

Chapter 4: Social Behavior

Respect for Elders – Parents in Particular

Allah Almighty instructs humanity to reciprocate their parents' devotion to their well-being and education through tender, kind and thoughtful consideration for them in their old age. Qur'anic references include:

For your Lord has ordered you not to worship any except Him. He also commanded you to be good to your parents. Should either or both of them reach old age and need care, do not behave irritably or reproach and reject them but always respond to them gently.

Treat them with humility and tenderness and pray, 'Lord be merciful to them, as they were to me when I was little.'

Your Lord is aware of what is in your heart and how you behave [towards His Creation]. He is All-Forgiving to those who repent. (Qur'an 17:23-25)

Here, as well as in ayah 151 of Sarah 6, Allah Almighty links His order – not to worship any other than Him – with His command to treat parents well,

Come, I will clarify what Allah really prohibits, do not associate anyone or anything with Him; and be good to your parents ... (Qur'an 6: 151)

These two commands are linked in order to emphasize the significance of parental rights. The assertion 'Allah is Divine' separates atheist from Muslim, as does obedience to heavenly injunctions.

Society depends on parents maintaining responsibility for the care, nurture and education of their offspring – and this is balanced by the reciprocal responsibility to be good to parents.

The Qur'anic expression 'lower the wing of humility' implies compliance and acceptance of the will of another. The analogy of a bird lowering its wings to conceal and protect its offspring illustrates the tender, caring treatment that parents most need when they themselves are old and dependent. We are told to be gentle and to ensure we do not express any irritation that might upset aged parents –

regardless of how they may behave in their dotage.

Many *ahadith* emphasize the need for patience and kindness towards parents, beautifully expressed by Imam Ali ibn Husayn (a.s.) in the *dua*,

O Allah, fill me with an awe of my parents like the awe in which people hold tyrannical sovereigns; let me be devoted to them with the devotion of a compassionate mother!

Make my obedience and commitment to them more pleasing to me than sleep to the drowsy, more refreshing than drink to the thirsty; so that I prefer their inclination over mine.

O Allah, thank them for my upbringing, reward them for their kindness, and protect them as they protected me in my infancy. [1](#)

In considering the degree of parental duty to mature children, jurists have debated the extent of a father's responsibility regarding decisions over his son's property. Some conclude that there are no limits to a father's complete authority over his offspring. They base this on the *Hadith*, 'You and your property belong to your father.'¹ However, we understand this to relate to ethical values rather than civil laws concerning ownership.

During the daily formal prayers – *salat* – we are recommended that when standing in submission to Allah – *qunut* – we should pray, 'O Lord, be merciful to my parents as they were to me in infancy.'¹ It is highly recommended that gratitude towards parents continues to be expressed even after they have died. After that time, Muslims should beg Allah to shower their parents' souls with His mercy. We take comfort in the belief that prayers, which Allah has specifically ordered us to offer, will indeed be accepted by Him.

Although the above is addressed specifically to parents, by inference it extends to all senior members of the family and community. Indeed, in this 'two-way system of Islam', elders are expected to treat the young with mercy and kindness, and the young to reciprocate by treating the elderly with deference.

4.2 Charity

Giving and caring for others is an elemental characteristic of Islamic behavior. Indeed, everything around us is a manifestation of giving. The sun has provided light and heat for millions of years, and continues to do so, for without it life on earth would not be possible. Forests provide the oxygen that sustains us in addition to the material with which to produce the millions of publications that educate and inform us. Our hearts beat to supply life-sustaining blood to our other organs. All these manifestations demonstrate the significance of giving. The Qur'an and *Hadith* describe the concept of charity as follows:

From the Qur'an

Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah are like grasses with seven ears – each with

100 grains. Truly, Allah gives manifold increase to whomever He wills ... (Qur'an 2:261)

While it is acceptable to give donations in public, it is preferable not to reveal one's generosity to the poor. That will redeem some of your evil deeds and Allah is aware of all that you do. (Qur'an 2:271)

Sincere giving of what one has – out of a longing to please Allah – may be likened to a garden on elevated ground. Rain falls freely upon it and it yields two fold fruits ... (Qur'an 2:265)

O you who believe, spend of the good things you have earned from what We have brought forth from the earth. Do not give as charity worthless things which you would not want yourselves ... (Qur'an 2:267)

[O Muhammad (S)] take charity from their wealth to cleanse and purify them and then pray for them. Truly, your prayer is an assurance of their tranquility. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. Do they not know that it is Allah who accepts His servants' repentance and receives their charity ... (Qur'an 9:103–104)

There is seldom good in secret deliberations other than to enjoin charity, goodness or to reconcile people. Those who meet in secret in order to seek Allah's pleasure will be granted enormous rewards. (Qur'an 4:114)

Vie with each other to obtain the Lord's forgiveness and paradise – which is as wide as the heavens and earth. It has been prepared for those who safeguard themselves with full awareness of Divine law. Those who spend, while prosperous or straitened, who control anger and forgive people... (Qur'an 3:133–134)

Those who recite the book of Allah, establish prayer and spend what We have given them – openly or in secret – aspire for imperishable reward. (Qur'an 35:29)

From Ahadith

The Prophet said:

*My community will prosper whilst they remain faithful to one another, return the things that they hold in trust and give in charity. When they no longer fulfill these duties, they will face famine and shortage.*²

While charity is delivered by the hand of its owner, it voices four statements:

I was perishing and you have given me existence.

I was insignificant and you have given me significance.

I was an enemy and you have turned me into a friend.

*I was protected by you and you have made me your protection until the day of resurrection.*³

Give charity to restore your family – for charity removes bad fortune and ailments, prolongs life and increases rewards.[4](#)

Imam Ali (a.s.) said:

Allah Almighty has established the livelihood of the destitute in the world of the rich. If the destitute are hungry, it is because they have been denied their due by those who are rich.[5](#)

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said:

When you are in financial need, get out of bed early – for the means of subsistence are distributed before sunrise. Allah Almighty blessed this nation in its early hours. So give charity in the early hours, for adversity does not follow charity.[6](#)

The first thing which will be weighed on the Day of Judgement will be the charity given to relatives.[7](#)

Commentary

While Islam promotes charity it does not encourage people to accept it, not to mention ask for it. However, as there are always people who need assistance, it is important for those with means to remain sensitive to the needs of others – so that none are ever obliged to ask for help.

Human beings are only temporary custodians of Allah's sustenance and favor. In the past this has been in the safekeeping of others, as it will be again in the future. Thus, commendable charity is given 'for the sake of Allah', in the knowledge that what is being given is not owned or earned by the donor. Therefore, to be parted from property presents no problem. Muslims who comprehend this never humiliate or belittle those to whom they give, nor do they feel they have done a great favor for which reciprocation is due.

Charity is not restricted to the giving of money; it is a broad concept that embraces greeting others warmly, smiling and seeking to solve another's problems – without expectation of gain.

The theme of the Qur'anic ayat 2:261–274 that exhort believers to give charity willingly for the pleasure of Allah, makes the following points:

1. The motivation should be to seek Allah's pleasure and not to 'show off' (2:264).
2. The act should not be followed by self-reproach or injury (2:263) (2:264).
3. What is given must be lawful and pure.
4. Maintain trust in the Provider and ignore Shaytan's encouragement not to give.
5. Give both openly and in secret.
6. The rewards for giving are in both this world and the one to come.

Those who give to display magnanimity should not expect to be rewarded by Allah. To clarify this, He provides the analogy of soil being completely washed off a smooth rock in the first heavy downpour, while similar rainfall on fertile earth is absorbed so that the earth eventually becomes adorned with abundant vegetation.

To conceal charitable gifts is to protect the recipient of them from embarrassment, shame or disgrace, and to preserve their standing in the eyes of others. This is emphasized in the *Hadith* of the Prophet – ‘one hand knows not what the other gives.’ However, this in no way implies that there is no reward in giving openly as stated in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 6, verse 1 – ‘Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen by them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in Heaven.’

4.3 Care of others – Orphans and the Destitute in particular

Orphans, deprived of tender, loving, parental attention, are entitled to the utmost care and consideration in Muslim society. The Prophet Muhammad (S) declared that in paradise, those who have cared for orphans will remain in close proximity to him. He illustrated this by holding together two fingers of one hand, to demonstrate that they would never find themselves further away from him than those two fingers.

It is the duty of a guardian to employ the utmost diligence to safeguard the rights and property of orphan(s) under her/his protection. Allah tells us in the Qur’an,

Safeguard the property of orphans until they attain maturity ... (Qur’an 17:34)

In another ayah He tells us:

Those who unjustly consume the property of orphans ingest the fire that will soon envelop them. (Qur’an 4: 10)

With good deeds balanced against bad, we are led to understand that jealousy consumes good deeds in the same way that fire consumes wood. Thus, usurping the property of an orphan is described as ingesting fire rather than food.

A lady came to the Prophet (S) saying, ‘O Messenger of Allah, my husband died leaving me and his daughter, but we did not inherit a thing.’ The deceased's brother said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, how can she expect to inherit from him when she neither rides a horse, attacks her enemies, nor earns. What she needs, others have to provide for her?’ It was in response to this that the above ayah was revealed.

Islamic jurisprudence deals comprehensively with the matter of guardianship of minors and orphans. Guardians are obliged to continue to support orphans in their care until they attain physical and spiritual maturity and the competence to deal with their own property.

In a general guideline, Allah's order to the Prophet is:

Do not oppress orphans. (Qur'an 93:9)

In the Qur'an, Allah Almighty addresses the Muslim community directly, 'O you who believe', or indirectly, via His instructions to the Prophet Muhammad (S), as in the above example. Such instructions include the care of helpless creatures – orphans, dependants or those incapable of managing their own affairs for whatever reason – as sacred trusts. Such sacred trust also applies when one is petitioned to help – by the poor seeking financial assistance, the ignorant seeking information, knowledge or guidance or the helpless seeking protection. All petitions should be granted in accordance with the resources Allah has made available, for a Muslim's duty is to share Allah's bounties with those who have been endowed with a lesser facility than ourselves – whatever that facility might be.

In another *ayah*, Allah refers to those who neglect the needs of orphans, as having no belief in the Day of Resurrection:

Have you seen a person who denies the existence of final judgement? Well, that is the one who rejects orphans and does not encourage the feeding of the poor. (Qur'an 107:1-3)

Allah Almighty tells us in the Qur'an that the good deeds that will repel misfortune on the Day of Judgement include:

The freeing of captives and feeding those who have insufficient food to survive on, the orphans and the homeless. (Qur'an 90:15)

An essential lesson that Allah taught previous nations was:

Do not worship any other than Allah, treat your parents and kindred well and care for orphans and the needy. (Qur'an 2:83)

To underline this point, Allah likens the care of those in need to the care of one's own parents and relatives.

Even though it is only close relatives who normally expect to be included in an inheritance, Allah recommends that a portion of an estate be earmarked for distribution to orphans and the needy when disbursement is made:

When kinsfolk and orphans and the needy are present at the time the estate is being disbursed, also provide for them from it and speak kindly to them. (Qur'an 4:8)

Although the Prophet Musa (a.s.) and Khizr (a.s.) were refused food and hospitality after their journey, Khizr (a.s.) immediately began to repair a wall that was in danger of collapsing. Musa argued, 'If you had wished, you surely could have received a payment for this work.' However,

Khizr (a.s.) explained that the wall belonged to a pair of orphaned boys whose inheritance had been secreted within its foundations – and so your Lord has willed that they receive their inheritance when they attain maturity. (Qur'an 18:82)

This ayah underlines the importance of safeguarding the property of orphans – even if in doing so one is also required to undertake a little unpaid work.

4.4 Honesty

The integrity of the Prophet Muhammad (S) before he received Allah's Divine Message, was due to two evident aspects of his behavior: honesty and truthfulness – *Al-Sadiq* and *Al-Amin*. Pagan and idolatrous Arabs entrusted their wealth to the care of the Prophet Muhammad (S) simply because honesty is admired by all, regardless of faith, race or color.

Imam Baqir (a.s.) said:

There are three meritorious acts that are not excusable to ignore: the return of what has been entrusted, regardless of the owner being righteous or a sinner; the fulfillment of covenants, regardless of these being held with honorable or dishonorable people; and being kind to parents, whether they are righteous or not.[8](#)

The above *hadith* emphasizes the merit of honesty and trustworthiness, that the Qur'an refers to as being signs of true faith:

Those who are faithful will certainly attain success ...[as will] those who remain true to their trusts and covenants. (Qur'an 23:8)

Even though acts of worship reflect commitment to faith, true faith is verified by one's honesty rather than the duration of one's ritual activity. The Prophet once said to his companions:

Do not be misled by the time someone spends offering prayer, fasting or the frequency with which they go on pilgrimage, but rather form your opinion by how truthful and trustworthy their behavior is.[9](#)

The above criterion was held in such esteem by the error-free Imams that Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said:

Had the murderer of Imam Ali (a.s.) entrusted me with anything, I would most certainly have returned it to him.[10](#)

4.5 Fairness and Justice

Fairness and justice are observable characteristics of elevated and purified souls, for those who are fair do not wrong others and avoid selfish or self-centered actions. Islamic teaching describes these commendable qualities thus:

From the Qur'an

O you who believe! Stand firmly with justice. (Qur'an 4:135)

O you who believe! Remain principled for the sake of Allah and bear witness with justice. Do not let hatred of anyone provoke you into intolerant behavior. Conduct yourself honorably, for that is nearer to piety. (Qur'an 5:8)

If you judge, judge with impartiality, for truly, Allah loves those who are just. (Qur'an 5:42)

Give full measure and weight with justice, and be just when you speak, even if it is against a kinsman; fulfill Allah's covenant. (Qur'an 6:153)

Say, my Lord has enjoined justice. (Qur'an 7:29)

Measure with justice and do not shorten the balance. (Qur'an 55:9)

In truth, We sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and sent with them the book and the balance so that people can establish themselves in justice. (Qur'an 57:25)

From Ahadith

The Prophet (S) said:

An hour's justice is worth more than 70 years of fasting the whole day and praying the whole night. One hour of injustice is worse than 60 years of sin. [11](#)

The highest level of justice is to love for others what you love for yourself, and hate for them what you hate for yourself. [12](#)

Whoever is in charge of ten people and does not deal with them justly will, on the Day of Judgement, arrive with their hands and legs in chains. [13](#)

When someone said to the Prophet (S), 'I would like to be one of the most just people,' he (S) replied, 'Then love for others what you love for yourself.' [14](#)

Imam Ali (a.s.) said:

Justice is the most secure of foundations. [15](#)

Allah created justice in order to sustain and protect humanity from sin and cruelty. [16](#)

Faith is based on four pillars: patience, certainty, justice and jihad. [17](#)

Imam Ali (a.s.) included in his will the advice to his sons: Be just to friend and foe alike. [18](#)

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said:

Justice is more welcome than water discovered by the thirsty. [19](#)

A seeker of wisdom followed a wise man 700 miles for the answer to seven questions. The sage answered the question, 'What is greater than the whole world?' with the single word – 'Justice.' [20](#)

Commentary

Chingiz-Khan sent three Muslim envoys to offer peace and safe commercial relations to Sultan Muhammad of Khwarazmshah. Although the Sultan responded favorably, when a caravan of 450 merchants and Muslims arrived from Mongolia with 500 laden camels, he detained and murdered them. He subsequently also murdered other envoys sent by the great Khan. From 1219 to 1221, Mongol armies pursued Muhammad and his son Jalal al-Din across Iran through Azerbaijan and into Syria – leaving death and devastation in their wake. The entire Kingdom of Khwarazm passed into the hands of Chingiz-Khan, together with a sizeable part of Iran. The Mongol conquest of central Asia that ended the Caliphate was achieved in less than three years.

When he came to Baghdad, the Mongol Lord Hulagu assembled Muslim scholars to ask, what is preferable, an unjust Muslim ruler or a just non-Muslim governor?' With the concurrence of the other scholars present, the highly respected Sayyid Ali ibn Tawus responded, A just non-Muslim is better than an unjust Muslim' [21](#). He based his response on a *hadith* in which the Holy Prophet said, while the state may function on disbelief, it cannot continue with injustice'. [22](#) That reply is claimed to have saved Hilla, Najaf, Karbala and all the inhabitants of southern Iraq from destruction.

It is unsurprising to find that 'The Just' – *Al-Adl* – is one of Allah's most beautiful names and that the *Imamiyah* include justice as one of the five principles of faith.

Adl is itself the root word from which *Al-Adl* – The One who is Just – is derived. *Al-Adl* is He who is just and from whom all justice emanates – the justice that underpins peace, harmony and order from which balance flows. He gave all things existence, created all things perfectly and, with absolute justice and generosity, sited creation in a perfectly balanced environment. Each aspect of creation is fully equipped to fulfill its own special function. *Al-Adl* represents absolute justice, the converse of tyranny – justice that represents right as opposed to wrong, order as opposed to chaos and harmony as opposed to dissension.

Even though we are not able to observe things at every stage of their journey, or permitted to see their inner aspects, everything is treated justly and is as He likes it to be'. Everything has been created with purpose. If we only see clouds, we know that without them we would not appreciate clear skies. Without weakness we would not appreciate strength, without poverty, riches etc. Allah knows His creation and it knows He is just.

Humankind's share in the attribute *Al-Adl* is limited to allowing reason and religion to control the passion and anger that cause injustice. To behave justly towards ourselves, our families, relatives, neighbors, employers and employees, we must restrict ourselves to the parameters of Divine Law. On no account may we bestow inappropriate advantages to disrupt order and balance.

Humankind's greatest benefit arises from accepting Allah Almighty's justice, for His plans, decrees and actions are just, whether they correspond with our will or not. In the same way that patients accept the medication that doctors prescribe to alleviate their physical suffering, our acceptance of Allah's Divine and absolute justice alleviates the suffering that stems from objecting to and resisting Allah Almighty. Absolute faith lies in acceptance of what He has ordained with absolute justice.

The justice of Allah became a matter of controversy among Muslims. The Shiah and Mutazilites believe that Allah is 'Absolutely Just' in the sense that it would be contrary to His nature to wrong anyone. The Asharite school considers it objectionable to regard Allah Almighty thus. 'Who are we,' they ask, 'To place any stipulation on the will of Allah?' They are certain that no one has the right to any opinion on how Allah will decide any matter, even if he is to commit the righteous to hell and reward the criminal on 'The Day of Judgement'.

The Shiah and Mutazilites reject that view. They say 'Allah Almighty Himself promised to reward the righteous and to punish the criminal and, they claim, Allah never breaks his promises. Because of their support of Allah's justice, the Shiah and Mutazilites came to be known as 'Those who are pro-justice' – *al-Adliyah*. The Imamiyah school consequently includes 'The Justice of Allah' as a 'Root of Religion'.

4.6 Repelling evil and exemplifying good

By the grace of Allah surges of adrenaline enable us to react swiftly to stress and danger. However, as with our other abilities, we have the choice to employ this wisely and appropriately – or to squander it on foolishness.

Adrenaline-induced 'fight or flight' responses generate biochemical changes in the brain that may make us aggressive and unpredictable, or make us timid and urge us to flee. At such time our natural judgment system is turned down and more primitive responses take over. If our body triggers the fight or flight response for situations that are not truly life-threatening, we experience what is, in effect, a false alarm. Too many such alarms may result in stress-related disorders, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, immune system disorders, migraine headaches, insomnia and sexual dysfunction.

Fortunately, in civilized society we rarely need to avail ourselves of this risk-facing enhancement, other than in 'extreme sports'. So, it clearly makes sound sense, physically, psychologically and legally, for us to control our aggressive and unpredictable urges. A society in which aggression-induced stress is constantly met by reciprocal aggression must be the closest thing to hell that we can imagine.

The ability to restrain anger and suppress retaliation not only signifies a refined and developed psyche, but control and self-denial are also pre-requisites for spiritual development. Imam Ali (a.s.), the epitome of courage and bravery, is reported to have said,

The most courageous are those who manage to control their ego's desires. [23](#)

In the Qur'an, Allah encourages us to repel evil via good deeds:

[And those] – who in adversity are kept patiently steadfast by their longing to face their Lord; who maintain prayer and give, privately and openly, of what We have provided them, and who repel evil with good – will find fulfillment in the hereafter [their ultimate abode]. (Qur'an 13:22)

It is these who shall receive a twofold reward for having remained steadfast in adversity, for having repelled evil with good and for having given to others from what We have provided them. (Qur'an 28:54)

But, [as] good and evil are diametric opposites, repel [evil] with that which is better, and the hatred of those who regard you as their enemy may be transformed into intimate friendship. (Qur'an 41:34)

The above *ayah* stresses that when controversial subjects need to be discussed, Muslims should present the points they wish to make in a mild and inoffensive manner. They should not regard those with whom they debate as enemies, but rather as colleagues with whom they are having amicable discussions.

This is also emphasized in the prayer of Imam Ali ibn Husayn (a.s.):

**O Allah, bless Muhammad (S) and Muhammad's Household and direct me:
to resist with good counsel, those who behave dishonestly towards me,
to repay with gentle devotion, those who distance themselves from me,
to reward with generosity, those who have deprived me, to recompense with cooperation, those
who exclude me, to counter with excellent praise, those who slander me,
to shut my eyes to evil and give thanks for good!** [24](#)

The Messenger of Allah (S) once asked:

Would you like me to clarify what the best morals for this world and the hereafter are? They are to forgive the one who oppressed you, to establish bonds with those who avoid you and to be kind to those who insult you.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said something similar:

Three noble qualities belong to this world and the hereafter – to forgive those who oppressed you; to make bonds with those who separate themselves from you; and to show forbearance when insulted. [25](#)

These are not empty exhortations for they were exemplified by the lifestyles of the error-free Imams – When a man from Damascus who was in Madinah happened to chance on Imam Husayn (a.s.). he broke into an abusive tirade about him and his family. The Imam's response was to say, 'I see that you are a newcomer to town. If you have not yet found accommodation you are welcome to stay at my house; if you are famished by your journey please dine with us; if the costs of travel have strained your finances I will be pleased to be of assistance.' Those who overheard this exchange were amazed by the differences in tone of the two men and quite taken aback when the Damascene accepted the proffered hospitality. Before this traveler left Madinah he let it be known that he had hated Husayn (a.s.) when he arrived in the city, but was leaving it with his heart overflowing with love for him.[26](#)

In a similar incident, Imam Ali ibn Husayn (a.s.) was once confronted in public by an onslaught of vituperation from a cousin. At that time, he (a.s.) chose to ignore both his cousin and his comments. Not to be silenced, his cousin shouted, 'I am speaking to you', to which the Imam (a.s.) replied, 'And I am ignoring you.' Shortly after the offender left, the Imam (a.s.) suggested to his companions that they follow him home. They assumed the Imam would confront him, but when the door was opened they heard the Imam say, 'If the statements you made about me are true, I ask Allah to forgive me. However, if they were untrue, I ask Allah to forgive you.' This embarrassed his cousin into making an apology. At this, the Imam turned to his companions and asked, which of the two actions was the better?'[27](#)

4.7 Relationship with other faiths

In the view of Allah the whole of humanity consists of one single community,

To the one community of humankind Allah sent Prophets, as bearers of good tidings and as Warners. He sent down to them The Book with the Truth so that He could judge between people ... (Qur'an 2:213)

Three facts emerge from the above ayah:

1. The unity of all humanity under One God;
2. The distinctiveness of the different religions brought by various prophets;
3. The role that revelation (The Book) plays in resolving differences that occur between people.

The Qur'an does not deny the variety of religions, nor that contradictions might exist between them regarding beliefs and practices. At the same time it emphasizes the need to recognize the 'oneness' of humanity created by Him, and the need for all to work towards a better understanding between the followers of the different faiths.

This is illustrated by history. For example, when conditions in Makkah were unfavorable to the early Muslim community and a challenge to the inhabitants of that city, Allah commanded His Messenger to

say, **'you to your religion and me to my religion'** (*Qur'an 109:5*). This was even more relevant when real issues of co-existence arose between the followers of Divine scriptures in Madinah.

The universal message of the Holy Qur'an thus reveals that, without subordination to any limited historical and cultural context, revelation accepts religious pluralism as a necessity. It teaches Muslims to continually negotiate the transformation of society via emphasis on the fundamental aspect of the unity of humanity that lies in its origin – its creation by the Divine Being. This affirmative principle of diversity is the cornerstone of the Creation

Narrative in the Qur'an and serves to remind people:

Surely this community of yours is one community and I am your Lord: so worship Me. (Qur'an 21:92)

Rather than regarding diversity as a source of inevitable tension, Qur'anic teaching underlines the indispensability of variety in defining common beliefs, values and traditions for the community life of the variety of specific traditions.

O humankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes so that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing of you. (Qur'an 49:13)

The unique characteristic of Islam is conviction that belief in the Oneness of God unites the Muslim community with all of humanity – because He created every human being, irrespective of their religion, tradition or background. And on the Day of Judgment, all the inhabitants of the world are to be judged, regardless of their sectarian affiliation or moral performance.

In his letter to his governor in Egypt, Imam Ali (a.s.) wrote, 'Humanity is made up of two kinds of people, those who believe that they are like others because all have been similarly created, and those who only believe that they are like those who follow the same faith.' The Persian poet Sa'di (d. 1292 CE) elaborated, 'Human beings are members of a body, in which every part is related to every other part, and each of those parts has been created from a single essence.'

Divine gift requires humans, regardless of their particular religious affiliations, to live harmoniously together and to strive for justice and peace throughout the world. In the Qur'an, Allah urges humanity to **' . . . compete with one another in doing good'** (*Qur'an 5:48*).

Islam does not claim that revelation was limited to the Prophet Muhammad (S) alone, for it is known that other prophets also received the truth.

We have revealed to you, as We revealed to Nuh (a.s.), and the prophets after him. We revealed to Ibrahim (a.s.), Ismai1 (a.s.), Isaq (a.s.), Yacqub (a.s.) and the Tribes, 'Isa (a.s.) and Ayub (a.s.), Yunus (a.s.), Harlin (a.s.) and Sulayman (a.s.), and We gave to Dawud (a.s.) Psalms [in the same

way as we gave to] messengers We have mentioned to you and messengers We have not mentioned to you – and Allah spoke to Musa (a.s.). Messengers who gave glad tidings and warnings in order that people may have no argument against Allah. (Qur'an 4: 163–165)

Islamic recognition of the variety of communities, each with its own laws, attests to the validity of the Jewish and Christian faiths, despite Islam – which avoids extremes and cautions moderation in everything – being the ideal for 'the best community'.

The Qur'anic notion of religious pluralism, even when the right path is conceived of as being the only basis for the success of humanity, objects to intolerant claims that various religious communities sometimes make. The Qur'an refers to moral as well as to religious obligations. While universal guidance indicates that moral standards underpin human well-being, specific guidance indicates the necessity for human beings to exercise their volition in matters of personal faith, if for no other reason than because any attempt to enforce faith would lead to its negation.

Justice is Islam's most sacred concept. Many ayat in the Qur'an emphasize its significance for all of humanity. Qur'anic injunctions stipulate the action to be taken whenever justice is violated, If two parties of believers fight one another, make peace between them [by trying to minimize the causes of the conflict], then, if one of them transgress against the other, fight the transgressor until they comply with Allah's command. However, when the transgressor once again submits to Allah's law, make peace between them with fairness and justice and act equitably. Truly Allah loves those who are just. (Qur'an 49:9)

It is obvious that no lasting peace can ever be established without the elimination of the causes of conflict, violations of justice and equity. Consideration of the universal and absolute nature of the moral categories of justice and equity indicates that the Qur'anic answer to conflict resolution is not limited to believers only. Rather, it conveys universal significance, and an answer to the demand for peace between conflicting parties to be restored by them both and for both to behave justly and equitably towards each other. 'Truly Allah loves those who are just.'

In another *ayah*, Allah tells us in the Qur'an,

O you who believe, always remain upright before Allah, bear witness with justice and do not let repugnance of others provoke you into not behaving equitably. Behave equitably, that is nearer to piety. (Qur'an 5:8)

Islam orders just behavior, even when 'being just' does not advantage one's own case (Qur'an 4:135). The obvious conclusion of all of the above is that justice is an absolute concept and one which is not limited to any one religion or race.

During Imam Ali's (a.s.) caliphate a dispute arose between the Caliph and a Jewish citizen over the ownership of a shield in the caliph's possession. Imam Ali (a.s.) attended the court but when the judge

addressed him by his title and addressed the claimant by his name, the Imam reminded the judge to observe equity between both parties in the manner in which he addressed them.

It is interesting to note how Allah addresses humanity, regardless of their beliefs, compared to the way in which He addresses believers. The Qur'anic expression for the first group is 'O humanity' – *Ya ayuha al-Naas* – while the term used for the second group is 'O you who believe' – *Ya ayuha alladhina Amanu*. The ayah mentioned earlier

O humanity, We created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes so that you may know one another' – is an example of the former group (Qur'an 49: 13).

Directives related to justice, fairness and all aspects of moral and spiritual values are addressed to humanity at large. Those that refer to acts of worship and Islamic law are addressed to those who believe in Islam.

Life is a gift of our Almighty Creator, and none may take it from any of His creation. Taking the life of one individual is considered equivalent to taking the lives of the whole of humanity. On the other hand, saving the life of one individual is regarded as being as noble as saving the lives of all of humanity (Qur'an 5:32). In this *ayah*, Allah doesn't limit sacredness of life to Muslims only. The behavior of all who arrogantly ignore this is not acceptable to humanity, and neither is it acceptable to those who believe in Islam.

- [1.](#) The Psalms of Islam, Prayer No.24.
- [2.](#) Wasa'il al-Shiah, Vol. 6, p. 13.
- [3.](#) Al-Ithna Ashariyah, p.223.
- [4.](#) Kanz al-Ummal, Vol. 6, p.371.
- [5.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Maxim 328.
- [6.](#) Al-Amali by Sheikh Mufid, p.72.
- [7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 49, p.94.
- [8.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 74, p. 176.
- [9.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 75, p. 114.
- [10.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 75, p. 114.
- [11.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 75, p.352.
- [12.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 75, p.25.
- [13.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 75, p.345.
- [14.](#) Kanz al-Ummal, Tradition No.44154.
- [15.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam.
- [16.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam.
- [17.](#) Nahjul Balaghahh, Vol. 3, Maxim 31.
- [18.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 77, p.236.
- [19.](#) Al-Kafi, Vol. 2, p. 146.
- [20.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 75, p.344.
- [21.](#) Al-Fakhri fi al-Adab al-Sultaniyyah, p. 17.
- [22.](#) Kashif al-Ghita, al-Din wal Islam, Vol. 1, p. 116.
- [23.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam.

[24.](#) Psalms of Islam, Supplication 20.

[25.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 71, p.339.

[26.](#) Biography of Imam Husayn (a.s.) by Ibn Asakir, p. 160.

[27.](#) Qadatuna, Kayfa Narifuhum, Vol. 6, p. 124.

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