Malcolm X: Message to Humanity

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As we mark the fiftieth anniversary of the martyrdom of El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, it is important that we remember his message, preserve it, and disseminate it. But what exactly was his message? For many, unfortunately, Malcolm X remains renowned for his vitriolic attacks against whites as a whole. While there is no doubt that Malcolm believed in the teachings of Elijah Muhammad with all his heart and all his soul for most of his adult life, namely, the belief that all whites were devils, it cannot be denied that his views about Caucasians evolved and that he eventually rejected them wholeheartedly. By focusing on his pre-Mecca phase as opposed to his final post-Mecca phase, Muslims and non-Muslims do a great disservice to the memory of Malik Shabazz and the true teachings of traditional Islam. As Malcolm came to realize, Islam was a universal religion based on fraternity and sorority. It was an inclusive as opposed to exclusive faith which was open to all believers regardless of race. It is important, then, to remind readers that while Malcolm X was determined to bring Islam to African-Americans, he was also committed to delivering this very same message to all Americans regardless of race.

An obligation upon all adult Muslims who are healthy and wealthy enough to undertake it, the *hajj* is saturated with spiritual lessons of all sorts. Upon the completion of a successful pilgrimage to Mecca, a Muslim is said to return home as pure as a new-born baby, purified of sins, and provided with a soul like a shiny blank slate. If ever there was a transformative *hajj*, it was the pilgrimage of Malcolm X, a man torn between the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, the self-proclaimed Messenger of Allah, and the teachings of Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah, the final Messenger of Allah according to all orthodox Muslims. In fact, Malcolm had, for years, struggled between heterodoxy and orthodoxy. In fact, as early as October 10, 1963, Malcolm X remarked that “When you become a Muslim, you don’t look at a man as being black, brown, red, or white. You look upon him as being a man” (Marable, 2011: 262). While he had been gradually drawing closer to mainstream Islam for over a decade, being gently groomed by Sunni and Shī‘ite Muslims, Malcolm X had yet to take the final step: namely, to reject the racist and heretical doctrines of the Nation of Islam and enter fully into the fold of the Muslim Ummah. This step would come as a result of interaction with a myriad of Muslims from all over the world during the course of
the hajj, the impact of which can only be described by Malcolm himself: Jedda, Saudi Arabia, April 20, 1964

Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this ancient holy land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad and all the other Prophets of the holy scriptures. For the past week, I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of all colors.

I have been blessed to visit the holy city of Mecca; I have made my seven circuits around the Ka’aba, led by a young Mutawwaf (guide) named Muhammad; I drank water from the well of the Zamzam. I ran seven times back and forth between the hills of mount al-Safa and al-Marwa. I have prayed in the ancient city of Mina, and I have prayed on mount Arafat.

There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blondes to black-skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and non-white.

America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered white – but the white attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color.

You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to rearrange much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions. This was not too difficult for me. Despite my firm convictions, I have always been a man who tries to face facts, and to accept the reality of life as new experience and new knowledge unfolds it. I have always kept an open mind, which is necessary to the flexibility that must go hand in hand with every form of intelligent search for truth.

During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept on the same rug – while praying to the same God – with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the words and in the deeds of the