

A Vision for Islam in America

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Introduction

This book presents a vision for Islam in America. This new vision is deeply rooted in the Quran and Sunnah¹. It is also based on deep commitment and love to America as our country, or to use the language of the Quran, as “our people”.

Each of the 7 chapters in this book progressively builds to demonstrate the foundation of this vision.

Chapter 1: The nature of creation

When Allah created Adam, He told the angels that Adam and his descendents are meant to be vicegerents² on earth (**إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ** (**خَلِيفَةً**). This means that the human race is intended to be a responsible party on earth: to take care of this earth, take care of each other, live honorably, and keep the covenant with their Lord.

Many generations came after Adam. These generations often forgot their covenant with their Lord. Allah sent prophets to remind the people. Many prophets were sent after Adam. There are common

¹ The way of the Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH)

² Someone appointed by God to take care of and protect the earth

themes which were carried by all the prophets, as the Quran narrates. These prophets came to remind their people and to guide them. They came with a beautiful attitude, related often in the Quran as: “ya qawmi”³

1. The first part of the message is (يَقَوْمِ أَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ): “Oh my people: worship Allah”. The first message is to remind and regulate the relation between the Creator and the creation. Don’t forget your Lord who created you, loves you, and sustains you. Live a life of righteousness; love and know your Lord.
2. The second part of the message addresses the relation with other humans. It addresses the specific challenges faced by society. It is a message of societal reform. The prophets identified certain challenges faced by society and worked hard to advocate for change and reform in these particular areas. ⁴

The first part of the message - Oh my people, worship Your Lord - was a common thread between the messages of all prophets.

³ This verse: “oh my people” is mentioned 47 times in the Quran by many prophets. Each prophet comes and speaks to his people. It is a loving term that is supposed to highlight the deep relation: similar to calling someone and saying “Oh my son”. The prophet’s people were not the “believers” but everyone in society.

⁴ Every prophet had a social reform message as part of his calling, and in addition to the message of Tawheed (Oneness of God). The implication is that Muslims today, as they call to their Lord, need to balance between both messages. Also, just like every prophet had a constant message of Tawheed, and a changing message of reform, Muslims should do the same. The reform is based on the specific needs of the society where we are living.

The second part of the message, which deals with the reform needed in society, differed from one prophet to the next. This second part depended on the specific problems faced by the society. Each prophet had a specific type of reform. Surat al-Hud & Surat al-people. They both mention good things. Generally, these prophets' messages had two parts: the Quran is mentioned as such:

وَالِىٰ مَدْيَنَ اٰخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا قَالَ يٰقَوْمِ اَعْبُدُوا اللّٰهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ اِلٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ وَلَا تَنْفُسُوا الْاَمْثَالَ
وَالْمِيزَانَ اِنِّىۤ اَرٰكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ وَاِنِّىۤ اَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ مُّحِيطٍ

“And to the people of Madyan, we sent them their brother Shuaib. He said: Oh my people, worship Allah, you have no God but Him. Do not unjustly handle the scale (in trading). I recognize the good in you, and I fear for you the punishment of a certain day (Day of Judgment)”.

Like all other prophets, Prophet Shuaib had two parts to his message: (a) worshipping Allah, and (b) addressing a societal reform specific to his community: unjust economic dealings (unjustly handling the scale).

Another significant observation is how each prophet came as a loving and caring leader to his community. Every prophet came as a “brother” to His people⁵. Even Prophet Lot was called a “brother” to

⁵ The implication: The reformers, “du‘at”, and Muslims in America today need to establish that sense of brotherhood to their people. “Our people” in America is the larger American society, for whom we need to show love, care and dedication.

his people⁶. No sin is too great for Allah to send a loving messenger with a warning to *his* people to remind them and guide them. The prophets came as a mercy and guidance to their people. Every prophet came with the message “oh my people”.

The paradigm was not one of anger or hate, but one of love and care.

If, after many years of communication and hard work⁷ the people rejected the message of the prophets, Allah would often punish the people in this life. Like a father who cares for his children who may be going astray, the prophets labored diligently for the benefit and health of their people.

Prophet Shuaib in the verse above further tells them: “I see a lot of good in you, and I fear for you a punishment from your Lord”. This attitude of loving their people, caring for them, and wanting the best for them is one that is a hallmark of these prophets who came to their people.

⁶ Prophet Lot was sent to a people who, among other things, were committing homosexual acts, yet the Quran still called him their brother. He labored tirelessly in a caring way to call his people to the same two messages every other prophet called for. Today, unfortunately, some Muslims have an attitude towards people who identify as homosexual that prevents the sharing of the message of Islam with them, with love and care. Everyone is “our people”, and everyone has a right upon the messengers (in this case, Muslims in America) to take the message to them. Here is a useful piece on this issue by Sherman Jackson :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HislwWhyU34&p=C0012FBCBAEB6B0C&playnext=1&index=24>

⁷ Think about the many years it took the prophets before God decided that their people are not accepting the message. Prophet Noah called on his people for centuries. Prophet Muhammad called his people for more than 13 years in Mecca. Even after those 13 years, the prophet did not give up on his people. We have to ask ourselves: Have we done our job on calling “our people”?

Allah also reminds us in the Quran that: (وَإِن مِّنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ): “A prophet has been sent to every nation”. The Quran mentions only 23 prophets by name; but in reality there are many other prophets that have been sent to their people, all across the globe, in order to remind them of their duties, and to remind them of their Lord.⁸

⁸ As we will see, the implication for us is that we are sent as prophets to our people - not in the sense of receiving new divine revelation - but in the sense of awakening and delivering the message of God to our people. This means that non-Muslims are our people and our community, not just Muslims. This also means that like the other prophets, we need to care for them and look out for their benefit.

Chapter 2: Islam

More than 120,000 prophets later⁹, Allah sent yet another Prophet, Muhammad (P)¹⁰. In some ways, the message of Muhammad (P) was no different than the message of all the other prophets. This is why Allah tells him in the Quran: “That which is revealed to you is the same as what has been revealed to all prophets before you.” (ما يقال لك إلا ما قد قيل للرسل من قبلك)

The essence of the message was the same (Oh my people, worship Allah, you have no Lord but Him). The other part of his message was also the same: reforming society.¹¹

Islam means “submission to the Will of God”. This is why the Quran affirms that all believers across times were “Muslims” in that they submitted to the Will of God. Worshipping the One God is the constant theme in the message of all the prophets. The Quran also states that the name “Muslims” was given by Prophet Abraham to the believers “هو سماكم المسلمين”.

⁹ This is based on a Hadith in which the prophet mentions that there are more than 120,000 prophets sent to humanity. For sure America must have received some. Also some scholars (like Jamal Badawi) argue that it is possible, even likely, that the Buddha and other similar historic figures were prophets, but whose messages were changed later, similar to what happened to the message of the prophets Jesus & Moses.

¹⁰ Will use (p) to denote “peace be upon him”, a prayer (recommended for all prophets in general and prophet Muhammad in particular).

¹¹ The implication of this is the following: Our core message to America is, “Worship Allah,” and then the second piece must be customized according to the specific challenges that society is facing (such as materialism, injustices, inequalities, healthcare, unemployment, moral issues, etc). Similar to the prophets, we should identify the few areas that truly require our focus, based on the society’s needs.

Universal Message¹²

There was one important difference between Prophet Muhammad (p) and other prophets sent before Him. Prophet Muhammad's message was the only truly universal message, intended not for a specific group of people, but for all of humanity. This is a huge difference and will have consequences that make his Ummah unique, as compared to all others.

Very early on, Allah proclaimed in the Quran: (وما أرسلناك إلا رحمة) (للعالمين): “We sent you but as a Mercy to Mankind.”

In the Hadith, Prophet Muhammad says: I was given 5 things that no other prophet was given before me. Amongst them: وكان النبي يبعث إلى قومه خاصة وبعثت للناس عامة (prophets were sent to a specific group of people, and I was sent to all of humanity).

Muhammad's (p) message was the first universal message to all of humanity:

- Allah instructs Prophet Muhammad (P) in the Quran to say : (قل) : “Say Oh Muhammad : Oh Mankind, I am a prophet from God sent to all of you.”

¹² The implication is that this message of Islam is intended for America. Had the prophets or the Companions been living here today, they would have taken the message to this land as core to their responsibility.

- And Allah also says: (وما أرسلناك إلا كافة للناس بشيراً و نذراً) : “We sent you to all of mankind, as a bringer of Glad Tidings and a Warner unto them.”

His message had no limitation in terms of race or time or location.

He was to take his message to the entire world. He said: (بعثت إلى) : (الناس كافة الأحمر والأسود Red (i.e., white) and the Black.”

His message to the believers

Prophet Muhammad (p) developed and organized his people to take Islam to the world.

He taught them that Islam is precious and worth sacrificing for: ما لكم “Oh you who believe, why is it that when you are called to sacrifice for your Lord you cling heavily to this earth? Are you pleased with the life of this world, rather than the Hereafter?¹³”

He taught them that life is short and should not be preferred over the everlasting life of the hereafter: (On the Day of Judgment, people will say) : إذ يقول أمثلكم طريقة إن لبئتم إلا يوم : “(On the Day of Judgment, people will say) : you have only spent (on this earth) but one day.”

¹³ The implication for us is the same: this verse and others were not only intended for the Companions, but also for the du‘at (reformers, callers to the message of God) after Prophet Muhammad. Do we love this dunya more?

Allah brought their hearts together and united them: (ألف بين قلوبكم)
He is the one who joined your hearts together. ¹⁴

He taught them to be organized and to work collectively together: يد
الله مع الجماعة (the Help of Allah is with the organized effort) ¹⁵

He taught them to love Islam like no other : قل إن كان أبؤكم و : “If
anything in life is more beloved to you than Allah and His
messenger and sacrificing for His Sake then beware of severe
repercussions.” ¹⁶

His message was simple: Love your Lord and worship Him, do good
on earth, live a responsible life, and take Islam to others. ¹⁷

Within a very short period of time, Islam had spread so fast all over
the known world - because it is “deen al-fitra”¹⁸, and because of the
dedication of the believers who took Islam seriously.

¹⁴ The implication is that we should work hard to bring the hearts of the believers together in order to be effective, and to be more able to deliver the message of Allah.

¹⁵ The implication is that collective work and forming a tight-knit community of believers, or at least a core group (like Ahl Badr, the people of Badr) who were truly committed to Islam – this is an important element of success. More than any other country, America respects, empowers, and adores organization. It is part of the DNA of society. Muslims need to work harder to organize themselves and work in an organized fashion.

¹⁶ This is a verse in Surat al-Tawba in which Allah mentions that money, children, family, nationality, race, tribe, houses or other things should not be preferred or more beloved than sacrificing for Islam. In order for the Ummah to stay on the path, some group of believers needs to live these concepts in full.

¹⁷ The essence of us is to bring back these concepts within the entire population (to our people). However, before this can happen, a core group needs to adopt them and practice them, so that they can be seen in action (not just in theory) by others.

From the beginning, the believers realized that Islam depended on them. Allah tells Prophet Muhammad: هو الذي ايدك بنصره وبالمؤمنين (Allah supported you with his victory, and the hard work of the believers)¹⁹

The companions had difficulties and persevered. Lest they think that they have done enough, Allah reminds them (and reminds us) in the Quran : أم حسبتم أن تدخلوا الجنة ولما يعلم الله الذين جاهدوا منكم ويعلم الصابرين : “Do you think that you will enter Paradise before Allah has identified the ones from amongst you who sacrifice, and the ones who are patient?”²⁰

Islamophobia

Similar to other prophets in the past, and like the true believers of today, Prophet Muhammad (P) was initially rejected and faced “Islamophobia.” He was called all sorts of names: كذاب ساحر كاهن مجنون (Liar, Sorcerer, Magician, Crazy, ...) ²¹

¹⁸ Fitra is the best of human nature. Islam resonates with human nature, because it was not changed by others (the message is the same that came with the Prophet), and because it was intended as a universal message and not just for the specific people to whom it was originally sent.

¹⁹ The implication is that it is not enough for Islam to be “the right religion”. Allah expects the believers to carry the responsibility of supporting the Prophet and supporting Islam. This means you and I are responsible for Islam.

²⁰ We should stop and think about this verse: Do we think we will enter paradise without sacrifice? Are we sacrificing in a manner that would make the Prophet proud of us?

²¹ Today Muslims are called terrorists. They are called extremists. We need to handle Islamophobia as the Prophet handled it.

The Meccans sent kids running after him throwing stones at him – may Allah’s blessings be on him.²²

All Meccans started to call him “مذمم” – Mudhammam, which rhymes with Muhammad – a name which means : the ugly one, or the crazy one. Everyone would call him this name. When he would pass a crowd, they would say: Mudhammam has come; or Mudhammam has gone. This was very tough on the Companions and believers who loved him so much and who would sacrifice anything for him. The most honorable man who walked the earth was being called the worst of names. The Prophet saw that this was very tough on the believers, so he would soothe them and say: “They are talking about another person; my name is Muhammad. They are talking about a man called Mudhammam, not about me”. May Allah’s blessings and Mercy be upon you, oh prophet of Allah.²³

²² The Meccans also physically abused him and his companions, and killed some of the Companions. Al hamdulillah, this has not happened to Muslims in America. We pray that we never see this type of attack.

²³ It is interesting that the Prophet did not rebel violently against these issues. I wonder how the Prophet would have dealt with a situation if a Meccan had drawn an evil cartoon of him. We need to focus on the real mission. The Prophet wanted to train the believers not to be angry about the harm that is happening to them. The essence of the message was not to protect the believers, but to benefit the entire society. Also, the Prophet wanted to tame the revengeful nature of the Arabs to take revenge from anyone who hurt their honor. In Islam’s higher aspirations for the believers is not that they simply take revenge for themselves, but rather to defend the truth and stand with the oppressed. The prophet did not allow the companions to act in violence against the Meccans who defamed him. The reason is that we need to focus on what Islam is really about: it is about guiding people and ensuring that the message of Islam reaches their hearts. Many of these people who were insulting the prophet in Mecca, because of the approach of the early Muslims, ended up accepting and defending Islam

The Meccans attacked the Prophet's family, friends and companions. They imprisoned him and all of his tribe for three years in (شعب أبو) طالب).²⁴

His own uncle Abu Lahab would follow him around Mecca. Whenever the Prophet was about to speak to someone about Islam, his uncle would interrupt and say: "Look, he is my nephew; I know him very well; he is a crazy man; don't listen to him". Then the person would say: "Well, if he is really your uncle, he must know you better. Go somewhere else". Of course when the attack is coming from relatives and close ones, it is even more difficult.²⁵

He faced Islamophobia similar to the prophets and reformers before him and after him. But he overcame this Islamophobia. He overcame it by focusing on his message, which was: Oh my people (ya qawmi) .. Oh my beloved people: "Worship Allah, you have no God but Him." ... and by reforming society.²⁶

later. Of course this has to be balanced with the fact that Islam will also fight and defend the oppressed. But the priority is to delivering the message and not in getting sidetracked with defending the insults.

²⁴ In some ways this imprisonment was similar to the Japanese internment camps in the US.

²⁵ Islamophobes try this nowadays when they bring so-called Muslims who either left Islam because it is a horrible religion, or who claim to be Muslims and bash the religion.

²⁶ It is very important for American Muslims to stay on message. Our goal is not to simply eliminate Islamophobia. We love America more than we love ourselves. We love our people more than we love ourselves. We seek what is good for our people, not just to "get our rights". We long for everyone to get their rights and not just Muslims in America. There are many Americans who are not getting their rights (more on this in chapter 4). We should not play into or accept a victimhood mentality. This does not mean that civil rights organizations in America (like CAIR,

If you read the Quran, including verses that were sent during these tough years of persecution and “Islamophobia” in Mecca, there was no victimhood mentality. The Quran was not obsessed with the victimization of the believers. On the contrary, the Quran was reminding the believers that this is to be expected. To the persecutors, the Quran was focusing on its message: reforming society, the greatness of God, the creation of Allah, the truthfulness of the message, removing ills from society, and removing oppression from society.²⁷

In the midst of the darkest moments, with the highest levels of anti-Muslim attacks, the Prophet never hated his people²⁸. He loved Mecca, and cried as he was forced to leave Mecca as the Meccans were plotting to kill him. When some of the Companions asked him to curse the unbelieving Meccans, he prayed for them instead and

MAS Freedom) should stop demanding the rights of American Muslims. However, this should be seen as only part of what we are about, and part of what we are asking for.

²⁷ This is important because America appreciates the victimhood mentality. We are pushed as a community into this paradigm. This is a good paradigm in America: you are a victim, and then the American system usually eventually stands up for the oppressed and the minorities get their rights. This is an OK paradigm, but it is not the complete picture for Muslims in America. We don't just want our rights as Muslims. We also have a beautiful message for our people that we want them to hear. We have a message. The way to solve this problem is not to completely forget about this paradigm. It is OK for us to have the CAIRS and MAS Freedoms which focus on resolving these issues. But this should not be our ONLY response as a community. This is where we need to come in to remind people of this additional role that we must play.

²⁸ A strong bond between the reformers, the du3at, and the people must exist. Muslims must care for and love America as their place of living and dawa. People don't care what you know, until they know that you care.

reminded his companions that: I was sent as a Mercy to Mankind, not as damnation.²⁹

During a trip to the neighboring city of al-Ta'if, where the Prophet tried to take his message, the tribe rejected his message, and sent kids to throw rocks at him until he bled, May Allah's blessings and mercy be on him. Towards the end of this trip, Allah sent the "Angel of the Mountains" to the Prophet, telling him: "I have been instructed by Allah to ask you: if you wish, I will crumble these two mountains on top of this tribe and destroy them." In a moment of deep affection and emotion, the Prophet cried to his Lord, asking him to guide his people, make them role models to others, and to accept from him his deeds.³⁰

He called others to their Lord and he advocated for reforming the ills in his society: injustices associated with slavery, usury, the oppression of women, usurping the rights of the weak, indiscriminant killings, and other such injustices.³¹

²⁹ It is very important for Muslims to realize that as messengers to our people, we need to love our people. We need to love America. Not the type of blind love that blesses the wrong, but the one that wishes to change the wrong. We don't want to defeat America, but we want America to be the best that it can be. See this for more on this topic : <http://hossamaljabri.com/2010/06/08/why-i-love-my-country/>

³⁰ Sometimes Muslims are quick to ask for the damnation of their enemy. Yet have we done our part to take the message to them? It is true that the Prophet sometimes made du'a against his enemies, but this was after years of due diligence to clarify the message, and after these people declared war on the Prophet and his message. Today, "our people" have no idea what our message is all about.

³¹ We need to find the core issues that we should adopt as Muslims in America from our American context, and the core of our message. Some of this reform

He civilized the Arabs and provided them with a new mission.

A huge surprise

In the midst of all of this, something very unusual happened. Prophet Muhammad was told: you are the final prophet to humanity. No more prophets. After more than 100,000 prophets, suddenly, there are no more prophets. This is the final message from the Divine to human beings.

No more prophets? This is a huge surprise. How would the following generations of humans be reminded, and how would they go back to God if they went astray? This leads us to the next step in our journey.³²

may already be recognized as a problem by others (e.g., income inequality in America). Other reforms may be unrecognized by others as a problem to be solved. We need to look deep and adopt the right set of issues. The Prophet did not adopt all issues at once, but there was prioritizing and gradualism. Our community's focus should not be on being a minority or political group with communal interests, but rather a moral force in society with a universal moral and spiritual message to all, one that we should be promoting with wisdom and compassion, but without compromising on the basics, even if this will make our "community" and our message intensely unpopular in some circles.

³² The history of mankind always included prophets reminding people and bringing them back to their Lord. Who will play this role today? It is like a school that for hundreds of years had teachers. Suddenly, the Department of Education says: we will no longer have any teachers. From now on, there are no more "teachers" in our society. This means something different has to happen (such as mentoring, peer teaching? Online teaching? Or something similar). Likewise "no more prophets" presents a radical change in the direction of human history. Some writers have contemplated on the wisdom of why now? Why 1400 years ago did Allah decide no more prophets? Maybe the world is not ready for a global

message? It may have been in anticipation of the world's new status as a "Global Village".

Chapter 3: The Muslim Ummah

The fact that there are no more prophets coming to humanity gives the Muslim Ummah a radically unique role as compared to previous nations.

From the beginning of Islam, Prophet Muhammad sent messengers to other nations. The Companions understood this to be an important part of their new faith, long after the death of the Prophet. They took Islam to the world. In the Hadith, the prophet told his companions: “Allah has sent me to all mankind, so deliver my message to others and do not dispute amongst yourselves.” The Companions said, “We will take your message to others, Oh Prophet of God, so send us where you wish.”

The Quran tells us that Prophet Muhammad (P) was sent as a “Mercy to Mankind”. But this verse cannot be realized without this unique role of the Ummah, for sincere followers must take his message to others.

The Prophet told his companions, as he tells us today, “You are my messengers to the world.” The Companions then adopted the same attitude and the same message - that of: “Oh my people” ... ³³

A simple Companion was asked by a king far away in Persia, “Why are you here in my land? Who sent you? What do you want?” In his own simple but eloquent articulation, he said, “Allah has sent us to

³³ Muslims today in America need to adopt this paradigm

take people from the worship of other people, to the worship of the Lord of all peoples; from the oppressions of man-made ways, to the Justice of their Lord; and from the constriction of this world to the expanse of this world and the Hereafter.”³⁴

Where is home?

Scholars, reformers, and du‘at after Prophet Muhammad (P) played the role of prophets to their people: they took Islam to Syria, Egypt, Morocco, India, Asia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Spain, and much later, to America (as we shall see in the next chapter).³⁵

Islam is a dynamic religion that must be taken to others. It is a medicine meant to be taken for healing; a house meant to shelter from cold; a guidance meant for wisdom; a gift meant to be shared with others. The Quran instructs the Prophet to say: Say (Oh Muhammad), “This is my Way, I call to my Lord, with wisdom, with all those who follow me.”³⁶

These Muslims who traveled the world took Islam with them. It was natural to adopt these new lands as their new homes. They married and lived peacefully in these lands.

إن الله ابتعثنا لنخرج العباد من عبادة العباد إلى عبادة رب العباد و من جور الأديان إلى عدل الاسلام و من ضيق الدنيا إلى سعت الدنيا و الأخرة

³⁵ Yes, all these countries at some point in time had no idea what Islam was all about.

³⁶ قل هذه سبيلي أدعو إلى الله على بصيرة أنا و من اتبعني

These Muslims came not only as scholars and du‘at, but as merchants and traders (and later students and professionals).

Today, if you ask a pious Muslim, “Where would you want to die?” a common answer will likely be, “Next to the grave of the Prophet in Medina,” or maybe, “In Mecca next to the House of Allah”. Yet, Muslims that were raised by the Prophet (P) – his companions that were taught by his blessed hands – competed to die the furthest away from Mecca and Medina because they wanted to take Islam to the entire world.

This happened to the extent that Umar, the second caliph, found that all the Companions left Medina and went to faraway lands. So Umar initiated a “presidential decree” that no more companions were allowed to migrate to other lands so that he could keep a few with him to make shura and consultation in the affairs of the state, since they had met the Prophet and could remind him of the prophetic tradition.³⁷ For the Companions, taking Islam to other nations was more important than being engaged in running the affairs of the Islamic state. They preferred to live and die in non-Muslim lands, taking Islam to the people of those lands, than to live in the blessings of the Islamic state.

³⁷ For various reasons some Muslims are still uncomfortable living in America, as if it were more “Islamic” to live in Muslim majority countries. The bottom line is that if you fear losing your religion, then you have the right to go somewhere else. But the truth is that we have a duty to live in America and to benefit Americans as “our people”. This is a priority for American Muslims today. Also as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, America today is one of the better places in the world to live, even from an Islamic perspective.

Home for these Companions who were raised at the hands of the Prophet was not where Islam was, but where Islam was *not*.

Wherever there is no Islam, this is where we should go, and this is where home should be. They felt that it was their duty to reform society and make things better and they dedicated their lives to this cause.³⁸

Forgetfulness

As human mortals, Muslims across the ages did not in the past, as they do not today, always live up to the ideals of Islam. They have made many mistakes and continue to make many mistakes. Such mistakes include:

- Rulers oppressing their people;³⁹

³⁸ There is an argument that goes like this: We must focus first on the Muslim community before we go out to the non-Muslims. If the Muslim community is not good, then how can we attract others to Islam? This is an argument that is at least partially correct; we must indeed work on the Muslim community. But remember, Allah is an “equal opportunity employer”. There is also an obligation to deliver the message to the larger society. This is especially true for Muslims in America, where 98% of the society – our people – know very little about the True Islam. We need to take the message to them as well. Having a role model community is crucial to truly delivering the message of God. But we cannot ignore 98% of society before we do that. Groups of individuals from this 98% are more likely to create this model society when they accept Islam and adopt it in a sincere manner. Such new converts have a very good chance of being this role model community. Islam does not discriminate based on how long you have been a Muslim or who your parents are. All the Companions were converts. In fact, the Prophet himself was the first convert! Converts, if correctly empowered, are more able to create this model community, which Muslims in America are trying to do.

³⁹ Look at the majority of the Muslim world today.

- Living for the luxuries of this life and forgetting about their mission;⁴⁰
- Battles being fought for lands or for profiteering, rather than for defending the truth and removing oppression;
- Killing of the righteous amongst the Ummah;
- Watering down the religion and compromising on its teachings;
- Oppressing the weak in society;
- Stagnation in religion and rejecting the normal process of renewal (tajdeed) that is mandatory in order for Islam to stay alive and dynamic; and
- Allowing racism, tribalism, or nationalism to divide the ummah.

This is the story of humanity though. From the time of Prophet Adam through the time of all the prophets afterwards, human beings have been forgetful and have tended to stray further away from the message of the prophets. This is also the story of the Muslim Ummah.⁴¹ The only challenge is that there are no more prophets coming to remind and reawaken people to go back to their Lord.

⁴⁰ We are drinking from the same Kool-Aid. We are falling into the same rat race that many others are caught in: work, work, work, without thinking about the bigger questions: What is my goal in life? Why am I here? What is expected of me?

⁴¹ Allah says in the Quran that the human being is “created weak” (khuliqa al-insanu da’ifan) .. He also says that the human being is forgetful (this is why He called him “insan,” which some have held is derived from the verb *nasiya*, “to forget”).

Revival & Reawakening⁴²

Within this laxity, forgetfulness, and straying away from the path, Allah has also determined that his Last Message to the world must be preserved, and must stay vibrant and relevant. Otherwise, on the Day of Judgment, how would He hold someone who lived in the year 2013, 3013, or 6013 accountable? The message must be preserved and conveyed.

Allah preserved the message through two important mechanisms: (1) by preserving the text (“We have revealed the Remembrance (i.e., the Quran) and We will protect it”⁴³ and (2) by sending reformers and messengers (small “m”) who keep the religion alive, who live and embody Islam as a way of life, who reawaken the people, reform the common understanding and practice of religion, and renew religion by addressing in a dynamic way the new needs of their people. These individuals and groups of reformers are needed since people do not simply follow a book. Rather, people follow role models and examples. This is why Allah rejected the premise of the Meccans who said: Why not send the Quran with Angels, instead of with a human prophet?⁴⁴

⁴² Some writings on Islamic revival :

<http://www.alrisala.org/Articles/thought/revival.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_revival

<http://www.tariqramadan.com/Rethinking-Islamic-Reform.html> (need better resources)

⁴³ إنا نحن نزلنا الذكر وإنا له لحافظون

⁴⁴ أبعث الله بشراً رسولا؟

These reformers played a crucial role in an era where no more prophets were to be sent from the Heavens. They took the believers back to the correct understanding and practice of their faith. At the same time, they provided new dynamic interpretations that made religion relevant and applicable to their context, their time and their people.

In fact, this process of renewal (*tajdeed*) was institutionalized in Islam, according to the Hadith of the prophet (P) where he said: Every century, Allah sends those who renew the faith for the Ummah.⁴⁵ From very early on in Islam, this term “mujaddid” was used by scholars after the Prophet to describe reformers who came with new understandings, new practice, and new ways to address the challenges of society, in order to preserve the religion by renewing it, to make it more relevant to addressing the existing challenges facing society at their time. They re-articulated the core values of Islam in ways that could be understood as relevant by the people. They preserved the core, while stimulating progress (*tajdid*). They were able to remind and re-articulate the core that should not change,

⁴⁵ This is an important authentic Hadith. There are other prophetic sayings and traditions that hint at this issue of preserving the religion through the reformers in the ummah. There is a Hadith that mentions that “the scholars of the ummah are like the prophets (small “p”) of Banu Isra’iil”. Also there is a Hadith that mentions that “the dreams, or visions, (ru’a) of the pious people are one form of revelation”. There is also a Hadith that this ummah will not concur on a wrong (la tajtami’ ummati ‘ala dalala). There is the Hadith that “there will always be a group of people on this earth who will take Islam seriously and will advocate for it and protect it and that this group will receive help and assistance of Allah”. All of these are divine mechanisms to substitute for the fact that there are no more prophets and to ensure that humanity continues to receive the message, not only in theory (the Book), but also in action (people).

while changing the means that are open to change. They showed flexibility where flexibility is due, while protecting the core of Islam that is universal and eternal.

The people understood Islam well, but they also understood well the needs of their people. They came to renew the religion by their new articulation and their understanding that was relevant to their time.

They awakened the believers and took the message of Islam seriously.

Many reformers have come over the centuries. They were scholars who engaged in ijihad and tajdeed. They stood against stagnation of the faith. They stood for revival. They stood against oppression. They stood against calls to compromise on the religion. They stood against the whispers of evil in the human soul. They stood against the inner temptations that can destroy the human being and destroy the leaders of the Ummah. They stood against their own human ego and their own human weaknesses. They worked sincerely to take Islam to others. They lived their life as a pact with Allah. They lived holding the banner of the Prophet Muhammad. They lived holding the flag of Prophets Jesus, Moses, and Abraham. They lived holding, and passing on, the flag of all the prophets before them. They found themselves holding the flag from a long chain of reformers, scholars, pious people, and prophets that extends, in turn, all the way to Prophet Adam (P).

Although only God knows who is amongst these inspired reformers who, according to the Hadith, exist in every century, scholars of the past have attempted to enumerate individuals who may be amongst these reformers (mujadideen). Amongst the names often mentioned are: Umar Ibn Abdul ‘Aziz, Imam al-Shafi‘i, Imam Abu Hanifa, al-Hasan al-Basri, Imam Malik, Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyya, al-Suyuti and, more recently, Hassan al-Banna, to mention just a few.

There will surely be others after them. In fact some of them are likely living amongst us today, as every century requires this type of tajdeed and renewal if Islam is to continue to stay relevant to humanity.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Since some within the Ummah believe that Hassan al-Banna, who was born in 1906, is honored to be amongst this group, there is no doubt that the Ummah today is awaiting more of these reformers to embody the true message of reform. (There is some wisdom in not pointing to a specific mujaddid while he is still alive, but to wait until after his passing. The reason is that it takes years to analyze the impact of this tajdid, and we never know how people may change before their death). Also, as scholars noted, this “mujaddid” may not be an individual, but a group of people.

Chapter 4: The Story of America

America is a baby among nations as it is one of the youngest nations in the world. It is also a super power. Like other nations, including Muslim-majority countries, America is not without its weaknesses and mistakes. These mistakes exist, and must exist, because we are talking about a human experience – which by definition will have mistakes.

But America also has something special, as we will see. This is why America has been, and continues to be, the preferred land for immigrants, including Muslims. In fact, if you want to know about America, don't ask an indigenous person who has lived here all her life, but ask an immigrant who has seen other places and therefore can make a comparison with other places.

America has upheld justice more than most countries around the world, including Muslim-majority countries. America has opened its doors to the minorities and oppressed of other nations. America has leveled the playing field so that more people can seek life's opportunities and contribute to society. America has allowed people of all faiths, including Muslims, to congregate, advocate for their way of life, take their message to others – more than any other country around the world, including Muslim-majority countries. America cherishes diversity, much like Islam, and inherently tries to do what it considers right. America has built-in systems and

governance structures that highlight the best of the human experience and are fundamentally in alignment with Islamic values.

America is not perfect and can be much improved. This is the opportunity and role of the reformers and the prophets who live for, and who love, their people.

America is more democratic than most other countries – closer to the concept of Islamic shura than any other country – including Muslim-majority countries today.

In many ways, America today is more Muslim (at least in attitude if not in ‘aqida) than many Muslim-majority countries. America has more justice, equality, freedom of worship, freedom to advocate for your cause, ability to grow and nurture your young as you please, ability to worship Allah, etc., than many other countries.

A Most Fertile Place

Today, America is the most fertile place for da‘wa⁴⁷ in the world. In fact if you read the Quran and make a list of all the nations that have in the past received a message from God, you will find that America is much more welcoming to the divine message than many others. Survey in your mind groups and nations such as: the people of هود;

⁴⁷ Da‘wa means invitation. It is described in the Quran in many verses. It is the process of educating people about Islam. The goal of da‘wa is not to convert, but to educate and teach. Guidance is in the hands of God. Muslims are not required, nor are they responsible for “converting” people. Success is not in “how many convert”, but rather in whether we have done our obligation to live and to deliver the right message faithfully to all people.

the people of عاد; the people of صالح, the people of Moses, the people of Jesus, and others featured in the Quran. Which place would a prophet find more opportunity to advocate for his message of justice and reform? Where would prophets Moses, Jesus or Muhammad have been more able to advocate for their divine message? Where would they have been more welcome: in their respective nations or in America today?

In particular, if you compare America today with other places around the globe, this difference is clear. It is not fair to compare the worst of America to the best of world history or the best of Islamic history. But let us honestly (from an Islamic perspective) compare America today with any other country around the world today. I think the answer is clear: America is the most welcoming place for Islam, and the most fertile place for da'wa in the world.

Mecca of today

America is at least as good as Mecca was before prophethood. There is a section in the beginning of many Seerah books which poses the question: Why did Allah choose Mecca to receive the final message from the Divine? Why not some other place around the world? Scholars conclude that Mecca was a most fertile place to receive the message of Islam. Although Meccans worshiped idols and had many vices, nonetheless, they were also most generous. They exhibited a lot of courage. Also, once they had committed to something, they gave it all they could. All of these qualities, and others, were

important qualities that made Mecca a most suitable place to receive the final message of the Divine. In similar ways, America today is one of the most welcoming places around the world. The people are willing to listen, to learn, and to change. When they find the truth, they adopt it. They are courageous and caring. They try to do what is right. They are by nature welcoming to others and not closed. It is crucial for the reformer to understand not only what is wrong, but also what is good and right, about his people, in order to strengthen the good and to increase it.

Mecca also had an important attribute which made it uniquely suited to being a home to this message: it had a good reputation and high standing amongst other nations, at least regionally. It was respected because of its reputation as a regional trade hub. This is similar to America today.

Religious Tolerance and Freedom

America was founded merely 200 years ago. It was founded on the basis of religious freedoms. It adopted the concept of “in God we trust”. Amongst its founders and early immigrants were people who were seeking religious freedom, and the ability to honor and practice their religion. It is founded on the basis that religion is so sacred that its founders wanted to minimize the negative influence that the state could eventually have on religion. This was based on their experience in Europe where the state often persecuted religious minorities. In fact, the motivation of the “separation of church and

state” in America is different from that in Europe. In Europe, secularism was a reaction against the tyranny and backwardness of religion. Europe’s secularism was motivated by what it perceived as the Church interfering with scientific progress and limiting human progress and experience. The founding fathers of America, however, wanted to protect religion from the tyranny of the state so that the state would not interfere negatively, as it often did, in promoting a specific doctrine, manipulating a religious doctrine, or playing favorites amongst the religions. This is a noble endeavor and certainly the best that humans could achieve without divine guidance. One of the core reasons for the separation of church and state was to protect the church (or religion in general) from corruption (or favoritism) by the state. ⁴⁸

Reforming America

None of this means that America today is perfect. There is still corruption and oppression. There is still discrimination. There are many economic inequalities. There is too much indecency and sexual misconduct⁴⁹. There is a break-down of the family as a cohesive unit of society. There is too much violence. There is rampant materialism and a selfish desire to succeed, sometimes at the expense of others. There are too many disparities between the

⁴⁸ Do Muslims want to impose Sharia in America? The answer is no. For a more detailed analysis of Sharia, and Sharia in America in particular, please refer to http://getrealanswers.org/?page_id=208

⁴⁹ As an example, see this program in selling youth sexuality on NPR <http://www.onpointradio.org/2010/10/selling-youth-sexuality>

rich and poor. Some may even say that today's America has colonial ambitions that it did not have in the past. There are many challenges that are calling out for you and me to make a difference, and areas that need true reform. There are many challenges in America. This is our role and our opportunity: to make America the beautiful even more beautiful by aligning it with a divine message, and to solve the problems in society.

When we compare America to other nations, past and present, there is a case to be made to that America today is like Mecca of yesterday. It is a chosen place for the seed of Islam to grow and prosper – for the benefit of America, and for the benefit of the entire world. The combination of the best that the human mind has to offer, with the final divine revelation, can be a powerful model for all of humanity that has not existed before. This is the challenge and the opportunity that America presents.

Summary up to this point

The chapters thus far represent a logical chain, which leads up to our role as American Muslims. We have established that God created this world for a purpose. Every human being has a purpose on this earth. Human beings often forgot about this purpose. God sent thousands of prophets across the ages with two key messages: guiding people back to their Lord, and reforming the problems in society. Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet, and this gave his

Ummah a very unique role amongst other nations: they must play the role of messengers (small “m”) to all of humanity. The Muslims after the prophet (P) took Islam to the world. Their home was where Islam was not!

Although Muslims built strong civilizations, the Muslim Ummah did not always live up to God’s expected ideals⁵⁰. However, Allah preserved his message to humanity by bringing forth groups of pious scholars, reformers, activists and others, to remind people, to remind the world, and to keep the message of God alive. In fact the prophet tells us that this process of reform is needed, and happens every century.

Today, America represents an ideal place for the seed of Islam. It is a leader amongst nations. It has inherent goodness and many qualities that are well aligned with Islamic values. This is the opportunity of the American Muslim community to take Islam to America. This is the role of Islam in America.

⁵⁰ “You are (or ought to be) the Best of Nations – because you advocate for that which is good and against that which is evil.”

Chapter 5: The American Muslim community

Chapter Four's reading of the American context leads us right into the next chapter of the book, which deals with the American Muslim community. American Muslims are a new people in a new country – a new religion in a new land. We are the new kids on the block.

Much like America is the baby of the world, American Muslims are the baby of America – in the sense that we are the latest addition to this beautiful land.

American Muslims face many opportunities and challenges.

Diversity⁵¹

American Muslims are very diverse. One third of our community is African American. Two thirds are immigrants and their children, who migrated from dozens of countries from around the globe.

There is also a growing convert population of Latinos, white Americans, and others. In this diversity lay many challenges and opportunities.

America, one of the most diverse and tolerant countries in the world, hosts a Muslim population that reflects this great diversity in America. There is tremendous strength in diversity, as both America and Islam teach us. Diversity brings new ideas, new talents and new strengths to the table. The early Muslims were more diverse than any

⁵¹ See Pew research on American Muslims :
<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/483/muslim-americans>

other group around them⁵². Islam encourages diversity and teaches that good deeds and piety are the measure, not race and color. However, unless managed, diversity can become a weakness rather than a strength. How do we bring together so many backgrounds, attitudes, ethnicities, and cultures? It is not only a question of melting in America, but also of melting in “Islam in America”. In other places around the world, all these Muslims would come together only in Hajj. How can we build a community that cherishes this diversity as a strength, rather than shaping a community based on the same divisions that exist in various Muslim societies around the world?

Potential

American Muslims are also some of the most educated in the world. This is an important strength. Find me another community of 6 million Muslims anywhere in the world that has the potential that American Muslims have today to effect change? Nowhere. America

⁵² Diversity: Among the closest companions of the Prophet was a black African (Bilal), a Persian (Salman) and a Roman (Suhaib). Then the Prophet migrated to Madina, where there were the immigrants (muhajireen) and the ansar (the indigenous inhabitants of Madina). The Prophet immediately worked to bring their hearts together by partnering the immigrants with the ansar. This partnership was a strong social and brotherhood bond (they shared their lives essentially). The Prophet also worked hard to ease the tension between the two major tribes of Madina. He told them that “there is no preference of an Arab over a non-Arab”. When tribalism (or nationalism) was used as a wedge to divide people, the Prophet said, “Let it go, it is rotten”. Islam appreciates and fosters this diversity among people. Hajj is (or is supposed to be) a major global meeting for the fostering of this diversity. This diversity includes non-Muslims as well, as the constitution of Madina shows, assigning responsibility and rights to all groups, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

attracts strong people who are successful and empowered. Unlike Europe, America is far away from the Muslim world, and therefore the ones who do make the migration are often stronger and more capable. This is a formula for tremendous success.

A Young Community: institutions

As new kids on the (American) block, we are also a young community. 65% of American Muslims were born abroad⁵³.

Although the African American Muslims have known America for a long time, as a community, we are generally less experienced in the ways and means of America⁵⁴. This poses a tremendous challenge, especially as the demands on our young community grew many folds after 9/11.

Our institutions are not as sophisticated or mature as institutions in other communities. Our boards are less experienced. Our organizational structures are still primitive. We don't have the same background in nonprofit management and community leadership. Our institutions are mostly led by doctors and engineers, not by strategists and executives. Our institutions are not professionally managed.

⁵³ Pew research <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/483/muslim-americans>

⁵⁴ African Americans and Immigrants: The coming together of the immigrant and African American communities is one of the important strategic elements that would strengthen American Muslims.

Unity

We do not have a working formula for coming together as a community. Our mosques and institutions are growing in an ad-hoc fashion, sprouting around the nation. The national organizations are struggling on how to manage the tremendous growth and demand around an entire continent. The vision of unity is a primitive vision of everyone moving in the same direction. More maturity is needed to come up with a formula that identifies a core that 90% of American Muslims can agree on, and areas of difference that should be tolerated. Muslim organizations have not identified common priorities and joined around them. We need to learn to work better in specialization, with an increased level of coordination.

American Muslim Identity ⁵⁵

Furthermore, our community has not had enough time to mature into an American Muslim community, with our own unique identity. Other religious communities – Catholics, Jews⁵⁶ and others – have had ample time to settle in within their American identities. Muslims

⁵⁵ *Islam and the Cultural Imperative* is a great reading about the cultural influence on Islamic practices. The article advocates for allowing a natural and healthy influence by the American Culture in order for Islam to naturally become an integral part of America. <http://www.nawawi.org/downloads/article3.pdf>

⁵⁶ *American Judaism* is a great reading for the growth and maturity of the American Jewish community. In fact there are many parallels between Muslims and Jews in America. Jews came from dozens of countries from around the world, and faced similar challenges of diversity, community building, a distinguished Jewish American identity, building institutions, anti-semitism (similar to Islamophobia), and others. The books is <http://www.amazon.com/American-Judaism-Jonathan-D-Sarna/dp/030010197X>

have not had this chance yet. What does America mean to us as Muslims? What does America mean vis-à-vis Islam and vis-à-vis other nationalities that we hold? What does it mean for America to truly be “home”? Do we have an American mosque, or an Egyptian (or cultural) mosque, or an Islamic mosque? Cultures around the world have influenced Islamic religious practice and paradigms – sometimes in acceptable ways.

Islam accommodates cultural practices. Islam allows culture to contribute to the shaping of the religious paradigm. Allah instructs the Prophet in the Quran saying, “*wa’ mur bil- ‘urf*”⁵⁷, or “command that which is culturally acceptable” - as long as the culture does not contradict the core of Islam. This is part of the dynamic nature of Islam which allows it to flourish in radically different times, places and cultures. This is part of the core that does not change in Islam, and the non-core that can change with time, place and context. Due to different cultures, there are differences between how Islam manifests itself in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Malaysia, and China. How about America? Should Islam in America simply be the blend of all world cultures, or should it have its own unique American identity? This is a key question that will determine the future of Islam in America. If Islam in America simply becomes the lowest common denominator of all the Muslim cultures around the world, then America will suffer and Islam will become irrelevant, even for its own 2nd generation, who will not relate to this new Islam that is

⁵⁷ Al-Araf, 199

neither their parents' nor is it firmly attached to their American context⁵⁸. If Islam is to become a truly American religion, an integral part of this country, then Muslims need to find the core in Islam that does not change, and color all the rest with the positives and uniqueness of the American cultures⁵⁹. This in fact is what happened in all other countries around the world where Islam has taken root. Throughout the world, the unchanging core of Islam had its imprint on all cultures that it touched, but it also celebrated and accepted a diversity of cultural practices that are very different from one country (or time) to another. The same needs to happen in America.

⁵⁸ The ideal mosque in America is one where the American culture is accommodated – within the Islamic paradigm – more than any other culture. Many mosques end up accommodating the culture of one or a couple of cultures (for instance, Arab or indopak). This translates into the nature of the celebrations, the language spoken, and the cultural practices accepted (for instance as they relate to women, food, and so on). Progressive mosques insist on “diversity” where “all” cultures are celebrated. But the best model moving forward is one where the American culture is given priority in the mosques in America. The reason is simple: if we want Islam to become part of the American society, we have to prioritize the American culture over any other culture. Of course this has to be done within the Islamic guidelines – which will require fiqh (wisdom), and sincerity to be applied correctly. This is not necessarily an easy process but one which is necessary for Islam to grow in America.

⁵⁹ One example may be the following: the role of women. In most Muslim-majority countries, the role of women is limited. Yet there is still a difference between, say, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This cultural difference manifests itself in the practice of religion. We should allow American culture to impact religious practices in normal and healthy ways which Islam has approved of. This is part of the dynamic nature of Islam which allows it to adapt where adaptation is admissible. There are good examples of how the role of women in Mecca was different than in Medina during the time of the Prophet, and the Prophet accommodated this change – to the point where the Meccans felt a little uncomfortable. The same can be said about music in Medina. See <http://www.nawawi.org/downloads/article3.pdf> for more examples.

Other challenges

We face many other challenges because of our young years in America. Communities are no longer able to import imams from overseas as they used to in the 1990s. Yet, we do not have the institutions to foster American imams who understand Islam well and who understand the American context in which they are operating. Developing indigenous American scholars is a necessary requirement which, if not addressed soon, will come to haunt our community in the next decade.

We are years behind other communities in our political, civic, legal, and media institutions.

Muslim institutions still depend on regular fundraising from their congregants, rather than on endowments or investment generated income.

We often compare ourselves to other minority communities in America. This result is that we are doing much worse. But the comparison is limited in at least one respect. It is like comparing the performance of a 2nd-grader to a 12th-grader. Muslims are still in 2nd grade in America. We are growing fast. We are behind not because we are weaker, but rather, because we need more time to feel at home in America and solve these issues. This is a phenomenon that

America clearly understands, especially since America is built on immigrants.

A decade ago, Muslim “scholars” in America were still advocating against voting and political participation, since we are not in a “Muslim country”. I remember when scholars were saying that Muslims had to “go back home” and live in a Muslim country. Today we have matured beyond these beginnings. Yet we still have a long way to go to shape a truly American Muslim reality that can feel at home in America and seek all the opportunities that America presents.

This context is important for Muslims in America. These are issues that we are all struggling with – all while having to deal with the day-to-day needs of our community, from defending our civil rights, to dealing with Islamophobia, to Islamic schools, mosques and institutions. Any leading Muslim organization in America is leading within a 2nd-grade paradigm – maybe 3rd-grade – but we cannot force the community into a 12th-grade competition overnight. The question for us is: How can we make our community mature as fast as possible to positively handle these challenges?

The Opportunity

Yet amongst all the challenges, there are tremendous opportunities. More than any other place around the world, America today is seeking to understand Islam and Muslims. Because of all the negative publicity, America is asking: What is Islam all about?

Unlike other Western countries, America does not know all that much about Islam. Muslims have been in Europe much longer than in America. Also, Europe dealt with Islam for centuries, even before the time of the Crusades, and has largely made up its mind about Islam. Yet America's interaction with Islam is more recent, and today, America is genuinely asking: What Islam is about?

Notwithstanding Islamophobia and the negative campaign against Islam, Americans are still trying to learn about Islam and Muslims. Because of the broad tolerance of American society, many individuals and groups are standing on the side of the Muslims⁶⁰. Islam is still the fastest growing religion in America, notwithstanding two wars in the Muslim world, terrorist attacks, and the negative media campaigns.

American Muslims represent the crème of the Muslim Ummah. They are educated and talented, and are empowered with the virtues of Islam and the freedoms and strength of America.

There is a small group of fanatics who desire to portray Islam as evil in America for political reasons. There is a large minority on the fence that is willing to accept the Islamophobic rhetoric, but have not fully accepted it yet. There is another minority that is falling back on the hard ingrained values of tolerance and "accepting the other" in

⁶⁰ Review how Americans have reacted to the Ground Zero mosque controversy, and also to the Quran burning event. Also, review Pew research on the attitude of America towards Islam : <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1706/poll-americans-views-of-muslims-object-to-new-york-Islamic-center-Islam-violence>

America, and is giving Muslims the same benefits afforded to other immigrant communities in America. There is yet another group that is on the sidelines and has not yet gone to either camp.

This is precisely why the next few years will lay the foundation for Islam in America. These years will influence many decades to come. We have a chance today to answer a genuine question that America is asking: Where will Islam fit in American society?

Who are you?

We are Americans. We are Muslims. We love America dearly and believe in the inherent goodness of the American people. We love Islam dearly and perceive it to be a way of life and a divinely revealed guidance to all of humanity. We believe that America is more Muslim today than many other countries around the world. We love America so much that we desire for it what we desire for ourselves and our children. We will educate our fellow citizens about Islam as the final divinely inspired religion, and a continuation of the message of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. We will do so with no violence and within the law, and within the guidance of our faith. We will advocate for what is right and good for our country, even if this sometimes goes against popular opinion.⁶¹

At some point in time, likely sooner rather than later, the question of what Islam means to America will be answered more firmly by

⁶¹ See the article "Why I Love my Country":
<http://Islampath.org/2010/06/08/why-i-love-my-country/>

America, and it will be difficult for future generations to reverse the answer. The question revolves around the degree to which Islam will become part of American society. Our dream is for the revival and natural growth of Islam to flourish within the borders of our great nation.

Chapter 6: American Muslim communities & organizations

The African American experience ⁶²

Islam in America goes back centuries to the coming of African slaves to our shores. In the 1930s, the Nation of Islam adopted some Islamic ideals and had an influence on the growth of American Islam⁶³. In the 1970s, Warith Deen Mohammed brought many of the adherents of the Nation of Islam back to mainstream Islam. The African American Muslims made important contributions to the civil rights movement and to the progress of the African American community in America. Today WD Mohammed, MANA, and Imam Jamil Al Ameen communities are a few of the successful organizations leading in Islamic work, mostly in the African American Muslim communities.

The immigrant experience

In the 1960s, new immigration laws in America, coupled with political and economic conditions in the Muslim world, made it easier for Muslims to immigrate to the U.S. from all over the world. Some of these early immigrants were individuals who carried a deep

⁶² Recommend book by Sherman Jackson: *Islam and the Black American*
<http://www.amazon.com/Islam-Blackamerican-Looking-toward-Resurrection/dp/019518081X>

⁶³ Nation of Islam: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_of_Islam

commitment to Islam. Some had relations with various Islamic movements in their own countries. These individuals held Islam in their hearts and minds, and took Islam with them wherever they went. When they came to America they started many of the local and national organizations that continue to strive and lead today. They founded, for example, the MSA, ICNA, NAIT, ISNA, then later MPAC, CAIR, MAS and many others. They also established many local institutions and mosques. They saw themselves as bearers of the message of Islam, extending from the time of Adam, through Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad – peace be upon them all. They understood life as a mission and tried to establish roots for Islam in this beautiful land. They were also still growing in their understanding of America.

Many of these individuals also labored to plant more seeds for Islam in America. Once they were outside the confines of a Muslim-majority country, they realized that their children would lose important values unless they themselves understood and established Islam in America.

Many of these organizations continue to exist today. Dozens more have been created to serve America and to serve the Muslim community in America.

Mainstream Muslim organizations

These mainstream Muslim organizations have a lot in common. Together, they constitute a strong unity within the Ummah of Islam

in America. Among these organizations are: Zaytouna College, MANA, Al-Maghreb Institute, MPAC, WD Mohammed, ISNA, ICNA, MSA, CAIR, MAS and hundreds of local centers⁶⁴. This is not a comprehensive list. These organizations today represent the mainstream Muslim organizations in America. They represent the Islamic movement in America⁶⁵. Here is what brings them together and the values that they share:

Core values shared by mainstream Muslim organizations in America:⁶⁶

1. Belief in Islam as the final revelation from the Creator of the heavens and the earth;
2. Belief in Islam as a comprehensive way of life that regulates many aspects of the life of the individual (spiritual, social, economic, etc.);
3. Belief in sharing Islam with their fellow citizens, by educating our fellow citizens about Islam;

⁶⁴These organizations are some of the key mainstream Muslim orgs in America. Acronyms stand for : Muslim Alliance of North America, Muslim Public Affairs Council, Warith Deen Mohammed, Islamic Society of North America, Islamic Circle of North America, Muslim Students Association, Council on American Islamic Relations, Muslim American Society.

⁶⁵ The term “movement” can conjure positive or negative feelings, depending on the audience. In American history, the word movement has a positive connotation: the civil rights movement, the labor movement, the Reform (Jewish) movement, etc

⁶⁶ These values are proposed by the author. They are also values that the author believes are already adopted by these organizations today, although not explicitly.

4. Belief in the positive role that Muslims should play in contributing to America (in politics, media, economics, as ambassadors around the world, on a spiritual level, etc.);
5. Belief in the necessity of positive integration of Muslims in America;
6. Belief in the validity and soundness of the American ideals of pluralism, tolerance, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and the American constitution;
7. Belief in America as our beloved home and country;
8. Belief in the inherent goodness and purity of the human being;
9. Belief in the divine mandate to unite as Muslims; and
10. Belief in the divine mandate to join hands with all fellow citizens, and to work with all races and creeds, to establish goodness and justice.

Although these Muslim organizations have a lot in common, they also have differences in their focus and/or their approach. Some organizations focus on the Muslim community, others on American society. Some focus on religious scholarship, others on civil rights. Some are more conservative, others are more liberal. But they all fall within a virtual umbrella that places them on the same boat of mainstream Muslim organizations. They have the same enemies (ignorance, Godlessness, and bigotry). They serve the same communities (Muslims and the larger society). They believe in the same high-level principles about Islam and about America. They share the same core beliefs.

Cooperation between these organizations is taking place at some levels. For instance, leaders within these organizations frequently hold consultations together. They speak together in conferences. They co-sponsor national initiatives. They come together on an as-needed basis.

Roadblocks

Yet there are still roadblocks to a more cohesive American Muslim community. This is due to a number of reasons. The following are some roadblocks on the road to greater cooperation:

- A conceptual framework of unity has not been developed among Muslims in America;
- Growing challenges force each organization to focus on its own work, without the ability to look at the big picture of Islam in America;
- Cultural differences (indigenous, multiple ethnic communities, etc.);
- Racial and economic differences (e.g., immigrants and African American communities);
- Islamophobic attacks sometimes force each into their own corners (but sometimes can have the other effect as well, i.e., of bringing everyone together);
- Government scrutiny and pressures (everyone is asking: Who will be targeted next?);
- Personal differences and leadership styles;

- Different priorities and segments that each serves;
- Perception of different “ideologies” (in fact, the so-called “ideologies” espoused by mainstream Muslim organizations are all very close, if compared with any other faith community in America);
- Political and economic pressures that cause each organization to work alone.

Furthermore, Shi‘a and Sunni Muslims have more room for cooperation in America because the political atmosphere is more conducive for coming together. In fact, many will argue that the Shi‘a-Sunni divide is mostly political and not religious. Therefore, without these political divisions (such as the ones in Iran and Iraq), Shi‘as and Sunnis have more room to cooperate and come together in America than in other places around the world.

More cooperation and unity among the mainstream Muslim organizations is important if Muslims are to rise to the challenges facing us today. Allah mandates unity among the believers in the Quran in order for His Help to come down to us. America celebrates and rewards those who unite and come together for a joint cause. The common challenges we all face today include:

1. Accurately portraying Islam and educating America about our faith;

2. Positively integrating American Muslims – especially 2nd- and 3rd-generation Muslims – into the larger American society, without isolation or assimilation;
3. Building stronger Muslim institutions;
4. Building a strong political presence for Muslims in America;
5. Contributing to positive reform in our country, guided by our Islamic ideals;
6. Encouraging more presence of Muslims in the areas of politics, media, law, and interfaith initiatives;
7. Establishing Islamic religious and academic institutions that cater to our American context;⁶⁷
8. Protecting our community (and our country) from the calls of violent extremism; and
9. Protecting our community from Islamophobia or from the marginalization of the Muslim community.

Some ideals that will help us unite include:

1. Tolerance for varying priorities;
2. Tolerance for varying approaches;
3. Assuming the best of intentions and giving excuses to each other;
4. Recognizing that a difference of opinion in one area does not preclude cooperation in another area;

⁶⁷ See “Educating Muslim Religious Leaders in America”:
<http://hossamaljabri.com/2010/03/26/education-of-muslim-religious-leaders-in-america/>

5. Agreeing on the key common challenges that we face as a community, and empowering each other to serve in different areas;
6. Accepting normal healthy competition between organizations (Allah says: “Let the believers compete in what is good”);
7. Recognizing the fact that what needs to be accomplished is 50 times more than what we are all doing now;
8. Recognizing that the engagement level of the Muslim community as a whole can be tremendously improved – within all segments, including “practicing” and “non-practicing” Muslims; and
9. Recognizing that we are all on the same team, even if each is handling a different area, with a different approach;

Chapter 7: The Future

What can the future look like?

The future can be a much more beautiful America, a much more peaceful and tranquil America – because of Islam – similar to the nation envisioned by Prophet Moses, Jesus or Muhammad for their communities. In fact just like the vision that Muslims who migrated to distant lands shortly after the time of the Prophet had: namely, to take Islam to the new land. The goal is not “conversion”, but to educate our people – our *qawm* – about Islam, and to contribute to needed social reform by partnering with all those who desire good for our country.

The future can be a much better Muslim Ummah – because of American Muslims who provide a unique perspective. American Muslims are at the crossroads between East and West. We are part of the West, yet share the legacy of the East. Today, the West in general, and America in particular, has surpassed the Muslim Ummah in many areas that are obvious, especially to the Muslims living in the West. I am not talking about theory, but the practical situation in the world today. The gift that we can bring now is to develop a model that brings the best of both worlds together: the best of this dunya and the akhira, the best of the material and the spiritual. A stronger America because of Islam can re-awaken and strongly lead the entire world. A strong American Muslim community can give hope to the entire Muslim world.

The future can hold a role model Muslim community in America that can be an example for America and for Muslims around the world — a community that is empowered, strong, integrated, for the service of our people, for the service of the good, the moral, the decent, and the ethical, a community that is diverse, that reaches out.

The future can have an American Muslim president that cares first and foremost for all people.

The future can hold a better world – a safer world, a more just world – because of the synergy between the final message from God and the leading nation in the world.

The future can have Islamic schools that have a long waiting list of kids of all faiths; or even more, the future can hold the best Islamic schools in the world where all students can flourish.

The future can have Islamic centers that are true service providers of counseling and support for everyone in their community, not just the Muslim community.

The future can have an America that advocates for peace and justice and real democracy in the entire world – including the Muslim world – because of the perspective that American Muslims bring.

The future can include a vision for a new Cordoba — a pluralistic country where all can live in peace, and where faith and the divine presence is an integral part of society.

The future can include a coalition of religious people in America to bring society closer to God, and to advocate for all that is decent and good.

We have a huge opportunity to make history in a unique way. We need to seize the moment and understand its implications for all of humanity and not just for our generation.

This is a serious opportunity that has not presented itself before. We also have the ingredients that can make it work:

- A strong representative Muslim community – one of the best small communities in the world;
- A beautiful country which is good at its foundation, with a system that in many ways adopts elements of Islam more than many other Muslim-majority countries around the world;
- A strong superpower that is respected amongst nations;
- A world that is waiting for the material and the spiritual to be brought together. This is the World 3.0

The future can include American Muslims as the crucible for this future generation – and a community in which the new mujaddid (renewer) is born.

There are many challenges indeed, but the rewards and the opportunity in front of us are worth these challenges.

The most important success factor for the future

But there is one more thing that is the most important about the future. If this thing does not happen, then it does not matter if everything else above happens. In fact this is the most important thing without which we will have failed, even if we succeed in all the elements mentioned above.⁶⁸

That goal is to meet the prophet PBUH on the Day of Judgment ... to shake his hands ... to give him a hug. And hear him as he congratulates us for carrying his flag ... for staying on his path ... for keeping steadfast on the path of all the prophets – Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all the others; for holding on to this flag that he passed to his companions, and which has been handed down across many generations of activists, scholars, reformers and “prophets” unto ourselves.

This is the real success. This is the real victory: that we do our duty and achieve the pleasure of our Lord. Many prophets in the past have labored diligently, but have not achieved “material” success. The material rewards mentioned above may or may not happen. They may not happen in our life time. This is why we have to focus

⁶⁸ One of the biggest dangers in Islamic work is to work for material success. I have seen this happen and it is very dangerous. Material success is in the hands of Allah, not in the hands of the workers. We can work very hard and not achieve material success (i.e., of people accepting the message). Of course it could also mean that we are doing something wrong. But remember, we can also work in the wrong way and achieve great material success. So we have to ensure that we are working right. Material success is in the hands of God. When Muslim activists are mostly motivated by material success, this is a disaster since they will give up when they do not achieve it.

intently on our real goal: Jannah, and the pleasure of our encounter with Allah.⁶⁹

We are sure that the future is bright. We ask Allah to make our generation amongst the ones who contribute to this bright future for everyone.

⁶⁹ This attitude is important for us to adopt. It is interesting that Prophet Noah is placed on a higher pedestal than prophet Yunus, although Yunus had more material success and more followers. The key to our success is staying true to our Lord.

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to the Muslim American Society for fostering an environment where love of country and commitment to faith can flourish and support each other. I am also grateful to many thoughtful leaders such as Dr Jamal Badawi, Tariq Ramadan, Sherman Jackson, Zaid Shakir, Suhaib Webb, and Basyouny Nehela for providing inspiration in their writings and lectures.

Any proceeds from this book will go to the ISBCC, MAS-Boston or other nonprofit institutions.

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