

Hoe je echte kennis van onwaarheden kunt onderscheiden (How to distinguish true knowledge from false)

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Respected brothers and sisters,

As Muslims living in the West gather today at the Blessed Summit 2024, we find ourselves at a critical juncture. In an era marked by rapid change, globalisation, and the proliferation of information, it is imperative that we equip ourselves with the tools to navigate the complex landscape of social, political, and spiritual challenges that lie before us.

The pursuit of knowledge has always been a cornerstone of Islamic tradition, with the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasising its importance. However, in our contemporary context, the acquisition of knowledge takes on new dimensions and imperatives. We must not only seek religious knowledge to strengthen our faith but also develop a deep understanding of the social, political, and economic forces shaping our societies.

As Muslims, we are called to be active participants in the betterment of our communities, striving for justice, equality, and the common good. To effectively engage with the challenges of our time, we must apply sociological insights and methods to analyse the complex interplay of factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and religion in shaping individuals and groups' experiences and opportunities. However, we must be cautious not to fall into the trap of simplistic narratives that paint all ethnic majorities as inherently racist, or all ethnic minorities as universally oppressed. The truth is often more nuanced and complex.

The Quran repeatedly emphasises the importance of standing firm for justice, even if it means going against our own interests or those of our loved ones. To truly embody this Quranic vision, we must work towards dismantling structural inequalities through collective action and solidarity while promoting inclusivity and equity within our own communities. This necessitates that we be aware of the intersectionality of different forms of marginalisation and strive for unity and understanding among diverse groups.

We, as a minority community in the West, have a unique opportunity to counter the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry by educating the broader public about the true teachings of Islam and the diversity of Muslim communities. We must engage in dialogue and discussion with wisdom, compassion, and respect, even in the face of hostility or misinformation. It is essential to remember that most people are inherently

good but may lack proper education and understanding. We can be powerful agents of positive change if we are ambassadors of our faith, focus on our shared values and common humanity, and build strategic alliances with those who share our commitment to justice and equality.

One of the key challenges facing Muslims in the West is the delicate balance between upholding our religious values and navigating the secular landscape of our societies. We must develop the wisdom and discernment to remain true to our principles while actively participating in civic life and contributing to the greater good. This requires a deep understanding of both Islamic teachings and the social, political, and legal systems within which we operate.

To achieve this balance, we must draw upon the rich intellectual heritage of Islam, which has always valued reason, empirical inquiry, and critical thinking alongside the guidance of revelation. The Quran repeatedly encourages us to reflect, ponder, and use our intellect to arrive at truth and wisdom. By engaging with the insights of contemporary sciences and disciplines, such as sociology, political science, and philosophy, we can develop a holistic and contextualised understanding of Islam that is both authentic and relevant to our lives today.

In this endeavour, the role of Islamic scholars, intellectuals, and community leaders becomes crucial. We need individuals who are not only well-versed in Islamic sciences but also have a deep understanding of the social, political, and intellectual currents shaping our world. These leaders must be able to translate Islamic concepts and values into practical guidance and solutions and to engage in constructive dialogue with other faiths, ideologies, and disciplines.

At the same time, we must also cultivate a culture of learning and critical thinking within our communities. This involves promoting education, both religious and secular, and encouraging individuals to seek knowledge throughout their lives. The Prophet (peace be upon him) emphasised the importance of lifelong learning, saying, "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" (Musnad Al-Shihab). In order to share and challenge different perspectives in a spirit of humility and mutual learning, we must create spaces for open and respectful dialogue and debate.

The pursuit of knowledge and the application of sociological, political, and theological insights are not just intellectual exercises but also spiritual and moral imperatives. The Quran reminds us of our responsibility as stewards and vicegerents on earth, stating, "And do not cause corruption upon the earth after its reformation" (7:56). This requires us to constantly reflect on our beliefs, actions, and their impact on others and to be willing to adapt and evolve in response to new knowledge and understanding. It also demands that we have the courage to stand up against all forms of injustice and bigotry, even in the face of adversity or opposition.

As we navigate the complexities of our time, it is essential that we keep the bigger picture in mind. The challenges we face as Muslims in the West are part of a larger struggle for humanity's future on earth. Climate change, widening inequality, the erosion of social cohesion, and the rise of extremism and intolerance are global issues

that require a concerted, collective response. We, as Muslims, have a unique perspective and a vital role to play in addressing these challenges, drawing upon the wisdom of our faith and the insights of contemporary knowledge.

The path ahead may be difficult, but we must remain hopeful and steadfast in our commitment to justice, compassion, and the betterment of all. Let us draw strength and guidance from the eternal messages of the Quran and the Sunnah of our beloved Prophet (peace be upon him). Let us also seek inspiration from the rich legacy of Islamic scholarship and the examples of those who have struggled for righteousness throughout history.

By combining the wisdom of revelation with the tools of reason and empirical inquiry and by placing faith, ethical conduct, and concern for the common good at the centre of our efforts, we can develop a dynamic and transformative understanding of Islam that empowers us to face the challenges of our time with confidence and grace. We must be a source of light and hope in a troubled world, working tirelessly to promote understanding, justice, and the flourishing of all people.

In conclusion, let us remember that the pursuit of knowledge and the struggle for justice and goodness are lifelong journeys that require patience, perseverance, and a sincere commitment. May Allah bless us with the light of knowledge, the strength of faith, and the courage to be agents of positive change in the world. May He guide us to the straight path and enable us to be among those who combine righteous action with sincere intention and who leave behind a legacy of compassion, wisdom, and service to humanity. Ameen.

Thank you for your attention, and may Allah's peace and blessings be upon you all.