

# 9

## PEACE BE UPON YOU

When I said that we should respond to the greeting of peace<sup>1</sup> from non-Muslims who are not hostile towards Islam, some extremists objected vehemently on the basis that “our religious teachers in the *pondok* never taught us that.”<sup>2</sup> They considered the whole body of Islamic knowledge to be contained within the *pondoks* of their youth. Some *ustaz* (religious teachers) even prohibit themselves reading about or considering any subject not already known to the *mazhabs* (schools of *fiqh*) of the Malay Archipelago or to the elders of their communities. We can’t deny the contribution of *pondok*-style teaching in the region, but baseless sentiment does not qualify as knowledge in Islam.

Islam is a religion of peace. Its form and essence have at their core firm values and true splendour. It will be truly beautiful if we base our understanding of it on the foundations of the Quran and Sunnah. The opinions of the *ustaz* don’t all conform to these two supreme sources, and not all who have been named “*ustaz*” have mastered the subjects they teach or preach about. If we were all in accord with the Quran and Sunnah, surely there would not be such fundamental conflict among the *ustaz*. But if there were no accord at all our *ustaz*, divided politically, would surely fall into accusing one another of

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1. *As-Salamu `alaikum*, “peace be upon you”.

2. *Pondok* is Malay for ‘hut’, but term is used to describe the particularly narrow, uninformed worldview often found in rural communities.

religious deviation. Ultimately, the views of the faithful may be accepted or rejected. What cannot be rejected is the testimony of the Quran and Sunnah. Whoever presents arguments based on these two supreme sources and adheres to their study according to academic discipline will have his opinions validated. No one, whether *ustaz*, religious teacher or *mufti*, is a Prophet or Messenger whose words are valued as if weighed on the scales of the Divine.

Returning to the issue of the *salam*, was what I said about responding to a non-Muslim's *salam* such a terrible innovation, or is it that some in the religious community tend more towards considerations of local sentiment and do not hold to learned discussion? Here I wish to quote Imam Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah (d. 751H) in his celebrated work *Zad al-Ma'ad*:

There is a difference of opinion among the scholars of the *salaf* (the first generation of Muslims) and *khalaf* (recent generations) regarding the ruling of offering *salam* to Jews and Christians. Many *ulama* (scholars) say that *salam* must not be offered to them. Others, however, say the *salam* should be offered them, just as their greetings of *salam* should be answered. This second opinion may be traced to Ibn `Abbas, Abu Umamah and Ibn Muhairiz. It is also of the opinion of the Shafi'i *mazhab*, but it is the *mazhab's* opinion that the reply should take the form: *as-Salamu `alaika*, without saying *wa rahmatullah*, and on the basis of *ifrad* (directed to a single person).<sup>3</sup>

Some scholars argue: "The greeting of *salam* should be offered to Jews and Christians because goodness is more important, or for fear of their reactions, or to sustain family ties, or for any other necessity." This position can be traced to Ibrahim al-Nakha'i and `Alqamah.

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3. In Arabic, *as-Salamu `alaika* is the masculine singular of *as-Salamu `alaikum* (plural of three or more people where at least one is male). *As-Salamu `alaikum wa rahmatullah* means "the peace and blessing of Allah be upon you" such that the deletion of *wa rahmatullah* removes an inappropriate Muslim reference in greetings to non-Muslims. See *Glossary*, s.v. *Salam*.

Imam al-Auza'i said: "If you greet them (Jews and Christians) with *salam*, then surely they have been greeted thus by some of the pious before you. If you do not greet them with *salam*, then the same has been done by some of the pious before you."

The *ulama* have a difference of opinion about replying to the greeting of *salam*. The majority view is that an equal reply is compulsory and this is the accepted opinion. Some scholars say that a reply is not compulsory." And he adds: "It has been authentically recorded in a hadith that the Prophet *pbuh* passed through a mixed gathering of Muslims, idolaters and Jews, and he greeted them all with *salam*. (*Zad al-Ma'ad*, Beirut: Muassasah al-Risalah, 1990, 2/425-426.).

Imam al-Bukhari in his book *Al-Adab al-Mufrad* under the topic *Kaif al-Radd 'ala Ahl al-Zimmah* ("Replying to the Greeting of Salam from the People of the Covenant")<sup>4</sup> reported the words Ibn `Abbas: "Respond to the *salam*, regardless of whether it comes from the Jews, Christians or the Zoroastrians, for Allah has decreed (*Surah Al-Nisa*, verse 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.'" (This narration is accounted *hasan*, i.e. "sound").

There are other accounts in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, especially in the chapter *Iza Kataba al-Zimmi Pasallama, Yuradd 'Alaihi* ("Replying to Letters Containing the Greeting of *Salam* from the People of the Covenant"). This chapter contains a *sahih* (authentic) account about Abu Musa al-Ash'ari who wrote a letter to a priest and in it conveyed *salam*. He was asked: "Did you greet him with *salam* even though he is an unbeliever?" Abu Musa answered: "He wrote me a letter containing the greeting of *salam* and so I replied the same way."

Accounts like these ought to be read by *ustaz* and whoever else intends to discuss this matter prior to issuing a judgment that any opinion is

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4. The People of the Covenant are religious minorities living in Muslim states, whose rights Muslims are enjoined to protect.

heretical. Unfortunately in this country there are religious groups that will not use facts as the foundation of discussion, and instead they turn to the sentiments of their traditional teachers for the measure of truth.

As for the hadiths that tell us to reply “*wa ‘alaikum*” (and also upon you) to the greeting of *salam* of the Jews, this was because the Prophet *pbuh* said the Jews of his time had the tendency to present the greeting as “*as-Samu ‘alaikum*”: death or destruction upon you. Their purpose was merely to confuse Muslims, and because of this the Prophet *pbuh* asked his followers to reply only with “*wa‘alaikum*”. This matter was clearly mentioned in his hadith: “When the Jews greet you, they usually say *as-Samu ‘alaikum*, so you should say (in reply to them), *wa‘alaikum*.” (Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim.)

It is clear that this hadith possesses a *sabab al-wurud* (specific reason for its conception), namely that it refers to a particular occasion or situation in which Jews mocked the greeting of *salam* and altered it to an expression that sounded almost the same, but with a completely different meaning. In other words, this hadith was not intended to apply in all situations.

And so, in a different situation, when non-Muslims greet us with *salam* using the correct phrase and with the noble reason of wishing us peace, then the hadith above cannot be applied. Is it really appropriate that we, as adherents of the religion of peace, should reject the blessings and good wishes of others in so improper a fashion? Absolutely not! And even more so as we are in a phase where Islam is viewed so prejudicially by the enemies of the Ummah. At the very least, not replying properly to the greeting of *salam* from non-Muslims departs from the commands of these two verses of the Quran:

First, *Surah Al-Nisa*, verse 86: “When a (courteous) greeting is offered to you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or (at least) of equal courtesy. Allah takes careful account of all things.”

Second, *Surah Al-Mumtahanah*, verses 8-9: "Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just. Allah only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong."

Consequently, the prominent scholar of hadith Sheikh Nasir al-Din al-Albani said:

This verse (*Surah al-Mumtahanah*, verse 8) clearly advocates kind and just treatment of the non-Muslim subjects of an Islamic nation, who offer peace and pose no threat to the Believers. Undoubtedly, if any one among them greets us by clearly saying *as-Salamu `alaikum*, and we reply it with a mere *wa `alaika*, verily this is most unjust and departs from virtue. It is because we have treated them as though they are among those who said *as-samu `alaikum* (death on you). This is an utter cruelty. (*Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'arif, 1995, 2/322.)

Even the scholars who prohibit responding to the *salam* of non-Muslims assert that, if conditions require it, then it is permissible to reply. They cite such examples as the avoidance of harm or other evil consequences. I say that, based on clear evidence from the Quran and Sunnah, and taking into consideration the reality of our lives, the condition of the Ummah today requires us to give equal reply to the greeting of *salam* from non-Muslims. The refusal to return a courtesy with an equal courtesy will only besmirch the divine face of Islam. Thus, replying to the *salam* of others in this era is obligatory both in the context of upholding the words of the Quran, and of fulfilling the responsibility of *dakwah* (missionary work).

# 10

## OF NAMES, JUSTICE AND ISLAM

The Perlis Shariah Committee provoked much public discussion when it debated the issue of retaining the name of one's father upon conversion to Islam.<sup>1</sup> Even those who have long been silent have emerged with statements to the media. Emotion and sentiment play active parts in this. Some are waiting for just the right moment, for the opportunity. I say: be patient.

This was not in fact a *fatwa* I issued in my personal capacity. It was the unanimous decision of all twelve committee members in attendance. The majority of them were university lecturers in various Islamic studies and many possessed PhDs. *Alhamdulillah*, Perlis has the largest number of *fatwa* committee members, and it would be wrong to think that this matter was decided without thought.

This is quite a unique issue. Only in our country does a convert to Islam have to change his or her name (and therefore descent) to Abdullah. I am not sure if this is the practice in Brunei, but it certainly does not occur in the Arab countries or in Indonesia. So, if there was an association in this country which has a few hundred converts as members, all of them would have the same 'bin' or 'binti'

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1. [Author's Note] I chaired the 10 March 2007 meeting of the Committee as Mufti of Perlis. This decision provoked extensive media coverage in Malaysia and Singapore.

(son or daughter of), that is “Abdullah”. If there are ten Ahmads, for example, how very confusing it will be as they will all be named “Ahmad bin Abdullah”. And so the officers of such an association would have to memorise their identification card numbers instead. Similarly, should a husband and wife embrace Islam they will become two individuals whose father has the same name: Abdullah.

If the Prophet *pbuh* practised this then surely the majority of his Companions would have had the name “bin Abdullah”. There would not be `Umar bin al-Khattab but `Umar bin Abdullah instead, nor Uthman bin `Affan but `Uthman bin Abdullah. There would be no `Ali bin Abi Talib but `Ali bin Abdullah. All of their fathers did not embrace Islam. But this is not what happened. The Prophet *pbuh* did change the unseemly names of some who embraced Islam, but they kept the names of their fathers; and the fact is that Arabs preserve their heritage and can name their descent to several generations. If we turn to the opening the celebrated book *Riyadh al-Salihin* by Imam al-Nawawi (d. 676H), we find the first hadith to be from `Umar bin al-Khattab. Imam al-Nawawi says: “Amir al-Mukminin `Umar bin al-Khattab bin Nufail bin `Abd al-`Uzza...”

“`Abd al-`Uzza” means the servant of al-`Uzza.<sup>1</sup> The name of the Prophet’s great grandfather was “bin Kilab” and *kilāb* is Arabic for “dog”. Islam did not change what was certain.

There are those who try to tie this issue to *akidah* (faith), as if the Perlis Shariah Committee did not take *akidah* into consideration. They feared that if the father’s name contained an element of *syirik* (any other God), this might affect the *akidah* of his son or daughter who embraces Islam. How weak-minded this is. Do they not realise that not only does the father have a name with elements of *syirik*, the father *himself* practices *syirik*. For example: if Gopal the son of Subramaniam converts to Islam and changes his name to Marwan,

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2. Al-`Uzzá (العزى) was a pre-Islamic goddess equated by the Nabateans with the Greek Aphrodite (i.e. the Roman Venus).

do we also want to change the name of Subramaniam – who does not approve of Islam as the true religion – to Abdullah?<sup>3</sup> And so every time we meet Subramaniam we shall have to address him “O Abdullah” for fear that addressing him as Subramaniam it will ruin his son’s *akidah*. Truly, *syirik* has nothing to do with this! If merely the name of Subramaniam can damage Marwan’s *akidah*, what happens when Subramaniam goes to the temple? Will Marwan become an outright apostate? Doesn’t this kind of thinking demonstrate how poorly some people understand the concept of *akidah*?

Some asked us why we raised this matter. This, after all, has been the practice for a long time. We told them that there were always grounds for any issue brought for discussion in the State Shariah Committee: there may be questions about it, or people might be unclear about religious rulings. An issue is debated for any of these reasons.

Briefly, the two main reasons for the Committee’s resolution were thus: first, there exists textual evidence in the Quran and Sunnah prohibiting the current practice. Allah says: “Call them by (the names of) their fathers, that is juster in the sight of Allah. But if you know not their father’s (names, call them) your brothers in faith or your *mawla’s*.<sup>4</sup> And there is no sin on you if you make a mistake therein: (what counts is) the intention of your hearts: and Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.” (*Surah al-Ahzab*, verse 5.) Imam al-Tabari (d. 310H) said in his *Tafsir al-Tabari*: “This verse is the reason why one may not claim to be the son of him who is not one’s father. There are also hadith that strictly prohibit this.”

This issue appears frequently in the hadith of the Prophet *pbuh*, among which is one that states: “Whoever claims to be the son of

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3. On official forms Gopal would have written his name “Gopal a/l Subramaniam” and his sister “Ranjeetha a/p Subramaniam” where “a/l” (*anak lelaki*) means “son of” and “a/p” (*anak perempuan*), “daughter of”. In practice the patronymic is usually abbreviated to an initial, thus S. Gopal and S. Ranjeetha.

4. i.e. those entrusted to one’s care.

a person other than his father, and he knows that person is not his father, Paradise will be forbidden to him.” (Reported by al-Bukhari.) He also said: “Among the major falsehoods is when one claims that he is the son of a person other than his father.” (Reported by al-Bukhari.)

Why is this prohibited? Islam is a religion that values and protects human rights. It is a religion that never distorts fact. A father, regardless of who he is, is forever a father because it is from his seed that his descendants rightfully spring, and not from the seed of another. His child is tied to him, and moreover there are regulations relating to rights, marriage and property. To reject a father or to act as if he does not exist can cause confusion in genealogy, muddles in marriage and the denial of family responsibility – and Islam is a religion that upholds rights and justice, and promotes human well-being. Dr Wahbah al-Zuhaili said in his work *al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuhu*:

Justice and rights demand that one is acknowledged to be the child of one’s true father. Not an invented father. Islam is a religion of rights and justice [...] and whosoever has a father that he knows about must assert his kinship. When a person does not have a father he knows about, only then he is referred to as *mawlā* or a brother in Islam. All this is done to prevent the distortion of truth. (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1989, 7/674.)

Islam is an upright religion. Abu Bakr al-Jazairi in his exegetical work *Aisar al-Tafasir* said sarcastically that “it is right that adopted children be acknowledged children of their known fathers, even though the father may be a donkey.”

The Prophet *pbuh* changed the name of one who embraced Islam only when his name bore an unworthy meaning – but he did not change the father’s name. For instance, he changed the name of one of his Companions from `Abd al-Syams bin Sokhr to `Abd al-Rahman bin Sokhr because “`Abd al-Syams” meant “servant

of the Sun". However, the name Sokhr ("rock") was retained. Furthermore, he did not change the name of Abdullah bin `Abd al-Asad even though "`Abd al-Asad" meant "servant of the lion". The Prophet *pbuh* did not say that a father's name had to be changed for fear of ruining the son's *akidah*. Those who desire details of this should consult those scholars of hadith who have mastered the *Kutub al-Tarajim*; or they can refer directly to books of *al-tarajim* that discuss the biographies of those who are mentioned in the history of Islam. Some of these include *Al-Isobah fi Tamyiz al-Sahabah* by al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala* by al-Hafiz al-Zahabi, and many others.

If this was the practice of the Prophet *pbuh* and his Companions, do we mean to say that we are more conversant with Islam than they were? Do we imply that the Prophet *pbuh* cared so little for *akidah* that he allowed a Companion to be called son of "the servant of the lion"? O commentators! Let us read more widely and not get ahead of ourselves.

Secondly, we raised this matter because we intended to preserve the good name of Islam. Today, Islam is attacked from many directions, and a common misconception is that Islam does not value human rights. In our country, many non-Muslims think that Islam is unjust because it breaks the ties binding a son to his father. When people embrace Islam, some of their fathers say: "You have converted, and I, who have toiled so much for you, you have discarded. Even my name is gone. Who is this Abdullah, this new father of yours?" For this reason many oppose Islam even more and worry greatly if their children convert. Sometimes, those who intend to convert ultimately cannot because they love their families and have no wish to cause them pain. How much worse all this will be when he is told to discard his family's or his father's name!

In truth, Islam enjoins one to do good by one's parents, even if they do not embrace Islam. This remains true even if the parents

endeavour to make him leave Islam. Allah commands that a person does good by his parents, and this command stands. All that is required is that the child does not cling to the old ways of *syirik*, *kufur* (rejection of Allah) and disobedience. Look at what Allah says in *Surah Luqman*, verse 15: “But if they strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice (and consideration).”

The question we should pose is whether we shall behave kindly towards our parents—as commanded by the verse above—if we refuse to be acknowledged as their children, or if we change their names without their approval, or if they reject the new ‘bin’ as their name. Does this not wound their hearts for no good reason? And all this time Islam commands us to act with justice and consideration towards our parents even they are not Muslims. Islam honours what is good and it honours the rights of all.

Moreover, don’t such actions cause non-Muslims to hate and to think ill of Islam? And is it not our duty to preserve the good name of Islam? For these reasons I believe that the Perlis Shariah Committee had very strong reasons to discuss the matter. Just because a practice has endured for a long time doesn’t mean that it must be retained and cannot be changed. The respected Malay intellectual Za’ba (Zainal Abidin Ahmad) wrote in his magnificent work *Perangai Bergantung Kepada Diri Sendiri* (“Attitude Depends on Us Alone”):

It is only in recent centuries that the Muslim intellectuals, almost the world over, have lost the spirit of individual ability and the qualifications to do as their predecessors have done. Yes, if we go searching for them, we might find that a few know how to be individuals, or are brave enough to be such; but everywhere we will find those who are accustomed to *taklid* (adherence without question), and worse, most of them adhere blindly!

Unfortunately, if anyone tries to do what was done by past scholars of Islam – that is, to free themselves from the shackles of *taklid* and to return to the Quran and Hadith to meet the ever-changing needs and conditions of the modern world – they will forthwith have hurled at them such unworthy words as ‘deviant’ and ‘causing others to deviate’, ‘conceited’, ‘innovator’, ‘wandering from the way charted by experts of the past’, ‘young and inexperienced but arrogant enough to challenge his elders and betters’ and much more. Such people believe that it is right merely to sit still and petrify right where they are! And it is probably because they themselves are incapable that they resent others who are capable. (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, 2005, p. 33.)

# 11

## PREACHING TO THE UNCONVERTED

I am very reluctant to accept invitations (and there are many of them) to seminars and colloquia on apostasy. While their organisers have their own reasons for these meetings, I would like to see a wider seminar on the large number of converts to Islam.

In the run up to general elections, there will be stories in various newspapers about members or political parties renouncing their loyalties. Whether the news is true or false, it is part of a psychological war intended to weaken a party's election machinery and to discourage those intending to vote for them. And so it is with the issue of apostasy: if all we talk about is people leaving the religion, we dishearten those few sincere Muslim missionaries and break the spirits of non-Muslims who wish to know more about our religion.

Is there anything more unfortunate than a religion that not only fails to attract others to it, but has its own adherents abandoning it too? Those who make a fuss of the large number of Muslim apostates play an important role, whether directly or indirectly, in weakening the Ummah from within and preventing others from approaching this Divine religion.

We have read about the great Muslim leader `Umar bin al-Khattab, who once advised Muslim soldiers, headed by Saad bin Abi Waqqas,

who were preparing for the Qadisiyyah war against the Persians. His advice was filled with pearls of wisdom, among which was this:

That which has brought victory to the Muslims is no more than the sins of their enemies. But for this fact, we would not have had the strength to face our enemies. Our strength is not as theirs, and our preparations (equipment) are not as theirs. If we were their equal in sin, then certainly we should have the advantage in strength. But if we are unable to triumph with the advantage of the God-fearing, then we shall certainly not be able to defeat them through might. (Dr `Ali al-Salabi, *Umar bin al-Khattab*, Cairo: Dar al-Tauzi' Wa al-Nasyr al-Islamiyyah, p. 420.)

`Umar's speech remains fascinating and full of meaning. It is a lesson for us, the Ummah, who are now so defeatist. I wish, however, to look at the reverse: if `Umar said "our strength is not as theirs, and our preparations (equipment) are not as theirs," the reality in our country is the opposite. The number of Muslims is increasing, the Government's budget and other allocations for Islamic programmes are abundant. Even income from *zakat* (obligatory charity) grows every year – although the poor still suffer – and Islamic departments and officers are numerous.

We have departments, organisations, foundations, courts, legislation and many other provisions dedicated to the interests of Islam. So why does it seem as if we are a defeated Ummah? If we can't be victorious through our sincere devotion to Allah, can we at least succeed through physical ability?

A person travelling on foot will eventually reach his destination if he keeps walking in the right direction. But a person in a fancy luxury car will go nowhere if he remains stationary, picking over how fine his car is without actually driving it anywhere. That is our condition today. We should be asking how far we have really moved this wonderful car of ours.

What should have happened is this: in accordance with the beauty of Islam, the longer non-Muslims live in a Muslim community the more comfortable they will feel and the more they will esteem Muslims, if they don't embrace Islam altogether. But the reality is that, with each passing day, the seeds of bigotry and prejudice blossom between them and us. I have no intention here of discussing the non-Muslim community and their agenda. But it is possible that it is we who have failed to present the true face of Islam which upholds values and honour. In time, Islam itself could become very unattractive to all of them.

We have failed to present positive values to them from the perspectives of economics and the affairs of the world. If we wish so much that the non-Muslims respect Islam through our successes in economic development and way of life, it seems that such wishes are simply too woolly. There is no shortcut to economic success. All that is left to us is to show how well the teachings of Islam shape the noble ethics of the Ummah. Indeed, there are still many people in this world who value grace more than wealth.

Sadly, our system of *dakwah* (missionary work) for the non-Muslims is wholly non-existent. A new Muslim convert complained that when he first decided to embrace Islam, he contacted the relevant authorities and was told by an official: "If you want to convert, you have to do it during office hours and wait until I come into the office." I'd like to suggest that the official post a notice on his door saying "time to embrace Islam: 8am to 5pm". Our *dakwah* spirit is shaky and yet we are baffled by why others are uninterested in Islam. Other people work hard for their religion regardless of time or sacrifice; and so we should not be surprised if they prevail in this competition.

Many non-Muslims have the wrong idea about Islam's attitude towards them. They think that Islam promotes hatred and hostility to non-Muslims for no reason; but Allah says in *Surah Al-Mumtahanah*, verses 8-9: "Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight

you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just. Allah only forbids you, with regard to those who fight you for (your) Faith, and drive you out of your homes, and support (others) in driving you out, from turning to them (for friendship and protection). It is such as turn to them (in these circumstances), that do wrong.”

But what is there to be surprised about if they misunderstand Islam? They see many Muslims receiving welfare aid from them, such as those after the Tsunami, the chronically ill and the like. Some Muslims regularly visit their places of worship to receive free medical aid, while on our part we don't give them much of anything. Furthermore, the positions of local *mazhab* (schools of *fiqh*) are so narrow that we even ban giving them meat from an animal slaughtered for feasts of *korban* (sacrifice) or *akikah* (thanksgiving), even if they are our next-door neighbours. It gets to the point that, when we invite the public to partake in the feast, we deliberately do not invite non-Muslims for fear that their presence will nullify our *korban* or *akikah*.

Neither the Quran nor the hadith say any such thing. Even the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Fatwa of Saudi Arabia, when asked about this, said:

Yes, we are allowed to give sacrificial meat to a non-Muslim who does not wage war against Islam, or to a non-Muslim prisoner of war. We are allowed to offer the meat of sacrifice to alleviate his poverty, or due to family ties or as a neighbour, or so as to win his heart. (11/424.)

But because of our blind adherence to a specific *mazhab*, many of us are narrow-minded when it comes to this issue. The funny thing is, we hold back a few pieces of *korban* meat but at the same time we're pawning our licences, permits, projects and land to the non-

Muslims. And we are also narrow-minded on the matter of greeting *salam* to non-Muslims, as we've seen in Chapter 9.

Many get worried when certain religious groups give aid to Muslims in times of crisis. They fear that Muslims will be influenced by them. But the question is why don't we give aid to the non-Muslims? We have a *Baitulmal* (general fund for Muslims), "surplus" *zakat*<sup>1</sup> and other resources that can be used to attract Muslims and non-Muslims alike to get to know the religion better. What's troubling is that there are some Muslims who believe that no reward awaits them for being charitable to non-Muslims. This is absolutely untrue.

In the time of the Prophet *pbuh*, Muslims at first also hesitated in giving aid to non-Muslims. They felt that high reward would be gained only if charity was given to those of the same faith. To address their concerns, Allah revealed in *Surah Al-Baqarah*, verse 272: "It is not required of you (O Messenger), to set them on the right path, but Allah sets on the right path whom He pleases. Whatever of good you give benefits your own souls, and you shall only do so seeking the "Face" of God. Whatever good you give, shall be rendered back to you, and you shall not be dealt with unjustly."

This verse means that charity to anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim, a good person or not, will still be rewarded as long as the intention of the giver is to seek Allah's blessing (see Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Quran al-'Azim*, Saudi Arabia: Dar 'Alam al-Kutub, 2/476.)

Even in the distribution of *zakat*, some scholars say that the allocation dedicated for new converts may also be given to non-Muslims who bear no hostility towards Islam. Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi is among those who hold this view (see his *Fiqh al-Zakah*, Beirut: Muassasah al-Risalah, 2/707). Whether poor or not, non-Muslims may be given a part of *zakat* if this helps bring their hearts closer to Islam.

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1. See Chapter 16.

But our definition on the term new convert (*mu'alaf*) is so narrow that *zakat* fails to function as part of the agenda of *dakwah*. And so it is unsurprising that *zakat* funds are in surplus every year while, at the same time, the problems of our Ummah keep increasing.

In the past, some considered it ill if the funeral procession of a non-Muslim should pass in front of them. However, it is said in a hadith: "There passed a bier before the Holy Prophet *pbuh* and he stood up (to pay his respects). He was told that it was the funeral of a Jew. The Prophet *pbuh* responded: 'Was he not human or did he not have a soul?'" (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.) Such fine values should be made clear to the non-Muslims so that they may look up to our Prophet *pbuh*. We should not try to bind religion to the values of extremism.

Our mosques should do the same as those in the time of the Prophet *pbuh*. Non-Muslims were permitted to enter mosques and listen to lectures and religious talks or, if they were in need, to receive financial aid. Mosques should be open to non-Muslims that they might come to know Islam, to see the devotion of Muslims and to get more information about the religion. This was exactly what happened in the time of the Prophet *pbuh*.

Representatives, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, from many lands came to meet the Prophet *pbuh* in his mosque. But for us today, if a non-Muslim enters a mosque or comes to witness the devotion of Muslims, a narrow-minded kind of thinking will activate immediately.

There is much more to be discussed. I suggest that we include in our religious studies syllabus (in mosques and schools) the subject of jurisprudence or Islamic ethics as applied in our interactions with non-Muslims. I say this in the hope that the Light of our beautiful religion will shine before them.