

# Critical Eastern Muslim Finally 'Gets the Message'

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**By Abdul Basit Naeem**

One day last week I suddenly found myself being subjected to a bit of ridicule by a brother-Muslim from an Eastern country. Like himself, he is at present a resident of New York City.

He had read something in a recent issue of this newspaper that apparently "annoyed and irritated" Him. Aware of the fact that for many years I have been associated with the Nation of Islam in North America (and "thus should know something about it") and that I frequently contributed to the columns of its official organ, "Muhammad Speaks," he had decided to call me and ask me a few "straight questions."

Reluctant to engage in important conversation over the telephone to avoid being heard by our forever curious and unwelcome "party-line", I suggested that I visit with him instead.



When I reached his office. I discovered that a seemingly endless barrage of questions awaited me. "Now ... do you really believe that he (the Honorable Elijah Muhammad) is God's Messenger? How did he get his 'Message'? In a dream or a vision? Or has he been visited by an Angel?... And what of this race business? You ought to know that ....Allah does not permit that..."

Knowing the mental disposition and temperament of our people, I decided, in the face of my brother's hostile attitude, not to answer him directly and instead use a bit of diplomacy in dealing with him. I, therefore, asked him if he would be good enough to first enlighten me with his own views on Islam and its teachings.

The Answer: "Why, Islam is the youngest of the three great Semitic religions, the other two being Judaism and Christianity, and it is akin to both. It was founded by our Illustrious Prophet Mohammed (may the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him! ) who graced this planet nearly 1400 years ago . . . And its teachings consist, in the main. of the well-known 'Five Pillars': Belief in the Oneness of God ; five-times a - day prayers ; "zakaat" or alms-giving ; fasting during the month of Ramadan ; and 'hadji ' or once-in-a-life time pilgrimage to Mecca . . ."

My Eastern brother's interpretation of Islam, inadequate indeed though it was, did not come as surprise to me. I knew that a good many years ago --- before I had given up reliance on European scholars' writings on Islam for my own information, I would have answered the question in just about the same way. I ventured to ask him "But isn't it true that the Holy Qur-

an speaks of Islam as the Religion of God Himself ? " "That's true," he acknowledged. I further inquired. "Wasn't Islam also the faith of Abraham, Allah's Prophet of the Ancient Ages? And isn't it a fact that in each of our daily prayers we remember Abraham simultaneously with remembrance of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him ! ) ...? Agreement "Sure, "he quickly replied. ". . . And am I not correct in stating that selfless service to our fellowman --- that is to say, tending the sick, providing food to the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and even aiding the cause of education and advancement of scientific knowledge --constitutes, in the eyes of Allah , an act of greater piety than regular performance of prayers and others rituals? " "Well . . .in a way .. yes ! " "Doesn't this, then, contradict what you said a little earlier . . as being the essence or spirit of Islam?

While nodding in obvious agreement, my brother, whose brow still exhibited small signs of displeasure, suddenly turned to another point: "But what of this racial angle? How can Mr. Elijah Muhammad possibly justify his teaching of that? " This was a delicate question. But, remembering at that moment that I had answered this type of question on a number of occasions in the past, I felt secure that Allah would enable me, once again , to dispose of it in a satisfactory manner. Of course, I could have started off by narrating the history of the European "race," pointing out its countless hideous sins and crimes against the innocent peoples of Africa and Asia thus reflecting on the Europeans ' innate "evil" nature. Or I could have reminded my brother from the East of the 400 long years of slavery in the U.S.A. --- the back ground against which Islam is being offered to the (so-called) "Negroes" of this country as the "only means of regaining their lost identity, cultural heritage, power and glory." I also could have given him a set of my own published writings of the subject, which can indeed satisfy the curiosity of most enlightened Eastern Muslims in regard to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's mission and work. But, somehow, I decided upon a totally different approach. 'The Reds and Blacks'.

From my briefcase. I took out a handsome little book entitled "The Islamic Call . " (Written by a distinguished Arab - Muslim scholar, El-sayed Mohammed M. Atta, "The Islamic Call" is a publication of the Selected studies Committee, Cairo, United Arab Republic.) Then, turning to page No. 201, I asked my brother if he would kindly acquaint me with the deeper meaning and real significane of the "Hadith" --a saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him!) ---quoted thereon in Arabic: (In literal translation, it read: "I have been sent to the Red and the Black." ) For what seemed to be a long minute, there was complete silence. then, a mixed feeling of bewilderment and relief completely changed my Muslim brother 's face. Smiling broadly, he arose from his chair, warmly shook my hands and said, "As-Salaam Alaikum, my true brother ! "