

FROM THE MINBAR

LEARN, DO NOT BURN ~ FORGIVE, DO NOT KILL!

Khutbah delivered by Imam Dr. Zijad Delic at SNMC on March 2nd, 2012 corresponding to Rabi'ut Thani 9th, 1433 H.

BACKGROUND

Indeed all praise is for God, Lord of the worlds. Peace and blessings of God be upon Muhammad (S), his family, Khulafai Rashidin, all his Companions, and all those who follow in their footsteps until the Last Day. All praise is for God! We praise Him. We seek His help and ask for His forgiveness. We seek God's refuge from evils of ourselves and from our evil actions. I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except God, alone, having no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad (S) is His Messenger.

My dear brothers and sisters in Islam ~ *As Salamu 'Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuhu.*

INTRODUCTION

The last few days we have heard about the violent protests provoked by the burning of the Qur'an and other religious material in NATO's *Bagram Airbase* in Afghanistan. Many people in these times would agree with me that the result of both insults – provocation and reaction – was unethical, inhuman and defeats the purpose of the countries who are committed in Afghanistan.

It is an important and urgent responsibility of Canadian Muslims, their organizations and leadership to guide Muslims and educate other concerned Canadian citizens in regards to where Islamic formative principles – the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition – stand in regards to the recent burning of the Qur'an and religious texts in Afghanistan and how Muslims should respond to such insults.

REACTION – FREE NEGATIVE PUBLICITY

The burning of the Qur'an, intentional or unintentional, is an unacceptable and horrendous act; however, the way some Muslims reacted is very reprehensible as well. They got angry and even sunk so low and went too far in insulting back. Killing Americans for the sake of defending the Qur'an is an awful act and an insult to the logic of Islam and what Islam and Muslims stand for.

It happens too often when some individuals engage in sacrilegious acts towards Islam and Muslims, some misguided individuals from the Muslim tradition react and express their outrage through the means that are very uncivilized (and un-Islamic least to say) and in such a way only offer free negative publicity for these irrational acts as well as reflect a bad image of Islam and the whole world's Muslim population.

Such acts do not have the place in the modern democratic discourse of civilized peoples – not in the West or in the East.

Here at home, in Canada, the action and the reaction have disturbed and saddened every conscious Canadian Muslim. I do understand that we feel hurt when someone talks ill about our faith or says and does something to hurt us, but this hurt



should never dictate the way we deal and the way we react; *otherwise we will be equal to those who have insulted us.*

Canadian Muslims have to maintain the high moral ground if they would like to be true followers of what the Qur'an mandates to us. We also have to remind ourselves that the Qur'an and the towering figure of the Prophet are too strong and too big to be affected by the acts of unintelligent impoliteness of some ignorant people.

THE QUR'AN IS A BULLETPROOF!

An act of burning the Qur'an will not affect the Qur'an and Islam in anyway. The Qur'an is a bulletproof! It will for sure create even larger gulf of misunderstanding between West and Muslims. It will also turn attention of people towards creation of culture of bigotry and religious hatred that is well and alive in the world today.

On the other hand, such insults on Islam, for an example this one in Afghanistan will push many Afghans to join the Taliban. We should realize that Taliban also play a political game and utilize these sorts of incidents to recruit people into their lines. I am positive that actions such as these of burning the Qur'an help in mushrooming Taliban in Afghanistan.

The lack of sincere, open, and constructive dialogue between the east and the west – orient and occident, is the main factor in escalations of the current problems. This dialogue needs to be more fruitful, otherwise, as is done in the last while, our dialogue, including interfaith, was nothing else than ceremonial and thus produced not much of what we hoped for...it was about nice meetings, some cultural foods and not much action...

Historically, Islam has survived such challenges and insults and I am positive that Islam will survive current challenges and insults. The Question is "Would Muslims survive these challenges?" If we do survive and that could happen only if we adhere to the Islamic principles while responding to the insults, then Muslims deserve "kudos." If not, then we should not blame anyone but ourselves for not following the principles that the Qur'an mandates to us.

DON'T BECOME ANGRY!

I cannot but think of the statement of Muhammad (pbuh) who, when asked for advice, responded,

"DO NOT BECOME ANGRY!" When asked again the same question twice, the same answer was given twice again.

I am not suggesting here that Muslims should be indifferent when insults on their sacred book – the Qur'an – are thrown into their faces. Rather, I am suggesting, as required by the Islamic foundational principles that we do not take path of impulsiveness and volatility.

Emotional outcries and the images of angry Muslims demonstrating in protests are not the proper response and the right behavior. Even worse than this is an un-Islamic reaction by protestors that turned the protest into violence which resulted in much worse criminal actions of harming and killing the innocent people.

As Muslims – people of faith – we have to act quite opposite! Yes, I agree that Muslims should contrast democratically the truth to falsehood, distortion and stereotyping. However, we must show in action that the message of the Qur'an is one of tolerance towards people who may think or not think as us. We are asked to try to find resolutions for our conflicts in more humane and Islamic (democratic) manners. The bottom line is that the message (the teachings of the Qur'an) is not the one of hate and violence.

Muslims cannot, according to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, combat bias and prejudice with angry demonstrations or death threats. My reading of these two normative sources of Islam did not direct me to this path. By these un-Islamic actions we would only create more bias and more prejudice. The history of violence towards Muslims bears with me that none of such acts have prevented further insults and attacks on Islam and Muslims. Quite opposite could be stated.

All Muslims have to realize that some of such insults are often done to provoke some Muslims and enrage them to jump and scream in the streets, attack embassies, burn flags, destroy properties or kill innocent people...and thus send a negative message about Islam and its followers. It is quite counterproductive! Loosing temper and resorting to threats or violence is not the solution.

Simply getting angry and then allow ourselves that

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⇒ In next issue: **Canadian Muslim Family**

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anger controls us will only cause more harm...others will have full right to point out our way and say "Did not we tell you that we are right!"

It does not matter what is the intention of the provocation to burn the Qur'an, Muslims cannot respond with violence. Muslims should never allow themselves to be irritated to that level that they hurt others, themselves and the image of Islam by going against the principles of their own faith.

In the case of the burning of the Qur'an in Afghanistan, Muslims reacted as usual – with anger and rage. Is this how Muslims should behave themselves in times of challenges and insults? So if this is not the way, how should Muslims here in Canada or elsewhere react to the insults directed towards their faith – the Qur'an or the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)? Should we just ignore these irrational provocations and insults or challenge the same and if so, how?

I am all for a proactive approach! Instead of being guided by emotions, Muslims must find ways to look to the Qur'an itself and the examples of the Prophet himself when combating the insults or injustice of any sort, shape or form.

Accurate and proper reading of the Qur'an and the life of Muhammad (pbuh) suggest quite opposite to what we see most Muslims do when faced with such challenges and insults.

Let us ask ourselves two simple questions: What does the Qur'an say about this topic? What lessons can we learn from our great role model Muhammad (pbuh) and how he acted/reacted in times when the image of Islam was insulted?

WHAT ISLAM SAYS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

First of all, God mentioned the following in the same Qur'an that was burnt by American soldiers: "Since good and evil cannot be equal, whatever someone may say or do to you repel the evil with something that is better. Then you will see that even the one with whom you may have relationship of enmity, will become your sympathetic and close friend." (The Qur'an 41:34)

In another verse of the Qur'an, God says that "When the righteous (good, committed and pious Muslims; individuals who abide by the Qur'an) hear vain talk (insults and attacks), they withdraw from it saying, 'Our deeds are for us and yours are for you; peace be to you. We do not desire the way of the ignorant.'" (The Qur'an 28:55)

Another verse of the Qur'an qualifies Muslims as people who do right things in the right manner, when facing injustice and insults: "Show forgiveness, speak for justice and avoid the ignorant..." (The Qur'an 7:199)

The Qur'an describes God's good and loving servants as individuals who control their anger and overlook peoples' shortcomings and forgive them: "Those who ... restrain anger and forgive (all) people. Indeed, Allah loves those who do good." (The Qur'an 3: 134)

Islamic traditions demonstrate in many examples of the Prophet's actions that he did just as the Qur'an asked him to do. He demonstrated the acts of forgiveness and tolerance as the policy in his life! For him the acts of forgiveness were acts of liberation. Forgiveness, for him, was not an act of

weakness but an act of strength and presence of strong human, ethical and religious identity.

He, when had an opportunity after becoming the leader of the community, did not retaliate against those who insulted him and his faith; he did not respond on their insults by insults. He responded with the better way, more human and needed way – forgiveness and amnesty.

One of the much known traditions is so vivid and moving in my memory and heart that deserves to be mentioned here. The historians have recorded a case of a woman who on regular day-to-day basis has insulted Muhammad (pbuh) by throwing trash on him as he walked down a particular path. The Prophet never responded in kind to the woman's abuse and insult. Instead, when she one day failed to come and insult him, he went to her home to inquire about her state and her conditions.

Another tradition also portrays Muhammad (pbuh) as the man of forgiveness, tolerance and reconciliation. When he returned to Makkah (the city in which he experienced all sorts of insults and abuse) and assumed the authority therein, after being in exile for several years, he did not take the path of revenge towards the Makkans. Instead he offered a complete amnesty. As it could be noticed, Muhammad (pbuh) in both cases, in a state of weakness and power, was the same man – the man of kindness, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Let me mention the case of Muhammad (pbuh) that we ALL need to reflect and learn from. When he was searching for shelter in Ta'if after facing difficult times in Makkah, people of Ta'if insulted and abused him. When he was asked to pray against abusers and those who insulted him, his response was: "I was not sent to curse people but rather I was sent as a mercy to humanity! I ask God to guide them because they lack knowledge."

Islam teaches us that the strongest of us are those who not only have the strength to suppress their anger when they are tested but also possess an immeasurable capacity to forgive, as the Prophet explained: "Whoever suffers an injury (insult) and forgives (the person(s) responsible for causing it), God will raise his or her status to a higher degree and remove one of the sins."

Islam also teaches that the best kind of forgiveness is answering the oppression with kindness, as mentioned in the tradition of the Prophet: "God has ordered me to maintain ties with those who sever ties with me, and to give to those who deprive me and to forgive those who oppress me."

HOW MUSLIMS SHOULD RESPOND?

Instead of responding to insults by insults, let us respond to insults by learning about each other; otherwise eye for an eye will make us ALL blind... and an evil will never correct another evil.

Therefore, Muslims are not supposed to respond to an insult by another insult. The best way to respond on insults or abuse is to turn to the educational means and try to bring some sense into this world of conflict. What I am suggesting is that Muslims ignore insults; not responding on insults with insults since that will only give the ignorant bigots what they wanted – publicity.

It is fair to say that during the last decade the world has witnessed a climate of ignorance, paranoia and fear when it comes to Islam and Muslims in the

West. Thus, the best way to approach the matter is to offer education to people on what Islam is all about and what Muslims stand for.

That would mean that we need to get active in our society and show our Canadian friends that Islam is peaceful and tolerant faith. We can show them by our attitude, mannerism and behavior what Islam/Qur'an is all about.

At the end of the day, it is only through these means that we will be able to clear up the clouds of misconceptions and fears. Resorting to threats and violence will do nothing whatsoever to clear up the fears. Such approach will simply intensify fears towards Islam/Qur'an and Muslims.

I call on all Canadian Muslims to better themselves as human beings by bettering the conditions of their hearts; develop better human attributes – treating the neighbors well, treating your countrymen well, wanting for them what you want for yourself... This is the best protest we could get engaged in. This is not about making one's point! This is about changing those whom we may disagree with in a manner that will benefit all.

I also call on Canadian Muslims to be self-confident and have confidence in our faith so that we do not feel that it is threatened by every hateful and impolite provocation or insult. Only then we would be able to react proactively and turn the challenge into an opportunity we will gain needed understanding and sympathy of our fellow Canadians.

CONCLUSION

As seen in the previous paragraphs, if Muslims focus on the positive attitude without falling into blinding anger, we will be able to offer the truth in a dignified and convincing way.

When insulted, the response of Canadian Muslims (or all Muslims for the matter of fact) should be a widespread education about the Qur'an and how the Qur'an at one point in time made life better and offered to human civilization resources for personal, family, communal, national, material, intellectual and spiritual development that were not existent at the time.

AN ACTION ITEM

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