

A HEARTILY TALK WITH THE AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM YOUTH

*Extracts from a series of lectures in Sydney by His Eminence
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Lack of adherence to advice

Islam is a peaceful religion that spreads harmony, love and ethics. However, unfortunately, some Muslims including a few self-declared scholars have only painted the opposite image of this Divine Message to the extent that it has been oppressed and misunderstood widely. Therefore, many scholars and educated leaders tried hard to reach the masses and correct those misled few to the right path as for their own sake as well as society's. So much advice has been given although the adherence of the masses seems to be lacking either due to environmental factors or other agendas in some cases but overall there should be a deeper reason.

This topic is a vital topic that has been studied thoroughly and commented on widely throughout the Muslim World although the actions have been slow and limited. Many Muslim preachers talk about this issue publicly quoting many Quranic verses and traditions to back their claims up in guiding people towards a peaceful real Islam. However, many of these preachers do not apply their own sermons on the ground or even if they do, then it is very much related to their own desire or short-term objectives.

This disastrous fact can be due to many reasons but for the purposes of this brief account let us concentrate on two important individual reasons as the aim of this account is to discuss the youth and what can they do to improve on a personal and spiritual dimensions mainly as this is the corner stone of any sought change. Allah states:

“The human self-witnesses, and Him Who created it in proportions. And inspired it with knowledge of what is wrong for it and what is right for it: Indeed successful will be the one who purifies it, and indeed failure will be the one who corrupts it!”

The two main reasons seem to be the lack of feeling Allah in daily lives as well as the double standards or hypocrisy. Let's try to explain each separately.

1. Lack of feeling Allah

We, Muslims, tend to always mention Allah to the extent that it might be the most used word in our vocabulary. Some, supposedly Muslims, lie, kill, torture, oppress, destroy societies etc. all under the name of Allah! But which Allah are they referring to?! Who is this Allah that they are allegedly obeying?! How do they communicate with him and feel him?!

The simple answer is that they are, in fact, following their own desires and calling it, mistakenly, Allah (may Allah be glorified)! They worship no one other than their own ambitions while using God as an excuse for their actions as well as a bridge to cross to the other side and drag the simple people along with them. Some of them may know this and some may be that ignorant and arrogant to the extent that they have convinced themselves to feel their imaginary god.

Allah is felt only through knowledge, guidance, honesty, being true to one's heart as well as seeking the truth through evidence and rationality. Allah described himself repeatedly at the beginning of almost every chapter and throughout His holy Book as "the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful". Scholars explain that this mercy is bestowed upon all beings and the entire universe, whether being of abidance to Allah or not.

God also states in another verse: "your Lord has dictated upon himself to act with mercy", while he repeatedly emphasises that: "you will not find a change in Allah's dictations neither any alteration". So Allah does not only describe Himself as merciful but goes further to make

it a dictation upon His Almighty to apply at all times. Then He builds on this promise and puts it into action by granting us a Prophet that is full of mercy and compassion. Allah states:

“(O Mohammad) we did not send you but to be a mercy for all worlds”.

Then He describes one aspect of that mercy by stating:

“Allah has indeed already been bounteous to the believers as He sent forth among them a Messenger from (among) themselves (who) recites to them His ayat (i.e., signs, verses) and cleanses them, and teaches them the Book and (the) Wisdom; and decidedly they were earlier indeed in evident error.”

Consequently, if we really feel Allah, then it should show in our daily decision and actions. We suppose to respect His Almighty enough as to be ashamed of our actions that inflict harm to innocent people under His name while He only wants mercy, peace and goodness for this entire World.

2. Double standards or hypocrisy

This evil trait is embedded in a lot of people unknowingly to the extent that it is overlooked most of the time. For example, we always tend to talk about best line of action, priorities and most ethical approach etc. But we seem to forget that these principles apply to ourselves first and foremost.

A second example is that today, preaching became a booming business so we notice many preachers that are not genuine in their advice. They do not seem to be talking from their souls anymore while Islam emphasises that “whatever stems from the heart, pieces the other heart”. So we need more genuine, compassion, honesty and, most importantly, applying our own speeches and advice in our everyday lives. This will enable us to be effective agents of

change in order for us to strengthen our societies to prosper and for our community to be considered amongst the good citizens everywhere not amongst the burdens of their respected societies. Imam Sadiq says:

“If there were hundred thousand inhabitants in a town and one of you present, but he was not the best amongst them then he cannot be considered as our follower.”

May Allah guide us to know, feel and follow Him by always applying His commands of peace and tranquillity wherever we may be!

Prophet Mohammad as a role-model for the Youth

Every society and every individual need a role-model who can they look up to in their endeavour to create their identity as well as place in this world. This need is widely accepted religiously, culturally, academically and logically. Muslim youth are no different. Therefore, the emphasise on considering a serious role-model will help them to have more direction in life as well as enable them to see Islam in practice from its most genuine source as to not fall as prey for ill-intentioned individuals or movements. Hence, Allah has clearly stated in Quran:

“You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah.”

The most important message that God tells us here is for us to use the Prophet as a good role-model for all of us. It should be noted here that a role-model is someone who is viewed as a practical example of how one ought to think, act, talk and most importantly, socially engage with others. That is why the Muslim scholars using this verse along with many others in Quran to indicate that the orders of the Prophet as well as his words, actions and approvals or disapprovals are all considered as guides for Islamic rulings in all aspects.

Now, I would like to concentrate on the life of Prophet Mohammad prior to his public call for Islam. This is of good relevance for us in the Western countries as we are Muslim citizens within non-Muslim societies.

The Prophet lived for 40 long years within his city of Mecca as an ordinary citizen before Islam and also a 12 years period as a Messenger of God later. He participated in everyday activities and even was actively involved in all the public affairs of his society as a good-natured and truth-seeker citizen. He lived amongst his nation and shared all their happiness

and sorrow. He shared their burdens and worked for their development and prosperity without discriminating amongst them for faith, race, status, wealth or gender. Mohammad was a committed, honest, trustworthy, critical and active individual to the extent that he was publicly known as Al-Sadiq Al-Amin, The Honest and The Trustworthy.

It was the pre-Islamic Arabia that entitled Mohammad with honesty and trustworthy, which is the most significant and noble medal of honour that any society can ever decorate one of its citizens with. This was during his youth year's decades before he announced his Message of Islam. So it was not due to his divine appointment neither as a political sweet talk. It was given to him because he was a model of how a citizen should be; of how everyone of us ought to be.

The two important characteristics that he was known with are the two single greatest traits that humans can ever achieve; honesty and trust.

Being honest is not only about telling the truth but it is to live ethically and morally; to be someone that his/ her actions are always equal to their speech. Every word, deed or emotion one shows should be truly representative of how they feel and based on evidence at hand.

Honesty also has another dimension, which is accuracy in delivering a piece of news or a quote. Hence, being a reliable source of information.

The second characteristic of trustworthy is the greatest trait that humans have always sought.

A trait that builds individuals, families, societies and the World!

A trait that would solve every conflict men even knew!

A trait that would make the person admired and wanted!

A trait that every human's dream and aim!

A trait that we miss in every single moment of our lives!

The two traits were that apparent on Mohammad that wherever he went, people would say: "the Honest Trustworthy is here".

By the way, it should be noted here that we are not talking about a free and democratic society that the youth were raised up to be moral citizens or humane leaders. It was, actually, a primitive tribal society that was based on the notion of the survival of the fittest. A society that did not appreciate moral stands when it came to financial or political gains. Tribes were invading each other for assets and dominance while their leaders were priding themselves on their violent means and superior might. The atmosphere was so disturbing that slavery was prominent and women were traded as commodities for the rich and the powerful.

In such an environment, Mohammad took ethics as his main ambition and struggled all his life to not only be an agent of change but to be that change that he wanted to achieve in that society as well as humanity. That is why Mohammad was able to deliver God's Message throughout the World even beyond his life. To put it in his own words:

"Truly, I was sent to perfect the noble ethics."

History is full of example of these great traits of Mohammad so please read it with an open mind. This would lead us all to improve ourselves both on intrapersonal as well as interpersonal levels. We should learn from Prophet Mohammad:

How to prioritise in life based on our fellow humans' needs rather than just be self-centred!

How to think and consider every situation and its effects on us, others and the environment!

How to communicate with our family, friends and society!

How to behave and treat others without any discrimination or neglect!

How to be ourselves yet be considerate enough to show respect and dignity at all times!

How to be non-violent towards all around us!

How to express ourselves in the most peaceful and productive manner!

How to be the real adopters of his great greeting:

“Assalamo Alaikom Wa Rahmatu Allah Wa Barakatoh”

“Peace be upon you as well as Allah’s mercy and blessings”

Muslims as Citizens

Islam emphasises citizenship and belonging as one of the foundations at which a society is formed. Hence, it considers the love and care of place of living as well as neighbours as one of its core religious acts. This religious act goes beyond just developing an identity with the place and belonging with its people to the higher moral levels of duty of care towards it and them. For example, Imam Ali states:

“Love of own country is an act of worship”

He also states:

“The Prophet has reminded us that much of our neighbours that we thought he would make them inherit us too”

He also states:

“Live amongst people in such a manner that if you depart them, they would miss you; and if you die, they would weep over you”

It should be noted here that one cannot act in the best manner towards his/ her country and fellow citizens, if he/ she does not adhere to their common laws and values while always trying to always be the model citizen when it comes to ethical conduct, dedication and commitment. These qualities can be achieved through open-mind, respect, understanding of others and empathy.

Our scholars have even rules that following local laws is a religious obligation; because Islam is a universal, spiritual and practical Faith based on an inclusion philosophy. Therefore it respects and promotes one’s individual and social culture, values and way of life. Hence, Islamic ruling books clearly state that in some aspects of religious rulings, one should refer to his/ her cultural traditions and/ or societal conventions. For example, hijab is obligatory upon

Muslim ladies but there is no actual formula for it other than general guidelines. This is the reason that one notices a big variety of styles of hijab throughout the World as every society has its own dresses to apply the hijab principle.

In summary, being a practicing Muslim is supposed to make one a better citizen with outstanding tolerance and adaptability not the other way around. Islam teaches us how to be better humans as individuals as well as being part of the wider society; Allah states:

“God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion. He instructs you, that you may receive admonition.”

Islam always highlighted the shared responsibility of all people towards each other at all times and everywhere. The duty of care is an onus on every Muslim towards his/ her family, companions, society, and humanity, country of residence, all beings and even the none-living resources. Prophet Mohammad summarises this by his famous quote:

“You are all caretakers and every caretaker is responsible for his subjects. The leader is a caretaker, and he is accountable for his subjects, and the man within his family is a caretaker, and is accountable for his subjects, and the woman is a caretaker within her family, and is accountable for her subjects, and the employee is a caretaker, and is accountable for his deeds”

Treating others with compassion and good manners

Islam at its core is a religion of public relations, so it concentrates a lot on ethics and conduct.

Allah tells His Prophet:

“You, truly, have great ethics”

Prophet also states:

“I, indeed, was sent to perfect good ethics”

The concepts of good manners, compassion, tolerance and respect are clearly visible throughout Prophet’s life from the time he lived in Mecca. He applied his principles in all stages of his lifetime, especially during the harsh years when he and his companions faced all kinds of torture, oppression, mockery, genocide and exile. But he always treated others, even those who directly harmed him, with the best possible manners and never even frowned at anyone. He set the best example of patience and forgiving to the extent that during the Fath of Mecca, when all his oppressors fell captive and were awaiting his orders, Mohammad faced them with absolute mercy and treated them with outstanding behaviour. He did not look at their crimes from killing his family and companions neither their oppression towards him nor their wars; but he looked at his own vision of creating a moral society which forgets and forgives.

He faced them proudly and asked: “what do you think I would do to you?”

They replied: “an honourable brother and son of an honourable man”

He told them clearly and loudly: “Go; you are all free.”

Some of his companions objected to this public pardon; however, he calmly explained that he only seeks peace and harmony not revenge and violence.

Yes, Mohammad seeks peace; Islam seeks peace; Allah seeks peace!

Peace within the self,

Peace within family,

Peace within associates,

Peace within society,

Peace within humanity,

Peace within the entire creatures and universe!

Prophet Mohammad and the Imams practiced this in every single moment of their holy lives to the extent that they used to always remind their followers to look after vulnerable people, animals, trees and even the non-living environment.

It is important to also pay the due attention of how they those around them even if they were non-Muslims or opponents. They used to remember them, ask about them, even visit them and help them when they are in need. History reports that one day Imam Ali was walking with his companions through the streets of Kufa when he noticed a poor man begging.

Ali, surprisingly, stopped and asked: “a beggar during the reign of Ali?!”

They replied: “he is Christian.”

Ali assertively responded: “you used him while young and left him during his old age?!”

He, then, continued to put his word into action by ordering them to: “grant him a salary from the treasury like everyone else.”

It is very important to note here that Islam cares that much about the vulnerable population to the extent that it established one of the most comprehensive social security systems in the World many centuries ago. Allah states clearly:

“Charity is only to be given to the poor and needy and those employed to administer it, and those whose hearts are made to incline, and (to free) the captives, and those in debt, and in the way of God, and for the way farer – an ordinance from God. And God is all knowing, wise.”

Islam established such a great concept because of its message, which is based on compassion; a principle that all Muslims ought to follow through all their dealings within themselves as well as those around them. Therefore, we should endeavour to show the brilliant image of true Islam through our ethical conduct, good manners, unconditional respect and compassion in everyday of our lives at home, work, travel or anywhere else.

It is nice to end this advice on this great verse of Allah:

“O mankind! We created you as male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted.”

Treat offences with grace and kindness

Humans by nature are social beings who ought to deal with other people, who might be like them or differ with them. This requests them to communicate amongst each other in most their dealings if not all. This is true in everyday life from neighbours to family, friends and colleagues or just general public. Therefore, exposure to all types of people follows and can memories wither good or bad, happy or sad.

Most people are generally good in nature and treat others nicely but there are the odd ones around who might act out of line in a discriminatory, racist or just arrogant way. It can be intentional or unintentional due to many factors some personal and some environmental. The issue in discussion here is not the aim of the other person rather your higher purpose in life.

During these unfortunate episodes, God still does not like you to be involved in violence and retaliation as much as possible because you are fuelling this hatred and proving your opponent right in his/ her claims as well as disturbing the social harmony. Islam does not want you to be weak and passive but wants you to be wise and moral. It aims at preparing you to be a better person; to teach you how to forget and forgive; to look at the bigger picture. Otherwise, society would go down a path of hate, revenge and violence, which is a never ending circle that harms all members of society even those who are not involved. Therefore, if you follow God's advice of forgiving and overlooking others shortcomings then you are being one of those that Quran describes as:

“When they hear vain talk, they turn away from it and say: We shall have our deeds and you shall have yours deeds; peace be upon you; we will have nothing to do with the ignorant.”

Allah describes that acting wisely with patient and forgiving is actually a difficult act that requires determination and hard work as He states:

“And whoever is patient and forgives – indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination”

Finally, let us illustrate this through a practical example from Prophet Mohammad’s life that would show us how we ought to act to those causing us harm or treat us in an ill manner.

There was a non-Muslim neighbour of the Prophet who used to throw garbage at the Prophet whenever he passed through that way. One day, the Prophet passed through but no garbage was thrown, so he asked about that person and was told that he has fell sick. Prophet Mohammad, immediately, went to that man’s house to inquire about his health and prayed for his quick recovery. That person was surprised and overwhelmed by this gesture of the Prophet, so he sought forgiveness and became one of the dear friends of Mohammad.

The above story demonstrates clearly how following the moral example of the Prophet can lead us to construct a multicultural society which is based on harmony, dialogue, non-violence and shared values. Hence, His Almighty states”

“Not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.”

Improve yourselves spiritually and professionally

A Muslim should always improve and endure all difficulties and obstacles to reach a better standing both spiritually and professionally. Imam Ali states:

“Work for this life as you would live forever; and work for your hereafter as if you die tomorrow.”

This becomes more of a moral obligation as you live in a land of unique opportunities and freedom, Australia. One can improve him/ herself as well as others through building a good social character, a moral outlook at life, educated personality and professional career. So one should endeavour through these two main means:

1. Seeking spiritual growth and improvement
2. Seeking knowledge and skills

1. Seeking spiritual growth and improvement

This can be achieved both on a personal and social levels. Personal path would be through reflection, prayer and especially patience. Allah explains this best through many clear verses in the Holy Quran:

“And your Lord says, ‘Call upon Me; I will respond to you.’”

“[Luqman said:] ‘O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination.’”

“And seek assistance through patience and prayer...”

“Except for those who are patient and do righteous deeds; those will have forgiveness and great reward.”

“But those who had been given knowledge said, “Woe to you! The reward of Allah is better for he who believes and does righteousness. And none are granted it except the patient.”

“But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except one having a great portion [of good].”

“And then being among those who believed and advised one another to patience and advised one another to compassion. Those are the companions of the right.”

“O you, who believe, persevere and endure and remain active and fear Allah that you may be successful”

“...but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere – who say, when afflicted with calamity: ‘To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return’ – they are those on whom [descend] blessings from their Lord, and Mercy and they are the ones that receive guidance”

“...Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account.”

“...And the angels will enter upon them from every gate, [saying],”Peace be upon you for what you patiently endured. And excellent is the final home.”

The above verses are just examples of what Quran contains from advice of how one should seek real growth, which can only be done through dedication and patience. Another important aspect is participation within the community activities and attending the mosques. This will ensure you to not feel isolated as well as widen your learning and friendships amongst many other benefits. For instance Imam Ali states:

Whoever goes always to mosque, would gain one of eight:

- a brother that benefits him in Allah,
- a good knowledge,
- a solid verse,

- he hears a word that would show him the guidance,
- an awaited mercy,
- a word that brings him back from a misguidance,
- or he leaves a sin because of fear or shame.”

It should be reminded here that there are many charitable acts that one can do to continue bearing their rewards even after his/ her death. Prophet states:

“Four things continue to reward a person even after his death; a man who dies on the true path, a good advice or knowledge given by him to someone who acts on that advice, an act of charity and a good son who prays for him and asks for forgiveness on his behalf.”

Imam Sadiq also states:

“Six things benefit a man after his death; a pious son who asks for forgiveness on his behalf, a copy of the Holy Qur’an he read from, a tree he planted, a glass of water he quenched others’ thirst with, a well he dug, and a good tradition or habit he left behind to those around him”

2. Seeking knowledge and skills

As mentioned above, Australia offers freedom and opportunity for every one of its citizens; therefore, one should use this chance as to seek to improve themselves as well as their society. This obligation becomes, even, more obvious and abiding when we clearly see the Islamic emphasis on such acts. This is illustrated through many Quranic verses and Prophetic narrations that encourage actively seeking knowledge and skills as well as applying them for the benefit of society.

A need for educating our masses about the importance of learning is vital as so many of the Muslim youth are, unfortunately, going through very testing times due to an identity crisis and a lack of clear guidance. This is, largely, the fault of ill-intended political movements and uneducated community leaders who are leading our youth towards a disastrous destiny. The other important factor is the lack of proper bringing up at home. One cannot expect his/ her sons or daughters to be role-model citizens in the future when they live a life of domestic violence, laziness and/ or double standards. For example, how many of our active elders are out of the workforce for no legitimate reason?! How many of our parents instruct their kids to against substance abuse while they smoke at home?! How many of our married couple fight over none-sense and then adhere to violence to supposedly solve their conflict instead of love, care and logic and then end up in divorce or a miserable life together?! In such times, knowledge and wisdom are the safest way forward for all of us forward to achieve better outcomes both individually and socially.

Let us take a journey together through Quran and Hadith to explore knowledge and its positive effects.

Allah states:

“Say (unto them, O Mohammad): Are those who know equal with those who know not?”

Prophet states:

“Seeking knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim, male or female.”

“Acquire knowledge and import it to the people.”

So these quotes as well as many others clearly dictate upon every Muslim to seek knowledge and skills. They are also required to act upon those knowledge and skills gained to improve themselves as well as advance their community and wider society. Knowledge also comes with many other benefits such as open-mind, tolerance, widening angle of view and, most importantly, teaches one how to express own opinion in a constructive manner.

I would like to leave you to reflect upon this statement of Imam Ali to be your guide through your journey in studies and future careers; inshallah:

“O seeker of knowledge! Knowledge has many merits:

- its head is humbleness,
- its eye is freedom from envy,
- its ear is understanding,
- its tongue is truthfulness,
- its memory is research,
- its heart is good intention,
- its intellect is the knowledge of things and matters,
- its hand is compassion,
- its foot is visiting the learned,
- its resolution is integrity,
- its wisdom is piety,
- its abode is salvation,
- its helmsman is well-being,
- its mount is faithfulness,
- its weapon is softness of speech,
- its tool is satisfaction,
- its bow is tolerance,
- its army is discussion with the learned,
- its wealth are refined manners,
- its stock is abstinence from sins,
- its provision for journey is virtue,
- its drinking water is gentleness,
- its guide is Divine guidance,
- and its companion is love.”
