**WHAT DEFINES A MUSLIM**



**14:24**. Do you not see how God strikes a parable of a good word: (a good word is) like a good tree – its roots holding firm (in the ground) and its branches in heaven,(1)

**14:25**. It yields its fruit in every season due by its Lord's leave. So God strikes parables for human beings, in order that they may reflect on them and infer the necessary lessons.(2)

 Hadith

A true Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hands Muslims are safe. And a Muhajir (emigrant) is the one who abandons all that God has forbidden.” (3)

 Man uses examples to elaborate his view points and draws on history for lesson to learn from. At times only a few simple words carry a great weight and other times engaging expression couched in beautiful language leaves a lasting impression. Keeping in view the nature of man, Allah (SWT) has given many examples, made many comparisons and narrated many stories of earlier Prophets and people to help deduce lessons. Our beloved Prophet (SAW)’s comments, recommendations and advices are masterpieces of literary beauty and the best examples of brevity and wisdom loaded with rich substance. Allah (SWT) in *Aayah* 24-25 of *Surah Ibrahim* says: 

“[Prophet], do you not see how Allah makes comparisons? A good word is like a good tree whose root is firm and whose branches are high in the sky, yielding constant fruit by its Lord’s permission – Allah makes such comparisons for people so that they may reflect…”

“Good/gracious tree” according to *Mujahid* (RA) and *Akramah* (RA) refers to the date tree. *Imaam Tirmizi* (RehmA) quotes *Anas bin Maalik* (RA) that Prophet (SAW) recited the above *Aayah*, when a dish full of fresh dates was brought to him and he interpreted it to mention the date tree.

Once while sitting among his companions, Prophet (SAW) asked: “Tell me the name of the tree which doesn’t shed it leaves, and it resembles to a *Momin* in nature?” The companions thought of many wild trees found in the woods, but *Abdullah* *bin* *Umar* (RA) rightly guessed the answer, but did not speak his mind because being the youngest in the gathering of ten. It is said that *Abu Bakr* (RA) and *Umar* (RA) were also present there. The companions submitted: “*Ya Rasul Allah*, please name that tree for us.” Prophet (SAW) said: “It is the date tree.”  *Imam Bukhari* has mentioned this tradition in ten places and *Haafiz Ibne Hajar* (RehmA) has given references from many other books in this context. [Fath al Bari]

We learn from this tradition that we should tactfully inquire for the religious knowledge and understanding of our friends and acquaintances. A teacher should ask his students, parents their children, a sheikh his disciples, a religious scholar his friends, and a supervisor his subordinates. Application with wisdom of such a practice promotes knowledge beneficial for intellectual and spiritual growth. Our meetings and get togethers these days are full of aimless discussion and gossips. We want to be up to date in worldly affairs, but our quest for religious knowledge is far less in comparison. We are judgmental about others, but fail to take into account our own shortcomings. Poet Jigar’s couplet mirrors our condition. He says:

“Man claims to have the ultimate wisdom, shame! for he stoops too low.

He surveys the whole world to find flaws, yet remains ignorant of faults within.”

The tradition also teaches us to respect our elders. Whenever Prophet (SAW) posed a question, his companions submitted with humility that Allah and His Messenger knew the best. *Abdullah bin Umar* (RA) though knew the right answer, yet he didn’t speak out of respect for his elders. One should be brief and should speak only when it is appropriate. Fear of Allah instills care and caution, and its absence makes a man to run his mouth unbridled. It is very sad that values have changed for the worst and good manners and etiquettes are given no importance. Intolerance, arguments for the sake of arguments, self-righteousness, and giving opinion without knowledge has become a fashionable trend these days. Disrespect and disregard for elders is in vogue. These ills have corroded our associations, our institutions and our organizations. The attitude of Prophet (SAW)’s companions teaches us that we should be careful while addressing our elders and be respectful to them.

According to a source, when *Abdullah bin Umar* (RA) told his father *Umar Farooq* (RA) that he had guessed the right answer, *Umar* told his son: “I wish you had told to make me happy more than having red camels.” That tells us that parents should feel proud of their children for their intelligence and understanding of religious knowledge and should be concerned on the lack to it. That is yet another sad situation. Parents are happy on worldly success of their children, but don’t pay any attention on their religious education, and if they do, it is not done properly. Religious education is not encouraged in our society. You know that only that house is damaged by a storm, which stands on week foundations. If we raise our children properly and train them in good morals, our society will change for the better.

Scholars have given different reasons for Prophet (SAW)’s comparing a *Momin* with a date tree. For example the date tree remains ever green, it is shady, produces a delicious and nutritious fruit. Tree leaves like everything else do *Tasbih,* glorify Allah (SWT), so a *Momin* too should keep himself engaged in the remembrance of Allah, by tongue or in his heart at all times and on all occasions. He must maintain his connection with his Lord.

No part of the date tree is useless, even the seeds of date are used as a fodder for camels. Its leaves were used to thatch the roof, and they were also used for insulation. Its wood is durable and weather resistant. It blooms even in the desert and scarcity of water doesn’t effect its growth. It looks very graceful even from a distance and stands tall as a sentry.

*Hafiz Ibne Qayyim* (RehmA) has listed many attributes of the date tree and highlighted its resemblance with a *Momin*’s character.

1. Faith in the heart of a *Momin* is as strong as the firm roots of the tree.
2. *Momin* is pleasant and helpful and his association is beneficial to all like the tree which yields delicious sweet fruits.
3. Dress of piety adores a *Momin* like the date tree which is a thing of beauty be it spring, summer, autumn or winter.
4. *Momin* remains firm, strong, patient and committed to his faith weathering all vicissitudes of life, like the date tree which stands the onslaught of inclement weather and storms and continues to hold to its grace.
5. *Momin* is hard on Allah’s enemies like the toughness of tree’s bark.
6. *Momin’s* scales greater heights in virtue like the tree which yields greater benefits

as it ages.

1. *Momin* never looses his virtuous nature and is a source of comfort and for the good of others. Similarly the benefits of the date tree are everlasting.

Prophet (SAW) said: “The best among you is he, from whom you always expect good and remain safe from his mischief, and the worst among you is he, from whom you don’t expect any good and are not safe from his mischief.” [Miftahu Daaris Sa’adah, by Hafiz Ibne Qayyim]

*Kanzul Ummal* (44152] also quotes this tradition as: “The best among you is he, whom people get the most benefit from.”

Imagine the life style of the Arabs 1400+ years ago and see how Allah (SWT) and Prophet (SAW) used the strategy of comparison from their own physical environment and taught them to build a character befitting the attributes of a *Momin.(4)*

Etymologically speaking, the word Muslim and the verb sa-li-ma both come from the root silm. This means that for Muslims, every matter takes place in line with silm (security), salamah (safety), and Muslim-ness. Muslims are seized by such a divine attraction that all of their actions take place around this powerful center.

They greet everyone with salaam, thereby placing love for themselves in everyone’s heart.[2] They end their prayers with salaam. All people, jinn, angels, and conscious creatures receive their salaam. That is, they exchange greetings with invisible creatures as well. Until now, no other people have extended this circle of greeting to such a degree as have the Muslims. Islam consists of performing such principal duties as fasting, giving alms, performing the Hajj, and striving to profess the faith. This means that they set sail on the sea of safety and security by obeying the command: Enter safety (Islam) whole-heartedly (2:208). Those who throw themselves into that sea emanate safety and Islam in every condition. No one sees anything but goodness in the actions and behavior of such people.

The ideal believers who enter an atmosphere of safety and security, having so immersed themselves in that atmosphere that they harm no one with their hands or tongues. This refers only to the true and ideal Muslims who leave their mark on all minds, not those who appear or claim to be so, or to those whose identity cards or passports have “Muslim” written on them.

Real Muslims are people in whom one can feel confidence and trust, so much so that other Muslims can turn their backs on them without a second thought. One can entrust a family member to such people without fear; this person will suffer no injury from the hand or tongue of the Muslim. If one were to attend a gathering with a true Muslim, one could leave in full confidence that no one will gossip about one, nor would one have to listen to gossip about others. Such Muslims are as sensitive to the dignity and honor of other people as they are to their own. They do not eat; they feed others. They do not live for themselves; they live to enable others to live. They will even sacrifice their spiritual pleasure for others.(5)

May Allah enable us to realize the importance of the gift of life and the countless blessings we have been bestowed with and utilize our time prudently and wisely and the way it pleases Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW). Aameen!

**References**

**(1) 14:24.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(2) 14:25. The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(3) Bukhari, Iman, 4; Abu Dawud, Jihad, 2**

**(4) neicc.net Khutbahs**

**(5) M. Fethullah Gulen, Fountain Magazine**