

Protection of Faith Must Take Precedence

ACKNOWLEDGE THE SERVICES OF PIOUS PRECURSORS AND
ENTERTAIN RESPECT FOR THEM
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This speech was delivered at the Muslim Community Centre of Chicago on June 20, 1977. As there was a very representative gathering and it was going to be the last speech of the tour, the Maulana thought it fit to restate briefly what he had seen and felt during his stay in that part of the world, and, also, offer some suggestions.

Brothers, Sisters and Friends!

I have been journeying through the United States and Canada for the last three weeks. During it, I have made dozens of speeches in Urdu and Arabic. But a speech is, after all, a formal public discourse in which there is the force of eloquence as well as repetition of ideas. Today, I Will talk to you informally, like a family-member. I will give some personal impressions, and offer a few suggestions, and shall feel obliged if you will think over them seriously.

After meeting different people and representatives of different organisations, I have arrived at certain conclusions. There are, as it were, the gains of the present visit for which I am deeply grateful to M.S.A. and other well-wishers. I pray to Allah and beg you, also, to join me in the prayer that at todays meeting, I may say only what is going to be useful and beneficial to you in the long run, and this journey of mine does not turn out to be an exercise in futility, for I am often assailed by the doubt whether I have proved really worthy of all the trouble. It has been a long and expensive affair and friends have spared no pains to make it possible Now, will I not be called to account by Allah for it May be, I have committed mistakes during the trip and failed to live upto expectations. What I am going to say, today, may serve as an atonement for my failings. There is no dearth of speeches, and it has, also, become customary to put questions to the speaker at the end of a speech. In the midst of it all, however, the real thing is forgotten. Often it so happens that during a speech the listeners begin to formulate questions in their minds. I hope you will not indulge in the exercise until I have finished.

First of all, I will ask you earnestly to protect the wealth of Islam you possess. Do not lose it at any cost. If you realised how short was the life of world and how long the life of futurity and through what stages were you going to pass in the Hereafter, your hair would stand on end. Who will be more unfortunate than ourselves if we did everything here in America but allowed the provision of the fear of Allah and soliciitude for the Hereafter to go to waste. I swear by Allah that it would have been much better to starve than to invite the risk and imperil the religious future of our children. We will be the greatest losers if we gained everything, but lost the wealth of Faith.

The Apostle of Allah said, One of the three qualities essential for tasting the sweetness of faith is that the idea of going back to Apostasy after a man has embraced Islam is as dreadful to him as being thrown into fire.”

Let us not, by our conduct, be the verifiers of the truth of these verses of the Quran:

Shall We tell you of those who lose most in respect of their deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, while they thought they were acquiring good by their works? (XVIII: 103-104)

The poor souls believed that they were acquiring good by their works! This is the moral of these verses. What I fear is that it might be applying to us. Many people know that they are doing wrong when they are guilty of a reprehensible or immoral act. But a peculiarity of the modern civilisation is that it never occurs to a man that he can err. He is so smug and self-satisfied. For instance, if one enquires from anyone in India or Pakistan where his brother was and what he was doing, he will reply with a twinkle in his eye, "Masha Allah, He is in America and earning so many thousand dollars." This is what is being said back home. Here, on our part, we say, "How well have we done? What would we be earning had we stayed in Hyderabad, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Lahore or Karachi? Here we are getting more than what a Governor or Minister in India or Pakistan gets?"

Be on your guard against this frame of mind and prefer the security and preservation of Faith to every kind of worldly success so that you do not depart from this world save as truthful Muslims. I say that a man who lives in America and takes the Faith unimpaired with him to the next world will, perhaps, merit a greater reward than him who dies in Arabia because he protects the lamp of his faith against all sorts of storms and tempests. It is related that the Apostle of Allah said:

"Some of my brothers will be steadfast in Faith and observe their duty to Allah." "Are we not your brothers?" asked the Companions. You are my Companions," replied the Prophet, but my brothers are those who have not seen me. They will be born much later and their faith will be on the unseen. i. e. they will embrace Islam without seeing me."

Believe me, you can attain the highest grade of spiritual excellence in America and the good work you do here will be infinitely more pleasing to the Lord because the mother feels more strongly for her child when it is far off from her and prays more earnestly for its safety. You are the children of Islam who are placed far away from its cradle and surrounded by forces of Apostasy and Materialism. You will, therefore, be receiving the special attention of Allah. Do not despair of His Mercy.

Give precedence to Islam in all circumstances. Poverty with Faith is a million times better than power and wealth that are without it. By the grace of Allah, you are an intelligent and educated people- Should there be the least danger to Faith, go back to your native land or to any other place where there may be the security of Faith, along with your family, even if you have to do it on foot. Whatever the conditions, your endeavour should be to live upto the Divine Commandment: And die not save as men who have surrendered (unto Him). (11: 132).

Next, let all your deeds be intended for seeking the countenance of the Lord and no other consideration, like that of place or position, should prevail. Worldly gain will, Insha Allah, come your way according to your ability and application, but take care of your intention so that you may receive the due reward on what you do. As a Tradition of the Prophet reads :

“The actions are judged according to intentions, and to every man is due what he intended. Thus, whosoever migrates for the sake of Allah and His Apostle, his migration is accounted for the sake of Allah and His Apostle; and whosoever migrates for the sake of this world or to wed a woman, it will be accounted only for the purpose for which it is intended.”

Look into your intention from time to time, and make it right. The aim and idea behind all your acts should be the propitiation of the Lord and the service of Islam and Muslims. You will, then, Insha Allah, earn the reward equal in value to that on Jihad, and, sometimes, even on martyrdom.

Your effort should be to do everything with Iman (faith in Allah) and ihtisab (confident expectation of Divine recompense) – A deed carries weight with Allah only when it is performed with iman and ihtisab. For example, it is stated in a Tradition about the fasts of Ramzan that, whoever keeps the fasts of Ramzan with Iman and ihtisab, all his previous sins will be forgiven”.

You may well ask how can fasting be observed with bad- niyati (badness of intention). Brothers, bad-niyati is one thing; be-niyati (absence of intention) is another; and, as I often say, the Muslims are more a victim of be-niyati than bad-niyati. At the time of performing a deed they care not to ask themselves whether they are doing it with the intention of pleasing the Lord or out of habit or custom.

Thirdly, do not be self-complacent. Look inward, into your own heart and mind. Keep your deeds under constant review. Cultivate the habit of self-criticism. Be your own examiner. I will advise you to visit your native countries regularly, every two years or so. Maintain a living contact with the places of your origin. It would be better if you could go to India, Pakistan or the cities of Mecca and Medina and spend some time there in a religious environment and in the company of virtuous and Allahy men. The wells of religious fervour and Allah-consciousness would dry up within you if you went on living here without a break. The battery of the heart must be charged from time to time by going to your country and passing a few months in it. I have noticed that there is a marked difference between those who maintain a contact with their native lands and those who do not. People who are out of touch with their home-countries generally, develop an insensitiveness towards religious feelings, values and ideals.

Even if they offer Salaat and observe fasting, it is in a routine manner. I agree that this, too, is not unavailing, but they grow indifferent to the spiritual content of these acts. They fail to appreciate their solidity and have no idea of the state of the chosen bondmen of the Lord and of the quality of their prayers and the depth and intensity of their feelings.

Religious environment is in the nature of a power-house. By the grace of Allah, this environment still exists in India and Pakistan and men of high moral and spiritual stature are found in whose company the rust is removed from the hearts. I am saying it from personal experience. The same way have I felt even in Saudi Arabia which I visit frequently. There, also, I have observed that families who have remained in contact with India are in a much better shape than those who have adopted the Arab culture and severed their ties with India. Mecca and Medina are, of course, the real centres of Islam, but they, too, have

started accepting thoughtlessly the influence of the Western Civilisation and the petrodollars are playing havoc with the social and cultural values of the Arabs. What is more, a sort of complacency is created when people take up residence in those blessed cities. We are the inhabitants of Hejaz, we live under the shadow of the House of Ka'aba- this is how they begin to feel. On the contrary, religious condition of those is, definitely, better who maintain a living contact with India make regular visits to it, do not lose touch with Urdu in which religious books and magazines are published, and make the theologians and spiritual mentors coming from India and Pakistan their guests and learn the laws and principles of the Shariat from them; they go more frequently to Mecca and Medina, perform the Umra (Pilgrimage to Mecca at any time of the year apart from the days of the Haj) more often and bear a greater attachment for the sacred town of Medina.

Fourthly, you live in America, and are, also, interested in the Islamic literature. I have seen that there is a growing demand in the United States and Canada for good religious books in English and Urdu, and theologians, writers and leaders from Islamic countries come here and meetings are arranged in their honour. Now, I want to impress upon you one thing : do not deprecate the pious precursors and think ill of those who have served the cause of Faith in their own spheres. It is a most dangerous trend and a grave folly. Our brothers whose knowledge is derived solely from books are, generally, more prone to it. When they read such articles or books they jump to the conclusion that no one had yet undertaken a thorough study of Islam. In their immature minds they form a tapeline for measuring the service to Faith, and proceed to pronounce judgement on every reformer on the basis of it.

You have no idea of the difficult circumstances in which these deep-hearted men had carried out their mission. I can only sympathise with him who, for instance, blames Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani for spending all his time in giving sermons and caring nothing for the establishment of an Islamic State, although, in his days, the Abbasid Caliph had suspended the Islamic order.

Gentlemen ! Are you not aware of the magnificent work done by this illustrious man of Allah? Africa is still indebted to him for it was through his Order that Islam spread there, and similar has been the case with India, Indonesia and many other countries. Allah alone knows how many dead hearts were reanimated by him and how many men were delivered from Apostasy and Polytheism to Islam through his efforts. He knew that the Abbasid Caliphs belonged to the family of the sacred Prophet; they were Arabs and Hashmites, and understood the Quran as well as he did. Then, why did they not acquit themselves in a fitting manner as the Caliphs of Islam? He was convinced that at the root of it lay the excessive fondness for power and wealth. So, he set himself to the task of the moral and spiritual regeneration of the society as a whole. I ask you what is wrong with Pakistan? Is that country and its rulers not Muslims? Had it not been created in the name of Islam? Only the other day a Pakistani friend was telling me that a youngman who was related to him had joined a procession that was being taken out at Lyalipur to protest against the Government. Some- one in the procession raised the slogan "On what was the foundation of Pakistan laid?" On La illaaha, illailaah, Mohammadui rasulullaah," replied the youngman. He had hardly finished the sentence that a bullet hit him in the chest and he dropped dead

on the ground, (It should be noted that the incident took place in the days of Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, after the last General Elections.) Now, tell me, whether the shot was fired by a Muslim or a non-Muslim? Why is it happening? Why is a Muslim killing a Muslim? If a person sincerely believed that the malaise was due primarily to headlong absorption in worldly aims and pleasures and spent his life fighting against it, what was wrong with it.

Sometimes, it is imagined that if anyone did not work for the establishment of an Islamic State, he simply wasted his time and did nothing, no matter whether he was Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, Mujaddid Alf-Sani or Shah Waliullah. This is owing to an imperfect reading of history. I say without hesitation that if Islam is safe and alive in the world, today, the credit for it does not go to any one section of the Ummat. The theologians, the jurists, the scholars of the Traditions, the religious teachers, the spiritual mentors and the Sufi-saints have all played their part.

Were anyone to assert that Imam Abu Hanifa only taught the rules and proprieties of Salaat and Roza while he should have seized power and established an Islamic State, then, my friends, the Islamic State would have come into being, but who would have been there to teach how Salaat was to be offered? And of what worth is a Caliphate in which no one knows how to say Salaat?

Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin what is right and forbid iniquity. And Allah's is the sequel of events. (XXII : 41)

The Quran does not say that those whom We will teach how to offer Salaat will establish the Islamic Government, but that power and rule is meant for paving the way for Salaat so that there remained no excuse for neglect.

Says the Lord : Until persecution is no more, and religion is all for Allah. (Vill : 39)

Never imagine that those who preceded us were worthless men, none of whom understood Islam or tried to establish the whole of it in form as well as in spirit-. In fact, they all were doing their best to serve the cause of Faith : someone was giving sermons, someone was teaching the Traditions, someone was issuing religious decrees and someone was writing books.

According to his aptitude and circumstances, everyone of them was engaged in the propagation and preservation of Islam and moral and spiritual instruction of Muslims.

We must not denigrate those who dedicated their lives to the teaching of the Name of Allah and the training and uplift of the Muslims. It will be the height of ingratitude to deny or depreciate their services. These tasks were performed, generally, by those who, in common parlance, are called Sufis. Do you not know what a glorious role the Sufis have played? They have saved the Islamic society from debasement and degeneration. I can prove it. The tide of materialism would have swept the Muslim Millet away like a straw had they not performed the fundamental duty. It was owing to them that sensuality and self-indulgence could not become the order of the day with the Muslims, and when anyone succumbed to the temptations of the Devil or to his own baser instincts, he went to those pious people and repented. The Sufi saints and spiritual mentors produced the right kind of men and

took from them the work for which they were most suited. Our history is defective. As I have written in the Foreword of *Tarikh-i-Dawat-o-Azimat* (By the same author. It has been brought out into English under the title of *Saviours of Islamic Spirit.*), the fault lies not with the history of Islam, but with the writing of it. The history as it has been written revolves round the courts of kings and noble lords and no worthwhile study has been made of the endeavours of reformation and renovation, otherwise there is no vacuum in it.

Do not be misled into believing that it is only now that some persons have understood Islam. No one had done it earlier. It will show Islam in a very poor light. The continuance of the Quran will become doubtful and so will be its clarity and understandability which has been demonstrated by Divine pronouncements like *By the Scripture which maketh plain*, (XLIII : 2), and *This is clear Arabic speech*, (XVI : 103), once we profess it.

Moreover, how can we be sure that the book which no one could understand for twelve hundred years had now been completely understood ? I, as such, regard every book or article as harmful which gives the impression that the meaning of Islam has not fully been grasped during all these twelve hundred years or that some of the Islamic truths are yet to be unrevealed. I can never accept it. The fundamental doctrines of Islam, the Quranic truths and the imperatives of Faith have always been with us, without an interruption, and whoever imagines that these have not been understood for a long time, betrays a lamentable lack of vision. I challenge anyone to prove about a reality or truth that it was forgotten at any time by the whole of the Islamic World. Ibn-i-Taimiyah has gone to the extent of claiming that there is not even a Sunnat which might have been forsaken by the Muslims as a whole. If it had gone defunct in one part of the Muslim World, it was alive in another part.

Men of faith live in the world like the sun,

Setting here, rising there; rising here, setting there.

Just as the sun never really sets,-if it passes below the horizon in one part of the world, it emerges into sight in another-, the realities of Islam, also, do not become altogether extinct. If they fade away at one place, there rise up men at another place to stake their lives for the survival of those truths. Never imagine that no one has been able to understand Islam properly although it has been here with us forever a thousand years, as if Islam is something of a riddle or an enigma. It is not like the doctrine of Trinity to explain which a complete philosophy is needed. It is nothing of the sort.

We may not meet again, and, hence, my eagerness to bring home the point to you. I do not want to blame or criticise anyone. My object simply is that the whole thing became clear to you.

So, have a good opinion of the pious precursors and pray for them. It is set forth in the Quran:

And those who come (into the faith) after them and pray : Our Lord ! Forgive us and our brethren who were before us in the faith and place not in our hearts any rancour towards those who believe. Our Lord ! Thou art Full of Pity, Merciful. (LIX 10)

There is a great protection of Faith in thinking well of the pious precursors, otherwise when the tongue becomes impudent, one speaks out whatever one likes.

Brothers ! Did they not understand the Faith who were much better than us in Knowledge, Action and Repentance ? If they did not understand, how can we be sure that we have understood it?

Another thing that helps greatly in the protection of Faith is Salaat Do your best to offer Salaat regularly and at the correct time. As Hazrat Omar had said in a circular, "The most important in all your activities and affairs is Salaat. He who protects it, will protect everything, and he who neglects it, will not let anything remain." Thus, hold fast to Salaat; do not neglect it wherever you are. If nothing more, offer only the Farz Rakats, but it is better to offer the Sunnats and Nafils as well for they act as a shield for the Farz Rakats.

Lastly, beware of the Western Civilisation which is now at the peak of its glory. I have noticed here a great laxity in some matters. To put it plainly, the intermixing of the two sexes has attained alarming proportions. Try your best to avoid mixed gatherings. If it is necessary for you to attend a party or meeting where the ladies are present, maintain a distance with them. At such gatherings there should be a separate enclosure and even a separate passage way, for women. There is a great protection in it. The Islamic social and cultural design is based on very wise principles and sound and healthful considerations. Free intercourse between men and women is strictly forbidden in Islam. Do not accept such influences of the American Civilisation. As far as possible, protect the Islamic culture and civilisation and try to preserve its distinctive qualities and standards.

One word more and I have done. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not advocating cultural arrogance, nor supporting a hostile or negative attitude towards anyone. Whatever I have said is in a spirit of sincerity and well-wishing. I entertain respect for everyone and am known for large-heartedness to the extent of earning a bad name. I have relations with people belonging to different schools of thought and hold them in esteem. It is out of a feeling of moral obligation that I have drawn your attention to these things.

I shall, Insha Allah, be praying for you and hope that you, too, will remember me in your prayers.