

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful, Ever Merciful

Friday Sermon Guidelines: International Women's Day

- Part 1: Sacred Spaces and Women
- Part 2: Women in Islamic History

Part 1: Sacred Spaces and Women

Assalamu-alaikum, Peace be with you

In today's *khutbah* (sermon), we are marking International Women's Day and discussing some of the challenges faced by sisters in our communities.

Today we give thanks to Allah for providing us with this space to worship Him, He is the All Knowing and All Hearing to which we express our love and devotion on this blessed *Jumma* (Friday).

Where do you go to give thanks and show gratitude to Allah the Most High? The Prophet (saw) said that the whole earth was created as clean and pure, and as a place of worship, or a mosque (*masjid*), for him and his followers. All his followers, male and female. As such, he used to offer his prayers wherever they were due, so the idea was to make the act of *salah* (prayers) as convenient as possible.

However today in 2019, we have a problem.

Unfortunately, some of our mosques have become too comfortable operating on partisan lines, making them spaces for particular ethnic groups, such as Arab, Pakistani, Indian, Turkish and so on and then continue to divide further based on their ideological leanings/school of thought and so on. And then we have mosques for men only and recently the emergence of "women-only" mosques as a protest to being excluded from the main prayer spaces. This is a worrying trend.

In his last sermon, the Prophet (saw) said: **'All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over a white; [none have superiority over another] except by piety and good action.'** His final message clearly explains that the only superiority that someone has over another is in piety and good action.

Indeed, the Quran also says: **“O mankind, surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families, that you may know one another; surely the most honourable of you with Allah (Swt) is the most God conscious (pious)...”** (Quran, 49:13)

So from the above saying, we can say that a male does not have superiority over a female and vice versa as all mankind is from both Adam and Eve and the only differentiating factor is their good deeds and their level of piety. That's it, nothing else matters, not class, not status, not background, not gender.

A sacred space is a special place where we all connect with the Divine, individually and collectively. It's a defined space for the purpose of spiritual growth, so really just another name for what a mosque is. It's an inclusive space for everyone regardless of who you are. It's our connection to Allah, the Divine.

Many Quranic verses urge believers, male and female (no distinction is made between the genders) to seek guidance and knowledge in the mosque, to pray, to learn, to connect as a community.

Say O Muhammad, ‘My Lord has ordered justice and that you all maintain yourselves in worship of Him at every *masjid* and invoke Him, sincere to Him in religion’ (Quran, 7:29)

“The Mosques of Allah are populated merely by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish prayers and give charity and fear nothing except Allah, for it is expected that those are of the rightly guided.”(Quran, 9:18)

Would our Beloved Prophet (saw) even recognise some of the spaces that women are given in our mosques today, if given any at all, many that are dirty, damp, and smelly and an entrance that is dark and dingy. Would he allow the women in his family and the women of his community to meet their Lord, in these often badly lit backrooms with sub-standard speakers and a distinct feeling of being an afterthought and not worthy of being a part of the main mosque? This is the reality for many of our sisters today. What are we doing to change this?

Imagine a circle connecting everyone you know and you can include everyone in this room. Together you have all created a sacred space inside the circle yet it would not exist if it were not for everyone joining hands as one. Old and young, black and white. Imagine a powerful bolt of compassion running through the entire circle like electricity binding it together.

Now imagine you have been ordered to leave the circle. A strong authoritative voice informs you don't belong there anymore. You're not sure why. Was it your height, your weight or eye colour, maybe the size of your feet! How would you feel? If compassion or *Rahma* is truly present, would everyone stand by and let you go? Who would be the ones that stand up to this wrongdoing on the part of the entire circle? Would you have the courage to stand up for yourself? What if everyone in the circle, older as well as younger, male and female of

all backgrounds would not accept this? Could you still be asked to leave, would this still be allowed to happen?

In the circle all are equal in the eyes of God – male or female. We are linked through the Divine individually and as a collective community – an *ummah*. The circle represents the sacred space – our community centres and mosques. Sacred spaces are important for men and women, as we are all part of the circle together.

I wonder how the Prophet (pbuh) would have felt - if his beloved wife for 25 years, Lady Khadijah (a.s), or their daughter Fatima bint Muhammad (a.s), or indeed the many other women in his family – were prevented from connecting to their Creator via the sacred space in the *Masjid An-Nabawi* (The Prophet's Mosque) in the city of Madinah? The Prophet's Mosque in the City of Madina was accessible and catered fully for both men and women. Let's reclaim the space that once belonged to all of us and all of us benefited from and return the sacred space to the centre of our lives where it belongs. This is our tradition, our *Sunnah*. There is nothing holding us back from being close to the *Sunnah* but ourselves.

On International Women's Day this week, and in all other days of the year, let us remember that our mosques and community centres are about people, not just buildings. Let us not ignore 50% of our people – our women - but rather support, nurture and encourage them.

Part 2: Women in Islamic History

In Part 2, it is recommended to highlight the role and contributions of some important women in Islamic history. For example:

- Pre-Islamic History

- Aasiyah, Wife of Pharaoh, Hajar, Wife of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s), Maryam, Mother of Prophet Isa (a.s)
- More information in the Quran and Books of Hadith and History.

- During birth of Islam:

- E.g. Khadija bint Khuwaylid (a.s) and other wives of the Prophet (pbuh), Nusayba bint Ka'b al-Anṣārīyya and other early converts to Islam in Meccan society, or Fatima bint Muhammad (pbuh)
- More information in the Quran and Books of Hadith and History.

- More recent Islamic Civilization:

- E.g. Fatima al-Fihri who founded a university in 9th century Fez, Morocco, Mariam Al-Ijlīya a 10th century astronomer, Sutayta Al-Mahmali a 10th century scholar and mathematician
- Further information in www.1001inventions.com/womensday

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Part 1 of this sermon guideline is adapted from a talk given at the MCB Our Mosque Our Future conference in October 2018 on the theme #PeopleNotBuildings entitled Women & Sacred Spaces.