and the others of the objective of the dialogue – to arrive at a solution, to find an answer; not to win over another person. At no time must you allow your emotions to get into the act and cause offence.

Anger has no place in a dialogue. So if you find yourself getting angry, get up and leave.

4. **Forgiveness:** Finally, and most importantly it is essential in building brotherhood, to forgive one another. We need forgiveness from Allahﷻ and the best way to ensure we get it is to forgive each other in this life. Carrying grudges, especially over imaginary injuries to our inflated egos, which is the main cause for our hatred of each other, is something that is injurious only to our own health. It ensures that we give our good deeds to the person we hate because we end up slandering and backbiting him and we carry that hatred in our hearts – a fire that can't be quenched except by ourselves. It is like carrying a live coal in your hand. It burns only you. The person you hate doesn't even know that you hate him and certainly doesn't care. So forgive each other. Don't carry grudges. Say to Allahﷻ, "Ya Rabb, I forgive him, you please forgive me." There can be no brotherhood without forgiveness.

I ask Allahﷻ to heal our hearts and fill them with His Love and Glory and to free us from the shackles of hatred, discrimination, distance and arrogance. May Allahﷻ bless you and the Ummah of Rasoolullahﷺ.