

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

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## **The Day of Arafah: That you may know each other**

By

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### **The acquaintance of the Prophet's companions**

That people come to know each other is a spiritual need, before which every barrier should go: the barriers of race, color, stock, and language. About this we have the Almighty's words in the Qur'an: "O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things." (49:13)

Elsewhere we find in the Qur'an: "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are Signs for those who know." (30:22)

And we have: "Call them by the names of their fathers: that is juster in the sight of Allah. But if you do not know their father's names, call them your brothers in faith, or your friends and allies." (33:5)

Let us also mention this Tradition of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, when he said: "No Arab may be regarded superior to a non-Arab; nor a non-Arab to an Arab, except by their piety;" (reported by Ahamad: 23536) and when he said: "Salman [a Persian convert to Islam] is one of us, the Prophet's family;" (reported by al-Haakem in his *al-Mustadrak*: 3/598; and al-Tabarani: 6/261). As everybody knows, Salman, being a Persian, cannot be a member of the Prophet's family by lineage; but he was a believer, and a devout Muslim.

In another Tradition, the Prophet says: "O Quraish, let not others show their worth through deeds, while you show your worth through your descent."

To a wider public, the Messenger, peace be upon him, said during his pilgrimage 'usually designated as 'the farewell pilgrimage': "O folk, verily your blood, as well as the decency of your families, are as sacred, prohibited to be trespassed on, as this sacred day, in this sacred month, at this holy town of Mecca. Have I conveyed the Message? O Allah, be my Witness." (Reported by al-Bukhari)

With all the above in the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions, we find that the majority of 'Muslims' practice, until today, all kinds of racism and rising above others. This is sure to be met with when a Muslim meets someone who does not happen to hold as high a position or to descend from an equally prestigious and established family or ethnicity. They seem unmindful of the words of the Almighty when He says in the Qur'an: "We have honored the sons of Adam, provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on

them special favors, above a great part of our Creation." (17:70), or His saying elsewhere in the Qur'an: "It is we who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world: and We raise some of them above others in ranks, so that some may command work from others. But the Mercy of your Lord is better than the wealth which they amass." (43:32)

Indeed, the Qur'anic verses should have established in the Muslims' consciousness that the diversity of abilities is one thing, and the equality of dignity and worth is another; and that cooperation, mutual commitment and compassion are part and parcel of preserving human dignity – for how can one preserve his self-esteem when he stretches his hand to receive charity?

We have a true application of this in Umar bin al-Khattab's saying of Abu Bakr's purchasing and liberating Bilal: "It was our lord liberating our lord;" for though Bilal's, the Abyssinian slave and the caller to prayer, position is nothing compared with the Caliph Abu Bakr, they are in Islamic terms equal in dignity.

We may also mention the preparation of 'the army of hardship', i.e. the army deployed for the Tabuk Campaign, when Abu Bakr offered all his money in charity; the Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him: "So what have you left for your family?" and he replied: "I left Allah and His Messenger!"

Some have seen in this sacrifice on the part of Abu Bakr an indication of his great faith. Of course, no one is going to argue about Abu Bakr's faith, and this faith can never be overrated; and yet, the real significance in this incident is that Abu Bakr trusts Allah in the first place to provide for his family; and in the second place, he trusts the Messenger, in his capacity as ruler; and bearing this in his mind, he does not hesitate to put all he possesses in the service of his fellow brothers in Islam.

Abu Bakr would have behaved quite differently if he had to live in a different age, in our age for instance, when individuals are each for himself, scuffling over a piece of bread; he would have behaved differently if, as we see around us today, one cannot trust that a person in need will find more than a handful of persons who will extend their hands in assistance; and, consequently, the individual will have to fend for himself. When everyone around you is so keen that no one else should have any share of his money, then you may do the same, in case you come across a time of need and do not find others to extend their hand in assistance. And so, our wonder at how Abu Bakr and the other members of the first generation gave away all, or most, of their money, will diminish when we recall that if he, or any of his family members, should suffer from adverse time, the Prophet, peace be upon him, as head of the state, would never let them suffer.

This will help us see their exceptional generosity in the right perspective; it is the same honest cooperation which impelled the Supporters (the indigenous Medina dwellers) to cede half of all their fortunes to their migrant brothers – even to the extent of offering to divorce a wife if the brother in Islam would like to marry her. They did it to preserve the integrity of the Islamic community, and as an indication that those believers who had left behind their homes and possessions in Mecca have in the tribes of Aus and Khazraj in Medina real brothers and true supporters: it was a touching indication that no difference in ethnicity, color, race, or location, can divide the two communities of Islam: the Migrants and the Supporters.

The members of the first generation of Islam proved in practical terms that they are one nation, one Ummah, since each member of them was willing to offer most liberally their most precious possessions.

In such a community, a person who loses a father in battle or in natural death will be sure to find those who are quite ready to marry his widow mother, at least to preserve her dignity; he will also find those who are ready to offer money, to give attention and care, and take responsibility for the orphans, to nurture them and to protect the whole family. No doubt, one will be called upon in such cooperative society to sacrifice even his life for the sake of his Ummah, not dreading to be killed or to die in defense of this Ummah.

One verse of the Qur'an that bears on this issue is this: "If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice," (4:3).

### **Standing in Arafah 'to know each other'**

The Muslims' congregating for performing pilgrimage is one embodiment of this unity of the Muslim Ummah we have discussed so far. It was a true manifestation of the human and Islamic unity during the time of the Prophet time and the Upright Caliphs (the first four caliphs who immediately succeeded the Prophet), but it is a congregation that we seem to misconceive and whose significance was distorted over the centuries. It bears real pondering to see how believers stream towards Mecca from the four corners of the world, to prove their unity, despite the differences in location, in color, language and features.

It is inconceivable then that we find our Ummah, after that first generation, confer on that congregation on Arafah a mythical and illusive sense; it is unfortunate that they keep unmindful of the real facts that anyone can witness in real-life terms. You still here such superstitious interpretations when some Muslims say it was called 'Arafah' because it

was the spot where Adam and Eve, or father and mother, met (from the Arabic verb *'arafa*, got acquainted').

And they say this despite the well-known fact, plainly stated in Islamic texts, that Eve was created from a rib of Adam's; indeed the Devil started to whisper his evil words to them after they proved to be loving and intimate husband and wife.

We may read about that in the Qur'an. The Almighty says, for instance: "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 – reverence Allah, through Whom you demand your mutual rights and reverence the wombs that bore you: for Allah ever watches over you." (4:1)

Also, elsewhere: "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts: verily in that are Signs for those who reflect." (29:21)

And "We said: 'O Adam! You and your wife dwell in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as where and when you will, but do not approach this tree, or you run into harm and transgression.' Then did Satan make them slip from the Garden, and get them out of the state of felicity in which they had been. We said: 'Get you down, all you people, with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood for a time.'" (2:35-36)

As a child of Mecca, I used to accompany my parents on their pilgrimage each year, from my earliest years until I was eighteen – at which age I left for Egypt, and then to other lands, for study – but as a child I remember how I sat at side-walks observing the pilgrim hosts at the hour of 'exodus' from Arafah towards Muzdalifah, peering into their faces,

their vastly diverse complexions and features, and their two-cloth '*iharam*' apparel: their heads were bare, so that you could not distinguish the great statesman from the humble guard, the great tradesman from the petty clerk; many bore their children, with their womenfolk next to them, in their white but decent clothing.

It is by watching such spectacle, and reflecting and pondering about its significance, that one comes to appreciate why Arafah is called Arafah.

### **The congregation of intimacy, brotherhood and compassion**

In this gorgeous congregation, you see people streaming from every spot of all continents, in all their diverse colors, features, and tongues; nothing brings them together except their being brothers and sisters in faith; brothers and sisters in both humanity and faith – their differences are no cause for dividing them; there is no room here for some rising above others on the basis of superior race, or for having more money, holding a higher position, or descending from a more established family.

It is in such a situation that we see the truth of the Almighty's words in the Qur'an: "O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things." (49:13)

And: "Call them by the names of their fathers: that is juster in the sight of Allah. But if you do not know their father's names, call them your brothers in faith, or your friends and allies. But there is no blame on you if you make a mistake therein: what counts is the intention of your hearts: and Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful." (33:5)

But how far do Muslims realize this supreme significance of pilgrimage and standing on Arafah? How deeply do they appreciate this feeling of intimacy, compassion, and brotherhood, in disregard of any other considerations? How well do they really fulfill that every single nation and every single individual are entitled to the same dignity, as humans; and brotherhood, as Muslims?

Let them reflect on this Qur'anic verse:

"We have honored the sons of Adam, provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of Our Creation."  
(17:70)

Dignity is every single human's right; nurturance is also for every single human: all human beings must enjoy this mutual commitment. How can a person who spreads his hand to receive alms, being in need, enjoy self-esteem and dignity? To be unmindful of such aspects will indeed distort the essence of the revealed Qur'an; it will additionally be a perversion of the proper human nature. No wonder that you see 'Muslims' at this abyss in their social life and their social relations when they fail to respond to values and principle like the above. They are still Muslim 'individuals' but no longer a Muslim 'Ummah': it is so since their relations are disrupted, their unity is torn up, their performance is inferior, and their civilization is decadent; they are often manipulated by their enemies, against their own good. It as a poet once said: As long as sticks are one bundle, no one can break them; but they can be easily broken when they are separated as single sticks.

This misapprehension of Arafah and what it stands for – though it is quite within reach of those who reflect – has led to another problem, a more serious problem: the problem of human relations themselves. And

this is especially deplorable since the misconception is attributed to religion, although it has nothing to do with religion: it really originates in certain social traditions and human limitedness; it is the selfish and racist positions of people who do offence to religion by claiming to speak in its name. And when Muslims do that they discourage and repel people who could have embraced Islam; they alienate many who could have admired this religion. It is our own responsibility, and we are to blame for the present situation; we have actually developed a distorted conception and poor worldview and civilization, and we present a very poor view of the Qur'an, after all the deterioration that came over our social, human and spiritual conceptions.

Therefore, though 'Muslims' are so numerous, they are among the least developed of nations, and among the weakest and most ignorant and abject. We have nothing to boast of among nations, no contribution to the world – we brag that we are God's vicegerents and viceroys, while we run after bare subsistence; we seem to be in a state of coma, waiting to die – we produce nothing, are never competing with those who contribute to the process of construction, improvement, cooperation and exactness.

We are on the whole just parasites on others. What most distinguishes the Muslims' culture at the present time, and even their educational systems and concepts are great rigidity, superstition, ignorance, and disease; the Muslim nations are poor, hungry, and ailing; their heads are bent before their enemies, in weakness and abjection. Their only claim is their being inheritors of a collapsed civilization; and their only occupation is living and bragging of past memories.

## **The role of thinkers in saving the Ummah**

It is the responsibility of the Ummah's scholars and thinkers to ponder and reflect; they need to search and look at all aspects of the Ummah's present conditions, to strive to perceive and reveal the causes behind this distortion of the Ummah's faith and worldview, and the decadent social practices. It is only by bringing out such bases of the present conditions that the Muslim Ummah may again restore its place as viceroy on the earth, as the model of guidance and justice, brotherhood and cooperation, and careful and peaceful performance.

It is then that the Ummah will be fulfilling the Qur'an's representation of it: "You are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors." (3:110)

It must by now be perceived that Arafah has been designated from the very beginning as a meeting area for realizing human brotherhood, and especially the more intimate Islamic brotherhood. This is not a mythical condition; it has nothing to do with that mythical conception of this spot as the one where Adam and Eve came to be acquainted: this latter conception is in line with the culture of ignorance and superstition we have been inheriting across centuries – a culture that has led to the deplorable condition of the Muslim Ummah that is still prevailing and is visible to any observer.

But it is to Allah that we turn to for support and assistance, since He is able to do whatever He wills to do.