



GAZA: A Palestinian vendor rides his horse cart on the beach in Gaza City during the holy month of Ramadan.— AFP

RESPECTING GOD

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First, they would have to expose the reality of how we treat God in order to bring attention to the severity of the problem. They would show us that we overlook, trivialize, marginalize, ignore and even deny the very existence of God.

They would probably bring to light some of God's positive qualities so that we can appreciate Him more: His omniscience, omnipotence, generosity, forbearance and forgiveness. They would show proof of His goodness, such as the presence of so much beauty on earth, how He provides water and grows food for seven billion people and countless animals, and how He protects the inhabitants of this fragile planet in innumerable ways.

And they would expose the fact that in spite of all that, many people mistrust Him, bad-mouth Him, and offend Him regularly, showing gross disrespect. Perhaps after being educated by this group, we would be more inclined to respect God. But if we really want to respect God we should try to know how He wants to be respected - which attitudes and conduct does he expect from us? We can find many clues in the Quran.

Those who respect God show gratitude: "God brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing at all, and gave you hearing, sight and hearts so that perhaps you would show thanks." (16:78) "We have established you firmly on the earth and granted you your livelihood in it. What little thanks you give!" (7:10) "Eat of the good things We have provided for you and give thanks to God..." (2:172) "God shows favor to mankind but most of them are not thankful." (10:60) "Why should God punish you if you are thankful and believe?..." (4:147)

Those who respect God remember Him: "Mankind! Remember God's blessing to you. Is there any creator other than God providing for you from heaven and earth?..." (35:3). "Remember your Lord in yourself humbly and fearfully... Do not be one of the unaware" (7:205). "(Believers are those) who remember God, standing, sitting and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth..." (3:191).

"Remember the Name of your Lord, and devote yourself to Him completely" (73:8). "O you who believe! Remember God much!" (33:41).

Those who respect God pray to Him: "Perform prayer and give alms and bow with those who bow." (2:43) "Seek help in steadfastness and prayer. But that is a very hard thing, except for the humble." (2:45) "The prayer is prescribed for the believers at specific times." (4:103) "Believers are those who safeguard their prayers." (23:9) Those who respect God worship none but Him: "Worship God and do not associate anything with Him..." (4:36). "We sent no messenger before you without revealing to him: 'There is no god but Me, so worship Me.'" (21:25) "The Jews say, 'Ezra is the son of God' and the Christians say, 'Jesus is the son of God'... they have taken their rabbis and priests as lords besides God, and also the Messiah, son of Mary."

Yet they were commanded to worship only one God. There is no god but Him! Glory be to Him above anything they associate with Him!" (9:30-31) "I am Allah. There is no god but Me, so worship Me and perform prayer to remember Me." (20:14) God expects specific expressions of respect, which are outlined above. Ramadan, with its focus on spirituality, is the perfect time to assess our adherence to these criteria. How do your attitudes and conduct show respect for God?

IRAN, WORLD POWERS SEAL NUKE DEAL; ISRAEL...

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The agreement is a political triumph for both Obama, who has long promised to reach out to historic enemies, and Rouhani, a pragmatist elected two years ago on a vow to reduce the isolation of his nation of almost 80 million people. Both face skepticism from powerful hardliners at home in nations that referred to each other as "the Great Satan" and a member of the "Axis of Evil." "Today is the end to acts of tyranny against our nation and the start of cooperation with the world," Rouhani said in a televised address.

"This is a reciprocal deal. If they stick to it, we will. The Iranian nation has always observed its promises and treaties."

For Obama, the diplomacy with Iran, begun in secret more than two years ago, ranks alongside his normalization of ties with Cuba as landmarks in a legacy of reconciliation with foes that tormented his predecessors for decades. "History shows that America must lead not just with our might but with our principles," he said in a televised address. "Today's announcement marks one more chapter in our pursuit of a safer, more helpful and more hopeful world."

Meanwhile, the ruler of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, sent a note of congratulations to Iran's President Hassan Rouhani yesterday for Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers, the UAE's official news agency WAM reported. The statement contained the first official comment by Gulf Arab countries towards a deal many of them privately fear will encourage Iran to back their enemies across the Middle East more forcefully.

Republican opposition

Republicans lined up to denounce the deal. Presidential candidate Lindsey Graham, a senator from South Carolina, called it a terrible deal that would make matters worse. Former senator Rick Santorum, another candidate, said the administration had capitulated to Iran. The Republican-controlled Congress has 60 days to review the accord, but if it votes to reject it Obama can use his veto, which can be overridden only by two-thirds of lawmakers in both houses. That means dozens of Obama's fellow Democrats would have to rebel against one of their president's signature achievements to kill it, an unlikely prospect. While the main negotiations were between the United States and Iran, the four other UN Security Council permanent members, Britain, China, France and Russia, are also parties to the deal, as is Germany. Enmity between Iran and the United States has loomed over the Middle East for decades.

Iran is the predominant Shiite Muslim power, hostile both to Israel and to Washington's Sunni Muslim-ruled Arab friends, particularly Saudi Arabia. Allies of Riyadh and Tehran have fought decades of sectarian proxy wars in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. But there are also strong reasons for Washington and Tehran to cooperate against common foes, above all Islamic State, the Sunni Muslim militant group that has seized swathes of Syria and Iraq. Washington has been bombing Islamic State from the air while Tehran aids Iraqi militias fighting it on the ground.

British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond told reporters that the deal was about more than just the nuclear issue: "The big prize here is that, as Iran comes out of the isolation of the last decades and is much more engaged with Western countries, Iranians hopefully begin to travel in larger numbers again, Western companies are able to invest and trade with Iran, there is an opportunity for an opening now."

Historic mistake

Still, Washington's friends in the region were furious, especially Israel, whose prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has cultivated a close relationship with Obama's Republican opponents in Congress. "Iran will get a jackpot, a cash bonanza of hundreds of billions of dollars, which will enable it to continue to pursue its aggression and terror in the region and in the world," he said. "Iran is going to receive a sure path to nuclear weapons." His deputy foreign minister, Tzipi Hotovely, denounced an "historic surrender" and said Israel would "act with all means to try and stop the agreement being ratified," a

clear threat to use its influence to try and block it in Congress.

Some diplomats in Vienna said the strong Israeli response could actually help, by making it easier for Rouhani to sell the agreement back in Iran. While Saudi Arabia did not denounce the deal publicly as Israel did, its officials expressed doubt in private. "We have learned as Iran's neighbors in the last 40 years that goodwill only led us to harvest sour grapes," a Saudi official who asked to remain anonymous said.

Nor were hardliners silent in Iran. "Celebrating too early can send a bad signal to the enemy," conservative lawmaker Alireza Zakani said in parliament, according to Fars News agency. Iran's National Security Council would review the accord, "and if they think it is against our national interests, we will not have a deal". It will probably be months before Iran receives the benefits from the lifting of sanctions because of the need to verify the deal's fulfillment. Once implementation is confirmed, Tehran will immediately gain access to around \$100 billion in frozen assets, and can step up oil exports that have been slashed by almost two-thirds.

The deal finally emerged after nearly three weeks of intense negotiation between US Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif - unthinkable for decades, since Iranian revolutionaries stormed the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 and held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days. Hatred of the United States is still a central tenet of Iran's ruling system, on display only last week at an annual protest day, with crowds chanting "Death to Israel!" and "Death to America!". But Iranians voted overwhelmingly for Rouhani in 2013 on a clear promise to revive their crippled economy by ending Iran's isolation. Hardline Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei did not block the negotiations.

New chapter of hope

"Today could have been the end of hope on this issue, but now we are starting a new chapter of hope," Zarif, who studied in the United States and developed a warm rapport with Kerry, told a news conference. Kerry said: "This is the good deal we have sought." European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said: "I think this is a sign of hope for the entire world." Obama first reached out to Iranians with an address in 2009, only weeks into his presidency, offering a "new beginning". But he followed this up with a sharp tightening of financial sanctions, which, combined with sanctions imposed by the EU, have imposed severe economic hardship on Iranians since 2012.

'Breakout time'

Tehran has long denied seeking a nuclear weapon and has insisted on the right to nuclear technology for peaceful means. Obama never ruled out military force if negotiations failed, and said yesterday that future presidents would still have that option if Iran quit the agreement. France said the deal would ensure Iran's "breakout time" - the time it would need to build a bomb if it decided to break off the deal - would be one year for the next decade. This has been a main goal of Western negotiators, who wanted to ensure that if a deal collapsed there would be enough time to act.

Obama said Iran had accepted a "snapback" mechanism, under which sanctions would be reinstated if it violated the deal. A UN weapons embargo is to remain in place for five years and a ban on buying missile technology will remain for eight years. Alongside the main deal, the United Nations nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, announced an agreement with Iran to resolve its own outstanding issues by the end of this year. The main deal depends on the IAEA being able to inspect Iranian nuclear sites and on Iran answering its questions about possible military aims of previous research.

For Iran, the end of sanctions could bring a rapid economic boom by lifting restrictions that have shrunk its economy by about 20 percent, according to US estimates. The prospect of a deal has already helped push down global oil prices because of the possibility that Iranian supply could return to the market. Oil prices tumbled more than a dollar yesterday after the deal was reached. — Agencies

NASA SPACECRAFT WHIZZES BY PLUTO...

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New Horizons is the first spacecraft to fly past Pluto, and its seven scientific instruments aim to reveal up-close details of the surface, geology and atmosphere of Pluto and its five moons. Already, scientists have learned from New Horizons that Pluto is 20-30 kilometers larger than previously thought, with a radius of 736 miles.

Scientists have also confirmed the existence of a polar ice cap on Pluto, and found nitrogen escaping from Pluto's atmosphere. "This is truly a hallmark in human history," said NASA's head of the science mission directorate, John Grunsfeld. The nuclear-powered spacecraft has enough fuel to carry on its exploration for years to come. Stern has said he plans to ask NASA

for funding to continue using New Horizons beyond its Pluto mission. But first, scientists need to know if it survived the chaotic Kuiper Belt, the region beyond Neptune which Stern has described as a "shooting gallery" of cosmic debris.

NASA expects to receive a signal from the spacecraft later this evening, at 9:02 pm (0102 GMT Wednesday) to find out whether or not the spacecraft made it through intact. Experts said there was a one in 10,000 chance that the baby grand piano-sized spacecraft could collide with debris. "I am feeling a little bit nervous just like you do when you send your child off," said Bowman. "But I have absolute confidence that it is going to do what it needs to do and it is going to turn around and send us that burst of data and tell us that it is okay." — AFP

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