

The 7th Doha Interfaith Conference

Spiritual Values and Achieving Unity & Solidarity

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“our greatest strength lies not in how much we differ from each other
but in **how much-how very much-we are the same**”. Eknath Easwaran

Setting the stage

According to Richard Garlikov, an American philosopher, "the term spiritual is often used to describe someone who is religious or who is devout in his/her worship of God. The spiritual person is one who is close to God, loves God, always thinks of God, puts God first, or who tries to do God's will. It is a person whose life, or important aspects of it are, in some way, centered around God". ¹

Speaking about spiritual values, Debra and William Miller point out that "spiritual values are human values". They argue that "we know that we are spiritual beings first and foremost and that "to be human is to be spiritual." So, by calling these spiritual values "human values," it reminds us that they are inherent in our spiritual nature". Debra and William Miller conclude that there are "five human values found cross-culturally in all spiritual traditions: Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love and Non-violence". ²

Furthermore, Irene Malek, suggests that "our values are derived from common elements based on the teachings of all spiritual traditions. We have found that the world's religions hold the pieces to the puzzle which can lead us into a higher life. These are the common principles or values in life that have been discovered eons ago. We believe that life lived through these principles and values is not only the path to wholeness but contains the hope for the future, especially when conveyed to our children". ³

Relating to this subject, Wayne Dosick proposes that "what is needed is a reawakening and a recommitment to religion's core teachings: the basic values of human existence-the standards of ethical behavior that define and "make or break" a human being . . . What matters is that the world's spiritual traditions-rooted in ancient and eternal wisdom-have

much to teach you. They have a deep and enduring knowledge to impart to you about how you-and your children-can be the best you can be." ⁴

Interestingly, Eknath Easwaran stresses that "our greatest strength lies not in how much we differ from each other but in how much-how very much-we are the same." ⁵

In line with this beautiful statement, I would like to share with you just some of those many **same spiritual values and beliefs that enhance our unity and solidarity**.

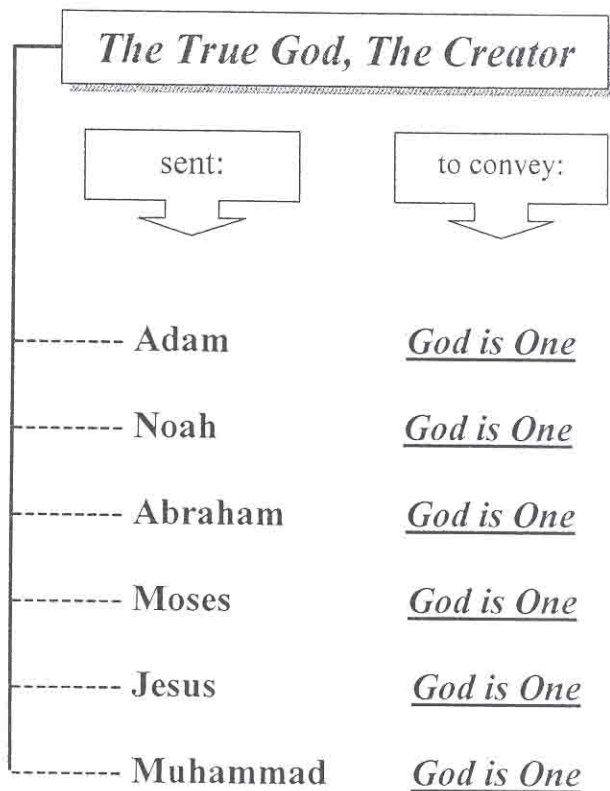
❖ Unity in One God

The foremost, significant spiritual value or belief unifying us is the fact that it is the **same God** who created all humans (including God's prophets and messengers), all animals, and all objects. It is this ***One true God*** who created the whole universe and all it contains. ⁶

Thus, throughout the history of humanity, true prophets and messengers including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were sent by ***the only true God (Allah) to teach and preach the same spiritual values and beliefs that effectively ensure and encourage unity and solidarity among the sons and daughters of Adam.***

In fact, God sent these major prophets as well as many other prophets and messengers to accomplish several tasks and missions, some of which are:

- 1) To receive guidance from God and deliver it to people.
- 2) To convey the message that God is One.
- 3) To be role models to their people.
- 4) To instruct their people to fear God and keep His commandments.
- 5) To teach their followers important religious and spiritual values and tenets as well as worldly matters.



The One God in the Bible

(The Old Testament):

- *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.* (Deuteronomy 6: 4)
- *You may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after Me. I, I am the Lord, and besides Me there is no Savior.* (Isaiah 43: 10-11)
- *I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no god. Who is like Me?* (Isaiah 44: 6)
- *And there is no other god besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides Me. Turn to Me and be saved...To Me every knee shall bow.* (Isaiah 45: 21-23)

The One God in the Bible

(The New Testament):

- *One came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he (Jesus) said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.* (Matthew 19: 16-17, in King James Version)
- *Now this is life eternal, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.* (John 17: 3)
- *Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.* (Matthew 4: 10)
- *Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is One Lord.* (Mark 12: 29)

The One God in the Qur'an

- *Say: He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him.* (112: 1-4)
- *There is no god but I; so worship Me.* (21: 25)
- *Can there be another god besides Allah (God)? Nay, most of them know not.* (27: 61)
- *Can there be another god besides Allah (God)? High is Allah above what they associate with Him.* (27: 63)

In Islam, the one true God (Allah) has created the whole universe, including time, space, energy, and matter. It is only this great God (Allah) who made all humans and animals, the earth and its mountains, oceans and rivers, plants and forests, the sun and the moon, galaxies and orbits, days and nights. All other objects, which we may or may not know, or have not yet been discovered, are all aspects of His infinite creation.

❖ Unity in prayer

Prayer is another magnificent spiritual value that we can find in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Prayer provides us with spiritual growth, psychological comfort, support, relief, tranquility, and contentment for our souls, minds, and hearts.⁷

What adds to the beauty of prayer is the truth that God's prophets, like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were praying and prostrating to the same one true God, Allah.

Furthermore, many other beautiful concepts and principles, such as love of God, submission and surrender to Him, supplication, unity, equality, sincerity, patience, humility, and meekness are evidently manifested in and learned from prayer.

Indeed, sincere and humble remembrance of God, supplication, seeking forgiveness, and prayer - to God alone - are great and wonderful spiritual keys to peace of mind, tranquility, and blessings.

Prayer in the Bible

(In the Old Testament)

- *Then Abraham prayed to God.* (Genesis 20:17)
- *Moses prayed to the LORD.* (Numbers 11:2)

Prayer in the Bible

(In the New Testament)

- *He (Jesus) fell with his face to the ground and prayed.* (Matthew 26:39)
- *In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.* (Mark 1:35)

Prayer in the Qur'an

- *Successful indeed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers.* (The Qur'an 23: 1-2)
- *And keep up prayer and pay the alms and bow down with those who bow down.* (The Qur'an 2: 43)

❖ Unity in greeting of peace

Religion teaches us to greet each other with peace. "shalom", "salam", and "peace" mean the same. The prophets of God like Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad used to greet others with peace and taught their followers to do so.

- *And thus you shall say, '... peace be to you'.* (1 Samuel 25:6)
- *While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you."* (Luke 24:36)
- *Peace (Salam) be upon you! I will pray to my Lord to forgive you. For He is to me Most Gracious.* (The Qur'an 19: 47)

The Prophet Muhammad said: "If you worship the Most Merciful, feed the poor, and spread peace (salam) to others, you will go to Paradise peacefully."

Spiritual Values in Islam:

In addition to the spiritual values concerning believing in the same one God (Allah), praying to Him alone, and greeting others with peace (salam) mentioned above, Islam also leads us to many other spiritual and moral values which aim at unity and solidarity with others. For example:

- Islam inspires us to have good intentions, positive attitudes, and kind feelings towards others.
- It teaches us to forgive, and love for others what we love for ourselves.
- It urges us to smile sincerely, and be kind to others.
- It instructs us to act courteously.
- It commands us to have good conduct and behave with respect.
- It teaches us to be gentle to humans, animals, birds, and our environment.
- It instructs us to respect and care for our parents and the elderly, and to be good to our families, spouses, and children.
- It encourages us to help, feed, and support the weak, the poor, the needy, and the disabled.
- It urges us to think, ponder, reason, and base our judgments on proof.
- It teaches us that all humans are equal regardless of their race, color, or nationality.

- It instructs us not to hurt, hate, transgress against, put down, or despise others.
- It clearly tells us why we are here, who brought us, where we are heading, and what our last destination is.
- It leads us to the truth.
- It tells about our creation and the creation of the universe.
- It reveals to us the truth about our spirituality.
- It clearly explains how to worship the one true God.
- It teaches about the real purpose of life.
- It tells us about the next life (eternal life).
- It instructs us to live in peace and good relationship with God, self, and others.
- It shows us the way to gain true happiness and ultimate pleasure.

Indeed, Islam realizes our innate natures. It speaks to our souls and our spiritual and intellectual needs and tendencies. God (Allah) who knows the secrets and thoughts of our spirit, mind, and heart, reveals to us the secrets and keys of how to attain high, sound, and sincere spirituality and contentment. Below, I mention 10 secrets:

Secret (key) 1: Know your one true God.

Secret (key) 2: Believe in God alone.

Secret (key) 3: Follow God's will.

Secret (key) 4: Worship God alone.

Secret (key) 5: Remember God.

Secret (key) 6: Seek God's forgiveness.

Secret (key) 7: Believe in God's prophets.

Secret (key) 8: Love for others what you love for yourself.

Secret (key) 9: Be generous to others and try to make them happy.

Secret (key) 10: Have sincerity and piety.

Briefly, these top 10 secrets through which we can achieve high, sound, and sincere spirituality, tranquility, and contentment as well as moral, social, and global peace are among the magnificent treasures of the Glorious Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's sayings.

Moreover, Islam teaches that spiritual submission to the will of God is the essence of the message of Allah. Confirming the true meaning of submission to Him and the reward prepared for those who believe and do good deeds, Allah points out in the Qur'an:

- *“Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds – they will have the Gardens of Paradise as a lodging.”* (The Qur'an 18: 107)

Similarly, the Holy Bible reports the words of Jesus' brother, James, saying:

- *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead also.”* (James 2: 26)

Interestingly, James also referred to the meaning of Islam that was previously discussed.

- *“Submit yourselves therefore to God.”* (James 4: 7)

Muslims submit their will to the one true God, have faith in Allah, and do good deeds. They obey and follow the commandments that the prophets taught and did, like believing in one true God, praying, prostrating, kneeling down in worship, fasting, giving alms, and charity, saying **‘if God wills’ (Insha Allah)**, and using the greeting of the prophets: **‘Peace be upon you’ (Asalamu Alaikum)**. Therefore, Muslims spiritually and practically, are true followers of the prophets (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus).

These are just some examples and pieces of evidence which clearly indicate the truth, unity, and universality of these great prophets' same teachings.

- *“Say: We believe in God (Allah), and the revelation given to us, and that given to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to all prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them and we submit to God”* (The Qur'an 2: 136)

Conclusions

All God's prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were sent by the same God, the Creator, to convey the same eternal message.

This truth is clearly evident and easily traceable in the Holy Bible and the Glorious Qur'an. Thus, many pieces of evidence in the Bible and the Qur'an confirm this one, eternal message: *"Turn to me now and be saved, people all over the world! I am the only God there is."* (Isaiah 45: 22)

God offered His guidance and light to all people and revealed the secrets and keys through which they can achieve tranquility and contentment, as well as spiritual, social, and global peace.

The original teachings of the monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam preach the same spiritual values and beliefs confirming that we all belong to the same One. These beautiful spiritual values and beliefs taught by these major religions should bring us together, enhance our unity and solidarity, and make us live in peace and harmony.

Finally, religion teaches us to be just, wise, sincere, honest, and objective when dealing with or judging others. And this dealing or judging should be performed with justice, positive attitude, dialogue, mutual respect, and clear understanding. These are just some characteristics of our common spiritual and moral values.



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The Holy Bible

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Brief Definitions of Major Islamic Terms

Allah: In Arabic, Allah is the name of the one true God, the Creator. Islam teaches that Allah is the true God of all mankind. Jewish and Christian Arabs use this name (Allah) to refer to God.

Muhammad: Is the last Prophet of the one true God (Allah); sent to all mankind (may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him).

Islam: Means submission to the Will of the one true God (Allah).

Muslim: Is one who submits to the Will of the one true God (Allah).

The Glorious Qur'an: Is the final Word of the one true God (Allah) revealed to Prophet Muhammad.

About the writer

Dr. Naji Arfaj attended Michigan State University, USA and completed his M.A. and Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics in 1995. He spent more than 20 years researching comparative religion. He frequently gives public lectures around the world. Dr. Naji is the author of several books (available on the Internet), and presents radio and TV programs. He is also Director of the Inter-Cultural Communication and Dialogue Center in Ahsa, Saudi Arabia.



Dr. Naji with King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz at the International Conference for Dialogue in Madrid, Spain 2008

Publications by the writer:

- *Who is the True God?*
- *What is His Nature?*
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