

MESSAGE OF A UNIVERSAL FAITH

by

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Dear brothers and sisters, we are assembled here in this great cosmopolitan city of London. Delegates from most world countries are participating. World conferences are often convened for political, economic, cultural, etc. purposes. The aims of this convention are singular, being discussion on Faith. In the world of today two matters stand out uniquely prominent: consciousness of world peace, happiness and prosperity of all mankind.

Modern scientific inventions have transformed our globe into a kind of a cosmopolitan city. The big cities of today present the spectacle of almost a resort of universal nature, wherein can be found persons of all races and nations. Such a promiscuous intermingling of all mankind on the physical, political, and cultural basis is a challenge for various faiths to discover—a universal religion. Faith, if rightly understood in its true spirit and if practised in life by its votaries, is by far the most potent factor conducive to peace, happiness and prosperity of man. Even if faith be considered as one of the factors, is the time not beckoning various faiths to unite? While mankind is already on the threshold of unity in secular spheres, does it not call for a united faith front, in order to complete that union? All faiths have a common origin and a common aim: a Divine origin, surrender to God's will and reward of virtue and service to mankind.

In view of these common fundamental concepts of faith, the differences should sink into insignificance. But where minor and formal rituals assume the form of disputes and discords, the fault must be found with the over-enthusiast and the fanatic followers and not with the teachings of faith itself.

Characters of a Universal Faith

Let us then consider the characters of a universal faith. These are mainly four: a universal God, a universal guide, a universal code of laws and a universal brotherhood. Only conception of a universal God can unite all mankind, because it is His universal attributes of dispensation, of Mercy, Beneficence and equal treatment of all mankind without any racial, national or religious discrimination which are conducive to bring about union amongst humanity. His universal law of reward of good and evil must be equally operative for all, without the least partiality or prejudice of any kind, whatsoever.

A universal guide should be a historical personality, who in his life presents a perfect model and a panorama of all kinds of human activities. Only a perfect exemplar who has experienced all vicissitudes of life can hold homage from all humans and be a source of inspiration for unity.

A universal teaching must be comprehensive, containing all truths ever previously revealed or ever needed for an advancing humanity.

Lastly, the resultant of these three universal factors, comprising the fundamental concepts of a universal faith, should be the formation of a universal brotherhood. If such a society comes into being, all discords and differences are bound to disappear. It should not be mistaken that natural differences between man and man will be eliminated altogether. It is wrong to conceive and expect such an unnatural state of affairs. But the formation of a universal fraternity on the basis of universal faith concepts as described is sure to bring about a real union conducive to universal peace, progress, and prosperity of mankind and therefore to usher in an era of universal happiness which is the agreed aim of all the man's activities.

As a critical student of the faith of Islam, I take your permission to present before you a few aspects of it and to leave it to your fair judgment if the universal characters, enumerated above, form a part of Islam.

Islam—a Universal Faith

The God of Islam is named as *Rabbul Alameen*, its Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is called *Rahmatullil Alameen*, and its book is designated as *Zikrulil Alameen*. All the three factors are suffixed by the common word *Alameen* which means *worlds*. Thus translated they mean a Providence for all the worlds, a Mercy for all the nations and a Reminder for all human beings. Universality is therefore indicated by the very titles of God, the Holy Prophet and the Book of Islam. Let me go a little into their detail.

A God would not be universal if He behaves differently with different persons and peoples. He must treat everyone in an equitable and just manner. He should have one law for all His servants whether belonging to this or that nation, and to this creed and faith or the other.

Here is His universal law of treating equitably all His subjects as stated in the Quran:

"The person who does an atom's weight of good shall see it and one who does an atom's weight of evil shall also see it" (99:7).

Certain people have distorted the above Divine law by making exceptions on account of their religion or race, etc. Their notions about a chosen race are refuted in the following verses:

"They say none except a Jew or a Christian would enter paradise. Say, bring your proofs in your support, if you be truthful. Nay, whosoever surrenders himself to God and is a doer of good deeds, he shall have his reward with his Lord. Neither fear nor grief shall overwhelm him" (2:111-112).

And again in another verse the idea of a chosen nation on account of difference in faith has been rejected thus:

"The Believers, the Jews, the Christians or the Sabians, whosoever has faith in Allah and the Hereafter and does good deeds, he shall have his reward with Allah and no fear or grief shall overtake him" (2:62).

In this verse it is clearly stated that the Divine law of retribution is equally operative on the basis of one's faith in God and the Hereafter and on his good actions and not merely on lip-belief. A Muslim, a Christian, a Jew and persons of any other persuasion, all are placed on an equal footing.

The converse is also equally true. We read in the Quran:

"They say, fire will not touch us but for a few days. ...Yea, whosoever earns evil, his sins overwhelming him on all sides, they are the inmates of fire" (2:80-81).

And again we have:

"Neither according to your wishes nor according to the wishes of the people of Book, whoever commits an evil, will be requited for the same, not finding any friend or helper against Allah. ...But whosoever acts virtuously, whether male or female, being a believer, these will enter the garden, not being dealt with unjustly a whit. And who has a better religion than the person who submits himself wholly to Allah and is a doer of good deeds" (4:123-125).

Differences and Disputes in Doctrines, no Bar to Goodwill and Peace

Doctrinal and ritualistic differences would always remain. Even then the God of the Quran is a universal God Whose universal law of retribution operates equally. A few more verses:

"If they reject thee say, my work is for me, and your work for you, you are clear of what I do and I am clear of what you do" (10:41).

Justice is administered on an equal basis of nature of deeds because such is the character of a universal Providence. The Quran says:

"I am commanded to do justice between you. Allah is our Lord as well as your Lord, we shall have reward for our deeds and you for yours. Thus there is no contention between us and you" (42:15).

As the reward is to be bestowed on actions, so at another place, as in the above verse, the Quran enjoins ending of all disputes:

"Do you then still dispute with us? He is our Lord, and also your Lord; for us are our deeds and for you your deeds. We are sincere to Him only" (2:139).

Universal Spiritual Dispensation

The dispensation, whether secular or spiritual, of a universal God is on an equal footing for all nations. Accordingly the Quran says:

"There is not a people but a divine warner has been raised amongst them" (35:24).

"Every nation had a divine messenger" (10:47).

"Every nation had a Divine guide" (13:7).

"For every one of you, we have appointed a law and a guide" (5:48).

Due to such universal teachings of equity and equality of mankind, the Quran concludes thus:

"All people are but a single nation" (2:213).

"People are naught but a single nation but they disagree" (20:19).

Addressing all the prophets, the God of the Quran says:

"This your community is one community, and I am your Lord, so keep your duty to Me alone. But they (the people) became divided, each party rejoicing in what is with them" (23:52).

Division and disputes are the creation of the divergent tendencies in man whereas God has been good, gracious and bountiful, equally to all his people.

Muslims have been prohibited to speak harshly or abusively of other gods thus:

"Do not abuse gods whom they worship besides Allah, lest they, through ignorance, in return abuse Allah" (6:109).

Of course it is not the intention that mutual discussions for finding out truth be dispensed with, but in this regard also the aim always should be mutual understanding and not such which results in bitterness and bickerings. Thus the Quran says:

"Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and have discussion with them in the best manner" (16:125).

Quranic Proposals for Unity between Various Faiths

"O people of the Book, let us agree on a common principle between us and you, of not worshipping any besides Allah, of not associating any partner with Him, and of not taking some of us as Lords besides Allah" (3:63).

Agreement on the commonly accepted principle of God's Unity in its practical form is, according to the Quran, one way of creating unity amongst different world faiths.

Another common and agreed principle upon which there could be built up the union of human race is suggested by the Quran in the following verse:

"Everyone has a goal on which (his life actions) revolve. (Believers!) Your aim should be to vie with one another in virtuous actions. (The result will be that) wherever you may be, Allah will bring you all together" (2:148).

Two agreed and common principles by one and all can therefore become the constructive edifice of

a real unity and peace amongst different faiths, that is, the great principle of God's Unity carried into practical life and the adoption of a life of virtue. Persons and peoples united upon these two fundamentals ultimately are led to a true and lasting unity between them. The message of the Holy Book—the Quran—therefore, to mankind is, let us try to understand one another's point of view and therefore through mutual, tolerant and proper discussion come to accepting a universal faith. However, if this means fails, we still have another course open; it is to unite on the common and agreed principles of Unity and virtuous deeds.

Nothing more clear, more convincing and more forceful than what has been said in the above verses could be said about the characters of a universal God, of His equal dispensation, Beneficence and His law of retribution for all mankind, on the basis of actions.

About the universality of the Quran, the Book has been called *Zikrul Li Alameen* or a reminder for all the nations.

As for confirming the previous truths, the Quran often repeats the phrase "it testifies to the truth of what is before it."

As far being a complete guidance it says:

"Wherein are all the rightly guiding books" (98:3).

"We have made distinct every kind of guidance in this Quran."

And lastly:

"Nay, these are clear verses of the book, in the hearts of a people who possess knowledge."

The Holy Prophet's Personality—a Historical Record of all Virtues in their Perfection

The claim of the Quran being a Divine scripture comprising all the previous and true revelations as well as all other guiding principles ever to be discovered through knowledge and understanding is thus established by the above verses.

The third character of a universal faith is the perfect model of a historical personality. So the Holy Prophet of Islam, peace be upon him, has been designated as *Rahmatullil Alameen* or a mercy for all the nations. Again, it is said about him:

"In the person of the Prophet of Allah, you will find the best of models" (33:21).

He embodies in him all the virtues and presents a perfection of all goodness. In his life is summed up the main moral and spiritual principles of all the previous prophets. From the life of a destitute orphan and a labourer, he rose to be the king and emperor; from being severely persecuted and exiled, he is forced in self-defence to become a soldier and a general; and from being a sufferer and a ruled one, he rises to the powerful position of a potent monarch. Thus he passes through all vicissitudes of life, displaying in every sphere of activity the highest and perfect moral attributes.

But there is another universal character in him. He believes in all the previous prophets as being

truly from God and also lays it down a condition for his followers to believe in all of them.

"They say, become Jews or Christians, only then you would be guided. Say, but the religion of Abraham, the upright, is the right course; he was not an idolater—Say, we believe in Allah and in that which is revealed to us as well as in that which had been revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes and we believe in what had been given to Moses and Jesus and in that which had been given to all the other prophets from their Lord: we make no distinction between them and we surrender only to Him" (2:135-136).

A True Muslim follows all the Prophets and Teachings

For the first time in the history of the world came a prophet who requires his followers not only to believe in him and his revelation but also in all the previous prophets and their revelations. The Holy Prophet of Islam also claims to have come in fulfilment of the prophecies of all the previous prophets and claims to be a prophet to all mankind:

"Say, O mankind, I am an Apostle of Allah to all of you" (7:158).

Could there be anything more magnanimous, more cosmopolitan and more international? Now, consider the case of a true Muslim. He is not only a follower of Islam but also a true follower of each and every religion ever revealed before. A true Muslim not only believes in all prophets and scriptures but being the follower of a perfect prophet and a comprehensive code, does he not act upon all the previous true teachings, as they all form a part and parcel of his own faith? His sympathies are as wide as the universe itself and his unity as extensive as the breadth of all other faiths. He becomes so to speak, a man of interfaith and international status.

Conversely, take the case of a non-Muslim who enters into the fold of Islam. Has he to deny or lose anything in which he believed before? None at all. He has entered from a narrower circle of brotherhood to a much broader and universal fraternal circle.

To illustrate the most liberal, tolerant and peace-loving attitude displayed by the Holy Prophet of Islam, I can very briefly refer to two of his well-known life events. A Christian deputation from Abyssinia came to him in Medina for holding controversy about the respective merits of Islam and Christianity. Not only was this deputation honoured by the Prophet by him lodging them in his mosque, but they were also asked by him to celebrate their Sunday service in it. Persons from the opposition camp coming to contend about the veracity of his prophethood are treated and tolerated like fast friends.

Another great event of the prophet's life is the one known in history as the Truce of *Hudaybia*. During the 8th year of *Hijrah* the Prophet, with 1400 of his companions, marched to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. But they are held up and not allowed to enter the holy city. A peace is concluded, definitely disadvantageous to Muslims. The Prophet's companions resent and protest against such a treaty, which they consider humiliating. But the Holy Prophet agrees to these very conditions merely to avoid bloodshed. The Holy Prophet's love and preference of peace and tolerance has no parallel in the annals of mankind.

ISLAMIC OR UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

It would be in the fitness of things if I quote here a few opinions from eminent westerners to show how much Islamic teachings are needed today in order to restore the imbalance created by the one-sided materialistic civilisation and to unite the world into a universal fraternity.

Napoleon Bonaparte

"I hope the time is not far off when I shall be able to unite all the wise and educated men of all countries and establish a uniform religion, based on the principles of the Quran, which are true and which alone can lead men to happiness."

Denison

"It seemed then that the great civilization was on the verge of disintegration. Was there any emotional culture that could be brought in to gather mankind once more into unity to save civilisation? It was among these people that the man (Muhammad) was born, who was to unite the whole known world of the east and the west."

Gibb

"But Islam has yet a further service to render to the cause of humanity—No *other society has such a record of success in uniting in an equality of status*, of opportunity, and of endeavour *so many and so various races of mankind*. If ever the opposition of the great societies of the East and West is to be replaced by cooperation, *the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition*."

Arnold

"Besides the institution of pilgrimage, payment of legal alms is another duty that continually reminds the Muslim that the faithful are brothers. It seldom fails to express itself in acts of kindness towards the new convert. Whatever be his race, colour or antecedents, he is received into the brotherhood of believers and takes his place as an equal among equals."

Gibbon

"Islam created a spiritual brotherhood of Muslims which overcomes all barriers of class, race and colour."

Zwemer

"There is a strange unity and solidarity in Islam which justifies such a loose use of the term 'world of Islam.'"

Duncan Greenless

"The nobility and broad tolerance of this creed which accepts as God-inspired all the religions of the world will always be a glorious heritage for mankind. On it could indeed be built—a *perfect world religion*."

Francis Potter

"Muslim missionary today preaches world peace, world brotherhood, the upliftment of women and the breakdown of racial barriers. There is considerable truth in his claim. While Christianity preaches temperance and the brotherhood of man, Islam really abstains from all forms of alcohol and practices racial equality."

How the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement earnestly wished to unite the different world faiths and factions would become evident to you if I be permitted to relate an incident during the last days of his life. It was the month of May 1908 when he visited Lahore, staying with his Lahore disciples, chiefly the Khawaja Kamal-ud-Din, who afterwards was to become the most successful and world famous missionary of Islam. During those days the movement for the freedom of India was in its inception. The Muslims had just formed the Muslim League, apart from the Indian National Congress. Seeing this, the Founder wrote a pamphlet entitled *Message of Peace*. The gist of it was that as both Hindus and Muslims were the inhabitants of a single country, they should unite together. His proposal for creating unity was that both communities should show respect for each other's spiritual guides. The Quran asks Muslims to respect the spiritual teachers of other peoples as truthful men and so he announced Krishna and Buddha to be God's prophets. In response, he wanted his Hindu brethren to reciprocate and declare the Holy Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, peace be upon him, to be a true man from God. Acceptance of such a proposal would lead to a real Hindu-Muslim unity. However, the Founder did not live long to see his proposal mature. Subsequently, the political unity between the two communities did not prove permanent but failed. The sub-continent was divided with much carnage and misery on both sides.

Even today his message of unity, love, concord on the basis of religious tolerance, goodwill and respect for one another's religious prophets, between Muslims and followers of all other faiths, especially the Christian and the Jewish worlds, stands extended and this move is bound to lead in easing and solving many a moot political problem menacing world-peace today. Let us all pray, may the Almighty God be pleased to guide us all on the right course of His will and pleasure, *Amen*.