

# Good News

...And give good news to those who do good (to others) - HQ22:37

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## Only True Morality Can Bring Lasting Happiness and Peace on Earth

*Eid ul Fitr<sup>1</sup> Sermon*

By Ebrahim Mohamed

O You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you so **that you may guard against evil** – Holy Quran: 2:183

All praise is due to Almighty Allah we praise Him and we thank Him for this blessed day of Eid; a day of recurring joy that is celebrated at the end of the month of fasting. The lesson we derive from the noble acts of devotion undertaken for the sake of Almighty Allah in the month of Ramadan is that only once humankind has reached the stage where they are in complete control of their lower passions of lust, greed and anger will lasting happiness abide on earth. The wisdom of our Creator in prescribing an effective remedy for the

diseases of evil that plague our beings and societies at large, is therefore indeed a great sign of His Mercy for humankind. The remedy is simple, *fasting*, and the objective? - ‘*So that you may guard against evil.*’

The abstention from food is an effective, psychological discipline that makes man realize, if, in obedience to Almighty Allah, he can stay away from what is otherwise lawful, how much more important is it for him to stay away from what is unlawful and evil in the sight of Allah. Fasting is thus a means to an end and that is the conquering of the evil within and without to quicken the growth of moral and spiritual qualities latent in all of us. This is the difficult part not the staying without food. Anyone can stay without food; even young children do it these days. The staying without food part of the Ramadan ends today but not the ‘staying away from evil.’ It is imperative, therefore, that we understand what *la allakum tattaqoon*, i.e. ‘guarding against evil’ really entail. It is hard continuous work.

<sup>1</sup> Celebration at the end of the month of fasting

We cannot change our natures, but we can mould and guide ourselves into becoming beings of high morality. 'Guarding against evil' means we constantly have to work on our weaknesses and to do this effectively we must first accept the fact that we have all been created weak and not perfect. We are all made up of basic raw qualities and traits that need to be refined. Like Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam wrote, you cannot change the nature of a person but you can teach him how to use his intrinsic nature for the moral good of humanity at large and not to harm anyone. Teach him how to conquer his lust and turn it into the moral qualities of love, compassion and empathy for humankind. Teach him how to turn his anger into bravery and rather become a defender of the weak and righteous and not a murderer of innocent people. Teach him how to turn his greed into insatiable quests for doing good to all of humanity instead of robbing and depriving them of their rightful property and rights. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad has written a masterpiece on this topic in his paper submitted at an International Interfaith Symposium in Lahore, India about a century ago, entitled the *Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* or just the *Teachings of Islam*. I recommend

it highly if you are interested in this branch of knowledge.

So transformation of the self, which is the aim and object of the fast, is hard work, but essential for in the end it is the only hope we have of establishing lasting peace and ever-recurring happiness on earth. If you feel this might be far-fetched, wishful thinking then let us ponder and reflect on the condition the world is in at present for a while. Then imagine a world where the forces of good over evil are dominant and triumphant; a world of controlled greed, controlled anger controlled lusts everywhere. Imagine a world where the freedom to worship Almighty God is a respected human right free of persecution. Then imagine a world of tolerance; a world devoid of backbiting; devoid of superstitions and suspicions; devoid of envy and hatred. Imagine a world free of anger and killings where human life is respected and where the striving for its preservation is zealously supported and applauded by every living soul on this earth and where even the slightest harm that might lead to its destruction are condemned in the loudest of voices with the contempt it deserves and duly punished with fitting punishments so as never to be repeated. Imagine a world free of lies, slander, corruption, defamations, and deliberate distortions of truth to malign others. Imagine a world

free of ignorance in all its ugly shapes and forms that we come across daily, such as the bigotry, biases, prejudices, dogmatism, extremism, and fanaticism that creep up upon us all the time.

Imagine a world where ‘free thinking’ and ‘free expressions of thought’ that uplift society not such that defame and abuse the dignity and rights of others, prevail. Imagine a world where the principles of justice throughout the world especially in morally depraved countries under majority Muslim governance are based on the noble dictum of the Holy Quran:

O you who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance of duty. And keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is Aware of what you do. -5:8

Then imagine a world free of greedy, ruthless profiteering by a handful of ‘fat-cat’ corporates and spoilt oligarchies bloated with ill-gained wealth and opulence to the misery of the masses; perhaps then you might just be able to imagine a world free of all sorts of human abuses; human-trafficking, homelessness, poverty, hunger and uncontrolled diseases and drug addiction. Like Lennon we can keep on imagining and like Martin Luther

King we can keep on dreaming of a world united in brotherly love, peace, justice and ultimately ample sustenance and happiness for all. But one thing is for certain such a ‘heaven on earth’ will not simply fall from the sky onto our laps like the disciples of Jesus pleaded for. Nay, it has to be earned. Therefore the Greatest of Physicians of the Universe, the *Rabbul Alameen* our Lord, the Nourisher and Sustainer of all the worlds has prescribed fasting as one of the means to achieving that end *la alla kum tattaqoon*- ‘so that you may guard against evil.’

Muslims these days tend to approach their faith more in a ritualistic manner. Often more emphasis is put on the external aspects such as the abstaining from food and drink and not enough focus is placed on the intended moral development that feeds the spiritual seeds of our souls.

With the advent of Islam and the revelation of the Holy Quran the means to obtain control over our base desires and passions that ignite evil have been made accessible to all of us. The prayer five times a day, the fast, the giving in charity, the pilgrimage are all devotions focused on generating humane, moral qualities within us. If it fails to do this then there is a serious problem with the manner these acts of devotions are performed. In fact, it would be a waste of time and effort. This unfortunately is the condition existent in

most parts of the Muslim world today. Anyone can be taught to perform the prayer, to fast, to give zakaat and perform pilgrimage; but when it comes to sacrificing over-blown egos to put into practice basic ordinances of the Holy Quran on issues of justice and exercising even basic human rights, Muslims in general fail miserably. During the time of the Prophet (pbuh), the hypocrites used to pray, they used to fast etc., but they turned their backs on the Prophet (pbuh) at the most crucial time in his career.

Today it would seem that Muslim nations have turned their backs on the Holy Quran. They recite it beautifully but are not prepared to implement its teachings in their daily lives. The *ulema* (religious scholars) are devoid and incapable of providing guidance instead they engage in petty politics fighting among themselves for status and positions of power over the vulnerable minds of weak followers unable to think for themselves and happy to be led like sheep to the house of mental, moral and spiritual slaughter. It is such behaviour that made the Prophet complain to Almighty Allah:

*'...Yaa Rabbi Inna Qoumit  
tagathoe haathal qurana  
mahjooran*

My Lord, surely my people treat this Quran as a forsaken thing.

The truth of this plea of the Holy Prophet has been proven true by recent studies done by a Phd. Economist, Professor Hossein Askari of George Washington University. Askari made a study on how close to Quranic principles the governance of 152 countries in the world are based. According to Professor Askari what motivated his study was the apparent disconnect between the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the practice of Islam in the Muslim world, which is reflected in the frustration of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) in the verse quoted above. Askari says, and I quote: '(The) indices provide a simple approach for Muslims to focus on the indisputable source of their religion—the Holy Qur'an—as opposed to pronouncements made by clerics, rulers, the media and extremists, who all have their own selfish agendas.' unquote. He looked at four specific categories within which the overall successful governance of a country depends. These are the Economy, Legal and Governance, Human and Political Rights, and International Affairs.

So I gather he would have, for example, looked at whether a country provides freedom of religion within the framework of the Quranic injunction '**there is no compulsion in religion**' and whether the justice system is based on a free and independent judiciary that

upholds the principle of the Holy Quran that says:

‘Be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably’ -5:8

and

‘O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allah, even though it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives — whether he be rich or poor, Allah has a better right over them both. So follow not (your) low desires, lest you deviate. And if you distort or turn away from (truth), surely Allah is ever aware of what you do.’ -4:135

And a political system that is all inclusive and consultative. And to address the social needs of the poor and disadvantaged there are numerous verses in the Holy Quran to this effect. The following one, however, stands out as capturing the true spirit that is expected to accompany these noble acts of benevolence:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the

needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty. -2:177

This verse is self-explanatory. Together with the other verses I have quoted on justice and freedom of religion, these form but a few that highlight the very high standard set by the Holy Quran with regard to all forms of human rights, justice, social welfare, etc. especially the spirit of selflessness i.e. ‘doing it for the sake of the love (*mughabba*) of Allah’ free of insincere, empty ritualism.

Now, one would naturally expect that with such noble Quranic guidelines, Muslim governed countries would be among the top-ranking nations on the ‘Askari’ index score sheet in the categories ‘Economy, Legal and Governance, Human and Political Rights, and International Affairs.’ However, it is with dismay that the opposite is true. Ranked at the top, based on an average score of all four categories, is New Zealand followed by the Netherlands, Sweden, Ireland, followed by 39 other non-Muslim countries with Malaysia the first Muslim

country in the rankings at 43<sup>rd</sup>. The country with the highest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia is 74<sup>th</sup>, and Saudi Arabia, the custodians of the Holy cities at 88 with Iran at 134 and Pakistan a low 137. I was particularly interested in the human rights stats as for me the Holy Quran lays much emphasis on human rights. First was Norway; Second Sweden; third New Zealand; followed by several other non-Muslim countries. Indonesia was 92, Saudi Arabia 110; and Pakistan at an almost rock bottom low of 142 out of 152 countries. What is shocking is the fact that these are countries that claim religious allegiance to the Holy Quran, which is sheer hypocrisy.

These results come as no surprise, though, for it is a known fact that in most of these Muslim countries you do not have the freedom to even speak out against any injustices whether committed by the ruling authorities or the sacrosanct *ulema* without the fear of being jailed. In Pakistan minority groups such as Ahmadis for example are declared non-Muslim by human agencies at the beck and call of bigots parading as clerics and, can you believe it, jailed for practicing Islam. And let me remind you these are no longer the much dreaded, dark, medieval days of human history, this is the supposed enlightened 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Islam is the natural religion of humanity it does not belong to Muslims alone. Thus the Holy Quran says:

So set thy face for religion, being upright, **the nature made by Allah** in which He has created men. – 30:30

It thus comes as no surprise that fair-minded, rational people, although not of the Muslim community, would, perhaps unknowingly, adopt such sound, practical principles to be found in the Holy Quran. Therefore, it is time that we stop looking for ‘Islam in Practice’ in the East for that is where the sun of Islam has set and rather turn our attention to the West for that is where it will rise according to an interpretation of a prophecy of our noble Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). All indications are that Islam is indeed on the rise in the West and it is very encouraging to see a host of enlightened folk emerging from among academics, religious scholars and ordinary folk, male and female, prepared to challenge the old order created by *ulema* still stuck in their narrow-minded, backward ideologies and practices. There is also an encouraging movement towards the adoption of the Holy Quran as the undisputed primary source and a slow but steady departure from the prominence given to the long overdue practice of blind subservience to flawed, outdated interpretations of the

clerical fraternity. The clarion call ***'Back to the Quran'*** of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to the Muslims 100 years ago is slowly coming to fruition. May this positive trend strengthen the resolve of all societies to find peace and happiness by guarding against and ultimately conquering all forms of evil.



**We strongly condemn all acts of aggression and terror including all violations of basic human rights specifically those carried out in the name of Religion or State!**

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