



# Between Natural & Religious Loyalties

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The Prophet, peace be upon him, said that: “Every child is born upon the primordial disposition (*fiṭrah*).”<sup>2</sup>

## [NATURAL LOYALTIES]

All people share a certain inborn instinct with respect to their relationships and dealings with others, in that they relate to others naturally or instinctively. Islam came to refine this matrix of human relationships, not to forbid people from it or to sever it. In fact, the Qur’an declares that cutting ties with others is actually a hallmark of the misguided: it does not deem it a mistake or a crime to keep ties with people. Allah, Majestic and Exalted is He, states: *Those who break the Pact of Allah after ratifying it, who sever what Allah Has ordered to be joined, and who commit corruption in the earth, such are indeed the losers.*<sup>3</sup>

The love one feels for a relative, spouse, friend, or even for one’s country or people, forms part of the innate, or natural *walā’* - loyalty, love and closeness - a person has in general; and this in no way goes against the religious *walā’*. Muslims from the earliest of times would interact with others in ways that were natural or inbred and with complete liberality. This is a far cry from the behavior of some later people who act on a mixture of misconceptions and harsh understandings, and so are led either to negligence or into extremism.

## [RELIGIOUS LOYALTY]

What is meant by [the religious] *walā’* is to have loyalty to the believers by being attached to them, loving them, maintaining bonds of brotherhood with them, assisting them, and empathizing with them. Without this, there is no meaning of a Muslim community (*ummah*). Indeed,

the Muslim *ummah* exists only by virtue of the ties that bind the hearts of its individuals together in a common sense of *walā’*, or loyalty. Allah, Exalted is He, says: *The believers are but brothers.*<sup>4</sup> Allah, Transcendent is He, also said: *This, your community, is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me!*<sup>5</sup> Allah, Blessed be His Name, further says: *Your friend can be only Allah and His Messenger and those who believe, who establish the prayer, pay the zakāt, and bow down [in prayer]. And whoever takes Allah and His Messenger and those who believe for friends, know with certainty, the party of Allah, they will be victorious.*<sup>6</sup>

This notion of mutual help, empathy, loyalty and love can also be seen in the words of the Prophet, peace be upon him: “The believers in their mutual love and compassion are like a single body, if one part of the body aches, the rest suffers in insomnia and fever.”<sup>7</sup> There is also his statement, peace be upon him: “The believer to another believer are like bricks [in a building], each part supporting the other.”<sup>8</sup>

This, then, is the *walā’* between the believers, and the disavowal, or *barā’a*,<sup>9</sup> of their enemies. This constitutes an essential element of *tawḥīd* - the monotheistic creed of Islam. The spirit of *walā’* entails hearts having love, mercy and affection. Its practical manifestation in everyday life involves help, support and awareness.

## [REJECTING THE “MY TRIBE, RIGHT OR WRONG” MENTALITY]

*Walā’* also necessitates aiding and supporting the truth and rejecting falsehood. This is why there occurs in the hadith of the Oppressor: “Restrain him.”<sup>10</sup> The bond of

loyalty, therefore, is a religious bond; not a tribal one. A distinctive characteristic of this religious bond is that it requires one's *walā'* to be based on rules and principles which transcend individuals and personalities. When an individual contravenes these principles, the best way to demonstrate loyalty is to prevent him from the wrong. It is never right to support any person in wrongdoing or to go along with them in it.

#### [LOYALTY'S FLIP SIDE]

Disavowal, or *barā'a*, in Islam is to declare oneself free or innocent of *shirk* - empartnering others with Allah in the worship of Him; of disbelief (*kufīr*); and of tyranny, wrongdoing and injustice; as well as of whoever manifests or calls to any of this. Say: "O disbelievers! I do not worship what you worship. Nor do you worship what I worship. I shall never worship what you worship, and nor will you ever worship what I worship. To you be your religion, and to me, mine."<sup>11</sup>

The meaning of disavowal or *barā'a* is a unadulterated credal love (*al-ḥubb al-'aqā'idī*) for this religion without, it must be added, divesting the heart of the natural love or humane dealings that are informed by the various types of love and affection: even with non-Muslims. For the basic premise in dealing with those who are not hostile [to Islam and the Muslims] is one of kindness and reciprocating peace. This is explicitly stipulated by Allah in His statement: *Allah does not forbid you to be benevolent and equitable to those who have neither made war on your religion nor driven you from your homes. Allah loves the equitable. Allah only forbids you to make friends with those who have fought against you on account of your faith and driven you from your homes, or abetted others to do so. Those who befriend them are unjust.*<sup>12</sup>

Allah mentions benevolence (*birr*), which is kindheartedness and goodwill; He also mentioned equity (*iqṣāf*), which is justice and fairness. For Muslims are asked, in their dealings, to be just, benevolent and largehearted; and they are told that differences in beliefs cannot be a cause for being unjust. In fact, the various nations are not one, monolithic entity vis-a-vis the Muslims. They are not all the same with regards to how close or distant, moderate or extreme, just or unjust they are to Islam or its followers - even in terms of actual beliefs. Says Allah,

Exalted is He: *They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book there is an upright community who recite the revelations of Allah during the night and fall prostrate before Him.*<sup>13</sup>

What is vital in the issue of disavowal; *barā'a*, is that we do not love the non-Muslims for their actual beliefs or religion - for this would corrupt the very foundation of *barā'a* and render it null and void. In other words, one cannot prefer another religion or faith over and above the religion of Islam. This is inconceivable for a Muslim who is convinced of his faith and is devoted to it: *You will not find those who believe in Allah and the Last Day on friendly terms with those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even though they be their fathers; their sons; their brothers; or their kindred. Allah has written faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Him. He will admit them into gardens watered by running streams where they will dwell forever. Allah is well pleased with them and they with Him. They are the party of Allah, and Allah's party are those who will succeed.*<sup>14</sup>

This passage refers to those who are hostile; those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, and who wage war against His faithful servants. This is made explicitly clear by al-Ṭabarī, Ibn 'Aṭīyyah, and other.

#### [THE "DISAVOWAL" VERSES IN CONTEXT]

Every passage in the Qur'an that prohibits the Muslims from forming loyalties with non-Muslims, then what is intended are those non-Muslims that are actively hostile towards Muslims. Take for instance Allah's saying: *O you who believe! Take not My enemies and your enemies as allies, offering them love though they deny the truth that has come to you and have driven the Prophet and yourselves out [of your city] because you believe in Allah, your Lord. If it was indeed to fight for My cause, and out of a desire to please Me that you left your city, how can you be friendly to them in secret? I know well all that you conceal and reveal. Whoever does so will have strayed from the even path.*<sup>15</sup>

Thus Allah, Transcendent is He, forbids taking as allies and friends those who are engaged in active hostilities towards the Muslims, and prohibits offering any secrets of war to them. For in the very same chapter, or *sūrah*,

Allah states: *Allah does not forbid you to be benevolent and equitable to those who have neither made war on your religion nor driven you out from your homes. Allah loves the equitable.*<sup>16</sup>

So the abhorrence (*karb*) is one of abhorring the [false] beliefs of the unbelievers, and the injustice and enmity that [some of them] meet out. Disavowal is of those who lead wars and spill the blood of innocent Muslims and non-Muslims. Likewise, one must disavow all those who engage in tyranny and oppression, as well as [disavow] all that leads to an increase in tyranny or further weakens the vulnerable and dispossessed. For Islam came to help the oppressed and restrain the oppressor.

#### [LOVING NON-MUSLIMS]

As for *walā'* of a relative degree - if such an expression can be used - such as the love a Muslim feels for a non-Muslim on account of his personality, or due to kinship, friendship, or his kind behavior, there is nothing wrong in this. For this is part of the natural *walā'* which Islam permits: it doesn't seek to obstruct it or to prevent it. In fact, Islam commands us to keep company with parents in kindness, even if they be idolaters.<sup>17</sup> Islam also allows marriage with Jewish or Christian women, even though Allah says about the relationship between spouses: *And He set between you love and compassion.*<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, Allah says of His Prophet, peace be upon him: *You [O Mubammad] do not guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He wills.*<sup>19</sup> This verse refers to [the Prophet's uncle] Abu Ṭālib. For the Prophet, peace be upon him, loved him dearly [despite Abu Ṭālib being a non-Muslim]. Yet this love was in no way unlawful, nor was it at odds with the religious *walā'* that Islam came with and which it rooted firmly in the hearts and minds of the Muslims. Al-Bukhārī cites in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, with a sound chain from Ibn 'Abbās; who remarked: "If Pharaoh had said to me, 'May Allah bless you', I would have said, 'And you to'."<sup>20</sup> For the ethics of Islam teach us to reply to a greeting with its like, and that the reward for good is none other than good.

Whatsmore, Allah says about the believers: *See, you are those who love them though they love you not.*<sup>21</sup> So this confirms that the believers had love for non-Muslims. It only rebukes them for offering love to those who would

not reciprocate that love, and for being compassionate and tolerant to those who sought to inflict humiliation and misfortune on them. The love that is reciprocated or mutually felt is not forbidden in Islam, for natural human relationships are predicated upon peace, tolerance and a sense of fellowship. Islam came to consolidate these values as well as to benefit from them so as to spread its teachings and exemplary ethics; as opposed to cutting-off from people or driving them away.

#### [THE ABRAHAMIC EXAMPLE]

Finally, as for the narrative of Abraham, peace be upon him, then Allah, Exalted is He, says about it: *There is an excellent example for you in Abraham and those who followed him. They said to their people: "We are free of you and whatever you worship besides Allah. Renounce you we do; enmity and hatred will reign between us until you believe in Allah only!" Save Abraham's saying to his father: "I shall ask Allah to forgive you, although I have no power to save you from Him. Our Lord, in You we place our trust, and to You we turn in repentance, and to You is the final return."*<sup>22</sup>

This verse is crystal-clear in depicting reciprocal enmity: *enmity and hatred will reign between us*. Abraham did not, at first, come to the idolaters and reciprocate their enmity towards him. Rather he called them to Islam and counseled them sincerely. But when they declared their hostility towards him, and made clear their contempt, it was only natural and necessary for him to finally reciprocate this hostility so as to safeguard his own faith from harm and injury.

*The prayer of Abraham for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it had become clear to him that he [his father] was an enemy to Allah, he disowned him. Indeed, Abraham was tender-hearted and forbearing.*<sup>23</sup> Abraham did not disown his father immediately but only after months had passed and his father persisted in his violent enmity and contempt for the religion. For this [attitude] contravenes the natural ties which Islam urges people to foster; ties based upon kindness and mercy: *We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds.*<sup>24</sup>

#### [IN CONCLUSION]

The natural, tolerant character which Islam advocates is

there to complete and to consolidate relationships with others. Muslims are asked to harmonize between their natural sense of *walā'*, or loyalty, towards their fellow citizens, their country, etc.; and their religious sense of *walā'* to their creed and their call. In fact, the latter type of *walā'* complements and completes the former type. The Prophet, peace be upon him, insisted: "I have only been sent to complete noble character."<sup>25</sup>

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#### TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

1. Taken from the Arabic section of the website, *Islam Today* ([www.islamtoday.com](http://www.islamtoday.com)), and translated by Abu Aaliyah. Though there is a translation of the text on its English section, it omits certain key points and passages. Furthermore, there were also some parts of the translation which I felt had not quite captured the author's intent and thus needed to be revised. Hence the re-translation.

Rendering texts into English from any language is no doubt a difficult task; not least if it is a nuanced theological text such as this. I cannot, with any certainty, claim that my translation is any "better" than the original translator's. What I am able to say is that it is a more complete translation. I must also add that, in translating, I benefitted from the original translation.

Finally, the original Arabic text had no headings; thus all the headings are from myself. I hope it facilitates the discussion. All footnotes, likewise, have been added by me. And it is by Allah's enabling grace, or *taufiq*, that all things are achieved.

2. Al-Bukhārī, no.1358; Muslim, no.2658.

3. Qur'an 2:27.

4. Qur'an 49:10.

5. Qur'an 21:92.

6. Qur'an 5:56.

7. Al-Bukhārī, no.6011; Muslim, no.2586.

8. Al-Bukhārī, no.481; Muslim, no.2585.

9. *Barā'a*: to become free from, or innocent of, something or someone. In other words, to disavow or disown.

10. This is a part of a hadith recorded in al-Bukhārī, no.2444. Its full text being: The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Help your brother be he oppressed or the oppressor." They inquired: We know how to help him if he is oppressed, but how can we help him if he is the oppressor? The Prophet replied: "Restrain him from wrongdoing; that would be helping him."

11. Qur'an 109:1-6.

12. Qur'an 60:8-9.

13. Qur'an 3:113.

14. Qur'an 58:22.

15. Qur'an 60:1.

16. Qur'an 60:8.

17. As per the Qur'an 31:15, where it strictures: *Bear them company in this worldly life in kindness.*

18. Qur'an 30:21.

19. Qur'an 28:56.

20. *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, no.1116, and its chain is authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*). Cf. al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādith al-Ṣaḥīḥah* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1985), 2:329.

Another report from Ibn 'Abbās, may Allah be pleased with him, (also in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, no.1110) states that: "Reply to the salutation of peace to whomsoever; be it a Jew, Christian or Magian. Allah says [4:86]: *When you are greeted with a greeting, return it with a better greeting or its equal.*"

21. Qur'an 3:119.

22. Qur'an 60:4.

23. Qur'an 9:114.

24. Qur'an 21:107.

25. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 2:381, and the hadith is *ṣaḥīḥ*. Cf. al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādith al-Ṣaḥīḥah* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'arif, 1995), no.45.



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