

Liberation in God's Image. Progressive Islam as an Islamic Humanism

Contributed by [Truah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights](#)

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At the heart of a progressive Muslim interpretation is a simple yet radical idea: every human individual, female or male, Muslim or non-Muslim, rich or poor, of the “developed” North or “underdeveloped” South, has exactly the same intrinsic worth. The essential value of human life is God-given, and is in no way connected to culture, race, ethnicity, gender, geography, or privilege. A progressive Muslim is one who is committed to the strangely controversial idea that the true measure of a human being's worth is a person's character and not the oil under their soil or their particular flag. A progressive Muslim agenda is concerned with the ramifications of the premise that all members of the human race have this same intrinsic worth because each of us has the breath of God breathed into our being: /wa nafakhtu fihi min ruhi/. (Qur'an 15:29 and 38:72). This identification with the full humanity of all human beings amounts to nothing short of an Islamic Humanism, one that strives for affirming of dignity and sanctity of all human life through—and not outside—a religious context.

A goal of Passover is the simultaneous remembrance of our bondage in Egypt and God's liberation of the Hebrews. While progressive Muslims honor the spiritual readings of bondage and liberation, they also insist that for billions around the planet, the bondage of Egypt is real in forms of poverty, occupation, exile, and humiliation. All of us deserve to worship a God who is committed to liberating all of God's children. All of us deserve to enjoy this liberation, by the simple virtue of being human and being made in God's image. An increasing number of those who advocate such a humanistic framework within the context of Islam have self-identified as progressive Muslims. 'Progressive' refers to a relentless striving towards a universal notion of justice in which no single community's prosperity, righteousness, and dignity comes at the expense of another's. Adherents of progressive Islam conceive of a way of being Muslim that engages and affirms the humanity of all human beings, that actively holds all of us responsible for a fair and just distribution of our God-given natural resources, and that seeks to live in harmony with the natural world. Safi introduces the idea of a humanistic framework allowing one to embrace the intrinsic worth of every individual. Such a progressive framework is seen as an inherent expression of an authentic Muslim identity. He concretizes the Passover story into the lived experience of the enslaved today. Professor Safi reminds us that for billions around the planet, the bondage of Egypt is real in forms of poverty, occupation, exile and humiliation. How do you remember those around the world who are "still in Egypt" during Passover? How does your religious identity compel you to embrace notions of universality?