

- Introduction -

The Muslim Chaplain's role in Guiding Muslim Worship is multi-dimensional. The responsibility is a great one. If we really want to understand the role of the Chaplain, one first must define that role. The State defines the role of a Chaplain as one who facilitates the spiritual needs of his particular faith group. Within the contract it also says that a chaplain is an advocate for the inmate. In fact, this is the only position within the Department of Corrections that has such a role. However, Chaplains are told like all other employees (when given the code of ethics) that *"As an employee of New York State, you are bound by the code of ethics as set forth in the Public Officers law. Under this law, you are required to pledge support to the Federal and State Constitutions and to perform faithfully the duties of your position (although there is no actual oral pledge given). You are also expected to maintain the high standards of conduct in carrying out your responsibilities and to conduct yourself in your position in a way that will reflect favorable on yourself and your department."*

The inmates see the Chaplain as an advocate. Someone to champion their cause, right or wrong. The inmates see the Chaplain as someone who really cares about them. For the most part, the inmate feels that the chaplain is there to help them.

And now for the Chaplain's Role in the eyes of the Imam who happens to carry that title. Firstly, the word "Chaplain" is an occupational title for Civil Service employees who are Clergy of different faiths. Within The New York State Department of Corrections, we have the Jewish Chaplain (Rabbi), Protestant Chaplain (Reverend), Catholic Chaplain (Priest or Deacon, and Muslim Chaplain (Imam). We also have emerging groups now; therefore we have Nation of Islam Chaplains and a Shia Chaplain, soon to be hired, to service needs of the Shia Muslim inmates. I submit that the role of a chaplain, that happens to be an Imam, is tremendous. He is a facilitator, teacher, counselor, advocate, role model, guardian and Dai.

The Chaplain's role is one of empowerment. The chaplain is about re-claiming lives. Most of the inmates who

are Muslim did not come to jail as Muslim, they were members of other religious communities, some were agnostic, and atheist. After reaching prison, they learned about Islam and embraced it. My job as the Muslim Chaplain is to make sure the Muslim inmate is able to practice his religion in the proper manner. It is the role of the Muslim Chaplain to see that the inmate receives Al-Islam in its pristine purity.

The Muslim inmates need to get correct Islamic knowledge, and this is one of our greatest responsibilities. We have to help them to become more acquainted with the Noble Quran (The Book of Guidance for well over 1 billion Muslims and also the Authentic Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). They need to understand and appreciate tawheed in all its aspects and they need to have the correct belief (Aqeedah). They also need to work on learning to read the Noble Quran in its original language, which is Arabic.

The Muslim Chaplain has to be an example of a good Muslim. The Chaplain is the religious specialist responsible for the spiritual, moral and ethical treatment of prisoners. He is the expert on Islam, as it were, in the prison setting. The

Muslim Chaplain has the responsibility to help the incarcerated Muslim to return to society in the best possible form. We believe that form is being a good Muslim. Although it is the responsibility of the chaplain to help the incarcerated Muslim, it is an Islamic duty to give our services to the incarcerated Muslims.

As a Chaplain, we have to recognize that the reality of the life of a Muslim in prison is like enlisting in the armed services and going to boot camp. They all go through the drills and maneuvers (learning and practicing the deen) in a controlled environment. Therefore, the real test comes when the Muslim inmate is released from prison, where they now feel the full impact of the influences that permeate from the society that we live in. We must remember that prison life is an artificial life. The inmate becomes totally dependent on that system for its life. Consequently, it is imperative to have a support system in place that will address the whole human being.

Because the Muslim inmate is in a lock-up situation, we must go to them and try to help them where they are. I can remember a question being asked once at an Islamic Seminar.

The questioner asked, "Is the shahadah of an inmate the same as the shahadah of a person that's free?" The speaker Diya uddin Bin Yahya said, *"It is the same shahadah. A person doesn't have 85% of a shahadah because they are incarcerated."*

Shaikh Zaki Abdul Hamid (one of the past Presidents of I.S.N.A.) said, *("whosoever accepts the true Tawhid (Allah's oneness), experienced in Quran and Sunnah, is a brother or a sister to every Muslim and must be loved and accorded loyalty and support based on the integrity of that commitment. (Islamic Horizon, February 19, 1988, pg.30).* Therefore, the Muslim Chaplain has to go into the prisons fulfilling the command to "Amr bil maroof wa nahiy anil munkar", enjoin good and forbid evil in the context of the reality of where those Muslim inmates are, why they are there, and how long they will be there.

The Muslim Chaplain who has deep insight will understand that many of the problems of incarceration have come as a result of men and women being disconnected from

Almighty Allah Ta'Ala, therefore, it becomes our responsibility to bridge this gap by helping to reconnect them.

There is a threefold connection that has to be re-fused.

- God to Man
- Man to Man
- Man to Self

Man has an obligation and responsibility to Allah Ta'Ala, he has an obligation and responsibility to his community and he has an obligation, and responsibility to himself and family. The message of Islam is a redeeming message, a message of liberation and message of true freedom. It is a message of hope and its message is one that heals.

Allah Ta'Ala tells us in the Noble Quran that it, the Quran, is a healing (shifaat) and a mercy (Rahmat).

In recapitulating the three fold obligation that man has to Allah, community and self (family), it is good to have some background into the various psychological modules, as we are dealing with human repair, souls that are damaged, and persons with many disorders. In my attempt to reach as many

Muslim inmates as possible, I have accepted some of Dr. Glasser's ideas as it relates to "Reality Therapy". Dr. Glasser's "main premise is *"that every person requiring (psychiatric) help suffers from one basic inadequacy – the inability to fulfill their essential personality needs. It is this inability which causes personality problems and interpersonal conflict. A person's behavior, however distorted, represents their attempt to satisfy their basic needs. To the extent that their efforts are unsuccessful, they will be a problem to themselves and/or to others."*

The basic personality needs are:

- relatedness – The need to love and be loved.
- respect – The acceptance of ourselves/and being accepted by others in terms of evoking self-worth (value).

All of the problems that we are confronted with daily are a result of our inability to satisfy these legitimate needs.

One needs to have:

- A positive self-concept
- A sense of self – worth – dignity
- Self – confidence

The Muslim Chaplain utilizing the above psychological module along with a strong Islamic base can mend the broken bones (heart & souls). The helping professional approaches the situation with a positive attitude. He knows that Al-Islam, in its pristine purity, can satisfy one's legitimate needs. As we used to say, "Al-Islam comes after everything else has failed".

It is therefore, this writers humble opinion, that correct Islamic knowledge has to be imparted to the Muslim inmate whereby, they may benefit from its intrinsic power. The Muslim Chaplain can only communicate this truth in an acceptable (palatable) way if he convinces the inmates that he is genuinely concerned about their welfare. The chaplain has to be a good role model because he is under a microscope. The slightest imperfection or defect will cause him to lose credibility with those whom he wishes to guide. Our purpose is to bring home the reality of the deen, i.e., what Al-Islam requires of its adherents, practical creativity and full acceptance of responsibility to one's self. Blaming others for what has happened to the inmate is not yet accepting reality and ownership. When the chaplain teaches Al-Islam properly,

the Muslim inmate recognizes that he alone is responsible for his actions.

The chaplain spends a lot of time counseling the inmates, listening to them, talking to them, and teaching them. The Chaplain's role is to help the Muslim inmate to practice his religion as best he can under the circumstances and then to leave prison life and come out to the free society and continue to practice that religion. The Muslim inmate is taught how to pray the Islamic way. Even before that he is taught about (Taharah purification) how to put yourself in the pure state for prayer – how to wash. He is taught various aspects of the religion. He is encouraged to learn as much as he can because once he is released from prison he will probably not have a lot of time to sit and study. He is encouraged to utilize the time while he is incarcerated. He should get all the knowledge he can, Islamic as well as secular.

This writer has on many occasions told the Muslim inmates to get all the college they can now because in the very near future, it won't be available to them. This has become a reality in that college is no longer available for inmates..

One of the things this writer does is offer Muslim inmates a greater perspective, by having –ex-offenders come back into the facility to express what pitfalls one may face in society, how to look out for them; and how to avoid falling into them, etc.

One very important element is shared with the inmates and that is about marriage. The inmate needs to know what a Muslim sister is looking for in a mate. They need to know how to choose a mate, what some of the characteristics to look for are. They need to know something about the persons past, family, etc. If they marry a sister with children, they need to know what they can expect from that type of relationship.

Inmates receive course studies and seminars on the Islamic concept of marriage which stresses the responsibility of the man/husband/father/provider/protector (Qawammun) and Dowry (Mahr), as opposed to Muta (shacking up, getting together just for the pleasure of sex).

The Muslim Chaplain teaches or is responsible for having taught sex education, interpersonal communications, choosing a mate – (the Sunnah criteria for doing so). Hadith selections,

respecting the marriage bond, - Talaq/divorce, Shura (consultation) with family members, child raising and Islamic education of self and family as opposed to the family being raised as Christian or other.

We discuss principles of management of wealth and emotions. Prison can force inmates into economizing; he or she should maintain this discipline and not lose it when they return to society. They should not give themselves over to the “splurge” mentality of mismanagement of their resources and misdirecting their feelings. Responsibility must be taught as opposed to “love talk”.

We discuss the Purpose of Islamic Marriages:

Individual – collective growth

Not for lust

Love is a growth out of concern

Social – moral/protection and balance

Muslim – Christian/Muslim – Jewish marriages, its role and its complications.

A great deal of time is given to marriage and all its ramifications because we have found that the highest level of recidivism came from those Muslim inmates who:

Were not married

Who were not gainfully employed

Who were not actively attached to an Islamic community

With the three elements mentioned above in place, Muslim inmates generally see much needed stability.

The Muslim Chaplain should have access to State Funds for equipment and materials to help facilitate the Islamic program. The Muslim Chaplain should develop an extensive library of Islamic newspapers, magazines, books, tapes of Imams and/or scholars giving lectures on various pertinent aspects of Islam, both audio and video.

Especially videos because a lot of the inmates have not even acquired their High School Diploma or its equivalent.

If the Muslim Chaplain keeps the proper focus by providing quality service to the incarcerated Muslim, we believe more of them will succeed on the outside (once released from prison).

This writer believes that great potential exist in prison for many sincere and dedicated Muslims to emerge and become active and productive citizens. Muslims who know the pitfalls and can draw on the experiences, not only for their own benefit, but also as brothers and sisters who can be models to other brothers and sisters who are incarcerated as well as being examples to those who are free. A very long time ago Imam Warith Deen Mohammed (Leader of the American Society of Muslims) said, "*Some of my best followers come from the prisons.*" Once an inmate commits himself to Islam he or she is transformed into a highly productive and contributing (law abiding) member of our society.

The Muslim Chaplain is a true liberator. His role is to free the captive believers through fostering proper growth and development in Islam.

The Muslim Chaplain provides classes, workshops, seminars, counseling sessions and some heart to heart talks to men and women who always needed to have a real friend, someone who truly cares about them.

To enhance the work behind the wall, the half way house concept is necessary, i.e., Bait-ul Nas, (House of Help), Bait-ul Nur (House of Light) and or Bait-ul Raja (House of Hope). These way stations, if you will, will help to fortify those leaving prison and give them the support system they need to stay strong in the Deen. It gives them the sense of security that comes from institutional life. The half way house concept lights up the minds of the Muslim and kindles their hearts with hope that al-Islam is the all encompassing religion, and that by totally embracing it they can truly find “real help”.

In recapping the Chaplains Role, according to the Chaplains Administrative Manual and religious handbook.

1. Introduction: The Chaplains represent the only functionaries in the correctional system, who are potentially free to be concerned with the needs of the inmate to whom they minister and with those needs alone.

The Chaplains are an integral part of the facilities rehabilitation/reintegration team.

A. Chaplains Role

- I. The Chaplains have three main purposes in fulfilling his role these are:
 - a) Provide religious training or expertise to meet the religious or spiritual needs of an inmate.
 - b) Instill reverences for G-d and human life as well as develop respect for legal authority.
 - c) Counsel inmates who need to gain maturity, self-confidence or self-control.
- II. A Chaplain must be sensitive to any injustices that may involve inmates and act on their behalf.
- IV Act as liaison between administrators and the inmates in religious matters.

The Chaplain as an advocate

- a) Advocacy

The Chaplains role as an advocate presents a unique situation which demands that he speak on behalf of the inmates rather than for others for whom there is concern.

The inmate needs a spokesman who can identify an injustice or lack of concern during their period of confinement. This

requires that a chaplain be exposed to criticism from society and its system of justice.

In conclusion, The Role of a Chaplain in guiding Muslim worship is like the role of a mother nurturing her child. The mother is there for the child every step of the way. The Chaplain is there for the inmate each and every day.