

# RACISM: A Qur'anic Perspective

The subject of 'race' is somewhat controversial. To begin with, the term has no agreed upon definition and means different things to different people. This article briefly describes two different concepts of 'race' - scientific and political - and examines them in the light of The Qur'an.

## 1. The Scientific Concept of Race

*Scientifically-speaking*, 'race' refers to a species or sub-classification of a species. Since all human beings belong to a single species - *Homo-Sapiens* - they are all members of a single race, the human race. The false notion of multiple 'human races' is a pseudo-scientific concept born of the misapplication of this term. In large measure, scientists and others who know the true meaning of the word 'race' are to blame for either directly perpetuating the myth of human races, or not clarifying that humans are one species.

The notion of any group of people constituting a 'pure race' is absurd. It is a confirmed scientific fact that all human beings proceeded from the same earthly mother and father. Scientists have known for some time about the parallel relationship between the development of human languages and the emergence of diverse ethnic groups throughout the world. However, these truths were revealed in The Qur'an over 1400 years ago, long before such questions were considered important and long before man had the means to scientifically investigate such phenomena:

*(4:1) O people, observe your Lord; the One who created you from one being, and created from it its mate, then spread from the two many men and women. You shall regard God, by whom you swear, and regard the parents. God is watching over you.*

*(30:22) Among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours. In these, there are signs for the knowledgeable.*

*(35:28) Also, the people, the animals, and the livestock come in various colours. This is why the people who truly reverence God are those who are knowledgeable. God is Almighty, Forgiving.*

## 2. The Political Concept of Race

Racism can be defined as "belief in the superiority of a particular race; prejudice based on this (racism), antagonism towards other races" (*Oxford American Desk Dictionary*, 1998). This definition of racism is correct in its content, but incorrect in terms of the word being defined. As previously stated, humans are one species or one race. An accurate definition of racism among humans would read: "belief in the superiority of a particular group, antagonism towards other groups." This is an example of intra-species prejudice wherein one group feels superior to another group within the same species. The 'human racist' assumes a posture of

believing that he or she is a member of a superior 'species' of humans.

If a group claiming superiority defines itself as a 'race', and if there is *only one* race - the human race - then it follows that those individuals and groups that do not belong to the 'superior' group must belong to an 'inferior' group and be classified as either sub-human or non-human. It might be said that 'race' is here being used in a *political* sense since it defines non-natural - in the sense of artificial or man-made - relations of power that are set up between individuals and groups.

A detailed examination of the historical record shows that the concept of 'race' was originally defined in terms of colour and/or factors associated with colour, and that this definition was constructed - that is, *invented* - by people who classified themselves as 'White' and saw themselves as superior to other 'Non-White' people. The legacy of this approach to differentiating among human beings on the basis of colour classification lives on in the contemporary world, where those who *self-classify* as 'White' are generally considered superior to - and, materially-speaking, *are actually* superior to - those 'others' who *they* classify as 'Non-White' and/or 'Coloured'.

On this basis, it might be said that, politically-speaking, 'race' is racism, that is, *race-ism* or Racism, "a system of thought, speech, and action, operated by people who classify themselves as 'white', and who use deceit, violence, and/or the threat of violence, to subjugate, use, and/or abuse people classified as 'non-white', under conditions that promote the practice of falsehood, non-justice, and incorrectness, in one or more areas of activity [e.g. economics, education, entertainment, language, labour, law, politics, religion, sex and war], for the ultimate purpose of maintaining, expanding, and/or refining the practice of White Supremacy (Racism)." [1]. White Supremacy (Racism) is, arguably, the dominant system of power in the contemporary world, and is structured as a hierarchy (or pyramid) of power relations: White Supremacists (Racists) at the top of the hierarchy (apex of the pyramid), 'White' people at the next level down, 'Black' people at the bottom of the hierarchy (base of the pyramid), and other Non-White people in the 'space' between 'White' people and 'Black' people.

## 3. The Pre-Historical Roots of Racism

As stated above, according to The Qur'an, *all* human beings are coloured, including those who self-classify as 'White'. Therefore, by setting themselves off against or 'distancing' themselves from 'coloured' people, White Supremacists (Racists) are rejecting their God-given colouring. In this connection, it is significant to note that the Arabic verb, *sha-th'a-na*, from which is derived the noun, *ash-Shay'th'aan* ('The Satan'), means "to become distant". On this basis, it might be said that *ash-Shay'th'aan* refers to the aggressive, alienating (or 'distancing') personality type among human beings and that White Supremacists (Racists) are examples of people who manifest this type. (Significantly, *ash-*

*shay'th'aan* is designated in The Qur'an as '*aduwun mubeen* (open enemy) for humanity; hence, White Supremacists (Racists) are open enemies to all peoples, 'White' and 'Non-White' alike.)

However, the aggressive, alienating personality type – or *ash-Shay'th'aan* - is not the source of racism. According to The Qur'an, the root of racism lies in the arrogant refusal of *Iblees* to bow down before 'Adam when commanded to do so by God:

(15:28-31) *Your Lord said to the angels, "I am creating a human being from aged mud, like potter's clay. Once I perfect him, and blow into him from My spirit, you shall fall prostrate before him." The angels fell prostrate; all of them, except Iblees. He refused to be with those who prostrate.*

(7:12) *He (God) said, "What prevented you from prostrating when I ordered you?" He (Iblees) said, "I am better than he; You created me from fire, and created him from mud."*

The noun, *Iblees*, is derived from the Arabic verb, *ba-la-sa*, which means "he became wrapped up in grief" or dejected. It appears from The Qur'an that *Iblees* could not accept that 'Adam had been created as a successor (*khalifah*) in the earth and became frustrated. In psychological language, it might be said that *Iblees* was non-compliant, externalized or blamed others for his failings, needed a scapegoat to project his anxieties and weaknesses on to, and was in denial of the truth. Among his other pathologies, *Iblees* suffered from a neurotic condition known as a superiority complex which masks feelings of inferiority. (The superiority complex may be defined as a compulsive drive to overcome anxiety and feelings of inferiority by exalting one's self (or group) above humankind.) *Iblees* also suffered from delusions of grandeur. Delusions of grandeur are defined as false beliefs resting upon self-aggrandizement, boastfulness, pride, and self-assertiveness; extravagant and impossible claims are made and plans are drawn.

Many humans fall prey to this ploy of *Iblees*-racism accompanied with the superiority complex and delusions of grandeur. Psychological and social seeds of racism have been firmly planted in all societies, past and present. In any community, there will be individuals who have a compulsive drive to feel *innately* superior to other individuals. This compulsive drive is a means of compensating for their real or imagined limitations, feeling better about themselves, and coping with anxiety.

It is crucial to appreciate that ignorance is not the cause of racism; *arrogance* is. Like 'the First Racist', all racists want to position themselves as 'Superiors'. Racism is usually spawned from: (1) distorting the significance of natural (God-given) differences in characteristics such as skin complexion, physical features, culture, language, and place of geographic origin, or (2) accepting bogus false 'differences' invented by individuals and groups who distort facts to promote racist ideas.

It is worthwhile pointing out that some individuals are "reactive racists". Having been victims of racism, reactive racists embrace racist ideas as a defence to repudiate racist beliefs directed against them. (This

might be referred to as 'petty racism' in contrast to Racism (White Supremacy) which is a *system* of global oppression.) They justify their racist beliefs by saying that they are only "balancing the scales", and claim to be "revealing true facts". (Some of their "facts" are really shared fantasies). For example, those who advocate replacing White Supremacy (Racism) with Black Supremacy (a non-existent system) are, in fact, advocating replacing Racism with Racism. The *real* alternative to Racism (White Supremacy) is not Black Supremacy; it is *justice*. This means recognising *all* human beings, irrespective of their colour, as human beings and affording them respect *merely* on that basis, that is, on the grounds that they share the same original mother and father and are, therefore, *all* equally human. According to The Qur'an, recognition between peoples *must* be mutual, the only *valid* criterion for rank being the extent to which an individual acts in accordance with the Laws of God in order to safeguard him or her self from the possibility of self destruction:

(49:13) *O Mankind! Behold, We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes so that you might recognise one another. Verily, the most honoured among you, in the Sight of God, is the one who most closely guards himself from the possibility of self-destruction (by following the Laws of God). Behold, God is Knower, Aware.*

#### 4. Conclusion

Racism, irrespective of whether it is of the 'petty' kind or the global, systemic type that is White Supremacy (Racism), is a psychopathological condition that is wholly incompatible with self-surrender to God (*Al-Islam*). One who self-surrenders (a *Muslim*) recognizes that God alone is The Superior One over His creation with no equal or 'competitor'. By contrast, a racist gives him or her self over to 'the First Racist', *Iblees* and the aggressive, alienating personality type, *ash-Shay'th'aan*, the open enemy of humanity.

There is only one solution to the psychopathological problem that is racism – or Racism (White Supremacy) – and that is complete self-surrender to God, *Al-Islam*.

#### References

[1] Fuller, N. (1984) *The United Independent Compensatory Code/System/Concept – a textbook/workbook for thought, speech and/or action for victims of racism (white supremacy)*.

#### Further information

For further information on what The Qur'an has to say about a number of issues, please visit the following website: [www.bandung2.co.uk](http://www.bandung2.co.uk)