



“THE INSTITUTION OF PILGRIMAGE”

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The Institution of Pilgrimage Obliterates all Distinctions of Race and Colour:

[Eid-ul-Azha sermon delivered at the Shah Jehan Mosque, Woking, England, on 5 June 1960]

"Every one of us must discover the truth that mankind is one. We must not only discover it, but accept it with all our hearts. Whether we like it or not the basic truth of our existence is that life is one indivisible whole. We must try our best to reach and grasp this great phenomenon of reality and then preserve it through belief, through prayer, through action and through sacrifice. Buddha, Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad and all the divine teachers of the world never taught that man was superior to man by virtue of his race, colour or nationality."

All over the Islamic world Muslims are celebrating the Eid-ul-Azha today. A vast concourse of human beings has assembled at Mina (a few miles from Makkah) to commemorate the spontaneous willingness of the Prophet Abraham (pbuh) to offer up his son to fulfil his vision:

So We gave him the good news of a forbearing son, but when he became (of age) to work with him, he said: O my son, I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice thee: so consider what thou seest. He said, O my father, do as thou art commanded; if God please thou wilt find me patient. So when they both submitted, and he had thrown him down on his forehead, and We called out to him saying, O Abraham, thou hast indeed fulfilled the vision. Thus do we reward the doers of good. Surely this is a manifest trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice. And We granted him among the later generations (the salutation), peace be on Abraham! Thus do We reward the doers of good (37:101-110).

It is in this way that the institution of the Pilgrimage with which is associated the institution of sacrifice has been kept alive in the traditions of Islam in remembrance of the act of complete submission to God by Abraham.

It is in this way again that Islam has succeeded in obliterating all distinctions of race, colour and rank. Thousands of Muslims all clad in one dress, of the simplest kind, moving in one way, giving up so many amenities of life in the desert of Arabia, and all of them utter the same words:

"Labbaika Allahumma labbaik (Here we are, O God! Here we are in Thy presence).

And in this way they teach the whole so-called civilised world the most needed lesson of today, that mankind is one.

"No touch of religious genius could have conceived a better expedient for impressing on the minds of the faithful a sense of their common life and their brotherhood in the bonds of their faith. Here, in the supreme act of worship, the Negro of the West Coast of Africa meets the Chinaman from the distant East, the courtly polished Ottoman recognising his brother Muslim in the wild islander from the farthest end of the Malayan Sea. At the same time, throughout the whole of the Muhammadan world, the hearts of the believers are lifted up in sympathy with their more fortunate brethren

gathered together in the sacred city of Mecca, as in their own home they celebrate the festival of 'Id al-Adha. Whatever the race, colour or antecedents of the worshipper, he is received into the brotherhood of the believers and takes his place as an equal amongst equals" (Thomas Arnold, The Preachings of Islam, London, 1913, pp. 416-417).

It is in this way that Islam has succeeded where others have failed. Arabs were the most disunited people among themselves, but prided themselves on the superiority of their race against the outside world. It was by following the ideology of Islam they their hearts were united:

And remember God's favour to you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts and so by His favour (that is, by following the ideology of Islam) you became brethren. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then he saved you from it (3:102).

Man needs this message, this ideology, to be taught to the world again. It is only under Divine guidance that he can free himself from prejudices of snobbery, colour or race distinction.

One of the most Menacing Problems of Mankind:

The race problem is one of the most menacing problems that confronts mankind today. It is present in its most hideous form in some parts of Africa, where naked oppression is taking place on account of race and colour. This is a common challenge to the whole world. The game of apartheid cannot go on for long [Note by the Webmaster: How true these words have proven to be!]. If things do not improve the West will suffer a great setback in Africa. An action accompanied by proper ideology can only save the situation.

It may be asked whether Islam has anything to contribute towards the solution of the problem. In Islam this problem does not exist, neither in theory nor in practice.

Even the present gathering here is living proof that all of us are equal in the sight of God. It is a simple statement but even after fourteen hundred years of Islam the world has not succeeded in understanding the full import of this message, in accepting this simple truth of life.

Islam is thus the only answer which can save Africa from groping in the dark, and can lift Africa out of chaos. The picture has become clear during recent years. But at the end of the last century and at the beginning of the present one things were not so hopeful.

In 1899, about sixty years ago, when the mundane power of Islam was at its lowest ebb, it was prophesied that Islam could not survive without political power. Therefore:

"Islam in Africa will be comparatively easy for Christianity to overcome" (Anson P. Atterbury, Islam in Africa, 1899, p. 183).

Even six years ago it was declared:

"Islam in East Africa has lost its position as the directive for African hopes and aspirations" (Lyndon P. Harries, Islam in East Africa, 1954, p. 28).

But the situation now is:

"Christianity, Islam and Communism are battling for the minds and hearts of Africa's uncommitted millions and at the moment Islam is making the greatest progress" (The New York Times, 14 March 1960, as quoted in detail in The Islamic Review of March-April 1960).

It has also been admitted that fifteen million Africans have turned to the fold of Islam during the last four years (Daily Telegraph, London, for 11 March 1960; full reference in The Islamic Review of March-April 1960).

It is not the sword which is being used to bring people to the fold of Islam. The sword was, in fact, never used for this purpose in the history of Islam. It is the inherent force as well as spiritual beauty of the religion of Muhammad (pbuh) which is conquering the hearts of the people.

Islam Needs your Help:

This brings us to a heart-searching question which every Muslim should ask himself: What have we done to further the cause of Islam in the world?

The Quran says:

O Messenger, deliver to the people what has been revealed to thee from your Lord (5:67).

The Messenger of God, Muhammad, has delivered that message to us and now it is our duty to deliver it to mankind. The Quran says to each of us:

Deliver to the people what has been revealed to you from your Lord.

Everyone of us should ask: What are we doing to fulfil this task, to deliver this message to the world?

We meet at Woking twice a year. It will be another year before we meet again. Africa is a far-away county from us; it will take care of itself by the help of our African brethren. Our duty lies in the county where we live at present. Islam is not at work in the Western world. It is only being represented. We must do something about it. The Western world needs Islam as much as the African world. Islam is on the march, no doubt, but it needs our help.

In Great Britain two persons, on the average, become Muslims every week. But this rate of progress is not at all satisfactory.

Let everyone of you contact at least two persons during the coming year for the sake of Islam. Tell them something about the Prophet and his message, give them something to read, pray for them so that they may see the light of truth. If you have succeeded in removing one small misunderstanding about Islam from the minds of people among whom you live you have helped the cause of truth. If you have failed, you have failed in a noble cause. But in the sight of God, you have not failed; you have your reward with Him.

The message of Islam which we are going to present to the world was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), whose advent was the result of the prayer of Abraham (pbuh) and Ishmael (pbuh). When they raised the foundations of the Ka'bah, this is how they prayed:

Our Lord, raise up in them a Messenger from among them who will recite to them Thy messages and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify them (2:127-129).

The Quran, the Book of wisdom, the Book which purifies and uplifts humanity, has been handed down to us unaltered through these ages. It can help mankind in various ways.

Non-Muslims can also Benefit by the Teachings of the Quran:

To those of my friends who are not Muslims the teachings of the Quran can also be of benefit. Let them try to shed whatever prejudices they have against a particular people, a particular race, a particular group -- in the West or in the East. I have myself suffered from such prejudices, and perhaps some of my friends of the early days are still under the impression that the members of their own family, the people living in their own village or in a particular street of their town, are the best people in the world. It takes time and needs struggle, individual struggle, of course, to free oneself from such prejudices. Everyone must discover this truth, and for that matter every spiritual truth, in his own way -- that mankind is one. We must not only discover it but also accept it with all our hearts. Whether we like it or not, the basic truth of our existence is that life is one indivisible whole. We must try our best to reach and grasp this great phenomenon of reality and then preserve it through belief, through prayer, through action and through sacrifice.

Buddha, Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, Muhammad and all the divine teachers of the world never taught that man was superior by virtue of his race, colour or nationality.

The Quran says:

O mankind, surely We have created you from a single male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know one another. Surely the noblest of you with God is the most dutiful of you (49:13).

Let us listen carefully to this Divine voice. We cannot afford to neglect it any more.

I wish each and every one of you a happy Eid.