

A Message for the “National Sirah Conference 2008”
by Shaykh Abdallah Adhami

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bismillāh al-rahmān al-rahīm
assalāmu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullāh wa barakātub

Warm and heartfelt greetings from New York City to all the participants of this conference.. and the esteemed and respected guests.. the organizers.. and everyone else listening. We were requested to address two questions: a simple message to the *ummah* on this blessed occasion of the month of the birth of our beloved prophet Muhammad, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*; the second question was, what from his blessed *seerah* impacted us particularly?

Regarding the first, I would like to first say that we were honored to narrate in *al-adab al-mufrad* of Imam Bukhari, *rahīmahu Allāhu ta‘ālā*, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, *radiya Allāhu ta‘ālā ‘anhu*, that “the spirits of the believers—their souls will meet and embrace—even if their physical beings are physically apart.”

I feel that I am with you as I feel that I am with every Muslim, and we should exert ourselves—like our beloved imam [Siraj Wahhaj in his message] said, to inspire this affinity for one another, because nothing can be more crucial a message to the *ummah* at anytime in its history—but particularly now. The affinity between believers is the most sacred message that we could have, and we could deal with—as a trust—to embody the ideals of our blessed messenger Muhammad, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*. This is what made him most approachable, most beloved, most unique, most humane, and most inspiring to absolutely everyone.

You know how Muslims get very excited when they find out that some western philosopher said something about the prophet Muhammad, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, that is noteworthy? They take out their notebooks and they want to copy down every word. I promise you, if we had a research army sent to all the libraries in the world to follow all the writings of all the major thinkers across history, I guarantee you they will find that every single one of them with sense, who really knew the beloved, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, was enchanted and inspired by him, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*. This is a reality. Muhammad is the adored one, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, the oft-praised one. Not just the number one name in the whole entire world—even today.

* Recorded for IIDR, which organized two conferences in the UK with the theme, “Muhammad: Prophet of Peace, Justice and Mercy.” The conferences were held on the 8th and 9th of March 2008.

The prophet Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, inspired everyone who ever knew anything about him, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*. The prophet’s most unique quality—his mercy and gentleness, his humility, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*—inspired our English word for “a humble person” that came through the Old Gothic “Mūkamōdei.” Listen carefully; *mūkamōdei* in Old Gothic is “the [manner of the] meek person, the gentle person.” The example of Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, inspired the English word, “meek,” as Jesus, peace be upon him and the blessing of God on all messengers, “the meek shall inherit the earth”—a promise from the heavens on the tongue of one of the most blessed companions in Prophet-hood to Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*. As he said, “I am the most worthy in affinity and kinship to Jesus because there is no prophet or messenger between him and me.” This is what the prophet Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, said. And the prophet Jesus is the one who asserted in what is recorded in the New Testament of the Bible, “the meek shall inherit the earth”—a promise from the heavens, a reality of history—that those who embody the ideals of Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, the ideals of Jesus, the humility, the humanity, the gentleness that is necessary to carry one’s self with dignity through the tumultuous world order—no matter what—is the person who will “inherit the earth.”

Moses, peace be upon him, in the Qurān, in surah A‘rāf, when Allah, *subḥānahu wa ta‘ālā*, tried the people that He chose to the highest stations—the Israelites. When they suffered and were in their trial the Jews complained to the prophet Moses, peace and blessings be upon him and every blessed messenger of God as well. He told them, *inna al-ardba lillāh, yūriṭuhā man yashā`u min ‘ibādih, wa-l-‘aqibatu lil-muttaqin*, “The earth belongs to God and He will make it inheritable by those whom He chooses”—those that are most worthy of carrying the trust of humanity that all prophets and messengers brought to this earth.

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is memorialized on two public buildings in our United States of America.* In 1902, a British architect, James Brown Lord—who may have very well passed away from this world as a Muslim, a distinguished British architect—was commissioned to build the Appellate Court building on Madison Avenue and 25th Street in New York City. He envisioned a monument to adore and revere all the major minds of history in the legal traditions, and he chose Muhammad and Moses, peace be upon them, to be number one and number two, and their statues adorned the entrance to the Appellate Court building that opened in 1902.

The more famous building in the United States of America that honors Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, is our Supreme Court building in Washington, that opened in 1936—one year, incidentally (if you’re interested in cosmic alignments of the universe), one year after the last prayer was performed at the Hagia Sofia in Istanbul. But that’s another story. The Supreme Court building

* There are actually a lot more than two buildings. When this presentation was repeated to various congregations in New York City, a number of people approached Shaykh Abdallah and informed him of numerous other buildings—historic and present-day, religious and secular—that honored the noble Prophet Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, in various creative media.

opened in 1936 with a bass relief of the prophet Muhammad as a divine holder of law (between Charlemagne and Justinian.) The question here is—brothers and sisters, reflect with the dignity, with the sense, and the insight that is worthy of people who call themselves the followers and lovers of Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, and the followers and lovers of a *shari‘ah* that began with Adam and culminated with Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, going through Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus, and every prophet and messenger in between them—IF the Muslims *claim* that they follow this magnificent system, we owe it to our Islam, to our magnificent *shari‘ah*, to behave with the dignity and poise that is worthy of the majesty that is the religion of all prophets and messengers.

Here’s the question: “What kind of civilization not only adores Muhammad on its public buildings (*ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), but also has the official documented historical account of his civilization, way after he left this world (*ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) be challenged by a contemporary fraud that is intended to somehow debase him and ridicule him in the eyes of many?

It is not a rhetorical question. It is question that is begging the *ummah* to do serious work, and serious scholarship, and serious investigation into what he would do in response to people who are trying to ridicule him—whether it’s through cartoons, or through articles, or through a fraudulent re-writing of history—that the Smithsonian Institute itself—an institution we are very proud of in the United States of America. (It is our cultural and theological arbiter. It is based in Washington, DC—placed dynamically in opposition, so-to-speak, physically to the Capitol Building—that’s a whole other story.) But there is so much richness in the way our country is built and we are proud of that, and we should highlight it, and we should operate within the wonder and the creative horizons that are possible within a system that respects itself enough to say that the official historical narrative on the prophet Muhammad and Islam is this! And I promise you, it is not the narrative, it is not the Fraud that is being perpetuated now and spread among the entire world. And so therefore, if you are followers of the “most meek,” the most beautiful, the most humane messenger and teacher (*ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), you have to ask yourself if “mistreated” by your neighbor: that mistreatment should inspire mercy in you—not only because the prophet Muhammad was the prophet of Mercy, but understanding the parameters that you are operating within makes you realize— that if you were in the position of your neighbor, and you were not Muslim, and you were subjected to all this Fraud across the airwaves—you would “mistreat” you as well.

But the bigger question is: “What is the goal of this targeted, methodical and insidious campaign to continually demean the prophet in the eyes of the world? Who’s the target of that?” You owe it to him, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, to ask yourself that question and to respond in kind. I suggest two answers to this question.

Number one, the target is to the Muslims; but not only to the Muslims themselves, it is their self image, it is their identity, it is their dignity, to make us doubt the value of what we really have, the worth of what we really have. So that the only discourse that becomes legitimate is the one that is imposed by the machine or the apparatus that chooses and arrogates to itself the license—which is number one before anything else horribly unconstitutional and egregiously un-American—to

disregard the established narratives of our cultural institution, like the Smithsonian. We are not angry only because the prophet Muhammad, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, is maligned, we are angry out of pride for our country whose cultural institutions are being disregarded as well. Understand this and you will understand that you have more than what is worthwhile in your *deen* and in your country—whether you are in the United States or the United Kingdom—to work intelligibly within a system that God allowed you to be in as a blessing to the rest of humanity. See yourself as a servant in that system, see yourself as a contributor to that system, someone who understands the broader perspective—and if you do then the second contribution that I have to answer this question, “who is the target besides the Muslims,” (number one, the Muslims to be shaken in their faith, and possibly in their love for this man)—but I affirm and posit that perhaps the more essential target for the proponents of such a message and such a fraudulent narrative is actually perhaps the *non*-Muslims in society that this—that the proponents of this fraudulent discourse aim to inoculate from ever being enchanted by this wonderful human being, the best teacher to ever walk this earth, and preach the message of humanity and brotherhood and dynamism and dynamic engagement with secular reality. All of these things are the message of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

It is important to somebody that this message not be outside—that it not get prominent, that this message not become—and I’ll prove that to you, in how we believe in our country and believe in our institutions. Last summer, there was, at the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York City, a marvelous exhibit on Venice and its trade history across 1,000 years with the Muslim world. The introduction by the curator of this show began by saying “there are many in this world who would like us to believe that the world was meant to be in perpetual conflict, eternal war, and bloodshed.” There are many in this world who want to promote hatred, who want to promote a discourse that is virulent and full of hate and venom and blindness against—and they listed—and “this exhibit,” he affirmed, begs to differ, and begs to show that history “testifies differently”^{*} to this hegemonic idea that is being thrown at the world for a purpose to take away the Muslims confidence and to inoculate and protect the non-Muslims from being enchanted from this person.

This [following thought] is something that Karen Armstrong inspired. Karen Armstrong is a self-proclaimed “[freelance] monotheist”—and I would like to say that we are all Practicing Monotheists. *masha Allah*, bless her mind and her pen. She highlighted in response to the pope the most intelligent

* “Venice and the Islamic World, 828–1797” exhibited from March 27 to July 8, 2007 in NYC. Holland Cotter, in “The Republic of Beauty: Melding West and East,” *New York Times*, Art Review, March 30, 2007, begins thus:

“Told often enough that the West and Islam are natural enemies, we start to believe it, and assume it has always been so. But the Metropolitan Museum of Art *argues otherwise* in ‘Venice and the Islamic World, 828-1797,’ a show that, with classic Met largesse, recreates the spectacle of two different cultures meeting in one fantastic city, where commerce and love of beauty, those great levelers, unite them in a fruitful bond.” (*emphasis added*.)

response that any human being could write to the incendiary comments that upset the Muslims so much—when the Pope [Benedict XVI] made a comment about the darkness, the alleged darkness of Islam and its blessed prophet, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*. Ms. Armstrong highlighted something very repetitive, and very characteristic in European history—that the Muslims are not that familiar with. She mentioned that the western institutions raised their attacks against the prophet Muhammad whenever the European societies started asking questions because they heard the stories about how magnificent he was. She was the one who highlighted this, and she highlighted it again when she said* that the pope is trying to protect the Europeans from being enchanted by the prophet Muhammad, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*.*

The second question has to do with, “What from the *seerah* impacted us the most?” You know, *subhāna Allah*, the *seerah*, as all human history, is all a testament to the glory of God, and we should never forget that no matter what is happening now is the most beautiful thing that could have been decreed. And whatever is happening now is a temporal step to get us to the big picture and the magnificent finality that God has planned for us down the road. Whether we’ll see it in our [lifetime] or not is another question—it’s not our business. We plant whatever seeds of goodness we can in our short lifetime and we leave, never having the delusion that we *must*, and we *will* taste from their fruits. That’s not how the prophets, peace be upon them—that’s certainly not how Moses behaved; that’s certainly not how Jesus behaved, peace be upon them, and that is certainly not how the prophet Muhammad, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, behaved. And that’s why he honored the memory of the prophets and messengers who came before him, and whenever people complained to him about what they are suffering from and struggling with, he always said, “May Allah have mercy upon Moses. He suffered much more than me and he was forbearing”—the ultimate in self annihilation, the ultimate in selflessness, *sallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*: to belittle, and to [relegate to diminution] that which appears to be suffering and insurmountable difficulty for people. He highlighted that “people before you suffered more.” [As if to say:] “You are in a hurry, you want to expedite the *qadar* [“decree”] of Allah,” and it takes a certain current, it takes certain energies to be aligned so that God’s plan will be had. And that’s the most unique thing about reading the *seerah* [literally, “story” or “reputation”], as we read any other history.

* Karen Armstrong, “We cannot afford to maintain these ancient prejudices against Islam,” *The Guardian*, September 18, 2006, actually wrote:

“.... when the popes were trying to impose celibacy on the reluctant clergy, Muhammad was portrayed by the scholar monks of Europe as a lecher, and Islam condemned — with *ill-concealed envy* — as a faith that encouraged Muslims to indulge their basest sexual instincts. At a time when European social order was deeply hierarchical, despite the egalitarian message of the gospel, Islam was condemned for giving too much respect to women and other menials.” (*emphasis added*.)

So from Badr to Fath Makkah, every event—whether the *hijrah* emphasizes the moral of exerting ourselves in a domain of the pragmatic and the possible, and not to just look for miraculous ways to escape, [and] having to deal with the secular reality of the world. That’s the *hijrah* in a sentence. *Hudaybiyyah* in a sentence is to teach us to respect the limitations of our community in a manner that gives—[that] enhances our political acumen, enhances our language, enhances our dignity. And [then] Allah reveals, *innā fataḥnā laka fathān mubīnā*, [“We have granted you a clear Opening”] after the believers [felt] that they have been given a humiliating defeat.

And so this is, but the most impact[ing]—and I think everyone will agree on this point—the most impact[ing], the most resounding, the most revolutionary lesson from the *seerah* has to be “Read!” The first word revealed to the blessed prophet Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*. The Quran is an aesthetic revolution. The Quran is the eternal call of quiet rebellion. The Quran is the eternal song of hope for *all* people—of *all* denominational affiliations, of all human ethnicities, and backgrounds and tongues. This is the most powerful thing about the *seerah*. The revelation of the Quran, whether it’s Baqarah [the second chapter] [which] came down divided over 80-parts, or al-An‘ām [the sixth chapter] that came down in one whole piece accompanied by tens of thousands of angles. The Quran, with the first word being, “read”—and etymologically, the “read” in Arabic is the ‘Q’ and the ‘R’ sounds in Semitic languages. The reverse [root—i.e.], the ‘R’ and the ‘Q’ sound which is “slavery,” [The reverse of] “to read.” *riq*, is “servitude” and “enslavement”—to read is the antithesis of this. To read is to free yourself from all sorts of enslavement; to read is to elevate yourself above any fraudulent narrative of any kind. To read is to elevate yourself in all forms of enslavement—and if you want, if we want to be a cultured people in the world—all historians and philosophers and thinkers and critics of society and history have agreed—there can be no culture, there can be no expression in the cultural domain, unless one is freed from all forms of enslavement.

This is the most powerful thing about the blessed *seerah* of our beloved messenger, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*; that the first word ever revealed to him, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, was to “Read.” Free yourself from any enslavement, free yourself from constriction, free yourself—and [“to] write” incidentally, the writing, the ‘K’, the ‘T’ and the ‘B’, is the reverse of the ‘K’ the ‘B’ and the ‘T’, which is *kabt*, “constriction.” The etymological reverse of constriction is to write. You read to free yourself from enslavement; and you write to free yourself from constriction and agony and suffocation and closure. You open yourself up to the world, and the world will open up to you by the intelligent writing that is worthy of people who love the prophet, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*.

Keep hope alive! Keep hope alive. Keep the love of the messenger present in your mind. Keep the love of Islam present in your mind. Keep the love and mercy to all humanity ever present in your mind, and you will be true lovers of Muhammad, *ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*.

May Allah bless you and your families. *assalamu ‘alaykum wa rahmatuallah wa barakatuh* [“Peace be upon you and the Mercy of God along with His Blessings”].