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Human Unity, Between Myth and Reality

All intelligent people today have some understanding of the need for the spirit of unity in human affairs. It alone enables us to meet the great global challenges such as the pollution of the natural environment and the unjust inequality between people of different races, creed and countries.

Discussion on human unity, which seemed a mere myth at the time of the ancient Greek philosophers, appears to be more of an achievable reality in the recent years. Formation of the UN, conversion of the Olympic Games from a national Greek game to an international sports competition and the European Union are just some examples of our way towards a global unity.

Science is helping man with material comforts through her golden inventions. Science has provided the man of our age with the power of global communication enabling us for numerous ecumenical and international seminars and dialogues between all nations and cultures.

The ideal of human unity has never appeared so close to realization, but paradoxically the closer we come to it, the more it seems to elude us. Is it not ironic that with the increase in the rate of divorce we are still ambitious for a global human unity?!

We speak of globalization and at the same time we deplore the dangers of uniformity and allied groups.

It was by scientific means that our planet earth turned to a global village or even a global bedroom, an ideal module to gain human unity with. But we now know that science can be misused as it has been and hence be more destructive to human unity. Mobile phones initially brought family members more in touch, but the misuse of the same technology has now torn them apart.

We should therefore bear in mind that not just any type of unification of human society can provide sustainable peace and success for all. For instance, when the UN was formed after World War II its primary purpose was to maintain world peace and cooperation. Nothing could be further from reality. The UN today is no more than a legal lever in the hands of the so-called superior countries that enjoy the privilege of the right of veto against their opponents.

Human unity as advocated by the power blocks of today's rich countries aims more at the exploitation of natural resources on the one hand, and enormously creating further global customers on the other. Therefore, a mere human unification may not necessarily provide a global sustainable peace. As I shall propose, human unity can only cultivate a sustainable peace if the hearts of humans– not their bodies or worldly interests– are united based on justice under a divine guidance.

Human Unity, Islamic Perspective

Islam is the religion of unity. The essence of Islam is believing in One Unique God; Allah and worshipping Him alone. Religion from the Islamic perspective is only one religion, i.e. submission to Allah.

“Truly the religion with Allah is Islam.” (3: 19).

All human beings are created of a unique common soul.

“O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single soul.” (4: 1)

Man irrespective of their creed, colour, race, language, etc are all equal and are the members of one human family of which Adam and Eve were their parents. The divine wisdom made them into different nations to know each other with the only preference in the sight of God being their piety.

“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 Allah is that who is more pious.” (49: 13)

Thus, Islam denotes all types of idle privileges of race, gender, nationality, wealth, etc.

Islam advocates for peace, fraternity and unity. The best talk in Islam is the one which brings people together.

“There is no virtue in most of their secret talks save in him who orders... conciliation between mankind. And whoever does this seeking the good pleasure of Allah; We shall give him a great reward.” (4: 114)

Thus, reconciliation between people is rewarded, in the words of the Prophet of Islam (S), more than one year of praying and fasting. The mission of the Messengers of Allah was to form a united faithful human community.

Human unity is only obtainable if humans as a global community enjoy a common divine goal. The unification of the goal will unite human beings. Such a united community is referred to in Islam as ‘Ummah’.

“Mankind were one community and Allah sent Prophets with glad tidings and warnings.” (2:213).

Islam regards a divided community on the brink of a pit of Hell-Fire:

“Hold fast all of you together, to the Rope of Allah and be not divided among yourselves.” (3: 103)

Nonetheless, a mere human unity is not a virtue in Islam if it is not based on Monotheism and justice. Human unity under the umbrella of secularism and imperialism is rather a global disaster.

“And were it not that mankind would have become of one community (of disbelievers desiring worldly life only), We would have provided for those who disbelieve in the Most Gracious (Allah), silver roofs for their houses, and elevators whereby they ascend.” (43:33)

Division and disagreement on the other hand is acknowledged in Islam as a reality of the life of this world although it is not endorsed as a value.

Etiology of Divisions

In order for us to accomplish human unity we must define human nature. What causes division and whether or not it is possible to obtain a global unity of mankind?

1. Divisive Human Nature

The social life of man by nature is divisive. That means unless there is an external force governing human life, man's nature is against the unity of people.

The reason being, man by nature is seeking his personal gains and avoids whatever which is detrimental to him. No ordinary human is exempt from this instinct. The same instinct is found in the kingdom of animals too. This instinct is a 'defense system' and is an internal force for their survival. Without this instinct wolf and sheep would have lived together peacefully. Although, they would both have died! For both of them need their food and preys for their survival. The divisive human nature is the primary cause of human conflicts between a couple or countries.

In spite of this primitive nature, mankind by his intellect has learned that his unity with some of his fellow humans will bring about more benefits to him. Thus, they become united on the principle of 'common interests'. A male and a female will realize that each of them has a need that alone is not achievable. Formation of a company by its directors, European Union, Allied KK a time whereat the interest of the so-called united members clash, the result of which is nothing other than discord and division.

There is, however, another type of transcendental unity in which the core of unity between its members is not their selfish interests. It is their common congenial and sympathetic relation that has united them together. This type of unity is best found amongst the adherents of a religion. It is this type of unity which fosters sacrifice for others.

After the battle of Ohud seven Muslim warriors were bleeding to death and they were extremely thirsty. A man with a little water came to their rescue. He offered the water to the first wounded soldier but he pointed at the one beside him meaning that the water should be given to his friend. He took the water to the second soldier but he also pointed at the third one until the man reached the last wounded soldier but found him dead. He turned to give the water to the previous ones but found them all dead¹.

It is with reference to this type of human unity that the Almighty Allah states:

“They give preference over themselves even though they were in need of that.” (59:9)

Thus, for a sustainable human unity, mankind needs a divine religion and that it must be accepted by all humans world-wide.

2. Greedy Nature of Man

Another nature of man is his excessive desire to acquire or possess more than what one needs or deserves, especially with respect to material wealth. Thus, many people are attached to competition, the stigma of selfish greed. The result of which is nothing other than conflicts of interest and discord within the human society. Mutual conflict and discord is one of the vicious characteristics of the people of Hell.

“Verily, that is the very truth, the mutual dispute of the people of the Hell-Fire.” (38:64)

The act of Satan; the main enemy of the human race, is to cause mischief and dispute among humans.

“Verily, Satan sows a state of conflict and disagreements among them (humans).” (17:53)

To tame this nature, Islam encourages people to obtain contentment and considers it a human virtue, a concept which, for those who are under the influence of capitalism is too difficult to contemplate. Greed in a capitalistic society is a virtue for the greedier the man is the more he is going to consume and this will ‘make the Capitalist System work’. It is due to this concept that here in the West doctors do not recommend any food prevention to their patients. Thus, as Ivan Illich in his book ‘Medical Nemeses’ has elaborated western medicine and unnecessary medication is in fact the cause of many new diseases.

In Islam, any behaviour which causes discord and conflict in society is a vice whereas, whatever which results in harmony and peace is regarded a virtue. Greed is definitely one of the Satanic paths leading to human conflicts whereas contentment and satisfaction is a great gain. Paradise is the house of peace and fraternity. To enter Paradise one’s heart must be free from any greed and bitterness towards others.

“Enter therein (Paradise) in peace and security. And We shall remove from their hearts any deep feeling of bitterness; brothers facing each other on thrones.” (15:46, 47)

Therefore, in order for mankind to gain a paradisiacal unity on earth we ought to remove bitterness from our hearts.

Obstacles to a Sustainable Human Unity

1. Ambiguity of the Human Language

Language, any language, is undoubtedly a Godly blessing without which man was nearly incapable of communication with his fellow humans. We regard man advanced over animals for his language abilities. Nonetheless, ambiguity and doubtfulness is an integrated nature of human language. As you are reading this article your understanding of it could be absolutely different to the author or another reader. When Romeo said to Juliet: “Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man.” What did he really mean by ‘grave’?

Allamah Tabatabaei (May God elevate his status in Paradise), a renowned Muslim philosopher and an exegete of the holy Quran asserted that the number of different interpretations of Ayah 103 of the second Surah of the Quran comes up to one million, two hundred and fifty nine thousand, seven hundred and twelve different interpretations!

This is an unavoidable problem of the human language which sometimes makes the communication between us as the dialogue between the deaf.

A deaf builder, who had a hard time finding a job, was once repairing his roof. One of his friends passed by and just greeted him from the road. The poor deaf man thought– based on his desire– that his friend has called him for a job. He cheerfully went down to his deaf wife and gave him the good news of finding a job. His deaf wife– based on her desire– assumed that her husband has promised to buy her some jewelry and hence, whilst being overjoyed rushed to her deaf daughter’s room and passed on her good news to her. The deaf young girl who was hopelessly waiting for any proposal for marriage hugged her mother and –based on her desire– thanked her mother for the news. She ran to her deaf granny and said: Grandma! I’m gonna get married soon! The deaf grandmother however –based on her desire– assumed that her granddaughter is asking if she would prefer a fresh apple or a glass of apple juice and therefore calmly responded: “My dear! I don’t have teeth, an apple juice would do!!!”

It is due to this inadequate human means of communication that Rumi says:

“I am a dumb who had a dream and people are all deaf

I am unable to talk and they are unable to hear.”

2. Oblivion towards Reality

Another obstacle to human unity stems from the way we perceive the world. There is a profound epistemological discussion about human access to reality. In general, there are two types of knowledge; acquired knowledge and knowledge by presence. All types of human knowledge gained by our sensory perceptions are the examples of acquired knowledge.

For instance, as humans we perceive the colour red as 'red' but is it really red? If you were a dog your answer to this question would be different. Then how do we know what the real colour– if any colour at all– of the external objects are? All knowledge of ordinary humans is acquired knowledge. That means they are our different interpretations of one Reality and thus, different opinions are emerged.

Knowledge by presence on the other hand is achieved by the union of the knower and the known and hence there is no mistake in it. The knowledge of the Almighty God about His creation is knowledge by presence because He is nearer to us than our jugular vein.

Knowledge by presence is the divine gift to the Prophets by means of revelation, as well as certain divinely selected people called '*Ma'soomin*'.

“Thus did We show Ibrahim the Malakoot (the Reality) of the heavens and the earth that he be one of those who have Faith with certainty.” (6:75)

It is only this type of knowledge that can endow with certainty. Similarly, this type of knowledge is free from any mistake and hence there will be no disagreement between the knowers. Thus, if all of the Prophets descend to earth and live together in a small town there will be never be any disagreement or discord between them.

Rumi; the most renowned Iranian poet and mystic gives an example to explain the secret behind all human disagreements. Although the issue is more profound than the example that Rumi is citing, academically it is a useful example.

He says: People of a village had heard about the elephant but had never seen it. A man brought an elephant to the village and placed it in a totally dark room. He then asked people of the village to go into the room one by one, touch the elephant, come out and explain how they thought the elephant would look.

One of them happened to touch the trunk of the elephant. He later explained: “An elephant is a water-pipe kind of creature.” Another person went in and touched the ear. He then said: “The elephant is a very strong, always moving back and forth, fan-animal.” The third person touched the curved back and hence he proudly proclaimed: “A leathery throne.”

Rumi then in explaining the secret behind their disagreement says:

“Had in the hand of each one of them been a candle,

the disagreement would have been out of place.”

3. Nationalism & Racism

Nationalism in its modern form began in the 19th century in Germany as a reaction to the French

Revolution. It soon however turned to a racist doctrine. Similarly, Zionism was initially formed with the excuse of returning the Jewish people to their homeland. Nevertheless, it soon showed to be a racist ideology claiming the superiority of a nation over humanity. Thus, nationalism is another facet of racism.

Although nationalism is relatively uniting people of a country against their common enemy, it is an obstacle to achieve the global human unity. The remedy therefore is to foster the spirit of internationalism.

Islam is definitely the religion of internationalism. In Islam, no nation or individual is superior to others save for their piety; which again denotes any superiority. Although the holy Quran was revealed amidst an Arab nation, it never addresses its audience as “O You Arabs!” Rather “O You Mankind!”

Unless mankind in practice exercises the spirit of the following final Prophetic saying, human unity is far-fetched from the truth: *“O you mankind! You are all from Adam and Adam is from the soil. There is no preference to an Arab over a non-Arab (or vice versa) but with piety.”*

Inspiration for Human Unity

1. A Universal Religion

Man without religion is a pretty sorry lot. He has never been able to survive without faith. Yet, religious disagreement has always been one of the major factors of division.

To obtain human unity as citizens of the earth we need a universal religion that has the qualification for universality. It is imperative that it enjoys the following characteristics:

A. Word of God: Its teaching be the actual Word of God.

B. Rational Yet Simple: Its teachings must be rational and yet simple. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant argued in his book “Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason” that a universal religion should have validity for every human being or “community of insight”. Kant argued that the revealed ‘religion’ must also be a ‘natural religion’ (*Fetrat* as mentioned in the Quran).

C. A Socio-Political Religion: God is our Creator and as such He knows best what leads to man’s prosperity. Moreover He has no interest in any of the laws He sets forth for Mankind. We need a universal religion that its teachings have a solution for our socio-political problems, a divine law and rules of how to govern the society towards its prosperity. Human desire and his self-interest as discussed earlier is the main obstacle to his prosperity. Thus, considering his immediate interest he has always failed to establish a law in which the rights of all humans are equally and justly protected. The so-called UN is ample example of this failure.

2. A Just World-State not Just a World-State

The dream of conquering the world and bringing it under subjugation has been the ambition of many tyrants of the past and present. Thus, just a World-State will not be able to unify mankind toward his prosperity. A secular world-state will be more dangerous than that of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia.

Man is in need of a Just and divine World-State in which an infallible world leader who is divinely protected executes the Law of God and will cater for the spiritual and physical welfare of all its global citizens.

The only religion that has the capacity of being a universal religion is ISLAM; the first and the last prescription of God to mankind. To this end, Sir Bernard Shaw in *'The Genuine Islam'* stated:

“If any religion had the chance of ruling over England, nay Europe within the next 100 years, it could be Islam.”²

The establishment of the Just World-State has been promised in the Old, New and final Testament of God, i.e. the global state of Imam Mahdi (May God hasten his coming) who will be accompanied by Prophet Jesus son of (Mary peace be upon them). Numerous Prophetic traditions asserted that the Almighty Allah will then prevail peace and justice on earth, as it has been filled with injustice and corruption.

3. A Just Democratic UN

After World War II the UN was formed with the excuse of safeguarding global peace and unity to stop German Nazism. In reality what we now have is an undemocratic and unjust UN. That means, out of all its members, only five countries, exceptionally, enjoy the unjust right of veto including England and France with relatively low populations. These five countries in fact determine the outcomes of the world. The current occupation of Iraq by allies without even the UN agreement removed the guise of hierocracy from the so-called democratic UN. What we need is a system that accounts for the power and influence of all nations of the world in proportion to their population. The problem is that at the moment there is not even a context for such thinking.

4. Unity in Diversity

For the time being the best practical option is to learn to practice the unity in diversity. Diversity is the law of nature. Variety is still ‘the spice of life’. Remember we are created in different nations so that we “get to know each other” not to fight one another. There is always going to be a form of disagreement.

“And if your Lord so willed, He could surely have made mankind one Ummah (nation), but they will not cease to disagree. Except him on whom your Lord has bestowed His mercy.”

(11:118-119)

Disagreement will only be removed on the Day of Judgment wherein reality will be shown and God will give His final decree.

“Verily, your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection about that wherein they used to differ.” (16: 124)

Unity, on the other hand, is the way that leads to the infinite. Diversity is an outward thing, unity is of the heart. As humans we have enough common grounds to be united. However, diversity is different from discord. It is discord not diversity that has thrown the world into the boiling pot of sorrow, wars, and death.

5. Do Your Part

Unity begins from within a household. Endeavour to keep your family and friendship circles united. Make reconciliation between people. Learn how to live with people who may view the world differently. Always be optimistic in your so-called understanding of others. Follow fearlessly the Truth wherever you perceive it. Serve people of all nations. They are all ‘the family of God’ and His creatures. Remember the most beloved one in the sight of Allah is the one who serves His family more.

6. Awareness towards Global Human Disaster

As the citizens of planet earth we will have fewer obstacles to tackle when we fight problems like pollution, depletion of natural resources and natural disasters. Our planet earth is a space ship damaging of which will cause all to drawn, including the vandal. In the recent earthquake in Iran we witnessed amazing national and international unity and campaigning unity –including the US despite its political enmity with Iran– to rescue the victims of the earthquake.

So far as man gets on somehow with life and is quite satisfied with his local and personal issues and the misery of other people in the world is ‘the least to worry about’, there is no hope for world community, for he will not see any further reason for his survival.

Unless all people on this globe realize that discord and division is a global disaster and unless they cannot commit to this change of mindset no human unity can be obtained.

1. al-Tabrasi, Majma’ul-Bayan vol. p.260

2. ‘The Genuine Islam’, vol. 1 no. 8, published in 1936

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