A Timeless Teaching of Hijrah: Brotherhood of Humanity

How the Prophet Instilled Brotherhood among Muslims *

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Sure, Islam is not racist; almost any Muslim will tell you that.

But Islam's very strong stance against racism and prejudice wasn't just demonstrated in words and principles: [O Mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous of you] (Al-Hujurat:13). It was also evident in the Prophet's establishment of the mu'akhah (brotherhood) system between the Makkan emigrants and the inhabitants of Madinah.

About six months after the Muslims of Makkah have left their homes, livelihoods, and, in many cases, their families, for the sake of Allah and immigrated to Madinah, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) established a system that would bring together Muslims of two different cities and different tribes.

The Muslims who had left Makkah were called Muhajirun, emigrants to Madinah; they had left their homes for the sake of Allah. They were now homeless and more or less penniless in Madinah. They needed help.

Enter the Muslims of Madinah. They become the Ansars (or helpers, supporters, backbone) of their Muhajirun brothers and sisters in faith.

They Were Not Just "Roommates"

Bringing Muslims together (Mu'akhah), coming from the same root as akh "brother" in Arabic, means a system of making people brothers and sisters. The Prophet paired one Muhajir with one Ansar. They were not just temporary roommates. They became brothers in the truest sense. Not only did the Ansar Muslim provide the Muhajir Muslim with food, shelter, and clothing. He offered him consolation, support, and true Muslim fellowship.

Although there were no set rules, each of the Ansar who got a Muhajir as his brother gave an equal share of his property and belongings to his Muhajir brother.

In the time of ignorance before the advent of Islam, the norm was Arab tribal enmity and prejudices. The mu'akhah system was entirely revolutionary at this time and place. It gave the Muhajirun a chance to rebuild their lives in their new home, while creating a deep bond of love and affection between Muslims of two very different backgrounds.

The regional differences between people, languages, and culture, despite smaller distances as compared to today, were immense.

Therefore, it was perhaps strange for people at the time to think of an Arab and a non-Arab living together as brothers.

For instance, Bilal ibn Rabah, an African Muhajir and a former slave, was paired up as a brother with Abu Rawahah `Abdullah ibn `Abdul Rahman.   They were brothers, not mere roommates. A black man and an Arab: who could have imagined this state of affairs in pre-Islamic tribal Arabia?

The mu'akhah system is clearly an example of Islam's solid commitment to the establishment of a genuine brotherhood that is entirely based on faith and character, instead of color, language, race, background, and ethnicity.   As we commemorate the beginning of the new Hijri year, we remember the timeless teachings of our beautiful Islam and we seek to purify ourselves and struggle to uphold these values in our daily lives.

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* Excerpted, with slight modifications, from: www.soundvision.com