

The More Loving One

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Recently, a Saudi blogger, Hamza Kashgari, has been deported from Malaysia by its Home Ministry into the custody of the Saudi authorities for allegedly blaspheming against the prophet in his tweets. Despite the lack of an extradition treaty, Hamza was hurriedly packed off to Saudi Arabia before an injunction preventing the deportation could be filed. For us hapless onlookers, there is precious little we can do but remember him and his words.

What happened to Hamza however raises some uncomfortable questions on both sides of the causeway. For Malaysia, one can only speculate about the hidden hands which were crucial in expediting his transfer. Worryingly this is yet another case in which the arms of the government machinery and bureaucracy were able to circumvent the procedures of the legal court in matters concerning Islam. Even more damning is the fact that Hamza was no security threat and Malaysia probably would not have been his last stop for asylum.

For Singapore, this raises another set of questions, albeit indirectly. Hamza was due to be charged due to the supposed blasphemous contents of his tweets. However, a close inspection of his words as we shall examine shows that they are far from being blasphemous. Singapore too has recently been wracked by a series of reports of religious intolerance, the veracity of which varies from case to case. The uncomfortable fact is that there could be some who could perceive the remarks as insulting or inciting ethnic tensions. What if the tweets had been made by a Singaporean? Should he or she be subject to the same legal scrutiny as Hamza? One unaddressed issue seems to be that the legislation guiding religious harmony is a blunt instrument whose actual applications can be somewhat imprecise.

However pressing these issues are, they are considerations for another time. Personally I hope that amidst the maelstrom surrounding the issue that the words which incited the uproar be remembered and contemplated with a spirit as best deserved them.

In reference to the Prophet's birthday, Hamza had tweeted (to the best of my knowledge)

'On your birthday, I will say that I have loved the rebel in you, that you've always been a source of inspiration to me, and that I do not like the halos of divinity around you. I shall not pray for you.

On your birthday, I find you wherever I turn. I will say that I have loved aspects of you, hated others, and could not understand many more.

On your birthday, I shall not bow to you. I shall not kiss your hand. Rather, I shall shake it as equals do, and smile at you as you smile at me. I shall speak to you as a friend, no more.'

At a glance, one might react in aversion but personally I am reminded of a story about the Prophet. The prophet advised a group of men against the use of artificial pollination of date palms. When it failed, the prophet reminded the men that although in matters of religion he was the prophet he was to be obeyed, for earthly matters he was a man and all too fallible.

This illustrates that as much as there is the Prophet who is the messenger of God, there is the prophet who is a man. The prophet as a man is long gone but the prophet as a concept remains. And much of the prophet as a concept has been reduced to an idol, a fetish to be used for legitimacy.

Now many blasphemies are spoken in the name of the prophet as a concept, things the prophet as a man would have probably recoiled. How many of us have heard of supposed stories of the prophet used to justify this insanity or that brutality? Perhaps there are scholars wise and learned who can distinguish truth from falsehoods, but they in turn are limited by their own human understandings. They also seem obscured by the many charlatans who peddle the good name of the Prophet to gain power and influence. How does a layman differentiate truth from falsehood?

Perhaps it was in this tumult of doubt and despair that Hamza chose to remember the one undeniable aspect of the Prophet, that the prophet was a human being. A human being wracked with the mantle of otherworldly message, and a herald of thisworldly change. A human being like any other that you knew in any time or space; parts of which you loved, parts of which you hated and parts of which you simply did not understand. And amidst the regal splendour imbued with the infinite majesty of the divine he imagined not just any man, but a friend. A friend who did not want you to bow to him or kiss his hands who despite his high stature will only stand by you as an equal, nothing more, nothing less.

In Hamza's parrhesia, I see the great affection and love he had for the prophet.

It does lead me to wonder, why did people hate him so for saying this? Perhaps on some level, those that now call for his head saw this pure simple love and saw themselves for what they were, poor needy suitors whose servile exaltations to his name pays lip service to the twisted abomination used for domination and control.

They hated looking into the pure still waters of your love for they saw only themselves.

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