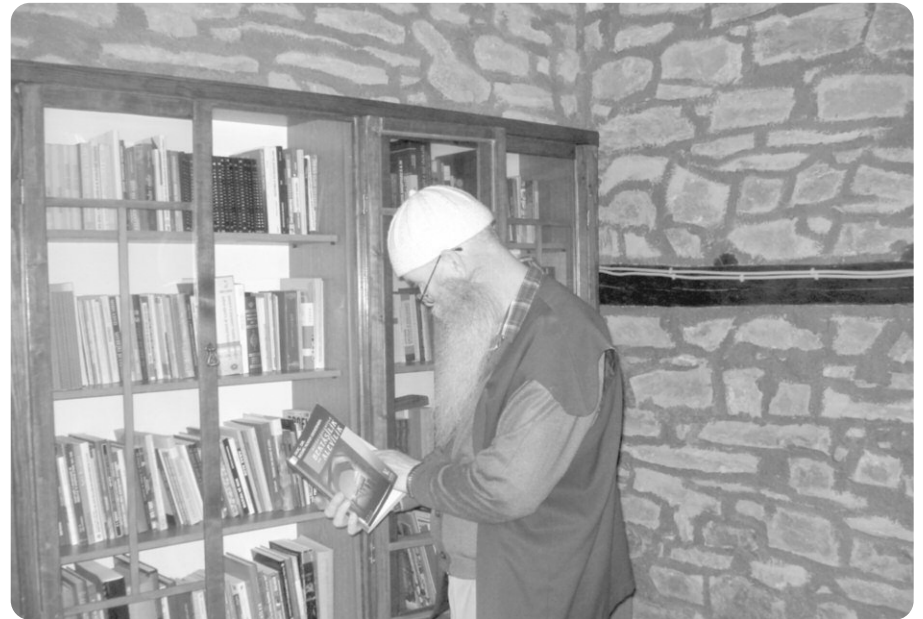


CENTER FOR ISLAMIC PLURALISM GREETINGS ON SULLTAN NEVRUZ



Fire damage at the Harabati teqe in Macedonia, 2011.



Dervish Abdylmytalip Beqiri, the caretaker of the Harabati teqe, 2011.

The Center for Islamic Pluralism extends warm greetings to Muslim believers celebrating the holiday of Sulltan Nevruz, falling on March 22 this year.

Sulltan Nevruz is observed from the Balkans through Turkey and neighboring countries in Central Asia by Sunni and Shia Muslims alike. Often popularly described as a Persian new year holiday, it is honored in the Bektashi Sufi tradition as the birthday of Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib, son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad.

I attended *jumaa* at a Shia mosque on Friday, March 18, the day after commencement of the intervention in Bahrain and preceding the international military action in Libya. I have thought much on the legacies of Imam Ali and the Ahl-e Bayt (People of the Prophet's House) in the time leading to Sulltan Nevruz.

Sunni and Shia Muslims, including Sufis, face profound responsibilities in these fateful moments. Social, not religious reform, and the coming of popular sovereignty, which should lead to firm democracy, are sweeping the core countries in which our Islamic *umma* resides.

In the forefront of this authentic international revolution, I never forget the combat and martyrdom of the noble people of Iran, a great and honorable nation that has contributed uniquely, with limitless creativity and bounty, to the advance of Islamic spirituality and theology.

Beginning in 2009, the proud Iranians have struggled continuously to regain their upright posture as protestors against the heretical and brutal clerical dictatorship headed by the despicable Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the worthless Ali Khamenei.

The sacrifice of blood for freedom, by Iranian oppositionists, cannot be forgotten for a single moment. For them, the death of Imam Ali, and indeed that of Imam Hussein at Kerbala, are a permanent, present-day reality. Islamic righteousness has been discarded in Iran, in preference for corruption, intimidation, and grotesque threats against the world. The circle of stupidity surrounding Ahmadinejad includes many perverse individuals who imagine his lawless abuses of office as a continuation of Hitlerism. The crimes of their regime are limitlessly cruel.

Ignoring the traditional Islamic recogni-

tion of the House of Israel as a People of the Book, the vampires of Tehran preach hatred and brutal violence against them, while blaming them for the abhorrence the deviant clerics and their political pawns have provoked among their subjects.

CIP has responded to recent expressions of anti-Israel bigotry by offering a rational view of the Jewish state and its Muslim minority, as presented in book form by Vehbi Bajrami, the leading Albanian-American journalist and owner of the Albanian-American newspaper *Illyria* in New York. *Illyria* is a voice for freedom with which I and CIP have long cooperated. Bajrami's worthy volume is titled *My Visit to the Holy Land* and is available through *Illyria* and CIP.

To paraphrase the words of a long-dead observer, Jew-hatred proliferates in countries where enslavement and corruption have maintained abysmal ignorance among the people. Only the most unenlightened and downtrodden folk can believe the lies and slanders that are spread against the Jews. These libels are a survival of ancient times, during which heretics were burned alive by bigoted clerics, and the majority of people lived in servitude, crushed and voiceless.

Islam was sent down to humanity as a mercy and a blessing, not to support despotism or persecution of those who believe differently, but to liberate the slave and protect humanity's full abilities of self-expression. Archaic ignorance is dissipating; the Muslims' eyes are opening wide. The enemy of the Iranian people is not the Jew, but the usurping cleric; similarly, Imam Ali was murdered in a mosque. Imam Hussein was killed by Muslims, not by Jews or Christians or adherents of any other faith than Islam. Qur'an (3:113) teaches us that among the Jews and Christians alike are many sincere believers, and today there are also many honest critics of the Tehran regime within the ranks of the People of the Book.

Shame on those who incite hatred against the Jews and between other nations! Little could be more offensive to Islam than to forget the Quranic principle (49:13) that Allah made the nations of the world different, so they would provide each other with wisdom and knowledge.

The evildoers of Iran have manipulated

dissident movements in Bahrain and Yemen, which have large Shia populations. We must call upon Shia Muslims in Bahrain to resist the intrigues of Iran and to focus their energies on the step-by-step formulation of a social reform program that will free them peacefully from egregious domination by Sunnis, including Saudi Arabia. We must similarly appeal to the militant protestors of Yemen, both Shia and Sunni, to repudiate the "export" of the apostates of al-Qaeda to their country by the Saudi authorities.

We must call upon the Shia ulema of Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, and North America to cry out for justice in Iran, first and foremost, before agitating the believers over the unfair occupation of Bahrain.

We must assist the great people who live under Saudi rule to find their way to a constitutional solution that will bring the country of the two holy mosques into the full light of social progress.

We should look at the inspiring example of the Libyan resistance to the horrors perpetrated by the unhinged al-Qadhdhafi and pray for their victory, while also affirming our support of foreign military aid to the resistance. We also pray for adoption of a wise and just policy by the international community (our hopes being tempered by caution based on the experiences many in CIP have undergone in the Balkans and Iraq). The foreign powers should remove the dictator and then remove themselves quickly from Libya.

Since many members of CIP are Sufis, we hope the uprising of the Libyans and their battle for dignity will offer opportunities to enlighten the world about the Sufi heritage of Libya. We know and treasure the rich history of Sufi sacrifice in fighting against Italian imperialism, along with the pronounced Libyan Sufi repudiation of Wahhabi dogma.

The Libyan freedom fighters carry flags with the symbol of their Sufi tradition (the black stripe with crescent and star). Let us help them lift this standard high and keep it unstained.

At the same time, at Sulltan Nevruz this year, we must contend with the attempt at complete destruction of the historic Harabati Bektashi teqe in Tetova, Macedonia, which reflects the ignorant and malevolent

agitation by Wahhabi fundamentalists and mercenaries against our traditions. And we must raise the banner of freedom for the Alevi community of Turkey, which is faced with discrimination and threats of violence under the government of the "soft" fundamentalist, Sunnicentric Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Finally, we must not ignore the oppressive darkness threatening our concelebrants of Sulltan Nevruz in Uzbekistan and Eastern Turkestan, where forms of Communist rule continue to torment our brothers and sisters. We call on the Uighur Muslim community to join hands with the civil society and minority rights activists among the Chinese Buddhists and the Tibetan nation, against aggression by the Beijing state.

Sulltan Nevruz and the religious passion of Imam Ali offer many lessons, both sobering and exalting, to the Muslims. Let us commemorate them as an advent of freedom for all believers.

Center for
Islamic
Pluralism

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