

In the Name of Allah Most Gracious Most Merciful

Some Points of Similarity Between Islam, Africa and the African

By

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

ISLAM AND AFRICA

In the early 7th century (CE), about 5 years after the commencement of Islam, Africa became the first land ever to welcome the persecuted Muslim emigrants from Makkah in Arabia.

We may also remember that the first Muazzin (caller of the prayer) and treasurer of the nascent Islamic state in Medina, and a close confidant of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was Bilal Ibn Rabah (رضي الله عنه) who hailed from Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia/Eritrea) in Africa.

Furthermore, one of the dear wives of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was Lady Maryam, a Copt from Africa; and the only wife of his, that bore him a child, other than his first wife, Lady Khadijah.

So this is the level of close relationship and comradeship that Islam enjoyed with Africa. The ruler of Abyssinia then, the Negus (Najashi), believed in the Prophethood of Muhammad (ﷺ) and converted to Islam

Today, Muslims are officially about 40-50% continent-wide, concentrated in North, West, and East Africa. Many believe that this number is much higher and growing at a tremendous pace.

Thus, from the earliest days of Islam, Africa occupied a unique and honoured position in Islamic history.

This beautiful message of Islam with its emphasis on universal brotherhood, justice and equity, is now once again reaching out to Africa and calling the people of Africa to witness and experience

and embrace this eternal message of unity, justice and equity, which is Islam.

This paper by brother Essa Al Seppe, touches only the fringes of this mammoth topic and relationship and only one minute aspect of it, and I believe, will lead to much greater discussion and research, with time, Insha Allah.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

IMAM ESSA AL-SEPPE

Imam Essa Al Seppe was born in Springs (in the Gauteng Province of South Africa). His father was a descendant of the Khoi Khoi; and his mother, a decedent of the San. He returned to the mercy of Allah (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) in Durban at the age of 52 years, on 29/05/2002, after a short illness, and buried at the Central Durban Brook Street Cemetery. However, in that span of 52 years, he left a significant mark over the dawah scene of Southern Africa.

He took the pledge of Shahadah and embraced Islam as a youth. In the 1970's and onwards, conversions by Africans to Islam gained momentum in South Africa, mainly from the African youth; and Essa Al-Seppe was part of that generation and momentum.

In January 1982 Sheikh Essa married Sister Fazila Sayed Rassol Khan a Muslim of Indian origin from Durban. They were married at the Darul Arkaam Centre in Marianhill, on the outskirts of Durban. Allah (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) blessed them with 5 children. The Darul Arkaam Islamic Centre was the very first Musjid and Islamic Centre which The Islamic Dawah Movement (IDM) had built in Southern Africa, and Imam Essa Al Seppe was the Director of the Centre at the time. Since then, IDM has built about a hundred such centres in Southern Africa, Alhamdulillah.

Imam Essa was profoundly influenced by the Ikhwanul Muslimmeen's struggle against oppression and injustice in Egypt and the Middle

East in general; as well as by the American Civil rights leader, Malcolm X.

Imam Al Seppe was totally committed to dawah in Southern Africa, and he made a tremendous impact in this regard. He very rightly believed that one must take into considerations the socio-economic-political context in one's promotion of dawah. Hence, his dawah always took into consideration the support of the liberation movements both in South Africa and Namibia, both of which were still under colonial rule then.

Sheikh Essa was associated with numerous dawah and general Islamic organisations as well as other civic organisations, in voluntary and non-voluntary capacities. Islamic dawah became his passion and life.

Because of this passion, he therefore also had a global outreach with many renowned international Muslim personalities, including Sheikh Hassan Al Turabi of Sudan and Sheikh Abdul Aziz Hamad of the Muslim World League in Makka and many others.

Alhamdullilah, Imam Essa possessed tremendous leadership qualities. He was invited on numerous occasions to conduct workshops, on numerous themes, but especially on strategic planning, development and leadership. He had completed his master's degree in the field of Globalisation at the University of Natal and authored several articles dealing with leadership and strategic planning.

One of his achievements was this publication, "Some Points of Similarity Between Islam, Africa and the African", written whilst in the employ of the Islamic Dawah Movement of Southern Africa (IDM) in the 1980's, and published by IDM in October 1985. However, because it promoted Islamic Dawah, no copyright was placed on it; and it was reprinted and published by others as well, Alhamdullilah.

This booklet has resurfaced in recent months, and aroused the interest of many people again; shown to be still very relevant in this day and age, especially in Muslim-minority Southern Africa. Hence a decision was taken to reprint it.

Sheik Essa was particularly sensitive to the question of Indian-African relationships amongst the Muslims of South Africa. The traditional elements amongst the Indian Muslims displayed tremendously over patronising and sometimes overtly racial attitudes towards the emerging Black Muslim Ummah and alienated them; and many amongst the latter “rebelled” with hostile attitudes. This state of affairs and actions troubled Imam Essa and many others.

Imam Essa Al Sappe was the director of the Islamic Dawah Movement (IDM) for several years in the 1980’s. He was admired for his dedication and commitment to the cause, and most important of all, for his passion for Islamic dawah. He ardently desired that as many people as possible could also Witness, as he had done, and share the blessings of Islam, as he had experienced.

His dawah efforts came as a breath of fresh air. He did not carry the baggage of the past, as often seen with born Muslims. It therefore gave a strong general indication that the resurgence of Islam worldwide will be further spearheaded primarily by new Muslims from the traditionally Muslim minority countries of the world.

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1

Introduction

One of the fundamental principles laid down by Islam is that a Muslim must believe in Prophethood. In this aspect of Islam, a Muslim must believe not only in the Prophethood of Nabi Muhammad (S.A.W.), the final messenger and seal of Prophethood, but also in all other Prophets (Ambiyaa) raised before Nabi Muhammad (S.A.W.). The Qur'an further establishes the fact that Allah, in His infinite mercy and grace, has made prophetic guidance a divine gift to be bestowed upon every tribe, nation and race.

*“There is not a nation, but a warner has gone among them”
(Qur'an 35:24)*

*And to every nation was sent a guide”
(Qur'an 13:7)*

*“Never have we sent a messenger – except in the language of his own people, in order that he might make (the message) clear to them”
(Qur'an 14:5)*

It is therefore a proven Qur'anic fact that the Prophets of Allah were sent even to Africa. We can also deduce from the above quoted Qur'anic Ayats that the points of similarity between Islam and various aspects of African Culture are not coincidental occurrences but actual remnants of the Prophetic mission of some of those Prophets who were raised before Nabi Muahhamd (S.A.W.).

Africa, with her diversity of tribes and cultural patterns, provides up to the present day subtle yet strong links with Islamic beliefs, practices and norms. One can conclude without doubt that Africans alone with their way of life and demeanour would serve as further links to bind them to Islam.

2

Africans not alien to the concept of monotheism

Africa has various religions and cultural patterns established over the centuries. To the African, religion has remained the most profound and meaningful amenity, along with its attendant rituals.

To the stranger, African traditional religions may seem polytheistic in outlook and practice. However, it is not so. Monotheism in its wide context does exist among African Traditional Religions. The only thing that indicates a clear deviation from true monotheism as preached and taught by all the Prophets of Allah is that, instead of direct communication with Allah, African traditional religions have established intermediaries such as “Spirits” and “Ancestors” to intercede between the worshipper and Allah.

An important and indeed interesting aspect of African traditional religions is that, in identifying Allah, Africans use a variety of names and attributes, which do not indicate belief in a “Multiple Godhood” but rather a single Supreme Being worthy of worship.

Among the San people of Southern Africa (so-called “Bushmen”), the concept of monotheism does exist in their tribal beliefs. Dr Peter Becker who has studied the life of these people, sums it up beautifully in his work “Tribe to Township” – “Bushmen are intensively sensitive to a governing force of life, an invisible, all present, omnipotent

power beyond the comprehension of man. And to this force of life is attributed all creation and all the manifestation of nature.”

In African traditional religions, and also in African tribal societies, there are no atheists. An Ashanti proverb goes thus: “No one shows an (African) child the Supreme Being”. That means everybody knows Allah’s existence almost by instinct and even children know Allah’s existence. African traditional religions are therefore basically monotheistic in concept and outlook, although not so in actual practice.

3

The African Perception of Allah

The perception of Allah as the Creator and only Supreme Being worthy of worship is beautifully rendered in African traditional names. To the African, Allah the Supreme Being is not perceived as the guardian Lord or Patron of a particular race, tribe or nation. Rather, the contrary exists in traditional religions whereby a variety of attributive names are employed to identify Allah as the Supreme Being.

A strong similarity between Islam and these traditional African names for Allah is the connotation which these names bear. Most of these names are equivalent in certain respects to some of the ninety-nine names and attributes of Allah – known as Asma-Ul-Husna to Muslims.

Among the Barundi people of Burundi – Allah is known as “Imana”, which when articulated in its own dialect, sounds similar to the Arabic word “Iman” – which means faith of belief. The attributes which the Burundi discern in “Imana” are literally equivalent in many respects to those acknowledged as belonging to Allah in the Qur’an, as the examples below cite:

“Bisabwa” – He alone is worthy of worship. This attribute is similar to the Islamic Kalimah “La Illaha Illallah” – “There is none worthy of worship except Allah”.

“Habimana” – Only He truly exists

“Habonimana” – Only He truly sees
“Hazikimana” – Only He truly saves
“Igirukwigomba” – Only He does as He will
“Birori” – Only He watches over everything

The Akan know Allah as “He who knows or sees all”. The Yoruba say “Only God is wise”. They also believe that “Only He is the discernor of hearts”.

The Banyawarda, like the Zulu of Southern Africa, know Allah as “The wise One”, while the Bacongo, like the Zulu, believe that “He is made by no other, and no one beyond Him is”. The Ba-Lemba of Southern Africa say Allah is “Mwali, we Denga” which means “The God of Heaven”.

The Zulu also use the attribute “Umdali” – meaning the Creator. “Umdali” also has similar connotations to the Arabic word “Al-Khaliq”. The traditional name for Allah used by the Zulu is “Umvelingqange”, which means “He who brings that which is not there until He creates it”. This name “Umvelingqange” also conveys a similar message as the Qur’anic verse: “Kun fe ya kun” – “Be and it is”.

In the summing up of the attributes of Allah, the Zulu say “Umvelingqange, umoya oyingcwele akazali futhi akazalwanga, akhukho lutho olu fana naye”. In English the summary reads thus: “Umvelingqange is a holy spirit. He does not beget nor is He begotten. And there is none comparable with Him.” This summary also compares in some aspects with the Qur’anic Surah Ikhlas: “Say: He is Allah, the one and only Allah, the eternal, the absolute. He beget not, nor is He begotten and there is none like unto Him” (Qur’an 112:1-4).

The Xhosa of Southern Africa use “Qamata” as their traditional name for Allah. To this name “Qamata”, which means “Allah the

greatest”, are usually added in the attributes “Katayi” or “Umdali”. Thus in supplication or conversation “Qamata” is spoken of as “Qamata Katayi” which means Allah the greatest who is over everything, or “Qamata Umdali” – Allah the greatest who is the Creator of everything.

In the Sotho group of languages of Southern Africa, the traditional name of Allah is “Ramasedi”, which means “He from whom comes light”. The name that is used in the context of an attribute bears a similar connotation as the attribute of Allah An-Noor (The Light).



4

The African Perception of “Religion” as a “Deen”

4.1 Similarities with the Islamic concept of Tauhid

Tauhid is the most important fundamental belief in Islam. Tauhid as a concept implies that all aspects of human activity, be they social, spiritual, economic, political, educational and otherwise, must be governed by rules, commands and directives from Allah and His Prophet (S.A.W.).

Among Africa traditional religions there are strong similarities which run along the Islamic concept of Tauhid, although such similarities have declined in some regions of Africa. This decline has largely been attributed to the colonialistic and Christian missionary work that have initiated the disintegration of African tribal institutions.

Proof of some of the deliberate onslaught against the African perception of Tauhid are mostly evident in the southern part of Africa, where Christian missionaries have encouraged the use of traditional names for “ancestors – spirits” as mediators in traditional religions so as to accommodate the Christian doctrine of trinity.

Some fairly common examples in this regard are:

- The Christian teaching of God to the Sotho is “Modimo” instead of Ramasebi. Modimo is derived from the word “Badimo” which means “Ancestor Spirits”.

- The Christian teaching of God to the Xhosa is “Uthixo”, which is derived from the Xhosa word “Thixo”, which means “An idol”.
- The Christian teaching of God to the Zulu is “Umkhulu – Komkhulu” which means the greatest of our greatest or elders. “Komkhulu” means in the Zulu language “elders” or “ancestors”.

Prior to the influx of colonialist and Christian missionaries on the African soil, the African had a traditional religion that was all embracing, giving him guidance on all aspects of life. To the African, religion is so much part of life that many African languages have no separate word for religion.

In African traditions all cultural activities revolve around specific directives emitting from “common religious beliefs”, be they social, spiritual, ritual, economic, political, educational or otherwise.

African tribal institutions and traditional practices also have no dichotomies between the secular and “religious” aspects of life. Many African languages also have no separate word for anything termed as secular.

An overall view of tribal institutions across the length and breadth of Africa also reveals a common similarity, through which different customs and rites contribute towards social cohesion, as in Islam which derives its directives from the Qur’an and Sunnah (Way of the Prophet (S.A.W.)).

4.2 The similarity between the Islamic Ritual of Salaah and Traditiona Rituals of the Africans

Islam institutes the ritual of Salaah as the gateway to total Ibadah (Worship) and as the first step in the onward progress of the believer. In a similar manner, the African in tribal structures regards ritual observances as the supreme safeguard of his day-to-day

existence, his basic needs, his relationship that make up his social order, land, cattle, crop, rain, his physical well-being, his family, his clan and state.

In African traditional institutions, all activities such as the birth of a child, and growing into early stages of youth, and initiation to puberty, circumcision and his final graduation to manhood, are processes which revolve around certain specified rituals. Even such things as paying dowry before marriage, slaughtering a beast, tilling the land, harvest and celebrating the first fruits of the season are observed and guided through the process of rituals.

4.3 Government through Shura or Mutual Consultation

In its pristine purity, African life was expressed in an unadulterated form, and as one in which social, economic and political organisation was so beautifully structured that there were no cleavages between individuals, community and state, and any possible friction was minimised to the least possible degree.

In ruling his subjects, the chief or king had to consult his councillors. He could not act arbitrarily as he had to abide by directives derived from the “religion” practised by the tribe. When passing judgement, he was also required to accept the advice of his councillors.

This system of Shura or mutual consultation is still in force in various regions of Africa, even among tribal structures which do not or did not have centralised authority.

Among the Zulu this system is called “Ibandla” and among the Sotho it is called “Khotla”. The similarity of this system when compared with the Islamic Institutions of “Caliphate” is that, like in Islam, the Khalifah is not a totalitarian ruler. A saying among the Zulu goes thus: “The people respect their chief but the chiefs ought to respect their people”.

Yet another strong similarity with Islam in African tribal institutions of kingship or chieftainship is that, in Islam, when a ruler is oppressive he is overthrown, but the concept and institution of caliphate is not questioned as it derives its directives from the Qur'an and Sunnah. In a like manner, in tribal society, if for instance a chief (for example King Shaka of the Zulus) is oppressive, then he is overthrown, but kingship or chieftainship is not questioned as it is an office of both political and "religious" authority. Hence the king or chief is respected and approached with humility and awe, like the Khalifah of an Islamic State.

5

African social customs and Islamic etiquette and habits (adab)

In this sphere, African customs share a greater scope of similarity with Islamic norms. African social etiquette is strongly based on what is called “Ubuntu” (humanness), which is a code of discipline of the mind and manners. The Islamic concept of Ukhuwah (brotherhood) compares favourably in many respects with the African philosophy of “Ubuntu”.

5.1 Greetings

Africans are generous people. In African society virtually the entire public is regarded as relations and therefore deserving of special treatment. Hence Africans, like Muslims throughout the world, are quick to make friends even with strangers.

African customs have imposed on every individual, young or old, the obligation to greet first any person whether known or unknown. In a Hadith of the Prophet (S.A.W.) Muslims are taught that “He who greets first is nearest to Allah”.

5.2 The message in African greetings

Greetings among the African people are not empty utterances which convey no sense of concern and mutual love. The following

forms of greetings among the Sotho people of Southern Africa compare well with the Islamic greetings of *As-salaamu Alaykum*.

The Sotho use the utterance “Khotso” or “Dumelang”, both of which convey the message of peace. The group or individual being greeted usually reciprocates the greeting by replying “Aye-Ate”, which means “Let the peace spread” or “Ahe” if the greetings were “Dumela” or “Dumelang”. The latter two forms of replying to greetings are indications of the reciprocating party to establish brotherly contact and willingness to communicate.

Among the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and various other groups, the words used in greetings differ slightly from the above, but the context in which the greetings are exchanged generally convey the message of peace and brotherly love.

5.3 Islamic greetings accommodated in African separatist churches

A fairly conspicuous feature of some African separatist churches is that the Islamic greetings of *As-salaamu wa Alaykum* are incorporated in their forms of address. To most of these churches, such as the Zionist churches which have largely Zulu speaking adherents and the Apolostic churches which have largely Sotho speaking adherents, expressions such as “Khotso Ya Modimo” or “Morena Ebe Le Lona”, which mean “May the peace of our Lord be with you”, and “Ukuthula Makube Nani”, which means “May peace be with you”, are a common feature and one in which every discourse starts.

5.4 New born babies

The birth of a child is an auspicious event among Africans as with most people. Africans follow certain procedures after childbirth, which are similar to those practised by Muslims, such as shaving off the hair and giving the child a name.

The shaving off of the infant's hair is regarded in some African tribes as a protection against diseases in early childhood. Usually the shaving off of an infant child's hair precedes the child-naming day, when the infant is brought out for the first time to be seen by friends and relatives.

In giving infants names, the Sotho adhere to the dictates of a saying which goes thus, "Lebitso lebe ke serongo", which means "a bad name is a wilful consignment of the child's destiny to bad fate". Thus, in giving names to newborn infants, in most cases only good names that reflect the character of an illustrious ancestor, a particular event in history or one that bears the significance of good cheer is chosen.

African children must be breast fed by the mother for varying lengths of time according to customs. This period may extend up to two years. Husbands are discouraged from interrupting child growth during breast feeding, hence their attention is diverted to a second or third wife.

5.5 Circumcision

Circumcision is one of the oldest standing traditions of the African people both north and south of the equator. It has been practised since the remotest days of African history.

In Southern Africa, circumcision was introduced by various tribes, such as the San (so-called Bushmen), the Xhosa, the Ndebele and the Zulu. Among the Venda, it was introduced by the Ba-Lembe tribe, who are the descendants of Yemeni Arab Muslims.

Some tribes such as the Xhosa, Sotho, Ndebele, Venda, Tsongo and others, summon youth to circumcision lodges annually during the winter season, while some tribes conduct circumcision schools once every three or four years. Circumcision in African customs marks the initiation of youth to adulthood.

5.6 Death, burial and life after death (Akhirah)

The Concept of the Akhirah is not a remote or unknown phenomenon in African society. To the Africans, death is not considered the end of life, just as Muslims believe, but the passing of the spirit or soul into the next life. This is also the point which marks a deviation from the concept of Tauhid with Africans, where traditional religions have established the dead as mediators between the living and Allah. It is assumed by Africans that a dead person attains an elevated status through death by coming closer to the Supreme Being.

The burial of the dead is also a simple procedure in which expenses are minimal. If a beast was slaughtered then, in olden days, it was for the reason that the corpse was to be enshrouded with the skin and then placed in the grave for burial. Amongst some tribes, reeds or grass mats are used, whilst with others the grave is lined with stones or rocks to prevent the grave caving in and as a precaution against animals digging the graves out.

Among the Ba-Lemba, a cavity is dug out on the side of the grave, which is to them the direction of Sofala and Sena, where the Emozaid (the people of Umma-Zaid) once settled.

5.7 Cleanliness and eating habits

African customs attach importance to cleanliness and like Muslims an African does not consider himself clean unless he has used running water. The Islamic concept of ceremonial cleanliness is also beautifully incorporated in tribal customs. For instance, the procedure that is taken by a menstruating African woman is similar to the Islamic practice adopted by Muslim women. For this purpose running water in streams or rivers is used. Bathing is also taken in the seclusion and protection of natural screens such as reeds on river banks.

A fairly common taboo among African customs is that in marriage, husbands are discouraged from approaching their women while in menstruation.

Washing hands before and after meals is common practice among Africans. Oral tradition in Zimbabwe confirms that a bowl of water was passed around for washing hands before meals. In present day, eating with spoons, forks and knives is an exception while the standard rule is to eat with hands. This is also strongly emphasised, especially on those occasions such as a feast or any similar auspicious occasion. Eating with the right hand is a strongly guarded practice. The left hand is always associated with handling private parts – and therefore not used for eating.

In traditional customs one is forbidden from eating or drinking while standing, and breathing into the vessel from which one drinks is frowned upon, as Muslims do.

5.8 Dress and adornment

Africans in tribal institutions were conservative in their mode of dress. There is a striking similarity with Islamic modes of dress and African modes of dress. In Southern Africa various tribes such as the Sotho, Xhosa, Nama, Herereo and others wear garments that are similar to Islamic dress. The women wear ankle length dresses or wrappers. The breasts are also covered with a shawl or suitable garment.

At a glance, the Islamic concept of Purdah and modesty is incorporated in African modes of dress. The Quranic injunction that women should draw an outer garment over their bosom when venturing out of their homes is very common among the Herero and Nama women of Namibia. The Sotho and Xhosa women also adopt a similar style in dress, while the Nigerians and women in other parts of Africa adopt dress that is much closer to women's Islamic dress.

The traditional flowing dress worn by Nigerians called the “Agba” gown, along with the women’s head gear called “Ibo” and the neck cover “Iborum” all bear a strong Arabic influence and Islamic resemblance.

5.9 Purdah and seclusion of females

In tribal institutions, even in modern urban areas, women do not generally mix freely with menfolk and the stranger does not enter the home of the host without permission.

A fairly significant thing in African tribal villages is that the privacy of the individual or family is safeguarded, so much so that the concept of Islamic purdah features prominently in the building of dwelling structures. In most cases, a separate home for boys or girls is built separately from the main and guest houses. The entire homestead is surrounded by an enclosure of thorn bushes, mud wall or grass fence for maximum privacy.

5.10 Brotherhood and relationship

African customs have made it common practice to regard the entire public as one’s relatives. People with a similar surname are also regarded as blood relatives.

Among the Zulu one finds words of wisdom in the sayings that “Induku entle igaulwa ezizwei”, which means the beautiful stick or staff is acquired from far off places, tribes or nations. This saying implies that one should not necessarily look for a wife in his immediate locality but farther afield. Africans such as the Zulu are emphatic in fostering good neighbourliness and mutual understandings. The words “Ubumakhelwane” and “Ubudlelwane” are derived from the philosophy of “Ubuntu”. Both imply that friendliness and mutual love must prevail at all times.

6

Is Islam backward?

6.1 Was the African way of life backwards?

Having seen in the preceding discussions various similarities of Islam with African traditions and customs in tribal institutions and in contemporary urban and rural societies, the question which may now be asked is, was African culture expressed only in the sphere of abstract spiritual realms, traditions and customs, all of which were guardedly regulated by traditional religions?

What bout thought processes, dynamism and progress?

In the answer to this question the development of African people will be clarified in general – particularly in those regions of Africa where Islam had established itself as a dynamic way of life.

Basically, Islam and African traditional institutions have suffered some setbacks after the colonial invasion of Africa. In the end, it has been Islam alone which has been able to recover and re-group its adherents due to its ultra-stable nature, while African traditional institutions have not been able to regroup and assume their former role in the African way of life. This is because basically African traditional practices have been expressed on a geographically prescribed territory, while Islam on the other hand being a universal ideology has been able to resurge in more than one place – within and outside Africa.

6.2 Islam and the development of Africans

The African way of life, which is still based on the philosophy of Ubuntu, was dynamic, and it is this indigenous African philosophy alone which firstly and primarily accounts for a large percentage of the preparation of Africans of past generations mentally, socially, politically and otherwise for the acceptance of Islam as a way of life. Secondly, it further facilitated the rapid spread of Islam in the African continent, which has been more than anywhere else in the Muslim world, by imbuing Africans, as Drs Stanlake Samkange and Tommie-Marie Samkange say in their book “Hunhuism or Ubuntuism” – “With many high mental as well as moral attributed and well planned social and political organisation adapted to their own way of life”.

6.3 Islam scored many firsts on the African continent

Islam scored many firsts in world history on the African continent. Foremost among these is the fact that Islam is the only ideology that has gained wide acceptance rapidly in Africa. Whole tribes in villages in both East and West Africa, which had remained solidly “pagan” (i.e. in the eyes of western scholars) despite centuries of Christian missionary activity, have been known to turn to Islam in a short space of time.

The establishment of the first universities in the world took place on the African soil. Of these universities, the first and oldest of over 1000 years – “Al-Azhar” – is in Cairo, Egypt, while the second and third were established respectively in Tunisia and Algeria.

In Mali, Muslims established centres of learning in Timbuktu, which flourished with an abundance of Muslim scholars between the 12th and 15th century. Market places, mosques and villas were a common feature of Timbuktu for 700 years when Islam held sway there.

6.4 Islam and Africans on socio-economic and socio-political dynamics

Africa has a long history of contact with the East, particularly East Africa, which was the exit point of goods of trade which came from the interior to the east.

Unlike pre-Islamic Arabia, Africa was progressive; so much so that it had no indigenous class struggles, nor any indigenous capitalist system (i.e. until the European occupation), nor did it have any conditions of poverty as existed in Victorian London and which formed part of Karl Marx's study of socialism. L.S.B. Leaky maintains that "In certain ways, Africans were perhaps superior to their white invaders...". He further remarks that "Europeans should do well to reflect that in many ways the Africans had already reached a position we, the so-called civilised races, are only just beginning to comprehend".

It is therefore an obvious fact that Africans had evolved and developed their own unique and dynamic "traditional socialism" based on Ubuntu, which governs the socio-economic and socio-political aspects of tribal institutions, hundreds of years before Karl Marx evolved his socialist and communist doctrines.

Africans thus found it easy due to prolonged orientation to Ubuntu – which is also non-materialist and non-secularist like Islam, to accept the dynamic Islamic economic concepts such as the institution of Zakaah.

6.5 Islam and African aspirations are similar – socialist indoctrinations are alien to Africans

The statement made by Karl Marx that "religion is the opiate of the masses" does not truly appeal to Africans generally, nor does it apply to the African way of life – even among non-Muslims, since "religion" is the strongest element in African life.

President Kaunda of Zambia, in remarking about Africa's own dynamic traditional socialism on Ubuntu, mentioned that "The African socialist must be a believer". Similarly, President Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal and the late Tom Mboya of Kenya have emphasised the religious nature of African traditional socialism.

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Conclusion

Fellow Africans should do well to reflect that it is Islam which gave Africa the Ki-Swahili language which has become the lingua franca of the continent.

And that it was through Arabic that the history of Africa was first written by so well known a Muslim scholar as Ibn Battuta.

The history of Africa has been tied with Islam for over 1 400 years since the 5th year of the Prophet's (S.A.W.) mission, when he sent the first Arab Muslim refugees to African to seek political asylum in Abyssinia.

Finally it was Islam which made Bilal (R.A.), an Abyssinian slave, the first Mueddhin in the history of Islam, as well as being one of the most revered and respected companions of the Prophet (S.A.W.).

In conclusion, I would like to mention the fact that it is for these and many other features of African culture that some Western scholars doing research on Islam and Africa have remarked that Islam was regarded by Africans as a means for strengthening African traditions rather than displacing them. Hence, many embraced Islam and many continue to do so.





Islamic Dawah Movement (IDM) Profile

Introduction

IDM is primarily involved in promoting the message of Islam to all the peoples of Southern Africa. With humble beginnings in 1977, it has now grown to be one of the larger dawah organizations in the country, and the Southern African region, with nearly 50 years of experience, expertise and professionalism backing it.

Mission Statement

The Mission of IDM is to promote the message of the unity of God to all the people of Southern Africa so that they may achieve their God given potential of excellence and purity; and in this way contribute to the moral, spiritual, social, intellectual and economic growth of the nations as a whole.

Vision

IDM's Vision is to take Islam to as many hearts and homes as possible; and to help build strong Islamic characters within the emerging and established Muslim communities in Southern Africa.

Core Values

The core values that underpins this movement include the belief in the Oneness of our Creator (Allah) and the prophethood of Muhammad and other great messengers (peace be upon them all), the existence of angels, revealed scriptures, personal accountability on the Day of Judgement, and life after death. The core values include the brotherhood of mankind, social justice and equity, personal hygiene,

tolerance and respect for all people, and the preservation of God's earth and all His living creatures.

Historical

IDM was established in 1977 and has since grown tremendously nearly 50 years of existence.

Initially IDM was a localized semi-rural centre, based in Marianhill and nearby Umlazi, called the Umlazi-Mariannhill Islamic Centre (UMIC).

As satellite Islamic Centres mushroomed in other parts of KwaZulu Natal, the name was changed to the Islamic Movement of KwaZulu and Natal (IMKAN). When the movement grew beyond the borders of the KwaZulu Natal Province and to neighbouring countries as well, it was finally renamed to the Islamic Dawah Movement of Southern Africa (IDM).

IDM has attempted to keep pace with the challenges and changing needs of dawah and education in the Southern African region. With the Qudrat of Allah (سبحانه وتعالى), and persistent and focused efforts, IDM has grown into one of the larger dawah and educational bodies in the region, which enjoys a high degree of confidence and credibility from the South African Ummah and abroad.

It has gained valuable experience and expertise over the years. As a result, IDM has developed tremendously, and now has the capacity and infrastructure to deliver quality dawah programmes in South Africa and selected regions of Southern Africa, given the funding to do so. The above strengths are vital and necessary for the furtherance of the Islamic cause in a professional and qualitative manner.

Beneficiaries

IDM's outreach, target audience and beneficiaries are primarily the historically disadvantaged communities of Southern Africa. In the main, this encompasses primarily, people of African origin.

Core Functions

IDM's core functions encompass categories that include:

- * Education and training
- * Skills development and capacity building
- * Quran, research, publications and literature
- * Dawah, religious and spiritual activities
- * Welfare, relief and humanitarian activities

Within these categories, IDM has initiated and conducts a whole host of activities.

Modus Operandi

Since its inception, IDM had earmarked dawah and education as top priorities amongst the entire spectrum of IDM's endeavours. For nearly 50 years, thousands of people and scores of communities have benefited and been empowered through the activities of IDM.

IDM sought to reach out to the disadvantaged communities by establishing Masaajid and Islamic classes, and employing resident teachers and duaats in the different areas. At each of these centres, a whole host of activities are conducted.

Little pockets of new Muslim communities mushroomed in these areas which were predominantly non-Muslim prior to the commencement of IDM's dawah activities. This has had a positive impact socially as well as Islamically, since Islam is taking root amongst the indigenous African communities which comprise about 80% of South Africa's population.

Collaboration and Synergy

IDM has repeatedly experienced the power of synergy. In this regard, over the years, IDM has collaborated with scores of organisations, locally and abroad, in joint ventures, and as a united team. This synergy strategy has proven to be a win-win methodology. Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) says in the Quran “.... **cooperate and help one another in acts of righteousness and piety....**”(Quran 5:2)

Needs Driven Approach

In its comprehensive range of activities, IDM has adopted a needs-driven approach. When communities needed or required Musjids, running water, Qurans and books, classroom blocks, Imaams and teachers for various disciplines, or skills to develop and uplift themselves, IDM endeavoured to make these available to the best of its capacity and financial status.

Social Responsibility

IDM believes it is incumbent upon every individual to contribute and give back to society, besides one's own personal growth and development. This creates a society that is caring, benevolent and altruistic.

Islam is an Ummah, where individuals care for one another, help one another, and support one another. The Prophet ﷺ said, “**The similitude of believers with regard to mutual love, affection and fellow-feeling is that of one body; when any limb of it aches, the whole body aches**” (Muslim).

Why Dawah?

The injunction for each and every Muslim individual to be actively involved in the work of Islamic dawah, comes from none other than Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) when He says in the Quran “ **Who is better in speech than one who calls to Allah, works righteousness, and says, “I am of those who bow in Islam”** (Quran 41:33).

Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) further gives the methodology of dawah when He says in the Quran: ***“Invite to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious” (Quran 16:125).***

The role of the Musjid

(Why has IDM concentrated in building scores of Musjids?)

The Sunnah of our beloved Prophet ﷺ was to establish a Musjid, which played the role of an Islamic Community Centre, immediately he settled in a place. He initiated this in Quba and again in Madinah. The Musjid became the focal point of the nascent Muslim Community. It became the hub and centre of the religious, educational and social life of the early Muslim community. A venue for congregational prayers, meetings, social events, and all kinds of gatherings. A venue to convene consultative councils, or any other commendable activity. A refuge for the poor, needy and orphans who required care. A place for prostrating in prayer and worshipping God. The first Islamic school (Madrasah) was housed in the Prophet’s Musjid in Madina.

The Musjid therefore has a multi-faceted role. It is the centre and fulcrum around which the life of a conscientious Muslim revolves and around which the life and growth of a conscientious Muslim Ummah evolves.

Women participated freely in all the social justice programmes taking place in the Prophet’s Musjid. The Prophet ﷺ said: ***“Do not deprive women of their share of the Musjid when they seek permission from you”.***

This was the welcoming and broader social role the Prophet ﷺ himself sought to engender for the Musjid.

Administration & Management

Selected individuals from amongst the board members and senior staff collectively manage and administer the day-to-day affairs as well as the long-term planning of IDM.

Legal Status

IDM is registered with the following South African Government Departments:

- ♦ The Department of Social Development of South Africa, as a Non-Profit Organisation. (NPO Number: 034-886-NPO)
- ♦ The Department of Justice of South Africa as a Trust. (IT Number: 4332/1991/PMB)
- ♦ The South African Revenue Services, for tax exemption status for IDM. (Registration No: 18/11/3/4856)
- ♦ The South African Revenue Services, for Section 18A Certificate, to enable rebates for donors.

Conclusion

Islam has the potential to harmonise the total spectrum of man's life, and to liberate man from all forms of corruption and injustice. For nearly five decades, IDM has taken Islam to as many hearts and homes as possible. For over four decades, IDM has attempted to provide quality dawah and service excellence. IDM has achieved this through a comprehensive and integrated programme of Islamic dawah activities in Southern Africa.

IDM has now developed a strong foundation of experience, expertise, professionalism and excellence over the years, with the Qudrat of Allah (سبحانه وتعالى). Some of our strengths include, attempting to operate along first world standards; building capacities of people and communities; developing resilience to accommodate for expansion; and staying focused on The Path of the Quran and Sunnah.

This has enabled IDM to enjoy a high degree of confidence and credibility from the international and local community, Alhamdulillah.

IDM is currently in a favorable position to effectively enhance and accelerate the Islamisation process in the Southern African region, Alhamdulillah, so that there may be Peace, Harmony, and Justice.

And all praise belongs to Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) the Lord of the worlds.

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