

Harvard Imam Calls on Muslim Leadership to Unite for Sake of Our NextGen American Muslim Leaders

Imam Dr. Khalil Abdur-Rashid

Renowned Islamic scholar Dr. Khalil Abdur-Rashid makes a powerful call for Muslim leaders to end divisiveness and meet the challenges of our time for the sake of our children.



-Inspiring the Leaders of Tomorrow-

Today's American Muslim youth are growing up in a time of tremendous challenges, both globally and communally. My generation is leaving behind a world that is more troublesome than ever, although one could argue that the generation before mine thought the same. In reality, every generation will have their share of challenges, but we owe it to the next generation to prepare them for the journey that lies ahead.

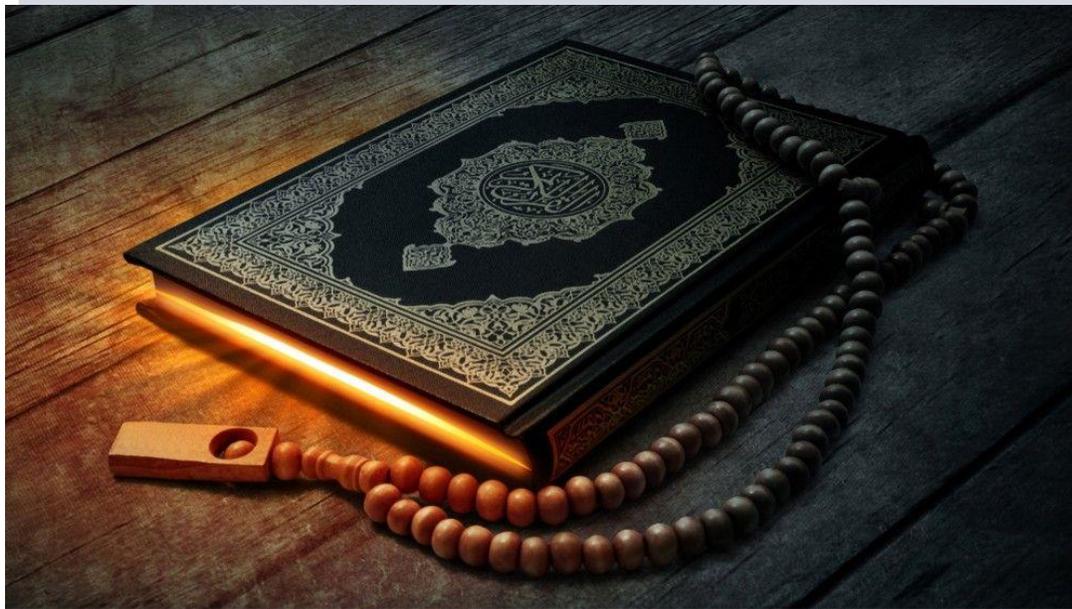
To that effect, the question which must be asked is: How do we prepare the next generation of American Muslim leadership and are we in fact doing it? I leave it to my readers to answer the last part, but I will offer my thoughts on the former.

First, the next generation of American Muslim leadership must be well versed in what it means to be an American. They must understand the history of race, religion, injustice, sacrifice and trauma that mark this country's history. This history still haunts both the American psyche and

society to this very day. Part of one's faith is to love for another what one loves for oneself and to uphold justice.

In fact, love of one's country is an extended part of one's faith, but the patriotism of the next generation of American Muslim leadership must be a moral one. Moral patriotism is the kind of patriotism that honors the ideals and values of this country and calls it to account when its institutions and leaders fall short of living up to those ideals.

America is the final frontier of human expansion, ripe for the development of a just and virtuous nation, but it is us who must understand our country in order to critically comprehend the depth and pervasiveness of the maladies. Understanding the problem, the habits and histories that gave rise to it and the idiosyncratic norms that abound in it, are prerequisites to properly diagnosing and solving the problem.



Second, we need the next generation of American Muslim leadership to be able to distinguish between cultural and religious practices of Islam, and not confuse the two. This requires them to be educated in Islamic practice and be practitioners of Islam, not "*his-lam* or *her-islam*." This is accomplished by achieving literacy in the Quran, which is difficult, given that an entire generation has focused on memorization to the neglect of literacy of the Quran.

Memorizing the Quran and understanding it are two different skill sets. The Quran and the practice (Sunna) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are the source materials for our values and practice. Literacy in the Quran and Sunnah produces civilizational thinking and creative solutions that heal and unify rather than harm and divide. To understand Islam on its own terms means that we engage in a strategic search of our own lived tradition for solutions to political, social, economic, environmental and global crises.



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To be Muslim is simply one aspect of identity politics that allows us to check boxes related to furthering diversity and inclusion efforts. It is a prophetic role that entails walking a prophetic path. This gives us a strategic advantage when offering solutions to some of the most pressing problems of the day.

But if we are illiterate of our own Book and its teachings, then how can we lead? If we possess no understanding of Allah's final guidance for us, then how can we represent? We tend to think we excel by being American, but we are called Muslims in the Quran and it is the realization of that identity, and the fruits that come with it, that is the key to success! It is an Islamic identity that truly defines and that truly endures—and it must be cultivated.

Mohammad
Muslims
Unity Islam
Quran
Peace

Third, we need courage that comes from the strength of our faith, not from the whims of an agenda bound by time and place. We are not in need of any more liberal or conservative Muslims; no more need for Salafi or Sufi Muslims; no more moderate or extremist Muslims. No more qualifiers or labels from others trying to define us, and no more labels that draw dividing lines. We need leadership that is defining.

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We need bonafide Muslims who give in charity, who avoid useless pursuits in favor of strategically beneficial engagement, who do not seek to become scholars for dollars nor to sell out for social media shout out; who do not compromise their values in favor of wealth or prestige and who speak wisely and know when to remain silent; who never forget the plight of the poor, oppressed and forgotten, and who uphold the Islamic values of preserving religion, life, family, property and human worth; those who are peaceful but not weak and who understand the intrinsic value of this world as subject to the value of the next one.

This is what we need from the next generation of American Muslim leadership. Indeed, this is what we need now more than ever.



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