



“ THE UNIFICATION OF MANKIND ”

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After the unity and universality of God, Islam inculcates the truism of the unity of mankind under the sovereignty of God, for without acceptance of this principle, there can be no practical unification of mankind. The Holy Quran says:

All people are one single nation (2:213).

O people, surely We have created you of a male and a female and made you tribes and families that you may distinguish one another; but the most honourable among you are surely the most God-fearing of you; surely God is Knowing, Aware (49:13).

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also exhorts us:

"Listen: Verily your Lord is one. Listen: Verily your father is one. O people of God, become brethren."

And Maulana Sadr-ud-Din (the Second Ameer [Head] of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement) in his book, Islam is Modern, remarks:

"When we come to realise that every nation is the creation of the self-same God, we will then look upon all mankind as God's big family. There have, however, arisen in God's family mistaken views and prejudices which keep its members apart. Their prejudices must be eliminated in order to bring peace and happiness to this family. Accordingly, the Holy Quran describes and discusses prejudices born of fanatical and religious views, prejudices that owe their origin to notions of racial superiority, and prejudices for which differences of colour and language are responsible (p. 15)."

But the Holy Quran does not limit itself only to a theoretical description and discussion of the problem, but goes way beyond that. And so every institution in Islam, including the practical and fundamental pillars of the religion — prayer, charity, fasting and pilgrimage — is geared towards bringing into realisation the fact that mankind is a single species.

Significance of Prayer:

We shall look at prayer first. In Islam, prayer is not only for personal purification; nor is it for self-development alone; nor is it only for the realisation of the Divine within ourselves. It is also, in the words of Maulana Muhammad Ali:

"The means of levelling all differences of rank, colour and nationality, and the means of bringing about a cohesion and unity among men which is the necessary basis of a living civilisation" (The Religion of Islam, p. 292).

"Once within the doors of the Mosque, every Muslim finds himself in an atmosphere of equality and love. Before their Maker they all stand shoulder to shoulder, the king along with his poorest subject, the rich arrayed in gorgeous robes with the beggar clad in rags, the white man with the black. Nay, the king or rich man standing in a back row will have to lay his head, prostrating

himself before God, at the feet of a slave or beggar in the front. There can be no more levelling influence in the world. Differences of rank, wealth and colour vanish within the equality, and love, totally differing from the outside world, prevails within the holy precincts" (Ibid. p. 298).

And every worshipper is fully conscious of the warning given in the Holy Quran:

So woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayer, who do good to be seen, and refrain from acts of kindness (107:4–7).

Institution of Charity:

It brings us to another institution in Islam for achieving the unity of mankind, that of charity — both voluntary and compulsory — for without acts of kindness or good deeds, our faith will not be constantly watered and will so wither and die.

The Holy Quran repeatedly enjoins upon us that we should pay the compulsory charity (Keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate), in addition to other voluntary acts of goodness which encompass all human activity and which include meeting a brother with a smile. The Holy Quran states in answer to those who believe that only a particular group will enter paradise to the exclusion of all others:

Nay, whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is the doer of good to others, he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve (2:112).

And as regards the universal nature of charity, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said:

"On every bone of the fingers charity is incumbent every day: one who assists a man in riding his beast or in lifting his provisions to the back of the animal, this is charity; and a good word and every step which one takes in walking over to prayer is charity; and showing the way (to another) is charity."

"Every good deed is charity, and it is a good deed that thou meet thy brother with a cheerful countenance and that thou pour water from thy bucket into the vessel of thy brother."

And thus we are urged to spend out of what good God has entrusted to us in the service of all mankind, not only for our own benefit, but also for the benefit of our families and members of our own race, nation or religion. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) has enlightened us thus:

"Mankind is a fold, every member of which shall be a keeper or shepherd unto every other, and be accountable for the welfare of the entire fold."

"O Lord: Lord of my life and of everything in the universe, I affirm that all human beings are brothers unto one another."

But this responsibility comprises more than the human race, for the Holy Prophet (pbuh) continues:

"All creatures of God form the family of God, and he is the best loved of God who loveth best His creatures."

"Respect the ways of God, and be affectionate to the family of God."

It must be pointed out here that in order to receive fully the rewards of our charity, our spending must be only for the sake of God and must be untainted by selfish desires and calculating ambitions. The Holy Quran gives us a description of the truly selfless servants of God:

And they give food out of love for Him, to the poor and the orphan and the captive. We feed you (they say) for Allah's pleasure only — we desire from you neither reward nor thanks (76:9).

Neither should we give it with any feeling of self-righteousness, pious smugness, vanity or conceit. Rather, the Holy Quran tells us:

And those who give what they give while their hearts are full of fear that to their Lord they must return (23:60).

Moreover, the Arabic word used for "giving" in regard to charity really means "presenting", thus safeguarding the dignity of the one who receives the gift.

Furthermore, the Holy Quran gives us a challenge in the following words:

You cannot attain to righteousness unless you spend out of what you love(3:91), and holds out as an ideal those who:

prefer others before themselves though poverty may afflict them.

Fasting as a Unifying Force:

In the third pillar of Islam, fasting, we experience not only the levelling of outer social divisions, but also the inner realisation of the oneness of mankind. When we fast we are forced to undergo the very feelings of hunger, thirst and deprivation of our fellow human beings from among the poor and the downtrodden and so we advance from a mere sympathetic feeling for them to a true sympathetic consciousness of their lot and this impels us to selfless service to all mankind.

With reference to the power of fasting as a unifying force, Maulana Muhammad Ali, in *The Religion of Islam*, says:

"In addition to its spiritual and moral values, fasting as prescribed in the Holy Quran has also a social value, more effective than that which is realised through prayer. Rich and poor, great and small, residents of the same vicinity are brought together five times daily in the mosques on terms of perfect equality and thus healthy social relations are established through prayer. But the commencement of the month of Ramadan is a signal for a mass movement towards equality which is not limited to one vicinity or even one country but affects the whole Muslim world. The rich and the poor may stand shoulder to shoulder in one row in the mosque, but in their homes they live in different environments. The rich sit down on tables laden with dainties and with these they load their stomachs four, even six times daily; while the poor cannot find sufficient food with which to satisfy their hunger even twice a day.... A great social barrier thus exists between the two classes in their homes, and this barrier is removed only when the rich are made to feel the pangs of hunger like their poorer brethren and go without food throughout the day, and this experience has to be gone through, not only for a day or two, but for a whole month" (pp. 398–399).

But perhaps the greatest demonstration of the unity of mankind comes during the annual pilgrimage to Makkah. There, people of every race, every colour, every tongue, every nationality come together; young and old, male and female, all dressed alike in a spontaneous spiritual outpouring of surrender to one God and love for mankind. Every feeling of bitterness or rancour is rooted out of the heart and every prejudice is banished.

Man comes face to face with his Maker: Labbaika Allahumma Labbaika (Here we are, O Allah, here we are in Thy presence), and is made fully conscious of the fact that mankind is a single nation and God is Lord of all. The pilgrim experiences here an earthly foreshadowing of what the righteous will taste in paradise on the Day of Resurrection:

And We shall root out whatever of rancour is in their breasts — as brethren, on raised couches, face to face (15:47).

As Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

"It is hajj (pilgrimage) alone that brings into the domain of practicality what would otherwise seem impossible, namely that all people, to whatever class or country they belong, should speak one language and wear one dress. Thus is every Muslim made to pass once in his life through that narrow gate of equality which leads to broad brotherhood. All men are equal in birth and death; they come into life and pass out of it the same way, but hajj (pilgrimage) is the only occasion on which they are taught how to live alike, how to act alike and how to feel alike" (The Religion of Islam, p. 506).

Through such institutions, Islam aims at bringing into practicality the elusive theoretical goal of the unity of the human race, despite the various discords, vested interests, pride and prejudice, false stereotype and competing ideologies that have always bedevilled the world.