

MANNERS OF UNIVERSAL TALK BETWEEN THE HEAVENLY RELIGIONS!

A PERSPECTIVE OF QURAN—O—SUNNAH.
In the Name of Almighty Allah, Most Beneficent and Most Merciful

* *Muhammad Bilal*

INTRODUCTION:

Commencing the religion of 'ISLAM' to the World, we have substantial grounds by Quran and Sunnah. Although, when we come up to the argument with non-Mulsims, especially to those who have their own heavenly books, i.e., Jews and Christians, we need to present a comparative resort between Islam and both of those religions. It is a basic faith of a Muslim that Allah has revealed His Books – the Taura'at (Torah), Zaboor, Injeel (Gospel) and the Qur'an – upon His Messengers – Moses, Dawood (David), Eesaa (Jesus the Christ) and the Last Prophet and the Last Messenger – Hadrath Muhammad (SAW) {Sallul Lahu Alaihe Wassallam!}. All of them called the people of their time is a same word which Allah(SWT)** has certified them in the Holy Quran that "*We make no distinction between one another of His messengers*"⁽¹⁾ The earlier Messengers foretold the coming of those yet to come, and the later Messengers confirmed what their forebears had said, supporting them and pointing out their importance. Thus the details of their law could have the difference according to the circumstances, times and interests of the people, but could not have ascertained the universal commandments by the wisdom of humankind. But what the wisdom's use to have a use in accepting the righteous way, is to be assessed – through the practices of Islamic Laws.

**Research Scholar (Urdu University) and
Lecturer: NED: University of Engg. & Technology, Karachi.*

6. The Associated Press, 16th October 1995.
7. The Guardian 18th September 2002.
8. The Holy Qur'an 2:115.
9. Prophet Muhammad's Last Sermon, Article No.7.
10. The Holy Qur'an 4: 1
11. The Holy Qur'an 49:13
- 12..Ib id
13. The Holy Qur'an 2:256
14. The Holy Qur'an 5:32
15. The Holy Qur'an 51:56
16. Tafseer-i- Kabir. Commentry on Qur'an 51:56.
17. The Gospel of Matthew 22:35-40
18. The Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46.
19. (Miskat ul Masabih, Hadith No. 1446).
20. The Holy Qur'an 42:38.
21. The Holy Qur'an 6:108
- 22.2-Timothy 2: 22-26.
23. Mishkat-ul-Masahbi
24. Holy Qur'an 1:1
25. Hans Kung, A Global Ethics for Global Politics and Economics, page 151

including atheist. The Holy Qur'an Introduces God to its readers in these words: *Praise the lord, the Lord of the Universe.*²⁴ The Qur' an remind its readers that the God of Islam is not only the God of Muslims but Christians, Jews, Hindus and people of all faiths. He is compassionate and merciful towards all humankind.

Human Rights education remind us the forgotten art of love and care for other human beings presented to us by Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad (May Peace and Blessings of Allah be Upon Them). Hans Kung put it very nicely:

The religions should not just endorse the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the implementation of which is often desired more by the ruled than the rulers. They should provide a basis for it from their own traditions, make it concrete in terms of today's situation and realize it in their own sphere. But at the same time they should give ethical stimuli to humanity beyond the legal level, prompt a perception of human obligations, and thus contribute to a universal ethic of humankind.²⁵

Let us join hands, keeping in mind our own religious traditions and beliefs, in the promotion of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its education for the betterment of humankind and to create new world order that is based on equality, justice and love.

REFERENCES:

1. Teaching Human Rights, Page 9. Published by The United Nations
2. Maulana Sami-ul-Haq, *Crusaders Terrorism and the World of Islam*. Page 101-102, published by AI-Qasim Academy.
3. Hans Kung in *Christianity and World Religions*.
4. The Washington Post, 2nd July 2002.
5. The Guardian, 27th September 2001.

It is thus clearly apparent that using freedom of speech to imply that there are no limits to what one can say or do is a myth. An act that offends the religious and moral values of a community such as solidarity, integrity and sanctity, resulting in endangering the peace, cannot be regarded as a right to express ones freedom of speech. Islam too teaches the principle of tolerance and co-existence, to live and let live. It discourages the defamation of other Gods and religious symbols teaching respect to humankind. It is stated in the Qur'an;

And insult not those whom they (disbelievers) worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongfully without knowledge. Thus We have made fair-seeming to each people its own doings; then to their lord is their return and He shall the inform them of all they used to do.²¹

THE HOLY BIBLE ALSO PROHIBITS SUCH USE OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND OPINION:

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.²²

CONCLUSION

Islam and Christianity remind their followers over and over again that man's true purpose of life is to worship God, but worship for the sake of ritual is meaningless. Man is supposed to work for the global peace, justice, and the betterment of humanity through this act of worship. No such worship is accepted and even regarded as worship if it is not linked with the development and welfare of other human beings (Human Rights Education) and environment regardless of their race, colour and geographical identities. That is why Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

"The whole creation is Allah's family and the best amongst you is he who is good to His family."²³

When Holy Prophet said *Allah's Family* he meant everyone including Christian, Jews, Hindus, people of all faiths

freedom of expression and speech knowing that the reactions will be extremely tense. There is no doubt that the publishing of these caricatures by the newspapers involved was an exercise to demonstrate control and power directed against Muslims, either subscribe to our culture and way of living or suffer the consequences and be ridiculed and debased.

Realizing the significance of this right some world dignitaries have condemned the publication of these caricatures and have emphasized the restriction of the right of the freedom of speech too. Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, said:

I also respect the right of freedom of speech. But of course freedom of speech is never absolute. It entails responsibility and judgment.

JACK STRAW, BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY; SAID:

There is freedom of speech, we all respect that. But there is not any obligation to insult or to be gratuitously inflammatory. I believe that the re-publication of these cartoons has been insulting; it has been insensitive; it has been disrespectful and it has been wrong. There are taboos in every religion. It is not the case that there is open season in respect of all aspects of Christian rites and rituals in the name of free speech. Nor is it the case that there is open season in respect of rights and rituals of the Jewish religion, the Hindu religion, the Sikh religion. It should not be the case in respect of the Islamic religion either. We have to be very careful about showing the proper respect in this situation.

THE US STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN, KURTIS COOPER, SAID:

These cartoons are indeed offensive to the belief of Muslims." We all fully respect freedom of the press and expression but it must be coupled with press responsibility. Inciting religious or ethnic hatred in this manner is not acceptable.

PHILIPPE DOUSTE-BLAZY, FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER SAID:

The principle of freedom should be exercised in a spirit of tolerance, respect of beliefs, respect of religions, which is the very basis of secularism of our country.

Vatican, cardinal Achille Silvestrini also condemned the cartoons, saying Western culture had to know its limits.

There are hundreds of books and newspaper articles that have been published attempting to criticize Islam and the basic tenets of its faith yet Muslims never object to scholarly debate since they are well aware that this is part of an ongoing debate on Islam and within the tenets of 'freedom of expression'. There have been countless newspaper articles completely misrepresenting Islam, often publishing clear lies and exaggerated stories about Islam and its law yet Muslims are tolerant and appreciate that this is part and parcel of living within societies who claim this to be part of their 'liberal democracies'.

However when this right of 'freedom of expression' is abused and the most sacred elements of Islam are deliberately insulted then this will definitely create great unrest among Muslims around the world. By depicting the Holy Prophet of Islam (PBUH) as wielding a knife and wearing a bomb disguised as a turban on his head is a deliberate attempt to insult and stir up controversy, presenting him and his followers as violent terrorists. Another caricature portrays him as supporting suicide bombers and saying "Stop, Stop we have run out of virgins". How can such caricatures be justified under the banner of free speech? Moreover these caricatures were not printed within a vacuum but in an environment of an anti-Muslim bias where tensions were already running extremely high within the Danish community and indeed throughout Europe. Only recently, the Queen of Denmark had made controversial remarks stating that:

We have to show our opposition to Islam and we have to, at times, run the risk of having unflattering labels placed on us because there are some things for which we should display no tolerance.

Moreover, many countries have passed anti-terrorist legislation, severely restricting the civil liberties of individuals, with the legislation drafted in a manner that is clearly aimed at focusing upon Muslims in the countries concerned. There is a strong feeling that a substantial minority is being continually abused and misrepresented in the mass media through the portrayal of negative images not based upon reality, and then subjected to humiliating checks and procedures when going about their lives on a daily basis, all in the name of freedom of

Rights Article 9.

Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law, and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE USA, AMENDMENT I OF BILL OF RIGHTS STATES:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Other countries having blasphemy laws are:

1. Austria (Articles 188, 189 of the criminal code)
2. Finland (Section 10 of chapter 17 of the penal code)
3. Germany (Article 166 of the criminal code)
4. The Netherlands (Article 147 of the criminal code)
5. Spain (Article 525 of the criminal code)
6. Ireland: Article 40.6.1.i of the constitution of Ireland provides that the publication of blasphemous matter is an offence. Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred act 1989, this includes hatred against a group on account of their religion.
7. Canada Section 296 of the Canadian Criminal code. Offence against the Christian religion is blasphemy.
8. New Zealand Section 123 of the New Zealand Crimes Act 1961

Churches for instance hold sanctity in the Christian world and are protected under the constitution in some European countries. An example is the constitution of Denmark, Section 4 [State Church] which states:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the Established Church of Denmark, and, as such, it shall be supported by the State.

It is evident from the above-mentioned laws that freedom of speech is a fundamental right but this right is not absolute.

2003) depicted the Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon eating the head of Palestinian child while saying, 'What's wrong, You've never seen a politician kissing babies before', this caused an uproar in Israel and other parts of the world raising tempers especially in the Jewish and Israeli community around the world. Whatever the matter of that caricature, the uproar was a natural reaction of a people for their leaders. More recently when the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi compared himself to Jesus Christ the Vatican including Italian politicians expressed shock and anger at these comments. A senior Catholic Church official added, "I know he will say he was speaking in jest but such. Things should not be spoken of in jest." The issue here is not one of curtailing freedom of expression but objecting to the ridicule and insult towards the scared elements of an entire civilization.

There is also a law of defamation normally under the Law of Tort that can lead to an individual being compensated for offence caused. The absolute right to free expression is curtailed in order to balance the rights of an individual. In the same way an act that causes offence to a whole community can never be justified under the banner of freedom of speech. Moreover in many countries it is illegal or at least discouraged to degrade or abuse the constitution or certain national institutions such as the army, courts of law, or parliament. Contempt of court also exists all over the world which severely limits freedom of speech, violation of which can lead to imprisonment. If the right to freedom of expression is absolute, why are there no objections to laws such as these?

To give respect to an individual's honour and dignity is a fundamental human right protected by law as is the prohibition on blasphemy and defamation as well as the right to religious freedom. The UN Charter, Constitutions and Laws from many countries provide protection to these rights. The UN Charter recognizes this right in Article 1(ii)

To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for Human Rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

It is also recognized in the European Convention on Human

freedom of expression but at the same time prohibit blasphemous and defamatory remarks against any religion and religious personalities. Islam not only protects this right but also emphasizes on our moral and ethical responsibilities. Islam does not support the idea of Human Rights without responsibilities. The recent publication of blasphemous and defamatory caricatures of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in some European newspapers is a crystal clear example of the misuse of the freedom of opinion and expression. The failure of Government to address this situation has allowed it to spread all over the world, with no end in sight. This situation has been unnecessarily allowed to spiral out of control and has threatened the concept of peaceful coexistence. If not addressed, it can lead to a potential clash of not only civilizations but religious and societies as well.

Much of this debate has focused on the 'right of freedom of expression' with its defenders advocating the sacredness of freedom of speech, which needs to be upheld no matter what the consequences. However in reality the issue is not one of curtailing the right of freedom of expression since this is a right that is not absolute and no one can claim so. Rights are reciprocal and their enforcement is interdependent on other fundamental rights. To insist that a right is absolute is erroneous since such a right can infringe other basic Human Rights. Every country that claims to be part of the 'civilized and democratic' world has put its own limits on freedom of expression in the interest of society in order to maintain a certain level of human behavior, be it based on local norms and customs, cultures or religions but in essence to *protect* the dignity of their moral and religious, social, and societal values. So to suddenly create an outcry that the right to freedom of speech is being undermined by Muslim protests is clearly a fallacy. The free propagation of child pornography for instance or the incitements of religious or racial hatred in the media is banned in many countries and quite rightly so. In many European countries it is a crime to deny the holocaust, being a criminal offence in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Israel, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Switzerland, and is punishable by fines and a jail sentence. When the British newspaper, The Independent (27 January

Man, surprisingly, will ask the Lord, "How is it possible?" Allah will reply, "Did you not know that a man got sick near you and you did not go to visit him; you would have found Me there if you visited him." Similarly, Allah will ask a man, "O Son of Adam, I asked you for food but you did not feed Me." Man surprisingly will say, "How is it possible that you need such a thing? Allah will reply, "Do you not know that a man was hungry and he asked for food from you but you refused; if you had fed him, you would have found Me there."¹⁹

Isn't the reality simple to practice? In Islam and Christianity, God wants us to discover His love and blessings in the act of service and love for others. He doesn't reveal Himself to us directly, rather He reveals Himself to us through the pain, sorrow and suffering of a human being regardless of his religion, race, sex, colour and nationality.

Human Rights education is not a new religion but it is the same message of Christ and Muhammad (PBUT) presented in a secular language. But when we observe our social and religious situation around us, we will see that we are being educated to focus on God whereas God is all focused on human beings. We are being educated to love and serve God whereas God wants us to love and serve His creation. We are being educated to find God in Synagogue, Church and Mosque whereas God is found in the pain and suffering of a human being. We are being educated to claim that He is our God whereas He is everyone's God. Human Rights education is nothing but changing our focus - from God to man.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Islam and Qur'an recognize the freedom of opinion and expression as a fundamental human right. It is stated in the Qur'an:

And those who answer the Call of their Lord (i.e. to believe that He is the only One Lord, and to worship none but Him Alone), and perform prayers, and who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation, and who spend of what We have bestowed on them.²⁰

Islam promotes the culture of love, respect and tolerance not only at societal level but also at national and International level, as also mentioned in the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Islam and Qur'an promotes the