

ALI 495: Living Islam in the West - Challenges and Opportunities

Part 1

Academy for Learning Islam

February 2019 | Jamadi al-Thani 1440

Outline

1. Muslim Settlers in the West
2. Importance of Knowing your Society
3. Stages of Western Society

Traditional, Modern and Post-modern societies

4. Challenges and Opportunities
5. Strategies for developing faith
6. Strategies for nurturing faith

Muslim Settlers in the West

Stages of settlement:

Stage One: Some early settlers came as temporary residents

Stage Two: Later settlers consider themselves as permanent residents

Stage Three: Children of settlers consider themselves primarily as Canadians or Americans.

In stage three, Muslims are increasingly influenced by Western thought and lifestyle.

Importance of Knowing your Society

العالم بزمانه لا تهجم عليه اللوابس

One who is knowledgeable about his era
will not be overcome by doubts (Imam al-Sadiq (a))

1. Muslim community is not immune from the culture of host society
2. Focus in the Muslim community tends to be on behavior
3. The primary focus should be on philosophies and ideologies

Stages of Western Society

Traditional society:

Pre 16th century

Christian theology: focus on God and Church

Submitted to the authority of scripture and the priest

Collectivistic

Duty to serve the king or queen

Stages of Western Society

Modern Society

Post 16th Century

Weakening of the Church and growth of humanism and naturalism

Submitted to the authority of reason and empiricism

Individualistic, growth of liberalism

Growth of nation states and democracy, duty of the state to protect human rights

Stages of Western Society

Post-Modern Society

Post 2nd World War, disillusionment with modernity

Growth of relativism and pluralism, post-truth societies

Anti-authority, neither reason or revelation

No defined purpose to life, rise of existentialism

Traditional, Modern and Post-modern ideas are spread through popular culture and lifestyle.

Eastern societies may also have a modern or post-modern approach.

Challenges and Opportunities

What are some of the challenges posed by modern and post-modern ideas to faith?

What are some of opportunities within modern and post-modern societies?

Challenges to Faith

1. The need for faith and organized religion is questioned
2. Exclusive claims to the truth are not easily accepted
3. Scientific explanations replace religious explanations
4. Scriptural claims and values are critically evaluated
5. Scriptural authorities are replaced by individual authority
6. Growth of increasingly diverse interpretations of faith

Opportunities for Faith

1. Develop a rational understanding of faith
2. Develop a deeper understanding of faith
3. Develop a pure understanding of the faith
4. Practice a relevant and dynamic interpretation of faith
5. Enhance our life experiences through faith

Strategies for Developing Faith

1. Develop a rational understanding of the beliefs.

Intellectually satisfying

Learnt through acquiring knowledge from scholars

2. Be selective and smart about media consumption

Books, articles, shows, movies, posts

Read alternate views, but seek guidance from scholars

3. Critically evaluate trends, policies, agendas and statements

Strategies for Nurturing Faith

1. Faith is not nurtured by reading books or listening to lectures.

Knowledge is not acquired by excessive learning, rather it is a light that God casts into the heart of whom He wills.

2. Faith is nurtured by living a lifestyle in-line with the faith.

To him rises the good word, and the righteous deeds raise it.

3. Faith is nurtured slowly and consistently

4. Faith is nurtured by having positive influences

Man lives by the religion of his friends, then let each of you see whom he chooses as a friend.

Living Islam in the West: Challenges and Opportunities

Part 2

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Outline

- Review
- Importance of Community
- Impact of modernity on communal life
- What is a community (misconceptions)
- What is a community (Islamic traditions)
- Communities in today's society

Review

- Apparent nature of a society vs the ideology of a society

Traditional	Modern	Post-modern
Absolute Realism	Scientific Realism	Anti-realism
Religion	Science and Humanism	Subjectivism
Authority with religious leaders	Authority with rational and empirical experts	No-authority
Purpose to know where we came from and where we are going	Purpose to know the physical world to utilize it	No set purpose in life
Limited in our essence	Limited in our biology	No limitations. Imagination is our limit

Review

- We should seek to understand the ideologies and trends of our societies.
 - These ideologies and trends cause the behaviour of our societies
- We should seek to understand the lifestyle choices that lead to these trends and ideologies.
 - Can you think of what lifestyle choices lead to individualism?
- We should seek to accept what is good and reject what is bad.
- We should know that the good can be found in Islamic traditions.
- We should seek to understand the impact of media, friends and school on our thinking and worldview.

Importance of Community

- Need to have strong communities to maintain faith and values.

Commit yourselves to the ? Masses, for surely the hand of Allah is with the community, for surely the isolated from the people is the object of Shaytan in the same way that the isolated from the flock of sheep is the object of the wolf.

Imam Ali (a) in Nahjul Balagha.

Importance of Community

- Living as a minority within a minority.

Be God-wary, and be good brothers to each other, loving each other in the way of Allah, connected and compassionate, visit each other, meet each other, and remind each other of our affairs and revive it.

Imam al-Sadiq (a)

Impact of Modernity on Community

- Urbanization.
 - Majority of world's population lives in Urban areas.
 - Caused by Industrialization in the 18th and 19th century.
 - Migration is very common.
 - Common to live in unfamiliar neighbourhoods.
- Transportation
 - General Ford introduces the assembly line
 - Majority of people can afford a personal automobile
 - Families live away from school, mosque, work, groceries etc.
- How does this change our sense of community?

What is a Community?

Misconceptions:

- A community is not a center.
- A community is not a group of people who meet at a center.
- A community is not a particular number of people.

Surely Ibrahim was a nation.

- The strength of a community is not defined by number, program or services.

What is a Community?

- A community is a group of people who are committed to the truth.

The Prophet of Allah (S) was asked, “what is the community of your nation?”

He (s) said, “The one which is on the truth, even if they are ten in number.”

Or he (s) said, “those who are on the truth, even if they are a few in number”

What is a community?

- A community is a group of people that are bonded to each other in brotherhood.

Surely the believers are only brothers (al-Hujaraat)

- Brotherhood means that the believers are supportive to each other: financially, emotionally and spiritually.

And support each other in acts of goodness and piety (al-ma'idah)

The neighbours and then the people of the house (Lady Fatima)

What is a community?

- Living in the west, communities should have:
 - a strong spiritual guide
 - strong educational institutions (schools and madrasahs)
 - a culture of learning and seeking the truth (post-madrasah classes, camps, retreats)
 - a strong religious identity, other identities are secondary
 - strong support services, not just programs (financial, marriage, health)