

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## Unity based on Renewal and Guidance

Ustādh Abu Eesa Niamatullah

It has become increasingly clear in recent times how important it is to unify the Muslims of Tradition, known as the “Salafis” and “Sufis” in the most crudest of terms, but more accurately referring to those practising Muslims that hold to the three well known central schools of ‘*aqidah* (ash’ari, maturidi, and athari/salafi) at the primary level, and then a mixture of the four schools of law and “no set school of law” at the secondary level. Basically, this means me and you.

This post is not meant to be detailing these issues and well-known differences, for those of us involved in teaching, lecturing, cultivating and bringing communities together are heartily sick of this never-ending vitriol of hatred of the “other”. In fact, it is not just community leaders and scholars who are sick of this but maybe the general masses are starting to wake-up to the dangers of this sectarian partisanship that is afflicting the Muslims at their most pressing hour, eloquently captured by Umm Zaid, to quote:

*O Muslims raised in the Jerry Springer era,  
is there a reason any of this went as far as it did?  
Is there a reason any of this ever went beyond the first little post?  
For what benefit? To what end?*

*What benefit is there in saying  
that you’re officially erasing part of the Ummah  
from your Crackberry?  
Where is the good in mocking and denigrating  
this or that group of Muslims because they  
pray differently or read different books than we do?*

*Some posted videos  
on their blawgs  
denying the humanity and  
Muslimosity  
of other Muslims because they*

*put a turbah on the floor  
before they pray.  
They laughed about it  
with other Muslims  
on other blogs.  
Is this what “Comments” are for?*

*Then we turn around and complain  
that the non-Muslims don't see us beyond the stereotypes.  
Shame. Shame.  
Stand before Allāh with those videos.  
Will you be laughing then?  
Will you be so proud then?*

*What is the reason for such a thing anyway?  
Is pulling our official sponsorship  
of other Muslims going to change  
their status and station with Allāh?*

*Or is our talk about being brothers and sisters  
limited to a respectful nod and grunt  
when we hear the ahadith of the Messenger of Allāh  
(aleyhi salatu wa salaam)  
on the subject of brotherhood?*

It is ironic that the back-lash against this untenable Muslim-on-Muslim aggression is coming from the internet itself, when it is very *same* internet that has exacerbated this enmity beyond control. Anyone reading this will no doubt be aware of their own role in fueling this fire, despite the fact their leaders and Imāms have been trying their best to condemn this *fitnah*, indeed to quote from a useful summary of the situation from a “Sufi” perspective by brother Yahya Birt:

*The phenomenon of rejoicing in groupthink, and claiming some automatic authenticity and superiority is common among camp-followers of any grouping and is hardly unique to traditionalists alone or even to Islam. The harm arises when this is systematically fostered by the leaders of such a movement. Yet the evidence for claiming that the leaders of traditionalism are guilty of this seems thin on the ground:*

*in fact I've heard a number of them make explicit condemnations of cultishness or groupthink. How far that is taken on board is another matter of course.*

This is a feeling from both sides of the debate; it would be wrong to think that there are winners and losers in such polemics with even the “Salafi” camp starting to realise the dangers of disunity, as honestly expressed on the MuslimMatters forum:

*Wallahi, the “traditionalists” are not perfect, and wallahi, the “salafis” are not perfect. So, why not discuss these issues of differences in a soft, amiable way instead of name-calling, hate-mongering and the like? I saw you and Abu Yusuf being thus... soft with words, “open-minded”, tolerant, humble and full of adaab. Yet, this behavior was not reciprocated. See this response of Abu Yusuf to GF Haddad’s original article that was replete with personal attacks. It reminds me, as SW stated in his post, that the same behavior we saw from some of the hard-line “salafi” shayookh, whose entire wala wal bara was related to a person’s knowledge of where Allāh is, is now becoming apparent in the “other” side. And similarly, the hard-liners’ entire jarh wa ta’del was related to Asharism as opposed to some other sects that were much further away from them in methodology and ideology. Now, many among our “traditionalist” brothers find this to be the most productive topic.*

Still, it seems sadly clear that our attempts to placate the internet masses are failing and hence, to quote again from brother Yahya, further action was needed:

*At the very least for Sufis and Salafis of the West (and elsewhere), a moratorium on polemical exchange, particularly over the internet, should be called for, matched by a process to getting religious scholars on both sides to met regularly along the lines of the Amman Initiative. A minimal goal would be to take the heat out of differing so that it becomes that beneficial form of differing that increases knowledge and does not create rancour, hatred and division. It might also open up a way to work together towards common interests and goals that are shared in common. There is increasing recognition that there are structural challenges facing Muslim communities that are best met together. At the very least forging unity involves the recognition that Sufi polemics against the Salafis have taken on very different implications after 9/11 that should now be taken into account.*

It was with this in view that an initiative headed by Shaykh Abdullah b. Bayyah (*hafidhahullah*) and some of the senior Imāms and Students of Knowledge in the West

has just convened a week-long **retreat** to discuss these very issues and declare a unified front against this *fitnah* that is creating such weakness. The “Global Centre for Renewal and Guidance” (المركز العالمي للتجديد والترشيد) as well as many other things, has officially been launched earlier today and will be releasing a pact insha’Allāh very soon cementing all that which holds Sunni Muslims together and unified so that we can move forward and deal with the *real* challenges facing the *Ummah* at the moment, identified by our Shaykh throughout this intensive week into three main categories **here**, of which details will follow at a later time by expounding on his solution for our wider problem in the West from his wonderful book “The Craft of Fatwa and The Fiqh of Minorities”

Naturally, a “minorities” approach scares off many traditionalists from all camps, for some valid reasons no doubt, but one thing which cannot be denied is the need for valid *ijtihad* from bona-fide scholars, and if senior scholars such as Shaykh Bin Bayyah do not set the standard, then secularism will rapidly fill that void.

Why “Renewal”? Although a scary word for some, it is simply a phrase indicating the need for perspectives to be renewed, priorities to be re-assessed and our collective *iman* to be refreshed.

Why “Guidance”? Because the traditional Islam which is under attack at the moment, whether practised by a Salafi or an Ash’ari, finds its salvation in divine knowledge and wisdom through the guidance of our scholars - and it will be the divine criterion of Islam that will cause us to collectively prosper and not the washing away of tradition in pampering to the whims of secularism and modernity.

This will not be easy, and we don’t expect a miracle over night - but the seeds of unity have been sown and the scholars and leaders of the da’wah from all schools, including Hamza Yusuf, Yasir Qadhi, Zaid Shakir, Usama Hasan, Jihad Brown, Abdullah Aladhami, Sherman Jackson and many more in attendance last week from all over the world at this historical and blessed event, have come together to demand their students and followers to do the same.

We hope and pray that Allāh grants us all the wisdom and ability to do that which pleases Him and serve the best interest of this divinely blessed *Ummah* of Muhammad (*sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*).