

Advice to Australian Muslim Youth [1]

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The school holidays have started and so my khutba [sermon] today is for our young brothers and sisters—the youth of our community.

The challenges that you face are many.

There are questions that relate to your identity. You may have asked yourself am I Australian Muslim OR Muslim Australian?

Am I an Arab, Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi Muslim who is also an Australian? Or am I a Muslim Australian from an Arab, Indian or Bangladeshi heritage?

You may have even asked yourself what it means to be good Muslim in Australia.

You may also be challenged by the various issues that surround you on a daily basis: the question of boyfriends and girlfriends, drinking alcohol and smoking, music and 'fun'.

How to dress?

And you may have even asked yourself to what extent are you free to do and say what you want as a Muslim living in a democratic nation?

You may even be confused about which 'Muslim' group to follow, which school of thought to follow (*Madhab*) or which Imam you should listen to.

These are mighty challenges that require genuine answers that can help you keep your Islamic identity while being an active and positive Australian citizen.

To date, our community—its Imams and leaders, its various organisations have been unable to work together to find solutions for these challenges.

Often internal conflict, politics and our inability to work together is the leading cause for not being able to provide the youth with proper answers, proper infrastructures to help them meet these challenges.

One of the most difficult challenges for us as Muslims, and particularly for young people, is the negative propaganda against Islam and Muslims, and the bad conduct of some Muslims.

For almost a decade Australian media has represented Islam and Muslims in a negative way. For the last decade every time you listened to the news, opened a newspaper or a magazine you would have witnessed some criticism against your faith, your Islamic identity, and your Islamic 'culture'. So, if you are now 20 years old, then for 10 of those years you would have grown up in a media and political environment that was negative for a young Australian Muslim.

Additionally, the horrible actions of some Muslims added to this negative representation.

This attack on Islam and Muslims can cause you to feel inferior, does not belong, or un-Australian despite the fact that you may have been born here, nurtured here and you know no other country than Australia.

One of the best ways to meet this challenge is to educate yourself about Islam, Islamic history and the many great contributions that Islam and Muslims gave to the world.

Educate yourself beyond the usual rhetoric that you hear at 'usual' Friday Khutba, or madrassa. You need to rise beyond that level of education.

Not just the basics of Islam.

Simple following of Islam without proper understanding is not enough.

And, don't wait for someone to come and take you by the hand. Don't wait for the leaders and Imams. They have their hands full. You must initiate the process.

You must lead the way.

First: You need to understand what *Imān* (faith) is; the might and power of Allah Ta'ala; His wisdom and His absolute qualities.

You must never underestimate the value of faith. Our civilisation is one of faith...and knowledge.

Faith cannot be imitated. You must know for yourself who is Allah; His attributes; His qualities; His wisdom.

Proper *Imān* is your path to safety.

It protects you against temptations.

It helps you against Satan.

It establishes and strengthens your identity.

You need to explore the Qur'an...read it...understand it...and ponder on how Allah describes Himself. Take the following verses, for example:

قوله تعالى: (وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ) [الأنعام:59].

And with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures-- none knows them but He; and He knows what is in the land and the sea, and there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear book [6:59]

وقوله تعالى: (أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ فِي كِتَابٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ) [الحج:70].

Do you not know that Allah knows what is in the heaven and the earth? Surely this is in a book; surely this is easy to Allah [22:70].

Second: You need to educate yourself about the history of Islam; its contributions to the world, the way it interacted with other people and cultures, its flexibility in various aspects of life and its strictness regarding other aspects.

Take for example science – the pride of the modern Western world. Its basis is the experimental, scientific method.

It was not Roger Bacon (born 1213 or 1214) or Francis Bacon (22 January 1561 – 9 April 1626) who pioneered the scientific method but it was the eleventh century Muslim scientist Ibn al-Haytham. Roger Bacon was only a commentator on Ibn al-Haytham’s writings on optics.

It was Ibn al-Haytham in the eleventh century not Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century, who first introduced the notion that science must be experimental.

The greatest physicist of all times, Isaac Newton “himself stood on the shoulders of a giant who lived 700 years earlier.” This is a scientist born in 965 in what is now Iraq who went by the name of al-Hassan Ibn al-Haytham. Ibn al-Haytham is regarded as the father of the modern scientific method; the father of optics; and the first to invent the camera obscura.

Learn more about Islam, its people and its history. And know that knowledge is power.

Knowledge allows you to make the right choice at times of difficulties and confusion.

The achievements of earlier Muslims in terms of both religious and worldly affairs can be attributed to various factors. Among these factors is their understanding of the value of knowledge, and its application. Many are the verses of the Quran and Hadith that speak of the loftiness of knowledge.

Allah, the Exalted, says:

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

“And say: `My Rubb! Increase me in knowledge.” (20:114)

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Are those who know equal to those who know not?” (39:9)

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

“Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe, and those who have been granted knowledge.” (58:11)

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

“It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allah.” (35:28)

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

"Allah makes the way to Jannah easy for him who treads the path in search of knowledge." [Muslim].

"When a man dies, his deeds come to an end except for three things: Sadaqah Jariyah (ceaseless charity); a knowledge which is beneficial, or a virtuous descendant who prays for him (for the deceased)." [Muslim].

In an *athar* quoted by Imam al-Ghazali, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib said to Kumayl:

O thou perfect of knowledge! Knowledge is better than riches, for knowledge guards you while you guard riches. Knowledge governs while riches are governed. Riches diminish with spending but knowledge increases therewith.

Third: Do not be confused about who you are, your identity: You are a Muslim Australian, or Australian Muslim.

There is a perception among many of us that it is fine to be an Indian Muslim, Pakistani Muslim, Algerian Muslim, and Palestinian Muslim. And so on. But, for some reason, there is a false perception that it is not fine to be an Australian

Muslim. The 'Australian' part is seen by some as '*kufr*' (unbelief). Don't be fooled by this simplistic and false understanding.

Don't be afraid to say you are a Muslim and an Australian. Don't be afraid to say that you are an Australian Muslim.

If you deny your Australianness you will deny a very long history of Islam in Australia.

Islam is part of the Australian fabric. As it was part of the European fabric. Islam was in the heart of Europe (Spain) for 800 years. Islam has a European identity. It is not foreign to Europe...or Australia.

So, don't be ashamed to say that you are Australian Muslim.

Islam and Muslim have been able to work in cultures and countries for centuries: China, India, Africa and Europe.

Muslims and Islam came to Australia many, many years before white settlement. Muslims from Makassar, Indonesia came to Australia at least 400 years ago, if not more.

Muslims have contributed tremendously to Australia. Muslims are part of Australian history. They are part of Aboriginal history. They had excellent relations with the Aboriginals of Australia. History proves this even though you are not taught this at school.

Fourth: Being Australian does not mean that you have to drink and gamble. It does not mean that you have to choose what is negative. You should have a positive identity. You should be a Muslim who says if something is good then it is mine. If it is bad it is not mine.

Drinking is not mine. Gambling is not mine. Pornography is not mine. Boyfriends and girlfriends are not for me. Night clubs are not for me. Drugs are not for me.

But this is not what makes Australia and the Australian identity. If you think this is what Australia is all about then you need to wake up from your sleep and slumber.

And who said there is no drinking, gambling, pornography and night clubs in 'Muslim' countries? These negative aspects of society are found everywhere, unfortunately.

But there is more to being Australian than these bad customs.

- Sport – Cricket; Rugby; Soccer
- Fairness, egalitarianism
- Informality (take it easy mate; she'll be alright...)
- Sense of humour
- Good Literature
- Mateship – equality and friendship
- Support for the weak
- Support for the homeless
- Support for the unemployed...and so on

These are unique aspects of Australia and of being Australian. These values are also Islamic and support and 'Islamic' identity.

Unfortunately, you often hear adults who have been in Australia for 20, 30 or 40 years say that this is not their country. Because of this attitude they never plan to contribute to the future of this country, or the future of Islam and Muslims in this country.

You must not be afraid to say that you are a Muslim Australian/Australian Muslim. Yes, your parents maybe from Jordan, Palestine, Pakistan or India, and you should be proud of that also. But you are an Australian Muslim.

Make this place your home, your country.

If you do then you will become functional and familiar at the local level.

You will become dynamically engaging, fostering stable indigenous Muslim identities and allowing Muslims to put down deep roots and make lasting contributions here.

In Australia, we need to take on this commitment, and understand that our Islam and long history as a world civilisation do not constitute barriers in the process but offer tremendous resources and opportunity.

But this challenge should not be your sole responsibility, it is a community responsibility. Your imams, leaders and Islamic organisations must help in this process.

Fifth: As a young man or woman, remember that your friend has the greatest impact on your life.

A wise man once said, 'tell me who is your friend and I will tell you who you are.'

Now it is called 'peer group pressure.'

Have you not heard Prophet Muhammad's saying "A person's faith is according to his/her friend's faith. So, beware who to befriend.'

Having a group of friends is an important part of being a teenager. It is how teenagers learn to get on in the world of their own age group and to gradually become independent.

Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life. They can also be a challenge as well.

Bad friends can have a devastating effect on your character as a Muslim. These pressures should never be underestimated, which can intimidate you into taking drugs, smoking, 'hanging out'; nightclubs, and having illegal relationships with man and women.

Finally: remember that you have many people in your community who are willing to help you, offer you sincere advice, give you hand when you need it.

But you need to approach them.

Don't be embarrassed to ask the difficult questions from your local imams and religious leaders.

Offer to be involved at the masjid.

And advise the imams and other community leaders on youth issues. Tell them how they can help.

Offer them suggestions and follow it up with them.

And never feel that your young age is a barrier...

Remember that you are the future of Islam in Australia.

You are the future leaders.

You can steer the community in a positive way forward and can help them understand who they really are, and how best to live as Muslims in this country.

You must lead...and not be led.