

Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful

The unity of the Islamic nation is, undoubtedly, a pleasant, idealistic and desirable concept that has been advised and emphasized in the original documents of Islam: the Qur'an and the narrations [*hadiths*].

Like many other words such as science [*'ilm*], Imamate, caliphate, wisdom [*hikmah*], and piety, the meaning of the word *hadith* has gradually changed and deviated to the extent that now it may mean something quite different from what it was originally meant to convey.

Approximation [*taqrib*] i.e., closeness of the Islamic sects, denotes the following ideas, whether we desire it or not:

- a. Keeping silent in the presence of opponents, and refusing to engage in any scholarly debate with them.
- b. Believing that every religion is right.
- c. Accepting that the followers of *Imamiyyah* school of thought are not the only people who will be saved in the hereafter.
- d. Saying there is a need to review some of the points in the Shi'ah doctrine and those in the religious texts.
- e. Agreeing that various Muslim schools of thought stem from the independent judgements of the '*ulama*', viz. their *ijtihad*.
- f. Confirming all the Companions [*sahabah*] as righteous.

Those who hold the above ideas say that "Right" cannot be monopolized by any specific group because it is distributed among all the sects with each entitled to a share. The dictum "the saved group" cannot apply to one particular sect; all ideological differences stem from some sort of desirable personal judgment, viz. *ijtihad*, made on the basis of religious texts. We, the Shi'ah, should, therefore, avoid

calling other ideologies “false” or “deviated”. Where there is a difference of opinion, we should remain silent and accept that others are also right.

We should not call them “malicious” or “those who devise a secret plan”; the Shi‘ah community should forget all feelings of enmity towards opponents, because these feelings are utterly undesirable. They say that there is no disagreement between our doctrines and great juridical pillars; the disagreement on Imamate is merely a difference of applicability. Those who claim the above, say, “We do not reject the idea of Imamate, and we have religious proof as to who should occupy the rank of Imamate and Caliphate. Yet, there is no use arguing over the issue of succession to the Prophet (S) these days; it does not concern us what others did or did not.

But as we understand it, our texts take approximation to mean:

- a. Creating a peaceful symbiosis among the Islamic sects and schools of thought.
- b. Ensuring tension-free social relations.
- c. Reducing tensions in order to prevent any sedition, social and religious unrest, maintain a peaceful and secure life, and simultaneously safeguard inter-sectarian beliefs and religious conventions.
- d. Avoiding any sensitive issue that might harm the religious or worldly affairs of the Shi‘ah community.

These will certainly help protect Islam and not be grist to the enemies’ mill. When we take for granted the fact that there are differences of opinion among Muslims, we do not imply that we consent to tensions and disruptions within the Islamic society, because such occurrences will serve the interest of the enemies of Islam. Difference of opinions and occurrence of clashes are two separate issues. It is tension along with strife, and not the ideological differences discussed in an entirely scholarly framework that harms the social relations of Muslims.

When I first came to know Dr. ‘Isam through the internet and witnessed his discussion with the biased Wahhabi ‘Uthman al-Khamis, I was fascinated by his method. His serene and solemn voice and his polite and systematic dialogue made his particular manner of discussion more interesting.

Sometime later I discovered that Dr. ‘Isam himself used to be a biased Wahhabi, conducting anti-Shi‘ah activities in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, but with God’s favor, later on, converted to Shi‘ism. He now attempts to debate with his former co-religionists. He also has a book, *al-Minhaj al-Jadid wa’l-Sahih fi’l-Hiwar ma’a’l-Wahhabiyyin*, on ways and methods of conducting discussions with Wahhabis. It was through a friend that I came to know Dr. ‘Isam, and *A Strife-free Dialogue* commenced its documentation after a few sessions of in-depth discussions with him.

The author mainly aims to establish a suitable method of communication with Wahhabis to familiarize them with Shi‘ism, and to prepare a proper ground for their conversion to the school of thought of the Household of the Prophet, peace be upon them.

Also, he believes that a group of the Wahhabis—those who are not makers of mischief or mercenaries of the colonialists—will adhere to the truth once they know it, just as he did.

By approximation and closeness of the Islamic sects, Dr. ‘Isam means a gradual progression towards understanding, consequent removal of tension and hope for a global Shi‘ism. The present book is in fact a prologue to his detailed book *Rihlati min al-Wahhabiyyah il’l-Ithna ‘Ashariyyah*.

The present book is not a word-by-word translation of the book *al-Minhaj al-Jadid*; rather, it is both a translation and an edition done under the supervision of the author himself. The following are examples of the editing carried out:

- a. Some repetitive points were deleted.
- b. Some long sentences were summarized.
- c. Modifications were made to fit the book in the culture of Persian native speakers.
- d. Long and lengthy footnotes were moved and included in the text.
- e. Key words suitable to the writer’s intention were chosen. For example, certain words and phrases such as “understanding” and “peaceful symbiosis” were used instead of “approximation” or *taqrib* so as to avoid ambiguity. All this was done after the writer was consulted.

The writer has, throughout the book, used the phrase “*Madhhab al-Ithna ‘Ashariyyah*” demanding that the same should be used. He believes that Wahhabis are less sensitive to this phrase. Besides, the words “Shi‘ism” and “Shi‘ah” are wider in scope, and cover other sects that the Imamiyyah consider rejected. In rendering the text into Persian, I have, however, used “Shi‘ism”, “Shi‘ah”, “Imamiyyah”, “Imami Shi‘ism” and “Twelver Shi‘ism” to introduce a variety of terms; however, I would like to say that I have always meant the “*Ithna ‘Ashari Madhhab*” and “*Twelver Shi‘ah*”.

May God’s blessing be on the one who follows guidance when he finds it.

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