

# Proper understanding of Islam

BS Foad, M.D

2011

# Concepts discussed

- 1-Asking questions, critical thinking and proper understanding of religion is important
- 2-Sources of knowledge in Islam
- 3-Basic Muslim beliefs and values
- 4-Relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims as outlined in the Qur'an
- 5-Islam is compatible with Western democracy and Islam is not at war with the West
- 5-Root causes of extreme and radical movements
- 6-There are misconceptions about Islam and the Muslims

# Sources of knowledge in Islam

1-The Qur'an

2-The Sunnah (tradition) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

3-Human interpretation of these two sources of guidance:

- Basic principles of morality and our accountability are agreed upon

- Differences in peripheral issues or Rulings in Jurisprudence due to different interpretation

# The Qur'an

- Is the **literal word of God**, and not the writings or sayings of Muhammad
- The Qur'an was **safeguarded from alteration**
- The Qur'an was **revealed in Arabic** because Muhammad was an Arab
- Qur'anic revelation **came gradually over 23 years** to strengthen the heart of Muslims, solve problems and answer questions
- **The Qur'an is a guidance, a mercy from God and a cure for the ills in our hearts**
- We have **obligations** towards the Qur'an

# How was the Qur'an preserved?

- 1- It was **written** on the material available at the time by scribes who heard the verses from Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)
- 2- The verses of the Qur'an revealed gradually over 23 year were **memorized** in the hearts of the Prophet's companions
- 3- **When the Prophet died, the whole Qur'an was safeguarded in written and oral forms**
- 4- **Abou Bakr collected** the Qur'an from its sources in one book; then **Othman wrote it in one version** to make sure there are no differences in recitation

# The Qur'an was revealed gradually over 23 years

- 1- To answer questions and solve problems
- 2- To strengthen the heart of the Prophet and to provide guidance
- 3- It would have been impossible for the Prophet and his companions to memorize, understand and apply the Qur'an if it came all at once

# The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic because Muhammad was an Arab

“Indeed this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. With it came down the Spirit of faith and truth. To your heart, that you may admonish in a clear Arabic tongue“

Ash-Shura'a 26: 192-195

“We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his own people“

Ibrahim 14: 4

# The Qur'an gives guidelines, but does not restrict us with specific details

The Qur'an does not specify the form of government, because the needs of each society is different

What it does provide are the guidelines of justice, equality, proper representation, freedom of expression and accountability which are applicable in every society

# The authenticity of the Qur'an

God did not want to give Muhammad miracles like the miracles He gave to Moses or Jesus, because people forget and the effect of miracles disappears with time. Rather God gave Muhammad an ever lasting miracle the Qur'an

**The proof that the Qur'an is indeed Divine in nature is in the Qur'an itself. Read the Qur'an and decide for yourself, could this Book be made up by a human being!**

# Misconception: Muhammad wrote the Qur'an

- **Muhammad was illiterate:** he could not read or write: How can he produce such a Qur'an?
- **The evidence for the authenticity of the Qur'an is in the Qur'an itself:**
  - The Qur'an is **clear and logical**, it tells us how to live our lives and what is our goal in life
  - There is **no contradiction**, rather its verses complement each other. None of its verses were proven wrong
  - No one could produce such a Qur'an**

# Our obligations towards the Qur'an

- 1- To **read** it properly with concentration and devotion
- 2- To **understand** its principles and guidelines
- 3- To **apply** its orders and directives in our lives and to establish and develop the noble character espoused in the Qur'an
- 4- To **teach** the Qur'an and spread its useful message
- 5- To **defend** the Qur'an against false accusations

# The role and function of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

- 1- As God's messenger he **delivered** the Divine message
- 2- He **explained** the message
- 3- He **applied** the message in his life
- 4- He became an **example to follow** in his behavior and noble character
- 5- He **taught** and groomed a generation of leaders to carry on his mission
- 6- During his life, he served as **head of state and leader of the Muslim nation**

# To obey the Prophet is a criterion of belief

“But no, by your Lord, they can have no real faith, until they make you judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against your decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction“

An-Nesa'a 4 : 65

# The Prophet's sayings were scientifically authenticated

- The character and memorization of each narrator was authenticated before accepting the Hadeeth, to make sure that he did not lie or forget or change the words
- Where he heard the Hadeeth (saying of the Prophet) and from whom was also authenticated
- The Hadeeth was cross referenced to other Hadeeth to make sure there is no discrepancy
- Those narrators who were weak or unreliable were exposed and not accepted
- The words of the Hadeeth were scrutinized to make sure they were indeed the prophet's own words

# Examples of the Prophet's sayings

- (A strong person is not the person who is strong physically, but is the person who is able to control his anger)
- (Feed the hungry, help those who need your help, spread the greetings and pray and remember your Lord at night, then you will enter paradise)
- (The believers are like one body: when one part of that body gets sick the other parts feel for it by exhibiting fever and staying awake at night)
- (The upper hand is better than the lower hand; and start with those you are supposed to take care of)

# Examples of the Prophet's sayings

- (You see the believers in their kindness and love for one another, and in their mercy and cooperation like one body)
- (Wish for yourself one of two blessings: a person whom Allah gave money and he is spending it properly; and a man whom Allah gave knowledge and wisdom, and he is applying it and teaching it to others)
- (The best among you is the person who learns the Qur'an and teaches it to others)
- (The best among you are those best in character)
- (The best amongst you is the person who is best in treating his wife and family)

# The difference between hard-line Muslims and liberal Muslims

Some Muslims follow a **strict or literal interpretation of the Sunnah** (Prophet's sayings and actions), and follow the opinions of old scholars who lived many centuries ago

Other Muslims favor **critical thinking and allow room for interpretation, and do not necessarily follow the literal words of the Hadeeth, but follow the concept and spirit of the Prophet's teaching.** This allows Islam to be compatible with a Western democracy and a pleural society. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) lived centuries ago and was talking to people who had a culture and tradition different from ours today. His sayings may have applied to a specific problem or incident at his time or he may have been responding to the needs that are not applicable to our times.

# Think, consider and reflect

- Abraham asked his Lord to show him how He gives life to the dead? Therefore, there is nothing wrong in asking questions in order to learn and understand
- The Qur'an encourages us to think and reflect
- Knowledge and proper understanding is the basis of true belief based on conviction. Such strong faith is not shaken in the face of difficulty

# Abraham asks God to show him how He gives life to the dead

“Abraham said: “O my Lord show me how You give life to the dead“ God said: “Do you then not believe?“ Abraham said: “Yes I believe, but I want my heart to be satisfied” God said: “Take four birds, cut them to pieces, then put a portion of them on every hill, and call on them: they will come to you flying with speed. Then know that Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise“

Al-Baqara 2: 260

# What do we learn from this Qur'anic story?

- **There is nothing wrong in asking questions**, even in matters of faith if our goal is to learn and increase our faith and understanding
- **We see God's power and miracles, but we may not know the how of His power.** God showed Abraham that indeed He is capable of giving life to the dead birds, but He did not show him how. We learn that our knowledge in some areas is indeed limited, and we learn to be humble

# The noble character of Muhammad (PBUH)

- 1- His kindness and gentle nature
- 2- His caring and desire to guide to Allah's way
- 3- His truthfulness, integrity and trust-worthiness
- 4- His humility and ability to forgive
- 5- His sound judgment and wisdom
- 6- His patience, perseverance and commitment
- 7- His eloquence and ability to communicate
- 8- His justice
- 9- His worship and devotion to Allah

# Problems facing prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Madina

- 1- Feud and war among the Arab tribes
- 2- The Jews controlled the economic life in Madina and were apprehensive about losing their influence
- 3- The large number of immigrants from Macca placed enormous strains on the economic and social fabric of society in Madina
- 4- The threat from Quraish persists
- 5- The Muslim must learn their religion and the Da'wa (inviting to Allah) must continue

# The prophet's plan to solve the problems in Madina

- 1-Every Muslim in Madina takes a brother from Macca to help him and supports him
- 2-The mosque is the focal point of activity
- 3-Pact of cooperation and non-aggression between Muslims and Jews
- 4- Prepare to defend your community against aggression, be alert and strong
- 5- Teaching the Muslims their Islam, and preparing the new generation of leaders

# Pact of cooperation and non-aggression between Muslims & Jews

- The rights and liberties of both Muslims & Jews are protected and safeguarded: Their lives, possessions, freedom to worship and not being oppressed or forced to accept Islam
- In return cooperation is expected in protecting Madina against its enemies
- To live under the laws of the state and Muhammad as its leader

# Muhammad is a messenger to all mankind

Every messenger was sent to his own people, but Muhammad was sent to all mankind:

“Say: “O people, I am sent to you all, as the messenger of God..” Al-Araf 7: 158

“We have sent you but as a universal messenger to all mankind..” Sa Ba 34: 28

“Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion to His servant, that it may be an admonition to all mankind” Al-Furqan 25: 1

# Misunderstanding the Prophet's sayings

The Prophet (PBUH) lived more than 1400 years ago and addressed people with a certain culture and tradition. Some of his sayings may not be applicable to our society today

The Prophet (PBUH) may have been addressing a specific question from a person or dealing with a specific situation at his time

**We can follow the guideline and the spirit of the Prophet's sayings, that are applicable at all times**

# Do not take the prophet's sayings out of historical context

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was talking to a society with certain traditions and culture. He talked to them in terms they can understand and relate to.

The prophet's saying : (I have been ordered to fight An-Nas till they bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that I am His messenger) does not mean that Muslims should fight everyone till they accept Islam. This is clearly against Qur'anic teachings of freedom of faith and choice. **An-Nas here refers to Quraish an Arab tribe that were fierce enemies of the Muslim state**

# Understand the historical context of the prophet's sayings

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (Whoever denounces his religion kill him) Muslim. This Hadeeth does not mean that Muslims should kill an apostate (Ridda) for several reasons:

- The prophet did not kill any apostate though some denounced their Islam at his time
- There is no Qur'anic verse that orders Muslims to do that
- **The Qur'an is very clear that God gave man the freedom to accept or reject faith and that no one is to be forced to accept Islam against his will**

The prophet was referring to those who left Madina and joined the Muslim enemies and fought against the Muslims. **It was their act as enemy combatants and not their faith that mattered.**

# Misunderstanding the Prophet's sayings

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (I am free of any Muslim who lives among those who worship partners with God: they are not similar) Abou Dawood & Termedhi

This saying refers to an incident that occurred at the time when Muslims were ordered to immigrate to Madina. A group of Muslims stayed in Macca and were killed by the Quraish tribe. The Prophet (PBUH) was only saying that they should have come to Madina where they would have been safe, that he is free of guilt regarding their own choice of not coming, rather staying behind. The saying enforces that **we should leave if we are not able to practice our religion and do not feel safe in one place**. This saying does not mean that Muslims cannot live in America or in Europe among non-Muslims

# Basic Muslim beliefs & values

- 1-Belief in One God: Tawheed
  - 2- Belief in being accountable to God
  - 3- Belief in God's Divine books
  - 4- Belief in God's angels
  - 5- Belief in God's messengers
  - 6- Belief in Fate as God's will, and how to deal with our fate
  - 7-Being good to our parents and families and neighbors
  - 8-Helping those who need our help, and sharing God's blessings with others less fortunate
- We apply our faith in the way that we live our life, in our character and how we interact with others

**By serving God, our faith increases  
and we attain righteousness**

**“O people serve your Lord, Who created you  
and those before you, that you may learn  
Taqwa (righteousness)**

**Al-Baqara 2: 21**

**We evolve and improve and become better  
human beings. This is the purpose of  
religion**

# The concept of God in Islam

- 1- There is only One God, the God of all whether Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Budhists, Agnostics or Atheists
- 2- God created us, provides for us and guides us to His way
- 3- We are accountable to God
- 4- God is merciful, and forgives our sins
- 5- God is just, and He responds to our prayers
- 6- God knows what we do
- 7- We cannot see God, nor understand His innate nature. We know Him through His creation and as He described Himself in attributes of perfection

# God is Forgiving, most-Merciful

“He ordained on Himself the rule of mercy“

Al-An'am 6: 12

“Without doubt I am He that forgives again and again, to those who repent, believe and do good, and are ready to receive guidance“

Ta Ha 20: 82

“Unless he repents, believes and works righteous deeds, for Allah then changes the evil of such person into good, for Allah is often-forgiving, most-merciful“

Al-Furqan 25: 70

# God hears and answers our prayers

“When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close to them: I listen to the prayer of every supplicant when he calls on Me. Let them also with a will, listen to My call, and believe in Me, that they may walk in the right way“

Al-Baqara 2 : 186

# Accountability

- \*Muslims believe that after we die, we will be resurrected to stand judgment and account for our deeds in life
- \*There is reward for those who do good and obey Allah: paradise; and there is punishment for those who were wicked and disobeyed God: Hell
- \*God's forgiveness and mercy extends to everyone who has even a small amount of faith
- \*Intercession is granted by Allah to whom He pleases and on behalf those who are acceptable to Him

# Our good deeds are multiplied

“ He who does good shall have ten times as much to his credit; he that does evil shall only account according to his evil. No wrong shall be done to any of them “

Al-Ana'm 6 : 160

# Muslims believe in the Torah & Bible

“It is He who sent down to you in truth the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Torah (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before that, as a guide to mankind”

Al-Imran 3: 3 & 4

Muslims also believe in all God's messengers, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus

# Our differences is a sign of God

“And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and the differences in your tongues and colors. Indeed in this are signs for those who know”

Ar-Rum 30: 22

We learn from our differences. This diversity should enrich our lives, rather than cause prejudice and bias

# What does the Qur'an say about treating non-Muslims?

The following guidelines are stressed:

1-Kindness

2-Justice

3-Talking to them in a good way

4-Working together and cooperating

5-Not forcing them against their will to become Muslims,  
and respecting their rights

6-Do not prejudge the fate of others

7-Inviting them to Islam with wisdom & good example

# Be kind and just

“Allah forbids you not regarding those who do not fight you because of your faith, nor drive you out of your homes, to treat them with kindness and justice, For Allah loves those who are just”

Al-Mumtahina 60 : 8

# Talk in a good way

“And tell My servants to say those things that are best: for Satan does sow dissensions among them, for Satan to man is an avowed enemy”

Al-Isra'a 17: 53

**We should work together in what is  
right and useful**

**“And cooperate and work together in  
righteousness and virtue, but not in sin and  
transgression, and be conscious of Allah for  
Allah is severe in punishment”**

**Al-Maeda 5: 2**

# Respect the right of others to their own faith

“Let there be no compulsion in religion”

Al-Baqara 2: 256

“If it had been your Lord’s will everyone on earth would have believed: are you then forcing people to believe against their will?”

Yunus 10: 99

“Let him who will believe, and let him who will reject faith”

Al-Kahf 18: 29

# Invite to your Lord

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good example and preaching, and argue with them only in ways that are best. Your Lord knows who has strayed from His way and who is guided”

An-Nahl 16: 125

“Say: “This is my way, I invite to Allah with clear insight and conviction, I and those who follow me”

Yusuf 12: 108

This does not mean that we force people to become Muslims against their will.

Inviting to God is an expression of how much we love God and acknowledge His blessings, and that we wish others to enjoy the same blessings

# Do not prejudge the fate of others

“Your mission (O Muhammad ) is to deliver the message; It is ours to call them to account”

Ar-Ra'd 13: 40

**Allah is the only Judge.** He takes all our actions into account. He is just, forgiving and merciful

This reminder is important because as human beings we are prone to pass judgment and criticize others who do not share our views

# Violence and murder is prohibited in all religions

The Qur'an states that human life is sacred

“Do not kill the soul that God has made  
sacred except for a due process of law”

Al-Isra'a 17: 33

“That if anyone murders one soul, it is as if he  
has murdered all of mankind; and if any  
saves one soul, it is as if he saved all of  
mankind”

Al-Maeda 5: 32

# So how come some Muslims become radicals, extremists and terrorists?

- 1-Lack of proper understanding of the Qur'an and its message, and superficial and wrong interpretation of the Prophet's sayings, and strict adherence to rigid views expressed by old scholars
- 2-Poverty, lack of decent jobs and no hope in the future allows radicals to recruit vulnerable young minds
- 3-Oppression and lack of freedom in Muslim countries and a feeling of injustice, and being subjected to torture
- 4-Occupation of Muslim land by foreign powers gives extremists grounds to call for Jihad

# Why extremists hold such radical views?

- **Lack of proper knowledge about Islam**

Their knowledge and application is based on old and wrong interpretation. They want to live as Muslims lived 14 centuries ago, living in the glory of the past. Their teachings revolve around prayers and memorization of the Qur'an, and blind obedience that does not allow for questions or critical thinking. Concepts are dogmas that are followed as sacred. They consider any view outside their own as wrong, including their fellow Muslims

# Why extremists hold such radical views?

- **Poverty and lack of decent jobs**

It is easy for extremists to recruit young men who are hungry, desperate and vulnerable, and to brain-wash them and program them into instruments of terror

The wealth of Muslim countries is usurped by corrupt dictators. Bribery is common and those in power only care about themselves

It is difficult to have human dignity or to have hope when you are poor and unable to provide for your family

# Why extremists hold such radical views

## Oppression and lack of freedom in Muslim countries

Most Muslim countries are ruled by dictators who tolerate no opposition to their rule. They jail, torture and kill dissidents.

The views of these dissidents become more radical and their ideology more twisted in jail. Their hatred only intensifies

They resort to violence and revenge

# Why radicals hold extreme views

## The occupation of Muslim land

The recent occupation of Iraq & Afghanistan reminds Muslims of British and French occupation of Muslim countries like Egypt, Syria and Iraq

It portrays America as a new colonial power only intent on usurping the oil, and the riches and resources of Muslim land

Extremists use this anti-American sentiment as a recruiting tool to "liberate Muslim land"

# How can we deal with the problem of terrorism?

- Hunting down terrorists and killing them or putting them in jail does not solve the problem; it only suppresses it as it grows underground and festers
- **We must address the basic underlying reasons for extreme ideology by proper education and exposing the wrong teachings of the terrorists against the teachings of true Islam; and by addressing the problems of poverty and lack of freedom and oppression in Muslim countries; and by getting out and leaving occupied lands to their own people**

# Common misconceptions about Jihad

- \*Many people wrongly believe that Jihad is holy war and means fighting
- \*Many people wrongly believe that Muslims are intent on fighting non-Muslims and forcing them to become Muslims against their will
- \*Some people believe that Islam is not compatible with Western culture and civilization

# What is the true meaning of Jihad?

Jihad means to strive and struggle and experience difficulty, and takes on several forms or activities:

**1-Jihad to control our vain desires**

**2-Jihad to resist the temptations of Satan and live our lives as God has commanded**

**3-Jihad to correct misconceptions, misinformation and stereotyping of Islam and Muslims**

**4-Fighting to defend our country against aggression**

# Important concepts about fighting in Islam

- 1- Fighting is only allowed to **defend** one's home or to defend one's country against aggression.
- 2- Fighting is **not allowed for personal reasons**
- 3- **No transgression is permitted:** fight only those who fight you, not civilians. Do not kill women, children or the elderly. Do not burn crops or destroy buildings
- 4- **Accept offers of peace**

# Fight those who fight you, but do not transgress

“And fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress, for Allah loves not transgressors“

Al-Baqara 2: 190

Fighting to annex land or for personal reasons is not allowed in Islam

# **The views of extremists are portrayed to represent the views of Islam**

Radicals and extremists are shown on TV as hateful and ruthless bent on destroying America. These people do not represent Islam and cannot claim to be Muslims.

**Islam safeguards human life and considers it sacred, and safeguards human liberties for Muslims and non-Muslims alike**

**Islam is not at war with the West**

# American Muslims enjoy freedom not available to Muslims elsewhere

- The freedom of worship and of being able to express one's views without fear of reprisals
- The freedom to work, earn a living, support one's family and plan a better future and to raise our children in a free country
- The separation of Church and State ensures the religious freedom of minorities and their basic rights
- The American constitution is compatible with Islamic principles of Justice, freedom and equality

# American Muslims also face increasing pressure and challenges

- 1-Islam is misrepresented in the news media** as a violent religion not compatible with Western democracy, and Muslims are portrayed as hateful primitive people. Their religion is being high jacked by terrorists who claim to be Muslims, and they must defend their Islam and prove that they are not extremists
- 2-Muslims in America must show that their religion is compatible with living in a democratic pleural society**, and that American principles like Justice, freedom, hard work and accountability are truly Islamic principles
- 3-Muslims in America are reaching out, working with and proving that they are an integral part of a diverse American society**, and are no longer isolating themselves