

ISLAM IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

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Abstract: The present article gives Islamic principles on how to live in a pluralistic society. The basic principle in this regard is mutual respect. While Islam believes in the oneness of reality, it lays equal stress on the practice of respect in everyday dealings with others. Islam promotes acceptance of diversity and differences and seeks to promote unity using the principle: 'Follow one, and respect all'. Religious freedom is a pivotal practice of Islam. Acceptance and celebrating it requires that everyone be allowed to present one's thoughts, and be given a quiet hearing. Essentially, Islam promotes predictability of behaviour, which is a consequence of belief in the Hereafter. As such a believer must adhere to the values of love, justness and compassion in one's dealings with others.

Keywords: Acceptance of Diversity, Acceptance of Others, Follow One Respect All, Love for All, Mutual Respect, Predictability, Prophet Muhammad, Religious Freedom.

1. Introduction

Islam is the name given to teachings of the Quran and the Hadith, and the finest example of living up to this standard was set by the Prophet and his Companions. The deeds of later generations, judged by these criteria, will be sadly

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deficient in true Islamic spirit. Those who make no attempt to live up to the Prophet's example are in no way representatives of Islam. As such to understand Islam one must look at Islam as enshrined in the Quran, Sunnah and Seerah. One must judge the actions of Muslims based on the original Islamic sources and not vice versa. The present article gives Islamic principles on how to live in a pluralistic society.

Mutual respect is the basic principle of living in a pluralistic society according to Islam. Islam recognizes no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims from the ethical standpoint. While Islam believes in the oneness of reality, it lays equal stress on the practice of mutual respect in everyday dealings with others as mentioned in the following verse of the Quran: "To you, your religion, and to me, mine." (Quran, 109:6)

This verse lays the basis of harmonious living in a pluralistic society. Islam promotes acceptance of diversity and differences and seeks to promote unity despite them, instead of searching for an imaginary unity by trying to do away with them. The method to solve the issue of religious differences that Islam gives is: 'Follow one, and respect all' given in the above Quranic verse.

Religious freedom is a pivotal practice of Islam. Acceptance and celebrating it requires that everyone be allowed to present one's thoughts, and be given a quiet hearing. One's thoughts are not to be forced upon others, but something to be gently presented. Islam further promotes love for all. This relationship can be established between all human beings only if they regard one another as sisters and brothers. Only then will proper feelings of love and respect prevail throughout the world.

According to Islam, the person who becomes useful to others leads one's life on a higher plane. But if one fails to do so, one should at least create no trouble to fellow human beings. For a person to be a really faithful servant of God, one must live either as a giver or as a no-problem person. There is no third option. Essentially, Islam promotes predictability of

behaviour, which is a consequence of belief in the Hereafter. As such a believer must adhere to the values of love, justness and compassion in one's dealings with others.

2. Harmonious Living in Pluralistic Societies

Islam gives many principles on how to live in a pluralistic society. For the greater part of his life, the Prophet of Islam lived in a society where adherents of other religions existed side-by-side with believers in Islam. The Prophet's behaviour towards the former was invariably that of respect and tolerance. At a time when the majority of the denizens of Makkah were still idolaters, his conduct consistently conveyed his high moral character. On the one hand, he communicated to them the message of God with love and kindness and, on the other, fulfilled all of their human rights. That is why the non-Muslims of Makkah had such great confidence in him, to the point of entrusting their belongings to his care. This they continued to do right up to the last days of his stay in Makkah.

After the attainment of his prophethood in 610 AD, the prophet lived in Makkah for a period of 13 years, later migrating to Madinah, where he lived for ten years until his death in 632 AD. For about half of this period in Madinah, he was living among people belonging to three religions—Muslims, Jews and polytheists. The Prophet devised a Constitution for these people, known in history as *Sahifa-e-Madinah* (The Madinah Charter). This charter expressly mentioned that issues concerning these three groups domiciled in Madinah would be decided on the basis of their own religious traditions—those of Muslims according to their Islamic traditions, and those of the polytheists and Jews according to their respective traditions.¹ This principle of Islam was intended to apply at all places where Muslims lived along with adherents of other religions. This *sunnah*, or practice of the Prophet, for a plural society carries the same

¹Ibn Hisham, Abdul Malik Bin Hisham (compiler) and Rawuf Sad, Taha Abdul, ed., *Al-Seerah Al-Nabwiyah (of Ibn Hisham)* (Arabic), 6 Vols. Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, 1411 AH, Vol. 1, 503.

moral authority as other of his practices. Islam recognizes no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims from the ethical standpoint. The rights granted to a Muslim are exactly the same as those granted to a non-Muslim.

2.1. Principle of Mutual Respect

Islam advocates acceptance of ideological differences. This is on a parallel with the principle expressed in the saying: Let us agree to disagree. In this connection, one of the commands of the Quran is that there shall be no compulsion in religion (Quran 2:256). In another verse the Quran declares you have your religion and I have mine (Quran 109:6).

It was as a result of this commandment which can be described as mutual respect that, when the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Madinah, he issued a declaration reaffirming his acceptance of the religion of Muslims for the Muslims and the religion of Jews for the Jews. This principle formulated by Islam is best described, not as 'religious harmony', but, rather, as 'harmony among religious people'. This is a principle whose utility is a matter of historical record. It is evident that in the past, as well as in the present, wherever religious harmony has existed, it has been based on unity despite differences, rather than on unity without differences. It is not based on agreeing to agree, but, rather, on agreeing to disagree.

One extremely revolutionary example of this principle is to be found in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. It concerns the conference of three religions, which was held in the Prophet's mosque in Madinah. A 60-member Christian delegation from Najd had come to Madinah to determine the situation there. They stayed at the Prophet's mosque. The delegation entered with the Prophet into public debate, and these were soon joined by the Jews, thus resulting in a tripartite dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This was a truly great congress, which the city of Yathrib [the earlier name for Madinah] had witnessed. They carried out dialogues and discussions on various religious topics for many days. Reports

say that during this period, when it was time for the Christians to pray, they stood up in the mosque itself and prayed according to their custom. The Prophet Muhammad saw this, and let them continue what they were doing. So they performed their prayer in the mosque. This conference is described by Muhammad Husain Haykal in his book, *The Life of Muhammad*.²

Although Islam believes in the oneness of reality, it lays equal stress on the practice of respect in everyday dealings with others, even if it means going to the extent of permitting people of other faiths to come to an Islamic place of worship for religious discussion, and if it is time for their prayers, letting them feel free to perform their worship according to their own ways in the mosque itself.

2.2. Principle of Accepting Others

There is a very relevant incident from the life of the Prophet of Islam. Once the Prophet was seated at some place in Madinah, along with his Companions. During this time a funeral (procession) passed by. On seeing this, the Prophet stood up. Seeing the Prophet arising, one of his Companion exclaimed: "O Prophet, that was the funeral of a Jew, and not a Muslim!" The Prophet replied, "Was he not a human being?" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 1312, 1313).

Here we can see that the Prophet was able to discover a commonality between himself and that Jew. Every person was worthy of respect at all events, because of the common humanity we share with one another. This incident also illustrates how an atmosphere of mutual love and compassion can be brought about in the world only when we consciously rise above all insidious demarcation of caste, colour and creed.

The above has been, in fact, been one of the main underlying causes for its successful dissemination. Here I quote from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: "Islam achieved

²Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, Faruqi, Isma'il Ragi A. Al, trans., Oak Brook: North American Trust Publications, 1976, 251.

astonishing success in its first phase. Within a century after the Prophet's death in AD 632 [the early generations of Muslims] ... had brought a large part of the globe — from Spain across central Asia to India — under a new Arab Muslim empire ... despite these astonishing achievements, other religious groups enjoyed full religious autonomy."³ The Quran at various points stresses the fact that the religion sent by God to humankind in the shape of Islam is not only a source of guidance in the religious sense, but is also a blessing in many other ways (6:157). One very important way in which it was a blessing was that it brought human history out of the age of darkness, and caused it to enter into the age of light. This was a revolution in thought, which unlocked the doors to innumerable worldly benefits. It is this second, worldly aspect of the Islamic revolution, which the well-known western historian Henri Pirenne, describes in terms of Islam having "changed the face of the globe. The traditional order of history was overthrown."⁴

2.3. The Importance of Accepting Diversity

James J. Bradac observed that nature abhors uniformity.⁵ As such differences are a natural part of life. From this emerges one of the stark realities of life, that is divergence of views do exist between people at all levels, be it at the level of a family or a society, a community or a country. In pluralistic societies, how can harmony be brought about? The fact is that just as there is diversity in everything else in the world, so also is there diversity in religious beliefs. So followers of different religions cannot do away with differences, but, instead, they

³"Islam," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 12, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 663-667.

⁴Henri Pirenne, *History of Western Europe*, New York: Doubleday, 1956, 46.

⁵James Price Dillard Lijiang Shen, *The Sage Handbook of Persuasion: Developments in Theory and Practice*, London: Sage Publications, 2002, 386.

have agree to disagree. They have to adopt this practical approach and principle in all matters of religion. Here, too, they have to accept diversity and differences and seek to promote unity despite them, instead of searching for an imaginary unity by trying to do away with differences. The Islamic formula to solve the issue of religious differences is that of mutual respect given in the Quran as mentioned earlier: "To you, your religion, and to me, mine." (109:6) or 'Follow one and respect all.

It should also be noted that there is nothing wrong in diversity of opinions. In fact, this is a positive quality that has many advantages. The beauty of the garden lies in the presence of different type of flowers and trees. This has been inferred from the following saying of the Prophet of Islam: "The Prophet Muhammad said, 'Differences of my Ummah are blessings.'" (Al-Maqaasid-al-Hasanah, Hadith No. 39)

A society whose members hold identical views and never have any discussions will soon find itself in the doldrums. That is why Umar bin Abd al-Aziz (682-720), the fifth rightly guided Caliph used to say, "I am not pleased that the companions of Muhammad did not hold diverse views, because if they did not hold varied views, there would not have been any concession.'" [Al Matalib ul Aaliyah, ibn Hajar, 12/601]

The Islamic view that is derived from these is that the intellectual development of the members of this society will be frozen if they do not hold divergence of thinking. This is because personal uplift takes place only where the interaction of divergent thinking provides the requisite mental stimuli. It is only after undergoing the intellectual challenge presented by others that a developed personality emerges.

A secular understanding of the same can be found in Arnold Toynbee's book, *A Study of History* in which he has attributed all developments of history to this *challenge-response*

mechanism.⁶ In his thesis Toynbee states that challenges like differences, divergence of views, etc. are a pre-requisite to progress. He, further, asserts, "the greater the challenge, the greater the stimulus. ... which demands a further response on his part. ... Each successive challenge thus produces differentiation within the society, and the longer the series of challenges the more sharply pronounced will this differentiation become."⁷ It can thus be said that if, in a human society, divergence of thinking ceases, the development of character will come to a standstill. That is why diversity or divergence of thinking is so important between peoples.

2.4. The Importance of Religious Freedom

Islam gives serious consideration to religious freedom and takes pains to avoid infractions. There is an event from Islamic history that illustrates this point. Umar Faruq, the second Caliph, travelled to Palestine at the request of the Christians to finalize the agreements between them and the Muslims. T. W. Arnold narrates in his book, *The Preaching of Islam*,

In company with the Patriarch, Umar visited the holy places, and it is said while they were in the Church of the Resurrection, as it was the appointed hour of prayers, the Patriarch bade the Caliph offer his prayers there, but Caliph Umar thoughtfully refused, saying that if he were to do so, his followers might afterwards claim it as a place of Muslim worship.⁸

He obviously foresaw later generations of Muslims being inspired to build a mosque on that very spot, thus setting up restrictions upon religious freedom. Umar's discretion is all the more remarkable for being the ruler of Palestine he could have done anything he wished. A man with less insight and forethought would have regarded praying inside the

⁶Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1962, 548.

⁷Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Vol. 1, 241.

⁸T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2001, 49.

Church as harmless and that could in no way be interpreted as depriving anyone of his rights. Umar, in fact, moved a stone's throw away, and said his prayers at a discreet distance from the Church. Muslims did indeed come to this city later on, and as he had foreseen, built their mosque at the exact point where he had said his prayers. The mosque exists to this day, but presents no obstacle to Christian worship. It is true that in later times certain excessively zealous Muslims converted a number of non-Muslim places of worship into mosques. Such actions are to be deplored as deviations. "But such oppression was contrary to the spirit of Islam," says T. W. Arnold.⁹

Religious tolerance and acceptance and celebrating it is an essential teaching of Islam. It requires that everyone be allowed to present one's thoughts, and be given a quiet hearing. The message is not to be forced upon one, but something to be gently presented. History shows that people enjoyed total freedom of thought in the new Islamic states. Professor Arnold in his book, *The Preaching of Islam* gives an excerpt from a full statement made by one of the Spanish Muslims who had been driven out of his native country. Protesting against the persecution of the Inquisition, he stresses, in contrast, the toleration of his co-religionists: "Our arms, it is true, are ever open to receive all who are disposed to embrace our religion, but we are not allowed by our sacred Quran to tyrannise over consciences..."¹⁰

2.5. Principle: Love Thy Neighbour

Love is the greatest human virtue. Where there is love, everything is in harmony, and where there is hate, all that is good remains in jeopardy. There are many sayings of the Prophet in which he has made it incumbent upon believers to treat their neighbors with utmost responsibility and concern. The Prophet of Islam once observed: "None of you can be a believer unless you desire for your fellowmen what you desire

⁹ T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, New Delhi: Goodword Books, 65.

¹⁰Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, 143.

for yourself" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 1). This is also given in the Bible as, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Matthew 22: 39)

For a true Muslim it is part of his faith to behave well with his neighbors. The Prophet thus said: "He who believes in God and the Last Day must not put his neighbor to inconvenience" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6136). Similarly, on another occasion he remarked: "That one will not enter Paradise whose neighbor is not secure against his mischief" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6016). Ignoring the plight of one's neighbour is looked down upon in Islam, as the Prophet once noted: "He is not a believer who eats to his fill while his neighbor goes without food"(Musannif ibn Abi Shaybah, Hadith No. 30359). This shows that a Muslim is one who is concerned with others' hunger and thirst as he is with his own—who is concerned not only with his own person but with the whole of humanity.

Neighbours are our nearest companions. After family members, it is neighbours that one comes in contact with. Developing good relations with neighbours is therefore an important aspect of a God-oriented life. A neighbour, be a co-religionist or an adherent of another religion, one's own community or of another, must always be taken good care of. They must be given their dues at all events, according to the demands of Islam and of humanity.

"Do you know what the rights of neighbors are?" asked the Prophet. And then he listed out: "Help him if he asks for your help. Give him relief if he seeks relief from you. Give him a loan if he needs one. Show him concern if he is distressed. Nurse him when he is ill. Attend his funeral if he dies. Congratulate him if he meets with any good. Sympathize with him if any calamity befalls him" (Shuab al-Iman, al-Bayhaqi, Hadith No. 9113).

This tradition shows that we are not only supposed to have good will towards our neighbours but we should also offer practical help whenever they are in need. Such great emphasis laid by the Prophet on our good treatment of our neighbours

shows that the aim of Islam is to awaken the springs of goodness in the human heart. If we can become good to our immediate neighbours, then that will be a guarantee of our being good to other people. For constant good conduct will surely develop a good moral character in us and that will surely reflect in our dealings with whoever we come in contact with. If we observe the injunction of the Prophet in this matter, then without doubt we shall contribute to strengthening society with the bonds of love, affection and brotherhood.

These sayings tell us the kind of awareness the Prophet aimed to bring about in people. It was part of his mission to inform people of the reality that all men and women, although inhabiting different regions of the world, and seemingly different from one another as regards their colour, language, dress, culture, etc., were each other's blood brothers and sisters. Hence a proper relationship will be established between all human beings only if they regard one another as sisters and brothers. Only then will proper feelings of love and respect prevail throughout the world.

2.6. Principle: Love All

Islam does not limit love to only family and friends. It commands Muslims to love all human beings. Let me explain this with the help of an example. During a visit to the US, I was invited by an American Church to deliver a lecture on Islam and peace. After my lecture a Christian scholar asked: "In Christianity there is a moral injunction: 'Love your enemy.' Can you cite any such teaching from the Islamic scripture?" I replied in the affirmative. In fact, all three Semitic religions have this precept in common. For example, it is said in the Hebrew Bible, "Hatred stirs up dissension, but love overlooks all offences" (Proverbs 10:12). It is recorded in the Bible that Jesus Christ once said: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43-44). In one of its chapters,

the Quran says: “Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend” (Quran 41:34).

This Quranic teaching dispels the ‘we and they’ concept. By nature everyone is your friend. The only difference is that some are your actual friends while others are your potential friends. So try to turn this potential into actuality. This is the best formula for universal brotherhood and is common to all the three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Love is the greatest human virtue. Where there is love, everything is in harmony, and where there is hate, all that is good remains in jeopardy.

The fact is that difference is part of nature and differences arise between individuals and groups. If a man and woman have love in their hearts, they will be able to live together harmoniously as a family. Love is a guarantee that all the differences that may arise between them will be amicably resolved. This phenomenon is aptly illustrated by the analogy of the shock absorber, a mechanical device that lessens shock by absorbing its force. When a car travels along a road, due to potholes or uneven surfaces, it frequently receives a series of big or small shocks. This affects the vehicle’s wheels and the impact would instantly reach the traveller, were it not for the shock absorbers, which guarantee that the effect of the impact will go no further than the wheels, and will not reach the traveller. Love is just like a shock absorber within one’s heart. If you have any love for others, you will have this inbuilt psychological shock absorber, which will absorb any shock that comes from others. You will remain cool and level-headed in every situation.

What is the rationale behind the ‘love-all’ formula? It is that every other person is your benefactor. It is your lack of awareness of this fact that makes you unable to adopt this love-all culture. We are living in a civilization, an advanced stage of refinement in ethical and material matters resulting from continuous effort on the part of all humanity. For example, when people started life on the planet earth, human

existence was in a primitive state. It then took thousands of years of the joint efforts of humanity to bring civilization into existence. For example, in the beginning, people used to walk only on two legs. Then we started travelling on horseback. After long experience, the wheel was developed, thanks to which travel by car was made possible. The uses of steam power was later discovered and travel by steamship and rail began; airplanes made air travel possible and further facilitated the means of contact and communication. All this was not the work of any single human being: all of humanity was involved in this process.

This aspect of reality about history gives rise to the culture of 'love all', while unawareness of this leads to the 'hate all' culture. The truth is that in this world the most realistic formula is that of 'love all' and the most unrealistic formula is 'hate all'. This is why all three Semitic religions teach us that we should love all people.

2.7. Principle: Be a Benefactor of all, Not a Problem Person

A tradition of the Prophet has been worded thus: "By God, he is not a believer, by God, he is not a believer; by God, he is not a believer, with whom his neighbours are not secure" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6016). It means one of the characteristics of believers is that they should love and care for all human beings. One of the lessons the Prophet taught was that we should live among others like flowers, and not like thorns, without giving trouble to anybody. In this vein, I would like to cite this saying of the Prophet: "If a believer is not able to benefit others, he must at least do them no harm" (Fathul Bari, 10/462).

According to Islam, the person who becomes useful to others leads one's life on a higher plane. But if one fails to do so, one should at least create no trouble for one's fellow beings. For a person to be a really faithful servant of God, one must live either as a giver or as a no-problem person. There is no third option.

The humanity of a person and the first criterion of his religiosity and spirituality are tested by the way one behaves towards one's neighbours. The relationship with a neighbour serves as a test of whether a person has human feelings or not, and whether one is sensitive to Islamic teachings or not. If neighbours are happy with one that is a proof of the person being a good person, but if the neighbours are unhappy that is a proof that the person's behaviour leaves much to be desired.

Today we are living in an electronic age. With the click of a button, we can get in touch with people across the world, see them and hold discussions with them. In this light, we can say that the concept of neighbourhood has been revolutionized in the modern age—people around the globe are now our e-neighbours. Hence the rights that are due to our immediate neighbours, now extend over to our e-neighbours as well. The same concern and desire to aid others living in different parts of the world should well up inside of us when we observe that people are in need of support and sympathy.

2.8. Be Predictable in Dealing with People

When a believer discovers the reality of the world Hereafter, it comes to dominate one's whole life. A believer becomes most desirous of the heaven of which one gave tidings to others, and the person was most fearful of the punishment of which one warned others. Deep concern for the life to come always wells up inside a believer. In the firm belief that one day one will be presented before the all-knowing God, everyone must conduct themselves with a deep sense of responsibility.

An incident from the life of the Prophet illustrates this point. The men taken prisoner in the Battle of Badr were the Prophet's bitterest enemies, but still his treatment of them was impeccable. One of these prisoners was a man by the name of Suhayl ibn Amr. A fiery speaker, he used to denounce the Prophet virulently in public to incite people against him and his mission. One of Prophet's Companions Umar ibn al-Khattab suggested that two of Suhayl's lower teeth be pulled out to dampen his oratorical zeal. The Prophet was shocked by

Umar's suggestion. He said to Umar: "God would disfigure me for this on the Day of Judgement, even though I am His messenger."¹¹ So, living with the sense of accountability to God is not a negative feeling. It is a completely positive feeling. It turns a believer into a responsible person; it inculcates the spirit of self-discipline. It makes the believer an honest person, building into one's personality a welcome predictability. And it saves the believer from all kinds of deviation.

A verse in the Quran says: "Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches are in the sky, it yields its fruit each season with its Lord's permission" (Quran 14:24-25). A true believer, in respect of one's character and deeds, is similar to a good tree that yields fruit every season. A believer's strong conviction in God and the sense of accountability make one very sensitive and responsible. On every occasion a believer does what faith in God demands. In every situation or in dealings with people, a believer conducts oneself in a manner that is expected of one who has living faith in God the Lord of the Worlds. Thus a believer's character is predictable – one can know beforehand the kind of response a believer would give in any situation.

It is this predictability of behaviour, which is a consequence of belief in the Hereafter, makes it possible for a believer to adhere to the values of love, justness and compassion in one's dealings with others. A believer would make every effort to never swerve from such conduct. And it is when individual members of society develop this attitude, the society as a whole become a picture of friendship and goodwill among people.

As an individual, therefore, a Muslim must be a good neighbour, while, on the larger scale of the community, Muslims should prove to be good neighbours at the national level as well.

¹¹Ibn Hisham, *Al-Seerah Al-Nabwiyah (of Ibn Hisham)*, Vol. 1, 649.

2.9. Acknowledging All: The Basis of Love

In Islam, acknowledging others for the good they have done to you is considered very important. The Prophet went to the extent of noting: "One who does not acknowledge people, cannot even acknowledge God" (Musnad Ahmad, Hadith No. 7504). If you add a pinch of dye to a glass of water, all of the water becomes coloured. So, too, in the case of love. When a believer has love in his heart for his Creator, at the same time he cannot resist showing his love to his neighbours. And in this electronic age, the whole world is one's neighbour. Thus one who acknowledges God in prayer regularly, but is not grateful to the people who have benefitted him in life, cannot be regarded as paying sincere thanks to God. This acknowledgment of and gratitude towards others is at the root of developing love for them. Not only does this make us positive for those who are immediately around us and from whom we receive help and support directly, but this also fills our heart with love for humanity at large.

What is the rationale behind the 'love-all' formula? It is that every other person is your benefactor. It is lack of awareness of this fact that makes one unable to adopt this love-all culture. We are living in a civilization. Whatever we make use of is a gift of this civilization. When we use these gifts of civilization or any of the modern-day amenities, we must ponder over the numerous people who must have put in enormous work and toil that must have gone into making it possible for us to benefit from various facilities. Such realization would lead to an outpouring of feelings of love and thankfulness for the whole of humanity, which worked to make life simple and easy for us today.

Most of us use the modern means of transportation, be they cycles, buses, trains, metros, cars, etc. Often we think that using them is our right because we have spent our money. But if we think deeply, in truth, these means of transportation are a great divine gift. God created human beings, then He provided them with natural vehicles such as horses, camels, mules and others for travel. This was the first phase of

vehicles. God knew that this would not be sufficient for humanity. So, He kept another thing in potential terms in the natural world. This potential was that of mechanical vehicles. God gave human beings mind, utilizing which we made many discoveries about nature. In this way, we discovered the wheel. Then, after long research we developed wheeled vehicles such as the bicycle, trains, cars, etc.

Modern vehicles are God-given, in terms of potential. And since many countries and their citizens were involved in turning this natural potential into actual, these vehicles are also gifts from humanity. Those who ponder over the entire history will acknowledge their Creator. This is known in Islam as *shukr*, or gratitude, in religious terms. Keeping the entire history into mind, one will realize that a car or a vehicle is God's great bounty, and in making it reach the commercial level, the entire humanity played an important role. When one thinks this way, one will acknowledge God the most and then acknowledge the humanity. The discovery of this reality about history gives rise to the culture of 'love all', while unawareness of this leads to the 'hate all' culture.

3. CONCLUSION

My research has led me to many conclusions about how to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society. Firstly, it has led me to understand that mutual respect is the basic principle of living in a pluralistic society as per Islam and all religions. There is no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims from the ethical standpoint. Each has been granted the same rights. Islam believes in the oneness of reality, it lays equal stress on the practice of respect in everyday dealings with others, even if it means going to the extent of permitting people of other faiths to come to an Islamic place of worship for religious discussion, and if it is time for their prayers, letting them feel free to perform their worship according to their own ways in the mosque itself.

Secondly, differences are a natural part of pluralistic societies in which people of various communities and

religions reside together. The formula Islam gives for harmonious living is to accept and celebrate the differences. In fact, Islam encourages the intellectual exchange for greater learning and wisdom. This develops one's minds and results in progress of the individual and society. Further Islam insists on human friendly behaviour and does not instil any fear into its adherents that they will lose their identity by co-operating and interacting with people who hold divergent views.

Thirdly, Islam asks believers not only to acknowledge God Almighty, but to also acknowledge the contributions of all humankind. The amenities that are available for all in the modern world are due to the contribution of the entire humanity. We accept all human beings by loving all as our potential friends and convert this into reality. One can live harmoniously in modern pluralistic societies in this way.