

COMMUNITY BUILDING IN ISLAM, PART III¹

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ABSTRACT: It is crucial for a community to have a shared identity and to work towards a joint cause. Regardless of whether it is on a worldwide or lesser scale, establishing a community is currently becoming more crucial, and successful community involves specific requirements and qualities. This series of papers studies the importance of community-building and Prophet Muhammad's efforts to implement it. Prioritized qualities such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, unity, persistence, moderation, humbleness, enjoining good and forbidding wrong, and maintaining a healthy balance in working for this world to eventually lead to a blissful hereafter were expounded on. This part further builds upon the concept of truthfulness in Islamic theology and its moral system; of Allah as the true being, revelation as the truth, the prophets' mission to serve the truth, and the importance of communities striving to become truthful.

¹ This series is based on a nine-session course conducted by the author on Community Building at the Islamic Centre of England in London in 2009.

Thus far we have listed some of the major characteristics of an Islamic Community, a community which is pleasing to Allah (swt), such as being balanced and moderate, calling towards good and in particular enjoining good and prohibiting bad. In what follows, we will refer to some other characteristics of an Islamic community.

Commitment to the truth

This is an immensely important quality both for individuals and for communities. The subject of truth is so important from the Qur'anic perspective that firstly we will expand on it a little and then focus on the role of truth in the community.

One of the notions on which great emphasis has been put in the Qur'an is the notion of truth and the True (*al-Haqq*).

Qur'an describes Allah as the True

In the Qur'an, Allah describes Himself as being 'the True' or the 'the Truth' (*al-haqq*). The Qur'an tells us that the reason why God should be followed, worshipped and obeyed is that '*Allah is the True.*' Thus, we can understand that for Allah, to be *the True* is more important than to be, for example, *Self-Sufficient*, *Self-Existent*, etc. For example, the verse 22:62 reads as follows:

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ هُوَ الْبَاطِلُ وَأَنَّ
اللَّهَ هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ

That is because Allah is the True, and what they invoke besides Him is nullity, and because Allah is the All-exalted, the All-great.

Indeed, this is a sound argument for the necessity of worshipping Allah and not worshipping idols and false gods. Allah says that the reason for asking us to worship Him only is because He is *al-Haqq*, *the True* and *the Real*; and what they call on other than Him is false. The major deciding factor is whether something is true or false and so we worship Allah and follow Him because He is *the True*. Two verses that expand on the meaning of being true are as follows:

1. The chapter *al-Hajj*, verse 6, Allah says:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّهُ يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَأَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

That is because Allah is the True and it is He Who revives the dead and He has power over all things.

2. The chapter *Yunus*, verse 32:

فَذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمُ الْحَقُّ فَمَاذَا بَعَدَ الْحَقِّ إِلَّا الضَّلَالُ فَأَنَّى تُصْرَفُونَ

That, then, is Allah, your true Lord. So what is there after the truth except error? Then where are you being led away?

Allah is the True and real basis of everything

So Allah is *al-Haqq*, the True and the Real. However, we may say that we are also true and real and that everything which exists is also true and real. For example, we could say that everyone and everything we know and everything in this world is *haqq*. For example, in Ziyarah Ale Yaseen we read “Heaven is true, hell is true, reward and punishment are true.” So if these are also true, then what is the difference between them and Allah being True? The difference is clear. There are uncountable real things that are all created. Allah is *al-Haqq* in the sense that not only is He True and

Real but He is also the Source and the Origin of everything else that is true and real. So ‘*al-Haqq*’ means the ‘True One’ Who is the Origin and the Source of everything else.²

Allah alone is the True

Allah alone is *al-Haqq*; we cannot say ‘I am *al-haqq*’ or ‘you are *al-haqq*.’ Of course, some mystics like Hallāj said: ‘ana al haqq’ (انا الحق). Although they meant something else e.g. being a manifestation of God Which is *al-Haqq*, personally I think we should refrain from calling anyone ‘*al haqq*,’ since this might be misleading. It is only Allah Who in reality is the One who is absolutely True in the fullest sense of this concept. Everything else in existence, including ourselves, are only true as far as we are related to Allah. This is similar to the concept of light. Allah is al-Noor, the real and original Light and the basis of every light such that every other light that is not Allah comes from Him.³

The truth observed in the creation of the world

The creation of the world also takes place observing the Truth. For example, out of many verses dealing with this subject, in Surah An’am, verse 73, Allah says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ

² In Islamic terminology we find something similar to this when, if we want to reach the core and the depth of an idea, we say that we want to reach the *hāqq*, meaning the foundation and the very real basis of the thing.

³ For further explanation, one may refer to the paper: “The Supreme Light and Created Lights: A Qur’anic Perspective” in *Message of Thaqalayn*, vol. 14, no 4.

It is He Who created the heavens and the earth with the truth...

Allah has created the heavens and the earth with Truth, truthfully, or observing the Truth. There is no falsity in the creation of the skies and of the earth.

Revelation, divine books, and prophets are true

Revelation

For example, in Surah Baqarah, verse 147, Allah says:

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ

This is the truth from your Lord; so do not be among the sceptics.

Similarly, in Surah Ale Imran, verse 60, we read:

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُنْ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ

This is the truth from your Lord, so do not be among the sceptics.

Thus the Truth *comes from* our Lord, or the Truth *is* from our Lord, so we should not have doubts and should not be one of those who doubt. What is this Truth that has come from our Lord? It is the Revelation, the Message, and because it comes from Allah it is True.

Then again in verse 62 of the same Surah we read:

إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

This is indeed the true account, for sure. There is no god but Allah, and indeed Allah is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.

The Qur'an

This idea is expounded upon in the Qur'an, and in particular regarding its own revelation, the carrying of the Revelation by Angel Gabriel, and the reception of the Revelation by Prophet Muhammad, describing them as all true and truthful. For example, Allah says in Surah Israa, verse 105:

وَيَا حَقِّ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ وَبِالْحَقِّ نَزَّلَ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا

With the truth did We send it down, and with the truth did it descend, and We did not send you except as a bearer of good news and as a warner.

Thus, since the Qur'an comes from Allah, and when it is issued by and originates from Allah then it is complete Truth, containing no falsity (*bātil*) because it is initiated by Allah.

The Prophet

So when it reaches the Prophet it is still pure and true because Gabriel does not do any mischief nor does he make any mistake in between the truth being issued by Allah and received by the Prophet. So everything comes down in a pure and truthful form: “*With the truth did We send it down and with the truth did it descend... (17:105).*”

Often it happens that a person sends a message and on the way the message is lost or distorted so that even if and when people receive the message it differs from the original. However, this is certainly not the case with Allah. When Allah sends a message, the message is also received with purity and truthfully.

In Surah Nahl, verse 102, Allah says:

قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيُثَبِّتَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهُدًى
وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

*Say, the Spirit has brought it down duly from your
Lord.....*

So Allah sent down the Qur'an, Gabriel brought it down and the Prophet received it, all these things being done truthfully. Furthermore, in verses 41: 41 and 42, Allah says:

وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ
تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ

*Indeed it is an august Book: falsehood cannot
approach it, from before it nor from behind it, a
[gradually] sent down [revelation] from One all-wise,
all-laudable.*

Mission of Prophet to serve the Truth

In the Qur'an, Allah talks about the mission of the Prophet. What was that mission? We find that the mission of the Prophet was again to serve the truth.

In Surah al-Baqarah, verse 119, we read:

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَا تُسْأَلُ عَنْ أَصْحَابِ الْجَحِيمِ

Indeed We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of good news and as a warner and you will not be questioned concerning the inmates of hell.

Thus, Allah explains that He has commissioned, dispatched, and sent the Prophet to give good tidings and warnings and has reassured him that he is not responsible for the dwellers of Hell who will bear the consequences of their own deeds. The Prophet then conveyed and delivered the message of Allah truthfully, without adding or hiding a single word to the message.

Furthermore, in Surah Haqqah, verses 44 to 46 Allah says: “*Had he faked any sayings in Our Name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta.*”

Though the verse is specifically regarding the Prophet, it is indeed a warning to us; certainly the Prophet did not do this. This must be a warning to all of us; if the Prophet had fabricated something from himself, adding or deleting a few words and attributing that to Allah, then Allah would have seized him by force and cut the artery of his heart. From this we understand that He would have destroyed him. Thus it is certain that not a single word was added by the Prophet, nor was it hidden by him.

Implementation of the divine message in a truthful manner

Implementation of the Qur'an in particular, or of the divine message in general, must be done in a truthful manner. In Surah Saad, verse 26, we find the example of David, a prophet who was then raised to the level of being the vicegerent of Allah (*khalifatullah*):

O David! Indeed We have made you a vicegerent on the earth. So judge between people with justice and do not follow desire, or it will lead you astray from the way of Allah...

Allah is telling Prophet David that He has appointed him a vicegerent, a deputy-like guardian on the earth. Prophet David is then advised to judge and rule truthfully amongst the people and avoid following his lower desires, lusts and appetites because as this would lead him away from the path of Allah. So he must endeavour to discover who is in the right; that is, whose claim is justified and whose claim is not. Thus we must not be biased and consider the claims of the people in our favour to be right because of our love for them whether they be brothers, friends, relatives, or people of same city or country. The only criterion that must be observed is the truth. Follow our desires and feelings will mislead us, taking us far from the path of Allah. We should also take care to hear both sides of a story, to gather evidence from all parties in a dispute so that we can judge truthfully in full knowledge of the facts.

This contrast between observing the truth and following one's desires is of utmost importance. The history of mankind is a history of conflict between the truth and peoples' desires, whereby either people have been following and observing the truth, and humbled when confronting it, or they were following their personal desires.

Disregarding the truth leads to destruction of creation

In Surah Mu'minoon, verse 71, Allah states an important principle that could have far-reaching and devastating consequences:

وَلَوْ اتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ

Had the Truth followed their desires, the heavens and the earth would have surely fallen apart (along) with those who are in them.

Allah says that the whole creation – the heavens, earth, and whoever lives in them – would be damaged and corrupted if the Truth were to depend on people’s desires. If it were the case that in reality there was no absolute Truth and people’s desires became the only criteria, then the entire creation would be destroyed.

This is why we mentioned that the whole of history is the history of the conflict between the Truth on the one hand and the desires, lusts, and appetites of people on the other. The history of mankind is nothing other than this, whether it be in personal, social, national, or international sphere.

Individuals and communities must strive to be truthful

If Allah is indeed the True, the Book was revealed truthfully, the Prophet delivered the message truthfully, his words and actions was in compliance with the Truth, and every judgement is to be made observing the Truth, what should we do as individuals and as communities?

We are to try our utmost to be truthful – to observe and commit ourselves to the Truth, which is not merely telling the truth. That is only one aspect of it. Truthfulness must become a quality of the heart and soul, rather than mere truthfulness as a quality of our speech.

What is a true or false statement? According to the commonly held view called the correspondence theory, this means that either the

statement corresponds to an independent reality which exists outside the statement or it does not correspond. So, for example, if someone says that the weather is presently warm, the truth of that statement depends on a reality which is independent from the statement; therefore, we can compare what has been said with that independent reality to see whether it corresponds to that reality or not. If the statement corresponds to the independent reality, it is true. If not, it is false.

However, relatively speaking, this kind of truthfulness is very trivial. Being truthful in every sense of the word is actually much more than this. It is quite possible that sometimes people make a true statement but in fact they are still liars. The Qur'an gives an example of this when Allah talks about the hypocrites (*munafiqeen*):

When the hypocrites come to you they say, 'We bear witness that you are indeed the apostle of God.' God knows that you are indeed His Apostle, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars. (63:1)

When the hypocrites visited the Prophet, they told him that they bore witness that he was sent by Allah as the Apostle of Allah. But then Allah says: *"And surely Allah knows that you are His Apostle. But Allah bears witness that these people are liars."* Allah called them liars because although what they said was indeed true, they did not actually believe in what they were saying as they did not say it with honesty.

Thus, sometimes truth or truthfulness is the quality of the statement and sometimes it is the quality of the speaker. If we say something we believe, the statement may be correct although we are not being

honest because we are deceiving others by telling them something we do not accept. This is not honesty because true honesty is to say what we actually believe and to say what we ourselves accept.

Therefore, truthfulness is not only about factual statements about, for example, the weather, the natural world, or about what others have said and done. It also concerns the advice that we give people and the way we preach. It is a true statement when we say it is good to be humble; however, if we do not believe that being humble is good, then we are not being honest, and even if we believe so without practise, then we are not being honest. Truthfulness is not a matter of making true statements or a matter of saying what we believe; it is most importantly a matter of saying what we ourselves are whole-heartedly and sincerely committed to. As the English saying goes: "Practise what you preach".

Examples of the most truthful people

Thus an honest person is not only someone who does not lie; his words, beliefs, and actions all confirm and conform to the truth, called 'siddeeq' or 'most truthful' in Qur'anic terminology, and is deeper than 'sadiq' or 'truthful'. It is such a high position that Allah praises Prophet Abraham for being 'Siddeeq' and both Lady Fatimah and Lady Mary as 'Siddeeqah', because everything that they believe, say, or do, is in compliance with the Truth. There is not an instance when they say something and act differently to their statements. Neither will they say something whilst in actual fact they believe something else. Indeed these people would not even say they intended to do something while intending something else but were prevented by circumstances from carrying out their intended action.

Their entire reality, soul, and spirit is in compliance with – and committed to – the Truth.

Why be entirely committed and in compliance with Truth?

We should be entirely committed and in compliance with the Truth because Truth is nothing other than Allah, and all that is created or legislated by Him. So anything True is either created by Allah or legislated by Him. True servants of Allah are those who are truly committed to the Truth. Servitude to Allah is nothing other than commitment to the Truth which in the first place is Allah Himself and in the second place is whatever is created or legislated by Allah.

Having said this, it now becomes clear why a mu'min must be truthful. It is not simply a matter of how much we pray or fast although these are important duties as Allah asks us to do so. However, what is of utmost importance is how committed we are in giving up our own ideas, and ways of thinking and living to adapt ourselves to the Truth. If we are servants of Allah then no matter who tells us something true, we would accept it without hesitation. For example, if we have said something wrong and someone tells us this, then we should accept it, no matter who is telling us, even if it is a child. Truth does not belong to the person who mentions that Truth. Truth comes from Allah Alone. We should not think that if we accept something true from someone that it means that we are somehow doing a service to that person. On the contrary, we are in fact doing a service to ourselves because, wherever it may be found, Truth is from Allah. In fact, even if our enemies tell us something true we must be able to recognise and decide whether it is true or not; and if it is true, we must accept it. This is the true mu'min.

The true mu'min searches for and welcomes truth and wisdom

A real mu'min is constantly in search for true ideas and wisdom. They do not wait for others to approach them with the true; they search for it. Some people simply continue with their daily lives and if someone comes along and tells them something, then finally think about whether to accept it or not. However, the mu'min is constantly searching for the Truth, looking for people to come and correct him. They want to find people who can present their mistakes and errors to them to improve themselves.

Imam Sadiq said: "My best brothers are those who offer to me, who present to me as gift, my faults, my mistakes, my deficiencies." Of course, the Imam himself is a ma'soom; this for our benefit.

So we must ask every brother, sister, or child to inform us if they observe any mistake in us or know anything about us that can assist in our self-improvement. Then, if someone for any reason mentions a negative trait, we are to appreciate it.

A long time ago I once read an interesting and informative story which I have not found in any other book. Apparently, in the early days of Islam, when people were sitting in the masjid in rows, before or after congregational prayers, one of the things some people did was walk up and down the rows, just as people do so today with a collection bag for donations. However, in those days, they did not ask for money; rather they asked everyone to tell them if they knew anything about them. This was the way they were tried to improve themselves.

However we are usually far from behaving in a similar manner. Often we become angry even if someone very nicely and politely

comes and tells something in private. In fact, even if we do not become angry, we may not take their words seriously.

One of my teachers gave a very beautiful example. He asked us what we would do if someone came and told us that we had a spot of mud or something similar on our face. Of course, we would immediately go and check in the mirror, try to remove it and thank that person for telling us. We would not think about things such as whether that person was our friend or not, whether they were young or old, rich or poor. We would appreciate and thank whoever had told us this, go in front of a mirror and try to remove that mud. So what is it that prevents us from accepting and appreciating what people tell us about any bad quality or bad habit that they have seen in us, which is like a black spot on our heart? Indeed we should be more thankful for that information.

Real servitude is to give priority to Allah and the Truth that comes from Him

We cannot judge or measure whether someone is a good servant of Allah simply by seeing how much they pray, fast, or recite the Qur'an, although of course these are all very important. Real servitude is to give priority to Allah, to give priority to the Truth which comes from Allah and to be always ready to change oneself for the better, giving up our own ways of thinking or doing things for the sake of Allah. This is the real test and challenge. Furthermore, we should endeavour to cultivate this habit when we are young because as one becomes older, and perhaps acquires more, whether it is talent, fame, wealth, and so forth, it becomes more difficult to do so.

Truthfulness and the community

It is obvious that a community must also implement truthfulness in the full sense of the word. Two verses from the Qur'an that were mentioned previously can now be reflected on:

1) Verse 159 of Surah A'raf reads: *"Among the people of Moses is a group who guide (the people) by the truth and do justice thereby."*

Allah is saying that amongst the nation of Musa there are people, a group or a community, who invite and guide people truthfully; they also rule, judge and make decisions truthfully.

In this verse, 'bihi' means 'bil haqq' so the phrase means *"yaduna bil haqq wa bil haqqi yadiloon."* 'Yadiloon' means 'to judge' or 'to rule' but mostly it is interpreted as 'to judge'.

When they judge, such people judge by observing the truth, and when they talk to and invite people they also observe the truth. They do not, for example, consider what they would like or what better serves their own selfish interests. Neither do they consider what would please their superiors, their group leaders, and so on. They only consider the Truth. Actually, this is one of the beauties of the Qur'an. The Qur'an contains no sense of rivalry in its words. If it merely consisted of the words of a human being, then we would not expect to find passages where one religion gives credit to and praises another religion or the followers of another religion. However, the Qur'an is the divine Word of Allah; so in it Allah praises a group of followers of Prophet Musa for observing the truth.

In Surah A'raf, verse 181, Allah makes this into a general principle which is no longer only about a group of Jewish people. Now we

find something more general: “Among those We have created are a nation who guide by the truth and act justly thereby.”

Allah is saying that amongst the people He has created, amongst His creation, there is such a group of people to be found. They can be found in various different religious communities and throughout the ages. So there have always been some people who ‘yaduna bil haqq wa bihi adiloon’, who guide truthfully and judge truthfully.

Who are these people?

The great Allamah Tabatabai prefers the view that this group or community who guides and judges truthfully are the *Ma’sumeen*, that is, the Prophets and Imams. Another view is that of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi, which maybe seems to be more acceptable, that such people are not necessarily only the Prophets and Imams; they could also be their true followers. Therefore, even amongst non ma’sumeen, amongst people who are not infallible, there can always be true followers of the Ma’sumeen who try to observe the truth when they guide and judge.

Conclusion

So truthfulness must be our standard; and those who are the most truthful must be our role models. It is irrelevant whether we are a mere group of 5-10 members; or a larger organisation such as an Islamic centre or an Islamic party; or if we are citizens of an Islamic state or are a Muslim community living as a minority in a non-Muslim country. Whatever our circumstances, we must continuously give priority to being truthful and to committing ourselves to

following the truth in its fullest sense by following only what is really created and legislated by Allah.

Insha-Allah we can reach the state that every one of us and our communities would be so very truthful that when other people hear us, listen to us, and observe our judgements, they would have full trust in us. This is what a Muslim individual and community must be like. When people hear something from a Muslim, they must be able to be 100% sure and certain that that Muslim is speaking truthfully to the best of his or her knowledge. Of course, we are not infallible, but at least other people should be assured that to the best of our knowledge, we are speaking with full honesty. We cannot – and should not – accept being called Muslim if we are dishonest, or indeed if we do not have a full commitment to the Truth. This is not something which we can call Islamic.