

# MALCOLM X (MALIK EL – SHABAZZ)

## THE POSITION OF THE BLACK PERSON IN AMERICA

Malcolm X (Malik El-Shabazz) was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 25, 1925. He fell to assassin's bullets in a Harlem auditorium on February 21, 1965. He spent his youth hustling the streets of Boston and New York, but he rose to become the most dynamic leader of the Afro-American Revolution.

Malcolm X was a street hustler, a drug runner and a burglar who landed himself a ten-year prison sentence at the age of 20. More than twenty-five years after his death, he still towers above the statue of liberty. He refuses to die. Wherever injustice and oppression takes place, his smiling face and uncompromising message fills the atmosphere. Yes, they killed the body but not the spirit. For the deprived and the oppressed Afro-Americans and Blacks all over, Malcolm X continues to be their hero – the inspiration – that makes it possible for them to maintain their sanity and dignity in a vile society which can't stop despising them.

As we come to know Malcolm better, we will understand his power as a speaker and to see the political legacy he left his people in their struggle for full emancipation. Over and over again in a simple imagery, savagely uncompromising, he drove home the real truth about the Black's position in America. He often said, ***“Don't be shocked when I say that I was in prison, You're still in prison. That's what America means – prison.”*** Who can deny that this is true for the black man? No matter how high he rises, he never loses consciousness of the invisible bars which hem him in.

Like most oppressed children, he had a traumatic childhood. He witnessed his parent's home being attacked and burnt down by the Klu Klux Klan. This notorious extreme right-wing white group was the leading and cutting edge of racial hatred in America. This white mob, with hoods and crosses, was the slave master at his most vicious. The Klu Klux Klan was typically American. It prospered and grew to power by capitalizing on forces already existent in the industry, church, civic organizations, and above all in the White House. The Klu Klux Klan didn't want the black as a neighbour, only as a hired hand to do the dirty work. Therefore, it was not difficult for Malcom X to initially believe that the white man was the devil. By the time he was in his teens he certainly experienced enough to convince him so. Of course, not all are, as he himself would later come to know and experience.

## CONVERSION TO ISLAM

Sometimes the end of the road can become the beginning. Prison was the punishment as well as the salvation for Malcolm. It was whilst serving a ten-year sentence for thieving that he came into contact with Islam as propagated by Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm now began reconstructing his life and his history in Islamic terms.

In Malcolm's own words, ***“I found Allah and the religion of Islam and it completely transformed my life”*** Through conversion he was able to reverse the regressive movement of his character and began to develop the progressive side of his heritage and personality. However, Malcolm remained vehemently anti-white and anti-integration between races. These were the fundamental beliefs of the “Black Muslims” of the “Nation of Islam” – the organization Malcom rose to be a national spokesperson for.

Elaborating on his conversion, he once said, ***“Anytime I have a religion that won't let me fight for my people, I say to hell with that religion. That's why I am a Muslim”*** However, Malcolm X was not a violent man. He simply refused to turn the other cheek. He, in fact, consciously chose to use self-restraint rather than self-indulgence as a means to freedom.

***“I still marvel at how swiftly my previous life's thinking pattern slid away from me, like snow off a roof. It was as though someone else I knew had lived by hustling and crime. I would be startled to catch myself thinking in a remote way of my earlier self as another person.”***

During this period of conversion, Malcolm X said that the hardest test he ever faced was praying. He was above all else a proud man. For years he had bowed down to no man: ***“Picking a lock to rob someone's house was the only way my knees had been bent before.”*** But now he had to kneel, admit his guilt, and beg the forgiveness of God.

***“I had to force myself to bend my knees. And waves of shame and embarrassment would force me back up. Again, again, I would force myself back down into the praying-to-Allah posture. When I was finally able to stay down –I didn't know what to say to Allah.”*** But he soon found the right words.

Equipped with his new faith Malcolm began to turn the prison into a University. Malcom X started to build his vocabulary by reading through the dictionary word by word. His work with words was only the first step in his re-education. It served to broaden his word-base, so that soon he was able to build upon that foundation by giving himself a course in black history. Elijah's teachings stressed that history had been whitened; the crimes of white people and the achievements of black people

had simply been left out of the official records. Malcolm X therefore set out to uncover this buried knowledge.

Why the “X” behind Malcolm's name? The Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad believes that American blacks were originally from Africa. They were captured, shipped and sold into slavery in America, by Christian trader white men. Their original culture and religion were mainly Muslim. Their Muslim names were changed to that of the slave master. Thus when accepting Islam, every person replaces his family name with an “X” because he doesn't know what his real identity is. The “X” is the outward or nominal form of a reformed self, a self-freed from internal division, from the shame and guilt that result from identification with the oppressor. It is a new self-image.

Malcolm X showed his leadership ability at its best when he restrained his ardent followers not to take up arms against their brethren who threatened to kill Malcolm X. He said that black on black violence must never be allowed. He exercised his leadership to the utmost to prevent any internecine war within the black community. It was the wicked hand of the community that eventually killed him. Of course, the trigger was pulled by some misguided members of his own community but the planned assassination was executed by the high command in the oppressive system. It is an unfortunate lesson in the liberation struggle of people everywhere that their own hands are eventually used to kill their most gifted warriors.

## PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA (HAJJ) AND CONVERSION TO MAINSTREAM ISLAM

Malcolm's embrace of true Islam following his pilgrimage to Mecca was the culmination of his life long struggle. There in Mecca, Malcolm came into contact with larger world of Islam and he discovered the universality of the message and the true spirit of Islam, which encompasses all colours and races.

***“There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colours, 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 led me to believe never could exist between white and non-white. America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem....Islam removed the white from the minds of white skinned people. “If white Americans would accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps they too, could accept in reality the Oneness of god, then perhaps they too, could accept in reality the Oneness of man - and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their differences of colour”***

(Malcolm X, letter from Mecca)

It was in the last two years of his life that Malcolm X became Malik El-Shabazz. He used this name because he experienced in Mecca that all men are equal regardless of their colour. Instead of inheriting a lost identity from the time of slavery (symbolized by the “X”) he was now part of a global and colour blind community.

It was during the holy pilgrimage that Malcolm learned the true nature of faith - the essence of which is the brotherhood of mankind, irrespective of race, colour or creed; and total submission to the will of Allah (God). On his return to America, Malcolm began preaching this new message of brotherhood and he started shedding some of his racist views which he previously held and this is why, some believe, he was assassinated in 1965.

***“I am not racist....in the past I permitted myself to be used... to make sweeping indictments of all white people, the entire white race, and these generalizations have caused injuries to some whites that perhaps did not deserve to be hurt. Because of the spiritual enlightenment, which I was blessed to receive as a result of my recent pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca, I no longer subscribe to sweeping indictments of any one race. I am now striving to live the life of a true Muslim. I must repeat that I am not a racist nor do I subscribe to the tenets of racism. I can state in all sincerity that I wish nothing but freedom, justice and equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all people.”***  
(Malcolm X, 1964, after performing the pilgrimage to Mecca)

In his autobiography he wrote, ***“My whole life had been a chronology of changes.”*** When we remember Malcolm X, we cannot ignore that he did change from seeing race as a dividing issue to his final testimony as a Muslim who believed in a religion which spells out clearly that all humankind is created and judged equally. While Malcolm preached separatism or racism of a different kind - he was tolerated, but the moment he began preaching the Islamic concept of God, he had to go. This is probably why his life was so brutally ended by those who felt threatened by his ideas.

This was the eulogy with which the actor Ossie Davis bid farewell to Malcolm X (Malik El-Shabazz):

***“Here - at this final hour, in this quiet place, Harlem has come to bid farewell to one of its brightest hopes - extinguished now, and gone from us forever ...Many will ask what Harlem find to honour in this stormy, controversial and bold young captain - and we will smile....And we will answer and say unto them: Did you ever talk to Brother Malcolm? Did you ever touch him, or have him smile at you? Did you ever really listen to him? Did he ever do a mean thing? Was he ever himself associated with violence or any public disturbance? For if you did, you would know him: Malcolm was our manhood, our living, black manhood.***

*This was the meaning to his people. And in honoring him, we honour the best in ourselves...And we will know him then for what he was and is - a Prince - our own black shining prince - who didn't hesitate to die, because he loved us so."*

## ISLAM AND THE MUSLIMS

*"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 together, irrespective of colour."*

(Malcolm X, Letter from Mecca)

The Arabic word 'Islam' means peace and submission to peace. The religion of Islam is the complete acceptance of the teachings and guidance of God. The Quran is the written collection of God's message. A Muslim is one who believes in God and strives to make peace in his or her life with every action and thought. A Muslim must also work to help build human society of the same ideals of peace - Muslims cannot let wrong or unjust actions take place. The word 'Allah' is the proper name of God in Arabic. It is a unique term because it has no plural or gender. The Quran was revealed to Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him), the last prophet chosen by God. Prophet Muhammad Peace be Upon Him) was born in Arabia in the year 570 and died there 63 years later. His actions and saying along with the verses of the Quran guide the Muslim's daily life.

## CONTINUITY OF THE MESSAGE

Islam is not a new religion. It has ties to the same message and guidance that God revealed to all people throughout history: *"Say we (the Muslims) believe in Allah and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and other prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them and to Him we submit"* (Quran 3:84)

## SOME ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES

### **Oneness of God:**

He is One and the only One. He is not two in one or three in one. This means that Islam rejects the idea of trinity or such a unity of God, which implies the existence of more than one God.

### **Oneness of Mankind:**

People are created equal in the sight of God. There is no superiority of one race over another. God made us into different colours, nationalities, languages and cultures to encourage diversity and the creation of peaceful interactions.

No one can claim to be better than another. The only way once can be better than another is in how much good a person does and how righteous a person is. But even then, only God is able to judge this.

### **Original Innocence:**

Islam does not believe in the concept of original sin. In the Quran, Eve did not tempt Adam to disobey God. Both she and Adam were lured into disobedience and afterwards both were forgiven by God. Therefore, people do not possess any "original sin" and are pure at birth.

### **Judgment Day:**

Muslims believe that there is a day of judgment for all humankind from the beginning of time.

This day is when God holds accountable each person for his or her own actions and deeds. Reward and punishment is based on what the individual had done to be true to God's message and to help humanity strive for peace.

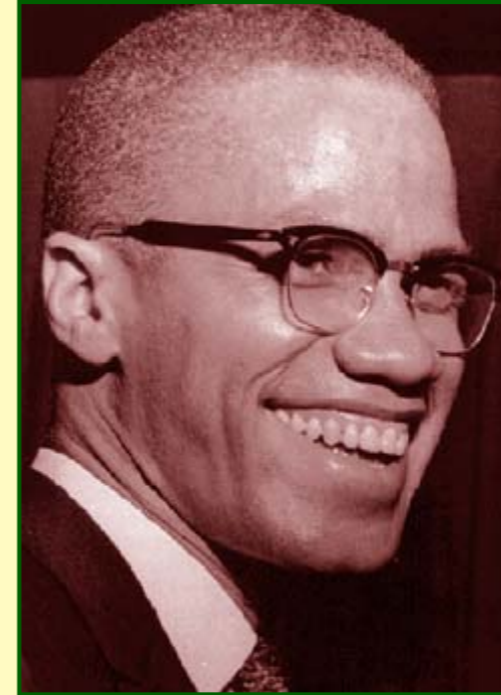
## THE MUSLIM WORLD

The Muslim population in the world is 1.5 billion. Twenty percent (20%) of the Muslims live in the Indian subcontinent, twenty percent (20%) in Sub Saharan Africa, seventeen percent (17%) in Southeast Asia, eighteen percent (18%) in the Arab world, ten percent (10%) in the former Soviet republics and China.

Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan comprise ten percent (10%) of the non-Arab Middle East. There are between six to eight million Muslims in the United States.

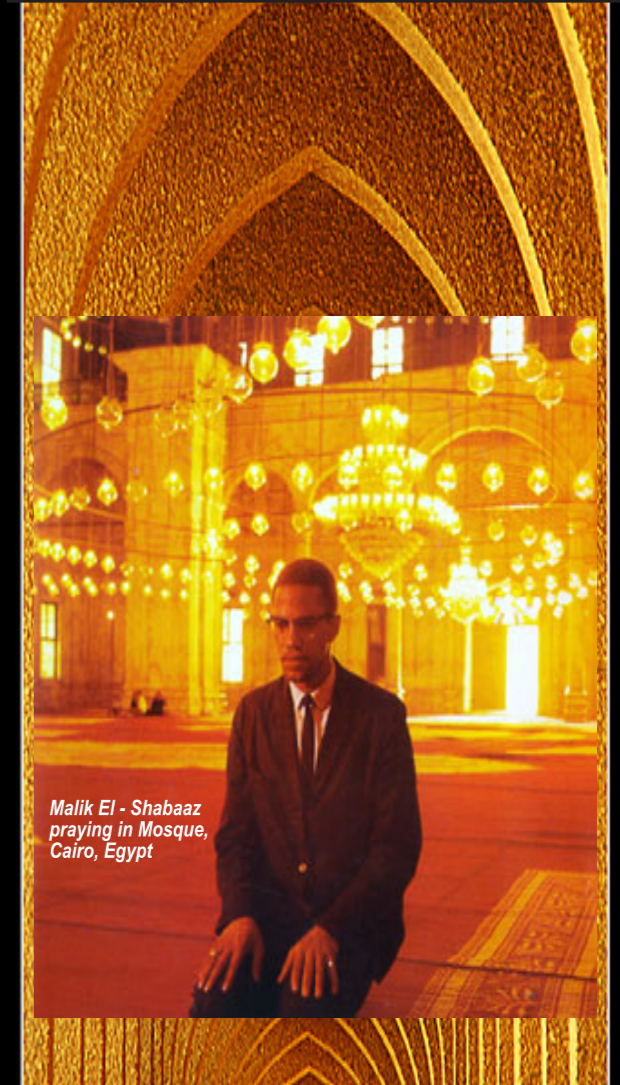
Muslim communities can be found in as far and diverse places as the rain forests of Indonesia, the Himalayan Mountains of North India, the deserts in the heart of Africa and the inner cities of America.

Every year millions of persons from these communities gather in Mecca to stand shoulder to shoulder and pray for peace, justice and equality for all humankind. This is where Malik El-Shabazz (Malcolm X) fulfilled his quest for the truth.



# MALCOLM X

## (MALIK EL-SHABAZZ)



Malik El - Shabazz  
praying in Mosque,  
Cairo, Egypt



## ISLAMIC DAWAH MOVEMENT *of Southern Africa*

**Head Office: Durban**



**495 Dr. Pixley KaSeme (West) Street,  
Durban, 4001, South Africa  
P.O.Box 48009, Qualbert, 4078**

**Tel: 031-304 6883**

**Fax: 031-305 1292**

**Email: [idm@ion.co.za](mailto:idm@ion.co.za)**

**[www.idmdawah.co.za](http://www.idmdawah.co.za)**

**Follow us on:**   

**Southern Kwa Zulu Natal: 071 457 3881**

**ISLAMIC DAWAH MOVEMENT OF  
SOUTHERN AFRICA (IDM)**

