The Voice of Unity Part 1: Unity of the Islamic Community

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The present article investigates the concept of 'ummah' in Islam and its religious foundations. It alludes to the different forms of unity found within the Qur'an as well as its necessary conditions—ones which include affirming the essentials of the faith and acknowledging common responsibilities emerging from it.

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The Voice of Unity Part 1: Unity of the Islamic Community

Al-Taqrib A Journal of Islamic Unity Number 5 November 2009

Muhammad Wa'iz-Zadeh Khurasani

Translated by Hamid Waqar

This is the first of a series of talks delivered in 1991 by Muhammad Wa'iz-Zadeh Khurasani, the then secretary-general of the 'Majma' Jahani Taqrib Madhahib Islami', on the topic of unity. They were presented over the duration of a several weeks prior to the commencement of the Friday prayers in Tehran. The remaining talks will be printed in subsequent issues of the English Taqrib journal, insha-Allah.

Abstract

The subject of unity is quite extensive and includes many facets such as the religious basis for unity, the concept of brotherhood in Islam, the root of differences, the history of the madhahib (schools of jurisprudence and thought), internal and external factors in the development of the madhahib, and pioneers of the Islamic unity movement.

As the first of a series of talks discussing these different facets, the present article investigates the concept of 'ummah' in Islam and its religious foundations. It alludes to the different forms of unity found within the Qur'an as well as its necessary conditions—ones which include affirming the essentials of the faith and acknowledging common responsibilities emerging from it.

Keywords: Islamic unity, ummah, Islamic brotherhood, madhahib, Unity week, Friday prayers.

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In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Allah states:

﴿وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا﴾

Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord, and do not be divided. (***3:103***)

To begin, I would like to congratulate my respected audience, the Wali al-Faqih, the Muslims as a whole, and the Shias on the blessed birthday of the Noble Messenger of Islam—the Prophet and saviour of humanity, Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah (*s*)—and on the blessed birthday of the founder of the [Shia] *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence), Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (*'a*), which is connected to the birthday of the Noble Messenger.

It is an amazing coincidence that the Unity Week was inspired by the birthday of the Messenger of Allah. There are two narrations regarding his date of birth provided by the Sunnis and the Shias—the 12th and the 17th of Rabi' al-Awwal. The days in between these days have been named Unity Week, which began yesterday.

The coincidence that I mentioned is as follows: just as the Noble Messenger of Islam was the Messenger of unity whose birthday has become the scale of unity (*wahdah*) in the Islamic community, so too the birthday of Imam Sadiq (*'a*), who brought the leaders together, has become the scale of proximity (*taqrib*) amongst the schools of thought. The explanation of this is that the four Imams of the Sunni schools of thought intellectually benefited from Imam Sadiq (*'a*) either directly or through a middleman.

Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150/767) was a mufti who was alive during the same period as Imam Sadiq (*'a*) and he took pride in being the Imam's student. Imam Malik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), the founder of the Maliki sect, was an official student of Imam Sadiq (*'a*). He narrated traditions directly from the Imam in the oldest Islamic jurisprudential book that exists today, *Muta'*, and which is the foundation of the Maliki sect.

Imam Shafi'i (d. 204/819) was a student of Imam Malik and transmitted traditions from Imam Sadiq (*'a*) through him and others as well. These traditions exist in the *Musnad* of Shafi'i. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855), the founder of the Hanbali sect, was a student of Imam Shafi'i. When Shafi'i wanted to migrate from Baghdad to Egypt (which is where he passed away), he said: "I have not left anyone in Baghdad more knowledgeable in jurisprudence than Ahmad ibn Hanbal."

Therefore, the root of the four *madhahib* is Imam Sadiq (*'a*) and he is the means of proximity amongst the schools of thought. I am not saying the 'unity' of the schools of thought; rather I am saying the 'proximity' amongst the schools of thought. Later, I will expound on this.

I thank the Office of Friday Prayers for giving me the opportunity to speak about Islamic unity and the proximity of the schools of thought on the Friday Prayer platform. The issues that I want to discuss will probably take no more than five or six speeches. I will mention the subjects that, God-willing if I remain alive and Allah gives me the opportunity, I will speak about in these talk (naturally they will not be given consecutively as there will be a definite gap in between them). I am doing this [i.e., listing the topics of discussion] so that the respected listeners will be aware of the organizational format of the speeches.

List of Topics for Discussion

The main title given to these speeches is Islamic unity and proximity between the schools of thought. The difference between these two terms will become clear throughout the speeches.

The first speech, which I am starting today, God-willing, is entitled: "The unity of the Islamic community." The second speech will be titled: "Islamic brotherhood." These two are different and one must contemplate over them and reach their depths.

The third speech will be about differences—where the differences in religion came from, the reasons behind them, and how many differences we have. Some of the differences must be accepted and some of them are forbidden—i.e., they must be rejected. The Qur'an forbade differences in general; it forbade differences which cannot be accepted and which cause divisions and disputes.

After that we will come to the fourth title in the series: "The origination of the *madhahib* in Islam and the reasons behind their differences." It is clear that there were no *madhahib* during the lifetime of the Noble Messenger. When did they start and why? Were the reasons behind their disputes purely political? Other than politics was the main reason behind their differences *ijtihad* (interpretive reasoning)? *Ijtihad* causes

differences that we are forced to accept—differences that Islam itself has accepted. This root of having differences is preliminary to knowledge and understanding just as some say that doubt is a preliminary to knowledge. If doubt is a preliminary to knowledge this would be very good. However, the doubt that occurs after knowledge is obtained is objectionable. The Qur'an has also rebuked this [latter] cause for differences.

The fifth title will be: "The progression of the Islamic schools of theology and jurisprudence." What stages did the *madhahib* that exist today go through? What paths did they take in theology and jurisprudence? What ups and downs did they experience?

The sixth title will be: "The role politics played in the growth of Islamic schools of thought." There are schools of thought that were not born from politics, which is the case for most of the famous *madhahib*, though politics played a role in their growth or in their losing influence. Sometimes, it even played a role in their disappearance Islamic history. We will not understand the reason behind the question of Islamic unity and the proximity between the Islamic *madhahib* until we solve this issue, until we discover the root of this issue, and until we reach the depths of it. We will not understand how to approach this issue, which is accepted by researchers of the various schools of thought, until we come to these realities.

The seventh title that came to my mind is another issue which is necessary to talk about here. Just as politics—i.e., internal Muslim politics—has played a role in the growth, downfall, and sometimes disappearance of Islamic schools of thought throughout history, it cannot be denied that the People of the Book (mainly Jews and Christians) have played a negative role through foreign occupation and Christian missionary activities in creating and spreading differences. A researcher wrote a book called *al-Tabshir wa al-isti'mar* which mentions the efforts of the Christian missionaries in creating differences amongst Muslims.

Christian missionaries were sent from America and Europe to Islamic countries. To use their own words, their purpose was "to give the glad tidings of the coming of Christ." Outwardly, as the Persian saying goes, they arrived as a 'pigeon of peace'[1]; however, the reality was that it was an effort to create differences and weaken Islam. Muslims must be aware of this issue.

The eighth speech will be about the efforts that peace-activists in the Islamic world and the leaders of the Islamic *madhahib* have carried out throughout history, particularly in this century, to promote Islamic unity. If we were able to extensively review this issue, we would see what great personalities can be found amongst the Islamic *madhahib* with remarkable intentions. They tried to leave these divisions and return to unity and compassion.

The Pioneers of Unity and Proximity

The International Conference of Islamic Unity will start once again in Tehran on Sunday. This conference took place today in Zahidan, Kurdistan, and Gorgan.

This year the topic of the Conference of Islamic Unity is ‘The Pioneers of Unity and Proximity.’ The participants of the conference are searching for people who worked towards laying the foundation for unity in the Islamic community and for bringing the schools of thought together throughout history, but particularly in this century. Islamic scholars from various countries and various schools of thought as well as a number of Iranian Sunni and Shia scholars will participate in this conference. In addition to the efforts of peace-activists, there are two other subjects that I must address.

The first one is to introduce ‘The Foundation for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought’ (Dar al-Taqrib bayn al-Madhahib al-Islamiyyah) which was established about forty years ago in Cairo by great scholars such as Ayatullah Burujardi, Shaykh Muhammad Shaltut, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Majid Salim, Imam Kashif al-GhiTa’, and others. It has been active for many years. If I wanted to speak extensively about this organization it would take a whole speech to do so, forcing me to make the ninth speech: “The Foundation for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought.”

The second subject, which would be the tenth speech, would be a discussion about The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought (Majma’ al-Taqrib Bayn al-Madhahib al-Islamiyyah). This organization was established two and a half years ago in Iran at the order of the Supreme Leader. The subtopics would include a description of the organization, the duties of the organization, its responsibilities, and its future programs.

I will try to cover these ten subjects, God-willing, over five or six speeches, perhaps more, in order to give you—those who are attending the prayer—more awareness of these topics.

The First Discussion—Unity of the Muslim Ummah

One of the essentials of Islam is that Muslims are one nation. This is found in two phrases in the Qur’an:

Indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So worship Me. (***21:92***)

Indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord, so be wary of Me. (***23:52***)

The ummah that is mentioned is a single Islamic community. The Prophet constantly spoke of the community by using phrases such as: “my ummah,” “whoever does such as such is not part of my

ummah," and "a condition to be part of my ummah is such and such." In short, this matter is one of the necessities of Islam—Islam came to build a community, to establish a community. A community is a congregation who follows one leader. A group of people who do not follow one line are not called a community.

The Qur'an has separated communities due to religious lines and practices. Each one of them has been considered responsible for their own actions:

تلك أمة قد خلت لها ما كسبت ولكم ما كسبتم ولا تسألون عما كانوا يعملون

That was a nation that has passed: for it there will be what it has earned, and for you there will be what you have earned, and you will not be questioned about what they used to do. (***2: 134***)

Six definitions have been given for the word 'ummah' mentioned in the Qur'an. One of these definitions is "general congregation." Another is "leader" as is mentioned in the verse:

إن إبراهيم كان أمة قانتا لله حنيفا

Indeed Abraham was a nation (***or leader***) ***obedient to Allah.*** (***16: 120***)

The third meaning of the term is "perseverance in religion." Yet other meanings are "religion", "time", and finally the one that is being discussed about now.

After mentioning the definitions of the term 'ummah', Shaykh Óusi writes in *al-Tibyan fi tafsir al-Qur'an* 2, "Ummah means the followers of one religion such as, for instance, the ummah of Moses, the ummah of Jesus, and the ummah of Muhammad." In the same place he states: "*millah*, *nihlah*, and *diyanah* have the same meaning" Moreover, one of the meanings of *millah* is "a trodden path"; therefore, the *millah* of Abraham means an evident and trodden path that Abraham opened for his followers and mankind, which is the religion of Abraham. According to this, the terms 'ummah' and '*millah*' have the same meaning; they originate from the same place. Moreover, the terms *ummah* and *imam* are taken from the same root definitive.

Hence, the congregation and the group which, in the name of Islam, follow one imam (*imam* in its literal definition, meaning 'leader')—who is none other than Noble Messenger of Islam—is called the Islamic ummah. The ummah of Moses was one ummah; the followers of Jesus were one ummah. Other nations that had a prophet were also one ummah.

White Muslims, black Muslims, red Muslims, yellow Muslims, Eastern Muslims, Western Muslims, Muslims speaking any language, Muslims of any tribe or nationality are all one ummah—a single Muslim

community.

Categories of Unity in the Qur'an

Before I speak about the single Muslim community, I will state that the Qur'an mentions three types of unity as an introduction:

1. Unity of humanity

O' mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware. (***49:13***)

The purpose of this verse is to bring the differences of tribes, nationalities, and nations into the proper perspective. Most of the differences in the world and most of the wars and travesties that have and are occurring have tribal and nationalistic roots—this tribe against that tribe, this country against that country, this nation against that nation. Islam acknowledges and accepts that humanity has various branches and tribes.

The Arabic term *shu'ub* is the plural form of *sha'b* which means "nation". We say *millat-e İran* (the Iranian nation) while Arabs say *al-sha'b al-'arabi* (the Arab nation). Allah has made it so. Likewise, the tribes are smaller circles of *sha'b*. We[3] are one nation consisting of people who speak Persian and people who do not speak Persian. The people who reside in Iran are one nation. The people of Egypt are one nation. The people of China are one nation. But, within these nations there are various tribes.

Allah also created the tribes. Why did Allah create these nations and these tribes? Was the reason of creating these nations and tribes so that people could misuse the differences not only now but throughout time? Absolutely not. The Qur'an states, "We ... made you nations and tribes that *you may identify yourselves with one another"* and that you may love one another.

None of you have rejected nor will you reject the existence of others. This nation should not try to exterminate other nations for everyone is a descendent of Adam: "Mankind resembles its father Adam and its mother Eve."[4]

We are all the descendents of Adam. The differences in nationality and tribes must not be taken as a tool used to try and obtain superiority. The differences should never be used as a source of pride or command of one tribe over another or of one nation over another. One of the commentators of the

Qur'an said: "*that you may identify yourselves* not that you may reject each other."

This means that one should not use these differences to negate another nation, to officially deny the existence of another nation, or to deprive another nation of their rights. Rather, "that you may identify yourselves" is a prelude to loving one another. It is said that the term *insan* (mankind) is derived from the root *uns* (intimacy). Man is an existence who is connected with others, who loves others; he not an existence who negates and rejects others.

Therefore, the verse mentions the unity of humanity. It states that the nationalistic and tribal differences that exist were created by Allah but the purpose of these differences is not to negate and reject each other nor is it to kill one another; rather, it is "that you may identify yourselves with one another."

No nation is superior to another in terms of nationalistic qualities or creation. Do some nations have any merits over other nations? Yes and although they do not have essential merits over other nations, there is one merit which can be obtained. Coincidentally, the purpose of this merit is to prevent people from being boastful about one's nationality. The Qur'an states:

﴿وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ﴾

... and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you. (***49:13***)

The one who is closer to Allah is the most Godwary or pious one. The scale of comparing the superiority of one nation over another, of one tribe over another, of one individual over another is piety. What is piety? It is when man is able to control his carnal desires—when he is able to control himself and not haphazardly consider himself superior to others.

Therefore, the criteria which is used as a merit and is also a merit with Allah is piety: "Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you." Allah created everyone equally, but the person who moves farther along the path of piety has moved closer in proximity to Allah. Allah gives more value to such a person. Piety, as we know, prevents man from oppressing people who are even lower than him and prevents man from taking pride in oneself over such people.

In addition to this verse there are other verses which will not be mentioned because I do not want to extend this discussion. These verses mention the scale of unity in humanity which is limiting the differences of nations and tribes and accepting their meanings on the one hand while using piety to be the criterion for merit on the other.

Some other verses mention knowledge and piety together; for instance:

يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ۝

Allah will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge in rank. (***58:11***)

Here, faith is used in place of piety and mentioned along with knowledge. This form of unity is the unity of humanity.

2. Unity of monotheistic religions

Another form of unity that the Qur'an mentions is a unity of religious people. People who believe in a monotheistic religion; a religion which has roots in revelation are included in this unity. There are many verses of this nature. I will read one verse and allude to the concepts of other verses of the Qur'an. There are verses that state that the truth is Islam:

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِندَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ۗ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ ۗ وَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ۝

Indeed, the religion with Allah is Islam. (3:19)

Or:

وَمَن يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ۝

Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him. (***3:85***)

These verses have been explained in two different ways which do not contradict each other.

One is that in this instance, Islam means the religion which we follow called 'Islam'. One of the merits of our religion is that Allah named it. Other religions are recognized by their relationship with their prophet or the nationality of their followers. Christianity is the religion of Christ. Judaism is named such because of its relationship with the Jewish nation, meaning the religion of the Jews. Jews are followers of Moses. But, Islam has its own name. Muslims are not called Muhammadans, meaning those who follow Muhammad. Rather, Islam has given itself a name—'Islam'. People who follow this religion are called Muslims.

This is a common explanation, but there is evidence and surrounding circumstances to suggest that Islam, in such verses, means the reality of Islam which is the reality of all religions. The Commander of the Faithful (*'a*) said: "I will give a genealogy of Islam which has not been mentioned by anyone else: *Islam* is surrender; surrender is certainty; certainty is confirmation; confirmation is confession; confession

is being obliged; and being obliged is action."[5] Surrendering to Allah means that one worships Allah and no other. It means that one obeys Allah and does not sin. This is a summary of all divinely inspired religions. The Qur'an states:

[illegible]

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 (***3:64***)

Therefore, in this verse there is a form of unity amongst the divinely-inspired monotheistic religions and polytheistic religions is demarcated. The followers of divine prophets are the same in being servants of Allah and in worshiping Him.

[illegible]

Yet they were not commanded except to worship Allah, dedicating their faith to Him as men of pure faith (***98:5***)

Prophet Noah states:

[illegible]

I have been commanded to be of those who submit [***to Allah***]. (***10:72***)

Prophet Abraham said:

[illegible]

so never die except as muslims. (***2:132***)

Being a *muslim*, *islam* and surrendering, is the reality of all divinely inspired religions:

[illegible]

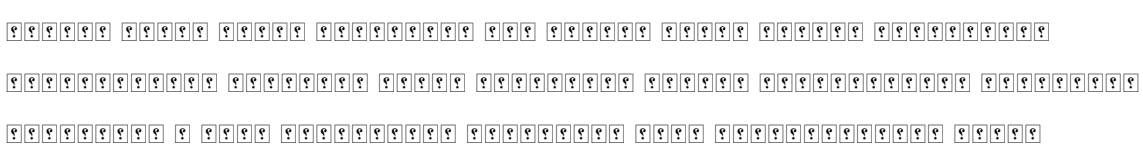
Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. Rather he was a hanif, a muslim. (***3:67***)

Hanif means a monotheist and *muslim* means one submitting to Allah.

Therefore, the reality of the true religion which was revealed to all of the prophets is one thing: surrendering to Allah, believing in the oneness of Allah, worshiping Allah, and being sincere to Allah—different phrases which definitely relate to piety. A person will not be sincere or monotheistic and will not surrender himself to Allah if he is not pious. In any case, this type of unity is the unity of religions—the unity of divinely inspired religions. This is the boundary between us on the one hand and idol-worship and polytheism on the other. The Qur'an never tells us to come to a common understanding with the polytheists. The reason is because we do not have anything in common with them. They worship idols and we worship Allah.

But, the term 'the People of the Scripture,' which is a term usually denoting the Jews and the Christians, is literally a term that can be applied to all religions that have their roots in revelation. This is one form of unity between all religions that is mentioned in the Qur'an. It states that the same thing that was revealed to Noah, Abraham, and Jacob was revealed to the Prophet:

We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and [***as***] ***We revealed to Abraham and Ishmael.*** (***4:163***)



He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have [***also***] ***revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, declaring, 'Maintain the religion, and do not be divided in it.'*** (***42:13***)

We will worship your God, and the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac, the One God, and to Him do we submit. (***2:133***)

There are numerous other verses as well. I do not want to recite all of the verses which would take up too much time. So, the second form of unity is unity amongst divinely-inspired religions.

Here, a point must be clarified. The unity of religions is mentioned sometimes in some Freemason groups in Europe and other places. But, the unity of religions that they mention includes all religions including polytheism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. They mean all 'godly' people even if their religion is polluted with polytheism—i.e., even if the foundation of their religion is polytheistic. What I mean by a unity of religions is a unity of divinely-inspired religions, not all religions. I had to say this so that people would not misuse the term unity of religions and say that all religions have commonalities. They do not. There are some religions whose reality is polytheism and do not have any commonalities with monotheistic religions.

Another point is that the essence of Islam and other divinely inspired religions is the same. Their essence is surrendering to Allah. But, they have different laws:

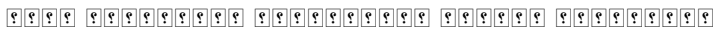
We had appointed a code [***of law***] ***and a path, and had Allah wished He would have made you one community.*** (***5:48***)

Each one of your religions has a code and a path. If Allah wanted He would have appointed all of you as one community which means that all of you would have one code and one religion.

The code is a compilation of laws. You pray in a certain way and they pray in another way. The laws regarding marriage are one way for you and another way for them. There are different laws. But, the reality of divinely inspired religions is one—submission to Allah.

3. Unity of the Islamic community

The third form of unity is the unity of the Islamic community which is the subject of our discussion. The Qur'an states:



Indeed this community of yours is one community (***21:92***)

According to the flow of the Qur'an, this verse has been explained in two different ways. Some have said that the verse addresses the followers of all prophets because other prophets were mentioned before this verse in the Qur'an. Then the following verse is mentioned:

[illegible]

Indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So worship Me. (***21:92***)

After this verse, the discussion is about differences. It states that the differences amongst you are:

[illegible]

… out of envy among themselves. (***2:213***)

They disputed amongst themselves out of oppression and envy before an oppressor existed. If we explain the verse in this way, the verse would be about the unity of religions because it would state that the worshipers of Allah—i.e., the followers of the prophets that were mentioned—are all one nation. One nation here would mean that all of them worship Allah.

[illegible]

Indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So worship Me. (***21:92***)

We stated that the scale of unity amongst the divinely inspired religions is monotheistic worship. The end of the verse confers this meaning as well.

However, some other commentators of the Qur'an state that Muslims are addressed in this verse after other prophets were mentioned. Since others were mentioned before, it now addresses Muslims—you are one nation:

[illegible]

Indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So worship Me. (***21:92***)

In another verse the phrase "so be pious" is mentioned. Therefore, the meaning and the criteria of our nation being a single nation is obtained. We are the Islamic nation because we are monotheistic, we worship Allah, we have one prophet, and we have one code of law; therefore, we Muslims are all members of one nation.

There are many phrases used in regards to Islamic unity. There is another term out there called 'Islamic

brotherhood'. God-willing, I will spend one complete speech on the subject of Islamic brotherhood and the meaning of brotherhood.

I will state here in general that Islamic unity or the unity of Muslims refers more to the political and social dimensions whereas Islamic brotherhood refers more to the dimension of compassion. It states that you must be compassionate as a brother. I mentioned the verse that the respected reciter of the Qur'an recited at the beginning of my speech:

﴿وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا﴾

Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord, and do not be divided. (***3:103***)

You were enemies to one another. Allah brought your hearts together and you became brothers. Brotherhood is a closeness of the hearts—it is compassion. Brotherhood is about Islamic compassion. Muslims are partners and one community when it comes to general issues, laws, and destinies in addition to the political and social arena in a difficult political world. One must be compassionate on a brotherly level as well.

The Qur'an has spoken extensively on this issue. The verses are so beautifully stated that man sees how the Qur'an speaks about the causes of Islamic unity and the causes of the success of Muslims. It did not leave anything out. But, Muslims do not pay attention to it. We have distanced ourselves from the Qur'an. We read the Qur'an, even have it explained to us, but I have not seen someone differentiate between Islamic unity and Islamic brotherhood. I have also not seen someone differentiate between the unity of Muslims and the proximity of schools of thought. Islamic unity is one matter and the proximity of the schools of thought is another matter. Of course, they are related to one another. The proximity of the schools of thought is a preliminary to unity amongst Muslims. These are issues that, if God-willing, I want to discuss with you gradually throughout my speeches.

Therefore, Muslims are one community and this is one of the necessities of religion. One community means that they must protect the unity that they have with each other. How is unity protected? The Qur'an states:

﴿وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا﴾

Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord. (***3:103***)

Unity is not that all Muslims stand in one line. Rather, everyone must cling to one place—i.e., one cord must be grabbed. That cord is the cord of Allah. But, what is the cord? There are many explanations for this. Some say it is the Qur'an, others say it is religion, others say it is Islam, and yet others say it comprises religious laws. Some traditions narrated from Shia sources state that it [i.e., the cord] refers to

wilayah.

This is acceptable as well since the essence of Islam is *wilayah*. The reality is that all Muslims must cling to one principle and that principle is taken from the principles of monotheism, prophethood, and the hereafter ('all that the Qur'an has come with and all that the Prophet has come with').

This general principle is common; it is a theological commonality. Islamic unity has two foundations: one, theological and the other, practical.

What is meant by the common general principles are the definite principles of Islam which are accepted by all Muslims. They have been established beyond a reasonable doubt by the Qur'an and prophetic traditions. Every Muslim must necessarily accept them such as, for instance, that everyone must be a monotheist, that the Prophet is truly a prophet, that the hereafter is real, and that Muslims must pray, must fast, must give charity, must perform *hajj*, and must enjoin the good and forbid the evil.

These are the pillars of Islam—in other words, the very same roots and branches of religion that we have been taught about. It was taught to us that there are three pillars of Islam: belief in the oneness of Allah, belief in prophethood, and belief in the hereafter. As for the other issues in which there are differences of opinion between the schools of thought, they are principles [not of Islam but] of the various schools of thought. Each school of thought has its own principles.

The Shias have five principles. In addition to the three pillars that are common between all Muslims, we add divine justice and *imamah* (leadership). Mutazilites have five pillars in addition to the common pillars: belief in one Allah (meaning a negation of accidental characteristics), divine justice, divine promises (meaning that Allah must act in accordance to His promises), the station between two stations (meaning that a Muslim who commits a greater sin is neither a disbeliever nor a believer), and enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. Other schools of thoughts have their own principles. I will inform you about them later on, God-willing, while we are discussing the various Islamic *madhahib*.

The Pillars of Islamic Unity

1. Clinging to the definite principles of Islam

Therefore, the first condition of unity is clinging on to principles. Principles has been termed as Allah's cord and explained as clinging on to the Qur'an. This means that one should hold on to what is mentioned in the Qur'an. If it is explained as clinging on to religion it would mean that one should hold on to the principles of religion and the definite commonalities between the *madhahib*. Otherwise, religion branches out (and must branch out) when it falls into the hands of religious authorities (*mujtahidin*) even if they are of one school of thought. There are differences, but the differences are in the laws of a *madhhab*, not in the religion itself. It is correct for religion to permit religious authorities to derive religious laws in these issues and accept their differences. A religious authority who derives the actual divine law

receives two rewards and the religious authority who makes a mistake receives one reward.

This is the first pillar—clinging on to the common definite principles. The Prophet of the Muslims is the Prophet of Islam. All Muslims are monotheists. All Muslims pray. The direction of prayer for all Muslims is the same. Look at all of the Islamic countries and all of the Islamic *madhahib*—do you find a direction of prayer other than the Ka'bah? There is no other direction. All Muslims believe that the ordainments issued in the Qur'an must be followed. Everyone generally believes in the system of politics, economics, law, and punishment. Of course, when one enters the arena of jurisprudence, there are various branches and divergences that can be found due to the opinions of jurists in various schools of jurisprudence.

This is one principle: clinging on to the cord of Allah—i.e., religion in the sense of the definite, the clear and decisive rulings, the certainties, and the issues that are accepted by all.

2. Common responsibilities

There is another pillar which is the acceptance of common responsibilities. Muslims who are one community and who have one religion must accept common responsibilities. I will relate to you two traditions which we placed in a statement about events that occurred in Eastern Europe (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on behalf of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought.

The Prophet said: "The person who wakes up not giving importance to the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim."[6] What else should the Prophet say? We wake up and think about our studies; a businessman wakes up and thinks about his business; another person wakes up thinking about politics. The one thing that does not enter his mind and will not enter his mind for a few days, maybe for a week, perhaps even for a month, is that he has a responsibility towards the Islamic community. The Qur'an and Islam state that the Muslims who are in the east have a responsibility towards the Muslims who are in the west. It does not matter what *madhhab* they follow. If they are Muslims and accept the principles of Islam—i.e., they are monotheists, they are Muslims, they have the same Prophet, the same prayer, and the same direction of prayer—we have a responsibility towards them. The condition for accepting responsibility is the need to put effort [in fulfilling it]. Everyone must pay attention and follow what happens and ask themselves what duty they have in relationship to what is happening. The above mentioned *hadith* was one tradition.

The other tradition, which brings the discussion a little closer to its desired results, is the famous tradition narrated from the Noble Messenger: "I hear a man calling out 'O Muslims!' The one who does not respond to him is not a Muslim."[7] Are you such a Muslim who will respond to another Muslim when he calls out for help? Could the Prophet have been any more clear or more decisive?

The issue of Islamic unity, which we said was holding on to the divine cord and accepting common responsibilities, is more necessary than these obligations. In the same way as it is obligatory to pray,

unity in the way that we mentioned—political unity, social unity, importance to the affairs of Muslims, acceptance of responsibility towards Islam and the Qur'an—is also obligatory. Just as it is obligatory on you to pray, to fast, to perform the *hajj*, and to eat, it is obligatory upon you to give importance to the affairs of Muslims so that Islam does not wither and die out and so that Muslims are not tortured. Between you and Allah, have we performed this duty? Have Muslims stood up to perform this duty?

Rare people are found in every society who give importance to the Islamic world. Others either do not listen or even ridicule these people. In fact, regarding the issue of Palestine—which the late Imam[8] clearly said was at the head of Islamic issues—I have heard with my own ears: "Arabs and Jews are fighting. What does it have to do with us?" It is not an issue of Arabs and Jews—it is an Islamic issue. They have occupied the Muslims' first direction of prayer. The distance between it and the second direction of prayer (the Ka'bah) is around three hundred kilometres, or maybe more—I do not exactly know. Looking at the power that they have and the government that they placed over the region we see that both of them are servants of America. Such is the condition of Muslims. Why should we not think about it? It would have been great if they put this as part of our beliefs during our childhood. It would have been great if they made us understand this.

When they told us about the issue of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil and when we accepted our responsibility [to engage in it], we were on the lookout to search for mistakes—individual or social mistakes to prevent. We enjoined good when we did not see the good. Now, come along and call for unity. Today, we see that the borders of the Islamic world are being attacked by the enemies. There is definitely a single plan and it is my belief that this plan comes either from Israel or from America. They are trying to snip the outskirts of the Islamic world and if that does not work they are trying to instigate infighting between Muslims.

Before continuing on this very topic, I would like to mention a relevant point here. If Muslims wish to fulfil this common responsibility—which, as mentioned earlier, is itself a necessity similar to practically holding firm to the Islamic principles—the conditions are as follows:

First: They must be Muslims and, in the least, must know these general principles and act in accordance to them.

Second: They must be aware of the conditions of other Muslims.

Last year some people from Albania came (during the days of *hajj*) to the delegation of the Supreme Leader and said that the communist-struck Albanians have been freed after 70 years. The Albanian youth only understand that they are Muslim. Their love for Islam is blossoming, but they do not know anything about Islam. This is distressing. Most of them have not been circumcised. The concepts of permissible and forbidden have yet to enter their minds; they do not know what permissible means or what forbidden means. This is distressing. We do not know them. The secretary-general of the Bosnian and Herzegovina political party who was also the vice-president of Bosnia asked one of their scholars

(who spoke Arabic well) to come to their aid (this was before the war began). He said, “one day, you will hear that genocide was committed against us. In World War II, when the world was in shambles, various sects of Christianity—some Catholic and some Orthodox—joined forces with the Serbs and the Croats to commit genocide against us and no Muslim knew about it.”

What do you know about the Muslims in Somalia? Do people other than those who have been educated, who have gone to high school, and who have studied geography know where Somalia is? Somalia is in the African Horn. A few months ago I was in Africa. It was said that there were two large tribes or two political parties fighting each other. They did not leave anything in their paths and they were both Muslim. They destroyed all the buildings, factories, and farmlands. As a result they are facing a drought and we do not know anything about this (America later intervened).

There are two conditions for acting in accordance to this responsibility: first one must generally know about Islam. One must be able to tell who a Muslim is or who isn’t. Second, one must be aware of the condition of Muslims. Once, an official of a media outlet asked me, “What kind of article should I write about Islam?” I replied, “Introduce the Islamic world.”

I will mention one issue and end my speech. A few years ago, a scholar in Egypt by the name of Muhammad Shakir wrote small books in Arabic about Islamic countries. Information about each country was printed in the form of a small booklet. I bought these books from Egypt. One of the books was about Tanzania. Tanzania had an Islamic government and the people of Tanzania were Muslim and some were Shia. Then a revolution took place and a Christian became the president—an Islamic country took on the form of Christianity. Muslims did not become aware of this. This is the issue. In order to act in accordance to this common responsibility, one must be aware of the conditions and the general state of Muslims. This is where the actions of the media, speakers, radio, television, and reporters on the one hand and the Ministry of Culture and the Foreign Ministry on the other hand become important. They have a role to play. They must obtain correct information from correct sources about the conditions of Muslims who have been scattered throughout the world and then make it available for other Muslims. When Muslims have been made aware [about the situation of other Muslims] they will give it more importance. They will consider themselves responsible and will not sleep at nights.

Last week Shaykh Falsafi, may Allah protect him, said: “I cannot sleep at nights because of the conditions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” That is the truth. That is the issue at hand. That is what the Prophet meant when he said: “The person who wakes up not giving importance to the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim.” Should a Muslim sleep when he hears that his brothers in Bosnia and Herzegovina are being slaughtered? Everything must be given. What is property? What is life? What is honour? Everything must be given so that Muslims can be saved from such conditions.

O Allah, wake the Muslims up from this sleep of ignorance. Make them aware of their social responsibilities. Make them aware of the unfortunate conditions of the Islamic world. Make them firm in the world of brotherhood and Islamic unity. O Allah, raise the late Imam, who was the founder of Islamic

unity in this age, with the Noble Messenger (*s*)—the Messenger of Unity—and with the purified Imams (*'a*) and grant us a blessed ending.

1. Literal translation of a Farsi proverb that means peace. [Tr.]
2. al-Tibyan fi tafsir al-Qur'an, v.1, p.477.
3. When he states 'we' here, he means Iranians. [Tr.]
4. This is a line of poetry attributed to the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ('a).
5. Nahj al-Balaghah, sayings 125.
6. Kafi, Kitab al-iman wa al-kufr, Bab 70, hadith 1 and 5
7. Kafi, Kitab al-iman wa al-kufr, Bab 70, hadith 5.
8. I.e., Imam Khomeini. [Tr.]

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