

## [The Depreciation of Life in Islam](#)

Author : Jacob Thomas on Sep 08, 2006 - 07:31 PM

Since the middle of July 2006, most of the print, radio, and television media have been preoccupied with the news about the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict. We have been bombarded with pictures of the devastation that took place on both sides of the Israeli-Lebanese border. However, and thanks to the online media in the Arab world, some salutary articles and analyses have appeared, focusing on some certain flaws that exist in the Islamic civilization.

While looking over the titles of recently published articles on two Arab websites, I noticed a particular one that appeared under two different titles. First, *kwtanweer.com* published on 22 August ***“Islam and Muslims Depreciate Human Life.”*** Two days later, the daily online newspaper *Elaph.com* published the same article with this title, ***“Life in the Eye of Muslims and Islam.”***

I quote some parts of the article, and end with my analysis and comments.

*“Many discussions have taken place, and arguments exchanged about the role of Islam in the rise of global terrorism. Several Muslims have tried to dismiss the charge of Islam’s involvement in **Irhab**, claiming that Islam does not condone violence, only those aberrant Islamic organizations are to blame.*

The author plunged right away into a description of life in the Middle East prior to the rise of Islam by highlighting the great achievements of the civilizations that had arisen in that part of the world.

*“Now when we consider the life of the peoples that had inhabited the part of the world now known as the Middle East, we find the people of Mesopotamia were the first to begin a sedentary life that led to the rise of civilization. They invented the wheel, writing, and music. They pioneered the collection of inscriptions on clay tablets, and preserved them in libraries. They promulgated laws that regulated relations between individuals within the state. **In short, the people of that region loved life and enjoyed it. Since they loved life, they worked hard at improving it.***

*“Then came Islam, and began to dismantle life on earth, making the future life one’s unique pursuit and goal. After all, hasn’t Allah told Muslims in the Qur’an (51:56)?*

***“I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me.?”*** Pickthall’s translation

***“I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve Me.”*** Yusuf Ali’s translation

*“The worship of Allah became the center of life; Muslims were not allowed to enjoy anything in this ephemeral world [known in Arabic as **Dunya**.] This Qur’anic teaching*

*led to a depreciation of the Muslim's present life by requiring him, for example, to pray five times a day, and to stay up most of the night during Ramadan (17:78)*

***“Establish worship at the going down of the sun until the dark of night, and (the recital of) the Qur'an at dawn. Lo! (the recital of) the Qur'an at dawn is ever witnessed.”***  
Pickthall

***“Establish regular prayers - at the sun's decline till the darkness of the night, and the morning prayer and reading: for the prayer and reading in the morning carry their testimony.”*** Yusuf Ali

“The sacred text added another injunction (17:79)

***“And some part of the night awake for it, a largess for thee. It may be that thy Lord will raise thee to a praised estate.”*** Pickthall

***“And pray in the small watches of the morning: (it would be) an additional prayer (or spiritual profit) for thee: soon will thy Lord raise thee to a Station of Praise and Glory!”*** Yusuf Ali

*“More commandments were added for the Muslim to obey. Certain fuqaha (jurists) taught that staying up for the recitation of the Qur'an during Ramadan was more meritorious than through any other month of the Islamic calendar. As one hadith put it: ‘He who stays up during the nights of Ramadan out of faith, all his former sins are forgiven.’*

*“No time was left for a Muslim to enjoy life in the here and now, or to improve it. And as if all these burdens were not enough, other fuqaha issued fatwas that prohibited music, singing, and musical instruments. Someone once asked the faqih Ibn al-Jawzi: ‘Is it lawful for me to enjoy what is allowed in entertainment?’ Al-Jawzi responded, ‘There are enough things in your life that distract you, so why add more to them?’ He claimed that listening to songs is a distraction to the soul, leading it away from the contemplation of Allah, His greatness, and His service. Furthermore, songs cause the soul to seek satisfaction from all kinds of sensory pleasures such as sex, which leads to adultery.*

***“Furthermore, this austere faqih added that it is not necessary for a Muslim to listen to songs in this life, since in Paradise, the houris will sing for him, according to this Hadith: ‘As soon as a believer enters heaven, he will enjoy the services of two houris, one by his head, and the other by his feet; singing to him with the best voice that has ever been heard by either humans or jinns.’***

***“One thing, however, remains of utmost importance for a Muslim, to engage in jihad ‘Fi Sabeel Allah’ in the cause of Allah, until he is killed. Thus, he enters Paradise, where he will enjoy true life: song, fun, sex, and wine. The shortest route to heaven is martyrdom according to the following Qur’anic text: (9:111)***

***“Lo! Allah hath bought from the believers their lives and their wealth because the Garden will be theirs: they shall fight in the way of Allah and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an. Who fulfilleth His covenant better than Allah? Rejoice then in your bargain that ye have made, for that is the supreme triumph.”*** Pickthall

***“God hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur'an: and who is more faithful to his covenant than God? then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme.”*** Yusuf Ali

*“Since a believer’s soul belongs to Allah, He may claim it back to Himself, whenever He wishes. But he who is afraid to engage in jihad fi Sabeel Allah, and refrains from killing Infidels, will weep the rest of his life. This is what the Qur’an declared regarding those Arabs who refrained from joining in the raid on Tabuk (9: 81, 82):*

***“Those who were left behind rejoiced at sitting still behind the messenger of Allah, and were averse to striving with their wealth and their lives in Allah’s way. And they said: Go not forth in the heat! Say: The fire of hell is more intense of heat, if they but understood. Then let them laugh a little: they will weep much, as the reward of what they used to earn.”*** Pickthall

***“Those who were left behind (in the Tabuk expedition) rejoiced in their inaction behind the back of the Apostle of God: they hated to strive and fight, with their goods and their persons, in the cause of God: they said, “Go not forth in the heat.” Say, “The fire of Hell is fiercer in heat.” If only they could understand! Let them laugh a little: much will they weep: a recompense for the (evil) that they do.”*** Yusuf Ali

*“Since jihad has become a duty for Muslims, the question arises, against whom should they fight? Ibn Jawzi said, ‘It is the Muslim’s duty to fight all Infidels.’ One Hadith quotes the Prophet as saying, ‘He who dies in jihad will become one of Allah’s favorites.’ Since a Muslim has so many inducements that beckon him to enter Paradise, and as his life on earth consists mostly of prayers, fasting, staying up at night during Ramadan, abstaining from music; why not kill a **kafir fi sabeel Allah**, and enter Paradise?*

*“Even in America, some Pakistani fathers send their young sons to Islamic schools for the memorization of the Qur’an. This is accomplished by endless repetitions of the Arabic text. To memorize the 6,200 ayats of the Qur’an takes an average of 2-3 years. What kind of a future awaits a child who has spent around 3 years memorizing Arabic verses he does not understand? Shouldn’t he rather be studying math, science, and English? In fact, these children become a fertile ground for absorbing radical ideas, and learn to hate all non-Muslims. How can such young boys, growing up in the multicultural society of America, ever be able to develop friendly relations with American children who happen to be Christian or Buddhist, when their instructors expound the teachings of*

*Surat 2:193, that exhorts Muslims to fight the unbelievers?*

***'And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrong-doers.'*** Pickthall

***'And fight them on until there is no more Tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God; but if they cease, Let there be no hostility except to those who practise oppression.'*** Yusuf Ali

*"And what about the impact on young minds of the command of Surat 47:4?"*

***'Now when ye meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks until, when ye have routed them, then making fast of bonds; and afterward either grace or ransom till the war lay down its burdens. That (is the ordinance). And if Allah willed He could have punished them (without you) but (thus it is ordained) that He may try some of you by means of others. And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He rendereth not their actions vain.'*** Pickthall

***'Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks; At length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: Until the war lays down its burdens. Thus (are ye commanded): but if it had been God's Will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others. But those who are slain in the Way of God,- He will never let their deeds be lost.'*** Yusuf Ali

***'Lo! Allah loveth them who battle for His cause in ranks, as if they were a solid structure.'*** 61:4 Pickthall

***'Truly God loves those who fight in His Cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure.'*** Yusuf Ali

***'O ye who believe! Fight those of the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you, and know that Allah is with those who keep their duty (unto Him).'*** 9:23 Pickthall

***'O ye who believe! fight the unbelievers who gird you about, and let them find firmness in you: and know that God is with those who fear Him.'*** Yusuf Ali

*"Now the situation in Pakistan is much worse than in the lands of the Infidels. This country has become an incubator for the breeding of suicide-bombers who engage in their jihad within Europe. Pakistan is filled with madrassas specializing in the memorization of the Qur'an. Like parrots, young boys repeat the words of the Qur'an in a language they don't understand; at the same time, their instructors fill their minds with mental 'explosives.' Last week, the Pakistani authorities arrested seven men connected with the plot to blow up nine airplanes leaving London for the United States, as was*

reported in the 20 August 2006 issue of *al-Sharq al-Awsat*. President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan decided to deport all foreign instructors in the Madrassas where the memorization of the Qur'an is taught. However, his action has no impact whatsoever on the factories that produce Irhabis in Europe or in New York. For example, a Pakistani living in either place, can attend a mosque that teaches the memorization of the Qur'an. This explains the fact that all those involved in the attacks on the London Underground in 2005 were Pakistanis who were born in England.

*“The same tragedy is repeated in India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and other Asiatic countries that harbor schools for the memorization of the Qur'an, where the students who don't understand one word of what they are memorizing, are at the mercy of their radical teachers to explain the meaning of the Arabic text. For example, two bombs exploded recently at a busy market in an Indonesian town where the majority of the people were Christian, leading to the death of 21 people. (Al Sharq al-Awsat 29 May 05). Those who plant bombs in markets and randomly killing people, trivialize life as it means nothing to them, not having been prepared to enjoy it, leaving them with but one goal: **entering Paradise via the road of Jihad**. Their 'producers' had programmed them to choose the shortest route to heaven, namely through martyrdom **fi sabeel Allah**. By entering Paradise, they will meet their dark-eyed houris and have unending fun!*

*“An Arabic proverb proclaims, ‘**A person, who doesn't posses a thing, isn't able to give it to others.**’ A Muslim, who loses his earthly life for the sake of entering Paradise, has no concern for the lives of others. He doesn't even allow little children to grow up; and in his attacks on others, both the young and the old are murdered. **It is as clear as the light of day that Islam kills life in the Muslim, and encourages him to kill non-Muslims. Neither Islam, nor Muslims value life. What they really accomplish is their depreciation of human life.**”*

## **Analysis**

This article sounds extremely provocative. The author's thesis is that Islam's sacred texts (Qur'an and Hadith), and the teachings of some ancient and contemporary Muslim religious leaders, have depreciated human life on earth by over-emphasising the future life. Such a worldview becomes a fertile ground for the rise of jihadism and terrorism.

## **Comments**

The author's boldness is remarkable. He minces no words in pointing to a basic defect in Islam: the glorification of jihad in the cause of Allah, and the unbelievable rewards that await the jihadists after their martyrdom. There were seventeen responses to the article, and most were very positive. One came from a Kurdish lady: ***“I am a Kurdish woman and really don't know how to type in Arabic. Thank you for telling the truth about a subject which, normally nobody dares to write about it. Thanks again and well done.”***

In all fairness to the Arab-Islamic civilization, the prohibitions of the Qur'an and Hadith regarding music, singing, and having “fun,” and the overemphasis on the Ramadan

regime of staying up during the night and listening to a recitation of the Qur'an, were not always and everywhere taken seriously. Both during the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, Muslims high and low, indulged in all kinds of worldly pleasures. And in modern times, both men and women singers (mostly Egyptian) became celebrities all over the Arab world thanks to the dissemination of their works by radio, disks, and cassettes. Neither can we deny the role of Arab cinema (again mostly Egyptian) in fostering a special genre of *tarab* (entertainment), with such well-known names as *Muhammad Abdelwahab*, *Um Kalthoom*, *Farid al-Atrash*, and *Ismahan*. However, these specific manifestations in Islamic life could not be reconciled with the clear teachings of the authoritative Islamic texts. When we take such texts seriously, and exegete that in accordance with the plain meaning of their words, the thesis of the article stands correct: Islam accords too high a priority to death in the cause of Allah, and thus depreciates human life.

As we witness nowadays a resurgence of a Salafist (fundamentalist) Islamic ideology, and take note of its involvement in global terrorism, how can anyone deny the correctness of the thesis of the article? Was not Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah of Lebanon, manifesting a blind adherence to this Islamic ideology when he precipitated the war with Israel, which resulted in the destruction of Lebanon?

I am writing these comments a few days before the fifth anniversary of 9/11/01. I can't get out of my mind the Arabic text of the words of Muhammad 'Ata that was discovered in his suitcase that missed the plane he boarded in Boston en route to the WTC in New York. On the previous evening, he exhorted his fellow-conspirators to be firm in their resolve to carry on their jihad against America. He quoted a few lines from a poem: *"Tabassam bi-wajhi'lrada ya fata; Fa'innaka ma'den l-ijannati'l khuldi"* *"Smile in the face of death, O young man. Since you are on your way to immortality in paradise!"*

And in order to add weight to his words, Muhammad 'Ata punctuated his talk with copious quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith; and used such traditional Arabic expressions as *"waqla ta'alah"* and *He, the Exalted One, said*. The horrific crimes which they were about to commit had already been sanctioned by Allah and His Prophet. Who can then resist Allah's commands? We cannot escape this undeniable fact: **a consistent interpretation and application of the teachings of Islam tend to glorify death, and to depreciate the life of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.**