

What Is Your Identity?

On this ever evolving global stage, the word 'identity' has taken on a whole new meaning. In the pre-modern world, a person often belonged to very concrete social strata---be it religious, economic, tribal, or political. This structure is changing with the globalization of the world as more and more people grapple with the concept of personal identity.

Muslims, as part of this world, are not immune to this phenomenon. Many second generation Muslim immigrants in western countries struggle with identifying themselves as part of any one culture and find it hard to reconcile it with their religious identity. As a result, we have a confused, if not disconnected, population of young Muslims emerging on to 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 I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. (Al-Maidah 5:3)

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, from teachings of the Prophet SAW, 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 in the wrong places.

The claim that Islam has the cure for all 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 (*AbdAllah*--slave of the Creator); besides Islamic brotherhood all other affiliations become superficial and unimportant.

RasulAllah SAW stressed about this issue in his farewell pilgrimage in the following words:

All mankind is from Adam and Hawwa, 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 a human being as Prophet SAW said:

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

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. A person has to consciously proclaim his submission to God and then act according to this proclamation knowing that he is accountable to God for his behavior; and this struggle continues until he meets his Lord.

This 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 earns 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 reaching 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 Ibrahim AS and Muhammad SAW.
2. One who safeguards others from his tongue and hands.
3. One whose neighbors are safe from him, 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 thoughts are not stable, then his actions will not be according to the teachings of Islam.
6. His tongue is moist in the remembrance of Allah.
7. He 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 Al-Hakeem 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 does not concern you.

Luqman Al-Hakeem also advised his son to remember two and forget two:

- Remember Allah and remember death;
- Forget the goodness you do to others and the mischief others commit to 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 sayings of Prophet SAW:

"Beautiful Islam entails minding one's own business." (At-Tirmidhi)

and

"A sign of one's excellence in his Islam, is ignoring what does not concern him."
(Ahmed, Malik & At-Tirmidhi)

11. One who denies *duniya* (this world) as *duniya* hardens the heart.

Unnecessary mingling and talking causes the heart to get sick and hardened and a hard heart cannot give *d'awah*. 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 *duniya*. They replace gossip and vain talk with the remembrance of Allah and help each other gain knowledge of Allah SWT—these are the qualities of *firqa-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 toward strengthening his relationship with his Lord SWT.

Qualities of a Mo`min

A Mo`min (believer) possesses all the qualities of a Muslim and more. A righteous predecessor once 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 a believer a cure, saying if he talks to you, he gives you wisdom; and his goodness outweighs his shortcomings. Some of the qualities of a believer are:

1. He talks less and does more; whereas a hypocrite talks more than he does.
2. A Mo`min's face is pleasant to look at and reminds one of Allah.
3. He has a wide bosom where he stores all his sorrow and no one knows about his grief.
4. His *nafs* (carnal instincts) are subdued 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 a perpetual state of thankfulness.
22. He doesn't follow his desires, 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).

Differences Between Believers and Hypocrites

Now will be an ideal time to discuss the difference between *Mo`min* and hypocrites. 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 the 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. A 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 informed of having a bad quality he gets upset. We can simplify it into this: They are two faced and show offs.

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, we lose the fight against evil—regardless of how much knowledge we have.

What is the Cure?

Allah SWT said in Surah Zukhruf:

وَمَنْ يَعْشُ عَنْ ذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَنِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُ شَيْطَانًا فَهُوَ
لَهُ قَرِينٌ ﴿٣٦﴾

وَأِنَّهُمْ لَيَصُدُّونَهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

And whoever is blinded from remembrance of the Most Merciful - We appoint for him a devil, and he is to him a companion.

And indeed, the devils avert them from the way [of guidance] while they think that they are [rightly] guided. (43: 36—37)

Once Shaytaan becomes a person's close companion, he decorates all his wrong actions for him and make them appear good until the person gets out of the mercy of Allah SWT. 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:

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ كُلُّوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ
الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٦٨﴾

إِنَّمَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالسُّوءِ وَالْفَحْشَاءِ وَأَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

﴿١٦٩﴾

O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy. He only orders you to evil and immorality and to say about Allah what you do not know. (2: 168—169)

The true knowledge of Shaytaan and his doings will protect a person from falling into his trap. Prophet SAW said:

“One beneficial scholar is better than a thousand worshipful devotees.” (Ad-Daylami)

This is so since it is understanding of religion that brings true contentment of the heart and victory of Allah SWT.

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ

أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا ﴿١٠٤﴾

Say, [O Muhammad], "Shall we [believers] inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds?[They are] those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work." (18:103-104)

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? It is the knowledge that brings one closer to Allah SWT; that makes one aware of himself and his actions; and decorates him with 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.

Conclusion

Colonialism left a destructive and damaging impact on Muslims as individuals, families and as nations. It deprived them of their own identity and left the residue of the colonialists' identity upon them. And once someone loses his own identity, he becomes an easy prey to be manipulated and moved—he thinks, acts, behaves and even plans according to the manipulators. He becomes hollow and is easy to be filled with whatever others want.

Today just look at the way we dress, behave, think, our lifestyle, even our goals and inspirations, and our style of marriages, talking, and eating! When we examine ourselves, we see that we are the residue of colonialism brushed by a tiny coating of Islam. What does it mean?

The word culture refers to the customs and habits of a particular people or nation. These habits and customs are cultivated overtime influenced by their surroundings. So what happens if we lose our culture and identity? We become hollow beings just imitating those who are trying to influence us; in reality we become a part of those who stole our identity. And this creates a vacuum inside the people and they live in a state of schism and collision between who they were in the past, what they are now, and who they will be in the future.

I consider it the ultimate bankruptcy of heritage and legacy; so much so that today our glorious heritage is saved in history books and museum while our personalities and identities are deprived of them. We are happy to talk about our great history while forgetting that we are a continuum of this heritage and tradition and are creating history for the future generations.

Today, we as Muslims can be termed the people of lost identity and don't underestimate this word. Lost identity means lost future. We have been systematically robbed of our identity in order to destroy us.

Prophet SAW and the early predecessors were critical about and emphasized the importance of preserving language, habits, customs, dress and other other aspects of our identity. This issue has been discussed by Islamic scholars in history under the topic of '*tameez*'. Our predecessors safeguarded their identity because they were aware of the disastrous magnitude of losing it and how it leads people to lose themselves and their faith.

And this is what has happened to us today. We are in a battle to regain our lost identity. When we look at the Qur'an and sunnah of the Prophet SAW we find that Allah SWT did not leave us as a lost people, instead He left us with a complete structure from how to behave to how to govern. Our *deen* develops a complete sense of identity for us because Allah SWT knows that identity is one of the main elements of a person's belief, as well as a sign of who you believe in and who you belong to. This belief and sense of belonging is what reflects on the person internally and externally and gives their lives meaning and purpose.

It is imperative that we consciously choose our identity and then strive to live according to its qualities and principles. 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, Paradise. *Ameen*.