

## **Roles of a Mosque in a Muslim Community**

By Shahid Athar.

Building a mosque is a prophetic and Islamic tradition of Muslim Communities. One of the first things that the Prophet Mohammed "Peace be upon him" did when he entered Medina, is to build a mosque, the mosque of Quba. Subsequently wherever the Muslim's have gone, they have built a Mosque for their needs in that community.

When I came to this country in 1969, there were not more than 50 Mosques but, yes Islam is growing and now there are 2,000 Mosques. But, is it the number of Muslims or the number of Mosques which reflects the true parameters in the strength of Islam? Unless we build a community around the mosque to support and maintain the Mosque and strengthen the community, the mosque itself will not protect the community.

Thus we see that at the peak of communist rule in Russia, there were only 400 mosques left in the whole of the USSR while during the revolution in 1914, there were 24, 000. Most of these mosques under communist operations were closed on week days and open only for Friday Prayer or Sundays. 700 mosques in Bosnia were destroyed by Serbs and there are many mosques in India that have been left behind, abandoned, or converted to Hindu Temples.

Let us ask ourselves, why do we need a mosque to begin with? After all, a Muslim can pray at home and his home is his mosque where he can live a comfortable Islamic life with himself and his family. However, we must remember that Islam is a religion to be practiced collectively therefore, all good things if they are done together has more of a reward than the same things done alone. Never in the Quran does Allah address Muslims as believer but, always as believers.

Thus we are supposed to pray collectively in a congregation and participate in other acts of worship like fasting and hajj together. Therefore, we do need a mosque for collective prayer. Many of the well established mosques in the country started with either a rented house,apartment, or basement of a house or even a garage. By growth of the community and their motivation, there are full fledged mosques.

But is the mosque only for prayers? No. The mosque is the center for all Islamic activity as it used to be in the mosques of the Prophet in Medina.

In these mosques, not only prayers took place, but it was a school of knowledge where companions used to study the Quran and ask questions. It was a place for the Government to receive delegations from foreign countries.

It was a treasury from which charity work was done and it was a war-room where decisions and planning for wars imposed on Muslims were made.

In fact, the mosque extended to the care of the needy and orphans, and the sick as well as a place for giving D'awa to non Muslims.

Thus we need our mosques not only to be a place of prayer but, a place for seeking Islamic Knowledge for Muslims and non Muslims, and there should be formal classes for newly converted Muslims to ease them into Islam. It should be a place where our children can receive an Islamic education combating the secular education of their public schools.

It should be a place where community social functions can take place with Islamic guidelines whether it is an Iftar party, eid party, marriage, or aqeeqa ceremony that takes place. It should be a place where Muslim men can socialize with other Muslim men and women with women, young boys with young boys, and girls with girls. Not necessarily in the prayer area but, in other areas of the mosque.

Muslims should have in their mosque a reference library where they can go and study Islam. From the mosque, there should be collection and distribution of all Sadaqa and Zakat. In addition to Sunday School and full time Islamic school, there should be day time and evening coaching classes for students in high school and knowledgeable teachers and professionals in the community should coach our students so that they can do a better job with their grades and provide some career counseling. Within each community, there are many Muslim physicians, male and female thus, I propose that in each mosque there should incorporate a free medical clinic which can meet after Friday Prayer or after Sunday school.

Where Muslims without insurance or those who are in need of emergency help can receive treatment.

If our resources increase, we can open these clinics even to non-Muslims and that would be the best form of D'awa. Another role of the free health clinic, is to provide education to Muslim men and women about health care, preventive aspects, and emergency care like first aid. Screening for diabetes, high blood pressure, and cholesterol can also be done in this clinic on a regular basis.

I propose that in each mosque there should be one room for exercise which can be alternated on days for use between men and women. For Muslim men when they

want to exercise, it is easy because they can put on shorts and start jogging in the streets. We do not want our women to do the same.

Therefore, we must care for their health by providing them an exercise facility in privacy. To furnish an exercise room is not that expensive; less than \$5,000.

Should we allow non-Muslims to come to our mosque or not.

The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) did allow non Christian delegations not only to come and talk to him about Islam but, he allowed them to stay and pray in their own way too. This is Islamic compassion. Doctor Muzzamil Siddiqui, President of ISNA, also wrote a paper in this response agreed to allow the non-Muslims to come to the Mosque. We want to make sure of several things as safeguards. The first is that people do not come in the prayer area. The second is that the women should dress in modesty.

Therefore, if one knows of a certain non-Muslim delegation whether it is a church, interfaith or school coming in, one may want to send them some material regarding the Islamic concept of modesty.

Many times, people are ignorant about Islamic customs and that is no reason to shun them away but, we must educate them.

D'awa to non-Muslims is a necessity and a tool of survival. Imam Fakhri Al Razi said 500 years ago "that we should cease to divide the world into Darul Kufr and Darul Harb but, divide is according to Darul Islam and Darul D'awa". If any part of the earth is not Darul Islam, they are all in need of D'awa.

Support maintenance of the mosque is every ones responsibility and not just that of the organizers. When there is a broken pipe or a roof which leaks in our own house, we call the plumber and get it fixed or do it ourselves. We do not do fund raising for maintenance of our house or for the education of our children. Therefore if we consider a mosque, The House of Allah as our responsibility, then we should take care of it as good or better than we take care of our own house and our family. I propose that every member of the community irrespective of his financial status does something for their mosque. Those who can give, they should give money. Those who can work, if they cannot give money, should work in teaching children or doing the maintenance work whether it is painting, cleaning or yard work. There are many programs available through grocery stores and telephone companies that will benefit the mosque.

We have implemented such programs with a long distance company as well as two grocery stores and the income for a small community can be as much as \$2,000 per month.

## **PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIVE SOLUTIONS**

There are many problems which are going on in several communities inside the mosque which has not only divided the community but, sometimes exposed our disunity to non-Muslims when the matters go to court.

Some mosques have become inclusive clubs or organizations putting the glory of the organizer inside and closing the door for everyone else.

An Islamic organization should be able to bring more people in rather than chase them out. This is related to our egocentrism. We are living in a "me first" society where the motto is I will get Me a hamburger. For most Muslims, this is the issue. "I will not cooperated with you since I don't like you but, when I do the same thing, I want you to support me". An extension of this problem is "whatever you are doing is un-Islamic because it is such-and-such Hadith against it however, I see nothing wrong with what I am doing since I see nothing in the Quran or Hadith against it".

Another problem is the fact that "there is another group which makes things happen, a second which watches things happen, and a third which does not know what has happened". We Muslims usually belong to the third category of apathetic people but, we have added a fourth which will criticize everything that happens. When the rice pilaf is being cooked, we want to stay away from the heat. When it is being served, we want to complain of a shortage, of salt, sugar, raisins and almonds. We always like to watch what others are doing without worrying about ourselves. The nature of this problem is told from the following story told to me by an elderly Muslim scholar. After he led the congregation in prayer, someone from the congregation came and told him that his prayer was invalid. When asked why, he said "your nose was not touching the ground in Sujood". The Imam replied, " I am an old man and I had a heart operation. It is possible that my nose was not touching the ground during Sujood but, may I know what was your nose doing at that time"? There is another story which goes like this. The host was insisting to the guest that he should eat more of the sweets that he was serving. The guest said " no I am full. I have taken 4 pieces already". The host said " No you are wrong, I have been counting and you have taken 6 pieces".

In every mosque, there is sometimes friction between the Administrator and the congregation; between the Imam, the Shura, and the Board of Trustees, between brothers and sisters, between conservatives and liberals, and of course between different ethnic groups. Not only do these differences hurt the feelings of one

another but, sometimes has even led to fighting or court battle. How do we solve such problems? We must remember that all of us are subservient to Allah and His messenger. That Imam has to be followed only when he is following Allah and his messenger. The Imam expects by his example to generate love for Him in the heart of the congregation members.

Islam is a colorless religion. It does not endorse one color of skin over another; one language over another; one type of food over another. Islam is like a flower garden with roses and other flowers of different colors and smell. Diversity among Muslims in their origin of tribes languages are signs from Allah. We should forget our differences and remain united in love and service to each other only for the sake of pleasure of Allah. Ask yourself in your Mosque; are you part of the solution or part of the problem? In one church, I saw this sign which said "a church is not a playground for the mischief makers, but a rehab hospital for the spiritually ill. Come on in, the doctor is in". The same thing can be said about a mosque also.

It is important for the congregation to participate in the activities of the mosque and for the organizers to invite everyone including women to actively participate. Womens roles should not be just left for cooking for the functions in the Mosque but, even to participate in the decision making process effecting the mosque as they would do in their own house. Children should not consider Sunday School a place where they are dragged from home to memorize some Surah but, a place so appealing and lively and full of interesting activities that they insist on going there every Sunday. And their parents should not look at Sunday School as a baby sitting place or a day care center where they can drop the kids off and watch the football games or go shopping. They must be actively involved in adult education or whatever activities are going on that day.

What is good for our children is also good for us. I firmly believe that when a Muslim is attached to a mosque, half of the problems are solved. Then he can take the message of Islam that he learns in the mosque to his home and environment, then most of the problems can be solved. We should not accept donation without participation, nor should we accept criticism without volunteering to resolve it.