# 1983

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# Interview Respect for Government Houston TX

### By Imam W. Deen Mohammed

Imam Ibrahim Kamalud-Din: The national but they never really think of government as a plan to them personally. We have a special guest today a very special treat for you and that special guest is Imam Warith Deen Muhammad. He is the leader of the American Muslim Mission, the largest Muslim community in the western hemisphere. Brother Imam, I would like to welcome you to our program American Muslim Mission in Focus.

Imam Warith Deen Muhammad: Thank you.

Imam Ibrahim: We would like to thank you very much for taking time out from your busy schedule to come and be with us. We know that you're traveling all over the country fulfilling obligations to speak at colleges and universities and leadership conferences and other organizations. We want to thank you very much-

Imam Warith: Thank you.

Imam Ibrahim: - for coming to be with us.

Imam Warith: Thank you Imam Kamalud-Din.

Imam Ibrahim: Yes, sir. Also, we have two other guests with us. The first guest I would like to present to you is Imam Arthur Farahkhan. He is the regional representative of the American Muslim Mission in the southwest. His home is Tulsa, Oklahoma. He's also the resident Imam there. Our second guest is Imam Yahya Abdullah he is the director of Islamic Studies and Education for the southwest region. He is also the resident Imam of the Dallas Masjid. I'd like to welcome you both.

Imam Arthur L Farahkhan: Thank you very much.

Imam Yahya Abdullah: Thank you.

Imam Ibrahim: Brother Imam, I'd like to begin with a question of you. Our time is short so we want to take advantage of you being with us here to get some information from you. We're always speaking of the moral foundation of a human life and you and your teaching have really made us realize the importance of human development. We also understand that the woman role in society is very important. She's the first teacher, the first human teacher of the human being and the baby is affected even when it's in her womb.

Imam Warith: Yes.

Imam Ibrahim: By what she thinks, what she eats, what she feels and et cetera. I would like if you will to speak to that a moment and carry it a little further for us.

Imam Warith: Yes. Environment is most important, as you just addressed, the natural environment that we live in before we even free in the world. We live in an environment of the mother's body and G-d has designed that to give us what we need there and prepare us and complete our development inside the womb, so we will be able to function out here. You hardly ever to come out with the nose closed up, the nose is open so you can breathe.

Imam Ibrahim: That's right.

Imam Warith: Everything is in nice order so we can function but look what we have to go through to be prepared. We have to be nine months in confinement, in a nice environment that G-d designed to form us as we should be formed. When we come out in the outer environment, the first environment we come into is the environment of the home. Environment of mother, environment of the home, environment that mother prepares that she watches over. The moral the problem comes when the sensitivities are disrupted, or changed are corrupted, you see.

We belong to our mother's children and most mothers they have the natural mother sentiments. This mother says, "This is my child. I'm going to take good care of this child", you see. The mother want to see you have a good life. She's not just going to dress you well with clothes. She's going to dress you well with proper behavior, right?

Imam Ibrahim: That's right.

Imam Warith: Right. She's going to try to dress you in proper behavior too because she knows that's important to your life, to your future. If you don't have the proper behavior, then the house environment is going to be destroyed. She cares about everyone in her house. She cares about all the children, not just you. You're one of the children. She cares about all the children. She doesn't want you coming up with bad morals and you'll be hurting your brothers and sisters. She protects her that little social order there, right?

Imam Ibrahim: That's right.

Imam Warith: her family order, social order, she protects that. When we come out in the world, we live in close quarters with other people. We have to realize that we have to have that same family interest in the family of man if we're going to live in close quarters. You can't have it without moral sensitivity.

Imam Ibrahim: You know, Brother Imam, listening to you, I can see why people have become disrespectful to a city state and national government because actually, the respect for government starts at home.

Imam Warith: It starts at home.

Imam Ibrahim: If it fails at home, then there's no way--

Imam Warith: It fails outside.

Imam Ibrahim: Yes.

Imam Warith: I agree with you.

Imam Ibrahim: I can see the answer really is to go back-

Imam Ibrahim: Yes, siree.

Imam Warith: - to the home environment and begin in there. Right. I'd like to go to imam Farahkhan and I know he must have a lot of questions for you. Any statements you'd like to make so we'll--

Imam Arthur: I'm really inspired by the Imam's presence and I'm just reflecting on your answer about the environment and I couldn't help but think about a commercial or a statement that said, "Let's go back to basics". As Muslims, we know that we have basics and perhaps our viewing audience don't know very much about that but perhaps our viewing audience is aware that in publications on media, where being told that the religion of Al-Islam is the fastest-growing religion on the face of the earth today. What is it about this religion? What is it about the basics that's turning people home?

Imam Warith: Well, first, let's look at where it's growing fast.

Imam Ibrahim: That's right.

Imam Warith: It's growing fast among the masses of blacks in America. It's growing fast in Africa and the third-world countries. Countries with third-world problems, developmental problems, it's growing fast there. We don't think of religion as being something that has appealed to people who need industrialization. They need industrialization but they also need to find those important bases to life. Our religion must provide a clear focus on the basic needs of man as a social creature, as a spiritual creature you see. That's why it's growing fast. It's growing fast in Japan I hear.

Imam Arthur: Yes, sir.

Imam Warith: It's growing fast in Japan. It is because the Japanese has experienced a new wave of blackout in the mind in the city of Tokyo, et cetera.

[laughter]

The fast life, the nightlife, so they've experienced a lot of problems and gotten away from their old traditions. They're looking at the religion now at Al-Islam which doesn't just offer a cultural mold for you to fit yourself into but it puts importance on the understanding of the need for that cultural mold. It's requirements in the natural life of individual, how the natural life of individuals demands some kind of cultural mold for his life.

It's a pity that America has to seasonally go so far away from her cultural mold, that's the Christian culture mold. We are seeing that growth that appeal from Al-Islam itself, because the masses and many people in highly-industrialized countries like America and Japan got their lights knocked out. They're looking at Al-Islam now because Al-Islam is popular and I think it's popular because Saudi Arabia is in focus, the Middle East problems. The Saudi Arabia is in Focus. Egypt has been put in focus, so the Islamic world, the Islamic nations have been put in focus and I think that has a lot to do with this curiosity too.

Imam Ibrahim: Thank you very much. You know, Brother Imam, we speak of Al-Islam but I imagine many people don't understand what we're talking about because it's Arabic and would you please just tell us briefly what Al-Islam means?

Imam Warith: Well, if I would say Islam, I'm sure a lot of middle-aged people and older people they would know what I'm talking about if I say Islam but that's incorrect, that's not the correct pronunciation. Correct pronunciation is Islam, Islam, not I-Z but I-S, Islam and that word has been popularized by translators of the Quran translators of the religious teachings.

Actually, when you look in the in the Quran you'll never find the religion proper being called Islam. It's always called Al-Islam. We like to be known for doing something ourselves first. We like to be known for some first and we are the first people to insist upon the pronunciation of the Quranic pronunciation of our religion. It's commonly called Islam. We insist on upon calling it Al-Islam as it is given in the Quran, in the holy book.

Imam Ibrahim: I've heard you teach many times that when you say As-Salaam, like As-Salaam is an attribute of Almighty G-d.

Imam Warith: Yes, it is.

Imam Ibrahim: Which means be peace, as a peace that you can only receive from G-d.

Imam Warith: That's right.

Imam Ibrahim: Of course, we know Salaam is a peace that you can receive from creation and directly from G-d, through creation from each other. If we are hungry and we--

Imam Warith: Salaam is a part, As-Salaam is the whole.

Imam Ibrahim: Right [laughs], very good, it's beautiful. I’d like to go to Brother Imam Yahya Abdullah and any statements or questions that you might have?

Imam Yahya: Yes, I'd like to ask Imam a question as it pertains to religion. We discuss in Al-Islam community and Imam Farahkhan mentioned the basics in the attracting power and how so many people are and the types of people that are being attracted to Al-Islam. My question is what is it in the teachings of Al-Islam that is attractive and what are some of the tenants and beliefs of the Muslims?

Imam Warith: Yes. I think what appeals to the people I described, the unestablished masses, that's what I meant when I was just referring to earlier the masses. The unestablished masses is appeal to the unestablished masses is understood in its religious simplicity, the simpleness, the simplicity of the language. The religion we have doesn't put a lot of importance on mysticism, on ritualism. It requires that we keep a sober outlook on life and that we understand and accept the continuation and continuity of life, that life is continuous, and life is one, it is one, it's united.

Eventually, we're going to have to deal with that oneness, so the oneness-- first principle in our religion is the oneness of G-d, the oneness of his creation, the oneness of the human life. If we are not aware of that, then eventually we're going to run into problems because one day we're going to have to live together. One day we're going to have to deal with each other and I like what we introduce in the beginning that show on the screen that says, from quoting the Quran, quoting our holy book says, "And G-d has made you tribes and nations that you should know each other and not despise each other."

That's G-d's mercy to us. He's saying I don't want you running to a collision down the road. You're a small tribe now and you have your island but that's not the way it's going to stay, you're going to multiply and other people are going to multiply. You're going to meet each other soon. You're going to have to deal with these differences and the races, you see. Our religion has an appeal because right away, it rejects racism, rejects it outright.

Prophet Muhammad, when he was told to introduce himself to the Arabs, he was an Arab, born in Arabia and speaking to Arabs, he wasn't told, "Tell the people I'm an Arab." G-d said to him tell the people I'm a mortal human being like you all, a mortal human like you. There is a key for understanding how we are to think in terms of racial identity and nationalism that really what’s important to us more than anything, although man has to grow from his human identity to tribal national identity, et cetera. We have to have our-- we're entitled to our separate cultures.

Racism has nothing to do with culture. We can be human race and have different cultures but we shouldn’t be races in the race's sense, you see. I'd love to see Irish people, nice Irish community. I'd love to see Italians enjoying the nice Italian community. I'd love to see African-Americans enjoying the personality, the African life and the African-American life, and the African American personality.

We want to keep that cultural identity and a cultural mold and the spiritual sensitivities to that. We want to keep all of that but what's more important for us, if we expect to live on this earth and enjoy peace and be able to progress as a people, we have to recognize that G-d has made us essentially one people. Our nature is the same, our natural-- the possibilities for that nature are the same, they're no different. Some people because of hard of effort, greater effort, or because of environmental pressure on them, they're forced to do great things and we look at them and say, “Look, how the Japanese are going with industrialization", but our religion tells us we all have the same potential for that industrialization.

G-d does have favor some with the environmental situation that brings it out, or some other conditions that have brought that out. That's important for us, never to become racist in the racist sense but I will caution blacks not to carry this humanitarianism off the planet into some dream, into some dream world or some dream life.

We have to accept that people do place great value on their own cultural history and their own cultural unity. We shouldn't try to impose and to force ourselves on that. We should value that and respect that in all people. We should be building our own personality and our own ethnic character, we should be building that ourselves and we should care enough about that to try to contain that and try to build it up better and progress it.

Imam Ibrahim: You noticed, Brother Imam, I noticed that for a long time, there has been a problem here in America with us for identity. We have what I heard you term once as an identity crisis.

Imam Warith: Yes, the writers for the field of human sciences, even some who had preachers, they have written on that. I've read books on the seriousness of the identity crisis in the black society in black America. I do recognize that there's a serious problem and I think our movement really is a growth out of that effort to solve the identity problem for blacks, Marcus Garvey, the Nation of Islam, and the Temple of Islam is called a Nation of Islam. These movements were mainly formed to try to resolve that racial identity problem.

Imam Ibrahim: You came with a term that we use now, as I heard, identity as an ethnic group and many people get confused when they hear that because I've heard some Muslims who don't understand the reason for this ethnic identity label. They think that we're trying to divide ourselves into a sect or something and thus the term Bilalian.

Imam Warith: It's because Bilal is looked at as a spiritual figure. Bilal was the one who called the people to prayer, Prophet Muhammad picked him, he was an African, African man, a man of African origin and Prophet Muhammad chose him upon suggestions of few other, one of the Caliphs and another person, a second person. The prophet saw the same like a vision of Bilal, the African man, calling the people to prayer. He was given that post, office of the Mu-adhin, which means the one who called the people to prayer. We have five daily prayers and every prayer is preceded by a call, an Adhan that's given in rhythmic as you know, a rhythmic call, a very beautiful rhythmic call.

He was the one chosen for that and I think the Muslim world, the Arabs, the Pakistanis, the Egyptians, the Muslims of the world and the immigrants here, when they heard us calling ourselves Bilalians, I think they thought because we came from a confused concept of our religion under the Temple of Islam or under the Elijah Muhammad, the late leader, Elijah Muhammad.

I think they thought we were trying to introduce a sect, a new sect, you see but actually, we were not identified with him as a religious figure. We were identifying more with him as a black person whose situation in Arabia is much like our situation in this country 100 years ago. He was a slave in Arabia and we were a slave here in America and he came to the knowledge of Islam and his life improved. He was given great statue, great station because of him embracing the religion Islam, Al-Islam.

We came to Al-Islam too from a slave background, from a slave past. We have gained the same feeling of comfort and feeling of pride and new worth because of our coming into this religion. We identified with Bilal only for that purpose, to show that we are African, an ancestor, he represents our ancestry and to show that we came from slave life or in a subject life, a life of subjection of servitude and to the dignity of Al-Islam just as he did, you see.

We don't make no big fuss about calling ourselves Bilalians but for us, it's the fulfillment. It fulfills something in our life when we call ourselves Bilalians, but we understand. We don't-- when we are addressing the public, other people who don't belong to our religion, in our experience, who don't know about our experience, we call ourselves African-Americans, Blacks. I don't like using terms like Black and White to identify people that much. I think these are the weakest terms that we have. The weakest of all the terms we have to identify ourselves with or by is white and black.

Imam Ibrahim: You're right.

Imam Warith: They don't say much at all. When white people talk to each other, you think they say, "Hey, white man. Hey white man, come here."? If they don't know that fellow, they know, and they recognize him as an Italian, they say, "The Italian fellow. The Italian fellow." We can't say, "I'm talking about the African fellow." We say, "I'm talking about that Black fellow."

Imam Ibrahim: That's right.

Imam Ibrahim: Really the burden of black and white, it's terrible. I try to stay away from that language as much as possible. I like to refer to us, the Blacks of America as African-American. After all, we don't have the same degree of blackness, do we?

Imam Ibrahim: That's true.

Imam Warith: Ralph Bunche was a long ways from jet black, but he's one of us. He's equally one of us, right?

Imam Ibrahim: That's right.

Imam Warith: Really, it has a way of really destroying our unity, of keeping us from realizing our sense of unity as a people, ethnic unity. It hurts our ethnic unity, for us to use this term, Black, because we're not all equally black.

Imam Ibrahim: That's right. I can see where that would be bad as an identification for a human being.

Imam Warith: Certainly, it is.

Imam Ibrahim: Color, period.

Imam Warith: I think, the important identity for us is Muslim.

Imam Ibrahim: That's right.

Imam Warith: We're Muslim. I remember my father, the late leader, he gave us the kind of catechism, and he asked a question, he says, "Who is your own self?" He gives the answer to you, to learn. "My own self is a righteous Muslim."

Imam Ibrahim: I remember that.

Imam Warith: He didn't say my own self is an African. He didn't say my own self is a Black man. The answer is, my own self is a righteous Muslim. G-d's word is what make us what we are. G-d created us naturally, but then we need help later, because we go away from the nature, right?

Imam Ibrahim: That's right.

Imam Warith: And G-d word is what make us what we are, so the religion comes into us and that's more important as an identity for us. We are Muslims, and Muslims keep us in line with the best of our nature. Muslims keep us in line with the best of our mind, best intellectual possibility, if we understand the religion. It will keep us in line with the best that is in us, and the best that is possible for us. That's the best identity, to call myself a Muslim. Now, for the purpose of identifying myself in a national setting, I'll say I'm an American. In an ethnic setting, I have to say I'm African-American, or I'm Black. Maybe one day, all of us will say I'm Bilalian.

Imam Ibrahim: Yes [laughs]. I bet we will.

Imam Arthur: I think too.

Imam Ibrahim: I'd like to ask brother Imams here to, just--

Imam Arthur: I got a question. It's really inspiring the way you broke down Bilal. We see Bilal started out real small, and it grew. We've been a member of the community for some time, we see our mission growing. Where are we going from here? Where is the American Muslim Mission headed?

Imam Ibrahim: Yes. I would like to think that Bilal, his role in the building of the religious community under Prophet Muhammad as a caller to prayer, caller to worship. I would like to feel that it is prophetic. That actually, now we are fulfilling something that is for the future. Here, Black people in America come from similar circumstances that he suffered as an individual. Here we are now, saying that we [audio cut] Muslim mission, the Daʿwah. After all, the mission to us is Daʿwah. It means to call people to the faith, to call people to the faith.

We are representing that call, that Daʿwah, to call the people to the faith, and I would like to think that, that is prophetic, that his life pointed to this. That in the future this would happen. I don't see him in his own individual life as having a mission as such. I see him in his symbol, what he represent, pointing to the future. That people like him, and from his circumstances, from his bad circumstances, will call people, and it will not just be a Mu'addhin place in the minaret, near the Masjid to call people to that one Masjid, but people to call people. A group of people that will call the conscience of the people back to the correct worship and correct respect for humanity.

Imam Ibrahim: Beautiful. Brother Imam, it always disturbs me to have to stop you.

[laughter]

Imam Ibrahim: This time runs out so fast.

Imam Warith: I hate to take up so much time too.

Imam Ibrahim: No.

Imam Warith: You should tell me if I'm taking up too much time.

Imam Ibrahim: I would like to bring out one point here that I think is very important. Many people know, what the Honorable Elijah Muhammad was teaching during the Nation of Islam. It was a black supremacy teaching, a racist teaching. It was used as an antidote for white supremacy because all of us came under that in slavery. He was not teaching the true concept about Islam. Although he did much good, and many good things came out of it.

Imam Warith: He was dealing with the problem of oppression, racial oppression, more than anything else. The Black [audio cut] the black man's life because of that discrimination.

Imam Ibrahim: The thing that I was trying to really bring out was the fact that you are his son, and many people don't know that. It was you who with the understanding of Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad that came along and set us directly on the straight path about Islam. I think it's very important that people understand that.

Also, I would like to say that I hope that you have gained some good information and understanding concerning our religion and concerning the Muslim life. Our program is not so much for proselytizing but is to give you information so that you can better understand us, and we will better understand you. I'd like to say, As-Salāmu ʿAlaykum. May the peace and blessing of the Almighty G-d be upon you, and we'll see you in our next program.

[music]

Voice-over: The American Mission Muslim in Focus. This program has dealt with the misunderstandings that exist in this country about the Muslim religion. We hope this program will bring about a better understanding of the religion of Al-Islam. We also hope that this program will encourage all people to begin to know each other better, so that we can work together to assure the survival of our religion.

[00:27:33] [END OF AUDIO]