

Responding to Vilification of Islam

One of the more serious challenges Muslims face today is the continued and unabated abuse, insults, and vilification hurled at the Shariah of Our Beloved Master, Hazrat Muhammad (Sallallahu alayhi wasallam). This article advises on the nature of such abuse and how Muslims should respond

It is undoubtedly a jihad of our times to meet this challenge and repel the verbal attacks on Islam. This is Jihad in an intellectual form, which Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) described in his blessed words: "he who wages jihad against them (the enemy) with the tongue is a true believer", narrated by Imam Ahmad RA and others.

As a prelude to this discussion, we present the following Verse of the Holy Quran:

"You shall be tested in your wealth and your lives. And (part of this test is that) you shall hear a lot of abuse from those who have been handed the Book before you (i.e. Jews and Christians), as well as from the Mushrikeen (Idolaters). If you adopt sabr and taqwa, then this (attitude) ranks among the great tasks (of Deen) — Sura 3, verse 186

From the above Quranic verse three points stand out quite saliently: a) Abuse will come in the form of verbal insult, as inferred from the phrase "you will hear"; b) these verbal insults constitute a test and trial for the Believers, which challenge they shall have to confront; c) Verbal abuse against Islam shall come from three quarters: Jews, Christians and Idolaters. The latter part of the verse provides indication of what attitude to adopt in response to these insults, an issue that will be dealt with towards the end.

Today, the three creeds (Judaism, Christianity and Idol-worship) account for the major part of the world's population. It is to be noted that the Arabic preposition min is used to denote part of a larger group, signifying that not all but some of the three abovementioned groups will resort to the abuse and insulting of Muslims. Allah Ta'ala uses the phrase Athun Katheerun, translated as "a lot of abuse". Muslims are thus braced for an onslaught of verbal abuse against their religion. These are some of the analytical points that emerge from this verse.

NATURE OF ABUSE

Insulting Islam, hurling abuse at Allah, and slandering the Prophet of Islam are all part of an on-going trend among the enemies of Islam that appears to have gained ascendancy over the last few years. Blasphemy in the form of insults, abuse, ridicule, and mockery was uttered in the time of The Holy Messenger (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) and even after his departure from this world. Over the years Muslims had to endure a rising tide of such abuse directed at their Religion and mainly at the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam). In fact, the Holy Quran tells us that all Messengers that came before were subject to verbal abuse and mockery, including our Rasool (sallallahu alayhi wasallam). They responded to such mockery and ridicule with intelligent arguments and clear reason.

Our antagonists appeared to have lost the battle on the intellectual front; they've been defeated in debates and have been left floundering in the face of the sheer moral superiority of Muslims. They have, therefore, sunk to the despicable and reprehensible level of insults and mocking. Verbal attacks on Islam can be placed into two distinct categories. One is the expression of belief by a Jew or Christian, or a constructive objection from their side against any Islamic teaching or tenet. Islam does not consider the latter an insult or abuse. Non-Muslims are entitled to express and voice their beliefs that conflict with Islam, and they are more than welcome to pose objections to any Islamic practice or principle. In fact, we Muslims relish the challenge of engaging non-Muslims of any creed in debate and discussion. We welcome the opportunity to answer objections and dispel false notions. Muslims are never averse to constructive criticism. It is precisely for this reason that Muslim Jurists rule when a kaafir in an Islamic state articulates his kufr belief or rejects a tenet of Islam based on his religion or belief, no punitive action can be taken against him or her by the Muslim Courts. But when the unbeliever stoops to the level of insulting and mocking Islam and Our Messenger, the Islamic justice system will launch punitive action against such a kaafir.

While people have the right to challenge the teachings of Islam on an academic level and to likewise intellectually engage Muslims in debate, no one, but no one has the right to insult and ridicule. Degenerating to that level only betrays the low wit and moron mentality of the individual. Stooping to the childish level of insulting, mocking, deriding, and even using slander to defame Islam and to defame the Prophet of Islam is unacceptable to any decent human being. There is clear demarcation between expressing one's beliefs about a certain religion and insulting that religion. That dividing line shall not be breached

HATE SPEECH

Hate speech is defined by the West as communication that vilifies a person or a group on the basis of colour, disability, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, or other characteristic. In law, hate speech is any speech, gesture or conduct, writing, or display which is forbidden because it may incite violence or prejudicial action against or by a protected individual or group, or because it disparages or intimidates a protected individual or group. This is the common and acceptable definition of hate speech among the West. Yet, when a film was recently released that vilified

the Holy Messenger of Islam (salutations be upon him), governments and courts were still grappling with the dilemma of whether that production should be termed hate speech or not. The hypocrisy of the West and the strong bias against Islam are once again very evident. When Muslim groups portray Israeli brutality, or speak out critically of American or British injustices, then the hate speech rule is so easily invoked to silence the voices of dissent against state oppression.

Free Speech in the Age of YouTube

Apple and Google earlier this year blocked a mobile application produced by Hezbollah. In 2010, YouTube removed links to speeches by the late Shaikh Anwar al-Awlaki, in which he allegedly advocated terrorist violence; at the time, the company said it proscribed posts that could incite "violent acts." YouTube prohibits hate speech, which it defines as that which "attacks or demeans a group" based on its race, religion and so on; Facebook's hate speech ban likewise covers "content that attacks people" on the basis of identity. Google and Facebook prohibit hate speech; Twitter does not explicitly ban it. Yet, the YouTube Company refused to ban the Hate Film, and had scant regard for the sentiments of Muslims the world over. The same can be said of Facebook that allowed the evil cartoons that mocked Our Rasool (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) to be freely published and circulated to all its users.

There is no doubt that the current wave of insults against Islam will fall under hate speech, if only for the fact that such abuse will incite violence or prejudicial action against or by a protected individual or group, as experience has shown. Only people blinded by religious prejudice or those predisposed to racial tendencies will deny this or ignore it.

We cited the above excerpts just to give readers another glimpse of the oppressive double standards of the kuffar in all quarters. In future, when the votaries of kuffar institutes and their like confront Muslims, we can refute their false claims through the medium of their own admissions and claims.

OUR RESPONSE

The Holy Quran exhorts Muslims to adopt taqwa and steadfastness in the wake of abuse and insults. Taqwa demands that one shall not say or do anything that violates Shariah and displeases Allah. Our every act, even against enemies after being incited, must be in conformity to the Pleasure of Allah Ta'ala. Who can ever forget the great gesture of Ali (Radhiyallahu anhu) who refused to slay a Jewish enemy after he had spat in the face of the Ali, out of fear that the motive for killing was now changed from Spiritual to personal? Likewise, on the occasion of Hudaibiya the Sahaaba were commanded by Allah not to allow the incitement and unjust behaviour of the enemy to cause them to transgress the Law of Allah. (Surah Maaidah, verse 2). On the same basis, when we have to deal with insults from our enemies, we shall respond in a manner that is strictly within the confines of Shariah. We also need the resources of sabr and forbearance to achieve the above. If the insult can be answered reasonably and intellectually, we shall use these modes of response to silence our critics. At times we shall need to highlight passages in the scriptures of these same critics in order to reverse the insult and prove that what they falsely perceive as a blemish in Islam is actually found within their own holy books.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

For example, criticism against the marriage of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) to Hazrat Ayesha when she was only 9 years old can easily be rebuffed by proving to the Christians that Mary, the mother of Jesus (Nabi Eesa) was only twelve when Joseph married her, who at that stage was 36 years old. The marriage was originally arranged when Mary was between 7 and 9 years old. A year after marriage, at the tender age of 13, Mary fell pregnant. Similarly, the now stale objection against the nine wives of Our Rasool (alayhis-salaam) is easily countered by pointing to the Prophets of the Bible such as David and Solomon who had "hundreds of wives". We encourage people to seek guidance from the Ulema when faced with objections against Islam. This is the intellectual or academic approach, a medium that our Ulema of the past always chose.

As for statements that are sheer insults and that are tantamount to stupid mockery, the response by Muslims living in a non-Muslim state should be to ignore and exercise sabr. Ignorance cannot be met with intelligent answers and reason. Almighty Allah states in the Holy Quran: And when ignoramus speak to the servants of Allah, they respond by saying: salaam"; The term salaam is indicative of a summary dismissal of the ignorant one instead of wasting time in debate and dialogue. Where legal channels are available to restrict and restrain, or even punish the perpetrators, these should be vigorously pursued. In an Islamic state, mockery and insults are offences punishable with measures ranging from imprisonment to death by execution. We who live in a non-Muslim country may not resort to such drastic measures. However, public debates or awareness programs should be launched to highlight these injustices and to expose the scurrilous attempts of our enemies to defame Islam and its Sacred Personalities. All fair-minded individuals who are told the truth will soon comprehend the reality of Islam and the nature of these insults. In fact, Muslims can use these negative attacks to their advantage by promoting Islam with greater urgency. It has been proven that after every flare-up involving Islam and Muslims new people are attracted to the Deen. All the negative hype actually stimulates a new interest in Islam. In that sense, our critics are actually doing us a great favour by kindling an interest in Islam among non-Muslims. After the Quran-burning atrocity by an American Shaytaan pastor, hundreds of people were interested to know what was in the Quran Shareef that drove a man to actually burn it. That in turn led to people converting to Islam. This is reminiscent of the early persecution of Islam that led to thousands of people embracing this new faith in the Time of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam).

COMMITMENT TO SHARIAH

Finally, the firmest and most positive response to these insults is to become more committed to our Shariah. The motive of our detractors is to make Muslims feel insecure and uncertain about their Islamic leanings, which in turn will lead to a decrease in practicing Islam. We can soundly and roundly defeat their aims and objectives by re-affirming our commitment to Islamic belief and practice, by reviving the Sunnah of that same personality who they hope to disparage and defame. The insulters must be taught a striking lesson in religious devotion: the more they will insult our Islam, the more we will close ranks in protecting this Religion. The more they will attempt to degrade our Rasool (sallallahu alayhi wasallam), the firmer we become in adherence to his Sunnah. It doesn't behove us as Muslims to, on one the hand fight those insulting our Religion, while on the other befriending the culture spurned by these very same insulters. Such an attitude only serves to belie our loyalty to Shariah and annexes the moral ground that we enjoyed in the past. We then have no leg to stand on in condemnation of the slander and derision of our enemies. The following verses of the Holy Quran convey this message quite succinctly: Verily We suffice for you (O Muhammed) against those who mock you.... for soon shall they know (the outcome of their mockery); And We are well aware that your heart has become depressed because of what they say; so recite the tasbeeh of Your Lord and engage in Salaah; and Worship Your Lord until death overtakes you. (Surah Hujr Verses 95-99)