

## **Burning the Qur'an** **BS Foad, M.D**

There is a lot of Anti-Muslim bias and rhetoric in the news media. This is propagated by the behavior of Muslim extremists and terrorists who project an image of a backward hateful religion. It also stems from ignorance of the teachings of Islam and what it represents. Recently a cleric threatened to burn the Qur'an and this was met with rejection and condemnation from Muslims and non-Muslims alike. To put things in prospective the following concepts will be discussed:

-What is the Qur'an and what is its central message?

-What does burning copies of the Qur'an mean?

-How should we react to such incidents as citizens of a democracy and in a country Noted for its plurality and religious tolerance?

To Muslims the Qur'an is the literal word of God. It was inspired to Prophet Muhammad 1440 years ago and was preserved both in oral and written forms. The Qur'an is the constitution that the Muslims follow, and its guidelines define their behavior and character. The obligation of the Muslims to the Qur'an is to read it with attention; try to understand it; apply its guidelines in their lives; teach it to others and to defend it against those who distort its message. It is not surprising, therefore, to see the reaction of Muslims around the world to an act that shows disrespect and ignorance of what the Qur'an means and represents to Muslims.

If this minister did proceed and burn copies of the Qur'an, he is only burning paper. He cannot extinguish the message and guidance that the Qur'an brings to Millions of Muslims. The Qur'an is alive and well preserved in the hearts and minds of many. The Qur'an states:

“It is indeed clear signs in the hearts of those endowed with knowledge”

Al-Ankabut 29: 49

Copies of the Qur'an were burned before, but that act did not prevent the spread of Islam, or meant that the Qur'an is dead or that its light of guidance has been extinguished. The Qur'an itself states:

“They would like to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God will not Allow but that His light should be perfected, even though those who reject faith May detest”

At-Tawba 9: 32

What is the proper reaction to threats that the Qur'an is to be burnt, or that Prophet Muhammad is ridiculed or that the message of Islam is distorted?

Emotional outcry and the image of masses of Muslims demonstrating in protest is not the proper reaction or the right behavior. Even worse is reacting in a wrong way by showing violence or by destroying property. Our reaction as Muslims should be to

contrast the truth to the falsehood, distortions and stereotypes propagated. We must show that the message of the Qur'an is one of tolerance, respect of other religions, and of working together and serving our community, and not a message of hate or violence. We must demonstrate the noble character of Prophet Muhammad and his gentle kind, caring nature, not the worrier image falsely depicted. We need to explain his teachings and sayings, and show how he respected and safeguarded the rights and liberties of non-Muslims.

We do not combat bias and prejudice with death threats or angry demonstrations. Rather, we must show that our Islam made us better human beings and that we reach out to others, and that we help those in need, and that we call for social justice. We should respect the rights of others to their own views, even if they are wrong and even when they attack our religion and what we cherish. The Qur'an stresses that we should safeguard the rights of others, including their right to accept or reject faith, and that as Muslims we are forbidden from forcing any one to become a Muslim against his/ her will:

“Let there be no compulsion in religion”

Al-Baqara 2: 256

“If it had been the will of your Lord, everyone on earth would have believed. Are you then forcing others to believe against their will?”

Yunus 10: 99

Personal note: BS Foad, M.D is a physician who has been in private practice of Rheumatology in Cincinnati, Ohio for the past 36 years. He is a founding member of the Islamic center of greater Cincinnati. He is the author of several books on Islam, including Islam basic concepts; accountability; God's prophets; the life story of Prophet Muhammad; American Muslims; Noble character and Understanding Islam. He teaches Islam at local colleges and has been engaged in interfaith activity for the past 30 years.