

Islam as a Religion of Human Dignity and Honor

Islam is a religion that aims to ascertain, uplift and sustain the honor and dignity of man. In Islam, man is God's vicegerent on earth. Every terrestrial component has been created for the purpose of accommodating and facilitating the fulfillment of man's noble mission of vicegerency. Man resides in the center of Islam's universe. As such, the creation of man stood for the last segment in a long formative process of creation during which everything that there is came into existence. It signified the pinnacle of God's act of universe creation that went through six stages. Moreover, God created Adam, the first man and father of humanity, with His own Hands and in His own Image, as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) revealed. (Sahih Muslim) This means that "Adam has been bestowed with life, knowledge, power of hearing, seeing, understanding, but the features of Adam are different from those of Allah, only the names are the same, e.g., Allah has life and knowledge and power of understanding, and Adam also has them, but there is no comparison between the Creator and the created thing. As Allah says in the Qur'an: 'There is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer' (al-Shura, 11)."

Hence, when God created Adam, angels, the most sublime and infallible creatures, were summoned to witness the final divine act of creation. Upon its completion, they were asked to prostrate themselves before Adam, that is, to prostrate to God, for there is no prostration except to God alone, and to acknowledge thereby the merit and wisdom of God's handiwork, and to accord respect to Adam and his existential capacities as the crown of divine invention. The Qur'an describes the dramatic occurrence as follows: "And (mention, O Muhammad), when your Lord said to the angels: 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority (*khalifah*, vicegerent).' They said: 'Will You place

upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?' Allah said: 'Indeed, I know that which you do not know.' And He taught Adam the names - all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said: 'Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.' They said: 'Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.' He said: 'O Adam, inform them of their names.' And when he had informed them of their names, He said: 'Did I not tell you that I know the unseen (aspects) of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed.' And (mention) when We said to the angels: 'Prostrate before Adam'; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers." (Al-Baqarah, 30-34).

Islam exists because of man; it is meant for him. Man, in turn, exists because, and for, Islam, to be shown how to live in complete service to his Creator and Master, and to be shown the way to self-assertion and deliverance in both worlds. Thus, the most important knowledge that Islam grants man is the knowledge about himself, his Lord and his relationship with Him, and about the life phenomenon and his place as well as role in it. Indeed, this is the greatest blessing that man enjoys in Islam. It is a demonstration of man's honorable and dignified position that he occupies in the hierarchy of Islamic beliefs, values and principles. It is due to this that the Qur'an often articulates such testimonials as, for example, "We have indeed created man in the best of moulds." (Al-Tin, 4); "Verily We have honored the Children of Adam..." (Al-Isra', 70); "Do you not see that Allah has made subject to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth and amply bestowed upon you His favors, (both) apparent and unapparent?" (Luqman, 20); "Read and your Lord is Most Honorable, Who taught (to write) with the pen, taught man that which he knew not." (Al-'Alaq, 3-5).

It goes without saying that the ultimate objective of the Islamic message is the preservation of a believer and his honor and dignity. This translates into the preservation of his religion, life, lineage, intellect and property. There is nothing on earth that is more inviolable than a believer, his blood, property and honor. There is nothing that supersedes him in importance. Everything on earth exists in order to make possible and then sustain a believer's lofty position. All things and events play second fiddle to his status. Even holy messengers were sent and revelations revealed for the purpose. Based on the divine Will and Letter, life systems, ordinances and practices are concocted for this same end as well. Accordingly, cultures and civilizations are judged only on the basis of how genuinely they were human honor and dignity-oriented and how much they succeeded in making such enterprise a reality. It was due to this that the Prophet (pbuh) is reported to have communicated to the Ka'bah while circumambulating (*tawaf*) it: "How pure you are! And how pure is your fragrance! How great you are! And how great is your sanctity! By Him in whose hands lies the soul of Muhammad, the sanctity of a believer is greater with Allah than even your sanctity (i.e., the Ka'bah). That is (the sanctity) of his property, his blood and that we think nothing of him but good." (Sunan Ibn Majah)

A companion of the Prophet (pbuh), 'Abdullah b. 'Umar (d. 74 AH/ 693 CE), once when he looked at the Ka'bah, reproduced the gist of those Prophet's words and said to the Ka'bah: "How great you are! And how great is your sanctity! But the sanctity of a believer is greater with Allah than even your sanctity (i.e., the Ka'bah)." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi)

The Prophet (pbuh) also said during his farewell pilgrimage in a sermon which denotes a blueprint for every Muslim civilizational awakening: "Verily, your blood, property and honor are sacred to one another (i.e., Muslims) like the sanctity of this day of yours (i.e., the day of *Nahr* or slaughtering of the animals of sacrifice), in this month of yours (the

holy month of *Dhul-Hijjah*) and in this city of yours (the holy city of Makkah)." (Sahih al-Bukhari)

It is thus natural that at a collective level, believers are seen as brothers and sisters to each other. (Al-Hujurat, 10). They constitute one *Ummah* or community. The best among them are only those who are most God-conscious, or most righteous. (Al-Hujurat, 13). The best among them, furthermore, are those who are most beneficial to the *Ummah* as well as to the whole of mankind. In their unity, mutual compassion and cooperation, the similitude of believers is like a wall whose bricks enforce and rely on each other. They are like a solid cemented structure held together in harmony and strength, each part contributing strength in its own way, and the whole held together not like a mass, but like a living organism. Believers are further related to each other in such a way that if one of them (a part of an organic and formidable formation called the *Ummah* or the community) is troubled by a problem of any kind, the rest of the body parts will remain disturbed and restless until the matter became cured. As a result, some of the most outrageous sins in Islam are those which are related to violating and damaging the honor and dignity of a believer, as well as those which are related to the betraying, dividing, weakening and undermining the *Ummah* or the community. The Qur'an proclaims: "Indeed, those who like that immorality or scandal should be spread (or publicized) among those who have believed will have a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter." (Al-Nur, 19)

"And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favor of Allah upon you -- when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you may be guided." (Alu 'Imran, 103).

At any rate, Islam is as much a personal experience and struggle as it is a collective endeavor and mission. Islam cannot be totally and thoroughly accomplished individually, or in small groups. Islam is a religion of, and thus aims at, society, life in its totality, and civilization. Islam is a religion of collectively inhabiting the earth and making together the world a better place. Islam is a religion of pragmatism and human nature. It is a simple and natural thing. It denounces everything that is unnatural, injurious and inhuman. It denounces everything that stands on the way of people's individual spiritual and intellectual advancements, and collective civilizational affirmation and rise. Simply put, Islam denounces anything that puts man's honor and inviolability, as well as his communal predilection and responsiveness, at stake.

It was because of this underlining character of Islam, surely, that after Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had received in the cave of Hira his first revelation, and with it his divine appointment as the final messenger of God to people, where heretofore he used to spend long periods contemplating and reflecting on the spiritual depression and failures of the world around him, he subsequently never returned to the cave. He did not return because Islam is not a religion of isolation and separation to be practiced by certain ascetic individuals or groups away from the masses and the pressing realities of life. It must be pointed out that the whole process of the Islamic transformation project started right in the cave of Hira, but not with the words of, for example, "pray" or "fast" or "perform pilgrimage", etc., but rather with the words "Read (*iqra*) in the name of your Lord Who created. He created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is most Honorable, Who taught (to write) with the pen, taught man that which he knew not." (Al-'Alaq, 1-5). The Prophet (pbuh) was asked - as is anyone who subscribes to Islam and Muhammad's mission - to read, study, try to solve and make known the problems and maladies of his people, as well as of the world and life in general. This is strongly suggested by the

notions of *God* as the *Creator* and *Guardian*, and man as the guided and taught mortal completely dependent on *God*, which are enfolded in the above mentioned verses. Accordingly, the Prophet (pbuh) once said that a Muslim who socializes with people and puts up with their provocations and annoyances, is better than a Muslim who does not socialize with people - i.e., lives alone -- and does not put up with their unpleasant deeds. (Sunan al-Tirmidhi)