

Answer to those who ask "Is there any class discrimination in Islam? Are people defined according their wealth, status, and beauty? Do believers convey the message only to a particular section of society?"

As the Qur'an tells us, Islam does not assess people's worth according to their race, descent, family, social status, wealth, gender, appearance, beauty, or physical traits. In Allah's sight, all people are born equal and gain consciousness, after which they are held accountable for their acts and attitudes, and assessed accordingly. The Islamic concept of superiority rests entirely upon that person's awareness of Allah. Allah relates this fact in the following verse:

O humanity, We created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might come to know each other. The noblest among you in Allah's sight is that one of you who best performs his duty towards Allah. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (Qur'an, 49:13)

Consequently, while assessing a person's value, believers have no criterion other than the person's heedfulness of Allah. Indeed, the Prophet (pbuh) also said: "The most beloved to me among you is the one who has the best character and manners" (*Sahih Bukhari*). However, assessing people according to this criterion and employing the most appropriate and useful methods to spread of Islam's morality are two different concepts.

That is because believers convey Allah's message to an unbelieving society. The people of such a society do not assess people according to their consciousness of Allah. On the contrary, they base their concept of superiority on such flawed measures as material wealth, race, or lineage. In all societies that are far from religion, the people who hold power and lead people—the Qur'an calls these people "the chiefs of the nation"—possess most of these attributes. In short, they are the wealthiest, the most famous and popular people who are often followed blindly by the rest of society. In their eyes, what they say is right and what they condemn is bad.

The Qur'an very concisely defines this unusual relation between leaders and their subordinates. Pharaoh and his people is a clear example: Due to his enormous material and military power, he became his people's leader and imposed his own outlook upon them. As the Qur'an informs us, he addressed his people with the following words:

Pharaoh said: "I only show you what I see myself, and I only guide you to the path of rectitude." (Qur'an, 40:29)

Pharaoh presented himself as the only guide, and his people, who were utterly ignorant of true religion, followed him. The Qur'anic account of this event is as follows:

In that way, he swayed his people and they succumbed to him. They were a people of deviators. (Qur'an, 43:54)

The people's submission to Pharaoh is a feature common to all societies that are far from religion. The prominent people lead the submitters, who make up the majority of the society. However, as the verse "**They followed Pharaoh's command, but Pharaoh's command was not rightly guided**" (Qur'an, 11:97) maintains, obedience to misguided leaders never leads people to the truth, for the majority of those who follow such prominent people often lack the faculty to see and obey the truth. As long as the prominent people present an appealing life that is far from religion, they can never see the mistaken nature of their ignorant way of living. Or, it would be more accurate to say that they pretend not to see the truth.

For this reason, those who call a society that does not live by the religion to faith must convey the message primarily to its leading elite, for their seeing the truth and embracing the Qur'an's morality sets an example for the other sections of society and leads them to the true religion. Indeed, Allah commands all of His Messengers to warn this section of the society first.

The previous verse stated that Pharaoh's people submitted to him, and so Prophet Musa (pbuh) was sent to Pharaoh's ruling circle:

We sent Musa with Our Signs to Pharaoh and his nobles. He [Pharaoh] said: "I am the Messenger of the Lord of the worlds." (Qur'an, 43:46)

The Qur'an reveals that all of the Prophets followed the same path. Prophet Nuh (pbuh) (Qur'an, 23:23-24), Prophet Hud (pbuh) (Qur'an, 7:65-66), and Prophet Shu'ayb (pbuh) (Qur'an, 7:85-88) were always in contact with the leaders of their people.

The concept of "prominent people" is surely too broad. In a society that does not live by the religion, everyone or every stratum, ranging from the elite to artists, intellectuals, businessmen, scientists, or popular students, that has any degree of influence over the people is considered one of the prominent people. What sets them apart from the others is that they have some control over masses who hold them in esteem and take them as role models. If one or many of them embrace Islam, their act may pave the way for the masses.

But this does not mean that this mission should be limited to a certain social stratum. The reason why believers focus their attention mainly on the prominent people is that the majority of people are unable to think freely, that is, without being led by the elites of their society.

However, this section of society also contains people of conscience and wisdom who incline toward faith. Believers do not neglect them; rather, they convey the message to them and take them as brothers and sisters. It goes without saying that, according to the Qur'an, believers have to communicate Allah's religion to anyone who asks for it.

Another important point is that being honored by Islam and adhering to the Qur'an enhances one's physical and spiritual quality. Concepts of attractiveness or unattractiveness cannot be limited to having certain bodily features, for it is known that some people who embrace faith become more beautiful, or the face of someone involved in wicked deeds is plunged into abasement. This is quite a metaphysical situation, for the spiritual beauty engendered by faith manifests itself in one's physical beauty. For instance, with regard to hypocrites, He says that **"you would know them by their mark."** (Qur'an, 47:30) In another verse, believers are also told to be recognized by their **"mark."** (Qur'an, 48:29) Indeed, a believer's face contains an expression of modesty, cleanliness, reliability, and honor, which Allah refers to as a "mark."

From the Qur'an, we learn that Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) (pbuh), who is praised for his sincerity and loyalty to Allah, was an extremely beautiful person:

When they saw him, they were amazed by him and cut their hands. They said: "Allah preserve us! This is no man. What can this be but a noble angel here!" (Qur'an, 12:31)

These verses reveal that Allah makes believers physically attractive, thanks to the light that He grants to them. As is in the example of Prophet Yusuf (pbuh), believers know that this is a blessing bestowed upon them by Allah.