Asabiyyah is a Diseases

Asabiyyah is a Diseases that weakens the Muslim Ummah

(Friday speech delivered by Imam Mohamed Baianonie at the Islamic Center of Raleigh, NC on July 31, 1998)

The causes and the diseases that have weakened the Muslim ummah are many, and the asabiyyah with all its kinds and forms is one of these deadly diseases that have weakened the Muslim ummah in the past as well as today; the once unified, merciful, and cohesive Muslim ummah has transformed into differing, conflicting, warring entities.

For this reason, it is a must for us to know what asabiyyah with all its forms is and to know what Islam says about asabiyyah and why Islam has fought it, and how we can rid ourselves from it.

Definition of asabiyyah:

Linguistically, asabiyyah comes from the word asabah which is the relatives of the person from the father side. These relatives are called asabah because they strengthen and defend the person that makes him/her stronger.

Idiomatically, asabiyyah is man's supporting his people to whom he belongs, whether they are right or wrong, oppressing or oppressed. The belonging to these people can be due to kith and kin, ethnicity, color, birth place, citizenship, school of thought, or a group of people with common interest.

What causes asabiyyah? The drive that causes asabiyyah is the feeling of being better than others, and that others are at a lower class. So, the person that has this feeling of asabiyyah thinks so highly of himself and of those to whom he belongs, and thinks that other people are as good as his own people.

This kind of thinking is corrupted, and it is in fact a kind of arrogance that comes from the mentality of Iblis, which led him to disobey the command of Allah when He ordered him to prostrate to Adam. Iblis said,

"I am better than him, You created me out of Fire and you created him (Adam) out of clay." The Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W.) warned us when he said, "No one enters Paradise if they have in their heart a grain weight of arrogance." The prophet (S.A.W.) defined this arrogance in two things: Rejection of the truth and looking down on people.

What are the harms of asabiyyah? Asabiyyah is harmful in many ways. It destroys the ummah, and changes the unity and harmony to disunity and disharmony. This is beneficial to the enemies of the ummah or an opportunistic group of people from this ummah. This situation is witnessed many times in the past as well as today.

The asabiyyah, in Jahiliyya time before Islam turned the Arab tribes into enemies and made from their Arabian peninsula a battle field. Allah (S.W.T.) told us about their situation before Islam in surat Al-Imran, (verse 103), what can be translated as, "And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah, and be not divided among

yourselves, and remember Allah's Favor on you, for you were enemies one to another, but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren (in Islamic Faith)…" This kind of situation is not restricted to the Arabs, it actually plagued all nations that were disunited because of asabiyyah.

The different kinds of Asabiyyah:

The first kind is the asabiyyah of relatives relationship and ethnic discent: it is the most ancient and the strongest kind of asabiyyah. The closer the relationship is, the stronger the asabiyyah. The further away the relationship is, the weaker the asabiyyah. Tribalism, ethnicism, and nationalism are of this kind of asabiyyah. From this comes a Jahili (unIslamic) slogan, "Support your brother whether he is oppressing or oppressed."

The second kind is the asabiyyah of principles and mathaahib schools of Islamic laws: This kind of asabiyyah grows amongst a group of people who are binded by one thought or one principle, be it religious or not, or the followers of a certain math'hab school of Islamic law. The individual in this group of people strongly supports his group or the followers of his math'hab whether they are right or wrong.

The third kind of asabiyyah is regionalism: It is formed amongst a group of people who live in one region. They think that just because they are living together in one region, that by itself will give them better qualifications than others. So they look down on others and think highly of their own selves even if those other people have lived with them for tens of years and even if they were born in their region but they are not originally from them. This kind of asabiyyah has grown in intensity within the Muslim ummah after the fall of the Islamic Ottoman Khilafah.

This regionalism was a goal that was sought by the enemies of Islam, so they planted this deadly thought and nourished it with all means, and people ended up victims of this deadly asabiyyah that only benefited the opportunistic people by keeping and strengthening their positions.

In the past, this kind of asabiyyah (regionalism) was the reason behind losing Andalousiah (Al-Andalous).

The fourth kind of asabiyyah is racism: It is formed amongst people with the same color of skin, thinking that their skin color by itself makes them better than other people of different skin color. This kind of asabiyyah did not exist in the Muslim ummah (walhamdulillah), but it is deep rooted in the west; the people of dark color skin were deeply hurt and oppressed because of their color in these countries which claim to be advanced and civilized for a very long time. So much blood was shed, they were dishonored, and stripped from their human rights because of their skin color and we know many details about that in this society that we live in. This oppressive situation gave birth to a violent reaction that manifested itself in many rebellions, violent acts and hate crimes that are initiated by different people out of asabiyyah for their own color at different times and different places.

Islam rejects all kinds of asabiyyah, because all these kinds of asabiyyah are not suitable to be a fair and just framework for the human societies; they are in fact manifestations of oppression, corruption and transgression on the earth.

Allah (S.W.T.) proclaimed that he created the differences amongst people to be a reason for them to get to know each other, and live together in cohesion and collaboration and not a reason for them to look down on one another. In reality, the

scale of being better than others is at-taqwa (rightousness) and the good deeds. Allah (S.W.T.) says in surat Al-Hujurat, (verse 13), what can be translated as, "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is those who has most taqwa…"

Allah (S.W.T.) also says in another verse, that the differences amongst people are a sign that indicates the greatness of Allah's creation and his power like the sign of the creation of the earth and the sky. Allah (S.W.T.) says in surat Al-Rum, (verse 22), what can be translated as, "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge."

We all as Muslims, those who inherited Islam and those who converted cannot be true Muslims if we still carry any kind of asabiyyah. When we accept Islam we have to leave and throw away all kinds of Jahiliyya beliefs, thinking, mentality, and behavior. This is how we will accept Islam as a complete way of life.

In this part of the Khutbah, we shall explore the stance of Islam toward asabiyyah, why Islam has fought it and warned us against it. We will also present how we can rid ourselves of it.

So what is the stance of Islam toward asabiyyah?

There are many authentic ahadith that warn us against the ignorant asabiyyah with all its types and forms.... all of these are strong warnings from which the heart of a believer trembles because he believes that he will stand accountable before Allah (S.W.T.) on the Day of Judgment. Among these ahadith are: Imam Muslim reported that the prophet (S.A.W.) said, "and whosoever fights under a blind (rayah) flag (it is not known whether this flag represents the truth or falsehood), gets angry along with his group of people, or calls to a group of people, or supports a group of people, and is subsequently killed because of that, then this killing is a jahili (sinful) killing." In another narration by Imam Muslim, ".....and whosoever is killed under a blind (rayah) flag, gets angry along with his group of people, and fights for the sake of his group of people, then he is not from my ummah." In both narrations, there is a strong warning from the prophet (S.A.W.) to the one who is triggered by asabiyyah to call for it, or to get angry for it, or to support it. In the first narration, it clarifies to us that if he gets killed because of asabiyyah, then his killing is a jahili (sinful) killing. In the second narration, the prophet (S.A.W.) excludes the one who carries asabiyyah from his ummah. Both of these warnings indicate how serious and great the sin of asabiyyah is. Imam Abu-Dawud reported that the prophet (S.A.W.) said, "He is not of us if he calls to asabiyyah, and he is not one of us if he fights for the sake of asabiyyah, and not one of us if he dies on asabiyyah."

Also when two men one from Muhajireen and one from Ansaar differed, each one called to his group for help, so each group got ready to support their man, then the prophet (S.A.W.) said what was reported by Imam Muslim, "What is this? Are you calling the call of the people of Jahiliyyah? Leave it, for surely it is filthy."

Imam Abu-Dawud reported in an authentic hadith that the prophet Mohammed (S.A.W.) said, "Whosoever supports his group of people not on the truth, he is like a camel that fell from a high peak into a deep valley where it only could move its tail." The prophet (S.A.W.) gave the example of the one who fights wrongfully for the sake of his group of people with the camel that fell from a high peak into a deep valley; it is helpless,

scolded, humiliated, and can not do anything except move its tail uselessly at the bottom of the valley.

In another authentic narration by Imam Abu-Dawud, the prophet (S.A.W.) said, "Allah (S.W.T.) took away the asabiyyah of jahiliyyah from you, and your boasting about your fathers. So, man is either a righteous believer or a corrupted non-believer. You are the children of Adam, and Adam is from dirt; let men quit their boasting of their own people, they are nothing but coal from the coal of Hell or they will be more humiliated in the sight of Allah more than the dung beetle that pushes dung with its nose."

We need to ask ourselves, why Islam has fought asabiyyah and warned us against it?

Simply because gathering and mutual support on the basis of asabiyyah contradicts the fundamentals of Islam and its teachings. The Muslim who believes in Allah (S.W.T.) has his heart filled with love of Allah and love toward those who are loved by Allah, and hatred toward those who are hated by Allah. The relationship between true Muslims and other people is based on this perspective only; he supports and allies himself with those who are loved by Allah and supports them when they are right even if they are the farthest people from him (in blood, ethnic background, race, birth place, or nationality….). And on the other hand, a true Muslim hates the enemies of Allah and shows animosity towards them even if they are the closest people to him (in blood, ethnic background, race, birth place, or nationality….)

This is the true stance of a believer and he adopts no other stance.

Allah (S.W.T.) gave us a good example of this kind of believer in Ibraheem (S.A.W.). Allah (S.W.T.) said in surat Al-Mumtahinah, (verse 4), what can be translated as, "Indeed there has been an excellent example for you in Abraham and those who believe with him, when they said to their people: "Verily, we are free from you and whatever you worship besides Allah, we have rejected you, and there has started between us and you, hostility and hatred for ever, until you believe in Allah alone."

The society that Islam wants is the kind of society where people gather on the basis of Islam and Islam alone. So that the believers will have one united ummah despite their differing colors, languages, ethnic backgrounds, tribes, so that this one ummah becomes like one body. We must keep in mind that Islam does not cancel races, languages, and regions, but makes them members and parts within this one body; they move when the body moves towards a common goal, in a way that none of the roles of any parts of the body is canceled.

The scale of being better in this society is not the race, language, national origin, ...; it is righteousness and good deeds, Allah (S.W.T.) says in surat Al-Hujurat, (verse 13), what can be translated as, "Verily, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa"

So how do we rid ourselves of Asabiyyah?

This is clarified in the Qur'an. Allah (S.W.T.) commanded us in surat Al-Emran, (verse 103), what can be translated as, "And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah, (Islam) and do not be divided among yourselves." Holding tight and assimilating on the deen of Allah (S.W.T.) and no other deen, and assimilation on the basis of anything else is an unIslamic, ignorant, and a rejected assimilation. This holding tight and assimilation on the deen of Allah should be done by all Muslims with no exception. If some do not do this, the cure will not be complete.

Also, it is a must that Muslims unite regardless of the factors that suggest differences, like skin color, languages, regions, national origins..... because unity is obligatory.

The cure is also with purifying the soul from the traces of jahiliyah and purifying it from arrogance, and looking down on people and planting the virtue of humility and respect of others.

The cure is also with the total awareness that asabiyyah is from the works of Iblees and a means of destruction in the hands of the enemies of the Muslim ummah from within and from outside. Asabiyyah is a sharp knife that has cut the veins of the Muslim ummah and is still bleeding and dying.

We ask Allah (S.W.T.) to protect us all from all forms of Al-asabiyyah Al-Jahiliyah and make us true believers. (Ameen)

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