

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Submitters Perspective

Monthly Bulletin of International
Community of Submitters

www.masjiduntucson.org



Published by Masjid Tucson
Jumada I 1424

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FREEDOM God's Quranic Gift

The Fourth of July in the USA reminds us that one of the major principles upon which this country was first founded is freedom of religion. This essential freedom was not just guaranteed by the struggles and the documents of the founding fathers, it was guaranteed by our Creator Himself. More than a thousand years before the founding of this country, God stated this critical principle in the Quran:

There shall be no compulsion in religion: the right way is now distinct from the wrong way. Anyone who denounces the devil and believes in God has grasped the strongest bond; one that never breaks. God is Hearer, Omniscient. (2:256)

This precept, that there shall be absolute freedom of religion, is critical for the very existence of Submission, true Islam. Without complete freedom how can we tell if we are following God or if we are following what the society or our peers dictate? We are constantly being barraged with different opinions on everything under the sun. They come at us from all directions, from TV, radio, what we read, our friends, our family, etc. And these opinions range from politics, to laundry soap to religion. This latter is the area where we must be most careful to make our own decisions, but it is often the area we are most likely to take someone else's opinion. Yet, God tells us:

You shall not accept any information, unless you verify it for yourself. I have given you the hearing, the eyesight, and the brain, and you are responsible for using them. (17:36)

In Submission we have been blessed with the knowledge that each of us is individually accountable to God alone. We are absolutely and completely responsible for our own belief, our own guidance. There is no religious hierarchy to dictate our religion to us. Only God is the Guide and the Teacher. Of course, He often teaches us through others....

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HORSES



3:14 Adorned for the people are the worldly pleasures, such as the women, having children, piles upon piles of gold and silver, trained horses, livestock, and crops. These are the material of this world. A far better abode is reserved at God.

16:8 And He created the horses, the mules, and the donkeys for you to ride and for luxury. Additionally, He creates what you do not know.

The horse has had a profound, far-reaching, long-lasting effect on civilization. It's far more than the beauty and grace of the horse; it's the impact the horse, domestication of the horse and then riding the horse had on the world. In an amazing way, the horse completely and dramatically and almost instantaneously changed the face of the world. Truly in exactly the same way that the computer has overhauled our world, and look at how quickly that's happened, the horse had the same impact on the ancient world.

First off on domestication: there have been more than 4000 species of mammals on the earth over the last one thousand years, yet the horse is one of fewer than a dozen that has achieved widespread success as a domesticated animal. This isn't from lack of trying. It's human nature to try to turn animals into pets or servants. It turns out that it's not a matter of human will at all. It's now recognized that certain species are "pre-adapted" to domestication. That's the term that science uses; we know that it simply means that God has designed them this way.

36:71-2 Have they not seen that we created for them with our own hands, livestock that they own? And we subdued them for them; some they ride, and some they eat.

Certain species—but fewer than a dozen—were designed by God to go through this life in service to man. The

horse and the zebra are members of the same family, but except for the occasional circus act, you don't see people riding around on zebras, but the horse is used in riding everywhere. How did this develop?

Well, it's all part of God's plan, part of His overall scheme that goes back to long before He placed man on earth. It's amazing, and only because of God's will, that the horse even survived. The "dawn horse," eohippus, was only about 14 inches high and weighed about 12-20 pounds. This early horse was probably a jungle dweller, and was certainly prey for a number of early predators.

Over the next 60 million years much evolution took place through natural selection and adapting to the environment. The horse slowly grew in stature, moved into more open ground and so developed long legs for speed and agility. Other adaptations involved the development of their hooves as their original 5 toes became 4, then 3 and finally the single solid hoof of today's horse—a great help in moving swiftly. These adaptations happened slowly over millions of years. It's only in the last 6000 years that man has been involved in this process, but our hand is clear. Natural evolution works on important things for the survival of the species; we select for coat color and looks depending on our whims and needs.

Interestingly, the horse began in North America and crossed the land bridge to colonize the Old World. By about 10,000 years ago it was completely extinct in North America. Driven from Europe because of habitat changes, they ended up existing only on the Russian Steppes for centuries. That's where domestication began around 6000 years ago and with this partnership with man, the horse made a sweeping comeback. And descendants of the population that left this continent, millennia before, returned with the Spanish Conquistadors in 1519 and totally changed the history of America.

The horse as we know it today—the general size and shape—emerged in the Pleistocene era, the same time as man. By around 4000 BC, there is archaeological evidence that horses were kept for meat and milk. They were probably kept in small herds along with cattle and sheep.

There's much debate about what happened next—in what order. It was originally assumed that the horse was used to pull carts and chariots before it was ever ridden. The assumption being

that it would have been easier to get a horse in harness than to mount him. But new evidence suggests the reverse. Archaeological remains from 6000 years ago show a horse that wore a riding bit, and this is 500 years before the first wheel. And how riding happened is completely open to debate. One quote: "To ride a horse was surely more an act of daring, bravado, curiosity and yearning than of necessity." Certainly, that first rider would have no idea of the changes that would follow this brave action. Perhaps it was purely accidental. It's not in the nature of the horse to allow something on its back. He has a very strong flight response and a survival instinct to throw off anything on its back—it's probably a predator. So it's likely that the first rider earned the horse's trust over a period of time and mounted as a natural extension of that companionship. How quickly was that first rider thrown off? Or did they just gallop off into the sunset?

Whatever, they changed history forever, with such speed and savagery that we can't even imagine. Archaeology tracks slow changes and movements of early communities up until this point in history. Suddenly everything changes. Tribal life was completely transformed. Communities mingled. Riverside communities moved out into the plains. Some cultures vanished abruptly and completely. It extended the range for hunting because man could suddenly run down big game. He could keep much larger herds of cattle, sheep and horses and simply drive them to new grazing lands whenever necessary. It touched communities farther and farther apart; they spread; they lost ties with old communities. Weapons of war proliferated. Conflicts grew over the best land and horses made war easier and worse at the same time.

When you got up on a horse you immediately held the high ground. This separated farmers from herdsmen, placing a serious wedge between them. The farmer, or "pedestrian," was at the mercy of the horsemen and had to form alliances with stronger groups for protection and learn to cooperate and provide food and grain in exchange for the right to exist. Arrogance went hand in hand with conquest—the motto "might makes right." Horsemen felt so superior.

How long did it take? Well, it's hard to know for sure, but there's an analogy in North America. Cortez invaded Mexico in 1519 with a force of only about 850

men and 16 horses, the 16 horses that were to reinstate the equine species on the American mainland. He claimed that "next to God, we owed the victory to the horses for they struck terror into the natives who naturally had never seen the like of these armored beasts before." By 1680 when the Indians rose up and drove the Spanish out, thousands of horses were left behind. They strayed northward and when they arrived on the American Plains, they caused complete changes in the culture within two generations. Two generations! Cultural changes sometimes take centuries to come about, but this was like the computer in our lifetime. It touched everything and quickly.

We have good historic records of this impact on the Plains Indians. The dominance of farming tribes was completely overtaken by hunting tribes. Riders could move 2-3 times farther and faster than could people on foot. Sedentary horticultural villages were so vulnerable. Enemies would make lightning strikes, take what they wanted and disappear; they could not be pursued or punished. Whole villages were abandoned or in self-defense they also became mounted. So warfare increased in intensity and in social importance. Prowess in war became more and more respected. Probably no aspect of Indian culture was not affected by horseback riding: religion, personal identity, warfare, economic productivity, commerce and boundaries.

By the fast gallopers. Igniting sparks. Invading the enemy by morning. Striking terror therein. Penetrating to the heart of their territory. (100:1-5)

Going back to ancient times, these early horse cultures were violent, arrogant and self-absorbed. They used the horse as a means to an end and that end was usually conquest. God continues in sura 100: *The human being is unappreciative of his Lord. He bears witness to this fact. He loves material things excessively.*

But we know that in spite of the general unappreciative nature of humans, there are righteous individuals. Solomon is a good example, especially in context of horses. History shows that Solomon was a sound horse breeder. It's claimed that he kept 1200 riding horses and perhaps 40,000 chariot horses. We know from the Quran that his horses were important to him, in fact, at one point, too important and God used them as a test.

One day he became preoccupied with beautiful horses, until the night

fell. He then said, "I enjoyed the material things more than I enjoyed worshipping my Lord, until the sun was gone. Bring them back." (To bid farewell), he rubbed their legs and necks. We thus put Solomon to the test; we blessed him with vast material wealth, but he steadfastly submitted. (38:31-4)

And I'd like to quote from The Encyclopedia of the Horse: "The expansion of Islam through the conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries initiated a train of events that would ensure the emergence of Europe from the Dark Ages into the Renaissance period and the rebirth of humanism. Unlike later conquests, which had no lasting effects, such as those of the Mongols, Islam bequeathed a rich legacy to the world in its graceful architecture and its appreciation and practice of the arts and sciences. It also left the incomparable horses on which its achievements were dependent." It is clear then that righteous people were capable of being appreciative of this great gift which God had provided. Ishmael, Solomon and Mohammed are all considered sound horsemen who improved breeding stock and made good use of the horse to transport armies and equipment.

In the Quran 17:64, when God talks about mobilizing all your forces, He uses a word that implies "horse power" because it's the horse, not the camel, that impacted war in this dramatic way. And of course the term survives today in the concept of the more horse power, the better, faster, more powerful is the car.

So we need to show appreciation when studying an animal as magnificent and historically crucial as the horse. God combined such beauty and grace with the willingness to be tamed and work with humans. That's quite a gift. Although we don't have to depend on horses in our modern society in the same way, we need to be aware that without that substantial contribution, history might have been very different.

God took that dawn horse weighing in at maybe 20 pounds, shaped its survival over millions of years, and allowed man to turn it into the hundreds of breeds of horses and ponies of today. We have beautiful Arabians, elegant thoroughbreds, and draft horses weighing up to 2500 pounds. We keep them and use them in ranching and racing and enjoy them for recreation. We put on a bridle and saddle and trot around an arena or on a bridle path or dress up in fancy clothes for a fox hunt.

We give no thought to the remarkable impact these gentle creatures had on all of history. It's just like with every other creation of God. We need to be appreciative.

The heavens and the earth are full of proofs for the believers. Also in your creation, and the creation of all the animals, there are proofs for people who are certain. (45:3-4)

Lydia K.

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FREEDOM

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He has sent messengers, including a messenger in our own generation. He tells us to consult with the believers when deciding our affairs. He may even guide us using the words of a disbeliever. But we are responsible for accepting and following what we hear, or rejecting it:

They are the ones who examine all words, then follow the best. These are the ones whom God has guided; these are the ones who possess intelligence. (39:18)

Thus we are responsible for examining all sides of an issue. This is especially important in issues of belief, for these are at the core of who we are. They determine whether we are following the path of God, or not. This brings up another essential freedom, freedom of speech. Without freedom of speech, how can we examine all points of view? We must hear all sides to examine them. Then we can decide which to follow.

But don't we have a responsibility to make sure that we do not listen to falsehood? Should we not silence that which we know to be detrimental? These are very knotty

questions. They are at the core of all discussions of censorship.

I believe that God tells us that it is not our responsibility to act as censors. The responsibility of what one says lies on that person, not on those listening as the following verse demonstrates:

A believing man among Pharaoh's people, who was concealing his belief, said, "How can you kill a man just for saying, 'My Lord is GOD,' and he has shown you clear proofs from your Lord? If he is a liar, that is his problem, and if he is truthful, you benefit from his promises. Surely, GOD does not guide any transgressor, liar." (40:28)

We must decide for ourselves if what we hear is correct and if we even wish to remain to hear it. But to stop it from being said is to thwart one of the basic freedoms we have been blessed with. What about others who may not have the experience to make a good decision about what is being said? Don't we have a responsibility to protect them? Ultimately, God alone is responsible for what each of us hears, what each of us sees. We must trust God to take care of our guidance, and that of our children and of every human being on earth:

You cannot guide the ones you love. God is the only One who

guides in accordance with His will, and in accordance with His knowledge of those who deserve the guidance. (28:56)

True freedom is essential for true submission to God. Freedom for ourselves, and freedom for those around us.

The United States identifies itself strongly with the freedoms it stands for. It seems most appropriate that a country based on such Quranic concepts should also have the motto:

"In God we trust."

And is that not the essence of Submission?

Lisa S.

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