

TAKING FAITH TO HEART: RECONCILIATION AND FRATERNAL LOVE IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT¹

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Abstract

We are living in a fractious world, where personal relations between the people are not always pleasant. There could be many insignificant, trivial conflicts between individuals, which if they were not resolved at some point, they may grow and may become serious problem not only for personal relations but for community. It is commonly thought greetings, smiling, shaking hands, embracing and kissing one another is the primary cure, or primary precaution for such social problems however, for hearts to truly reconcile and strengthen social bonds, those behaviors are needed but not enough. If such gestures do not spring from a deep-seated conviction that one's fellow being must be loved for the sake of God, then they remain at the level of external social politesse and cannot effect social reform at the deepest, grass-roots level. As Nursi said primary motive of individuals must come from the belief. 'Love for the sake of God, dislike for the sake of God, ju-

1 A paper presented at *the International Symposium: Bringing Faith, Meaning and Peace to Life in a Multicultural World* organized by the Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture, Turkey, October 3-5, 2004.

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gment for the sake of God” must be guiding principles for onces life.

Keywords: Reconciliation, Fraternal Love, Islamic Thought,

Öz

İmanı Kalbe Taşımak: İslam düşüncesinde Uzlaşma ve Kardeşlik Sevgisi

Kişisel ilişkilerin bazan hoş olmadığı çok kırılğan ve problemlı bir dünyada yaşıyoruz. Kişiler arasındaki küçük ve anlamsız tartışmalar eğer zamanında problem büyümeden çözülemezse büyüüp sadece kişileri ilgilendiren problem olmaktan çıkabilir, toplumun bütünü nü rahatsız eder hale gelebilir. Selamlaşma, gülümseme, el sıkışma, kucaklaşma, öpüşme bu tür sosyal problemlerin çaresi ya da önleyici tedbiri olduğunu yaygın biçimde düşünülmektedir. Ancak kalplerin samimi olarak barışması ve sosyal bağların güçlenmesi için bu davranışlar gerekli ama yetersizdir. Şayet birinin diğerini sevmesi, Allah adına olmaz, bu davranışlar Allah inancının gereği olarak yapılmazsa dıştan görünen sosyal kibarlık olarak kalır ve toplumda köklü ve derin değişimlere yol açmaz. Nursi'nin dediği gibi, fertleri harekete geçiren esas sebep inançtan kaynaklanmalıdır. “Allah için seviniz, Allah'ın sevmediğini sevmeyiniz, Allah için hükmediniz.” hayatınızı yönlendiren temel prensipler olmalıdır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Uzlaşma, Kardeşlik sevgisi, İslami Düşünce

1. Introduction

One of the best known verses in the Qur'an with its enormous implications for individual transformation and growth and social reform is from chapter 13, verse 11. The verse states, “Indeed, God does not change people's circumstances unless they change what is in themselves.” According to this verse, change is to be effected first internally in the individual before any meaningful external change can take root. From the Qur'anic perspective, the most important locus for generating

genuine individual change followed by social change is thus clearly the human heart - not to be understood of course merely as a physical organ but as the basic cognitive and emotive center of the human system.

An important consequence of the transformation of the human heart to make it receptive to God's will is the cultivation of fraternal bonds among fellow believers and genuine reconciliation between erstwhile enemies. The centrality of harmonious relationships and the importance of maintaining concord among believers is asserted in Qur'an 49:10 which states, "Indeed the believers are brothers. Make peace among your brothers and fear God, so that you may be shown mercy." An incipient methodology of effecting reconciliation is contained in two significant Qur'anic verses 3:103 and 8:63, which refer to "the reconciliation (lit. joining) of hearts," a process known in Arabic as "ta'lif al-qulub." Through the centuries, Muslim scholars and theologians have taken note of these crucial verses and focused on their conciliatory implications, both in their particular socio-historical contexts and in their general applicability. This paper will now proceed to selectively delineate the exegeses of the two verses 3:103 and 8:63 by some of the most important Qur'an commentators from the medieval and modern periods in order to specifically focus on the meanings of ta'lif al-qulub and their implication for developing a methodology of faith-based reconciliation.

2. Exegeses of Qur'an 3:103

This verse states:

Hold fast, one and all, to the "rope of God" and let nothing divide you. Remember the grace of God towards you, when you were enemies He reconciled (lit. "joined") your hearts and you became through His grace brothers.

2.1. Al-Tabari's Exegesis

The famous medieval exegete Muhammad Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310/923) understands the “rope of God” to be the equivalent of “the religion of God which He has commanded you to follow,” and as a consequence of which, believers are vouchsafed “cordiality [among them], unity based upon the word of Truth, and submission to God’s commandment.”³ He understands the exhortation “Remember the grace of God” to mean “remember the blessing that He conferred on you of friendship and of being gathered together in Islam.”⁴ “Remember!” he explains, “O believers, the bounty of God towards you when you were enemies while polytheists. You killed one another out of tribal partisanship in disobedience to God and His messenger. Then God joined your hearts in Islam (submission [to God]) and made you the brothers of one another after you were enemies and you continue in the bonds of friendship in Islam.”⁵

Al-Tabari then cites two Companion reports in explication of this verse. The first one goes back to Qatada [b. Di’ama] who stated that the verse meant, “You used to slaughter one another in it (sc. the Jahiliyya or the pre-Islamic period) and the strong used to prey on the weak until God brought forth Islam and made of you brothers and reconciled you. By God, and there is no god but He, indeed friendship is mercy and divisiveness is a punishment. The second variant report from Rabi’ (b. Ka’b) states in explication, “You used to kill one another, with the strong among you preying on the weak until God brought forth Islam and joined you together by it, assembled you together, and made of you brothers by means of it.” These two reports, therefore, expound on the intrinsic benefit for believers in general of the remembrance of God and making oneself receptive to submission to His will.⁶

3 Al-Tabari, *Jami’ al-bayan fi tafsir al-Qur’an*, ed. Mahmud Muhammad Shakir and Ahmad Muhammad Shakir (Cairo: 1954), 7:70.

4 Ibid., 7:76.

5 Ibid., 7:77.

6 Ibid.

Al-Tabari provides further occasions of revelation which particularize the meaning of this verse to the specific situation of two key Medinan tribes before and after the advent of Islam. He comments that “the enmity” referred to in this verse refers to the enmity incurred during the wars which were waged between the two Medinan tribes of al-Aws and al-Khazraj before Islam. As the pre-Islamic Ayyam al-’Arab (“the Battle-Days of the Arabs”) literature informs us, these wars had lasted for about 120 years. Ibn Ishaq (d. ca. 151/768), the famous biographer of the Prophet, recalls that these wars took place between al-Aws and al-Khazraj “even though they were full brothers.” The intensity of their enmity was unprecedented, according to Ibn Ishaq, and “then God Almighty extinguished that (sc. the enmity) through Islam and brought them together through His messenger, Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.” Through this verse, al-Tabari affirms, God was reminding the Ansars (the Medinan Muslims) of the misery and wretchedness that had afflicted them on account of their mutual hostility, their slaying and fear of one another. The verse is a further reminder of how acceptance of Islam and the guidance of the Prophet, accompanied by faith in him and the message he brought forth, finally led to reconciliation and security and facilitated the development of the bonds of friendship and brotherhood between them.⁷

Al-Tabari concludes this section by commenting on the last part of the verse (“and thus you became brothers by His grace”). This means, he remarks,

You became sincere, truthful brothers because God, exalted is He, joined your hearts through Islam and the word of Truth, through cooperation in aiding the people of faith and rallying against unbelievers who opposed you, so that there is no malice and no enmity between you.⁸

7 Ibid, 7:78.

8 Ibid., 7:84.

2.2. Al-Qurtubi's Exegesis

Like al-Tabari, the seventh/thirteenth century Andalusian exegete al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1273) understands the “rope of God” mentioned at the beginning of the verse to refer to the Qur’an on the basis of two hadiths narrated by Ibn Mas’ud. A third hadith, also narrated by Ibn Mas’ud, glosses the phrase as referring to “communitarian life” (Ar. al-jama’a). Al-Qurtubi remarks that the meanings are intertwined and related for God has enjoined sociability and forbidden separation from the community, for “separation is [equivalent to] destruction and communitarian affiliation is [equivalent to] salvation.”⁹

The prohibition: “do not become disunited” warns against the fissiparousness that afflicted other religious communities in the practice of their religion and exhorts believers to remain brothers in “the religion of God” by not blindly following every whim and various objectives. Al-Qurtubi goes on to clarify, however, that the verse does not rule out differences with regard to secondary matters of religion (Ar. al-furu’). If such differences do not lead to dissension and arise in the course of extrapolating legal rulings from and explicating the religious law, then they are not harmful differences. The Companions of the Prophet often differed from one another in the derivation of legal rulings in new circumstances, but remained in spite of that, amicable towards one another. Al-Qurtubi cites the well-known hadith “The difference of my community is a mercy.” The kind of difference God forbids is the kind that leads to corruption. Al-Tirmidhi records the well-known hadith in which the Prophet warns, as related by Abu Hurayra, that his community would split up into seventy-three sects, just as the Jews and the Christians had split up into seventy-one or seventy-two sects.” The one sect that would be saved is “the one of [communitarian] unity” (wa-hiya al-jama’a). Al-Qurtubi then goes on to list in great detail the various sects which need not concern us here.”¹⁰

9 Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami’ li-ahkam al-Qur’an* (Cairo: n.d.), 2:1401.

10 Ibid., 2:1402 ff.

The rest of the verse, al-Qurtubi continues, enjoins the believer to remember God’s bounties, “the greatest of which is Islam and following Muhammad, upon whom be peace. It is thereby that enmity and dissension are dissolved and there is [instead] love and affection.” The direct referents in this verse are the Aws and Khazraj, although the verse also has a general meaning, according to al-Qurtubi. It is through God’s blessings that the two former hostile tribes became brothers in religion.¹¹

2.3. Ibn Kathir’s Exegesis

In his commentary on 3:103, the popular fourteenth century exegete Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1352) understands *habl Allah* (“the rope of God”) as referring to God’s covenant (‘ahd Allah) and His protection (dhimma). According to a report from al-Harith al-A’war, this phrase refers to the Qur’an. The command “Do not become separated” is understood to specifically enjoin communal life and forbid withdrawal from society.¹²

The rest of the verse, according to Ibn Kathir, points to the Aws and Khazraj who were prone to much fighting in the Jahiliyya, and on account of their bitter enmity, harbored malignant hatred towards one another. All that was to change, however, “when God brought forth Islam, and those who entered it, entered it and became brothers, loving one another through the majesty of God, cooperating with one another in a spirit of piety and God-consciousness. Their disbelief in God, reflected in their constant feuding and fractiousness, had brought them to the edge of the Fire, from which they were delivered when God guided them to faith. Ibn Kathir cross-references here Qur’an 8:63 (discussion of which is given below).

That such a spirit of conciliation and fraternal love is far more

11 Ibid.

12 Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-‘azim*, (Giza: 2002), 3:134.

precious than material compensation is forcefully underscored in the following report recorded by Ibn Kathir regarding the division of spoils after the battle of Hunayn in 8/629. When some of the Ansar during this event remonstrated that others were being given preference over them in the allotment of booty, the Prophet addressed them thus, “O gathering of the Ansar, did I not find you in error and then God guided you through me? Were you not divided and then God brought you together? Were you not in need and God enriched you through me?” Those present realized their mistake and acknowledged that “God and His messenger have been most gracious.”¹³

Like the exegete Mujahid, Ibn Kathir points to the danger inherent in relaxing one’s guard against potential fractiousness and thus allowing seditious elements to stir up enmity. He does this by relating the following anecdote narrated by Muhammad b. Ishaq b. Yasar who stated that Qur’an 3:103 was revealed in connection with a specific incident concerning the Aws and Khazraj. It so happened that a Medinan Jew passed by a gathering of the Aws and Khazraj and was displeased to see the concord and amity reigning among them. So he dispatched one of his men to sit among them and revive the memory of their prolonged wars, such as the vicious battle of the Bu’ath. The man did as he was told and before long, he had succeeded in inflaming the passions of the Aws and Khazraj to the extent that they started chanting their battle slogans and reaching for their weapons. News of this reached the Prophet and he hurriedly approached them and began to calm them down. He said, “Are you harking back to the pre-Islamic period while I am among you?” Then he recited to them Qur’an 3:103, at which they were filled with remorse. They began to make up with one another, and embraced one another after having cast away their weapons.”¹⁴

This report powerfully demonstrates the recuperative power of the remembrance of God and His limitless grace towards humans, whi-

13 Ibid., 3:136.

14 Ibid.

ch effaces the memory of past wrongs and allows for reconciliation. But such memories can be resurrected by those malignantly inclined to sow dissension. The constant invocation of God in gratitude for His immeasurable beneficence towards humankind is, however, a potent shield against the incitements of troublemakers and helps preserve the unity of believers.

2.4. Muhammad ‘Abduh’s Exegesis

The nineteenth century Muslim reformist and scholar Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) also understands this verse to refer to the Aws and Khazraj tribes of Medina and their reconciliation in Islam after their bitter past of chronic hostility. He also sees this verse as containing a strong denunciation of the tribalism of the pre-Islamic period, termed in Arabic al-’asabiyya. He marshals two hadiths as proof-texts to further clarify his position. The first is recorded by al-Bukhari on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas, in which the Prophet states, “The most reprehensible of people before God are three: one who is a disbeliever in advanced age; one who wishes to resort to the customs of the Jahiliyya in Islam; and one who seeks to shed the blood of a Muslim without any rightful cause to do so.” In another hadith narrated by Jubayr b. Mut’im, as recorded by Abu Da’ud, the Prophet declares, “One who invokes tribalism is not one of us.”¹⁵

‘Abduh sees this pre-Islamic tribalism resurgent in his own time (the late nineteenth century) in the nationalisms of Europeans, which, he regretfully observes, is also in the process of being adopted by Westernized Muslims. The latter, he states, seek to impose the idea of nationalism by trying to deceive others into thinking that this is the way to achieve national glory. ‘Abduh regards this, however, as a relapse into pre-Islamic tribalism and asserts that true advancement of the nation lies rather in uniting all its citizens under Islam, which ensures

15 Muhammad ‘Abduh, *Tafsir al-manar* (Cairo: 1931), 4:21.

the well-being and welfare of all people, regardless of their religion or ethnicity. This is what “holding fast to the rope of God,” as occurs in the verse, means and it is thereby that fraternity in God is achieved. It is through “holding fast to God’s rope” that one may successfully resist divisiveness and sectarianism which leads to the shedding of blood, as happened in the Jahili past. He reminds us that, according to the reports which have come down to us, the wars between the Aws and Khazraj lasted 120 years until Islam put an end to them, and “God reconciled their hearts through His messenger, [upon him be] blessings and peace.”¹⁶

3. Exegeses of Qur’an 8:63

And He has reconciled their hearts. If you had spent all that is in the earth, you could not have joined their hearts, but God has united them. Indeed He is Almighty, All-Wise.

3.1. Al-Tabari’s Exegesis

Al-Tabari comments that the phrase in this verse “He joins their hearts” refers to the reconciliation of the hearts of the believers among the Aws and the Khazraj “based on [acceptance] of His true religion” after the severe dissensions and fractiousness that had plagued them. He thereby led them to become united and caused them to become “brothers after having been enemies.”

Al-Tabari further makes clear that this verse indicates that the establishment of true amity and genuine reconciliation can only be effected through one’s sincere belief in God and the divine guidance that one is then privy to. Addressing the Prophet in this verse, God counsels him:

“Were you to spend, O Muhammad, all that is on earth of gold, paper, and other desirable things, you would not be able to reconcile

¹⁶ Ibid.

their hearts with all your strength, for it is God Who joins them in guidance. Thus they come together and unite as a strengthening from God for you, as support from Him, and as a provision against your enemy.”

With such divine aid and support manifested in the unity of believers around him, the Prophet is assured of victory over his adversaries and encouraged to place his trust only in God.

Al-Tabari then goes on to record the exegeses of various commentators on this verse. The well-known early exegete al-Suddi (d. 128/745), for example, understood this verse to refer to the Medinan Ansar, who became reconciled with one another in Islam after their vicious tribal feuding. A similar exegesis is attributed to the famous biographer Ibn Ishaq and the Companion Bashir b. Thabit.

The early exegete Mujahid b. Jabr (d. 104/722) was of the opinion that the statement “Were you to expend all that is on earth you would not be able to reconcile their hearts,” meant that when two Muslims met and shook hands, their sins are forgiven.” A variant exegesis attributed to Mujahid offers further elucidation of this somewhat elliptical comment. According to this variant, ‘Abda b. Abi Lubaba related that he met Mujahid and the latter took his hand in his own and said, “If you should see two individuals who harbor love for God (*mutahabban fi’llah*) and one of them takes the hand of the other and smiles at him, their sins drop off them just as the leaves drop from the tree.” ‘Abda told Mujahid, “But indeed that is easy.” Mujahid remarked, “Do not say that, for indeed God has stated, ‘Were you to expend all that is on earth you would not be able to reconcile their hearts.’” ‘Abda then realized that Mujahid was far more perspicacious than him.

The two reports taken together convey Mujahid’s conviction that sincere faith in God results in genuine bonds of friendship and good will among believers, expressed outwardly in gestures of friendship

towards one another, such as in shaking hands and exchanging smiles. But simply going through such motions does not automatically create a sense of bonhomie, unless they are firmly embedded in faith and love for God - this latter being a much harder task, as pointed out by Mujahid - and can only be effected by God Himself. Once firmly implanted in one's heart, love for God translates into love for one's fellow beings. Another report suggests that effusive expressions of affection are a natural consequence of the believer's love for God and, as a consequence, for His created beings. Fudayl b. Ghazwan related that he encountered Abu Ishaq and greeted him, upon which the latter asked, "Do you know me?" Fudayl replied, "Yes. And if it were not for my bashfulness before you, I would have kissed you."

Feelings of harmony and love towards one's fellow human beings are fragile, however, and must be constantly nurtured against the onset of divisiveness. For as one report on the authority of 'Umayr b. Ishaq warns, "the first [thing] to be removed from among people is concord and affection (Ar. ulfa)."¹⁷

3.2. Al-Qurtubi's Exegesis

In his exegetical work, al-Qurtubi focuses more briefly, in comparison with al-Tabari, on this verse and sees it essentially as parallel to 3:103. Thus 8:63 is also understood to refer specifically to the reconciliation between the two tribes of Aws and Khazraj after the advent of Islam. Al-Qurtubi further points to the rabid enmity that existed between Arab tribes in the Jahiliyya and comments that its dissipation in the Islamic period must be considered "one of the miracles of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him," in view of the fact that "they were the most prone to violence among God's creation." But then "God reconciled their hearts through faith," so that they would fight only to safeguard religion from its enemies. Al-Qurtubi refers to the alternate

¹⁷ Ibid.

explanation that the reconciliation in this verse refers more specifically to the bonds of friendship between the Meccan Emigrants and the Medinan Helpers and remarks that the meaning of this explanation is similar to the former.¹⁸

3.3. Ibn Kathir's Exegesis (d. 774/1352)

Ibn Kathir, like al-Tabari and other exegetes, also emphasizes the role of faith in God in extinguishing the rabid enmity between Aws and Khazraj in the pre-Islamic period and replacing it with “your obedience, and your mutual help and support of one another.” It was God Himself, “Almighty and Wise,” who brought about this reconciliation for “He does not dash the hopes of those who rely on Him.” Those whose hearts are reconciled are “those who love one another for the sake of God,” as related by the Companion ‘Abd Allah Ibn Mas’ud. Further, Ibn ‘Abbas is quoted as saying that “the bonds of blood-relationship may be severed and [God’s] bounty may be rejected, but when God brings hearts together, nothing can sway them.” Ibn ‘Abbas then proceeded to recite, “Were you to spend all that is on earth, you would not be able to reconcile their hearts.”¹⁹

The rest of Ibn Kathir’s exegesis of this verse largely resembles that of al-Tabari’s.

3.4. Muhammad ‘Abduh’s Exegesis

The well-known modern reformist exegete Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) in tandem with the medieval exegetes, also understands the Aws and Khazraj to be the referents in this verse. Taken together with Qur’an 3:103, the verse points to the Ansar and, according to the view of most commentators, does not deal with the Muhajirun at all. But

18 16. See his *al-Jami‘ li-ahkam al-Qur’an* (Cairo: Dar al-Sha‘b, n.d.), 4:2881.

19 See his *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-‘Azim*, ed. Mustafa Sayyid Muhammad et al. (Giza: n.d.), 7:114-15.

‘Abduh is of the opinion that 8:63 may be understood to refer to the Muhajirun and the Ansar together since “by God’s grace, they became brothers²⁰ without mutual envy or hostility, as is often common in such situations. He refers to the incident of the division of spoils after the battle of Hunayn and remarks that God through His grace and the wisdom of His messenger had averted any ill consequences.”²¹

“Were you to spend all that is on earth, you could not reconcile their hearts,” means, Abduh explains, that the Prophet had conferred the grace of God upon the believers through faith and a brotherhood which was much stronger in regard to affection and depth of emotion than a brotherhood based on common descent and shared nationality. Given the duration of their internecine warfare and their deep-seated hostility, no amount of worldly goods or benefits could have eradicated such a grievous state of affairs. Only sincere faith - the fulcrum of happiness in this world and the next - could have effaced such rancorous hostility. ‘Abduh understands this verse to also apply to the Muhajirun, who became brothers in faith despite differences in social status and worldly rank. He very expressively states this thus: As for the Muhajirun, reconciliation (ta’lif) occurred among their rich and the poor, their masters and their clients, their nobility and their common people, in spite of the arrogance of the Jahiliyya that had previously existed among them.” It was this enmity among them that allowed them to endure the enmity of their fellow tribesmen and relatives for the sake of God. None of this could have been achieved through all the wealth and enticements of the world.

‘Abduh then goes on to point to the centrality of love in human relationships as asserted by wise people through the ages. They agree that

20 18. This refers to the mu’akhat whereby the Prophet paired in most cases a Meccan Emigrant with a Medinan Helper to foster brotherly relations between them.

21 See his *Tafsir al-Manar* (Cairo: 1349/1931), 10:70-71.

“Love is the greatest of all bonds among humans and the most potent inducement to happiness is human social life and its refinement.” They further concur that in the absence of love, nothing else can take its place in repelling evil, while the proper functioning of society is contingent on “the virtue of justice” (fadilat al-’adl). While previously love was considered to be instinctual and not a matter of choice, while justice was an act of deliberation (lit: “one of the acquired actions;” Ar. min al-a’mal al-kasbiyya), Islam made love a virtue and justice an obligatory duty, the latter being obligatory upon all who reside in the Islamic state, with no distinction between the Muslim and non-Muslim, the pious and the impious, the rich and the poor, etc.²²

4. Said Nursi’s Thought

In his well-known work *Risale-i Nur*, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in his Twenty-Second Letter deals with the issues of disunity and discord among believers and the virtues of inculcating among them feelings of fraternity and love. He states,

Dispute and discord among the believers, and partisanship, obstinacy and envy, leading to rancor and enmity among them, are repugnant and vile, are harmful and sinful, by the combined testimony of wisdom and the supreme humanity that is Islam, for personal, social, and spiritual life. They are in short, poison for the life of man.²³

Said Nursi underscores the centrality of reconciliation in the Qur’anic paradigm of harmonious co-existence on the basis of particularly Qur’an 49:10, 41:34, and 3:134, all of which stress the importance of maintaining concord and fraternal ties among believers. Verse 41:34, which states “Repel evil with what is better than it; then the one betwe-

22 Ibid.

23 Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Letters*, tr. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: 1997), 2:311.

en whom and yourself enmity prevails will become like your friend;” and 3:134, which states “Those who suppress their anger and forgive people - verily God loves those who do good” in particular counsel believers not to give in to the natural impulse to seek revenge for the infliction of some harm upon them, The suppression of one’s possibly justifiable anger and subsequent forgiveness is a far superior course of action because it is selfless and strengthens the community of believers in unity rather than promoting divisiveness. The medieval exegete Ibn Kathir in his commentary on 41:34 says that it is precisely the act of charitableness and kindness (al-ihsan) evident in repelling evil with good (that is, by forsaking retaliation for some injury) which causes your adversary to seek reconciliation with you, to develop affection and sympathy for you, so much so that he or she now becomes transformed into “your intimate friend or your relative on account of [his or her] compassion for and charity towards you.”²⁴

In his detailed discussion of why rancor and enmity among believers are dangerous toxins, Bediuzzaman also emphasizes the heart as the locus for sustained beneficial change in human relationships. He warns that the enmity within one’s heart is far more detrimental to the spiritual and physical well-being of the believer than the enmity of an external enemy. He advises,

If you wish to nourish enmity, then direct it against the enmity in your heart attempt to rid yourself of it. Be an enemy to your evil-commanding soul and its caprice and attempt to reform it, for it inflicts more harm on you than all else. Do not engage in enmity against other believers on account of that injurious soul.²⁵

The best way to defeat your enemy is in fact to “respond to his evil with good” as the Qur’an counsels. A quintessential trait of the sin-

24 Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* (Beirut: 1990), 4:103.

25 Nursi, *Letters*, 2:314.

cere believer is nobility, both of intent and action. Treating your enemy with kindness and goodness is the nobler course of action, Nursi explains, and allows him or her the opportunity to repent and become a friend. Returning one's enemy's hostility causes him or her to persist in a state of enmity, for even if the enemy is outwardly defeated, hatred will continue to burn in his or her heart, and a true resolution of the hostility cannot be attained.²⁶

Said Nursi also stresses, like the medieval exegetes before him, that when genuine love towards one's fellow human beings resides in one's heart, then "(t)he believer loves and should love his brother, and is pained by any evil he sees in him. He attempts to reform him not with harshness but gently." How can that not be after all? The believers are united by a commonality of belief and purpose. "The unity of belief," Bediuzzaman declares, "necessitates also the unity of hearts, and the oneness of our creed demands the oneness of our society." Aggression towards a fellow believer is thus tantamount to transgressing against the entire community of the faithful which is built upon a collectivity of fraternal bonds at the personal level.²⁷

Like al-Qurtubi before him, Bediuzzaman endorses positive differences of opinion which seek not to destroy and dominate but to reform and improve the other. The first promotes partisanship which is extremely destructive of cordial social relationships while the latter promotes a healthy pluralism of ideas which are mutually reinforcing, wedded as they are to the pursuit of a common objective.²⁸

This common objective is to act for the sake of God and ward off the discord and anarchy associated with anti-God forces such as the Dajjal ("the anti-Christ") at the end of time. Nursi warns, "If one does

26 Ibid., 2:314-15.

27 Ibid., 2:313.

28 Ibid., 2:317-18.

not make of the exalted rules, ‘Love for the sake of God, dislike for the sake of God, judgment for the sake of God’ the guiding principles of one’s conduct, dispute and discord will result.”²⁹

5. Conclusion

The two principal Qur’anic verses under consideration and their exegeses by some of the most prominent Muslim commentators through time have much to tell us today about faith-based resolution of conflictual situations and harmonious coexistence with others. The verses locate the locus of both love and animosity within the human heart - which of the two gets the upper hand within it is contingent upon certain choices of the individual. The individual, on the one hand, may choose to believe in and submit to God, thereby cleansing his or her heart of resistance to His will and allowing one’s heart to be flooded with love for Him and, consequently, for His creation. On the other, he or she can reject faith in God and harden one’s heart against one’s fellow human being and thus allow oneself to be swept away by worldly needs and desire for dominance. The two diametrically opposed states are exemplified by the Medinan tribes of Aws and Khazraj who were intractable enemies before the advent of Islam. But once faith entered their hearts through their submission to God, it was God Himself, as the exegetes, remind us, who transformed their inward state from one of animosity to fraternal love and reconciliation. The exegetes are thus clearly alluding to the transformative power of selfless love unvitiated by ulterior motives other than the common pursuit and defense of a higher truth and reality.

In terms of generating social harmony, several reports relate that internal feelings of fraternal love need to be expressed in external gestures of bonhomie and affection towards one another, such as smiling, shaking hands, embracing and kissing one another. For hearts to truly reconcile and strengthen social bonds, it is not enough, however, to

29 27. Ibid., 2:319.

simply go through these gestures of conciliation and rapprochement. If such gestures do not spring from a deep-seated conviction that one's fellow being must be loved for the sake of God, then they remain at the level of external social politesse and cannot effect social reform at the deepest, grass-roots level. As the late 1st/7th century exegete Mujahid had counseled, transformation of one's heart as a prelude to genuine reconciliation is a much more difficult and challenging enterprise and requires that one be, above all, constantly receptive to God's guidance and His will. Reconciliation, once effected, requires constant vigilance and nurturing since, as 'Umayr b. Ishaq had warned, friendship and intimacy among people are susceptible to dissipation in adverse circumstances. This is further demonstrated in the example that the thirteenth century exegete Ibn Kathir provides of the incitement of the Aws and Khazraj to the brink of violence because they allowed one skilled in the art of sedition to inflame their passions. It was the Prophet himself who reminded them of God's favor towards them in creating bonds of fraternal love between them. This drew them back from the edge of violence and caused them to fling away their weapons and turn repentantly towards one another.

The Qur'anic concept of "the joining" or "reconciliation of hearts" (ta'lif al-qulub), as explicated by exegetes from Mujahid to Said Nursi, is a particularly important one in the general context of quotidian human relationships and of special relevance today in the field of conflict resolution and religious peacebuilding in our fractious world. It offers a preliminary methodology of effecting reconciliation among adversaries, rooted in love for God which translates (or is meant to translate) into love and respect for all God's created beings. Contemporary Muslims may use this concept as a useful springboard for developing more detailed procedures for constructive peace-building, thereby taking to heart their faith and more effectively implementing its moral imperatives.

6. References

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