

## CONFRONTING ISLAMOPHOBIA AND RACISM

All praises are due to Allah, Lord of the worlds and may the peace and blessings of Allah be constantly showered upon our Beloved Prophet Muhammad forever.

As we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the tensions and crises of the world are increasing by the day. Muslims, in the past, have always looked to the guidance of their Lord and the methodology of the Last Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to bring light in the time of darkness. Almighty Allah has revealed in His Glorious Qur'an, Surah At-Talaq: 2-3:

“...And whoever has the consciousness of Allah (Taqwa), Allah will make a way out for him and provide for him from where he knows not. And whoever puts his trust in Allah, then, Allah will be sufficient for him. Surely Allah will accomplish His purpose. Indeed Allah has made a limit for all things.”

It is reported by Jabir ibn Abdullah (r.a.) that “whenever the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) gave the Friday Sermon, his eyes would get red, his voice would raise and he spoke as though there was an army nearby about to attack.” Jumu'ah prayers were meant to be relevant and focus on the reality facing the Believers. It is a time of reflection and preparation to face the challenges ahead.

In the past few days, after the election of Donald Trump as the President of the U.S.A., hundreds of racist, Islamophobic attacks were carried out across the country. Multiple women had their Hijaab (headscarves) ripped off and thousands of Muslim women are afraid to appear as Muslims in public.

In Southern Lehigh high schools, Pennsylvania, the white students called the black students “cotton pickers”. At Royal Oak Middle school in Michigan, a video showed students chanting: “Build the Wall”. In Buffalo, N.Y. on a college campus, a black doll was found hanging from a building with a noose around its neck. In Wellsville, N.Y. Nazi Swastikas were painted on a baseball dugout. In Queens, N.Y., white students on a bus told the students of color, “Get to back of the bus, Trump is President!”

This blatant racism and Islamophobia brings back memories of the Jim Crow days in the U.S.A. or apartheid South Africa. South Africa had one of the most powerful armies in the 20th Century and had institutionalized its hate. But despite this, Racism was defeated and the system was brought down through the unity of the oppressed: Black, Brown, Christian, Muslim, African Traditional religion and even White people of consciousness.

Yes, Muslims were involved in the revolutionary struggle against racism! In 1652, when the Dutch had colonized Cape Town and brought in slave labor, a large group of Muslim slaves and political prisoners were imported from the Dutch colonies in Indonesia, Southeast Asia and East Africa. Shaykh Yusuf of Macassar, Indonesia founded a movement based on Al Qur'an and Islamic knowledge. They resisted slavery and reports have come out showing Malay slaves getting up at night in chains and making Tahajjud prayer. They passed their resistance down from generation to generation and now there are over 150 masjids in Cape Town alone.

From the oft-repeated portions of Al Qur'an that the Malay South Africans would read constantly was Surah Yunus, verses 62-64:

“Now surely, the friends of Allah shall have no fear nor shall they grieve. They are those who believe and guard against evil (with Taqwa). They shall have good news in this world's life and in the Hereafter. There is no changing the words of Allah. That is the mighty achievement.”

So the Awliyaa or friends of Allah were not described as an elite, closed group but the people who sincerely believed and surrounded themselves with the consciousness of Allah. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also once said:

“Beware of the supplication of the oppressed for there is no barrier between it and Allah.”

Islamophobia is now clearly upon us and in the tradition of the Prophets during times of calamity, Muslims have to be strong and patient. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was reported to have said:

“The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, but there is good in both of them. Strive for that which benefits you. Seek your help from Allah and do not become weak. If a calamity strikes you, do not say, “ If I had only done such and such. Say, “This is what Allah has willed and whatever He intends, he will bring to pass. Verily, ‘if’ opens the way for the devil.”

This Prophetic tradition informs us that we should strive for strength in all that we do. The Prophet also informed us:

The strong one is not really the good wrestler, but he who controls himself when he is angry.”

So strength is mental, and spiritual as well as physical. It manifests itself in good health and excellent character. Muslims should also focus on beneficial activities and not waste time. We should seek our ultimate assistance from Allah and not become lazy and dependent on others.

Above all, we should accept the Will of Allah in all affairs and not let past events haunt us, for whatever happened was ultimately beyond our control.

Some practical activities to combat Islamophobia are as follows:

- Build Taqwa (Consciousness of Allah) and seek nearness to Him in words and in deeds.
- Remember what happened to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and how he persevered.
- Remember that Muslims are not alone!!! African people are still facing racism and oppression, Latino people are suffering and being threatened with deportation; Native people are still facing extermination with the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline; many other minorities in the USA are reeling from the prospect of a right wing administration in America.
- Canada is not the same as the U.S.A. There are many open minded, well -intentioned people in our society. The influence of Islamophobia is here, however, so Muslims have to remain vigilant.
- Bring out the name, “Islamophobia” as much as possible. Learn about it, teach it, especially to the children. Show similarities with Racism, Anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry.
- Describe all forms of hate speech and crimes against Islam and Muslims as Islamophobia.
- Bring up the issue of Islamophobia at work, in school, to neighbors, friends, even in interfaith gatherings.
- Report every incident whether on the bus, in the street, in the mall, on the highway or around the Islamic centers. Record the incident with cell phones, call the police to report it, call the Islamic Institute of Toronto or your local masjid. Islamophobia needs to be halted before it becomes an institution.

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- Make Dua (supplication) to guide the haters and the Islamophobes to their sanity and the straight path. As our Beloved Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) constantly prayed for his enemies, we need to clean our hearts of revenge and hatred but never give up struggling and uniting with those who are oppressed.

May Almighty Allah give us patience, plant our feet firmly in the earth and give us victory over evil. And may He ease the burden of the suffering people of Syria, Iraq, Burma, Palestine, Central African Republic, Kashmir and throughout this earth.

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*Excerpts from the Friday sermon at IIT in Canada*