

Muslim Terrorists and Inferior Women

In this article, I will attempt to clear up two misconceptions that are prevalent about Islam. Before discussing the misconceptions directly, it is important to give an introduction about the source of Islām.

Islām is the name of a way of life that the Creator wants us to follow. We avoid the word religion because in many non-Islamic societies, there is a separation of religion and state. This separation is not recognised at all in Islām; the Creator is very much concerned with all that we do, including the political, social, economical, and other aspects of our society. Hence, Islām is a complete way of life.

The source of Islām is Allāh, the Creator of everything known and unknown to us. He is One, and He is Unique. Allāh has taught us about Islām via two mediums; the Qur'ān and the Sunna. Both the Qur'ān and Sunna were transmitted to humanity, via the Messenger of Allāh; Muhammad, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. The Messenger of Allāh was nothing more and nothing less than a mortal messenger of the immortal Creator.

The Qur'ān is a book containing the literal Word of Allāh. It was transmitted from Allāh to an angel of His (Gabriel), and from the angel to the Messenger of Allāh who delivered it to us. The Qur'ān covers a wide variety of topics, including evidence to support its claim of being the Word of the Creator, stories of earlier generations, rules which humanity is asked to obey, and information about the Hereafter. The Qur'ān claims that it is protected from change, and this is confirmed by its 1400 year history; the earliest copies and the latest copies are exactly the same.

The Sunna is the term used to describe how the Messenger of Allāh lived his life. The Messenger's life is an example for all Muslims to follow. Whatever the Messenger did, said, or approved of, is a source of Islām just as much as the Qur'ān. The Messenger's role is not overemphasised; his life was dictated by what the Creator desired, and the Messenger did not add or subtract to Islām according to his own personal whim. His life was such that his wife called him 'a walking Qur'ān'. The Qur'ān and Sunna are the only two mediums by which Allāh has directly taught us about Islām. This leads us to the following simple but critical principle: ***If any man or woman engages in a belief or action which clearly contradicts the Qur'ān or Sunna, then that belief or action cannot be thought of as 'Islamic'.***

This rule applies whether the man or woman is Muslim or non-Muslim. Hence, we cannot equate Islām and the Muslims. Islam is the way of life; Muslims are people who claim to follow that way of life. A Muslim may claim to follow Islām, but be wrong.

Some misconceptions about Islām are due to the wrong beliefs and actions of Muslims, and others are due to a significant lack of understanding and false stereotyping by non-

Muslims. Two such misconceptions are listed below. Instead of simply stating the misconception by itself, I have also included some reasons why people might adopt that misconception. After each misconception and its possible reasons, I show briefly why the misconception is false.

My answers to the misconceptions are drawn from the Qur'ān and Sunna. All other approaches are insufficient; Islām is a way of life which is very firmly based on a scholarly approach, an approach which is based on knowledge.

In Islām, women are inferior to men because a man can marry up to four wives and women must wear the veil.

This widely held misconception does not remotely follow from the reasons given. The first and most important observation to make about the popular question 'Are men and women equal?' is that it is a badly formed, unanswerable question. The problem that many people conveniently ignore is that 'equal' is not defined. This is a very critical point; the equality must be specified with respect to some measurable property. For example, women on average are superior to men if we ask who is shorter in height than the other. Women are also superior on average if we ask who children bond to deeper, mothers or fathers. Women are also superior on average if we ask who has a tendency to socialise more. On the other hand, men are superior on average if we ask who is taller in height than the other, and so on. Every question can be turned around, and more importantly these are properties, which are irrelevant. What then, is the really important property that we are worried about in terms of gender equality? Naturally, from the point of view of the Qur'ān and Sunna, the obvious important property is who is dearer to Allāh, men or women? This question is emphatically answered in the Qur'ān.

If any do deeds of righteousness, - be they male or female - and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them.
(Qur'ān, 4.124)

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allāh's praise, Allāh has prepared forgiveness and great reward.
(Qur'ān, 33.35)

The Qur'ān and Sunna repeat over and over again that Allāh only favours one person over another based on that person's awareness, consciousness, fear, love, and hope of Allāh. All

other criteria are excluded, namely, gender, ethnic group, country, ancestry, etc. However, men and women are different in their composition, and in their responsibilities under Islām. Yet, both are bound by obligations to one another, especially the following important one which must be understood in any discussion on men and women.

Marry those among you who are single, or the virtuous ones among yourselves, male or female: if they are in poverty, Allāh will give them means out of His grace: for Allāh encompasseth all, and he knoweth all things. (Qur'ān, 24.32)

In this verse, the Creator emphasises that marriage is to be vigorously pursued by the Muslims; the state of being single should not to be maintained. Men and women are different in their responsibilities towards the families that they are strongly encouraged to set up. Women are not obliged to work, whereas men are. The man must provide for the family, but the woman does not have to spend out of her money for it, though she gets a reward for doing so. This one degree in no way affects the position of the Creator in which He has stated that He does not hold women dearer to Him than men, or vice versa. Rather it is simply a way of partitioning responsibilities in a household of two adults: someone must make the final decision on daily matters; though the final decision rests with the husband, it is through mutual consultation that decisions are best reached.

While men are allowed to marry up to four wives, they are also commanded to meet the preconditions of being able to financially support them. They must also deal with each wife justly and fairly with respect to marital and economic obligations. Allah says in the Qur'ān;

Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice. (Qur'ān, 4.3)

Moreover, women are allowed to reject any marriage proposal made to her by prospective suitors, thus if she does not want to marry a certain person, she can reject his proposal. Likewise, she can condition the marriage contract, which does not permit her husband from another woman whilst married to her if she wishes. While it is irrelevant to Islām, it is worthwhile to note that both Judaism and Christianity allow polygamy. The idea is not as foreign to non-Muslims as is often claimed.

Finally, the wearing of the veil by women is also an illogical premise to claim that women are inferior to men. It is more appropriate to indict a society of female exploitation if it tolerates pornography rather than if it enforces the veil. Given that He does not endear people to Himself based on their gender, given that the Creator cares about all of us male or female, given that the sexual and violent drive of men is stronger than that of women...given all this, it is illogical to cast a negative light on this injunction.

Islam tolerates the killing of innocents as Muslims can be terrorists and they engage in

'holy wars' (jihād) in order to force Islām upon others and establish a harsh and cruel judicial system, namely the Sharī'a.

This misconception is one of the most widely held about Islām today. And yet in the Qur'ān, the Creator unambiguously states

Nor take life - which Allāh has made sacred - except for just cause. And if anyone is slain wrongfully, we have given his heir authority (to demand compensation or to forgive); but let him not exceed bounds in the matter of taking life; for he is helped (by the Law). (Qur'ān, 17.33)

Based on this verse, it is Islamically unlawful to murder anyone who is innocent of certain crimes. It is well to remember at this point the distinction made above between Qur'ān and Sunna, and the Muslims; only the Qur'ān and Sunna are guaranteed to be in accordance with what the Creator desires, whereas the Muslims may possibly deviate. Hence, if any Muslim kills an innocent person, that Muslim has committed a grave sin, and certainly it cannot be claimed that the action cannot was done 'in the name of Islam'.

It should be clear, then, that 'Muslim terrorist' is almost an oxymoron: by killing innocent people, a Muslim is committing an awesome sin, and Allāh is Justice personified. Another reason advanced in support of the misconception is that the Creator has imposed 'Jihād'. The term 'holy war' is from the time of the Crusades and originated in Europe as a rallying cry against the Muslims in Jerusalem. Jihād is an Arabic word meaning struggle, but in the context of many verses in the Qur'ān, it carries the meaning of military struggle, or war. Allāh gradually introduced the obligation of military struggle to the Muslim community at the time of the Messenger. The first verse ever revealed in that connection is as follows,

To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged; and verily, Allah is most powerful for their aid. (Qur'ān, 22.39)

This verse lays down the precondition for all war in Islām; there must exist certain oppressive conditions on the people. The Creator unequivocally orders us to fight oppression and persecution, even at the expense of bloodshed as the following verse shows,

Fight in the cause of Allāh those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allāh loveth not transgressors. And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith. But if they cease, Allāh is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (Qur'ān, 2.190-192)

As one might imagine, the method of military struggle has been clearly and extensively

defined in the Qur'ān and Sunna. Since this subject is a huge one, we simply summarise part of it by noting that it is unlawful to kill women, children, the infirm, the old, and the innocent. Hence, the Creator obligates us to fight wherever people are being grossly deprived of freely hearing or practicing the Message of Allāh as contained in the Qur'aan and Sunnah. If we insist on calling Islamic jihad a defensive movement, then we must change the meaning of the word 'defence' and mean by it 'defence of man' against all those elements, which limit his freedom. These elements take the form of beliefs and concepts, as well as of political systems, based on economic, racial, or class distinction.

A third reason often cited for the misconception about Islām which says that this way of life tolerates the killing of innocents is that the judicial system of Islām is unnecessarily harsh. This reason is weak in two respects. First, it presupposes that human beings are more just and more merciful than the Creator, and therefore we can change the law. Second, it is often based on gross oversimplifications of Islamic law, such as saying 'all thieves get their hands cut off'.

The Qur'ān and Sunna make it clear that the law of retaliation (or equality) governs us for murder and physical injury, but forgiveness is better as the following verses from the Qur'ān show,

O ye who believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder: the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the woman for the woman. But if any remissions are made by the brother of the slain, then grant any reasonable demand, and compensate him with handsome gratitude, this is a concession and a Mercy from your Lord. After this whoever exceeds the limits shall be in grave penalty. (Qur'aan, 2.178)

The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allāh: for (Allāh) loveth not those who do wrong. (Qur'ān, 42.40)

Most people are also unaware of the stringent conditions, which must be met for the law of retaliation to be applicable. The Sunna is full of examples of the Messenger of Allāh showing us when the law's preconditions were fulfilled. For example, a thief is only liable to lose his or her hand if the item stolen exceeds a certain value, and if it is proven that the item was taken from its normal resting place. Stealing food is not punishable by the loss of one's hand, and other items are exempt as well. This is just an example of how gingerly the law is applied in Islām.

Finally, another reason advanced for this prevalent misconception is that Islām was spread by the sword. It should be clear by now that we must always distinguish between the Qur'ān and Sunna and the Muslims when it comes to determining what the Creator has asked of us. Allāh has stated clearly in the Qur'ān,

Let there be no compulsion in religion; Truth stands out clear from Error; whoever rejects evil and believes in Allāh hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks. And Allāh heareth and knoweth all things. (Qur'ān, 2.256)

Hence, it is impossible to accept Islām under duress. Even if misguided Muslims were to try to somehow force Islam on others, it would not be accepted by the Creator based on this verse. Historical arguments that try to demonstrate that Muslims did not 'convert others by force' are actually secondary to the argument given above. However, it is worth noting that historically, Islām did spread by peaceful means. The Message of the Creator was conveyed to Africa and to Southeast Asia by trading Muslims, and today the largest Muslim country in the world is Indonesia. The military expeditions that led to the conquest of large swathes of territory in Europe and Central Asia were all marked by tolerance of other creeds and faith.



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