

Fitnah

How do we recognize the truth?

People are mistaken when they say that there are many versions of the truth. There is only one truth, and everything apart from that truth are many versions of a lie.

Who can you talk to in order to establish what is the right account of events - any event? There is much bloodshed and hostility in the world today. Violence is rampant, Muslims are now poised to randomly kill other Muslims, with both the aggressor and the victim claiming to be on the path of the honest and the righteous. Yet, it cannot be that both the murderer and the murdered are correct, nor can it be said with certainty in today's world events, which are tainted with media blackouts and economic manipulation, that the killer is always in the wrong and the killed is always in the right.

In the times of Rasulallah SAW, it was easy to spot a hypocrite, for their characteristics surfaced clearly over time. When they were tested through difficult circumstances and lines were drawn in the sand, one would know on which side of the line the hypocrite of those days would stand. In a time where being Muslim was a dangerous and risk laden choice rather than an easy heritage, there was not much avenue for one's hypocrisy to remain unannounced for long. The hypocrite would be quick to renounce a belief system in which he did not see an immediate worldly benefit to him.

Today, hypocrisy is much more deeply rooted, but at the same time manifestly more subtle. When Islam evolved into a legacy and a birthright, the practice of which can be summarized into a series of public rituals, it is easy for hypocrisy to remain hidden. Yet, it is these hypocrites who carry out or are otherwise pivotal in effecting the worst of private and public atrocities, never once realizing how they have strayed so far from the truth. In entering into any kind of discussion with them, they would be blinded to what is right. Like the proverbial elephant in the room, the truth would be ignored by the hypocrite, because it just cannot be seen by him. A

hypocrite would be incapable of admitting that he is one, for the reason that he has been blinded from understanding the truth, including the truth about himself.

What does the Qur'an say about this?

One of the first few messages at the beginning of the Quran is contained in Al Baqarah, Chapter 2. In it, those to whom the truth is clear can be summarized in a simple verse:

"Those are upon [right] guidance from their Lord, and it is those who are the successful." (Al Baqarah, 2:5)

What about those to whom the truth is either clouded or totally obstructed from their vision? Why is it that some people are willing to defend injustice with their lives, thinking that it is the equitable thing to do? When it comes to the most fundamental principles, which does not even require a great intelligence, but basic humanity to understand, how can so many people now behave the way they do and not comprehend the wrong of their actions?

The Qur'an examines this issue in greater detail:

"Indeed, those who disbelieve - it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe. Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil. And for them is a great punishment." (Al Baqarah 2:6 to 2:7)

Society today is now permeated with those who proclaim themselves to be Muslim, to act in the name of Islam, and yet when push comes to shove, they do not walk their talk. They react in dismay when questions arise on the level of Islam in their hearts – for outwardly, the boxes are ticked – they are seen to be performing salat, are conversant with the Qur'an, they fast and even perform hajj and umrah. However, at crunchtime, their true behaviour spills the contents of their hearts, and betray the corruption and blindness within.

Is this a new phenomenon? Far from it, these characteristics were already identified fourteen centuries ago. The Qur'an says:

"And of the people are some who say, "We believe in Allah and the Last Day," but they are not believers. They [think to] deceive Allah and those who believe, but they deceive not except themselves and perceive [it] not." (Al Baqarah 2:8 – 2:9).

The Qur'an often speaks in metaphors, but not here. These passages are clear and leave no room for doubt or misinterpretation. Just a quick glance at current events will provide ample evidence of the many who have fallen into this tragic category. These are the people who profess Islam with their tongues, but their minds and limbs behave in ways which are wholly abhorrent to the most basic Islamic teachings.

Spreading like wildfire

Once the disease of hypocrisy enters the heart, it will quickly dominate it. Spreading like wildfire, this domination is accelerated when one perpetually lies and denies the truth of Allah's Message. This is not a personal conclusion drawn by the author, but one that is elucidated in the following passage:

"In their hearts is disease, so Allah has increased their disease [of doubt and hypocrisy]; and for them is a painful punishment because they [habitually] used to lie." (Al Baqarah 2:10)

Eventually these are the ones who will instigate great harm against society. We are witnessing these events across the Muslim map every single day. Just by observing the daily news, we can see how this trend of behaviour has reached epidemic proportions – gross violations of human rights and lives and brutal killings carried out by the hands of those purporting to believe in Islam.

However "... when it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption on the earth," they say, "We are but reformers [peacemakers] Unquestionably, it is they who are the corrupters, but they perceive [it] not." (Al Baqarah 2:11 – 2:12) How many key figures across various lands are now guilty of this very same pattern of behaviour? Their actions fall within the template described by the Qur'an, almost word for word. When called to account, they simply raise their hands and claim to be acting for the greater good.

The Root of The Problem

What is the root of all this? It does not stem from weaknesses, for Allah forgives the sins of His slaves. The cause of it is much darker – it starts when one denies Allah's attributes or one of the pillars of the deen. These are the so called revolutionary minds, who with their limited understanding, are convinced that their own systems are superior to what has already been ordained by Allah, and who behave as if Allah's commands and injunctions apply to some outdated era rather than to them. It is this rejection of the fundamental belief in Allah's orders, the increasing disbelief in the rules and structures determined by Allah, that sows hypocrisy – in short the denial of Allah and His Messenger. This hypocrisy poisons and contaminates the heart, blinding its owner to the extent that truth and falsehood can no longer show themselves with clarity.

And when it is said to them, "Believe as the people have believed," they say, "Should we believe as the foolish have believed?" Unquestionably, it is they who are the foolish, but they know [it] not. (2:13) And when they meet those who believe, they say, "We believe"; but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, "Indeed, we are with you; we were only mockers." (2:14)

Again, this is the behaviour witnessed of many key players in Islamic nations. Outwardly professing their Islam, their methodology and philosophy are in direct contradiction with the duties entrusted to them as leaders of Muslim nations. They reject any form of Islamic governance, and are willing to slander, spill blood and instigate havoc and indiscriminate slaughter in order to establish a secular rule, or some other personal agenda. Their allies and supporters are not Muslims, but other hypocrites and non-believers who are in influential positions.

Added to that is their overwhelming love of dunia – the love of wealth, glory and power – for which they willingly and enthusiastically trade their deen. This attachment to dunia further deceives, making the disease more chronic by fuelling it with its hypnotic charms, hurtling them into even deeper blindness and obliviousness.

Inability to Perceive

Allah has snatched their understanding to the extent that they do not know what they do not know, being wholly incapable of perception. In Al Baqarah, verse 9, we have already set out how they are unable to comprehend that their deception does not fool anyone but themselves. Verse 12 emphasizes this blindness:

Unquestionably, it is they who are the corrupters, but they perceive [it] not. (Al Baqarah 2:12), and again, Verse 13 already quoted above mentions that they are the foolish ones, but are unable to perceive it.

While they continue with their mockery of Allah and humanity, they do not realize that it is they who are being mocked by Allah:

"[But] Allah mocks them and prolongs them in their transgression [while] they wander blindly." (2:15) Their vision of the truth is so clouded, and their hearts are so blinded by their hypocrisy, that they are blind but are unable to recognize their own blindness. No matter how hard one tries to reason with them, present concrete evidence of their various evils or appeal to their intellect or even basic human compassion, they would remain arrogant, stubborn and blinded to the truth, as well as the catastrophes and tragedies that they continue to perpetuate.

Their end will be even more tragic than the lives of those they have ruined, and in this Allah states with finality at all the hypocrites who have caused havoc and destruction on this earth, the ones who sold out on their religion for power, money and glory, the ones who have been so grossly misguided that there is no turning back for them – *"Those are the ones who have purchased error [in exchange] for guidance, so their transaction has brought no profit, nor were they guided." (2:16)*

This is why their version of the truth is not the truth, but different degrees of lies and falsehood. May Allah grant us the vision to perceive the truth, and not snatch away our ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood in the face of such turbulent times, ameen.