

Islam

Part 3

Islam and Violence

Islam and Women

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The religion of Islam does not support, preach, or advocate violence, discrimination, or terrorism in any way, shape, or form. Extremist groups who claim to follow Islam are no more representative of Islam than David Koresh is of Christianity, or Rabbi Kahana is of Judaism.

Contrary to popular belief in the West, *jihad* is not one of the five pillars of Islam. In the West, the concept of jihad has been improperly translated as 'holy war.' Instead, jihad means 'struggle' or 'striving' and refers, in particular, to the personal struggle that every Muslim engages in to live a peaceful and good life.

Islam teaches Muslims that they must “strive” or work hard to make their religion real in their lives and in their societies. This should be done by JIHAD on four levels:

- 1. jihad of the tongue:** speaking about faith;
- 2. jihad of the hand:** putting their faith into action by good works;
- 3. jihad of the heart:** making their faith real as a spiritual force in their lives;
- 4. jihad of the sword:** defending their faith when they fear it to be under attack.

From the Qur'an: Sura 2, Vers 190:

“Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors.”

There are several occasions which would prompt Muslims to apply the jihad of the sword. They are: 1) to defend oneself, one's family, country, and religion (4:75); 2) to defend fellow Muslims who are helpless and oppressed (8:72); and 3) to secure religious freedom.

“War is permissible in self-defense, and under well defined limits. When undertaken, it must be pushed with vigor (but not relentlessly), but only to restore peace and freedom for the worship of Allah. In any case strict limits must not be transgressed.” (*The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* by ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī.)

Some of the rules about war and fighting are:

- purity of intention;
- declaration of war;
- It must be a legitimate authority and not an individual declaring that war. (The last Khilafeh or Jammaa’h (highest Muslim Council, like our Congress) was abolished in 1924.)
- War should be the last resort.
- responding to peaceful initiative;
- no attacks on non-combatants (children, men, women, trees, crops, buildings, natural resources);
- human treatment of all those who are injured;
- Peace should not be withheld when the enemy comes to terms.

Islam and Women

Before Islam, women in Arabia had few rights, Islam's reform included a woman's right to possess and dispose of property, to keep her name after marriage, to become a guardian for a minor, to undertake trade or profession, to sue in court without her husband's approval, and to individually tailor a marriage contract. Centuries before the women's movement in the West, Islam granted women the right to own property, to be educated, and the right to inherit. In the West, in many instances, women did not receive these rights until centuries later.

The Veil

The custom of veiling predated Islam in Arabia and the Mediterranean region, but it was by no means universal. Aisha Bint-Talhah, an eighth-century noble beauty "of proud and lofty spirit," was married three times. When her second husband criticized her for not wearing a veil, she replied that the public had the right to see God's gift of beauty to her, and under no condition would she veil herself.

The veil may have had its origin in the context of protection rather than subjugation of women, its purpose being to shield her from the prying and covetous gaze of the unworthy or to identify her as free-born. Only women of upper-class families could wear the veil, a status symbol.

Polygamy

Before Islam, men in Arabia could have many wives. Limiting the number to four was an Islamic reform of the practice; another restriction was that there be absolute equality in a husband's treatment of several wives. This being impossible, it may be said that the Qur'an indirectly discouraged polygamy. Today, polygamy is illegal in many Arabic countries. A trend began with Tunisia outlawing the practice in 1956. Several Arabic countries permit polygamy under certain conditions such as the approval of the first wife, the approval of the judge, financial ability to support two wives, or a medical document certifying that the first wife cannot bear children. Today, polygamous marriage represents less than 5% of all marriages and is rapidly disappearing as these countries become more developed and literate.

“However inadequate the teachings and practices of Islam ... seem to be, they were significant step forward. Comparatively speaking, against the backdrop of 7th century Arabia, the Qur'an was a virtual champion of women's rights. Much of the Quran advocates for women was not seen in the West until proximately a hundred years ago.” (I. Zepp, p. 129) Here is a list of positive teachings from the Qur'an:

- Female infanticide was abolished
- Primogeniture, when inheritance goes only to the oldest male heir, is banned.
- Women can inherit property from husbands, fathers, brothers, mothers, and sons, and it is their personal property to keep and use as they please.
- Women retain their maiden names. In Islamic law there is no precedence or basis for changing the last name of a married woman.
- Divorce may be initiated by women.
- A woman has final approval on a marriage partner arranged by her parents.