

**SEASONS OF CIVILITY:**  
**AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON PARKER PALMER'S FIVE HABITS OF THE**  
**HEART**

*[Note: On May 21, 2012, the Islamic Society of Milwaukee and more than thirty other religious organizations signed a statement calling for the citizens of Wisconsin to enter into a "Season of Civility" amidst the current "hostile political rhetoric (that) is overstepping the bounds of civility and even decency in our congregations and the society at large." The Islamic Society of Milwaukee's Religious Director, Dr. Zulfiqar Ali Shah, offers the following passages from the Qur'an and remarks on the Islamic perspective towards Parker Palmer's Five Habits of the Heart and respectful dialogue between all human beings, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. The Five Habits and some Discussion/Reflection Questions are inserted below in italics amongst the remarks.]*

***Habit 1: An understanding that we are all in this together***

We are all human beings. We come from the same Father Adam and Mother Eve and we are instructed by God not to forget this fact. The Qur'an states:

4:1 "O MANKIND! Be conscious of your Lord, who has created you out of one living entity [soul], and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of God, in whose name you demand [your rights] from one another, and of these ties of kinship. Verily, God is ever watchful over you!"

Almighty God has honored all humans with a soul, a divine gift. Human dignity is based upon this common denominator and is the source of God-given universal human rights such as life, liberty, freedom of religion and conscience, property ownership, dignified life, family and lawful wealth. No one is allowed to compromise or violate others' God given rights.

*For discussion or reflection: Reflect on the fact that the verse is addressed to all mankind, rather than just to the Muslim believer. What does the fact that all human beings belong to the same family have to say about how we should treat one another and any claim of superiority based upon race, sex or other biological differences? What is the significance of the statement that all human rights flow from God? What is the significance of God asking human beings to be mindful of "these ties of kinship (with the rest of humanity)"?*

***Habit 2: An appreciation of the value of "otherness"***

We are reminded that no person is better than any other person, except the one who is more God-conscious and also better in conduct. The Qur'an states:

49:13 "O MANKIND! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware."

*For discussion or reflection: Reflect on the fact that the verse is addressed to all mankind, rather than just to the Muslim believer. Note the statement, similar to Qur'an 4:1 above, of the common biological and familial origin of all human beings. How should the fact that our differences are stated to be for a positive purpose of coming to know each other - rather than any negative purpose such as to despise, hate or destroy one another – impact my community's and my attitude and behavior towards "otherness"?*

### **Habit 3: An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways**

Human diversity is part of God's divine plan. The Qur'an states:

5:48 "...Unto every (faith community) have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto, you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.

It is natural to have different feelings and opinions. Our differences should not and must not lead us to treat others ill or go to the extreme of considering others as non-human strangers to be afraid of. We must celebrate human diversity and learn from one another. Our common humanity and respect for human dignity must supersede our political, national and religious differences.

*For discussion or reflection: Reflect on the fact that it was not God's will to create mankind as a single faith community. Reflect on what it means to me that God is going to test my faith community and me by what He has given my community and me. Discuss how God's directive to faith communities to compete (vie) with one another in doing good works can create life-giving benefits to all of humanity and creation.*

### **Habit 4: A sense of personal voice and agency**

Muslims also must exercise respect regarding differences amongst themselves and others. The Qur'an states:

49:10-12 All believers are but brethren. Hence, [whenever they are at odds,] make peace between your two brethren, and remain conscious of God, so that you might be graced with His mercy. O YOU who have attained to faith! No men shall deride [other] men: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves; and no women [shall deride other] women: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves. And neither shall you defame one another, nor insult one another by [opprobrious] epithets: evil is all imputation of iniquity after [one has attained to] faith; and they who [become guilty thereof and] do not repent - it is they, they who are evildoers! O you who have attained to faith! Avoid most guesswork [about one another] for, behold, some of [such] guesswork is [in itself] a sin; and do not spy upon one another, and neither allow yourselves to speak ill of one another behind your backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would loathe it! And be conscious of God. Verily, God is an acceptor of repentance, a dispenser of grace!

*For discussion or reflection: Reflect on the fact that the statement that brothers are brethren does not negate the fact that all human beings are “brethren”; see 4:1 and 49:13 above. Reflect on the fact that, although the verse addresses the believers (Muslims), the verse describes standards of a believer’s individual conduct that pertain to his or her conduct towards all men and women – not just believing men and believing women. What is my role as an individual believer to act in a manner that benefits rather than harms others?*

***Habit 5: A capacity to create community***

Disputes are unavoidable due to agendas and interests, which are sometimes open and sometimes hidden. God calls for a group of people in every faith community who will work towards just and amicable solutions. Enjoining good and shunning evil is a human responsibility that should be performed on individual as well as communal levels. The Qur’an states:

3:103-104 And hold fast, all together, unto the bond with God, and do not draw apart from one another. And remember the blessings which God has bestowed upon you: how, when you were enemies, He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brethren; and [how, when] you were on the brink of a fiery abyss. He saved you from it. In this way God makes clear His messages unto you, so that you might find guidance, and that there may grow out of you a community [of people] who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong: and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state!”

Let us strive to recall our common brotherhood and sisterhood as children of Adam and Eve and try to afford each other the respect and dignity that God requires that we give each other despite our differences.

*For discussion or reflection: The verse is addressed to the believers (Muslims). What does it mean to be a community that “invites” unto all that is good? What does it mean to enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong? How does this relate to 5:48 above, which instructs that God did not will mankind to be one faith community, but instead commanded faith communities to compete in doing good? How does this relate to the other verses quoted earlier acknowledging the dignity of each human being and enjoining good conduct towards all others?*