

Debate in Islam: Between Truth-Seeking and Ego-Defending

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Introduction: The Purpose of Scholarly Discourse

In Islam, debate and scholarly discussion (*munāẓarah*) are not battlegrounds for the ego, but sacred spaces where truth is sought and falsehood is dispelled. The proper *uslūb* (methodology and manner) of debate is rooted in sincerity, humility, and an unwavering commitment to *al-ḥaqq* (the truth), regardless of where it leads or whose opinion it contradicts.

Our Deen is not built upon spite, tribalism, or the humiliation of others. Rather, it is founded upon the pursuit of knowledge and the submission to truth whenever it becomes clear.

The Qur'anic Foundation: Listening and Following the Best

Allah, the Most High, praises those who approach discourse with open hearts and sound intellects:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ ٱلْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُۥٓ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَدَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمْ أُو۟لُوا۟ ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ١٨

those who listen to what is said and follow the best of it. These are the ones ˹rightly˺ guided by Allah, and these are ˹truly˺ the people of reason.[1]

This noble verse establishes a fundamental principle: the believer does not defend a position out of stubbornness or pride. Instead, he listens carefully, weighs the evidence, and follows wherever the strongest proof leads, even if it means abandoning his previous position.

Allah also commands us regarding the manner of discourse:

۞ وَلَا تُجَٰدِلُوٓاْ أَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ إِلَّا بِٱلَّتِي هِيَ أَحۡسَنُ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُواْ مِنۡهُمۡۖ وَقُولُوٓاْ ءَامَنَّا بِٱلَّذِيٓ أُنزِلَ إِلَيۡنَا وَأُنزِلَ إِلَيۡكُمۡ وَإِلَٰهُنَا وَإِلَٰهُكُمۡ وَٰحِدٞ وَنَحۡنُ لَهُۥ مُسۡلِمُونَ

Do not argue with the People of the Book unless gracefully, except with those of them who act wrongfully. And say, "We believe in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to you. Our God and your God is ˹only˺ One. And to Him we ˹fully˺ submit."[2]

If this is how we are commanded to debate with the People of the Book, then how much more so with our Muslim brothers?

ٱدۡعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلۡحِكۡمَةِ وَٱلۡمَوۡعِظَةِ ٱلۡحَسَنَةِۖ وَجَٰدِلۡهُم بِٱلَّتِي هِيَ أَحۡسَنُۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦۖ وَهُوَ أَعۡلَمُ بِٱلۡمُهۡتَدِينَ

Invite ˹all˺ to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord ˹alone˺ knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is ˹rightly˺ guided.[3]

Notice: Allah does not say "*argue with them until they submit*" or "*argue with them to humiliate them.*" He says: "*in a way that is best.*" This is the foundation of Islamic debate etiquette.

The Prophetic Example in Debate

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was the embodiment of excellent character in all matters, including debate and discourse.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "*Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent.*"[4]

This hadith establishes that not every thought requires expression, and not every disagreement requires confrontation. Speech must be *khayr* (good), beneficial, true, and kind.

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[1] Sūrat al-Zumar, 39:18
[2] Sūrat al-ʿAnkabūt, 29:46
[3] Sūrat al-Naḥl, 16:125
[4] Sahih al-Bukhari 6136

In another Riwayah, A Bedouin once came and urinated in the masjid. The Companions were furious and wanted to attack him, but the Prophet ﷺ stopped them and said: *"Leave him alone and pour a bucket of water over it. You have been sent to make things easy, not to make them difficult."*[5]

Even in such a shocking situation, the Prophet ﷺ chose education over humiliation.

In another riwayah, a young man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: "O Messenger of Allah, give me permission to commit fornication." The Companions rebuked him harshly, but the Prophet ﷺ called him closer and asked him gently:

"Would you like it for your mother?" He said: "No." The Prophet said: "*Neither do people like it for their mothers. Would you like it for your daughter*?" He said: "No." The Prophet said: "*Neither do people like it for their daughters.*"

The Prophet ﷺ continued this way until the young man said: "*O Messenger of Allah, pray to Allah to purify my heart.*" The Prophet ﷺ placed his hand on the young man's chest and made duʿāʾ for him.[6]

This is the prophetic method: not shaming, not attacking, not declaring people deviant, but guiding with wisdom and mercy.

The Nobility of Returning to Truth

One of the most beautiful aspects of Islamic scholarship is the culture of *rujūʿ ilā al-ḥaqq*, returning to the truth. When a scholar recognizes that he was mistaken, retracting his view is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of nobility and intellectual courage.

When ʿUmar (may Allah be pleased with him) was giving a khuṭbah about limiting the *mahr* (dowry), a woman from the congregation stood up and challenged him with the verse:

وَإِنْ أَرَدتُّمُ ٱسْتِبْدَالَ زَوْجٍ مَّكَانَ زَوْجٍ وَءَاتَيْتُمْ إِحْدَىٰهُنَّ قِنطَارًا فَلَا تَأْخُذُوا۟ مِنْهُ شَيْـًٔا ۚ أَتَأْخُذُونَهُۥ بُهْتَٰنًا وَإِثْمًا مُّبِينًا ٢٠

If you desire to replace a wife with another and you have given the former ʿevenʾ a stack of gold ʿas a dowryʾ, do not take any of it back. Would you ʿstillʾ take it unjustly and very sinfully?[7]

ʿUmar immediately acknowledged his mistake and said from the minbar: ***"A woman is right, and ʿUmar is wrong."***[8]

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[5] Sahih al-Bukhari 6128
[6] Ahmad Ibn Hanbal
[7] Sūrat al-Nisāʾ, 4:20
[8] Jalalu'd-din Suyuti in his Tafsir-e-Durru'l-Mansur, vol. II, p.133; 2. Ibn Kathir in his Commentary, vol.I, p.468;

This is the statement of a leader who values truth over pride.

Imam al-Shāfiʿī, may Allah have mercy upon him, famously said:

"My opinion is correct with the possibility of being wrong, and the opinion of others is wrong with the possibility of being correct."[9]

He also said:

"I have never debated anyone and wished that he would err. I have never debated anyone and cared whether the truth came from my tongue or his tongue."[10]

And it is said that he also said:

"I wish that people would learn this knowledge without a single letter being attributed to me."[11]

This is the statement of someone who seeks knowledge for Allah's sake, not for fame or reputation.

Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal said:

"Whoever claims ijmāʿ (consensus) is lying. How does he know? Perhaps people have differed. Rather, let him say: 'I do not know of any disagreement.'"[12]

This is intellectual honesty. This is the way of the sincere scholars, precision in speech, humility in claiming knowledge.

One of the most profound stories about the etiquette of debate comes from Imam Abū Ḥanīfah (may Allah have mercy upon him) and his interaction with students regarding proper conduct in scholarly discourse.

Imam Abū Ḥanīfah once said to his son Ḥammād:

"O my son, when you sit with people in a gathering to discuss knowledge, be more concerned with what you write down than with what you say. For verily, you will not be able to write except what is beneficial, but you may speak much that is not beneficial."

And in another narration, he advised his students:

"If you debate, then do not raise your voice over your brother's voice, for indeed the loud voice does not establish proof."

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[9] Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm wa Faḍlih (Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr)

[10] Ibn Rajab, "Al-Farq bayna al-Nasihah wa at-Ta'yir" (English translation: "The Difference Between Advising and Shaming")

[11]

[12] Masa'il-ul-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal RH narrated by his son Abdullah bin Ahmad RH, pg. 438-439

He also said:

"We are humans; our opinion today may contradict our opinion tomorrow. And our opinion tomorrow may contradict our opinion the day after. So do not take from us what we say today and abandon tomorrow, nor what we say tomorrow and abandon the following day."

This is profound wisdom: acknowledgment of human fallibility and openness to correction.

When Imam Abū Ḥanīfah met Imam Mālik, they disagreed on several issues. But their disagreement was marked by profound mutual respect.

Imam Mālik said of Abū Ḥanīfah:

"I saw a man who, if he told you that this pillar was made of gold, he would establish proof for it through his evidence."

Despite their differences in methodology and many rulings, they recognized each other's sincerity and knowledge.

Compare this to today's climate, where disagreement on a single matter leads to complete character assassination and declarations of deviation!

More Prophetic Guidance on Speech and Debate

On Controlling the Tongue

The Prophet ﷺ said: "*Whoever can guarantee what is between his jaws (his tongue) and what is between his legs (his private parts), I can guarantee Paradise for him.*"[13]

The Prophet ﷺ also said: The Prophet; said, "*A slave (of Allah) may utter a word which pleases Allah without giving it much importance, and because of that Allah will raise him to degrees (of reward): a slave (of Allah) may utter a word (carelessly) which displeases Allah without thinking of its gravity and because of that he will be thrown into the Hell-Fire.*"[14]

How many today speak carelessly about scholars, students, and ordinary Muslims, declaring them deviant or misguided without realizing the gravity of their words?

The Corruption of Debate: When Spite Replaces Sincerity

Now we come to the painful reality of our times.

[13] Sahih al-Bukhari 6474
[14] Sahih al-Bukhari 6478

Today, there are groups and individuals who do not come to the field of knowledge with evidence (*dalīl*), but with accusations, labels, and childish polemics. They do not seek the truth; they seek "bonus points" by attacking others, believing that declaring people deviant is some form of worship.

The Disease of the Madkhali Methodology

The Madkhali movement has become notorious for its obsession with *tabdīʿ* (declaring people innovators) without sound evidence, proper verification, or scholarly nuance. They have made refutations and warnings their primary "worship," rather than learning beneficial knowledge and calling to goodness.

Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَن تَشِيعَ ٱلْفَـٰحِشَةُ فِى ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ١٩

Indeed, those who love to see indecency spread among the believers will suffer a painful punishment in this life and the Hereafter. Allah knows and you do not know.[15]

Spreading rumors, publicizing sins (real or imagined), and obsessing over the faults of others, this is closer to the way of the hypocrites than the way of the believers.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "*It is enough of a lie for a man to speak of everything he hears.*"[16]

Yet the Madkhali methodology is built upon uncritically accepting and spreading every rumor and claim against those they've decided to oppose.

The Disease of the Khawārij

The Khawārij, throughout Islamic history, have been known for their hasty *takfīr* (declaring Muslims as disbelievers), their extremism in judgment, and their lack of mercy.

The Prophet ﷺ described them: "They will speak with the best of words but their faith will not pass beyond their throats. They will exit Islam as an arrow exits from its target."[17]

The Prophet ﷺ also said about them: "*They are the worst of creation.*"

What made them the worst? Their actions were outwardly "Islamic", they prayed, fasted, recited Qur'an, but their hearts were filled with extremism, harshness, and a lack of mercy. They killed the best of Muslims while claiming to defend Islam.

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[15] Sūrat al-Nūr, 24:19
[16] Riyad as-Salihin 1547
[17] Sahih al-Bukhari 6934

Today's neo-Khawārij may not kill with swords, but they kill reputations, unity, and the spirits of sincere believers through their harsh words and extremist interpretations.

Both Share the Same Disease: Debating to Shame, Not to Learn

Whether Madkhali or Khārijī in tendency, both groups share this trait:

They debate to win, not to learn. They speak to shame, not to guide.

- No verification of claims
- No evidence beyond hearsay
- No *adab* (proper manners)
- But plenty of anger and accusations

Allah says:

وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا۟ ٱلْحَقَّ بِٱلْبَـٰطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا۟ ٱلْحَقَّ وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ٤٢

"And do not mix truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth while you know [it]."[18]

Yet this is exactly what they do: they twist the truth, beautify falsehood, and weaponize religious language to serve their egos and partisan loyalties.

The Prophetic Du'ā for Sincerity

The sincere student of knowledge makes this duʿāʾ:

"O Allah, if my view is correct, strengthen me in the field of knowledge; but if it is false, then reform it for me and allow me to repent from it."

For running from the truth is not "victory", it is defeat before one's own nafs.

And our Lord says:

وَقُلْ جَآءَ ٱلْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ ٱلْبَـٰطِلُ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلْبَـٰطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا ٨١

"Truth has come and falsehood has vanished. Indeed, falsehood is bound to vanish."[19]

Truth is heavy enough to carry itself. It raises the one who holds firmly to it, and it crushes the one who turns away from it.

And we say: "O Allah, show me the truth as truth and grant me the ability to follow it, and show me falsehood as falsehood and grant me the ability to avoid it."

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[18] Sūrat al-Baqarah, 2:42
[19] Sūrat al-Isrāʾ, 17:81

The Reality: Knowledge is Carried with Humility

Let this be understood clearly:

Knowledge is carried with humility, not hostility.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Allah is Gentle and loves gentleness, and He gives for gentleness what He does not give for harshness."[20]

A cause is defended with proof, not insults.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "*Whoever humbles himself one degree for the sake of Allah, Allah will raise him in status one degree, and whoever behaves arrogantly towards Allah one degree, Allah will lower him in status one degree, until He makes him among the lowest of the low.*"[21]

Conclusion: The Final Word

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱتَّقُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ وَقُولُوا۟ قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا ٧٠ يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَـٰلَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَمَن يُطِعِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا ٧١

"*O you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice. He will [then] amend for you your deeds and forgive you your sins.*"[22]

Islam is too beautiful, too noble, and too important to be reduced to tribal feuds and online warfare.

Let us debate as seekers, not as warriors. Let us be correct as brothers, not as enemies. And let us remember that on the Day of Judgment, we will not be asked: "*Did you win the argument*?" We will be asked: "*Did you follow the truth*?"

My only duʿāʾ regarding the extremists and the harsh-hearted is:

"*O Allah, show us truth as truth and grant us the ability to follow it. Show us falsehood as falsehood and grant us the ability to avoid it.*"

And know this, my brother and sister:

Those who seek the truth always grow. Those who defend their egos always shrink. **Where spite settles, knowledge leaves. Where knowledge enters, spite dies.**

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[20] Narrated by Muslim (2593).
[21] Sunan Ibn Majah 4176 (Daif Hadith)
[22] *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, 33:70-71

May Allah guide us all to what He loves and is pleased with. May He protect us from the trials of knowledge without action, and action without knowledge. May He make us from those who listen to the word and follow the best of it.

Amīn.

فَتَعَـٰلَى ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمَلِكُ ٱلْحَقُّ ۗ وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِٱلْقُرْءَانِ مِن قَبْلِ أَن يُقْضَىٰٓ إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُۥ ۖ وَقُل رَّبِّ زِدْنِى عِلْمًا

Exalted is Allah, the True King! Do not rush to recite ˹a revelation of˺ the Quran ˹O Prophet˺ before it is ˹properly˺ conveyed to you,1 and pray, "My Lord! Increase me in knowledge."[23]

Tiktok- IftiraTarihUtansin[24]

Instagram- IftiraTarihUtansin_[25]

Discord- iftiratarihutansin

Twitter- IftiraTarihUtansin[26]

Website- Hayatimanvecihad8[27]

Acces our website;

[23] Ṭā-Hā, 20:114

[24] https://www.tiktok.com/@iftiratarihutansin?_t=ZN-8uM21ZWsBmQ&_r=1

[25] https://www.instagram.com/iftiratarihutansin_/

[26] https://x.com/iftiratarihutan

[27] https://hayatimanvecihad8.wordpress.com/