

Reviving Simplicity & Love for Humanity

Thursday Reflections by Dr. Hamid Slimi

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Today more than ever before, there is an unprecedented abundance of knowledge including the religious one. There is a wealth of books and online resources as well as many people with a lot of information. You can get answers to your questions and religious fatwas in seconds, detailed information on history and finance and even details about your genes and ancestry by doing relatively affordable genetic tests to determine potential health risks and to find out about your ethnic origin. Many people can access knowledge from almost anywhere in the world using their smartphones, smart televisions and computers. But has this massive knowledge increased us in our faith and humanity? Has this knowledge come without a price and a liability? Has it brought us closer to God as believers and closer to one another as human beings?

During my trips and visits to different places around the Muslim world, I always observe and gage how close are people to each other and how interactive and collaborative they are with their neighbors, communities and guests. One of the striking things I consistently notice is that in many places where people live a simple life and practice a simple and basic Islam there is more love, harmony, peace and less disputes among them. These people usually have a very basic yet essential knowledge of the religion such as the Oneness, Greatness and Mercy of Allah, the firm belief in the Day of Judgment and the afterlife and they unconditionally love Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and believe that he is the last Messenger of Allah to all humanity regardless they understand Arabic or not. They strongly believe and understand Allah is very Merciful so you see them making du'a all the time and they would never miss an opportunity where du'a is being made. They may not understand talks and lectures or ask "brainy" questions but they believe and understand that Prophet Muhammad (S) is a gift of Mercy to humanity and that Islam is a message of Mercy. These people talk less, listen more, love to feed, donate with a smile and indiscriminately show care and concern. They donate more to build mosques, orphanages, schools and hospitals and they would answer the call for help without delay.

Where there is emphasis on love, humanity, relationships and caring for one another, there are more positive results compared to where there is more focus on finding faults, winning arguments and proving each other wrong. Where there is too much disassociation from reality, there is gossip, slandering and focus on finding errors and putting each other down as well as focusing on insignificant trivial matters. Growing up as a youth, I witnessed peace, love and compassion among simple and less sophisticated people and I witnessed more tension dissention and arguments among those who are supposedly learned and erudite. This is not to belittle their knowledge or discourage anyone from seeking knowledge but to emphasize the point that knowledge can either bring us closer to Allah and one another when we are humble and simple or it can make us arrogant, vain and self-centered when we compare ourselves to others and look down on others. Knowledge is good and useful, but it can become deadly if it is not practical and used with wisdom like medicine when used without the doctor's prescription and

direction. Satan himself was very knowledgeable and pious person but his pride and jealousy brought him down when he compared himself to Adam (Peace be upon him) and refused to obey the command of Allah (SWT): **[It is We who created you and gave you shape; then We bade the angels prostrate to Adam, and they prostrated, not so Iblis; he refused to be of those who bow down. (Allah) said: "what prevented thee from bowing down when I commanded thee?" He said: "I am better than he: thou didst create me from fire, and him from clay." (Allah) said: "Get thee down from this: it is not for thee to be arrogant here: get out, for thou art of the meanest (of creatures)." He said: "Give me respite till the day they are raised up." (Allah) said: "Be thou amongst those who have respite." He said: "Because thou hast thrown me out of the Way, lo! I will lie in wait for them on Thy straight Way. "Then will I assault them from before them and behind them, from their right and their left: nor wilt Thou find, in most of them, gratitude (for Thy mercies). (Allah) said: "Get out from this, disgraced and expelled. If any of them follow thee Hell will I fill with you all.]** (Qur'an 7:11-18)

Today's global image of Islam and Muslims reflects more dispute than harmony among Muslims, disputes and conflicts that are sometimes hundreds of years old and displays anything but unity and love. Prophet Muhammad (S) warned his followers that this will be the focus of Satan when he said, **"Satan has lost hope that those who perform Salat will worship other than Allah...But he will never give up trying to cause enmity and hatred amongst you..."** (Muslim & others)

The image of Islam seems to be better in communities where people focus on spreading love, helping others and addressing each other's daily needs and concerns. Living in developed and modern countries, we have more opportunities, means and better ways of communication with each other compared to billions living in small and remote villages with relatively little or no means of communication. Yet we sometimes cannot stand looking at one another in our communities and some of us would do anything to avoid seeing each other. Some of us do not even know our neighbors' names let alone how they are doing and whether they need our help or not or whether they have food for their families. Many go to pray at the masjid on Fridays but they would not even smile or shake hands with those who neighbored them for a good thirty minutes or more, heard the same khutbah sermon and prayed behind the same imam and supplicated to the same God.

Islam was spread in Central and South East Asia as well as Africa and other parts of the world by very simple people who focused on simplicity and mingled with the local people, smiled and shared food with them. Most of them were Sufis who practiced a very simple Islam but one that was focused on love and simplicity. They emulated the Prophet (S) and his companions who were very simple and loving. Their smile and humility, which is the universal language of love, caused people to enter Islam without an in-depth knowledge. Faith was more felt and lived than just read and written. The local hosting people loved the incoming guests and loved the Arabic language they spoke although they did not understand it.

We need knowledge that brings people closer to Allah not a knowledge that will enable us to judge others and prove them wrong. Our mission in this life should be the

mission of every Messenger of Allah, which is simply (a) To bring people closer to Allah and (b) To bring people closer to one another.

Islam's greatness is in its simplicity and love for humanity.