

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
Muharram / Safar 1437

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There is More to Color than Meets the Eye

Our spirit draws us to light and colors. How often have we seen a toddler chasing a brilliant butterfly or picking a bright, colorful flower from the garden? I was that way. As a child, I spent many happy hours in our garden. One of my favorite flowers was portulaca with its vibrant blossoms of yellow, pink, red, and orange. They still bring back happy memories when I see them growing in a garden today. Like all the other blessings from God, color has been woven into the fabric of life on earth (16:13).

In nature, colors help to protect both animal and plant species. For example, the arctic hare has white fur, which helps it hide from predators in the snows of an arctic winter. Chameleons have the ability to change colors to match their surroundings so they can better hide from animals who think them a tasty treat. Some animals have the ability to mimic the colors of other species to protect themselves. Birds don't like the taste of a Monarch butterfly, but find a Viceroy butterfly very yummy. Because of this, God has given the Viceroy butterfly a unique form of protection. Its wings mimic those of the Monarch causing birds to disdain them because they believe them to also be Monarchs. Other animals use color to

warn off potential prey. Several species of poisonous frogs are brightly colored in blues and reds. Predators have learned that lunging on these frogs leaves more than just a bitter taste in their mouths, so they allow these frogs to go on their way unmolested.

It is not just the prey species that have been given the gift of colors. Predators can use this as well to preserve their species. The arctic fox, like its favorite meal, the arctic hare, has white fur in the winter. This helps it better hide while stalking its prey. The tall grasses of Africa are tawny in color, so it is no coincidence that the lion who hunts there is also tawny in color. All the better to sneak up on its fast running prey.

God hasn't just gifted the power of colors to faunae (animals). Florae (plants) also benefit. Some plants are pollinated by insects that fly during the day. They typically have brightly colored red and yellow flowers which are very attractive to insects, and, because they are in the longer range of color spectrum, can be seen from farther away. (That's the same reason why we have red for stop and yellow for caution in traffic signals.) On the other hand, red and yellow are not very visible in the dark, so plants pollinated by night-flying creatures have white flowers whose color is more easily

seen at night.

Because green is in the shorter range of the color spectrum, it is not as easily seen from a distance. That may be one reason why trees most typically have green leaves, and those leaves are most typically eaten by insects that live in or near them. They are not drawn by the color but choose to live in proximity to their meals.

Colors are not only used to protect predator and prey, they are also used to attract mates. In many species, especially birds, the male is far more brightly decorated than the female. Not only is this because the male will routinely draw prey away from his nesting mate, but it is also important in helping him find her in the first place. We have only to look at the brilliant peacock and the dowdy peahen to understand the reason behind these creations. Similarly, the attention of a lonely female fish is more easily caught by the scales of the flashy male than those of his duller counterpart.

Humans are not exempt from using color. While God hasn't given men colorful feathers, He has given us the gift of colors that we have used for millennia to dye our clothes and put on our faces

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(like henna for hair, nails, and decorative patterning of skin) to make ourselves stand out, fit in, and look good to our friends.

God has not only shared the beauty of color with His living creations, but also in His inanimate creations. He has created rushing blue rivers, towering red sandstone rocks, and beaches of many colored sands. His majestic mountains, valleys, deserts, rivers and seas reflect His glory through the power of color representing different minerals (35:27). The masterpiece of the most gifted painter is no match for a sun rising over a snow-capped mountain peak. Nor can the greatest work of a master sculptor compare with the divine creations of God (Job 12:7-12; Jeremiah 10:10-14) such as the fairy chimneys in Turkey, the Grand Canyon in the United States, and the wind sculptured red sand dunes in Namibia.

God doesn't just use color to warn, protect, or inspire His living creations. The colors He has given to plants can attract us to them so we can benefit from the nutrients they have inside. Different vegetables of different colors may have different vitamins and nutritional ingredients. The different qualities are all important in maintaining a healthy life. For example, we are drawn to the bright colors of oranges, strawberries, and raspberries which contain a high level of vitamin C. Milk and cheese like the calcium and fat they contain are white and creamy. The deep brown color and enticing aroma of chocolate invites us to take a bite, and rewards us with a natural chemical that soothes our nerves as well as powerful antioxidants. And the rich purple of grapes, figs, and blueberries call us to sample these fruits with their nourishing ingredients. Fruits and vegetables of many colors are an important part of a healthy life (16:69; 39:21). The same is true of our races.

Just as God has given His other creations colors to preserve them, so has He done with man (35:28). Anthropologic and other scientific studies have provided good evidence that early humans living at or near the equator received large amounts of sunlight.

While the right amount of sunlight is essential for life, too much or too little can be fatal. We absorb sunlight through our skin. Humans living in sun rich areas such as Africa developed dark skin pigmentation, which permitted them to absorb enough sunlight to produce critical compounds such as vitamin D, but not so much as to significantly increase their risk from ultra-violet induced skin cancer. Dark pigmented eyes also offered protection to their possessors from the harmful effects of sunlight, which could be critical for a hunter-gatherer species, dependent on vision.

As our ancestors moved north, the light from the sun dimmed. In addition to less sunlight, the temperature was much colder in the winter. Because early humans in Africa did not need as much clothing to protect themselves from the weather, they received significant amounts of sunlight on their skin. But because those living in the northern climates had to deal with ice, snow, and freezing temperatures, they needed to wear more clothing than their southern relatives. For our northern ancestors wearing furs was not a fashion statement, it was a survival mandate. However, in their need to avoid freezing they covered their skin thereby reducing the amount of sunlight they received. To counter this, in accordance with God's plan, their skin pigment gradually diminished until they were very fair skinned. Also, because there was less light shining on their eyes, their eye color changed from brown to blue which allowed more light to enter the retina.

While skin color was driven in large part by where people lived, their language was also influenced by their environment (30:22). Different languages in different areas developed different words. For example, people living on the equator had little need for words such as "snow" or "seasons." Language was used to unite a people and share common beliefs and cultures. Even today language should be used to unite different cultures, not divide us because all languages come from, and are ultimately heard by God (30:22; 22:17-18). So we must be careful what we say (Quran 35:10; Proverbs 5:1-2; Gospel of

Matthew, 6:2, 5; Quran 2:264).

While people living in northern Europe and in southern Africa may have had different skin colors, they had the same hopes and fears, and the same Creator. The world has changed dramatically today bringing our different races together. Though our outward appearances may still be different, our needs for fulfillment, happiness, and belonging are still the same and we still share the same Creator (22:34), Who loves all of us as long as we keep His commandments and do not do evil (19:96; 49:13). After all, we all share one true purpose in life: To magnify the glory of God and praise His name (Quran 51:56; Gospel of Matthew 22:37; Psalms 99:1-5).

Because we share that Creator, we are part of a common family. Our ancestors relied on this family, tribe, or group for their survival. While a solitary bear could live by hunting on its own in the summer and hibernating in the winter, a solitary human would likely succumb to predators, hunger, or the weather. Although few of us now face those kinds of threats, we still have a great need to belong to a wider family and it is still important to God's plan for us. In fact, God has decreed that we treat everyone justly and fairly as instructed in the Bible as well as the Quran (Gospel of Matthew 25:34-36, Matthew 22:39; Quran, 4:36; 24:22; 33:6; 3:75). In the New Testament, Jesus also commanded his followers to care for the poor and the unfortunate, as stated in the Gospel: whatever you do "for the least of my brethren you did it also for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Color is a sign, a gift, a tool from God. Let's not turn this blessing to a curse – a proof of ignorance.

Our diversity as a people, our colors, our history, and our abilities, when taken together, form a rainbow. Like the rainbow shown to Noah as a promise of a brighter future (Genesis 9:16-17), so our rainbow of human diversity holds a promise of a better future, which shines brightly in the light of God.

Laleh

RIGHT AND WRONG

What is the most common feature among us humans? We have numerous inherent flaws which give rise to several negative characteristics. [4:27-28] *GOD wishes to redeem you, while those who pursue their lusts wish that you deviate a great deviation. GOD wishes to lighten your burden, for the human being is created weak.* It is the weakness which makes humans susceptible to enticements. Owing to this, we have so many troubles around us—dishonesty, deception, vice and all other corruptions. The subtitle for 4:27 is *God's mercy*. If we sincerely implore God, He will help us.

When we are born, we know only life. Our parents, teachers and guardians tell us what to do, how to do it and also what not to do. God has ignited the spark of monotheism in all of us. *Monotheism: Natural Instinct* [30:30] *Therefore, you shall devote yourself to the religion of strict monotheism. Such is the natural instinct placed into the people by GOD. Such creation of GOD will never change. This is the perfect religion, but most people do not know.*

Religion steps in early. God is most concerned for our security both now and in the all important Hereafter. Parental advice is intended to safeguard the child from physical and psychological harm but God also desires to save our soul from eternal damnation.

God has given us the gift of a conscience. Our conscience constrains us from vice and transgressions by objecting to and protesting our behavior. It reminds us of retribution in the Hereafter even if we manage to avoid it here. Hamlet alludes to this in his soliloquy – *Thus Conscience does make Cowards of us all*. But it's not cowardice; it's heeding God's warning, and thus refraining from what we know is wrong.

Take the case of Joseph. The Quran says

he may have been tempted to do what he was invited to do. [12:24] *She almost succumbed to him, and he almost succumbed to her, if it were not that he saw a proof from his Lord. We thus diverted evil and sin away from him, for he was one of our devoted servants.* But God guided him and augmented his thinking and conscience. He was restrained by a fear of God.

God has also given us another faculty—reasoning. [16:78] *GOD brought you out of your mothers' bellies knowing nothing, and He gave you the hearing, the eyesight, and the brains, that you may be appreciative.* [91:8] *Then showed it what is evil and what is good.* We can reach a conclusion in a logical way. We are permitted to draw a differentiation between right and wrong in consideration of our own conduct.

However, even our reliance on reasoning may not be enough at all times. For instance, Satan relied only on his (flawed) power of reasoning when he rejected the command to fall prostrate before Adam. He contested that he was made of fire and therefore superior to Adam who was made of clay. Hence, reasoning has to be taken with conscience and in the light of the guidance of God. To come to the correct conclusion we have to do what is most pleasing to God.

A desire or a want is not a bad thing as such. This is also part of our nature and this motivation may energise us to great achievements. A desire becomes insatiable when it has no end, which is that we want much more of the same thing than we actually require or deserve.

When does this desire become bad? When it overpowers logic and conscience. There can be beneficial results when we are moderate, and it can be devastating when our deeds are infected with ego and arrogance. Then this desire turns to greed and in turn to envy. We crave what lawfully belongs to someone else. We start to entertain resentment against that person. What happens next? The person uses all methods—legal, ille-

gal, moral, immoral—any and every scheme to get his end achieved. The next stage is violation, excesses and treachery. The mind gets blocked and overpowered. He may even harm or kill someone to grab what he wants. [68:13-14] *Unappreciative, and greedy. Even though he possessed enough money and children.* [74:15] *Yet, he is greedy for more.*

Recall the first murder on earth was the killing of Abel by his brother Cain. This was an instance of ego and jealousy too. [5:27] *Recite for them the true history of Adam's two sons. They made an offering, and it was accepted from one of them, but not from the other. He said, "I will surely kill you." He said, "GOD accepts only from the righteous.* [5:30] *His ego provoked him into killing his brother. He killed him, and ended up with the losers.*

Submission goes further than any other religion as it guides all aspects of our conduct—speech, manners, greetings, marriage, divorce, inheritance, controlling anger, forgiving injury, borrowing and lending, fair dealings in trade and commerce, slander, backbiting, suspicion, war and peace. It covers all our activities, and all commands are obligatory. The Quranic guidance: [23:96] *Therefore, counter their evil works with goodness; we are fully aware of their claims.*

No more pride, no more prejudice. We are taught human values and moral virtues of love, compassion, sympathy, mercy, graciousness, forgiveness, generosity and humility. Even if someone is antagonistic and spiteful to us, we know how to handle the situation and bring about a positive transformation.

[41:34] *Not equal is the good response and the bad response. You shall resort to the nicest possible response. Thus, the one who used to be your enemy, may become your best friend.* [28:54] *To these we grant twice the reward, because they steadfastly persevere. They counter evil works with good works, and from our provisions to them, they give.*

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ISSN 1089-053X

Happiness is Submission to God Alone

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What should our Submission be? We should willingly present a complete and unreserved compliance to the Authority of God. He has clearly defined right and wrong for us, so we have a firm belief that any act we do or refrain from doing due to God's command is the right choice.

It can't just be lip service though, as explained in [49:14-15] *The Arabs said, "We are Mu'mens (believers)." Say, "You have not believed; what you should say is, 'We are Muslims (submitters),' until belief is established in your hearts." If you obey GOD and His messenger, He will not put any of your works to waste. GOD is Forgiver, Most Merciful. Mu'mens (believers) are those who believe in GOD and His messenger, then attain the status of having no doubt whatsoever, and strive with their money and their lives in the cause of GOD. These are the truthful ones.*

This is who we are striving to be.

Alim

* * * * *

[4:110] *Anyone who commits evil, or wrongs his soul, then implores GOD for forgiveness, will find GOD Forgiving, Most Merciful.*

[2:256] *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.*

It's a Blessing to Receive

Most of us have heard the saying: "It's better to give than to receive." Well, I remember about 30 years ago I got taught a very good lesson about this saying. I was working then, and I would look for opportunities to help people. I've always been a "people care-giver." I'd help people pay their rent, buy food, listen to them, just whatever I could do to help them. I believed in "better to give than receive," and I wanted to get those blessings from God. We know that God loves when you help those less fortunate than you.

But one day, here comes the lesson. A sister came to help me; she wanted to give me money and food. I said, "Oh no, I don't really need the help. Thank you just the same." Then that sister turned to me. She said, "Oh yeah, Latefah, I forgot. Only you can help people and get blessings from God. You don't want to receive help from me, so I can't get God's blessings, huh?"

Well, I was shocked. I said, "Sister, I didn't mean to hurt you or let you miss your blessings from God. So I will accept your gifts, praise God." And I didn't feel bad inside either.

So this is the lesson that can be learned. If you are a person who always denies other people's help or service, or always want to be the one

to give, think about this. It's hard at first, but you get used to it, like I did. Now, I feel good inside to receive, just as good as when I give. There comes a time when you must let others help you, and you have to feel good about it. God uses all of us to help each other in one way or another. So if you're that person who always says no, take the gift and praise God. If you really don't need the help, fine, you can pass it on to someone who does. But remember to let other people do their work so they can get their blessings from God. I now feel the same inside, giving thanks to God, when giving or receiving.

[2:262-263] *Those who spend their money in the cause of GOD, then do not follow their charity with insult or harm, will receive their recompense from their Lord; they have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve. Kind words and compassion are better than a charity that is followed by insult. GOD is Rich, Clement.*

[2:274] *Those who give to charity night and day, secretly and publicly, receive their recompense from their Lord; they will have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.*

[2:277] *Those who believe and lead a righteous life, and observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), and give the obligatory charity (Zakat), they receive their recompense from their Lord; they will have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve.*

Carolyn