

ISLAM AS A UNIFYING FACTOR TO PROMOTE INTEGRATION AMONG NATIONS

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The topic which I have been asked to speak on is "The Role of Islam as a Unifying Factor." Before I elaborate on this subject, I have to say frankly that I was shocked when I heard in the beginning of the conference the term "Moslem Problems," because I have always believed that Islam, as a religion of God, cannot produce a problem. On the contrary, it offers solutions to problems.

Islam is a unique religion; it is a system of life. It is not concerned only with the religious aspects of human life, but with all of that life. It does not limit its values to the happiness of its followers only, but it stands concerned about all humanity. I believe that not only Islam can be considered a unifying factor, but every right religion of God is, too, and should thus be a unifying factor in the search for world harmony. Islamism came to unify people, and so did Christianity, because religion at its simplest is God's message on the goodwill of mankind. If it is viewed as divisive factor, then such a view is only a human error. As long as religion stays as a belief and a doctrine, it is a unifying factor. The trouble only starts when it becomes dogmatism or fanaticism.

Islam and Humanity

Islam considers all human beings as one nation belonging to one God and one Father. Our God is Allah, as we Moslems name Him, or is God the Lord or Khoda, and our Father is Adam. The Almighty God has assigned all that is in the universe to be at the disposal of mankind and to be under his control in his capacity as successor (viceregent) of God on this earth. It is stated in the Holy Quran that God has created

for us all that is in the heavens and on earth at our disposal.

The Quran has emphasized the dignity of man: "We have dignified the children of Adam, made them utilize the land and the sea, and provided them best with sustenance and we have preferred them over many of what we have created." For man's dignity, the Angels, the pure souls, have knelt down and this indicates that all the materialistic and spiritual powers of the universe were put for the service of man. Hence, man should be grateful for this grace by following the path of the Gracious.

All these show the dignity of man since his creation in this universe. This dignity, as the verses of the Quran and the Sunnah (Shariyah) indicate, is not limited to any race, color or nationality, but is a gift of all men who are all equal. In fact it is not limited to any one religion. It was said that when the Prophet passed by an on-going funeral, he stopped to acknowledge the dignity of the dead. Some of the Prophet's companions said: "It is a non-Moslem funeral," but the Prophet replied: "Is it not a soul?"

All Men as One Community

Islam considers all men as one nation. The Holy Quran states this oneness in many verses. As long as the origin is One, unity should prevail. Human differences are accidents created for certain purposes. God has sent his Messengers to guide and to judge these differences and to show the people the right path.

Mankind was one single nation
 And God sent Messengers
 With glad tidings and warnings
 And with them He sent
 The Book of truth,
 To judge between people
 In matters wherein
 They differed;
 But the People of the Book,
 After the clear Signs
 Come to them, did not differ
 Among themselves,

Except through selfish contumacy
God by His Grace
Guided the Believers
To the truth
Concerning that
Wherein they differed
For God guides
Whom He will
To a path
That is straight.

The Holy Quran has stated that difference in religions should be left for God to judge, for God is the only one who can judge in the last day over these differences among men. Moreover, Islam states that differences in religions and beliefs are natural and should never be barriers to the whole unity of Man. These differences were God's way of creating man equipped and strengthened to adjust and respond to his environment.

If the nature of life in its earlier years made the peoples and nations isolated from one another, making it difficult for them to compromise, God sent a prophet for every community so that the prophet would guide his community to God's path. And when these communities have adopted one path to God, these peoples and tribes naturally compromise because they embrace the path of God which is the Lord of all.

However, man's inattention to God's course made every community continue to remain independent. Thus the artificial differences have continued and have increased and deepened from their unawareness of the only Lord. For this reason, God has willed the coming of Islam as the last resort. Hence, Islam was to be a religion for all mankind in order to let men return as children of Adam and believers of God.

For this reason, we find that Islam has set up Moslems on a principle of which Prophet Mohammed has said: "There is no preference between a white female child and a black female child except by worship of God and good work." This was not a theoretical but a practical and realistic principle, because this was represented by the Prophet's

companions who represented all the races known at that time: from the East there was Solamn Alfarsy, from the West Suhaib Al Roomy, and from the South Bital the Ethiopian. Each of them represented a cornerstone of the Muslim Community, which was a symbol of the whole world with all its different races and colors. It was a world where people of various environments and classes must be fused together through Islam.

The main religions have played a great role in creating civilizations and establishing nations and prosperity. All religions demand kindness and love, and hate force, aggression and evil. These religions were a basic factor in spreading peace among men.

The right heavenly religions have cooperated in enhancing co-existence among men and encouraging them to live together through love in a way that no one attacks another or sheds his blood, and differences in religion would not stand as a barrier to their security, freedom, property and honor.

In this spirit, religion has found a place in the pages of the history of cooperation towards the welfare of mankind. We cannot forget the role of both Islam and Christianity in working together during the Abbasiyad Age, which greatly influenced the field of education and culture. In that age, one of the most distinctive characteristics of our social morality was our cooperation to fight the hardships of life despite differences in religion and belief.

One of the best manifestations of religion in history was the role played by Sheik Alislam Ibn Taimiyah, who requested the Prince of Tartars to release his prisoners. The Prince approved his request and released the Muslim, but not the Christian and Jewish prisoners. However, Sheik refused this and said: "The Christian and Jewish prisoners must be released too, because they also believe in God and his prophet." The Prince released them all. This was the spirit of religion in its immortal reality.

But once religion is narrowly understood, it is characterized by hatred, aggression and produces conflicts, disputes and bloodshed. It is only then when religion turns out to be badly discriminatory, threatening to bring the worst consequences. There are many who believe that the remedy to destructive denominationalism is for mankind to give up

religion. This is a wrong belief. Religions have never been a means to war nor a tool for destruction and genocide.

The difference between religion and denominationalism is similar to the difference between education and ignorance, right and wrong, good and evil, belief and disbelief. Religion is brotherhood, love, mercy and peace; denominationalism is hatred, suffering and conflict. Religion is faithfulness, good morality, cleanness of conscience, and goodness of spirit; denominationalism is unfaithfulness, immorality and evil.

Many leaders have been blind to these differences, so that they have attacked religion in the belief that it is identical with denominationalism. They are not aware that in so doing they have stripped the community of its most powerful weapon against denominationalism and its consequences. If we accept the argument to give up religion because it is misused, then we should accept the argument that every man should give up medicine because it is also misused, or to close down universities because they have been used to misguide some students from the path of righteousness.

Islam is a religion of love for people, and peace among men. As our Prophet said, "No one is considered a good believer unless his love for his brother is the same as his love for himself." So this religion came, calling for peace and disregarding partisanship, whatever its cause. God said, "Oh mankind, we created you out of male and female and made you into nations and tribes to know one another. The most dignified for God is that who fears God most." Prophet Mohammed says: "Do not hate each other, don't envy; don't call each other names, and don't be unjust to each other; be believers of God, brothers." In this respect, many Christians saw Islam as a natural supplement to the Old and the New Testaments. Prophet Mohammed said: "I was sent to fulfill the good morals."

Islam was against discrimination, whether of sect or of race. It fought national partisanship and nationalism so that justice and love would prevail among peoples every where. The Prophet said: "Whoever calls for or fights for partisanship does not belong to us, because a believer should not side with or be dogmatic about his party or his country in a way which leads to inequity."

Discriminating against those who belong to different religions,

treating them badly, looting their properties, and so on result in destruction and suffering in the lives of individuals and groups. This is what every right religion has forbidden. This is what Islam intends to eradicate.

These similarities reveal the amity of religions, their simplicity and their aim to bring happiness to all humanity. History, up to the present, has proudly appreciated those who have shown the simplicity and amity of religion in their rules and conquests. On the other hand, it degrades those who applied the worst means of discrimination in their victories.

When Khaliph Omar entered Jerusalem, he granted its people security for their temples, churches, religions and properties. Thus, he was setting up the best example of the simplicity and amity of his religion.

When Sultan Mohammad Alfatih entered Constantinople, he granted its patriarch domestic control over his people provided that he does not interfere with their beliefs and worship. In doing so, he proved himself a man of religion who opened his heart to all people and saw to it that it was the right of the people to worship God freely.

However, when the dogmatic Spaniards occupied Islamic Spain, they dispersed its population, persecuted its people, killed and imprisoned them, despised their temples, and set fire on their properties. They did not apply the amity of their religion. They applied the rancor of an ignorant religious person who believes that there is no place on earth for those who do not belong to his religion. The tragedies of discrimination, aggression, wars and disputes came about as a result of blind partisanship out of ignorance, myths, rancor and misguidance.

While Romans, Mongols and other conquerors and invaders used violence, inequity, shedding of blood and looting in the countries they conquered, the Muslims, on the other hand, were kind, honest and just to the people they conquered. This is the spirit of Islam which sets up principles representing humanity and gracious Islamic morality. The Muslims have preserved these principles and ideals (according to God's and the Prophet's order), such as equity, forgiveness, faithfulness and patience. Many of writers of the West and East have viewed Islam in a just way and they ascribed forgiveness as a virtue of Islam and the

Muslims, even when they were dealing with their enemies. We saw also that Islam respected fully the freedom of religion, prohibited compulsion in religion, and granted an absolute freedom for those who belonged to other religions. This was in accordance with the Almighty God (no compulsion in religion). Islam has protected the faith of those who are under its state, those who covenanted with it, and those who did not revolt against it. Islam has made it easy for them to carry out their religious duties.

We have presented so far one permanent fact: that men are one community belonging to one father and one God and that all the prophets of different times and places in their preaching share the same message when they called for belief in one God. Moreover, we have shown that the Islamic view involves the notion that belief in God should be through reason and enlightenment; that the course of preaching should be through wisdom and good advice; and that there should be no compulsion in religion. However, we have seen people belonging to a certain religion become dogmatic over their religion, which diverted them from God's straight course. They compelled people to adopt their religion — an act which was not in agreement with the will of God. This does not mean that we should prohibit any group from preaching its religion, but that the method of preaching must not be by compulsion or killing, but through wisdom and good advice.

If the Muslims were too enthusiastic in preaching Islam, this was flowing out of their sincere feeling that they are saving humanity order to return it to its original conduct in accordance with God's will. I repeat that there is no evidence in history which indicates that Muslims have offended or killed people who belonged to other religions with the intention of taking their religions away from them.

Therefore, we realize that there is no stability, security or peace in the universe except by the return to the course of God, the course of one God and one Community.