

Advice to Australian Muslim Youth

Part 2

Friday Khutba [Sermon]

21 Dec. 12

Mohamad Abdalla

In my last khutba I began to speak about the question of identity for Australian Muslim youth.

To my surprise, there was an over whelming positive response from young and old. This shows the need to address these important and timely issues.

Today, I wish to continue on the topic of identity.

There are two important aspects of identity – religious and cultural.

Today I will only talk about religious identity and in another Khutba I will talk about cultural identity, insha-Allah.

First, if you remember last Friday I said that knowledge is power and that you must enhance and expand your knowledge of Islam, its history, especially its contributions to, and relationship with, Europe or the Western world and civilisation.

Proper and deep knowledge can remove an inferiority complex that may have developed among young and old Muslims.

An inferiority complex is a persistent feeling of being inferior to others in some way. Due to a persistent media campaign against Islam and Muslims, you – as a young person – may feel that you don't belong to Australia, you are not accepted, or that you need to compromise your beliefs and values to fit in.

There are a number of ways you can overcome such feelings, and one of the most powerful of these ways is knowledge.

Because your most important identity is Islam, it is necessary to educate yourself more about Islam and its history in order to overcome any negative feelings that may have developed within you.

Before I talk more about identity, let me give you one example that shows the extent of Islam's impact on Western civilisation. These are contributions that are not known even to most Muslims and non-Muslims, or ignored and neglected.

Look at the Shariah –Islamic Law - for example. There is so much negative hype about it in the West and many Muslims don't really understand anything about it.

Despite the negative hype about Shariah, it was instrumental in advancing the Common Law – or conventional western law.

Islam influenced the Common Law in a number of ways but I want to mention only two:

- 1) Trial by Jury, and
- 2) The legal contract

I will not talk about the legal contract because it is a bit complex for today's Khutba.

But let's quickly talk about trial by jury.

Before the influence of Islam people in England and much of Europe used to sort out their legal claims through what is called 'Ordeals' using water or fire.

So, for example, if someone stole your horse and you complained then to determine who is right an 'ordeal' using water or fire was held. Both the thief and owner of the horse would be thrown in a river or water and whoever survives is the true owner of the horse.

Or, a metal rod would be heated and each one would be asked to hold it. The one whose hand is not burnt is the real owner.

This practice remained in England until King Henry the Second changed it in the 12th century. King Henry the Second was influenced by the Islamic system of Lafif (Jury) which was developed by Muslim scholars of the Maliki *madh-hab* and was in practice in Sicily when it was ruled by Muslims.

The influence on the English Common Law came through Sicily whose administration was run according to the Islamic model, even under King Roger II.

In fact, for your information, King Roger II lived his life as if he was an Arab emir - title, signature, clothes, coins, close advisors and personal physician.

This is not the time to expand on this topic, but if you are interested we can have a separate lecture to explain in details the Islamic origin of the Common Law.

The point is that there is so much more to Islam and its history than what you already know, or what the media or schools tell you.

Your identity can be strengthened through positive and appropriate knowledge.

So, you MUST learn and go beyond the basics.

Look at how the great scholar of grammar Sibawayh سيبويه, (d.793). He was a non-Arab but became the master of Arabic language.

How and why is interesting and hopefully will inspire you to go and learn more.

Sibawayh at the beginning of his youth sought knowledge in the field of hadith. He studied with the likes of Hammad, the famous muhaddith in Basra, and it was here

with Shaykh Hammad that a particular incident took place which changed Sibawayh's entire focus...

One day Hammad (rahimahullah) asked him to read out a hadith and Sibawayh began by saying: "ليس من أصحابي أحد إلا ولو شئت لأخذت عليه ليس أبا الدرداء" – however, he read Aba as Abu in a state of raf' (nominative) thinking that it was the Ism of Laysa. Hammad al-Basri corrected him and said, أخطأت يا سيويه إنما هو – استثناء – 'You're mistaken O' Sibawayh, it is in fact an Exception,' (i.e. meaning: '... except for Abu al-Darda'). So Sibawayh said, لأطلبن علما لا يُنازعي فيهِ أحد – 'I will certainly seek knowledge [grammar] such that none can dispute with me therein.'

So he travelled to the learned scholars and grammarians of his time.

Sibawayh established the foundations of grammar for the people and wrote his huge scholarly work '*al-Kitab*.'

After his death, one of his students took it upon himself to make this book available to the public. Not only did his book benefit the people of Basra, but it thereafter became one of the greatest books on grammar to have ever been written in history, such that the people began to call it: *Qur'an al-Nahw* (the 'Qur'an of Grammar').

Sibawayh, *rahimahullah* died at the **young age of 34**, but despite that, the Ummah to this day has not stopped benefiting from his book and the knowledge which he left behind

This type of knowledge will empower you.

Let us now return back to our topic of identity.

As a young person you need to understand that there are two major factors that influence your identity: religion and culture.

Your religious identity is influenced by Islam. You are a Muslim and therefore there are things that you cannot compromise no matter where you are.

The most important aspect of your religious identity is belief in the oneness of Allah Ta'ala (Tawhid).

Tawhid should shape the way you see the world. If you fail to understand the oneness of Allah, His qualities and attributes then you will be challenged.

Take for example the theory of evolution that is taught as truth. If you don't understand Tawhid and the Islamic view of creation then your faith will be challenged.

This is not the time to speak about this topic but again we can discuss this in a separate lecture if you are interested.

As an Australian Muslim, your faith in Allah Ta'ala determines who you are and how you behave.

If you believe, for example, that He sees you and knows what you do all the time then you will not smoke, drink alcohol, take drugs, watch pornography or lie and cheat others.

The weaker your belief in Allah Ta'ala the more likely that you will do these things

If you remove this religious identity then there is nothing to stop you from doing these harmful things because it seems cool to do these things.

But your belief in Allah Ta'la will stop you.

Your religious identity will help you become a person of moral integrity; truthful, honest, and compassionate towards all people.

When the *janaza* (funeral) of a non-Muslim man passed before Prophet Muhammad he cried. When he was asked why he cries he said because one soul slipped out of his hand toward the Fire.

He did not curse him. He did not feel happy that he died a non-Muslim. He did not become joyful that a non-Muslim died.

Your religious identity will help you pray 5 times a day without feeling ashamed. This is an obligation that cannot be compromised because you are an Australian, living in the 21st Century.

Salah, just like fasting cannot be compromised because you live in the modern world.

These are some aspects of your religious identity that cannot be compromised whether you are in Australia, Asia, Africa or the Middle East.

Deep and correct understanding of Islam will make you an active and positive Australian Muslim.

It will make Islam part of the fabric of Australian society as it was in Sicily in the 11th and 12th centuries.

Do not become what the Prophet called an *'ima'a*.

حَدِيثُ بِنِ الْيَمَانِ رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ : (لَا تَكُونُوا
إِمْعَةً ، تَقُولُونَ : إِنْ أَحْسَنَ النَّاسُ أَحْسَنًا ، وَإِنْ ظَلَمُوا ظَلَمْنَا ، وَلَكِنْ وَطَنُوا
أَنْفُسَكُمْ ، إِنْ أَحْسَنَ النَّاسُ أَنْ تُحْسِنُوا ، وَإِنْ أَسَاءُوا فَلَا تَظْلِمُوا) رواه الترمذي

الْمُنْرِدُّ الَّذِي لَا يَنْبُتُ عَلَى رَأْيٍ ، وَيُؤَافِقُ كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ عَلَى رَأْيِهِ

'Do not be an *Ima'a* (imitator) saying: if people do good I will do good and if they do bad I will do bad. Rather, establish a distinct identity and do good when others do good and do not do bad when others do bad.'

Surat al Kahf in the Quran revolves around the story of a group of young men who were asked to leave belief in Allah and follow the rest of their society. In fact, they

were being forced by the king of the day to leave Islam. They refused and escaped to save their faith.

أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا {9}
إِذْ أَوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا {10}
فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَى آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا {11}
ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ أَحْصَى لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمَدًا {12}
نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُمْ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاَهُمْ هُدًى {13}
وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا رَبُّنَا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَنْ نَدْعُو مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَهًا لَقَدْ قُلْنَا إِذَا شَطَطًا

When the youths sought refuge in the cave, they said: Our Lord! grant us mercy from Thee, and provide for us a right course in our affair.

So We prevented them from hearing in the cave for a number of years.

Then We raised them up that We might know which of the two parties was best able to compute the time for which they remained.

We relate to you their story with the truth; surely they were youths who believed in their Lord and We increased them in guidance.

These youth were forced by the king of the day to disbelieve or they will be killed.

In Australia no one forces you to disbelieve, or stop Salah or drink

In other words, do not be influenced by peer group pressure.

Do not smoke, take drugs, drink intoxicants and so on because is easily available and other people do these.

Understand who you are...understand your purpose and you will become firm against these bad practices.

Become your own individual.

But you can only do that if you have deep knowledge.

Unfortunately, even Islamic schools and madrassas do not provide deep Islamic knowledge. Islamic schools can be a wonderful place if they move beyond the superficial Islamic identity.

By superficial I mean the clothes and few basic Islamic studies classes.

In traditional Muslim societies schools, known as madrassa, provided significant knowledge to their students.

Look at the CV of one of these students, Imam al-Bayhaqi:

- By the time Baihaqi was 15 years of age, and in secondary school or maktab, he had memorized 11 books of grammar, lexicography, and poetry, including a dictionary of Arabic words 'on law, living things, heavenly bodies and earthly things,'; as well as a dictionary of infinitive nouns with explanations in Persian.
- In his second maktab, when he was 15 and 16 years, he memorized 4 more works and a part of a 5th in the fields of grammar, lexicography.
- At 17 years, he studied under the direction of Maidani, correcting 7 works on *adab*-studies, five of which he had memorized. During the same period he studied philosophical theology and another work on lexicography under two professors.
- At 37 years of age he had written 72 books, some in several volumes

This is an example of the Islamic legacy which we can learn from.

What can be done?

I said last week that our community does not lack talent and resources, but we lack a vision and a strategy.

This is a community and not individual effort.

As a first step, a group of young brother and sisters can begin to think of the challenges that they face, write that down and sit with the Council of Imams to find solutions. The Council of Imams may then call for a community meeting to discuss how best the community can enhance existing infrastructures and resources to help young Australian Muslims maintain a healthy identity.

But don't wait for anyone to start this move. You have to do it and we can help you.

Lead and do not be led.