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Greatness comes with unity

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THERE has never been a time when the Muslims were so looked down upon, so treated with disrespect and so oppressed as they are today.

Everywhere Muslims are bullied, detained, bombed and massacred with impunity.

Muslim countries are unable to do anything to defend themselves and their people and fellow Muslims anywhere.

Some Muslim countries actually appear to be collaborating with the oppressors of Muslims.

Many Muslims try to explain the sad fate of the Muslims by saying that this world is not for us.

For us, a place in heaven has been reserved. In the next world the enemies of Islam would be punished and thrown into hell because of their action in this world.

Is this truly what Islam teaches us? Did the Prophet accept his persecution because his place in heaven had been assured?

Did he relish the fact that his Quraish persecutors would end up in hell? What would have happened to the spread of Islam if the Prophet had not struggled against his enemies, dispatched his early followers to safe havens, migrated to Madinah to build up the strength of the Muslims, and increased their numbers in order to fight back?

If he had retreated to await his reward after death, we would not be Muslims today.

And we know in the end he defeated his enemies and was able to spread Islam throughout the world, to build the greatest empire and civilisation in history.

Clearly, the Prophet did not believe that for Muslims, this world is not important, this life is not important, this life on earth is only for infidels. He not only believed that Muslims had a share of Allah's bounties in this world but that Muslims must be prepared to fight for their worldly share.

Allah could have said "Kun, Fayakun" (Be, and it shall be) but Allah left His messenger to struggle and fight to spread Islam and to gain for the Muslims their share of this world.

So the idea that we must suffer in silence and await our heaven in the next world is not Islamic.

In fact, it goes against the Sunnah of the Prophet. The Quran enjoins upon us to prepare to deter and defeat the enemy with force of arms with warhorses, bows and arrows in those days.

Many think that if we have warhorses then we have fulfilled our obligations.

But what is important is not warhorses or bows and arrows. What is important is to deter and defeat our enemies.

And to do this we need guns and rockets, warships and warplanes, armoured cars etc.

We cannot depend on others to supply us with these things forever, least of all by those who are opposed to us.

We need to invent, design, produce and test our own weapons of defence. To do this we need to have scientific and technological knowledge and skills.

Those who learn science and mathematics, and acquire technological skills are obeying and fulfilling the injunctions of Islam.

Those who prevent them from studying these subjects by saying that only learning religion will earn us merit are, in fact, going against the teachings of Islam for they weaken the ummah and prevent them from putting fear in the hearts of the enemies of Islam and becoming able to defeat them.

The people who prevent Muslims from having their own capacity to protect themselves are actually helping the oppression of the Muslims.

Our enemies will always attack us because we are weak. They will only cease to do so if we maintain a strong enough defence capability.

This is the Sunnah of the Prophet. Just as the followers of the Prophet had to develop and acquire skills to make bows and arrows and other weapons, we have to develop and acquire skills to make modern weapons.

Why are we not doing so? The reason is because those who interpret Islam did not stress these very fundamental teachings of Islam.

By telling us that science and technology are secular subjects which will not earn us merit in the afterlife, we are discouraging Muslims and their societies from fulfilling the injunctions of Islam to be equipped with the means of defending ourselves and to deter the enemy.

During the glorious years of the Muslim civilisation we were not oppressed. Muslims were respected and feared. That was because Muslim countries were strong militarily and economically, and advanced in the sciences.

The Europeans had to learn from Muslims as well as the Greeks and others who had pioneered science and mathematics.

We all know that the Prophet brought only one Islam. The Islam that he received from Allah is only one.

But today there are many Islamic religions. There are the Sunni and the Shia, divided into numerous groups by the different imams and tarikat.

Had Allah wanted us to have all these religions then the Prophet would have conveyed this to the first Muslims; would have taught Sunni Islam, Shia Islam etc.

But we know that during his 23 years of teaching Islam he did not speak about Sunni or Shia or the various tarikat.

The divisiveness in Islam came only after he had passed away. They are the results of differing interpretations of Islam by different scholars through the centuries.

Some of these interpretations and teachings are so different from each other that their followers actually accuse each other of not being Muslims.

Indeed, they regard many who profess to be Muslims as infidels. Thus Sunni Muslims regard the Shia as infidels and vice versa.

In Malaysia, one political party has convinced its followers that anyone not joining or supporting it is not a Muslim.

Tens of thousands of Malay-Muslims believe this, believe even that voting for this party will gain them a place in heaven.

It sounds ridiculous except that the followers are deadly serious in their acceptance and belief, and develop enmity towards those who do not join this party or vote for it.

There is now a deep split among the Muslims of Malaysia, caused by Muslim politicians abusing the teachings of Islam.

Because of the thousands of different interpretations of Islam and very many different sects and adherents, each claiming to be the true followers of Islam, the Muslims are thoroughly confused.

They are even more confused because they are told that the door of ijtihad or interpretation of Islam is closed and they must accept anything that had been interpreted long ago.

Yet the very people who tell us that we may not re-examine and

reinterpret Islam are themselves making new interpretations every day.

And their interpretations are meant only to enhance their position in the community, to ensure support for their politics.

The result of this confusion is a deeply divided ummah, prone to disputes and fighting each other.

They are less interested in defending themselves against the professed enemies of Islam than they are in opposing other Muslims.

That these conflicts among Muslims will only weaken the Muslims is totally ignored by them.

Disunited, confused about Islam, fighting each other for power, lacking in essential knowledge and skills, misapplying their God-given wealth, the Muslims of today have reached the lowest point in their development.

Still they go on doing what is prohibited by Islam and damaging themselves.

They are unwilling to see the reality of the situation or admit that they have deviated from the teachings of Islam. They continue to reject the brotherhood of Muslims.

Frustrated and angry, some Muslims have resorted to terrorism. Many believe they have been successful in this. But what have the Muslims really gained by these acts of terror?

All that has happened is that the enemies of Islam have found justification for putting more pressure on Muslims, attacking and killing them, treating them and their religion with contempt.

Muslims fight and die not in order to achieve any real objective, to free themselves from oppression, for example.

They fight and die in order to retaliate, take revenge, and vent their anger.

Muslims seem not to plan or strategise. Even their terror attacks seem to be random attacks, isolated and uncoordinated.

Everyone seems to be acting on his own. If they plan, it does not seem to be coordinated nor advance their cause.

Apart from making their enemies angry and providing excuses for them to retaliate, nothing which can contribute towards ultimate Muslim success or victory has been achieved.

The Muslims have clearly lost their way. There is a saying in Malay that when you lose your way, you must return to the beginning and start again.

With so many contradictory interpretations of Islam over the last 1400 years, most of us have become so confused that we really do not know whether we are right or wrong, whether we are taking the right path or not, whether indeed we are following the teachings of Islam.

Certainly we are nowhere near achieving the greatness that was once Islam. If at all, we seem to be slipping further and further away from it.

Since we are so confused and divided because of the various interpretations and teachings of Islam, we should really return to the fundamentals of Islam, to the original teachings of the Prophet, to the Quran and the verified Hadith, especially those which are clear and indisputable and not subject to different interpretations.

What is the most fundamental teaching of Islam? It is that Islam means peace. We greet each other with the wish for peace.

Is it just an empty greeting which we do not mean or do we wish for peace because we really want peace?

If we want peace then shouldn't we strive for peace, at least among ourselves as Muslims first, and then with people of other faiths?

The Quran states that all Muslims are brothers. Apart from Islam advocating peace, surely brothers must not fight each other.

Brothers should love each other, being as they are of the same family. Brothers should be united. That is the basic teaching of Islam. There can

be no dispute about this injunction of Islam, no difference in the interpretation of this teaching.

But Muslims do try to negate even this clear teaching of Islam. They are fond of declaring that other Muslims are not true Muslims; in fact, they are infidels because they believe in different imams, belong to different mazhab or sects, being Sunni or Shia, followers of different tarikat etc.

Far from accepting all Muslims as their brothers, they adopt dress codes which differentiate them from other Muslims whom they condemn as being less Muslim for not wearing their dress.

But the Quran is explicit as to who is and who is not a Muslim. According to the Quran a Muslim is one who "bears witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet".

Even if he or she sins, big or small, he or she remains a Muslim for as long as he or she "bears witness to Allah as the only God that is worshipped and that Muhammad is His Prophet".

So all the Muslims, all those who bear witness to Allah as the only God that they worship and that Muhammad is His Prophet must be brothers, must be at peace with each other and must be united.

We can have our worldly differences. we can have our quarrels as brothers often do, but we would still be brothers and behave like brothers.

Why should Islam advocate the brotherhood of Muslims if they are meant to behave not as brothers?

If Muslims are expected to behave as enemies of each other then Allah would not declare that all Muslims are brothers.

Peace and the brotherhood of Muslims is a fundamental teaching of Islam. If we uphold this fundamental injunction of Islam alone, there will be Muslim unity and we will be strong.

The Muslims were not meant to have countries and divided according to race or nation.

They were, every one of them, members of the great Muslim community, the ummah.

But now, Muslims have divided themselves into different states and their loyalty to the state is more than to Islam.

In the pursuit of the interests of their respective countries, they are quite prepared to fight their Muslim brothers from other countries; they are quite prepared to be divided, to join opposing camps, even those of their non-Muslim enemies.

They are already weak. Divided they are weaker. Unable to protect themselves from other Muslims and from other enemies they allow themselves to be manipulated against their co-religionists.

They become pawns in the games other people play. Truly they have lost self-respect. Truly they are not following the teachings of Islam.

Blaming others for our sad fate may only be partially correct. But there is very little we can do to get others, our enemies, to help us.

On the other hand if we blame ourselves there is something that we can do to overcome our own faults and weaknesses. It is, therefore, much better if we look for and recognise our own faults.

Muslims must surely know what it is that they are doing wrong. Certainly their disunity, their rejection of Islamic brotherhood is wrong.

They do not have the right priorities either, emphasising the avoidance of minor sins while openly committing major sins.

But beyond that, they have often deliberately ignored or misinterpreted much of the basic teachings, the clear verses in the Quran.

They often read the verses partially, ignoring the context, the parts which qualify the injunctions in the main parts of the verses.

Very often we miss completely the message, focusing on the form instead.

Thus when we are asked to prepare warhorses so as to deter and defeat the enemy, it is not deterring and defeating the enemy that we take note of. It is the keeping of horses. Similarly when making judgment, it is not justice that we seek to achieve, it is the process of making the judgment.

If the process is followed then even if injustice is the result, we believe we have followed what our religion enjoins us to do.

We ignore completely the injunctions of the Quran that stress making judgment with justice.

And because we ignore this stress on justice enjoined by Islam, we create an image of Islam that is uncaring and unjust.

I will not cite more cases of the misinterpretation and deliberate ignoring of the teachings of Islam.

It is because of this that Muslims of today are backward, lacking in knowledge, unable to defend themselves and their religion, and forced to resort to terror in order to seek revenge.

How long can we go on doing this? Will what we are doing today restore the greatness of our religion and the fitrah that it should be to mankind?

Will it deliver us from our detractors' oppression?

Frankly, I don't think so. It is not because we are incapable of developing ourselves to the level where others would be forced to respect us and our religion.

It is simply because we refuse to adhere to the true teachings of Islam and to strive to better our lot on this earth as much as we prepare for the life in the hereafter.

We pray for hassanah in this world and for hassanah in the akhirat but we do nothing beyond merely asking Allah to help us in this world, and in the next.

We ignore the Quranic injunction that Allah will not change our fate unless we strive to change it ourselves.

Finally, may I request that we evaluate what has been said and not who said it.