

In Memoriam: Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah (1935–2010)

In memory of the late Grand Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah (November 16, 1935 – July 4, 2010), it is appropriate that some of his seminal views with regards to Muslim unity are outlined.

His Eminence once confirmed in a statement that sectarian debates that violate Islamic mores are an offence against the very reality of Islam. He also reproved Muslims from going through the classical Sunni and Shia books with the aim of scrounging for errors and turning them into a foreboding cloud that would preside over the future generations. He maintained that the creation of any type of strife in the Ummah is tantamount to treason and is in direct opposition to the commandments of the noble Messenger (S). Ay Fadhlallah, pointing out that sectarian debate brought relief to Israel, called on the Shia and Sunni leaders to confront it and support the Palestinian people instead of occupying themselves with marginal issues.

The following is the text of the statement that he issued:

The state of political disruption in the Ummah has reached to the extent that it is threatening the unity of several Arab and Islamic countries, and the sectarian assault, launched from several positions, is targeting religious and political symbols and creating big cracks in the Ummah's firmament... all these developments bring about sorrow and grief and highlight a number of errors and mistakes that have been and are still being committed at many levels:

First: The fact that the rhetoric has violated Islamic mores and values; for resorting to terms that connote takfir, lechery, slandering, and insults, does not only offend those who use them, but rather the general Muslim community that models itself after the religious scholars. This trend could eventually lead the Muslims to become shocked by the bitter reality [of the offenders], hence driving them towards irrational positions and abandoning religious scholars and perhaps even losing faith in the reality of religion itself.

Second: Scrounging the classical books to dig out Sunni positions that condemn the Shias, or Shia

views that condemn the Sunnis is one of the biggest slips, for the mistakes included in these books ought not to be turned into a sword that hangs over the heads of the coming generations, or an obstacle that impedes Islamic unity. Moreover, whoever seeks to dig out the mistakes of history and use them to incite fanaticisms in the present or future Muslim generations, is actually betraying the Ummah and disobeying the commandments of the noble Messenger (S) who had addressed the Ummah with a decisive speech, in which he (S) said: “Do not become misguided after me, some of you striking the necks of the others.”

Third: We do not reject the idea of criticizing any given religious leader, but we would like any forthcoming criticism to be based on objectivity and scholarship, and for it to remain aloof from fanaticism and the mentality of vengeance; for we neither approve of sanctifying what is not sanctified, nor support excessive criticism such as violates Islamic morals. Allah says in His glorious Book: **“And do not dispute with the followers of the Book except by what is best...” (29:46)**, so how do you think the dispute among the people of the same Book, the Qur’an, ought to be?!

Fourth: The ongoing sectarian polemics that are extending rapidly and that have reached the vast space of modern media through political forums on satellites, the internet and the like...all these developments bring about horror in the souls of those devoted to the Ummah and relief in the hearts of its enemies, especially the Zionist entity. This entity expresses nothing but relief at the fact that the Ummah’s leaders and scholars have entered into this escalating argumentative chaos. Meanwhile, the Zionist entity goes forth in its acts of killing, assassination and besiegement in Gaza and the West Bank. As it advances its attempts to judaize Jerusalem and tightens its grip on occupied Palestine, it makes plots for wars with all Muslim societies that are preoccupying themselves with marginal issues and useless details and opening the doors wide open to the American invaders and Zionist occupiers.

We call on the Ummah’s aware vanguards, the revered Sunni and Shia elites to take action at all levels so as to stop the internal fragmentation and put an end to these debates that add nothing except further complicating relations between the various Islamic parties. Moreover, we call on everyone to support the oppressed Palestinian people and end the siege imposed on them at the economic, social, and political levels, for the Messenger of Allah (S) says: “Allah will not bless a nation, unless the weak takes his right from the strong.”

Given the recent fatwas of Ayatullah Khamenei and Ayatullah Sistani on the issue of disparaging and denouncing the notables of the Ahl al-Sunnah, it is appropriate that we bring to the attention of our dear readers the fatwa of Ayatullah Fadhlallah in this regard:

We forbid cursing, slandering, and abusing the mothers of the believers and deem such acts to be in contradiction of genuine Islam.

The opinions and fatwas of Ayatullah Fadhlallah have always constituted a unifying Islamic stand and have always insisted that Muslims should be aware of the danger of inciting and fuelling seditions and

sectarian strife that would only tear them apart and serve to do nothing but facilitate the schemes and projects of the Ummah's enemies. Therefore, His Eminence forbade the cursing and slandering of the mothers of the believers and the companions, considering that such acts are in opposition to the practice of the Commander of the Faithful ('a), which necessitates giving supreme priority to the general Islamic interest over any personal or secondary interests.

The following is the excerpt of an interview conducted by the Saudi daily Okaz with His Eminence regarding the issue of cursing and slandering the companions and mothers of the believers, on Safar 28th, 1429 H., March 6th, 2008 A.D.

Q: What is your stand regarding the issue of cursing and slandering the companions, including Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Aisha?

A: Personally, I forbid the act of slandering and cursing any companion whom Allah had mentioned in the following Ayah:

“Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure,” (48:29),

at a time we set aside the issue of the Imamate and Caliphate, for which we have other considerations. As for the issue of cursing, I have always deemed it forbidden for any Muslim, and I state in all the relevant religious inquiries I receive that it is forbidden to curse and slander any companion including the Caliphs. I reiterate the words of Imam 'Ali ('a) which he said while he was on his way to Siffin and heard some of the People of Iraq cursing and slandering the People of Sham, so he told them: “I dislike you starting to abuse them, but if you describe their deeds and recount their situations that would be a better mode of speaking and a more convincing way of arguing. Instead of abusing them you should say: ‘O Allah! Save our blood and their blood, produce reconciliation between us and them, and lead them out of their misguidance so that he who is ignorant of the truth may know it, and he who inclines towards rebellion and revolt may turn away from it.” Actually, this text is found in the book Nahj al-Balaghah.

In this aspect, I tend to adopt the way Imam 'Ali ('a) used in interacting with the Caliphs, although Shias believe that the caliphs are the ones who deprived the Imam of his right to the caliphate. In his letter to the people of Egypt, he ('a) said: “I suddenly noticed people surrounding Abu Bakr to swear him allegiance. I, therefore, withheld my hand till I saw that many people were reverting from Islam and trying to destroy the religion of Muhammad (S). I, then, feared that if I did not protect Islam and its people and there occurred in it a breach or destruction, it would mean a greater blow to me than the loss of power over you, which was in any case to last for a few days of which everything would pass away as the mirage passes away or as the cloud scuds away. Therefore, in these happenings, I rose till wrong was destroyed and disappeared and religion attained peace and safety.”

Thus, we deal with the issue of the caliphate in the same manner as Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) who was

open to the caliphs, supporting them and guiding them to where their interest lies. It is narrated that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq ('a) said: "It is easy to earn people satisfaction; just hold your tongues back against them." Moreover, we deem it forbidden to curse and slander the mothers of the believers; on the contrary, they ought to be honoured as a sign of honouring the Messenger of Allah (S). On this occasion, I recall the following verse of a poem written by one of our scholars, Muhammad Baqir Hujjah al-Islam, who died a hundred years ago, in which he says: "O redhead (Aisha), [the act of] cursing you is forbidden, because for the sake of one person, a thousand persons are honoured."

Therefore, we deem it forbidden to curse, slander and offend the mothers of the believers, just as we deem it forbidden to curse and slander the companions, and we have issued a fatwa on this ruling and it spread widely throughout the world.

Q: Is this stand you have taken based on your rejection to the concept of slandering and cursing, in general, or out of consideration to the feelings of Sunnis, or out of your belief and conviction that the companions enjoy a high status [that ought to be honoured]?

A: Actually, my stand stems out from the genuine Islamic line that we believe in; which deems slandering and cursing any Muslim impermissible, especially if that Muslim was a companion [of the Prophet], considering that slandering and cursing is [an act of] derailment from the genuine Islamic line. I believe that conducting dialogue, in a direct manner, places those engaging in it in an intimate ambience that enables them to ease and reduce the differences amongst them at the psychological, mental and intellectual levels.

Q: When we discuss the issue of cursing and slandering the companions with the wise and rational Shias, they say: this is the stand of the exaggerators in the Shia sect and not that of the sect itself, but the problem actually lies in the fact that the companions are scorned in the works of prominent Shia figures. What do you say about that?

A: It is natural to consider that the historic accumulations and personal psychological interactions have left a negative impact on the way the caliphs are regarded, as a result of the state of oppression inflicted upon the Members of the House ('a) that the Shias believe in; thus, we believe that the issues have evolved due to the historic accumulations and personal interactions. At a time we meet some Shias who justify cursing and slandering, we find some Sunni brothers who deem the Shias as Kafirs (disbelievers). I have even heard some of them saying that the Jews and Christians are better than the Shias, for they believe that the Jews and Christians are among the People of the Book, while the Shias are atheists. Therefore, we note that there exist many accumulations that ought to be treated.

Therefore, I used to say that my call for an Islamic – Islamic dialogue is based on the need for correcting the mistakes and removing the complications existing in any sect, by means of dialogue. This is because dialogue directly places those engaging in it in an intimate ambience that enables them to bring them closer to one another at the psychological, mental and intellectual levels.

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