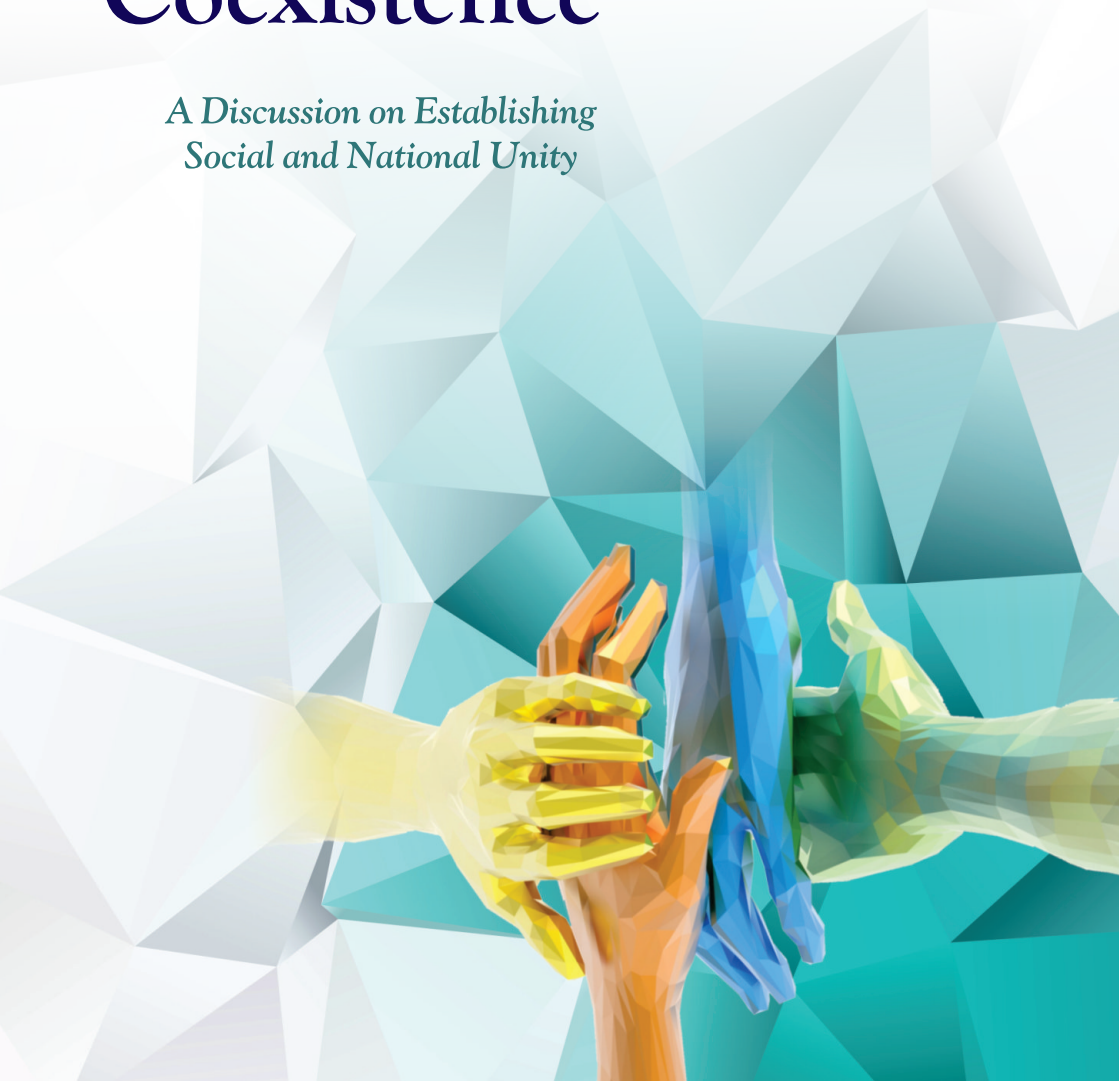


HASSAN AL SAFFAR

Diversity & Coexistence

*A Discussion on Establishing
Social and National Unity*





Hassan al-Saffar

Diversity and Coexistence

A Discussion on Establishing Social and National Unity

In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.

All Praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, with peace and blessings upon our Prophet Muhammad, his pure and immaculate progeny, and his honorable companions

“The well-being of people’s affairs lie in coexistence”¹

Imam Muhammad al–Baqir

Ibn Ali ibn al–Husayn

Ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib

(Peace be upon all of them)

(Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, pg. 167)

¹ صلاحُ شَأْنِ النَّاسِ التَّعَايُشُ

E- Book (Digital Version)

ISBN: 978-0-620-94688-99

Original Title:

التنوع و التعايش

بحث فى تأصيل الوحدة الاجتماعية و الوطنية

حسن موسى الصفار

First Edition Published by: Dar Al Saqi 1999

Diversity and Coexistence

A Discussion on Establishing Social and National Unity

Author: Hassan al - Saffar

Translation: Abdal Latif Al Matrah

Edit and Research by: Yasar Ebrahim

Revised by: Mansoor Mollagee

Forwarded (Arabic) by: Dr. Shaykh Muhammad Abduh Yamani

Forwarded (English) by: Syed Aftab Haider

Published by: Ahlul Bait Foundation of South Africa July 2021

No 2, De Wet Rd, Cnr of Ottery & De Wet Rds, Ottery

Cape Town, South Africa

Postal Address: PO Box 42, Ottery 7808, Cape Town, South Africa

Email: afosa@afosa.org - Website: www.afosa.org

Facebook.com/Afosa14 YouTube: AFOSA - Twitter: @AhlulbaitZA

Copyright ©2021 by Ahlulbait Foundation of South Africa

All Rights Reserved

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	9
PREFACE	13
FORWARD	17
INTRODUCTION	25
CHAPTER ONE	31
I Ethnic & National Diversity	39
II Language Diversity	41
III Religious Diversity	47
CHAPTER TWO	55
I Manifestation of Divine Power & Wisdom	57
II Legitimacy of Diversity	61
III Diversity; for a better understanding of others	65
IV Positive and Constructive Competition	67
CHAPTER THREE	75
I Diverse Citizens and Religions	83
II One Nation, Many Nationalities	91
III Firm origins with Diverse Denominations	105
CONCLUSION	117
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	125

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hujjatul islam wal Muslimeen Allamah Sheikh *Hassan al-Saffar* (الشيخ حسن الصفار, born 1958) is a Shi'a scholar and Friday prayer leader from Qatif, Saudi Arabia. He is considered one of the most important Shi'a leaders in Saudi Arabia.

On 23 October 2009, The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre made mention of Shaykh Saffar as being 'one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world'.

Beside his primary education in Saudi Arabia, he has studied and taught in several theological seminaries in different countries including Iraq, Iran and Kuwait.

He established and led a social movement aimed at promoting religious values, achieving the concept of citizenship and equality between citizens, overcoming sectarian discrimination, and cultural and sectarian exclusion by adopting the methodology of political, media and cultural work.++++

He plays a leading role in the movement of communication and openness between different sects and trends in the national and Islamic

arena. He has spearheaded initiatives to open channels of dialogue between Salafis and Shi'a in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The author is also a popular orator in the region who started his public speaking from an early age, as young as 12. Some of his lectures are broadcast on various radio and satellite channels from Kuwait, Iraq, Iran and Lebanon.

Most of his speeches revolve around building character, developing society, spreading a culture of unity and tolerance and protecting human rights.

He has published more than 147 books in various fields of religious and cultural knowledge, some of which have been translated into other languages.

A number of scientific and cultural magazines have published his research work and articles, including: (Al-Kalima), (Al-Waha), (Insights), (Al-Hajj and Umrah), (Al-Minhaj), (Risala Al-Taqreeb), (Contemporary Awareness), Al-Hiwar, and (Ijtihad and Renewal, and other magazines. Some daily newspapers also published his regular weekly articles including Al-Youm (Saudi), Al-Watan (Kuwait), Al-Dar (Kuwait), Al-Ayyam (Bahrain), Al-Watan (Qatar).

In a demonstration of appreciation for his competence and in acknowledgment of his religious and social role, senior religious authorities have appointed him as their representative in religious affairs in the region.

His website: www.saffar.org

PREFACE

It gives us great pleasure in presenting this reprint of the celebrated work by Shaykh Hasan Al-Saffar entitled '*Diversity and Coexistence – A Discussion on Establishing Social and National Unity*'. It presents us with an opportunity to reflect on the firm position Islam holds on matters relating to diversity within human society and the consequent need for mutual coexistence. This becomes more pertinent when the social fabric is composed of a multitude of layers nuanced by culture, ethnic background, geographical sources of origin, religion or other.

Historical Legacy

The legacy of Apartheid, proselytising an “apartness” or “separateness” of people on the basis of racial classification still looms large, albeit in a different form. The fundamental challenge with this stratification was that the separation was woven within a class paradigm. As Shaykh Saffar points out so eloquently in his opening remarks in saying that, “*there is a huge gap between developed and developing nations*” (page 9), and further elaborates that, “*the highest percentage of working children – one in three – are in Africa*” (page 10). Such stark economic disparity does foment a strongly racial element within the diversity of the human construct. In South Africa however, this was institutionalised, which means that diversity discourse never begged the meaningful coexistence question since those “separate” paths never crossed, or if they did, it was with the silo of constraint as permitted by the rules of engagement endemic to white privilege.

The creation of a new ‘masterclass’ dressed in the attire of economic privilege on account of politically correct nuances has not changed the bottom line for a grassroots populace, who still wallow in abject poverty

at the service of the whimsical desires of an engineered elite. This means that after three decades of democracy, we are still lacking on the social cohesion front, entrenched in division within our society along much of the same socio-economic lines. Given its legacy, this automatically translates into the entrenchment of racial inequality. In 2019, the World Bank recognised South Africa as the most unequal country in the world, meaning that South Africa's economy does not equally benefit all of its citizens². These stark contrasts yield unbelievable access to wealth for a select few, alongside children falling into pit latrines and drowning on account of a lack of adequate sanitary or ablution facilities.

The author presents great insights into how best to melt together these dichotomous positions with an Islamic worldview as espoused by the Holy Qur'an, the life of the Holy Prophet (S) and his Immaculate Household (AS).

Rise of Extremism

In stressing the source of this challenge, the author goes to great lengths to illustrate the factual element relating to diversity and its firm position within the Islamic realm. Diversity has become a political tool to foment strife, division, wars, enmity, hatred and suspicion amongst people. In this, religious extremism has taken centre stage, with Muslims largely being regarded as the most fanatical perpetrators of violence on the world platform. The horrific acts of terror in the name of Islam targeting ordinary citizens and even Muslims themselves is a serious conundrum in itself, when it is common knowledge and oft forgotten, that religion promotes peace, love and understanding amongst people. The fact that the main drivers of such psychotic mayhem derive inspiration from lessons originating from the same land as the author, makes this book all the more significant for its contribution to the promotion of the polar opposite – a meaningful coexistence based upon mutual respect.

² <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/facts-why-south-africa-most-unequal-country-oxfam/>

The flip side of this same religious extremism coin and no less despicable in the manner that it incites hatred is Islamophobia. The hate speech against Muslims and prejudice directed against the religion appears to be an antidote to the rising geopolitical that Islam presents on the world stage. What was previously differences of opinion between people of various faiths, the current tone of anti-Islamic rhetoric has strong shades of racism and anti-religious sentiment. The most vociferous sources displaying such contemptible behaviour surprisingly arises not from other faith-based people, but a militant brand of atheism that has chosen for itself Islam as the target of all its venomous vitriol. This exaggerated fear of Muslims as a people and Islam as a religion and feeding negative stereotypes does suggest sinister motives. That hatred towards a people based on their religion is no different to a marginal group of people misusing religion to achieve their selfish or personalised ends.

South Africa, during the Apartheid years, was a bastion of religious tolerance and mutual coexistence amongst the vast majority of people who vehemently opposed the racist regime. This bond melted together diverse cross-sections of society and cemented it through protests, organised demonstrations, and critical opposition. Religious leaders were in the forefront of many of these efforts. It was indeed a sad day on Thursday, 10th May 2018, when we witnessed the first terror attack in South Africa, visited upon the Imam Husain Mosque in Phoenix, Durban. The paradox is that it was organised, initiated and perpetrated by extremists in the name of Islam, against an Islamic Place of Worship, where Qurans were set alight. The importance of this effort by Shaykh Saffar in promoting dialogue, encouraging mutual respect and tolerance and raising the flag of a peaceful coexistence is pertinent in a world driven by intolerance of individuals and communities towards one another. He demonstrates through countless examples from Islamic history that this is not only possible within the confines of a genuine Islamic paradigm but is in fact actively promoted. The selfish exploitation of religion to promote political ends are shown to be the cause of most of the problems being faced. The author highlights this

when he cites the numbers of people being killed in the wars with Israel compared to those killed in conflicts fanned by extremism in the Islamic world.

Conclusion

We are deeply privileged to be promoting this significant contribution by the author, which in his own words are, *‘a humble attempt to promote the ethics of coexistence, based upon the fact that diversity is a global, social and human phenomenon, which stems from the infinite wisdom of the Almighty in order for humans to know, understand, and respect one another. Our religious concepts and teachings direct us to positively deal with our diversity and differences. If we go back to our glorious Islamic history, we can find wonderful examples that should inspire and motivate us towards establishing and maintaining peaceful coexistence.’*

A primary driver of extremism and intolerance being witnessed today is in direct contrast to all true religious teachings. The essence is founded upon peaceful coexistence, the recognition of diversity within the human family and the need to accept views out there do indeed exist that are different to ours. This revolutionary thinking that creates a dynamic space within this world for humanity’s concomitance can only exist when there is mutual respect within the spirit of, *“You are either compatriots in faith, or equals in humanity.”* (Imam Ali (AS))

Syed Aftab Haider

Cape Town, South Africa – July 2021

FOREWORD

By Dr. Shaykh Muhammad Abduh Yamani³

I was graciously requested by my dear brother Shaykh Hasan al-Saffar to write a foreword to this valuable book that is presented before you. The subject matter of this book, i.e. diversity and coexistence, is an imperative topic. This book is of great value, particularly given that it calls for dialogue, reflection, and coexistence and deals with this sensitive and important topic in an objective and logical manner, leaving the reader engrossed in a book infused with the author's nuanced insights, rich experiences, and vast knowledge that cogently elucidates the message he is trying to portray.

The book deals with this serious issue in an eloquent manner and an engagingly evocative fashion. As you read the book, the thoughts and ideas of the author will feel so inherent, that you may find yourself identifying with them as if they were your very own.

The reader will find that the topic of this book is universal and has global appeal. For the topic has always existed and been a concern for humans throughout the ages; as coexistence is integral to the continuation of human life; "Had Allah willed, He would have made you but one community"⁴, but Allah's wisdom dictated the creation of

³ Former Minister of Culture and Information of Saudi Arabia

⁴ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً

(The Glorious Quran, Chapter 16 Verse 93)

humans as diverse populations, tribes and nations, so that they would come to appreciate one another in an atmosphere of coexistence.

Another distinct quality of this book is that each of its chapters are so richly and comprehensively written that they could independently be developed to form a separate book. For example, subjects and topics such as the apparent difference in language, race and ethnicity, nationalism, and individual differences are all worthy of expansive study and reflection.

The author has skillfully addressed the various aspects of the topic in an organized manner, infusing them with rich references to Qur'anic verses and traditions of the Holy Prophet. I was most impressed with the author's views about the state of the Muslim Ummah, as the current internal divisions and strife are impeding and hindering its progress and advancement. The author then focusses upon the worry and tension that further plagues the path to advancement and how the enemies have taken advantage of these internal battles that have preoccupied the minds of the Muslims.

One who reads Shaykh Hasan al-Saffar's book will undoubtedly appreciate his focus on the pivotal role coexistence could play in unity, strength and progress of this Ummah. When it comes to the issue of ethnic and national diversity, I was pleased with the author's focus on the Islamic viewpoint towards creation of man from a single soul, referencing the Qur'anic verse,

“O mankind! Be wary of your Lord who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and from the two of them scattered numerous men and women. Be wary of Allah, in whose Name you adjure

one another and [of severing ties with] blood relations. Indeed Allah is watchful over you.”⁵

The author then continues his discussion by referring to linguistic diversity, followed by religious diversity. He concludes by stressing that any differences found in these two areas should not be a reason for conflict and quarrel, but rather peaceful coexistence, social harmony, and mutual respect.

In the second chapter the issue of differing opinions in Islamic thought and perspective is discussed with great objectivity. He again supports his argument with reference to a Qur’anic verse that affirms the multiplicity of tongues (languages) and colors, “Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. There are indeed signs in that for those who know”.⁶

Another important issue he raises is the legitimacy of diversity and its relationship with getting acquainted with others. In addition, the issue of competition in any sphere must be positive and objective and in harmony with God’s instructions and the teachings of the Prophet, his immaculate family, and his honorable companions. For as long as competition is positive, it protects humanity, as a whole, against conflicts and disagreements that would otherwise result in countless human loss.

It is in this chapter where the author emphasizes what has been stipulated in the chapter of al-Ma’ida, where Allah states that He made a code and path for every nation, and had He wished, He would have created them all as a single community, “For each [community] among you We had appointed a code [of law] and a path, and had Allah wished

⁵ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا رُؤُوسَهُمْ وَرَبَّتْ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

(Chapter 4 Verse 1)

⁶ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْخْتِلَافِ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

(Chapter 30 Verse 22)

*He would have made you one community, but [His purposes required] that He should test you in respect to what He has given you.*⁷

Furthermore, the author stresses on the idea that difference is innate and beneficial for life, so long as not transformed into conflicts and hostilities. He then emphasizes that positive competition and rivalry in accomplishing good must substitute futile arguments and conflicts, benefitting from the following Quranic verse “For every nation We have appointed rites [of worship] which they observe; so let them not dispute with you concerning your religion, and invite to your Lord. Indeed, you are on a straight guidance.”⁸

He then identifies the wise amongst the people, those who “...when they hear vain talk, they avoid it and say, ‘Our deeds belong to us, and your deeds belong to you. Peace be to you. We do not court the ignorant.’”⁹

In the third chapter, the book focuses on coexistence, its applications, and draws benefit from the conduct and practices of the Holy Prophet.

In summary, I believe that the book generally engages in vital issues and provides objective solutions, raises important questions about civilized coexistence, higher morals, the importance of dialogue and the role and responsibility of intellectuals towards establishing Islamic unity and distancing it from conflict and hostilities. He then closes with the Holy Verse, “And obey Allah and His Apostle, and do not dispute, or you

⁷ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَا جَاءَ، وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ
(Chapter 5 Verse 48)

⁸ لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ... فَلَا يُتَارَعَتُكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ، وَادْعُ إِلَى رَبِّكَ... إِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى مُّسْتَقِيمٍ
(Chapter 22 Verse 67)

⁹ وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا اللَّغْوَ أَعْرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَا تَبْتَغِي الْجَاهِلِينَ
(Chapter 28 Verse 55)

will lose heart and your power will be gone. And be patient; indeed Allah is with the patient.”¹⁰

It was an honour for me to write the foreword for this book, especially given that the author is a scholar who follows the Shia school of thought, a group who are known for their moderation and objectivity. He is a scholar who we recognize as one who is aspiring towards objective and direct dialogue in resolving fundamental concerns, especially the love of Allah, His Final Prophet and his family and honored companions, as well as their respect and reverence, as we have been ordered to so by Allah, *"And [also for] those who came in after them, who say, 'Our Lord, forgive us and our brethren who were our forerunners in the faith, and do not put any rancour in our hearts towards the faithful. Our Lord, You are indeed most kind and merciful.'"* ¹¹

We have come to know from Allah's Prophet who is reported to have said, "None should revile my Companions. for if one amongst you were to spend as much gold as Uhud, it would not amount to as much as a portion or even half of their worth"¹². The same reverence and respect must also be given to all the mothers of the believers i.e. the wives of the Holy Prophet and in particular Lady Khadijah b. Khuwaylid, a lady to whom all Muslims are greatly indebted to, for her support, loyalty and strengthening of the Holy Prophet and his cause, and all her daughters, especially the immaculate Lady Fatimah al-Zahra. This reverence includes all the mothers of the believers, including Lady Ayesha, as it was her who transmitted to us as a trust the narratives concerning the

¹⁰ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ وَاصْبِرُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ
(Chapter 8 Verse 46)

¹¹ وَالَّذِينَ جَاءُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لَنَا وَلِإِخْوَانِنَا الَّذِينَ سَبَقُونَا بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَا تَجْعَلْ فِي قُلُوبِنَا غِلًّا
لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ رَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ
(Chapter 59 Verse 10)

¹² لَا تَسُبُّوا أَحَدًا مِنْ أَصْحَابِي. فَإِنَّ أَحَدَكُمْ لَوْ أَنْفَقَ مِثْلَ أُحُدٍ ذَهَبًا، مَا أَذْرَكَ مُدًّا أَحَدِهِمْ وَلَا نَصِيفَهُ.
(Sahih Muslim, Book on the Virtues of the Companions, tradition 2541)

Editor's Note: In the original the forwarder begins this tradition with the phrase, الله الله في اصحابي, this is not part the above tradition, but from another.

virtues of Lady Fatimah which had not been narrated by anyone else¹³, that Fatimah is the leader of the women of paradise¹⁴... just as she narrated the tradition that Fatimah and her husband, Ali b. Abi Talib were the most beloved persons to the Holy Prophet.¹⁵

It is without doubt, that tremendous efforts and conscious solutions have been vested in this book, and it deserves to be read thoroughly, as it sets out serious issues and invites the reader to ponder, think and initiate dialogue.

Finally, I consider this book to be a worthy addition to Arabic literature and ask Allah that it be of benefit, as He is the one behind all efforts and He is the light towards the correct path.

Muhammad Abduh Yamani

¹³ EN: This does not seem to be the case, as this tradition has also been reported from another of the Holy Prophet's wives, Umm al-Salama

¹⁴ Sunan Nisa'i, Chapter on the virtues of Fatimah daughter of Prophet Muhammed, tradition. 8366

¹⁵ Sunan Tirmidhi, Chapter on the virtues of Fatimah daughter of Prophet Muhammad, tradition. 3874

INTRODUCTION

There is a huge and horrific gap between the developed and developing nations of the world and the gap seems to only grow bigger as time goes by. Year after year, the developed countries become wealthier while developing countries become poorer and more underdeveloped.

More than three quarters of the world's population live in developing countries, yet they only have access to 16% of global produce, this while 20% of the global population, who live in developed, countries enjoy 85% of global produce. Even oil-rich countries of the third world have tremendous disparity between their population growth and gross national product, GNP; even in the Gulf Cooperation Council States, the population between 1990 – 1995 grew to 23% while the GNP did not exceed 19%.

The painful reality of the sad state of affairs is realized when we compare Israel to its neighboring Arab countries. Israel is geographically located within the third world and is a brutal, occupying state which was planted in the heart of the Arab world and is actually an extension of the great progressive powers. Its population is estimated to be about 5.4 million and its gross domestic product in 1994 reached 78.1 billion dollars; while the population of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian areas combined is 83 million people, yet their combined gross national product is lower than that of Israel, even though these countries are well and long established in the region, while Israel was planted amidst them and created within the last fifty years.

Developed countries enthusiastically attempt to confront this imbalance between them and developing countries through more credit

and loans which, in turn, only hinders their economies and consigns their future to the will of creditors and loan providers.

The World Bank report (world debts 1993-1994) stated that the debt of Arab countries alone increased to 189 billion dollars by the end of 1992 and the levy charges alone for these loans increased to over 17.7 billion dollars.

It should be noted that Egypt, as an example of an Arab country, has foreign debts exceeding 31.18 billion dollars, and according to Youssef Boutros Ghali, the Egyptian Minister of Finance, these debts will not be paid off until 2034!

What suffering those living in developing countries face in various facets of their lives, including education, health, employment and the provision of basic living essentials.

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) report of January 1995 gave the following startling facts and figures:

- Nearly one third of the people in developing countries live in utter poverty;
- Malnutrition adversely impacts the physical and cognitive development of one out of every three children in developing countries;
- An estimated 1.3 billion people in developing countries are deprived of the basic levels of portable drinking water;
- In 1992, some 6 million children under the age of five died from pneumonia or diarrhoea.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that around 100 million children under the age of fifteen are compelled to

work, and thus are deprived from schooling due to abject poverty. Around 95% of them are in developing countries and nearly half of those are in Asia; but the highest percentage of working children – one in three - are in Africa.

So, when and how will these communities be capable of improving their dire conditions and rise from the yoke of relentless poverty and overcome this tragic state?

The first step that will put us on the path towards development and progress is to mobilize and affirm the will to coexist with others.

If we recognize and respect each other, acknowledging our mutual interests and fate, we would be able to work together to overcome our state of backwardness and be able to move along the path of progress towards the wide and bright horizon of civilization.

The gap between where we are, and the path towards civilisation and progress is very wide. Therefore, we need to make tremendous efforts and mobilize all of our energies in order to even slightly close this gap.

Development is a tremendous challenge, even for those countries that enjoy peace and stability; in addition to there being fierce global rivalry between industrialized and developed countries as is apparent today between the US and Japan.

Even if we were to move at the same speed as others (industrialized and developed nations), we wouldn't be able to catch up to them due to the large gap that now exists between us and them. Once someone has overtaken you by a thousand kilometres at the speed of 120 kmph, you will simply not be able to catch up with them, even if you moved at their speed. In fact, you will need to intensify and accelerate in order to make up for the distance they have already achieved ahead of you.

It is an established fact that internal divisions and strife hinder any attempts and initiatives to move forward. Our people¹⁶ are similar to those in all human communities, in that they have varied opinions and champion various religious, nationalist and political perspectives and loyalties. The crux of our problem lies not in the differences that exist but in how people react to and deal with them. Instead of enjoying an atmosphere of tolerance, understanding and acceptance, an environment of suspicion and distrust prevails. In such an unhealthy climate, each group is suspicious of the other, and is prepared to confront and undermine its real or perceived rival group; by doing so, instead of forming unity and cooperation that would lead to progress and harmonious living, the infighting, bickering, tension and conflict dissipates energies and leads to destruction.

As long as we are pre-occupied and consumed with our internal strife, which consumes our time and energies, our enemies find it easy and conducive to exploit our differences in order to keep us disunited and in perpetual tension. Unwittingly, we abdicate our power to the hegemonic powers that tirelessly seek to dominate and subjugate us.

Dominant powers of this world maintain their dominance and grip over us by keeping us forever reliant and hopelessly backward. Instead of developing, progressing and becoming self-sufficient, we become mere consumers of their products and services thereby strengthening their economies at the expense of ours.

Given this situation, the question that needs to be raised is this: When will we enter the real battlefield in this sphere? Are we able to wage that battle, while we are embroiled in futile divisions and animosities?

To see an example of this painful reality, it suffices to reflect on the number of people killed in all the wars the Arabs have fought with

¹⁶ EN: Muslims living in the East and Arab lands

Israel, which is estimated to be around 150,000; in addition to more than half a million lives lost in civil wars in three Arab countries i.e. Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan! These figures actually refer to recent developments in Iraq and Sudan. In addition to loss of life, tremendous resources have been squandered in these civil wars, which surpasses several times the loss of life and infrastructure in the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The destructive Lebanese civil war lasted over sixteen years, during which time Lebanon lost its commercial, economic and tourism position in the region and the world. The Lebanese economy was fully decimated, and the victims of this regrettable civil war reached 225000, while over a million people were displaced. These figures are even more troubling when considering that the population of Lebanon at the onset of the civil war was less than 2.5 million.

In Turkey, a horrible conflict has existed between the Kurds and the Turkish state, resulting in over 20000¹⁷ casualties (when this book was first published in 1999), and the expenditure of millions of dollars annually from the state treasury.

Afghanistan has been through a vicious and violent internal conflict between rival combatant factions of so-called mujahideen for over fifteen years, where the number of casualties has surpassed 45000¹⁸ (as of the time of the first publication).

Over the last [fifty] years, Somalia has been through a devastating civil war that has caused major destruction to all state institutions, and has left the nation and its people divided, caused severe famine, abject poverty and the spread of killer and infectious diseases.

The Muslims of Pakistan live in a vengeful environment of sectarian strife raging between the Sunnis and Shias, where both sides

¹⁷ EN: This number as of 2016 has increased to 40000, with no further 'official' number available since

¹⁸ EN: Since the American invasion in 2001, this number stands at over 153000

are engaged in a vicious cycle of attacks and counter attacks. These have been indiscriminate, and all targets are considered legitimate including mosques, worshippers, scholars, scientists and politicians on both sides. This has resulted, in this year alone (1986), in the killing of more than seventy religious and socially active individuals from amongst both denominations.

The bloodshed caused by internal strife continues in more than one place of the Islamic World, but with varying degrees. This sad state of affairs indicates the necessity for dialogue, respect, understanding and peaceful coexistence, rather than resorting to force, denial, or marginalization in dealing with these issues.

This book is a humble attempt to promote the ethics of coexistence, based upon the fact that diversity is a global, social and human phenomenon, which stems from the infinite wisdom of the Almighty in order for humans to know, understand, and respect one another. Our religious concepts and teachings direct us to positively deal with our diversity and differences. If we go back to our glorious Islamic history, we can find wonderful examples that should inspire and motivate us towards establishing and maintaining peaceful coexistence.

I must take a moment and share with the readers the context of this book. It is based on a lecture I gave in Qatif in 1995. With much gratitude, I acknowledge the invaluable encouragement and support of my wonderful brother Zakir Ale Jabil. We thank Allah for all your tireless efforts on converting this lecture into its written form. It must be mentioned that I have restructured the speech transcript, expanded on it and included all references that I have consulted.

I hope and pray that this humble effort will be accepted and earn the pleasure of Allah and the means for further success.

CHAPTER ONE:

DIVERSITY; A GLOBAL AND SOCIAL PHENOMENON

Introduction

- I. Ethnic and National Diversity**
- II. Language Diversity**
- III. Religious Diversity**

INTRODUCTION

There are many verses in the Glorious Quran addressing diversity and multiplicity among people. Although human beings are equal in humanity and in their common basic characteristics and features, however it is within the social environment that they, in varying degrees, become distinct from one another.

This diversity that is discussed in the Glorious Quran concerning the life of man, is either a phenomenon that exists in all types of creation and objects, including the galaxies and their varied constellations and stars; the world of plants in which there are a plethora of variations in colour and size, despite the fact that the soil in which they thrive and their source of water is the same.

Allah says in the Glorious Quran,

*“In the earth are neighbouring terrains [of diverse kinds] and vineyards, farms, and date palms growing from the same root and from diverse roots, [all] irrigated by the same water, and We give some of them an advantage over others in flavour. There are indeed signs in that for people who exercise their reason.”*¹⁹

And *“and palm-trees and crops of diverse produce, olives and pomegranates, similar and dissimilar.”*²⁰

¹⁹ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ قِطْعٌ مُتَجَاوِرَاتٌ وَجَنَاتٌ مِّنْ أُغْتَابٍ وَزَّرْعٌ وَنَخِيلٌ صِنَوَانٌ وَعَبْرٌ صِنَوَانٍ يُسْقَى بِمَاءٍ وَاحِدٍ وَنُقْضَلٌ بَعْضُهَا عَلَى بَعْضٍ فِي الْأُكْلِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَكَيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

(Chapter 13 Verse 4)

²⁰ وَالنَّخْلَ وَالزَّرْعَ مُخْتَلِفًا أَكْلُهُ وَالرَّيْثُونَ وَالرُّمَّانَ مُتَشَابِهًا وَعَبْرٌ مُتَشَابِهٍ

The world of animals is also a diverse one, as the creatures that roam the land and birds that soar the sky are not one community; they indeed form multifarious and varied communities as described by Allah in the Glorious Quran, *“There is no animal on land, nor a bird that flies with its wings, but they are communities like yourselves.”*²¹

Even the angels are not of the same level, nor are they of the same form; there is variety in their forms, in the tasks they perform and their ranks, as Allah says in the Glorious Quran,

*“All praise belongs to Allah, originator of the heavens and the earth, maker of the angels [His] messengers, possessing wings, two, three or four [of them]. He adds to the creation whatever He wishes. Indeed Allah has power over all things.”*²²

As for the human world, the Glorious Quran has mentioned their diversity with respect to their lives within its various dimensions.

Individual Differences

Each human being is unique in how they look and sound. The image and voice of people we know are imprinted in our minds, and it helps us distinguish one person from another. Photography and voice-recognition devices are used for identification purposes. If some similarity should take place in facial features and tone of voice, this would certainly be rare and such similarities can be verified, checked and with a little precision be distinguished.

(Chapter 6 Verse 141)

²¹ وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا ظَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُنمِّئَ بِكُمْ

(Chapter 6 Verse 38)

²² الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَثْنَى وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

(Chapter 35 Verse 1)

Fingerprints are a sure way of distinguishing and identifying individuals, as the ridges contained on the thumb of each person are distinctly different and do not match any other person – no matter how closely related they are.

There are billions of people around the globe, yet each person has his/her own distinctive fingerprint. which explains why taking a person’s fingerprints is considered an authentic verification of a person’s identity.

It may be that words of Allah, “*Yes indeed, We are able to [re]shape [even] his fingertips!*”²³ alludes to this scientific fact that predates what was only recently proved in this field. We now have an independent science called “fingerprinting” which is used extensively in criminal law [forensics] and by security forces to fight crime and identify criminals.

The formation of our fingerprints at the tips of our fingers starts in the womb and changes until the final image at around the fourth month of the gestation period. This creation happens in a manner unexplained by science.

It is impossible for two fingerprints to be similar, and also there is no probability of any two fingerprints being similar amongst seventeen billion people. Fingerprints were not known before 1883. So, is there any possibility for two fingerprints to be same? Say amongst twins for example.

“There have been comparisons done between 80000 fingerprints in different parts of the world on a daily basis and there has never been one reported case of identical fingerprints, even among identical twins. This is what research laboratories have found and mathematical theories have

بَلَىٰ قَادِرِينَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ نُسَوِّيَ بَنَانَهُ²³

(Chapter 75 Verse 4)

proven that there is no such probability between seventeen billion people. “²⁴

Differences in levels of learning and knowledge

The level of intelligence and acumen varies among people to such an extent that there are measurements and levels through which they are monitored, and their different grades determined. The desire for learning and knowledge also differs from one person to another. Besides biology, an individual’s environment has a tremendous impact on one’s ability and attitude towards learning and acquiring knowledge.

The outcome of both genetic and environmental influences on one’s capacity as well as attitude and desire to learn are reflected in the distinct levels of knowledge amongst people. Allah says in the Glorious Quran, “*We raise in rank whomever We please, and above every man of knowledge is One who knows best.*”²⁵

Differences in Economic Status:

It should be noted that people in their material life and its economic aspect are also different, as you have the rich and the poor and varying other levels between them. This is a fact that is alluded to in the following Quranic verse,

*“It is We who have dispensed among them their livelihood in the present life, and raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service.”*²⁶

²⁴ Ahmad Bahjat, Fingerprints, an article published in the Al-Hayat newspaper, pg. 20, num. 2014, 24/08/1416 AH.

25 نَزَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مِّنْ نَّشَاءٍ يُّوَفِّقُ كُلَّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ

(Chapter 12 Verse 76)

26 نَحْنُ قَسَمْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَّعِيشَتَهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَرَفَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِّيَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا سُجَّدًا ۝

(Chapter 43 Verse 32)

Differences in talents, abilities and desires among human beings are what makes them appreciate their need for each other. What motivates an employee to work hard and improve their employer's company and profits is nothing but their need for a livelihood! Conversely, the employer searches for an employee because of the need for technical expertise and professional experience. Such are occurrences in all walks of life; people are not replicas of each other in talents, abilities and desires. They have different motives for dealing with and being of use to each other for the sake of general good, as well as for the advancement of life.

In summary, this category of human difference inevitably leads to different levels, types, and standards of living. Next, we turn to ethnic and national diversity.

I. Ethnic and National Diversity

The source of all humanity is one man and one woman, Adam and Eve, as stated by Allah in the Glorious Quran, *“O mankind! Be wary of your Lord who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and from the two of them scattered numerous men and women.”*²⁷

Yet, the continuous human reproduction and the spread of humans to all corners of the earth has, over the passage of time, compelled bodily shapes and features to adapt to their natural environments and circumstances. This process has produced different human communities, each displaying unique physical features. This is the most probable and reasonable theory to explain the existence of all types of human races. This perspective is diametrically opposed to other theories that have been rightly described as racist. One example of such a racist theory is the one advanced by Gobineau, which claims superiority of one race over another or above all others. His theory has been refuted and discredited by western scholars of human sciences. The assumptions of Gobineau and other similar racist theories are unscientific claims aimed at duping vulnerable nations and people around the world of the deterministic view that suggests racial inferiority as a natural and direct cause of their cultural backwardness. The motive behind such a racist view is very clear, to subjugate people and nations to the yoke of superiority of the supposed purer race. The message of such a view is clear that no matter how hard one tries to lift oneself from the backward conditions one is in, the efforts will be of no avail; eternally doomed or cursed by one’s inferior race, and thus shall never reach the status acquired by developed nations.

²⁷ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً^c
(Chapter 4 Verse 1)

The French intellectual, Dr. Claude Lévi-Strauss, professor of social anthropology has said, “But the argument on the history of race is also a history full of total failures which have accompanied these studies time and again; as it has become evident from all repeated features to determine racial differences, that they are all linked with adaptive features, even if the premises of their chosen value are not often apparent to us.

One of those for example, the skull shape, which we know to have a tendency everywhere towards being round, as well as the status of the skin color, which tends towards being lighter in areas where the climate is cooler, but which compensates for the lack of sunlight and helps the body to resist paralysis. Research then focused on blood types, but this also – and very rapidly started to notice that it is not lacking of adaptive features, and this value was probably related to nutritional factors or a result of the different sensitivity of its carriers to certain diseases such as smallpox or the plague and this may well be the case in relation to blood protein serums.²⁸

²⁸ Claude Levi Strauss, *Articles in Humanity*, chosen and translated by Dr Hasan Kubaysi, 1st. edition, Beirut, Dar al–Tanweer, 1983, pg. 225.

II. Language Diversity

A striking type of difference among people is their multiplicity of languages. Research have shown that there are about 3000 spoken languages in the world today, not including dialects which are local variations of languages spoken by small communities comprising a few hundreds or thousands of people. There are also over a hundred languages, each of them spoken by a million or more people and there are some 19 languages amongst these, which are spoken by about 50 million people.²⁹

The language spoken by the greatest number of people is Mandarin Chinese. It is spoken by over a billion people. In India, the second most populous country in the world, there are more than 850 languages and local dialects that are being used.³⁰

Allah has granted humans the ability to express themselves through pronunciation and speech, a fact that is captured in the following Quranic verse, *“He created man, [and] taught him articulate speech.”*³¹

Although animals also use sounds to express themselves and communicate within their collective life systems, this remains well below the level of human language. One linguistic researcher has stated, “There is nothing amongst any other creatures in terms of a real language which has all the characteristics of human languages. Some of

²⁹ The Arabic International Encyclopaedia, vol. 21, , 1st edition, 1996, Riyadh. pg. 119

³⁰ Guinness Book of Records, pg. 150, 1st edition, 1993, Dar al-Talas li Darasat wa Tarjumah wa Nashr, Damascus.

³¹ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ

(Chapter 55 Verses 3-4)

them have a few similar features, while others have other features, but all of their languages seem to be constrained to a certain restricted context, and none of them have the ingredients required to create new structures that may arise due to differing situations. Thus, language is a phenomenon, which is specific to humans.”³²

Given that the human race began in small communities, one of which is represented by Adam, the father of all humans, and his wife Eve and their offspring, it must therefore follow that they had one language which later branched out into many others due to human reproduction and dispersion around the earth. Accordingly, language researches classify languages into families, which are interlinked and share a common origin called the original language. Once the speakers of a language are divided into groups that are not connected with each other, the language of each group continues to develop in its own way. Over a few centuries, each of these groups will have developed its own unique mode of speaking to the point that they would not understand the language of people to whom they historically belonged. It should be noted that the Arab scholar Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi was the first to indicate that languages are interlinked-families. He posited that languages belong to families much like humans do.³³

Even though there isn't a clear explanation of how language first began among humans, nor is there a complete history of the stages of language development, all indicators lead to the unity of language, and one of these indicators is the presence of general principles for all languages.

“Many linguists, including Chomsky, Greenberg and Hjelmslev, who are among the most eminent ones; have shown that there are common vocal, grammatical and semantic structures among all world

³² Dr. Na'yif Khur'ma, *Adhwa ala al-Darasat al-Lughawiyah al-Mu'asirah*, page 152, World of Knowledge Series (9), Kuwait, 1978.

³³ The Arabic International Encyclopaedia, vol. 21, pg. 123.

languages, regardless of whether or not they were historically related. All world languages possess terms which stand for different objects, feelings, attributes, actions and relationships. From a biological aspect, there is no noticeable differences in the indication of these terms, as there seems to be a common basis for them... In addition, it is generally well known that any child or person can learn any language of the world; thus, it is clear that the basic skills required to acquire the different languages are the same, despite the presence of differences in the physiological features of people.”³⁴

Linguistics has become an important human science and has its own numerous schools and theories, and the more linguists study language, the more discoveries they find including puzzles, questions and mysteries that require further exploration and investigation. This shows the greatness and importance of the linguistic dimension in humans, which reflects the greatness and power of the Creator.

This is why the Glorious Quran considers the number of languages and diversity of tongues as one of the infinite signs of Allah’s creation, as stated by the following Quranic verse, *“Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. There are indeed signs in that for those who know.”*

³⁵

Indeed, the difference in tongues and variety of languages do not indicate a preference or superiority of one group or race of people over another. No language bestows superiority to its speakers, nor does any language impose backwardness on its speakers. Language is indeed a bowl and tool that may become as wide or as narrow depending on the level of the culture of its speakers. Imam Jafar al-Sadiq said in his

³⁴ Dr. Na’yif Khur’ma, page 168.

³⁵ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاختلافُ اللِّسَانِيَّتِكُمْ وَاللَّوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَكَيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ
(Chapter 30 Verse 22)

detailed discourse about the unity³⁶ of Allah, which he dictated to his student Mufaddal bin Umar, “O Mufaddal! Consider the blessing of speech, with which he is endowed by Allah, the Almighty, which is the medium for the expression of his inner thought and his cordial feelings springing from his cogitation and with which also he understands the inner points of others. Without this faculty he would have been like quadrupeds, neither able to convey his own inner thought to others, nor to understand the words of the speaker.” Until the Imam says, “The same is the case of speech and language, for this too is a matter of terminology and resolution, determined by the people according to their mutual understanding of talk. That is why different groups have different languages and scripts.”³⁷

Accordingly, language is a tool for communication, and the difference in language from one nation to another has no relation to the make-up of a nation, nor does it have any impact on its level of development. Throughout history, we have seen speakers of a certain language, who were at the peak of their progress and prosperity, gradually diminishes and becomes consigned to a lower or the bottom rung of development and degeneration all the while maintaining their language. The opposite scenario may also happen and has happened in human history.

Variations maybe noticed at the level of communities who share the same language, which is another argument against the claims and assumptions of racist theories that elevate the status of some people and debase those of others on the basis of language differences.

Some scholars have attempted in the past to make a link between language and racial types, purporting that the language of the Aryan

³⁶ EN: The complete English translation of this tradition can be viewed at the following URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/tradition-mufaddal>

³⁷ Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, Bihar Al-Anwar, vol. 3, 3rd edition, Beirut, Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1983, pg. 82.

people, such as those with blonde hair and blue eyes, is a superior language because those who speak it are more developed than others. It is this very racist claim of superiority that they used as a pretext to colonize poor countries, enslave their people, and regard them as ignorant and uncivilized savages. This type of theory was utilized in our current era by the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy, where they categorized people linking them to their languages, and ranked the Arabs at the bottom of their lists.

It has now been proven beyond any shadow of doubt that no such link exists. Any group of people is certainly capable of acquiring any language on earth. No language can be considered superior to another, except in as far as it has enriched and enlarged its language through new vocabulary and terms, using modern sciences and technology. Such is the case with Western civilization. This maybe a temporary advancement that will level off over time. Other languages may experience a similar expansion in their vocabulary as they make discoveries in various fields that necessitate new terminology.³⁸

Civilizational advances of any nation are reflected in its language, as new terms spring up to express developments in the life of that nation. This is what happened to the Arabic language, which has witnessed tremendous expansion and development after the rise of the Islamic civilization. The same was the case with European languages, which were positively impacted by the industrial revolution and scientific and technological advancements.

³⁸ Dr. Na'yif Khur'ma, page 242.

III. Religious Diversity

Religion is a deeply ingrained phenomenon in humans. The thinking and perceptive nature of humans distinguishes them from animals. Their faculty of reason motivates them to ask existential questions about their origin, purpose of their creation, purpose of life and the final destination, who created them and what should be their relationship with Him. The answers and conclusions humans reached concerning these questions became the means for their religion and beliefs.

So, as humans are thinkers and perceivers, religion has accompanied humans being from the very beginning of their life, which is why some historians of religion have advocated that religion started with the beginning of human life on earth some two million years ago.³⁹

Plutarch, the renowned Greek historian, stated the following more than two thousand years ago, “We may find cities without walls or without kings, civilization or theatre, but no one has seen a city without places of worship and worshippers”.

Similarly, Bergson noted some fifty years ago, “There have been found up to now human communities deprived of science, art and philosophy, but no human community has been found without possessing a religion.”⁴⁰

As diversity and differences naturally emerged in all aspects of human life, including the quest for meaning and for God, Allah did not abandon humans to their own resources to solve and answer their

³⁹ The Arabic International Encyclopaedia, vol. 10, page 569.

⁴⁰ Alija Izetbegović, *Islam between East and West*, page 60–61, First Edition, 1994, Kuwaiti al-Nur magazine, The Bavaria Foundation.

existential questions and spiritual yearnings. He sent His prophets as guides, leading humans towards righteousness and the straight path.

The role of the prophets is to deliver Allah's message in the best manner possible and without compulsion or coercion. In their response to the invitation of the prophets, people were divided into two main groups; those who positively responded to the invitation of the prophets with conviction and faith, and those who turned their backs to Allah's messengers, owing to their adherence and desire to preserve their superstitious and paganistic belief systems. Allah says in the Glorious Quran, *"Is the apostles' duty anything but to communicate in clear terms? Certainly We raised an apostle in every nation [to preach:] 'Worship Allah, and shun fake deities.' Among them were some whom Allah guided, and among them were some who deserved to be in error."*⁴¹

From these two main groups emerged many and varied groups to who Allah sent apostles and prophets. Human progress necessitated the renewal and development of religious laws with monotheism the underlying core ideology of all divinely inspired messages. Over time, some followers of the prophets and their members distorted, twisted and perverted some aspects of these messages in an effort to hide the original and pristine core of the true divine message. This thus required the sending of new prophets to bring people back to the correct path. Allah sealed the chain of prophets with the message and messengership of Prophet Muhammad.

Some people stubbornly hung on to the old messages of their ancestors, with all the accumulated distortions and refused to heed the call of subsequent prophets. Many religions sprung among the first group – followers of the divinely-inspired religions, including Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

⁴¹ فَهَلْ عَلَى الرُّسُلِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ فَمِنْهُمْ
مَنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ الضَّلَالَةُ

(Chapter 16 Verse 35-36)

The other group, which outright rejected Allah’s message, created pagan religions. Over time, this group splintered into groups and factions, each developing its own belief system and practices. Most common among these groups are Hindus, Zoroastrians, Confucians, Buddhists, Taoists and Shintoists.

Approximate numbers of followers of some of the World’s religions ⁴²	
Muslims	924,612,000
Roman Catholics	971,702,000
Hindus	689,205,000
Protestants	422,429,000
Buddhists	311,438,000
Religions of People’s Republic of China	170,236,000
Orthodox	163,623,000
Sikhs	17,735,000
Jews	17,357,000
Shinto	3,205,000

⁴² The Arabic International Encyclopaedia, vol. 10, page 571.

The Glorious Quran mentions the numerous religions, including divinely inspired and paganistic ones. The Quran emphasizes that the number and types of belief systems are a natural phenomenon of this life and is a direct result of the freedom exemplified in the free will granted to humans by Allah, i.e. the ability to choose between good and evil. The final judgment of these groups is left to Allah as He is the supreme Judge.

Allah says in the Glorious Quran, “Indeed Allah will indeed judge between the faithful, the Jews, the Sabaeans, the Christians, the Magians and the polytheists on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed Allah is witness to all things.”⁴³

This blessed verse mentions the followers of six religions which were known and prevalent at that time: The Muslims (those who believe), the Jews, the Sabaeans, the Christians, the Magians and the polytheists.

A reader into the essence and context of the meaning of the above mentioned verse would undoubtedly discern the Quran’s acknowledgment of different religions among people. When we contemplate why the Qur’an acknowledges the existence of a variety of religious systems, we arrive at the following points:

Firstly, it is not possible to wipe out different religions by force or compulsion as mentioned in this Qur’anic verse, “*There is no compulsion in religion,*”⁴⁴ and, “*To you your religion, and to me my religion.*”⁴⁵

43 إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

(Chapter 22 Verse 17)

44 لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

(Chapter 2 Verse 256)

45 لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

(Chapter 109 Verse 6)

Secondly, the believer in Allah’s message must use appropriate methods and means to advocate for his religion, refraining from the use of dismissive, disrespectful, and dishonoring language and actions when dealing with followers of other religions. The following Quranic verse underscores the manner a Muslim must invite others to Islam, *“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best.”*⁴⁶

Thirdly, the ultimate purpose of faith and religion is to reach the truth, so one must be open to other religions and views in search of the truth and right path. Allah describes the seekers of truth in this verse, *“Those who listen to the word [of Allah] and follow the best [interpretation] of it.”*⁴⁷

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is clear that a person should not rely solely on the belief system and ideology that has been passed down by their ancestors without thinking or discussion. Those who blindly follow their ancestors’ beliefs are described in this verse, *“...they say, “Sufficient for us is what we have found our fathers following.” What, even if their fathers did not know anything and were not guided?!”*⁴⁸

A sensible discussion between followers of different faiths should be based on evidence and rational proof, as is propounded by the Quran, *“Have they taken gods besides Him? Say, ‘Produce your evidence!’”*⁴⁹

Any dialogue between followers of different religions should be academic, objective, calm, and based on mutual respect as instructed by

46 ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۗ

(Chapter 16 Verse 125)

47 الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ ۗ

(Chapter 39 Verse 18)

48 قَالُوا حَسْبُنَا مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا ۖ أَوْلَوْكَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

(Chapter 5 Verse 104)

49 أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً ۚ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ ۗ

(Chapter 21 Verse 24)

the Quran, “Do not argue with the People of the Book except in a manner which is best.”⁵⁰

Fourthly, religious differences among people should not lead to fighting and conflict. Humans are predisposed to appreciate coexistence, harmony and mutual respect. As for those who follow their own tendencies to use violence against others with whom they disagree, should be dissuaded from doing so and be directly confronted if they resort to aggression, as is urged by the following verse, “Allah does not forbid you from dealing with kindness and justice with those [polytheists] who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes. Indeed Allah loves the just.”⁵¹

Islam categorically forbids hurting the feelings of followers of other religions just because they follow a different belief system, even if they are pagans. If they are insulted, their natural response would be to insult the religious beliefs of the Muslims. Muslims are instructed in the Quran as follows, “Do not abuse those whom they invoke besides Allah, lest they should abuse Allah out of hostility, without any knowledge. That is how to every people We have made their conduct seem decorous.”⁵²

50 وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

(Chapter 29 Verse 46)

51 لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِّنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

(Chapter 60 Verse 8)

52 وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدُوًّا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۖ كَذَٰلِكَ زَيَّنَّا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلَهُمْ
(Chapter 6 Verse 108)

CHAPTER TWO:

DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE; AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

The following subjects will be discussed in this chapter:

- I. The manifestation of divine power and wisdom**
- II. The legitimacy of diversity**
- III. Diversity; for a better understanding of others**
- IV. Positive & constructive competition.**

I. Manifestations of Divine Power and Wisdom

Diversity has, unfortunately, very often been the cause of fighting and conflict among people. One group transgresses against another by disparaging, mocking and insulting them in order to subjugate them and strip them of their dignity. Some groups transgress against others who are different because of a dogmatic belief in what they perceive as truth. Still other groups are intolerant of those who are different due to unknown elements in society who deliberately sow seeds of discord and disunity in the community, exploiting the animosity and conflict to further their own selfish interests and ambitions.

Human history is full of wars and conflicts based on religious, racial, national, tribal and even class differences. So, what is the Islamic view and position on diversity and differences among people?

Through an in-depth and conscious reading of the Glorious Quran, the recorded authentic Sunnah (Prophetic traditions) and the examples and teachings of Muslim leaders, we will be able to abstract Islam's view on diversity and difference.

The Glorious Quran emphasizes for people to contemplate and focus their attention to diversity and difference in Allah's creation. They are exhorted to consider the common source of all beings, Allah and that He created us to be unique, and not mere replicas of each other. Diversity and difference, therefore, are to be appreciated and celebrated as manifestations of divine wisdom and power.

There is wisdom and reason behind the diversity that Allah created, so we must mobilize our powers of reason and intellect to appreciate and learn from it.

The Glorious Quran addresses various aspects of diversity in the universe and life, by providing examples and similes that require deep contemplation and thinking. The following are some examples on this subject from the Glorious Quran:

- A. Honey: this healthy and delicious food produced by bees from collecting nectar and pollen from flowers and stored it in their honeycomb, comes in different colors and tastes. Allah says in the Glorious Quran,

*“And your Lord inspired the bee [saying]: ‘Make your home in the mountains, and on the trees and the trellises that they erect. Then eat from every [kind of] fruit and follow meekly the ways of your Lord.’ There issues from its belly a juice of diverse hues, in which there is a cure for the people. There is indeed a sign in that for a people who reflect.”*⁵³

- B. The Glorious Quran in other verses talks about the diversity within the world of plants, inanimate objects, animals, and humans. Pondering upon the phenomenon of complete diversity in the universe, coupled with scientific research to unlock its secrets and dimensions, will lead us to appreciate the intricacies of our universe and direct our minds to the power, greatness and wisdom of their master designer and creator, Allah. As we reflect and appreciate our wondrous world and the greatness of Allah, we become more humbled and awe struck in His majesty and become more willing to follow and obey His commands. Allah says in the Glorious Quran,

⁵³ وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنْ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَعْرِشُونَ ثُمَّ كُلِي مِن كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ فَاسْلُكِي سُبُلَ رَبِّكِ ذُلُلًا يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بُطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِّلنَّاسِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“Have you not regarded that Allah sends down water from the sky, with which We produce fruits of diverse hues. And in the mountains are stripes, white and red, of diverse hues, and [others] pitch black? And of humans and beasts and cattle there are likewise diverse hues. Only those of Allah’s servants having knowledge fear Him. Indeed Allah is all-mighty, all-forgiving.”⁵⁴

- C. The blessings that Allah has prepared for mankind in this life, including what is beneath and upon the earth and which are at their disposal and service, are not of a single kind, but rather vary in shape, form and colour. This diversity manifested in Allah’s creation are lessons for humans to ponder and heed, and to direct his mind towards the desired objective. Allah says in the Glorious Quran, *“And [He disposed for your benefit] whatever He has created for you in the earth of diverse hues—there is indeed a sign in that for a people who take admonition.”⁵⁵*
- D. Within this general context comes the discussion about diversity within the realm of humans, who enjoy variations of race, nationality, language and colour. Beneath these differences are truths and secrets which can only be attained by those who engage in serious study and scientific research. Those who faithfully and dedicatedly study this matter will surely arrive at the conclusion that such diversity is merely one form of the manifestation of divine power and wisdom. The Glorious Quran says, *“Among His signs is the creation of*

⁵⁴ أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بَيْضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَعَرَايِبُ سُودٌ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالْدَّوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ ۗ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ

(Chapter 35 Verses 27-28)

⁵⁵ وَمَا ذَرَأْنَا لَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

(Chapter 16 Verse 13)

the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. There are indeed signs in that for those who know.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ
(Chapter 30 Verse 22)

II. Legitimacy of Diversity

There are two types of diversity that we will mention in this section.

The first is a natural, inherent difference that people find amongst themselves. They do not choose it, nor are they consulted about it. No one is given a choice before coming to this life about racial or national identity, nor are they given a choice in terms of what shape and appearance they would like to have. Hence, a white person does not choose his whiteness, nor does the black person choose his darkness. Similarly, they cannot or rather did not choose to which root or ethnicity to belong to.

This natural diversity follows Allah's design, order and will, and is manifested in His creation, as the verse says, *"O mankind! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes."*⁵⁷ Thus, Allah is the one who made us different in race, nationality and ethnicity.

The second type of diversity is the kind an individual adopts by choice and is intrinsically linked to their convictions and values. People can choose the particular religion that fulfils their spiritual yearning, the ideology they believe in, and the culture they wish to espouse. This type of choice naturally leads to the emergence of new religions and various schools of thought. The same is true with political choice, which leads to different political directions, parties and loyalties.

⁵⁷ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ

(Chapter 49 Verse 13)

We can conclude that the second type of diversity is a direct result of the agency of free will that Allah has granted to human beings. Allah created human beings as free and rational beings, with the ability to choose, think and make decisions. It is how human beings exercise this free will, for either good or evil, that will result in Allah's reward or punishment on the Day of Judgment.

Allah says, *"and had Allah wished He would have made you one community, but [His purposes required] that He should test you in respect to what He has given you."*⁵⁸

*"Had your Lord wished, He would have made mankind one community; but they continue to differ."*⁵⁹

*"Had Allah wished, He would have made you one community, but He leads astray whomever He wishes and guides whomever He wishes, and you will surely be questioned concerning what you used to do."*⁶⁰

*"...a part [of mankind] will be in paradise and a part will be in the Blaze. Had Allah wished, He would have surely made them one community."*⁶¹

Owing to the significance of this freedom to choose that He granted to humans, Allah emphasizes in numerous verses, in order to make it clear to us, that this freedom of choice is a God-given and undeniable truth. Hence, no human being should violate other's right to choose by, for example, imposing one's religious views on others.

⁵⁸ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لَيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ

(Chapter 5 Verse 48)

⁵⁹ وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ

(Chapter 11 Verse 118)

⁶⁰ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَلَتُسْأَلُنَّ عَمَّا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

(Chapter 16 Verse 93)

⁶¹ فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ ۗ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَهُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً

(Chapter 42 Verses 7-8)

If imposing a view or perspective was acceptable, Allah would have surely compelled His creation to believe in Him and in the message that He sent down to humanity. This is another instance where the divine wisdom is manifested - the giving of freedom of choice to mankind. Allah says, *“And say, [This is] the truth from your Lord: let anyone who wishes believe it, and let anyone who wishes disbelieve it.”*⁶²

Allah’s wisdom has allowed people the opportunity to form such diversity in their beliefs and the different paths they wish to pursue, because they are endowed with freedom of choice, which can only be exercised in this life of trial and examination. Is it therefore right for anyone to eliminate or fight against diversity and impose one ideology and belief system upon others? Clearly, the simple answer is ‘NO!’

Even the role of prophets was solely focused on delivering the message and guidance, and no prophet or apostle had the right to control or impose their message on people.

Allah says, *“Had your Lord wished, all those who are on earth would have believed. Would you then force people until they become faithful?”*⁶³ and *“So admonish—for you are only an admonisher, and not a taskmaster over them”*⁶⁴

It is true that the Truth is one and indivisible, however that word which will identify and make it apparent will be left until the Day of Resurrection. It is then when humankind will witness what the real truth is. Nevertheless, in this life, where there are many different religions and denominations within each religion, every group claims to have the ultimate and immutable truth. Some groups use the right and best

62 وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ

(Chapter 18 Verse 29)

63 وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَآمَنَ مَن فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُم جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ

(Chapter 10 Verse 99)

64 فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرُ لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ

(Chapter 88 Verses 22-23)

means to argue their position, while others claim monopoly on the truth and are fueled by their fanaticism and bigotry. The following verses capture this phenomenon in a beautiful manner,

*“The Jews say, ‘The Christians stand on nothing,’ and the Christians say, ‘The Jews stand on nothing,’ though they follow the [same] Book. So said those who had no knowledge, [words] similar to what they say. Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ.”*⁶⁵

*“To Allah shall be the return of you all, whereat He will inform you concerning that about which you used to differ.”*⁶⁶

Based on the above, the legitimacy of difference in the view of Islam lies in acknowledging the right to be different and to have differing views and perspectives. Allah is One and the accepted religion before Allah is only one, *“Indeed, with Allah religion is Islam [submission],”*⁶⁷ and *“Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter.”*⁶⁸

⁶⁵ وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصَارَىٰ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَىٰ لَيْسَتِ الْيَهُودُ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ وَهُمْ يَتْلُونَ
الْكِتَابَ ۚ كَذَّبَ لَكَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ فَاللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ
(Chapter 2 Verse 113)

⁶⁶ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ
(Chapter 5 Verse 48)

⁶⁷ إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ
(Chapter 3 Verse 19)

⁶⁸ وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ
(Chapter 3 Verse 85)

III. Diversity; for a better understanding of others

If variety is the outcome of common differences in backgrounds, cultures, lifestyles and circumstances, etc., then such variation should inspire a desire for a better understanding and communication with others, both within and between different human communities, as doing so may lead to:

One, knowledge about others, as in order for each human community to get to know others outside of their own community, they must become familiar with aspects of the inner and peculiar life of others. Humans are curious by nature and also have a desire to learn and gain knowledge, but both of these traits must motivate people to get to know and communicate with other human beings. Two, by getting to know other communities and by learning about them, will enrich the experience of the communities and allow them the opportunity to benefit from the strengths of others, as well to diminish any weaknesses that are between them.

This is why the Glorious Quran indicates that diversity, in reality, should be a catalyst for understanding others, as Allah says, *“O mankind! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware.”*⁶⁹

Interest in establishing and maintaining relationships between people and among nations must be founded on the principle of mutual

⁶⁹ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

(Chapter 49 Verse 13)

respect. When a community treats and views another with disdain and contempt, it will be blind to its strengths and positive aspects. The Glorious Quran exhorts humans to gain a better understanding of others and denounces contempt and disdain between people and among nations. This message is clearly outlined in the above verses, in addition to the following verse, *“O you who have faith! Let not any people ridicule another people: it may be that they are better than they are; nor let women [ridicule] women: it may be that they are better than they are.”*⁷⁰

This verse is not directed at one person laughing and making fun of another, although this is also behavior that is looked frowned upon, but the verse focuses more on the context of groups and interactions among communities; one community or society with another.

The Glorious Quran teaches us not to evaluate people on the basis of their apparent features, such as appearance and physical shape. Instead, the Quran requests us to focus on people’s inner noble qualities and virtues, as is clear in this verse that *“Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Godwary among you.”*

70 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرْ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّن نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ

(Chapter 13 Verse 11)

IV. Positive and Constructive Competition

It is natural and normal for each human community to try and elevate its position, affirming itself and to be better than the others. However, what is the most appropriate way to elevate one's position is a necessary question.

We will mention two methods and approaches that people can choose from, one being positive, the other negative.

The first method is to work towards weakening the other, learning about their strengths in order to destroy them. Once their strengths have been obliterated, their prospect for progress and advancement will be severely hampered. After the perceived rival collapses or is severely weakened, the aggressor emerges as the victor, and the only strong and prominent player. The bully is happy, as there is no one to compete against him.

The second method is for a community to focus on and invest in itself by developing and using its own talents to prevail over other communities.

An example to further illustrate these two types of methods of competition can be that if two people want to race against each other, and each of them are looking for ways to get an advantage over the other. One option could be to undermine the other racer by deliberately hindering or stopping his ability to compete. The other option is to allow his competitor to run at his fastest speed, while he doubles his efforts to be faster than his competitor.

Conflict and fighting are costly to humanity. Valuable time, energy and resources are wasted by conflict, not to mention the human

pain and suffering it inflicts. One of the ugly consequences of conflict is that it entangles the parties involved in the conflict in a vicious cycle of revenge. Each party becomes preoccupied with how to get back at their perceived adversary. Instead of pooling their efforts towards building, improving and bettering themselves, their communities and countries and the world, they are blinded by revenge and violent impulses to wipe out each other's progress. In the final analysis, all parties within the conflict will lose.

A quick examination of the statistics on how much has been spent on weapons between forces involved in conflicts around the world, the mutual loss of human life in wars and battles and all the pain and suffering experienced by people in the aftermath will highlight the horrors and dangers of conflict that can easily be avoided.

To illustrate this point further, let's refer to one paragraph from the 1994 United Nations' Development Program report which reads as follows,

“India ordered 20 MiG-29 fighter aircraft from Russia at a cost that could have provided basic education to all the 15 million girls out of school!

The Republic of Korea ordered 28 missiles from the United States for an amount that could have immunized all the 120,000 unimmunized children and provided safe water for three years to the 3.5 million people without safe water.

Despite having 800 million people in absolute poverty, the two regions continued to spend heavily on arms: South Asia \$19 billion, and Sub-Saharan Africa \$8 billion.”⁷¹

⁷¹ EN: In the original Arabic text, these figures were taken from a translated report that appeared in the Lebanese al-Safir Newspaper on 02/06/1994. These quotes have been taken from the original report that can be found at URL:

The Glorious Quran instructs and guides humanity to reap the potential benefits of diversity in promoting the spirit of positive and constructive competition. When humans compete cooperatively, each community's progress adds to, and not subtracts from, the progress of all humanity. Allah says,

“For each [community] among you We had appointed a code [of law] and a path, and had Allah wished He would have made you one community, but [His purposes required] that He should test you in respect to what He has given you. So take the lead in all good works. To Allah shall be the return of you all, whereat He will inform you concerning that about which you used to differ.”⁷²

In explaining this verse, Sayyid Taqi al-Modarressi says: “The Glorious Quran deals with human differences in general terms. It deals with the differences that exist between the divine books and followers of these divine religions and provides an answer to the question of why people differ in their practices. The answer of the Glorious Quran is clear and decisive, and we will elaborate on it with the following points.

- a. Each nation has its own specific way of dealing with material and spiritual matters. The economy, social and individual behavior of each nation (and all that is classified as a mode) differs from that of other nations as reflected in their unique language, culture and ambitions.
- b. Just like the diversity that exists in the universe, difference is inherent in human nature; it is part of creation. It is the wisdom of the Divine to make humans different; as Allah is able to make humans a nation of identical beings, like birds, fish and other species.

http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_no_stats.pdf

⁷² لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَا جَا يُولُو شَاءَ اللّٰهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ اُمَّةً وَّاحِدَةً وَلٰكِنْ لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا
الْخَيْرَاتِ اِلَى اللّٰهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

(Chapter 5 Verse 48)

- c. Difference is beneficial to human life as it leads to competition and actions towards doing good deeds. Each group or nation vies for gaining more and better knowledge to improve their life and move it forward. Major civilizations that flourished in history, did so as a result of inner struggle, competition and the desire to advance in order to shine above other civilizations. The invisible struggle of civilizations made them last longer. They adhered to an ethic of honest and positive competition—the kind that does not aim to debase or destroy others.
- d. Hence, differences should not lead to animosity and cut-throat competition, where each team or group seeks to destroy its perceived or real rival by means of verbal attacks and other immoral and harmful tactics. Instead of standing in judgment of the actions and progress of others, which may embroil us into conflict with that group, we need to channel all of our energies into constructive development. Allah is the ultimate judge, and He will judge our deeds. The aim of each community and nation, therefore, should be to attain the maximum achievement for itself in the vast plain of life, which has abundant resources to accommodate everyone’s needs.

The possible wisdom behind Allah creating different people is to test their self-control and how well they use their God-given potentials and natural abilities. Humans are instructed to use their talents and powers to gain more knowledge and understanding, and to thoughtfully and morally apply and utilize that knowledge to increase their faith and do more good deeds.”⁷³

⁷³ Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Modarressi, *Min Huda al-Quran*, vol. 2, 2nd edition, 1407 AH, pg. 393.

Once again, and in the context of the differences that exist between the followers of Islam and those of other religions, such as the Jews and the Christians, and the admonishment against squandering time and energy in futile arguments, the Quran says, “*Even if you bring those who were given the Book every [kind of] sign, they will not follow your qiblah. Nor shall you follow their qiblah, nor will any of them follow the qiblah of the other.*”⁷⁴

The sensible alternative to futile argument is positive competition and striving towards good deeds and achievements, as Allah instructs in the following verse, “*Everyone has a cynosure to which he turns; so take the lead in all good works.*”⁷⁵

Other verses that emphasize the same mentioned above include the following, “*For every nation We have appointed rites [of worship] which they observe; so let them not dispute with you concerning your religion, and invite to your Lord. Indeed, you are on a straight guidance. But if they dispute with you, say, ‘Allah knows best what you are doing. Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which you used to differ.*”⁷⁶

So, the above verses first acknowledge differences and that each nation has its own peculiar way of worship and acts of devotion, *for every nation We have appointed rites [of worship] which they observe*. The verses also then instruct against arguing about religious differences and ways of worship, *so let them not dispute with you concerning your religion*. However, even though a believer is satisfied and sure with his

74 وَلَئِنْ أَتَيْتَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ بِكُلِّ آيَةٍ مَا تَبِعُوا قِبْلَتَكَ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَتَهُمْ وَمَا بَعْضُهُمْ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَةَ بَعْضٍ

(Chapter 2 Verse 145)

75 وَلِكُلِّ وِجْهَةٍ هُوَ مَوْلِيهَا فَاَسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ

(Ibid Verse 148)

76 لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ فَلَا يُنَازِعَنَّكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَاذْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ إِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى مُسْتَقِيمٍ وَإِنْ جَادَلُوكَ فَقُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ اللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

(Chapter 22 Verses 67-69)

religion and beliefs, they must not enter arguments and disputes, but these verses do not restrict positive and constructive dialogue in the spirit of sharing, using the best means of conduct possible, *and invite to your Lord. Indeed, you are on a straight guidance.* More so, the verses do not consider theoretical debates and arguments as being the true criteria, but rather focusses on practical achievements, *but if they dispute with you, say, ‘Allah knows best what you are doing’.*

Furthermore, underscoring the importance of productivity and hard work of various groups, rather than wasting energy on futile arguments and disputes, many verses in the Glorious Quran focus on the performing of good deeds, actions or work. For example, “*Say, ‘Will you argue with us concerning Allah, while He is our Lord and your Lord, and to us belong our deeds, and to you belong your deeds,’*”⁷⁷

Sensible and rational believers do not lower their standards to that of exchanging insults and hurling curses with those who they differ with. Rather than getting sidetracked and distracted, they concentrate on carrying on with their good work, as is instructed by their faith and reflected in this verse, *”and when they hear vain talk, they avoid it and say, ‘Our deeds belong to us, and your deeds belong to you. Peace be to you. We do not court the ignorant.’*”⁷⁸

Allah also says, “*Allah is our Lord and your Lord. Our deeds belong to us and your deeds belong to you. There is no quarrel between us and you. Allah will bring us together and toward Him is the destination.*”⁷⁹ Hence, there should be no need for us to argue and hold animosity towards each other

⁷⁷ قُلْ أَنْتَجِدُونَ فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ وَلَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ

(Chapter 2 Verse 139)

⁷⁸ وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا اللَّغْوَ أَعْرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَا نَبْتَغِي الْجَاهِلِينَ

(Chapter 28 Verse 55)

⁷⁹ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ لَا حُجَّةَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ اللَّهُ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا وَإِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

(Chapter 42 Verse 15)

Essentially, this life is the arena where humans have the opportunity to develop, grow and flourish. The test of life is to see who utilizes this opportunity and those God-given potentials to do the best, work the hardest and give the most. Allah summarizes the purpose of human life in this verse, *“He, who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct. And He is the All-mighty, the All-forgiving.”*⁸⁰

⁸⁰ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

(Chapter 67 Verse 2)

CHAPTER THREE:
**“CO-EXISTENCE IS THE MEANS
FOR AN APPROPRIATE WAY OF
LIFE”**

Introduction

- I. Diverse citizens and religions**
- II. One nation, many nationalities**
- III. Firm origins with diverse denominations**

Introduction

Despite their differences, human beings continue with their lives. They share common interests and benefits, and it is not possible for them to choose a certain area of this globe to live in exclusively without interactions with others, where they not effect or are affected.

There also exists internal differences among human communities. If, for example, blacks or whites chose to live in a certain corner of the globe, they will take their differences with them. Differences do not dissolve by the mere switching of geographic locality. Each group member will continue to adapt to variations of life within their group based on national, tribal, religious or political affiliation. If, for example, Muslims or Christians favored or chose a certain area of the globe to live in, they will have a multitude of races, nationalities, religious denominations and orientations until subdivisions and segregation reaches the narrowest circle. That narrow circle runs against the nature of life and humanity.

With the tremendous scientific and technological advances that have so far occurred in our lives, distances have been nullified and boundaries among people have been broken. The globe has become one village, or as they say a global village, forcing people to coexist for the sake of common interests, despite their different sense of belonging and other categories of identity they may have.

Allah has entrusted the bounties of the universe to the disposal of all. It is for all people alike, and no one has the right to deny other from it. A sense of belonging to a certain group or perspective does not give anyone the excuse or pretext to deprive another being their inherent right to access and enjoy the bounties of the earth.

The Glorious Quran affirms that Allah’s bounties and blessings in this life are for all members of humanity. He provides for both believers and non-believers alike, thus His provision is not denied to anyone, as is reflected in the following verse, *“To these and to those—to all We extend the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined.”*⁸¹

Allah also says, *“And the earth—He laid it out for mankind.”*⁸²

Thus, the earth and its abundant bounties are for all to enjoy regardless of race, religion, national origin and other self-made categories of difference.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir is quoted to have said, “The well-being of peoples’ affairs is in coexistence”⁸³.

Once a man in the presence of Imam Ali b. Husayn, Zayn al-Abidin, supplicated saying, “O Allah! Make me needless of your creation,” to which the Imam responded, “It is not so, for people are meant for people; rather you should say, O Allah! make me needless of the evil ones from your creation.”⁸⁴

Hence, people need each other, and their affairs can only efficiently occur through solidarity and coexisting, no matter how different they are. The question that we must now pose is that how can coexistence be reconciled with diversity and difference?

There are two fundamental conditions to promote coexistence despite issues related to differences:

⁸¹ كَلَّا نُمِدُّ هُنُوْلًا وَّهِنُوْلًا مِنْ عِظَاءِ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَا كَانَ عِظَاءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْضُوْرًا

(Chapter 17 Verse 20)

⁸² وَالْاَرْضَ وَصَعَهَا لِلْاِنَامِ

(Chapter 55 Verse 10)

⁸³ Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, vol. 71, pg. 176.

⁸⁴ Ibid, vol. 75, pg. 135.

The first condition is to guarantee and safeguard the rights and interests of all groups. If one group feels that their rights are being violated or that their interests have been attacked or threatened by another party, the atmosphere will not be conducive for coexistence. Often, conflicts and disputes between different groups are caused by encroachment and oppression of one group by another. Consequently, the oppressed group, despite being a minority and weak, will forever feel aggrieved and disadvantaged, and these feelings will not inspire any desire in them to interact positively with other groups. Instead, it will be more motivated and predisposed to take revenge against their oppressors.

It is precisely for this very reason that the Quran stresses the importance of protecting the rights of others and to refrain from excessiveness against those who infringe. It is true that believers have the right to defend themselves in the face of aggression, but their defense should not exceed the limits of self-defense. The Quran instructs the believers, *“Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed Allah does not like transgressors.”*⁸⁵

And in another verse, Allah says, *“Ill feeling for a people should not lead you, because they barred you from [access to] the Sacred Mosque, to transgress.”*⁸⁶

The ethic and value of justice must be upheld regardless of the ill behaviors of others. Commitment to justice must always prevail over perceived negative emotions and attitudes toward others. The Quran instructs us, *“O you who have faith! Be maintainers, as witnesses for the sake of Allah, of justice, and ill feeling for a people should never lead you to be unfair.”*⁸⁷

⁸⁵ وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ
(Chapter 2 Verse 190)

⁸⁶ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَا نُ قَوْمٍ أَنْ صَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ أَنْ تَعْتَدُوا
(Chapter 5 Verse 2)

⁸⁷ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَا نُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا

A believer, therefore, should not be biased in his stand at the expense of righteousness and justice. Group loyalty should not blind a believer to what is the right and just thing to do, as Allah Almighty says, “O you who have faith! Be maintainers of justice and witnesses for the sake of Allah, even if it should be against yourselves or [your] parents and near relatives, and whether it be [someone] rich or poor, for Allah has a greater right over them. So do not follow [your] desires, lest you should be unfair.”⁸⁸

The second condition is mutual respect. All people are equal in humanity. Humanity is the common denominator. Respecting other people’s humanity, no matter how different they are from us is an outward expression of respecting our own humanity. Imam Ali b. Abi Talib said, “People are of two types: either they are your brother in faith or your equal in creation.”⁸⁹

The Glorious Quran teaches Muslims to deal with those who are of a different faith with decency and dignity, and to interact and associate with them respectfully. Muslims are enjoined to grant and safeguard the rights of religious minorities, as long as they remain peaceful and do not engage in acts of aggression against Muslims. Allah says, “Allah does not forbid you from dealing with kindness and justice with those [polytheists] who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes. Indeed Allah loves the just.”⁹⁰

(Ibid Verse 8)

88 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَن تَعْدُوا

(Chapter 4 Verse 135)

89 فَإِنَّهُمْ صِنْفَانِ: إِمَّا أَحْسَنُ لَكَ فِي الدِّينِ وَإِمَّا نَظِيرٌ لَكَ فِي الْخَلْقِ

(al-Sayyid Razi, Nahj al-Balaghah, Letter 53.)

90 لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

(Chapter 60 Verse 8)

The peace treaties and agreements that the Honoured Prophet made with the Jewish tribes, Christians and groups of polytheist Arabs are ideal examples for Muslims to emulate. The example of the Prophet is a roadmap for promoting peaceful coexistence among differing and diverse groups.

History attests to the commitment and adherence of Muslims to these treaties, dealing with them appropriately, and keeping their promises and covenants based on Islamic tenets, as Allah says, *“Fulfill the covenants; indeed all covenants are accountable,”*⁹¹ *“...and those who fulfill their covenants, when they pledge themselves...”*⁹²

Just as Allah created all people and bestowed His blessings and grace upon them all, His guidance and message are also directed towards all. Islam is not a religion of enslavement, nationalism or tribalism, it is indeed as Allah directed His Prophet Muhammad, *“We did not send you except as a bearer of good news and warner to all mankind, but most people do not know,”*⁹³ and, *“Say, ‘O mankind! I am the Apostle of Allah to you all.”*⁹⁴

Even those who reject and refuse to receive Allah’s message and do not embrace Islam as their faith, they shall never be denied the right to enjoy living under the governance and protection of Islam.

⁹¹ وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَهْدِ إِنَّ الْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْئُولًا

(Chapter 17 Verse 34)

⁹² وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا

(Chapter 2 Verse 177)

⁹³ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَئِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

(Chapter 34 Verse 28)

⁹⁴ قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا

(Chapter 7 Verse 158)

Thus, the essence of Islam and the Prophet is one of goodness, and to be a mercy for all of humanity, as instructed by Allah, “*We did not send you but as a mercy to all the nations.*”⁹⁵

Having discussed the topic of difference in the previous chapter, we would now like delineate upon some points in this chapter regarding difference within Islamic societies and within the historical context of Islamic civilization.

⁹⁵ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

I. Diverse Citizens and Religions

During the first year of establishing the Islamic community in Medina, to where the Honoured Prophet migrated, he established a constitution known as the Medina Document, to organize and manage the emerging and budding society and to serve as the foundation for developing the Islamic state. This document included the recognition of non-Muslim citizens and their membership in the new society, and their obligations and rights. The document also laid out the rights and responsibilities of Muslims.

One particular article in that document which was dictated and signed by the Prophet states:

“The Jews of Bani Awf are one community with the believers; each group has its own religion, allies and persons, except for those who do injustice and iniquity, thus only hurting themselves and their own families. Everything that has been ordained for the Jews of Bani Awf applies to the Jews of Bani al-Najjar...” The document then continues in mentioning the same for all the Jewish tribes that were present in Medina, until it states, *“The Jews must bear their expenses and the Muslims theirs. Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document. They must seek mutual advice and consultation, and loyalty is a protection against treachery, A man is not liable for his ally’s misdeeds. The wronged must be helped. The Jews must pay with the believers as long as war lasts. Yathrib⁹⁶ shall be a sanctuary for the people of this document.”⁹⁷*

Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din commenting on these phrases writes, “This document shows that Islam accepts the concept of

⁹⁶ The previous name of Medina

⁹⁷ Ibn Hisham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah, vol.2, pgs. 119-123

creating a political community of diverse people in one state, under one governing authority, which guarantees full citizenship and rights for all; it does not stipulate that a pure Islamic society of exclusively Muslims is a criteria for creating a state.

The phrase ‘community with the believers’ is of great significance, because it refers to the fact that they are part of the nation in the political sense, whereas his statement ‘the Jews have their religion as do the Muslims’ illustrates the element of diversity within society. Thus, the new society is one nation in the political sense with differing religious beliefs, because it comprises of two nations, different in ideology”⁹⁸.

The Prophet also wrote to the Christians of Najran, in which he affirmed their full rights under Islam, “In the Name of Allah, the all-Merciful, the all-Beneficent. From Muhammad, the Prophet and Messenger of Allah to the Bishop Abi al-Harith and to the bishops and clerics of Najran, their followers and abbots. That they rightfully possess whatever they have, plenty or otherwise, from their transactions or assets; the coming under the protection of Allah and His Prophet shall not alter their freedom to practice as abbots and clergymen nor change any of their rights or authority, nor anything they had enjoyed before this protection and this shall be the case as long as they resort and advice towards peace and harmony, and not burden themselves with injustice and the unjust”⁹⁹.

The principle of social solidarity is guaranteed for all members of society, regardless of their creed. During his reign, Imam Ali b. Abi Talib once saw an elderly blind man begging, he asked, “Who is this?” The people responded by saying that he is a Christian. The Imam replied, “So you have made use of him until he became old and you now

⁹⁸ Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, *Fi al-Ijtama’a al-Siyasi al-Islami*, 1st edition, Beirut, 1992, pgs. 290 & 302.

⁹⁹ Shaykh Husayn Ali al-Muntazari, *Darasat fi al-Wilayah al-Faqih*, vol. 2, 2nd edition, Beirut, al-Dar al-Islamiyah, pg. 752.

neglect him!? Give him a stipend from the Islamic Public Treasury (Bayt al-Maal)”

This incident is mentioned by the *muhaddith* Hurr al-Amuli in his book under the chapter entitled “Supporting a Christian from the Islamic Treasury once he becomes old and unable to earn.”¹⁰⁰

In the Islamic society, non-Muslims were permitted to take public service and administrative positions. This is evident in “the accepted religious opinion of the Sunni jurists permitted filling governmental positions and responsibilities in the Islamic State to non-Muslims. It was put in practice during the time of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, as well as by subsequent administration where Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians assumed administrative and financial positions, and some occupied significant and high-ranking positions within the administration of the Islamic State. Both Abul Hasan al-Mawardi al-Shafi’i (d. 450 AH) and Abu Ya’la al-Far’ra al-Hanbali (d. 458 AH) pointed out that it was appropriate for a non-Muslim to become an executive minister of the state¹⁰¹.

This opinion is also endorsed by the current Shia scholar, Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din¹⁰².

Islamic law protects the rights of religious minorities, and history records with tremendous pride that how when a Jew had a dispute with Imam Ali b. Abi Talib with regards to a piece of armour, and how the Imam attended the judicial council before Shurayh al-Qadhi and sat next to the Jewish plaintiff.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Amuli, *Wasa’il al-Shia*, vol. 15, 1st edition, 1993, Beirut, Muassisah Ale Bayt, pg. 66

¹⁰¹ Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, *Nizam al-Hukm wa al-Idarah fi al-Islam*, 2nd edition, Beirut, 1991, pg. 492.

¹⁰² EN: The esteemed Lebanese Shaykh passed away in the year 2001

¹⁰³ Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, vol. 41, pg. 56

The principles of morals and ethics which Islam instills upon its followers are suitable for both Muslim and non-Muslims living under Islamic jurisdiction.

It is reported that one of Ibn Abbas's sons slaughtered a goat, and that Ibn Abbas told him, "Once you have skinned it, begin 'the distribution' with our Jewish neighbor." Ibn Abbas repeated his command to his son, until he replied, "Why do you repeat yourself?" Ibn Abbas then retorted, "The Prophet had continually emphasized taking care of our neighbors, so much so that we feared that he would insist on including them as heirs in our wills!" According to this story, Ibn Abbas had a Jewish neighbor to whom he would always give gifts, as he would his other neighbors, showing concern and compassion for all neighbors. Islam is against discrimination of any kind and stresses the importance of good manners, as well as upholding and respecting social rights that govern a Muslim's relationship with others, even if he may have some conflict. Everyone, Muslim or not, is equal under the teachings and laws of Islam.¹⁰⁴

When a Sabian writer named Abu Isaac al-Sa'biah passed away in the year 340 AH, prominent Muslim writers and poets composed eulogies in his memory and admiring his talents and praising his qualifications, treating him and his contributions as a son of the state under the rule of Islam.

Sharif al-Radhi Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Musawi (d. 406 AH), a prominent writer and great scholar wept when his friend the Sabian intellectual Abu Isaac Ibrahim b. Hilal al-Sa'bi passed away and eulogized him with an Arabic poem that was regarded among the best of eulogies.

*Do you know who they carried on poles
did you see how the light of the caller lit*

¹⁰⁴ Hasan al-Qubanchi, Sharh Risalah al-Huquq, vol. 2, Dar al-Adhwa'a, 1991, pg. 534

*A mountain fell, and had it fallen in the sea
It would have caused continuous froth,
I didn't realize before you were buried in the ground
that the earth would be elevated higher than the mountains¹⁰⁵*

We also have his brother Sharif al-Murtadha Ali b. al-Husayn al-Musawi, another prominent writer and scholar (d. 436 AH) wrote in another wonderful eulogy of the Sabian intellectual, Abu Isaac al-Sabi.

*What a day was your day O Abu Isaac
for it marked my separation,
bidding farewell to the best desired wish*

We find in Islamic writings and literature, many cases and examples that reflect the level of cohesion and coexistence between citizens hailing from different religions, and how being of a different faith did not have any adverse impact on social solidarity, harmony, and mutual respect.

The poor and the needy deserve assistance from the community, regardless of their religion and belief, and charity and almsgiving can be paid to unbelievers and infidels whether they are Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian, be they protected by the state (*dhimmi*) or hostile to it (*harbi*). This fact is captured in this verse, "*For the love of Him, they feed the needy, the orphan and the prisoner,¹⁰⁶" as the prisoner mentioned in the verses clearly refers to one who was *harbi*¹⁰⁷.*

Religious diversity does not annul partaking in and enjoying the benefits from development and opportunities for further growth. In

¹⁰⁵ Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin, A'yan al-Shia, vol. 9, Beirut, Dar al-Ta'aruf, 1986, pg. 222

¹⁰⁶ وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا

(Chapter 76 Verse 8)

¹⁰⁷ Dr. Wahbah al-Zuhayli, al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adilatahu, vol. 2, 3rd edition, 1989, Dar al-Fikr, Damascus, pg. 920

Islam, if a person sees an unused and barren piece of land that has been neglected and revives it with his efforts and hard work, bringing it back to life, he automatically becomes the owner of that land.

“It is permitted for anyone to till a dead piece of land, and his hard work in reviving the land, apparently, makes him the owner of the land regardless of whether he is a Muslim or not.”¹⁰⁸

There is no stipulation by followers of the Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali schools of thought for the person who carries out the act of reviving barren land to be a Muslim, and there is no distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims based on the Prophet’s saying that, “Anyone who resurrects a plot of dead land owns it;” as revival is one reason for ownership, it is common between both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, similar to all other parameters of ownership¹⁰⁹.

The German researcher Adam Mez, professor of Eastern Languages at Basel University, Switzerland, who passed away in 1917, documented wonderful examples of religious diversity in the life of Muslims in his book (Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Century Hijra), and what follows are some extracts from that book:

The geographic historian Shamsuddin Al-Maqdisi (d. 380 AH) speaks about the status of the Zoroastrians in Shiraz and states that he hasn’t seen any Zoroastrian wearing anything to distinguish them from others and that markets used to be decorated during non-Muslim festivals. He also reports that in 371 AH/981 AD, a prominent Sufi died, and Muslims, Jews and Christians had walked in his funeral procession.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Sayyid Muhammad Rawhani, Minhaj al-Salihin, al-Mu’amalat, kitab Ihya al-Mawat, Issue 673, 2nd edition, Beirut, Dar al-Zahra,

¹⁰⁹ al-Zuhayli, vol. 5, pg. 559.

¹¹⁰ Adam Mez, al-Hizarah al-Islamiyah fi al-Qarn al-Rabi’ al-Hijri, vol.1, 5th edition, Dar al-Kutub al-Arabiyah, pg. 85.

There is nothing in Islamic legislature to restrict non-Muslims from participating in any occupation. They were well established in many lucrative jobs. They were money exchangers, merchants, landlords and doctors. In fact, they organized themselves such that most money exchangers and intellectuals of Damascus were Jewish while most doctors and writers were Christians, and that the head of the Christians in Baghdad was the Caliph's personal doctor.¹¹¹

The Islamic government did not interfere with the religious rites of non-Muslims. In fact, some caliphs were reported to have attended the processions and festivals of non-believers, and even ordered their celebrations to be preserved and supported. In times of drought, the government would order that processions take place with Christians led by the bishop and Jews with horn blowers.¹¹²

In Islamic cities, there were no segregated neighborhoods set aside for Jews or Christians, even though people of the same religion wished and chose to live in close proximity to one another, Christian monasteries were spread all over Baghdad to such an extent that they were found in every part of Baghdad.¹¹³

Given that Islamic laws were specifically written for Muslims, the Islamic state made allowances for people of other religions by allowing them to open and operate their own courts. What we know about such courts is that there existed ecclesiastical courts. The spiritual heads of these courts played the role of senior judges and wrote many of their law books. Their judgments were not restricted to matters of marriage, but also included matters concerning inheritance and a large number of disputes specific to Christians, which were not of any concern to the state.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ibid, pg. 86.

¹¹² Ibid, pg. 88.

¹¹³ Ibid, pg. 93.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, pg. 93.

A point worth of mentioning is that so many workers and administrators in the Islamic state were Christians, that one could easily infer that Christians were the rulers of the Islamic State. The complaint about the *dhimmis* being in charge of managing and passing judgments about Muslims and their money is an old one.

The Muslim army was led twice by Christians during the third century.

The Christian and Jewish public servants would swear an oath, just like Muslims and the book titled *Diwan al-Insha*, written in 840 AH (1436 AD) lists the oath made by the Jews during that period. It also lists the first person to have established these oaths for people of the Judaic religion to be Fadl b. al-Rabi, a minister to the caliph al-Rashid.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pgs. 105-106.

EN: The above book, originally written in German was also translated into English under the title, 'The Renaissance of Islam'. All the above extracts are taken from the Arabic translation done by Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Abu Raydah.

II. One Nation, Many Nationalities

Allah chose his Prophet, Muhammad, an Arab from amongst the most noble of Arab families, to be His last prophet and to convey the last divine message, Islam, to mankind. Allah's wisdom dictated that Arabic be the language of that message, as reflected in the following Quranic verse, "...brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart (so that you may be one of the warners), in a clear Arabic language."¹¹⁶ Hence, Islam emerged and flourished in the Arabian Peninsula and from that very society, spread outward to reach, over time, almost every corner of the globe.

The fact that Islam started in Arabia does not mean that Islam came for the Arabs only. Islam is indeed Allah's message and religion to all of humanity until the Day of Judgment.

The universality of the message of Islam is clearly conveyed in these Quranic verses: "We did not send you except as a bearer of good news and warner to all mankind, but most people do not know."¹¹⁷

"We did not send you but as a mercy to all the nations."¹¹⁸

The values, concepts and teachings of Islam are of universal pedigree and are directed to all people of the world.

Right from Islam's beginnings there was a core group of followers who embraced it and sacrificed their lives for it. This core group

¹¹⁶ نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ
(Chapter 26 Verses 193-195)

¹¹⁷ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَئِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ
(Chapter 34 Verse 28)

¹¹⁸ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ
(Chapter 21 Verse 107)

comprised of individuals from diverse races and nationalities, and henceforth formed the prototype of ideal diversity that became the seedlings for building the larger diverse Islamic society.

Some of the prominent individuals were Salman al-Farsi (The Persian), Suhayb al-Rumi (The Roman), Bilal al-Habashi (The Ethiopian), alongside the first Arab companions from the men of Quraysh (tribe) and the youths of Yathrib (Medina).

From Persia,

Salman al-Farsi played a significant role in safeguarding the young Islamic state (Medina) from an imminent sweeping attack planned by a coalition of polytheists and Jews aimed at crushing and destroying it.

The allied army was made up of more than ten thousand fighters, while the Muslim army consisted of approximately three thousand fighters. The Muslims were in a defensive position, defending their city while the polytheists were on the offensive, ready and well prepared for battle.

Had the offensive forces been able to storm the town where the small and ill-equipped Muslim army was, Islam as a movement would have been squashed and severely undermined.

The Prophet gathered his companions for a consultation session about the gravity of the situation. Salman al-Farsi made a recommendation based on his experience in Persia saying, "O Prophet of Allah, we should dig a ditch to separate us from the enemy and thereby blocking their ability to attack us from all sides. We Persians, when confronted with an impending danger from an enemy, would dig ditches

around the town, thereby limiting the enemy's attacking positions and locations."¹¹⁹

Seeing the wisdom in Salman's ingenious strategy, the Prophet and Muslims accepted the plan and started digging a ditch around Medina, which successfully and marvelously foiled the enemy's plan.

The historian al-Waqidi (d. 207 AH) describes the high regard in which Salman al-Farsi was held by the Muslims at that time:

People at that time competed in adopting Salman al-Farsi as one of their own, claiming him to be an integral member of their community. The migrants (*Muhajirun*) claimed that Salman was one of them and boasted about Salman's strength and knowledge in digging ditches. While the supporters (*Ansar*) said, "He is one of us and we have a greater right to have him as one of us!" These squabbles reached the Prophet who said... Salman is surely one of us, Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family). He would work as much as ten men.¹²⁰

Salman was later appointed by the Caliph Umar al-Khattab as the governor of the Persian capital Madain.

From Ethiopia,

Bilal describes himself, "I am an Ethiopian... who was a slave in days past."

In fact, Bilal b. Rabah al-Habashi holds a glorious position in Islamic history. His steadfastness and endurance were legendary, despite the brutal torture and savage beatings he went through at the hands of his master. He is most distinguished for the role that the Prophet granted him, whereby he became the official prayer caller

¹¹⁹ Shaykh Jafar al-Subhani, *Sirah Sayyid al-Mursaleen*, vol. 2, Beirut, al-Bayan al-Arabi, 1992, pg. 251.

¹²⁰ Al-Waqidi, *al-Maghazi*, vol. 2, 3rd edition, Beirut, Muassisah al-'Alami, 1989, pg. 446.

(*muazzin*), once that role was formally sanctioned. It was painfully difficult for the racist males of Quraysh to see the black, Ethiopian Bilal climb up the Kaaba to proclaim the call for prayers after Mecca was conquered! An example of the Quraysh's racist and dismissive attitudes toward blacks can be seen in the words of an individual named Itab b. Asid, who had not yet embraced Islam. He says that when he heard Bilal's call to prayer, "Allah would have honored Asid had he not heard this, but now he hears what annoys and angers him!"

But this is Islam's universal and compassionate nature, it does not discriminate against people because of their background, race or nationality.

Prof. Khalid Muhammad Khalid states, "Out of every ten Muslims from the dawn of Islam till today. and Allah only knows for how long thereafter, we will meet at least seven people who know Bilal... This is to say that millions of people over the centuries and generations have known Bilal, memorized his name and knew of his role, just as they knew Islam's two greatest Caliphs – Abu Bakr and Umar.

And if you were to ask a child who was in the first years of primary school in Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia or China, America, Europe, Russia ... and in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco... in the jungles of Africa or the mountains of Asia ... in every land inhabited by Muslims, Who was Bilal, my boy? He will respond by saying, He was the Prophet's *muazzin*... and he was the slave whose master resorted to torture him with hot stones to deter him from his religion, yet his response when his master asked him who is your god? He responded in the only way he knew...the One...the One.¹²¹"

¹²¹ Khalid Muhammad Khalid, *Rijal Hawl al-Rasul*, Cairo, Dar al-Kutub al-Hadithiyah, 1968, pg. 117.

The Roman

Suhayb was brought up amongst the Romans (Byzantines) who had taken him as a prisoner of war at a young age in one of the battles in the Ablah region in Syria together with other members of his family. He became “Roman” through his knowledge of the language, dialect and by being acquainted in their ways. Suhayb was then sold by slave traders and finally ended up in Mecca, where he was bought by one of its merchants.

Due to his intelligence and commercial skills, he was freed by his master, who gave him the opportunity to be his business partner.

Suhayb accumulated great wealth and Allah guided him to Islam during the early days of Islam in Mecca. This period was an exceptionally hard and difficult one for the early Muslims due to the Quraysh’s intolerance and hostility towards Islam. Early Muslims were persecuted, tortured and driven out from Mecca.

When the Prophet migrated to Medina, Suhayb decided to follow him, but the fiendish men of Quraysh blocked him while he was on route to Medina. They scornfully protested to him, “You came to us an impoverished tramp, made your fortune with us and reached such status, and now you want to escape with your money!”

They agreed to let him go only if he handed over to them all of his wealth. Suhayb agreed; he gave them and informed them where all his wealth was and joined Allah’s Prophet, who greeted him by saying, “Abu Yahya has profited greatly from the transaction he has made.”¹²².

Suhayb’s stature became prominent in Islamic society to such an extent that the Second Caliph, Umar b. al-Khattab requested that he

¹²² Ibid, page 187

perform his funeral prayers and asked the people to pray behind him until Muslims chose a leader¹²³.

People from diverse races and nationalities participated in establishing the Islamic society and setting up the Islamic government. It has been narrated from the Prophet, “There are four forerunners: I am the forerunner amongst the Arabs, Suhayb from amongst the Romans, Bilal from amongst the Africans and Salman from amongst the Persians”¹²⁴.

Islam’s universal values and teachings attracted these people from different races to join a unified faith. Islam exhorted everyone, regardless of their background, to use their skills and mobilize their energies and abilities to assume an active role in society.

This certainly was a formidable task to accomplish given tribal thinking and attitudes that were prevalent in Arabia before the advent of Islam. Islamic teachings, morality and the Prophet’s leadership and guidance created a new climate and a new culture.

The Muslim historian Ibn Asakir reported the following incident, “Qays b. Mutatiah attended a gathering in which Salman, Suhayb and Bilal were all present and said ‘The Aus and Khazraj (tribes) have come to support this man (referring to the Prophet), but what is the involvement of those in here? (referring to the non-Arabs in attendance).’

This is when Mu’az b. Jabal stood up and grabbed him by the collar and took him to the Prophet. He informed the Prophet of what was said. On hearing this, the Prophet got up angrily, grabbed his cloak and went straight to the masjid, calling people for the congregational prayer. When the people gathered he began delivering the following

¹²³ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *al-Isabah fi Tamyeez al-Sahabah*, vol. 3, Beirut, Dar al-Jeel, 1992, pg. 451.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

sermon, “O people, God is one, and so is religion; and Arabic is not the exclusive right of those born to Arab parents, it is in fact a tongue, so anyone who speaks Arabic is an Arab”¹²⁵.

Another incident narrated from Jabir b. Abdullah al-Ansari reads, “The Prophet addressed us in the middle of the *Tashreeq*¹²⁶ days, with his farewell sermon, saying ‘O people, your God is one, and your father [Adam] is one, there is no preference given to an Arab over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab over an Arab, nor to a red over a black person nor a black over a red; the only preference and superiority is on the basis of piety, and the most dear of you before Allah is the most pious... Have I made this message clear?’ They all replied, ‘Yes! O Prophet of Allah.’ He then said... so those who have witnessed this must inform those who were absent”¹²⁷.

Islam Embraces All People and Nationalities

Islam’s appeal spread to all of humanity, embracing people from various races and nationalities. The Islamic Ummah was comprised of different races and nationalities who lived harmoniously under unified values and contributed to the establishment and advancement of human civilization.

The converts to Islam came from all sorts of racial and national backgrounds including Romans, Persians, Turks, Africans, Indian, Berber and Kurds, just to name a few.

The pages of history are replete with Muslim luminaries who came from different lands and races including al-Afghani, al-

¹²⁵ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Haqiqah al-Qawmiyah al-Arabiyyah*, Kuwait, Dar al-Bayan, pg. 22.

¹²⁶ EN: It is the name for the days of the 11-13 of Dhil Hijjah i.e. the days after the sacrifice and the Eid

¹²⁷ Muhammad Ray Shahri, *Mizan al-Hikmah*, vol. 10, 1st edition, Maktab al-Islamiyyah, 1405 AH, page 629.

Zamakhshari, al-Bukhari, al-Samarkandi, al-Baghdadi, al-Halabi, al-Shirazi, al-Qalqashandi, al-Isfahani, al-Qayrawani, al-Qurtubi....

The English historian, Philip Mansel wrote a book in 1995 titled, 'Constantinople. City of The Worlds Desire 1453. 1924,' in which he discussed historical aspects of the Ottoman Islamic State. The author constantly within the chapters draws our attention to the cosmopolitan nature of Constantinople under Ottoman rule. He also indicates that the Ottoman empire, during its golden days, included 72 and a half nationalities (Gypsies were considered half a nationality). In fact, in 1876, there were 49 newspapers being published in eleven languages including Turkish, Greek, Arabic, English and French.¹²⁸

One researcher has mentioned that the present Muslim World is comprised of 190 nationalities, with hundreds of languages and local dialects.¹²⁹

Legitimacy of Languages

It is true that Arabic is the language of the Glorious Quran, which was revealed to the Prophet by Allah in a clear Arabic language¹³⁰. In order to truly understand the Quran, discern its apparent and hidden meanings, appreciate its rhetoric clarity and to enjoy a unified language for Muslims to communicate, it is most helpful for Muslims who are non-Arabic speakers to learn Arabic.

The invitation to learn Arabic does not imply abandoning one's native language. It is offered as a choice. Not knowing Arabic does not make one less Muslim than his/her Arabic-speaking counterpart. On the

¹²⁸ Susannah Tarbush, Article appearing in the al-Hayat Newspaper, London, 16/11/1995.

¹²⁹ Muhammad al-Simaak, Hal Islam Huwa Hadaf? Journal al-Wai'i al-Islamiyah, Kuwait, No. 337, Shawwal 1414 AH.

بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ ¹³⁰

(Chapter 26 Verse 195)

contrary, Islam recognizes and respects people's natural desire to use their mother tongue and choose any language they wish to acquire. From a doctrinal perspective, Islamic law permits contracts and agreements be written in any language.

However, acts of worship, such as the prayers, because of divine command, must be performed in proper Arabic. However, Abu Hanifa, Imam of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, permits the Takbiratul Ihram of prayers to be uttered in a language other than Arabic. Similarly, Imam Shafi'i permits the Takbeer to be said in another language¹³¹ by those who cannot pronounce it properly. Similarly, some Hanafi scholars also permit non-Arabic speakers, who cannot read the Fatihah properly to do so in another language.¹³²

Furthermore, the Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt knew the languages of the Muslims of their times and communicated with them in those languages.¹³³

Social Interaction

The Prophet was challenged by nationalism and tribal fundamentalism in social interactions, so he encouraged Muslims to interact and mingle with each other regardless of race, nationality or tribal identity.

Islam established an important role for marriage to overcome national and tribal barriers, whereby the Prophet made sure that Juwaybir, a black man, was married to a young Arab lady of noble descent, whose name was al-Dulfa b. Ziyad b. Labeed. The Prophet said to her father, "O Ziyad, Juwaybir is a believer and the believer (male) is equal in status to a female believer, and a Muslim (male) is equal in

¹³¹ Zuhayli, vol.1, pg. 634.

¹³² Ibid, page 655.

¹³³ al-Majlisi, vol. 26, pg. 190.

status to a female Muslim, O Ziyad, bless their marriage and don't refuse or reject him!"¹³⁴

A story is narrated by Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, in which he said, "The Prophet married Miqdad b. al-Aswad to Dhiba'ah b. al-Zubayr b, Abd al-Muttalib. He blessed their marriage, endorsing it to be a model to emulate so that the message was clear...the dearest in the sight of Allah are the highest in piety."¹³⁵

Hisham b. al-Hakam met with one of the Khawarij who asked him, "O Hisham, what do you say about Non-Arabs? Is it legitimate for them to marry Arabs?" He replied in the affirmative. "Can the Arabs marry from Quraysh?" Again, he answered yes. He was then asked, "Can the Quraysh marry from Bani Hashim?" When he again said yes, he was asked who was his source, to which he replied, Jafar b. Muhammad al-Sadiq, who I heard say, "So you consider your blood [e.g. retribution (*qisas*)] to be equal, but not your chastity?!"¹³⁶

A group of historians and narrators have mentioned that when Imam Ali b. Abi Talib became the Caliph, he appointed Harith b. Jubayr as the governor of some eastern territory. From there, Harith sent Imam Ali two daughters of the king of Persia, Yazdagar b. Shahriyar. Imam selected Shah Zanan to be the wife to his son Imam Husayn and she gave birth to his son Imam Zayn al-Abidin; whilst he selected the other to be the wife of Muhammad b. Abi Bakr, and she gave birth to Qasim, the renowned scholar.¹³⁷

Interracial relationships and close affinity amongst families was a common practice within the Islamic society regardless of background or nationality.

¹³⁴ al-Amuli, vol. 20, pg. 68.

¹³⁵ Ibid, pg. 69.

¹³⁶ Ibid, page 70.

¹³⁷ Baqir Sharif al-Qarashi, Hayat al-Imam Zayn al-Abidin, vol. 23, 1st edition, 1988, Beirut, Dar al-Adhwa.

People's Customs and Traditions

Each subculture within the Islamic community preserved and upheld their customs and traditions, mainly ones that contravene and contradict Islamic teachings and laws were rooted out.

The Persians used to celebrate the solar new year, which they called Nowruz, the new day. Imam Ali b. Abi Talib on one Nowruz day was given a gift. Imam Ali asked, "What is this for?" They responded by saying, "O Master of the faithful, today is Nowruz," to which he responded, "make our everyday Nowruz."¹³⁸

The custom during Nawruz festivities was to exchange gifts. The Caliph in Baghdad would distribute gifts to people, such as different types of perfumes. The type of gifts differed according to regions. The custom of the Sasanian kings of Bukhara was to give their commanders traditional spring and summer robes, whereas the Fatimid caliphs would give their people gifts of clothing and food.¹³⁹

Not only does Islam encourage interaction among people of different races, nationalities and respects and sanctions their unique traditions and celebrations, it also demonstrates its authentic ethic of integration and enacting the 'equality-for-all' principle with the appointing of members of different races and nationalities in high-ranking leadership positions.

Commanders from different Nationalities

There were many individuals, from differing backgrounds, who assumed important leadership positions within Islamic Ummah. During the first Abbasid reign, the Baramakah, who were Persians, assumed high positions of authority within the government. During the reign of

¹³⁸ Ray Shahri, vol. 7, pg. 132. [EN: That is visit people and give them gifts for the sake of Allah (SWT) every day and not just wait for a special occasion.]

¹³⁹ Mez, vol. 2, pg. 293.

Saffah, the first Abbasid Caliph (132 –136 AH), Khalid b. Barmak rose to prominence and became the vizier of the caliph. This role continued until the reign of Mansour al-Abbasi. Thereafter, his son, Yahya b. Khalid al-Barmaki became the vizier during the reign of Harun al-Rashid. Yahya had four sons, Jafar, al-Fadhl, Muhammad and Musa, who each played an important and influential role within the government. The political role of the Baramakah continued until 187 AH, when they earned the anger of the caliph al-Rashid, who decided to part with them.

During the beginning of Mamun al-Abbasi’s reign, Fadhl b. Sahl and his brother, Hasan b. Sahl, who were both Persians, had leading positions within the government. Fadhl b. Sahl was named ‘Possessor of Two Commands’.

During the reign of Mutasim al-Abbasi, the Turks had significant influence within the government and the army, and this leading role continued from 232 AH until 324 AH.

Towards the end of the second Abbasid reign, the Seljuks, who originated from Turkmenistan, had influence and overall control from 447 AH to 656 AH.

The Ottoman Turks took over political leadership of the Islamic state for nearly four centuries i.e. from 932 AH until 1342 AH. With the end of their reign came the end of the Islamic Caliphate. The once unified Islamic State was then broken down into many nation states.

In the domain of knowledge, prominent scholars from various nationalities were instrumental in progressing the fields of science and knowledge to such an extent that the scholar Ibn Khaldun writes in chapter thirty-five of his famous “*al-Muqaddimah*”¹⁴⁰ titled, “Most of the scholars and learned men in Islam were non-Arabs (Persians).” He writes,

¹⁴⁰ EN: This book has been translated into English by Franz Rosenthal, titled ‘The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History’

“It is a remarkable fact, with few exceptions, most Muslim scholars both in the religious and in the intellectual sciences have been non-Arabs. When a scholar is of Arab origin, he is non-Arab in language and upbringing and has non-Arab teachers. This is so in spite of the fact that Islam is an Arabic religion, and its founder was an Arab...

Thus, the founders of grammar were Sibawayh and, after him, al-Farisi and al-Zajjaj. All of them were of non-Arab (Persian) descent. They were brought up in the Arabic language and acquired the knowledge of it through their upbringing and through contact with Arabs. They established the rules of grammar and made grammar into a discipline in its own right for later generations to use.

Most of the *hadith* scholars who preserved traditions for the Muslims were also non-Arab (Persians), or Persian in language and upbringing, because the discipline was widely cultivated in Iraq and the regions beyond. Furthermore, all the scholars who worked in the science of the principles of jurisprudence were non-Arabs (Persians), as is well known. The same applies to speculative theologians, philosophers and most Quran commentators. Only the non-Arabs (Persians) engaged in the task of preserving knowledge and writing systematic scholarly works. Therefore, the truth of the following statement by the Blessed Prophet becomes apparent, “If scholarship hung suspended.”¹⁴¹

There may be some exaggeration in Ibn Khaldun’s claims, but it is clear that leading scholars of jurisprudence, *hadith* and various other sciences were Persians. Imam Abu Hanifah, the head Imam and founder of the Hanafi school of thought is of Persian origin. Al-Bukhari, the compiler of *Sahih Al-Bukhari* was also Persian. Similarly, al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, al-Nisa’i, al-Sajistani, and numerous others were all scholars of Persian origin.

¹⁴¹ Abd al-Rahman, Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*, 4th edition, 1978, pg. 543.

III. Firm origins with Diverse Denominations

Muslims depend upon on two primary sources in understanding matters of faith and jurisprudence namely, Allah's Book (the Glorious Quran) and the Sunnah (traditions) of the Holy Prophet. The means of understanding and achieving knowledge from these two sources are through careful thought and intellection and allowing for the doors of *Ijtihad* to be opened, from which a multitude of various opinions and diverse conclusions are attained.

Such a method in interpreting and drawing differing conclusions from legal texts was present during the time of the Prophet, but he did not oppose such a practice as differing opinions stemming from interpretation was a natural phenomenon.

When the Prophet ordered the Muslims to take up arms against the Jews of Bani Qurayzah, he instructed his caller to announce the following, "To all those who listen and follow, do not perform the Asr (late afternoon prayers) until you get to Bani Qurayzah." This was said after the time for Zuhr has entered.

The companions to whom the order not to pray was issued were conflicted and divided in their understanding of the Prophet's orders into two groups:

The time for the Asr prayer entered while the warriors were on their way to Bani Qurayzah, and they discussed the matter taking into account the Prophet's command.

A group of them were of the opinion that prayers should never be delayed from its appointed time, and that it must be performed on time, thus before reaching Bani Qurayzah. This group interpreted the Prophet's order "not to perform the Asr prayers until they reach Bani Qurayzah" as a way of motivating them to move quickly to reach the

Bani Qurayzah and was not aimed at delaying the prayer from its appointed time.

Based on their interpretation, this group performed the Asr prayers on time on the way and before they arrived to the Bani Qurayzah.

The other group of companions were of the opinion that the Prophet's order must be implemented literally and that the Asr prayer must be performed after reaching the Bani Qurayzah's territory. Their interpretation was to wait even if it meant performing the Asr prayer after its appointed time i.e. after sunset. Correspondingly, this group of companions did not arrive to the destination until after the sunset and only then did they perform their Asr prayer. This group had acted upon what they believed the Blessed Prophet has meant by his instructions.

When the Prophet learned what both groups had done, he didn't argue with or condemn either of them. Instead, he acknowledged and approved the actions of both sides i.e. those who performed the Asr prayers on the way, at the appointed time and those who delayed it until they reached Bani Qurayzah, which was after sunset.¹⁴²

Bayhaqi relates that the Prophet told his companions "I ask you to delay the Asr prayer until you reach Bani Qurayzah," But the sun was setting before they arrived. A group of Muslims said... the Prophet didn't intend for us to miss the pray, so they prayed before they arrived. While another group insisted on following the instructions of the Prophet literally, with the belief that it was okay to delay the prayer, as it had been commanded by the Holy Prophet to do so. So, both groups performed what they felt was their religious duty based upon the saying of the Holy Prophet and neither was dealt with harshly or condemned by the Holy Prophet.

¹⁴² Muhammad Ahmad Bashmil, *Mawsuah al-Ghazawat al-Kubra*, vol.4, Cairo, al-Mat'bah al-Salafiyah, 1986, pg. 147.

Further, a contemporary Salafist traditionalist, Shaykh Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, in his elucidation of the traditions in Shaykh Muhammad Ghazali's book *'Fiqh al-Sirah'* writes concerning this tradition, "This tradition, which Bayhaqi has quoted in his *Dala'il al-Nabuwah*, is an authentic tradition reported by Ubaydallah b. Ka'ab and by Lady Ayesha. Hakim Nishapuri also establishes its authenticity based on the criteria of the two Shaykhs¹⁴³ and in accordance with al-Dhahabi."¹⁴⁴

The incident was also mentioned by Sayyid Mohsin al-Amin al-Amuli. He comments on it, "The Holy Prophet's intention was to get the warriors to hurry and arrive quickly to the Bani Qurayzah, so that they reach by the time for the Asr prayer. His intention was not that their Asr prayers would not be valid until they arrived at the Bani Qurayzah. Those who did not arrive in time for the Asr prayers to be performed and who prayed after sunset were legitimately excused because of what they had understood from the Prophet's command."¹⁴⁵

When it comes to the Prophet's sunnah (tradition), there are differences in dealing with their recording and authentication. A companion or a follower or a scholar may read a hadith attributed to the Prophet and will act on the contents, while others, who has not received the text through their sources, will ignore that hadith. The position towards a single narrator will also differ as there will be some who will act upon that narrators saying, while others will disregard so they do not deem him to be trustworthy.

Indeed, political and social circumstances had a strong impact on how views and interpretations were formed and disseminated

¹⁴³ EN: That is al-Bukhari and al-Muslim

¹⁴⁴ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Fiqh al-Sirah*, 8th edition, Dar al-Kutub al-Hadithah, 1988. pg. 336.

¹⁴⁵ Sayyid Mohsin al-Amin al-Amuli, *A'yan al-Shia*, vol. 1, Beirut, Dar al-Ta'aruf, 1986, page 266.

Because of these and other similar reasons, different schools of thought and jurisprudence in Islam deduced different conclusions and interpretations from the sources.

Similarly, in the field of knowledge related to theology and beliefs, various schools of thought emerged such as the Jabariyyah, Qadiriyyah, Mutazilites, Asharites and Maturidiyyah.

In the area of jurisprudence, there was a split between the school of Ahl al-Hadith based in Hijaz and the school of Ahl al-Ra'yi based in Iraq.

As a result of the difference in scholarly opinions, the jurisprudential schools of thought become diverse, where we now have denominations such Sunni, Shia and Khawarij. So the seeds for diversity within the new-formed Ummah and difference of thought were sown very early on.

It should be noted that this diversity in ideology and jurisprudence was not a feature of a negative difference and conflict. In fact, in its early stages and during the golden era of the Islamic community, it was used as a platform for dialogue and vigorous and healthy debate which enriched thought and Islamic jurisprudence. Disputes that occurred among the leaders of the different schools of thought were handled objectively in an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance. Thus, one either accepted the opinions of others, disregarding their original opinion or held firm to their initial opinions, all the while displaying appreciation and respect for the opinions of others. Scholars disagreed in an agreeable and respectful manner.

The open debate of ideas and the open-mindedness of the scholars led to the production of a wealth of intellectual and jurisprudential heritage. Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zahra writes, "This diversity tapped into their natural talents and motivated them towards the recording and writing of the Islamic Sciences. Scholars were extremely diligent in

learning from other scholars who preceded them, and instead of following their own intellectual ideas only, they built and refined the previous opinions and created new ideas from this. It is no wonder Muslim scholars left behind a wealth of jurisprudential works that, without exaggeration, is probably the largest jurisprudential treasure in the world. The Europeans will probably claim that Roman Law has the greatest treasure in terms of literary and development. However, if all the Romans laws were weighed, they wouldn't compare to one tenth of what has been produced by those Muslim scholars who have dealt with all the main issues of jurisprudence, as well as detailed specific solutions contained alongside the more holistic rules. Their intellectual legacy is sufficient to enrich humanity with goodness, if only mankind was ready to heed and benefit from it."¹⁴⁶

The relationship between the Imams and scholars of the various schools of thought was characterized by open communication and mutual respect. For example, Zayd b. Ali b. al-Husayn, who the Zaydi sect attribute their formation to, had close and strong relations with scholars of his time who learnt from him. For example, Wasil b. Ata¹⁴⁷ attached himself to him and benefitted from him; so did Abu Hanifa, who learned from him as well. It has been mentioned that Abu Hanifa was so fond of Imam Zayd that he took his side, defending him against those who wanted to harm him. He confronted the Umayyad soldiers in defense of Imam Zayd by saying "His act is as the act of Holy Prophet at Badr."¹⁴⁸

Imam Abu Hanifah, the leader of the Hanafi sect, met with the Shia Imams from the progeny of Imam Ali, and he admired and respected them. He also benefited from their knowledge without becoming a follower of the Ahl al-Bayt, despite his clear admiration and

¹⁴⁶ Muhammad Abu Zahra, *Tarikh al-Mazahib al-Islami*, Cairo, Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1989, pg.302

¹⁴⁷ EN: The systemizer and the foremost scholar and proponent of the Mutazili school of thought

¹⁴⁸ Muhammad Abu Zahra, pg.45.

love for them. He took knowledge from Zayd b, Ali, Muhammad al-Baqir, his son Jafar al-Sadiq and from Abd Allah b, Hasan b. Hasan. But he was never known to be a follower of any of them in his thoughts.¹⁴⁹

Imam Abu Hanifah narrates, “I was told by Abu Jafar al-Mansour that people were getting attracted to Jafar b. Muhammad, so he asked me to prepare some difficult questions. I then prepared forty questions.” The Imams met at al-Hirah in the presence of al-Mansour.

Abu Hanifah recounts this meeting, “I came to him and entered his council while Jafar b. Muhammad was already seated to his right. When I saw him (Imam Sadiq) I felt an awe enter me, one that I never felt for Abu Jafar al-Mansour. I greeted him and he asked me to sit by his side which I did. He (Mansour) then turned towards me and said, ‘Abu Hanifah, propose your questions to Abi Abdillah (Imam Sadiq),’ so I began asking my questions. In his responses, Abi Abdillah would continuously say, ‘You say so and so while the scholars of Medina say such and such and we (Ahl al-Bayt) say something else... some of your opinions were in line ours, sometimes they were in line with theirs and at times both differed from us.’ This continued until he had answered all forty of my questions without leaving anything out.” Abu Hanifa then said, “The most knowledgeable is he who is most knowledgeable about the differences between opinions.”¹⁵⁰

Imam Malik b, Anas, leader of the Maliki sect, used to attend the council of Imam al-Sadiq, and it is mentioned in al-Madarik something to the effect that, “I used to attend the session of Jafar b. Muhammad, he was well humored and always smiling, whenever the Holy Prophet was mentioned in his presence, he face would change colour [out of awe and respect]. I used to frequent him for a time. I only saw him doing three things: praying, fasting or reciting Quran. I never saw him relate from the Prophet, except in a state of ritual purity, or speak about what did

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, page 361.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, page 693.

not concern him. He was one of the men of knowledge, worship and zuhd (asceticism) who feared Allah and I never came to him without him removing the cushion he was sitting on and giving it to me to sit on.”... he went on describing his many other personal traits and attributes...”¹⁵¹

The numerous diverse sects and schools that differ in thought, jurisprudence and the resulting differing opinions of scholars are a natural outcome of the principle of *Ijtihad* in understanding the concepts of religion and its laws. The effort and diligence that is put into this is very much necessary. In fact, it is a criterion which most of the scholars of Islam see as a *wajib kifa'i*¹⁵² for Muslims across all-times and place. Therefore, it has to be an accepted concept.

One researcher has stated, “If *Ijtihad* is a permanent Islamic duty, it is because it forms a tool to deduce specific legal laws, which are taken from Divine Revelation, the commands of the Quran and the Prophet’s explanation of them. The survival of Islamic law is dependent on it; as it (the Islamic law) is the final and eternal, whose laws are responsive to the ever-changing issues of time, place, interests, customs and traditions. In the words of Suyuti (849-911 AH). ‘This duty of *Ijtihad* is a compulsory from the *Kifa’i* compulsory acts in every era and it is compulsory on Muslims at all times to establish it groups from all places.’ This obligatory nature of *Ijtihad* will naturally lead to diverse and differing opinions.

For there is no doubt that the existence of multiple *Mujtahids*¹⁵³ will lead to different schools of thought. The numerous and different opinions must in fact result in numerous, diverse and different readings and interpretations which are manifested in sects, schools and movements. Thus, *Ijtihad* engenders diversity, which in turn inspires its development. Such *Ijtihad* is binding for one scholar and those who

¹⁵¹ Ibid, page 397.

¹⁵² EN: An act that is incumbent upon all Muslims, but gets remitted from all if one Muslim performs it.

¹⁵³ EN: A scholar who has the required prerequisites to partake in *Ijtihad*

choose to follow him and not anyone else or someone who follows another *Mujtahid*. This has become a rule of Islamic thought and therefore allows for greater accuracy and clarity on the beginning of the multitude of religious thoughts.”¹⁵⁴

Accordingly, the behavior of the scholars who wished to better society was based on respecting the multitude and diversity of opinions and sects... Imam Jafar al-Sadiq instructs his students, when involved in providing religious edicts and decrees for people, not to ignore the opinions of other sects and schools of thought when the inquirer is a member of any of those other sects and schools of thought. He told one of his students Aban b. Taghlab, who was one of his closest students and who would sit in Masjid al-Nabi in order to answer people’s religious questions, “Take into account and consider what you know of their opinions and inform them accordingly.”¹⁵⁵

As an acknowledgment of multiplicity and the support of it thereof, Imam Malik b. Anas, leader of the Maliki sect, refused to impose his sect and opinions on other Muslims. The Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid wanted to make Imam Malik’s book, al-Muwatta, the standard book of law, to hang a copy of it on the Ka’bah in order for all people to recognize it, but Imam Malik did not approve of this.”¹⁵⁶

The Other Side

These were some shining beacons from our Islamic history in which we see the community abiding by Islamic values and applying it teachings. We see harmony, cooperation and coexistence among the numerous differing racial, sectarian or religious groups.

¹⁵⁴ Muhammad Imarah, Faridhah al-Ijtihad Taqinun li al-Ta’adudiyah wa al-Ikhtilaf, al-Hayat Newspaper, 27/10/1417 AH.

¹⁵⁵ Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khui, Mu’jam Rijal al-Hadith, vol. 1, 4th edition, 1410 AH, pg. 149

¹⁵⁶ Muhammad Abu Zahra, pg. 430.

There is, however, another aspect of Islam's history which is not as positive and rosy. On the contrary, it causes pain and sorrow as it is replete with bigotry and animosity that resulted in the loss of life, violation of customs and the denial of basic rights. The root cause being the renouncement and intolerance of diversity, and deliberate attempts to impose a certain ideology. In this rejectionist and close-minded climate, erroneous views, suggestions and proposals were developed to justify the objectives.

Non-Muslims suffered forms of oppression in certain cases and during periods of Islamic history. An example is the oppression of non-Arabs or Mawalis at the hands of some Muslim rulers, who used difference of opinions as a means to cause great strife within the Islamic Ummah.

We cannot claim that our history and heritage were fully compatible with Islam's vision and the ethic of coexistence. Alongside those brilliant moments that were compatible with the spirit and essence of Islam, unfortunately, there were some aggressive and painful acts that were contradictory and not in line with the generosity, tolerance, and fairness of Islam. The more we witness acts of hatred, injustice and intolerance, the further the community deviates from Allah's path. Such negative and destructive acts of domination by an oppressive force, no matter how seemingly ignorant it is, reveal its underlying agenda, to spread hatred and cause sedition in the Ummah.

Our pressing task now is to project the true and authentic values of Islam, to derive practical lessons from our glorious heritage and history so that we become well-equipped to combat forces of darkness and confront the challenges facing our communities.

The wars and catastrophes experienced by the third world and the suffering of developing people through being kept backward and created problems, can mostly be attributed to the prevailing environments of conflict between the different players and their value systems, lack of

consensus on what constitutes a just social system based on recognition and accepting, coexisting and partnering with others to build a peaceful and dignified free world.

CONCLUSION

The move from Bigotry to Coexistence

...

Who is responsible?

Despite the Islamic virtues of accepting, recognizing and coexisting with others regardless of their creed, there are real challenges and dangers that the Islamic World is facing during these contemporary times. Even though we are living in an era of unprecedented openness and scientific advancement, there remains a terrible illness eating away at the body of our Islamic World. One which hinders its revitalization and reinforces its divisions and derails it from the path of unity of opinions and leadership.

This dangerous disease is that of sectarian bigotry, which has continued to pollute the social environment in many countries and regions with its poisonous divisive fanaticism. This reminds us of what the Prophet said, “Anyone who has fanaticism in his heart the size of a mustard seed shall be resurrected by Allah on the day of resurrection together with the Arabs of era of ignorance.”¹⁵⁷ He also said, “Not from us is he who advocates religious fanaticism, nor he who kills or is killed because of it.”¹⁵⁸

In many parts of the Islamic world, there are people who live side by side with their fellow countrymen who belong to different Islamic denominations. These people, however, are not living a life of coexistence, cooperation and harmony, even though they are all adherents of the same religion, the same nationality and even ethnicity. They are full of conflict and disharmony where the minorities are suffering from sectarian oppression and discrimination. The question

¹⁵⁷ Muhammad b. Yaqub al-Kulayni, *al-Usul min al-Kafi*, vol. 2, 3rd edition, Tehran, 1388 AH., pg. 308

¹⁵⁸ al-Hafidh Abu Dawud al-Sajistaani, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, vol. 2, *Kitab al-Adab, Bab fi al-Asabiyah*, tradition no. 5121, 1st edition, Beirut, Dar al-Jinan, Muassiah al-Kutub al-Thiqafiyah, 1988

that needs to thus be answered is that do these sectarian differences justify oppression and discrimination?

The number of Islamic denominations stem from the same sources, the Divine Book and the Sunnah. Also, all of them have one common origin in their belief, *Tawhid*, belief in Allah, belief in the finality of Prophet Muhammad and belief in the Day of Judgment. Members of all denominations face the same Qiblah during prayer, the Blessed Kaaba, give alms, perform *Haj*, and fast during the Month of Ramadhan. They all have inherited their denominational identity and membership from their parents and grandparents; they did not invent or create these denominations during this period or in recent centuries.

So, what justifies conflict and animosity?

First, it is real ignorance of Islam's true teachings.

Second, vicious manners stem from selfishness, self-centred interests and bigotry.

Third; the efforts of internal and external enemies which fuel the conflict by fanning the fire of divisions and sowing seeds of sedition and divisiveness

Is there an alternative? Yes, coexistence!

Coexistence is the only alternative:

When Muslims differ in their denominational identity and membership, they have one of three choices by which they can deal with diversity and multiplicity:

The first choice is to attempt to impose and enforce, whereby the followers of each denomination try to impose their beliefs on others, coerce them to accept and embrace it. They do this because the followers of each denomination believe that their way is superior to the

others and as such consider themselves dutybound to spread their teachings.

This choice is problematic from the point of view of divine law (*sharia*), because beliefs and methods of worship should not be achieved through compulsion; as the Glorious Quran says, “There is no compulsion in religion.”¹⁵⁹ Quite the opposite, persuasion and one’s willingness and wilfulness should be the basis for accepting and embracing a certain faith. Islamic Sharia stipulates that a Muslim should not impose upon others what they do not actually believe in, as Allah did not give such a right to even His Exalted Prophet. In fact, Allah told the Prophet, “So admonish—for you are only an admonisher, and not a taskmaster over them,”¹⁶⁰ and “Had your Lord wished, all those who are on earth would have believed. Would you then force people until they become faithful?”¹⁶¹

From a practical perspective, all attempts of imposing views and beliefs are futile and bound to fail as people will be pushed further towards their own existing religions and denominations in the face of a threat, challenge or confrontation. Muslims populations in countries that were formerly dominated by Communism are a perfect example of this.

Similar attempts took place during some periods of our history, when rulers tried to impose their religious views upon members of religious minority groups. The rulers were driven, by their sense of being the majority or being in power, to oppress those who were from a different denomination. History tells us that such attempts were of no avail, and if at all successful, the success was limited and temporary.

¹⁵⁹ لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

(Chapter 2 Verse 256)

¹⁶⁰ فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ

(Chapter 88 Verse 21-22)

¹⁶¹ وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مِنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ

(Chapter 10 Verse 99)

The second choice, a state of animosity and conflict. In this state, followers of each sect become entrenched in their own group; members are mobilized against each other, which in turn generates hatred and animosity and groups become estranged from each other. The ‘stronger’ side will become more oppressive towards the other. As it does so, the oppressed group will naturally defend itself and try to avenge its grievances against the oppressor. This tit for tat goes on until the community gets embroiled in internal strife leading to perhaps a civil war.

No one wins in this situation. This strife and in-fighting provides the enemies of Islam the perfect opportunity to enact their plans and achieve their objectives.

The Lebanese civil war and the bloody sectarian events currently taking place in Pakistan are classic examples of such a destructive choice.

The third choice is the choice of coexistence. In this choice each side recognizes the right of the other to hold on to their beliefs and convictions; the right to practice their religious rites and style of worship based on their doctrinal jurisprudence. In such a climate, all citizens enjoy equal rights, responsibilities and obligations, cooperating and working together for the common good and mutual interests, confronting common threats and challenges together.

This is the call of Islam and its teaching of tolerance; it is the way of Islam’s leading Imams and its sincere and dedicated luminaries.

It is also the call of reason and logic; recognizing a shared destiny in a common living environment and within one nation, as stated by Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, “The well-being of peoples’ affairs is in coexistence.”¹⁶²

¹⁶² Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, vol. 71, pg. 167.

Whose responsibility is it?

How can our communities elevate their status to a civilization of peaceful coexistence?

How can we rise above differences and divisiveness and confront the causes of estrangement and animosity?

How can diversity and multiplicity enhance our experiences and be a source of enriching our thoughts, ideas, and opinions?

How can national Islamic unity be achieved for every Muslim community and for the Muslim Ummah as a whole? The responsibility falls on all of us, just as has been reported from the Exalted Prophet said, “You are all shepherds and each shepherd is responsible for his herd.”¹⁶³

Responsibility falls first and foremost on the shoulders of Muslim rulers in Islamic nations, who will always remain responsible for uniting their people, providing an environment that is conducive to coexistence and harmony between its citizens, based on justice and fairness, prohibiting any national or sectarian discrimination, as has been reportedly instructed by the Prophet, “The best ruler is the one who brings together those who differ, and the worst is the one who divides those in agreement.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ EN: This tradition is recorded in both Shia and Sunni books of tradition. See: Bihar al-Anwar, vol.73 and Sunan Jami al-Tirmidhi, Kitab al-Jihad

¹⁶⁴ Sayyid Muhammad al-Shirazi, al-Sabeel ila Inhadh al-Muslimin, 7th edition, Beirut, Muassisah al-Fikr al-Islami, 1994, pg. 312. (EN: It must be noted that this tradition is not recorded in any reliable book of traditions)

Religious scholars are expected to play a vital role in calling for unity and harmony and warn against national discord and sectarian division. A religious scholar should never engage in stoking the flames of sectarian fanaticism with fabricated justifications, as reported from the Master of the Faithful, Imam Ali, “ Indeed, Allah the Glorified, has never given any goodness to a person, whether in the past or present, who separates from the people.”¹⁶⁵ Additionally, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq is reported to have said, “Do not make enemies of others because of your religion; for surely animosity brings disease to the heart.”¹⁶⁶

Educated individuals and those in the media should mobilize their pens and efforts to promote an environment of tolerance and togetherness, and combat fanaticism and radicalism which only feeds on ignorance and foolhardiness, stoked by the enemies of Islam.

Finally, every responsible citizen should contribute to building national Islamic unity through proper and mature behavior when interacting with their fellow citizens. Conflict and strife threaten a nation’s present and future, it harms peoples’ welfare. That is why the divine teachings warn against it. For indeed how true are Allah’s words, *“And obey Allah and His Apostle, and do not dispute, or you will lose heart and your power will be gone. And be patient; indeed Allah is with the patient.”*¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Nahj al-Balagha, sermon number 176.

¹⁶⁶ Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, vol. 2, pg. 133.

¹⁶⁷ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ وَاصْبِرُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ
(Chapter 8 Verse 46)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- The Glorious Quran
- al-Amin, Sayyid Mohsin, A'yan al-Shia, Dar al-Ta'aruf, Beirut, 1986.
- Ibn Abil Hadid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, Beirut, 1983.
- Ibn Khaldun, Abd al-Rahman, al-Muqadimah, 4th edition, Dar al-Jeel, Beirut, 1978.
- Ibn Hisham, al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah, Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1st edition, Beirut, 1994.
- al-Sajistani, Hafidh Abu Dawood, Sunan Abi Dawud, 1st edition, Beirut, Dar al-Jinan, Muassisah al-Kutub al-Thuqafiyah, 1988..
- Abu Zahra, Muhammad, Tarikh al-Mazahib al-Islamiyah, Cairo, Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1989.
- Bashmil, Muhammad Ahmad, Mawsuah al-Ghazawat al-Kubra, Cairo, al-Mat'bah al-Salafiyah, 1986.
- Izetbegović, Alija, Islam between East and West, First Edition, 1994, Kuwaiti al-Nur magazine, The Bavaria Foundation. Khaled Khaled Mohammad, Rijal Hawl Al-Rassul, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Hadithah, Cairo, 1968.
- Khur'ma, Dr. Na'yif, Adhwa ala al-Darasat al-Lughawiyah al-Mu'asirah, World of Knowledge Series (9), Kuwait, 1978
- al-Khui, Sayyid Abu al-Qasim, Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith, 4th edition, 1410 AH.
- al-Rawhani, Sayyid Muhammad, Minhaj al-Salihin, 2nd edition, Beirut, Dar al-Zahra, 1992
- Ray Shahri, Shaykh Muhammad, Mizan al-Hikmah, 1st edition, Maktab al-I'lam al-Islamiyyah, 1405 AH.
- al-Zuhayli, Dr. Wahbah, al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adilatahu, 3rd edition, Dar al-Fikr, Damascus, 1989
- al-Subhani, Shaykh Jafar, Sirah Sayyid al-Mursaleen, Beirut, al-Bayan al-Arabi, 1992.
- al-Simaak, Muhammad, Hal Islam Huwa Hadaf? Journal al-Wai'i al-Islamiyah, Kuwait, No. 337, Shawwal 1414 AH.

- Strauss, Claude Levi, Articles in Humanity, chosen and translated by Dr Hasan Kubaysi, 1st. edition, Beirut, Dar al–Tanweer, 1983.
- Shams al-Din, Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi, Fi al-Ijtama’a al-Siyasi al-Islami, 1st edition, Beirut, 1992,
- Shams al-Din, Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi, Nizam al-Hukm wa al-Idarah fi al-Islam, 2nd edition, Beirut, 1991.
- al-Shirazi, Sayyid Muhammad, al-Sabeel ila Inhadh al-Muslimin, 7th edition, Beirut, Muassisah al-Fikr al-Islami, 1994
- Tarbush, Susannah, Article appearing in the al-Hayat Newspaper, London, 16/11/1995.
- al–Amuli Muhammad b. al-Hasan, Wasa’il al-Shia, 1st edition, Beirut, Muassisah Ale Bayt, 1993
- Ibn Hajar al–Asqalani, al–Isabah fi Tamyeez al -Sahabah, Beirut, Dar al-Jeel, 1992.
- Imarah, Muhammad, Faridhah al-Ijtihad Taqninun li al-Ta’aduyiyah wa al-Ikhtilaf, al-Hayat Newspaper, 27/10/1417 AH.
- al-Ghazali, Muhammad, Fiqh al-Sirah, 8th edition, Dar al-Kutub al-Hadithah, 1988
- al-Ghazali, Muhammad, Haqiqah al-Qawmiyah al-Arabiyyah, Kuwait, Dar al-Bayan,
- Guinness Book of Records, 1st edition, Damascus, Dar al-Talas li Darasat wa Tarjumah wa Nashr, 1993.
- al–Qubanchi, Hasan, Sharh Risalah al-Huquq, Beirut, Dar al–Adhwa’a, 1991.
- al–Qarashi, Baqir Sharif, Hayat al-Imam Zayn al-Abidin, 1st edition, Beirut, Dar al-Adhwa. 1988.
- al-Kulayni, Muhammad b. Yaqub, al-Usul min al-Kafi, 3rd edition, Tehran, 1388 AH.
- Mez, Adam, al-Hizarah al-Islamiyah fi al-Qarn al-Rabi’ al-Hijri, 5th edition, Dar al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah,
- al–Majlisi, Muhammad Baqir, Bihar Al–Anwar, 3rd edition, Beirut, Dar Ihya al–Turath al–Arabi, 1983
- al-Modarressi, Sayyid Muhammad Taqi, Min Huda al–Quran, 2nd edition, Beirut, Dar al-Bayan al-Arabi, 1407 AH,

- al-Muntazari, Shaykh Husayn Ali, Darasat fi al-Wilayah al-Faqih, 2nd edition, Beirut, al-Dar al-Islamiyah, 1988
- The Arabic International Encyclopaedia, 1st edition, Riyadh, Muassisah Amal a-Mawsuah lil al-Nashr, 1996.
- Al-Waqidi, Muhammad b. Umar, al-Maghazi, 3rd edition, Beirut, Muassisah al-‘Alami li al-Matbuat, 1989.

The Author’s address:

Hasan Musa al-Saffar
P.O. Box 1322
al-Qatif, 31911
Tel: +966138555210
Fax: +966138512600
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The author has skillfully addressed the various aspects of the topic in an organized manner, infusing them with rich references to Quranic verses and traditions of the Holy Prophet.

Furthermore, the author stresses on the idea that difference is innate and beneficial for life, so long as not transformed into conflicts and hostilities. He then emphasizes that positive competition and rivalry in accomplishing good must substitute futile arguments and conflicts, benefitting from the following Quranic verse “For every nation We have appointed rites [of worship] which they observe; so let them not dispute with you concerning your religion, and invite to your Lord. Indeed, you are on a straight guidance.” (Holy Quran 22:67)

Dr Muhammad Abduh Yamanni

South Africa, during the Apartheid years, was a bastion of religious tolerance and mutual coexistence amongst the vast majority of people who vehemently opposed the racist regime. This bond melted together diverse cross-sections of society and cemented it through protests, organised demonstrations, and critical opposition. Religious leaders were in the forefront of many of these efforts. It was indeed a sad day on Thursday, 10th May 2018, when we witnessed the first terror attack in South Africa, visited upon the Imam Husain Mosque in Phoenix, Durban. The paradox is that it was organised, initiated and perpetrated by extremists in the name of Islam, against an Islamic Place of Worship, where Qurans were set alight.

The importance of this effort by Shaykh Saffar in promoting dialogue, encouraging mutual respect and tolerance and raising the flag of a peaceful coexistence is pertinent in a world driven by intolerance of individuals and communities towards one another.

Syed Aftab Haider



Published by:
Ahlulbait (as) Foundation
of South Africa

ISBN - 978-0-620-94688-99



9 780620 946889