

(Note: Wherever the word “you” or “your” is singular and refers to one human being, it is printed with an italic y, as in: you. Wherever such a word refers to God, the letter y is printed in capital, as in: You.)

For Fast 24 – September 4

Topic: (R) Religion

The natural religion, the religion of human nature:

- “So set yourself for religion, being upright, the nature made by Allah in which He has created mankind. There is no altering Allah’s creation. That is the right religion — but most people do not know.” — 30:30

The “right religion” according to this verse is the religion which corresponds to human nature. It is innate in human nature to accept the One God as its Creator, submit to Him, and show sympathy and charity to fellow human beings. This is why these principles lie at the *root* of all religions, which are then made different and complicated by elaborate structures placed on top.

- “And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them bear witness about themselves: Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes, we bear witness. In case you should say on the day of Resurrection: We were unaware of this...” — 7:172

The verse does not mention the bringing forth of descendants from Adam, but *from the children of Adam*, and this seems clearly to refer to every human being as he or she comes into existence. Thus the recognition of God is a part of human nature. That is what religion is, not some artificially constructed dogma imposed on mankind.

Religious differences should not lead to disputes:

- “Say: Do you dispute with us about Allah, and He is our Lord and your Lord, and for us are our deeds and for you your deeds; and we are sincere to Him?” — 2:139

A Muslim’s conception of Allah is very broad. It includes all that is best in all other religions, but is free from the limitations they put. Therefore no one who is true to his religion can dispute the Muslim conception of the Divine Being. Here Allah is described by Muslims to the Jews and Christians (and to others also by extension) as “**our** Lord and **your** Lord”. He is Lord of Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Moreover, He will judge everyone justly on the basis on their actual deeds, *not* on the basis of labels, names and beliefs which people ascribe to themselves.

- “Those who believe (i.e. Muslims) and those who are Jews and the Sabians and the Christians and the Magians and those who set up partners (with Allah) — surely Allah will decide between them on the day of Resurrection.” — 22:17

It is implied that differences in religious beliefs do not call for punishment from God in this life; these will be decided on the day of Judgment. Punishment in this life is brought upon those who work mischief and transgress all limits in doing evil.

- “... and say (to people of other religions): I believe in what Allah has revealed of the Book, and I am commanded to do justice between you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds, and for you your deeds. *There is no contention between us and you.* Allah will gather us together, and to Him is the eventual coming.” — 42:15

Muslims are here commanded to do *justice* and follow *principles* instead of *prejudices* in judging others. Again it is added that Allah will judge everyone, Muslim or otherwise, by their *deeds*, and not claims and labels. *No contention or dispute* is necessary between Muslims and others.

Way of arguing with others:

- “Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord knows best him who strays from His path, and He knows best those who go aright.” — 16:125

This describes how people should be called to Islam. “Wisdom” means to appeal to reason and knowledge. “Goodly exhortation” is to give advice that people can see is in their benefit. Arguing in the “best manner” is to both present the best arguments and evidences, and to do so in the best behaved, polite manner, showing consideration for the feelings of others.

- “And do not argue with the People of the Book except by what is best, save such of them as act unjustly. But say: We believe in what has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit.” — 29:46

The words “save such of them as act unjustly” indicate that in case of dealing with people who mock and ridicule, or use harsh language in argument, sometimes a retaliatory reply can be given, provided it is a proportionate response. But the message must always be conveyed that Muslims believe in the revelations that came to others and recognise that it is the same God Whom both parties worship.

Freedom of religion granted by Islam:

- “There is no compulsion in religion — the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error.” — 2:256

To all the allegations that the Holy Prophet preached Islam by the sword, this verse is a sufficient answer. Being assured of success, Muslims are told that when they hold power in their hands their guiding principle should be that *there should be no compulsion in the matter of religion.*

- “And if your Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them. Will you then force people till they are believers?” — 10:99

This verse refers to the deep anxiety felt by the Holy Prophet that people should embrace the message brought by him. He is told that it is in the natural order of things that while some people believe, others do not, and no human being can or should apply compulsion to others in this regard.

- “Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made ... Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, then *cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques* in which Allah’s name is much remembered, would have been pulled down” — 22:39-40.

The lives of Muslims are to be sacrificed not only to stop their own persecution by their opponents and to save their own mosques, but to save churches, synagogues and cloisters as well — in fact, to establish perfect religious freedom.

People are free to believe or not to believe:

- “Clear proofs have indeed come to you from your Lord; so whoever sees, it is for the good of his own soul; and whoever is blind, it is to its harm. And I am not a keeper over you.” — 6:104
- “And say: The Truth is from your Lord; so whoever wishes, let him believe, and whoever wishes, let him disbelieve.” — 18:29
- “We have truly shown him the way; he may be thankful or unthankful.” — 76:3

The words “thankful or unthankful” carries the meaning of accepting or rejecting.

- “If they accept Islam, then indeed they follow the right way; and if they turn back, your duty (O Prophet) is only to deliver the message.” — 3:20
- “Your duty (O Prophet) is only the delivery of the message, and Ours (God’s) is to call (people) to account.” — 13:40