

How to Establish a Just Society

Abstracts of Proceedings
39th World Religions Conference

Held September 22, 2019
Humanities Theatre, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Representatives of
Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Indigenous Spirituality,
Islam, Humanism and Sikhism.

Organized by the
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at of Canada



Acknowledgments

Our thanks is to the speakers representing various faiths and philosophical traditions, for participating and providing an abstract of their speech on the theme “How to Establish a Just Society” for the 39th World Religions Conference.

In the staging of this conference, we have received support and help from numerous organizations and individuals. In addition to the speakers and guests that attended the event, we acknowledge the contributions of all our partner organizations; The City of Waterloo, The City of Kitchener, The City of Cambridge, Sikh Students Association of UW, Ahmadiyya Muslim Students’s Association, Indigenous Community, Brahmarishi Mission of Canada, Church of Saint Michael, St. Philip’s Lutheran Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Golden Triangle Sikh Association, Siri Guru Singh Sabha Cambridge, Multi-Faith Resource Team Ecumencial Campus Minister of the University of Guelph, The Society of Ontario Freethinkers, The Sacred Secular Sanctuary, The Waterloo Record, Muslim Television Ahmadiyya (MTA), 570 News Talk Radio, Callture, Scientology Volunteer ministers and the Cross Cultures magazine.

Moreover, we recognize the cooperation and volunteer services of the Conference moderator - Angela Vieth, and the volunteer services of the entire WRC team, WRC Organizing Committee and approximately 75 other volunteers who worked with great enthusiasm for the organization of this conference.

Nabeel A. Rana
Event Coordinator

Nomaan Mubashir
Chair WRC Organizing Committee

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Introductory Remarks - 39th World Religions Conference

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada and all conference partner organizations welcome you to this wonderful celebration of mutual respect and harmony.

The World Religions Conference brings together different faiths and philosophies promoting peace, understanding and tolerance. This is a wonderful opportunity to come together and share varying perspectives in a respectful forum - promoting a message of harmony, respect and tolerance.

Freedom of religious belief is a cornerstone of Canada and having the right to worship, to believe, and to express oneself safely, is vital to a healthy community. Throughout this conference, you will hear from renowned scholars of different faiths on how to establish a Just Society. I encourage you to share your views, expand your knowledge, and celebrate the many differences that make our country strong and better.

From humble beginnings in Brantford and moving to Waterloo, Kitchener and Guelph, the World Religions Conference continues to bring understanding and respect among the followers of all religions and philosophies for the last 39 years.

The Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian (peace be upon him), expounded on such interfaith interaction over a century ago. Describing the basis of respect for others' faiths and respect for the founders of all religions he wrote:

"... This is the most attractive and peace-giving principle. It provides the basis for reconciliation among nations and promotes better moral conduct. It teaches us to believe in the truth of all the prophets, wherever they might have appeared..."
Tohfa Qaisariyyah (A Gift for the Queen) page 259

The World Head and Fifth Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, while delivering a keynote address at a similar World Religions Conference in London UK, said:

"... all the major religions of the world taught the worship of God and love and compassion for mankind in their original form. If these original teachings were upheld today, it would lead to a harmonious society, free from conflict and war..."
Keynote address, Conference of World Religions, London UK, February 11, 2014

Congratulations to everyone who is participating in today's event. I wish you all a wonderful and meaningful conference.

Sincerely,

Lal Khan Malik
National President
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada
September 22, 2019
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada



PRIME MINISTER • PREMIER MINISTRE

September 22, 2019

Dear Friends:

I am pleased to extend my warmest greetings to everyone taking part in the 39th World Religions Conference, being held at the University of Waterloo.



This event provides a platform to explore the teachings and practices of different faiths and philosophies. I am sure that this year's theme, "How to Establish a Just Society," will stimulate a great deal of enlightening, respectful and thought-provoking dialogue.

I would like to thank everyone in attendance for their commitment to fostering peace, tolerance and understanding amongst individuals of diverse faiths and backgrounds. I would also like to thank the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at of Canada for their hard work in ensuring a rewarding experience for delegates.

Please accept my best wishes for an enjoyable and productive gathering.

Sincerely,

The Rt. Hon. Justin P. J. Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



16 September 2019

Dear Nabeel Rana,

Thank you for your kind offer and invitation for me to come and speak at the 39th World Religious Conference taking place at the University of Waterloo on 22nd September 2019.

Unfortunately, my term in office as President of the UN General Assembly 73rd Session concludes today, otherwise I should have gladly accepted your invitation for me to bring greetings to the audience at the opening session.

However, I should be very happy for the following written message to be shared;

‘Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, please be assured of my best wishes and hopes for a successful 39th World Religious Conference. I am sorry not to be able to join you in person, but my period in office is coming to an end and my successor is about to take up the reigns of office. I applaud the WRC and your long and distinguished record in campaigning against injustice and promoting multi-faith dialogue and action. In recent years we have seen an increase in hate crime against those of all faiths and the United Nations is determined to help reverse and finally end this tide of intolerance. In June I presided over a memorable special meeting of the UN General Assembly on ‘Combatting Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Racism and Hate – The Challenges of Teaching Tolerance and Respect in the Digital Age’. In order to create a ‘Just Society’, tackling the root causes and effects of racism and hate that can be often found in social media has to be one of our top priorities.’

I wish you all the best for a successful Conference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "MESPINOZA".

Maria Fernanda Espinoza
President of 73rd Session General Assembly
United Nations.



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September 2019

On behalf of Regional Council, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the attendees of the 39th World Religions Conference. I'm sorry that I'm not able to join you today as local religious and academic leaders come together to reflect upon how to create a just society.

Waterloo Region is rich in multiculturalism and has a proud and long history of welcoming newcomers from across the world and spanning most religions. I believe that we have a caring and compassionate community. The more we learn about different faith traditions, the more we recognize that religion unites us rather than separates us.

I know that we don't live in a perfect world and that we need to be diligent in our efforts to address and prevent the many injustices around us. I am hopeful that today's coming together will result in a renewed desire to make this world, our community a better place to live.

I wish you all a memorable conference.

Regards,

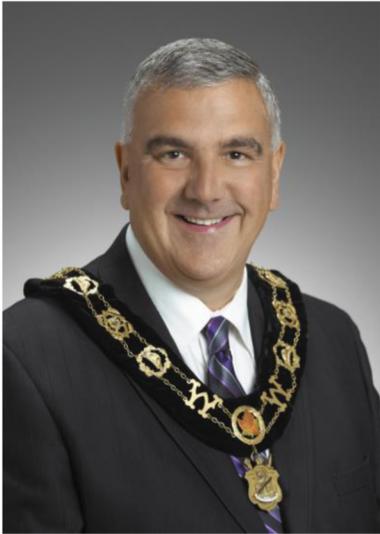
Karen Redman
Regional Chair

City of Waterloo

Dave Jaworsky, Mayor



Welcome from the Mayor



On behalf of Council and the citizens of the City of Waterloo, it is truly a pleasure to extend a warm welcome to everyone attending the World Religions Conference on Sunday September 22, 2019.

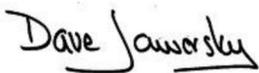
This long running conference in Waterloo celebrates diversity through religions and philosophies from well-known scholars around the world. This year's theme *How to Establish a Just Society* focuses on the many injustices happening around us.

While you are in Waterloo, I hope you have a moment to explore the interesting shops and restaurants in our Waterloo's uptown core or enjoy a visit to the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, the City of Waterloo Museum at Conestoga Mall, or the Eby Farmstead at Waterloo Park.

If time permits, further explore our 500-acre RIM Park in the northeast corner of the city that provides access to several trails, parkland, a golf course, and heritage areas, or visit our new Westmount Sports Park. This new parks design protects the local bird population and has an interactive sound panel of the 32 different bird species in the area. The park is adjacent to Laurel Creek, which provides extraordinary bird watching.

Thank you to the volunteers and organizers who have worked hard to bring together a variety of groups. The efforts of many volunteers enrich our community and help make it a wonderful place to live, work, and play!

Sincerely,



Mayor Dave Jaworsky



Message from the President for World Religions Conference

Hello and on behalf of the University of Waterloo, welcome to our campus.

Universities have been a place of open discussion and expression for centuries in the pursuit of knowledge and societal growth. I am pleased to welcome you to our University as your gathering seeks to create positive dialogue and community interaction.

Waterloo is a welcoming and diverse place where ideas and beliefs are given the opportunity to be explored and flourish. Peace, innovation and prosperity are only possible when we work together and everyone, regardless of their background, each have a seat at that table and the right to express themselves and their ideas freely.

Having the World Religions Conference as a place where different ideas and beliefs can be shared in an open and constructive environment is the embodiment of many of the University of Waterloo's values.

I wish everyone involved in the conference the best as you share your experiences and ideas and I hope you enjoy our wonderful campus during your time here.

Sincerely,

Feridun Hamdullahpur
President and Vice-Chancellor
University of Waterloo



How to Establish a Just Society Hindu Perspective

Swami Chaitanya Jyoti
Brahmarishi Mission of Canada

[Brilliant Speaker and a profound thinker, Swami Chaitanya Jyoti is a disciple of H.H. Brahmrishi Shri Vishvatma Bawra Ji Maharaj. Vice President and Head Preacher of International Brahmrishi Mission Canada. Involved in every aspect of the community – secular, religious and spiritual. Untiringly industrious, highly service motivated and court-eous. Received the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal Award in 2012 for outstanding and selfless service to the community and Canada.]

It is my honor to represent the views of our Vedic Sanatan Dharma on “How to establish a just society”. When we think of a just society the first thing which comes in mind is a society with equality. However what we should imply as equality in society needs profound thinking. A just society doesn't mean blindly implementing equality. A just society is an ideal society, where peace, prosperity, happiness and tranquility reign. Such an ideal society is rooted in one of our holy scriptures, the Ramayana, and is known as the concept of Ram Rajya.

Ram Rajya is not a myth or imagination, it is an historic truth of it times and for the time to come. Established by Lord Rama, Ram Rajya was based on truth. Dharma/Righteousness was its foundation. Scriptures were the guiding principles. Saints, Yogis, and scholars were the guiding lights. The Vedas were respected and followed. Therefore, Rama Rajya endured and prospered. As described in the Ramayana during the government of Lord Rama everyone was happy. There was none who suffered from affliction of any kind—whether of the body, or natural calamities or that caused by another living being. Everyone loved one another, each followed one's prescribed duty, conformably to the precepts of the Vedas. Rama's kingdom was free from evil-doers, thieves and dacoits. No one even dreamt of sin. Everyone practiced truth, purity, compassion and charity. There was no premature death nor suffering of any kind. Everyone was beautiful and sound of body. No one was poor, afflicted or miserable. No one was stupid or devoid of auspicious marks. All were unaffectedly good, pious and virtuous. All were clever and accomplished—both men and women. Everyone recognized the merits of others and was learned and wise.

Now the question arises how can such an ideal society be established? A society is built up by the government and general public. Hence efforts to establish an ideal society should be from both sides. An ideal form of government, should be where the ruler and subjects have a sort of a parent-child relationship, where the subjects can approach the ruler anytime with whatever problem they have and the ruler works for his/her subjects with a sense of duty, responsibility and love. Like a parent the ruler doesn't discriminate between its subjects (children), and treats all his/her subjects with equal compassion. The ruler focuses on public good coupled with self-austerity. It's a state where no decision is taken that harms even a single person, where every voice is heard and where justice is swift and accessible to even the poorest, the weakest and the marginalised. It's a state where even the subjects are righteous, nobody steals and nobody speaks any untruth, an absolute ideal society.

A Just society requires the contribution of each human being, Humans are social beings. They cannot live without society. Their activities and their whole lifestyle are related with society. Besides our social life we also have a personal life. Our personal life determines the quality of our social life. If our internal life is strong, powerful and stable then our external or social life becomes good too. The great Seer Patanjali has given 10 sets of disciplines for our personal and social life. The first set of disciplines are called the Yamas. The word 'yama' is often translated as 'restraint', 'moral discipline' or 'moral vow', and Patanjali states that these vows are completely universal. The Yamas traditionally guide us towards practices concerned with the world around us, but often we can take them as a guide of how to act towards ourselves too. There are five Yamas in total listed in Patanjali's Sutras: 1. Ahinsa (non-harming or non-violence) 2. Satya (truthfulness) 3. Asteya (non-stealing) 4. Brahmacharya (restraining mind or 'right use of energy') 5. Aparigraha (non-greed or non-hoarding).

The next set of disciplines are called the Niyamas (Individual Disciplines or controlling oneself). Niyamas are practices concerned with ourselves, which also affects the outside world. When we practice Niyamas they bring within us: purity, peace, contentment, abundance, self-acceptance, harmony and love. Patanjali lists a total of five Niyamas: 1. Shaucha (cleanliness or purity) 2. Santosha (contentment or satisfaction) 3. Tapa (discipline or controlling mind) 4. Swadhyaya (study of the self and of the scriptures) 5. Ishwara Pranidhana (surrender to Divine Consciousness). When each and every person will practice these disciplines, the establishment of a just society can be realized.

The next thing which should be considered for a just society is the equality. As I mentioned before equality in society doesn't mean to blindly give equal rights of authority and power to everyone. When it comes to human rights equality should be there for all. But when it comes to authority, power and responsibilities then we need to look further into the classification of the society. The classification of the society according to our scriptures is called Varna Vyavastha, more common known as the cast system. Lord Krishna has very clearly explained 'VARNA VYAVASTHA' in our holy scripture 'The Bhagavad Gita', which is factually universally practiced. The word 'VARNA' in Sanskrit means to describe. Description, classification of society based on 'APTITUDE' and 'ACTION' or profession is called 'VARNA VYAVASTHA'. In every society we can see class of creative thinkers & scholars responsible to guide the society; class of protectors, leaders responsible for management of law and order and security; business class responsible for generating wealth and resources. Last but not the least is the class of laborers, workers supporting all other three classes as per requirements. In Sanatan Dharma this categorization has been given the following names, Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Varna system in any society is universal and quite analogous to head, hands, stomach and feet of our body. Head is the thinker, hands are protectors, stomach is responsible to digest food and cater energy to different parts of body. Feet are responsible to transport the whole body as per requirements.

According to the Manu Smriti (one of our scriptures), separate rules were formulated for each Varna and accorded punishments for violation of these rules. The Varna Vyavastha is a functional requirement for the social system because of decentralization of power. The power of knowledge, power of arms, power of wealth and power of labour should be distributed among the four classifications in accordance with their position. Such an arrangement of doing away with the concentration of power in the hands of a particular class serves as an antidote to exploitation and dictatorship. Thus the possible evil consequences of centralization could be prevented due to Varna Vyavastha.

How to Establish a Just Society Christian Perspective

Revd Dr. Preston Parsons
St John the Evangelist Anglican Church

[Highly educated and engaging. Preston obtained PhD in Christian Theology from University of Cambridge in England while serving as Priest Vicar at St. John's College, and Director of Studies at Westminster College. Served in Sacramento California and St. Mary Magdalene in Winnipeg. Recently moved to Waterloo in 2017 with his wife, Karen. Currently a Rector at St John the Evangelist, an Anglican church in downtown Kitchener.]

Second Corinthians 5:17-19

17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

This short passage from Christian Scripture captures one fruitful way for Christians to think about establishing a just society, and leads me into what I will do today:

1. Interpret this passage from Scripture, speaking to i. the relationship between what God accomplished in Jesus, and ii. what that work has to do with Christian life and the pursuit of justice;
2. Give an example of this from some of the work we've done at St. John's in Kitchener, especially advocating for supervised drug consumption in our neighbourhood.

1.i. St. Paul, here in Second Corinthians, wants to be sure to firmly underline something before we carry on with speaking about human action: God, in Jesus, has already accomplished what needs to be accomplished.

- There's already a “new creation.” What Jesus accomplishes, in his death and his being made alive again, is nothing short of a remaking of all things, of making all things right—that is, made just.
- This locates the centre of things like justice around Jesus; for Christians, we cannot speak about something like justice before looking upon what Jesus has already done.
- Paul describes this work of Jesus as “reconciliation.” Reconciliation is the world made new in Jesus, where “everything old has passed away,” Thus reconciliation, as new creation where things are made just, is about life; everything old, including death, has passed away.
- For St. Paul, Jesus as a human person, who is at once a human person and God, reconciles God and humanity—two things that were once far apart—into peaceable coexistence with one another. This is part of the renewal of the world in Jesus: that in Jesus, God and human beings are brought into peace with one another, and thus able to live.

1.ii. St. Paul also knows that our experience of the world is not always, or is perhaps even rarely, an experience of a living reconciliation. What he does, though, is to describe God's accomplished work of reconciling all people, and all things to himself, as a ministry and message.

- It's important to note, here, that St. Paul does not see a contradiction here! God's work of reconciliation is accomplished in Christ. Paul. In Jesus, all things are already made right and just; in Christ, the world lives.
- The church is the body of Christ; that is, followers of Jesus have been entrusted with living out God's life in Christ, in the world, as the church which is his body.
- This gives the church the task of reconciliation, through the message of God's work in Christ: the world is already alive in Jesus.
- It also gives the church the task of reconciliation, through the ministry of God's work in Christ: as we live out our calling to be the body of the living Christ in the world, we carry out a task of actively working toward a world in which human beings live and thrive.
- Through the church's pursuit of this kind of reconciliation, we would look to Jesus and what Jesus accomplishes. We would pursue a world where things are made right, and where human beings live and thrive, as we do in Jesus. Through God's work in the church, this ministry of reconciliation makes life and human thriving concrete and “real” in the world.

2. That all sounds a bit abstract! So let me give an example of how that has worked out in practice for St John's, Kitchener, in our advocacy and support of supervised drug use in our neighbourhood.

- People who use injection drugs, such as fentanyl and carfentanyl, are dying from overdose Canada at a rate that outstrips SARS by a great margin.
- One of the proposals to respond to this epidemic is to allow injection drug users to use under the supervision of a medical team, so that if overdose takes place, it can be reversed and the person overdosing can live.
- A program was proposed for our neighbourhood in Kitchener, which will house supervised drug use and St. John's came out in support of this initiative.

- But “isn't doing drugs wrong?” “Why would the church support a program where drug use would be tolerated?”
- These questions assume that the church is some kind of morality police. But what St. Paul does not say that the church is the morality police. The church is to carry out the task of reconciliation, and part of that task of reconciliation is to orient ourselves, and our public institutions like health services, to God's new creation in Christ. This means supporting those things that are oriented to life and human thriving.
- Consumption and Treatment Services (CTS) is very practically oriented to life and human thriving. Not all people who use drugs can “just quit.” Some may, for a variety of reasons, never quit. To withhold life-saving and life ameliorating services from people who use drugs just because they aren't able or don't want to quit, is in a very real sense, at least to allow their health to deteriorate, and a death sentence.
- And so we are supportive of CTS, not because we condone drug use. That's the wrong place to start. We would support it because it's services are oriented to life and human thriving, in creaturely and limited terms. This orientation to life and human thriving is what we see and find in Jesus's new creation, the Jesus who entrusts his church with his ministry.
- We would see our advocacy and support of CTS as a proclamation of a message of a Christ who offers life, and a ministry where lives are preserved and human thriving is made possible, and thus part of a world reconciled with the God of life.

How to Establish a Just Society Jewish Perspective

Dr. Michael Grand, PhD, C.Psych
President of the College of Psychologists of Ontario

[Active for many years in Multifaith settings, Michael Grand PhD, C.Psych has been a member of the Jewish community of Guelph for over 45 years. As a former President of Beth Isaiah Synagogue, he currently conducts religious services and classes. He is past director of graduate training in Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology at the University of Guelph. Now retired with the rank of Professor Emeritus, he is the President of the College of Psychologists of Ontario.]

To fully appreciate the steps that must be taken to build a just society, one must first articulate an understanding of exactly what we mean by the term “just.” To do this, we turn to the Torah, the Hebrew Bible and the command of Moses to the people as they are about to enter the land of Caanan, “Tzedek, tzedek tirdof,” “Justice, Justice shall you pursue.” But this is not a cold, impartial, universal justice, unmoved by either context or life circumstance. For this, the Torah uses the terms “mispat” and “din”. It is a justice grounded in the social circumstances of the people, nuanced, partial, specific to the context in which the action will be grounded. “Tzedek, Tzedek tirdof” is a cry to build a society based upon social justice.

According to the Torah and its various interpretations offered by our sages and scholars over the past three millennia, the foundation for such a society will only be achieved if three fundamental propositions become universally held. To this end, let us first turn to the book of Breisheit, the Book of Genesis.

In the first chapter of Genesis, we are taught that Adam and Eve were the first humans. The Rabbis asked, why was this necessary? Why were there not several couples instead of just one. The answer they gave was that no person or group must claim superiority for ancestral birth, as we all share in a common ancestry. Thus, the first proposition to build a just society is that we are all equal in the eyes of the Almighty. No one must assert that by virtue of birth, they are entitled to more than any other person or group. And what is the implication for the creation of a just society? We must create the conditions that will allow for equal opportunity for everyone. Restriction based on racial ancestry, social class, belief, or religion should never be allowed. Equal opportunity for all, in all aspects of social life, be it education, housing, health care, or food security must be such that everyone is

provided with all that they need to live in this world. A just world differentiates between meeting wants and meeting needs. The former depends on the initiative and attributes of the person. The latter reflects a society that recognizes that, at our core, we are all part of a common family and as such, each of us has the responsibility to ensure that all our family members receive what we need to live in this world.

The second proposition also finds its origin in the book of Genesis. We are told that through the act of a Divine Breath, Adam came into life. The implication, of course, is that as the children of Adam, each person possesses a spark of the Almighty. Every human being must be treated with the respect due to one who carries within one's soul that Divine spark. Every life is precious. Every person deserves the respect and dignity afforded to us as bearers of the Divine Intention. If opportunities in life for the full expression of our Divinely-inspired humanity are only offered to the rich and the powerful, not only do we turn our backs on those deserving of equal opportunity, but we also deny that the weak and powerless possess the Divine spark. Such a position is untenable from a Jewish perspective. It is our task to build a society in which no one is humiliated, nor will anyone's Divinely-inspired humanity be diminished by law or circumstance. This is a huge challenge but one that we must constantly strive to achieve.

The third proposition is that all the material goods we possess in this world are not really ours at all. The Torah teaches us that the world and all that is found within it belongs to the Almighty. We are but the guardians of His possessions. Thus, the implication is clear: When we use our material gifts to aid others, we are not giving up anything that we own. We are only transferring the Almighty's possessions from our guardianship and using them to aid in the wellbeing of others who lack such necessities of life. And how are we to do this? Maimonides, the great 13th century Rabbi, philosopher and legal scholar, stressed two important points: Assistance must be given in a way that preserves the dignity of the recipient and the highest form of giving is to assist a person to be self-sufficient and not dependent on others.

The Torah teaches that “Just as I am Merciful, you shall be merciful, just as I am Compassionate, you shall be compassionate.” Given our limitedness as human beings, we will never fully know the Almighty. However, that does not mean that we cannot emulate in our behaviour, the Actions of the Almighty. A just world calls out for justice, righteousness and charity. In Hebrew, these three concepts are all captured by the same word, tzedek. If we wish to see a just world, tzedek, tzedek tirdof – Justice, Justice shall you pursue.

How to Establish a Just Society Indigenous Spiritual Perspective

Elder Malcolm Saulis
Tobique First Nation

[A Well-famed Traditional Aboriginal Spiritual Teacher and Speaker. Malcolm is a Wolostoquik (Maliseet) person from the Tobique First Nation. He has been a Wilfrid Laurier professor for 35 years and a researcher in many areas of Indigenous interest. He is recognized as Circle Keeper and received teachings from many Elders. He has worked with churches and government around issues of healing and reconciliation, restorative justice, residential school survivors and indigenization.]

- In the Indigenous worldview the relationship among the elements of Creation are seen in the :
1. The presence and relationship with the Creator
 2. The connection and relationship with the Universe
 3. The relationship and presence in the ordinary life of the Indigenous person of the Ancestors

The understanding about a just society is manifested by an examination of these three great

elements in the land and the things that exist on the land to support human life. It is not possible to have a just society if we engage in the destructive and exploitative view which we show in our relationship and use of the land. It is an easy step to carry over into the human relationship the same exploitative and hurtful behaviours we show towards the land.

We can engage in developing and understanding of these human dynamics by asking the following questions;

1. What would be the outcome of a just human relationship if we followed the direction of the Creator?
2. What would be the outcome of a just human relationship if we carried the energy and spirit of the presence of the Universe in our lives?
3. What direction would the Ancestors give us about creating a just society?

How to Establish a Just Society Islamic Perspective

Imam Imtiaz Ahmed
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama`at Canada

[Engaging and influential speaker and writer. Imtiaz is the Imam of Bai'tul Islam, one of the largest Mosques in Canada. Graduated in Islamic Theology and Comparative Religions (2010) in Canada. Served as a Missionary in Ghana, Africa and Ottawa, Canada. Working persistently to bridge relations at Interfaith events and appearing in media interviews. Named as the 25 most influential young Canadians by the Power and Influence Magazine.]

Despite mankind's 21st century claims that we have evolved beyond the need for religion, our world is plagued by double standards and hypocrisy at every level of society and the resulting injustice is of grave concern and grief for those of us who sincerely feel the pain of humanity.

In life, we cannot stand when someone steps on our toes. If a person budges in front of us in line, we suddenly become so self-righteous about seeing injustice done that we will openly humiliate them. Yet, justice demands that our indignation for upholding justice should also become enflamed when we see the rights of others being usurped. It is the responsibility of each and every human being to uphold a high standard of justice irrespective of the situation that they may be in; whether the outcome favors them or not.

In life, we are sometimes faced with a situation where we have to choose between justice and our own self-respect, or covering for one of our friends or loved ones. It is in moments like these that a person demonstrates whether he is a friend of justice or not.

God says in the Holy Qur'an:

“O ye who believe! Be strict in observing justice, and be witnesses for [the sake of] Allah, even though it be against yourselves or against parents and kindred. Whether he be rich or poor, Allah is more regardful of them both than you are. Therefore, follow not your low desires so that you may be able to act equitably. And if you conceal the truth or evade it, then remember that Allah is well aware of what you do.” (4:136)

Muslims have been directed to be ready to give testimony against themselves and their family members in order to establish the truth and for justice to be served. A Muslim's loyalty to the truth must take precedence over everything else.

God Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an:

Verily, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others; and giving like kindred... (16:91)

This is the shining principle of how to discharge the rights of one another. The Arabic word 'Adl means 'absolute justice'.

The Holy Qur'an states:

O ye who believe! Be steadfast in the cause of Allah, bearing witness in equity; and let not a people's enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice. Be always just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah. Surely Allah is aware of what you do. (5:9)

Thus the Holy Qur'an commands Muslims to be fair and just with all parties, including their enemies and opponents.

This is the highest standard of justice: that neither on an individual basis, nor on a communal basis, should the enmity of others prevent you from acting with justice.

Is this not a beautiful principle to demolish the walls of hatred? But Islam does not just stop with justice – it seeks to take man to a far loftier state. The Holy Qur'an says that if you wish to promote love and affection and wish to remove enmity from the world, then one must go beyond justice, and enact true and loving kindness.

There's a sweetness in an act of kindness that is felt by the soul. Justice only helps to balance out what has fallen out of balance. For instance, if my neighbors trespass my rights, I can drag them to court and have justice done. However, this will not foster a positive and long-lasting relationship between us.

If I instead make it a point to inform my neighbors courteously and bring them a small gift, it will resolve the issue and will breathe love and tenderness between us.

However, the comprehensive and ingenious teachings of the Holy Qur'an do not just stop there. God almighty also explains that when I exercise kindness, I should not consider that I have done some great favor upon my neighbor but should consider it part and parcel of being human. I should never bring up any act of kindness in the future to gloat about it or to make them feel bad that they owe me anything. Hence, Islam instructs us to decorate the fundament of justice with the crown of kindness as well.

The Prophet of Islam (sa) said that a person should desire for others whatever he desires for himself. I believe that this timeless principle is as true today as it ever was in the past. Certainly, every person desires peace for themselves and to be saved from all anxieties and worries. Every person hopes that he or she has the means to live comfortably and without hardship. Every person seeks good health so that they can enjoy their lives free from pain or difficulty. Every person craves good standing in their community and the respect of others. In a similar vein, every government and every nation also seeks such prosperity. However, how many people or nations are there who truly desire peace, prosperity and success for others?

In order to establish a just and peaceful society, Islam also places great emphasis on the fulfilment of one's trusts. Thus, chapter 4, verse 59, of the Holy Qur'an states:

“Verily, Allah commands you to make over the trusts to those entitled to them, and that, when you judge between people, you judge with justice. And surely excellent is that with which Allah admonishes you! Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.”

In this verse, Muslims have been clearly instructed to fulfil the trusts that have been placed in them. This includes trusts and oaths that have been undertaken at a personal level and those trusts that are collective - The

oath of marriage, the oath of friendship, the oath of treating God's creatures with love, the oaths that we make with our Creator.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the understanding of Justice that has been taught to us by the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as) the Promised Messiah and Reformer of the latter days.

The Worldwide Head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, His Holiness Mirza Masroor Ahmad (aa) Caliph of Islam said:

“If we truly want peace in our time then we must act with justice. We must value equality and fairness.

Whether Muslim or non-Muslim we should pursue the universal standards of justice outlined in the Holy Qur'an. As the Prophet of Islam (sa) so beautifully stated, we must love for others, what we love for ourselves. We must pursue the rights of others with the same zeal and determination that we pursue our own rights. We should broaden our horizons and look at what is right for the world, rather than what is only right for us. These are the means for peace in our age.”

Thank you ladies and gentlemen!

How to Establish a Just Society Humanist Perspective

Doug Thomas

President of Secular Connexion Séculière and The Society of Freethinkers

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Definition: A just Society involves the following essential elements:

Reason – essential for a just society since without reason, laws can not provide fairness in all circumstances. They become merciless dogma.

Ethics – necessary as an element in lawmaking, for reform of laws and for social justice

- 8 principles of humanist ethics are available at www.sofree.ca

Dignity – society must treat all beings with dignity or no just society can exist

Equality – inequality is an injustice, all people must be treated equally unconditionally

- no excuses about treating people differently, but equal

A just society would deliver justice in this life, since there is no evidence of an afterlife where suffering in this life will be rewarded in another.

Systemic Justice – the laws of the society we want to be just

They must be made justly: they must be just and be seen to be just.

Transparency in processes must be maintained

Favouritism toward one sector in society creates injustice as surely as discrimination against a sector does. Any hope of establishing a just society rests on the removal of unjust laws that systemically favour believers over non-believers.

For example:

319 3(b) Criminal Code of Canada – allows the utterance of hate speech and the publication of hate literature as long as the comments are supported from religious texts.

O Canada a theist national anthem that excludes non-believers (National Anthems Act, 1980)

Charity qualifications that make religions charities automatically while secular humanist organizations must justify their charitable status yearly with community commitments.

Some laws legitimize discrimination unintentionally. I doubt that the legislators who voted in Québec's bill that forbids the wearing of religious symbols in government workplaces intended to make attacks on visible minorities in public places seem more legitimate, but that is what happens.

Social Justice

More difficult to achieve, but is a requirement for progress in achieving systemic justice.

The most important element in creating social justice is education. When Sikhs are questioned about their support of Sharia law, it is evidence that the questioner doesn't know anything about Sikhism or Islam. Ignorance is the greatest bulwark of discrimination and it is supported by its close companion, fear of the unknown.

Secular humanists are often accused of being evil, and of worshipping Satan. Such worship is impossible in the secular humanist philosophy since we are non-believers and Satan is just another creation of human minds. How do the eight humanist principles I have already cited promote evil?

Ignorance and fear must be eliminated for a just society to exist.

Summary

Reaching a secular humanist just society would require us to use reason as our tool, ethics as our template, dignity as our touchstone, and equality as our goal. A secular humanist just society will exist in this life, the only life we have.

How to Establish a Just Society Sikh Perspective

Navdeep Singh
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[Talented and well educated, Navdeep serves as a Chairperson and Trustee at the Siri Guru Singh Sabha Sikh Gurdwara in Cambridge. Has been helping in organizing Sikh youth camps and teaches weekly children's classes in Sikh history and Sikh spirituality at the Cambridge Gurdwara. Currently works as a Senior Project Manager with SunLife Financials. Holds a Bachelors of Engineering, a M.Sc. in IT, and MBA in Finance and Strategy.]

In this universe no one is like anyone else. So when the very fundamental principle of the creation of this world is based on diversity, we are facing a daunting task to create societies that are fair and just to all living in those.

Since the evolution of civilizations, human beings are making continuous efforts to develop a setup that should bring equality for all in all the aspects of the human lives. To date, many experiments have been conducted

that have assisted us to create societies that are fair to a certain extent. However, we still see inequalities and unjust treatments in our societies that are causing great sufferings to many individuals. So intellectuals are continuously working on finding the answers to the questions such as “How to create Just Society?” The current eternal living guru of the Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib Ji, answers all such questions by telling us about the weaknesses and pitfalls, the reasons behind it and most importantly, the solutions to remove such obstacles.

To better understand our solution to today's question, let us review the Sikh philosophy in accordance with the macro level framework of Society that can be divided into four areas – Economical, Social, Political and Religious.

Guru Granth Sahib Ji explains that an economic well being is needed to meet our needs and one should not hesitate to work hard to earn his livings. In today's world our overwhelming urge to have more of everything, usually much more than one really need, drives us to practice wrong means and even use deceit to acquire wealth of others. One being considerate of the fact that the life in this world is not permanent and one is responsible for his/her own actions will restrain us from not taking what rightfully belongs to the other. Guru Sahib ji teaches us that lust, ego, attachment, greed and wrath diffused in the world is creating the imbalance in our social lives and causing human sufferings. To excel socially, one needs to be enlightened with the spiritual wisdom and such wisdom can only be attained through the companionship with the Saints, the enlightened beings.

The Sikh philosophy stresses that leaders should have the qualities of humility and selflessness. They should be prepared to work tirelessly for the betterment of society. Guru Granth Sahib ji directs that only the one who is worthy of a throne should sit on it. Further, the citizens play a vital role in government's proper functioning and success. However, Guru Sahib warns us that citizens/subjects are not acquiring the knowledge and lack any wisdom, and thereby are suffering in the hands of their leaders.

For ages, religious beliefs were driven by desire of heaven and fear of hell. The Sikh Gurus instead motivated their disciples to achieve the ultimate state of union with the Divine through love. Love for all creation because God resides in every atom of the universe. Further, the Sikh believes that religious freedom is an instinctual human expression. It is a vision of a world in which the inhabitants are cognizant of each other's values and beliefs; beyond labels and stereotypes, we connect with one another on the basis of that we are all extensions of Divinity.

As a Sikh, our Guru's teachings are a constant reminder that we should be working throughout our life for the physical, mental, and spiritual (kirt karo, naam japo, vand chakko) betterment of all living beings, and not hesitate to even lay down our lives for the rights of the others. The 9th Sikh Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur Ji, setup a unique example in the history of mankind by sacrificing his life for the cause of the others (Hindus), protecting their religious freedom.

The Sikh Gurus also setup the institution of langar, the free community meal that eliminates the idea of subordination and dominance between all people. It allows community and camaraderie to flow freely from the bonds of caste, race, ethnicity, gender, age, wealth, etc.

Sikh philosophy holds that each one of us is a drop of water from the infinite ocean of the universe, and that we all come from the same source called Ik Oangkaar, Sach, or Vaheguru. It is upon us whether we call this source God, the Universe or a form of energy. We all share this in common. The goal of a Sikh is to truly love the One Universal energy, to see this energy in all things and ultimately to love all as One. By doing so we together can form a just society.

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