

When religion turns violent

BS Foad, M.D
2011

When religion turns violent

Concepts discussed:

- 1–Murder is prohibited in any religion
 - 2–How do we treat those who do not share our convictions?
 - 3–Why some turn violent and become extremists and radicals and resort to violence?
 - 4–Misconceptions about Jihad
 - 5–American Muslims face increasing pressure
- 

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



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

Islam orders Muslims to treat non-Muslims with kindness & justice

“God forbids you not, with regards to those who do not fight you because of your faith, nor drive you out of your homes from treating them with kindness and justice, for God loves those who are just”

Al-Mumtahina 60: 8



Talk to each other 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



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



Do not prejudge the fate of others

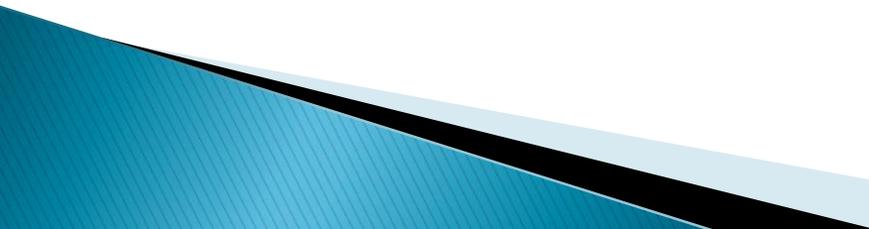
“Your mission (O Muhammad) is to deliver the message; It is ours to call them to account”

Ar-Ra'd 13: 40

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

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

There are several reasons why some turn to extreme ideology and violence:

- 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

Do not take the Qur'an or Hadeeth out of historical context

Verses in the Qur'an relating to the Jews must be understood in the light of struggle between Muslims and the Jewish tribes in Madina. It has no bearing on current day Jews. Each person is judged according to his deeds and does not bear the sin or mistake of his forefathers. Some Muslims wrongly assume that the Qur'an is anti-Jewish. On the contrary, a good part of the Qur'an is devoted to the Children of Israel and the Qur'an praises the Jews in many verses

Literal versus liberal interpretation of God's message

Some Muslims want to follow the literal words both in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah (tradition) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Their argument is that the Prophet's companions witnessed the revelation of the Qur'an and knew why these verses were revealed and what they relate to. They asked the Prophet (PBUH) if they had any doubt about the meaning of a verse. They also knew the Arabic language. Therefore, we should follow their explanation of the Qur'an because they know it better than we do.

Literal verses liberal interpretation of God's message

Others say we should follow the spirit and concept but not the literal words at all times. The Qur'an was revealed more than 1400 years ago and addressed people who lived at that time and had their culture and traditions. Our times and our challenges are different.

The Prophet (PBUH) addressed the needs and questions that arose at his time. His sayings may have been specific to certain incidents or individuals, but there are lessons and concepts to be learned and applied from his sayings if we follow the concepts and spirit, rather than the literal words.

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

The notion that Muslims must fight all mankind till they become Muslims is wrong

- Islam is against forcing others to become Muslims against their will
 - The relationship with non-Muslims is based on kindness, justice and cooperation, not enmity or hatred
 - Muslims are supposed to safeguard the freedom and rights of both Muslims and non-Muslims alike
- 

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 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
- 

Fighting is only one form of Jihad

When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) returned from one of the battles he said: (We returned from the small Jihad to start the greater Jihad). When asked what is the greater Jihad? He said:

(Controlling your vain desires and your soul to become a master of yourself)

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

Permission to fight was given because Muslims were wronged

“To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they were wronged; and verily Allah is most powerful for their aid. Those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, (for no cause) except they say: “Our Lord is Allah“

Al-Hajj 22: 39 & 40

* Fighting was permitted only in the second year after Hijra to defend the Muslim state against its enemies

Fighting is not allowed for personal reasons, only in the cause of Allah

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was asked: A man fights with courage; and a man fights for fame and glory; and a man fights for gain: who is fighting in the cause of Allah? He said: (only those who fight to make the word of Allah great are the ones fighting in the cause of Allah)

Bokhari

Some Muslims call for “Holy Jihad“. Only those charged with authority can rally Muslims in Jihad to defend themselves against aggression

When peace is offered accept it

“If the enemy inclines to peace, you too should incline towards peace and put your trust in Allah, for He is the One that hears and knows all things“

Al-Anfal 8: 61



Extremists are a minority among Muslims

- These extremists represent a minority among Muslims, most of whom are peaceful, and have the same hopes and fears as anyone in the Western world. They want a good life for themselves and their families. They do not hate non-Muslims and want to live in peace
- If you ask any Muslim in the Middle East they will tell you we love Americans and everyone would love to come and live here. What they dislike is American policy which they see as wrong and unfair and siding with rulers who are oppressing their own people

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 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 savage people
 - 2–American troops are occupying Muslim countries
 - 3–Leaders in many Muslim countries are receiving and complying with orders from the American government and are perceived by their citizens as puppets of the American regime
 - 4–Muslims in America must learn 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
 - 5–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
- 

How should we as American Muslims respond to misinformation?

- Certainly not by emotional outcry or angry remarks or condemnation
 - Rather by contrasting the truth to the falsehood propagated and by presenting a clear logical message
 - It is a long difficult process that requires patience, perseverance and resolve, and learning from our mistakes, and from the experience of those before us who experienced similar challenges
- 

Islam is compatible with Western democracy

- Islam respects and safeguards human freedom and liberties. Among these is the right to express yourself and to think critically and oppose what you consider to be wrong. Islam is against oppression and transgression in all its forms
 - Justice and equality are two basic concepts of government in Islam
 - Citizens should respect the rule of law and obey those charged with authority
 - The dignity of every human being is safeguarded, no person is better than another person because of lineage, wealth or power: what is important is character and behavior
- 

Is there a home grown terrorism in America?

Susceptible vulnerable young American Muslims have recently been recruited by Radicals and extremists as terrorists. How were they able to do so?

These are educated young men and women who were born here in America and educated here and knew and enjoyed American culture and ideals?



Is it easy to influence young minds?

The radicals and extremists programmed and brain-washed these young susceptible people by claiming that America is against Islam and the Muslims and is fighting to occupy and dominate Muslim countries. They made them believe that Islam is under attack and that it is their duty to defend their religion in any way possible. If the way is to attack civilians or cause panic let it be!

How can we then combat home grown terrorism?

- *Muslims must report any person who is showing signs or evidence that he or she is becoming radicalized or is being recruited by extremists
 - *We as Muslims must explain that our country America is not at war with Islam as a religion or an ideology. We are at war with terrorists or extremists that are intent on attacking, killing and striking at America.
- 