6280 - The perseverance of Islam despite splits and divisions

the question

Unity and Diversity in Islam. Islam has suffered splits and divisions to the faith, could you explain what these have been and why they have emerged. How is it that despite the differences in Islam, it has been possible for Muslims of different persuasions to feel a sense of unity?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Know, may Allaah guide us and you to the truth and enable us to follow it, that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not die before he had shown the way clearly to his ummah [nation]. There was no major or minor matter but he gave us knowledge about it from Allaah. At the end of the last Hajj [pilgrimage] performed by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) there was revealed the aayah [verse] (interpretation of the meaning):

"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islâm as your religion" [al-Maa'idah 5:3]

The Sahaabah [Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him] (may Allaah be pleased with them) adhered very closely to this path, and thus Allaah protected the followers of Islam from splitting in this blameworthy manner.

They were followed in that by the Taabi'een [the generation that followed the generation of the Sahaabah] (may Allaah have mercy on them), but some internal and external factors led to the emergence of some reprehensible divisions following the three best generations. Among the external causes of that were:

Mixing with other, non-Muslim nations, such as the Persians, Romans, Indians and Greeks, and contact with other religious groups such as Jews, Christians, Sabians, Magians, Indian religions and

others.

Among the internal causes were:

Following whims and desires, giving room to doubts, turning away from learning the religion and sharee'ah of Allaah, ignorance, extremism, and imitation of non-Muslims… etc.

All of these reasons, and others, led to some small groups splitting from the right path which the majority of the Muslims followed, so there emerged some groups, innovations and opinions that differed from the path of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and his Companions, and the Taabi'een and those who followed their path.

But we may note that these groups and factions were in fact a discordant note that differed from the majority of Muslims, and their followers were shunned and opposed by the scholars, khulafaa' [khaleefahs or Muslim rulers] and majority of Muslims, which meant that they were contained and their influence was prevented from becoming widespread during most periods of Islamic history.

The majority of Muslims remained on the Sunni path – in general – and when forms of bid'ah emerged among them, the scholars of truth have always hastened to oppose them and point out their falsehood. Our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told us that these divisions would emerge; he warned us about them and commanded us to adhere to the jamaa'ah [main body] of the Muslims. He said: "The Jews and the Christians split into seventy-two sects, all of which are in Hell; this ummah [nation] will split into seventy-three sects, all of which will be in Hell apart from one." They asked, "Which one is that, O Messenger of Allaah?" He said, "Those who follow the path which I and my Companions are on today."He said,"A group of my ummah will remain following the truth and will prevail, and those who oppose them will not harm them, until the Day of Judgement begins."

There are many reasons why the Muslims have always felt a sense of unity, some of which we have mentioned above. But the most obvious reason is that this religion comes from Allaah and it is protected by Allaah. If any other religion had been exposed to the wars, conspiracies and plots that Islam has been exposed to, it would have vanished a long time ago (as we see in the case of

other religions). Every rational person will see that a belief which for more than 1400 years has stayed exactly the same as it was at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and is still renewing itself in the hearts of its followers (in love and adherence) like the renweing of a flower in spring – this is the strongest evidence that the religion of Allaah is the true religion. And Allaah is the Guide to the Straight Path.