

CONDITION OF THE UMMAH

PART 11

FROM MAKKAH TIME TO CURRENT TIME

March 13th 2002

A much discussed topic throughout this series has been the *sunnah* of Allah SWT. *Sunnah* refers to the custom, habit, and way of doing things. Allah SWT has a *sunnah*, Prophet SAW has a *sunnah* and each one of us has a *sunnah*. When we live with people, hangout with them or work with them, we learn about their personalities and habits. We also figure out what makes them happy, what irritates them, and how to obtain a desired response from them.

Our Lord Allah SWT has a *sunnah*, and out of His mercy He has made this *sunnah* very clear for us. We do not have to spend a lifetime trying to figure out what Allah SWT wants from us and what results our actions will produce. Allah SWT has told us throughout the Qur'an what His *sunnah* is, how He deals with peoples and civilizations and what He SWT does when people behave a certain way. One of the main components of the *sunnah* of Allah SWT is sequence. There is a sequence and system to everything in the Creation; the universe, human development, water cycle, even decaying processes have a system. Therefore, we can interchangeably use the word "system" for the *sunnah* of Allah SWT and say that Allah SWT has a system of doing things. And this system never changes!

Even our worship follows a certain system. While performing *wudu*, we cannot wash our feet before our face. Neither can we make *sujood* before *ruku'* while praying. Hajj also has a systematic sequence which must be observed. In either one of these cases if the sequence is broken, it will annul the worship. Just like this revival of the *deen* of Allah SWT has a systematic approach which must be observed in order for it to be accepted and fruitful. Keeping this in mind, let's explore the current situation of the world, especially of Muslims.

WHAT IS WRONG HERE?

Below are some real life scenarios that exhibit the forms of *jahiliyyah* rampant in our societies. Let's read them and analyze the condition of the Muslim world.

- A young Muslim brother of Arabic decent grew up in Latin America. He had lost all touch with his Islamic background and was far away from Allah SWT. Someone gave him *da'wah* and introduced him to the lectures of Sheikh Kishk (may Allah's mercy be on him) who is a renowned Egyptian scholar. The teachings of Sheikh Kishk had such a profound influence on the young man that not only him, but also his entire family became devout Muslims. This young man once gave ride to a visiting imam at the local masjid and per his habit, played the lectures while driving. The imam became very upset and asked him to turn it off. The young man was stupefied and couldn't understand why anyone would be so upset with a religious figure of such caliber as Sheikh Kishk. The reason imam gave him was that Sheikh uses weak and unknown *ahadeeth* in his speeches.
- A young man went to make salah in a masjid in New York City. He felt cold and tried to close the window and in the attempt cut his finger. He called the police and later sued the masjid on the grounds of incurring bodily injury. Now the community is busy gathering money to pay him in order to save the facility. The saddest issue in this case is that an imam of another masjid helped him in suing this particular masjid.
- There is a famous Islamic bookstore on the East Coast of the United States which carries one of the largest collections of Islamic books in various languages. Recently they started carrying books that can literally misguide people and lead them to hellfire. When the owner was inquired about these books, he claimed he had no knowledge regarding the contents of the books or the credibility of the information contained in it. Sadly, his sole purpose of selling these books was to make profit since people were interested in buying them.
- Sunday schools or weekend Qur'an classes are a growing phenomenon in the *masajid* in United States. People send their children to weekend schools where they learn a little bit of Qur'an, a few hadeeth, some rituals, and both parents and teachers feel like they have fulfilled their responsibility of passing on Islam to the next generation. Many people in different *masajid* have observed these young children use the bathroom and run back to their Qur'an sessions without washing themselves. They touch the Qur'an, sit in the masjid and attend the congregation prayers with others while in the state of *najasa* (impurity), and nobody cares.

- A young man and woman were in love and wanted to marry. The father of the woman refused because the man was not from the same country. He only wanted to marry his daughter to a man from his own tribe, let alone the country!
- Another young couple wanted to marry but could not because the man could not afford to pay the dowry that the girl's family demanded.

Let's analyze these scenarios...

The young brother who was just getting to know his *deen* through Sheikh Kishk was left confused by another supposedly learned person's remarks. What is the correct way of looking at this situation?

Ibn 'Abbas (RA) was the cousin of Rasul Allah SAW who gave him the title of '*tarjuman al ummah*', the translator of this nation. No one ever reached the level of Ibn 'Abbas (RA) when it came to Qur'an understanding and explanation. He was once asked about a similar issue and he said that we never claim a person is good or bad until they die. If they die in the state of obedience, we say they were good. If they die in the state of disobedience we consider them to be among the people who go astray. Now let's see how Sheikh Kishk died. He died in the state of *sajda* a little while before the Friday prayer!

What kind of death is that?

How can we claim a person who received this honorable death from Allah SWT to be astray and misguided?

Who is misguided, Sheikh Kishk or the people who are spreading confusion about him?

What about the man who cut his finger and sued the masjid?

What about the imam who helped him in suing the masjid?

What about the bookseller selling books that can lead people to hellfire?

If he does not know, why doesn't he bother checking with a knowledgeable person about which books to sell?

What about the people purchasing these misguided books? Why don't they ask a knowledgeable person which books to buy and read?

What about the teachers of the weekend schools at the *masajid* who teach children Qur'an and hadeeth, but do not teach them basic Islam manners? Manners and etiquettes are the moulds that shape personalities. This lack of focus on shaping the personalities is the reason our youth leave Islam by the time they reach high school and college.

What about parents preventing their children from marrying who they like and insist on them marrying people of their choice, their own background and culture? Where is the basis of that in Islam?

What about the custom of excessive dowry?

What do these scenarios show us?

All these situations show us that Muslims have no sincerity. We have no sense of self respect and lack honesty between us and Allah SWT. They show us that we are too far away from Allah SWT in all aspects of our lives. Our attitudes, cultures, customs and behavior can be summed up in one word—*jahiliyyah!*

WE DO IT IN THE NAME OF ISLAM

Jahiliyyah or ignorance is the term used to describe pre-Islamic Arab society. Everything that the Arabs used to do that was not sanctioned by Islam is considered to be *jahiliyyah*. Allah SWT has completed the *deen* of Islam and has not left anything out of it.

This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. (Al Maida 5:3)

Since Islam is complete, if we act in a way that is not sanctioned by Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW, then we are still living *jahiliyyah*, even though it may be termed modern *jahiliyyah*. Rasul Allah SAW came to remove this state and brought people from the darkness of ignorance into light of faith and knowledge.

Let's look at the time of revelation and draw parallels between that time and ours.

The pre-Islamic Arab society was a tribal society where the allegiance was to one's tribe and family whether they were wrong or right. Their devotion was to their own self interests and gods of their choice. The rich abused the poor, the parents treated their children like property and the strong bullied the weak. The criterion of success was wealth and property. Everyone was ready to inflict harm on others for their self interest. It was a chaotic time seeped in ignorance and malice.

We are supposed to be different but unfortunately carry all of these sicknesses. The only difference between us and them is that we do everything in the name of Islam.

When we look around the attitudes of Muslims all over the world, irrespective of where they come from, we find a deep state of *jahiliyyah*. Our devotion, love, loyalty, and commitment are supposed to be only to Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW. Not to a land, flag, family or culture. We have to be kind and dutiful to our families especially parents, but if they expect us to act against the teaching of Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW, then we must stand firm and live the reality of *Allah-u-Akbar*—Allah is the greatest!

Here is a living example of our *jahiliyyah* in the name of Islam...

An American woman converted to Islam and married an Arab man. He would not help her taking care of the children, shopping or any other household chores. He would not eat at home because he didn't like her cooking. He could not stand crying children so he demanded that she takes them out of the house when they cried. As if this negative attitude was not enough, he would use her phone to make overseas phone calls worth over thousands of dollars, which he did not bother to pay afterwards. His actions caused her credit to be ruined. This was his behavior with his wife who was a New-Muslim but his 'piety' was such that he would not allow his wife to stay outdoors after dark; she had to be home before Maghrib!

This by no means is an isolated case. Any Islamic religious figure will tell you that this is becoming a norm in our society. Many Muslim men marry these New-Muslim girls and destroy her personality and her Islam instead of supporting her and building her strength so she can carry on the *da'wah* to others. They either give her hard time to the point she rejects Islam or they leave her with children and no means of supporting herself.

Isn't this *dhulm*, oppression?

What about preventing women to learn Islam from male teachers? Many Muslim cultures balk at the idea of a Muslim woman sitting in the company of a learned man meanwhile she can go anywhere else for her materialistic benefit. An example of such oppression is a Muslim sister who wanted to study from a Sheikh but her husband refused to give her permission on the grounds that he is *non-mahram*, and she should not interact with men. This sister is the sole bread winner of the family and works as a receptionist at Viagra where it can be assumed that majority of her interaction is with men. By this way, for money, exceptions can be made but for her own Islamic knowledge, no!

Let's take the general condition of the men of our *ummah* to understand this concept of oppression. If a man has no principles and no sound knowledge, if he has doubt about everything in life, if he neither stands or calls for a cause, nor follows someone to lead him to righteousness, if he does not have the knowledge of the *deen* and he does not seek to educate himself, how can he start a family? What kind of family would it be? A man is supposed to be the teacher and the role model for his family. If he does not know, how can

he educate them? And if he does not educate them about Islam, isn't he oppressing them by denying them their right to know their *deen*?

What about the incidents mentioned earlier in this article. Aren't all those forms of *dhulm* against a house of Allah, a dead scholar, and even our own children? If we oppress each other, Allah SWT has promised to send others to oppress us! Is it then surprising that the Muslims are under oppression all over the world?

The deep state of *jahiliyyah* of the Muslim world can be measured by the amount of drugs, prostitution, cheating, crimes, corruption, bribery, absence of trust, lack of love and mutual support. Today, Muslims' loyalty is towards their family, tribe, job and wealth whereas Islam came to destroy all that. If we had loyalty to Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW, we would never succumb to this state of abject humiliation and suffering.

There is no difference between what is happening to us now and what happened during the Makkah time, except for one: their *jahiliyyah* was in the name of their statues, while we do everything in the name of Islam!

WE NEED TO LEARN TO LIVE THIS DEEN

We are ignorant and we seem to be satisfied with our state. Muslims all over the world are suffering and those who are not in affliction satisfy themselves with some demonstrations and petitions. Islam does not teach us to demand our rights from our enemies, especially when we are in the state of weakness and subservience. At a time like this, the only one who can and will help us is Allah SWT.

Have we tried petitioning to Allah SWT?

There are many people who say we have to do something. It is absolutely justified except that we do not follow the correct sequence here as well. Who are we supposed to call first, Allah SWT or people?

It is about time we realize that we are too far from Allah SWT and have to start taking steps back to Him. We are just in the beginning of Makkah and we have to do what Muslims in Makkah did! We have to go back to the Qur'an revealed at the beginning of Islam in Makkah and find out what message Allah SWT wants to give us!

The message at that time was simple, *la ilaha illal lah*—there is no one worthy of worship except Allah SWT! We might recite it today but we do not have its reality in our hearts. This belief changes lives if we understand it!

WE ARE UMMAT WASATA—WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Thus, have We made of you an ummah justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; (Al Baqara 2:143)

Allah SWT has made us an *ummat wasata*—a moderate and justly balanced nation. This title can be interpreted to mean many things and all of them are correct. Some of the reasons we are called an *ummat wasata* are as follows:

- Our obligations towards Allah SWT are not as extreme as the previous nations, nor are they so little that they can make us forget our religious identity.
- Allah SWT made us medium in size, not too big, not too small.
- Our life spans are neither too long, nor too short.
- The regulations imposed on us by Allah SWT are not too extreme or too lax.
- We were the last nation brought to mankind, yet we will be the first nation to be resurrected on the Day of Judgment.
- The rules of Allah SWT and even His punishments became moderate for us. For example, in previous nations if someone committed a sin, the angels would mark their doors and everyone else would know about their sin. We have been protected from that. Similarly, if a person gave in charity, a fire would descend from the sky and consume the offering. It was evident right away whether an offering was accepted or not. Allah SWT softened this rule for us as well.
- Islam does not teach us to be extreme in worshipping Allah SWT.
- We are not extreme in either material accumulation or its rejection. Isa (AS) rejected material comforts completely in order to set a role model for his community who were excessive in their accumulation of wealth. Therefore Christians have a monastic tradition. Islam is moderate and does not require complete abstain from worldly comforts.

Unfortunately, we have left this moderation in all aspects. Muslims are diverting too much to the right or to the left instead of taking *sirat-al-mustaqeem*, the straight path! Let's look at the current situation of Muslims to substantiate this claim.

Instead of taking our necessities from this world and then spending time for the betterment of our afterlife, all our energies are focused on material acquisition of this world. Can the Muslims living in multi-million dollar houses claim to be of *ummat wasata*?

What about extremism of some Islamic groups for political motives? Is it reasonable to enforce the rules of Allah SWT on people who do not want them? Is it the sequence that Allah SWT and His Prophet SAW have taught us?

Our condition could be linked back to the earlier point made in this article...lack of sincerity! We are not sincere in our *deen* because all our thinking and ambitions are for ourselves, not for Islam! Most of the Islamic groups today lack proper understanding of Islam. Instead of thinking about the benefit of Islam as a complete entity, we cherry pick its aspects that appeal to us and then work towards them.

WHERE DO WE START?

If we want to change the condition of Muslims, we all need to start with ourselves. We need to change what is within us in order for Allah SWT to change the condition around us:

Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. (Ar Ra'd 13:11)

In order to change our condition, we need to turn to Qur'an and the *sunnah* of the Prophet SAW. And we have to follow the system as ordained by Allah SWT and taught by His Prophet SAW. The correct sequence of building Islam is to develop *iman* and *yaqeen* of Allah SWT in our hearts until all our thoughts, attitudes, ambitions, and goals conform to *la ilaha illal lah*. Once this belief is inculcated in the hearts, the implementation of rules of Allah SWT becomes easy.

Aisha (RA) said, If the first thing to be revealed was: 'Do not drink alcoholic drinks.' people would have said, 'We will never leave alcoholic drinks,' and if there had been revealed, 'Do not commit illegal sexual intercourse,' they would have said, 'We will never give up illegal sexual intercourse.' (Bukhari)

Allah SWT does not mean to cause us distress or to compel us into following His rules. This is not the spirit of Islam. Instead He SWT introduces Himself, His attributes, His Mercy, His kindness, and the rewards of patience and perseverance in the next life until our hearts are filled with His love and we love obeying His commandments.

The *iman* in Allah SWT goes hand in hand with sacrifice. Once the belief of Allah SWT manifests in our hearts, it reflects through our amount of sacrifice for the cause of Islam. The stronger the belief, the more the person would be able to sacrifice. Let's take the example of Abu Bakr (RA), one of the mightiest companions of the Prophet SAW.

"If the *iman* of Abu Bakr was put on one side of the scale and the *iman* of this entire *ummah* on the other, Abu Bakr's *iman* would have outweighed. (Tirmidhi)

His *iman* was manifested through his actions all throughout his life. His entire wealth was sacrificed to support the cause of Islam and relief of Muslims. Not only Abu Bakr (RA), all the Muslims in Makkah sacrificed according to their ability. Some sacrificed their wealth, others their families, status and comforts.

This begs us to reflect on our own state. How much do we sacrifice for our spiritual growth?

What are we doing to develop *la ilaha illal lah*?

The truth is that we can barely make time to read a book to develop our *iman*, let alone sacrifice our life for the cause of Allah SWT. Meanwhile, if the professor at college or our boss at work gives us an additional project, we stay awake at night, take caffeine shots, take multiple showers and do whatever it takes to be able to finish it on time and get an A+ in class or bonus at work. At this time who is *akbar* in our life, Allah SWT or the A+ and bonus?

If we cannot sacrifice money, time, effort, sleep, thinking, feeling, who are we?

Can we claim to have sincerity?

We have no sincerity and truthfulness to our *deen*. Everything in our life is make believe; our salah, fasting, reading, *halaqat* (Islamic study circles), everything is routine!

Our sincerity lies towards our desires and pleasures! We are willing to do anything and sacrifice anything just to be able to get what we want. Unless we give up this hypocrisy and embrace Islam purely for Allah SWT so that our actions begin to match our words, we will not be able to achieve anything else. This is where we have to start and we have to start now since there is no time left to waste!

MAKKAH WAS TOUGH

Makkah was exceptionally difficult for the Muslims. They faced jeers, taunts, ridicule, severe emotional and physical persecution and even death in some cases. This is the reason why there was not a single hypocrite in Makkah.

Since the system of Allah SWT does not change, the history has to repeat itself with us in order to purify us from hypocrisy and facilitate the ground for pure *iman* to take hold. In Makkah, being a Muslim meant to face trials. The same time of trials and tribulations is going to be upon us soon enough, but what is scary is that the *iman* of this *ummah* is so weak that many Muslims might actually lose their faith.

Some of these cases were seen in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 in the United States when Muslims changed their names as well as their children's names to Non-Muslim names

in order to avoid any backlash. The backlash at that time was really nothing compared to what might happen to us in the future. If Muslims changed their names then, what will they do when the situation actually gets rough? Would they change their religion out of fear of other people?

We are in this condition because we have not respected the *sunnah* of Allah SWT and instead of focusing on building our *iman*, we have been busy with decorating our outside with rituals of Islam, while the fruit viz. faith remains missing inside of us. This has brought us to a standstill where neither do we have the sweetness of faith and strength of character, nor do we have the benefits of worship. All our worship—prayers, fasting, charity, hajj—are routine acts. They don't really enhance our relationship with Allah SWT as they are meant to.

Just look at the importance and concentration we give to our salah and compare that to the level of importance and concentration we give to our professors and bosses. Why would Allah SWT strengthen our hearts and support us in times of need if we do not have Him in our hearts to begin with? If Allah SWT is really in our hearts, would we be in a rush to end our salah? Would we be hurrying to end the meeting between us and Allah SWT? Can any meeting benefit us more than the meeting with Allah SWT? Can anyone give us what Allah SWT can give us, both in this life and the hereafter?

Let's read the following saying of the Prophet SAW and then reflect over our lives...

"None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." (Tirmidhi)

Who amongst us does that?

Who amongst us loves to give for Islam and Muslims more than what he keeps for himself and his family?

What does it say about the sincerity of our faith?

On another occasion, Prophet Muhammed SAW said:

"Work for the affairs of this world as if you were going to live forever but work for the Hereafter as though you will die tomorrow." (Mishkat)

What works have we done so far in our life through which we can hope to receive the mercy of Allah SWT?

Where are the teachings of this religion in our lives?

TRUE ROLE MODELS

All is not bad though, *alhamdulillah*. There are still some Muslims out there who sacrifice all that they have for the sake of Islam. Shamefully, these are New-Muslims, not those who are born into the faith. New-Muslims sacrifice their parents, spouses, jobs, children, friends, lifestyle, food, clothes, and the list goes on. They do it wholeheartedly for the pleasure of Allah SWT. Many New-Muslims quit their jobs once they find out it is haram. A lot of them are abandoned by their families and in some cases become homeless, but they happily accept it all.

Who has more *iman*?

What a shame that a Muslim few days into the fold of Islam is able to let go of so much but a person born into the faith cannot leave haram income.

The New-Muslims are the true role models of Islam who must be respected, appreciated and supported.

LET'S COMMIT

Allah SWT is the Most Merciful Lord. No matter how wayward our actions may be, His mercy is never too far. He SWT is waiting for us to return back to Him. He SWT has said in the Qur'an:

Say, "O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah . Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."

And return [in repentance] to your Lord and submit to Him before the punishment comes upon you; then you will not be helped.

And follow the best of what was revealed to you from your Lord before the punishment comes upon you suddenly while you do not perceive, (Az-Zumar 39:53—55)

Allah SWT reminds us of His mercy yet warns us of a torture that arrives in a way people never expect it to be. This is what we should be scared of now! When we study the condition of the world, the behavior of the Muslims, and the *sunnah* of Allah SWT, this torture is going to occur soon enough. And when this happens all our degrees, wealth, properties, businesses, will be futile. Have we forgotten the glorious Muslim civilizations of Spain, Bukhara, Samarkand and Baghdad? Isn't that what happened to them? And if it happened to them, what surety do we have that it won't happen to us?

The only way to save ourselves when the torture of Allah arrives is to commit to the *deen* of Allah SWT. These are the steps that we must start with...

1. Cry to Allah SWT and beg Him to save us from our *nafs* (base desires), temptations, ignorance, shaytaan, and His SWT's anger.
2. Sincerely struggle to develop and strengthen our faith in Allah and spread the message of Islam, since Allah SWT has promised:

And those who strive for Us - We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good. (Al-'Ankabut 29:69)

3. Develop humility by
 - a. Visiting the sick,
 - b. Visiting cemeteries,
 - c. Serving the needy,
 - d. Taking care of the orphans

It will help foster reality of our existence in our hearts since there is no time for being arrogant. Our *iman* is at stake now!

4. Do excessive amount of *dhikrullah* (remembrance of Allah SWT)
 - a. Do it with comprehension
 - b. Develop concentration by doing it a little louder in initial stages until our *nafs* and shaytaan is overcome.
5. Be content.
 - a. We are drowning in the mercy of Allah SWT and considering the suffering of Muslims all over the world, we have no right to complain about anything.
6. Develop environment which strengthens our *iman*.

- a. We have to either develop the environment which helps us strengthen our *iman* or we have to migrate and join an environment which can do that for us.
- b. It is a command of Allah SWT to remain in the company of believers.
- c. If we stay alone without support, sooner or later shaytaan will snatch us the way a wolf snatches a lonely sheep. Rasul Allah SAW has said:

"There are no three people in a town or encampment among whom prayer is not established, but the Shaytaan takes control of them. Therefore, stick to the congregation, for the wolf eats the sheep that strays off on its own." (An-Nasai)

7. View all situations through the prism of Allah-u-Akbar.

- a. Believe without a doubt that Allah SWT is greater and more encompassing than anything, no matter how difficult the situation or how egregious the tyrant against us.

These are times of extraordinary events as well as times of extraordinary opportunities. Let's remove the yoke of *jahiliyyah* from our necks and let's commit our lives to Islam like the early Muslims in Makkah did. Just like they became the lighthouses which guided millions after them, we may be able to do the same and leave a legacy behind us.

May Allah SWT save us from His displeasure, His anger, and His torture. May Allah SWT remove the *jahilliyah* from our hearts, minds and lives and fill them with the purity of *la ilaha illa lah. Ameen!*