SPECIAL REPORT Ramadhan- A case study of Islamic values

Individualism
OR Collective
Responsibility?

By Majed Iqbal

On 16th of July, Gordon Brown announced the first ever cross-government youth crime plan with new enforcement measures and improvements to sentencing. It would include and a new approach to youth crime prevention - including "tough parenting" programmes targeted on areas with the most problems.

"I know the police are doing everything in their power to bring those responsible to justice," he said.

In the same week, David Cameron launched his party's campaign in what he called Britain's "'Broken society by-election'.

"We need cultural change. Children just don't know the difference between right and wrong. And that goes for all our social problems. If we want to repair our broken society, we've got to make clear what's expected from each and every citizen, introduce the idea of moral choice and create a society built on personal responsibility. Head teachers will have more responsibility, as we'll give them the freedom to exclude unruly pupils and make them real captains of their ship. Police officers will have more responsibility. Responsibility starts at home. The values we need to repair our broken society and to build a strong society are values that should be taught in the family. Family always comes first. So we'll give a tax break for marriage and end the couple penalty. And we'll provide a universal health visitor service for every parent so they get help when they most need it".

Blame the Victim

The packages announced by both Politicians feed off a 'blame the victim' approach. An attitude which shrugs off all responsibility off the shoulders of Politicians.

It is often said that when the bell rings at school, teachers are the first ones out of the school before the children! Teachers have no interest in the children and their role in society. They just need to do their job and head off- send off unruly pupils to the Exclusion Unit- if they're making trouble- GET THEMOFF YOUR BACK, is the approach.

It is oft quoted that Parents are not keeping tabs on their children and need to step up to their responsibility and find out what their children are getting up to. But they are pushing their children towards the school to resolve their anti-social habits and behaviours and wish to see the school take the lead to make them into leading individuals.

Single mums are blamed for having no father Figure and hence no role model who children can look up to. That's why we see government offering child tax credits for families to see them off financially which would help with a good upbringing

It's the Polices fault- They need more powers it is also said. They haven't been doing their job properly to tackle crime

Black rap culture is also singled out as a cause for youth crime often glorified by American Rap star sensations who strike a chord with youth. Only a few years ago "black music" in the form of UK garage was blamed for crime and the group 'So Solid Crew' were being harassed everywhere

Even Political Parties are washing their hands off responsibility and tackle the issue of crime as Political capital for their PR campaigns. In fact, Conservatives are having field day with this crime issue. David Cameron is the most trusted of the three main party leaders to get a grip on violent street crime

David Cameron 33% of the vote
Gordon Brown with 20%
Nick Clegg with 2%

Offloading Problems Syndrome

All sectors of society are offloading their problems onto the 'next' person and feel no responsibility in tackling the growing endemic of Youth Crime. This syndrome is a consequence of the rampant concept of Individualism which dictates that one 'looks after his own back'. So it is deemed appropriate to turn the blind eyed and offload the problem onto someone else. Some of us maybe even familiar with this practice at work where tasks are repeatedly 'delegated' to avoid accounting for.

Social Responsibility

This July, Cameron will told a conference held on social justice that politicians should be discussing causes of crime not its symptoms. He said "The hoodie is a response to a problem, not a problem in itself. We - the people in suits - often see hoodies as aggressive, the uniform of a rebel army of young gangsters".

Despite such promises and clinical speech writing, one can clearly see an obvious level of disengagement by Politicians and Political parties to absolve their responsibility to society. Nobody is interested in tackling crime. Hence an atmosphere of no social responsibility prevails.

How can society breed values of individualism but yet wish to see youth helping the elderly, staying free of drugs, responsibility towards communities, respect and tolerance for people from different backgrounds and a having a robust social and civil behaviour towards women?

We see the direct opposite as a result of feeding and promoting ideas like Freedom and Individualism which breed a "Me, myself and I" culture and where anything gives you satisfaction you are encouraged to pursue it.

Hence we see the betraying friends over turf wars, stealing off families to feed drug habits, Preying on women for sexual adventures/encounters, mugging the elderly of their pension money in their homes, happy slapping, corporate white collar crimes in the cities, fraud and deception at work for a quick buck and many other endless criminal activities spawned from the evil twin sisters, freedom and individualism.

Everyone desires to do what is required for themselves and absolve any form of social responsibility. This is from the Politician part of the government right down to the street person. An endemic problem eating away at the roots of modern British society seen as a beacon of light and an exemplar for the rest of the world to emulate.

Our own Communities- "Its not my son!"

Unfortunately, the Muslim Community has developed similar traits in thinking. Our youth can be drowned in drug use and it s promotion but yet parents are willing to hid e the truth and shift the

blame onto someone else. The community turns a blind eye to drugs and shifts the problems onto the parents , blaming them for irresponsibility.

The same examples can be cited for cases like girls running away from home, crime, underachieving in education etc.

The fundamental values which underpin British Society have to be opened up to scrutiny and debate. Values are not sacred that cant be challenged without being accused of blasphemy. rather a real discussion is required to ask the serious questions about what values and ideas are suitable an productive for any place in the world today which can create harmonious societies and breed a mentality of collective responsibility that can be one of the key aids in tackling menacing problems we face today, like crime.

Islam- A fresh look at societal Responsibility

The Islamic system creates a society where there is motivation to make the society better for everyone, so therefore problems that are not on your doorstep are still your problems and solutions must be found for them.

A cursory glance at the way Islam tackles Social issues and problems will startle many as no distinction is made in looking after Muslims and non-Muslims. The whole focus is to make society a place of tranquillity and peace whose responsibility just doesn't lie on the state, but extends to members of society too. This can be in a collective way through groups and organisations as well as efforts exerted through individual endeavours by the ordinary person.

Islam and Neighbours

Islam placed immense emphasis on the way people deal with neighbours. We all have neighbours and live in communities side by side with each other. Our relations with people right next to us reflect significantly our characters, ideals and values which underpin the way in which we deal with each other.

Islam equated the treatment of a neighbour with either belief or disbelief for a Muslim. The blessed The Holy Prophet (saw) once said **"He is not a Muslim who sleeps with his stomach full while his neighbour stays hungry"**.

Furthermore, the concept of neighbour is far beyond the conception we have been acquainted with in modern secular countries. The Holy Prophet (saw) is said to have defined the "neighbour" in these words: **Your neighbour is 40 houses ahead of you and 40 houses at your back, 40 houses to your left and 40 houses to your right**.

Islam mandated good and healthy neighbourly relations regardless of the belief of the neighbour. Narrated Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-'As: Mujahid said that Abdullah ibn Amr slaughtered a sheep and said: Have you presented a gift from it to my neighbour, the Jew, for I heard the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) say: **"Gabriel kept on commending the neighbour to me so that I thought he would make an heir"** - Sunan Abu Dawood, 2446

Making sure that neighbours enjoy a peaceful environment, Islam warned that any harm, either physical or mental will warrant serious repercussions in the next life for a Muslim. Narrated AbuHurayrah: The Messenger of Allah (may peace and blessings be upon him) observed: **He will not enter Paradise whose neighbour is not secure from his wrongful conduct.** (Sahih Muslim)

It is clear that Islam develops a concept of social responsibility right from the individual in society where concern and care is exerted to the affairs of people at a local level. This is on stark contrast to how individualism and freedom breeds a selfish outlook where some people don't even know who there neighbours are and offer little assistance or even help when a situation arises. Even if this means, that a person is being mugged in broad daylight, a blind eye turned to the incident will not be something away from the norms of what people should be expected to do in this situation.

Deaths and bereavements

It is well known practice amongst Muslim Communities wherever they may reside to help their families and even neighbours in difficult situations. In the case of Death, Islam places responsibility on the neighbours of the deceased to aid in the difficult situation as the bereaved will be busy in mourning.

When Ja`far ibn Abi Talib died, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "**Prepare food for Ja`far's family, they have something that is keeping them occupied**" (At-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud).

Responsible Attitudes

Islam fashions a responsible Citizen who worries himself over the issues and concerns of those around him. A failure in not realising these aims will have a consequence in the next life for a Muslim.

Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "**Verily, Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, will say on the Day of Judgement: 'O Son of Adam! I fell ill, but you did not visit Me.' The human will ask, 'O my Sustainer! How could I visit You when You are the Sustainer of the Worlds? And how can You fall sick?' He, the Almighty, will say, 'Did you not know that such and such a servant of Mine was sick. But you did not visit him. Did you not know that, had you visited him, you would have found Me by his side? O Son of Adam! I asked you for food, but you fed Me not?' The man will say, 'O my Sustainer! How could I feed You when You are the Sustainer of the Worlds? And You are free from hunger?' He, the Almighty, will say: 'Such and such a servant of Mine asked you for food, but you refused to give him any. Did you not know that, had you fed him, you would have found it recorded here with Me? O Son of Adam! I asked you for a drink, but you did not give Me any.' The man will say, 'O my Sustainer! How could I give You a drink while You are the Sustainer of the Worlds and are free from thirst?' He, the Almighty will say, ' Such and such a servant of Mine asked you for a drink, but you did not give him any. Had you given him a drink, you would have surely found that recorded with Me.'"**

Muslims are ordered to reach out to people and engage in issues where there is concern shown.

Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil

In a society based on Islam, Political parties and organisations would be active in making sure the state exerts it responsibilities and rallies the masses behind them when they see the government not honouring their commitments. On top of this, individuals and groups must make

sure that they are not lazy and busy with their own personal commitments all the time and don't bother with the status of their community and the Islamic world at large.

A companion of the Prophet (saw),Abu Bakr As-Siddiq (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: "O you people! You recite this Verse but you don't understand it:

`O you who believe! Take care of your ownselves. If you follow the (right) guidance [and enjoin what is right (Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do) and forbid what is wrong (polytheism, disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden)] no hurt can come to you from those who are in error.' (5:105)

But I have heard Messenger of Allah (PBUH) saying: "**When people see an oppressor but do not prevent him from (doing evil), it is likely that Allah will punish them all.**"[Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidhi].

By narrating this Hadith, Abu Bakr As-Siddiq (May Allah be pleased with him) refuted the often quoted "individualistic" interpretation of the verse and made it clear that it is the duty of the Ummah and each of its member to make best possible efforts to check the vices prevalent in the society. So much so that if a Muslim has the ability to check the vices by means of force or speech but he does not do it, his negligence in this regard will become a cause of Divine wrath and punishment.

There are many other evidences which are similar in ordering Muslims to be active in protecting their communities and society.

A companion of the Prophet, Hudhaifah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "**By Him in Whose Hand my life is, you either enjoin good and forbid evil, or Allah will certainly soon send His punishment to you. Then you will make supplication and it will not be accepted**".

Islam does not qualify Monk Status or a religiosity which is confined to the four corners of the room of a house while corruption is rife around the society. Islam challenges that person who behaves like this and is worried only about their own worships. It is mentioned in the Quran

"And fear the Fitna (affliction, trial) which affects not in particular (only) those of you who do wrong, and know that Allah is Severe in punishment" [8:25]

Also The Messenger of Allah (saw) was asked: "Will we be destroyed while there are righteous people amongst us?" He replied: "**Yes, when the evil becomes great**".

Ahmad and Tabarani narrated on the authority of Udai Ibn Umairah that he (saw) said "**Allah does not punish the general public because of the wrong doing of specific people until they see the evil (committed) among them while able to stop it and they do not. If they do that, Allah will punish the specific people and the general public**".

Ahmad narrated on the authority of Abu Bakrah that the messenger said: "**If the people see the Munkar (evil, wrong doing) and they do not change it, Allah will take them with a punishment**".

Hence enjoining the good and forbidding the evil is a collective responsibility bestowed on all Muslims living in a society and breeds a sense of desiring to work for a change when they see issues are getting out of hand. Turning a blind eye is really not an option that a Muslim can enjoy.

The above evidences make the Muslim in a society based on Islam to work with in the framework of what Islam demands. Hence they must work towards making the institutions in a state more strong and commit themselves locally through their efforts and making awareness about issues. This can be problems through modern technology like people taking photos of women in the street as a laugh, people causing rifts between religious communities on the internet, open crime activities or rampant drug use amongst people. These issues can be addressed locally and reported through state machinery like Police and Courts for evidence.

Consequences of Collective and Individual Dis-engagement

No civil society can stand by and see problems worsen without intervening. The "pass the book" mentality often seen causes major problems for the society at large and its repercussions can be devastating.

Nu`man bin Bashir (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: The Prophet (PBUH) said, **"The likeness of the man who observes the limits prescribed by Allah and that of the man who transgresses them is like the people who get on board a ship after casting lots. Some of them are in its lower deck and some of them in its upper (deck). Those who are in its lower (deck), when they require water, go to the occupants of the upper deck, and say to them : `If we make a hole in the bottom of the ship, we shall not harm you.' If they (the occupants of the upper deck) leave them to carry out their design they all will be drowned. But if they do not let them go ahead (with their plan), all of them will remain safe"** [Al-Bukhari]

We learn from this Hadith that the consequences of certain actions can affect the whole society with everyone having to suffer for them. It is, therefore, essential that the people spring up to their responsibilities and help save the whole of society from destruction and further trouble. If this is not done, the entire society will have to suffer.

Ramadhan and Islam- A Fresh Vision

Ramadhan time is the true essence of Islam which sees Muslims at their best with a heightened state of consciousness. The values of Islam as detailed above are illuminated in the actions of the Muslims both individually and collectively, making a real and positive change in their respective realms.

Baihaqi reported on the authority of Salman Al-Farsi that the Prophet (saw) delivered a sermon on the last day of the month of Shaban. In it he (Saw) said: **"O People! The month of Allah (Ramadan) has come with its mercies, blessings and forgivenesses. Allah has decreed this month the best of all months. The days of this month are the best among the days and the nights are the best among the nights and the hours during Ramadan are the best among the hours. This is a month in which you have been invited by Him (to fast and pray). Allah has honoured you in it. In every breath you take is a reward of Allah, your sleep is worship, your good deeds are accepted and your invocations are answered. Therefore, you must invoke your Lord in all earnestness with hearts free from sin and evil, and pray that Allah may help you to keep fast, and to recite the Holy Qur'an. Indeed, miserable is the one who is deprived of Allah's forgiveness in this great month. While fasting, remember the hunger and thirst on the Day of Judgement. Give alms to the poor and needy. Pay respect to your elders, have sympathy for your youngsters and be kind towards your relatives and kinsmen. Guard your tongue against unworthy words, and your eyes from scenes that are not worth seeing (forbidden) and your ears from sounds that should not be heard.**

Worship is therefore not confined to rituals but also to treatment of people and dispensing the best attitudes when dealing between people, regardless of their faith or background.

The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) says, "**Ramadan has come to you. (It is) a month of blessing, in which Allah covers you with blessing, for He sends down Mercy, decreases sins and answers prayers. In it, Allah looks at your competition (in good deeds), and boasts about you to His angels. So show Allah goodness from yourselves, for the unfortunate one is he who is deprived in (this month) of the mercy of Allah, the Mighty, the Exalted.**" [Narrated by Tabarani]

The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) addressed his companions on the last day of Sha`ban, saying, "**Oh people! A great month has come over you; a blessed month; a month in which is a night better than a thousand months; month in which Allah has made it compulsory upon you to fast by day, and voluntary to pray by night. Whoever draws nearer (to Allah) by performing any of the (optional) good deeds in (this month) shall receive the same reward as performing an obligatory deed at any other time, and whoever discharges an obligatory deed in (this month) shall receive the reward of performing seventy obligations at any other time. It is the month of patience, and the reward of patience is Heaven. It is the month of charity, and a month in which a believer's sustenance is increased. Whoever gives food to a fasting person to break his fast, shall have his sins forgiven, and he will be saved from the Fire of Hell, and he shall have the same reward as the fasting person, without his reward being diminished at all**." [Narrated by Ibn Khuzaymah]

Conclusion

The confidence in the Islamic values to tackle many of the growing problems circulating in the West and its manner of resolving them has been a debate which has hit headlines in the last year in Britain. Whilst nobody argues for the application of shariah law in Britain, it begs to question why the Western world champions these ideas of Liberal democracy, Freedom and Individualism as a standard for Muslim Countries when their failures to create harmonious societies are seriously being re-examined?