

His Excellency, Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmuli's Message to the
6th Annual Conference of the Muslim Congress of America

*I seek refuge from the accursed Shayṭān.
In the Name of Allah, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.*

All praise belongs to God, Lord of all the worlds. Blessings and Peace be upon all the prophets and messengers—especially their Seal and their Exceller, Muhammad; and his Immaculate Family, the Good and Noble ones—especially the Remnant of Allah in the worlds [Imam Mahdi]. We associate ourselves to them and disclaim their enemies in God's presence.

We would like to welcome all the esteemed guests gathered here—the intelligentsia and all the noble brothers and sisters in faith. We would like to honour this yearly symposium of yours full of blessings, with the hope that that which transpires in this major religious gathering facilitates the felicity and eminence of all in this world as well as the hereafter.

A point regarding gatherings themselves must be made here, so that the boons of these types of meetings become clearer. It is reported from the blessed precinct of Imam Riḍā (upon whom be peace)—these sacred souls being the correlate of the Noble Qur'an—that:

تَزَاوَرُوا فَإِنَّ فِي زِيَارَتِكُمْ إِحْيَاءَ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَ ذِكْرًا لِأَحَادِيثِنَا وَ أَحَادِيثِنَا تُعْطِفُ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ
“Visit one another for surely in your visiting there is life for your hearts and evocation for our traditions; and our traditions make you incline to one another.”

Effectively saying that you should visit one another, hold symposiums, gatherings, meetings, and conferences—because in your gatherings, as you are the followers of the Qur'an and the Family, the enlightened words of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are discussed and [these] teachings make hearts to connect and make the community [members] to incline to [and accommodate] one another.

He said, “and our traditions make you incline to one another,” meaning, the community is realized and made fruitful by inclination-accommodation. Such a tendency comes in the wake of correct knowledge and good action. If Imam Riḍā ('a) said that the positive effect of meeting is that you will acquire “tendency” and “inclination”, this is because the right knowledge and good action is what is discussed in your gatherings; and it is these two factors that make both ideas and intentions to incline to [and accommodate] one another. Because when correct knowledge is at play, the ideas and thoughts of one another will be accommodating [and compliant]. And because your actions, your speech, your behaviour and your writing is for God's pleasure and [in line with] goodly acts, intentions become connected to one another. Man lives by way of thought and intention, so if the people in a nation are of the same way, with common thoughts and common intentions, they will incline to, accommodate and work with one another.

In a commonly used parable, it is said that “stones do not become affixed to one another by themselves”, meaning that what makes these towers stand tall and scrape the sky is soft mortar. If it were not for soft mortar, no stone could be affixed to another.

Imam Riḍā was saying that what we have is a firm discourse and a soft discourse. Our firm and ironclad discourse pertains to the intellectual proofs of theoretical philosophy; but we also have acts, speech, and behaviour that is soft and pertains to practical philosophy—that is issues of ethics, law, jurisprudence and their like.

The important matter that you in the West must take into account is that you carry out the mission of Islam in that region. Each and every one of you must be a propagator of religion. The propagation of religion is sometimes by way of books and the written word; sometimes by way of speech, audio tapes and their like; and sometimes by way of actions and behaviour. What is expected of each and every one of you is that you live with and treat one and all on the basis of etiquette and justice.

While the noble Qur’an gives particular instructions to the Muslims and special orders to the monotheists, it also provides universal precepts for all the inhabitants of the world, whether they are believers or non-believers. One of these universal mandates of Islam that has caused many people to lean towards the Qur’an and the Family stems from a luminous Qur’anic verse that the Imams (‘a) have expanded upon:

وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا

...and speak kindly to people (2:83)

God says, “speak kindly to people”—speak to and interact with people on the basis of art, beauty, justice, truth, and reality. He did not say, “speak to the *believers*, speak to the *Muslims*, speak to the *monotheists*”, rather He said, “speak kindly to *people*”.

[*Speech* here is not being contrasted with *action*; for the common expression “What do they say?” means, “What is their school of thought? What is their speech *and* action?” Or for example when it is said that someone *devoured* the property of someone, this “devouring” is used because it is one of the most apparent acts in life; but in reality someone who usurps clothes, a carpet, a particular land or property is said to have figuratively *devoured* someone’s property, connoting all types of usage. Similarly, the figurative *say* [of the verse] actually means all types of action. So when the Qur’an says that you should *speak* to people on the bases of goodness, it means that your actions, speech, writings, and behaviour, all must be beautiful.]

You must have good deeds as well as good intentions—you must speak in a good fashion and speak the good word. You must speak with sincerity while not insulting anyone; you must be truthful, with the truth and also be polite; for politeness and etiquette lies in the subtlety of speech, action, and behaviour. Hence the verse, “speak kindly to people”; this is from the positive side.

Correspondingly, on the negative side, there is another expression in the Qur’an that is given to much explanatory commentary from the Immaculates, where God said:

وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ

do not cheat the people of their goods. (7:85)

Here again it is not just about the faithful, the Muslims, the monotheists, or the People of the Book. It is about people in general, saying, do not diminish anything in the least for the people. God said “goods” in the plural, and “people” implying the genus of the human race. He said, do not diminish anything in the least for the people in your monetary, political, and international interactions; as well as in your teaching and writing.

If you are writing an article for instance, it should be scholarly and complete. If you are teaching a class, you should do it after in-depth research. You should never take advantage of the weak thinking of students—for taking advantage of the ignorance of the audience, is itself an act of vagary on the part of the speaker or writer. What is being said that you should start your class, article, or work of art and industry only after in-depth study. If you want to present something to a cultural organization, it must be well-researched and you must not cut corners.

Hence on the positive side He said, “speak kindly to people”, and on the negative side He said, “do not cheat the people of their goods”. In this manner, the plane of the intellect and the plane of the will are connected to one another.

What you are witness to in the world today—especially in the Middle East—is the consequence of intellectual ignorance and practical caprice. Because modern man has lost his true self, he imagines that to find himself he must beat others down. The clearly visible reality that the major part of national budgets in the contemporary world is spent on bloodshed and killing people is due to the fact that neither are ideas [and the intellect] ordered, nor are intentions [and the will] balanced—for it is only when man rediscovers his true humanity that his works become divine.

God, almighty, ordained nobility for man; and we all agree that man is a noble creature. The Qur’an has also assented to this by saying:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

Certainly, We have honoured the Children of Adam. (17:70)

This is a principle. But this is not the whole story, for the Qur’an does not see the source of honour and nobility to be the *humanity* of man—so as to allow for humanistic thought.

Why is man noble? He is not noble just because he is human. Rather, he is noble because he is the vicegerent of the Noble—God being all-mighty and noble. It is because man is His viceroy and representative that he avails of nobility for God said:

إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth. (2:30)

Hence the nobility of man is not due to his humanity but rather due to his viceroyalty.

So to repeat, the point is that it is because man is the viceroy of the Noble that he is allotted nobility. The meaning of viceroyalty or vicegerency, which you might have heard many times

over, is that the viceroy does the work of the sovereign he represents and uses his counsels and follows his orders. If a person is a “viceroy” and a “representative” but does not give ear to the words of his sovereign or authority, he has usurped his position and has sequestered nobility while not really being noble. If such a person makes use of his “nobility” but does not do the work of a viceroy and does not obey the instructions of his sovereign, he is in reality embroiled with “the devils from amongst the men and the jinn”¹ on one hand, and entangled in the allusion to the verse “they are like cattle”,² on the other hand. It is not the case that just any person who is a “rational animal” is ordained with nobility. Hence the nobility of man is based on his vicerealty, and from the Divine perspective his vicerealty stems from the fact that the viceroy is at the bidding of the sovereign and follows the orders of God.

And God has ordered us that we speak the truth to the people and that we do not diminish in the least any of the works of the people; so that you should protect yourselves from the injuries of imperfection and defectiveness [that would result if you diminish their works]. In selling, do not shortchange or swindle others, in writing and speaking do not underperform. Imperfection, defects, and cheating and their like are all a part of immoral behaviour. It is because of this that the Imams, in particular the blessed Imam Riḍā, (upon all of whom be peace) have called us to such gatherings; saying, because you are the followers of our school, your gatherings are replete with our traditions and are the source of you becoming a knower and becoming an intellectual—and any nation that is nourished by knowledge and intellection is a nation that is dynamic, resolute, and enduring.

We wish that all of you—all brothers in faith—in the East or the West of the globe, in whatever period that they live and in whatever place they are and in whatever language they speak, are included in the special prayers of the Imam of our Time (may our souls be sacrificed for him). We also wish that God all-immaculate, grants all of you the goodness and prosperity of this world and the hereafter.

Once again, we wish to honour your presence here and pray that you are all put in God’s protection—with the hope that God concludes the affairs of one and all in goodness and mercy.

May Allah forgive us and you. Peace be upon you and the Mercy of Allah and His Graces.

‘Abdullāh Jawādī Āmulī

Translated by Shuja Ali Mirza

¹ Cf. Qur’ān 6:112

² Cf. Qur’ān 7:179