

ISLAM'S ANSWER TO THE RACIAL PROBLEM



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It is a great and, as I feel, rather undeserved, honour which the Organisers of this conference have so very kindly and generously done me by inviting me to address you and thus to contribute to the aims of the Conference, namely to develop closer relations with other religious groups, to present the teachings of Islam as they actually are, and to remove misunderstandings about, as it has been called, the most misunderstood religion in the West, so that the Western World may see it in its true image. I am most grateful for this honour and I pray to Almighty Allah* for His help and guidance so that I may be able to do justice to the task which lies before me.

The topic I have been asked to speak about is: "Islam and the Racial Problem." When it was proposed to me I accepted it very readily, even eagerly, for some very personal reasons which I may kindly be permitted to mention very briefly.

When I was introduced to you, you were told that I am a German Muslim, a German convert or revert to Islam. As a German national, who was born in the late twenties, I spent my childhood and my youth under a political regime which, by the gross and utterly shameful atrocities perpetrated upon racial minorities and by its dogmatic belief in, and its ruthless application of, the "Herrenrasse" - or Master - Race Theory, meaning nothing less than the absolute supremacy of a "Germanic Race" over all other human beings living on this earth, has become synonymous with racism and all the ills and evils, the misery and suffering, the injustice and brutality that go with it.

Though by sheer accident of birth, not by any personal virtue or merit - and accident of birth, nothing more and nothing less, decides over life and death, happiness and misery, freedom and bondage under a racist regime - I was spared the fate of becoming a victim myself of this obnoxious and pernicious creed. I cannot and shall never forget the terror and excesses which marked its rule in my country, nor shall I ever forget the plight and agonies of the innocent objects and targets of this diabolic and inhuman system of dividing man and man as I saw it practiced around me in the formative years of my life.

* Allah is the proper noun for God Almighty in the Semitic languages, i.e. in the language of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them all).

It is against this background and with these personal experiences with racism and its problems and consequences indelibly engraved in my mind and memory that I so eagerly and readily responded to the invitation to expound, as far as my limited knowledge of Islam permits, the Islamic concept of inter-human relation, its high ideal of human brotherhood and the actualisation of this ideal in history, in contrast to the antagonism between the different races of man as preached and practiced by racism.

Let me commence by taking you on a pilgrimage to the Holy Places of Islam in and around the venerable city of Makkah, in present day Saudi Arabia, the city of the “Ka’aba”, the Sacred Mosque, which, according to the Holy Qur’an, is the first house that was ever built on earth for the worship of the One and Only God - to Makkah, the birthplace of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace and the blessings of Allah, the city in which, and in whose vicinity, the Holy Prophet received the first and a large part of the remaining revelations from On High.

This annual pilgrimage, or “Hajj”, as it is called in the Arabic language, is one of the “Five Pillars”, one of the five fundamental religious duties to be performed by Muslims.

Without going further into details of the conditions to be fulfilled in order to be able to proceed on this pilgrimage, or of the rites and rituals to be observed in its course, let me describe in a few words the most striking and unforgettable sight that will present itself to your eye upon reaching the sacred territory.

You will see a multitude of men, women and also children, close perhaps to two million, from every corner of the world, black and brown of complexion, yellow and white, Arabs and Iranians, Turks and Malays, Chinese and Africans, black and white Americans, blond and blue-eyed Europeans—in short to quote one of our great German Poets, Friedrich Schiller: “Who knows the nations, who the names of all who here together came?”

And there is still more that fills us with wonder. Whether black or brown, yellow or white, rich or poor, young or old, every male that our eye beholds is dressed alike, wearing two white seamless sheets of simple material, thus eliminating completely all marks and signs of distinction of dress between the African and American, the Asian, Australian and European, the mighty and wealthy and the poor and lowly. Here they have come, brother unto brother, sister unto sister, bearing witness to the brotherhood of mankind, to the equality of all human beings before their Creator, for it is to worship Him and to extol His glory that has brought them here. They have heard and heeded His call, and their reply uttered, nay cried out by all and sundry, echoing and re-echoing from the surrounding mountains is:

“Labbaik, Allahumma Labbaik” - “Here am I, O Allah, here am I, there is none who is Thy partner, all praise and blessing belong to Thee alone, for Thou art the Sovereign, and Thou hast no partner.”

The pilgrimage to Makkah, the huge assembly of believers from all five continents, the gathering together of a multitude of worshippers of all races on the plain of Arafat is perhaps the most spectacular expression symbol and proof of the unity and brotherhood of man as enunciated and upheld by the religion of Islam, and it is equally a symbol and proof of the equality of man before Allah, the Supreme Being, as taught by this religion.

The concept and idea of the oneness of humanity is Islam's unique contribution to human civilisation, and it came as a natural sequel to its cardinal doctrine, the doctrine of "Tauhid", or the unity, the Oneness, of God.

The doctrine, which runs through all teachings of the Holy Qur'an like a red thread, has found its most concise and terse expression in the 112th chapter of the Holy Book, called "Al-Ikhlaas", or "Purity of Faith".

Say: "He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him." (Holy Qur'an 112: 1-4)

He, Allah, the One and Only, is the author of all existence; He is our Creator, to Him we belong and to Him is our return. And He is more than mere author and creator: He is also the "Rabb" of His creation and His creatures; and "Rabb" according to the great authority on the Holy Qur'an, Imam Raghīb signifies, in Arabic "the cherisher, sustainer and fosterer of a thing in such manner as to make it attain one condition after another until it reaches its goal of completion and perfection." Thus, Allah being the "Rabb ul-Alamin", the "Rabb of the Worlds", as He is called in the opening chapter, of the Holy Qur'an, all of His creation and of all of us whom He created, are equally and without exception under His care and guidance. He deals with all of us alike, no matter to which race, nation, tribe or parentage we may belong, for He created us all alike, as the Holy Qur'an further elucidates in numerous verses and words, such as:

"And mankind is naught but a single nation."
(Holy Qur'an 2:213)

We are all the children of Adam, and Adam was made of dust. Here dawned the idea for the first time in human history that all men have a common origin and that, because of their common origin, because we belong to Allah, all and sundry, to Whom is our ultimate return, the whole of humanity is but one family, one nation, and should, ideally, form one fraternity, the universal brotherhood of man.

The differences of colour and languages, of build and of features are not regarded as differences of quality, or as marks or degrees of excellence, but as an expression of the diversity in nature:

Says the Holy Qur'an:

“Among His Signs is this, that He created you from dust: and then, behold, ye are men scattered (far and wide)”
(Holy Qur’an 30:20)

“And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours; verily in that are Signs for those who know.”
(Holy Qur’an 30:22)

Allama Yusuf Ali, one of the first Muslims to translate the Holy Qur’an into the English language, commenting on this verse, remarks: “All mankind were created of a single pair of parents; yet they have spread to different climates and developed different languages and different shades of complexions. And yet, their basic unity remains unaltered. They feel in the same way, and are equally under God’s care”.

Whatever the country in which a people lives, whatever the language they speak, whatever the colour of their skin, they are recognised as one family, living under one roof - the canopy of heaven, scattered, but of common origin:

Says the Holy Qur’an:

“O mankind! Reverence your guardian Lord, Who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women.”
(Holy Qur’an 4:1)

There is one verse in the Holy Qur’an, however, which not only re-states the common origin of man, explains the division of humanity into nations, or races, and tribes, tells us that the object and purpose of this division was also the ultimate unification of humanity, but goes a step further: It points out to us the one and only criterion, the only standard by which man is judged by God, and thus by which we should also judge our fellow-man. As you will presently see, this criterion is not his colour, nor his race, not his social standing, not even his skill and the degree of his intelligence. It is something which to achieve lies within reach of every human being, black or brown, white or yellow, rich or poor, if only he made an effort to cultivate it within himself:

Says the Holy Qur’an:

“O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).”

(Holy Qur’an 49:13)

“The principle of the brotherhood of man laid down here”, observes another author of an English translation of the Holy Qur’an, “is based on the broadest foundation. The address here is not to believers but to men in general, who are told that they are all, as it were, members of one family, and their division into races, nations, tribes and families should not lead to estrangement from, but to a better knowledge of, each other. Superiority of one over another in this vast brotherhood does not depend on race, nationality, wealth or rank but on righteousness, on the careful observance of duty towards God and fellow-man, on moral greatness”, to which I may be permitted to add: and on the strength of one’s “Iman”, of faith in the one and only God because it is through faith and through submission unto the will of God only, through which we can attain to moral greatness.

This verse of the Holy Qur’an is the answer of Islam to racism, an answer which, as far as the Muslim community is concerned, did not remain a pious exhortation but sounded the death knell of racial discrimination in the World of Islam as borne out not only by the example set by the Holy Prophet Muhammad; but also by subsequent events in the history of all Muslim nations and by the general attitude of the Muslims until the present day. I am inclined by personal experiences gathered during travels in almost all Muslim countries in the course of the last 25 years, to insist that, in consequence of these teachings of Islam and their translation into practice by the Holy Prophet; such a complete change was wrought in the minds and hearts of all who embraced Islam, in the minds and hearts of all Muslims that is, that to them racial differences present no problems at all, nay, that Muslims are largely almost totally unaware of, and most certainly little disturbed or embarrassed by, such differences.

There are instances galore in the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace and the blessings of God, which show us that, as is the case with regard to all injunctions of the Holy Qur’an, he was the perfect exemplar, the beautiful pattern of conduct also with regard to the application and actualisation of the principle of the brotherhood of man in his own dealings with his followers as well as in his personal relations with adherents of other faiths. But we can only appreciate fully how formidable a task it was to establish this principle among his followers, if we look at the social conditions which prevailed in Arabia before the advent of the Holy Prophet. Let me, in order to illustrate this point, quote from a book of a non-Muslim author, namely from “The Social Structure of Islam” by Reuben Levy: “The population of Arabia, outside of a few settled communities embedded in it, has throughout historical times been so constituted as to form a number of groups or tribes, very loosely held together either by loyalty to a particular leader or by the assumption of descent from a common ancestor, whether real or legendary. Within each of such groups or tribes, the independence of individual units - the tents or families - has always been taken as a matter of course and the head of each unit has been regarded as being in status the equal of every other. In the hands of the families lies the power to elect the “Shaikh” or tribal chief of whom in theory no special qualification is required. In actual practice however there is normally a strong prejudice in favour of choosing the “Shaikh” from amongst the members of particular families. At the time of the rise of Muhammad such families held a position of great influence within the community so that in any claim to authority the factor of birth was considered of paramount importance. Noble ancestry was the supreme test of

nobility and no person whose genealogy was not entirely free of hereditary taint - for example ancestors of servile or negro origin - could be regarded as conforming to the requisite standard. Such persons were relegated to the humbler ranks of society and were thus compelled to undertake careers that inevitably marked them as inferior beings ... In the same way that the old nobility resisted the assumption of equality by other Arabs so the inhabitants of Arabia as a whole refused to consider foreigners as being their peers.”

The Arabs regarded themselves as a superior race. And as regards the negroes they did not recognise them except as slaves.

It is this situation to which the Holy Qur'an refers in the following verse:

“And hold fast, all together, by the rope which God (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude God's favour upon you; for ye were enemies, and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth God make His Signs clear to you: that ye may be guided.”

(Holy Qur'an 3:103)

Among the measures introduced by the Holy Prophet of Islam to level the differences of rank and of race among his steadily growing community perhaps prayer ought to be mentioned in particular. Five times a day the Muslims meet together for prayer. Among the first Muslims were members of the noblest Arab families as well as a good number of negro slaves. At prayers they all stood shoulder to shoulder before the Almighty, and when, in the further course of prayer they prostrated before their Lord, it might well have been that the head of a noble Arab praying in a row behind a negro slave rested at the latter's feet. In prayer and in the company of the Holy Prophet no differences of status was recognised between the two.

From standing side by side in the ranks of prayer, the next step was a mere corollary; they mingled freely on terms of perfect equality on all other occasions. Service to God was thus the door through which the fraternisation of humanity was effected ... The negro slaves and the noble Arab were made to meet together on terms of equality in prayer and in religious gatherings. It was thus impressed on their minds, that they were all equal before God, and life once moulded on these lines led to the natural consequence that the negro slaves and the Arab nobility enjoyed equal status in society. It may be pointed out here however, that the Holy Prophet persistently encouraged Muslims to free the slaves.

In the first Muslim community a negro slave, Bilal, was chosen by the Holy Prophet himself to deliver the “Adhan”, the call to prayer, while the Holy Prophet himself was the “Imam” or leader of the congregation. Thus, of the two office-bearers of the Mosque, the Holy Prophet himself, of noble blood and birth, was one, the other being Bilal, a negro.

In his famous oration, which he delivered on the occasion of his “Farewell Pilgrimage”, his last pilgrimage before he closed his eyes forever, the Holy Prophet re-affirmed and re-stated the

principle of equality and brotherhood of man in Islam, thus bequeathing it as a sacred legacy to generation after generation of Muslims after him until the present day.

Let me quote from the oration:

“Ye people! listen to my words, for I know not whether another year will be vouchsafed to me after this year to find myself amongst you at this place.”

“Your lives and property are sacred and inviolable amongst one another until ye appear before the Lord... and remember, ye shall have to appear before your Lord who shall demand from you an account of all your actions... Ye people, ye have rights over your wives, and your wives have rights over you. Treat them with kindness and love... Keep always faithful to the trust reposed in you.”

“Ye people, listen to my words and understand them. Know that all Muslims are brothers unto one another. Ye are one Brotherhood.”

“All men are equal in Islam. The Arab has no superiority over the non-Arab, nor does the non-Arab have superiority over the Arab, save in the fear of God.”

That the Holy Prophet's bequest was heeded and the example set by him was followed by subsequent generations of Muslims throughout the ages and throughout the width and breadth of the world of Islam is well known to every student of the history of Muslim nations. It is impossible for me within the limits of the time allotted to me for this talk to render a detailed, much less a comprehensive account of all such facts and incidents which afford proof of my assertion. I can only quote some of them, and I may be permitted to do so at random:

One of the acid tests of unrestrained and unrestricted inter-racial relations are inter-racial marriages. That such marriages were never frowned upon by Muslims is borne out by the fact that many a Caliph of the Umayyad and Abbasid as well as of later dynasties, had Turkish, Greek or even negro mothers.

On the other hand, social rank or high office did not bestow upon the bearer special privileges before the law and certainly did not entitle him to ill-treat a brother Muslim with impunity. The following incident which is reported to have occurred during the reign of Omar, the second Caliph after the death of the Holy Prophet is an example of absolute equality of all men in Islam. Jabbala, King of the Ghassanides, having embraced Islam, set out on a pilgrimage to Makkah. While performing the circumambulation of the Ka'aba, a humble pilgrim engaged in the same sacred duties, accidentally dropped a piece of his pilgrim's dress over the royal shoulders. Jabbala turned round furiously and struck him a blow. The poor man went to the Caliph and prayed for redress. Omar sent for Jabbala and asked him why he has so ill-treated a brother Muslim. He answered that the man had insulted him, and had it not been for the sanctity of the place, he would have killed him on the spot. Omar replied that his words added to the gravity of

his offence, and that unless he obtained the pardon of the injured man he would have to submit to the penalty of the law. When Jabbala refused to do as he was bidden because-as he retorted-he was a king and the other only a common man, Omar replied “King or no king, both of you are Muslims and both of you are equal in the eye of the law.”

But perhaps one of the most instructive examples of the policy of Islam towards different races is furnished by Spain. Permit me to quote from Syed Amir Ali’s fundamental work “The Spirit of Islam”:

“Immediately on their arrival on the soil of Spain, the Muslims published an edict assuring to the subject races, without any difference, the most ample liberty. Suevi, Goth, Vandal, Roman and Jew, were all placed on an equal footing. Their women were invited to inter-marry with the conquerors.

“...The fidelity of the Arabs in maintaining their promises, the even handed justice which they administered to all races and classes, without distinction of any kind, secured them the confidence of the people ... The Jews profited most by the change of government”, and when many centuries later Spain was re-conquered by Ferdinand and Isabella, innumerable Jews left the country for Muslim lands, preferring a life in exile under Muslim rule to life in their home country under the new rulers of whose racial and religious tolerance they were not convinced.

And this is another aspect of the principle of the brotherhood of mankind as envisaged and enunciated by Islam: namely religious tolerance.

The essence of the attitude of Islam towards adherents of other faiths is to be found in the charter which was granted to the Jews by the Holy Prophet after his arrival in Madinah, and in the message which he sent to the Christians of Najran, a town in Southern Arabia, then largely inhabited by Christians, after Islam had fully established itself in the Arab Peninsula.

“In the name of the most Merciful and Compassionate God,” says this first charter of freedom of conscience, “Given by Muhammad, the Prophet, to the believers, whether of the Quresh or of Yathrib - (as Madinah was then called) - and to all individuals, of whatever origin, who have made common cause with them: all these shall constitute one nation ... the Jews who attach themselves to our commonwealth shall be protected from all insults and vexations: they shall have an equal right with our own people to our assistance and good offices. The Jews of the various branches - (and here follows the names of the various Jewish tribes of Madinah and the surrounding territories) - and all others domiciled in Yathrib, shall form with the Muslims one composite nation; They shall practice their religion as freely as the Muslims; the clients - meaning the protected, and the allies of the Jews shall enjoy the same security and freedom.”

This is a paraphrase of the Charter granted by the Holy Prophet to the Jews after he had arrived in Yathrib, a town which because of him became known as Madinat-un-Nabi the City of the Prophet, or in short Madinah, while the message to the Christians of Najran, sent to them almost at the end of the Holy Prophet’s mission, runs as follows:

“To the Christians of Najran and the neighbouring territories, the security of God and the pledge of His Prophet are extended for their lives, religion, and their property - to the present as well as the absent and others besides: there shall be no interference with the practice of their faith or their observances, nor any change in their rights or privileges; no bishop shall be removed from his bishopric, nor any monk from his monastery, nor any priest from his priesthood. And they shall continue to enjoy everything great and small as heretofore, no image or cross shall be destroyed; they shall not oppress nor be oppressed, they shall not practice the rights of blood vengeance as in the days of ignorance (the era before the advent of Islam); no tithes shall be levied from them nor shall they be required to furnish provisions for the troops.”

“This document,” observes Syed Amir Ali in his book quoted before “has furnished the guiding principle to all Muslim rulers in their mode of dealing with their non-Muslim subjects, and if they have departed from it in any instance the cause is to be found in the character of the particular sovereign. If we separate the political necessity which has often spoken and acted in the name of religion, no faith is more tolerant than Islam to the followers of other creeds. “Reasons of State” may have led a sovereign here and there to display a certain degree of intolerance, or to insist upon a certain uniformity of faith; but the system itself has ever maintained the most complete tolerance. Christians and Jews, as a rule, have never been molested in the exercise of their religion, or constrained to change their faith. If they are required to pay a special tax, it is in lieu of military service, and it is but right that those who enjoy the protection of the State should also contribute in some shape to the public burdens. Towards the idolaters there was greater strictness in theory, but in practice the law was equally liberal. If at any time they were treated with harshness, the cause is to be found in the passions of the ruler or the population. The religious element was used only as pretext.”

If there have been instances of religious intolerance in the history of the Muslim nations, these instances - and that should be very clearly understood - did not happen because of Islam but in spite of Islam and they only betray lack of knowledge of the teachings of Islam, and of understanding of the spirit and principles of that religion.

You might like to interpose here that the idea of racial equality and of the brotherhood of mankind is not the exclusive property of Islam, nay that these ideas have been proclaimed by different individuals and ideologies in different places of our globe and at different times. You might like to quote to me - as I did to you - from various sacred and profane works of the most dissimilar authors, and you will certainly insist that in the West - in Europe and America - this idea has been accepted adopted as a principle or policy, of organised society, since the 18th century at the latest when the Age of Enlightenment had dawned and the French Revolution had sounded the clarion call of “Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite!”

I certainly cannot and shall not claim that the idea of racial equality and of human brotherhood is the invention of Islam and has only been proclaimed by that religion and by nobody else. But I

claim and insist that only in and through Islam has this idea ever been realised in action over centuries and among the most different and dissimilar nations and races.

In spite of the lofty ideals of Enlightenment and of the French Revolution the West did not and has still not solved the racial problem, nor has the West been able until today to establish racial equality everywhere in its hemisphere. It is barely fifty years ago that racism raised to the position of State Philosophy - the most brutal and barbaric racism that can be imagined - the one I referred to at the very beginning of my talk, was crushed in my own country. Racism in the shape of "Apartheid" is still allowed to raise its ugly head in South Africa*, and racism is certainly not eradicated in the United States in spite of the abolition of slavery that took place some time ago and in spite of legislation introduced after the Second World War, aiming at the levelling of differences between the various racial groups and at the doing away with racial discrimination. In the Socialist World, Marxism Leninism or Communism has introduced its own brand and type of racism - namely what I may be permitted to call "ideological racism" which is as hateful and abhorrent as biological racism. So, wherever we look we find that neither the ideals of the Age of Enlightenment and of the French Revolution, nor the UN Charter of Human Rights, the latest exercise in bringing about racial equality and in abolishing racial discrimination have been able to achieve their goal, while Islam has most certainly done so.

I may be forgiven if at this place I narrate some of my own personal experiences as a Muslim.

I mentioned before that in the course of the last 25 years or so I have visited almost every Muslim country and I have been posted for longer or shorter periods in about half a dozen of them. Wherever I went I was immediately accepted by the local Muslims as one of theirs, and my religious affiliation proved to have an incomparably stronger and deeper effect on them than my nationality or the colour of my skin. As a matter of fact the latter were of absolutely no consequence at all in their attitude towards me. And when I married a young Muslim lady from Pakistan, more than 30 years ago, it did not create the slightest embarrassment to the family of my wife nor to us, the young couple. The marriage was accepted with the same naturalness as any marriage of two Pakistanis, and no one of my Muslim relatives or friends ever considered or treated our children as halfcast in the ugly meaning of that word, nor were my children ever made to feel any different from full-blooded Pakistani children. They, who grew up among Muslims never knew of racial differences between men until - yes, until in the wake of one of our numerous transfers from one post to another we were forced to make a brief sojourn in South Africa. There they saw for the first time in their life those ugly signs "For Whites Only". And it was there that they were made to realise that in a country where racism or Apartheid reigns, Ahmed cannot play football in the street with John, and Laila cannot just drop in at Linda's to admire her new doll. And what a shock they got when they saw that their father and their mother, in order to do such a simple transaction as to buy postage stamps, had to enter the post office through different doors.

- But then they stood in front of a beautiful church, and their perturbed minds were set at rest when, - for it was Christmas time, they read the invitation written in bold letters above the door:

“all are welcome”, until they noticed, in smaller, much smaller letters, once again the ugly sign “For Whites Only!” So even here, in the House of God, and during Christmas, the Festival of Joy

* Apartheid was still in force in South Africa when this talk was given in 1976. publisher.

and of Love, there was no bridge to cross the deep, deep gap between fellow human beings who have everything else in common - except the colour of their skin.

Why, then, has Islam succeeded where other systems and ideologies seem to have failed? What is the secret of its success, and in what way can the religion of Islam contribute to the solution of the racial problem under which millions and millions of our fellow human-beings are still reeling?

In my humble opinion Islam has succeeded where other systems and ideologies have failed because of two decisive factors: namely the universality of its teachings and the divine sanctions on which the Islamic concept of the brotherhood of mankind is based.

A Muslim believes that Islam is not only the last of the world's great religions but also an all-inclusive religion which contains within itself all religions which went before it. It is one of its most striking characteristics that it requires its followers to believe that all great religions of the world that preceded it have been revealed by God, and it is a fundamental principle of Islam that a Muslim must also believe in all prophets who were raised up before the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Prophets, according to the express teachings of the Holy Qur'an were sent by God to all nations:

Says the Holy Qur'an:

“And there is not a nation but a warner has gone among them.”
(Holy Qur'an 13:7)

But whereas all previous prophets were sent with specific missions to their own people only, the Holy Prophet Muhammad was sent to all nations of the earth, as the Holy Qur'an teaches us:

Say: “O mankind! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of God, to Whom belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth.”
(Holy Qur'an 7:158)

and elsewhere:

“We sent thee not but as a mercy for all nations.”

(Holy Qur'an 21:10)

“There is no question now,” says Allama Yusuf Ali in his commentary to this verse, of race or nation, of a ‘chosen people’ or ‘the seed of Abraham’ or the ‘seed of David’; or of Hindu Arya-Varta, of Jew or Gentile, Arab or ‘Ajam, Turk or Tajik, European or Asiatic, White or Coloured; Aryan, Semitic, Mongolian, or African; or American, Australian or Polynesian. ‘The Holy Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace and the blessings of God, was sent to them all’ - and that distinguishes him from all other prophets, and that also distinguishes Islam from all other religions. The message that was revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad from On High was a message addressed to all nations on earth, and the principles set forth in that message

applied universally to the whole of mankind. He was the last of the prophets, and Islam, based on the revelation which the Holy Prophet received is the final and perfect expression of the Divine Will.

Says the Holy Qur'an:

“This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.”
(Holy Qur'an 5:4)

It is the self-same God, the Supreme Being, the Ultimate Cause, the One and Only, our Lord and Creator Who has also spoken to us, through the mouth of the Holy Prophet Muhammad the words which I have already quoted earlier and which I should like to call back into our memory:

“And mankind is naught but a single nation.”
(Holy Qur'an 2:213)

“O Mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other, (not that ye despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous (and God-fearing) of you.”
(Holy Qur'an 49:13)

In Islam and to every single one of its followers the equality of man and the brotherhood of mankind are not the figment of the human brain and mind. They are guiding principles decreed by God.

Equality and Fraternity, as well as liberty, according to the teachings of Islam, are religious categories, and only where they are conceived as such can these lofty ideals become reality.

There is no road to the unification of humanity, no road to a brotherhood of man which knows no boundaries of colour, race, country, language and rank except through God, the One and Only, the Creator and “Rabb” of all that is in the heavens and on earth. Without absolute and unreserved faith in Him, and in the truth and universality of His revelation - without the will to serve Him, which is the purpose of our creation, and to follow His commandments and guidance this goal can never be achieved as history tells us.

Only God, the Absolute, has established absolute values by which we can assess our and our fellow - human being's real worth. Colour and race, position and rank do not belong to them. To the true believers these differences are mere accidents and they are of no consequence, therefore, his relation with, and evaluation of his fellow man.

Says the Qur'an:

“Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God, O men, is he who is most righteous, the most God-fearing of you.”

(Holy Qur'an 49:13)

This then, is the yard stick by which in Islam man is measured, and not his race or rank. Peace and mutual trust among individuals and nations alike can only be brought about if we base our inter-human relations on the recognition of, and strict adherence to, absolute values. Materialism and secularism, humanity's ideal in modern times, lacks all prerequisites because their value concepts change from time to time and from place to place. Islam is the only force which provides man with the spiritual and moral foundation on which lasting peace and mutual trust and respect among the nations of the world can be built. Islam is, first and foremost, an international religion, and it is before the grand international ideal of Islam, the ideal of the equality of all races and of the unity of the human kind, an ideal founded on the belief in the Oneness of God, that the curse of racism and narrow minded nationalism, which have been and still are responsible for many of the troubles of the ancient and the modern world, can be swept away.

The Muslim Community, past and present, has not only established true and lasting brotherhood among its members, a brotherhood that encompasses everyone who belongs to it, irrespective of racial or social differences. It has also shown us by its example the road to this goal. The starting point is faith, unquestioning faith in God, the “Rabb” of the world. From there it leads us to submission unto His will—the stage at which we willingly and cheerfully obey His commandments and actualise the principles laid down by Him for our actions and conduct—until we reach the stage of supererogatory service to God and men. The road leads us, to use Arabic terms, from Iman, faith, to Islam, submission and ultimately to Ihsan, goodness. And this is the road we have to tread if we want to bring about mutual respect and trust among men, the road to the abolition of all racial and social discrimination, the road to the unification of mankind, to the universal brotherhood to which the assembly of Muslims of all races and from every nook and corner of the world at Makkah during the days of Pilgrimage bears witness. But this assembly also shows us that our unity lies in God, and in God only.

May we be inspired by their faith and example; may we follow their road, A'ameen!

(This was a paper read at the international Islamic Conference on the occasion of “The Festival of Islam”, in London 1976.

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