

FROM THE MINBAR

DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF MUSLIM UNITY: THE UNITY OF PURPOSE

Khutbah delivered by Imam Dr. Zijad Delic at SNMC on May 18th, 2012 corresponding to Jumadath Thani 27th, 1433 H.

BACKGROUND

Indeed all praise is for God, Lord of the worlds. Peace and blessings of God be upon Muhammad (S), his family, Khulafai Rashidin, all his Companions, and all those who follow in their footsteps until the Last Day. All praise is for God! We praise Him. We seek His help and ask for His forgiveness. We seek God's refuge from evils of ourselves and from our evil actions. I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except God, alone, having no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad (S) is His Messenger.

My dear brothers and sisters in Islam ~ As Salamu 'Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuhu.

INTRODUCTION

The Muslim Ummah, worldwide, today numbers about 1.7 billion followers. Muslims are the majority in many countries from Morocco to Indonesia and from Turkey to Sudan. Their lands cover a strategic area of the world's oil and mineral resources, as well as the major trade routes. Muslim minorities are significant in number in many countries including Canada. The statistic goes on and on.

As we can see, Muslims do not have shortage in number and resources. Only in Canada we number more than 1.1 million. We are well educated and well employed in every sector of Canadian enterprise – public or private. We are the second largest religious group in Canada after Christianity. Our shortage is not in numbers and resources but somewhere else. Our shortage is in ideological unity or I would say "the unity of purpose."

Yes, we are great in number, well off financially but yet when considering our influence on world affairs today; everyone would agree with me that it is almost insignificant. Never mind the world affairs; our influence in the Canadian affairs – our own home – is negligible, almost at the lowest level.

THE CONCEPT OF UNITY IN ISLAM

The concept of unity itself is discussed in the Holy Qur'an on three levels: The unity of Humanity, the unity of the People of the Book and the unity of Muslims.

Foremost is the unity of humanity. The aim of this unity is to direct all the racial, tribal, and religious differences into a constructive direction. Thus the emphasis on "knowing one another" (*li ta'arafu*) stressing that people find mutual understanding rather than conflict so that no one denies another's rights for life and prosperity.

God Almighty explains: *"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with God is the one who has piety."* (49:13)

Within the unity of humanity, the unity of the People of the Book (or the monotheistic religions) is referred to in the Qur'an: *"Say (O Muhammad): O People of the Book! Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us will take others as lords besides God. Then if they turn away, say: Bear witness that we are Muslims."* (3:64)

The essential monotheistic unity of the People of the Book exists, but it should not, however, be taken to mean that there are no differences between their different rules and laws. While the original way (*din*) is one throughout all monotheistic religions, the practical implementation - i.e. the law - is different: *"To each among you We have*



prescribed a law, and a clear way. If God willed, He would have made you one nation but that He may test you in what He has given you." (5:48)

Of course, the third unity that the Qur'an speaks of is the unity of the Muslim community: *"And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of God, and be not divided among yourselves."* (3:103)

In all three aspects, the essential meaning of unity is preservation of the welfare of the people's faith and their worldly life.

DEFINITION OF UMMAH

What does this term Ummah mean? In general terms the meaning of Ummah would be a group of people following the same path, way of life or worldview. In more specific contexts, the word Ummah, in the Qur'an, is used to describe the community of the Last Messenger, Muhammad (S), i.e. those who believed in his message in the past; those who believe in it now; and those who will believe in it in the future. It is not country, race, ethnic, language or party affiliation. Almighty God says in the Qur'an: *"You are the best community ever raised up for humanity' facilitating what is right and preventing what is wrong, and believing in God."* (Ali 'Imran 110)

The Muslim community bears the elements/ingredients needed for a strong cohesive community, the most prominent of which is the unity in belief, which generates the unity in structure, system and methodology.

The individuals in such a community adhere to the same belief, submit to the same One God, follow the same Book – the Qur'an, face the same Qiblah, and have the same goal, even if they speak different languages, come from different cultural backgrounds, or are from the different social levels. The bond that unites this community is its common Muslim faith, which cannot be compared to any other bond – racial, tribal or otherwise.

Unity is not a slogan; it is a mission! It is not a theory but an action! Wherever we are we should try to see how we can achieve unity among ourselves. Each one of us should ask ourselves: Do I want to be united with my fellow Muslims? What am I doing to work with others to promote my purpose and achieve my goal? If I have a problem, what am I doing to solve the problem?

Unity does not come down as rain from the sky. Unity is not a miracle that will happen among those who do not believe in unity. Unity will only come if we strive for it and work hard to achieve it. It is a reward of faith, sincere efforts, lot of patience, good will, tolerance, and sincere commitment to the objectives and aims. Unity requires continuous efforts and commitment.

IMAN & ISLAM: THE FOUNDATIONS

As it could be seen, Iman and Islam are essential foundations of Muslim unity. The Muslims' past suggests that when we follow the ethical barometers of our faith we

tend to unite. Thus, the impact of unity becomes great in all aspects of life; however, when we divide; we are looked down upon and lose very much needed energy and resources as well as our image.

Almighty Allah says in the Qur'an: *"O you who believe! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly; and follow not the footsteps of the evil one...."* (2:208)

Therefore, the unity of the Muslim community is only possible if Muslims, individually and collectively, return back to the spirit of Islam with sincerity and decisive effort. Indeed, the foundation of Muslim unity is in Islam itself. There is no need to look for any justification outside the realm of Islam, in order to unite Canadian Muslims (Muslim Ummah in Canada).

UNITY OR UNIFORMITY?

Unity is not a slogan; it is a mission! It is not a theory but an action! Wherever we are we should try to see how we can achieve unity among ourselves. Each one of us should ask ourselves: Do I want to be united with my fellow Muslims? What am I doing to work with others to promote my purpose and achieve my goal? If I have a problem, what am I doing to solve the problem? Unity does not come down as rain from the sky. Unity is not a miracle that will happen among those who do not believe in unity. Unity will only come if we strive for it and work hard to achieve it. It is a reward of faith, sincere efforts, lot of patience, good will, tolerance, and sincere commitment to the objectives and aims. Unity requires continuous efforts and commitment.

Still, we often hear complain: "Muslims are not united!" What is meant by this term 'unity'? Do we mean that there should not be differences of opinion? We do not have to share each and every opinion unanimously. It does not mean that we should not have any differences in opinions – unity does not mean uniformity. We do not have to look the same, speak the same, dress the same, etc. This is not only unnatural, it's humanly impossible. Having different opinion means diversity, not disunity. Unity does not mean negation of diversity. Diversity is good; disunity is bad. Diversity is a mercy; disunity is a curse.

But what is the main reason for this hopelessness? Is it diversity of opinions or diversity of purpose – Ideological diversity? When Muslims had ideological unity then they had unity of purpose. That was a reason why they have contributed so much to the world when they adhered to the principles of faith.

CAUSES OF DISUNITY

As it could be seen, the state of Ummah is not at the desired level! Signs of this flow are quite obvious.

This Issue 'From The Minbar' presents:

⇒ **THE UNITY OF PURPOSE**

⇒ In next issue: **Community of Success**

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However, if we want to find the cure for the hopelessness then we have to look deeper and search for the causes of Muslims disunity. Almighty God warned us not to get into such a state: *"Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputes after receiving the clear signs..." (Ali 'Imran 105)*

Let me mention a few of the causes so that we will be able to understand our current state and how to deal with some of the consequences that we face especially in the west. One of the major causes of disunity is, of course, ignorance about our basic obligation to strive for unity and to maintain unity. Other major causes of disunity are: advocating and adhering to nationalism or tribalism, juristic differences, propagating and practicing racism, loving Duniya (this world) too much, greed and selfishness, egoism, etc. The Messenger of God, Muhammad (S) said: *"A believer with respect to another believer is like a building, one part strengthen and reinforces the other."* (Bukhari, Muslim)

DIVERSITY IN OPINIONS

One of the greatest achievements of the Messenger of God (S) was to unite hundreds of fragmented Arab tribes throughout the Arabian Peninsula into a single, strong unit – a community. When he (S) united them, he did not eliminate differences of opinion between them, but he enabled them to have dialogue with each other and come to a sense of mutual understanding and purpose.

In short, differences of opinion, when properly channelled, are an asset to the intellectual growth of the Muslim community and are a sign of the vitality of the intellectual heritage of Islam. The competition arising between different scholars from all schools of thought should encourage them to strive with their maximum effort to reach the best decisions and, ultimately, the truth. Diversity should not lead to division and fragmentation but in fact is part of unity just as it was in the society created by the Messenger of God (S) 1,400 years ago. All scholars and intellectuals of Islam should continue discussions of the juristic and philosophical issues under the umbrella of *La Ilaha illallah Muhammadum Rasulullah* and with the spirit of brotherhood and faith, as they did in the golden era of Islam.

CONSEQUENCES OF DISUNITY

Disunity among Muslims is our greatest challenge in modern times. We are at present a very fragmented and divided people. We have disunity at every level: at the local level, national level, and international level. We talk about unity and discuss the problem of disunity in our meetings and conferences, but we fail to be united. We fail to work together, although everything in our religion and in our current condition demands from us that we come together and work together.

After we are informed about the causes of our disunity, here are some consequences of this malady. It is self-evident that the consequences of disunity are all detrimental to the Ummah in general and to each Muslim in particular. The Ummah becomes weak; suffers from low morale; wastes time and energy addressing minor problems, personality conflicts arises; factual problems are ignored and more attention is paid to attitudinal problems; and while all this is happening, media is rejoicing...

PRINCIPLES OF UNITY OF PURPOSE

We now realize that Muhammad (S) did this almost impossible task back in 7th century. What Canadian Muslims of the 21st century need to do to establish unity of purpose among the superbly diverse groups that came to Canada from every corner of the world? Here are several practical ways and principles (remedies) on which our community can build this needed unity of purpose:

1. *Understand that Muslim Unity is not an Option: It is Fard (an Obligation)*

It's become cliché to say that Muslims have reduced Islam to rituals and forgotten other important tenets. While it is crucial to practice the five pillars of Islam, for instance, we cannot ignore other basic aspects of the faith that

emphasize brotherhood and sisterhood, ethics, justice, etc. According to the Quran and Traditions of the Prophet Mohamed (S), Muslim unity is our religious obligation -- Fard. It is a must! In Islam unity and faith are interrelated. People of faith are united people. The simple logic could be applied here: the more faith Muslims have, the more united they should be, because they are brothers and sisters to each other as God Almighty informed us: **"Indeed the Believers are brethren to each other."** (Al-Hujurat 10).

Let us consider the following reference from these two sources: God Almighty said in the Quran: *"The Believers are but a single Brotherhood/Sisterhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers/sisters; and be aware of God, that you may receive Mercy."* (49:10)

Almighty Allah says the commands in the Qur'an: *"And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves."* (Ali 'Imran 105)

Unfortunately, many Muslims only read the second part of the verse without looking or understanding the essence of unity or divisions that are present among Muslims. The correct understanding then would be that every Muslim should hold fast to the Rope of God (Muslim formative principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah) and as a consequence of such choice, the Muslims will find ways to unite themselves.

God's Messenger Muhammad (S) said: *"In their love, kindness and compassion for each other, the believers are like a human body: when one part of it is hurt, the rest sympathizes with it in wakefulness and fever."* (Bukhari, Muslim)

2. Learn open-mindedness towards other points of view

It is interesting that Muslims at educational institutions or places of work speak with their friends and colleagues and discuss challenges issues while being willing to disagree with them in a respectful manner. But the minute some of us step into a mosque or Muslim community meeting or a function, all that open-mindedness seems to go out the window.

3. Learn to criticize without hurting

The way some Muslims criticize each other, you'd think they were talking to the worst persons in the world instead of to fellow brothers or sisters. This type of ignorant and arrogant behavior is a sure way to fuel more anger, create further hurt and dissension. It is no route towards unity. Muslims must learn the Adab (etiquette) of disagreement, whether it is disagreement with individual Muslims or our leaders, the People of the Book or other brothers and sisters in humanity. Knowing and implementing this will not only help solve problems in a practical manner, but it will also lead to a greater sense of brotherhood and sisterhood, solidarity and cooperation in the community, society and the world.

4. Avoid taking a strong position on smaller points

There is what's called a "Fiqh of priorities" and this essentially means that there are some aspects of Islam that we should be more concerned than others. For instance, it's more important to emphasize that Muslims establish prayer than whether or not there should be a curtain between men and women in mosques. Knowing what our priorities are will help us avoid making secondary issues of the faith factors of division in our communities.

5. Do not embarrass rather encourage

These horrible phenomena of calling fellow brothers and sisters Kafirs or Fasiq must end if we want to create a climate that is conducive to unity. Kafir/Fasiq-calling is a sure way to isolate individuals from the community. We must remember that Muslims in Canada come from all cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. If people express ideas that are not in line with Islam as we see it, we cannot interfere into the field of God and start measuring the volumes of their faith. Such an attitude will only fuel their ignorance, anger and stubbornness, not to mention humiliation and embarrassment they will go through.

6. Reaching out across ethnic and cultural boundaries

The ignorant practice of maintaining "ethnic mosques" is still a reality in Canada. For a success of a Muslim community in Canada, all of our institutions, functions and communities must become more ethnically diverse and open to the needs and concerns of Muslims of all backgrounds. Muslim leaders and individuals have a duty to ensure that no Muslim, regardless of their ethno-cultural background, feels shut out of the community, ignored or neglected. Muslim leaders especially have to walk the talk. They need to make the first step and reach out to Muslims who may have been traditionally isolated because of ethnicity or culture in mosques and other institutions. It is not enough to just open the door to all. A direct effort has to be made to solicit feedback, advice and support from all Muslims so that they feel a part of the community.

7. Realize and apply the advice found in Surah Hujurat

This 49th chapter of the Quran provides excellent guidance on the kind of behavior that Muslims need to avoid so they would be able to establish Muslim unity – the unity of purpose. It should be a regular reading for every month, at least once a month. For instance, Allah, advises us to avoid mockery, defamation and suspicion. These are all things which serve to divide us and create hatred, hurt and dissension. Whenever we recall that we have done Ghibah (backbitten someone) against a Muslim or non-Muslim, we should remember that we need to seek that person's forgiveness. Doing this is a prerequisite to washing off that sin of Ghibah.

8. Talk about the issue and encourage others to read and talk about it

Share resources with other members of the community on the topic. If we find thought-provoking articles about the topic, let us share them with our Imams and the community members. It's also important to discuss it in various Muslim settings to start the thinking and reflecting process amongst Muslims for indeed those of us who are not aware of Islam's demands for unity will never be able to comprehend its urgency.

9. Make Dua for unity

Finally, make sure that you as an individual are not only working for unity but making Du'a for it as well, since results are all in God's Hands. Once when we "tie our camels" we can relax and put our trust in God.

CONCLUSION

Building Muslim unity of purpose on the basis of the general principles that were outlined is the best way to ensure that it lasts. Unity built on such sound principles is strong, enduring and resistant to any sort of collapse.

AN ACTION ITEM

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