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RAMADAN: BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND UNITY

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ × ٩ كالي.

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مَا تَعَالَتْ أَصْوَاتُ النَّاسِ بِالتَّكْبِيرِ.

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مَا تَفَتَّحَتْ أَبْوَابُ السَّمَاءِ فِي هَذَا الصَّبَاحِ الْكَبِيرِ.

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مَا تَنَزَّلَتْ عَلَيْنَا رَحْمَةُ إِلَهِ الْعَالَمِينَ الْقَدِيرِ.

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مَا تَقَارَبَتْ قُلُوبُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فِي هَذَا الْيَوْمِ الْمُنِيرِ.

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ،

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ و اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَمَدَّ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ بِالتَّوْفِيقِ ، وَأَلْهَمَهُمْ كَلِمَةَ الْحَقِّ

والتَّصْدِيقِ ، وَأَرْشَدَهُمْ إِلَى أَوْضَحِ مَحَجَّةٍ وَطَرِيقٍ ، وَجَعَلَهُمْ بِرَحْمَتِهِ

خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ وَفَرِيقٍ ، أَحَمَدُهُ عَلَى النِّعْمَةِ الَّتِي بِهَا حَبَانَا ، وَأَشْكُرُهُ

عَلَى الْمِلَّةِ الَّتِي بِهَا هَدَانَا. وَأَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا

شَرِيكَ لَهُ ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ ، اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ وَسَلِّمْ

وَبَارِكْ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَمَنْ اهْتَدَى بِهَدْيِهِ.

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَيَا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ، اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ أَوْصِي نَفْسِي وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِتَقْوَى اللَّهِ
وَطَاعَتِهِ.

Beloved Muslimin and Muslimat.

On this blessed glorious morning, let us extend our praises and deepest gratitude to Allah, the One and Only Lord of the Universe. Allah, The Most Exalted, has bestowed upon us the blessing of the month of Ramadan. A month that has allowed us to rejuvenate our iman and taqwa; a month that has boosted our yearning to perform acts of worship and good deeds, and our inclination for peace and compassion. Let us pray that every single act of worship and good deed that we have performed throughout this month will be accepted by Allah, and will be favourably valued on our scale of deeds in the hereafter. Amin ya Rabbal 'Alamin.

RAMADAN BUILDS CONFIDENCE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Dear brothers and sisters, on this blessed morning, I would like to invite everyone of us present today to reflect upon the pearls of wisdom and lessons that we have gained from this last blessed month of Ramadan. Do we remember how we were willing to endure hunger and thirst, all for the sake fulfilling our obligation to Allah?

Remember, how out of fear of committing a sin that could cause a flaw in our worship, we were more mindful of our speech and actions throughout Ramadan? We frequented the mosques and enlivened the nights of Ramadan with terawih and tahajjud prayers, as well as recitations of the Quran – when we may not have been able to do during other months. We have also witnessed how eager most of us were in coming forward to help those who are in need and facing difficulties, in whatever way we could assist.

This is the result of the training that we have undergone throughout Ramadan. This is the outcome of taqwa. It does not only bring us closer to Allah s.w.t. but also cultivates closer ties between fellow human beings. This is the form of taqwa which we desire. It is in line with what Allah s.w.t. says in Surah Ali-Imran, verses 133-134:

﴿ وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴾ (١٣٣) الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَاظِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

Meaning: “And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden (Heaven) as wide as the skies and earth, which is prepared for the righteous. [They are] those who give in prosperity and adversity, and those who restrain anger, and those who are forgiving towards others. And Allah loves the doers of good.”

Jemaah,

These verses remind us that the deeper our taqwa is, the more confident we should be of our faith and beliefs. In fact, with a stronger faith, we should be more confident when interacting with fellow Muslims as well as those of a different faith. Not as how some groups claim that the more religious and God-conscious (taqwa) we are, the more we should isolate ourselves from others in order to preserve our faith.

Throughout Ramadan, we have seen various laudable initiatives by the mosques as well as Islamic organisations that project the confidence of our Singaporean Muslim community. For example, there were mosques distributing pamphlets and brochures about Ramadan to non-Muslim neighbours that live close to the mosque. Others organised programmes for non-Muslims residents to explain to them the beauty of fasting through community *iftars* (breaking of fast). In fact, there were several non-Muslim organisations that contributed to some Muslim organisations to offer assistance to those who are in need.

This is the beauty of Islamic teachings. The early Muslim communities, equipped with confidence emanating from a deep sense of taqwa, have always been interacting with communities from different faith groups, mazhabs, races and inclinations. The more they learn and understand their religion, the more

confident they were that their religion and their faith will not easily be watered down simply by participating and contributing to the larger society. In fact, by realising that they are ambassadors of Islam who are responsible for presenting Islam to others, it increases their appreciation for the religion even more.

A SIGN OF TAQWA: HUMILITY.

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ،
اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ .

Ma'asyiral Muslimin Wa Zumratal Mukminin,

In addition to a high level of religious confidence, taqwa will also shape one to be of noble akhlak or conduct and one who is not overcome by arrogance. Those who have taqwa – despite believing that the opinion that they hold is correct and the closest to what has been ordained by Allah and His Messenger – will not deny that perhaps there is truth in the different opinion of a fellow Muslim, even if it differs from their personal beliefs. In other words, they would not allow for arrogance to overcome them and to feel that only their opinion holds true and all other opinions are wrong and should be labelled as deviant or blasphemous. If we were to meet 'religious teachers' who propagate such teachings, we should exercise great caution. If they continue to preach such messages, leave them, and look

instead for authoritative and properly accredited religious teachers.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Islam places great emphasis on knowledge and contemplation. The rulings within Islam are based on knowledge and rationality, open-mindedness and prioritise the unity and the *maslahah* or greater interest of the community. Hence, the Muslim community should not allow itself to be divided over endless debates on non-fundamental issues.

It is time for the Muslim community today to be confident of the noble principles and values in Islam. It is time for the Muslim community to exercise maturity in dealing with issues of differing opinions. This is what was described by a contemporary scholar, Syeikh al-Raisuni as being fair in matters of *khilaf* or difference.

One who adheres to a mazhab (school of thought), should be fair when discussing other mazhabs. And one who is more inclined to a particular opinion has to be honest in quoting the merits and strengths of differing opinions. Being fair and just will lead to greater understanding and love. To be just is to be moderate. Being just will help to extinguish any flames of fitnah, and being just will definitely unite the ummah. Allah s.w.t. says:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا كُوْنُوْا قَوَّٰمِيْنَ لِلّٰهِ شُهَدَآءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا
يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلٰٓى اَلَّا تَعْدِلُوْا اَعْدِلُوْا هُوَ
اَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوٰى وَاتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ خَبِيْرٌۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُوْنَ ﴿٨﴾

Meaning: “O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah , witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; for that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do.” [Surah al-Maidah verse 8]

A mukmin who is filled with taqwa will always be open to discussions and dialogues instead of accusing others of being in the wrong or worst, ignorantly labelling others as kafir or denouncing their Islamic faith. These are extremist tendencies which we should not allow to fester in our community.

Remember an incident during the time of Rasulullah s.a.w. that was reported by Imam Ahmad and Abu Daud: “*The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) once came out to his Companions when they were disputing about the Divine Decree (takdir), and he turned red out of anger. He said: 'Have you been commanded to do this, or were you created for this purpose? You are using one part of the Quran against another part, and this is what led to the destruction of nations before you.'*”

Jemaah,

Just look at how extremist groups like ISIS have blatantly defiled the sanctity of the month of Ramadan with the attacks in Istanbul, Dhaka and Baghdad. Even the holy city of Madinah and the Prophet's Mosque were not spared of their violence and cruelty. The deviant ideology and sheer barbarity of such groups thrive and flourish in an atmosphere rife with communal and sectarian hatred and discord, as shown in the attacks in Baghdad, which led to the loss of hundreds of lives. It must be our duty to strongly reject this ideology of violence, and also to reject all teachings that sow the seeds of hatred towards others, whether they share our faith or are from a different faith. Hatred leads to discord, and discord creates a fertile ground which radical and extremist groups can and will exploit for their heinous agenda. Such evil acts bear unspeakable sin, and their perpetrators will be thrown into the throes of God's eternal punishment.

THE DESIRED FORM OF RELIGIOSITY

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ،
اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ .

Ma'asyiral Muslimin Wa Zumratal Mukminin Rahimakumullah,
As I have described earlier, with a deep sense of taqwa, one will be confident to practise one's faith no matter where one is, and in whatever situation. With a deep and holistic

understanding of Islam, a believer will be able to apply Islam within the context of the environment he or she is in, without compromising his or her religious obligations. This is an attribute that we have, and will continue to instil in every Muslim in Singapore.

However brothers and sisters, today, we may find those who seem to have lost their confidence in the religion as well as themselves. They claim that all contemporary forms of governance are devoid of Islamic values simply because they do not conform to the notion of the caliphate or an “Islamic” state. By extension, they argue that Muslims living in countries such as Singapore will never be able to be perfect or complete in their faith.

This view is extremely problematic and inaccurate. It does not reflect the examples shown during the times of Prophet s.a.w., nor does it reflect the realities of religious life today. The Prophet s.a.w. was in full consent of his companions living in Habsyah, under the rule of a non-Muslim government where they thrived as contributive citizens. Further, there was the Treaty of Madinah, drawn up by Rasulullah s.a.w. with the consent and agreement of the people of Madinah who were of different faiths and races. These are some of the evidences against the earlier problematic view I just mentioned.

In fact, as mentioned by a prominent contemporary scholar of Islam Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah, the Treaty of Madinah is actually a reminder of how Rasulullah s.a.w. himself upheld human rights such as the freedom of religion, honouring the rights of minorities, prioritising peaceful relations between citizens, and so on. This is the type of Islamic values that need to be nurtured by leaders, scholars and the community alike. We need to do this together.

Jemaah, this is the form of Islamic thought and religiosity that we have inherited from Muslims of the early generations, and this has been embraced by many of our scholars. It is also the Islamic practice that has been shaped in Singapore, and must continue to be developed further, for the sake of our future Muslim generations. When interacting with non-Muslims, we should display confidence and noble mannerism. We cannot let ourselves, as well as our community, to be trapped by a siege mentality – feeling as if we are often being attacked, oppressed and isolated.

ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN SINGAPORE

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ،
اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ .

Ma'asyiral Muslimin Wa Zumratal Mukminin Rahimakumullah,

The Singapore Muslim community has thus far shown a high level of confidence, despite being a minority group.

However, we should remember that it is not the numbers that define us. Rather, it is the quality of the contributions that our community delivers, and the continuous commitment that we have to offer, that make up the virtues of our Singapore Muslim community, and should remain as the foundation that we continue to build upon.

Just look at the administration and management systems of our mosques – they have been emulated and depicted as examples for many regional organisations.

Despite being a minority group, our mosques are never void of various dakwah activities for all ages and the different segments of the community. In fact, some Muslim countries have acknowledged that our mosques are more active and lively than the mosques in Muslim-majority countries.

Besides that, the Singapore Muslim community is also well-known to have pioneered and led many efforts to strengthen the peace and understanding between the different faith groups. For example, the late Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddique founded the Inter Religious Organisation (IRO) in 1949. He was an ambassador of peace in establishing harmony between

different religious groups in Singapore. He centred his message of Islam by highlighting the aspect of humanity. It is hence not surprising that he was known as the pioneer of interfaith discussions, not just in this region but also in the history of the modern world.

And it is in this spirit that the Harmony Centre was set up at An-Nahdah Mosque. It serves as a symbol of commitment of the Singapore Muslim community towards peace and efforts to establish understanding between the different faith groups in our society.

All of these efforts reflect the confidence of the Singapore Muslim community in contributing to global efforts in establishing and maintaining peace. We develop ourselves based on Islamic traditions, and we move forward while holding on firmly to this tradition. It is a tradition that develops our confidence; a tradition that marries guidance from the past, the realities of the current lifestyle and the pursuit of harmony for the future.

The Singapore Muslim community has always, and must continue to play a critical role in establishing good ties with others; be it with families, friends, neighbours, and with our fellow citizens. This is certainly more advantageous for Muslims

in our effort to preserve the spirit of the noble teachings of Islam, and for the future of Singapore Muslims to come.

AFFIRMING THESE VALUES IN OURSELVES AND OUR FAMILIES

Jemaah,

All the efforts and initiatives that I have mentioned earlier are noble efforts, and they must be continued by the current generation, as well as future generations. We would always need the lessons and examples from the past, but at the same time, we need to ride the current waves and define our own realities and future.

However this would require the commitment of each individual, and the confidence that he or she is able to positively and actively contribute to the overall prosperity of the community.

Remember my brothers and sisters, everything starts with us. Shaping the community that we would like to create starts with small but nonetheless significant efforts of every individual and family. If we envision a community that has taqwa and contributes to religion as well as world peace, then we have to pave the way. We also need to ensure that we have instilled the right values in our families and ourselves. May Allah bless our

efforts and ensure that Islam will continue to prosper for generations to come. Amin Ya Rabbal 'alamin.

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ،
اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ .

Ya Allah, Ya Fattah Ya 'Alim,

We beseech You, for You are the One who Grants our supplications. We ask, and You give. We commit sins, and You Forgive. We deviate, and You are merciful. We strive and in You we put our trust, and in You we confide and it is You who will help us.

Ya Allah, Ya Sami' Ya Khabir,

Lead us from our current situation into something better. Guide us from weakness to strength, from difficulties to ease, from fear to peace, from humiliation to honour, from despair to resolution, from division to unity, from disorientation to guidance, and from negligence to persistence.

Ya Allah, Ya 'Afuwwun Ya Ghafur,

You are the All Knowing, You know of our situation and You hear our prayers. We beseech that You fulfil our hopes, enhance our deeds, affirm our stand, shower us with Your mercy and forgiveness upon our sins, bless us with Your gift so that we can improve our shortcomings, and make us among Your servants who are obedient to You. And on this glorious

day, make us among Your servants who have been cleansed of sins and misdeeds, who have been blessed with success and have their deeds accepted. Amin Ya Rabbal Alamin.

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ، اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ ،
اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ .

بَارِكْ اللَّهُ لِي وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنِي وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِمَا فِيهِ مِنَ
الآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، وَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي وَمِنْكُمْ تِلَاوَتَهُ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ
الْعَلِيمُ، أَقُولُ قَوْلِي هَذَا وَأَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ الْعَظِيمَ لِي وَلَكُمْ، وَلِسَائِرِ
الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ، وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ، فَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ فَيَا
فَوْزَ الْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ وَيَا نَجَاةَ التَّائِبِينَ.