

BASHSHAAR



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BROTHERHOOD IN ISLAM

by Imam Kalamazad Mohammed Sahib

Islam is a universal religion and the Holy Qur'an teaches us that our Creator, Allah, is One and that we, human beings, are a single species, a single family, in spite of superficial differences like colour, nationality, race, etc.

In fact, every institution in Islam, including Fasting, is geared towards not only a theoretical understanding, but to a practical implementation of the unification of mankind under the umbrella of One God. In today's talk, emphasis will be placed on the Islamic teachings concerning the spirit of brotherhood that should permeate the hearts and limbs of every individual; for, as mentioned before, Fasting is one of the means used by Allah, Most High, to make us really transform this ideological concept into a real, tangible, practical and spiritual expression in our daily lives.

Firstly, we learn from the Holy Qur'an that Prophets were sent to every nation on earth and they were all given the message: "O ye messengers, eat of the good things and do good. Surely I am Knower of what you do. And surely this your community is one community, and I am your Lord, so keep your duty to Me. But they became divided into sects, each party rejoicing in that which was with them." (23:51-53).

As a result of this splintering of the human race into disparate groups, the last Prophet of God, Muhammad (pbuh), was sent as a mercy unto all the nations in order to unite mankind under the banner of One God. The following verses of the

Holy Qur'an reveal the message of unity, that which every Muslim is duty bound to fulfil to the best of his ability.

The Holy Qur'an says: "Mankind is a single nation." (2:213) and further informs us: "O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware." (49:13).

As a result, we are commanded: "And hold ye fast, all of you, to the rope of Allah and break not loose from it." (3:103).

The Hadith is replete with teachings, exhortations and commands on these all-important topics of brotherhood, unity, and love for all mankind. I shall quote a few sayings of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Firstly, as regards the universal brotherhood of man, our Holy Prophet teaches and instructs us:

"Mankind is a fold, every member of which shall be a keeper or shepherd unto every other, and be accountable for the welfare of the entire fold.

O Lord: Lord of my life and of everything in the Universe! I affirm that all human beings are brothers unto one another.

All creatures of God form the family of God; and he is the best loved of God who loves best His creatures.

Respect the ways of God, and be affectionate to the family of God" (Bases of Islamic Culture, pp. 16-17).

As regards unity, the Holy Prophet says: "You will find all believers in God as firm and united together in ties of love and kindness as the limbs of a body. If one part of it gets pain, all other parts feel afflicted in sympathy."

If we human beings, believers in God, claim to love God, how then can we demonstrate the sincerity of our profession?

The Holy Prophet tells us:

"Whoever loves another for the sake of God, in reality has expressed his love for God.

God says: "If you wish to receive graciousness from Me, show graciousness to those whom I have created.

Treat kindly the dwellers of the earth and God will treat you kindly.

He who, for the sake of God, has loved another human being, that person verily has extolled the glory of God." (Bases of Islamic Culture, pp. 20-21).

The Companions (rta) of our Holy Prophet (pbuh) imbibed these teachings of his and to what extent they practised them I leave you to judge as you listen to this incident from the earliest days of Islam as narrated by one of the Muslim soldiers:

"During the battle of Yarmuk I went out in search of my cousin, who was on the battlefield. I took some water with me, knowing it would do him good. I found him in the very thick of the fighting. Alas, he was dying. I ran forward to give the little water I had. But, as I did so, another badly wounded soldier beside him gave a sigh, and my cousin turned his face and pointed to take the water to the other man first. I took the water to the other person whom I recognised as Hisham-bin-Abilas. But I had hardly reached him when we heard another groaning person nearby. Hisham also pointed to the man, that I should give the water to him instead. However, before I arrived, this third man had died. Hastily I ran back to Hisham but he was also dead. Hurriedly I made my way over to my cousin. Alas, he, too, had passed away. (All of us came from Allah and we will all return to Him.)" (Muslim Stories for Children)

If it be objected that this shows love only between Muslims, then what about the famous example of Salah-ud-Din (Saladin), another celebrated son of Islam whom everyone has heard of and who lived centuries after the death of our Holy Prophet (pbuh)? It is related that during the Crusades, one of his greatest enemies, the English king, Richard the Lion Hearted, was ill. He sent him pears and peaches to eat and snow from the mountain to cool his drinks. Salah-ud-Din knew the verse of the Holy Qur'an, which says: "We feed you for Allah's pleasure only – we desire from you neither reward nor thanks." (76:9).

This lofty behaviour does not come easily. It has to be cherished and nurtured in the family at home, and more so, in the larger and more important family – the Jamaat. The Jamaat is a microcosm of the world community, for the same principles that are needed to make us live a proper Muslim life internationally are the very ones that we need to inculcate if we are to build a united, cohesive, God-fearing jamaat instead of a disparate and motley group of individuals, each with his own agenda – principles like those of tolerance and understanding, patience and perseverance,

gentleness and kindness, sympathy and empathy, sensitivity and refinement.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the 14th Century Mujaddid of Islam, in his own coherent, lucid, inspired, inspiring and heart-penetrating style has given us certain guidelines for living a successful life in a jamaat as well as in the world community that comprises both Muslims and non-Muslims. In his book *Kishti Nuh* (The Ark of Noah), he advises us to put God first in our lives and for His sake to be kind and merciful to humanity, for all are God's creatures. He says:

"Do not oppress with your tongue, or hands or in any other way. Always work for the good of mankind. Never unduly assert yourselves with pride over others, even those who are placed under you. Never use abusive language to anyone, even though he may abuse you. Be humble in spirit, kind and gentle, and forgiving, sympathetic towards all and wishing them well.... Immediately compose all your differences and make peace among yourselves: forgive the transgressions of your brothers for indeed he is evil who is not willing to make peace with his brother.... In fact, if you really desire that God in heaven be pleased with you, then hasten to become one amongst yourselves as though you were brothers (and sisters) born of the same mother." (pp. 5-8).

In his *Malfuzat*, he gives us insight in how to acquire sensitivity and tolerance, understanding and tenderness and the divine attributes that are required for lifting ourselves from the stage of selfishness and crudity to that of social and spiritual sophistication. He writes:

"The truth is that everybody (in a jamaat) is not at the same level of development. Allah, Most High, has Himself described the various classes of believers thus:

- (i) So of them is he who wrongs himself;
- (ii) And of them is he who takes a middle course,
- (iii) And of them is he who is foremost in deeds of goodness by Allah's permission. That is the great grace (35:32)."

Secondly, it is also a fact that the Companions (rta) themselves also made slow and gradual advancement both in their faith and in their actions. It is recorded that when our Holy Prophet (pbuh) went to Madinah he asked a Companion for a piece of land on which to build a masjid, whereupon the Companion made an excuse and said: "I need it for my own use."

What a grievous sin that was – that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) should request a piece of land to build a masjid and this person, a disciple to boot, should put his personal needs above those of the religion! But it was that same Companion who later on willingly suffered martyrdom for the sake of Allah.

Progress always takes place by slow degrees. A person does something this year and in the next year he adds to it. However, if there exists any kind of evil thinking in our hearts, then we will be acting like someone to whom there comes for help a sick person who is beset by all kinds of illnesses, and after giving him medicine for a day or two we turn him out without paying the full attention that he deserves and so no cure is effected.

Our job is to make du'a [prayer] for others night and day with humility, and to supplicate Allah for their welfare. It is not fitting for a preacher to take offence at the slightest thing and show repugnance to people. At this stage these people are deserving of mercy and Allah, Most High, is making preparations for their reformation. Moreover, everyone is not at the same spiritual level. Amongst the Companions (rta) there were some who were close to the status of prophethood and many at a lower level than that – just as one finds pearls in the sea and corals, too, and shells and other things like gold and various kinds of creatures. The same obtains in a jamaat.

Jamaat members should make du'a if they see a fault in a brother. If they do not do so and instead talk about it and circulate it, then they will be committing a sin. What shortcoming is so great that it cannot be expunged? Therefore we should always help our brother by making du'a for him.

Furthermore, we should not speak ill of, nor backbite our fellow jamaat members. The Holy Qur'an instructs us thus: "O you who believe, avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin; and spy not nor let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You abhor it! And keep your duty to Allah, surely Allah is Oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful." (49:12).

When our Holy Prophet (pbuh) was asked what constituted backbiting, he replied thus: "You talk about your brother which he dislikes...if what you say about him is true, still you would be backbiting him, and if what you say about him is not true, you will be slandering him." (Muslim).

We should realise that in a jamaat there are people of varying temperaments and conditions. Some resemble people who are now recovering from a strong bout of illness, whilst others have acquired a bit of strength. Therefore, if weakness is discerned in someone, then he should be given good advice in private. If he does not heed it, then you should make du'a for him, and if these two devices do not work, then he should be left to the will of Allah, Most High.

One should not therefore be quick to take offence at the faults of others, for we should remember that among the ranks of the qutbs and abdals there were many who had previously committed wrong deeds like fornication and theft. Therefore, we must not

be too hasty to abandon a brother, for if a person's child is guilty of wrongdoing, he tries all methods available to reform him. The same treatment should be accorded a brother in faith.

The Holy Quran has not taught us to spread or publish abroad the defects of others. On the contrary, it exhorts us thus: "Exhort one another to patience, and exhort one another to marhamah (mercy)." (90:17).

By marhamah is meant that if one observes a blemish in someone, then offer him good advice and make du'a for him. Du'a has a very powerful effect and it is regrettable that a person should observe the fault of a brother and talk of it a hundred times without even once making du'a for him. One should speak of the fault of another only after he has wept in supplication for him for at least forty days.

How eloquently the poet Sa'di spoke when he observed that Allah, Most High, Who knows everything, conceals our shortcomings from public view but our neighbours who know nothing make a big hue and cry over our alleged defects. One of the names of Allah is As-Sattar – the One Who covers and hides the weaknesses of His servants - and we should therefore inculcate that quality of His in accordance with the dictum of the Holy Prophet – "Colour yourselves with the Divine colours."

It is not our intention that you should become a protector or conniver of faults, but what is discouraged is that you should publish the defects of your brothers and malign them in any way, for our Holy Prophet (pbuh) has mentioned this as a sin.

Shaikh Sa'di had two students – one who was very brilliant in his exposition of deep spiritual truths and insights, whilst the other was of an envious disposition. The former complained to the shaikh that whenever he made a commentary on any subject, his colleague would burn with envy. The shaikh replied that one student had chosen the road to Hell by his envy, whilst the other had done the same by ill-speaking his brother.

In short, there can never be a jamaat unless there exist mutual mercy, compassion, du'a and the habits of concealing the faults of others.

We hope and pray that these lessons will have been learnt or reinforced during the past month of Ramadhan and that their application will now become automatic in our daily lives as we plan and pray and anticipate the next month of Ramadhan. In sha Allah.

BASHSHAAR
(Bringer of Glad Tidings)
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THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COMPANY

Not everyone has a good influence on you. Some people will bring out negatives in you and because of their influence you can become estranged from your inner beauties. Such people, by appealing to the negatives within you, can turn you into an egoist. These people are of doubtful value and if you listen to them, you will fall into a shallow, flat way of life.

Some people may also depress you, take away your vitality and your belief in the good. These are cynical people who do not see the sense of anything and are sarcastic about everything. They reject even the dearest and most elevated things, pulverising everything with their omnipresent criticism. To be in contact with them is infectious. You think and speak like them without being aware of it. It is better to avoid such people or they can blemish you.

Fortunately though, there are other types of people who will have a beneficial effect on you; people who remind you of your true destination in a conscientious way; people who will inspire you to utilise your positive qualities optimally.

Seek out these people or make sure that they can find you. They have the best intentions with regard to you. As negative and pernicious as the others are, these people are heart-warming and affirmative. They are a source of light to you, and growth in humaneness. You will become better and purer by their grace.

"And keep thyself with those who call on their Lord morning and evening desiring His goodwill, and let not thine eyes pass from them, desiring the beauties of this world's life. And follow not him whose heart We have made unmindful of Our remembrance, and he follows his low desires and his case exceeds due bounds". (Quran, 18:28).

Sources:

Zo mooi als je bent (Hans Bouma, Dutch book)
The Holy Quran (translation of Maulana Muhammad Ali)

BACKBITING

"O you who believe, let not people laugh at people, perchance they may be better than they. ... Neither find fault with your own people, nor call one another by nicknames. ... O you who believe, avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is sin; and spy not nor let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You abhor it!" (Quran, 49:11-12).

- He who tells another's matters to you certainly carries your matter to others.

- Do not speak ill of those who are dead, as it is a great sin to do so.

- Do not criticise the thing which you do not know, as it is possible that you may be unaware of many of its correct details.

- The tongue is a beast; if let loose, bites.

- Backbiting is the pastime of the weak.

- One who obeys and believes the backbiter loses a friend.

"Obey not any mean swearer, defamer, going about with slander, hinderer of good, out-stepping the limits, sinful, ignoble; besides all that, notoriously mischievous" (Quran, 68:10-13).

"When you received it on your tongues and spoke with your mouths that of which you had no knowledge, and you deemed it a trifle, while with Allah it was serious. And why did you not, when you heard it, say: It beseems us not to talk of it. Glory be to Thee! This is a great calumny. Allah admonishes you that you return not to the like of it ever again, if you are believers. ... Those who love that scandal should circulate respecting those who believe, for them is a grievous chastisement in this world and the Hereafter" (Quran, 24:15-17, 19).

Sources:

- The Holy Quran
- Some of the Sayings of Ali

HONEST EARNINGS

Faith, patience, righteousness and truthfulness lead us to acquire our earnings in an honest manner. If we derive our income in a dishonest way, we will lose innumerable good qualities. Furthermore, more and more people will lose trust in us, if we act in a dishonest manner.

The Holy Quran stresses honesty in many verses, among them being:

"And swallow not up your property among yourselves by false means, nor seek to gain access thereby to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of men wrongfully while you know." (2:188)

"O you who believe, devour not your property among yourselves by illegal methods except that it be trading by your mutual consent. And kill not your people. Surely Allah is ever Merciful to you." (4:29-30)

"Woe to the cheaters! Who, when they take the measure (of their dues) from men, take it fully, and when they measure out to others or weigh out for them, they give less than is due." (83:1-3)

The Holy Prophet, too, has said: "The honest businessman will share in the reward of the Prophets."

Other religious scriptures also emphasise the characteristic of honesty, as we read below:

Bible: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." (Ephesians 4:28)

Hindu scriptures: "Let your conduct be marked by truthfulness in word, deed, and thought." (Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11.1)

When running our businesses, we should never succumb to means that are unworthy of us. The merchant who thinks that falsehood and fraud are allowed only cheats himself. He might gain many material benefits, but his spiritual self loses because he does not trust in the providence of his Lord, the Sustainer of mankind.

CHARITY

Some quotations from the Quran about spending in the way of Allah:

1. "The parable of those who spend their property in the way of Allah is as the parable of a grain growing seven ears with a hundred grains in every ear, and Allah multiplies for whom He pleases." (2:261).

2. "O you who believe! Give in charity of the good things you earn and of what We have brought forth for you out of the earth, and do not aim at giving in charity what is bad, while you would not take it yourselves." (2:267).

3. "If you give in charity openly it is well, and if you hide it and give it to the poor it is better for you. And it will do away with some of your evil deeds..." (2:271).

4. "Charity is only for the poor and the needy, and the collectors appointed for its collection, and those whose hearts are made to incline to truth, and the ransoming of captives, and those in debt, and for the way of Allah, and (for) the wayfarer." (9:60).

However, we should not make our charity worthless by reproach or injury, as the Quran says:

"Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah, then do not follow up what they have spent with reproach or injury, their reward is with their Lord, and they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve. A kind word with forgiveness is better than charity followed by injury..." (Quran 2:262-263)

Therefore, the Quran teaches us that it's better to spend in secret:

"If you manifest charity, how excellent it is! And if you hide it and give it to the poor, it is good for you. And it will do away with some of your evil deeds; and Allah is Aware of what you do." (2:271)

The Bible confirms this view:

"But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly." (Matthew 6:3-4)

THE SPIRIT OF HUMANITY KNOCKS AT THE DOOR OF ISLAM

by Maulana Muhammad Ali

There is demand throughout the world for something which would save humanity from the destruction to which it is hurrying headlong. The faith that unbounded material advancement and unthought-of conquests of nature will make humanity reach the heaven of happiness has been utterly shattered by the events of the past few years and there is a void which can only be filled by some securer faith. Material advancement has brought to man material benefits on a vast scale, but it has taken away the one thing which could bring him happiness; it has taken away peace and contentment of mind. Humanity today is groping in the dark for the contentment which only faith in God can bring to it. The entire world order stands in need of being reconstructed on the foundation-stone of faith in God and oneness of humanity, and this foundation-stone is in the possession of Islam.

The call comes from the West:

"For the fullest development of its cultural life, Europe cannot do without the forces and capacities which lie within Islamic society." (H.A.R. Gibb, *Whither Islam*, p. 378).

"At the other end, Europe, too, is experiencing a spiritual crisis which is by no means a purely temporary phenomenon, but is indeed in the last resort the inevitable outcome of that force which, since Europe's estrangement from Islam after the Crusades, has dominated its development: exaggerated individualism. This spiritual crisis might possibly lead to the elimination of the greatest of the dangers which is now threatening the Muslim world. Thence, perhaps, new powers might be born among the Oriental people which would check the present decay of Islam, or even turn it into new growth, if Europe were to continue along the lines which it is following at present. Who would deny the possibility at least of such a new development, after seeing, for instance, how movements like the Ahmadiyya, with its strong ethical powers and its, no doubt, deep religious feelings, are able to exercise a certain influence far beyond what has so far been considered to be the frontier of Muslim territory" (ibid. pp. 308, 309).

The reference to the concluding passage is clearly to the efforts which the Ahmadiyya Movement is making for carrying the light of Islam to the West. But the writer takes it for granted that Islam's march to the West is a march beyond its frontiers.

Not at all. The Holy Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] was told in clear words that the Western lands were as good a part of the territory of Islam as the Eastern lands. Here are his own words:

"My Lord contracted the earth for me (that is, showed me a plan of it) so that I saw its Eastern lands and its Western lands, and I was told that the territory of my followers would reach the lands which were shown to me."

The Prophet said this at a time when Islam had no territory at all, neither in the East, nor in the West, nor in Arabia itself. Today the Prophet's dream regarding the East is a hard reality; tomorrow will see the reality of his dream regarding the West. There is already a demand for Islam in the West and it is now the duty of the Muslim to carry the truth to the West to supply that demand. I know there is despair in some quarters among the Muslims. The West, they say, is lost beyond all hope and it is only waste of time, energy and money to carry the message of Islam to Europe. In other quarters, there is despondency due to the material advancement of Europe and the material backwardness of the East. The Muslims should conserve, it is argued, their whole energy for the amelioration of their own community instead of dissipating it on others. There are others who think that the task is too stupendous and the Muslims have not the resources to carry it on. To all these I would say that at the Prophet's advent, the whole world was lost beyond hope, yet the Prophet set to work for its betterment and he succeeded. The scheme to save humanity is a Divine scheme and it does not behove a believer in the goodness and wisdom of God to give way to despair under any circumstances. Just cast a glance at the past history of Islam. When Islam advanced to the East, the East was then materially great and spiritually dead, just as Europe is today. Nor was it with material resources that Islam conquered the East. It was the tremendous spiritual force of the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet which carried it forward to the East and broke down all resistance, and it is the same spiritual force that will make Islam conquer the West. The Holy Qur'an itself lays claim to being endowed with this mighty force which will break down all material resistance:

"And if there were a Qur'an with which the mountains could be made to pass away or with which the earth could be traversed from end to end or whereby the dead could be made to speak – nay! the command is wholly Allah's." (13:31).

"Had We sent down this Qur'an on a mountain, those wouldst have seen it falling down, splitting asunder, because of the fear of Allah, and We set forth these parables to men that they may reflect." (59:21).

The history of the rise and spread of Islam is an illustration of the great truth given expression to in

these verses. Islam won the world by its spiritual force, not by material resources. Anyone who has access to Arnold's Preachings of Islam can see it for himself. Another great modern author, Stoddard, thus begins his *The New World of Islam*:

"The rise of Islam is perhaps the most amazing event in human history.... The other great religions won their way slowly, by painful struggle, and finally triumphed with the aid of powerful monarchs converted to the new Faith. Christianity had its Constantine, Buddhism its Ashoka, and Zoroastrianism its Cyrus, each lending to his chosen cult the mighty force of secular authority. Not so Islam. Arising in a desert land sparsely inhabited by a nomad race previously undistinguished in human annals, Islam sallied forth on its great adventure with the slenderest human backing and against the heaviest material odds. Yet Islam triumphed with seemingly miraculous ease."

There is no reason to doubt in the face of those two testimonies – the testimony of the Prophet and the testimony of history – that Islam will one day be the predominant religion of the West as it is already the predominant religion of the East, and this dominance will be attained not by material resources but by the mighty spiritual force of the Qur'an. The Holy Book itself repeats this promise thrice:

"He it is Who sent His Messenger with the guidance and the true religion that He may make it triumphant over all religions." (9:38; 48:28; 61:9). Islam is at present faced with a double fight, against Christianity and Capitalism as prevailing in Europe and America, and against irreligion and Communism as prevailing in Russia and its dependencies. The present is a psychological moment for accepting the challenge of both Christianity and irreligion. If we strike with a united effort at this moment, we have every chance of success, but if we are indifferent, Christianity and irreligion will gain further ground in their respective spheres. By a little united effort and by widening our outlook on life, we can render important service to humanity; we may even save humanity from another cataclysm by turning its minds to high spiritual truths as revealed in the Holy Qur'an. There are only two factors which can save humanity from the destruction to which it is hurling itself down – a strong faith in God and a blotting off of national and racial prejudices, and both these factors can be supplied only by Islam. It was the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement on whose mind the idea dawned first of all, that the time had come to carry the message of Islam to the West. It was in 1891, when opposition to him was at the highest, that he wrote:

"What has been shown to me in a vision is this, that the rising of the sun from the West signifies that the Western world, which has been involved of old in the darkness of unbelief and error, shall be made to shine with the sun of Truth, and these people shall have a share of Islam. In reality, the Western countries have up to this time shown very little aptitude for spiritual truths, as if spiritual wisdom had in its entirety been granted to Asia and material wisdom to Europe and America. Now Almighty God intends to cast on them the look of mercy." (Izala Auham, p. 516).

He saw many such visions but he was not a mere visionary. In 1901, he started a religious magazine called *Review of Religions* to carry the message of Islam to the West. He died in 1908, and soon after his death, the Anjuman, which he had founded to carry on his work after his death, undertook the work of translating the Holy Qur'an into English. This was in 1909. Three years after this, the first Muslim mission in Europe, known as the Working Mission, was established by one of his disciples, the late Khwaja Kamal al-Din.

MANDELA'S DREAM FOR THE 21st CENTURY

July 18th, 2018 marks the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela. This provides a unique opportunity for people around the world to reflect on his life and times and to promote his legacy.

Below is a summary of his speech at the Parliament of World Religions, December 5, 1999.

"Even in the closing decade of the century, we have witnessed how internecine strife degenerated into genocide with former neighbours participating in the slaughter of each other. This century, unfortunately, had too many leaders attempting to exploit communal differences for their own political ends. We have had men who were so arrogant that they wanted to conquer the world and turn human beings into their slaves. Alexander the Great, Caesar, Napoleon and Hitler are some examples. But it was the ordinary people, not kings and generals, it was the ordinary people who put an end to those dictators. And it is for that reason that the real leaders of the world are those who for 24 hours a day think in terms of the poorest of the poor. It is those men and women who know that poverty is the single most dangerous threat to society in the world today.

I must also add that I do appreciate the importance of religion. You'd have to have been in a South African jail under apartheid where you can see the cruelty of human beings to others. But it was religious institutions, Hindus, Moslems, leaders of the Jewish faith, Christians, who gave us the hope that one day we would come out. And in prisons, the religious institutions raised funds for our children who were arrested in thousands and thrown into jail. And many when they left prison had a high level of education because of the support we got from religious institutions. And that is why we so respect religious institutions and we try as much as we can to read the literature which outlines the fundamental principles of human behaviour like the Bhagavad Gita, Koran, the Bible and other important religious documents.

As we approach the 21st century, we cannot but be starkly aware that we stand at a crossroads in our history. The world is still marked by massive inequality. The general citizenry to which we referred — those women, men and children who merely desire and have inalienable right to lead a decent life — continue to suffer deprivation and poverty. In too many parts of the world warfare and violent conflict still reign. The powerful dominate at the expense of the poor and the vulnerable. The symbolic turn of the century calls us to a commitment to make the coming century one in which these and other issues of human development are fundamentally addressed. No less than in any other period of history, religion will have a crucial role to play in guiding and inspiring humanity to meet the enormous challenges that we face.

The world is undergoing a profound redefinition of values and modes of perception. The globalization of the world economy and the outstanding advances of communications technology have drawn all of us together into a smaller world. Those technical advances might, however, also have contributed to a growing confusion of values as people seek to find their localized places in that globalized world. The escalation of poverty in a world that is at the same time marked by excessive wealth, the suffering and marginalization of vulnerable groups at a time when the concepts of

democracy and equality are supposed to have become universal, the growing degradation of the environment often caused by the greed of industrial development. These are but some of the contradictions that at heart are moral and ethical questions. And on the level of personal life as the world supposedly becomes smaller, the loneliness of individual human beings across the globe increases.

Religion faces its own challenges. We have seen how religion at times provided the basis and even gave legitimization to violent expressions of intolerance and conflict. Tragically, religion sometimes seemed to have lost its ability to hold people to good values and to inspire in them those articles and approaches that transcend the narrow and immediate considerations. Religious leaders, institutions and adherents now once more need to draw upon those critical resources that have made it such a central part of human life throughout the ages. Few other dimensions of human life reach such a massive following as the religious. Its roots are in every nook and cranny of society where political leaders and the economically powerful have no sway. The religions and faiths of our world have pondered over and listened. Hence the importance to once again draw on those forces of spirituality and innate goodness.

No government or social agency can on its own meet the enormous challenges of development of our age. Partnerships are required across the broad range of society. In drawing upon its spiritual and communal resources, religion can be a powerful partner in such causes as meeting the challenges of poverty, alienation, the abuse of women and children, and the destructive disregard for our natural environment.

Source:
<https://parliamentofreligions.org/parliament/1999-cape-town/nelson-mandelas-speech-1999-parliament>

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Have you used one to say "thank you?"
- William Arthur Ward**

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