

Jihad Against Racism

ISLAM IS AGAINST RACISM AND PREJUDICE

Tips to launch your personal Jihad against Racism.

Extracts from an article *By Abdul Malik Mujahid*

Alhamdu lillah, all Masjids in the world are open to all people. Muslims pray shoulder to shoulder with no regard to any national, ethnic, class or color differences. Islamic egalitarianism still gains converts from the untouchables of India to Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali in America. However, this dominant reality is sometimes marred by individual behavior, which is contrary to the ideals of Islam.

Some Muslims fall for the age-old trick of Satan and start playing the silly inferiority/superiority game. Some stereotype others and tolerate prejudice against other human beings, despite the fact that all human beings are equal, from the same man and woman. (Quran 49:13)

How should we save ourselves from falling into this trap? How should we help others stay above the killing fields of racism and nationalism? What can we do now to become a better human being? Here are some tips on how we can launch our personal Jihad against this disease.

The Prophet (saww) said: "If one of you sees something evil he should change it with his hand. If he cannot, he should speak out against it, and if he cannot do even that he should at least detest it in his heart, this being the weakest form of faith".

1. Knowledge is power

Do we know what the Quran and Sunnah say about Racism? The Quran established individual character as the criteria of success, not color, tribal or economic status of a person. The Prophet preached and established these ideals in the peace sanctuary of Madinah and Islamic society which he developed.

Let our parents, children, Islamic schools, and Imams learn and teach the ideals of Islam.

2. Ask the only One who can really help

We can get rid of racial and prejudicial attitudes within ourselves with the help of God.

Make sincere and focused Dua for those people and groups who remain oppressed, subject to humiliation, subject to difficult behavior. After all, Dua increases love between people

people.

Also make Dua for yourself and others to gain an appreciation of others. Pray together with your family for those friends in the Masjid or at your job who are from other groups. And remember that dua without actions is nothing.

3. Hate the hatred

The Prophet never hated anyone. He neither hated Makkah nor the Makkans who tortured him, starved him and his people and killed his companions, may Allah be pleased with them. He continued to pray even for his worst enemies like Abu Jahl.

4. Make sincere Tawbah (repentance to God)

If we have hurt someone through our tongue or attitude, we need to seek God's forgiveness. It is also important to seek the personal forgiveness of that person as well if s/he is within reach as an Islamic pre-requisite to seek God's forgiveness. There has to be a personal acknowledgment of wrongdoing and a commitment to change. This is done by turning to God and seeking His Forgiveness for looking down on other beings due to a false belief in someone's inferiority.

5. Watching Our Tongue

The Prophet (saww) said: "Whoever can give me a guarantee for what is between his two jaws and between his two legs, I can assure him Paradise".

Keeping this in mind, effort should be made to curb useless talk, which can lead to worse things like backbiting and slander of individuals and groups of people.

Defining backbiting, the Prophet said that backbiting is anything that you say about someone in his absence that may displease him. When he was asked by one of the Companions, 'even if he is as I describe him?' he responded by saying, If he is as you describe him then you are guilty of backbiting, otherwise you are guilty of slander (which is worse than backbiting).

To add emphasis to how awful slander is, consider that the Prophet said it is worse than adultery because if a person commits adultery, Allah can forgive him if he repents. But a slanderer will not be forgiven until the person he had been speaking about forgives him.

6. No ethnic jokes please

Ethnic jokes are not innocent humor. They carry the virus of bigotry most of the time. Think about how hurt we feel when some comedians depict Muslims as terrorist.

Consider this verse of the Quran: "O you who believe! Let not a group scoff at another group, it may be that the latter are better than the former; nor let (some) women scoff at

group, it may be that the latter are better than the former; nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former, nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames. How bad is it, to insult one's brother after having Faith. And whosoever does not repent, then such are indeed wrong doers" (Quran 49:11).

Such silly and hurtful jest clearly goes against the type of manners Allah and His Prophet expect from us. It's a sin in Islam to ridicule or laugh at any beings, and if they are a group, the sin is stronger.

7. Don't call people, Kalla, Gora, Desi, Chapta, or Abd

Muslims disliked being called Moor, or Mohammeden. We insist that since we write our name Muslims that's how everyone should spell our name. So let's call other people with the names they like for themselves. Fair enough?

Alhamdu lillah most Muslims don't do this. But once in a while we hear names, which we need to challenge. The Urdu term "Kalla" or "Gola" is used by some for Africans. While it literally means "black" and "slave", the way it is used most of the time is demeaning. The same is true for the Urdu term Chapta or Peela, which refers to the color, and features of South East Asian people. Gora in Urdu for Caucasians falls in the same category although it also just means a white person, but is used to convey historical distrust and betrayal of the white colonial lords. Desi on the other hand is mostly used to describe stereotypical images of South Asians "curry smelling" Indians and "pakis." It is often used as a term of self hate in the second generation.

Similarly some Arabs use the term Abd to describe black people, despite the fact the Prophet categorically prohibited use of this term. Another term Zingy is used for the same people in the demeaning way. Some Arabs use the term Rafeeq (literally comrade) for Pakistanis in demeaning way similar to how the "N word" is used in the west. Ibn al Khinzeer (son of a pig), a reference to whoever you are angry with amongst some Arabs and specially towards Jews is not only unworthy of the followers of Prophet Muhammad, it is a direct violation of his command not to insult one another's parents.

Even the Islamic term Kafir has to be use with care. Not every non-believer is a Kafir. This Quranic term, regarding those who rejected Allah's guidance after recognizing it to be the truth, should not become a term of hate.

8. Challenge the offensive, names, jokes and comments

If someone uses a hurtful name in our presence, we might simply say, "Don't call him/her that. Call him/her by his/her name." If you are the victim, simply say "That kind of joke offends me," or say "You don't like to be called bad names and neither do I".

We should feel comfortable in pointing out unfairness. It is very rewarding in the eyes of Allah since by challenging this we are following three of Allah's commands:

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1. Stand up against injustice.
2. Discourage the evil
3. Don't call people with bad nicknames

It's part of a Muslim's duty to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. Let's do it with wisdom and patience. Be polite but firm.

9. Do not generalize

If you observe something wrong in some persons' behavior, don't generalize it to their ethnic group. Attribute it to those persons not their group. For example, I have heard several times that Arabs in Chicago run liquor stores or "Golas" will never be civilised. While it is true that there may be 100 or so Arabs who have this type of Haram business, they are a small minority among hundreds and thousands of Arabs living in Chicago. Without condoning what they are doing, we must see that there are Muslims of other nationalities who are also involved in Haram businesses.

10. Defend the abused group

Note unique and special qualities in other people. Show the positive points of an ethnic group that is being made fun of. Whether it's the hospitality of the Arabs, the respect for elders in Indo-Pakistani culture, the resilience of African-Americans, for instance, point out the positive to those who don't want to see the other side of the coin.

If you're still tongue-tied, consider this Hadith: the Prophet (saww) said: If a man's Muslim brother is slandered in his presence, and he is capable of defending him, and does so, Allah will defend him in this world and in the next. But if he fails to defend him, Allah will destroy him in this world and in the next.

11. Speak everyone's language

What do you do when there are say, three people, one of whom speaks your native language and the other doesn't? Too often, many of us do the wrong thing.

It creates suspicion and discomfort if you speak a language in front of others who may not understand it. Use a common language understandable to all. So if Br. Muneer and you both understand Arabic, but Sr. Yasmeen doesn't, speak in English instead, so she doesn't feel left out. If you observe this behavior tell them it's unfair. If you are the one who is doing the wrong thing, then don't defend it by saying, "you should learn our language".

The Prophet (saww) said: "When three people are together, two should not talk secretly, leaving the third alone since this may grieve him".

12. Share your joy

Have you invited people other than your cultural group at an occasion of happiness in your family?

Whether it's Eid, a wedding or the Aqiqah of a newborn baby, expand your next guest list to include those of different backgrounds. Sharing joy is a great way for people of all ethno-cultural groups to bond.

13. Share your sorrow

Have you visited a sick colleague, class fellow or a neighbor of another ethnic group? Have you been to the funeral of other people?

Relationships are not only built on the good times, but on the hard ones as well. Visit the sick, attend funerals, and console those who need it, and don't reserve your sympathy to those of the same skin color or country.

14. The way to a man's heart is through his stomach

Have you learned to cook the food of other cultures? Have you shared your food with them?

I know people who have become Muslim because of the hospitality of Muslims. Food is a great way to bring people together, and to get to know others. Share food with neighbors. Food is power. Use it!

15. Smiling is a charity

Who do you smile at? Do you limit your grins to groups you know, especially your ethno-cultural group?

Smiling is charity, not just for your people. Expand your smile "directory" to include all. Smile opens close hearts.

16. Salam is for everyone

Quran demands that we greet others better than the way they have greeted us. (Quran 4:86).

After Juma do you say Salam and meet only those people you know or do you initiate a Salam to those from another ethnic group?

Consider this Hadith: The Prophet (saww) said: "Those who are nearest to Allah are those who are the first to give a greeting"

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Saying Salam is also a great way to increase your love for a fellow Muslim, no matter where they are from. Consider this Hadith: the Prophet (saww) said: "You will not enter Heaven until you believe, and you will not believe until you love each other. Let me guide you to something which will cause you to love each other: spreading the greetings of peace (Assalamu alaikum).

17. Hug someone today

Have you ever experienced a hug by a Muslim you never knew? What a feeling. This one just for the sake of Allah. Try it on a Muslim in your masjid and then introduce yourself to him. He is your brother. Isn't he?

18. Beyond Salam

Alhamdu lillah, we see a lot of faces of different ethnic groups in masjids, but have we gone beyond Salam with them?

Have we invited this brother or sister to our home this year? Let's take the initiative to go beyond the Salam and invite a fellow human being of a different background over to our place. Don't wait for a specific occasion. Just invite them over for dinner, lunch, or a game of basketball.

19. A Masjid tour of other neighborhoods

While in a number of cities in America and Africa, Masjids tend to become ethnically homogeneous due to the population patterns of the city; we can try to overcome this isolation.

Let's visit other neighborhoods and pray in a Masjid there. So if you're an Urdu speaking person, visit the predominantly Arab mosque. If you're an Arab visit the mostly African-American mosque. If you're Turkish, visit the mostly Bengali mosque.

Let's defy the neighborhood divisions which we did not create. Let's take our Sunday school children on field trips to different neighborhoods and Masjids. Providing opportunities for interaction with people of diverse groups instills understanding.

Studies show that children playing and working together toward common goals develop positive attitudes about one another.

20. Strangers should find an open Masjid door

How are you at welcoming strangers in your Masjid?

Do you move forward in welcoming, guiding and introducing them to others or do you allow a stranger to remain a stranger while you busily chat with your own cultural group? Open your heart and arms to the new brother or sister who may have come to the Masjid with great difficulty. Welcome their choice and don't let them regret visiting your mosque.

The security staff at Masjids need to have sensitivity training as well.

21. Watch those expressions and attitudes

Did you see that twist of the mouth, or the raise of that eyebrow?

Sometimes, it's not just words, but facial expressions that also indicate ethno-racial degradation and intolerance. It's not enough for us to just avoid verbal jabs. Language is not just about words; it's about body language too.

22. Defend yourself

If you are the target of ethno-racial humor, slurs or attacks defend yourself.

- First seek refuge in Allah from Satan Following the Prophet's advice, if you are angry, remain silent, sit down, move away or make wudu.
- If you feel your security is being threatened seek any help available.
- If you are attacked defend yourself if you are capable of it.
- Document and pursue the case with local police, the department of human resources and anti-hate groups.

God tolerates a person who is being wronged to respond in the same coin but He prefers us to be better: "The recompense for an evil is an evil like thereof, but whoever forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah. Verily, He likes not the Zalimun (oppressors)" (Quran 42:40).

An ex-Marine member of the white supremacist movement the Ku Klux Klan became Muslim due partly to the polite and confident response of a Muslim doctor to his racist remarks calling him a "dog eater".

This is an example of following Allah's instructions that ask us to respond to evil with something which is better.

23. Stand up for justice

Take an active stand against injustices like profiling and discrimination in the workplace or at schools. Speak out against someone or a group being paid less because of their national background.

"O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it is against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be he rich or poor. Allah is a better

against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be he rich or poor, Allah is a better Protector to both (than you) are. So follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you may avoid justice, and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do" (Quran 4:135).

24. Work with other anti-racism groups

Volunteer time to organizations and groups which are working for an anti-racism agenda or for social justice. All the prophets were sent to help people take a stand for establishing justice (Quran 57:25). Working for a common cause brings people closer. Islam encourages cooperation with non Muslims for the common good of humanity (Quran 5:2).

25. Multi-ethnic Marriages

Some ideas that dislike and discourage multi-ethnic marriages amongst Muslims are wrong because they conflict with the Sunnah of the Prophet and with the Quranic principle of all people being one.

I am not advising anyone to offer him or herself for a social experiment. But we must accept our children's choice with an open heart instead of resistance based on the false interpretation of compatibility (Kafa'a) offered by some books.

26. Raising race free children

Islam does not recognize race, but the society we live in does. Bridging this gap is the challenge of Muslim parenting.

- Choose to live in a multi-ethnic community. Children with multi-ethnic interaction grow up to be better human beings.
- Participate in your PTA with an antiracist agenda.
- Help your children feel good about themselves. Children who feel good about themselves are less likely to be prejudiced.
- Welcome children of all background in your home.
- Debrief them if they come home with a racial slur from the school.

27. Let's have a straight niyyah to please Allah

Let's make our intentions (niyyah) that we will strive to build human society based on the equality of all human beings as Allah has asked us to do. Insha Allah, He will reward us for each step we take to get ourselves, our community, and our society rid of racism and nationalism.

Conclusion

As Muslims who are dehumanized day and night by the media and opinion leaders, it is our duty to emerge as a better human being through this ordeal instead of engaging in the

our duty to emerge as a better human being through this ordeal instead of engaging in the satanic game of counter dehumanization.

Whoever starts to look at others as lower beings first kills his own humanity. Prejudice, racism and nationalism are equal opportunity diseases.

Racism and nationalism are twin evils which have killed more people in last one hundred years than probably all the wars in last one thousand years including crusades and massacres of the infamous Genghis Khan.

Let's launch our personal Jihad against racism. May God be with you. *Allahu Akbar.*