



Islam: The Cure for Racism

The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests have now extended into their fourth month, casting a long shadow over the upcoming US presidential election. The civil unrest was sparked by the murder of George Floyd on 25th May 2020 and is fuelled by decades of institutionalised racism. Members and allies of the marginalised African-American communities now rally onto the streets in objection to the discrimination and oppression that has long since plagued the country.

The disease that is racism is nothing modern. It has afflicted the institutions of men for centuries, giving rise to some of the worst known examples of genocide, slavery, social injustices and war.

A prime example of this racism is the prejudice of the British colonialists against the natives of the Indian Sub-Continent. It was the British imperialists who considered themselves superior to the natives, a sentiment best expressed in the words of the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, when he referred to the natives as “a beastly people.” It was his government that looted the land of its riches, leached from its grain supply to increase British stocks, and scuppered the economy of the Sub-Continent, leaving millions dead or in a state of abject destitution. A direct result of all this pillaging and looting was the Bengal Famine which led to the deaths of three million natives. Yet, instead of admitting responsibility for the catastrophe, the Prime Minister chose to place the blame on the natives themselves, claiming that “they were breeding like rabbits,” and therefore the cause of the food shortage.

It is clear that there is nothing that racism offers that is ethical or virtuous and Islam strictly forbids it. In regards to those who discriminate on the basis of race, Allah (swt) inspired RasulAllah (saw) to say, « يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ رَبَّكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَإِنَّ أَبَاءَكُمْ وَاحِدٌ أَلَا لَا فَضْلَ لِعَرَبِيٍّ عَلَى عَجَمِيٍّ وَلَا «O people, your Lord is one and your father Adam is one. There is no favor of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, and neither white skin over black skin, nor black skin over white skin, except by Taqwa (piety). Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous (have Taqwa) of you.” [Bayhaqi]

Indeed, the Prophet (saw) never discriminated on the basis of racial differences and as such the earliest generation of Muslims were of a diverse racial stock. There was Bilal ibn Rabah (ra) the Abyssinian, Salman al-Farsi (ra) the Persian, and Suhayb ibn Sinan (ra) the Roman.

The Companions (ra) of the Prophet (saw) differed in the tribes and races that they belonged to but it was Islam that unified them all. Truly, there is no bond that can compete with that which exists between the believers for it is not founded upon any selfish desires or worldly self-interests, but rather upon the sincerity of worshipping Allah (swt). Allah (swt) revealed in the Quran, « إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ۝ «The believers are but a single brotherhood, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy.” [Surah al-Hujarat 49:10]

Any philosophy or concept that threatens to sabotage this brotherhood is condemned in Islam. The brotherhood is not to be divided on ethnic, linguistic or regional lines and no political party can ever be established on such divisions of ignorance. RasulAllah (saw) said, « مَنْ قُتِلَ تَحْتَ رَايَةٍ غَمِيَّةٍ يَدْعُو عَصْبِيَّةً أَوْ يَنْصُرُ عَصْبِيَّةً فُقِتِلَ جَاهِلِيَّةً ۝ «The one who is killed under the banner of a man who is blind (to his just cause), who raises the slogan of family or supports his own tribe, dies the death of one belonging to the days of Jahiliyyah (Ignorance).” [Muslim].

From these divinely revealed evidences, it is clear that racism has no place in Islam.

The true virtue of Islam, however, is exhibited in the fact that not only does it refuse to condone bigotry, it simultaneously erases any mind-set that could lead towards it.

Racism is nothing more than an act of prejudice, one born out of the insecurities that arise within an individual when they experience a crisis of identity. The individual deems this crisis as a threat and this invokes the survival instinct. This leads the individual towards reaffirming their identity and self-worth, doing so by attributing their identity to one quality of their selves and then bonding with individuals who possess the same quality.

As this bond develops, it distances its possessors from others that are considered different. All of this is in an attempt to pronounce their identity. When too much value is given to this one quality that the group possesses, it leads to a sense of supremacy which can be projected in the form of oppression and bigotry towards those groups that are deemed different. As such, the bond now becomes destructive as it pitches people against people in the most inhumane manner.

It is Islam that can provide a solution to this crisis as it is Islam that can pluck it from its roots. It is understood in Islam that the identity of a Muslim is not dependent on others nor upon any worldly institution, rather it is safeguarded by Allah (swt) through that which He (swt) has revealed in the form of the Holy Quran. It is the Holy Quran that guides man in all of his life's affairs, eliminating any doubts he may have of his purpose or identity, and assuring him that the basic qualities of his - his looks, his intelligence, his strength etc. - are not to be glorified, but that the best characteristic in the eyes of Allah (swt) is that of piety and righteousness. Allah (swt) reminds us in the Quran: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا ﴿١٣﴾ **“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.”** [49:13]

Even when Allah (swt) has ordered us to hate kufr and its possessors, He (swt) ordered just and kind dealings with non-Muslims. Allah (swt) revealed, لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي ﴿١٤﴾ **“Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who did not fight against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity.”** [Surah al-Mumtahinah 60:8].

And thus Ahmad reported that 'Abdullah b. Rawaahah said to the Jews of Khaybar, “O you Jews, you are the most hated creation in my eyes. You killed the Prophets of Allah ‘azza wa jalla and fabricated lies on Allah, but my hatred for you will not make me deal unjustly with you.”

In this manner, Islam ensures that the believer does not fall prey to a primitive and solely emotional mind-set. Rather, Islam develops the believer in his thinking and awareness, developing his character and purifying his heart of ignorance and bigotry. It protects the believers from all evil and instils within them righteousness and a love towards Allah (swt), fair dealings and kindness.

Clearly, Islam is the perfect Deen and a Mercy from Allah (swt).

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