

All Humans are One People

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The humans, by nature, extol the strengths and virtues of their kin and tribes and attempt to stress their superiority over their competitors. This tendency is nurtured by lore and myths. Some have created, or distorted, religious bases for their claims. Sociologists have used their tools to either play on such emotions or have interpreted, or distorted, data to confirm their own beliefs and biases. Some anthropologists deliberately manipulated data on the sizes of skull cavities to assert that some ethnic people are more innately intelligent than others. With a few exceptions, philosophers, and not just the overtly racist ones, have also entertained such thinking. The group in power claims credit for all useful and meaningful knowledge and ideas and belittles or ignores the common heritage with others. Most religions generally mention the equality of all humans but few remaining original sources contain strong and consistent emphasis on the equality and dignity of all human beings.

The more recent movement toward multiculturalism attempts to correct some of these problems but it is facing many hurdles. In addition to opposition from the forces of the entrenched elements of the ethnic-based old guards, the movement is in danger of creating its own new ethnic myths. Instead of an emphasis on the common heritage of all humans, it may be veering towards a greater emphasis on ethnic quarrels.

The Qur'an provides strong support for teachings that emphasize a common human heritage. It very clearly describes all humanity as one people, "the Children of Adam". It says that they were all honored by God. Revelations and truth were given to all the children of Adam and their progeny. No one should be belittled or degraded. The diversity of languages and colors and other characteristics are for identification purposes only and are not measures of superiority. God created all things in pairs and both genders of human beings were created from the same essence. The level of one's importance, in the eyes of God, is based on the extent of that person's good character and God-consciousness, and not on the characteristics of outward identity.

This article gets you started by giving a few examples from the text of the Qur'an. Before getting into the references, let us start with a few key words we will encounter. While I will continue to use the translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, I will point out some nuances of the Qur'anic language that do not come across clearly in his style of translation.

The Qur'an uses the phrase *Bani Aadam*, meaning the tribe of Adam, at least six times and the related words *Dhurriyati Aadam*, the progeny of Adam, once. It talks of the creation of *Insaan* and not Adam per se. The word *Insaan*, meaning Human, is from the three letter root *a-n-s* and connotes the sense of companionable, sociable, friendly, nice etc. This word and its variants appear in the Qur'an about 89 times. A related word, *Annaas*, which should be translated as "people", appears in the Qur'an about 243 times. (Yusuf Ali often translates this word as

“mankind”). The word *Dhakar* is used for male and *Untha* for female; the former and its variants appear in the Qur’an 20 times and the latter with its variants 31 times. The word for men is *Rajul* which, with its variants appears 48 times in the Qur’an. The female is called *Nisa*’; this word with its variants appears in the Qur’an approximately 56 times. The final word I would mention here is *Nafas*. The closest English equivalent for this word is Person. It, and its variants, appears in the Qur’an about 297 times. Now let us look at a few uses of these words and the message the Qur’an conveys through them.

1. Dhurriyati Aadam: The posterity of Adam.

After mentioning the teachings and exhortations of Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Isma`il and Idris, Surah Maryam (19), Aayah 58 says:

Those were some of the prophets, on whom God did bestow His grace, of the posterity of Adam, and of those whom we carried (in the Ark) with Noah, and of the posterity of Abraham and Israel - of those whom we guided and chose...

2. The whole tribe of Adam, Bani Aadam, is honored.

Surah Al Isra’ (17), Aayah 70, says:

We have honored the sons of Adam; provided them with transportation on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred upon them special favors above a great part of Our Creation.

Important note on translation: The above Ayah uses the phrase Bani Adam, which means “Children of Adam. Abdullah Yusuf Ali translates it above as “sons of Adam”. It is clear, however, that he does not use the word “sons” in the male gender sense because he translates this same phrase as “the Children of Adam” in Surah Al A`raaf (7), Aayat 26, 27 and 31. Of these, Aayah 27 is very instructive of the gender neutrality of the phrase Bani Aadam. God says:

O ye Children of Adam! Let not Satan seduce you in the same manner as he got your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their raiment, to expose their shame: for he and his tribe watch you from a position where ye cannot see them: We made the Evil One friends (only) to those without faith.

3. Ethnic and other different characteristics are for identification only.

In Surah Al Hujuraat (49), Aayah 13, God says:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).

4. The differences of language and color are Signs of God.

Aayat 20 through 22 of Surah Ar Rum (30) say:

20. *Among His Signs is this, that he created you from dust; and then, behold, ye are men scattered (far and wide).*

Translation Note: The word “men” is Yusuf Ali’s translation of the Arabic word Bashar used in the Ayah above. Bashar means “human”.

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

22. *And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are Signs for those who know.*

5. The standard of treating others as equal is the minimum standard.

The standard described in Surah 49, Ayah 13 above is the minimum standard. More is expected of you after belief. This is clear from the context of Aayah 13. This Aayah comes after the believers are told how to treat each other. After those expectations are described, they are told that the minimum expectation from all humans is the one described in Aayah 13 above.

Aayat 11 and 12 of Surah Al Hujuraat (49) are:

11. *O ye who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): not let some women laugh at others: it may be that they (latter) are better than the (former): nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other by (offensive) nicknames: ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used of one) after he has believed: and those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong.*

12. *O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: and spy not on each other, not speak ill of each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it. But fear God: for God is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.*

6. Men and Women are created of the same essence.

Surah Al Nisa '(4), meaning The Women begins with the following Aayah:

1. *O mankind! Reverence your Guardian Lord, Who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; Reverence God, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for God ever watches over you.*

Translation Note: Without getting into a complicated grammatical and theological discussion here, I wish to point out that the “single person” in the above translation is the word *Nafs*, which is grammatically feminine. More literally, therefore, the above translation would say “...created you from a single person, and created from the same person her mate, and from these two scattered ...”