

DAKWAH ORGANIZATIONS IN PLURALISTIC COMMUNITY, PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES: A CASE STUDY OF JAMIYAH SINGAPORE

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INTRODUCTION

It is no doubt that our present world presents challenges to everyone who has conscience to work together to prevent a collapse of moral civilization and promote through all means possible, a 21st Century intellectual, moral and spiritual infrastructure for the sake of human and all creatures of God sustainability.

Religion has, since the beginning of human society, been the basis of wholesome human civilization. This holistic guidance from Almighty Allah has always been disseminated through thousands of Prophets and Messengers of God who were sent to all ancient nations. Their messages, whether verbal or written down in the form of scripture were in perfect accordance with the socio-cultural, political, economic and intellectual development of different societies at different times. The essence of the universal values that were taught such as Reverence for God, filial piety, familial responsibility, chastity before, during and outside marriage, love for children, compassion for the less fortunate, neighbourliness, love of nation, striving for excellence, thrift, prudent, charity, valour and chivalry, sense of balance, appreciation of beauty given in the cultural format of the different societies sustained human civilization.

These divine messages, divine editions of the same Religion of God whether through Adam, Noah, Moses, Abraham, David or Jesus (pbut) were either ignored, suspended, distorted, marginalised or disbelieved in, immediately or over time causing tremendous conflict in society. The conflicts were inevitable because human beings are essentially beings of values and disagreeing with universal values goes against their own nature (fitrah) whether they perceive it or not.

What Prophet Muhammad revealed to a world which was then corrupted to the core, were the same values, the same eternal guidance given in the past but he gave it in a permanent, universal format.

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ (آل عمران: 64)

Say: "O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will).

Promoting Peace and Harmony

Muslim leaders of Singapore together with Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Zoroastrian representatives played a pivotal role in initiating the formation of the Inter-Religious Organisation of Singapore and Johore (IRO) in 1949 under the stewardship of Maulana Muhd Abdul Aleem Siddique, who was the man in history travel for 40 years

around the globe to promote World Peace, Inter-Faith and Global Harmony. He was known as the Roving Ambassador of Peace (Ismail Z.M 1932-2007)

At the grass root level, Inter-Racial Confidence Circles (IRCCs) are also working towards the same goals. It is common place in Singapore today for the Declaration on Religious Harmony to be read out publicly during multi-racial or multi-religious functions.

Projecting Community and Social Bonding

Jamiyah Singapore and other Muslim organisations regularly invite representatives of non-Muslim organisations to join in for Ramadan's Iftar, Eidul Fitri celebrations and visit Islamic centres and mosques. Tea-sessions and dialogues are regularly organized with them. Likewise non-Muslim organisations also invite Muslim representatives to visit their churches, temples, organisations and participate in their functions and dialogues. It is common to have join functions to raise funds for charity and community service. For example in March 2003, organisations representing nine different religions, civic and grass root organizations co-organised with Jamiyah Singapore the commemoration of the different New Year celebrations to promote the understanding of other cultures and at the same time to raise substantial funds for charity. Participation is carried out without compromising religious sensitivities.

Religion is Service

In 1971, Jamiyah Singapore embarked on its mission to change mindsets by setting up residential welfare programmes i.e. a Jamiyah Halfway House for recovering drug-addicts, a Jamiyah Home for the Aged, a Jamiyah Children's Home and Jamiyah Nursing Home. These programmes and services are complemented by Free Medical and Legal Clinics, Spiritual and Family Counselling Unit and a Welfare Rations programme. Jamiyah Welfare Homes, programmes and services are open to all without discrimination on the basis of race, language or religion.

Service also takes the form of disseminating and exemplifying the values which sustain and enhance human civilization.

Muslims believe in Cultural and Religious Pluralism, Inter-Faith Dialogue for Harmony

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرَهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ (يونس: 99)

If it had been your Lord's Will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth! Will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe (Yunus: 99)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ (البقرة : 62)

Those who believe (in the Qur-an), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (Al Baqarah: 62)

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيَّنَّا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلَهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (الأنعام : 108)

Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance. Thus have We made alluring to each people its own doings. In the end will they return to their Lord, and we shall then tell them the truth of all that they did. (Al An'aam : 108)

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنَ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا
وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ (البقرة : 265)

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects Evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things. (Al Baqarah : 265)

الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ لَهَدَمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ
وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ (الحج : 40)

(They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, (for no cause) except that they say, "Our Lord is Allah." Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His (cause); for verily Allah is Full of Strength, Exalted in Might, (able to enforce His Will). (Al Haj: 40)

This is a miracle of the Quran, the Constitution of Islam that during the most hostile period when they and their Jewish allies were being attacked, the rights of the minority pagans and minority Christians in the early Madinah period were mentioned so clearly even though for the Muslims the most uncompromising monotheism was enjoined. In Singapore Jamiyah Singapore publicised such facts regularly and even regionally through exhibitions, publications and conferences. For example Jamiyah Singapore and Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) jointly organised 9 international conferences on Islamic Perspectives on Peace and Harmony started since 2002.

UNDERLINING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY

Strengthening family values and empowering women and mothers through life-long balanced and excellent education is vital. "Al-ummu madrasatun" The mother is a school. (Hadith).

Consequently society in this age of distance-learning and IT should take measures for the continuing education of women and mothers and taking the Quran's extolling of motherhood, their education in this respect should be heavily subsidised or given freely. This among other thing will give meaning to the following Quranic verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا (النساء : 1)

O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single Person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; fear Allah, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you. (An Nisaa: 1)

For 26 years continuously, Jamiyah Singapore has been promoting the concept of respect for women and reverence for mothers through its Exemplary Mother Competition which is open to all mothers who are forty years and above and who have shown exemplary

commitment and sacrifice in raising their children and enabling them to receive excellent education. The Guest of Honour is normally the Head of State or the Head of Government. Otherwise a senior Minister will officiate the event which offers attractive prizes to winners. Cultural performances, publications and videos provide educational and people bonding entertainment. This is yet another conduit to promote Islamic values, couched in the language of universal values, in a pleasant and congenial manner.

EDUCATION FOR LIFE

As a hadith puts it,

أَطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنَ الْمَهْدِ إِلَى اللَّحْدِ (حديث)
Seek knowledge ('ilm) "from the cradle to the grave".

This is a matter of life or death for Muslim minority communities. From the 30s our organisation had public education talks and publications to stress the importance of excellent and balanced education. From 1970s we created a paradigm shift by organising education classes in void-decks of apartment buildings, mosques and our own centre. These were run on a professional basis and provided both secular and theological education.

CONCLUSION

Islam is pre-eminently and transparently a religion of moderation and reasonableness. There are no irrational dogmas or mysteries which mystify the modern mind. It has contributed substantially towards the development of human civilization and its sustainability. Yet normative Islam has much more to contribute today and in the future.

Even the present difficult times, present a golden opportunity for Muslims to project the correct image of Islam to our non-Muslim brethren. We must do it in an impactful manner bil Hikmah wal Hasanah.

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ (النحل : 125)

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance. (An Nahl: 125)

Today non-Muslims are visiting mosques in Singapore to know the real, genuine Islam and not the distorted image in the media. There are moves to have permanent exhibition of Islam in mosques to benefit both Muslims and non Muslims. Surely we should have the best representatives of Islam at the mosques or Islamic centres to receive them!

Jamiyah Singapore has published books and booklets such as “Mother-You Light Up My Life”, “Towards World Peace and Global Harmony”, “Muslim Way of Life” to project the beautiful teaching of Islam. This is of crucial and strategic importance today.

وَإِذَا حُيِّبْتُمْ بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا أَوْ رُدُّوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَسِيبًا (النساء: 86)

When a (courteous) greeting is offered you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or (at least) of equal courtesy. Allah takes careful account of all things. (An Nisaa: 86)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا صَرَ بْتُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَتَبَيَّنُوا وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ أَلْفَى إِلَيْكُمْ السَّلَامَ لَسْتَ مُؤْمِنًا تَبْتَغُونَ عَرَضَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فَعِنْدَ اللَّهِ مَغَانِمٌ كَثِيرَةٌ كَذَلِكَ كُنْتُمْ مِّن قَبْلُ فَمَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ فَتَبَيَّنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا (النساء: 94)

O ye who believe! when ye go abroad in the cause of Allah, investigate carefully, and say not to anyone who offers you a salam: "Thou art none of a Believer!" coveting the perishable goods of this life: with Allah are profits and spoils abundant. Even thus were ye yourselves before, till Allah conferred on you His favours: therefore carefully investigate. For Allah is well aware of all that ye do. (An Nisaa: 94)

In fact we even welcome non-Muslims to take part in breaking fast / Iftar in mosques and share the Qurban meats to them as well. Because our Prophet Muhammad welcomed the Non-Muslim who visited him in Madinah so we have to treat them like the Prophet advised us to treat all non-warring non-Muslims in the “Eternal Pledge of Protection to Christians Everywhere.”

Modern Research, Information Technology and Communications make it easier to do so. This will change the mindsets of both Muslims and non-Muslims and help to usher in an era of balanced, wholesome progress, genuine inter-racial, inter-religious peace and harmony, Insha' Allah.

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