

Allameh Mohammad Reza Hakimi's Letter to Fidel Castro, the President of Cuba

Your highness, the President of the Democratic Republic of Cuba,

After greetings to your Excellency, who supports the deprived, preserves human dignity, and stands unfalteringly against colonialism and imperialism, I wish for a long, happy and healthy life for you, and I send my greetings to the statesmen and the decent and resistant people of Cuba. I also hold the memory of that brave and holy fighter, Che Guevara.

I have been aware of your character for many years, and since we share in the support of the deprived and the oppressed, and in standing up against oppressors and usurpers, I have had a special love and kindness for your Excellency. Now that the opportunity has arisen for addressing you, I think it would be apt to narrate the following memory:

About forty years ago during a university lecture, I was speaking about the very important and humane teachings of Shia Islam, and the expansive, passionate, and deep defense of the Great Quran, the Holy Prophet and the Sacred Imams of the rights of the vulnerable classes, struggle to preserve human dignity, and standing up against oppressors and arrogant powers with a burning desire to the point of martyrdom. I was speaking with a special passion, which was evoked in my soul from the nature of such teachings. The title of my speech was, "The Interpretation of the Sun," meaning that the sun which shines upon the whole earth on the lives of people is for the proliferation of global justice and the preservation of human dignity... not for nourishing oppressors and warming up the atmosphere for the creators of repression. And if at present the world is not so, it must become so. Making an effort and crusading for human justice is a crucial and irrefutable duty.

I was making this speech with certainty, by relying on the commandments of the Quran and the Prophet of Islam, while the audience was heavily influenced by such exalted topics and humane teachings... when one of the members of the audience approached me after the lecture and said: "If only Mr. Fidel Castro were present here today and would have listened to your lecture, and would have received the messages which our religious teachings have for humanity, and would have observed the extent to which we share in his struggles."

Our religion's humane and justice-enhancing teachings date back to the appearance of Islam and the sayings of Imam Ali (A.S.) in the "Nahjul Balagha" (the greatest charter in the defense of humane behavior and the

obliteration of privation), and are dependent on a kind of implementation that Imam Ali, in his short and problem-ridden caliphate, cries out:

"The enemy has placed only the city of Kufah under my authority; and in this city, in which my rule is based on the words of God, there can be found not one indigent, hungry, jobless, homeless, oppressed or deprived person. Tell me, has there ever been a day when the sun has shone on developed or desolate lands where its ruler could honestly make such a claim?"

Your Highness may observe that the humane and idealistic spiritual bond between us dates back forty years. Allow me then to permit myself to take a little bit of your valuable time by writing this missive:

I read your interview with the honorable priest, Frei Betto. Your interview has been translated into Persian for the second time by men of letters. In this interview you ask the honorable priest: "In Christianity, what teachings do you have in regard to the deprived, how to defend them, and to stand up against repression?"

The priest responded to you only in a few sentences.

While reading this interview I was thinking that in Islamic teachings (whether they appear in the Quran or in the teachings of the Holy Prophet and the Sacred Imams) there exist many such teachings which comprise numerous volumes of books and entail the highest horizons of "personal development," "social development," and the proliferation of justice and freedom. In this letter I shall refer to some examples.

Let me also remind Your Highness that in your journey to our land some time ago, I was very eager to meet you. Alas, research and studies, along with illness and the brevity of your stay in Iran deprived me of this opportunity. However, I did watch the programs of your visit to Iran on television.

After you left Iran I heard from a few people that Your Excellency, on this journey as well as previously, had stated that you were interested in learning a few things about the religion of Islam and the teachings of the Quran. Delighted by your avid spirit, I thought I would take the opportunity to perform my duty in fulfilling the desire of one who is honest in his dealings with the people, resistant in the face of the enemies of justice, virtue, and humaneness (especially the brutal and terroristic American government, the supporter of the most malicious terrorist groups in the world).

I would like to present you with two volumes of the book, "Al Hayat," which has been translated into Spanish, on behalf of me and my brothers, who have aided and accompanied me in its writing. It is an honor to be writing you a

letter; however, friends advised me that it would be more appropriate if I made the letter lengthier by including certain topics.

"Al Hayat" is in two segments, the first of which is in six volumes, which was originally published in Arabic, and then translated into Persian by the late, honorable Mr. Ahmad Aram. After that, Volumes 1 and 2 were translated into Spanish by the erudite Mr. Moallemizadeh. Volumes 1 and 2 have also been translated into Urdu by the learned and wise Mr. Abed Asgari.

Abundant teachings have been presented in the two volumes which have been translated into Spanish (published in four volumes, which I offer you as a gift) about mankind, human understanding, freedom, justice, and a higher civilization, which rely on two genuine sources for the understanding of Islam, that is, the Book and the Hadith (the Quran and the Narratives). Especially in the two final chapters of the Spanish version, important problems and issues have been discussed - albeit briefly - in regard to governance and its relation with the masses, allowing everyone to enjoy their rights, and the precise and complete attempt to preserve human dignity. I hope the sixth volume will soon be translated into Spanish and become available to you, for that volume includes special and unprecedented discussions on human rights, the human character, and the necessity of implementing justice... to the point that poverty would be finally uprooted from society.

Now, with your permission, I wish to enter into a brief discussion in which I will draw from three important sources of Islamic knowledge:

1. The Great Quran
2. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him)
3. Imam Ali (A.S.)

In principle, if we wish to summarize all the teachings of Islam into two words, it will be thus:

1. ONENESS: the correction of man's relation with God.
2. JUSTICE: the correction of man's relation with man.

Now, if you look at Islam from any point of view, that is, Islam in its theoretical and practical aspects, you will not find anything other than the two above-mentioned topics. And we understand well that in order to attain complete happiness (both worldly and in the other world; in other words, mortal happiness and immortal happiness), the same two principles and precisely abiding by its theoretical and practical aspects - while considering proper education and training - will suffice for mankind.

Once man believes in God, by performing his duties with respect to his Creator, he will be successful in the eternal dimension; and upon believing in the significance of justice and its implementation (in which reasonable freedom is embedded), man will need nothing more for attaining social happiness and a healthy social life.

Where is the society which has heeded the Quran's cry regarding Oneness and Justice, and has escaped a great decline and fall? In every Islamic country, and in every existing Quranic society, the situation is other than that which has been described. What exists in these societies is only the name of Islam, not its principles and customs. The brawls are in the name of Islam, but not for the sake of Islam. In such societies faith in Oneness and Justice has lost its meaning. In such places the cry of Oneness and Justice must be heard so that they will be able to awaken depraved societies and shake up neglectful rulers.

In the Quranic message there are two fundamental pillars:

1. A healthy education and training, that is, developing character; and
2. A policy of Justice, that is, developing society

In short, a Quranic society is one which is based on Justice, while Quranic rule is one which is based on Justice. Anything other than this does not deserve the adjectives 'Islamic' or 'Quranic'.

Mr. President:

The ultimate point of the Quran – in its teachings and verses – is to help man reach "the good life," that is, a life in which there is "growth". This religion's ultimate aim is to create such a society and such a life. And in order to reach such a lofty goal, one cannot build character without building society (pruning society of the various causes of human decadence); just as one cannot build society without building character.

In this regard, the words of the Holy Prophet are very instructive: "All individuals of an Islamic society are like a shepherd, while at the same time all are like the herd."

Reflect on this additional and compounded responsibility. In such a society everyone is responsible for everyone else; everyone supervises over everyone else; everyone is a teacher to everyone else; everyone is an adviser to everyone else; and everyone is even the policeman for everyone else. Can one imagine a society more humane and unified than this?

Thus, the movement of Islam in the direction of building character and society is akin to a two-sided coin; without each side of the coin the other side

cannot be achieved. That is, until individual characters are built, the society cannot be built; and until the society is built, individual characters cannot be built. Therefore, in the society which the Quran wishes to build, one cannot have a one-sided responsibility; that is, an individual cannot have only individual responsibilities and not social responsibilities; and the society cannot have only social responsibilities and not individual responsibilities. It is in this way that the splendid structure of "proactive humaneness" is built, while human beings are neither deprived of justice nor of dignity. And of course, reasonable freedom is embedded within justice, and is a necessary condition for justice; however, justice is not a necessary condition for freedom. And it is for this reason that in a Quranic society, power is not the goal; rather, it is a means which is used in so far as it is necessary. Power is a means for attaining Quranic aims (a fulfilling life), and not satanic intentions and crushing human dignity, as the power of the U.S. government is an obvious example. That is, departing from humaneness and entering the ring of rapacity.

Not only does the United States of America not allow exalted, fulfilling, and angelic humaneness to form, rather it prevents other countries – such as ours – from strengthening the pillars of Quranic life. And by influencing and spreading a culture which is contradictory with Quranic culture, it prevents the establishment of a Quranic society, lest many of the countries that are presently under its influence seek freedom and liberation, and withdraw from under its satanic power and domination, and force her to apologize for the sake of humaneness, and humiliate her in the face of the principles of human rights.

In any case, if we wish to clearly define the meaning of a "Quranic society," it will be such: a "Quranic society" is a society in which the elements for human growth exist, while the elements which prevent such a growth are lacking.

The Quran is an explosion of the kingdom of understanding in the horizons of eternal happiness.

The Quran is a stake in the tent of humaneness in all ages.

The Quran is the flowing firmness of the ages throughout history.

The Quran forces man to think about the peoples in the past and the destiny of ancient civilizations so that he will learn from the experiences of oppressors, who were themselves later subjected to oppression, and refrain from cruelty and oppression.

The Quran cries for justice so that all people will live under the widespread shadow of justice, and each individual will be able to grow and be fulfilled.

The Quran wants the people to boldly defeat oppressors and annihilate the three idols: Pharaoh (the political idol), Croesus (the economic idol), and Haman (the cultural idol).

The Quran motivates people to make an effort to understand truths about existence, take the path of discipline and experience, and make the utmost use of their power of wisdom.

The Quran wants people to ignite the fire of revolutions, fight against corrupt and oppressive rulers in order to save the deprived, and rise up whenever there is a need for rebellion.

The Quran wants human beings to be valiant epic-makers and be willing to sacrifice their lives for higher values.

The Quran wants Muslims to be the messengers of peace and security for all the peoples of the world, and to strengthen the foundations of healthy governments, to observe divine limitations, and not act wickedly toward anyone - whether Muslim or non-Muslim.

The Quran wants people to increase the divine blessings with effort, and to understand and conquer nature, develop and beautify cities, and take pleasure in seeing parks, meadows, rivers, the sea, the sky, the stars, and the moon... to observe justice in a precise manner and make life enjoyable for all, and refrain from any sort of selfishness, self-centeredness, and monopoly in order to attain individual, social, political, legal and civil virtue.

The Quran says that wealth should not be in the hands of only a few, but rather it should be in circulation among all the people (as blood in the vessels of the body of society).

The Quran considers the path for reaching virtue (upright thought and action) to be the unsparing implementation of justice.

The Quran wants the people not to lie, not to cheat, not to speak ill of other people, not to wish evil upon others, and view life as a market from which one can acquire provisions; and this provision is virtue, and virtue lies in justice and doing good deeds.

The Quran wants Muslims to be brave, kind, holy warriors, knights in armor, the defenders of the values of the Quran and Islam, of the lands of the Quran, and not show weakness in defending Islam and its principles.

The Quran honors human dignity and considers the protection of human dignity to be a necessity. After Oneness, the pivot of the Quran's teachings

and commandments is man, justice, freedom, and spiritual and material growth.

The Quran was sent down by the Creator of the universe, revealed by a faithful angel to the heart of Mohammad (peace be upon him), in clear Arabic language so that it would startle the people of the world.

The Quran is a mirror of the manifestation of the Creator of existence for His creatures.

The Quran takes precedence to all the books which have previously been sent down to man by his Creator (and after the Quran no other book will descend from the heavens).

The Quran is the differentiator of religiously legal and illegal (clean and unclean) individual and social actions.

The Quran is the most steadfast guide for mankind.

The Quran brings glad tidings for the pious, who do good deeds and will receive great rewards.

The Quran is a kind leader and a pure counselor, which guides in a direct path in which there exists no multiplicity or discord. As the Quran states: "This is the direct and divine path. Thus, follow this path and not other paths in which you will be lost and will deviate from God's path. God advises you in this manner so that you may become one of the virtuous."

The Quran is a book that teaches Oneness (devoid of polytheism or atheism). Oneness arises from none other than the Quran.

The Quran is the logical demonstration of truth on behalf of the Great Creator; and it is a clear inner view.

The Quran is a light which cannot be extinguished.

The Quran is a contract between the Almighty God and His creatures, with clear and lucid views.

The Quran is the flag of salvation; whoever lives under its shadow will not lose his way.

The Quran is a Book which calls humanity to absorb the radiance from its wisdom, and encourages man to reflect on the small and great verses of existence.

The Quran is the source of knowledge and wisdom, and the axis of training and self-development.

The Quran is the teacher of hard work and effort, and brings glad tidings of transforming revolutions.

The Quran is a Book in which truths have been categorized and brilliantly expressed, without any doubt. "If the Quran were not God's Book, it would be filled with contradictions."

The Quran is a scale of justice, a call for establishing justice.

The Quran is a Book of love: God's love for man, and man's love for God.

The Quran brings glad tidings, startles, and is an invitation to steadfastness and resistance.

The Quran commands justice, benevolence, good deeds, and living virtuously.

The Quran calls people to witness right actions and to establish justice.

The Quran cries out for collaborating in doing good deeds and abstinence, and not collaborating in the ways of sin and vindictiveness.

The Quran is a teacher of grace and forgiveness, commands good deeds and forbids evil deeds.

The Quran calls people to act in a noble manner, to be humble and look the other way, and not to be unruly and conceited.

The Quran calls people to remember God, for it strengthens the heart and brings spiritual repose.

The Quran demands that its verses be read with slow deliberation, not with haste and without concentration, for the Quran is the Book of the Almighty God which He has sent to His creatures so that they would think deeply of each of its verses, and by benefiting from the purity and knowledge of the Quran, they would rip the truth-covering veil from their hearts and cast it aside.

The Quran calls on the people to emerge from physical and spiritual stagnation, journey through the earth, and view everything deeply with open eyes.

The Quran is a Book which shows people opportunities for deep and constructive reflection with regard to the body and how it was originally formed, the abilities and the spirit with which the Creator has endowed man and his evolution in human existence. In the various stages of existence (childhood, adolescence, youth...) the Quran motivates one to think properly until the end of life and transition to the afterlife.

The Quran is a Book which takes man to the world of deep reflection in order to understand Creation, which is constantly being manifested.

The Quran is a Book which forces man to think deeply about past nations and their destinies, and the hardships which have befallen ancient civilizations on account of their oppressions and cruelties. "Because no matter how many times we warned them, they disregarded [our warnings] we opened the doors for them to adversity and misfortune."

The Quran is a Book which reveals the destinies of people who, due to steadfastness in the way of God, the sacrifice of wealth and life and, with divine guidance, have sought resplendent truth, fomented transforming revolutions, blessings and welfare, and have cut off the hand of those who have usurped their rights.

The Quran is a Book which motivates people to make an effort to understand truths and divine knowledge, and pursue the path of spiritual development so as to reach proximity to God. For the Creator who has given them their daily bread and blessed them with life and wisdom, renews his blessings at every instant; otherwise, they would lose both life and wisdom. And in such a way, wise people who have reflected upon the world, and have discerned right from wrong, will go hopefully and joyfully to their Creator; and such people ask for forgiveness from the divine threshold so that they would join the patient, the truthful, the humble, and the charitable.

The Quran is the Book of Prayer. It calls on people to perform their daily prayers and give alms, to pray with others, and to genuflect and prostrate before the Creator of eternity.

The Quran demands that the pious encourage the people to do good deeds and refrain from doing evil.

The Quran demands that people refrain from extravagance and excessiveness.

The Quran demands that in the way of various individual and social duties, and in the human and divine duties, people exert great effort, show no weakness or boredom on this path, and understand that the creation of the heavens and the earth, and man's short life on earth, followed by death and a transition to the cosmos is not empty and without aim.

The Quran wants Muslims not to have any differences, to be a unified people, and to dismay those who wish to create division amongst them.

The Quran desires that in all the elements which have been mentioned, the people would rely on the Quran's guidance, that is, to travel through the universe holding the cane of the Quran, and to see the world clearly with the torch of the Quran. And most importantly, not neglect thinking deeply of "The Great Quran" and its awesome verses which speak to the people, and understand that "The Great Quran" is not an ordinary Book, but rather a cord which connects them to their Creator. The wonders of its verses and its extraordinary secrets are never-ending, and it has no similarity with the words of an ordinary person.

And now I shall cite a few words by the Holy Prophet in order to introduce the contents of Islam:

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him)

One hour of [effort for implementing] justice is better than seventy years of worshipping God.

The rights of the poor are in the wealth of those who are able. Therefore, the wealthy are responsible for the hungry.

If any hungry person exists in a prosperous neighborhood its residents will be deprived of God's mercy.

The highest level of wisdom – after faith in God – is to cultivate friendship, and to do well to others, be they good or bad.

Whoever takes rights from an oppressor and gives it to the oppressed will be on the same level with me in heaven.

If any debtor who cannot pay his debt states the fact to an Islamic ruler, the payment of his debt will be the duty of the ruler.

Oh Muslims! Give the poor their rights so that your prayers will be accepted by God.

(In Islam, prayer is considered to be the pillar of faith. Yet prayer and worship are valuable only when they are accepted by The Almighty.)

I have been given the mission [by the Quran] to act according to justice amongst the people.

Whoever sits next to a learned person has sat next to a friend of God; and God will help him enter heaven.

Whoever confesses to a crime after fear has been instilled in his heart, this confession will have no judicial value.

Women are like a bouquet of flowers; therefore, do not treat them harshly.

Imam Ali (A.S.)

Imam Ali was fostered by the Quran and Mohammad (peace be upon him). As of the age of ten, he was reared by the Holy Prophet, and not one instant of his social life was corrupted by the iniquity of pre-Islamic ignorance. He is a perfect example of the Quran, Mohammad, and Islam. What follows are a few quotations of his sayings, teachings and behavior.

Whoever attains power must not practice nepotism, so that there would arise no opportunity for taking advantage of the people.

God has made it imperative for an Islamic ruler and his family to live on the same level as the lowest individual in society.

Never believe that society could be corrected without the implementation of justice! Oh, officials of an Islamic government, your post has been entrusted to you for carrying out your duties; it is not a stall for committing fraud and embezzlement of the public treasury.

Supervision over markets and prices is a necessity, and supervisors who commit crimes must be treated with the severest punishments.

If Hassan and Hussein (Ali's two sons and the grandsons of the Holy Prophet) do wrong, I will not absolve them.

I will degrade and disable the powerful until the rights of the weak have been extracted from their gullets; and I will bestow power upon the weak to the extent that they would be able to gain all their rights.

The wise and knowledgeable in society are answerable to God for the deprivation of the deprived, and the power and influence of the wealthy.

Go into the night and meet the needs of the needy - even when they are asleep.

If the ruling system is Islamic, not a single person would be oppressed, even non-Muslims; and no one would be deprived, even non-Muslims.

One day a group of Muslim dignitaries came to Ali, described their services to Islam, and asked for receiving distinctions... Ali said in response: "This wealth [which is in the government treasury] belongs to God, and you are all creatures of God. I have read God's Book [the Quran] and did not see anyone receiving a distinction over anyone else."

Ali said to the sinful: "Do not come to me to confess your sins, for I will punish you; rather go and be penitent among yourselves and your God."

People who are agreeable, who are weak, worldly, and prone to corruption, people who wish their relatives and themselves to receive benefits can never form a theocracy and administer the society in accord with God's will.

Imam Ali was so protective of the public wealth that he wrote to his officials: "Make the nib of your pen finer! Write lines that are closer to each other! Do not be verbose! Attempt to make your point concisely, for under no pretext should the public treasury be at a loss."

In appointing a judge, choose the best and wisest of a judge who does not accept a bribe and is not under anyone's influence.

The worst provision which one can send for the afterlife is cruelty to others and infringement upon the rights of others.

Imam Ali divided the city of Kufah (upon which he ruled) into seven districts. He gave all the people their equal share from the public treasury. Once, when supplies were received into the treasury and were divided into seven sections, an extra loaf of bread was left. The Imam commanded that it be divided into seven segments and a morsel be left in each district.

Imam Ali: "When I became the ruler I had a few dirhams and some tattered clothing. Now, if at the end of my rule I have more than this, let it be known that I am a criminal, and have committed a crime against the people.

Imam Ali himself always worked like a hard laborer; with his own labors and his own hands he created palm groves. When revenues were received from these palm groves, he would give the proceeds to the needy. Once, after he had acted thus, he rose and went to the bazaar and presented his sword for sale. Imam Ali said, "If we had dinner for tonight, I would not have put my sword up for sale." And in the end, he bequeathed all the palm groves which he had created, and "Ali's endowments" became famous.

He appointed one of the prominent and famous personalities of Basra, Abu al-Aswad Da'li, to become a judge in Basra. However, after only a short time, in spite of not having enough manpower, Imam Ali dismissed him from his

duties. The judge asked: "Why have you dismissed me, though I have done no wrong?" Ali replied, "[It is true] but one day while you were speaking to a client, you raised your voice over his."

Has humanity ever seen such a sentry for guarding its values, one who would not allow an elderly judge to raise his voice over that of a criminal? Have the Greek or Roman civilizations ever had such a judge, or has anyone witnessed such a thing in post-Renaissance Europe? Never mind the United States of America!

In the order which Imam Ali writes to his governor in Egypt – known as the Malek Ashtar Letter – thirty times he advises in regard to human rights and dignity. One can claim that his book, "Nahjul Balaghah," is a book of human rights.

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One of the very knowledgeable Islamic sages, Allameh Jafari, who was also my friend, and passed away a few years ago, has written a thesis about the benefits of Islam. I will note some of it for your perusal. This section is in regard to the Islamic rights of animals:

1. When any living creature is at the disposal of someone, that person must provide the living creature with all the necessities of life.
2. If the owner of the animal neglects to provide this, the Islamic ruler must force him to do so; and in the event this is not possible, the ruler himself must provide for the animal.
3. If the animal has a suckling baby, there must be enough milk for the baby in the mother's breasts. If there is enough milk only for the baby, then milking the mother is *haraam* (religiously illegal or unclean).
4. Whoever milks an animal must clip his nails so that the animal would not be harmed.
5. Cursing and beating an animal are *haraam*.
6. Hunting animals as a sport, without need, is *haraam*.
7. The killing of chicks in their nests is *haraam*.
8. The person who is in charge of animals must not be harsh, so that the animal may not be subjected to cruelty.
9. One must not ride an animal to the point that it becomes exhausted.
10. An animal which is injured, or has a physical defect, and cannot walk properly must be treated with the utmost care.

Yes, Your Excellency!

Although my missive has become rather long, the opportunity of writing to you has been of tremendous value. All of this was a mere drop in the ocean of the humane guidance and training in Islam. I hope the opportunity will arise for you - now and then - to read the two volumes I am sending, which include ten chapters. I wish volume six had already been translated and I could present that to you as well.

The End