

Congratulating others on their religious celebrations - part 2

DISCLAIMER: This reminder was originally delivered in Arabic on Friday, 1st January 2010. Any meanings lost in translation are not to be attributed to the speaker as reminders are translated by volunteers. The mosque has no official translator and volunteers often have no formal qualifications to translate on the day. Please forgive any errors as they are from our human weakness and any right guidance is from God.

There is no doubt that Islam is a way of life and the beginnings of good behaviour and morality. It is the source of all good and the light that lightens the way of Mankind until the Day of Resurrection. That is why the Qur'an was the last book revealed - for leading people to the straight path. We Muslims are ordered to have a good understanding and for our behaviour to be a reflection of this book about which God says: "Indeed, this Quran guides to that which is most suitable and gives good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that they will have a great reward" [Al-Isra 17:9] and in another verse "[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded" [Saad 38:29].

We mentioned in a previous reminder the opinion of the European Council for Opinion and Research regarding congratulating non-Muslims on their festive occasions by Muslims who are residents in non-Muslim countries. This reminder continues on the theme of dealing positively with non muslims.

The situation of some Muslims who live in this country is truly strange and bizarre! They neglect obligatory worships, exceed the limits and violate the inviolable; among us, there are thieves who steal from private and public wealth by fraud, deception, forgery, lying and tax evasion. Among us are criminals filling the prisons by spreading corruption, working to organise prostitution and making money out of it, trading in drugs and other unlawful things. Among us are the owners of restaurants and cafes who sell alcohol and pork and do not hesitate to acquire unlawful wealth and feeding our families from it!

People among us pretend to uphold the obvious tenets of Islam which we understand but at the same time they are rude and harsh in heart when dealing with non-Muslims because of teachings that others are infidels and we- the Muslims - are the chosen people by God so we can do anything to them without observing any pact of kinship or covenant of protection with them.

This is indeed a gloomy and dark picture for the Muslims living as a minority in this country and other western countries. There are good signs shown sometimes like going back to the religion and seeking knowledge - especially in the new Muslim generation. Unfortunately, even this good was affected by some corruption and intellectual deviation which contradicts with the spirit of Islam and the guidance of Quran especially when it come to the issue of dealing with the others - with 'non-Muslims'.

The 'others' are those who we came to live among either willingly (like people with scholarships and other scientific expertise) or by forced circumstances like people who fled from injustice in their countries or were born from migrant parents. Those 'others' provided us with good and human kindness regardless of some of the excesses which do not negate that good. The Qur'an taught us how to deal with the 'others'- the Qur'anic approach for dealing with any 'other' is to distinguish between the positions, doctrines and ways of that 'other' as it states in the Qur'an "They are not [all] the same" [Al-Imran 3:113]. This different way of dealing is only in order to achieve justice, and is a proof against generalising in our assessment of others.

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Quran orders us to encourage People of the Scripture to a way that is best but excluded those who commit injustice, as God stated in [Al-Ankaboot 29:46]: “And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them”.

The Jews fit within this description of the People of the Scripture. Despite the Quran’s classification of Jews as the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers in the verse “You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews and those who associate others with God” [Al-Maeidah 5:82] - the Jews were also classified in other verses as “They are not [all] the same; among the People of the Scripture is a community standing [in obedience], reciting the verses of God during periods of the night and prostrating [in prayer]. They believe in God and the Last Day, and they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and hasten to good deeds. And those are among the righteous. And whatever good they do - never will it be removed from them. And God is Knowing of the righteous.” [Al-Imran 3:113-115].

Also, the Qur’anic approach differentiated between

1. the Christian who disbelieved in God and associated Isaa (AS) and his mother as partners in Godship with God (SW) and
2. the Christian who is the nearest in affection to the believers in the verses “and you will find the nearest of them in affection to the believers those who say, “We are Christians.” That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant. And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they have recognized of the truth. They say, “Our Lord, we have believed, so register us among the witnesses.” [Al-Maeidah 5:82-83].

This is the Qur’an’s method of dealing with ‘others’. This is to be strictly applied even with the non believers who are not the people of the Scripture. In surat Al-Tawbah - a Surah which some claim legalised the violence and killing of the others (and they explain that this is why it did not start with Basmalah ‘In the name of God, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful’) - the verses in this Surah also commit to the Qur’anic approach in distinguishing between the positions and type of non muslims so we should follow that approach of distinguishing as:

- 1- **those we have treaty with and who respect those treaties .**
Their right is to respect and fulfil our covenant with them “Excepted are those with whom you made a treaty among the polytheists and then they have not been deficient toward you in anything or supported anyone against you; so complete for them their treaty until their term [has ended]. Indeed, God loves the righteous [who fear Him].” [Al-Tawbah 9:4”
- 2- **Neutrals** who do not acquire full knowledge of Islam. Our duty towards them is to present that knowledge to them and deliver the message of Islam and then to leave them safe and in total freedom to make their choice without any compulsion “And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of God. Then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know.” [Al-Tawbah 9:6].

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- 3- **Aggressors** , who oppose the individual for his or her religion, drive them away from their homes and break covenants like the disbelievers of Quraish did during the time of the Prophet peace be upon him. This is the type that human rights already oppose and humanity should work to avoid their evil because they “They do not observe toward a believer any pact of kinship or covenant of protection” [Al-Tawbah 9:10]. That is because this type break their covenants and transgress a person simply for his or her beliefs “How [can there be a treaty] while, if they gain dominance over you, they do not observe concerning you any pact of kinship or covenant of protection? They satisfy you with their mouths, but their hearts refuse [compliance], and most of them are defiantly disobedient. They have exchanged the signs of God for a small price and averted [people] from His way. Indeed, it was evil that they were doing.” [Al-Tawbah 9:8-9].

This is how Quran distinguished between the positions of the others- Jews, Christians and non believers and defined the attributes of each group. Thus, the Qur’anic approach is distinguished by adopting the right standards and by its justice even with those who have enmity to and who fight Islam.

Do not forget, oh Muslim that each of you represents the Muslim community living among non-Muslim majority. You cannot use the text from Quran and Sunnah which came in the context of and with regard to the affairs of a Muslim state. Our scholars took this situation into account as ibn Taymiyyah said in his book ‘iqtida’ al sirat al mustaqeem’ when talking about differing from non-Muslims:

“differing from them should take place only when the religion (Islam) is in the state of sovereignty as differing from non-Muslims was not imposed upon Muslims when they were weak. If a Muslim were in a territory of war or chaos or territory of non belief (but not war) then he is not asked to differ from the people in their public life affairs if this leads to harm. It may become liked (*mustahab*) or even compulsory (*wajib*) upon him to participate in their public life affairs if there was a religious benefit like calling them to lead a Godly life or any other good intentions.”

God says: “Indeed, God orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded.”[Al-Nahl 16:90].