

# Good News

*And give good news to those who do good (to others) – Holy Quran 22:37*

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## **Diversity - A Blessing Not a Curse**

**- Ebrahim Mohamed**

As the nation celebrated Heritage Day on the 24<sup>th</sup> September, I thought I'd share some insights I came across in the Holy Quran on the topic of diversity.

Diversity according to the Holy Quran is a *sign* of God's creation meaning it's a *blessing* and NOT a curse:

And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for the learned – 30:22

Prejudices, based on skin colour and languages, have plagued humanity since the beginning of time. Attempts to address the

injustices associated with such prejudices have been a long and hard struggle that is continuing well into the so called 'enlightened' 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The idea of a progressive secularism propagated by neo-liberals and so-called freethinkers, as the answer to society's racial problems, has failed miserably. Instead, the 'master race' concept of European colonialists which started in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the *Age of Discovery*<sup>1</sup> has ever since been the cause of large sections of humanity having been subjected to racial oppression and bondage for centuries.

In South Africa, after more than twenty years of transformation from *legislated* racial oppression in the form of 'apartheid' to a free and open non-racial society, racism

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<sup>1</sup> History of Colonialism - Wikipedia

periodically raises its ugly head and opens wounds not entirely healed.

In America, even after the appointment of their first black president, more black people have been jailed and killed by white policemen.

Thus the so called *exceptional* masters of the first world have given us nothing but racial discord, division and oppression – nothing but modern day enslavement by the *haves* of the *have nots* except now on a much larger scale.

From a religious perspective, it is regrettable though that human behaviours, despite the noble teachings of a Confucius, Buddha, Krishna, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, are still predominantly driven by desires of the ego, customs, superstitions, fanaticism, misguided beliefs, dogma, and blind nationalism, that serve as the breeding ground for intolerance and prejudices, be it for racial, religious or for whatever other reasons.

I therefore decided rather to focus my attention on the Holy

Scripture instead of the human entities that share my faith in my search for answers.

It was not surprising to find that God Almighty, Creator of all the worlds, talks about a universal brotherhood of man despite differences.

Mankind, we are told, consists of members of one family, and thus their division into nations, tribes and families should not lead to antipathy but should be seen as an opportunity to gain knowledge of each other and to learn from each other. Superiority of one over another in this vast brotherhood, we are told, does not depend on nationality, wealth, or rank, but on the careful observance of duty to Almighty God, the Lord of the heavens and earth:

O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families **that you may know each other.** Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you. Surely

Allah is Knowing, Aware. –  
49:13

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) echoed these sublime teachings of the Holy Quran in a practical way. He is reported to have said: ‘Hashimite or no Hashimite (referring to the high ranking Quraish tribe from which he hailed) if you do not walk in the way of God then you are not of me.’

Thus we find that Bilal, a well-loved Ethiopian Companion of the Holy Prophet was given the honour of giving the first call to prayer on the Prophet’s command. When his followers were persecuted in Mecca, the Holy Prophet ordered them to seek asylum in Abyssinia ruled by a black King and commanded them to be obedient to his rule. In fact, a whole chapter in the Holy Quran is dedicated to the Ethiopian sage, Luqman, whose words of wisdom are etched into the Holy Scripture and regularly recited and taught by millions of Muslims all across the world.

Thus we find that *equality* of the human race is not merely an abstract hypothesis in Islam; it is a practical way of life on which fundamental tenets are based. For example the formal five daily prayers bring together worshippers of all rank and file, standing shoulder to shoulder next to each other, black and white, pauper and rich, king and subjects all together in worship and obedience of the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth.

On a global level, the annual pilgrimage (*Hajj*) brings together nations of different colours and tongues, clad in the same white simple cloth with one focus on their minds, the unity of God and the unity of mankind. All racial and gender prejudices are discarded, in fact prohibited during the pilgrimage rituals, giving rise to an awe inspiring spectacle of racial equality and harmony unmatched in any society in the entire world.

Some Muslim nations unfortunately do not uphold and

practice these teachings of Islam and practice social inequality instead. Thus we find that class distinctions, based on lineage, are rife among Arabs and Indo-Pak Indians. This is not due to, but despite of, the sublime teachings of *equality* we find in the Holy Quran. These nations have adopted these practices as an extension of their own backward national and cultural customs and practices and failed to incorporate the reform brought about by Islam.

Diversity, according to the Holy Quran, is indeed a blessing not a curse. This is how God created us. Imagine we all looked, spoke and thought alike. How boring and unappetising life on earth would have been. Intellectually, we would have stifled and no sooner have become extinct.

Because of its diversity each society in every age since the beginning of time has made invaluable contributions to civilization each in its own unique way.

It is, however, a travesty of justice and most unfortunate that most Western societies have been fed false historical information that gives the impression that Europe is the forerunner of civilisation to the exclusion of all other races.

Objective studies, however, point to Africa as the origin of human life and civilisation. Now the truth of this assertion might be debated, but we know for a fact that African, Egyptian, Arabian, Indian, Mayan, Native American, and other Aboriginal cultures - long before Europe came on the scene - had made enormous contributions to human civilization. There was a time in history, it is said, when civilisations, such as India for example, had already built palaces of marble and stone and feasted on delicately spiced foods and their women wore fine silk clothes, when Europeans were still roaming around in caves clad in buckskin and eating raw meat.

The native tribes of North America, for example, and the

Khoisan of this country whose belief in the Great Spirit (Almighty God) had far superior moral standards of living that were more in harmony with nature and the environment than that of the European ravagers and plunderers of their land. It is therefore regrettable that non-European contributions to civilisation are often suppressed, for obvious reasons, by Western historians. It is to eradicate such obvious prejudices that the Holy Quran encourages us to do proper research because we are told:

‘In their histories there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding.’ – 12:111

Therefore our knowledge of foreign tongues, beliefs, cultures, etc. only enriches our own knowledge base and, when it does, we soon learn to respect diversity and treat others with the same dignity we expect ourselves to be treated with.

Another point the Holy Quran makes that is of prime significance in a multi-religious society as ours,

is that although, biologically, our origin might be from the same source and essence, we have been endowed with diverse spiritual paths. This is in accordance with Divine Wisdom so that we may compete in the performance of virtuous deeds:

‘For every one of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you a single people (on a spiritual plane), but that He might try you in what He gave you. *So vie one another in virtuous deeds.*’ – (5:48)

‘To every nation We appointed acts of devotion which they observe’ – 22:67

‘And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them.’ – 35:24

Thus the good teachings of all faiths on earth should be used for the good of humanity irrespective of colour, race, or religion. Indeed, just like God’s Beneficence such as the rain and the sun that are vital to our

physical existence, extends to all of humankind, regardless, so does His *spiritual light* encompass His entire creation.

Thus we find moral codes of conduct even among the most ancient people of this world from which we can draw lessons. The humane spirit of *ubuntu*, for example, is essential in this age not only in this country but worldwide where there is so much social strife.

However, for all peoples to live in harmony and at peace with each other there must be some basic rules of conduct that everyone subscribe to. In this regard the Holy Quran draws attention to the social evils that should be avoided at all costs in order to promote harmonious co-existence in a plural society as ours. Thus we find in chapter 49 verses 11 and 12 of the Holy Quran the following guidelines:

- Do not mock and do not condescend to people.
- Do not be unduly critical of people and do not defame

them by calling them by derogatory names.

- Do not be suspicious of people.
- Do not spy on people.
- Do not back-bite others.

May we stand *united* and NOT divided in our diversity.

Happy Heritage Month!



**We strongly condemn all forms of human rights and environmental abuse. We especially condemn the ruthless killings of all innocent parties in general and those committed in the name of Religion or State!**

### The Good News

Editor : Ebrahim Mohamed

Contact Details: P.O. Box 13744

Goodwood, Cape Town, South Africa

7463

Email: [emuhamed@mweb.co.za](mailto:emuhamed@mweb.co.za)

Publications: Ahmadiyya .Anjuman  
Isha'at Islam Lahore (South Africa)  
Reg. P.B.O. 930050262