

Taking Pride in One's Race: Do Not Follow the Footsteps of Iblis

Among the greatest calamities to afflict the Muslim ummah are Assabiyyah (nationalism/tribalism) and Wataniyyah (patriotism). Both are practices of the Jahiliyyah (Age of Ignorance) which were categorically prohibited following the advent of Islam. Allah (swt) and His Messenger (saw) have condemned these despicable practices and issuing the most severe of warnings against them. Consequently, the Companions of the Prophet (ra), upon embracing Islam, completely abandoned nationalism and patriotism, attaining true nobility through Islam.

Nevertheless, Iblis (Satan) never despairs and is untiring in his efforts to drag humanity back into misguidance, sin, harm, disunity, and various forms of evil; Iblis desires that as many human beings as possible join him in Hellfire. Therefore, Iblis and his legions of devils continuously fan the flames of nationalism and patriotism within humanity – particularly among Muslims – knowing full well that these flames spread rapidly, cause immense devastation, and are exceedingly difficult to extinguish.

Iblis: The First Creation Cursed Due to the Logic of Superiority

The sole reason Iblis was expelled from Paradise, cursed, and destined for Hellfire was his sheer arrogance and refusal to prostrate to Adam as commanded by Allah (swt). This commanded prostration was not an act of worship toward Adam (as), but rather a manifestation of absolute obedience to the command of Allah (swt), the Only True Deity worthy of worship and obedience. Yet, Iblis rebelliously and arrogantly defied the command of Allah (swt), at time when all the angels prostrated to Adam in full submission and contentment with their Lord's decree.

What was Iblis's justification for refusing to prostrate to Adam? His reason was conveyed to us directly by Allah (swt), repeated in numerous verses, solely so that we may draw profound lessons from his story and avoid imitating his accursed behaviour: ﴿قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ﴾ **“Allah said, 'What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?' [Iblis] said, 'I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay.'”** [Al-A'raf (7): 12]. ﴿قَالَ يَا إِبْلِيسُ مَا لَكَ أَلَّا تَكُونَ مَعَ السَّاجِدِينَ * قَالَ﴾ **“Allah said, 'O Iblis, what is [the matter] with you that you are not with those who prostrate?’ He said, 'Never would I prostrate to a human whom You created out of clay from an altered black mud.'”** [Al-Hijr (15): 32-33]. ﴿وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ قَالَ أَأَسْجُدُ لِمَنْ خَلَقْتَ طِينًا﴾ **“And [mention] when We said to the angels, 'Prostrate to Adam,' and they prostrated, except for Iblis. He said, 'Should I prostrate to one You created from clay?’”** [Al-Isra' (17): 61]. ﴿قَالَ يَا إِبْلِيسُ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَنْ تَسْجُدَ لِمَا خَلَقْتَ بِيَدَيَّ ۖ أَسْتَكْبَرْتَ ۖ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْعَالِينَ * قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ * قَالَ فَأَخْرِجْ مِنْهَا فَاتَّكَ رَجِيمٌ وَإِنْ خَلَقْتَ بِيَدَيَّ ۖ أَسْتَكْبَرْتَ ۖ أَمْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الْعَالِينَ * قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ * قَالَ فَأَخْرِجْ مِنْهَا فَاتَّكَ رَجِيمٌ وَإِنْ﴾ **“Allah said, 'O Iblis, what prevented you from prostrating to that which I created with My hands? Were you arrogant [then], or were you [already] among the haughty?’ He said, 'I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay.' Allah said, 'Then get out of Paradise, for indeed, you are expelled. And indeed, upon you is My curse until the Day of Recompense.’”** [Sad (38): 75-78].

Such was the logic of Iblis, constructed purely from his own intellect (aql) and base desires (hawa) – that he was superior to Adam because he was created from fire, while Adam was created from clay. In fact, Allah (swt) never decreed such a standard. Allah (swt) never stated that fire is superior to clay, or vice versa. Whether fire or clay, both are the creations of Allah (swt); whether angels, jinn, or humans, all are creatures of Allah (swt) and are strictly obligated to submit to His commands. It is absolute submission to Him that endows a creature with nobility, not the "material" from which they were created.

By these actions, Iblis became the very first creation to feel superior based on a difference in origin, a metric never sanctioned by Allah (swt). Iblis perceived himself as more noble, exalted, and magnificent than Adam simply because he was made of fire, despite knowing full well that Allah (swt) never evaluates the worth of His creatures based on the elements of their creation.

It is within this context that every Muslim must draw profound lessons from the story of the accursed Iblis. Anyone who feels superior to others merely due to differences in race, language, ethnicity, lineage, skin colour, place of birth, or residence has undeniably adopted the traits of Iblis. In reality, Allah (swt) has never measured human nobility by any of these worldly standards.

Human Nobility Stems from Piety, Not Ethnicity

Allah (swt) creates humanity according to His divine will, whether a person is born Arab, Malay, Chinese, Indian, Rohingya, or otherwise. He determines where on this earth a person is born. No human being ever requested to be born into a specific race or location; indeed, none ever requested to be born at all.

It is Allah (swt) alone who brings human beings into existence, and He has never established the nobility of His creatures upon the foundation of ethnicity. Nor has He ever decreed that a person born in the Arabian Peninsula is more noble than one born in the Malay Archipelago, that someone born in America is superior to one born in China, that a Malaysian is better than a Myanmar national, or that an urbanite is above a villager. He has never established such criteria.

On what basis, then, does an individual born Malay feel superior to a Rohingya? On what basis does someone born in Malay lands feel superior to those born in the Indian subcontinent or Arabia? Do the Malay lands not belong to Allah (swt), just as the lands of Myanmar belong to Him, and indeed, the entirety of the earth belongs to Him? Have they not heard the decree of Allah (swt) that He created humanity into nations and tribes so that they might know one another – not so that one race might exult over another – and that true nobility is measured solely by piety (Taqwa)? **﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا﴾** **“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.”** [Al-Hujurat (49): 13]

As wicked as Iblis was, he at least possessed a distorted logic in feeling superior to Adam, citing his creation from fire versus Adam's creation from clay. However, where is the logic of human beings who feel superior to others, when all of them were created from clay? The Messenger of Allah (saw) said: **﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ، أَلَا إِنَّ رَبَّكُمْ وَاحِدٌ، وَإِنَّ أَبَاكُمْ وَاحِدٌ، أَلَا لَا فَضْلَ لِعَرَبِيٍّ عَلَىٰ أَعْجَمِيٍّ، وَلَا لِعَجَمِيٍّ عَلَىٰ عَرَبِيٍّ، وَلَا لِأَحْمَرَ عَلَىٰ أَسْوَدَ، وَلَا لِأَسْوَدَ عَلَىٰ أَحْمَرَ إِلَّا بِالتَّقْوَىٰ، كُنتُمْ لَادَمَ، وَآدَمُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ﴾** **“O people! Verily your Lord is One, and your father (Adam) is one. Know that there is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor of a non-Arab over an Arab. Neither is the white superior over the black, nor is the black superior over the white, except by piety. You are all from Adam, and Adam was created from dust.”** [Reported by Ahmad & al-Baihaqi].

Thus, any human being who feels superior to another due to racial differences has essentially followed in the footsteps of Iblis. In fact, their reasoning is even more absurd than that of Iblis!

Nationalism is Prohibited; Muslims are Brethren

Islam categorically forbids nationalism with a prohibition as clear as the midday sun. Furthermore, the Messenger of Allah (saw) disavowed those who practice it from being among his Ummah. He said: **﴿لَيْسَ مِنْ دَعَا إِلَىٰ عَصَبِيَّةٍ وَلَيْسَ مِنْ قَاتِلٍ عَلَىٰ عَصَبِيَّةٍ وَلَيْسَ مِنْ مَاتَ عَلَىٰ﴾**

«عَصِيَّةٌ» **“He is not one of us who calls to nationalism, he is not one of us who fights for nationalism, and he is not one of us who dies for nationalism.”** [Reported by Abu Dawud].

The Messenger of Allah (saw) was truly sent as a mercy to the worlds, dispatched to perfect moral character, and sent with profound gentleness and compassion towards the believers. Such was his noble nature, possessing a beautiful personality and eloquent, gracious speech. Yet, when speaking of nationalism, he utilized exceptionally stern language, forbidding his followers from using euphemisms. He (saw) said: «مَنْ تَعَزَّى بِعَرَاءِ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ، فَأَعْضُوهُ بِأَيْرِ أَبِيهِ وَلَا تَكْنُوا» **“Whoever boasts with the arrogance of Jahiliyyah (tribalism, ancestry), tell him to bite his father's male organ, and do not use metaphors (speak clearly).”** [Reported by Imam Ahmad and An-Nasa’i].

Such is the baseness and disgust of nationalism – perceiving oneself as superior to others merely based on differences in creation. This despicable trait stems directly from Iblis; it has been harboured by him since the inception of Adam and will remain until the Day of Judgment. It serves as a weapon for Iblis to mislead humanity into following his path. It is this very trait that caused Iblis to be cursed by Allah and condemned to Hellfire: «لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْكَ وَمِمَّنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ» **“That I will surely fill Hell with you (Iblis) and those of them that follow you all together.”** [Sad (38): 85].

Nationalism obliterates the brotherhood among believers, fractures the Muslim Ummah and their lands, and even serves as a catalyst for plunging a person into Hellfire, unless they repent and are saved by the mercy of Allah: «وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۚ وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا ۚ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ» **“And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favour of Allah upon you - when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favour, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided.”** [Ali Imran (3): 103].

Remember that Allah (swt) has decreed all Muslims to be brothers and sisters, regardless of race, lineage, skin colour, or place of residence. As long as they testify to the same Shahadah (declaration of faith), they must love one another just as they love themselves. The Prophet (saw) said: «لَا يُؤْمِنُ أَحَدُكُمْ حَتَّى يُحِبَّ لِأَخِيهِ مَا يُحِبُّ لِنَفْسِهِ» **“None of you [truly] believes until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself.”** [Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim].

May Allah protect us from the vile and despicable trait of nationalism, and count us among those described in the following hadith: «مَثَلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي تَوَادُّهِمْ وَتَرَاحُمِهِمْ وَتَعَاطُفِهِمْ مَثَلُ الْجَسَدِ إِذَا اشْتَكَى مِنْهُ عُضْوٌ تَدَاعَى لَهُ سَائِرُ الْجَسَدِ بِالسَّهَرِ وَالْحُمَّى» **“The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever.”** [Reported by Muslim].

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