

A WORD ON UNITY

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Unity is a great and wonderful blessing from God upon the believers, none but the believers. The unity we see in the world is artificial and/or temporary. But, for the believers, God promises an everlasting and true unity.

God does not change the condition of people unless they themselves change. We simply cannot achieve unity by wishing it. We have to follow God's laws, and God gives us the specific methodology for achieving unity. For example, Verse 17:53 of the Quran is giving us a formula for unity: ***"Tell my servants to treat each other in the best possible manner, for the devil will always try to drive a wedge among them."*** Obviously, if we treat each other as nicely as we can, we are going to be very close. When we lose our temper at someone, it does not draw that person closer to us. Controlling our temper helps promote closeness. However, we must never compromise the Quranic principles for the sake of unity. Compromising may lead to unity, but only to disenchanted, temporary and artificial unity.

Unity is a trait of the believers, and God creates harmony between the believers. The believers are one family and are humble towards each other. They hold fast to the rope of God, and are stern against the disbelievers. They do not break their religion into sects and are like bricks in a wall.

We learn about unity by analyzing some of the factors that cause disunity. Some of the most important factors causing disunity among the people are:

- 1) Different priorities,
- 2) Idol worship,
- 3) Differing beliefs and opinions,
- 4) Failure to follow one consistent source.

All these can be summed up in one word, EGO. It is our ego that causes us to follow our own priorities, idols and opinions. By telling us to kill our ego, take one consistent source (the Quran), and to have God as the foremost priority, the Almighty is giving us the most powerful ingredients for creating unity. One God, one book, and one brotherhood.

Open-mindedness is a key prerequisite to unity. The ability to accept criticism is also necessary. We have to change our outlook on criticism. To get annoyed or touchy when criticized is a demonstration of ego.

Open-mindedness means not hardening our opinion. Open-mindedness means considering all possibilities in a given situation, working out the pros and cons of each in the light of the Quran, and safeguarding ourselves against as many of the possible negative outcomes as possible. It is true that we cannot always cover all the possible consequences, but we do our best. Then, we repent to God for the rest, for the things we have not thought of.

There is a strong link between ego and opinion. It was our opinion that got us in trouble in **the** first place during the Great Feud. We were of the opinion that Satan could be a god with God. It was Pharaoh's opinion that there was no Lord of the universe. It was Abraham's father's opinion that statues had to be worshiped. All along, our opinion has gotten us into trouble. Ironically, this ego is a disease that is prevalent among the educated while ignorance is a disease of the illiterate. Most professionals and other successful people think that because they are more educated than others, their opinion is better.

We must convince ourselves that no believer's action is malicious. If it is, then it is their problem, and we have to help them correct it. We must not get defensive and protect our opinion, and we must not backbite. If you cannot say anything good about someone, then shut up. Discuss matters face to face. Only the gutless or the ignorant say things behind someone's back.

We must not take things personally if we are being criticized. If we are wrong, it does not mean that we are inferior or insulted, or lose self esteem. It means that our opinion was wrong. Our opinion does not matter anyway. Only God's opinion matters.

The Quran says in Verse 10:19 *"The people used to be one congregation, until they disputed."* The people disputed over their opinions. They were not satisfied with the opinion of God and His messenger. The Quran gives us a very clear message in Verse 49:1. *"O you who believe, do not place your opinion above that of God and His messenger..."* If we disregard this **commandment**, then we become divided like the previous communities:

"The people used to be one community, until God sent the prophets, as bearers of good news, as well as warners, and He revealed through them the scripture, truthfully, to judge among the people in their disputes. But those who received the scripture rejected any new scripture, despite clear proofs, due to jealousy on their part. God guides those who believe to the truth that is disputed by others, as He wills. God guides whomever He wills in a straight path." (2:213)

In conclusion, there are three stages we go through. We first learn to form opinions and hold on to them. This is ignorance. Then we learn to discuss listen, and accept the best opinion. This is wisdom. Finally, we realize that our opinions do not matter-only God's opinion matters. This is guidance - God's guidance. In Him we trust.