

ARBAEEN PROCESSION RE-BRANDS TRUE HUMAN IMAGE OF ISLAM

Jumuah lecture by Mowlana Syed Aftab Haider on Friday 10 November 2017 (20 Safar 1439) at the Ahlul Bait (a.s) Islamic Centre, Ottery, Cape Town

Today, we are facing a very serious challenge, namely the misrepresentation of Islam. We see wholesale exploitation and abuse of the name of Islam as this religion is promoted as a religion of violence and extremism. It is incorrectly perceived as a religion which has nothing to offer humanity and the world at large, but only cares for its own followers and believers.

This is a dilemma which we face every day, while in contrast other religions have been promoted as religions of peace, love, humanity, caring and compassion for everyone, irrespective what you believe in. Religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity have these common slogans attached to their “brand”. At least this is how these other religions have been promoted. Whether this closely resembles their ideological position is a big question...

If we reflect on the core message of Islam, we can categorically state with all confidence that Islam in its core teachings is a divine message from Almighty Allah (SWT) to all of humanity ie. not limited to Muslims only!

If we look at the most important resource in Islam, namely the Holy Quran, we see that numerous verses addressing humanity, when it starts with:

“O mankind!”

WHAT SUBJECT IS THE HOLY QURAN MOST APPROPRIATELY CATEGORIZED UNDER?

When the Holy Quran speaks about guidance, again we see that it is not limited to Muslims. The Holy Quran is a guide to humanity, and not only for Muslims. Books are categorized by their subject. Example, a bookshop will have history books on the one side, science books on another side, fiction in a different section, etc.

Every book, whatever it is, has a subject that serves as its purpose. Under what subject will we categorize the Holy Quran? Will it be history? Yes, it has history, but it is not a book of history. The subject of the Holy Quran is not to narrate history. Will it be sciences or astronomy? No, even though these subjects are covered in the Holy Quran as well.

Will it be categorized under the subject of ethic and morality? Indeed, the Holy Quran covers this in detail, but again, the Holy Quran is not confined to this subject. Will it be political science? Yes for sure, but again, the Holy Quran is a book which goes beyond politics.

How about Theology or philosophy? Is this the rightful section to place the Holy Quran? Indeed, the core message of Islam is Tauheed (monotheism) and the Holy Quran presents various arguments and reasoning in this regard. The Holy Quran would very much be best placed here, but again, this subject is not what the Holy Quran is confined to.

This question can carry on and on...the Holy Quran fits into every subject but the Holy Quran explains that it cannot be confined to any particular shelf. The categorization that we've created for different subjects is manmade for our ease. The Holy Quran is not a book written by a human being, and therefore cannot be confined to the categorization created or defined by human beings!

The Holy Quran is beyond these categorization "shelves". So where does the Holy Quran fit? We need to know what the subject of the Holy Quran is, in order to answer this question.

HUMANITY IS THE CENTRAL SUBJECT OF THE HOLY QURAN

Basically, the subject of the Holy Quran is Humanity (Insan) and all its facets! Unfortunately, in the categorization of our bookshops and libraries, we find no categorization called Insan (Humanity)!

Humanity is the addressee of the Holy Quran! Humanity, with its relationship to the Creator (SWT). Humanity, with its relationship to other people, and humanity with its relationship to itself. That's it!

All the topics of the Holy Quran carry this underlying theme. The same Insan (Humanity) reaches to a point where he/she becomes a true believer (Mu'min), after a process of development and evolution. This is then where the Holy Quran addresses such human beings as:

“O you who believe!”

So now we see how Islam has been misrepresented in being portrayed as a religion which is isolated. The truth and reality of Islam is quite the contrary! Unfortunately, so-called Muslims carry the largest share of responsibility for this serious challenge pertaining to the distorted image of Islam. They have presented Islam as a message for a special, selected group of people.

ORIGINAL ISLAM IS ONE OF ATTRACTION TO PERFECT HUMAN CHARACTER

I don't know from where this started, as the original Islam has a focus of inviting people, but our tendency today is to repel people. This is unfortunately the image of Islam which is portrayed, that we are special people above the rest. The Holy Quran condemns this approach in the strongest terms, of people thinking that they are better than others by virtue of being Muslim.

The Holy Quran presents the following criteria for classifying people, in verse 13 of Surah Hujraat (chapter 49):

"Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you."

We see from this verse that simply being Muslim or a particular skin colour or ethnicity has absolutely no relevance. The defining criterion is Taqwa ie. that core of humanity where you are REALLY God conscious, and not simply appearing that way through your dress, long beard, name or ethnicity. None of these are defining factors for Islam.

When one studies the life of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAWA), he summarizes his mission as being only and only to perfect human character. He says that he has been appointed onto this earth as a divine Prophet of Almighty Allah (SWT), and the sole purpose of his Prophethood is to transform humanity to the highest levels of morality!

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Written by ramadan

Sunday, 12 November 2017 19:32 -

This is the Holy Quran and this is our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAWA)!

Those who really continued with this spirit of the Holy Quran and of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAWA), continued with this spirit and culture of humanity!

ANNUAL ARBA-EEN PROCESSION TO KARBALA

Today is the 20th of Safar, and millions of people are walking toward Karbala, specifically to the shrine of a hero by the name of Husain (a.s), who is the grandson of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAWA). Prophet Muhammad (SAWA), who was the prophet of mercy and perfection of noble character! The grandson of this prophet took the everlasting stand in making the ultimate sacrifice to save humanity!

When Husain (a.s) started his mission, he announced despite great adversity facing the harshest of enemies:

“The only thing which invites me to this great movement is that I should reform the affairs of the followers of my grandfather”

Husain (a.s) accomplished this revival of the spirit of humanity with great distinction, such that his remembrance transcended the borders of sects and religions. Today, in Iraq, it is reported that more than 30 million people have descended on Karbala. This country of Iraq does not have any infrastructure at all as a result of 3 wars in 3 decades. All it has is ruined buildings which continue to be the target of terrorists planting suicide bombs!

How is it possible for such a country to host this huge crowd every year, free of incidents? This event of Arba-een brings out that spirit of humanity, where ordinary people are begging you to drink a glass of water from them, or they would beg you to eat a few dates from them, if there is nothing more that they can afford. Here, people are even begging to massage your feet, since you are walking on such a sacred journey as a visitor of Husain (a.s).

IMAM HUSAIN (A.S) REVIVED THE HUMAN SPIRIT

This is the revival of humanity of Islam by Imam Husain (a.s), as explained so eloquently by the great poet and philosopher, Allama Iqbal, where he says:
“Let the dignity of human beings awake, then each and every nation will shout Husayn is ours!”

The legacy of Husain (a.s) crosses the boundaries of religion. That is why you find non-Muslims being part of this annual tradition of walking to his shrine, as they believe that Husain (a.s) has a universal message to offer to this embattled world.

Husain (a.s) is the reviver of that spirit of humanity which is the core of Islam, which originally attracted people to Islam in the time of his grandfather, our beloved Prophet of universal mercy, Muhammad (SAWA).

One who is blinded by prejudice and viewing this with sectarian lenses may think that I am exaggerating. I would therefore request that you refer to the following article on the website of the British news agency which we are all familiar with, The Independent:

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<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/20-million-muslims-march-against-isis-arbaeen-pilgrimage-iraq-karbala-a7436561.html>

This annual procession on the occasion of Arba-een is a most outstanding expression of the humanity of Islam and manifestation of human values, where young and old, fit and frail, walks up to hundreds of kilometers from different corners.

It is not just any old procession. It is a procession of true love where you experience human spirit in its true, sublime form, which Husain (a.s) continues to keep alive – 14 centuries and counting...

ARBA-EEN PROCESSION TRANSCENDS RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES

This year, Arba-een (40 days of the martyrdom of Imam Husain (a.s)) is taking place after these enemies of Islam and humanity have been resoundingly defeated, Alhamdu Lillah. ISIS is the worst scar on the face of Islam and they have been removed from most of the areas of Iraq. Stability is returning and life is getting back to normal. Basic facilities for the citizens of this country and affected areas, is starting to show some light of hope.

You will be surprised to know, that there are Sunnis walking in this annual procession of Arba-een, while media portray it as a Shia event! These Sunnis say with pride that Husain (a.s) belongs to them as much as he belongs to Shia!

We also see Christians taking part in this procession, saying that when the followers of Husain (a.s) freed them from the cursed menace of ISIS, they were not stopped from returning to their

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churches! Rather, they say that these followers of Husain (a.s) helped them resurrect their places of worship and restoring their freedom of religion. Therefore, they take part in this procession with the flag exclaiming "Labbayk ya Husain"!

Even people like the Yazidis take part in this annual procession of Arba-een. This is an ancient religious group, long before Islam, and they suffered heavily with the ISIS invasion. They say that when their women were raped under the name of Islam, it was the followers of Husain (a.s) who came to rescue them. Therefore, they believe that Husain (a.s) has something for them.

This is Husain (a.s) and this is his message! It is not a message of sectarianism or hate. The message of Husain (a.s) goes contrary to the message of discrimination and division. Every step of Husain's (a.s) message in Karbala is a message of love and humanity.

DEVIOS INTENT BY SAUDI ARABIA AND ISRAEL WILL NOT REST

While this great victory has been achieved, we see that the enemies of humanity who created and supported these bloodthirsty ISIS terrorists in the region have recognized their loss and are now looking for the next strategy to protect the Zionist entity. ISIS could not fulfil its purpose in this regard ie. to divert the attention of the Muslim Ummah from the Palestinian situation, and the worst criminality and injustice perpetrated by the Zionist state of Israel.

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So now, a new strategy has to be employed to protect Israel, and this has started with the attack on Lebanon, by calling the Lebanese prime minister to Saudi Arabia and asking him to resign!