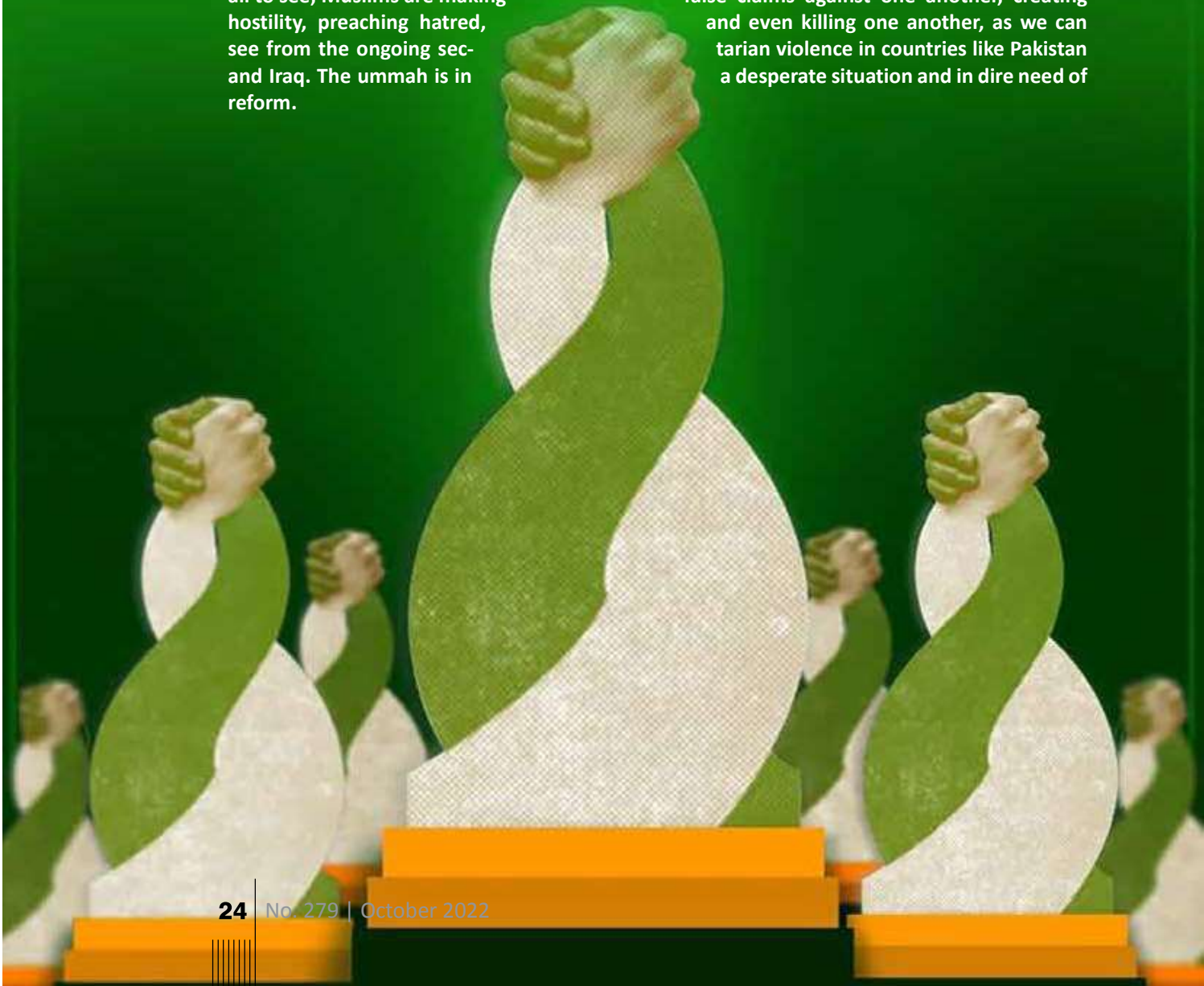


The Importance of Islamic Unity

“Surely, this Ummah of yours is a single Ummah, and I am your Lord, therefore worship Me (and no other).” (Holy Qur’an, 21:92)

The above verse points to an ideal, which is currently not being met. If we look at the current state of the ummah (the global Islamic community), we can clearly see that generally speaking, it is far from a “community”. The all to see; Muslims are making hostility, preaching hatred, see from the ongoing sectarian violence in countries like Pakistan and Iraq. The ummah is in reform.

disunity within the ummah is very apparent for false claims against one another, creating and even killing one another, as we can see from the ongoing sectarian violence in countries like Pakistan and Iraq. The ummah is in dire need of reform.



Defining Islamic Unity

It is essential that we define what is meant by “Islamic unity”. There are various ideas and conceptions of Islamic unity. According to the highly intellectual scholar and prolific writer, Martyr Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, “There are three definitions of what Islamic unity is. The first is that all Islamic schools of thought should come together, give up their differences and form a new single denomination. The second definition is that one school of thought should be followed and all the others forsaken. Both these ideas are incorrect and impractical and do not represent the true conception of Islamic unity. The third idea is that Islamic unity is, as Ayatollah Motahhari says, “in no way related to the unity of the different schools of jurisprudence but signifies the unity of the Muslims and the unity of the followers of different schools of thought, with their different religious ideas and views. This is the correct definition of Islamic unity.”

According to this definition of Islamic unity, we do not need to make any compromises on our principles, practices, or beliefs for the sake of Islamic unity. Furthermore, we do not necessarily have to stop talking about the differences between the various Islamic schools of thought or avoid engaging in discussions and dialogue about them. Some people believe that in order for us to unite with other schools of thought we must compromise some of our be-

liefs, otherwise, the achievement of unity would not be possible, and, therefore, we cannot possibly unite if it entails compromising our beliefs. This belief is akin to the “all or nothing” principle.

Is Difference, the Cause of Disunity?

Many think that it is impossible for such a large community with so many diverse schools of thought, each with their own ideologies and practices, to unite. Differences of opinion in matters of practice, jurisprudence, and particularly doctrine and belief are regarded by many as the root cause of disunity in the ummah. In answer to this view, we need to revisit our definition of Islamic unity. Islamic unity is not about forming one single uniform denomination with the same doctrines and practices. Differences of opinion permeate all societies, nations, and even families. People differ

on social issues, political matters, and even familial affairs. Difference and variety are intrinsic features of this world. Differences in opinions, views, and thoughts in themselves are not bad and should not be the cause of disunity.

We must reflect upon why there is so much diversity in this world and why we have been exposed to such a wide range of religions, ideologies, sects, and lifestyles. Such diversity in the world poses a great challenge to human beings to utilize the intellect that Allah has granted them. If there were only one religion in the world then people could choose to either follow that religion or not, there would only be two options to choose from. This would lead to intellectual stagnation which would be detrimental to our existence, for it is difference that leads to intellectual exploration, reasoning, dialogue, and discussion. Having said that, that is not to say that different opinions, beliefs, and religions are all valid. There is a clear division between truth and falsehood and it is only after we start to search for the truth that we come to appreciate and understand other ideologies, a process that breeds tolerance and ultimately unity. In the words of the Holy Qur’an: “...and if Allah had willed He would have made you a single community, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you, therefore strive with one another in good deeds; to Allah is your return, so He will then inform you in that which you dif-

► **Many think that it is impossible for such a large community with so many diverse schools of thought, each with their own ideologies and practices, to unite.**

ferred.” (5:48)

However, we often tend to talk about differences between the various Islamic schools of thought more so than we do about the similarities to the extent that we tend to forget those essential tenets that make us all Muslims. All Muslims believe in one God, Allah (SWT), follow the Last Messenger, Muhammad (PBUH), have the same book, the Holy Qur’an, fast in the same month, Ramadhan, visit the house of Allah during Hajj, and finally, we all share one identity, we are all Muslims.

Ayatollah Amini, the distinguished compiler of the 20-volume book “Al-Ghadir”, says in his famous compilation:

“People are free to express views and ideas on religion. These (views and ideas) will nev-

er tear apart the bond of Islamic brotherhood to which the Holy Qur’an has referred by stating that “surely the believers are brothers...” (49:10)

Notwithstanding the differences that we have in the primary and secondary principles, we share a common point and that is belief in the Almighty and His Prophet...We all live under the banner of truth and carry out our duties under the guidance of the Qur’an and the Prophetic Mission of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The message of all of us is “Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam...” (3:18) and the slogan of all of us is “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.” Indeed, we are (the members of) the party of Allah and the supporters of his religion.”

The division and disunity that exists in the ummah today is not due to the theological and jurisprudential differences between the different Islamic schools of thought, rather it is due to how we respond to such differences. The disunity that is so rampant within the ummah is due to our intolerance and ignorance. A major obstacle to uniting the ummah is the lack of a genuine desire to understand where the other party is coming from and why he or she holds certain beliefs and carries out certain practices.

Socio-Political Unity

The current state of disunity has weakened the ummah and left it in a vulnerable position. This is why we see Muslims under



attack in their own countries across the globe. In the wake of the current global political climate Islam as an institution, an ideology, and a way of life is being attacked. The incidence of Islamophobia is rising and Muslims are finding it hard to fight back due to the lack of a unified and cohesive Muslim front.

Talking about Islamic unity, Grand Ayatollah Imam Khomeini (RA) once said: "Today, world peace is such that all countries are under the political influence of the superpowers; they observe control everywhere and have schemes for defeating every group. The most important of these is sowing discord among brothers. Muslims should be awake, Muslims should be alert that if a dispute takes place

among Sunni and Shi'ite brothers, it is harmful to all of us, it is harmful to all Muslims. Those who want to sow discord are neither Sunni nor Shi'ite, they are agents of the superpowers and work for them."

The current situation of the Muslims is akin to that of a football team whose players are fighting amongst each other, leaving the goal unprotected and vulnerable to the strikers of the opposing team to score and defeat them. In order for us to wave off the attacks on Islam and Muslims, we must unite on common grounds and similarities, which we have so many of. Irrespective of the jurisprudential and theological differences, all Muslims can and should work towards similar socio-political

aims. Such aims include protecting the ummah, creating a just society, working towards the welfare of Muslims and humanity at large, disseminating knowledge and educating people, and generally speaking providing for the needs of the Muslim community on all possible levels. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said that "He who wakes up in the morning and does not think about and have concerns over the affairs of the Muslims is not one of us".

Dialogue

One practical way in which the community could come together is through dialogue and it can be a very powerful tool if used appropriately. Sometimes debates can lead to arguments





and polemical disputes causing more disunity. Rather, we should be holding discussions and dialogues with the sincere intention of understanding one another, to seek the truth, and to unite under one banner, and work together for a common cause.

Tolerance and understanding can be achieved through dialogue and discussion. After dispelling the myths and misconceptions about one another, and either agreeing on issues of difference or agreeing to disagree on such issues, Muslims can then come together and constructively discuss the socio-political problems of the ummah and society in general and set aims and objectives as to how to tackle such problems. In his refreshing book, "Doctrines of Shi'i Islam", Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani writes as under:

"The Imami Shi'a do not regard differences in juristic details as undermining Islamic brotherhood or as precluding the solidarity of the Muslims as a unified community. They believe that by engaging in scholarly discussion, in a calm atmosphere, many of the intellectual

and jurisprudential differences and difficulties can be resolved. In principle, human society is characterized by the fact that there will always be differences of opinion. Closing the door of intellectual discussion and enquiry to the intellectual causes the swift demise of knowledge and learning, for it cannot but erode intellectual thought and reflection."

The Holy Qur'an says: "Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in the best manner: for your Lord knows best who have strayed from His Path, and those who follow the right way." (16:125) How can we refuse to share the blessing and the mercy that has been bestowed upon us by Allah with others, especially so considering that Islam is a universal religion, open to all people. As

▶ **One practical way in which the community could come together is through dialogue and it can be a very powerful tool if used appropriately. Sometimes debates can lead to arguments and polemical disputes causing more disunity**



such we must make it accessible to everyone, through various means such as dialogue. In a hadith, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (AS) says:

“Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus) (AS) stood up to address the children of Israel (bani Israel), he said: ‘O children of Israel! Never reveal wisdom to the ignorant since this is tyranny on wisdom (itself), and never conceal it from those worthy of it since this will be tyranny on the worthy.’ ”

Conclusion

Martyr Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr has been quoted saying:

“...from the time I was able to recognize my existence and realize my duty in this community I have considered my existence dedicated equally to the Shias and Sunnis. I spread the message of unity and the belief that

unites the people. I have lived my life solely for Islam; the path to salvation and the goal of all Muslims. Thus my dear Sunni brothers I am with you, just in the same way as I am with the Shia brothers. I have regard for you in the same proportion you have regard for Islam.” We

► **“Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus) (AS) stood up to address the children of Israel (bani Israel), he said: ‘O children of Israel! Never reveal wisdom to the ignorant since this is tyranny on wisdom (itself), and never conceal it from those worthy of it since this will be tyranny on the worthy.’ ”**

must all work towards uniting our ummah and begin to realize that we are all one. Any differences of opinion should be a cause for constructive dialogue rather than destructive debate, fostering intellectual inquiry rather than mutual sectarian denigration. As the Holy Qur’an says: “Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving clear signs: for them is a dreadful penalty...” (3:105) “And hold fast, all together, by the rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah’s favor on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love so that by His Grace, you became brothers; and you were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make His Signs clear to you: That you may be guided.” (3:103)