

Our Love for our Prophet (S) & the Cartoons issue

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Our Love for our Prophet (Blessings & Peace be upon him) is also an act of worship. Again, Muslims in Europe and more specifically France, have to deal with another wave of Islamophobia and ridiculing of their sincerely held beliefs and one fundamental aspect of worship in Islam. While the killing of a teacher who shared some ridiculous cartoons last week with his students was something unacceptable, it must be noted that the very act of killing was not the result of an Islamic injunction or an organized act by French Muslims but rather it was the product of many things, including the frustration and the ongoing provocation of sentiments of Muslim citizens, especially the marginalized youth as well as the reality of ghettoization in the country of Liberté (freedom), Égalité (equality) and Fraternité (brotherhood). It is simply the effect of the failure of those who claim to exercise their freedom of speech to understand the values of respect and sanctity of people, places and times. In the name of freedom of speech, there is a lot of hate being spewed which is perceived as provocation and intimidation that eventually lead to extreme reactions.

For Muslims, there are things that are sacred regardless of how practicing they might be. These tenets of respect and regard are shared pretty much by everyone. One of them is the love and admiration they have for the Prophet Muhammad (Blessings & Peace be upon him). For Muslims, after God (Allah the Almighty) come all the Prophets and angels starting with Prophet Muhammad (Blessings & Peace be upon him). Upholding to these principles is considered an integral part of worship in Islam.

When French President Emmanuel Macron delivered his speech earlier this month – before the beheading of teacher Samuel Paty – he began his address by repeating that the French principle of secularity guaranteed the freedom to worship. However, when it comes to intended provocation and ridiculing an aspect of worship of Islam which is the sacredness and holiness of the Prophet upheld by the Muslim devotees, there is no guarantee by the secular state because respect seems to be a relative and contextual thing not a principle. This last point highlights the major difference between Islam and those who do not understand the concept of inviolability (*hurmah*). The Qur'an teaches this important principle not only for Muslims but also in how the latter should treat others and regard their religious beliefs and practices. For instance, we read,

[Do not revile those whom they call upon (as deities) besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance. Thus, have We made alluring to each people its own doings. In the end will they return to their Lord and We shall then tell them the truth of all that they did.] (6:108)

And

[Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those

who aid His (cause); for verily Allah is Full of Strength, Exalted in Might, (Able to enforce His Will).] (22:40)

In the same speech, Mr. Macron stigmatized the Muslims when he went on to say, "Islam is a religion which is experiencing a crisis today, all over the world," How could he dare speak about Islam and the world when his country was a colonial ruler that not only impoverished millions of Muslims, especially in Africa, and killed millions of them in the last century including 1.5 million Algerians during the 1954-62 war of independence, freedom, equality and dignity. According to him, in order to free Islam in France from foreign influences, the President suggested plans to end a system allowing Imams to train overseas, reduce homeschooling, and take control of religious funding. By targeting Muslims in this fashion and singling out Islam as the main source of the problem, Macron contributed in more marginalization of French Muslim citizens and residents. Ironically, in the same speech, Mr. Macron acknowledged that his country had failed its immigrant communities, creating what he described as "our own separatism" with ghettos of "misery and hardship" where people were lumped together according to their origins and social background.

Islam is not experiencing a crisis but rather the likes of Mr. Macron need to understand that Islam teaches respect and believes in a freedom of speech that is responsible, respectful, sensitive and just. The very golden rule taught by every religion which teaches us 'to do to others as we would like them do to us', shows that freedom of speech that teaches and spreads hate, causes divisiveness, marginalization, racism and discrimination is definitely going to make our world less and less safe and indeed a crazy place to live in.

The slandering of the Prophet (Blessings & Peace be upon him), the cartoons and the continuous hate literature against Muslims are not a new thing but what is setting a dangerous precedent is when a head of state legitimizes that and singles out a minority in his/her country. The current French President has officially stigmatized the French Muslim minority. Every government is supposed to defend and protect its citizens not to create a hostile environment for a specific faith/ethnic group. France prides itself for its laïcité (secularism) but paradoxically seems to be meddling itself in religious affairs more than any other secular country. The French President wants to define for Muslims what Islam is or is not and what is considered moderate or extreme. Regardless of the impetus behind all of this unnecessary predicament, whether it was meant for political gains and winning votes or it was simply driven by Islamophobia at its highest level, the fact is that Muslims in France and around the world must stand more united, practice and educate their fellow citizens on respect, tolerance, justice and dialogue. Standing for the Prophet is not just by attending demonstrations and speaking loud but it is also by emulating his character and getting involved in the societies where we live in with acts of charity and social work. It is also by standing against racism and discrimination against all humans and ethnic/religious groups. Following the footsteps of our beloved Prophet (Blessings & Peace be upon him) is the best thing we can do to stop all this growing hate and Islamophobia.

Yes! Our love for our Prophet is an act of worship of Allah.
[Say (O Muhammad): "If you do love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins; for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."] (3:31)

May Allah shower His Blessings and Peace on our Beloved Prophet Muhammad and all the Prophets before him! May He guide us all to do what pleases Him and keep us on the right path!