

# **Confronting Islamophobia**

Thursday Reflections (Dec 18-15)

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Regrettably, this week, with the ongoing media updates on the San Bernardino massacre investigation, the continuous reckless and negative remarks on Islam and Muslims by Donald Trump and Ben Carson, the special focus on the issue of Terrorism and “Radical Islam” in the last Republican candidates’ debate in addition to the unending headlines on different global conflicts including in Syria and Iraq, Islam is becoming more than ever a major global problem and as a consequence all Muslims are becoming a potential threat to the safety and security of the globe especially in Western countries.

Islamophobia has been on the rise especially after 9/11 attacks but today it has gone deeper in Europe and North America. It can be detected in the election campaigns, political debates, entertainment and talk shows, workplaces, public places with graffiti, slurs and physical attacks on women with hijab and in some cases it has already infiltrated the school systems especially in some private institutions or unofficially in public schools through rhetoric, bullying and discrimination.

Islamophobia is defined as the hate of or prejudice against Islam or Muslims, especially as a political force or an organized movement. Given the recent current attacks and killings especially in North America and Europe, a rapidly growing sentiment of resentment and frustration

is manifesting itself in all walks of life to the point that even children are experiencing some form of Islamophobia in playgrounds, schools and soccer fields. Muslim (which also means committed to peace and peacemaking) is becoming a difficult identity to bear for youth who feel disenfranchised whether at school, work or general public life.

According to the center for race and gender at the University of California, Berkeley, the term "Islamophobia" was first introduced as a concept in a 1991 Runnymede Trust Report and defined as "unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims." The report pointed to prevailing attitudes that incorporate the following beliefs:

- Islam is monolithic and cannot adapt to new realities
- Islam does not share common values with other major faiths
- Islam as a religion is inferior to the West. It is archaic, barbaric, and irrational.
- Islam is a religion of violence and supports terrorism.
- Islam is a violent political ideology.

### **So how do we confront Islamophobia?**

To answer this question, we need to know first and foremost that (a) Islamophobia is as old as Islam is. Prophet Muhammad (S) and his followers experienced it through discrimination, harassment, defamation, bullying...etc., it went so far to getting many of his companions and followers tortured and killed. Wherever and whenever a minority lives, there is always some kind of xenophobia or

discrimination. Being different whether visibly, religiously or otherwise is not going to be a problem-free thing. So we should always expect that there will be problems and we should learn how to face them whether through human rights codes, national constitution (like Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom) or through the experience, wisdom and lessons of other minorities before us.

(b) We have to study, assess and know our strengths and weaknesses, our limitations and powers, the context where we live and the causes of Islamophobia. In other words, there are things we can do, things we can try to do, things we should not try to do and things we should never do.

1) **Things we can do:** Believe in destiny and that whatever happens we should always remain positive and proactive – Speak up and express our concerns and never feel intimidated – Write and use all opportunities available to us including social media – Condemn acts of injustice, terror and hate perpetrated in the name of our religion and Dissociate ourselves from those who commit them – Report every incident of hate crime we experience or witness – Embody as much as we can the beautiful teachings of Islam such as generosity, forgiveness, patience and love and concern for all humanity – Share our personal experience with Islam and why we love our religion and how the latter makes us better human beings while also admitting that we are not perfect – Pray to God Almighty for guidance for ourselves and for all humans.

2) **Things we can try to do:** Discuss these issues with our colleagues, classmates and people around us in our daily life -

Seek Unity among Muslims and avoid dispute and focusing on trivial matters at the expense of important and vital issues like Islamophobia itself – Spread love among Muslims and all humans – Contribute volunteer hours every week to serve humanity – Attend public forums and try to frequently volunteer at our local community events – Attend school board meetings and meet with the teachers and administration - Stand with the weak and vulnerable in society – Support and join forces with other minorities - Work with a team of fellow Muslims and non-Muslim friends and allies – Be part of a congregation of Muslims and offer our assistance with whatever useful skills we have - Share food and goodies with our neighbors and colleagues – Donate money and food to the poor and food banks - Hold open houses or info sessions – Philanthropy and financial Contribution to projects of outreach, public services and welfare/interest - Spend money on ways to improve the image of Islam and Muslims as much as we spend on our mosques and schools – Get more involved in media and public relations – Accommodate and assist journalists, reporters and media producers.

3) **Things we should not try to do:** Apologize for things we have not done or we have no control over – Use the same language as Islamophobes – Expect others to do the work for us but rather we should take ownership – Claim Muslims are perfect and deny that there are misguided individuals and groups that tarnish the image of Islam – Use conspiracy theories as a reference – Quote every

saying or incident without documentation or ascertaining the truth – Argue too much with those who do not know the facts and the backgrounds...etc.,

- 4) **Things we should never do:** Lose hope and faith in Allah - Leave the fold of Islam because of the sense of being overwhelmed or overpowered - Take the law into our own hands and do the Police or authorities job – Repel evil with evil – Make up lies about others – Hate or spread hate against people because some of them might be racists, xenophobes or Islamophobes.

Finally, we close with three beautiful verses from the Qur'an that sum up a lot of what we mentioned above since they give us the best steps to confront bigotry and Islamophobia. Allah (the Exalted) says:

**[O you who believe! When you meet an overpowering force (or challenge) be firm and call Allah in remembrance much (and often); that you may prosper. And obey Allah and His Messenger; and fall into no disputes, lest you lose heart and your power depart; and be patient and persevering: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere.]** (Qur'an, Chap. 8:45-46)

And He also says,

**[And the servants of (Allah) Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when those who do not know (them & their religion) address them, they only say "Peace!"]** (Qur'an, Chap. 25:63)