



In The Name Of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

المعهد الإسلامي في تورنتو

Islamic Institute of Toronto

Education for Virtuous Living

Speak Good or Remain Silent: A Response to the Recent Remarks of a Muslim Teacher

By Shaikh Ahmad Kutty

“Speak that which is good or remain silent.”

These are the words of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that immediately came to mind on perusing some of the comments and counter comments on social media regarding the highly derogatory remarks made recently by one of the Instructors of al-Maghrib Institute. His words demean women and cannot be excused or brushed aside as an innocent joke or an attempt at humor.

I advise the brother to retract his words and apologize unconditionally. Let me explain why.

Words heal or hurt; they may elevate our spiritual status or they may pull us down. Humans by nature can easily fall into temptation by using words carelessly, thus hurting themselves and others in the process. Hence, the Prophet’s valuable advice to use words wisely and beneficially or restrain ourselves and remain silent.

The Prophet always measured his words so that by the end of his sermons, listeners would retain simply the main points. He warned against the irresponsible use of one’s tongue.

While advising his companion, the Prophet said, “Hold off the tongue!” When the latter asked, “will I be accountable for my words?”, he said, “most people find themselves in hellfire because of the misuse of their tongues.”

The companions imbibed this Prophetic wisdom well. Ali said, “wounds inflicted by spears can be healed; however, not so the wounds inflicted by tongues.” Abu Bakr: “There is nothing I need to restrain more than my own tongue!” Another said, “My tongue is a predatory beast; if I unleash it, it may bounce back and devour me!”

There is a great deal of wisdom in the spiritual discipline of observing silence. This practice should only be broken when we have something good to say or when we need to rectify a wrong or redress an injustice.

Sadly, our social atmosphere today is increasingly poisoned by the careless use and even the misuse of our words. We are prone to innuendos, easy sarcasms, smears and stereotyping. We indulge in name calling, labeling and vilifying or taking a quick shot at those we dislike or disagree with.

We must cure ourselves of these vices or diseases, as Imam Ghazali describes them, if only we care about preserving the health of our spiritual heart.

What about banter? Isn’t there a place in Islam for humor and lighthearted joking?

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was always jovial and never shied away from humor. However, he made sure to avoid words that were hurtful and derogatory; he also advised his followers to stay clear of



In The Name Of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

المعهد الإسلامي في تورنتو

Islamic Institute of Toronto

Education for Virtuous Living

them at all times. His beloved wife Aishah once described Safiyah as 'the one with short hands'. The Prophet responded with "you have used such words that would even pollute the water of the ocean."

If there is anything good to come out of this, it is this: those who are seen to speak on behalf of Islam - scholars, leaders, and workers alike - would do well to practice the discipline of silence.

I believe the comments made by the instructor mentioned above were offensive and hurtful, no matter how one may try to rationalize it. As there is no dearth of misogyny parading as genuine Islam among Muslims, we need to stay clear of words and expressions that may be demeaning or derogatory even with the best of intentions. And we have a duty to side with everyone who is for standing up for the rights of those whose rights have been denied. Muslims must never bury our heads like ostriches in the sand, blaming others or being apologetic for our crimes or faults. We cannot change others; we can only change ourselves.

Unless Muslims take responsibility to redress the grievances of Muslim women and give women their equally respectable place in our community by following the example of our beloved Prophet, peace be upon him, we will never be able to bring about a genuine Islamic renaissance.

Everything that is done in our society to bring more equity into it is a worthy cause for Muslims, including International Women's Day, for, irrespective of ideological backgrounds, we must support social justice. This is the lesson of Hilf al-Fudul or the Pact of Virtue that the Prophet spoke so highly of. He said, "if I were called to a cause similar to that I would respond to it no matter who calls for it."

The Prophet never said that if he were called to join a noble cause, he wouldn't do so if those advocating it were pagans or atheists. The reminder here is that when it comes to causes which will bring about increased social justice, Muslims are to join hands with all who take part. And there is indeed a crisis in the inequitable ways women and girls are treated around the world. As those who belong to the ummah of a Prophet who actively addressed and challenged this inequity, we should be unequivocal about our stance on this issue. This includes Muslim women AND Muslim men.

Once this wisdom is learned, I would advise the brother to go for a spiritual retreat and practice the discipline of silence. I would assure him that he will never regret it. By doing so, he would help himself and thus will be able to serve the cause of Islam better.

I pray to Allah to grant us rectitude in words and actions and forgive us our sins, major and minor, outward and inward, that which we recognize and that which we are not aware of.