

Six Months of Dissension

Mahmood Jawaid
October 10, 2008

“The number of months in the sight of Allah is twelve (in a year) so ordained by Him the day He created the heavens and the earth; of them four are sacred; that is the straight usage.” (Holy Quran 4:36). The four sacred months, according to Hadeeth, are Rajab, Dhul Qadah, Dhul Hijjah, and Muharram. Fighting in these months is prohibited. In the old days this allowed the pilgrims to travel without any fear for Hajj and Umrah. While in this day and age this has become irrelevant, now we, the Muslims, have six months of dissension on various issues. It all starts in the month of Sha’ban and continues with some interruption until the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal.

Sha’ban:

Fifteenth of Sha’ban is when the face off begins. It happened to be the middle of this night when the Prophet^{SAW} strolled down to *Jannat-ul-Baqee* (the cemetery in Madinah). Following into his footsteps, bus loads of the devout Muslims visit cemeteries in the middle of the night. The cemeteries in this night look more like a place of a festival. To tell you the truth, I am a Muslim but not that devout. It gives me a little chill to have a picnic, out of so many beautiful places, in a cemetery, the city of the deads. I do like having picnics, but in broad daylight in a park, not in the middle of night in a cemetery. Some say the day belongs to humans and the night belongs to ghosts and demons. It is the cemetery where they congregate the most. Just in case they exist, why should I interfere in their life, when they leave us alone in the daylight. I can do whatever I want, wherever I want, even in a cemetery in a broad daylight, but night belongs to them. A hug from them will be the kiss of death for me. I do not dispute the Prophet^{SAW}'s visit to *Jannat-ul-Baqee* in the night, but Makkah and Madinah are no fly zones for the ghosts. The rest is fair game for them.

Having visited the cemetery, they pray for an extension in their life and provision. They claim that the affairs for the coming year are ordained in this night: who is going to live and who is going to die, who will get how much provision. Not being that devout, I spend the night in the comfort of my bed. I believe AllahST knows what is best for me. If He thinks this year will be the best time for me to go, then let it be. I am ready to call it quits. A year or two will not make a big difference in the big scheme of things. Will it make any difference if I lay dead for a billion years or a billion plus two years? About my provision, He has fed and clothed me well all these years, so why to bug him for more. If He thinks I will need more, He will give it to me. Besides He has already made the budget for over six billion people. If I demand for more, He will have to gyp someone else. Would you like it if I gyped you? So I let AllahST do His job, and I do mine.

Assuming that they have been granted the extension they requested, they celebrate by preparing Halva in the morning. While I have issues joining them in the cemetery or in the night vigil, I do not mind joining them for Halva. I love Halva and like to eat a lot of it.

Then there is another group of devout Muslims, who do regular things on a regular basis and do not want to mess up their routine. They do not understand what the fuss is all about. They ask fifteenth, what fifteenth? They contend that it is a weak Hadeeth. Why to mess up a good night of sleep for a weak Hadeeth. A big debate rages in mosques both in favor and against the celebration. I say, instead of complaining, why you don't also

Six Months of Dissension

arrange for a picnic. If you do not like the cemetery, have it in a ball park where you can have all the lights you want. If you still do not want to have a picnic, at least join your brothers in halva. Halva has no religion or Madhhab. By the time the month of Sha'ban comes to an end, the halva is gone and so is the steam from the argument.

Ramadhan:

The month of Ramadhan culminates in the second round of dissension. This time the dissension is not about having or not having a picnic in the cemetery or about halva; it is about the elusive moon: when we should call the moon a new moon. Don't get me wrong. The moon is still the same old moon which has been there for billions of years. But every so often it disappears only to reappear after few days. When it reappears it marks the beginning of a new lunar month. When should we say it has reappeared? The poor moon knew it would be an object of love, but did not know that it would also become an object of contention. Had it known, it would have remained still. There is a Jewish saying that if there are three Jews, there will be four opinions. Muslims are not far behind. Like many other issues, there are four opinions on this issue among them. Some say "Seeing is believing. When you see it after its disappearance, it is a new month." Some say "Why bother. Haven't we seen enough of it? Why do you want to see it again, it is the same old moon. Don't you know *'the sun and the moon are following courses (exactly) computed?'* (Holy Quran 55:5). As soon as it crosses the horizon, which we can calculate, let us call it a new month." The moon is there on the horizon, but it is dark and cannot be seen. Some who do not like the dark moon, but do not want to go through the hassle of seeing it, say "Not that soon. Give me light, not Bud Lite, the sunlight. Give the sun a chance to shine some light on it." It happens when the moon sets after the sunset. It may not be visible because of the twilight and low surface brightness, but is not dark. Then there are some who want to go through the motion of seeing the moon even when it is not there and claim to have seen it. Heated discussion ensues in mosques each group trying to prove his point. The most commonly heard phrase that night is *'wallahi, ya akhi.'* Foaming mouths, raised fists, and pointed fingers are common scenes during these discussions. Basically we end up with three starting dates for the new lunar month.

I wonder what Jibraeel^{AS} thinks about this fiasco. Since he has to descend on the night of 27th, he must wonder which night he should descend. Should it be according to the sighted moon, the dark moon, the lighted moon or the fake moon? Since AllahST has promised the Night of Power (Laylatul Qadr) to all the Muslims, being an Equal Opportunity Bestower of Blessing, He would not let us down. He must grant a hug from Angel Jibraeel^{AS} to every Muslim who spends his or her night of 27th in worship. I feel sorry for Angel Jibraeel^{AS}. He must be putting in three long nights of hugging instead of just one. Knowing AllahST is Just, I am sure Jibraeel^{AS} is paid overtime for extra two nights.

Shawwal:

As the month of Ramadhan comes to an end, the month of Shawwal rolls in and third round of dissension begins. We again face the same issue. When is the Eid? When should we take off from work? When should the doctors not schedule patients for visit? Which day should we tell the school to declare Eid? When should we reserve the hall for Eid prayer?

Those who believe in sighting promise us that they will let us know as soon as they will sight the moon which could be two o'clock in the morning. We all end up burning

Six Months of Dissension

midnight oil clinging to our cell phone waiting for the news. As soon as the news spreads, panic sets in. Since us Americans believe in surprises, this is the ultimate surprise we can get.

Then there is the *Fiqhi* issue. If it is Eid, and I am still fasting, I could be committing *Haram*. On the other hand if it is still Ramadhan and I intentionally break my fast thinking it is Eid, I could be penalized for sixty consecutive days of fasting. You are doomed if you do and doomed if you don't. I go with the majority. At least I will have company in the Hell. I don't mind misery as long as I have company. The whole fiasco must be causing a huge accounting havoc for the *kiraman katebeen* (the two angels who write our good and bad deeds). Should they enter my fasting/not fasting in the column of good or bad? I hope our dissension does not cause a quarrel between them, both wanting to enter fasting/not fasting in their ledger. Would I be able to sue them if they gyped me?

When should mom cook *sewai*, if the father and the son are celebrating Eid on two different days. Once I called a friend of mine to extend Eid greetings. He was upset, because he was fasting. We have not talked since. Being in two different groups is worse than being a Democrat and a Republican. At least they shake hands after the voting is done. Forget about the handshake, we do not even talk for months.

Dhul Hijjah:

By the fifteenth of Shawwal things cool down a bit. The month of Dhul Qadah gives us a break. Luckily there is no festival in this month. Most of us get busy saying goodbye to the would be Hajjis. But things heat up again in the month of Dhul Hijjah and the fourth round of dissension begins. Dissension arises because of the difference in the methodology of determining the new lunar month and the fact that Eid-ul-Adha coincides with the Day of Sacrifice for Hajjis. Some say: "I am not there, but I will pretend that I am there." They celebrate Eid the same day the Hajjis are doing the sacrifice. Other say: "If I am not there, why pretend that I am there. I will go with my own moon, not the Meccan moon." They celebrate Eid according to the local moon-sighting.

I am sure if I asked the sacrificial animals for their preference, since Saudi moon-sighting is one or two day ahead of the actual sighting, they will vote for the local moon. This will give them two extra days to enjoy life. I am sure they will also support the use of calculation for predicting the moon-sighting. This will give them time to be mentally prepared for their eventual demise. This is the surprise nobody looks forward to.

Muharram:

While we are still enjoying kabob and steak from the sacrifice, the fifth round of dissension starts with the arrival of the month of Muharram. This round cannot be blamed on the elusive moon, the halva, or the picnic in cemetery. This time the dispute is about should we mourn or celebrate. While Shias go into a state of mourning for the martyrdom of Imam Hussein climaxing on the tenth of Muharram, Sunnis recall an event the Prophet^{SAW} witnessed. He noticed upon his arrival in Madinah that the Jews celebrated the tenth of Muharram for the victory of Moosa^{AS} over Firon. Upon hearing this, the Prophet^{SAW} stated that if he was alive next year he would also celebrate the event, in fact he will celebrate an extra day, since he was much closer to Moosa^{AS} than the Jews were (all the Prophets^{AS} are brothers). While the Shias spend the tenth in mourning, the Sunnis are in a mood of celebration, but they cannot make up their mind when. Should they fast on the ninth and tenth or the tenth and eleventh. I wonder what the Prophet^{SAW} did between his arrival at Madinah and his departure from the world, a

Six Months of Dissension

span of about ten years. I feel sorry for *kiraman katebeen*. They have to make four columns for our deeds: one for the mourners, one each for those fasting on the ninth, the tenth, and the eleventh. I hope they have licensed Excel from Microsoft. It will make their job much easier.

Rabi-ul-Awwal:

Things cool off in the month of Safar. Luckily nothing of significance happened in this month. By this time Hajjis have returned and are well rested. Parties to welcome them are held throughout this month. But then the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal arrives and the sixth and final round of dissension begins. This is the month in which the Prophet^{SAW} was born. There is a difference of opinion among Shias and Sunnis if he was born on ninth or twelfth. However, the divide is neither over the date, nor about when is ninth or twelfth, but about the celebration of his birth, called Mawlood, itself. Mawloodis contend that if we can celebrate our own birthdays, if Christians can celebrate the birthday of Isa^{AS}, why should we not celebrate our beloved Prophet^{SAW}'s birthday. Their celebration has acquired a special format. Big gatherings are held where his life and virtues are extolled, frequent recitation of Darood takes place. It ends with everybody standing up in unison and reciting Salam on the Prophet^{SAW}. It is assumed that the Prophet^{SAW} arrives at this moment and joins the crowd. I see a big logistic nightmare here. Since Muslims are spread all over the globe, many celebrations must be taking place at the same time. How many places can the Prophet^{SAW} be present at the same moment? It must be very taxing on him to be in all the places at the same time. We just talked about Jibraeel^{AS} doing overtime. But he has three nights to cover the whole world. Now we are expecting the Prophet^{SAW} to be at million of places at the same time. I do not think even Monte Carlo simulation (the best simulation program to solve logistics) can solve this issue. Besides, who is minding the business in Madinah if he is roaming around the globe? There is always a stream of people visiting his grave and extending greetings to him. We are told he returns the greeting. It will be out of his character to disappoint his guests. Would you like it if someone invited you and when you arrived, your host had gone out of town? Considering all the logistics involved and the added burden of receiving all the guests in Madinah, I bet he stays put in Madinah.

One good thing about the Mawloodis is that they serve delicious food and distribute sweets after the meeting. Affluent Muslims, may not pay Zakah, but write blank checks for the party out of love of the Prophet^{SAW}.

The Antimawloodis go by the book. They contend, if the Prophet^{SAW} did not do it, why bother. Don't we already have enough at our hand? They consider Mawlood an innovation and mount a campaign against it. Once again a great debate ensues between the Mawloodis and the Antimawloodis. Mawloodis spend more time proving why the celebration is the right thing to do than the time they spend in extolling the virtues of the Prophet^{SAW}. To counter the Mawloodis, the Antimawloodis also arrange meetings to talk about the life of the Prophet^{SAW}. But they also end up spending more time talking about why celebrating Mawlood is incorrect than the time they spend talking about the life of the Prophet^{SAW}. They, however, make sure nobody stand up at the end of the meeting. I suppose they could use superglue to keep them seated. Now here is the 64,000 dollar question: if everyone must remain seated, how one would get out of the meeting. Since they do not serve any food, I do not go to their meetings. My guess is, since they hold the meeting in the mosque where everybody sits on the carpeted floor, they all crawl out of the mosque.

Six Months of Dissension

We know that when a thing walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it must be a duck. If both the Mawloodis and Antimawloodis are holding special meetings in the month the Prophet^{SAW} was born then, except for cutting a cake, both in one way or other are celebrating his birthday. The only difference being Mawloodis stand up at the end of the meeting and have a big feast and Antimawloodis remain seated and do not have any feast. Since the Prophet^{SAW} probably stays put in Madinah, does it make any difference if one remains seated or stands up? For me the main difference is food and sweets. One serves delicious food and distributes sweets, the other does not. I am the type of guy who likes food. Give me food and I will be there. You want me to stand up, I will stand up. I would not even mind saluting you. If you say sit. I will sit and will not move till you give me food. But please do not ask me to lie down. After hearing all those speeches, I may fall asleep. I do not want the food to be left alone staring at my closed eyes.

By the time the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal come to close, things quiet down. After playing six round of dissension we are all tired and need a relief. Things go back to normal only to heat up again in the month of Sha'ban. In between the two months, we live in peace and harmony with each other for four months. At the beginning of the article, I quoted a Quranic verse mentioning four months of peace and tranquility. It does not specify which month. I just wonder if it meant Rabi-ul-Thani, Jamadi-ul-Awwal, Jamadi-ul-Thani, and Rajab.

About the Writer:

The writer has authored "Secrets of Angels, Demons, Satan, and Jinns – Decoding their Nature through Quran and Science," and "Atom to Adam – How, When and Where in the Light of Quran, Bible and Science (A Study of Human Origin)," both published by InstantPublishers.com (<http://instantpublisher.com/>) and "Lessons from the Qur'an," published by Ta-Ha Publishers (<http://www.taha.co.uk/>). These books are available from Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com/>) and Ta-Ha Publishers (<http://www.taha.co.uk/>), respectively. He has also published many essays on religious issues in the Charleston Gazette, West Virginia and written quite a few Islamic satires. He is a Chemical Engineer and possesses Master of Science degrees in Chemical Engineering and Chemistry and has Professional Engineers license from the State of Texas. His e-mail address is mnajawaid@yahoo.com.