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ISLAM

Islam believes in plural society

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For the greater part of his life, the Prophet of Islam lived in a society where adherents of other religions existed side by side with believers in Islam. The Prophet's behaviour towards the former was invariably that of respect and tolerance. At a time when the majority of the denizens of Mecca were still idolaters, his conduct consistently conveyed his high moral character. On the one hand, he communicated to them the message of God with love and kindness and, on the other, fulfilled all of their human rights. That is why the non-Muslims of Mecca had such great confidence in him, to the point of entrusting their belongings to his care. This they continued to do right up to the last days of his stay in Mecca. After the attainment of his prophethood, he lived in Mecca for a period of 13 years, later migrating to Madina, where he lived for ten years until his death. For about half of this period in Madina, he was living among people belonging to three religions — Muslims, Jews and polytheists. The Prophet devised a constitution for these people, known in history as *Sahifa-e-Madina* (The Madina Charter). This charter expressly mentioned that issues concerning these three groups domiciled in Madina would be decided on the basis of their own religious traditions — those of Muslims according to their Islamic traditions, and those of the polytheists and Jews according to their respective traditions. This principle of Islam was intended to apply at all places where Muslims lived along with adherents of other religions. This *sunnat*, or practice of the Prophet, for a plural society carries the same moral authority as other of his practices. Islam recognizes no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims from the ethical standpoint. The rights granted to a Muslim are exactly the same as those granted to a non-Muslim.

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