Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Sept 21, 2012

The Prophet is under Attack

The recent movie ‘Innocence of Muslims’ produced in the United States and the cartoons published by a French magazine have sparked an outrage among the Muslims across the globe. It seems that under the cover of ‘freedom of speech,’ both these provocative media presentations have been directed to defame and denigrate the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and play with the religious sentiments of Muslims. This anti-Islam and anti-Prophet imagery has resulted in violent protests, deaths, and injuries in several cities around the world. We regret the loss of lives and send our heart-felt condolences to the bereaved families.

In the present times, when people are in dire need of cooperating with one another, and understanding one another, publicizing of such vulgar and offensive images only contribute toward promoting disunity, misunderstanding, and hatred among people. Surat al-Hujurat is a blueprint for the social system in Islam. Ayah 13 of this surah clearly states that Allah (SWT) made human beings into different peoples and tribes so that they might come to know each other. “O humankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might come to know each other. The noblest among you in Allah’s sight is the one with the most taqwa. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware” (al-Hujurat, 49:13).

Obviously, the differences in nations and races should not be a reason to despise, mock, harm, or kill one another. Extremism of any kind, be it the area of ‘freedom of speech,’ is fatal to the well-being of the people. Freedom of speech is a right among many other rights that Islam also gives to its followers, but with every right is a responsibility. Every right is a double-edged sword. It can be used for virtue or vice. The same applies to the word expressed by the tongue or the pen. Both the pen and the tongue are tools that can be used to bring harm or benefit to the people.

Abu Hurairah relates that Allah's Messenger (SAW) said: “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak a good word or remain silent. And whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should show hospitality to his neighbor. And whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should show hospitality to his guest.” The Prophet (SAW) was a great and wise teacher. He loved people to express themselves freely without any fear of intimidation. The last clause in the second Aqabah pledge (baiy’ah) that Muhammad (SAW) took from the Ansar stated: “And that we shall speak the truth wherever we may be, not afraid of any blame coming from anyone.” This indeed may be said to be ‘Freedom of Speech – Par Excellence.’

Allah (SWT) has laid down certain guidelines that deal with issues that touch upon one’s freedom of speech. “O you who believe! Let not people ridicule others who may be better than them; nor let women ridicule other women who may be better than them. Do not speak ill of one another; do not use offensive nicknames for one another. How bad it is to be called a mischief-maker after accepting faith! Those who do not repent of this behavior are evildoers” (al-Hujurat, 49:11). Ridiculing others is forbidden, whatever mode of expression is used to do so, be it the tongue, the pen, the soap-operas, the tabloids, the scandalous literature, or any other expression through the electronic or print media.
Thanks to the divine laws, there is no such thing as open-ended freedom. It is always hedged by restrictions and accountability. Despite his creative mind and potential, man is a creature of God and subject to His laws, for God alone precisely knows man’s strengths and weaknesses. The Halakha (Jewish laws) of Judaism, the Canon law of Christianity, and the Shariah of Islam are laws that set parameters for action. Freedom is honored as long as it does not transgress the boundaries drawn by Allah (SWT).

We are human beings with feelings and emotions. We are not robots. One offensive word or gesture, and we can be ticked off. People by nature are sensitive to certain things. Trampling upon their sentiments arouses their emotions and sometimes makes them take steps that lead to mayhem, chaos, and even bloodshed.

The recent brazen and shameless attack on the Prophet’s character under cover of the so-called ‘freedom of speech’ is an offence against an entire nation; against the Muslim ummah at large. Muslims have the right to be infuriated and outraged. Their response, however, needs to be positive, peaceful, and meaningful and not violent causing loss of lives and damage to properties. The Prophet (SAW) during his own life time was subjected to all sorts of ridicule, humiliation, and abusive treatments. He was accused of being a magician, a poet, a crazy man, and so on. But he bore it all with patience and reliance on Allah (SWT). Allah (SWT) informed us that he (SAW) was a human like any other human being. “Say, ‘I am only a human being, like you” (al-Kahf, 18:110). Allah’s response was clear, “So proclaim openly what you have been commanded to say, and ignore the idolaters. We are enough for you against all those who scoff at you (who mock you)” (al-Hijr, 15:94-95).

The Prophet (SAW) was sent on a universal mission—to take people out of darkness into light. Notwithstanding the obstacles in his path, and despite the maltreatment he was subjected to, he was commanded to ignore those who scoffed at him and to carry on his missionary work, in total obedience and worship of God till the last breath of his life. “Who set up another god beside God— they will come to know. And We know that your chest is strained by what they say. So glorify with the praise of your Lord, and be of those who prostrate. And worship your Lord until what is certain comes to you.”(al-Hijr, 15:96-99).

Under the present circumstances, we should exhibit restraint and avoid being apologetic and defensive; otherwise we will play into the hands of those who have hidden agendas. Rather, as members of the Muslim ummah, we should honor the Prophet (SAW) by fulfilling his rights as is due to him. We should obey him, love him, respect him, salute him, and follow in his footsteps. We need to respond to the current scandal by believing in Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW) all the more. “O you who believe, shall I show you a bargain that will save you from painful torment? Have faith in God and His Messenger” (al-Saff, 61:10-11). We need to strengthen our relationship with the Prophet (SAW) through the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

We should also educate the masses as to who Muhammad (SAW) was. We should let them know what people of conscience, even though they are not Muslims, have said about Muhammad (SAW). To give only few examples, the great French poet, writer, politician, and historian Lamartine in his book The History of Turkey published in Paris in 1854 says about Muhammad (SAW): “Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may ask, is there any greatest man than he?”

The Reverend Bosworth Smith in Muhammad and Muhammadanism, published in London, 1874 says: ‘Head of the State as well as the Church, he was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without the Pope's pretensions, and Caesar without the legions of Caesar, without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a police force, without a fixed revenue. If ever a man ruled by a right divine, it was Muhammad, for he had all the powers without their supports.”

The British Theosophist, activist, writer, and orator Annie Besant says: “It is impossible for anyone who studies the life and character of the great Prophet of Arabia, who knows how he taught and how he lived, to feel anything but reverence for that mighty Prophet, one of the great messengers of the Supreme. And although in
what I put to you I shall say many things which may be familiar to many, yet I myself feel whenever I re-read them, a new way of admiration, a new sense of reverence for that mighty Arabian teacher.”

We are too well aware what Michael H. Hart; author of The 100: A Ranking Of The Most Influential Persons in History had to say about the Prophet (SAW). He said: “My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular level.”

It is really befitting to revisit what the world renowned intellectual, philosopher, and playwright Sir George Bernard Shaw writing in The Genuine Islam, Vol. 1, No. 8, 1936 had to say about our beloved Prophet (SAW): “If any religion had the chance of ruling over England, nay Europe within the next hundred years, it could be Islam.”…“I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence which can make itself appeal to every age. I have studied him - the wonderful man and in my opinion for from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the Savior of Humanity.”…“I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it the much needed peace and happiness: I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today.”

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is no longer with us in person, but his legacy will continue to remain forever. It is we who represent him. We have to follow the Prophet’s model (uswah). Then only we can lead ourselves and others from darkness into light, from anxiety and sadness into happiness. Giving testimony to the Prophet’s character, Allah (SWT) says: “And indeed, you are placed on an exalted standard of character” (al-Qalam, 68:4). May Allah help us to understand the greatness of this man, and give us the tawfiq to embody his character and to follow in his footsteps.

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IONA Research & Publications

The following press release was also read in the khutba.

Press Release issued by the Imams’ Council of the Michigan Muslim Community Council

Imams Council of the MMCC condemns the killing of Ambassador Christopher Stevens

(Royal Oak, MI, 9/12/11) – The Imams’ Council of the Michigan Muslim Community Council condemns in the strongest terms the killing of the US Ambassador Christopher Stevens in Libya and other embassy staffers. Islam strictly prohibits the killing or harming of diplomats and civilians under any circumstance.

Such violence is against the Islamic teachings and the spirit of the Holy Qur'an.

The Qur’an teaches, “If anyone slays a human being unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth—it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind…” (5:32)

On behalf of the imams and the Muslim community we offer our condolences and deepest sympathy to the family of Ambassador Stevens and other victims of violence as we pray for peace and a world free of hate and bigotry.
The imams do support our freedoms, but also denounce the abuse of such privileges, including the promotion of hatred via inflammatory literature, movie, or speech by individuals or groups. Such actions by all extremists must not be allowed to damage the emerging freedoms in the Middle East and peaceful co-existence everywhere. We urge all Muslims to peacefully oppose any provocative or aggressive acts against their faith.

The Imams’ Council of the Michigan Muslim Community Council represents a coalition of Muslim religious leaders (imams) in Southeast Michigan.