107289 - Dividing Muslims into practising and non-practising

the question

I have questions regarding, the phrases "practitioner muslim" and "non practitioner muslim"? Here in Sweden the phrases, "practitioner muslim" and "non practitioner muslim" is used continuity. As when people receives the question are you a muslim?, the phrases "practitioner muslim" or "non practitioner muslim" is used. With the phrase "practitioner muslim" people mean that he/she beliefs in the Islamic "Deen", that is, believing in God, the prophets, the angels, the scriptures and the judgement day. Further with "practitioner muslim" people mean that he/she beliefs in the Islamic "Sharia", and that he/she most follow it and does so, for example the person, pray five times a day, fast in ramadan, pays zakat and so on. With "non practitioner muslim" people mean that he/she beliefs in the Islamic "Deen", that is, believing in God, the prophets, the angels, the scriptures and the judgement day. Further with "non practitioner muslim" people mean that he/she mostly do believe in the Islamic "Sharia", but he/she does not follow it, for example the person, do not pray five times a day, does not fast in ramadan, does not pay zakat, the woman does not wear Hidjab and so on. To my guestions. Can a person be a "practitioner muslim"? or "non practitioner muslim"? Is the terms legal/correct? Whom is a musli.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The Muslim is the one who believes in the six pillars of faith: He believes in Allaah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and the Divine will, both good and bad; who utters the testimony of belief in Tawheed (Oneness of Allaah) to proclaim his submission to Allaah alone with no partner or associate; and follows the sharee’ah which was brought by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

Everyone who does that is a Muslim, with the same rights and duties as all other Muslims, unless he destroys his Islam by saying, doing or believing anything that implies kufr and demolishes the

pillars of faith that are established in his heart.

But people vary in the degree of their faith, just as they vary in the level of their adherence to the rulings of Islam and following its commands.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told us that faith has many branches and varying degrees, which means that the believers will vary in their degrees according to the extent to which they follow these branches and levels.

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Faith has seventy-odd – or sixty-odd – branches, the best of which is saying Laa ilaaha ill-Allaah, and the least of which is removing something harmful from the road, and modesty is a branch of faith.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (9) and Muslim (35).

In the Holy Qur’aan, people are divided into three categories: the one who wrongs himself by sinning, the one who is average in his adherence to what is obligatory and avoidance of what is forbidden, and the foremost in good deeds who regularly performs naafil acts of worship and strives hard to attain high levels. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Then We gave the Book (the Qur’aan) as inheritance to such of Our slaves whom We chose (the followers of Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم). Then of them are some who wrong their ownselves, and of them are some who follow a middle course, and of them are some who are, by Allaah’s Leave, foremost in good deeds. That (inheritance of the Qur’aan) ___ that is indeed a great Grace”

[Faatir 35:32]

Division of people into categories according to their obedience and adherence to the laws of Allaah is something real and unavoidable, but calling people by those categories is something which may vary. But in general these categories are acceptable and correct.

Although we do not see anything basically wrong with this categorization, which includes calling people practising or non-practising, we would like to draw attention to some mistakes that have to

do with the kind of categorizing that is common nowadays.

1.

It is not permissible to limit the concept of “practising” or “being committed” to external matters only, and apply this label only to one who has a beard and wears a thobe, rather attention should be paid to complete adherence to Islam and correct ‘aqeedah (belief). A good attitude and morals are the basic foundation of this category. The thobe, beard and women’s hijabs are part of Islamic teachings, but not everything; they are outward indications of religious commitment which should be accompanied by inward commitment too. But this required balance between inward and outward is lacking in more than a few cases, unfortunately. Hence it is not permissible to use these characteristics as a weapon to categorize people incorrectly. The one who dislikes a person and calls him non-practising or uncommitted, and who likes another person and describes him as practising or committed, intends thereby to judge whether people are good or bad, when he is not qualified to do so, rather he may be lacking in good character altogether.

We have seen many examples of this behaviour in many societies, in which Islamic terminology is used to achieve personal gains. This is a phenomenon that is dangerous and must be avoided by all.

2.

With regard to using these labels as a means of causing division among people, creating disputes among them and stirring up disunity, this is an evil intention which is not acceptable in sharee’ah, unless the person who is described as not being religiously committed has gone to extremes in committing evil openly and blatantly doing things which the Muslim scholars are unanimously agreed are wrong; such a person may be described as a sinner and uncommitted or non-practising. But we see that many people define as religious commitment things that they think are part of the religion but which may be matters that are subject to ijtihaad, then they label people as religiously committed or otherwise based on the scholarly view that they prefer, without paying any attention to the actual difference of scholarly opinion concerning this matter. This is

also a serious mistake.

Hence what we think is most fair and just and farthest removed from dispute, and more safe before Allaah is to describe people – when there is a legitimate need for further description beyond simply calling a person a Muslim – by using clear and specific words and not general words. For example, one may say: He prays regularly, or he is of good character, or he reads Qur'aan. These attributes are clear and specific, and express the fact that is being described, without introducing personal opinion, or bearing the responsibility of general words which may be motivated by greed or grudges. As for describing someone as "religiously committed" or "practising", these are general and ambiguous words which require close scrutiny of the person described, followed by honesty in judgement, which is rarely found nowadays. And it is well known that most of people's problems result from general, ambiguous statements.

And Allaah knows best.