



# **Community Building**

**Authors(s): Mohammad Ali Shomali**

**Publisher(s): Ahlul Bayt World Assembly**

[www.alhassanain.org/english](http://www.alhassanain.org/english)

**Notice:**

**This version is published on behalf of [www.alhassanain.org/english](http://www.alhassanain.org/english)  
The composing errors are not corrected.**

## Table of Contents

<b>Community Building, Part 1</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Abstract .....	8
Introduction .....	8
The importance of community in the Qur'an.....	8
The task of the prophets in the Qur'an.....	10
To purify people .....	10
To guide people to establish social justice .....	10
To establish communities.....	11
Prophet Muhammad's efforts to establish a fledgling Islamic community..	11
.....	11
The need to provide good examples of Islamic communities .....	12
Some qualities of a true Islamic community .....	13
Truthfulness and trustworthiness .....	13
Persistence .....	13
Right direction, right path .....	14
Balance, moderation, and the best example .....	15
Balance between this life and the hereafter .....	16
Conclusion .....	16
Notes .....	18
<b>Community Building in Islam, Part 2</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Abstract .....	21
Introduction .....	21
An Islamic community is moderate and balanced .....	21
Examples of balanced Islamic community .....	22
Material and spiritual life .....	22
Treatment of differing ideas and opinions.....	22
A decent life and balanced use of technology .....	23
Characteristics of those living in an Islamic community .....	23
Righteousness and moderation .....	23
Humbleness and balance.....	24
The Islamic community is the best nation in benefiting others .....	24
Reasons for being described as the best nation.....	24
Enjoining good and prohibiting bad .....	24
Faith in God .....	25
Unity is essential for the effectiveness of the community .....	26
Concern for oneself versus responsibility towards society.....	26
Qualities of an Islamic community .....	27
Truth and Justice .....	27
Rationality.....	28
Seeking Knowledge.....	28
Charity .....	29
Environmental awareness.....	29
Security.....	30
Family solidarity and strength .....	30
Hospitality.....	30
Keeping promises .....	30
Pardon and forgiveness .....	31

Patience .....	31
Fairness and wanting for others what we want for ourselves .....	32
Conclusion .....	32
Notes .....	33
<b>Community Building, Part 3 .....</b>	<b>36</b>
Abstract .....	36
Commitment to the truth.....	36
Qur'an describes Allah as the True.....	36
Allah is the True and real basis of everything.....	37
Allah alone is the True.....	37
The truth observed in the creation of the world .....	37
Revelation, divine books, and prophets are true Revelation .....	37
The Qur'an.....	38
The Prophet .....	38
Mission of Prophet to serve the Truth.....	38
Implementation of the divine message in a truthful manner .....	39
Disregarding the truth leads to destruction of creation .....	39
Individuals and communities must strive to be truthful.....	40
Examples of the most truthful people .....	41
Why be entirely committed and in compliance with Truth?.....	41
The true mu'min searches for and welcomes truth and wisdom.....	42
Real servitude is to give priority to Allah and the Truth that comes from Him.....	42
Truthfulness and the community .....	43
Who are these people?.....	43
Conclusion .....	44
Notes .....	45

**Community Building, Part 1**

**Authors(s): Mohammad Ali Shomali**

**Publisher(s): Ahlul Bayt World Assembly**

**Journal: Vol. 16, no. 2, Summer 2015**

*Part 1 of this series illustrates on the importance of community- building in the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's efforts to put it into practice. Prioritized qualities that ensure a dynamic Islamic community will also be expounded on, such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, persistence, and maintaining a healthy balance in working for this world to eventually lead to a blissful hereafter.*

*This series is based on a nine session course conducted by the author on Community Building at the Islamic Centre of England in London in 2009.*

## **Community Building, Part 1**

This series is based on a nine session course conducted by the author on Community Building at the Islamic Centre of England in London in 2009.

### **Abstract**

To consider a group of people a successful community involves specific requirements and qualities. Though personal identity is truly important, it is essential for a community to likewise have an identity that is shared by other members of the same group, and to work in a united way for the same causes. Regardless of whether it is on a worldwide or lesser scale, establishing a community is becoming more and more vital in today's day and age. Indeed, apart from possessing the task of purifying the people and educating them on how to create social justice, the prophets established successful communities.

Part 1 of this series illustrates on the importance of community- building in the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's efforts to put it into practice. Prioritized qualities that ensure a dynamic Islamic community will also be expounded on, such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, persistence, and maintaining a healthy balance in working for this world to eventually lead to a blissful hereafter.

### **Introduction**

The issue on how to establish an Islamic Community has always been of great importance but is especially so for today, whether it is on a general scale in the worldwide Islamic community or on a smaller scale in minority Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries. It is essential for us to know the qualities and characteristics of an Islamic Community and how we can move towards establishing it.

It is not simply the case that when we have a number of Muslims living, working or worshipping together that we can finally call it an Islamic community. However, in many cases this is actually what we find: a group of Muslims interacting together is deemed an Islamic community, even though it is not.

As we will explain, a community must be a very unified and integrated group of people who behave like one body, and in addition to his or her own personal identity, every individual should have an identity that is shared with other members of the community. All must work together in a united way for the same causes.

This article in this series briefly highlights some of the most important points relating to this issue, which will then be further elaborated on in future parts of the series.

### **The importance of community in the Qur'an**

From an Islamic point of view and in particular from a Qur'anic point of view, the development of community, society, or nation is of utmost importance rather than focusing on individuals.

The Qur'an gives attention to every person as each one is unique in the sight of Allah. Allah does not say that because He has created billions of people, He does not care about them as individuals. Every person receives



attention from Allah as if he or she is the only creature of God. However, relatively speaking, we cannot compare the significance and importance of society and community with that of individuals. We cannot sacrifice the formation or development of a community in the interest of personal gain. We do not want to sacrifice or ignore the needs of the people, though at the same time we must not forget that it is imperative for us to move towards establishing a community. Given the many signs and evidence for this, we shall begin with considering a few notions and then gradually build upon them.

In the Qur'an, Allah addresses human beings collectively:

1. When reading through the Qur'an even once, it is crucial to ask ourselves who exactly Allah is addressing when He talks to us. Of course, sometimes Allah addresses the Prophet himself as "Ya ayyuhar-Rasool" or "Ya ayyuhan-Nabi" and then the Prophet delivers the message of Allah to us.

However, when Allah wants to talk to us, or asks his Prophet to speak to us on His behalf, is He talking to each and every person independently from other people, or is Allah primarily focusing on the community as a whole?

There are approximately 200 cases in the Qur'an where Allah uses the word 'al-naas' when speaking directly to the people. 'Al -naas' can mean people, a group of people, a community, a society, humanity, or mankind. In addition to these cases, sometimes Allah says 'Bani Adam', (the children of Adam). It is rare that Allah talks to one individual person. This means that the message of Islam is in large for the masses, societies, communities, or humanity as a whole.

Even the word 'al-insan' (human being) in the Qur'an is meant in a general sense because when Allah says "Ya ayyuhal-insan," He is not referring to any specific person - He is once again addressing the general public. Furthermore, the cases in which Allah talks about 'al-insan' are much fewer, about 80, compared to the 200 cases in which 'al-naas' is mentioned.

2. Secondly, when it comes to the community of the faithful, many times the Qur'an uses the expression "O those who believe" or "O those who have faith". However, as far as I remember, we do not have a case in which Allah says "O the one who has faith". Allah always addresses us in the plural form.

3. Regarding our daily obligatory prayers, Allah commands us to recite the chapter al-Hamd - The Opening - in every first and second units (rak'at) of the prayer. In this chapter, we do not say "I worship only You..." rather we say "We worship only You...." and then we say "We ask and seek assistance from You" - in the plural form.

We can make requests from Allah during any part of our daily prayers, whether we are in bowing or prostrating, and especially so in the qunut; but if we are going to ask for something, it is better to ask in the plural form. For example, in the qunut we usually begin our prayers with "Rabbana" (Our Lord), such as in the supplication,

***"Our Lord. Grant us good in this world and good in the hereafter, and save us from the chastisement of the fire." (2:201)***

When we conclude our prayer we say "Assalaamu 'alayna..." ("May Allah's peace be with us!") not "Peace be with me." This is the outlook of a person who belongs to a community.

Thus, the Qur'an is clear that although complete respect and full attention are given to people as individuals who are indeed the building bricks that make up the community, the community is the final goal. The most productive conditions for nurturing good people is when we have a good community.

## **The task of the prophets in the Qur'an**

### **To purify people**

Regarding the task of the prophets, the Qur'an at times refers to individuals and sometimes about the community. The purpose of the prophets and indeed all the Divine Books is to take people out of the darkness into the light. For example, in Surah Maidah, verses 15 and 16, Allah tells the People of the Book:

*O People of the Book! Certainly our Apostle has come to you, clarifying for you much of what you used to hide of the Book, and excusing many (an offense of yours). Certainly there has come to you a light from Allah, and a manifest Book. With it Allah guides those who follow (the course of) His pleasure to the ways of peace, and brings them out from darkness into the light by His will, and guides them to a straight path.(5:15-16)*

Moreover, in verses 2:151, 3:164, and 62:2 Allah speaks of the Prophet's task as purifying the people. Thus, the individual aspect is mentioned, the task of helping each and every person to move towards Allah by purifying themselves and moving from darkness into light.

### **To guide people to establish social justice**

However at the same time Allah says:

*Certainly We sent down Our Apostles with manifest proofs and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice... (57:25)*

The prophets were sent to guide so that people can establish social justice and equity. It is noteworthy that Allah does not say He sent His prophets and provided them with the Book and the Balance so that the prophets could establish justice. On the contrary, the prophets have come so that people themselves can establish justice. It is the role of the people with the help of the prophets to establish justice, otherwise people would probably sit back and expect the prophets to establish justice for them, and then they would simply come and enjoy and benefit from it once it was established. However, the Qur'an states:

*"Allah would not change our affairs unless we ourselves decide to change (13:11)."*

If we want to develop into good, pious, and prosperous people, we cannot relax and wait, asking and expecting Allah or the Prophet to perform miracles for us to make achievements. They show us the way and approach, and then we are to take action.

### **To establish communities**

From the beginning of their mission, every prophet had two goals in mind: to help individuals who are willing to become good and move from darkness into the light, and also to establish a community.

No one will succeed in their mission unless they plan to establish a community. Even if we settle and spend decades reforming and training individuals, when we eventually leave that place or even die there, those individuals and the effect they have will gradually disappear.

The people may continue to exist in that place although the purpose behind the movement will not remain. However, if good people are found, and efforts are made to educate and train them, then together we can establish a community, and then there would be lasting results.

This is what the prophets bore in mind. This was the responsibility they were given. Every prophet either came to establish a new community or nation or instead to lead and guide a community or nation that was already established although they were facing difficulties. For example, there were many prophets of the Bani Israel (the Children of Israel), living in the period of time prior to the advent of Prophet Jesus, and it was even the case that sometimes there were dozens of these prophets alive at the same time. These Prophets strove to preserve the community of the Bani Israel by reminding them of the covenant they made with Allah to stop them from deviating and becoming scattered.

Thus, whilst some prophets founded entirely new communities, other prophets tried to preserve, develop, and advance existing ones, they were all concerned with the issue of community.

### **Prophet Muhammad's efforts to establish a fledgling Islamic community**

Like many other prophets, Prophet Muhammad was given two tasks. Of course, either of these two can be divided into sub-tasks but essentially, one task was to educate and train individuals, and the second was to form and establish a community. For example, when the Prophet went to the city of Yathrib, later known as Madinat al-Nabi, he quickly established an Islamic community.

Moreover, in a matter of only 10 years, this community spread nearly all over the Arabian Peninsula; and in a matter of a few decades it spread to many parts of the world until today. If the Prophet had not followed this strategy of establishing a community and merely focused on individuals, he could not have achieved what he did in forming a new civilisation.

The first task he launched in Medina was a community centre - a masjid. A masjid is the House of Allah and simultaneously the house of the people. No person has the right to prevent people from entering this House. As soon as a building is consecrated as a masjid, it becomes the property of the entire community. Everyone can enter it and benefit from it. When Allah speaks of Masjid al-Haram, He says:

***Indeed the first house to be set up for people (nas) is the one at Bakkah, blessed and a guidance for all nations. (3:96)***

Upon arrival in Medina, the Prophet laid the foundations of Masjid of Quba as a place for congregational and Friday prayers and a hub for the Muslims in that district. Jum'ah Prayer is very much related to the community because we believe that it was the Sunnah of the Prophet. It is the teaching of the Ahlul Bayt that Jum'ah must be held in only one place in every town.

Of course, if the town is large with a specific distance between the two places of prayer, then another Jum'ah Prayer can be held, but Jum'ah Prayer cannot occur in every district or masjid. People can perform their daily prayers in their local masjid or in the main central masjid, but when it comes to Friday Prayer they should all gather in one place.

Thus, in Islam, the idea of coming together and forming the community is crucial, and the Prophet did this from the beginning by establishing a masjid and leading congregational and Friday Prayers. After arriving in Madinah, he asked each Muslim from Madinah, the Ansar, to be a brother to a Muslim from Mecca, thus forming the covenant of brotherhood (al-ukhuwwah) between them. Although they both were from Mecca, the Prophet remained with Imam Ali and they made the covenant of brotherhood with each other. Following on from this, he made great efforts to establish a close-knit, homogenous, and friendly community.

### **The need to provide good examples of Islamic communities**

Most people would surely be interested in Islam if in addition to having good individual Muslims we were able to show the world that we have two, three, or four full-fledged Muslim communities meeting the Islamic requirements. Unfortunately, it seems that we have not established good enough examples or set high standards to set as a model for other communities. Of course we should not be too pessimistic because there are many strengths: good individuals, small yet progressive groups, and in some parts of the world there exists some forms of an Islamic nation on a larger scale. However, we are still far claiming to have established a community that is well-pleasing to Allah and His Prophet from a social and communal point of view.

Therefore, as part of a requirement for having a road map, it is essential to be able to identify and clarify the signs of a healthy community. When can we claim that our community is an Islamic community? As said before, it is not a matter of having a few thousand or even a few million Muslims and then claiming it a Muslim community. The same way every person is to wholeheartedly embrace and implement Islam in their lives, so too must every community fully embrace and implement Islam on the shoulders of individuals who have already fully embraced and implemented Islam on a personal basis.

For example, there might be a group of a thousand Muslims living as a minority in a non-Muslim country, or even a million Muslims living in a Muslim country, all believers as individuals yet as a community are like non-believers because they do not uphold Islamic social values. This is the great challenge. Thanks to God, throughout the ages and in every generation we have had good people.

However, we have not witnessed the same success regarding establishing full-fledged Islamic communities. The Prophet managed to start establishing an Islamic Community, but the time was too short and there were many challenges externally and internally. Unfortunately, Imam Ali and other Imams also were not given the opportunity to do so. Indeed, throughout the centuries we have very few cases of a community, society, state or nation which we could honestly describe as an Islamic community, nation, or state.

Even many Muslim organisations, parties, and movements may not meet the standards that Islam sets up for such communal entities. This has happened not because Islam is negligent regarding the social aspect of life; on the contrary, Islam is clear about this.

Unfortunately we Muslims have sadly neglected this important aspect of Islam. On the whole, the most we have generally done has been to take care of our own personal piety and looked after our own families. And throughout the greater part of our history, those in power such as the Bani Umayyad and Bani Abbas were not interested in a comprehensive Islamic system and thus had no interest in establishing a true Islamic community.

### **Some qualities of a true Islamic community**

We are gravely in need of deciding the requirements for an Islamic community, in identifying and clarifying the signs of healthy Muslim community, that which portrays our community as pleasing Allah on a collective, rather than individual, basis.

#### **Truthfulness and trustworthiness**

There are some signs which indicate that a believer (mu'min) is healthy, not just physically but religiously and spiritually healthy. For example, according to the Ahlul Bayt, as stated in our hadiths, if you want to know whether someone is really a believer or not you should test them in two things: Are they truthful (sidq al-hadith)? and do they keep their promises (ada' al-amanah)? It is our responsibility to care for and return to the owner any item that has been entrusted to us.

These are two fundamental signs of a believer. We cannot recognise a believer by looking at their outward appearance, countless prayers, or pilgrimages. These acts are undoubtedly important, though to really test whether a person is a true believer, what is important - in addition to other signs - is their honesty or truthfulness, and reliability or trustworthiness.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Persistence**

Let us examine one idea from the life of Prophet Muhammad. Among the many aspects, I would like to draw your attention to this verse where Allah tells the Prophet in the chapter Hud:

*"So be steadfast, just as you have been commanded - [you] and whoever has turned [to Allah] with you - and do not overstep the bounds. Indeed He sees best what you do." (11:112)*

Allah tells the Prophet to be steadfast and to persevere on the right path, to be persistent, as he is commanded by Allah, and He says that the same thing applies to whoever has returned to Allah with the Prophet. This means

that it is the responsibility of the Prophet and his followers to remain persistent. In the chapter al-Shura, verse 15, a slightly similar verse is stated:

***So summon to this [unity of religion] and be steadfast, just as you have been commanded and do not follow their desires...(42: 15)***

The verse from Hud is a command for the Prophet and his followers, whereas in Surah Shura it is a command solely for the Prophet.

Regarding this, the Prophet said: 'The Chapter Hud made my hair turn gray.' It was because of this command to remain persistent along with his followers. Although remaining persistent is also mentioned in the Chapter al-Shura, the Prophet referred only to the verse in the Chapter Hud as causing his gray hair. Regarding this, the late Imam Khomeini wisely remarked, "It was not a challenge for the Prophet as an individual to remain persistent; rather the challenge was to ensure that the whole community remains loyal."

This is the challenge of leading a community. Every so often there are good leaders who are not given due attention and are not followed. The Prophet knew that ensuring that he himself as well as the Muslim community do not disperse or move in the wrong direction was a real challenge.

### **Right direction, right path**

In the Qur'an, verse 142 of the Chapter al-Baqarah appears in the middle of several verses on the change in the Muslims' direction of prayer, the qiblah. In the early days, Muslims faced Jerusalem, Bayt al-Muqaddas, during prayer. However, they were being criticised, blamed, and made a mockery of for not having their own qiblah. Then Allah asked the Prophet while in Masjid Qiblahtayn in Madinah, to change the direction to Mecca.

Related to the change of qiblah, Allah says:

***The foolish among the people will say, 'What has turned them away from the qiblahh they were following?' Say, 'To Allah belong the east and the west. He guides whomever He wishes to a straight path'. (2:142)***

Those who did not understand asked the Muslims for the reason for the change of direction, and consequently were told by Allah to say that it does not matter which way we face for prayer because both the east and the west, and indeed everything, belongs to Allah.

Immediately after that, Allah states that He guides those with whom He is pleased towards the Right Path. The Right Path is a very important concept. It is not necessarily a physical direction. There are those who are concerned about whether they should face East or West, but Allah says that these are merely physical directions. What is of utmost importance is your direction in life. It is not as important which way your body faces, if your whole purpose in life is misdirected and disorientated.

Of course, someone who has correctly orientated themselves spiritually also tries to physically face the direction of the Holy Land. However, there is little or no benefit in being concerned with the physical direction when the entire soul is deviated from the way of Allah.

Although the Right Path is an important spiritual concept, Allah has, however, also used the metaphor that the Right Path is neither towards East



nor towards West, as we also find in that beautiful Verse of Light, in the chapter The Light (al-Noor), where Allah says:

*Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp-the lamp is in a glass-the glass as it were a glittering star-lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western, whose oil almost lights up, though fire should not touch it. Light upon Light. (24:35)*

The oil of this lamp is from the olive tree. Light is emitted from this oil because it is so transparent and glistening that even without lighting it, it is shining. One of the qualities of this olive tree is that it leans neither towards the East nor towards the West. It is neither eastern nor western. Again Allah is saying that the East and the West both belong to Him, so we should not be too concerned about them; what is of utmost importance is 'Sirat al-Mustaqeem' - the Right Path.

### **Balance, moderation, and the best example**

In the Chapter The Cow, Allah says:

*"Thus We have made you a middle nation that you may be witnesses to the people and that the Apostle may be a witness to you." (2:143)*

The Arabic word 'wasat' means balanced. Sometimes it also means beautiful but beauty is also related to balance; if there is no balance then there is no beauty as it becomes exaggerated and unrealistic like a caricature or a cartoon drawing.

The Islamic way of life is made balanced by Allah: it is moderate and does not go to extremes. This is 'al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem', the Right Path. If we turn in any direction that would be eventually causing our loss of balance and moderation, then we are distancing ourselves from Islam. Allah has made us into a nation that is balanced and moderate.

Furthermore, the Islamic community must endeavour to become a witness and set standards for others. If people want to know how to best look after their elders, we should set the best example. We should become the best example in every aspect for others look up to as a model: how to raise children, care for the poor, create jobs, spend their leisure time, establish social welfare, and have a peaceful life. All they have to do is observe our communities and nations. The Prophet is our example whom we should follow and become examples for other people.

This is different from racism, from saying that we are the chosen people of God and so everyone must serve and worship us. Being better certainly does not mean that your life is more important than others' lives or that your blood is more important than others' blood so that everyone must worship and serve you. Being selected in Islam is for those who have been given the responsibility to benefit others. Being better is surpassing others in benefitting and serving people. We will expand on this later when discussing the verse 3:110.

Allah has made us a balanced and moderate nation with the aim of becoming witnesses for other people, while the Prophet is witness over us. We are to follow the example of our Prophet and practically demonstrate his teachings, especially in our community life.

It is not very effective or helpful if we merely keep telling people what our Prophet said regarding care for children, spouses, strangers, the sick, the deprived and oppressed, and so forth. It is not always useful to verbally repeat the teachings of our Prophet. It is through modelling his teachings of looking after the elderly, the deprived, vulnerable and oppressed people that we can exhibit a true Islamic community that we encourage and nurture closeness and intimacy amongst ourselves because this is what our Prophet has taught us.

### **Balance between this life and the hereafter**

Being balanced has various different dimensions. We have to strike a balance between working for worldly affairs (dunya) and working for the hereafter (akhirah), instead of sacrificing one of them for the sake of the other. We cannot merely work for this life for the sake of a healthy and prosperous material life while forgetting about our eternal life.

Similarly, it is unacceptable to merely work for our hereafter and overlook the development of this world and, for example, disregard progress in science and technology. A Muslim community must have both. This is mentioned in a well-known hadith narrated from Imam Hasan which begins with: "With respect to your life in this world, be as if you are going to remain here forever."<sup>2</sup>

If we believe we will remain in this world for eternity, we would do our utmost to achieve the best in all aspects of life. For example, with respect to the environment, why do people destroy it through wastage and pollution?

Perhaps they think that since they are only going to live on this planet for a few years or decades then the environment available at present is sufficient. We tend to disregard what will happen after we are gone. But if we believed that we will remain in this world forever then we would surely try to implement a sustainable plan.

The hadith of the Imam continues: "And with respect to your eternal life, to the hereafter, imagine as if you are going to die tomorrow."<sup>3</sup>

If we believe that we may die tomorrow, we would not postpone anything that will benefit us in the hereafter, such striving to be good and repenting to Allah for our wrongdoings.

Whether as individuals or collectively as a community, Muslims must strike a balance between working for development in this world and for happiness in the next life.

### **Conclusion**

From an Islamic point of view each person is very important and unique in the sight of Allah, to such an extent that Allah says if you give life to one person it is as if you have given life to all humankind, and if you kill one person it is as if you have killed all people. However, whilst each and every person is very important, the community and the society are extremely significant.

Every Prophet held the task of purifying, educating, and training individuals, while simultaneously working to either establish a community of faithful people or to lead and move forward an already existing community.





### **Notes**

1. For further discussion on these two qualities, please refer to the series "Indicators of Piety" by the same author in the Message of Thaqaalayn.
2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 138.
3. Ibid.

**Community Building, Part 2**

**Authors(s): Mohammad Ali Shomali**

**Publisher(s): Ahlul Bayt World Assembly**

**Journal: Vol. 16, no. 3, Autumn 2015**

*Part 2 of this series further builds upon qualities such as moderation, humbleness, enjoining good and forbidding wrong, unity, truth, justice, environmental awareness, and having firm faith in God.*

## Community Building in Islam, Part 2

This series is based on a nine-session course conducted by the author on Community Building at the Islamic Centre of England in London in 2009.

### Abstract

Though personal identity is truly important, it is essential for a community to likewise have an identity that is shared by other members of the same group, and to work in a united way for the same causes. Regardless of whether it is on a worldwide or lesser scale, establishing a community is currently becoming more crucial. To consider a group of people a successful community involves specific requirements and qualities. The first part of this series demonstrated the importance of community-building and Prophet Muhammad's efforts to put it into practice.

Prioritized qualities were expounded on, such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, persistence, and maintaining a healthy balance in working for this world to eventually lead to a blissful hereafter. This part further builds upon qualities such as moderation, humbleness, enjoining good and forbidding wrong, unity, truth, justice, environmental awareness, and having firm faith in God.

### Introduction

The issue on how to establish an Islamic Community has always been of great importance but is especially so for today, whether it is on a general scale in the worldwide Islamic community or on a smaller scale in minority Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries. It is essential for us to know the qualities and characteristics of an Islamic Community and how we can move towards establishing it. It is not simply the case that when we have a number of Muslims living, working or worshipping together that we can finally call it an Islamic community.

However, in many cases this is actually what we find: a group of Muslims interacting together is deemed an Islamic community, even though it is not. As we will explain, a community must be a very unified and integrated group of people who behave like one body, and in addition to his or her own personal identity, every individual should have an identity that is shared with other members of the community. All must work together in a united way for the same causes.

This article in this series briefly highlights some of the most important points relating to this issue, which will then be further elaborated on in future parts of the series.

### An Islamic community is moderate and balanced

In the previous session we reached the stage of talking about this verse:

***Thus We have made you a middle nation that you may be witnesses to the people, and that the Apostle may be a witness to you. (2:143)***

Allah emphasises that the Muslim nation must be a moderate and balanced one – a nation that does not go to any extremes – so that this nation can become witnesses over other people in the same way that the Prophet is a witness over them.

A crucial point in this verse is rather than merely verbally instruct others on the Prophet's teachings and conduct, we are to demonstrate them through our conduct and inter- personal relations. Only then can we enable ourselves to be a testimony and witness for what the Prophet taught just as the Prophet did himself.<sup>1</sup>

## **Examples of balanced Islamic community**

### **Material and spiritual life**

One aspect of being moderate and balanced is to strike a balance between being materially or spiritually inclined by paying attention to both the physical, material life in this world and to make preparations for life in the Hereafter, as Imam Hasan said: "With respect to your life in this world, be as if you are going to remain here forever."<sup>2</sup>

*As both an individual and part of a society, Muslims neither sacrifice the material world for the sake of the Hereafter, nor do they sacrifice the Hereafter for the sake of this life. Indeed, these two aspects of life greatly complement each other. We have a better chance of working successfully for our eternal life if we have a decent and comfortable life in this world. As previously said, it is for this reason that all the prophets attempted and struggled to establish social justice (57:25).*

When people have peace of mind while living conveniently, they are better able to concentrate on fulfilling their spiritual needs.

### **Treatment of differing ideas and opinions**

An Islamic society must be balanced and moderate in its treatment of other people's differing views. Some societies and communities are closed-minded – automatically against any new way of thinking or living. On the other extreme, some societies and communities are open to such an extent that they are unable to make judgements and cannot choose between what is beneficial or not, since they simply accept everything.

An Islamic society has a clear policy: we are open to everything that is good. We are to firstly acknowledge and secondly accept anything good, whether it is from our friends or enemies; whether they are from believers or unbelievers. On the other hand, we are to reject anything bad even if they are from our friends or fellow believers. We are to be very selective while at the same time open; a combination of both attitudes is needed. Indeed to some extent, this has been the case with the Muslim nations throughout history; they strived to benefit from the scientific and technological information of other nations.

Thus, we must not only verbally declare that we are open, but rather to have open hearts – to see goodness even in our enemy. In one anecdote, Prophet Jesus was passing by a dead dog with his companions who were his apostles. Everything seemed to be disgusting about this dog, as they criticized it by commenting on its ugliness and its odour. But Prophet Jesus said, "What white teeth this dog has."

With all its negative traits, Jesus found and acknowledged the good in it. Likewise, we are to acknowledge anything good, even when it is in our enemies. As the Qur'an says:

*O you who have faith! Be maintainers, as witnesses for the sake of God, of justice, and ill feeling for a people should never lead you to be unjust. Be just; that is nearer to Godwariness, and be wary of God. God is indeed well aware of what you do. (5:8)*

#### **A decent life and balanced use of technology**

An Islamic society must not deprive itself from having a convenient and comfortable life. Technology is one aspect that has, to a more or lesser extent, offered convenience. We are not against technology. There are those who deem technology as an obstacle to good living. For example, in North America, there are those with good intentions and ideas, and yet believe modernity to be a deprivation to humankind, that with the development of technology and our dependency on machines, we have been greatly deprived of the concentration and peace of mind we had in the past. Thus, they do not use such things as electricity, telephones, and cars. Though their intentions and ideas may be good, this attitude seems somehow not right or appropriate.

We must not be against technology or using machines; at the same time, we must not rely on them so much that we become weak and dependent. Nowadays there are machines for practically everything, even to simply peel an orange or to de-stone an olive, or using our car to drive a few minutes walking distance.

We have become so dependent; we almost cannot live without electricity, cell phones, internet, and cars. Perhaps a good idea is to have a policy that technology should also be governed by certain moral principles so that not everything scientists invent and produce and out of which people can make money is permitted in the market. This is a field in which we are to maintain a balanced attitude. We should encourage scientists to develop the scientific research because as far as science is concerned, we have no limits.

However, when it comes to technology, research methods, and introducing scientific findings, then caution should be considered in observing moral requirements. We should refrain from producing everything in our capacity without restrictions.

### **Characteristics of those living in an Islamic community**

#### **Righteousness and moderation**

In Nahjul Balaghah, Imam Ali talks about Prophet Muhammad, saying, “So he threw open the Truth, gave advice to the people, guided them towards righteousness, and ordered them to be moderate.”<sup>5</sup>

People are either balanced or acting in the wrong way. In the Qur’an, we read:

*Had they observed the Taurat and the Injeel and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would surely have drawn nourishment from above them and from beneath their feet. (5:66)*

The Jews and the Christians are being told that if they had established and implemented the teachings of Taurat (the Torah) and Injeel (the Gospel) in their lives and in their societies, they would have been able to have drawn nourishment from above and from beneath their feet, and this means to

benefit from the Divine Blessings coming from above and below them, in other words, a prosperous life. Then Allah says:

***“There is a balanced (muktasidah) group among them, but evil is what many of them do.” (5:66)***

The people who believed in Taurat and Injeel were divided. Some of them were balanced (muktasidah) and moderate, but on the other hand there were people who were acting inappropriately: ***“...but evil is what many of them do.” (5:66)*** In other words, they were either balanced or acted wrongly, displaying the significance of being balanced.

#### **Humbleness and balance**

In the Sermon on the Pious, Imam Ali uses the root ‘iktisaad’. ‘Muktasad’ sometimes means economical though in many cases it means to be balanced. Imam Ali refers to the pious people as “those who are humble and balanced in their life.”

There are also further verses from the Qur’an regarding this subject which can be used for further reading and reflection. Verse 25 of Surah Furqan emphasises on the necessity of balance and moderation in giving charity. Verse 110 of Surah Israa also highlights the need for striking a balance in the volume of our voice during prayer and calling on Allah – that is, to avoid praying in either a loud or very soft voice.

#### **The Islamic community is the best nation in benefiting others**

In verse 3:110 we read:

***You are the best nation (ever) brought forth for mankind: you bid what is right and forbid what is wrong and have faith in Allah. And if the People of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them (some) are faithful, but most of them are transgressors.(3:110)***

The Muslim community is the best nation to have been brought out, which means the best nation to have been created, declared, and introduced by God for the sake of humankind. It is worth noting that the Arabic word ‘naas’ means the whole of mankind.

This is quite different from apartheid or racism because this does not mean that we should consider ourselves to be the best in the sense that we should be served by others. It means that we are those who are best able to benefit and serve others so that mankind benefits from us more than it does from other people.

#### **Reasons for being described as the best nation**

The verse then goes on to explain a few of the reasons why Allah has declared that the Muslim Nation (Ummah) is the best Ummah to serve and benefit mankind, although of course there may be other reasons found elsewhere.

#### **Enjoining good and prohibiting bad**

The Qur’an says:

***“You bid what is right and forbid what is wrong and have faith in Allah.”(3:110)***



We uphold the principle that we should not be indifferent towards what people do. What makes the Islamic Ummah capable of being the best at serving humankind is feeling responsible for encouraging good actions and requesting others not to do wrong. This shows the significance of enjoining good and prohibiting bad, because it is the first quality mentioned by Allah after calling the Islamic nation the best nation. People are always in need of mutual advice, support, and guidance. No one should think that they are not in need of advice or guidance from others when doing wrong, or any encouragement when doing right.

The Islamic Ummah must be able to offer testimony for moral and social values not only in word but also in deed. For example, nowadays many societies, especially modern ones, are suffering from the breakdown of families. We should stand up for family values in words and practise to model the proper way of safeguarding the family.

### **Faith in God**

Commenting on *“and have faith in God (tu’minun-a billah) (3:110),”* in his *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur’an*, Allamah Tabatabai mentions that faith in God (tuminun-a billah) is the foundation for enjoining good and prohibiting bad, because faith is mentioned at the end. Of course, there are also other interpretations. However, what is perhaps sufficient for us is to know that enjoining good, prohibiting bad, and having complete faith in Allah help the Islamic community survive and benefit and serve others. Similarly, verse 3:104 reads:

*“There has to be a nation among you summoning to the good, bidding what is right and forbidding what is wrong. It is they who are felicitous.”(3:104)*

Question: Is enjoining good and prohibiting bad the responsibility of a few or all members of the community? In both *Al-Mizan* and *Tafseer Nemuneh* – two contemporary exegeses of the Qur’an – it is explained that there must exist a group within the Islamic nations who enjoin good and prohibit bad on behalf of the entire community, although to a smaller extent this is also the responsibility of every person. A select qualified group of people should enjoin good and prohibit bad, and also call and invite everyone towards good.

I have another point of view. “There has to be a nation among you” does not necessarily refer to a certain group of people who enjoin good. I think that in this case, “minkum” does not mean ‘part’ or ‘some’; rather, it means ‘from.’ Thus, the phrase becomes ‘from you’ a community must be produced, or from among this nation a nation must be produced that enjoins good and forbids bad.

Therefore, it does not mean that only some of us, a select group of us are to do this because that would then create various problems and complications around the question of why only a select group of people. Of course, the authors have attempted to answer it. However, again, my opinion is that “minkum” means ‘from,’ so we should understand that from this nation we must make a nation that follows a principle and practise of enjoining everyone towards good and prohibiting bad. Such people are described as those who are felicitous, which is also a good support for this

interpretation, because Allah is saying it is those who will be happy and who will attain salvation.

So according to the first interpretation only those select people will obtain salvation and so surely we should ask what happens to the rest of the Ummah? Yet with the second interpretation, salvation and happiness are achievable for all.

#### **Unity is essential for the effectiveness of the community**

Preceding the above verse is a very famous and well-known verse:

*Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord and do not be divided (into sects). And remember Allah's blessing upon you when you were enemies, then He brought your hearts together, so you became brothers with His blessing. And you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, whereat He saved you from it. Thus does Allah clarify His signs for you so that you may be guided. (3:103)*

Allah advises us to hold onto the divine rope and not to become divided by fighting each other; and to remember that because of His blessing our hearts are united. Allah has saved us from falling into the hell of hostility and separation that leads to the fire of eternal Hell, and has explained His communications for us to find the right path.

Immediately after this, Allah speaks of the essential necessity of producing from amongst us a community that calls people towards good and prohibits bad. He is telling us that firstly the Muslim community must be united; if we are disunited then whatever we do is useless. If we, as individual Muslims or as a community disagree amongst ourselves, disapprove of what other people say and criticise each other, then we cannot positively influence other communities and they would not deem it necessary to learn from us.

Although we could possibly agree on some terms due to some similar doctrines, when they witness hostility amongst ourselves, they will not be prepared to take seriously what we say. Indeed, this is exactly why the Qur'an says:

*"And obey God and His Apostle, and do not dispute, or you will lose heart and your power will be gone. And be patient; indeed God is with the patient." (8:46)*

Having no fragrance is having no effect, rendering us useless.

#### **Concern for oneself versus responsibility towards society**

The following verse which is sometimes misunderstood is beautifully explained by the late Allamah Tabatabai. Allah says:

*O you who have faith! Take care of your own souls. He who goes astray cannot hurt you if you are guided. To Allah will be the return of you all, whereat He will inform you concerning what you used to do. (5:105)*

Some people think Allah is saying that we must only be concerned with ourselves – our personal lives and our relationship with God – without having social responsibilities towards others. They think that what other people do has nothing to do with them and is no concern of theirs. However this is a misunderstanding of this verse.

“Take care of your own souls” does not discharge our social responsibilities, that we put aside our role in enjoining good and prohibiting bad. Since, as we know, one part of the Qur’an can interpret another part of the Qur’an, is it possible that “Take care of your own souls” means we should have nothing to do with other people when there are many verses about enjoining good and prohibiting bad?

On the contrary, the verse means that each and every one of us must do our very best to fulfil our obligations and responsibilities. Once we perform our duties properly, whatever others do or not do will not harm us. We are to enjoin good whether people listen to us or not, and even if they do not listen, it will not harm us. If all of humanity decides to go in the wrong direction, it will not harm us in the least if we are on the Right Path.

This is especially encouraging for those who want to get involved in the community for fear of not feeling appreciated or supported. It is encouraging to know that we should simply do our best and not need to worry about whether other people appreciate or not, listen or not, or go in the same direction or not. None of this would harm us. It is sufficient for us if we please Allah by fulfilling the requirements of being an active member of society and it is irrelevant whether other people accept or not.

Thus “Take care of your own souls” means to fulfil whatever we need for our personal and social development and for achieving proximity to Allah.

### **Qualities of an Islamic community**

The following is a list of several qualities of an Islamic community for further reflection.

#### **Truth and Justice**

An Islamic community is very concerned with truth and justice. In two places in the Qur’an, Allah is clear and direct about the community as that which is concerned with truth and justice. Moreover, there are dozens of other verses regarding the general importance of truth and justice.

Verse 7:159 reveals the truthfulness of the community who truly followed Prophet Musa:

***“Among the people (or community) of Moses is a group who guide (the people) by the truth and do justice thereby.”(7:159)***

This warrants a detailed discussion about how a community can and must be truthful just as an individual person must be truthful. Just as some people can be hypocritical and dishonest, communities can also be hypocritical and dishonest.

The above-quoted verse reveals that indeed there is a group of people who guide truthfully, who when they give advice, they implement that in themselves; they do not cheat, deceive others, or show off. “...and do justice thereby” means they truthfully try to exercise justice.

In verse 181 of the same chapter, a more general idea is stated:

***“Among those We have created are a nation who guide by the truth and act justly thereby.”(7:181)***

The previous verse included “among the people of Moses,” but this verse states “Among those We have created.”

Thus, one of the requirements of a good community, pleasing to Allah, and whom Allah is happy with, is that they must follow the truth, be truthful, and establish justice.

### **Rationality**

From the Qur'anic point of view, a good community is one in which rationality governs every aspect of life. A Muslim community must be a rational community that can think clearly and carefully, and decipher right from wrong based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. It is not a closed- minded community that blindly follows certain customs or the ways of its ancestors. Rationality is essential, especially in the school of the Ahlul Bayt. Even our ijtihad is performed in a rational way; reason is one of the sources we use in understanding Islam, particularly for deriving Islamic law.

### **Seeking Knowledge**

An Islamic community is greatly interested in acquiring knowledge and developing different types of sciences. When Prophet Muhammad started his mission, the number of people able to read and write in the entire Arabian Peninsula was extremely limited; the literate were known by name due to their scarcity. However, in a few years, that ignorant society transformed so much that many sciences had been developed. Firstly, the Qur'anic sciences were numerous. In addition to developing religious sciences, they also developed and enhanced sciences from other nations such as philosophy and logic; and experimental sciences such as chemistry, physics, geography, and geology.

Indeed, the Muslim community was so advanced and ahead of other nations that during the Middle Ages, Europe greatly benefited from them; they were compelled to translate the numerous philosophical and scientific books from Arabic into Latin to run their universities as they functioned using those texts.

Why did the Prophet place so much emphasis on knowledge? Why does the Qur'an say,

***“Are those who know equal to those who do not know? (39:9)”***

Why did the Prophet say “Seek knowledge even as far away as China.”<sup>4</sup>

A community will die without knowledge. For a society or community, knowledge and new scientific discoveries are like taking in fresh oxygen.

Though religious sciences are vital, Islam encourages seeking any type of scientific knowledge. At the time when the Prophet said “Seek knowledge even as far away as China,” there were no Muslim scholars in China to teach Islamic ethics or Qur'anic interpretation. We should seek all useful available knowledge. For example, there are those who spend their lives researching knowledge that does not have any positive effect. That type of knowledge is irrelevant, although we are not entirely against it.

As previously mentioned, there is no limit regarding the acquisition of scientific knowledge but pursuing something without benefit is not very much encouraged. Conversely, Islam is highly open to the development of any type of knowledge or science, whether religious or not, that can be beneficial to mankind, a small group of people, or even an individual. One just should observe the priorities.

## Charity

Charity and charitable organisations, movements, and enterprises are required in Islam. In an Islamic community, charity is part of every person's life. It is not something marginal, nor accidental. In the Qur'an, dozens of verses on giving alms is mentioned immediately after prayer, which is undoubtedly extremely important – one of the pillars and foundations of Muslim life. In many verses, giving charity is mentioned immediately after the establishment of prayer which shows its vital importance. A key verse reads as follows:

***Those who, if We granted them power in the land, maintain the prayer, give the alms, and bid what is right and forbid what is wrong. And with Allah rests the outcome of all matters. (22:41)***

The Qur'an also teaches us that we should feel obliged to have a fixed budget for charitable purposes in both our personal and communal possessions:

***...and there was a share in their wealth for the beggar and the deprived. (51:19)***

***...and in whose wealth there is a fixed share for the beggar and the deprived (70:24 and 25)***

## Environmental awareness

An Islamic community and society should pay due care and attention to the environment, and must not waste or damage it. The environment is a trust. There are two types of trust according to Islam: those that can be utilised and those which cannot, and environment is understandably an aspect that can be used. For example, if someone leaves on a trip and entrusts his or her laptop to us, we cannot use it unless we are specifically told that we can do so. Or someone entrusts us with money and asks us to look after it till he or she returns. This is then a trust we cannot use.

However, there are those who permit us to use their laptop or money until they return. So trusts can sometimes be used or sometimes should not be used. All these natural resources are given to us as trusts from Allah for our use. For example, the Qur'an says:

***Do you not see that God has disposed for you whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth and He has showered upon you His blessings, the outward and the inward? Yet among the people are those who dispute concerning God without any knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture. (31:20)***

We can use water, air, minerals, oil – pretty much everything provided for us. We can benefit from animals and plants, while remembering that they are still trusts. We must not harm, waste, or damage them. We are responsible for developing them. As Allah says in the Qur'an,

***“...He brought you forth from the earth and asked you to develop it...”***  
***(11:61)***

Attention to the environment is a great concern for an Islamic community.

### **Security**

Everyone must feel safe in an Islamic community. This is not only in the sense of there being no war; this concerns something much more than that. In an Islamic community, we should feel safe in the sense that we must not feel any threat from our fellow brothers or sisters. This is the overwhelming sense of safety and security that we need to have. When we have tens, hundreds, or even thousands of people living in such a community, everyone must feel sure that no one will plot against them, or have ill will; no one will try to damage their reputation, and indeed, no one will allow others to damage their reputation.

Sincerely implementing this Islamic principle would bring much safety and security to everyone. In a hadith from Prophet Muhammad (s) we read: “A Muslim is the one that other Muslims feel safe from his hand and from his tongue.”<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, sometimes we fail to respect the reputation of our own brothers and sisters, let alone non-Muslims. We must prevent ourselves from damaging others’ reputations. According to a hadith, a believer (mu’min) has so much respect in the sight of Allah that their respect for them exceeds the respect for the Ka’aba. Who dares to insult the Ka’aba? Is there any Muslim who disrespects the Ka’aba? If a mu’min has to be more respected than the Ka’aba, then how can we allow ourselves to do something that would damage a fellow believer? How can we allow ourselves to remain silent and indifferent to other people damaging our fellow believers? This is not Islamic.

In an Islamic society, we can ensure that everyone only wishes good for us and would defend us in our absence. If we have such a spirit in our lives and in our community, then life becomes joyful, like Heaven on earth.

### **Family solidarity and strength**

Families must be very strong in an Islamic society. The relationships between parents and children, husbands and wives, and between the older generation and the younger generation must be strong and firm. Indeed, this must also spread out to include the extended family of grandchildren and grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins whom we must all have strong connections with.

### **Hospitality**

Muslims whether as individuals or as a community should be very hospitable. Prophet Muhammad is quoted as saying, “Whoever has faith in Allah and the Hereafter, must respect his guest.”<sup>6</sup> It is a requirement – not merely a recommendation – of faith to be respectful and hospitable to our guests. It is not something that we can do if or when we feel like it. It is necessary.

Furthermore, this hospitality is not only for relatives and friends, it must also be extended to strangers. We must be hospitable even towards people whom we do not know, that is, to refugees, tourists, visitors and so forth.

### **Keeping promises**

A requirement of an Islamic community is that promises must be kept. A culture must be established in which we keep any covenant made. People



should have confidence in making any treaty or covenant with Muslims and with an Islamic community. They must know that Muslims will never cancel, disregard, or break their promises.

### **Pardon and forgiveness**

Though it is natural that every community entails problems, we should not continuously punish others for them. The main, overriding principle must be to pardon and forgive others unless there is a systematic violation of values and rights where we realise that if we forgive, it would worsen the situation, and the other party would be encouraged in their wrongdoing. Otherwise, an Islamic society is to show overwhelming mercy towards its members and outsiders.

Thinking optimistically about others' words and deeds is vital. For example, we should believe they are telling the truth unless we have definite evidence to the contrary. Holding doubts or suspicion without proof can be detrimental to our relationships. In the Qur'an we read:

*O you who have faith! Avoid much suspicion. Indeed some suspicions are sins. And do not spy on or backbite one another. Will any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it. And be wary of God; indeed God is all-clement, all-merciful. (49:12)*

*Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed the hearing, the eyesight, and the heart—all of these are accountable. (17:36)*

Even if people seem to say or do that which can be understood in a negative way, we are reminded in the hadith that we should give 70 excuses for our fellow believers before accusing them. Our overwhelming attitude should be a very positive one, full of understanding and sympathy.

Constant reaction and retaliation to people's mistreatment of us is not wise. For example, we certainly are responsible for clarifying an issue and stating the truth when a non-Muslim activist or politician makes a negative statement about Islam or Muslims. However, using foul language, misbehaving, or making accusations is not the way to respond. It might well be possible that the person genuinely did not understand the case, or perhaps that person is honest although was not exposed to – or understood – the truth.

Making quick judgments about a person's ill-will towards us is plain wrong. We are to speak using soft, gentle, and polite language; although, of course, there will sometimes be some cases where we need to use strong language. Overall, the governing rule is to use less force and more patience and mercy.

### **Patience**

Patience is a highly recommended quality of a believer often mentioned in the Qur'an. Patience is also a fundamental quality of an Islamic community. The rewards for being patient are described as being endless and immeasurable; indeed, there is saying that describes how, on the Day of Judgement, those who were consistently patient when faced with the repeated daily challenges of life are ahead of the martyrs in entering Paradise.

### **Fairness and wanting for others what we want for ourselves**

The Golden Rule encourages us to want for others what we want for ourselves. In an Islamic community, we need to have an attitude and work towards achieving a situation that ensures that all members of the community have those material and spiritual things that make an individual content, comfortable, and able to progress and succeed in this life and the next. Conversely, we should also not want for others what we would not want for ourselves.

There may be occasions when we should want others to be able to have or achieve things which we cannot. For example, we may very much want to study in university or seminary, work in a particular field, marry or have children, but due to personal circumstances are unable to do so. However, this should not mean that we do not sincerely want and pray for others to have them, and indeed help them achieve them.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we studied some of the important aspects and qualities of an Islamic community and of its members. These qualities which should be present not only in the character and behaviour of a faithful believer but should also be manifested in a truly Islamic community so that as Muslims we can honestly say that we are the best nation for benefitting and serving humankind. As Muslims we should not merely be concerned with our own personal situation; we must also accept the responsibility for our community and society as a whole.



## Notes

1. Imam Ali (a) is also quoted as saying:

ما امرتكم بشيء الا و قد سبقتم بالعمل به , و لا نهيتكم عن شيء الا و قد  
سبقتم بالنهي عنه

I did not ask you to do anything unless I preceded you in doing it. And I did not ask you to refrain from anything except that I myself was the first to act thus so. (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 157)

2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 44, p. 139. The hadith is as follows:

وَ اعْمَلْ لِدُنْيَاكَ كَأَنَّكَ تَعِيشُ أَبَدًا وَ اعْمَلْ لِآخِرَتِكَ كَأَنَّكَ تَمُوتُ عَدَا

3. Sermon 195 (according to some editions, it may be Sermon 194)

4. For example, see Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, pp. 177 & 180.

5. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 235.

6. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 667. The Arabic text is as follows:

مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيُكْرِمْ صَيْفَهُ

**Community Building, Part 3**

**Author(s): Mohammad Ali Shomali**

**Publisher(s): Ahlul Bayt World Assembly**

**Journal: Vol. 16, no 4, Winter 2016**

*This series of papers studies the importance of community-building and Prophet Muhammad's efforts to implement it. This part further builds upon the concept of truthfulness in Islamic theology and its moral system; of Allah as the true being, revelation as the truth, the prophets' mission to serve the truth, and the importance of communities striving to become truthful. This series is based on a nine-session course conducted by the author on Community Building at the Islamic Centre of England in London in 2009.*

## Community Building, Part 3

This series is based on a nine-session course conducted by the author on Community Building at the Islamic Centre of England in London in 2009.

### Abstract

It is crucial for a community to have a shared identity and to work towards a joint cause. Regardless of whether it is on a worldwide or lesser scale, establishing a community is currently becoming more crucial, and successful community involves specific requirements and qualities.

This series of papers studies the importance of community-building and Prophet Muhammad's efforts to implement it. Prioritized qualities such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, unity, persistence, moderation, humbleness, enjoining good and forbidding wrong, and maintaining a healthy balance in working for this world to eventually lead to a blissful hereafter were expounded on.

This part further builds upon the concept of truthfulness in Islamic theology and is moral system; of Allah as the true being, revelation as the truth, the prophets' mission to serve the truth, and the importance of communities striving to become truthful. Thus far we have listed some of the major characteristics of an Islamic Community, a community which is pleasing to Allah (swt), such as being balanced and moderate, calling towards good and in particular enjoining good and prohibiting bad. In what follows, we will refer to some other characteristics of an Islamic community.

### Commitment to the truth

This is an immensely important quality both for individuals and for communities. The subject of truth is so important from the Qur'anic perspective that firstly we will expand on it a little and then focus on the role of truth in the community. One of the notions on which great emphasis has been put in the Qur'an is the notion of truth and the True (al-Haqq).

### Qur'an describes Allah as the True

In the Qur'an, Allah describes Himself as being 'the True' or the 'the Truth' (al-haqq). The Qur'an tells us that the reason why God should be followed, worshipped and obeyed is that 'Allah is the True.' Thus, we can understand that for Allah, to be the True is more important than to be, for example, Self-Sufficient, Self- Existent, etc. For example, the verse 22:62 reads as follows:

***True, and what they invoke besides Him is nullity, and because Allah is the All-exalted, the All-great. (22:62)***

Indeed, this is a sound argument for the necessity of worshipping Allah and not worshipping idols and false gods. Allah says that the reason for asking us to worship Him only is because He is al-Haqq, the True and the Real; and what they call on other than Him is false. The major deciding factor is whether something is true or false and so we worship Allah and follow Him because He is the True.

Two verses that expand on the meaning of being true are as follows:

1. The chapter al-Hajj, verse 6, Allah says:

*That is because Allah is the True and it is He Who revives the dead and He has power over all things. (22:6)*

2. The chapter Yunus, verse 32:

*That, then, is Allah, your true Lord. So what is there after the truth except error? Then where are you being led away? (10:32)*

### **Allah is the True and real basis of everything**

So Allah is al-Haqq, the True and the Real. However, we may say that we are also true and real and that everything which exists is also true and real. For example, we could say that everyone and everything we know and everything in this world is haqq. For example, in Ziyarah Ale Yaseen we read “Heaven is true, hell is true, reward and punishment are true.” So if these are also true, then what is the difference between them and Allah being True?

The difference is clear. There are uncountable real things that are all created. Allah is al-Haqq in the sense that not only is He True and Real but He is also the Source and the Origin of everything else that is true and real. So ‘al-Haqq’ means the ‘True One’ Who is the Origin and the Source of everything else<sup>1</sup>.

### **Allah alone is the True**

Allah alone is al-Haqq; we cannot say ‘I am al-haqq’ or ‘you are al-haqq.’ Of course, some mystics like Hallaj said: ‘ana al haqq’. Although they meant something else e.g. being a manifestation of God which is al-Haqq, personally I think we should refrain from calling anyone ‘al haqq’ since this might be misleading. It is only Allah Who in reality is the One who is absolutely True in the fullest sense of this concept. Everything else in existence, including ourselves are only true as far as we are related to Allah. This is similar to the concept of light. Allah is al-Noor, the real and original Light and the basis of every light such that every other light that is not Allah comes from Him<sup>2</sup>.

### **The truth observed in the creation of the world**

The creation of the world also takes place observing the Truth. For example, out of many verses dealing with this subject, in Surah An’am, verse 73, Allah says:

*It is He Who created the heavens and the earth with the truth. (6:73)*

Allah has created the heavens and the earth with Truth, truthfully, or observing the Truth. There is no falsity in the creation of the skies and of the earth.

### **Revelation, divine books, and prophets are true Revelation**

For example, in Surah Baqarah, verse 147, Allah says:

*“This is the truth from your Lord; so do not be among the sceptics.” (2:147)*

Similarly, in Surah Ale Imran, verse 60, we read:

*This is the truth from your Lord, so do not be among the sceptics. (3:60)*

Thus the Truth comes from our Lord, or the Truth is from our Lord, so we should not have doubts and should not be one of those who doubt. What

is this Truth that has come from our Lord? It is the Revelation, the Message, and because it comes from Allah it is True.

Then again in verse 62 of the same Surah we read:

***“This is indeed the true account, for sure. There is no god but Allah, and indeed Allah is the All- Mighty, the All-Wise.” (3:62)***

### **The Qur’an**

This idea is expounded upon in the Qur’an, and in particular regarding its own revelation, the carrying of the Revelation by Angel Gabriel, and the reception of the Revelation by Prophet Muhammad, describing them as all true and truthful. For example, Allah says in Surah Israa, verse 105:

***“With the truth did We send it down, and with the truth did it descend, and We did not send you except as a bearer of good news and as a warner.” (17:105)***

Thus, since the Qur’an comes from Allah, and when it is issued by and originates from Allah then it is complete Truth, containing no falsity (batil) because it is initiated by Allah.

### **The Prophet**

So when it reaches the Prophet it is still pure and true because Gabriel does not do any mischief nor does he make any mistake in between the truth being issued by Allah and received by the Prophet. So everything comes down in a pure and truthful form:

***With the truth did We send it down and with the truth did it descend. (17:105).”***

Often it happens that a person sends a message and on the way the message is lost or distorted so that even if and when people receive the message it differs from the original. However, this is certainly not the case with Allah. When Allah sends a message, the message is also received with purity and truthfully.

In Surah Nahl, verse 102, Allah says:

***Say, the Spirit has brought it down duly from your Lord. (16:102)***

So Allah sent down the Qur’an, Gabriel brought it down and the Prophet received it, all these things being done truthfully. Furthermore, in verses 41: 41 and 42, Allah says:

***“Indeed it is an august Book: falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it, a [gradually] sent down [revelation] from One all-wise, all-laudable.” (41:41-42)***

### **Mission of Prophet to serve the Truth**

In the Qur’an, Allah talks about the mission of the Prophet. What was that mission? We find that the mission of the Prophet was again to serve the truth.

In Surah al-Baqarah, verse 119, we read:

***“Indeed We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of good news and as a warner and you will not be questioned concerning the inmates of hell.” (2:119)***

Thus, Allah explains that He has commissioned, dispatched, and sent the Prophet to give good tidings and warnings and has reassured him that he is

not responsible for the dwellers of Hell who will bear the consequences of their own deeds. The Prophet then conveyed and delivered the message of Allah truthfully, without adding or hiding a single word to the message.

Furthermore, in Surah Haqqah, verses 44 to 46 Allah says:

***“Had he faked any sayings in Our Name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta.” (69:44-46)***

Though the verse is specifically regarding the Prophet, it is indeed a warning to us; certainly the Prophet did not do this. This must be a warning to all of us; if the Prophet had fabricated something from himself, adding or deleting a few words and attributing that to Allah, then Allah would have seized him by force and cut the artery of his heart. From this we understand that He would have destroyed him. Thus it is certain that not a single word was added by the Prophet, nor was it hidden by him.

### **Implementation of the divine message in a truthful manner**

Implementation of the Qur’an in particular, or of the divine message in general, must be done in a truthful manner. In Surah Saad, verse 26, we find the example of David, a prophet who was then raised to the level of being the vicegerent of Allah (khalifatullah):

***“O David! Indeed We have made you a vicegerent on the earth. So judge between people with justice and do not follow desire, or it will lead you astray from the way of Allah.” (38:26)***

Allah is telling Prophet David that He has appointed him a vicegerent, a deputy-like guardian on the earth. Prophet David is then advised to judge and rule truthfully amongst the people and avoid following his lower desires, lusts and appetites because as this would lead him away from the path of Allah. So he must endeavour to discover who is in the right; that is, whose claim is justified and whose claim is not.

Thus we must not be biased and consider the claims of the people in our favour to be right because of our love for them whether they be brothers, friends, relatives, or people of same city or country. The only criterion that must be observed is the truth. Follow our desires and feelings will mislead us, taking us far from the path of Allah. We should also take care to hear both sides of a story, to gather evidence from all parties in a dispute so that we can judge truthfully in full knowledge of the facts.

This contrast between observing the truth and following one’s desires is of utmost importance. The history of mankind is a history of conflict between the truth and peoples’ desires, whereby either people have been following and observing the truth, and humbled when confronting it, or they were following their personal desires.

### **Disregarding the truth leads to destruction of creation**

In Surah Mu’minoon, verse 71, Allah states an important principle that could have far-reaching and devastating consequences:

***“Had the Truth followed their desires, the heavens and the earth would have surely fallen apart (along) with those who are in them.” (23:71)***

Allah says that the whole creation – the heavens, earth, and whoever lives in them, would be damaged and corrupted if the Truth were to depend on people’s desires. If it were the case that in reality there was no absolute

Truth and people's desires became the only criteria, then the entire creation would be destroyed.

This is why we mentioned that the whole of history is the history of the conflict between the Truth on the one hand and the desires, lusts, and appetites of people on the other. The history of mankind is nothing other than this, whether it be in personal, social, national, or international sphere.

### **Individuals and communities must strive to be truthful**

If Allah is indeed the True, the Book was revealed truthfully, the Prophet delivered the message truthfully, his words and actions were in compliance with the Truth, and every judgement is to be made observing the Truth, what should we do as individuals and as communities?

We are to try our utmost to be truthful, to observe and commit ourselves to the Truth, which is not merely telling the truth. That is only one aspect of it. Truthfulness must become a quality of the heart and soul, rather than mere truthfulness as a quality of our speech.

What is a true or false statement? According to the commonly held view called the correspondence theory, this means that either the statement corresponds to an independent reality which exists outside the statement or it does not correspond. So, for example, if someone says that the weather is presently warm, the truth of that statement depends on a reality which is independent from the statement; therefore, we can compare what has been said with that independent reality to see whether it corresponds to that reality or not. If the statement corresponds to the independent reality, it is true. If not, it is false.

However, relatively speaking, this kind of truthfulness is very trivial. Being truthful in every sense of the word is actually much more than this. It is quite possible that sometimes people make a true statement but in fact they are still liars. The Qur'an gives an example of this when Allah talks about the hypocrites (munafiqeen):

***“When the hypocrites come to you they say, ‘We bear witness that you are indeed the apostle of God.’ God knows that you are indeed His Apostle, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars.” (63:1)***

When the hypocrites visited the Prophet, they told him that they bore witness that he was sent by Allah as the Apostle of Allah. But then Allah says:

***“And surely Allah knows that you are His Apostle. But Allah bears witness that these people are liars.”(63:1)***

Allah called them liars because although what they said was indeed true, they did not actually believe in what they were saying as they did not say it with honesty.

Thus, sometimes truth or truthfulness is the quality of the statement and sometimes it is the quality of the speaker. If we say something we believe, the statement may be correct although we are not being honest because we are deceiving others by telling them something we do not accept. This is not honesty because true honesty is to say what we actually believe and to say what we ourselves accept.



Therefore, truthfulness is not only about factual statements about, for example, the weather, the natural world, or about what others have said and done. It also concerns the advice that we give people and the way we preach. It is a true statement when we say it is good to be humble; however, if we do not believe that being humble is good, then we are not being honest, and even if we believe so without practise, then we are not being honest.

Truthfulness is not a matter of making true statements or a matter of saying what we believe; it is most importantly a matter of saying what we ourselves are whole-heartedly and sincerely committed to. As the English saying goes: “Practise what you preach.”

### **Examples of the most truthful people**

Thus an honest person is not only someone who does not lie; his words, beliefs, and actions all confirm and conform to the truth, called ‘siddeeq’ or ‘most truthful’ in Qur’anic terminology, and is deeper than ‘sadiq’ or ‘truthful’. It is such a high position that Allah praises Prophet Abraham for being ‘Siddeeq’ and both Lady Fatimah and Lady Mary as ‘Siddeeqah’, because everything that they believe, say, or do, is in compliance with the Truth. There is not an instance when they say something and act differently to their statements.

Neither will they say something whilst in actual fact they believe something else. Indeed these people would not even say they intended to do something while intending something else but were prevented by circumstances from carrying out their intended action.

Their entire reality, soul, and spirit, is in compliance with – and committed to – the Truth.

### **Why be entirely committed and in compliance with Truth?**

We should be entirely committed and in compliance with the Truth because Truth is nothing other than Allah, and all that is created or legislated by Him. So anything True is either created by Allah or legislated by Him. True servants of Allah are those who are truly committed to the Truth. Servitude to Allah is nothing other than commitment to the Truth which in the first place is Allah Himself and in the second place is whatever is created or legislated by Allah.

Having said this, it now becomes clear why a mu’min must be truthful. It is not simply a matter of how much we pray or fast although these are important duties as Allah asks us to do so. However, what is of utmost importance is how committed we are in giving up our own ideas, and ways of thinking and living to adapt ourselves to the Truth. If we are servants of Allah then no matter who tells us something true, we would accept it without hesitation.

For example, if we have said something wrong and someone tells us this, then we should accept it, no matter who is telling us, even if it is a child. Truth does not belong to the person who mentions that Truth. Truth comes from Allah Alone. We should not think that if we accept something true from someone that it means that we are somehow doing a service to that person.

On the contrary, we are in fact doing a service to ourselves because, wherever it may be found, Truth is from Allah. In fact, even if our enemies tell us something true we must be able to recognise and decide whether it is true or not; and if it is true, we must accept it. This is the true mu'min.

### **The true mu'min searches for and welcomes truth and wisdom**

A real mu'min is constantly in search for true ideas and wisdom. They do not wait for others to approach them with the true; they search for it. Some people simply continue with their daily lives and if someone comes along and tells them something, then finally think about whether to accept it or not. However, the mu'min is constantly searching for the Truth, looking for people to come and correct him. They want to find people who can present their mistakes and errors to them to improve themselves.

Imam Sadiq said: "My best brothers are those who offer to me, who present to me as gift, my faults, my mistakes, my deficiencies." Of course, the Imam himself is a ma'soom; this for our benefit. So we must ask every brother, sister, or child to inform us if they observe any mistake in us or know anything about us that can assist in our self-improvement. Then, if someone for any reason mentions a negative trait, we are to appreciate it.

A long time ago I once read an interesting and informative story which I have not found in any other book. Apparently, in the early days of Islam, when people were sitting in the masjid in rows, before or after congregational prayers, one of the things some people did was walk up and down the rows, just as people do so today with a collection bag for donations. However, in those days, they did not ask for money; rather they asked everyone to tell them if they knew anything about them. This was the way they were tried to improve themselves.

However we are usually far from behaving in a similar manner. Often we become angry even if someone very nicely and politely comes and tells something in private. In fact, even if we do not become angry, we may not take their words seriously.

One of my teachers gave a very beautiful example. He asked us what we would do if someone came and told us that we had a spot of mud or something similar on our face. Of course, we would immediately go and check in the mirror, try to remove it and thank that person for telling us. We would not think about things such as whether that person was our friend or not, whether they were young or old, rich or poor. We would appreciate and thank whoever had told us this, go in front of a mirror and try to remove that mud.

So what is it that prevents us from accepting and appreciating what people tell us about any bad quality or bad habit that they have seen in us, which is like a black spot on our heart? Indeed we should be more thankful for that information.

### **Real servitude is to give priority to Allah and the Truth that comes from Him**

We cannot judge or measure whether someone is a good servant of Allah simply by seeing how much they pray, fast, or recite the Qur'an, although of

course these are all very important. Real servitude is to give priority to Allah, to give priority to the Truth which comes from Allah and to be always ready to change oneself for the better, giving up our own ways of thinking or doing things for the sake of Allah. This is the real test and challenge.

Furthermore, we should endeavour to cultivate this habit when we are young because as one becomes older, and perhaps acquires more, whether it is talent, fame, wealth, and so forth, it becomes more difficult to do so.

### **Truthfulness and the community**

It is obvious that a community must also implement truthfulness in the full sense of the word. Two verses from the Qur'an that were mentioned previously can now be reflected on:

Verse 159 of Surah A'raf reads:

***“Among the people of Moses is a group who guide (the people) by the truth and do justice thereby.” (7:159)***

Allah is saying that amongst the nation of Musa there are people, a group or a community, who invite and guide people truthfully; they also rule, judge and make decisions truthfully.

In this verse, 'bihi' means 'bilhaqq' so the phrase means "yaduna bil haqq wa bil haqqi yadiloon." 'Yadiloon' means 'to judge' or 'to rule' but mostly it is interpreted as 'to judge'.

When they judge, such people judge by observing the truth, and when they talk to and invite people they also observe the truth. They do not, for example, consider what they would like or what better serves their own selfish interests. Neither do they consider what would please their superiors, their group leaders, and so on. They only consider the Truth. Actually, this is one of the beauties of the Qur'an. The Qur'an contains no sense of rivalry in its words.

If it merely consisted of the words of a human being, then we would not expect to find passages where one religion gives credit to and praises another religion or the followers of another religion. However, the Qur'an is the divine Word of Allah; so in it Allah praises a group of followers of Prophet Musa for observing the truth.

In Surah A'raf, verse 181, Allah makes this into a general principle which is no longer only about a group of Jewish people. Now we find something more general:

***“Among those We have created are a nation who guide by the truth and act justly thereby.” (7:181)***

Allah is saying that amongst the people He has created, amongst His creation, there is such a group of people to be found. They can be found in various different religious communities and throughout the ages. So there have always been some people who 'yaduna bil haqq wa bihi adiloon', who guide truthfully and judge truthfully.

### **Who are these people?**

The great Allamah Tabatabai prefers the view that this group or community who guides and judges truthfully are the Ma'sumeen, that is, the Prophets and Imams. Another view is that of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi,

which maybe seems to be more acceptable, that such people are not necessarily only the Prophets and Imams; they could also be their true followers. Therefore, even amongst non ma'sumeen, amongst people who are not infallible, there can always be true followers of the Ma'sumeen who try to observe the truth when they guide and judge.

### **Conclusion**

So truthfulness must be our standard; and those who are the most truthful must be our role models. It is irrelevant whether we are a mere group of 5-10 members; or a larger organization such as an Islamic centre or an Islamic party; or if we are citizens of an Islamic state or are a Muslim community living as a minority in a non- Muslim country. Whatever our circumstances, we must continuously give priority to being truthful and to committing ourselves to following the truth in its fullest sense by following only what is really created and legislated by Allah.

Insha'Allah we can reach the state that every one of us and our communities would be so very truthful that when other people hear us, listen to us, and observe our judgements, they would have full trust in us. This is what a Muslim individual and community must be like. When people hear something from a Muslim, they must be able to be 100% sure and certain that that Muslim is speaking truthfully to the best of his or her knowledge.

Of course, we are not infallible, but at least other people should be assured that to the best of our knowledge, we are speaking with full honesty. We cannot and should not accept being called Muslim if we are dishonest, or indeed if we do not have a full commitment to the Truth. This is not something which we can call Islamic.

## Notes

1. In Islamic terminology we find something similar to this when, if we want to reach the core and the depth of an idea, we say that we want to reach the haqq, meaning the foundation and the very real basis of the thing.
2. For further explanation, one may refer to the paper: “The Supreme Light and Created Lights: A Qur’anic Perspective” in Message of Thaḳalayn, vol. 14, no 4. Online at: <https://www.al-islam.org/message-thaqalayn/vol-14-no-4-winter-2014/supre...>

[www.alhassanain.org/english](http://www.alhassanain.org/english)