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The Culture of Difference from an Islamic Perspective: Mechanisms and Morals

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Abstract:

The present article discusses the concept of difference as a natural phenomenon and civilizational necessity. It is confirmed that the difference between people's minds and interests is inevitable and leads to variety and integration.

Light is shed on the employment of difference as a positive culture to reach integration between people's opinions, acceptance of the Other and participation in community building. In contrast, there are negative types of difference, which reject and take a hostile attitude to the Other, pushing for bigotry and arrogance based on prioritizing personal desires over the truth.

A number of mechanisms and means are suggested from an Islamic perspective to help in promoting positive difference and reducing negative difference. The literature review provides true stories of pious and wise people who managed to build bridges on their differences with their good manners.

Keywords: manners of difference, reasoning.

نحو ثقافة الاختلاف في الإسلام: آليات وأدبيات

الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث مفهوم الاختلاف عموماً كونه طبيعة كونية، وضرورة حضارية، فيؤكد على أن الاختلاف بين الخلق في عقولهم وأفهامهم واهتماماتهم قضية حتمية لا مجال لتجاوزها، ولا قيام للحياة بدون هذا التنوع والتغاير والتكامل الذي هو ثمرة الاختلاف. والبحث يسعى إلى تسليط الضوء نحو توظيف الاختلاف كثقافة إيجابية في الوصول إلى التكامل بين البشر في الآراء والاجتهادات، وقبول الآخر والتشاركية في بناء المجتمعات، ويحذر من الاختلاف السلبي الذي يرفض الآخر ويعاديه، ويدفع إلى التعصب والتعالي على الحق انتصاراً للأشخاص أو الهوى، وذلك من خلال عرض أنواع الاختلاف وأسبابه السلوكية والفكرية. وقد توصل الباحثان إلى مجموعة من الآليات والوسائل المنبثقة من الرؤية الإسلامية، والتي تعين على تفعيل الاختلاف الإيجابي وتؤكد عليه، وتحد من ظاهرة الاختلاف السلبي، وتحذر منه، ولضمان سلامة نتائج الاختلاف المنشود فقد ألحق الباحثان بهذه الوسائل مجموعة من الأدبيات والأخلاقيات التي أثرت عن العقلاء والصالحين الذين نجحوا في بناء جسور التواصل على أنهار الاختلاف بينهم.

كلمات مفتاحية: أدب الاختلاف، الاجتهاد، قبول الآخر

Research Body:

Allah has made the creation different in this life as proof of His ability and greatness. Such a diversity indicates the integration and harmony necessary for the building and living of the earth. Allah says in the Noble Quran: “ إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاختلافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ * الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ” “Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day there are signs for men who understand.* Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord! You have not created this in vain! Glory be to You; save us then from the chastisement of the fire” (Al Imraan 3:190-191)

However, such a difference is not only about massive signs, but about everything in this life. Allah says: “وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ” “And of everything We have created pairs that you may be mindful” (Al-Thaariyat 51:49). He has made difference an integral of the nature and people of this world, such as life vs death, young vs old, poor vs rich, believer vs disbeliever and even this life vs the Hereafter. Allah also says: “وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاختلافِ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَالْوَالِدَاتُ إِذَا فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ” “And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors; most surely there are signs in this for the learned” (Al-Room 30:22).

Broader differences than those in languages and colours can also be found in people’s minds in terms of understanding and intelligence levels. They belong to different types of personality, like realistic vs emotional and kinesthetic vs visual.

One can notice the diversity of the minds’ understanding of the same above verse: “the diversity of your tongues”. For some, it refers to the difference of languages and dialects. For others, it means different voices and tones in spite of going out of similar places of articulation. A third opinion mentions the different content of speech in terms of carefully chosen and polite vs ugly taboo words. All the above displays Allah’s perfect ability, dominant will and mercy for His creation in this difference.

Subject of the Study:

The study looks into the matter of difference in a realistic and positive manner. Difference constitutes a secret of life, growth, competition between people and harmony of the creation, making a beautiful divine picture of variety. According to Ibn Al-Qayyim (1408H, vol. 2, p. 519), dissimilarity among people is inevitable, for they have different wills, understandings and smartness, but what is unacceptable is their attack and aggression against each other.

Allah says: “...and they shall continue to differ* Except those on whom your Lord has mercy; and for this did He create them” (Hood 11:118). Exegesis scholars have different views here. For Al-Hassan and Ataa’, it means He created them to differ. As for Mujaahid and Ikrimah, He created them for mercy. Ibn Abbaas combines both as He created them in two parties: those who receive mercy will not differ and those who do not receive mercy will differ (Ridhaa, 1990, vol. 12, p. 161).

In another narration to Ibn Abbaas, some people agree under Islam and make the Noble Quran a reference when they disagree. Thus, they enjoy harmony and make one nation, so Allah has mercy on them by protecting them from the evil of difference in this life and from torture of the Hereafter. Other people also disagree in terms of religion as they do in the interests and gains of this life. As a result, they find the torture of difference in this life and the Hereafter and are deprived of Allah’s mercy due to being unfair to themselves.

Problem of the Study:

The problem is found in the deviation from the sound method in dealing with difference. In other words, some use it as pretext for disputing and maximize difference in small and minor matters, rather than looking for common points between people’s understandings. Thus, it is necessary to

guide people to accept diversity and warn them against unacceptable types of difference. Although the Quran established rules and manners to govern difference over 1400 years ago, there is not much literature in refereed journals to discuss the issue from an Islamic perspective. The only article found by the researchers is Al-Khafaaji & Saleh. There are also scattered relevant online essays, like Dialogue in the Noble Quran and Acceptance of the Other by Nayef Abboush (Aluka, 2017).

Objectives of the Study:

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What is difference?
- What are the types and causes of difference?
- What are the positive mechanisms to deal with difference?
- What are the manners of difference in Islam?

Method of the Study:

The researchers adopt the analytical method to explore the insights of the relevant Quran verses, Hadith traditions and scholars' citations. They are classified under appropriate headings to attain the core and impact of positive difference, while addressing negative difference through the inductive method to learn about its main causes.

Structure of the Study:

The study consists of the three following sections:

1. Meaning of Difference
2. Types and Causes of Difference
3. Management of Difference: Mechanisms and Morals
4. Conclusion: Findings and Recommendations.

1. Meaning of Difference (ikhtilaaf)

According to Al-Shaatibi, every matter that takes place within Islam but the difference about it does not cause enmity, hatred nor division, then it can be considered an Islamic issue. However, any matter arises and causes enmity, hatred, mockery and division, then it has nothing to do with Islam (Al-Shaatibi, 1417H, vol. 5, p. 164).

1.1. Definition of Difference (ikhtilaaf) in contrast with Some Arabic Synonyms

Difference (ikhtilaaf) is defined by some as any dissimilarity in saying, opinion, state, appearance or attitude (Al-Ilwaani, 1987, p. 24). For others, difference (ikhtilaaf) and disagreement (mukhaalafah) applies when one takes a way other than that of the Other in terms of state or act. Difference is wider in meaning than opposite, because any opposites are different but different matters are not necessarily opposite (Al-Fairouzabaadi, 1996, vol. 2, p. 562).

Some Arabic Synonyms

- a. Khilaaf could refer to mere dissimilarity, especially in opinion. Allah says: **فَاخْتَلَفْتُمْ** "فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا" "But parties from among them disagreed with each other" (Mariam 19:37).

Another sense is about opposition. Allah says: **وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَمْلِكَكُمْ إِلَىٰ مَا أَنهَأَكُم عَنْهُ** "I do not desire that in opposition to you I should betake myself to that which I forbid you" (Hood 11:88).

It could also imply integration and harmony as in verse: **فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا** "...then We bring forth therewith fruits of various colors" (Faatir 35:27)

- b. Jidaal indicates argument for the purpose of proving oneself right against the Other (Al-Zubeidi, not date found, vol. 28, p. 194). According to Al-Fayyoomi, Jidaal is considered negative when it busies oneself from accepting the truth and positive when it is about defending the truth (Al-Fayyoomi, no date found, vol. 1, p.93).

- c. Iftiraaq refers to division and disparity (Al-Zubeidi, no date found, vol. 26, p. 298). Thus, when difference causes division, it acquires a negative sense (Al-Aqel, 2000, vol. 2, p. 32).
- d. Shiqaaq indicates extreme hostility between opponents so they cannot agree or have any understanding (Al-Raazi, 1979, vol 3, p. 171) Allah mentions a case between spouses in the following verse: "وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ شِقَاقَ بَيْنِهِمَا" "If you fear a breach between the two..." (Al-Nisaa' 4:35). The term implies hardness and remoteness (Al-Maawardi, no date found, vol. 1, p. 483).

According to the above, some concepts may steer the phenomenon of difference away from its essence into negative aspects. Thus, significant efforts are needed to enhance relevant manners, leading to a common culture of integration, role-playing and acceptance of the Other. The Sharia law is keen on unity and amity within its followers, in particular, and respect to the Other, in general. Allah says: "وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ" "And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited, and remember the favor of Allah on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became brethren" (Al Imraan 3:103).

1.2. Necessity of the Culture of Difference

In a bid to agree on a point to secure happiness in this life and the Hereafter, it is necessary to consolidate the culture of difference in our own minds and our children's. We also have to deepen the concepts of accord on common interests and factors at the expense of minor disputes. That would lead to building the earth and promote the universal model of Islam as an eternal religion, whose loss and division in its followers' lives made the world witness significant suffering in terms of civilization. In other words, the culture of difference is required for the unity of hearts rather than minds. Among the forms of such need are the following (Al-Odah, 2014, p. 87):

- A ruler or an official needs it to maintain the rights of his people, even those who disagree with him. For instance, Prophet Mohammad (Peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) upheld all the rights of his opponents in Medina, like Jews and hypocrites. As for his companions, he was so patient, forgiving and fair in granting their rights, even against himself.
- A teacher needs it to maintain the students' rights, be fair and give them the benefit of the doubt in terms of their questions, problems and objections. If he exerts patience and raises them to have independent responsibilities, rather than melt in his personality, they would become intelligent, noble leaders but not weak imitator followers.
- A parent needs it to be close to his children's hearts. He/she would realize why they disagree with him and that they are going to be grownups. They are not supposed to be copies of their mother or father. Rather, as they have their special fingerprints, words, eyes and voice tones, they should have their own thoughts and minds.
- Spouses need it to focus on each other's strengths rather than weaknesses as well as resist any split which the devil attempts to grow between them. Their home should be based on mutual respect, without dictatorship or abuse of one's right against the other.
- This culture is mostly needed by those specialized in Islamic jurisprudence and other sciences of Sharia. They have to tolerate the Other's opinion as long as it is based on evidence or somewhat palatable interpretation. They are supposed to be aware that the Islamic texts could be either definitive or mostly presumptive, which necessitates diversity and difference in perspectives.

In the Prophet's biography, there are many incidents in which he consolidated the culture of acceptance and respect of the Other's opinion in some ambiguous matters, without him preferring

one understanding or opinion to another. For example, narrated by both Al-Bukhari and Muslim, Abdullah bin Omar reported: Prophet Mohammad (Peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) called on us after the end of Al-Ahzab battle: "None shall pray Zuhr afternoon prayer except in Bani Qureitha." So, some prayed on the way to catch the prayer time, while some prayed in Bani Qureitha though they missed the time. But the Prophet blamed neither party (Al-Bukhaari, 1422, Hadith no. 4119; Muslim, 1991, Hadith no. 1770).

Interestingly, he silently approved both without censure or favouring either choice. Therefore, it seems that he aimed at training the companions on the acceptance of the Other's opinion, normalization of difference and opening the door for reasoning, which later paved the way for the two major jurisprudence schools: purpose and tradition.

1.3. Difference as Trouble

Difference becomes a problem when negatively utilized and the common spaces are ignored. In this case, rejection dominates the points of dissimilarity and disagreement in ambiguous matters, and people abandon the basics of dialogue and manners of Islam.

Here, instead of being a healthy phenomenon to enrich the Muslim mind with various perspectives and understandings from all dimensions and angles, difference becomes a problem, a tool of internal damage and an opportunity for division and conflict.

In this context, signs of the universe guide people indirectly to accept difference and employ diversity. Human beings, to whom Allah has dedicated the entire universe and has preferred over all other creatures, are required by the Noble Quran and Prophet's Hadith to discard disagreement and build bridges of agreement and cooperation among themselves. For instance, Allah says: "يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ" "O you men! surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is Knowing, Aware" (Al-Hujuraat 49:13). The Prophet (Peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) also says: "Straighten your lines and do not disagree to make your hearts disagree (Muslim, 1991, vol. 1, p. 323)."

When Allah narrates the history of previous folks, He warns us against committing the same mistakes. He says: "...and be not of the polytheists* Of those who divided their religion and became sects, every sect rejoicing in what they had with them" (Al-Room 30:31-32). He considers any disagreement that causes division a deviation from the prophet's guidance. He says: "إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيَعًا لَسْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ" "Surely they who divided their religion into parts and became sects, you have no concern with them; their affair is only with Allah, then He will inform them of what they did" (Al-An'aam 6:159). The People of the Book, in particular, were not actually punished due to their lack of knowledge, but because they employed their knowledge to harm each other. Allah says: "وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوْتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَعْضٌ بِبَعْضٍ" "Those to whom the Book had been given did not show opposition but after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves" (Al-Imraan 3:19) (Al-Ilwaani, 1987).

Nowadays, likewise, the negative utilization of difference makes many people go beyond disagreement of minds to hearts. For them, diversity of thinking becomes a reason for mistrust, and the presence of a different Other justifies enmity rather than amity. Some even adopt Pharaoh's slogan: "مَا أَرِيكُمْ إِلَّا مَا أَرَىٰ وَمَا أَهْدِيكُمْ إِلَّا سَبِيلَ الرَّشَادِ" "I do not show you aught but that which I see (myself), and I do not make you follow any but the right way" (Ghaafir 40:29), in order to impose his ideas on his opponents.

2. Types and Causes of Difference

2.1. Types of Difference

Muslim scholars vary in classifying difference according to different dimensions. The following typologies may overlap in a way or another:

2.1.1. In Terms of Acceptability

Here, difference is divided into:

- a. Acceptable: This type goes in line with Allah's law in the difference and integration of creatures. It is committed to the manners of difference and achieves the purposes of difference. It is basically associated with thoughts and reasoning. It is beneficial in motivating minds to learn all the possibilities of an incident or evidence, adding understandings to one's own and providing the one having an issue with alternatives (Al-Ilwaani, 1987, p. 27).
- b. Unacceptable (negative): This type is based on one's desires. Here, one tries to prove himself but not the truth. Since he is not after facts, he follows bigotry, stubbornness and division. So, in order to cover his own weakness, he could become angry, swear or threaten his opponents. This way, he imitates Satan, whose answer Allah quotes in the Noble Quran: "قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ" "He said: What hindered you so that you did not prostrate when I commanded you? He said: I am better than him: You have created me of fire, while him You did create of dust" (Al-A'raaf 7:12).

2.1.2. In Terms of Motives

Here, motives of difference are divided into:

- a. Bigotry and personal desires: Here, one is keen on opposing his peers, even if they are right. His heart is filled with hate and arrogance and is after stardom, even by means of irregular opinion or action. When the Prophet (Peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) came to Medina, one of the leaders of the city called Huyayy bin Akhtab was asked whether he knew and confirmed that Mohammad is the expected prophet?". He said: "yes." He was then asked: "What is your heart attitude towards him?" "To be his enemy throughout my lifetime", he answered (Ibn Hishaam, 1955, p. vol. 1, p. 519).
- b. Hard working and looking for the truth: Here, one is after righteousness, rather than personal interests. In this context, Abu-Haneefah used to say after establishing an opinion: "This is my opinion and the best I can make. But whoever brings along what is better will have the right to claim the truth" (Al-Baghdadi, 1417, vol. 13, p. 51; Al-Razi, 2003, p. 68). Likewise, Al-Shafi'i said: "When I argue with anyone, I never like him to err. Furthermore, I wish that the knowledge I have in my heart would be with everyone and would not be attributed to me" (Al-Raazi, 2003, p. 68).
- c. Abandoning the people of falsehood and sins to followers of righteousness: Here, one speaks out to counter the people of falsehood and secure his faith as his Lord asked Muslims to do: "وَلَا تَرْكَبُوا إِلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا فَتَمَسَّكُمُ النَّارُ" "Incline not to those who do wrong, or the Fire will seize you" (Hood 11:113). "وَقَدْ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْكِتَابِ أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلَا تَفْعَدُوا" "Indeed He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear Allah's communications disbelieved in and mocked at, do not sit with them until they enter into some other discourse; surely then you would be like them; surely Allah will gather together the hypocrites and the unbelievers all in hell" (Al-Nisaa' 4:140).
- d. Misunderstanding of the Islamic texts, the different aspects of the subject or the details, sometimes with good intention: Here, the devil attempts to influence novice learners or those with weak understanding of the Sharia. For instance, the thought of the Khawaarij group, who declared war against Ali bin Abi-Taleb and said he became a disbeliever, was based on misunderstanding of the Islamic texts and their targets. In fact, upon a debate with Abdullah bin Abbas, 2,000 out of 6,000 of these people abandoned their ideology and went back to Ali's side (Ibn Al-Jawzi, 2001, vol. 1. p. 83).

2.1.3. In Terms of Outcomes:

Difference may be divided into:

- a. Diversity: Among the forms of this type are people's different specializations, professions, thoughts and reasoning of positive variety to achieve the integration of life. It holds senses of breadth and positivity more than dispute, especially in the Islamic jurisprudence matters, reasoning opinions and various narrations on the same subject. Good relevant examples are the multiple forms of Al-Istiftaah invocation and the ways of putting the hands on the chest in the prayer. Omar bin Abdul-Aziz said: "I am glad the Prophet's companions had different opinions. If they had had one opinion, people would be in distress. They are models, and whoever adopts the opinion of any of them will be in breadth (Al-Qurtubi, 1994, vol. 1, p. 902).

Another example has to do with the interpretations of the 'straight path' in the Al-Faatihah Opening Chapter. It is said to mean Islam, Sunnah and Juma'ah, Quran or worship road. The above descriptions of the straight path are like the many names of Allah, His prophet and His book. They are not in conflict, neither in words nor in senses (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1986, vol. 19, p. 140).

- b. Opposition: In this type, the different opinions cannot be reconciled in any case (Al-Majeedi, 1424H, p. 53). On the one hand, it can be acceptable if it is based on evidence and accompanied with the culture of difference morals, like the dead's hearing of the living and the dead's torture due to his family's weeping. On the other hand, it cannot be accepted if it is based on desire, contradicts straightforward Islamic texts and leads to the division of hearts. That includes the bigotry of some adherents of Islamic jurisprudence approaches, like ruling that a follower of Al-Shaafi'i shall not pray behind that of Abu-Haneefah, or that of Maalik shall not get married to that of Ahmed bin Hanbal. As it takes place to serve personal desires or bigotry for a person or approach, it constitutes the mainstream shape of difference taken by the people of heresy and desires.

2.2. Causes of Difference

In general, difference is attributed to either misunderstanding or bad intention. In the first case, one may or may not be tolerated according to the power of evidence and the understanding of its indications. The second case mostly results from diseases of the heart.

According to Al-Qaradaawi (1989, pp. 13-14), both causes can be elaborated as follows:

2.2.1. Moral and Behavioral Factors

These mainly have to do with following personal desires, including:

- a. Arrogance
- b. Mistrust
- c. Selfishness and love of fame
- d. Prejudice to people, opinions and approaches
- e. Chauvinism for a country or group

To get rid of the above, one needs to strongly resist the devil and purify himself by adopting the opposite qualities.

2.2.2. Intellectual and Reasoning Factors

Most of these may be justified in terms of possible perspectives based on reason and revelation, different aspects of investigation of the subject and the impact of personal and contextual tendencies, including:

- a. Difference in secondary matters due to the variety of Islamic jurisprudence schools in interpreting Islamic texts, reasoning in the absence of a straightforward text, broadening vs tightening, choice of literality vs purpose and adoption vs rejection of a piece of evidence. Relevant examples are innumerable. Thus, many books are dedicated to list logical, language and methodological reasons for the difference between Islamic jurisprudence

- scholars, like Removing Blame on Major Scholars by Ibn Taymiyyah and Fairness in Explaining Causes of Difference by Al-Dahlawi.
- b. Difference in the branches of Sharia and some matters of creed – like the understanding of Allah’s attributes and some presumptive matters in terms of authenticity or meaning like the Prophet (Peace and blessing of Allah be upon him)’s seeing of Allah in the journey of Ascension to heaven.
 - c. Difference in political stands and decisions, like participation in elections and parliaments.
 - d. Difference in judging and assessing some disciplines, like logic, philosophy and Sufism, as some entirely reject them, some entirely approve them and others elaborate on their details.

3. Management of Difference: Mechanisms and Morals

3.1. Mechanisms of Fruitful Handling

3.1.1. Belief in the Inevitability of Difference

The following points constitute forms of realism to deal with difference:

- a. Handling difference as inevitable is considered a necessity as it embodies the reality in its varied shapes, colours and concerns. With realism, one can employ different capacities, excuse opponents, reduce the effects of disagreement and open broader ways for agreement with the Other. In fact, it is impossible to impose one opinion or thought on all people. Thus, looking for extreme idealism away from the details of reality is a sort of fantasy as well as over-naivety, which does not fit the nature of life.
- b. Difference represents a form of mercy and abundance, without which people would suffer in managing their lives with all the variety of details. In fact, it provides a great wealth of opinions, mental efforts, comparisons and experiences for those who seek the truth. That’s why the common saying goes: “Reasoning is mercy”.
- c. Other than prophets, nobody is infallible. Therefore, any saying not found in the revelation is negotiable. In addition, language – even that of the revelation – could have multiple interpretations, and terms may be understood in different ways. Therefore, one’s opinion is correct but could be wrong; the Other’s opinion is wrong but could be right. Allah says: "أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْفُرْقَانَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا" “Do they not then meditate on the Quran? And if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy” (Al-Nisaa’ 4:82).
- d. Whoever knows more finds more excuses. Thus, before giving value judgements or be conclusive about a certain opinion, one should learn the Other’s views and empathize their perspectives and evidence, so he can decide on the matter. The Other may have persuasive evidence and good justifications which support his opinion and accounts for his disagreement. It is said that judging a matter is based on its understanding. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the assessment of people should be founded on knowledge and fairness, but not ignorance and unfairness like the people of heresy do (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1986, vol. 4, p. 337).

3.1.2. Positive Handling of Difference

Looking at difference from a positive perspective is rather like looking at the full half of the glass. It also highlights strengths over weaknesses and employs dissimilarities for the sake of all parties. This attitude could be mastered by optimists of deep insights, who can change their view of matters with their powerful determination. Consider the following real examples:

- a. It is narrated that Is’haq bin Bahlool authored a book on the difference between Islamic jurists and called it A Book on Difference. But Ahmed bin Hanbal said to him: “Call it A Book on abundance” (Ibn Abi-Ya’la, 1953, vol. 1, p. 111). So, the wise scholar was keen on giving the book a title which is positive in order to gather, but not divide, people. Difference holds the indications of abundance, mercy, ease and diversity.

- b. Abu-Haneefah used to encourage his students to reason when looking into matters. He would discuss a single issue for days or even a month and then say: "If you find evidence, adopt it." He meant that they were free to disagree with him and take the opinion referred to by the evidence. Accordingly, as Ibn Abdeen reports, two of Abu-Haneefah's companions disagreed by about a third of his approach (Ibn Abidin, 1992, vol. 1, p. 67). This could be one of the teaching methods for our age. Everyone can take part in reaching a conclusion after differences melt, weak opinions vanish and all the views are respected, leading to the most possible ruling.

3.1.3. Fruitful Dialogue

According to Al-Heeti (1989, p. 40), dialogue is an activity between two parties, in which each presents what he/she is convinced with and reviews the other party's sense and thought to express facts from his/her perspective. As Islam is based on persuading the Other through proof and intellect, there are so many pieces of evidence in the Noble Quran and Prophet's Hadiths on holding dialogue with opponents. Examples are the conversations between Allah and the angels with regard to making man His agent on earth, between Allah and Satan when he refused to prostrate to Adam and that between the messengers and their folks in a good manner. These and others establish rules, dimensions and moral guidelines for dialogue with opponents, even in the hardest form: monotheism vs polytheism.

Allah asks his Prophet to address unbelievers: *أَفَلَمْ مَنْ يَرْزُقْكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قُلِ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّا أَوْ إِيَّاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ * قُلْ لَا نَسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا أُجْرِمْنَا وَلَا نَسْأَلُ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ * قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبُّنَا ثُمَّ يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ* "Say: Who gives you the sustenance from the heavens and the earth? Say: Allah. And most surely we or you are on a right way or in manifest error* Say: You will not be questioned as to what we are guilty of, nor shall we be questioned as to what you do* Say: Our Lord will gather us together, then will He judge between us with the truth; and He is the greatest Judge, the All-knowing* Say: Show me those whom you have joined with Him as associates; by no means (can you do it). Nay! He is Allah, the Mighty, the Wise" (Saba' 34:24-27).

Among the rules and moral guidelines in the above verses are the following:

- a. Allah says: "Say: Who gives you the sustenance from the heavens and the earth? Say: Allah." That is, agree on a common ground, which is the recognition that Allah is the true Lord. Such an agreement would be a point of departure to hold dialogue and tackle the difference.
- b. Allah says: "And most surely we or you are on a right way or in manifest error." This establishes objectivity and standing on the same distance between the parties of the difference. According to Al-Fakhr Al-Raazi, if any party describes the Other and his opinion as wrong, that would make him angry. In the case of anger, thinking loses soundness, true understanding is not expected and the purpose of persuading the Other will be missed...even though the Other might be an absolute stray misleader (Al-Razi, 1420H, vol. 25, p. 205).
- c. Allah says: "Say: You will not be questioned as to what we are guilty of, nor shall we be questioned as to what you do." This teaches politeness rather than replying with the same abuse or accusation, as the verse attributes guilt to oneself but deed to the Other.

The next example from Prophet Mohammad's life represents good, uninterrupted listening to the Other and keenness to persuade him of the truth. It is narrated that Utbah – one of Qureish leaders – said: "O son of my brother, you are distinguished by your qualities; yet you have sown discord among our people and cast dissension in our families; you denounced our gods and goddesses and you charge our ancestors with impiety. Now we have come to make a proposition to you, and I ask you to think well before you reject it." "I am listening to you, O Abul-Waleed," said the Prophet. "O son of my brother, if by this affair you intend to acquire riches, honors, and dignity, we are willing to collect for you a fortune larger than is possessed by any one of us; we shall make you our chief

and will do nothing without you. If you desire dominion, we shall make you our king; and if the demon which possesses you cannot be subdued, we will bring you doctors and give them riches until they cure you." When 'Utbah had finished his discourse, the Prophet said: "Have you finished, O Abul-Walid?" Utbah said: "Yes." The Prophet said: "Now listen to me, O Abul-Walid." "I listen," he replied. The Prophet recited to him the first thirteen verses of Fussilat Chapter. Allah says: "تَنْزِيلٌ مِنَ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ. كِتَابٌ فُصِّلَتْ آيَاتُهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا" "Ha Mim!* A revelation from the Beneficent, the Merciful Allah* A Book of which the verses are made plain, an Arabic Quran..." (Fussilat 41:1-3). When the Prophet had finished his recitation and prostrated, he said to Utba: "This is my reply to your proposition; now take what course you find best" (Ibn Is'haaq, 1978, vol. 1, p. 207).

3.2. Manners of Difference

The practical morals found in the culture of difference are numerous. They show the attitude of those great people, who Allah made them famous for adopting Islamic values in difference with the Other and acceptance of the opposing opinion. Among these morals are:

3.2.1. Sincerity and Detachment of Worldly Desires

Abdul-Rahmaan bin Mahdi narrated: "We were in a funeral attended by Abdullah bin Al-Hassan when he was a judge. When a seat was put, he sat with people around him. I asked him a question and he gave a wrong answer. "May Allah amend you!" I said, "The right answer is so and so." Then, he nodded and said: "Then, I withdraw with humiliation. I withdraw with humiliation. To be a follower in the truth is better, for me, than to be a leader in falsehood"" (Ibn Al-Jawzi, 1992, vol. 8, p. 298).

3.2.2. Fairness

Malik narrated: "When (Caliph) Abu-Ja'far Al-Mansour performed pilgrimage, he summoned me. I came to him, we talked and I answered his questions. Then, he said: "I intend to order copying your volumes (Al-Muwatta' book) and sending a copy to each Muslim region. Then, I would order Muslims to apply their content and abandon anything other than this new knowledge. I have found that the essence of knowledge is the heritage and knowledge of the people of Medina." So, I said: "O Leader of Believers, do not do that. People have already received opinions, heard Hadiths and circulated narrations. Each area takes and applies what it has already learnt. They accept the different opinions of the Prophet (Peace and blessing of Allah be upon him)'s companions and others. So, it would be hard to change what they believe in. Let people do what they have and what they have chosen for themselves." Al-Mansour said: "I swear if you obeyed me, I would order it to be done"" (Al-Qurtubi, no date found, p. 41).

3.2.3. Gentleness

It is reported that Omar bin Al-Khattab passed by a Jewish old man, who was begging. So, Omar said: "We have not been kind to you. We took tribute from you when you were young, but we leave you in your old age!" Then he added: "Assign a salary to him from the Treasury" (Ibn Zanjaweh, 1986, vol. 1, p. 169).

3.2.4. Employing the Agreed-upon Area

Younis Al-Sadafi said: "I have never met anyone wiser than Al-Shaafi'i. I once argued with him on a certain matter and then separated. When he saw me later, he took my hand and said: "O Abu-Mousa, cannot we be brothers even though we disagree on a matter!"" Al-Thahabi commented on this incident: "This indicates this scholar's great mentality and deep understanding when peers disagree" (Al-Thahabi, 1427H, vol. 4, p. 280).

4. Conclusion:

4.1. Findings:

- Difference (ikhtilaaf) refers to any dissimilarity in opinion, state or stand. It is an inevitable phenomenon and constitutes no problem in itself. It is even a secret of harmony and integration when people follow manners and positive techniques.
- Difference becomes problematic when it is negatively employed. In this case, common points are minimized, light is shed on disagreement on open matters and the basics of dialogue and manners of Islam are ignored.
- Difference between people is attributed to two main causes: misunderstanding and bad intention.
- There are various mechanisms and manners to govern difference. People, in general, and Sharia specialists, in particular, do not have to avoid difference, but to cope with it, control it and employ it in a positive manner. They need to believe in the inevitability of opinion variety, agree on the many common points, tolerate possible dissimilarities based on sensible religious and mental reasons and go beyond unjustified personal disputes.

4.2. Recommendations:

- The culture of difference needs to be promoted between people, especially in scholarly contexts.

Different parties need to go back to the basics of reason and innateness as well as the indications of religious texts, in a bid to realize the causes for difference with the Other.

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