

The Reminder

BY SHAYKH AMER JAMIL

Our Youth Our Future

The Muslim community of Scotland is the youngest of all communities with low achievements in many areas:

- **31% of the Muslim community is under the age of 16, whilst only 10% are above the age of 50** (2001 Census).
- **Of all people aged between 16 and 29, Muslims are the most likely to have no qualifications (22%). This trend continues at 45% for the 30-49 age group** (2001 Census).
- **Employment levels amongst the Muslim community are the lowest in Scotland, at 45%** (2001 Census). **This has been linked to some degree to the low educational qualifications and due to the lower rates of employment amongst Muslim women.**
- **The number of Muslims in prison is disproportionate. Muslims account for 0.84% of the population yet comprise 1.3% of the prison population** (Prison Statistics Scotland, 2005/06).

YOUTH IN ISLAM

The image of the youth in Islam is very dynamic and positive. There are many great examples of the youth in the Quran such as certain Prophets like Ibrahim (Abraham), his son Ismael (Ishmael), Yusuf (Joseph), Yahya

(John the Baptist) and others such as Maryam (Mary) the mother of Isa (Jesus) and the People of the Cave (Peace and blessings be upon all of them).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was kind and compassionate towards all people, but he was especially caring towards the youth: *"He is not from us, the one who does not have mercy for our young nor respects our elderly"* (TIRMIZI). He (peace and blessings be upon him) understood their needs and treated them with respect.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was once brought a drink, which he drank. There was a boy on his right and elders on his left. He (peace and blessings be upon him) said to the boy: *"Do you give me permission to pass (the drink) to the others?"* (It is normally the one who is seated on the right who has the first right to drink next). The boy replied *"By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, I cannot prefer my share of what is from you to anyone else"*. So the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) placed it into his hand (BUKHARI).

He (peace and blessings be upon him) built their character and prepared them for positions of leadership and responsibility.

IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

“Take advantage of five states before five : Your Youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your prosperity before your poverty, your free time before you become preoccupied, and your life before your death” (TIRMIZI)

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) informed us that a Muslim will be asked about 4 things on the day of Resurrection;

What he did with his life, how did he spend his youth, how did he earn his money and what did he spend it on and how did he act upon knowledge he had learnt. (BAYHAQI)

This hadith firstly mentions that we will be asked about how we spent our lives, this covers a person’s entire life from birth to his death. However, we are also questioned more specifically about a certain period of our lives – our youth. This indicates that what we do in this particular period has very serious consequences in the Hereafter.

A person in his youth is at his prime. It is a time when he is full of energy, strength, enthusiasm and desire. Controlling all of these in a Halal (lawful) way is a lot more difficult than at an older age. At an older age a person is more conscious of death and therefore, more likely to control himself from doing Haram (unlawful) acts.

In contrast a young person is less likely to think of death. Generally, young people feel they can amend their ways when they are older. Consequently, the reward for doing good deeds in a person’s youth is multiplied significantly more than in old age. Whoever wastes this precious time will never be able to make it up when they are older.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) mentioned that there are 7 special categories of people who will be given protection on the Day of Resurrection under His Shade. One of the 7 categories is **a youth who grew up in the worship of Allah (the All-Mighty)** as narrated in BUKHARI.

INSPIRATIONAL YOUTH IN ISLAMIC HISTORY

Islamic history is full of young Muslims who made the most of their youth and consequently left their mark in history. The first period of Islam in Mecca was the hardest and most difficult. The first Muslims endured torture, verbal abuse, oppression, boycotting and physical violence. The vast majority of the early companions (May Allah be pleased with them) were young and it was they who supported the Prophet's (peace and blessings be upon him) mission in those early days.

It was upon their young shoulders that Islam prospered. Their lives were full of sacrifices, striving to do good for themselves and others, and concentrating their efforts on the true worship of God (May Allah be pleased with them all). It was for these reasons that they were successful and came to be remembered throughout the centuries. There is much for our youth to learn from the way in which they spent their lives.

Most of our famous contributors in history whether they were Islamic scholars, rulers, thinkers, scientists, poets, historians or writers, all dedicated large parts of their youth in their respected fields. They used their youthful years positively for the betterment of society and humanity.

Those of our youth involved in gangs, drugs, fraud and generally wasting their youth, need to learn from the example of their predecessors.

HELPING OUR YOUTH

A recent report conducted by the Children's Society has concluded that more young people are anxious and troubled and that children's lives in Britain have become "more difficult than in the past". With statistics indicating high prison numbers and low achievements in education and employment, the challenges for Muslim youth are even greater.

The youth have a lot of energy, ideas, enthusiasm and potential. On the other hand, elders have wisdom and life experience. We need to combine both of these to maximise the hidden potential of the community.

It is vital that the Muslim community implements the following:

- The community must concentrate its resources and efforts into helping our youth become dynamic individuals for the future.
- Our elders need to nurture, teach and guide the youth. This will require them to listen to the concerns of young people, give them more responsibility in community organisations and then oversee their development ensuring they become strong leaders of the future.
- The youth need to listen to and respect their elders, in order for them to fully benefit from their experience and wisdom.
- We must invest our money, time and resources into youth projects and activities. Much of our charity is sent abroad but we must ensure that charity starts at home first.
- Mosques need to become more youth friendly. The talk preceding the Friday sermon needs to be relevant to issues affecting the youth and delivered in English (since the youth is the majority of the community their needs take priority over any other group).
- There needs to be better Islamic education tailored towards the youth which encourages them to learn, ask questions and develop their thinking.
- Parents need to take a more active role and interest in their children's lives.
- Our youth need to be given more responsibilities at an earlier age.

CHALLENGES OF MUSLIM YOUTH

In the wake of 9/11 and 7/7 Islamophobia has increased. The unfortunate reality is that many non-Muslims have become accustomed to a distorted image of Islam through the media. In 2006 a report showed how half of Scots believed that Scotland would begin to lose its cultural identity if more Muslims came to live here compared to 38 per cent in 2003.

Some believe we are in a helpless situation as the power of the media is too strong in influencing people's attitudes. However, we can learn many lessons from the early days of Islam in Mecca. The early Muslims were also powerless with the majority viewing them with suspicion and fear. Despite that they managed to change the attitudes of many non-Muslims in Mecca through their sincerity, good moral character, patience, truthfulness, commitment to doing good for others and upholding justice for all.

In the view of many contemporary Muslim thinkers it is our youth who have been born in this country, who understand the language and culture who must take responsibility to show the rest of society the true image of Islam.

For this to happen they will need to have a comprehensive understanding of Islam and then implement it in their own lives. The saying "actions speak louder than words" is very true. Every Muslim must realise that he/she is an ambassador of Islam and his/her actions will reflect positively or negatively on Islam as a religion.

At the height of Islamic civilisation Muslims contributed and advanced in many fields including; medicine, astronomy, science, engineering, mathematics, philosophy, sociology, architecture and law. Their desire to contribute to humanity and society stemmed from their Islamic teachings. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"The best of people is the one who is most beneficial to people" (HAKIM).

It is this spirit that our youth needs to revive and apply in their lives. Society faces many

challenges with problems with alcoholism, obesity, smoking, drugs, violence, poverty and climate change. Scotland spends £5 billion on drug and alcohol abuse, has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates and violent crime has doubled over the past 20 years.

Our youth need to play their role in meeting these challenges for the betterment of the whole of our society.

We must invest in our youth. They are the future for Muslims and Islam in Scotland.

Are we ready to take action? Are our youth ready to rise up to their responsibilities?

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