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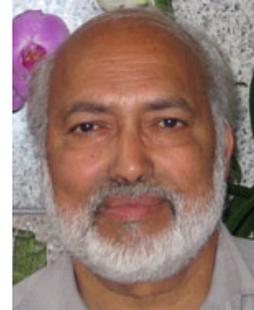
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'Only way' religions out

Iftekhar Hai

AMERICAN MUSLIM scholars assert that freedom of religion is one of the fundamental principles in the Quran, when it states there should be no compulsion in religion.



They also believe in pluralism, a teaching in Islam that explains there are multiple paths to salvation. According to the Quran, all people have equal access to the gates of Heaven, and there are no people on Earth to whom God has not sent messengers.

This means people born in China, India or the indigenous people of the Americas have been tutored in their own language and in their own countries about their spiritual responsibilities and about living a righteous life. With that, we see people coming together and connected as one global community.

The best that religions can offer often comes to the forefront. People who are insistent that their way is the "only way" and that other paths are wrong are now in the minority. Each day they get isolated more and more from the global community destined to live on one piece of real estate — the Earth.

Currently, American Islam is being nurtured in a constitutionally elected democracy. While it has yet to evolve globally, I can clearly see the seeds being spread all over America.

The present-day world has come a long way from the days of holy wars. Happily, crusades and military jihads are on their way out.

The days of Alexander the Great, Caesar and caliphs/sultans are gone forever. Although we are seeing some pockets of war in Iraq, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, I believe most of the world is getting away from engaging in modern warfare, which could be devastating to the global community.

American democracy is also at work when you see the two-party system battling for control of power through ballot boxes. America has a great responsibility to lead the world in a just and spiritually correct way.

Fortunately, American Islam is also taking root in the West, though in the infancy stage. We have immigrants from all over the Muslim world who are eager to come to the U.S. and Western Europe for a better economic life. These new immigrants are destined to go through a period of adjustment.

We are all born accidentally in whatever faith we are born into. Some of us come out of their faith to explore other religions, and sometimes they find comfort and peace of mind in that faith, which is perfectly OK, because freedom of religion is now an internationally accepted global principle. Religion is very personal and private matter and American Muslims must go a step further in keeping a separation wall between the religions and state.

American Islam has its roots firmly embedded in a democratic society and the global principles from the United Nations Charter of Human Rights.

Iftekhhar Hai is president of United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance in South San Francisco.

Next week: Rabbi Michael O'Berg.

NOTE: The title I gave for my article was, "American Islam." The editors have final say in what changes they make. First time I learned about the title is when I saw the newspapers. I have convey my feelings to the editors about this.

Iftekhhar Hai