

WE, THE HUMANS

Safdar Hasan Siddiqi

I stand before you as a human being among the sea of human beings before me. I have the same body chemistry as you all have. I am propelled by the same kind of spirit to indulge in my day to day activities of material nature. I have the same aspirations in myself, as any one of you, i.e. to be a good person and service others. I too have the urge to learn more and more and to benefit from the fruits of learning; academic, scientific and technical. I too, as you all do, yearn for peace, wider understanding, fraternity amongst us and progress and prosperity in our world.

The question that arises here is how to achieve these objectives that are primary for making our lives purposeful and useful and ensuring good life for humanity? What specific steps will have to be taken by us to make this possible?

The first step, I understand, is to lay down a sound ideological and philosophical basis for human progression, which has been allowed to be thrown into utter confusion and delusion by the formulators of public opinion in the various countries, and which needs to be articulated on the basis of commonsense and human experience. The ideological and philosophical vacuum thus created must be filled. We project ourselves ambitiously before our people as leaders while being unaware ourselves of the requirements of leadership and the fundamentals of knowledge. We consider ourselves as repositories of wisdom, and our followers as ignorant and uncivilized, and at the receiving end having no intellect to propose or to advise. Whereas a leader should not only be equipped with the nitty-gritty of administration, but should have a firm grasp of the purpose of life as well as the basic requirements of the populace. He or she should be aware of the basic principles governing the social, political, economic and cultural development of society, such as equal human status and rights, the right to a better social, financial and educational status, the lessening the gap between the highest and lowest incomes, equal rights of the people of a country

over the means of production, extension of leisure, cultural niceties and development to the greatest number of people, improvement of overall health of the population etc. A whole new and progressive concept of political leadership will have to be evolved on the world level, which will encompass also the so-called civilized nations and the world powers.

The basic philosophy that should be generally accepted by human beings, if they are to live a life of peace and plenty, is that this world, with all its beautiful material contents, has been created by an entity which humanity recognizes and remembers as God; that the universe is bound by certain universal and unchanging laws which are at work every minute of our existence; that our responsibility is to discover these laws and apply them in the various fields of life in their ever changing conditions for the betterment of our individual and collective relations; bringing about scientific and technological development and always using them for the betterment of working conditions. Such a philosophy determines that all human beings, they may be connected with any religion or belief, who "believe in God and serve humanity to the best of their ability", and who consider themselves answerable to the society and to God, are good human beings and are one people, and those who are propelled by their own whims and egos are another kind of people, the former serve one another and the latter serve themselves only. The former are useful to the society and the latter are harmful to it.

The basic attribute inherent in man is to differentiate between right and wrong, justice and injustice, truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, and on the basis of this enlightenment, to exert one's will to change the status quo, which constitutes a dilapidated state of affairs, to a viable and fruitful system of social life and governance. This attribute enables a person subconsciously to object to wrong and falsehood and work for establishing right and truth, and to stand up against injustice and oppression in society. These attributes are the kingpins of a vibrant, progressive and developing society.

Now, what causes hindrance in this process is the false concept of 'religion' which has been tailored by the vested interests in a country. Religions were constructed after the departure of the prophets who did not come for the purpose of instituting 'religions' or sects, nor did they come to divide man. Religions create dissensions and hatred, instead of love and understanding, in a society. The true concept that brings about a composite and humane world society, and which constitutes a good way of life, is "belief in God and service to humanity". According to this concept the whole human race is one people, one nation. A man thus enters into a brotherhood which had no prejudices of caste, colour, race or geography. The whole world of Human Beings becomes united into one homogeneous Human Being. A person who practices this concept is, in fact, a true believer, and his/her salvation is assured. Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is not the monopoly of religious elite (clergy). It is the right of every individual to interpret for oneself its meaning, with sincerity and the will to practice it, because every person is answerable for one's deeds to one's inner-self and the society. Moreover, moral values, which have developed through ages into universal human values, should be given due importance for the progression of the human race, and should generally form the basis of our activities.

The second step is to devise an unbounded Code of Human Conduct for general guidance of human beings. One such code could be:

Code of Human conduct for Universal affirmation

We affirm that:

- We will look up to each other as fellow human beings having equal rights and status.
- We will promote pro-existence and will renounce discrimination on the basis of colour, nationality, race, language, religion, gender or any other kind of bias.
- We will seek and promote knowledge, truth and wisdom and work for building a humane society.

- We will endeavour to raise the level of literacy, educational standards and moral values in order to promote genuine democratic polity and vibrant culture.
- We will strive to establish an efficient and just socio-economic system that would prevent exploitation of the masses and improve their standard of living and state of happiness.
- We will reject fascism and all kinds of conduct aimed at forcing people to think and act according to the whims and dictates of others, and will advocate rational dialogue for settling differences.
- We recognize the need to develop human fraternity, banish wars and secure peace at the global level. The inherent human faculties of creativity, love and pursuance of beauty, and the productive potential of the human race need to be employed in harmony with and for the protection of nature and environment.
- We consider consumerism (wasteful expenditure on luxurious living) as harmful for positive progression in human relationships. We seek to live frugally and spend our savings for the betterment of society.

The third step is to create a clear understanding of the material issues that one has to face in this world. If I may relate these issues for your convenience, they are:

1. **Law and order:** The primary human requirement is the establishment of a just socio-economic system which caters fully and equally to all sections of society, and presents those with equal opportunities for progress. An above-the-board judiciary is essential to ensure the rule of law and to safeguard the Constitution of a country.
2. **Good Governance:** The State is responsible for providing the basic necessities of life to the people, and guaranteeing basic human rights. A non-political civil bureaucracy should be established to manage the affairs of the government for the benefit of the masses. Empowerment of the people and their effective participation in state affairs should be made certain.
3. **A Sound Economy:** The economy of various countries should be framed in such a way that the gap between the

higher and lower income groups is kept at the minimum; that the standard of living of the lower strata of society is regularly raised; that a sound balance between import expenditure and export income is maintained; that the development expenditure is mainly devoted to the uplift of the common man; that especial attention is paid to development of trade, agriculture and industry.

4. **Education:** A minimum of 15 per cent should be allocated in the budgets for education. There should be the same curriculum for all students, and compulsory education up to the medium level. A hundred percent literacy should be the aim of all educational policies. Entry in educational institutions for higher specialized education should be strictly on merits. Teachers must be paid decent salaries and imparted thorough training.. Academic freedom, openness of mind, spirit of enquiry and creativeness based on modern knowledge should be the basis of education. Scientific and technological knowledge should be given top priority.
5. **Health:** The expenses incurred on health should be reduced reasonably so that everyone could afford the necessary expenditure for health maintenance. Especially, measure for prevention of disease should be stepped up. The cost of medicines, especially the life-saving drugs, should be kept at a low level so that it could come within the reach of everyone.
6. **Political Process:** People should be facilitated to play an active role in the political process of one's country. Political process should be developed for the benefit of the people. Politics should not be for grabbing power and promoting self-interest. Its purpose should be development of the society and amelioration of the lot of the people by raising their economic and social standards. Politics of dialogue and consultation should be encouraged. Moreover, new leadership should be nurtured from the lower and middle classes.
7. **Elections:** Free, fair and transparent elections should be guaranteed, and only those getting more than 50 per cent of the polled votes should be declared elected. Elections to the

Senate should be on the basis of direct elections. The Election Commission should be fully empowered and financially independent.

8. **Social Reforms:** The civil society should be deeply involved in the political process and in improving the social structure, the intellectual standard and political understanding of the masses. Equal rights, dignity and self-respect should be guaranteed to all citizens, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, sect or gender. Freedom of conscience must be fully ensured. Sectarianism should be done away with and culture of tolerance promoted.
9. **Local Bodies/Counties:** Local bodies/counties should be made autonomous and financially independent to serve the masses at the district and county levels. Local bodies should be a means of creating political awareness at the grassroots level and for developing leadership at the local and district levels. These should be used to cater to the basic needs of the people and to create deep involvement of the people in solving their problems at the local level. Local bodies could serve as nurseries for producing true representatives of the people for the assemblies at the provincial and central levels who would be capable of establishing democratic norms and good governance.
10. **Legislation:** Legislation should be done essentially for the benefit of the common man, workers and peasants. Industrial workers should be made shareholders in industrial enterprises.
11. **Women:** Women should be treated at par with men. They should be given equal rights and status in society and made independent financially.
12. **Minorities:** Minorities should be treated as equal citizens of a nation and given equal rights. All laws detrimental to their interests should be abolished.
13. **Defense:** Priority should be given to the development of a country over its defense. Establishment of peace in every country, and the world, should be our primary objective as a nation. Military expenditure should be reduced to the minimum, and trading of sophisticated arms should be

minimized. Compulsory military training to the young should be imparted to increase a country's defense capability.

The fourth step is to realize fully that we humans are in essence "spiritual beings" and we need a "spiritual environment" for attainment of our spiritual excellence, in addition to the attainment of our physical needs. Our body will decay at some stage but our spirit (that propels the body) has to live on because it has been created by an ever-living Creator of Man and Universe. The sphere of our spiritual being is very vast. It encompasses the whole gamut of human activity; it creates various civilizations; it conceives and appreciates beauty; it differentiates between different flavours and colours; it conceives ideas and inspirations, and finally it propels human activity.

The fifth step is to change the concept of State from that of an instrument of force and coercion to an instrument of good governance effected through personal examples by those who are authorized by the people to govern.

The sixth step is to remove the environmental stress because it is a great hindrance in the healthy growth of the people and society. A good and enabling environment helps one to improve vision and intellect and to encourage useful activity, while a bad environment stifles all kinds of growth.

The seventh step is to counter the bad effects of globalization. The main defect of globalization is that it hinders cultural and spiritual development of nations, in accordance with their inherent capabilities and local conditions; it cripples their indigenous economy and hinders a country's agricultural and industrial development.