

Hudaybiyyah, praised in the Qur'an as a "clear victory" (48:1) despite being a compromise. Islamic jurisprudence developed principles for the ethics of war (*fiqh al-jihad*), insisting on the protection of civilians, prohibition of mutilation, and respect for treaties. These principles are not just legal but are moral commitments that promote peace over revenge.

4. Forgiveness and Mercy: A Prophetic Standard

Forgiveness in Islam is not weakness—it is nobility. Allah is described as *al-Ghaffar* (the Forgiving) and *al-Rahman* (the Merciful), and believers are encouraged to embody these attributes. The Qur'an states:

"Repel evil with what is better; then the one who was your enemy may become your close friend" (Qur'an 41:34).

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ forgave the people of Mecca at the height of his power. His mercy was not reactive but principled. This has inspired Muslim rulers, scholars, and mystics throughout history—from Saladin's chivalry in Jerusalem to Imam al-Ghazali's spiritual counsel.

5. Justice and Equality: The Ethical Backbone of Islam

Justice (*ʿadl*) is the foundation of Islamic governance and social order:

"Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and to judge with justice..." (Qur'an 4:58).

The Prophet ﷺ declared:

"Even if Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, stole, I would punish her," thus rejecting

nepotism.

Equality in Islam is spiritual and ethical. Bilal al-Habashi, Salman al-Farisi, and Suhayb al-Rumi—figures from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds—became central companions of the Prophet. The Farewell Sermon made it clear:

"No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, nor a white to a black, except in piety."

6. Love, Compassion, and Solidarity: Beyond Sentiment

The Qur'an uses the term *mawaddah* (loving kindness), notably in family life:

"He placed between you affection and mercy" (30:21).

But love in Islam extends beyond family to all humanity and creation. The Prophet ﷺ said:

"You will not believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself."

Solidarity is manifest in *zakah* (almsgiving), *sadaqah* (charity), and *waqf* (endowments). These are structural expressions of love and ethics made into law and practice.

7. Moderation and Balance: Wasatiyyah as a Way of Life

The Qur'an defines the Muslim community as:

"A middle nation" (*ummatan wasatan*) (2:143).

Moderation (*wasatiyyah*) applies to belief, consumption, emotions, and behaviour. Excess is condemned; so is negligence. The Prophet ﷺ warned:

"Beware of extremism in religion, for it



destroyed those before you.”

Islam thus avoids the extremes of monasticism and hedonism, legalism and libertinism. The ideal is a balanced life that nourishes the soul and serves society.

8. Religion as Moral Guidance: Not Dogma but Direction

Religion in Islam is not a set of isolated rituals but a comprehensive moral compass. The Qur’an consistently ties *‘ibadah* (worship) to ethical conduct:

“Establish prayer... indeed, prayer prevents immorality and wrongdoing.” (29:45)

In Islamic theology, faith (*iman*) must lead to action (*‘amal salih*), and action is judged by intention (*niyyah*) and impact. Religion thus becomes a force for societal betterment.

9. Understanding, Tolerance, and Interfaith Engagement

The Qur’an encourages dialogue:

“O People of the Book, come to a word that is equitable between us...” (3:64)

and warns against compulsion:

“There is no compulsion in religion...” (2:256)

Islamic history records rich examples of coexistence: the Covenant of Najran, Ayyubid Jerusalem, Ottoman millet system, and al-Andalus. Scholars such as Imam al-Qarafi wrote legal treatises protecting the rights of non-Muslims under Islamic governance.

10. The Ethical Response to Materialism and Arrogance

Modernity’s challenges—materialism, consumerism, and egoism—are not new. The Qur’an warned against *taghut* (false idols), *istikbar* (arrogance), and *tughyan* (transgression).

“Indeed, man transgresses when he sees himself self-sufficient” (96:6-7)

Islam promotes humility (*tawadu’*), detachment from excess (*zuhd*), and accountability (*mubasabah*). Wealth is not condemned, but its use is a moral test.

11. Global Religious Leadership: Shared Moral Responsibility

Islam recognises moral leadership among the righteous of all faiths. The Qur’an praises those who:

“Enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong” (3:104) and describes upright members of other religions as “standing in prayer, fearing the Hereafter” (5:82-84).

This sets the stage for a global alliance of spiritual

leaders—Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on—committed to justice, compassion, and peace. The Amman Message (2004) and Marrakesh Declaration (2016) reflect such aspirations.

12. Happiness, Harmony, and the Pursuit of Meaning

Islam views happiness (*sa’adah*) not as pleasure but as contentment and purpose. The Qur’an teaches:

“Indeed, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest” (13:28)

Inner harmony comes through faith, ethical living, and community. The Prophet ﷺ was described as always smiling, even in hardship, modelling a joy rooted in trust (*tawakkul*) and hope (*raja’*).

13. Palestine and Gaza: A Moral Litmus Test for Humanity

No discourse on justice and values can ignore Palestine and Gaza. The occupation, the blockade, the enforced famine, and the constant bombing violate every moral code, secular and religious.

Islam commands solidarity with the oppressed:

“And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children...” (Qur’an 4:75)

Support for Palestine is not political opportunism but a fulfilment of a divine mandate for justice. It is a test of our shared humanity.

Conclusion: Towards a Global Moral Movement

Islam offers a vision of ethical universality rooted in divine guidance and human dignity. The shared values of justice, love, forgiveness, moderation, and understanding are not unique to Islam, but Islam offers a coherent theological and practical framework to embody them.

In a fragmented world, the Islamic ethical tradition can serve as a bridge between faiths, civilisations, and generations, toward a more just and compassionate world.

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Working for the Common Good: A Muslim Obligation in the West

DR MUHAMMAD ABDUL BARI

Introduction

This paper explores how Muslims in the West, especially those in mosques and community institutions, can engage meaningfully with wider civil society, not just to protect their own rights, but to contribute to the common good.

God created humans as His “representatives” or stewards on Earth (Qur’an 2:30) and this is a key objective in Islam. Believers must strive to perform this role with integrity and excellence in all circumstances. Islam is both spiritual and communitarian, and its social aspect calls on individuals to strive (*jihad*) in order to create empathetic, respectful and equitable societies. Alongside core beliefs and ritual worship, good behaviour and service to others are essential aspects of piety and are seen as a form of ongoing charity (*sadaqa jariyah*) that will be rewarded immensely in the Hereafter.

Mosques and community leaders should thus prioritise two key goals:

- Build internal capacity by nurturing talent within

their congregations

- Encourage outward engagement to serve the wider society

These are vital for grassroots democracy and the survival of any faith community in pluralist, post-religious societies. Success depends on strong internal grounding and rootedness to faith as well as confident external engagement and alliance building, underpinned by better socio-religious understanding, thoughtful planning and effective action. Leaders must be equipped with contextual Islamic knowledge and be able to engage confidently and productively with society.

Muslim civic leaders require social and political literacy and the intellectual maturity to inspire service without any expectation. In a world dominated by materialism and a “me first” attitude, spirituality and humility are antidotes and should be their hallmark. If Muslims remain disconnected from civic and political life, they risk developing an insular mindset and false sense of achievement. The next generation



will drift further away from community involvement, widening the existing generational and cultural gaps. Talented and professional Muslim youth, including children of established community leaders, often hesitate to lead legacy institutions. A community cannot thrive if it fails to harness its youth.

Story of Muslim Migration to the Modern West

The meteoric rise and expansion of Islam in its early centuries sent a shockwave across the wider world. The eruption of knowledge, academia and intellectual pursuit amongst Muslims initiated a civilisation that in turn energised the then intellectually stagnant Europe. Some European Christian powers responded with hostility, launching a series of Crusades to regain lost holy sites. Later, the Mongol Horde devastated the Muslim world, marking the start of its gradual decline.

By the 13th century, the already weakened Muslim world fell behind further due to internal disunity and intellectual stagnation. A Renaissance in Christian Europe, known to be influenced by Muslim scholarship, created an unparalleled vigour that launched a global expansion. With superior knowledge and drive but bereft of ethical or moral values and teachings, the European ruling class began an adventurous 'discovery' of the then unknown world. "Europe is ablaze with knowledge and skills. Truly its foundation of life is in the pitch darkness," lamented Asian philosopher poet Iqbal in early 20th century.

Europe's "conquest" led to ethnic cleansing and the genocide of weaker indigenous people. There was stiff resistance from victims, but they simply were not a

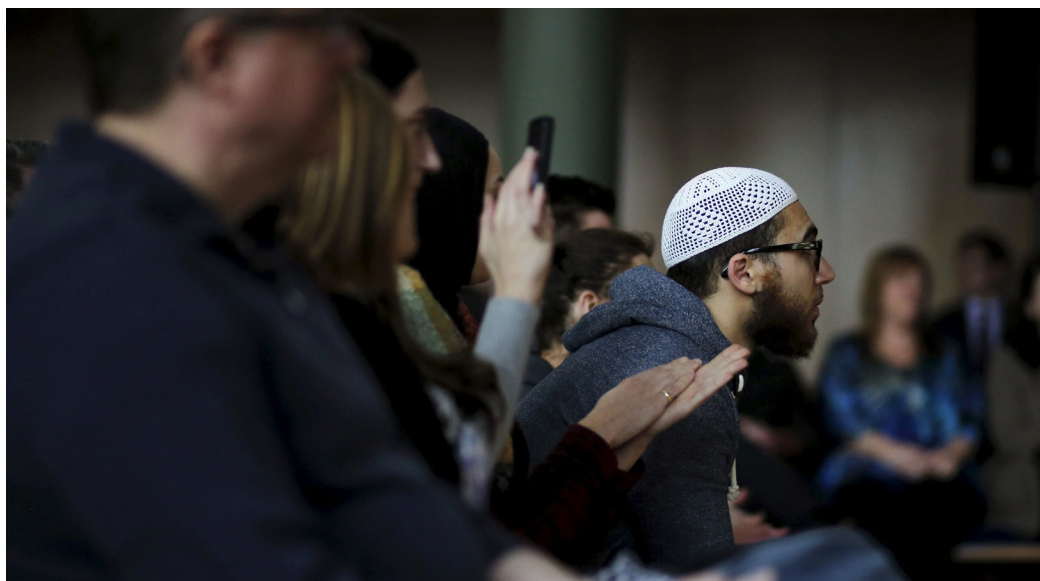
match, and the three 'new' continents soon turned into European settler colonies. At the same time, many countries fell victim to colonisation, largely from their own hands through decadence and deceit. European colonisers were relentless in their injustice, using divide and rule policies in Asia or enslaving millions of Africans by shipping them to America.

Muslims faced unprecedented humiliation under colonial rule. Even post-independence, most Muslim countries remain deviously fragmented and weakened by Western "divide and rule" policies and the ineptitude and corruption of newly installed rulers. Poor governance, failing economies and internal conflict have forced many Muslims to seek a better life and education in the West, where they now form significant minorities.

Despite some good progress in Western countries, Muslim communities generally lag behind their peers across the major socio-economic indicators. Post-9/11, the narrative has shifted further against them, with sections of politics, media and thinktanks framing Muslims through the prism of national security. Social and theological challenges further complicate integration and identity. Western Muslims now face the task of rebuilding themselves and contributing meaningfully to civil society.

The State of Muslims in Western Countries

Muslims in the West form a "community of communities", each with unique histories. First-generation migrants worked hard to establish mosques, community organisations and businesses. However, they often started their journey from disadvantaged



backgrounds; internal differences on ethnic, linguistic, sectarian and political lines often held back collective progress.

In socio-economic indicators like health, housing and employment, Muslims often remain at the lower rungs. While they have excelled in areas such as charitable giving and small business enterprise, they remain underrepresented in politics, media and wider public discourse. They are often misrepresented or portrayed negatively in not only the right-wing media, but often in mainstream discourse. Anti-Muslim rhetoric, including attacks on Muslim women, often goes unchallenged.

Although educational outcomes have improved in recent times, social mobility remains limited, hindered by discrimination and internal limitations. Religious leaders, daunted by the evolving societal landscape and weak contextual knowledge, have struggled to guide their communities effectively.

Identity and Belonging

Islam promotes a deep sense of belonging and responsibility toward the world we inhabit. Muslims historically travelled freely to faraway lands to seek knowledge, trade and serve humanity, exemplified by the travels of the famous Moroccan scholar and author, Ibn Battuta. Their sense of belonging to any place was as vital as their sense of responsibility. Islam celebrates diverse human identities and envisions globally minded citizens who balance self-interest with the common good.

When practiced with sincerity, Islam fosters integration, empathy and synergy. The idea of “us and them” based on one’s clan, tribe or race is not compatible with Islam’s teachings, which rejects racial or tribal divisions and promotes a universal brotherhood.

While some accuse Muslims of isolationism or separateness, this is often a political smear by right-wing factions in media and politics to win votes or gain power. Nevertheless, it is also a reality that Muslims have often failed to demonstrate visible social cohesion with mainstream society. Greater political literacy, communication skills and outreach are needed to forge alliances and counter marginalisation. Islam teaches believers to contribute unilaterally to the wellbeing of society, regardless of any suspicion or hostility.

Priorities for Western Muslims

Muslim leaders, from mosque imams to academics and politicians, must adopt creative and pragmatic strategies for civic engagement. Lazy thinking or

copying others without understanding local nuances is unhelpful. The first generation, still a predominant demographic force in many countries, needs empathetic and practical support in adapting to Western societies. Younger generations need confidence to engage with the mainstream.

Western Muslims must work with broader civil society groups committed to justice and social equality. Democratic systems allow citizens to effect change through advocacy, professional bodies and legal channels, enabling civil society to take governments and public servants to task. Opting out of civic and socio-political life only entrenches disadvantage.

Muslim parents, community leaders and educators must collectively raise political awareness and instil a sense of civic duty, especially in the youth. Serving others should be engrained in every Muslim’s upbringing, for it not only benefits society materially but enriches their own spiritual and ethical life. Some may avoid engagement due to apathy or fear, but they should be supported. Disengaged Muslims indeed suit the agenda of Islamophobes, who benefit when minorities are silent and marginalised.

Complement, Coordinate and Join the Dots

It is vital Muslims understand and act on their dual responsibility to both their own community (the Ummah or religious compatriots) and the wider society (the *qaum* or people amongst whom they live). As God’s stewards, they should embody service and lead with vision and professionalism.

Community-building requires integrity, healthy competition and effective leadership. Individuals should carve their own niche and collaborate to amplify impact. Support for umbrella organisations, such as the Muslim Council of Britain, can bring collective progress through “joining the dots” and complementing separate efforts. Where such bodies exist, individuals and institutions should coordinate and offer practical backing as it will be seen as the entire community’s success.

Engagement with wider society also demands socio-political and cultural awareness. Alliance building and effective lobbying or advocacy, to support the vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of society, needs a mature approach to bridge-building and negotiation. With patience and determined efforts, Muslims and their institutions should set optimistic targets and find practical solutions to the following questions:

- How can they best serve their own community and become a valued part of society?

- How can they act as a catalyst for good?
- How can they stay true to Islam while doing so?

Adding value to any existing successful activity can be the starting catalyst to positive change. For example, many mosques teach school-age children basic Islam and Qur'an recitation in the week, often after school hours. Using some of this time to also teach values, civic participation, building character (*adab* and *akhlaq*) and imparting social skills could uplift these children and elevate mosques as respected community centres. Qualified teachers and other relevant professionals can be drawn from the congregation or local community to enhance this education.

With a rich volunteering ethos in the community, such programmes can be implemented affordably, using local professionals. Some mosques may already do this but if it were to become standard practice, it would not only enhance children's self-esteem, but also garner more respect and support for mosques as the hub of the community. Careful planning and execution of these ideas can yield profound benefits.

Conclusion: Aiming High

Muslims must remember that worship is a private matter between them and God alone. It is their character, integrity and day-to-day behaviour that defines their public identity. A proper understanding of Islam leads one to better practice of worship which should translate into better human qualities and social competence.

People are drawn to those who are authentic, caring and principled. In the UK, Muslims are recognised as leading charity givers, a quality closely linked to the spiritual impact of Ramadan. This is known to be same in other countries. If Muslims everywhere can build on this trait to selflessly serve everyone beyond the holy month, they will be seen as establishing a moral force for good across societies. By opening mosque doors regularly and actively engaging with others in matters of socio-economic-political rights, they will demonstrate the ethic of service that Islam requires.

Character-building begins in the family. This trust (*amana*) must be embraced by parents through gentle, positive and purposeful parenting that helps children grow with human qualities such as reflection, discipline and a balanced approach to life. A culture of reflecting, reading, learning and practicing then becomes second nature for children as they grow. Effective mosques and community organisations can complement and build on this through mentoring and further education.

Historically, Muslims were known for their characteristic trait as a community of purpose. As proactive enforcers for good, they symbolised the best of humanity wherever they lived and whatever their profession was. They were assets to themselves, their religion and to the wider society. For a thousand years they were at the helm of a value-laden civilisation that helped reshape the old world and usher in a new era of human progress.

Sadly today, a lack of a higher purpose, unity and deficiency in leadership has weakened the Muslim global position. It is time the new generation, especially in the West, shoulder the task of recreating value-driven and service-oriented communities everywhere.

There is nothing for man except what he strives for (Qur'an 53:39)

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