

Respect all cultures, do not discriminate

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

God sent more than one hundred thousand prophets or messengers to every group of people. All the messengers of God enjoy an equal status. In the chapter entitled Al-Baqarah (The Heifer), the Quran, says: "The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and (so do) believers. They all believe in God and His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. They say, 'We do not differentiate between any of His messengers. We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, Lord, to You we shall all return!'" (2:285)

This Quranic verse relates directly to the messengers or the prophets of God, but it also has a broader application, according to which everyone is worthy of respect, regardless of his creed or culture. Such belief, a matter of conviction, promotes a culture of equal respect among mankind. Difference in belief is necessarily subject to discussion, but it is not a reason for discrimina-

tion. If your belief system is different from that of others, you have every right to engage in discussion and dialogue on the subject, but in the process you have no right to show disrespect to others. This holds true even if you feel that your personal ideology enshrines the supreme truth. The culture of discrimination is, after all, quite alien to the divine religion.

Islam has two aims regarding society — dissemination of the truth as set forth in the Quran, and maintaining a healthy society that honours the principles of respect and peaceful coexistence. To this end, the Quran lays great emphasis on restraint and discipline — conflict and extremism being completely alien to the Islamic system of thought. One should bow to the principle of tolerance, for others have a right to live according to their convictions, just as you want to live according to your own convictions.

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