

## A Message on the 17<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>

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17 years ago I began my work as a social worker and walked into my supervisor's office to receive my new caseload of children who needed protection from abuse and neglect by the very caretakers who had a moral and legal obligation to protect them. I asked my supervisor for permission to take an extra 30 minutes for a later lunch break on Friday on account of the distance I had to drive to perform the Friday prayer. As she granted me extra time on Friday for that purpose, she handed me my new case load and ask me to explain a bit about Islam and why Muslims had to prayer in congregation on Friday. As I was proceeding to answer, a co-worker entered the office and frantically announced the crashing of a plane into the World Trade Center Tower.

Since 9/11/2001 American Muslims have been placed in a dual position of explaining themselves on the one hand and being treated as a caseload to be investigated, targeted, and handed off to another administration to deal with on the other. The impact of this new world era that was ushered in by the worst tragedy on American soil is daunting. We mourn our fellow Americans of all faiths and traditions who lost their lives in that horrible crime on this very day in 2001. We also stand firmly with our country and fellow citizens against all forms of hatred, extremism, and violence of any stripe, no matter the source.

But the current political and social climate that we find ourselves in today in America is a product of not only of the evil actions of that day but also of the mistaken choices that were given preference to by some in position of authority over more balanced and just ones. Today, the impact of the mistakes of the post-9/11 era in the United States has generated a climate where not only anti-Muslim and anti-Arab bias endure but one where entire communities of color are demonized and threatened in the name of security. The "Otherizing" of each other has become endemic to the current way we "co-exist". Tolerance is no longer tolerable.

The walls that divide communities and neighbors become the limit of our imagination but we forget that walls are requisites for the creation of windows – paradoxically, windows cannot exist without walls. We must employ the intellect of our souls to drive us, not in pursuit of means towards ends, but instead towards higher means in the pursuit of higher ends. We must see that it is never too late to turn hate into hope; we must rise from the ashes of who we were and exit from the shadows of who we are, and raise our standards towards who we can be! We can each be agents of change to help our country heal from the wounds that often times seen so unhealable. We must learn to see windows in walls – we must learn to construct windows in walls.

This day also marks the beginning of the Islamic New Year and the sacred month of Muharram. Muslims fast on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of this month in honor of how God saved Moses and the Israelites from Pharaoh by parting the sea. It is also a time where Muslims remember the

slaying of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein and his entire family, at the hands of extremists. This solemn month reminds us of sacrifice, courage, and Divine Blessings upon those who resisted oppression, who lived and died for on the side of hope not hate. For American Muslims, we now live at the intersection of history and today. Let us honor this solemn occasion by remembering those that are no longer with us; by thinking about what we will leave behind of a better place when we are gone; by pushing ourselves and each other to higher causes and higher ends; by committing ourselves to making windows in the walls around us; and by resisting with courage and moral character when hatred, oppression, and evil are deployed against us.