

From Protest To Engagement

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**Yusuf Islam on: 'From Protest to Engagement'
24th February 2007, London**

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Al-salām 'alaykum wa rahmat Allah wa barakātuhu

[Opening du'a']

The invitation to come to this event was very welcome, number one because of the subject, and number two of course, because of those who are going to be speaking. This subject is only going to be as good as the content, or the delivery of that content, and Al-Hamd lillah, we're so fortunate to have such scholars here with us today. I'm not one of them, believe me, but I have something of experience of this subject: From Protest to Engagement.

One of the things we tend to forget is our obligation to engage with the wider world. It's very easy to fall into the pattern of looking after only our own; our own organisations, our own movements, and forget about the universal message which we are supposed to be responsible for, which we are carrying.

So often we bypass major messages in the Qur'an which remind us of that. And in fact, the first few verses of sūrat Al-Baqarah, where it says, wa allathīna y'uminūna b'mā onzila ilayka wa ma onzila min qabluka- And those who believe in this Book, that which was revealed to you Muhammad and those who believe in what was revealed before.'

Well, you know what, that was the key for me to understand that this message is not

a new message; it's the universal message – the only clear message which does encapsulate the true teachings of every Prophet that was ever sent to this world.

Now, how do we represent that? The image that we have of ourselves is not the true image we should have. That image is the confidence of the universality and the breadth of the message that we are responsible for.

Since becoming a Muslim in 1977 and discovering this key to the unity of all things, and the unity under which everything exists, which is Allah, *subhāna wa ta'ālā*. The world has changed since becoming a Muslim. At that time it was kind of quiet. There were a few book shops that had oriental things and Islam was a quaint, oriental thing. Since that time, everything has changed. The way that Muslims are facing up to these changes or increased dangers of living in this world, seems to be very much the same. We have a problem. One of our problems is that we fail to adapt and how to understand how to refer to the great teachings that we have, from *rasūl Allah, sallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*. And we keep using repetitious and ineffective methods. I'm afraid I disagree a little with Professor Tariq Ramadan about the protest issue. Yes, it is one form of engagement, but the way in which you see how we are perceived after this protest, is damaging to the very cause that we're trying to further. And so when we see ourselves on television, we see ourselves shouting, violently looking as though we're going to tear someone's throat, and those are the pictures they love you know. They love that.

Let's remember, the Prophet (saw), never shouted. I may be corrected, but as far as I know, I've never read about a time when he shouted. Except that his face would go red when he saw the injustice of perhaps an Imam that would take too long in his prayer, and he would be upset because it would be making things difficult for the people to worship. Then he'd get sort of hot. But he wouldn't shout. Especially in the kinds of methods we have seen taken to adopt.

One time he was coming to Medīna – this is a story that perhaps many of you know. He was coming to Medīna and the Sahābah were saying, 'Allahu Akbar!' shouting. The Prophet (saw) said, 'The one you are calling is not deaf, and nor is he absent.' He then went on to say to the narrator of this hadīth, Abu Musa, 'Do you know one of the treasures of Paradise?' he said 'No, *rasūl Allah*.' He said '*lā howla wa lā quwa illā billah*.' In that message, if we understand it, we don't have to shout. We don't have to shout. We don't have to fulfil that self-fulfilling prophecy that Tariq Ramadan was talking about, when you walk up to the customs man and you know that he thinks you're guilty. By the way, everyone else who walks through customs feel like they're guilty, so you're not the only ones.

Wa kathālika ja'alnākum ummatun wasata – And thus we have made you a nation justly balanced. And that description must be fulfilled, and the most important part of that description is justice, again, something that Tariq spoke about; that justice is to be applied to everybody. I think that was another of Tariq's; he is very prolific *mā shā' Allah*, that we shouldn't cut the hands of the thief. We should suspend this. Why? His argument was, because we've got to it universally. We can't just do it to the poor who happen to be on the wrong side, or part of the wrong tribe, or without the right connections. It should be done for everybody otherwise, don't do it. That's universal justice.

One of the biggest things, and again he mentioned it in passing, but I believe it should be more defined. One of the most important things is to again, look at the Sunnah of the Prophet (saw), in his concern for humanity. And what was his first concern? Of course, he was giving charity, and in shā' Allah, we must do that anyway. That is part of the character of a believer. But the big concern was to do with uniting the humanity under the One God. And that is the Message, no different to the one delivered by Jesus, Abraham, Moses and all the Prophets. This is not a new religion, but it's been completed. Therefore this understanding has got to be part of our approach. When it comes to wrong doing, no matter what we see in the world, the greatest injustice is the allowance that has perpetrated education, the media and everything whereby people don't even acknowledge there is even a creator. And that is our first job. When the Prophet (saw) sent Muad to Yemen, a place of the People of the Book, he said you must first invite them to the Oneness of God. Your God and our God is one God, whether you believe it or not, we do. We do. That oneness, that Tawhīd, is where all things begin. Kalima tayyiba. That is the firm beginning of the root.

And to prove this point, we only have to look at one of the sayings, or one of the incidents that is mentioned in the Sīrah. When the Arabs came, the Meccan chiefs came, and tried to convince the Prophet (saw) to give out this, they said 'We'll make you a King, we'll give you all the women, whatever you want, money, kingdom, it's yours.' So he said he wasn't looking for political affluence or power, because he was talking about la ilaha illa la. He said, 'If they put the sun in my right hand the moon in my left, I would never give up this mission until either I am successful or I die in that path.'

What is the last thing – almost the last thing – he said in the final Hajj? He said, 'Bear witness oh Allah' and he asked everybody, 'Have I delivered the Message?' they said 'We bear witness, ballā, that you have delivered the Message.' The Prophet said, 'Allah, bear witness oh Allah, I have delivered that Message.'

Don't belittle that Message of unity, of tawhīd! Don't get involved in the haramness of the pork or the drink or the hijāb, or all those things because that is not where it starts, and you are living in a place like this!

I met a woman yesterday and I had trouble to look at her in the face because she said 'Come on, do you really believe that? Do you really believe there is a God?' I said, 'My God, I do!' she said, 'Do you really believe that you go on after death?' and I said, 'I do!' I said 'Here's the proof: how young do you feel?' she said, 'I feel as young as a child,' I said, 'You see. You haven't aged. Your soul is still as it is. That's going to go on. So whoever you are, that's going to go on, beyond death.' And that is the thing; everyone gets old, I'm getting old – you can see that – but you don't feel that old. It's just that your body starts giving up. But you still feel and you know that is the continuation of soul that Allah has created.

But there are so many people like that who have lost their faith, and the education system is responsible for that, and as Tariq was saying, that is our responsibility. So linkage between Muslims and Islamic Education... Sorry – I don't like the word Islamic anymore. I think sometimes it blocks us. You know, Islamic Shari'a, Islamic da'wa.' All these words, we've got so used to, and yet they lack the meaning. Education is what I'm talking about and we know that education must begin with the fard – knowing who is your Lord, and the compulsory things that are going to save you from the Hellfire.

So that's my message. I believe that the delivery of this message is the continuation of the Sunnah of the Prophet (saw), would never ever give up on this issue, regardless of how many other injustices we see in the world today. Don't forget the curing of the heart will be the curing of the human being.

[Closing du'ā']