

## Islam as the School of Unity

The Holy Qur'an invites all human beings to unity—Muslims, Christians, Jews, etc.—and this invitation is not exclusive for the time of the Prophet (s) or a certain group of the People of the Book {*ahl al-kitab*}:<sup>1</sup>

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا ۗ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

***Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allah!'***<sup>2</sup>

The Glorious Qur'an speaks about the synagogue, temple, church and mosque in the same line because the Name of God is mentioned in all of them. As such, they must be held in high esteem and respect.

Although the blessed verse quoted invites all to unity, the greater emphasis is on the solidarity of Muslims. This is because, in addition to their unity and commonality in *tawhid* {unity of God}, prophethood {*nubuwwah*} *qiblah* {the direction where one faces for prayer and other acts of worship}, etc., Muslims also have a commonality with some branches of religion. Thus, among the followers of the various religions, Muslims are more deserving of having unity, and thus the possibility of scientific, cultural, political and other interactions among them is stronger. {the direction where one faces for prayer and other acts of worship}, etc., Muslims also have a commonality with some branches of religion. Thus, among the followers of the various religions, Muslims are more deserving of having unity, and thus the possibility of scientific, cultural, political and other interactions among them is stronger.

### [Keeping aloof from spitefulness](#)

The life conduct {*sirah*} of the Holy Prophet (s)<sup>3</sup> serves as a proof, guideline and model for all of us. Through compassion, magnanimity and endeavor, he (s) was able to unify the people of Hijaz,<sup>4</sup> most of whom had been idol-worshippers, under the banner of Islam.

After their acceptance of Islam, some of them, known as the *munafiqun* {hypocrites}, engaged in open confrontation with the Prophet (s) who had to deal with them. They were those who ostensibly embraced Islam but in intention and practice they were not assisting him (s). In spite of this, the Prophet (s) peacefully associated with them and his objectives were the accomplishment of the mission as well as imparting the understanding and implementation of the Holy Qur'an. The very same conduct was adopted by the infallible Imams (a) and they never kindled the flame of discord among Muslims.

We can see that although 'Ali (a) had reproached the earlier caliphs as recorded in *Nahj al-Balaghah*,<sup>5</sup> in other instances he would laud them. All this was primarily to foster the freedom of thought and the spread of Islamic beliefs. The conclusion is that in the present age, indulging in magnifying Sunni-Shi`ah differences, apart from not being useful, will result in an irreparable loss.

Proximity between Sunnis and Shi`ah advances the interests of both. The Shi`ah in particular have not confined their thought, culture, jurisprudence {*fiqh*}, exegesis of the Qur'an {*tafsir*}, and beliefs to themselves and their seminaries. A survey of Muslim-populated countries substantiates this statement as the books of great Shi`ah figures such as Shaykh al-Mufid, Shaykh at-Tusi, 'Allamah Hilli, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, and Professor Mutahhari can be easily found in these countries.

The proximity of Sunnis and Shi`ah opens the ways for the spread of Shi`ah thought and culture in the Muslim world, and as a result, makes the further proximity of these two sects even more possible.

More than anyone else, the Wahhabis are apprehensive and endangered by this proximity. It is for this reason that during the *Hajj* season, they prohibit the entry into the country all religious books including the Qur'an (in Persian translation), *tafsir*, history and *hadith* books, and even Iranian magazines and newspapers. This is because they are afraid that these printed materials would present facts against their particular policy and doctrines. This is in spite of the fact that those matters are never repugnant to the truth of Islam.

In terms of outlook, they oppose not only the Shi`ah but also the four Sunni schools of thought. They write books against the proximity of Sunnis and Shi`ah, campaigning against it, regarding it as an impossible venture, and claiming thus: "We shall never have an understanding with those who are engaged in speculative interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an and who disrespect the two sheikhs {*shaykhayn*}."

## **Why Wahhabism should be identified**

The anti-unity campaign of Wahhabis reaches its peak during the Unity Week.<sup>6</sup> One of the best means of replying to such a plot is that the '*ulama*' of the *Hajj* caravans and pilgrims should be the promoters of unity more than anyone else. They should be familiar with the methods of dealing with them and understand their views and opinions so that during confrontations and argumentation's, they could reply to them consciously and intellectually.

It is necessary for some Muslims who are following the Sunni school to be properly informed about the opinions of the Sunni imams so as to realize that the Wahhabis also have views difference to them and even regard many of the beliefs of the Ahl as–Sunnah as polytheistic and, worse still, prone to infidelity {*kufr*}. In reality, Wahhabism is a political movement under the religious cover of identifying with the Sunnis and it wants to prevent the unity of the Islamic schools of thought {*madhahib*}. It is trying to kindle the flame of discord among Muslims especially between the two main sects—Sunni and Shi`ah—so as to make the imperialist hegemony permanent over the Muslim nation.

Unfortunately, with the acquisition of the oil–rich land of Arabia and reliance on the enormous God–given wealth, Wahhabism has succeeded in becoming a potent force and has established innumerable offices and organizations throughout the world for the propagation of its dogma. In the Sunni–populated regions of Iran and Pakistan where most of the people are suffering from poverty and deprivation, the Wahhabis are making huge investments, constructing religious schools {*madaris*}, spending large amounts of money upon their students and others, and attracting people to Wahhabi doctrines. Since most of our Sunni brothers are living on the border regions of Iran, they are more subjected to the influence of the propaganda of the imperialist Wahhabis.

As the 'Alawi Shi`ah and Muhammadi Sunnis have risen up now hand in hand against their enemies and can clearly see the hand of imperialism behind the curtain of Wahhabism, it is necessary for Sunni and Shi`ah '*ulama*' to conduct research about Wahhabism and identify it well so as to make it clear that this group has differences of opinion not only with the Shi`ah but also with the Ahl as–Sunnah. Although the Wahhabis are always playing the Sunni card and try to portray themselves as the well–wishers and sympathizers of the Sunnis, Sunnis in turn have to know that the issues regarded by Wahhabis as their points of departure with the Shi`ah are the same issues that are common between the Sunnis and the Shi`ah. They also have to know that the Shi`ah school is closer to the Ahl as–Sunnah than Wahhabism is.

## Leaders and Unity

During the past decades, there were figures who regarded the unity of Muslims as their ideal and aspiration, but they did not realize this precious aspiration, or if they ever took steps for its realization, they were very insignificant and rudimentary. In the recent period, the late Ayatullah Burujerdi (r)<sup>7</sup> gave an affirmative reply to this aspiration by approving the *Jami'ah at–Taqrīb bayn al–Madhahib al–Islamiyyah* {University or Forum for the proximity of the Islamic schools of thought}.

There have been other '*ulama*' and *fuqaha* who upheld the approach of the late Burujerdi. In this context, the viewpoint and outlook of the late Hadrat<sup>8</sup> Imam Khomeini (r) and his efforts are well known to all. At the present time also, in a bid to extend the scope of this unity further, Ayatullah Khamene'i (may his sublime presence endure) has issued a decree for reviving the foundation of unity and the forum for proximity, which is itself worthy of gratitude and a source of hope.

It is appropriate for us to note at this juncture that the Shi`ah *'ulama'* and *fuqaha* of the past, such as Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413 AH), Sayyid Murtadha 'Alam al-Huda (d. 436 AH), and Shaykh at-Tusi (d. 460 AH), among others, have also emphasized unity between Sunnis and Shi`ah, and have written valuable books on this subject such as *al-Khilaf* which enumerates the common points of belief between the two groups. 'Allamah Hilli has also written a book on the basis of the jurisprudence {*fiqh*} of the Shi`ah and the four Sunni schools.

All these are proofs for the proximity of jurisprudential views of the two schools and of the interest of leading figures in jurisprudence in establishing mutual understanding. Of course, at the present time there are treatises on jurisprudence written by Sunnis in which the views of the Sunnis and the Shi`ah on the branches of religion and jurisprudence have been compared. For example, the books *Mawsu'ah Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir* and *Al-Fiqh 'ala'l-Madhahib al-Khamsah* can be cited.

- [1.](#) People of the Book [ahl al-Kitab]: the respectful title given to the Jews and Christians in the Qur'an. [Trans.]
- [2.](#) Surat Al 'Imran 3:64.
- [3.](#) The abbreviation, "s", stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, *sallallahu 'alayhi wa alihi wa sallam* [may God's salutation and peace be upon him and his progeny], which is used after the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). [Trans.]
- [4.](#) Hijaz: the region in Western Arabia bordering the Red Sea that includes Ta'if, Mecca and Medina. Here, it alludes to the entire Arabian Peninsula. [Trans.]
- [5.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah (The Peak of Eloquence) is a collection of speeches, sayings and letters of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) compiled by Sharif ar-Radi Muhammad ibn al-Husayn (d. 406 AH/1016). The contents of the book concern the three essential topics of God, man and the universe, and include comments on scientific, literary, social, ethical, and political issues. With the exception of the words of the Glorious Qur'an and of the Holy Prophet (s), no words of man can equate it in eloquence. So far, more than 101 exegeses have been written on Nahj al-Balaghah, indicating the importance of this treatise to scholars and learned men of research and investigation. For more information, visit: <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul> [1]. [Trans.]
- [6.](#) 12-17 Rabi' al-Awwal. [Trans.]
- [7.](#) The abbreviation, "r" stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, *rahmatullah 'alayhi, rahmatullah 'alayha, or rahmatullah 'alayhim* [may peace be upon him/her/them], which is used after the names of pious people. [Trans.]
- [8.](#) Hadrat: The Arabic word Hadrat is used as a respectful form of address. [Trans.]

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[1] <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul>