

[Is Islam a Tolerant Religion?](#)

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At the end of my previous article posted on 22 June, 2006, and entitled: “**Reformation in Islam: “Islam of Mecca” versus “Islam of Medina,”**” I wondered whether “*many other would-be reformers will join the call for making the Meccan Qur’an, the only standard for politics in Islam!*” Well, I did not have to wait long. The *Tanweer* website posted on 25 June an article with this title: “**Is Islam a Tolerant Religion?**”

I would like to share with you certain parts of that article, followed by my analysis, and comments. The author was very bold to tackle this subject, since it is taboo to suggest the absence of tolerance in the Muslim faith. He set forth his case by asking:

“Is Islam a tolerant religion?” Yes, this is a question being repeatedly asked nowadays, and it requires a proper answer. Now, if it is true that Islam is a tolerant religion, am I then allowed to ask this question? Or, would opening up this subject lead many Muslims to hurl at me all kinds of insults and charges, calling me a kafir, and a heretic?

“For example, recently I contributed an article on “The Arab States and Terrorism.” An angry reader responded with these threatening words: “You, an enemy of the Creator [better watch out]...” Did that indicate a spirit of tolerance among Muslims, to call another person an “enemy of God,” simply because he held to a different opinion?

“Now someone may respond, ‘That was the attitude of just one individual, so why are you generalizing his remarks as if they applied to all Muslims?’ However, the behavior and attitude of Muslims towards the “Other,” proves the opposite. The remark I alluded to was not merely one man’s personal opinion. Rather, it has become the rule among most Muslims. In fact the history of Islam is filled with bloodletting due to the intolerance vis-à-vis others who hold to different opinions.

*“We notice that the mindset that seeks to destroy the “Other,” as well as the rise of Islamic terrorism during the last two decades, has placed Muslims in a bloody confrontation with the world. This violent behavior has left a strong impression among non-Muslims and those enlightened [moderate] Muslims, that Islam is a religion that advocates violence, and the rejection of the ‘Other.’ Islam is seen as a faith that does not tolerate any criticism, and rejects all values of modernity and cultural evolution. Islam seems to adhere only to teachings that are firmly anchored in the past. In other words, Islam recognizes neither the present, nor the future. It is perceived as a religion that glorifies death rather than life. The radicals have transformed **jihad** into a synonym of **Irhab** [terrorism,] to such an extent, that **Islam** and **Irhab** have become two sides of the same coin. Muslims, in the view of non-Muslims, are now presumed to be terrorists, unless proven otherwise! Is it not therefore, the duty of moderate Muslims to act quickly and seek to rectify this view of Islam, and to show that Muslims are human beings who want to live at peace, just like the followers of other world religions?*

*“I firmly believe that it is high time we face the question, **“Is Islam a Tolerant Religion?”** To call a person who poses this question, a kafir, or an atheist, or participating in **Crusader** or **Zionist** plots, is a proof of the inability of most Muslims to face the real problem.*

*“I do expect to get responses from those who claim that Islam is a tolerant religion, and who would refer me to several religious texts, in the **Qur’an**, and the **Sunna**, that prove their point. On the other hand, there are many more texts that prove the very opposite. So, the problem that faces Muslims today is that those who yield authority in Muslim countries refer to the second set of texts, namely to those that advocate intolerance*

*vis-à-vis the **‘Other,’** or, the **‘Different.’** Furthermore, there has always been a great gulf separating words from deeds throughout the history of Islam; and this gulf has widened during the present time.*

*“It is a well-known fact that Islam has a different position, for example, regarding the **United Nations Declaration on Human Rights**, even though most Arab and Muslim states have signified their agreement with the declaration. The UN speaks about equality between human beings, and condemns any discrimination based on religion, sect, or gender. However, most Muslim states have declared their opposition to such UN positions, on the ground that they are incompatible with their religious texts. For example, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians have faced clear discrimination in Islamic countries, even though these groups happen to be the original inhabitants of the lands conquered by Islam! Muslims regard them as **“Dhimmis”** who live now within Islamic states, and who must pay the Jizya, **‘an yadin, wa-hom saghiroon,’** i.e. **“they pay the tribute readily, being brought low. (9:29)”** [saghiroon may be translated, **minimized!** JT]*

*“There are also certain Hadiths that approve of this discrimination against Dhimmis. We mention one that purports the Prophet as saying, **‘Don’t initiate a greeting with Jews and Christians, and if you happen to pass by them, force him to walk on the narrowest part of the road.’** Another hadith attributed to Muhammad is; **‘There can be no two religions in Arabia.’** We learn also that the second Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, forced all Jews and Christians to leave Arabia during his term, 634-644.*

*“At present, as the Islamist movement keeps spreading, you can add a lot more about the plight of the minorities living within the Muslim world. In April 2006, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leader Muhammad Mahdi stated to the weekly **Rose el-Youssef**, **‘To [Expletive] with Egypt, and to those within Egypt. I’d rather be governed by an Indonesian Muslim, than by a Coptic Egyptian.’** It should be noted that the Copts happen to be the original inhabitants of Egypt. Where is the spirit of tolerance?*

*“Then there is a great deal to say about discrimination against women. In spite of the fact that women don’t differ from men except physiologically, and possess the same intellectual abilities, and in some instances even surpass men in such gifts, women in Islam are considered as **‘deficient in mind and religion.’** The testimony of a woman in*

*the courts is worth only half a man's testimony. The same thing pertains in matters of inheritance, for a **'man's portion is worth as much as two women's portions.'** When it comes to the rights of a divorced woman, her husband is responsible for her needs for three months only. In fact, a woman's status is on par with animals. This classification is supported by an authentic hadith, **'A man's prayer is nullified when a dog, or a donkey, or a woman, happens to pass by.'** Please tell me, is this a manifestation of a spirit of tolerance?*

*"Of course, there are many texts that call for tolerance, pluralism, and the right to be different in Islam. The problem is that the preachers of violence and intolerance have a list of sacred texts that support their position. Furthermore, they claim that those texts that call for violence and the abolition of the **'Other'** [reference is here to the Medinan surahs of the Qur'an] possess a priority in importance, on the ground that they 'descended' after the Meccan surahs, [and thus have abrogated the Meccan surahs.]*

*"For example, we may refer to those wonderful Ayas that call for tolerance, pluralism, and the right of dissension, such as, **'Had Allah willed He could have made you (all) one nation, but He sendeth whom He will astray and guideth whom He will, and ye will indeed be asked of what ye used to do'** (16:93) M. M. Pickthall Translation*

***'And if thy Lord had willed, He verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they cease not differing.** (11:118) MMP*

***'Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way. Lo! thy Lord is Best Aware of him who strayeth from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright.'** (16:125) MMP*

***'Say: (It is) the truth from the Lord of you (all). Then whosoever will, let him believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve.** (18:29) MMP*

"In support of the position of tolerance in Islam, this saying is attributed to the Prophet:

"Differences among my people are a sign of mercy."

*"However, what is actually taking place in the Muslim world, is exactly the very opposite of the texts quoted above. For example, the Algerian Islamists [members of the Front Islamique du Salut or FIS] declared during the 1990s, **'Anyone who opposes us by his writings will be answered by our guns.'** Practically, this attitude was manifested in most Arab and Islamic countries for the last two decades. It has led to the assassination of tens of Arab lay intellectuals who were advancing the cause of democracy. Not to forget the murder of about 250,000 people in Algeria alone due to the acts of the Islamists. Around one thousand Iraqis are assassinated every month by jihadist. And, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, tens of freedom-loving intellectuals are languishing in prisons, among them the author, Dr. Hashem Aghajeri. In Lebanon, Hizbollah declared that its leader, Nasrallah is above criticism. So, when a TV program made fun of that declaration, his*

followers took to the streets and threatened all those who dared to dissent from their position.

“Doubtless, those who are on the side of jihadism and intolerance chose some of these sacred texts in support of their views.

“O Prophet! Exhort the believers to fight. If there be of you twenty steadfast they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a hundred (steadfast) they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they (the disbelievers) are a folk without intelligence. (8:65) MMP

“Make ready for them all thou canst of (armed) force and of horses tethered, that thereby ye may dismay the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others beside them whom ye know not. Allah knoweth them. Whatsoever ye spend in the way of Allah it will be repaid to you in full, and ye will not be wronged.” (8:60) MMP

“Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knoweth, ye know not.” (2:216) MMP

“Fight in the way of Allah, and know that Allah is Hearer, Knower.” (2:244) MMP

“You shall fight back against those who do not believe in GOD, nor in the Last Day, nor do they prohibit what GOD and His messenger have prohibited, nor do they abide by the religion of truth - among those who received the scripture - until they pay the due tax, willingly or unwillingly.” (9:29) Khalifa’s translation.

“Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the Religion of Truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low.” (9:29) MMP

*“Now it is beyond doubt that those leaders of **Irhab** rely on such verses from the Qur’an and instill them into the minds of young men changing them into human robots, simply programmed for murder in the name of Allah!*

*“Thus, in order for the Muslim world to live at peace with the other civilizations, it is of utmost importance that the religious leaders of Islam face honestly this question: **“Is Islam a religion of peace?”** We need a serious response from them in order to curb the activities of the Jihadists and Irhabists who have highjacked Islam. They must move quickly to clarify Islam’s position regarding this mad violence that has gripped the Muslim world, and spilled into many other lands. They have to cleanse Islam from all the vestiges of Irhab; otherwise, all of us will be paying a heavy price for their inaction. Is there anyone, anybody listening to me?”*

Analysis

No doubt, the author of this article is very concerned about the rising tide of intolerance in Islam, coupled with the inability or unwillingness of Muslim religious leaders to do anything about it. He cites his own experience after writing an article about the “Arab States and Terrorism.” The response of one reader was symptomatic of the general attitude of Islam regarding any criticism of its position vis-à-vis dissenters or non-conformists. This attitude has tarnished the image of Islam worldwide.

He then alluded to the possible responses of many who would remind him of the texts drawn from the Qur’an and the Hadith that advocated tolerance. While such texts are certainly part and parcel of the Islamic tradition, there are many more texts that advocate intolerance towards non-Muslims. It is these texts that are quoted by Islamists and Irbabists in support of their campaign to bring the whole world --- even by force--- within *Daru’l Islam*.

My Comments

I consider the appearance of this article an extremely important event. It questions the much-vaunted claim that Islam is tolerant, or that Islam is a religion of peace, an extremely important event. Here is an honest, moderate Arab Muslim intellectual issuing a clarion call to anyone who would listen to deal with the urgent question, ***“Is Islam a Tolerant Religion?”***

What I especially appreciated in his article is the fact that he did not hesitate to refer to the history of Islam and its sacred texts, as he deals with this crucial topic. When that history is read honestly, and passages in the Qur’an and Hadith are allowed to speak for themselves, one can hardly substantiate the claim that Islam is a tolerant religion. In fact, the history of Islam, both ancient and modern, is replete with instances of murders and assassinations all done “fi sabeel Allah” (in or for the cause of Allah.) I could cite for instance, the murder of Ali by the *Khawarej* in 661; the assassination of his son Hussein under the *Umayyad* caliphate; and the blood bath that took place in 750 when the founder of the *Abbasid* dynasty, *Al-Saffah* (the Butcher) eliminated all but one member of the *Umayyad* family.

However, the most important aspect of the article is the admission of its author that the Qur’an is filled with exhortations to kill, or persecute the Infidels. I mentioned in my previous article that appeared in FFI on 22 June, that these verses came or “descended” in Medina, i.e. after Muhammad had established his Islamic state. Thus, as no religious leader in Al-Azhar or elsewhere has declared the Medinan texts of the Qur’an that advocate war and violence as no longer normative, the problem will persist. They are part and parcel of the one Qur’an, and their teachings are just as authoritative as the chapters that came earlier in Mecca. Sad to say, the plaintive question of the article remains: ***“Is there anybody listening to me?”***

Another comment I would like to make relates to those Western leaders, and others who make comments on Islam and its relation to the rest of the world. Please, don’t make facile and uninformed statements such as ***“Islam is a peaceful religion.”*** If you cannot

say, for prudent reasons, the whole truth about Islam, you could refrain from making irresponsible or uninformed comments about this faith. Furthermore, please read the words and testimonies of insiders, like the articles that are posted on the *Tanweer* website, and don't rely on those Western "scholars" who paint a rosy picture of Islam.

Finally, I would like to make a modest proposal to the citizens of the United States as the mid-term elections of 2006 approach. Please ask pointed questions about Islam, of all those seeking election, or re-election, for House and Senate seats. See if they subscribe to the simplistic and erroneous mantra, "*Islam is a religion of peace.*"

But above all, be very concerned about candidates for the office of President and Vice-President of the United States in 2008. We know that any president relies on the advice of "experts" before making his final decision on crucial international matters. Still he himself must possess a proper knowledge of the issue.

During the Cold War era, no candidate for the highest offices in America, who manifested a poor knowledge of the true nature of Marxist ideology, would have had any chance of being elected. Now we face a more serious challenge to our way of life, and the threat comes from within Islam. All candidates aspiring for these high offices should be graded about their awareness of the true nature of Islam. No one who parrots the warn-out cliché "*Islam is a religion of peace,*" is worthy our vote. The outcome is too serious a matter: it has to do with our future, and the future of our children and grandchildren.