Brotherhood and Fellowship in Islam

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This text discusses about the importance of brotherhood and fellowship and what a Muslim should do regarding his relationship with the rest of the Muslims regardless of race, nationality or location. All the advice provided is according to the edicts present in the verses of the Holy Qur'an.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

One of the strongest and most deep-rooted links in human relations, is the tie of brotherhood. Brothers love each other, are benevolent towards each other, and share each other's joys and sorrows.

Sometimes differences may occur between brothers, causing anxieties, but very soon these acrimonies are replaced by affection and sincerity, and rifts completely forgotten.

Islam makes use of this firm link in order to strengthen social order and ameliorate human relations, and considers all devout Muslims as true brothers.

As two brothers are joined together through their father, the Seal of the prophets is regarded as a father of the Ummah in Islam, and the Muslims as his children. In this way, all the Muslims have been considered as brothers.

In this verdict, namely Islamic brotherhood, there exists no boundary, and all Muslims from any race, locality and language are covered by this law, and are regarded as brothers by Islam.

The holy Quran speaks explicitly about this matter and says:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

"The believers are but brethren, therefore make peace between your brethren and be careful of (your duty to) Allah that mercy may be had on you." (***49:10***)

As history shows, prior to the advent of Islam, there were many differences and separations among the people. With the liberating teachings of Islam, the spirit of brotherhood was blown into the people, and this Islamic brotherhood was created.

The holy Quran says about this matter:

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۚ وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا

"And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited, and remember the favor of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire..." (***3:103***)

In Islamic teaching certain rights have been prescribed for all Muslims and they are bound to perform those obligations.

The fourth Imam (PBUH)[1] says:

وأما حق اهل ملتک عامه فإضمار السلامه ونشر جناح الرحمه والرفق بمسيئهم و وتألفهم واستصلاحهم وشكرمحسنهم ... فعمهم جميعا بدعوتک و انصرهم جميعا بنصرتک وأنزلتهم جميعا منک منازلهم ؛ كبيرهم بمنزله الوالد و صغيرهم بمنزله الولد و أوسطهم بمنزله الاخ ؛ فمن أتاک تعاهدته بلطف و رحمه ؛ وصل أخاک بما يجب للأخ على أخيه

"The right of your co-religionist brethren is that you should always and sincerely pray God for their health, be extremely kind to them, be lenient and sympathetic towards them, and endeavour to reform them. You should be thankful to their good ones, and must pray for all your co-religionist brethren, help them, and be considerate to each according to his condition. You should regard the aged as your father, the young as your children, and those of your age as brothers. When co-religionist brethren visit you, welcome and receive them kindly and warmly, and treat them in the same way that a brother treats

another." [2]

Imam Sadiq, the Sixth Imam, has said:

المسلم اخو المسلم و هو عينه و مرآته و دليله، و لا يخونه و لا يظلمه و لا يخدعه و لا يكذبه و لا يغتابه

"A Muslim is a brother to another Muslim. He is like an eye for him (i.e. he shows his good and bad qualities); and is like his mirror (he shows his beauty and ugliness); and is his guide. A Muslim never acts treasonably to his brother, does not oppress him, does not play tricks on him, does not lie to him, and does not resort to fault-finding and backbiting towards him." [3]

The holy prophet of Islam, describing the rights of Muslims towards each another, says:

يغفر زلته، ويرحم عبرته، ويستر عورته، ويقيل عثرته، ويقبل معذرته، ويرد غيبته، ويديم نصيحته، ويحفظ خلته ...
...

"A Muslim should connive at the errors of his co-religionist brother; have pity in his troubles; keep his secrets; disregard his mistakes; accept his excuse; defend him against the malicious and the fault-finders; act as a counsellor for him; and maintain friendly relations with him. When that brother-in-faith is sick, he should visit him; accept his gift; reward him reciprocally for his presents; thank him for his kindnesses; speak well with him; be friendly with his friends; not abandon him in trouble; wish for him what he wishes for himself, and despise for him what he himself despises."[4]
Imam Sadiq, the sixth Imam, says:

أَحِبَّ لِأَخِيكَ الْمُسْلِمِ مَا تُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِكَ وَإِذَا احْتَجْتَ فَسَلْهُ وَإِنْ سَأَلَكَ فَأَعْطِهِ لا تَمَلَّهُ خَيْراً وَلا يَمَلُّهُ لَكَ كُنْ لَهُ ظَهْراً فَإِنَّهُ لَكَ ظَهْرٌ إِذَا غَابَ فَاحْفَظْهُ فِى غَيْبَتِهِ وَإِذَا شَهِدَ فَزُرْهُ وَأَجِلَّهُ وَأَكْرِمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْكَ وَأَنْتَ مِنْهُ ...

"Cherish for your Muslim brother what you cherish for yourself. If you need something, ask him for it: and if he needs something, do not refuse it to him. Do not abstain from generosity to him nor express annoyance. He too in his turn, should not abstain from showing goodness to you. Act as his supporter, since he, too, supports you. In his absence, protect his honour. When he returns from a journey, visit him. Respect and honour him. He belongs to you, and you belong to him, if he is harsh towards you, do not sever your relations with him, but ask him for pardon. If he meets good fortune, thank God for it, and if he faces a difficulty, hasten to assist him. If his enemies resort to trickery against him or set a trap for him, aid him and prevent him from being caught." [5]

What was mentioned was an example of the rights of co-religionist brethren which have been commanded by Islamic teachings.

Next to these general injunctions, other duties of Muslim towards each another have been considered carefully by the exalted leaders of Islam in separate chapters, and each obligation has been strongly emphasised.

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Fellowship means assisting co-religionist brethren and aiding them financially.

Religious narrations have attached much importance to this matter which ameliorates the life of deprived classes, and creates affection and solidarity among Muslims, and this is regarded as a necessary attribute of every devout Muslim, and is rewarded fittingly by God.

Imam Sadiq (PBUH) says:

تقربوا الى الله تعالى بمواساة اخوانكم

“With fellowship and assistance to your co-religionist brethren, make yourself a favorite at God's threshold.” 6

The holy prophet of Islam said in his will to Imam Ali:

سيد الاعمال ثلاث خصال: انصافك الناس من نفسك ومواساة الاخ في الله عز وجل ، وذكرك الله تعالى على كل حال

"Three things are the best acts; first, to treat people with equity and justice; second to assist your co-religionist brethren as fellows and aid them financially; and third, to remember God under all conditions." 7

Imam Ali (PUBH) has said:

مواساة الاخ في الله عز وجل تزيد في الرزق

“Showing fellowship to co-religionist brethren and helping them in the way of God, will increase one's sustenance.” 8

Waghedi, who was a great scholar in the time of caliph Ma'emoun, says: “I had two friends one of whom was of the Hashemi Family. We were such sincere friends that we were really like one spirit in three bodies. One of those years, at the festival time, I was on the rocks with poverty. My wife said: ‘We two can put up with all discomforts and hardship, but these children give me a heart-burn, since I see other children dressed in new clothes duly adorned for the festival, whereas these children's clothes are old

and worn out. Think of a way if you can, and get some money to enable me to buy come clothes for them.'

I pondered for some time, but could find no way. At last I wrote a letter to my Hashemi friend, asking him to help me if he could.

My friend sent me a sealed bag and wrote that it contained one thousand drachmas, I had not yet unsealed the bag when a messenger arrived from the other friend, reporting his great need and asking for help. I sent him the bag without seeing the contents, and went to the mosque feeling very depressed. I felt so ashamed to face my wife that I spent the whole night in the mosque. In the morning, I went home and contrary to what I thought she smiled cheerfully at me, and expressed much glad not for the generosity that I had shown to my friend and had given priority to him over myself.

At this moment, my Hashemi friend entered our house and said: "Tell me the truth. What happened to the bag of money I sent you yesterday?" I narrated all that had happened.

He looked down for a moment and then said: "Yesterday when you sent a message asking for help, I had nothing but this bag of money, and I sent it to you. So to get some money for my own expenses I wrote to our other friend, asking for his help. He sent me my own sealed bag, and I remained astonished all this time till you explained the matter."

Waghedi says: "We three divided that money among us, and they offered my wife a hundred drachmas.

The strange event was reported to Ma'emoun who summoned me and asked me to narrate the story, and I described exactly what had happened. Ma'emoun ordered to give two thousand dinars individually to all three of us and a gift of one thousand dinars to my wife."[9]

The above story is a historical incident which has occurred for some Muslims who were educated in the school of Islam. Under the influence of the teachings of Islam, they acquired such fine qualities and human ways, and thus the spirit of brotherhood and fellowship dominated their lives to such an extent.

If we study the history of early Islam, we can clearly observe the spirit of brotherhood and fellowship among individuals.

In the battle of *Ohod*, which was one of the toughest of Islamic battles, the Muslims showed a great degree of self-sacrifice. Many groups courageously welcomed martyrdom. And a large number of them fell wounded and half-dead on the battlefield.

Seven Muslim soldiers had fallen wounded side by side, breathing their last. All of them were exhausted and thirsty. A man whose duty was to provide water to the soldiers, came there, but he had enough water for only one man. He came with it to one of them, asking him to drink it, but the wounded soldier said: "Give it to the man who has fallen near me." So the carrier of water came to the second man who refused to take the water, asking him to give the water to the next soldier. Thus, the third and fourth

soldiers acted in the same way until all the seven of them, in turn, wanted the water to be given to the next man. The water-carrier came back to the first man since the seventh soldier had said that the first man was the thirstiest, but he was found dead by this time. When he came upon the others turn in turn, they, too, had passed away, and thus all of them had died in thirst, and actually taught other people the lesson of self-sacrifice and fellowship.[10]

That was an example of the lesson they had learnt in the school of the great prophet of Islam, and employed it even under the hardest conditions in all aspects of their lives.

It is unfortunate that, despite having faith in such a liberating religion and sublime teachings, we are involved in such a condition that the spirit of brotherhood and fellowship is gradually disappearing among us, to be replaced by a dryness and indifference which are the souvenirs of the west. But we should remember that this state of affairs is contrary to Islamic teachings, and a Muslim cannot remain cool and indifferent towards the discomforts of his co-religionist brethren, and be a spectator.

The noble prophet of Islam says:

مَنْ أَصْبَحَ لَا يَهْتَمُّ بِأُمُورِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فَلَيْسَ بِمُسْلِم

"He who begins his day without endeavouring for the improvement of Muslims' affairs, is no Muslim." [11]

Imam Sadiq, the sixth Imam, says:

خياركم سمحاوكم و شراركم بخلائكم و من صالح الاعمال البر بالاخوان و السعى فى حوائجهم و فى ذلک مرغمة للشيطان و تزحزح عن النيران و دخول الجنان

"The best of you Muslims are those who are generous, and the worst are the mean and miserly. One of the good and admirable acts is to show goodness to co-religionist brethren, and endeavour to meet their needs. Such an act makes Satan abject, and its doer will be immune from the fire of hell, and will approach heaven and eternal happiness." [12]

A man came to the noble prophet of Islam and complained of being hungry. The prophet sent someone to a number of his relatives to get some food for the man. Unfortunately no food was to be found in their houses. The prophet turned to those who were present and said: *"Which of you can take care of this man tonight?"* Imam Ali said: *"O, prophet of God! I will do it."* Then Ali took the man's arms and proceeded together to his own house. On reaching there, Imam Ali asked his noble consort, Fatima: *"What eatables do we have in the house?"* She said: *"A little food enough for our children."* He said: *"We must give priority to our guest over our children and ourselves."*

Upon this verdict, Fatima managed somehow to put the children to sleep without supper, and the Imam

placed the food before the guest, and while pretending to repair the lamp, put it out.

The guest began to eat in the dark, and the Imam sat by him without touching the food, but making the guest think that his host, too, was partaking of the supper.

Thus, that night the Imam, Fatima and the children went without supper, and for the sake of God, showed hospitality to the guest. God Almighty in the following Quranic verse has praised this nobility of character and self-sacrifice:

وَيُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ

***"...and prefer (them) before themselves though poverty may afflict them..."* (*59:9*)**

Naturally, this conduct is not possible for everyone, and only a supreme man is able to behave in this manner.

Nor has Islam required every follower of its faith to act in this way as a duty, but what is considered a definite and inevitable duty is brotherhood and fellowship, in the sense that a Muslim should help his co-religionist brethren in distress and hardship, devote a part of his wealth to the betterment of the condition of the needy and the helpless, visit sick Muslims, console them, and as far as possible take care of orphans and those who have no guardian, and participate in the establishment of public welfare foundations.

A Greek used to visit Imam Ali frequently and discuss Islamic injunctions with him. When he became sufficiently versed in Islam, and was convinced of its rightfulness, he embraced this faith under the direction of the Imam. When Imam Ali was guiding him about his future duties, he said:

وآمرک ان تواسی اخوانک المطابقین لک علی تصدیق محمد صلی الله علیه واله وتصدیقی

"I advise you to assist your co-religionist brethren who are the followers of the prophet of Islam and me, and help them with some of the wealth which God has granted you. Meet their needs, remove their difficulties, and treat them kindly." 13

Imam Reza, the eight Imam, says about the rights of co-religionist brethren:

إن من حق المؤمن على المؤمن المودة له في صدره والمؤاساة له في ما له والنصرة له على من ظلمه ... و
... لايظلمه و لا يغشه و لايخوكه و لا يخذله و لا يغتابه و لا يكذبه

"One of the rights that every believer owes to his co-religionist brother is to love him truly, to help him

financially, to show him fellowship, and aid him when he is oppressed by someone... A believer is never unjust to his co-religionist brother, does not deceive or betray him, and allows no slander, nor lies to him." 14

He who offers a garment as a gift to his co-religionist brother, will be rewarded with heavenly garments by God, and he who gives a loan to his co-religionist brother for the sake of God, will receive alms by God, and he who removes the sorrow of his co-religionist brother, will be aided by God in removing the sorrow of his life in the hereafter...

Safwan Jamal says: "I was sitting with Imam Sadiq in a gathering when a man of Mecca entered and said that his money was finished and he had no fare left for his return trip.

The Imam ordered me to get up and see to the affairs of my co-religionist brother. I rose at once and did my best to get enough money for the man's fare, and after giving it to him, I returned to the Imam's session. The Imam asked me what I had done for that man. I reported that with God's aid his affair was put in order. The Imam said: *'Remember that if you help your co-religionist brother, you will be held in a greater esteem by me than for the performance of weeklong circumambulation of the House of God by you'* and then added: 'A man came to Imam Hassan (PBUH) and asked for assistance in his own difficulty. The Imam put on his shoes at once and went out with him. On the way they reached a spot where Imam Hossain (PBUH) was engaged in prayer. Imam Hassan asked the man: *'Why didn't you refer to Hossain to help you in your difficulty?'* The man answered: 'O, son of the prophet of God! I intended to do so, but he is in his spiritual seclusion, so I did not go to him.' Imam Hassan said: *'But if he had received the favour of aiding you, it would have been better for him than one month's spiritual seclusion'"* 15

Imam Sadiq says:

ما قضى مسلم لمسلم حاجة الانا‌داه الله تبارک و تاعلى على ثوابک و لا ارضى لک بدون الجنه

"Every Muslim who removes the need of his Muslim brother is promised a reward by God, and I think no reward other than heaven is adequate for him." 16

A man called Abdol-A'ela who was a distinguished Shi'a, left Kufa for Medina. The Shi'a followers of Imam Sadiq wrote down the questions on the issues they had in mind, and gave them to him in order to receive the answers back from the Imam through him. They also asked him on being received by the Imam to request him to explain the rights of a Muslim towards his co-religionist brother.

Abdol-A'ela says: "When I found the honour of meeting the Imam, he answered all the questions but said nothing about the rights of co-religionist brethren. On the following days, too, the Imam made no reference to this matter. When my stay in Medina came to an end, and I went to beg leave from the Imam, I reminded him that my question was still unanswered.

He said: *“I deliberately abstained from giving an answer”*. I asked the reason, and he said: *“I fear to explain since you may not act upon it and thus abandon your religion of God.”* Then he added: *“Of the hardest things that God has made obligatory for his servants there are three matters: firstly, the observance of justice and equity between oneself and others, meaning that one should treat his co-religionist brethren in the same way that one expects others to treat oneself. Secondly, one should show fellowship to one's co-religionist brethren, and aid them with his wealth and thirdly, one should, under all conditions, remember God, and by that I do not mean that one should keep on repeating the phrases ‘Glory be to God’ or ‘God be praised’. What I mean is that upon coming across a forbidden act, one should remember God and thus abstain from committing such an act.”*[17]

These teachings had penetrated the spirit of the followers of Islam so deeply that their conduct cannot be compared with that of any nation. We have given several examples of this, and books of history abound in such cases of brotherhood and fellowship.

Now that many centuries have passed since the advent of Islam, and humanity has made the so called "astonishing progress" in industries and technologies, not only is this noble human quality not observed in advanced countries, but rather the exact reverse of it exists there.

A writer says about the relations of Europeans with each other: “The relations of people with each other are cold and devoid of deep-rooted feelings. It seems that true affection, which is an emotional relationship illuminating life, has been crushed under the wheels of industry. Basically, there is no sign of self-sacrifice, indulgence and sympathy at all, and the number of one's friends may not exceed the number of one's fingers.”

When the writer was confined in hospital, though my visitors were not many, I could claim that their number was greater than that of the visitors of the German patients in that ward of the hospital. This was quite surprising for the hospital staff, since one rarely saw a German visiting his sick relative.

Here I will narrate an interesting incident as a living proof of my claim so that you may see the extent of the kindness and affection of civilized nations.

A few years ago, a professor from a German university embraced Islam in the presence of the director of an Islamic group in Hamburg. Sometime later, this convert Muslim was confined in a hospital due to some sickness. The director of the Islamic group, learning of his sickness, went to visit him, but was unexpectedly faced with the sad and depressed countenance of the professor. He asked the reason for his depression and discomfort.

The professor who until that moment, had kept silent and was immersed in his own thoughts, began to speak, and narrated his amazing but unfortunate account as follows: “Today my wife and son came to visit me. The hospital ward informed them that I was suffering from cancer. While leaving the hospital, they addressed me and said: ‘We are told today that you are dying of cancer, and only a few days of your life are left. So we say good-bye to you for the last time and you must excuse us from paying

another visit.' He added then: 'This noticeable pain and mental depression is not due to a feeling that the doors of hope are shut against me and that I despair of life. It is rather due to the unfair and inhuman behavior of my wife and son which has given me such a severe depression."

The director of the Islamic group, who was deeply moved at the professor's uneasiness, said: "As Islam has strongly emphasized the matter of visiting the sick, I will come to see you whenever I find an opportunity." One hearing these words, there emerged a happy smile on the professor's face. His physical condition however became worse and after some time he died. A number of Muslims went to the hospital to attend his funeral and burial rites, and carried the body of the convert to the cemetery. But the matter did not end here. At the moment of the burial, a young man, looking angry, arrived and said: "Where is the professor's corpse?" They asked: "Are you related to the deceased?" He said: "Yes he is my father. I have come to deliver his body to the hospital for autopsy; for, a few days before his death, I sold his body to the hospital for thirty German marks."

But in spite of his insistence, those present opposed him and he was obliged to let the matter drop.

Later on, when the young man was asked what his profession was, he said that he worked in a factory in the morning, and did hairdressing for dogs in the afternoon.

This bitter incident truly shows how human kindness and affection are declining in the civilized society. Today, too, the retrogressing course of humanity in terms of noble qualities, and outburst of social depravity are undeniable. Great thinkers, confessing this bitter truth, are looking for a remedy, and are deeply pained at this unpleasant situation. They know well what the sickness is, and feel that a fundamental combat with this carelessness and perversity, and building up a new world hinges on faith and virtue.

Those who are submerged in this kind of life, have realized that this is an empty life which can never offer happiness to mankind. It is interesting to hear this frank and clear confession from the present President of America on the occasion of taking the oath of office. He said: "We consider ourselves rich in commodities, but our spirit is unstable. While we land on the moon with brilliant skill, we are involved with a crushing dispersion on the earth. We are involved in war, while we desire peace. Discord has separated us, while we are looking for unity. We see empty lives all around us, while we long for satisfaction. In the face of a spiritual crisis which has afflicted us, we are in need of a spiritual response. To find such an answer we should only look at ourselves. When we listen to the call of conscience, we shall see that it respects such simple and basic things as goodness, purity, love and kindness."

It is by means of attention to these facts that every just person involuntarily bows to the great legislator of Islam – a legislator who, by paying attention to all the physical, spiritual and instinctive needs of man, has enacted such happiness-giving laws which are in harmony with human nature and logic, and which respond to all wishes. These are the laws which have, for many centuries, been carried out and have produced satisfactory results. They are the laws which have not merely stayed in a written from, but

have also been executed in their full sense, without meeting any difficulty in their enforcement.

The more we look at the confessions of western thinkers, the more we feel their social and psychological disorders, and eventually we further appreciate and praise the pure, chaste and heavenly Islam.

In conclusion, what should be remembered is that all Muslim are duty-bound to propagate the teaching of Islam without any adornment, and especially acquaint the young with these injunctions of Islam so that the spirit of brotherhood and fellowship, which has existed for many centuries in the Muslim society, may be strengthened, and under the auspices of this Islamic brotherhood, we may proceed towards true happiness.

1. The abbreviation 'P B U H' stands for 'peace be upon him', and is usually placed after the name of an Imam.
2. Bihar-al-Anwar, vol.74, p.21, and Tohaf-ul-Uqool p.277.
3. Kafi, vol.2, p.166.
4. Bihar-al-Anwar
5. Kafi, vol.3, p.263.
6. Khesal-e-Sadoogh, vol.1,p.8.
7. Bihar-al-Anwar, vol.74,p.392.
8. Bihar-al-Anwar, vol.74,p.392.
9. Historical stories, Morawej-o-Zahab of Masoudi
10. Majmoal-Bayan,vol.9,p.260
11. Kafi,vol.2,p.146.
12. Majaless-e-Mofid,p.179, Amali Toussi, vol.I.
13. Ehtejaj of Tabarsi, p.114.
14. Bihar-al-Anwar, vol.74, p.233.
15. Kafi,vol.2, p.158.
16. Ghorbol-Assnad, p.19.
17. Usool-e-Kafi, vol.2, p. 170., Bihar-al-Anwar, vol.7, p.243.

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