

What Is Your Identity?

In this ever evolving globalized world, the word Identity has taken on a whole new meaning. In the pre-modern world, often a person belonged to very concrete social strata--be it religious, economic, tribal, or political. This structure is changing with the globalization of the world; and more and more people are grappling with the concept of personal identity. Muslims, as part of this world, are not immune to this saga. Many second generation Muslim immigrants often struggle with identifying themselves as part of one or the other culture and reconciling it with their religious identity as well. As a result, we have a confused, if not disconnected population of young Muslims emerging on the world stage.

When Allah SWT revealed the following words in the Quran, He knew what paradigms we would be dealing with.

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا

This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion. (Surah Maidah: 3)

Allah SWT sent His Messenger Muhammad SAW with a message that is complete in its entirety; any issues we are dealing with can be solved by extracting messages from the Qur'an, teachings of the Prophet, and/or the teachings of the righteous predecessors. If we can't find the answers, then we either haven't been seeking sincerely or are just looking at the wrong places.

The claim that Islam has the cure for all of the social ills is not baseless. Plagues such as social oppression, addiction, family disintegration, religious and ethnic discrimination, and racism can all be solved by true teachings of Islam. The issue at hand of identity crisis among Muslims can be easily solved if we know the true meaning of identity. Islam does not entertain or encourage tribal, national, and ethnic affiliations. Once a person embraces Islam, his or her true identity is a Muslim; besides Islamic brotherhood all the rest of the affiliations are superficial and unimportant. RasulAllah SAW stressed about this issue in his farewell pilgrimage in the following words:

All mankind is from Adam and Hawwā', an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood.

Islam only cares about the spiritual status of the human being as Prophet SAW said:

Allah doesn't look at your bodies or your wealth; rather He looks at your hearts and deeds.

Islam is the willful submission to Allah SWT and His rules and regulations. A person is not a Muslim just because he was born into a Muslim family or possesses a Muslim name; that is why there is no concept of baptism in Islam. A person has to proclaim his submission to God and then act according to this proclamation knowing that he is accountable to God for his behavior, which makes Islam a status of the heart and body. Once this fact is established then the person's sole concern is to achieve the standard that is set by Allah and His Prophet to be called a Muslim. Once a person has received the status of Islam, he can perfect his relationship with Allah further until he reaches the station of belief and earn the title of a believer or *Mo`min*. After this, the highest status earned by the great souls is that of perfection or *Ihsaan* wherein one is called a *Mohsin*.

Reaching the status of *Islam*, *Iman*, and *Ihsaan* is a life long struggle. It requires sincerity, patience, and consistency; but above all it requires one to know the qualities of these people. In this article we will inshaAllah list the qualities of a Muslim and a *Mo`min*; once these qualities become a part of your personality, know that you are on your way to reach the level of *Ihsaan*.

Qualities of a Muslim:

1. One who has fully submitted to the will of Allah SWT and follows the way of Ibraheem AS and Muhammad SAW.
2. One who safeguards others from his tongue and hands.
3. One from whom his neighbors are safe, and he fulfills their rights.
4. One whose heart and mind is according to the teachings of Islam. If it is otherwise, then it is considered hypocrisy.
5. His heart is the reflection of his mind and his limbs (actions) are the reflection of his heart. If his mind is not stable, then his actions will not be according to the teachings of Islam.
6. His/her tongue is moist by the remembrance of Allah.
7. He/she keeps the covenants and promises.
8. The one who hates to be disgraced by Allah and loves to be elevated by Him SWT.
9. He runs away from everything displeasing to Allah to everything that is beloved to Him SWT.
10. A Muslim has wisdom. Luqman AS was asked about how to gain wisdom and he gave the following advice: Do not talk about what will not benefit you; Do not involve yourself with what doesn't concern you. This practice increases the obedience to Allah SWT and opens the channel of communication between the Master SWT and His slave. This advice is based on the saying of Prophet SAW to "leave that which doesn't concern you."

11. One who denies *dunya* (this world) as *dunya* hardens the heart. Unnecessary mingling and talking causes the heart to get sick and hardened and a hard heart cannot give *dawah*. The practice of real slaves of Allah is to get away from those who elevate them unnecessarily with praises and from those who drag them to *dunya*. They replace gossiping and vain talking with remembrance of Allah and help each other gain knowledge of Allah SWT—and these are the qualities of *fiqra-an-Naajiyah* (the saves ones).
12. A Muslim knows the rights of other Muslims on him and does his utmost to fulfill these rights.
13. A Muslim dedicates most of his time towards strengthening his relationship with his Lord SWT.

Qualities of a Mo`min:

A Mo`min possesses all the qualities of a Muslim and more; one righteous predecessor said: *All* of a Mo`min is bounty; he benefits you if you seek him, share with him, consult him, or just walk with him; and when you need him, you will find him—ready—by your side. Another scholar called Mo`min a cure saying if he talks to you, he gives you wisdom; and his goodness outweighs his shortcomings.

1. A Mo`min talks less and does more; whereas a hypocrite talks more than he does.
2. Mo`min's face is pleasant to look at and reminds you of Allah.
3. He has a wide bosom where he stores all his sorrow and no one knows about his grieves.
4. His nafs (carnal instincts) are low and under control.
5. He detests status and glory and doesn't talk about others.
6. He is usually quiet and contemplating.
7. His time is rich and wisely used.
8. He walks with humility avoiding arrogance and ego.
9. When he smiles, it is calm and displays contentment.
10. If you ask him a question, he responds wisely and to your satisfaction.
11. If challenged or argued with, he maintains respect and dignity.
12. He is not stingy.
13. He is never in a hurry.

14. He doesn't display arrogance or anger.
15. A Mo`min doesn't argue and is always reflective of his actions.
16. If someone makes him angry, he displays self-control and acts with justice, without hurting anyone.
17. He is compassionate towards his companions.
18. When he makes a commitment or a promise, he always keeps it.
19. His walk and talk show mercy towards all creation.
20. He forgives other's mistakes.
21. A Mo`min is content with his Lord and is in perpetual state of thankfulness.
22. He doesn't follow his desire, instead resorts to the teachings of Allah and His Prophet.
23. He doesn't oppress those who oppress him.
24. A Mo`min minds his own business and doesn't involve with anything that doesn't concern him.
25. When people insult him, he doesn't retaliate; and when attacked, he doesn't get angry.
26. He doesn't make mistakes with his tongue such as backbiting, gossiping, spreading news etc.
27. A Mo`min has a straight personality and is in state of constant worry (over spiritual matters and dealings of afterlife).

Now will be an ideal time to discuss the difference between *Muslims* and *Mo`mins*. It might be disturbing for a lot of us as we possess many of these characteristics, but unless we honestly analyze ourselves, we can never hope to change either ourselves or the condition of Muslim *Ummah* (nation).

Main differences between a Mo`min and Hypocrite:

1. A Mo`min has one personality regardless of his surrounding and his company, whereas a hypocrite's personality changes according to the people he is with.
2. A Mo`min is the same whether alone or around people, whereas a hypocrite is different around people than when he is alone.
3. Mo`min's outside is calm and his inside is busy with Allah SWT, while a hypocrite surrounds himself with noise and company to fill his inner void.

4. A Mo`min prefers isolation and carrying out good deeds in secrecy, while a hypocrite prefers to show off.
5. A Mo`min minds his own business, whereas a hypocrite keeps himself occupied with the affairs of others.

One sage summarized the signs of hypocrite into these words:

They are lazy when alone and energetic/active when in company; if you tell him he is good, he is happy, whereas if he is criticized or told of having bad quality, he gets upset. We can simplify these into this: They are two faced and show off.

What is happening to us?

We, as Muslims, have lost the very foundation of our faith and if the foundation is destroyed, then how can the building of knowledge stand on it? The foundation of our faith is unshakable belief and trust of Allah SWT and afterlife. This guides all the rest of the spiritual affairs. Gaining knowledge without building faith first is like swimming in every direction in the ocean trying to reach the shore without a compass; eventually the person's strength will diminish and his body will collapse. When the *Iman* (faith) is low, our control over our heart and faculties becomes loose, which causes Shaytaan, our surroundings, and our carnal instincts to take over and we lose the fight against evil—regardless of how much knowledge we have.

What is the cure?

Allah SWT said in Surah Zukhruf, ayah 36-37:

وَإِنَّهُمْ لَيُضِلُّونَهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

وَمَنْ يَعْشُ عَنْ ذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَنِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُ شَيْطَانًا فَهُوَ

لَهُ قَرِينٌ ﴿٣٦﴾

But as for anyone who chooses to remain blind to the remembrance of the Most Gracious, to him We assign an [enduring] evil impulse, to become his other self: whereupon, behold, these [evil impulses] bar all such from the path [of truth], making them think that they are guided aright!

Once Shaytaan becomes a person's close companion, he decorates all his negative actions for him and make them appear good until the person is out of the mercy of Allah. Anytime a person swings from the remembrance of Allah, he becomes a ball in the hands of Shaytaan.

Allah SWT warns us about Shaytaan in Surah Baqarah ayah 168-169:

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ كُلُّوْا مِمَّا فِى الْاَرْضِ حَلٰلًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوْا خُطُوٰتِ

الشَّيْطٰنِ اِنَّهٗ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِيْنٌ ﴿١٦٨﴾

اِنَّمَّا يٰۤاْمُرُكُمْ بِالسُّوْءِ وَالْفَحْشَآءِ وَاَنْ تَقُوْلُوْا عَلٰى اللّٰهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ

﴿١٦٩﴾

O MANKIND! Partake of what is lawful and good on earth, and follow not Satan's footsteps: for, verily, he is your open foe and bids you only to do evil, and to commit deeds of abomination, and to attribute unto God something of which you have no knowledge.

The true knowledge of Shaytaan and his doings will protect a person from falling into his trap. Prophet SAW said that one 'Alim (learned person) is better than a hundred 'Abid (worshippers), since it is understanding of religion that brings true contentment of the heart and victory of Allah SWT.

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْاَخْسَرِيْنَ اَعْمٰلًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

الَّذِيْنَ ضَلَّ سَعِيْهُمُ فِى الْحَيٰوةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُوْنَ

اَنْهُمْ يُحْسِنُوْنَ صُنْعًا ﴿١٠٤﴾

Say: "Shall we tell you who are the greatest losers in whatever they may do? "[It is] they whose labour has gone astray in [the pursuit of no more than] this world's life, and who none the less think that they are doing good works.

These verses were revealed for non-Muslims but are applicable to us today as we possess the same qualities that Allah SWT is criticizing. This brings us to the important topic of acquiring Islamic knowledge. Ali RA called knowledge better than money because knowledge guards a person whereas a person guards money; knowledge lasts while money eventually leaves; and money decreases with spending while knowledge increases when spent. What kind of knowledge is a person supposed to acquire? Knowledge that brings one closer to Allah SWT; that makes one aware of himself and his actions; and brings one humbleness, humility, and good qualities. Today we are not seeking the right knowledge, because if we were, this wouldn't be our condition.

We will close our article with the following words of a sage:

If you want to go on the journey of Iman, you have to have four qualities:

1. To busy your tongue and heart with the remembrance of Allah.
2. To hold tight your heart to Allah (check your actions all the time)
3. Do the opposite of what your *nafs* (carnal instinct) wants.
4. Purify the niyyah (intention) all the time.

It is imperative that we choose our identity and strive for the qualities of the title that we aspire to attain. May Allah SWT grant us sincerity and ability to travel on the Straight Path, the path that He SWT has chosen for His guided slaves, and allow us to reach the best abode—the abode of peace and happiness, the Paradise. *Ameen.*