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Introduction and How to Use This Guide

In this document you'll find a variety of resources—some are opportunities to reflect, others are more prescriptive. We recommend you browse the full document so you get a sense of what's available—contextual framing from Karen Armstrong, guidance for Muslims by Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid, an overview of Islamophobia from Barbara Kaufmann, and links to resources by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and others—many geared toward educators. Finally, you'll find a reflective article by Cambridge Muslim College dean Abdal Hakim Murad and a list of resources for your further study.

After getting an overview of what's here, we recommend you set aside time to read at least one of the background articles. Then, use these tools to take action. The single most important thing that you can do to counter Islamophobia is not to remain silent. Your courage to speak will embolden others to be compassionate, and may give pause to those who vilify.

We invite you to share your experiences with us, either on the Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/CharterCities/ or by emailing the Charter for Compassion at contact@charterforcompassion.org.

This document will continue to be updated online. You'll be able to find updates here: http://www.charterforcompassion.org/index.php/compassion-and-religion/islamophobia-guidebook
Very frequently we use terms without thinking through their etymology. In a conference call in which we discussed *Islamophobia* (report of the call can be found at: [http://www.charterforcompassion.org/index.php/religion-spirituality-interfaith-reports-and-document s](http://www.charterforcompassion.org/index.php/religion-spirituality-interfaith-reports-and-documents)) a few participants asked all gathered to consider the words we use when talking about Islamophobia--essentially to avoid using combative language (i.e., attack, battle, battleground, fight, etc.). Later one participant, Linn Moffett wrote that “we need to carefully and consistently be conscious of our words to counteract all of the other influences being broadcast across the wires, media, and more importantly, throughout the ethers of human consciousness, realized or not, since it does show up.”

In another communication, Nancy Seifer suggested that the Charter for Compassion’s response to working with Islamophobia had touched off a groundswell of energies that have been present latently and hopefully can be mobilized for the good. This is evidenced in a report that appears later in this work, “Islamophobia-in-2015-the-good-the-bad-and-the-hopeful.” She also suggested that we might start using the word “harmlessness”--“a positive word to express the consciousness behind this initiative--connoting a recognition of the oneness or interrelatedness of all of life and thus an unwillingness to harm even perceived enemies.” She pointed out that Gandhi’s Jain philosophy of *ahimsa* is often defined as practicing harmless.

Indeed, we must be positive and filled with hope as we continue to educate ourselves about Islam, and certainly other religions.

Of course, the passage in the Charter for Compassion itself helps point the way:
We...call upon all men and women to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

The Term “Islamophobia”

The University of California-Berkeley Center for Race and Gender offers the following definition of Islamophobia.

The term "Islamophobia" was first introduced as a concept in a 1991 Runnymede Trust Report and defined as "unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims." The term was coined in the context of Muslims in the UK in particular and Europe in general, and formulated based on the more common "xenophobia" framework.

The report pointed to prevailing attitudes that incorporate the following beliefs:

- Islam is monolithic and cannot adapt to new realities
- Islam does not share common values with other major faiths
- Islam as a religion is inferior to the West. It is archaic, barbaric, and irrational.
- Islam is a religion of violence and supports terrorism.
- Islam is a violent political ideology.

Islamophobia is a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve "civilizational rehab" of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise). Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended.

Source: University of California-Berkeley Center for Race and Gender: http://crs.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/defining-islamophobia
The spread of Wahhabism, and the West’s responsibility to the world

In 2013, the European Union declared Wahhabism the main source of global terrorism. But it’s not just a “Middle East problem”; it is our problem, too.

By Karen Armstrong

François Hollande’s declaration of war against Isis (also known as Islamic State) was, perhaps, a natural reaction to the carnage in Paris but the situation is now so grave that we cannot merely react; we also need sustained, informed and objective reflection. The French president has unwittingly played into the hands of Isis leaders, who have long claimed to be at war with the West and can now present themselves as noble resistance fighters. Instead of bombing Isis targets and, in the process, killing hapless civilians, western forces could more profitably strengthen the Turkish borders with Syria, since Turkey has become by far the most important strategic base of Isis jihadists.
We cannot afford to allow our grief and outrage to segue into self-righteousness. This is not just the “Middle East problem”; it is our problem, too. Our colonial arrangements, the inherent instability of the states we created and our support of authoritarian leaders have all contributed to the terrifying disintegration of social order in the region today. Many of the western leaders (including our own Prime Minister) who marched for liberté in Paris after the Charlie Hebdo massacre were heads of countries that, for decades, have backed regimes in Muslim-majority countries that denied their subjects any freedom of expression – often with disastrous results.

One of these regimes is Saudi Arabia. Despite its dismal human rights record, the kingdom has been central to western foreign policy in the Middle East since the 1970s and western governments have therefore tacitly condoned its “Wahhabisation” of the Muslim world. Wahhabism originated in the Arabian peninsula during the 18th century as an attempt to return to the pristine Islam of the Prophet Muhammad. Hence, Wahhabis came to denounce all later developments – such as Sufism and Shia Islam – as heretical innovations.

Yet this represented a radical departure from the Quran, which insists emphatically that there must be “no coercion in matters of faith” (2:256) and that religious pluralism is God’s will (5:48). After the Iranian Revolution, the Saudis used their immense wealth to counter the power of Shia Islam by funding the building of mosques with Wahhabi preachers and establishing madrasas that provided free education to the poor. Thus, to the intense dismay of many in the Muslim world, an entire generation has grown up with this maverick form of Islam – in Europe and the US, as well as in Pakistan, Jordan and Malaysia.

In 2013, the European Union declared that Wahhabism was the main source of global terrorism. It is probably more accurate, however, to say that the narrowness of the Wahhabi vision is a fertile soil in which extremism can flourish. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Wahhabi chieftains did indeed conduct violent military expeditions against the Shia but, during the 1930s, the Saudi kingdom abandoned military jihad and Wahhabism became a religiously conservative movement. Today, some members of the Saudi ruling class support Isis but the Grand Mufti has condemned it in the strongest terms. Like Osama Bin Laden, Isis leaders aim to overthrow the Saudi regime and see their movement as a rebellion against modern Wahhabism.

Military action in Syria will not extirpate Islamist extremism elsewhere. In order to be fully successful, President Hollande’s campaign must also include a review of domestic policy. France has signally failed to integrate its Muslim population. Most of the terrorists responsible for the atrocities of 13 November appear to have been disaffected French nationals. So, too, were the Kouachi brothers, who committed the Charlie Hebdo massacre, and Amedy Coulibaly, who hijacked the Jewish supermarket in January. All three lived in notoriously deprived suburbs of Paris and – evoking France’s colonial past – were of Algerian and Malian descent. Psychiatrists who have investigated people involved in the 9/11 plot and in subsequent attacks have found that these terrorists were not chiefly motivated by religion. Far more pressing has been the desire to escape a stifling sense of insignificance. Powerless at home, many of them alienated by the host culture, young Muslim men in the West are attracted by the strong masculine figure of the jihadi and the prospect of living in a like-minded community, convinced that a heroic death will give their lives meaning.
As they debate the feasibility of British air strikes in Syria, some MPs have insisted that they must be accompanied by negotiation and diplomacy. Again, these cannot be conducted in a spirit of superior righteousness. There must be a recognition that the West is not the only victim of Muslim extremism. We seem curiously blind to this. Far more Muslims than non-Muslims have been killed by Isis, yet this is rarely mentioned. Two weeks before the Charlie Hebdo atrocities in January, the Taliban murdered 145 Pakistanis, most of them children; two days after it, Boko Haram slaughtered as many as 2,000 villagers in Nigeria. Yet, compared with the Paris attack, the media coverage in the West was perfunctory. There has been little acknowledgment that the refugees whom many would seek to exclude from Europe have experienced the horrors we saw in Paris on a regular basis in Syria or Iraq. Already we seem to have forgotten that more than 40 people in Beirut were killed by two Isis suicide bombers on 12 November.

Source: The New Statesman, November 26, 2015
Wahhabism to ISIS: how Saudi Arabia exported the main source of global terrorism

Although IS is certainly an Islamic movement, it is neither typical nor mired in the distant past, because its roots are in Wahhabism, a form of Islam practised in Saudi Arabia that developed only in the 18th century.

By Karen Armstrong

As the so-called Islamic State demolishes nation states set up by the Europeans almost a century ago, IS's obscene savagery seems to epitomise the violence that many believe to be inherent in religion in general and Islam in particular. It also suggests that the neoconservative ideology that inspired the Iraq war was delusory, since it assumed that the liberal nation state was an inevitable outcome of modernity and that, once Saddam's dictatorship had gone, Iraq could not fail to become a western-style democracy. Instead, IS, which was born in the Iraq war and is intent on restoring the pre-modern autocracy of the caliphate, seems to be reverting to barbarism. On 16 November, the militants released a video showing that they had beheaded a fifth western hostage, the American aid worker Peter Kassig, as well as several captured Syrian soldiers. Some will see the group's ferocious irredentism as proof of Islam's chronic inability to embrace modern values.
Yet although IS is certainly an Islamic movement, it is neither typical nor mired in the distant past, because its roots are in Wahhabism, a form of Islam practised in Saudi Arabia that developed only in the 18th century. In July 2013, the European Parliament identified Wahhabism as the main source of global terrorism, and yet the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, condemning IS in the strongest terms, has insisted that “the ideas of extremism, radicalism and terrorism do not belong to Islam in any way”. Other members of the Saudi ruling class, however, look more kindly on the movement, applauding its staunch opposition to Shiaism and for its Salafi piety, its adherence to the original practices of Islam. This inconsistency is a salutary reminder of the impossibility of making accurate generalisations about any religious tradition. In its short history, Wahhabism has developed at least two distinct forms, each of which has a wholly different take on violence.

During the 18th century, revivalist movements sprang up in many parts of the Islamic world as the Muslim imperial powers began to lose control of peripheral territories. In the west at this time, we were beginning to separate church from state, but this secular ideal was a radical innovation: as revolutionary as the commercial economy that Europe was concurrently devising. No other culture regarded religion as a purely private activity, separate from such worldly pursuits as politics, so for Muslims the political fragmentation of their society was also a religious problem. Because the Quran had given them a sacred mission – to build a just economy in which everybody was treated with equity and respect – the political well-being of the umma (“community”) was always a matter of sacred import. If the poor were oppressed, the vulnerable exploited or state institutions corrupt, Muslims were obliged to make every effort to put society back on track.

So the 18th-century reformers were convinced that if Muslims were to regain lost power and prestige, they must return to the fundamentals of their faith, ensuring that God – rather than materialism or worldly ambition – dominated the political order. There was nothing militant about this “fundamentalism”; rather, it was a grassroots attempt to reorient society and did not involve jihad. One of the most influential of these revivalists was Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-91), a learned scholar of Najd in central Arabia, whose teachings still inspire Muslim reformers and extremists today. He was especially concerned about the popular cult of saints and the idolatrous rituals at their tombs, which, he believed, attributed divinity to mere mortals. He insisted that every single man and woman should concentrate instead on the study of the Quran and the “traditions” (hadith) about the customary practice (Sunnah) of the Prophet and his companions. Like Luther, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab wanted to return to the earliest teachings of his faith and eject all later medieval accretions. He therefore opposed Sufism and Shiaism as heretical innovations (bidah), and he urged all Muslims to reject the learned exegesis developed over the centuries by the ulema (“scholars”) and interpret the texts for themselves.

This naturally incensed the clergy and threatened local rulers, who believed that interfering with these popular devotions would cause social unrest. Eventually, however, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab found a patron in Muhammad Ibn Saud, a chieftain of Najd who adopted his ideas. But tension soon developed between the two because Ibn Abd al-Wahhab refused to endorse Ibn Saud’s military campaigns for plunder and territory, insisting that jihad could not be waged for personal profit but was permissible only when the umma was attacked militarily. He also forbade the Arab custom of killing prisoners of war, the deliberate destruction of property and the slaughter of civilians, including women and children. Nor did he ever claim that those who fell in battle were martyrs who would be rewarded with a high place in
heaven, because a desire for such self-aggrandisement was incompatible with jihad. Two forms of Wahhabism were emerging: where Ibn Saud was happy to enforce Wahhabi Islam with the sword to enhance his political position, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab insisted that education, study and debate were the only legitimate means of spreading the one true faith.

Yet although scripture was so central to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s ideology, by insisting that his version of Islam alone had validity, he had distorted the Quranic message. The Quran firmly stated that “There must be no coercion in matters of faith” (2:256), ruled that Muslims must believe in the revelations of all the great prophets (3:84) and that religious pluralism was God’s will (5:48). Muslims had, therefore, been traditionally wary of takfir, the practice of declaring a fellow Muslim to be an unbeliever (kafir). Hitherto Sufism, which had developed an outstanding appreciation of other faith traditions, had been the most popular form of Islam and had played an important role in both social and religious life. “Do not praise your own faith so exclusively that you disbelieve all the rest,” urged the great mystic Ibn al-Arabi (d.1240). “God the omniscient and omnipresent cannot be confined to any one creed.” It was common for a Sufi to claim that he was a neither a Jew nor a Christian, nor even a Muslim, because once you glimpsed the divine, you left these man-made distinctions behind.

Despite his rejection of other forms of Islam, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself refrained from takfir, arguing that God alone could read the heart, but after his death Wahhabis cast this inhibition aside and the generous pluralism of Sufism became increasingly suspect in the Muslim world. After his death, too, Wahhabism became more violent, an instrument of state terror. As he sought to establish an independent kingdom, Abd al-Aziz Ibn Muhammad, Ibn Saud’s son and successor, used takfir to justify the wholesale slaughter of resistant populations. In 1801, his army sacked the holy Shia city of Karbala in what is now Iraq, plundered the tomb of Imam Husain, and slaughtered thousands of Shias, including women and children; in 1803, in fear and panic, the holy city of Mecca surrendered to the Saudi leader.

Eventually, in 1815, the Ottomans despatched Muhammad Ali Pasha, governor of Egypt, to crush the Wahhabi forces and destroy their capital. But Wahhabism became a political force once again during the First World War when the Saudi chieftain – another Abd al-Aziz – made a new push for statehood and began to carve out a large kingdom for himself in the Middle East with his devout Bedouin army, known as the Ikhwan, the “Brotherhood”.

In the Ikhwan we see the roots of IS. To break up the tribes and wean them from the nomadic life, which was deemed incompatible with Islam, the Wahhabi clergy had settled the Bedouin in oases, where they learned farming and the crafts of sedentary life and were indoctrinated in Wahhabi Islam. Once they exchanged the time-honoured ghazu raid, which typically resulted in the plunder of livestock, for the jihad, these Bedouin fighters became more violent and extreme, covering their faces when they encountered Europeans and non-Saudi Arabs and fighting with lances and swords because they disdained weaponry not used by the Prophet. In the old ghazu raids, the Bedouin had always kept casualties to a minimum and did not attack non-combatants. Now the Ikhwan routinely massacred “apostate” unarmed villagers in their thousands, thought nothing of slaughtering women and children, and routinely slit the throats of all male captives.
In 1915, Abd al-Aziz planned to conquer the Hijaz (an area in the west of present-day Saudi Arabia that includes the cities of Mecca and Medina), the Persian Gulf to the east of Najd, and the land that is now Syria and Jordan in the north, but during the 1920s he tempered his ambitions in order to acquire diplomatic standing as a nation state with Britain and the United States. The Ikhwan, however, continued to raid the British protectorates of Iraq, Transjordan and Kuwait, insisting that no limits could be placed on jihad. Regarding all modernisation as *bidah*, the Ikhwan also attacked Abd al-Aziz for permitting telephones, cars, the telegraph, music and smoking – indeed, anything unknown in Muhammad’s time – until finally Abd al-Aziz quashed their rebellion in 1930.

After the defeat of the Ikhwan, the official Wahhabism of the Saudi kingdom abandoned militant jihad and became a religiously conservative movement, similar to the original movement in the time of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, except that *takfir* was now an accepted practice and, indeed, essential to the Wahhabi faith. Henceforth there would always be tension between the ruling Saudi establishment and more radical Wahhabis. The Ikhwan spirit and its dream of territorial expansion did not die, but gained new ground in the 1970s, when the kingdom became central to western foreign policy in the region. Washington welcomed the Saudis’ opposition to Nasserism (the pan-Arab socialist ideology of Egypt’s second president, Gamal Abdel Nasser) and to Soviet influence. After the Iranian Revolution, it gave tacit support to the Saudis’ project of countering Shia radicalism by Wahhabising the entire Muslim world.

The soaring oil price created by the 1973 embargo – when Arab petroleum producers cut off supplies to the US to protest against the Americans’ military support for Israel – gave the kingdom all the petrodollars it needed to export its idiosyncratic form of Islam. The old military jihad to spread the faith was now replaced by a cultural offensive. The Saudi-based Muslim World League opened offices in every region inhabited by Muslims, and the Saudi ministry of religion printed and distributed Wahhabi translations of the Quran, Wahhabi doctrinal texts and the writings of modern thinkers whom the Saudis found congenial, such as Sayyids Abul-A’la Maududi and Qutb, to Muslim communities throughout the Middle East, Africa, Indonesia, the United States and Europe. In all these places, they funded the building of Saudi-style mosques with Wahhabi preachers and established madrasas that provided free education for the poor, with, of course, a Wahhabi curriculum. At the same time, young men from the poorer Muslim countries, such as Egypt and Pakistan, who had felt compelled to find work in the Gulf to support their families, associated their relative affluence with Wahhabism and brought this faith back home with them, living in new neighbourhoods with Saudi mosques and shopping malls that segregated the sexes. The Saudis demanded religious conformity in return for their munificence, so Wahhabi rejection of all other forms of Islam as well as other faiths would reach as deeply into Bradford, England, and Buffalo, New York, as into Pakistan, Jordan or Syria: everywhere gravely undermining Islam’s traditional pluralism.

A whole generation of Muslims, therefore, has grown up with a maverick form of Islam that has given them a negative view of other faiths and an intolerantly sectarian understanding of their own. While not extremist per se, this is an outlook in which radicalism can develop. In the past, the learned exegesis of the *ulema*, which Wahhabis rejected, had held extremist interpretations of scripture in check; but now unqualified freelancers such as Osama Bin Laden were free to develop highly unorthodox readings of the Quran. To prevent the spread of radicalism, the Saudis tried to deflect their young from the internal problems of the kingdom during the 1980s by encouraging a pan-Islamist sentiment of which the Wahhabi *ulema* did not approve.

Where Islamists in such countries as Egypt fought tyranny and corruption at home, Saudi Islamists focused on the humiliation and oppression of Muslims worldwide. Television brought images of
Muslim suffering in Palestine or Lebanon into comfortable Saudi homes. The government also encouraged young men to join the steady stream of recruits from the Arab world who were joining the Afghans’ jihad against the Soviet Union. The response of these militants may throw light on the motivation of those joining the jihad in Syria and Iraq today.

A survey of those Saudi men who volunteered for Afghanistan and who later fought in Bosnia and Chechnya or trained in al-Qaeda camps has found that most were motivated not by hatred of the west but by the desire to help their Muslim brothers and sisters – in rather the same way as men from all over Europe left home in 1938 to fight the Fascists in Spain, and as Jews from all over the diaspora hastened to Israel at the beginning of the Six Day War in 1967. The welfare of the umma had always been a spiritual as well as a political concern in Islam, so the desperate plight of their fellow Muslims cut to the core of their religious identity. This pan-Islamist emphasis was also central to Bin Laden’s propaganda, and the martyr-videos of the Saudis who took part in the 9/11 atrocity show that they were influenced less by Wahhabism than by the pain and humiliation of the umma as a whole.

Source: The New Statesman, November 27, 2015
On October 31, 1517, the Augustinian friar Martin Luther nailed ninety-five theses onto the castle church door in Wittenberg and set in motion the Reformation. He and the other great reformers were addressing a society undergoing the painful transition to modernity. In any modernizing society, people no longer feel at home in the changing world and they often discover that they can no longer be religious in the old ways. All his life, Luther was prone to agonizing depressions; none of the traditional medieval rites and practices could touch his tristitia, his profound and desolate sorrow. Instead he was released from his despair in a solitary breakthrough when he realised that he was justified before God not by his merits but by his faith in Christ and felt as though he had been born again. Justification by faith was not an original theological idea; it had been widely discussed since the 14th century. What was new was that Luther's revelation was a personal and intensely private experience. Medieval Catholicism had been primarily communal; as in all traditional faith, one experienced the sacred by living in community, which for Christians was the Body of Christ. In leaving the Roman Church, Luther was also making one of the first declarations of independence that would punctuate Western modernization. Henceforth for Luther, the Christian must stand alone before his God, relying simply on his Bible. Luther was experiencing in a religious guise the individualism that would be essential to Western modernity. This would lead him to a wholly new conception of religion's role in public life.

Luther was the first European to advocate the separation of church and state. God, he believed, had so retreated from the material world that it no longer had any spiritual significance. True Christians, justified by born again conversion, belonged to the Kingdom of God. Incapable of hatred or injustice, they were essentially free of state coercion. But such Christians were few and far between. Together with non-Christians, they belonged to the corrupt and violent Kingdom of the World, that is, the state, whose prime duty it was to restrain these sinners by force “in the same way as a savage wild beast is bound with
chains and ropes so that it cannot bite and tear as it would normally do.” If the state did not have absolute powers, the world would be reduced to chaos. No government could rule according to the gospel precepts of love, compassion and forgiveness. It could only impose peace, order and continuity by the merciless use of the sword.

For its part, the Church, or the Kingdom of God, must hold aloof from the inherently corrupt and depraved policies of the Kingdom of the World and deal only with spiritual affairs. The Roman Church, Luther believed, had failed in its true mission because it had dallied with the sinful Kingdom of the World. Where previous prophets, sages and reformers in all the great faith traditions had felt impelled by their spiritual insights to undertake a principled critique of state violence and injustice, Luther believed that because religion was a wholly private affair, his reformed Christian should retreat into his inner world of righteousness and let the world, quite literally, go to hell.

Luther’s response to the Peasants War in Germany in 1525 showed that a secularised political theory would not necessarily be a force for peace. The peasants were resisting the centralizing policies of the rulers of the German principalities, who were trying to create strong sovereign states on the model of France and England and in the process were depriving the peasantry of traditional rights. Luther, of course, fully supported those princes who were seeking to create absolute states and believed that the peasants had committed the unpardonable sin of mixing religion and politics. Suffering, he insisted, was their lot and they must turn the other cheek and accept the loss of their lives and property. “A worldly kingdom,” he insisted, “cannot exist without an inequality of persons, some being free, some imprisoned, some lords, some subjects.” So, Luther commanded the princes, “Let everyone who can, smite, slay and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisoned, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel.” Killing these peasants was an act of mercy, because it would liberate them from this satanic bondage.

Luther’s vision of the strong, absolute state expressed in a religious form what was happening in Europe politically. The German princes and the kings of Europe were resisting the ambitions of Charles V to achieve trans-European hegemony on the Ottoman model. These struggles, which culminated in the horror of the Thirty Years War (1618–48), would be known as the Wars of Religion, because, it was said, Protestants and Catholics were so inflamed by the theological quarrels of the Reformation that they had butchered one another in these senseless battles. But while there is no doubt that the participants certainly experienced these wars as a life-and-death sectarian struggle, this was also a conflict between one set of state-builders over another. By the end of the Thirty Years War, Europeans had fought off the danger of imperial rule. Henceforth Europe would be divided into smaller states, each claiming sovereign power in its own territory, each supported by a professional army and governed by a prince who aspired to absolute rule – a recipe perhaps for chronic interstate warfare. New configurations of political power were beginning to force the church into a subordinate role, a process that involved a fundamental reallocation of authority and resources from the ecclesiastical establishment to the monarch. All these developments required a new understanding of religion.

Luther had been deeply in tune with his troubled times. The sovereign, independent state achieved at the end of the Thirty Years War mirrored his vision of the independent, sovereign individual; his view of religion as an essentially subjective and private quest over which the state had no jurisdiction would be the foundation of the modern secular ideal. But Luther’s solutions also suggested that the wholly secularised state would be no panacea. Not only would secular wars be as pitiless as any religiously-inspired crusade or jihad but in privatizing religion some of the more valuable insights of traditional faith could be lost, in particular the social concern for justice and equity, which had always
been essential to spiritual enlightenment, as well as an insistence that this concern could not be confined to one’s own congenial group, but must also embrace the foreigner, other species, and even the enemy.

The trauma of the Wars of Religion inspired what has been called the “myth of religious violence.” People concluded that the fanatical bigotry that was always inherent in religion could be contained only by the creation of the liberal state that separates religion and politics. Europe had learned the hard way that once combatants are convinced that God is on their side, compromise becomes impossible and cruelty knows no bounds. The rabidly intolerant passions that religious faith always seems to unleash must never again be allowed to intrude on political life. Even though military historians and experts on terrorism repeatedly insist that a number of interrelated political, social and economic factors are always involved in both warfare and lawless atrocity, there is now a widespread conviction that religion is the main or even the sole culprit. For Richard Dawkins, “only religious faith is a strong enough force to motivate such utter madness in otherwise sane and decent people.” But this view is not confined to the “new atheists”; I am frequently informed by all manner of folk that “Religion has been the cause of all the major wars in history,” as though this odd remark ~ the two world wars, for example, were clearly not fought for religion ~ were a statement of incontrovertible truth.

We now take the secular state so much for granted that it is hard for us to appreciate its novelty, since before the modern period, there were no “secular” institutions and no “secular” states in our sense of the word. Their creation required the development of an entirely different understanding of religion. In the modern West, we regard religion as a coherent system of obligatory beliefs, rituals and institutions that focuses on a supernatural deity and is an essentially private pursuit, hermetically sealed off from all “secular” activities ~ much as Luther described. But this view of religion is unique. No other culture has had anything remotely like it and before the 18th century it would also have been incomprehensible to most Europeans. Words in other languages that we translate as “religion” invariably refer to something vaguer, larger and more inclusive. The Arabic din signifies an entire way of life and the Sanskrit dharma covers law, politics, and social institutions as well as piety. The Oxford Classical Dictionary firmly states: “No word in either Greek or Latin corresponds to the English ‘religion’ or ‘religious.’”

Before the modern period, therefore, religion was not a separate activity, hermetically sealed off from all others; rather, it permeated all human undertakings, including economics, state-building, politics and warfare. It would have been impossible to say where, for example, “politics” ended and “religion” began. If the Wars of Religion had been solely motivated by sectarian bigotry, we should not expect to have found Protestants and Catholics fighting on the same side, yet in fact they often did so. Thus Catholic France repeatedly fought the Catholic Habsburgs, who were regularly supported by some of the Protestant princes. In the French Wars of Religion (1562–98) and the Thirty Years War too, combatants crossed confessional lines so often that it was impossible to talk about solidly “Catholic” or “Protestant” populations. These wars were neither “all about religion” nor “all about politics”. Nor was it a question of the state simply “using” religion for political ends. Until the 18th century, dissociating the two would have been like trying to take the gin out of a cocktail.

Secularism has certainly been beneficial in the West; it has freed us from an ecclesiastical hierarchy which could have impeded the scientific, ideological and technological innovations that were essential to our modernization. But it was itself a wholly new experiment. Traditional spirituality did not retreat, Luther-like, from engagement with the world but urged people to work practically and politically to improve the human lot. The prophets of Israel had harsh words for those who assiduously observed the temple rituals but neglected the plight of the poor and oppressed. Jesus’ famous maxim to “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” was not a plea for secularism. Nearly all the uprisings against Rome in
first-century Palestine were inspired by the conviction that the Land of Israel and its produce belonged to God, so that there was, therefore, precious little to “give back” to Caesar. The bedrock message of the Quran is that it is wrong to build a private fortune but good to share your wealth in order to create a just, egalitarian and decent society. Gandhi would have agreed that these were matters of sacred import: “Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”

There is no doubt that throughout history violence has often been articulated in religious terms and that this has tarnished the more noble values of traditional faiths. But the separation of religion and politics during the early modern period was not the discovery of an iron law that automatically invalidated previous civilizations ~ which, of course, had not separated religion and politics ~ as aberrant. It took root in Europe in part because it mirrored new configurations of power that were pushing the churches out of government. Secularization, however, emerged at a time when Europe was beginning to colonize the “New World” and it would be one of the factors that would influence the way the west viewed the indigenous peoples.

The philosophers who devised the secular ideal came to believe that, in the words of John Locke (d.1704): “The church itself is a thing absolutely separate and distinct from the commonwealth. The boundaries on both sides are fixed and immoveable. As an essentially a “private search”, it could not be policed by government. The separation of religion and politics ~ “which are in their original end, business, and in everything perfectly and infinitely different from each other” ~ was thus written into the very nature of things. But the liberal state was in fact, a radical innovation, just as revolutionary as the market economy that was gradually developing in the West and would shortly transform the world. Because of the violent passions it aroused, Locke insisted that the segregation of “religion” from government was “above all things necessary” for the creation of a peaceful society.

Hence Locke, the apostle of toleration, was adamant that the liberal state could tolerate neither Catholics nor Muslims, condemning their confusion of politics and religion as dangerously perverse. Locke was a major advocate of the theory of natural human rights, originally pioneered by the Renaissance humanists. The first draft of the American Constitution would define these rights as life, liberty and property. But for the humanists there had been no question of extending these rights to the indigenous inhabitants of the New World. Indeed, these peoples could be penalised for failing to conform to European norms. Alberico Gentili (d.1608), professor of civil law at Oxford, had argued that land that had not been exploited agriculturally, as it was in Europe, was “empty” and that “the seizure of [such] vacant places” should be “regarded as law of nature.” Locke too agreed that the “kings” of America had no legal right of ownership to their territory. He also endorsed a master’s “Absolute, Arbitrary, Despotical Power” over a slave that included “the power to kill him at any time.” Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who had crafted the “wall of separation” between church and state in America, and had proudly declared that “all men are created equal” had no qualms about owning African slaves.

Traditional sages, poets and mystics, however, had often created mythologies that forced people to face up to the damage that they were doing to others. They may not have been able to stop these abuses, but they kept the people aware of their rulers’ failings and inconsistencies. Secularism would have its own glaring inconsistency. It was supposedly designed to create a peaceful world order, but, so intricately was the Church involved in the entire economic, political and social structures of society, it could only be established violently. In North America, where there was no entrenched aristocratic government, the disestablishment of the various churches could be accomplished with relative ease. But in France, the Church could be dismantled only by an outright assault; far from being experienced as a natural and essentially normative arrangement, its creation could be experienced as traumatic and terrifying. During
the French Revolution, one of the first acts of the new National Assembly on November 2, 1789, was to confiscate all Church property to pay off the national debt, so that secularization began with dispossession, humiliation and marginalisation. This segued into outright violence during the September Massacres of 1792, when the mob fell upon the goals of Paris and slaughtered between two and three thousand prisoners, many of them priests. The following year, an uprising broke out in the Vendee in western France, led by farmers, artisans and shopkeepers in protest against military conscription, unfair taxation, and above all the anti-Catholic policies of the regime. Early in 1794, four revolutionary armies were dispatched from Paris with instructions to spare no one. At the end of the campaign, General Francois-Joseph Westermann reportedly wrote to his superiors: “The Vendee no longer exists. “I have crushed children beneath the hooves of our horses, and massacred the women...The roads are littered with corpses.” It was becoming clear that banishing faith to the private sphere would not necessarily eliminate the violence from political life.

No sooner had the revolutionaries rid themselves of one religion, however, than in 1793 they invented another. Their new gods were Liberty, Nature and the French Nation which they worshipped in elaborate festivals choreographed by the artist Jacques Louis David. That same year the Goddess of Reason was enthroned on the high altar of Notre Dame Cathedral and the reign of terror plunged the new nation into an irrational bloodbath, in which some 17,000 men, women and children were executed. In 1807, while Napoleon’s armies invaded Prussia, the German philosopher Gottfried Fichte urged his fellow countrymen to be prepared to lay down their lives for the Fatherland, which was a manifestation of the divine and the repository of the spiritual essence of the Volk, which alone could give humans the immortality they craved. If we define the sacred as that for which we are prepared to die, what Benedict Anderson called the “imaginary community” of the nation has indeed replaced God. It is now considered admirable to die for your country, but not for your religion.

The nation-state came into its own in the early 19th century with the Industrial Revolution. Hitherto all civilizations without exception had depended economically on a surplus of agricultural produce wrested from the peasantry by an elite group, who comprised no more than 5 percent of the population. But once industrial manufacture became the economic basis of society, the nation had to be bound tightly together to mobilize its disparate peoples for industry. Modern communications enabled the government to create a national ethos that could be conveyed to the people and intrude into the lives of their people more than had been possible before. Even if they spoke a different language from their rulers, subjects now belonged to the “nation,” whether they liked it or not. John Stuart Mill regarded this forcible integration as progress; it was surely better for a Breton, “the half-savage remnant of past times,” to become a French citizen than “sulk on his own rocks.” But Lord Acton feared that the adulation of the national spirit, which would emphasize ethnicity, culture and language, would penalise those who did not fit the national norm: “According, therefore, to the degree of humanity and civilization in that dominant body which claims all the rights of the community, the inferior races are exterminated or reduced to servitude, or put in a condition of dependence.” Tragically, events would prove that Acton’s misgivings were all too well founded.

The Enlightenment philosophes had tried to counter the intolerance and bigotry that they associated with “religion” by promoting the equality of all human beings, together with democracy, human rights, and intellectual and political liberty, modern secular versions of ideals which had been promoted in a religious idiom in the past by poets, sages and prophets. The structural injustice of the agrarian state, however, had made it impossible to implement these ideals fully. The nation-state made these noble aspirations practical necessities. More and more people had to be drawn into the productive process and needed at least a modicum of education. Eventually they would inevitably demand the right to participate in the
decisions of government. It was found by trial and error that those nations that democratized forged ahead economically, while those that confined the benefits of modernity to an elite fell behind. Innovation was essential to progress, so people had to be allowed to think freely, unconstrained by the constraints of their class, guild or church. Governments needed to exploit all their human resources, so outsiders, such as Jews in Europe and Catholics in England and America, were brought into the mainstream.

Yet this toleration was only skin-deep, and as Lord Acton had predicted, an intolerance of ethnic and cultural minorities would become the Achilles Heel of the nation-state. Indeed, nationalism’s concentration on the prosperity and destiny of the nation made it difficult for people to acquire a more global perspective. In 1807, Thomas Jefferson, one of the leading proponents of the Enlightenment in the United States, instructed his secretary of war that Native Americans were “backward peoples” who must either be “exterminated” or driven “beyond our reach” to the other side of the Mississippi “with the beasts of the forest.” The following year, Napoleon issued the “Infamous Decrees” ordering the Jews of France to take French names, privatize their faith, and ensure that at least one in three marriages per family was with a gentile. Increasingly, as national feeling became a supreme value, Jews would appear chronically rootless and cosmopolitan. In the late 19th century, there was an explosion of anti-Semitism in Europe, which undoubtedly drew upon centuries of Christian prejudice, but gave it a scientific rationale, claiming that Jews did not fit the biological and genetic profile of the Volk, and should be eliminated from the body politic as modern medicine cut out a cancer.

Industrialisation had led to the development of modern weaponry. At first, Europeans had been reluctant to use the new machine guns against their fellow Europeans, but by 1851, Minie ball-firing rifles issued to British troops overseas and used to great effect the following year against Bantu tribesmen. “Civilized man is much more susceptible to injury than savages,” Sir John Ardagh explained at a conference in The Hague that debated the legality of these weapons in 1899; “The savage, like the Tiger, is not so impressionable, and will go on fighting even when desperately wounded.” Human rights could not be extended to non-Western peoples, because they seemed scarcely human.

Modern weaponry had made it relatively easy for the Western colonialists to subdue the peoples of Asia and Africa in their global empires. As the European imperialists prepared to leave their colonies, they established nation-states on the Western model in which secularization was imposed as violently as it had been in France. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who founded the secular republic of Turkey in 1918, is often admired as an enlightened Muslim leader in the West, but for many in the Middle East he personified the cruelty of secular nationalism. He hated Islam, describing it as a “putrefied corpse and suppressed it in Turkey by outlawing the Sufi orders and seizing their properties, closing down the madrasas and appropriating their income. He also abolished the beloved institution of the caliphate, which had long been a dead-letter politically but which symbolised the link with the Prophet. Secularisation was not experienced as liberating but as a force for violence, disempowerment and oppression.

Ataturk continued the policy of ethnic cleansing that had been initiated by the last Ottoman sultans; in an attempt to control the rising commercial classes, they systematically deported the Armenian and Greek-speaking Christians, who comprised 90 percent of the bourgeoisie. The Young Turks, who seized power in 1909, espoused the anti-religious positivism associated with August Comte and were also determined to create a purely Turkic state. During the First World War, approximately one million Armenians were slaughtered in the first genocide of the twentieth century, men and youths were killed where they stood, while women, children and the elderly were driven into the desert where they were raped, shot, starved, poisoned, suffocated or burned to death. Clearly inspired by the new scientific racism, Mehmet Resid, known as the “Execution Governor” regarded the Armenians as “dangerous
“microbes” in “the bosom of the Fatherland.” Ataturk completed this racial purge. For centuries Muslims and Christians had lived together on both sides of the Aegean; Ataturk partitioned the region, deporting Greek Christians living in what is now Turkey to Greece, while Turkish-speaking Muslims in Greece were sent the other way.

Secularising rulers like Ataturk often wanted their countries to look modern, that is, European. In Europe and the United States, modernity had evolved organically; in the Middle East it was experienced as an alien and foreign import. In Iran in 1928, Shah Reza Pahlavi issued the Laws of Uniformity of Dress and with their bayonets, his soldiers tore off women’s veils and ripped them to pieces in the street. In 1935 the police were ordered to open fire on a crowd who had staged a peaceful demonstration against the dress laws in one of the holiest shrines of Iran and killed hundreds of unarmed Iranians. Policies like this made veiling, which has no Quranic endorsement, an emblem of Islamic authenticity in many parts of the Muslim world.

Following the example of the French, Egyptian rulers secularized by disempowering and impoverishing the clergy. Modernization had begun in the Ottoman period under the governor Muhammad Ali (1805–49), who starved the ulema financially, taking away their tax exemption status, confiscating the religiously-endowed properties that were their principal source of income, and systematically robbing them of any shred of power. When the reforming army officer Jamal Abdul Nasser came to power in 1952, he changed tack and turned the clergy into state officials. For centuries, the ulema had acted as a protective bulwark between the people and the systemic violence of the state. Now Egyptians came to despise them as government lackeys. This policy would ultimately backfire, because it deprived the general population of learned guidance that was aware of the complexity of the Islamic tradition. Self-appointed freelances, whose knowledge of Islam was limited, would step into the breach, often to disastrous effect.

In 1954, after surviving an attempted assassination, Nasser incarcerated thousands of members of the Muslim Brotherhood, many of whom had done nothing more incriminating than distributing leaflets. One of the detained Brothers was Sayed Qutb, an educated man who was well-informed about Islam. But in Nasser’s prison he himself was tortured and saw other Brothers slaughtered casually by prison guards, beaten and executed. When he heard Nasser vowing to privatize Islam on the Western model, he was convinced that secularism was cruel, aggressive and immoral. Amidst the horror of his Egyptian gaol, he wrote Milestones, the work of a man who has been pushed too far, which would become a classic text for Sunni fundamentalists.

What we call “fundamentalism” has always existed in a symbiotic relationship with a secularization that is experienced as cruel, violent and invasive. The case of Qutb is just one of many tragic examples of an aggressive secularism actually damaging religion and pushing it into a violent riposte. Every fundamentalist movement that I have studied in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is rooted in a profound fear of annihilation, convinced that the liberal or secular establishment is determined to destroy themselves and their faith. From Ataturk to the Shahs to Nasser we can see how this perception has developed in the Middle East.

Some secular thinkers regard “religion” not only as inherently belligerent and intolerant but irrational and backward, the unnatural and violent “other” to the peaceable, rational, and humane liberal state. This attitude had informed the colonialists’ view of the indigenous peoples as “primitive” because their political institutions were mired in their benighted religious beliefs and they had failed to develop an industrialised economy. Even today the apparent reluctance of some Muslims to embrace the secular ideals that had
often been imposed so cruelly is often regarded as a failure to evolve naturally and “grow up” in the way that “we” did.

Today the “new atheists” represent an extreme expression of this tendency. In the past, Sam Harris felt it necessary to italicize his claim that “most Muslims are utterly deranged by their religious faith.” In a recent article on ISIL, he has argued that “religion itself produces a perverse solidarity that we must find some way to undercut” and that those Muslims who condemn the atrocities of Islamic State, are not and, indeed, cannot be inspired by the teachings of Islam but have simply absorbed the secularist ideals of toleration and human rights. Secularism was an extremely valuable development for us in our pioneering modernization but it should not be regarded as one of the laws of nature. To stigmatize those to whom it does not come naturally as fanatical, unhinged and barbaric has helped to damage our relations with other peoples in the past and even today can manifest the very bigotry that secularism was supposed to supplant.
The True, Peaceful Face Of Islam

By Karen Armstrong

There are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, and Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion. If the evil carnage we witnessed on Sept. 11 were typical of the faith, and Islam truly inspired and justified such violence, its growth and the increasing presence of Muslims in both Europe and the U.S. would be a terrifying prospect. Fortunately, this is not the case.

The very word Islam, which means "surrender," is related to the Arabic salam, or peace. When the Prophet Muhammad brought the inspired scripture known as the Koran to the Arabs in the early 7th century A.D., a major part of his mission was devoted precisely to bringing an end to the kind of mass slaughter we witnessed in New York City and Washington. Pre-Islamic Arabia was caught up in a vicious cycle of warfare, in which tribe fought tribe in a pattern of vendetta and countervendetta. Muhammad himself survived several assassination attempts, and the early Muslim community narrowly escaped extermination by the powerful city of Mecca. The Prophet had to fight a deadly war in order to survive, but as soon as he felt his people were probably safe, he devoted his attention to building up a peaceful coalition of tribes and achieved victory by an ingenious and inspiring campaign of nonviolence. When he died in 632, he had almost single-handedly brought peace to war-torn Arabia.

Because the Koran was revealed in the context of an all-out war, several passages deal with the conduct of armed struggle. Warfare was a desperate business on the Arabian Peninsula. A chieftain was not expected to spare survivors after a battle, and some of the Koranic injunctions seem to share this spirit. Muslims are ordered by God to "slay [enemies] wherever you find them!" (4: 89). Extremists such as Osama bin Laden like to quote such verses but do so selectively. They do not include the exhortations to peace, which
in almost every case follow these more ferocious passages: "Thus, if they let you be, and do not make war on you, and offer you peace, God does not allow you to harm them" (4: 90).

In the Koran, therefore, the only permissible war is one of self-defense. Muslims may not begin hostilities (2: 190). Warfare is always evil, but sometimes you have to fight in order to avoid the kind of persecution that Mecca inflicted on the Muslims (2: 191; 2: 217) or to preserve decent values (4: 75; 22: 40). The Koran quotes the Torah, the Jewish scriptures, which permits people to retaliate eye for eye, tooth for tooth, but like the Gospels, the Koran suggests that it is meritorious to forgo revenge in a spirit of charity (5: 45). Hostilities must be brought to an end as quickly as possible and must cease the minute the enemy sues for peace (2: 192-3).

Islam is not addicted to war, and jihad is not one of its "pillars," or essential practices. The primary meaning of the word jihad is not "holy war" but "struggle." It refers to the difficult effort that is needed to put God's will into practice at every level--personal and social as well as political. A very important and much quoted tradition has Muhammad telling his companions as they go home after a battle, "We are returning from the lesser jihad [the battle] to the greater jihad," the far more urgent and momentous task of extirpating wrongdoing from one's own society and one's own heart.

Islam did not impose itself by the sword. In a statement in which the Arabic is extremely emphatic, the Koran insists, "There must be no coercion in matters of faith!" (2: 256). Constantly Muslims are enjoined to respect Jews and Christians, the "People of the Book," who worship the same God (29: 46). In words quoted by Muhammad in one of his last public sermons, God tells all human beings, "O people! We have formed you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another" (49: 13)--not to conquer, convert, subjugate, revile or slaughter but to reach out toward others with intelligence and understanding.

So why the suicide bombing, the hijacking and the massacre of innocent civilians? Far from being endorsed by the Koran, this killing violates some of its most sacred precepts. But during the 20th century, the militant form of piety often known as fundamentalism erupted in every major religion as a rebellion against modernity. Every fundamentalist movement I have studied in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is convinced that liberal, secular society is determined to wipe out religion. Fighting, as they imagine, a battle for survival, fundamentalists often feel justified in ignoring the more compassionate principles of their faith. But in amplifying the more aggressive passages that exist in all our scriptures, they distort the tradition.

It would be as grave a mistake to see Osama bin Laden as an authentic representative of Islam as to consider James Kopp, the alleged killer of an abortion provider in Buffalo, N.Y., a typical Christian or Baruch Goldstein, who shot 29 worshipers in the Hebron mosque in 1994 and died in the attack, a true martyr of Israel. The vast majority of Muslims, who are horrified by the atrocity of Sept. 11, must reclaim their faith from those who have so violently hijacked it.

Source: Time Magazine: [http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,175987,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,175987,00.html)
Deepening Our Historical Perspective

Secularism and Islam

by Dilwar Hussain

To many people today Islam, of all the world faiths, is probably the least likely to declare itself compatible with secularism. Yet a recent publication (British Secularism and Religion: Islam, Society and the State, 2011), that I helped to edit, argues that Islam can be read in precisely that way. In fact, secularism is very important for Muslims in the modern world, as it is the basis for equality, democracy, freedom, human rights and the autonomy of religion itself. These values have a strong resonance with my reading of Islam even though some conservative voices may disregard these as ‘western values.’

Historically, the Muslim world had a very positive relationship between scientific and rational inquiry on the one hand and religion on the other, creating significant innovations in science and mathematic. But while the Enlightenment and the exciting search for emancipation of the human spirit engendered important developments in Europe, intellectual stagnation settled in too much of the Muslim world causing it to lose that creative relationship with rationalism. From the late 19th century one could hear calls for renewed thinking (ijtihad) and reform (islah) in the Muslim world, a movement that only now seems to be gathering momentum.

With the purpose of furthering a conversation among Muslim communities, the basic argument of the above book is for a more nuanced approach to the secular; to move beyond polarised debates on the subject. It is important to distinguish between different forms of secularism: procedural and programmatic, i.e. structural pluralism, neutrality of the state and management of the public sphere—more ideological, anti-religious sentiment. The book argues that Muslims could embrace the former, while they may debate and dialogue with the latter.
As such, the British model of secularism (a pragmatic, weak form of establishment) is a good starting point for a democratic society, with a secular public culture that also has a space for faith. While there may be room for improvement of the 'British model', the American and French models (which are more secular in constitutional terms) show (differently) that the debate around religion in public life is not easy to resolve by mere constitutional separation.

Despite the fact that some Muslims advocate a return to the ‘Caliphate’, the current tide of public opinion in the Arab world, for example, shows that Muslim masses aspire to freedom and democracy in ways that were not recognised previously. (An argument against disregarding such values as 'western'. Surely, these are now universal aspirations?) In the early 20th Century pre-occupation with the Caliphate, it was seen as a symbol of Muslim unity and its restoration as vital in defending Muslim interests and procuring justice in a post-colonial context. However, in reality, there has usually been a normative distinction (albeit in pre-modern settings) between the temporal, sovereign authority and institutions of religion in the Muslim world. The latter mainly advocating autonomy and resenting their co-option by the state whenever that did happen. If one adds to the mix, the immense disappointment of Muslims with the various national projects often couched (even if at times with little more than lip-service) in the name of Islam—Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, etc., there is a growing recognition that a liberal, secular democracy is a good model for ensuring accountable, open, societies that can protect the rights of citizens, all citizens.

However, the story is more complex than that; an absence of religious rule (and ‘on paper’ separation of religion and state) doesn’t automatically imply genuine freedom and liberty, given the role of the military and authoritarian tendencies in many Muslim countries. Furthermore, ‘secularism’ in the Muslim world has, in the past, been associated with forced ‘westernisation’ (Turkey for example) and/or double standards (e.g. support for dictatorships). This means that Muslim publics are often very sceptical of the term ‘secularism’ (though as mentioned above, not necessarily the notion of separation).

While advocating secularism, I am not for the disappearance of religion. Rather, I see secularism as a good way of managing the public debate, especially where multiple religious, ideological and belief arguments may collide. So there is a conversation to be had about the extent, nature and mode of religious presence in the public sphere. Given the plural nature of that presence perhaps the Rawlsian notion of ‘public reason’, can help—especially in a culture of very low religious literacy? But it seems that we also need to reach a point where (sensible and rationally argued) religious voices can be given consideration and not automatically disregarded as ‘superstitious’.

The nuanced conversation and reform we are trying to nurture, on all sides, will need time; and yet it often seems like time is running out. But the process of reform cannot be forced, or enforced. For it to be an authentic voice, it needs to be organic. We can, however, catalyse that process by fostering education and critical thinking, by encouraging open, pluralistic and free spaces of debate and by encouraging people to dialogue in safe spaces so they can build meaningful relationships that cut through the polarised impasse of today.

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Source: [http://www.euro-muslims.eu](http://www.euro-muslims.eu)
For more than two centuries the Western societies have been dealing with the ongoing process through which they were securing the rights of the individuals while setting clearly their duties towards the structured community they were belonging to. It is through that historical development that our societies have become more and more democratic by clarifying the common legal framework and setting the central principle of “rule of law”. It has been then possible to speak about freedom, equality, and citizenship and to deal with ideologies and political views embodied in social organisations or political parties. This was the natural way to deal with social and political pluralism. After the World War II, the arrival of new immigrants – sometimes coming from the previous colonised countries – added a new dimension to the old concept of pluralism: we had thus to deal with “other” cultures and religions, and mainly with “Muslims”. For the last forty years, the Western societies have been dealing with a new complex challenge in the form of a new kind of cultural and religious diversity. Not only the situation is new and difficult but all the figures and the economic prospects are informing us that immigration is not going to stop: whatever strong might be our cultural resistance (and sometimes our rejection of the “foreigners”), our economic needs will be stronger as our societies and enterprises need more and more
workers and our “indigenous populations” become more and more older. This conflicting picture creates tension, doubts and fears.

Even with a positive take on the facts, one shall ask: how can we deal with this new historical situation? In other words, how to adapt an old effective framework regulating political pluralism to a society facing cultural and religious diversity and cultural heterogeneity? Are the old references and concepts (such as secularism, rule of law, citizenship, etc.) still meaningful or efficient? Do we have to change our vision and propose to take into account the rights of the newcomers, as individuals or as communities. It is clearly not enough to state bluntly “the newcomers must simply adapt” as we hear in some political discourses and among the majority of the French sociologists (Kepel, Tribala, Taguieff, etc.). We can’t accept a pure culturalist positioning saying that we must be ready to change the laws to accommodate the immigrants for democracy is about freedom and respecting cultural and religious minorities. We also need to go further than to assert, with no clear vision, that we need “to compromise on both sides”. Our responsibility in such a debate is to clarify the terms of the debate, to know from where we start and to circumscribe the different challenges and fields at stake.

We must begin by stating that the Western democratic societies are based on a common legal framework (sometimes constitutions) that must be accepted and respected by their members (as long as they are not imposing an unjust behaviour like the apartheid legalisation in the old South African regime for instance: here consciousness objection should be understood as “lawful”). Thus citizens must be law abiding and get equal rights and equal duties before the law. We must add here a third dimension related to the principles of secularism: the State should be neutral as to the religious affairs and does not intervene in theological matters. In our view, a clear debate must start with a clear picture based on these three principles: rule of law, citizenship and secularism. These are the starting points of reference but the passionate debates over the last decade have shown that they would not be sufficient to solve the new challenges we mentioned earlier. People are driven by negative perceptions, mistrust and fears “on both sides” so to say: on the one hand we hear “they will never be integrated” (which is not a new statement when it comes to immigrants); on the other “we will never be accepted”. All are experiencing a kind of “identity crisis”: the question “What is Dutchness, Britishness or Frenchness?” echoes the interrogative doubt: “Would it be possible for us to remain Muslims in the West?” In such a climate it would be wrong, and even dangerous, to reduce the debate to a “pure legal problem” for its scope is clearly wider.

Nevertheless, it would be as dangerous to accept, voluntarily or not, to read the texts of the law through the distorting prism of the common (negative) perception: the same text could be read in an inclusive way when we trust our fellow citizens or, on the contrary, in a very exclusive way in times of mistrust: during the latter, to ask the same rights might be wrongly perceived as claims to get specific treatments. Another mistake would be to “culturalise” “religionise” or “islamise” all the social or socio-economic problems we are facing: lacking good and effective social politicies, politicians end up instrumentalising cultures and religions for the sake of bad politics. Laws are essential, as we have mentioned, but the challenges are more complex and require taking into account other dimensions.

As we referred to perceptions constantly interfering into the current debate, we must add a central and essential psychological factor. Whatever is our take on the common law and equal citizenship, we will not succeed if we are unable to shape and feed a strong and shared “sense of belonging” among the citizens. We are witnessing the creation of closed areas and social ghettos where people (rich or poor, coming from the same cultural background and/or economic status) are isolating themselves. Some white indigenous French, British or Dutch citizens are migrating from within the cities to the outskirts because
they no longer feel at home in some areas. On the other hand, the new European citizens, asked to “integrate” on almost a daily basis, feel that they still have a long way to go before being accepted and thus feeling at home. Negative perceptions, fears, mistrust are undermining the common sense of belonging and create virtual or real walls between people. It is urgent to rebuild bridges and to promote mutual knowledge and a common awareness as to the immigrants’ contribution to the Western societies not only through material and economic inputs but also by assessing the cultural and religious richness they add to the societies. It is important to push citizens from different background to get out of their respective ghettos and to become more proactive. 

Mutual knowledge, general awareness of respective contributions and proactivity are the prerequisites to reach mutual trust and to feed a sincere feeling of loyalty towards the country: all these dimensions, in turn, nurture the sense of belonging our societies need.

Hence, it will not be enough to repeat obsessively that we want to promote common citizenship and that we respect people’s identities. These theoretical discourses, full of good and humanist intentions, will be neither heard nor trusted by the citizens if they are not part of a prospective vision and concretely translated into effective multidimensional policies. We need a holistic approach based on a vision, overall objectives and practical steps to follow. It is crucial to understand, upstream from the problems we are facing on the ground, that solutions will be reached through a two way process. Our democratic societies, without changing their laws, must reconsider their traditional and inherited narrative to make it more inclusive. Inclusiveness is the key when it comes to teach the official History of a country. The western populations have changed tremendously and it becomes important to think about, and shape, a more comprehensive and consistent common History of memories. We must be willing and able to integrate in our official curricula a self critical discourse as to what have been done to previous colonised people who now have become our fellow citizens: to speak about the two sides of our past, the light one as well as the dark one. A positive discourse on the immigrants’ contributions to our societies and a better knowledge of the cultural and religious diversity should go along all the social policies promoting civil engagement and social cohesion.

Our requirements towards the new citizens or the residents with diverse cultural backgrounds must be clear with no compromise. They have to know, and abide by, the laws, respect the institutions and accept the cultural Western environment (they may be selective for their own sake and behaviour but they have to be inclusive as well and make the national culture theirs). It is important that they refuse to feed a kind of “victim mentality” and start addressing, not as potential-suspect-on-the-defensive, but as fellow proactive citizens some of the legitimate concerns and fears people might have around them: on violence, women, cultural heritage, etc. This should be the intellectual and social attitudes the new citizens have to promote by being in the mainstream debates regarding common values, national identity and domestic issues: they must refuse to create a new kind of citizenship which is a psychological alienated “minority citizenship”. It does not exist in our legislations but it may be created in some minds (this is one of the reasons why the legal approach is necessary without being sufficient and exclusive).

This overall vision of an constant two way process within our societies should rely on effective concrete policies. We need courageous politicians (refusing to instrumentalise people’s fears and play the easy game of polarisation) and committed citizens engaged within the civil society: it means exploiting the potential richness and contribution of each individual or cultural and religious community through new and creative social projects. Dialogue is not enough; people need to do things together. This is why the local level, and the local political authorities and institutions are so instrumental and important for now and for the future: this is where the people can know each other, reach mutual trust, be proactive and get
a strong sense of belonging. Local initiatives, far from the political national rhetoric, are essential to change the climate and mentalities: a national movement of local initiatives is of course necessary and it must be accompanied by the government which should listen more to the positive messages coming from the people building at the grassroots than to the distorting images and (naturally bad) news carried by the media. By saying that one should realise that the key of success in that field is also to think of a “media strategy” : to get journalists involved with a better understanding, and more accurate knowledge of the stakes and a civic willingness to speak and write more about “what’s work”.

Every institution has a role to play and among them our universities. Professors, lecturers and students cannot think far from the society and think for it and even judge its failures. The role of the professors and the teachers is to clarify the terms of the debates, to refuse to be driven by passions and fears and thus to come with a critical and positive contributions within the civil society. When dealing with concepts such as “citizenship” or “identity” we witness on a daily basis the degree of confusion and tension and our universities should be the space where deep, free and critical debates are still possible. The unique condition would be not to think on behalf of the people or by proxy but with our fellow citizens, within the civil arena, and to be proactive. It means to be able to listen, to learn from practical experiences and to talk with the average citizens and not only to them. This is why I think that this Chair at Erasmus University connected with the local involvement of the municipality is a pilot project: it means respecting the competences of each other while working together for a better future.

Source: Outline of Inaugural Lecture of Professor Tariq Ramadan, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Chair Citizenship and Identity, 9 November 2007. The final text of the lecture can be watched/heard at: www.eur.nl/fsw/ramadan.

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by Tariq Ramada

In the West, the idea of Sharia calls up all the darkest images of Islam: repression of women, physical punishments, stoning and all other such things. It has reached the extent that many Muslim intellectuals do not dare even to refer to the concept for fear of frightening people or arousing suspicion of all their work by the mere mention of the word.

It is true that scholars of law and jurisprudence have almost naturally restricted the meaning to their own field of study, that dictators have used it for repressive and cruel purposes, and that the ideal of the Sharia has been most betrayed by Muslims themselves, but this should not prevent us from studying this central notion in the Islamic universe of reference and trying to understand in what ways it has remained fundamental and active in the Muslim consciousness through the ages.

If the idea of “establishing rules” is indeed contained in the notion of Sharia (from the root sha-ra-a), this translation does not convey the fullness of the way it is understood unless its more general and fundamental meaning is referred to: “the path that leads to the spring.” We have pointed out the tone of Islamic terminology, which systematically reflects a corpus of reference that sets a certain way of speaking of God, of defining the human being and of understanding the relationship between them by means of Revelation. We have seen that this corpus of reference is, for the Muslim consciousness, where the universal is formulated: God, human nature, which makes itself human by turning in on itself and recognizing the “need of Him,” reason, active and fed by humility, and, finally, Revelation, which confirms, corrects, and exerts a guiding influence.

Just as the shahada is the expression, in the here and now, of individual faithfulness to the original covenant by means of a testimony that is a “return to oneself” (a return to the fitra, to the original breath breathed into us by God), so the Sharia is the expression of individual and collective faithfulness, in time, for those who are trying in awareness to draw near to the ideal of the Source that is God. In other words, and in light of all that has been said in the first chapter, the shahada translates the idea of “being
Muslim,” and the *Sharia* shows us “how to be and remain Muslim.” This means, to put it in yet another way and extend our reflection, that the *Sharia* is not only the expression of the universal principles of Islam but the framework and the thinking that makes for their actualization in human history. There can be no *Sharia* without a corpus of fundamental principles that set, beyond the contingencies of time, a point of reference for faithfulness to the divine will. This corpus of principles, as we have seen, is a fundamental given of the Islamic universe of reference, which asserts, in the midst of postmodernism, that all is not relative, that there does indeed exist a universal, for it is a God, an only God, who has revealed timeless principles, which, while not preventing reason from being active and creative, protect it from getting bogged down in the contradictions and incoherences of the absolute relativity of everything.

By inviting Muslims to accept pluralism by a purely rationalistic approach, to express their faithfulness in a purely private way, or to define themselves in terms of minorities, some commentators have thought to ward off the danger of Islamic universality, which they perceive as inevitably totalitarian. Is this not how the West understands the quasi summons to have to affirm one’s “faith” in the autonomy of reason in order to prove one’s open-mindedness or one’s firm support for the “universal values of the West”; or the new fashion of apologetic for a Sufism so interior that it has become disincarnated, almost invisible, or a facade with only blurred links to Islam; or, again, stigmatization and the exercise of constant pressure on Muslims driven to adopt the monochrome reaction of minorities on the defensive, obsessed with their only right—to be—and with their differentness? This is all happening as if, in order to ward off the “necessarily expansionist” universality of Islam, either Islam must be refused its claim to universality or Muslims must be pressed to accept this exercise in wholesale relativization.

Some Muslim intellectuals have accepted the imposition of these game rules. Others have opposed it and continue to oppose it by rejecting the West per se, with all it has produced, because it has forgotten God or because all that takes place there is Promethean, if not “satanic.” Between these two extremes, there is a way, I believe, to change the terms of the debate: if, for Muslims, it is a matter of rejecting the insidious process of the relativization of their universal values, it is also incumbent on them to explain clearly in what sense, and how, those values respect diversity and relativity. If the Way to faithfulness, the *Sharia*, is the corpus of reference in which Islamic universality is written down, it is urgent and imperative to say how it is structured and how it expresses the absolute, and rationality, and the relation to time, progress, the Other, and, more broadly, difference. At a deeper level, the intuition that must feed this refusal of relativization and this presentation of the fundamental principles of Islam in the heart of the Western world is the conviction that this is the only true way to produce an authentic dialogue of civilizations and that this is now more necessary than ever. With globalization at hand, the fear is that the West—helped by an intangible Westernization of the world—will engage in a “dialogical monologue” or an “interactive monologue” with civilizations different only in name but so denatured or so exotic that their members are reduced, taking the good years with the bad, to discussing their survival and not the richness of their otherness. Muslims have the means to enter into this debate on an equal footing, and they should do so, and find debating partners ready for this worthy, enriching, and essential confrontation of ideas and ideals.

Source: [http://tariqramadan.com/](http://tariqramadan.com/)
The horrific attacks in Paris and San Bernardino have captured headlines and triggered responses from journalists, politicians, and religious leaders. Some Western heads of government have once again threatened a global war against terrorism, while some political commentators have even invoked World War III.

In the United States, Republican presidential candidates and some thirty governors have called for a freeze on accepting refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria. Donald Trump, the leading Republican candidate for president of the United States, has pushed the envelope to its extreme, advocating a temporary freeze on all foreign Muslim immigration, as well as the monitoring or even the forced closure of American mosques. The result? Trump soared in the polls, as did fellow presidential candidate Ben Carson, who stated that “for a Muslim to become president of the United States...you have to reject the
tenets of Islam.” In Europe, far-right political candidates continue to make political headway. The far-right Front National party of Marine Le Pen won nearly 30% of the vote in the recent French regional elections; although the party did not win any of the regions outright, the strong showing positions Le Pen as a future presidential candidate.

Fear of Islam and Muslims in general—not just Muslim extremist and terrorist movements specifically—have become normalized in popular culture in both America and Europe. The anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim hate speech, bias, discrimination, and hate crimes—commonly referred to as Islamophobia—are on the rise. Islam Muslims and the vast majority of Muslims have been brush-stroked by and often equated with the kind of militant extremism and terrorism practiced by a mere fraction of Muslims, obscuring the fact that the vast majority of terrorist victims are themselves Muslim. This, in turn, has had a significant impact on the growth of Islamophobia as well as the domestic policies that have threatened Muslim civil liberties. But what are its causes?

**Is Islam the primary cause and catalyst for terrorism?**

Major polls have consistently reported that Islam is a significant component of religious and cultural identity in Muslim countries and communities globally, and thus an attractive tool for violent extremists as an instrument for legitimation and mobilization. However, the primary catalysts for extremism and terrorism are political grievances often intertwined with the use or misuse of religion. Osama Bin Laden and others like him appealed to long-standing political grievances among many in the Muslim world, the mainstream non-violent majority and extremists alike: Western influence, invasion, occupation; Western support for authoritarian regimes that claim to speak for all Muslims; uncritical bias and support for Israel from the American government in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Add to this the Iraqi and Syrian (Shiah-dominated) governments’ repression and killing of tens of thousands of civilians and other crimes. ISIS has shown a particular talent for coopting and exploiting all of these issues. Their execution videos, released when ISIS called itself the Islamic State of Iraq (October 2006–April 2013, Al-Furqan Media Foundation), underscored the importance of political grievances for legitimation of their actions and as a tool for recruitment.

In addition to this, public displays of Islamophobia in the West, from political speeches and demonstrations to negative portrayals of Muslims in the media and hate crimes, are also effective tools for recruitment. Major studies have also found that Islamophobia increases significantly not only with incidents of domestic terrorism but also at election time, as seen in the 2008 and 2012 presidential and the 2010 Congressional elections. During those races, Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum, Herman Cain and others sought to gain attention by making reckless statements about Muslims. In 2010 in particular, the public debate over the so-called “Ground Zero” mosque in New York became fodder for candidates looking for media coverage. Today, that trend continues with candidates such as Trump, Carson, Cruz, and others.

Most Americans—who live in a country with a relatively small Muslim population—say they know little or nothing about Islam. Thus, it is not surprising that when terrorists commit their acts of violence in the name of Islam in Paris and San Bernardino, they are drawn to demagogues in America like Donald Trump and in Europe who bring Muslims and the Islamic faith to the forefront of the political debate. As Kareem Abdul-Jabbar recently wrote in the *New York Times*: “Trump is ISIS’s greatest triumph: the perfect Manchurian Candidate who, instead of offering specific and realistic policies, preys on the fears of the public, doing ISIS’s job for them.”
To what extent has media contributed to the problem?

Media Tenor, in its 2011 report “A New Era for Arab-Western Relations,” found that out of nearly 975,000 news stories from US and European media outlets, networks significantly reduced coverage on events in MENA to actions of Muslim militants. A comparison of media coverage in 2001 versus 2011 demonstrates the shocking disparity of coverage. In 2001, 2% of all news stories in Western media presented images of Muslim militants, while just over 0.5% presented stories of ordinary Muslims. In 2011, 25% of the stories presented militant image, while the images of ordinary Muslims remained stuck at 0.5%.

The net result is an astonishing imbalance of coverage: an exponential increase in coverage of militants but no increase at all over the 10 year period in the coverage of ordinary Muslims—and that despite census figures confirming a rapidly growing Muslim population. The situation got worse, for example—between 2007 and 2013, 80% of all American news coverage about Muslims/Islam was negative.

Over the past decade, there has been an explosion of social media websites targeting the Muslim community, with serious international and domestic consequences. A cottage industry of ideological, agenda-driven, anti-Muslim polemists has sprung up, consisting of pundits, bloggers, authors, lobbyists, elected officials, and their resourceful and wealthy funders.

An August 2011 Center Report, Fear, Inc., documented, based on IRS information, that $42.6 million flowed from seven foundations over ten years to support Islamophobic authors and websites. A CAIR Report in 2013, “Legislating Fear: Islamophobia and its Impact in the United States,” reported that the inner core of the US-based Islamophobia network enjoyed access to at least $119,662,719 in total revenue between 2008 and 2011.

Totally lost or obscured in the fear and fog of war are the facts on the ground regarding American Muslims. Data from major polls (Gallup, Pew and others) and studies have reported that the vast majority of Muslims in America, for example, are educationally, economically, socially, and religiously an integral part of our American mosaic: members of Congress, the military, corporate, education and religious leaders, physicians, lawyers, engineers, scientists and small business owners. American Muslims were among the victims and first-responders on 9/11. In contrast, Muslim terrorists are a fraction of a fraction of 1%. No wonder that the US Attorney General, Senior Pentagon and Department of Homeland Security, as well as leaders in the Democratic and Republican parties, have rejected Donald Trump’s outrageous and inflammatory rhetoric and its threat to American principles and values and to the civil liberties of American Muslims.

House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) offered the simplest and most direct rebuttal Tuesday, the day after Trump called for a ban on Muslims entering the United States: “Freedom of religion’s a fundamental constitutional principle,” Ryan said.

“It’s a founding principle of this country....This is not conservatism. What was proposed yesterday is not what this party stands for, and more importantly, it’s not what this country stands for. Not only are there many Muslims serving in our armed forces dying for this country, there are Muslims serving right here in the House, working every day to uphold and to defend the Constitution.... Some of our best and biggest allies in this struggle and fight against radical Islamic terror are Muslims—the vast, vast, vast majority of whom are peaceful, who believe in pluralism, freedom, democracy, individual rights. I told our members this morning to always strive to live up to our highest ideals, those principles in the Constitution on which we swear every two years that we will defend.”
As President Barack Obama recently observed:

[I]t is the responsibility of all Americans—of every faith—to reject discrimination. It is our job to reject religious tests on who we admit into this country. It is our responsibility to reject proposals that Muslim Americans should somehow be treated differently. Because when we travel down that road, we lose...We were founded upon a belief in human dignity—that no matter who you are, or where you come from, or what you look like, or what religion you practice, you are equal in the eyes of God and equal in the eyes of the law.

A lot of things went wrong this past year, but there may be a silver lining. As Islamophobia intensified and gained more media attention, many Americans and the international community took notice. Google searches of the term "Islamophobia" spiked dramatically after Paris and San Bernardino. Prominent journalists, government and religious leaders, politicians, scholars, and members of the general public started calling out Islamophobia with more force, and leaders on both the right and left stood in solidarity with Muslims. Dozens of interfaith efforts also popped up around the country. So, despite the fact that Islamophobia was at its worst in 2015, there are reasons to hope that we are turning a corner.

Source: http://blog.oup.com/2015/12/oiso-islamophobia/#sthash.dw5Y2YB5.dpuf

John L. Esposito is the Editor-in-Chief of the Oxford Islamic Studies Center. He is University Professor, Professor of Religion & International Affairs and of Islamic Studies and Founding Director of the Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University. Islamophobia in 2015: The Good, the Bad, and the Hopeful, a report from The Bridge: Protecting Pluralism – Ending Islamophobia at Georgetown's Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, offers a wealth of information, polling data, and other resources on Islamophobia.
This speech was delivered at a White House gathering celebrating and protecting “America’s Tradition of Religious Pluralism.” The speaker was Vanita Gupta, the head of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice.

I’d like to begin by framing the challenges we face in the context of our national story. In America, our Constitution guarantees all people – regardless of what they look like or where they worship – fundamental fairness and equal justice under the law. That simple but unwavering belief has driven America’s leaders, over generations, to defend and enforce the principles that form the foundation of a tolerant and open society.

Two hundred and twenty five years ago, that belief led President George Washington to assure the Jewish community of Newport, Rhode Island, that the United States “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

It led a poet to describe the enduring American spirit by writing these words, later engraved onto the Statue of Liberty, as a symbol of America’s light that radiates from the shores of Ellis Island: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free.”
And it led President George W. Bush, in the days of palpable fear after 9/11, to remind the American people that the “terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself,” declaring that, “the enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends.”

And, that simple but unwavering belief of equal justice under the law has also shaped my own personal story. As the daughter of Indian immigrants and as the wife of a Vietnamese refugee, my faith in the promising ideals of our country led me to a career in the law. And it continues to guide me today as the chief civil rights prosecutor for the United States of America.

Of course, as President Obama acknowledged earlier this week, America has not always lived up to the promise of its founding ideals. From our engagement in the slave trade, to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the stains on our history remind us of the dangerous consequences that can arise out of fear and bigotry. Even today, in the 21st century, too many people in this country continue to suffer discrimination and violence because of their religious beliefs, with a backlash particularly pronounced following heinous acts of terrorism.

Similar to what we saw after 9/11, in recent weeks following the terrible and tragic attacks in San Bernardino and Paris – and amidst a ratcheting up of divisive rhetoric around religious intolerance – community members and advocates have reported an uptick in hate-related incidents targeting Muslim Americans, as well as those perceived — rightly or wrongly — as being Muslim. We’ve heard from Muslim parents concerned for the safety of their children being bullied in school. And we’ve heard about reports of criminal threats and violence against mosques, children, and adults. We continue to investigate many of these incidents.

This discriminatory backlash not only threatens the millions of Muslims in the United States who peacefully practice their religion. It threatens all of us, because Muslims – like all Americans – work in our local businesses, teach in our schools, compete on our sports teams, and risk their lives in defense of our country. America derives its prosperity, strength, and security from the diversity of its people.

Hate-motivated violence and discrimination deserve no place in civilized society. They also violate our federal civil rights laws. During his first year in office, President Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, providing the Justice Department with additional tools to investigate and prosecute hate crimes, including existing categories of hate crimes based on a person’s actual or perceived religion.

It signaled to the world an enduring commitment to the most fundamental of American values. And it voiced an unwavering belief in the strength of our diversity. Working in close partnership with our U.S. Attorney colleagues, the Civil Rights Division remains committed to vigorously enforcing this law to combat hate-motivated violence. In the aftermath of 9/11, and in response to community member concerns, the Civil Rights Division launched a new initiative to combat discriminatory backlash against Arab, Muslim, Sikh and South-Asian Americans — as well as those individuals perceived to be members of these groups.

As part of this initiative, we focus on ensuring efficient and accessible processes for reporting hate crimes. We strive to implement proactive measures to identify cases involving bias crimes and discrimination that may merit federal action. We lead robust outreach to affected communities. And we work with other components in the
Justice Department to ensure accurate referral, effective outreach and comprehensive provision of services to victims of civil rights violations.

And since the unspeakable events of 9/11, the Justice Department has investigated more than 1,000 incidents involving acts of violence, threats, assaults, vandalism and arson targeting against Arab, Muslim, Sikh, and South-Asian Americans, as well as individuals perceived to be members of these groups, prosecuting dozens of these cases to the fullest extent of the law. In recent years, we’ve charged and convicted defendants for beating a Sikh cab driver in Washington State, for vandalizing churches in California, for firing a gun at a synagogue in Salt Lake City, and for setting fire to an Islamic Center in Ohio.

In addition to our criminal prosecutions, we continue to engage directly with local communities. With the support of advocates, U.S. Attorneys, the Civil Rights Division, and the FBI organized a series of regional trainings earlier this year – in Mississippi, California, Oregon, Kansas, and Florida. These sessions helped to train local and federal law enforcement in how to recognize, investigate, and prove hate crimes; to educate communities and engage them in the process of ensuring public safety; and to encourage better hate-crime reporting and data collection.

**Opposing Religious Discrimination**

While hate-motivated violence often reveals discrimination in its most severe form, the Civil Rights Division continues to combat religious discrimination on all fronts. Because of meaningful settlements we negotiated, today Jewish employees can serve the Birmingham, Alabama, Police Department without being forced to work on Shabbat. Students in DeKalb County, Georgia, can learn in school free from religious discrimination and harassment. And communities across the country can build and operate houses of worship free from unjust and unlawful interference.

As recent events have revealed, however, urgent and pressing work remains for public officials and private citizens alike. From non-profits to religious organizations, community leaders of various faiths have joined together to launch an innovative public awareness campaign called Know Your Neighbor. And I want to applaud the spirit of mutual respect and collaboration that they bring to this vital work of community engagement.

Earlier, you also heard from my colleagues across the administration about the efforts we’ve led to combat religious discrimination. And today, we’re going to build on those strides of progress. I’m delighted to stand with all of you to announce a new administration-wide community engagement initiative to ensure we fulfill our nation’s promise of religious freedom.

In the coming months, the Civil Rights Division will partner with other federal agencies – including the Departments of Education, Homeland Security and Labor; the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; and within the Justice Department – the FBI and Community Relations Service – to host a series of community roundtables and discussions.

As part of this initiative, we will engage with individuals from across the country so that we can better understand how the scourge of religious discrimination continues to undermine opportunity. And we believe these discussions
will provide valuable guidance to help inform our efforts in the Civil Rights Division as we continue to combat religious discrimination in the weeks and months ahead.

Combating discrimination based on one’s religion remains fundamental not only to protecting our values but also to defending our freedom. We cannot – and we must not – allow our enemies to define how we live or to dictate how we treat one another. To people in this country of every faith and nationality who feel afraid, threatened or unsafe, please know that with this administration, this President and this Department of Justice – you will never stand alone.

As Americans, today we face challenging times. And as our nation confronts these issues, each of us as its citizens must renew our efforts to fight discrimination that violates our laws and contradicts our most fundamental values. If we stand united in these efforts – defending diversity over discrimination – there exists no challenge Americans cannot overcome.

When President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law – a landmark statute that we continue to enforce each day at the Civil Rights Division – he reminded the American people about the ongoing and ever-changing quest to bring our nation closer to its founding values. “Those who founded our country,” he said, “knew that freedom would be secure only if each generation fought to renew and enlarge its meaning.” As we confront the civil rights challenges of our time and our generation, let us together renew our nation’s meaning of religious freedom in the 21st century. Let us rededicate our collective action to always respect the dignity and value of every person without question. And let us bring America ever closer to the founding vision of a land protected by justice, anchored in fairness and filled with opportunity for all its people.

Source: The Interfaith Observer:
http://theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2016/1/11/the-history-of-american-pluralism.html
What Would the Prophet Muhammad Think of ISIS

by Abdul Malik Mujahid

Does ISIS represent Islam as lived by the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him? The following chart makes it clear that the terrorist group does not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prophet Muhammad, Peace &amp; Blessings</th>
<th>ISIS The Terrible Terror</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>said to be merciful to people so God is merciful to you</td>
<td>angers God by being merciless to humanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banned killing prisoners</td>
<td>enjoys beheading prisoners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Opposite Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prohibited killing any civilians</td>
<td>kills civilians, including children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>established law and order</td>
<td>seeks to destroy law and order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>campaigned to end slavery</td>
<td>is reestablishing slavery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freed all of his slaves</td>
<td>enslaves people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prohibited rape</td>
<td>engages in rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>established peace among warring tribes of Arabia and different religious groups</td>
<td>terrorizes and rejects peace among people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expressly forbade burning any creature alive</td>
<td>burns people alive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>declared Muslims, pagans, and Jews of his state as one people with full freedoms</td>
<td>has no regard for people of other faiths like Christians and Yazidis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ordered Muslims to protect churches</td>
<td>destroys churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abided by his treaties and agreements</td>
<td>breaks all treaties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prohibited calling a Muslim a Kafir—calls everyone a Kafir who does not follow them

Prophet Muhammad, God’s peace and blessings be upon him, is described in the Quran as a Mercy to all of the worlds. He came to establish peace, justice, law, and order. As the table above notes, ISIS is diametrically opposed to everything he taught and expected his followers to adhere to. ISIS does not represent Islam or Muslims.

Download a pdf of “How Prophet Would Think of ISIS” here
Why Don’t Muslims Condemn Terrorism?

by Samana Siddiqui

The Islamic faith requires Muslims to believe in and practice five pillars. In our day and age, condemning terrorism committed by extremists seems to have become the sixth pillar. After any incident of terrorism, representatives of mosques, Islamic centers and organizations, bloggers, and writers sit with their fingers ready at their keyboards, prepared to issue condemnations for crimes they have not committed.

Yet, despite these clear statements stating their and the Islamic position condemning terrorism, which are diligently sent to media outlets locally, nationally, and internationally after every incident, Muslims are routinely accused of “not condemning terrorism”. There are two reasons for this.

First, media outlets are not interested in reporting the Muslim side of a breaking news story. It is neither in their own interest, nor do they feel that their audience will care what Muslims have to say about a crime committed in their name. This is why most of the time, journalists and their editors will not include a quote or statement from the many that Muslim individuals and organizations immediately send out. Second, it is the nature of the news media to report on that which is an aberration, not the norm. In practical terms, that means they will never show the law-abiding, tax-paying Muslim. They will hone in on the exception. Such bias is nothing new. In the past, this same prejudice was exercised against other minority communities by the American media, from African-Americans to Jews to Japanese-Americans. Muslims are the current scapegoat being singled out for such unethical journalistic treatment.
An additional tendency of the media, which fuels the myth that Muslims do not condemn terrorism, is to focus on Islamophobes as spokespersons on issues. That means individuals who have made a career out of spreading hate and outright misinformation about Islam and Muslims are given ample air time to share their hateful views. This is akin to giving large amounts of air time to former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke to spout his hatred of Jews.

In the case of Muslims, hatemongers like David Spencer and Pamela Geller are featured prominently in news items about Islam and Muslims without being challenged or another view being presented for balance.

This focus on terrorism committed by extremists in the name of Islam is not only unfair, but it also paints a false picture of the most dangerous threat to Americans today - right wing extremism.

According to a June 2015 report by the New America Foundation, that kind of homegrown threat is twice as prevalent than the threat posed by Islamic extremists.

As well, when it comes to terrorism and violence, Muslims are more peaceful than their neighbors. A World Public Opinion (WPO) survey done in collaboration with the University of Maryland reported that 51 percent of Americans believe "bombings and other types of attacks intentionally aimed at civilians are sometimes justified," while only 13 percent of American Muslims hold a similar view, with a full 81 percent saying violence against civilians is never justified.

As well, 89% of Muslim Americans surveyed by Gallup rejected violent individual attacks on civilians as compared to 71 percent of Christians and 75 percent of Jews. Muslims are the least likely to justify attacks on civilians. Only 11 percent of Muslims justified that sometimes such attacks are acceptable as compared to 27 percent of Christians and 22 percent of Jews.

These facts need to be widely publicized by both Muslims and non-Muslims. The media’s wilful ignorance and/or refusal to acknowledge them, along with their exclusion of Muslim statements condemning terrorism, are fueling the myth that Muslims do not condemn terrorism.

Muslims have, do, and will continue to condemn terrorism. It has no place in our faith. And it has no place in our world.

Source: http://www.soundvision.com/article/why-don-t-muslims-condemn-terrorism

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by Karin Miller

War, terrorism, economic instability, poverty, crime, unemployment, and environmental crises fill the news. Yet many of us carry on with our daily lives as if everything was fine. We continue to buy and consume more and more. We continue to rely on fossil fuels and unsustainable technologies that pollute our environment and endanger its many species of plants and animals. We continue to ignore the suffering of others in our communities, countries, and across the globe. We have forgotten that we all live on one planet, and that we are all connected. We have forgotten that a crisis on the other side of the world is our crisis one day. It is as if we have all fallen asleep and are dreaming a collective nightmare.

Despite all the troubles we face, there is beauty in this global predicament. The world is at a turning point. These crises can teach us. Rather than causing us to despair or to feel ambivalent, they can bring us hope. They are our chance to make a better world and a better future.

Our current mode of operation—acting in isolation, separation, and only for individual benefit—is not sustainable. While some people may continue to benefit from ignoring the whole in the short run, society
will eventually begin to crumble under this paradigm just as a body dies when ravaged by cancer. A healthier approach is to recognize that we are all one body of life. By stretching beyond our personal comfort and satisfaction, we can transition into ways of being that are sustainable, inclusive, and conducive to all life.

The values set forth in this book are offered as the foundation for a new paradigm to help humanity evolve as a species by moving us away from isolationism, separation, individualism, and the destruction that lies ahead on our current path. Changing the ways we interact and live—with each other and all life on the planet—will enable us to find new solutions and opportunities for individual and societal transformation. It is possible to create, and shift into, a new approach that welcomes, values, and supports all perspectives and the beautiful diversity of the world. It is time to wake up and create a new paradigm that supports and benefits the whole body of life. When we embrace the values of unity, community, life, freedom, connection, sustainability, creativity, empowerment, choice, and integrity—what are referred to in this book as “Global Values”—we can create a healthy and sustainable world with real social justice underpinned by democracy and human rights.

**How did we get here?**

Generally speaking, Western culture moved from understanding the world through myths (mythos) to understanding the world through religion and theology (theos). About 2,500 years ago, with the birth of Western philosophy, the ancient Greeks shifted our thinking toward inquiries about the natural world and the role of humans in it. They nudged Western thinking toward order, reason, and words (logos). Religion continued to dominate Western cultures, but the tendency toward reason was building steam.

By the 18th century, Western society was moving into the age of modernity, and the Industrial Revolution was getting under way. These things changed not only Western culture, but the entire world. The Industrial Revolution brought mass production of consumer goods and mass reproduction of cultural goods, and the age of modernity gave humans a false sense of dominance and superiority over the natural world. Many people came to believe that they could control and conquer nature, and that all their problems would one day be solved by reason, science, and progress.

Today, we are in the Information Age—some call it the Computer Age or the Digital Age. We have certainly made great technological advances, including those that connect us through the Internet, the World Wide Web, e-mail, and social media. Unfortunately, today’s postmodern world is not as successful as many had once hoped it would be.

In our excitement for progress, things seem to have spiraled out of control and our dreams of a better world are like memories from the distant past. Extreme weather and droughts are wreaking havoc across the planet. Clean water is becoming scarce. Advances in medicine are being clawed back by antibiotic-resistant bacteria. We are seeing all sorts of societal collapses, and our communities are being ripped apart at the seams by many social ills. Sophisticated societies have literally been destroyed by war, while others are suffering from failing transportation, education, and health infrastructures. For many communities, long time social inequality is causing civil unrest. As individuals, many of us feel we are living pointless lives focused only on ourselves—and we feel powerless in the bigger scheme of things. We are living in a time of great turmoil. Many things are changing beyond recognition, or disappearing altogether. Our old social structures are falling apart, and many people are grasping at the pieces to hold them together. In desperate attempts to maintain some stability, people are clinging fearfully to that which is familiar.
Desperation can cause people to become more conservative, more liberal, or more extreme in their values, opinions, and religious beliefs. Some people are even willing to kill and die to maintain their traditions and what they know best. They hope their fanaticism will somehow keep the old ways alive and preserve the world that is being torn from all of us. The problem with extremes is that not only do they not help us, they hurt us. Extreme viewpoints polarize us, causing the gaps between people to grow wider and making it more challenging to find common ground. This does nothing to help us solve our global problems. We will never get anywhere new by following the liberal left, the conservative right, or any sort of fundamentalism. We have already taken these paths, and each of them has led us to where we are now. We must “re-member” that we are one.

We have lost our connections with each other and the natural world, and it is time for humanity to “re-member” that all life is one. Our societies no longer value cooperation, kindness, generosity, and compassion. We collectively live in a state of great imbalance, and as individuals many of us are isolated from each other and our communities. If we want to change things for the better, we have to start by changing our own thinking. By changing our minds, and re-membering our connectedness, we can shift our paradigm and support actions that promote a healthy and sustainable world.

Remembering that all life is one is about putting humanity back together again conceptually, and making us whole. It is about realizing we are all interconnected and integral parts of the whole body of life, and reimagining how we think of ourselves in relation to others. It can be helpful to think about humanity as a single human body. If we think about each person as a cell in the body of humanity, it is easy to see we all need to work together. Each cell performs its individual function, but that function is best carried out in cooperation and coordination with other cells for the benefit of the whole body.

Sadly, as things are now, it seems as though we are living in a collective hallucination of disconnectedness. We have lost sight of our intimate and intricate connections to everything and everyone, and we view ourselves as unconnected, lone individuals. It is as if all the cells in the body of humanity have forgotten they are part of a whole—and the cells have forgotten that if the body dies, they too will die. The pressures of living in this isolated way are pushing our societies and our bodies to their physical limits. Rather than working together for the benefit of all, our societies are in fierce, often deadly, competition for vital resources—energy, water, food, shelter. As individuals, we are in competition with each other for jobs and income so that we can secure vital resources for ourselves and our families. If we are lucky enough to have a job, we are working longer hours, spending more time away from our loved ones, and travelling many miles each week just to keep roofs over our heads and food on our tables. This increased individual activity has a negative impact on the environment and our societies. As a result, our habitats, infrastructures, and social systems are reaching breaking point. We live in vicious circles of competition, consumption, and destruction.

The promise of modernity has been broken—things are not getting better. If we are to reclaim our lives, our societies, and our happiness, we have no choice but to change our ways. By recognizing we are all one, we can begin to live in balance with each other and all creation. This is not to suggest that we negate our individuality, give away our money, or act altruistically against our self-interests. Rather, this is a call to act with an awareness of the whole and to remember that we as individuals are part of that larger body of life. We recognize that it is in our own self-interest to align with the interests of the greater whole because we are ultimately connected. What we do for others and our environment directly or indirectly impacts ourselves.
Our journey is like the story of The Wizard of Oz

Like Dorothy Gale in *The Wizard of Oz*, we are all on remarkable personal journeys. Collectively, as societies, we also sought something more fulfilling over the rainbow. However, rather than finding the Emerald City, we have been swept up in a cyclone of chaos—just like Dorothy. Having been knocked unconscious, we now seem to be lost together in a dream. As Dorothy looked to the Wizard of Oz to help her find a way home, we hope for something or someone who can deliver on the promises of a better future, or who can at least take us back to what we remember as the idyllic days of the past. Unfortunately, the wizard was powerless to send Dorothy home, and she had to find her own way, aided by the new friends she makes throughout her journey. Similarly, no magic solutions to our global predicaments exist outside ourselves. We must learn that we have the answers and the ability to get ourselves home. Rather than looking to institutional knowledge and conventional norms, it is time to trust ourselves. We can let go of our old ways and assume a perspective that will lend itself to a sustainable existence on this planet. This is the way to peace and stability for humanity.

It takes both introspection and great courage to change. When we are reluctant to change it is usually because we are holding onto fear. Perhaps we fear losing what we hold near and dear, or have become comfortable with the status quo and fear we do not know what our future will hold for us if things change. Not wanting to make a poor decision, we cling tightly to that which we know best—even if it is not good for us or society. Our resistance to change can paralyze us if we let it. If we want a better world and a better way, if we want to make the transition to peace and stability, we must face our fears. We must admit that things are not working, and that our current approach is incomplete, inadequate, and ill-equipped to deal with all the challenges we are facing in our chaotic world. Like the Lion, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*, we must find the courage, the intelligence, and the heart to change our ways.

We merely need to look inside ourselves, as Dorothy did, to realize that we have had the answers all along. For example, we know deep down that connection, sustainability, and freedom are more useful to ourselves and humanity than isolation, wastefulness, and bondage. We can choose to discard unhealthy values and systems and embrace—or reclaim—values that support a healthy and sustainable world and that promote peace and stability.

A holistic approach

Hungarian philosopher of science and systems theorist Ervin László suggests that society is at a critical turning point in human evolution. He has suggested we need a social shift toward a “planetary ethics” and responsibility, so we can move into an era of better environmental stewardship, sustainability, and peace. Laszlo describes a form of ethics whereby we should feel responsibility to all, to the whole circle in which we are involved. He says, “Human consciousness can evolve. At the innovative margins of society it is already evolving. A holistic view is taking shape, one that sees the human being as an organic whole, embedded in the socio- and culture-sphere, embedded in turn in the wholeness of the biosphere.”

Now is the time to learn from our past and evolve. We can use this challenging point in history to create a new paradigm. As asserted by Alastair Taylor in the early 1960’s through a systems-theory model of human evolution, we are uniquely positioned to synthesize what we have learned from the mythos, theos, and logos eras to create a new era based on holos, or wholeness. If we step out of the game, and objectively observe the needs and interactions of all of the players, we can create new solutions for the benefit of
all—we can create a holistic paradigm. Such a holistic paradigm will take the whole of life and creation into consideration, and it will recognize the interdependence of all thoughts, actions, and forms of life. It will function as a support for the whole body of life in all its diversity and beauty.

A great renaissance grounded in connection and the need for one another is at hand. It is time to embrace each other and all creation, and to work together in the spirit of cooperation and community to shift into a holistic paradigm that will benefit us all. It is time for us to evolve.

A new paradigm for a new world

This book is intended to promote a shift in human consciousness to a holistic paradigm rooted in Global Values. Global Values serve as a common thread uniting people of all different religions, cultures, and political viewpoints. Rather than asserting truth, they offer a new perspective and platform upon which to base our thoughts and actions. They can inform a holistic paradigm, and they can be embraced by all peoples in order to work for positive societal transformations. Global Values represent a new approach for a new era.

Our current paradigm encourages categorization, separation, and isolation, and it is no wonder the world is in chaos. These values divide people, and they can cause us to turn against each other. The changes taking place in the world in the name of these values are destroying us and our environment. We are living through the dismantling of our old ways, but there is great power in times of change. Chaos is itself a catalyst for change, and it always contains great potential. We can try to turn away or hide from the chaos, or we can awaken our senses and our spirit and face it. When we face chaos with a new aliveness we can see expanded views of the universe, and this makes room for new possibilities—we see we can evolve out of chaos.

The evolution of humanity can be thought of like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. Once the caterpillar's body is isolated in its cocoon, enzymes are released to dissolve it. The result is a gelatinous goo, a pool of pure potentiality. Imaginal discs are clumps of cells that are not broken down by the enzymes, and they use the caterpillar goo to grow. The imaginal discs grow into wings, legs, antennae, and every other part of a butterfly, and finally, all these parts connect with each other to create the butterfly that will break out of its protective chrysalis and fly off to a new life. Humanity is in the breakdown and transformation stage of metamorphosis. Our familiar structures are falling away, and everything is in chaos. Peace, stability, and order seem to be things of the past. The body of life is being consumed, wars are raging, economies are cannibalizing each other, everything is breaking down, and yet, we are surrounded by pure potentiality.

If we think of ourselves as imaginal discs in mid-metamorphosis, we can think of Global Values as the bit of DNA that will enable us to bind together in new ways, so that we may evolve and emerge from the chaos as a more beautiful incarnation of humanity.

Like the imaginal discs that connect in a transforming caterpillar, new technologies have brought us a new awareness of each other and our opportunity as a species. Through our smartphones and other Internet connected devices, we can easily connect and communicate with people from all over the world. We can access and share information as never before. Through social media we may become friends with others whom we have never even met in person. We can share our views on the hot topics of the day at a click of a button. Such new technologies can be used to solve our problems as we join in group discussions of both
our communities at home and virtual communities around the world. By joining forces, we can build a critical mass of support for our new evolution to a state of balance and unity.

We now have the opportunity to join together both at the local and global level and collectively act as one for the benefit of all creation. If you are seeking to work together for a sustainable, unified world that reflects the oneness and interconnectedness of all things, please join me and all who share Global Values. Together, we can shift to a new, holistic paradigm that supports a healthy and sustainable world.

Karin Miller is Vice President and General Counsel of a major entertainment industry consortium. Active in the mind, body and spirit communities for over ten years, Miller served as pro bono counsel to Marianne Williamson for the formation of the Peace Alliance and as an Advisory Board Member to the Alliance for a New Humanity, chaired by Deepak Chopra. Karin founded Our New Evolution (ONE) to connect and empower people and projects that are aligned with Global Values—the heart of Karin’s new book, Global Values: A New Paradigm for a New World. Read the introduction to Karin Miller’s book and visit www.OurNewEvolution.org to learn more.
Islamophobia

General Points to Consider

**Recognize Islam as the new “other.”** The hate is the same hatred of white supremacists against people of color, of Anti-Semitism, of the Tutsis toward the Hutus, of Native Americans by the early American settlers, of Russians (or Americans) during the cold war, of Christians by Roman emperors, of Northern Ireland’s Catholics vs. Protestants, or Japanese by other East Asians and Americans, “witches” in Salem Massachusetts and any other group that has been or is marginalized, excluded, banished, ridiculed, or targeted for violence. “Otherizing” divides and harms humanity rather than uniting in compassion, love for one’s fellow humans.

Today it is the Muslims; tomorrow it will be another group. Throughout history, groups have been targeted based on current prevailing sentiment until the collective moves on to some new group. Humans practice superiority in the mistaken belief that by putting someone else down, one’s own status is “elevated.” It’s important to remember projection onto a group seen as “other” is temporary and employs the darker side of human nature and depends on who is seen as the new “evil du jour.” Remind others to keep this in mind too by pointing out the outcomes of hate groups and war mongering because someone is made “other.”

**Religion is a sacred space and a private matter.** Freedom of religion means the ability to practice one’s faith by choice openly or privately and to be free of intimidation or violence. Religions designate a holy space for the purpose of allegiance to the great mysteries or something greater than the human self. Whether it is a church, Mosque, Synagogue, Fellowship Hall, Temple, Shrine, Satsang, Native American Sweat Lodge or Longhouse or Kirtan, that space is holy and should be accorded the respect and reverence accorded a holy place.

**Speak up.** When someone lumps together all “Muslims” or whatever “evil group du jour” is the contemporary target, and labels and disparages them, your own group can just as easily become a target for no rational reason. Groups represent a diverse population and no one person or one behavior represents the whole of a group. One black person does not speak for all black people. One badly behaving Asian does not represent all Asians. One white person does not speak for the whole race. There are different kinds of Catholics and different brands of Protestants. No one religion is embraced by all people in a group. Not all tenets are embraced by all in that religion. Diversity is as common to faiths as it is to
humans.

When someone slams another group or religion, that is an insult to something holy and should not be tolerated. It is important to be vocal about conversation that is offensive. Say you are offended and why. When something is publicly offensive or comes from a place of authority, question it in a letter to the editor. Hold a meeting to discuss this with your congregation or group.

“**Faith**” is precisely that—**something that is embraced in theory or adopted without proof.** The great mysteries and religions are man’s way of explaining that which he doesn’t understand. Religion is a hypothesis, and act of faith. How do you prove God—by whatever name? It’s based on belief and faith and interpretation of scriptures considered holy. No belief or faith or person or group has the one superior or correct answer. Most deities are generous enough to embrace all peoples, even those considered “fringe.”

**Killing in the name of religion or of a god is just morally wrong and is not sanctioned by a god in any form.** The taking of a life is the taking of something holy. Followers of a faith are governed by guiding principles; every major faith, at their esoteric core, incorporates the golden rule in some form. “Treat others as you would like to be treated” is a common thread. Respect for self, others, life and land and all things holy, runs through most scriptures and is a guiding principle no matter the window-dressing.

**Earth is an island.** At the edge that island is the black and terrifying nothingness of space. We must learn to get along on this planet if we are to survive. Everything is interconnected and the web of life is immense and precious while intertwined in an intimacy that we are only now beginning to recognize. Thus we are all accountable to one another. Remind those who would divide instead of unify that the human is one species no matter the color, religion, location, circumstance, accident of birth or inherited religion.

**Respect the instruments of all religions whether it’s the building housing the faithful, the scriptures or holy book that is considered divinely inspired and prophetic.** Consider how inflammatory disparaging someone else’s instruments, traditions, ceremonies is and how you would feel being on the receiving end of that prejudice and hatred. Speak up about respecting all peoples and all faiths whether it suits you or not, in the name of freedom of religion.

**Fundamentalism in any faith is rigid and emotions run high among fundamentalists.** Fear and dependency are driving forces in fundamentalism. Understand that those who espouse it are motivated by fear and the rigidity is defense in the face of fear. Fundamentalists don’t embrace change. Hating or disdain will not help someone examine their own beliefs and behavior but will serve to reinforce the behavior and make it more rigid. Most people who adopt rigidity do not recognize their unconscious motives. Listening to reasoning and finding common ground is a better response than condemnation.

**Spend time with Muslims in your community and ask them what you can do to help.** Maybe hold a vigil or a public demonstration of solidarity with the faithful to show your support. Attend a service in a Mosque or other place of worship to foster understanding and invite them to your place of worship. Hold an interfaith dinner or event and invite people of other faiths and include Muslims.

**Do not be silent in the face of terrorism—any terrorism.** Harassment, ridicule, racism, name
calling, marginalization, violence, acts of cruelty have no place in civil society particularly in holy places. It is hypocritical to pretend to be against terrorism or terrorists while perpetrating your own brand of terrorism. Do not tolerate terrorism in any form including micro-aggressions. Be clear and be vocal about the intolerance. If the offense is in writing or in the media, write a letter to the editor or go to the comment section of the website to make your thoughts known. Counter bullying where you find it on social media. Let the Muslims in and around your community know you care, embrace and support them. Be visible.

**Educate self, others and your community about Islam.** Invite a speaker to give a sermon in your place of worship; request books for your library or buy and donate books that help with understanding about what Islam is; bring Islam up in a meeting and discuss how to approach prejudice in your community; practice zero tolerance in the face of intimidation or harassment.

**Keep and speak an open mind.** Remind those who would close their minds and hearts to others what irreversible damage has been done and what evil perpetrated in the world in the name of religion.

Compiled and written by Barbara Kaufmann
14 ways you can fight Islamophobia
by Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid

Islamophobia is real. You may have personally experienced it or know a family member, friend or acquaintance who has. This new racism must be made known and fought against. Here are a couple of ways to combat this phenomenon:

1. Remember the Prophet. The Prophet was subject to horrible insults and hate crimes in his lifetime. He remained steadfast, patient and tolerant in the face of this Islamophobia. We must model this same behavior. Good and Evil deeds are not alike. Requite evil with good, and he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend. But none will attain this save those who endure with fortitude and are greatly favored by God. (Quran 41: 34-35) Pray that God guides these people who mock the Deen and one of God’s Prophet.

2. Note that incidents of Islamophobia are not isolated. Whether it's threat of bombing Makkah, calling Islam evil, depicting the Prophet as a terrorist, disrespecting the Quran, discriminating against Muslims, profiling Hindus, Sikhs, or Latinos thinking they look like Muslims, torturing prisoners, bombing civilians, these are all signs of Islamophobia.

3. Also note that not all media or all non-Muslims support this type of insulting behavior. Many have been at the forefront of condemning torture, bombing and occupation. There are 75 million Americans who, despite all Islamophobic media, think positive about Islam and Muslims.

4. Equate racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. They all are fruits of the same tree of hate.

5. Start using the word Islamophobia to describe any kind of hate crime or speech against Islam and Muslims. Doing this will make the term uniform and eventually, an accepted part of the English language the way the term "anti-Semitism" is.
6. If you are involved in interfaith work, bring up the topic of Islamophobia at your meetings. Stress the urgency and need for people of all faiths to help address and condemn it and all other forms of intolerance publicly. If possible, get the organization to issue a public statement condemning Islamophobia in general, as well as in response to specific incidents like those mentioned above.

7. Sponsor reports on Islamophobia. Unless more documentation and yearly opinion surveys are conducted, people will continue to dismiss Islamophobia as a reality. So far, the UK is the only country which has officially commissioned a report on Islamophobia. The word has yet to become a part of American media.

8. Request your local library to purchase some of the latest books and articles on the phenomenon of Islamophobia. Some of these include Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy, Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Causes and Remedies and Combating Islamophobia depends on unlearning intolerance

9. Report any and every incident of Islamophobia you, your family or friends encounter. The FBI collects hate crime statistics. Report Islamophobia to them at your local FBI office. File a report with the Council on American-Islamic Relations. They issue an annual report on Muslim civil rights in the US. Also report the crime to your local police office.

10. If it’s an election year, make sure your local Congressman or Congresswoman who relies on your vote is aware of Islamophobia. Organize a delegation of Muslims in your constituency if you can and arrange to make a presentation on the topic, as well as a list of clear things you would like your Congressman or Congresswoman to do about Islamophobia if they want your vote.

11. For every incident of Islamophobia, write a letter to the editor and your local civil rights organization about it.

12. Organize a program at your local mosque or community center about the problem of Islamophobia today. Hold a brainstorming session as part of the program as well to discuss how to solve this problem.

13. Thank those who speak out or act against Islamophobia. A quick call, even leaving a message and/or a two-line email message are sufficient.

14. Make Dua that Allah guides those who hold Islamophobic views and practice Islamophobia. The Prophet made Dua for the Quraysh, asking for them to be guided because they were ignorant of what they were doing by committing Islamophobic acts and saying wrong things against Islam and the Prophet.

Avenging the Prophet Who Banned Revenge

by Abdul Malik Mujahid

"We have avenged the Prophet Mohammad," the gunmen reportedly shouted after killing 12 at the French magazine Charlie Hebdo, Wednesday. The publication is known for lampooning the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him.

Well. The Prophet banned revenge as he built his peace sanctuary in seventh-century Madinah, establishing instead the rule of law.

He never killed anyone. Only, after God's command to defend his peace sanctuary, under attack by the pagans of Makkah, did he pick up arms. These defensive battles lasted a total of six days in his life and the number of dead from both sides was less than 300.

Peace was his goal, which he achieved by developing alliances between Madinah's Pagans, Jews, and Christians.

Violent extremists who accuse others of disrespect, then consider this a license to kill have nothing to do with the Islam taught by the Prophet they claim to be avenging. They have nothing to do with the message of forgiveness and mercy which Allah revealed to the Prophet; nothing to do with the law and order the Prophet established and upheld, which led to him being considered one of the world's greatest lawgivers by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Muslim love for Prophet Muhammad is unquestionable. God's peace and blessings be upon him. It does hurt us when people are abusive towards the Prophet.
It is, however, the ignorant, who do not know the loving path of mercy and forgiveness taught by the Prophet; they are turning into violent extremists and committing crimes in his name.

This is not love. This is hate.

The Prophet would be horrified at what is being done in his name to avenge disrespect to his honor. The pagans of Makkah tortured the Prophet and his followers. He did not retaliate. He preferred to move away, first encouraging migration to Abyssinia, which was ruled by what he described as a “just king”, who was a Christian, Najashi or Negus.

When some tribes agreed, he established the peace sanctuary in Madinah via constitution and consensus. He built a society that promoted inclusiveness, freedom, rule of law, and peace.

Respect for other faiths was a key element of Madinah society. Muslims, are required to believe in all the revealed books, as well as all His Prophets and Messengers. We are also ordered to never insult the cherished beliefs of others, for humor or in retaliatory anger. This is why even today, throughout the Muslim world, you will not find newspapers being disrespectful of other religions. The terrorists are not the norm. They are the exception.

Muslims in France, America, and around the world are sick of terrorists perpetuating violence that is a violation of their faith in their name. We are against war and hate. We are also tired of the abuse of freedom of speech to spew hatred, mistrust, fear, and misunderstanding.

War, terrorism, and Islamophobia are a nexus, connected to each other and condemnable. They feed off of each other, perpetuating violence and fear. We Muslims condemn terrorism, war as well as hate. We must strive against them all.

Source: Huffington Post
Sharia and the Lives of Muslim Americans

By Abdul Malik Mujahid

You might have seen a government-required sign at a McDonald's restroom telling employees to wash their hands. Muslims do this as a part of living their faith, which is called sharia in Arabic. The Prophet Muhammad also encouraged Muslims to wash their hands before and after eating. Muslim parents raise their children on many such manners. The first chapter in almost all books on sharia is about morals and manners of cleanliness, which Prophet Muhammad said is half of the faith. God's peace and blessings be upon him.

When Muslims begin anything they say, "in the name of God." -- that is sharia. When they greet each other, they smile and say, "Assalamu Alaikum" (peace be with you) -- that is sharia. Similarly, when Muslims take short breaks five times a day to pray, this is another example of practicing sharia. Prayer is normally the second chapter in almost all books about sharia.

Sharia does not present a comprehensive list of pure foods and drinks, although it prohibits ten or twelve things and declares everything else to be Halal or lawful to consume. If Muslims cannot find Halal food, they often eat vegetarian or kosher food. This is all sharia.

When you see a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf and a loose dress, or a Muslim man with a head covering or beard, they are likely following sharia manners of dress.

When in a marriage sermon you hear the Quran recited about piety, loyalty to each other, and God's advice for clear communication between spouses, that is a sharia wedding.

Muslims often avoid taking out mortgages due to the sharia prohibition on Riba (usury/interest). This has led to the establishment of the worldwide Islamic financial industry and Dow Jones Islamic Market Indexes. The latter select companies that don't deal in weapons, pornography, gambling, tobacco, or
alcohol, etc. These investments are similar to 30 other "faith-based" investment options, like the Catholic Values Index. These are examples of the practice of sharia in the realm of business.

All of the above are real-life examples of the totality of sharia as practiced by the observant among the close to six million Muslims in America and the 3,000 formal Muslim congregations in America. Muslim Americans include doctors, entrepreneurs, professors, cab drivers, and the geek fixing your computer.

Their service to their communities is also an example of practicing sharia.

The Sharia That Muslim Americans Don't Practice

There are parts of sharia that Muslim Americans don't implement in their daily lives.

Since Muslims ran a civilization for over a thousand years, they naturally developed a body of laws to deal with governing society. These laws deal with issues ranging from fighting neighborhood crime to international laws of war and peace.

Muslim Americans don't practice these laws since they deal with the realm of government and state. Sharia emphasizes that the rule of law in a society must be implemented by the state. It considers vigilantism a major crime and a sin. Therefore, sharia prohibits Muslims from practicing this part of Islam on an individual basis.

The Quran, like the Old Testament, is not limited to only the Ten Commandments, all of which except for the commandment to keep the Sabbath are to be found in parallel statements in the Quran. Like the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy), it ordains punishments for serious crimes. Unfortunately, it is this penal law that many people wrongly think is exclusively sharia. This is incorrect.

It is true that Islamic criminal law has been at times implemented harshly, and even wrongly, by some Muslims. Such an application of Islamic criminal law is void of God's mercy, which is considered His primary attribute in Islam. However, those nations or groups that do this do not speak for all Muslims, nor do they speak for the prophet of mercy, Prophet Muhammad, who would turn his face away when a person confessed his or her crimes. This was to give them room for repentance and forgiveness.

About five countries among the 56 Muslim nations worldwide implement Islamic criminal laws. Virtually none of them implement sharia in its totality in all spheres of life. Their laws are a combination of local custom and precedent in that particular country, as well as remnants of laws brought by European colonial powers that ruled those countries.

The primary purpose of sharia is to preserve life and order in society, not to incarcerate and punish. However, many in the Muslim world who are sick and tired of corruption and injustice demand that the criminal laws of Islam be implemented in their countries. However, this is not what Muslims in America are demanding. Their practice of sharia is limited to the personal sphere.

Sharia Is Neither One Nor Static

Sharia is not one monolithic body or a codified book of comprehensive law.
Sharia is based on the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, but not all of sharia is God’s word. A good part of sharia is made up of human contributions. There are literally hundreds and thousands of books written in the last 1,400 years, in multiple languages in places as diverse as Tim

**Sharia Continues To Evolve**

A recent development, for example, is a sharia discipline called Islamic Economics and Finance. It now commands a trillion dollar market, thousands of scholarly works, graduate programs, and the establishment of sharia boards at hundreds of Muslim and non-Muslim owned banks. This exercise in sharia is essentially a human contribution of the last 50 years, aiming to offer Muslims guidance on how to invest and conduct their financial transactions in a modern economy in line with their principles as believers.

Throughout history, Islam has cherished debates. An important early Islamic debate that continues today was between traditionalists and rationalists over whether the universal principles of God’s law were to be known by revelation or reason or both. These debates have resulted in dozens of schools of thought in Islam.

**Is Sharia A Threat To America?**

When some American pundits call sharia, "a growing threat to the United States," Muslim Americans wonder what in the world are they talking about. sharia is overwhelmingly concerned with personal religious observance, not with constitutions and laws. All observant Muslims practice sharia. Defining sharia as a threat, therefore, is the same thing as saying that all observant Muslims are a threat. Unfortunately, three U.S. states have passed anti-sharia laws, and 18 others are actively considering bills against sharia. Some politicians are now looking to pass a federal law against sharia. Anti-sharia bills are a part of a well-funded campaign of fear-mongering and intolerance, not unlike previous campaigns in America against Catholics and Jews.

To understand sharia is to understand Islam. Criminalizing sharia will criminalize the practice of Islam in America. Sharia mandates that Muslims respect the law of the land. It is also against sharia to impose sharia on anyone. Muslim Americans are subject to the same laws and constitution as any other American. Sharia is in some ways similar to the Jewish halacha law or Catholic Canon Law, with similar historic roots but far less complex. Unlike Jewish Halacha law which is practiced in Jewish American courts called Beth Din, there is no Muslim court system in the United States, nor is the Muslim community demanding this.

Source: Huffington Post
Speaking Out and Taking Action

Local Communities Affirm Solidarity with Muslim Neighbors

Representatives of Columbus, Ohio’s Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities gathered at First Congregational Church in Columbus on December 10, 2015 to denounce GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump’s anti-Muslims remarks. – Photo: First Congregational Church, Facebook

The Most Important Story Major Media Missed
by Paul Chaffee

Last month, December 2015, in the wake of terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, with Donald Trump threatening to close American borders to Muslims, and increasing incidents of Islamophobic violence, the major media barely noticed one of the most important stories.

Across this land dozens, and now hundreds of communities spontaneously have generated interfaith gatherings to stand against the violence and sour rhetoric and to affirm their friendship with Muslim brothers and sisters in their local communities.

You didn’t read about most of the following stories in major media. But if you surveyed local, regional papers and local TV news coverage, along with religious and interreligious newsletters, these gatherings piled up, peaking in mid-December but still going strong weeks later with new programs in dozens of different communities. Numerous communities noted that standing in solidarity with each other is nothing new – and that the huge wave of interfaith gatherings is simply a measured response to this month’s unfortunate news. I decided to spend some time identifying these stories:
In Carson, California, near San Bernardino, the City Council opened its December 15 meeting by inviting an imam, a rabbi, and a pastor to offer prayers of concern for those who lost family members in the San Bernardino tragedy as well as prayers of appreciation for the first-responders.

In Atlantic City, New Jersey leaders from government, law enforcement, and religious communities not only offered a broadside against Islamophobia from City Hall but called out Donald Trump and Ben Carson for adding fuel to the fire: “We deplore your statements about Muslims. We are against racism and bigotry. We stand united with all Americans.” This became a theme in many of the events.

In Logan, Utah half a dozen religious groups, including the Latter Day Saints Student Association, joined to visit the Logan Islamic Center to show their friendship and solidarity with the Muslims in their community. Bonnie Glass-Coffin, who helped promote the visit, said, “We want to serve the common good, which is not being served by the current political rhetoric. There are a lot of people who have been hurt by it. So we’re coming together to show support.”

Folks in Denver, Colorado were particularly creative, gathering more than than 200 people from a variety of religious traditions at a mosque for an evening of praying, lighting candles, making greeting cards and hanging ribbons in the name of peace and unity for all.

In Cincinnati, Ohio women clergy from eight different religions organized an outdoor prayer meeting to unite women of different faiths in condemning hatred and intolerance. A press release said “We come together to remind ourselves and the nation that we are one. We are interconnected circles of humanity. Our ethical commitment is to all-American values such as pluralism, mutuality, religious freedom, and respect.”

A downtown outdoor rally was organized in Bloomington, Indiana by the anti-discrimination group Not In Our Town to counter Islamophobia and to undercut fear. Planner Glen Becker said “Fear is so powerful ... We believe love is more powerful than fear.” The purpose of the rally was to show “our Islamic brothers and sisters” that “this community is a safe, welcoming place.”

In Rosedale, outside of Baltimore, Maryland leaders and their followers from different faiths gathered at a local mosque for an educational interfaith vigil, a time to get acquainted and to learn about each other’s traditions.

In Las Vegas, Nevada more than 200 members from Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Episcopal, Sikh, Baha’i, Catholic, Buddhist and Christian Science traditions gathered at a mosque for an interfaith prayer vigil.

In Louisville, Kentucky Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said “Americans must resist the hatred and suspicion that leads to policies of discrimination.” He went on to say, “When we fail to see the difference between our enemies and people of good will, we lose a part of who we are as people of faith.”

In Washington DC, Vice President Joe Biden joined theologians and clerics from different religions at Georgetown University to decry the anti-Muslim rhetoric of the day. “Everyone is welcome here in America,” Biden said, noting that those who choose to immigrate to the United States are often those with the greatest faith and courage.

I quit collecting the notices when I got to 25, but daily stories keep coming about these friendship gatherings. They’ve arrived from Tampa, Columbus, Washington Township (NJ), Baltimore, Los Angeles.
Miami, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Arlington, Fort Wayne, Augusta (GA), Silver Spring (MD), Santa Cruz, Berkeley, Grand Rapids, and so many more communities.

More Wisdom in the People than in the Frightening Headlines

Meanwhile good news came from pollsters. New research from the Pew Research Center suggests that the public rejects by a wide margin the idea of holding U.S. Muslims to increased scrutiny because of their religion. About six-in-ten Americans (61%) say Muslims living in the United States should not be subject to additional scrutiny solely because of their religion. It remains that 32% say Muslims should be subject to more scrutiny than people in other religious groups. Thirty-two percent is a tremendous burden for any group to bear, but it is not monolithic, and other traditions have faced similar trials and come through shining.

Saud Inan, a self-described Muslim American Activist, recently published “6 Ways Interfaith Partners can Stand with Muslims.” It’s a splendid primer for those who have met ‘the other’ and want some guidance for working together towards a healthy interfaith culture, locally and globally.

Finally, if you hear anyone still asking ‘Why don’t good Muslims stand up and condemn terrorism?’ – refer them to the story of 70,000 imams. Meeting in central India recently, they issued a fatwa, a theological condemnation, against terrorist organizations, including the Taliban, al Qaeda, and Daesh, the militant group that calls itself the Islamic State. I couldn’t find a single reference to this remarkable level of agreement in the American press, but Huffington Post Australia carried the story.


Paul Chaffee is publisher and editor of The Interfaith Observer (TIO), a monthly internet magazine promoting healthy interfaith culture which began in September 2011. He was the founding executive director of the Interfaith Center at the Presidio, where he served for 17 years. He sat on United Religions Initiative’s original Board of Directors for six years, was a trustee of the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) for ten, and served as a Parliament Ambassador for the Parliament of the World’s Religions for three.
Do Desperate Times Call for Desperate Measures
Healing Our Perceptions of ‘the other’

by Reed Price

In the song “Boy in the Bubble,” Paul Simon sings “these are the days of miracle and wonder.” And indeed they are, replete with powerful technology that effectively shrinks time and space, medical prowess that extends and improves lives and a staggering scientific understanding of our universe — from the minute to the magnificent.

But, as Simon also sings, these are the days of “the bomb in the baby carriage,” camo-clad couples firing fusillades, and dictators and military extremists forcing refugees to flee their homelands.

How to respond? Is it any wonder we mostly meet these spasms of violence with bigoted bombast and simple solutions — our animal brains are quick to stereotype and differentiate in an anxious effort to seek short-term safety. We are not unlike the orcas that avoided Penn Cove for nearly 45 years after seven young whales were captured there in the early 1970s. Like us now, the orcas then were confused; they mistook a symptom (dangerous coves where their cousins were entrapped) for a cause (commercially motivated humans who could seek them out anywhere).
Are we making that same mistake when faced with spasms of violence that sear our screens? Are the perpetrators of senseless violence the cause or are they the symptom of a deeper issue: a cultural unrest that killing the killers will not cure?

It may be helpful to compare our global society to a person: what if the violence that is poisoning our world is not so much an incarnation of evil as a species self-injury?

Therapists tell us that when an individual compulsively engages in self-harm, it’s often the result of intense anger and frustration fused with extreme impatience to make that anger and frustration go away.

Many people who self-harm describe “being at war” with their bodies. Self-harming is not suicidal; it’s a twisted attempt at self-soothing.

Further, though self-injury is an impulsive act, it’s usually not without preparation. People who self-damage anticipate the action and imagine how to accomplish it wherever they might be – at home, at school, at work. (When I read that the California couple who opened fire in San Bernardino died with a significant cache of weapons and ammo left behind, I thought they must have been compulsively preparing and impulsively acting.)

So what’s the treatment for dysphoria — personal or cultural?

**Acceptance, Compassion and Communication**

First, radical acceptance. We need to acknowledge our situation; we need to — in Twelve-Step parlance — “conduct a fearless and searching inventory” of ourselves. As the Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book spells it out, “we searched out the flaws in our makeup which caused our failure.” Among those flaws in our global body: those in power often abuse that power to selfish advantage; we are inclined to make decisions based on short-term rather than long-term consequences; and we can easily abandon moral principle when faced with physical threat.

Second, cultivate compassion. Seek to treat each other as we wish to be treated ourselves. The implications of this ancient cross-faith directive — the Golden Rule — are discomforting but necessary. Can we still, from our fear/confusion/anger, seek out our enemies’ humanity? Rather than fixating on whether an assailant is “crazy” or “a terrorist,” can we consider that he or she may be a profoundly wounded individual whose actions may be borne out of intense anger and frustration? Can we allow that the desire to resort to violence is universal (look how quickly France and the U.K. unleashed bombs on ISIS after the Paris attacks, or how rapidly the U.S. waged war following Sept. 11, 2001) — and recognize that violence always begets more violence?

Third, communication. Eboo Patel, president of Interfaith Youth Core, says that while we know there are fundamental things we disagree about, we should seek to identify fundamental things on which we agree. Food and safety, for starters. We should build on those. And we commit to listening deeply to those we see as enemies: recognize they can teach us a lot.

There are heartening examples of the movement towards this kind of cultural health — specifically seeing refugees as common victims of violence, not the enemies themselves. Here are two from...
where I live: the community gathering in support of Muslim Americans at the Japanese Exclusion Memorial on Monday, December 14; and expressing commitments to help Syrian refugees at this month’s Bainbridge Island/North Kitsap Interfaith Council meeting here in northwestern Washington state.

If we can, even for a moment, silence our fears, we may gain perspective and open an avenue for hope. As Simon concludes his song, “[imagine] the way we look to a distant constellation/That’s dying in the corner of the sky/These are the days of miracle and wonder/And don’t cry baby, don’t cry.”

Source: The Interfaith Observer:

**Reed Price** is a cross-media content consultant whose firm, @rveep, helps nonprofits and for-purpose organizations tell their stories in text, image and video. A former national journalist, Reed also has extensive professional experience in social media. Among his clients: The Charter for Compassion International, Island Volunteer Caregivers, and the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. He’s the communications coordinator for the Bainbridge Island/North Kitsap Interfaith Council in Washington state and is a longtime member of Eagle Harbor Congregational Church (UCC) on Bainbridge Island. He admires the music of Leonard Cohen, the art of Wassily Kandinsky and the reflections of Henri Fredric Amiel. For more information, visit rveep.com.
by Sahar Taman

Since President Obama’s December 6th message from the Oval Office in response to the violence in San Bernardino, most American Muslims are relieved to hear that our president and our government stand against unprecedented Islamophobia. In recent weeks there is an outpouring of solidarity with Muslims from thousands of religious institutions, organizations and community groups and on social media. A coalition of groups, including SARAH, the Spiritual and Religious Alliance for Hope, and Charter for Compassion, even created an Islamophobia guide.

Yet, even with this support, I see that the American Muslim community is tired. We are tired of seeing the same horrors, the fearmongering of the media, explaining our religion, and tired of the social media debates about whether we need to apologize while feeling that we need to be more vigilant than ever in protecting our families. We must overcome the tiredness as the president has called on us.

In his address, beyond the reminder that Muslims are part of America, Mr. Obama also asked American Muslims to take action:

*Muslim leaders here and around the globe have to continue working with us to decisively and unequivocally reject the hateful ideology that groups like ISIL and al Qaeda promote; to speak out*
against not just acts of violence, but also those interpretations of Islam that are incompatible with the values of religious tolerance, mutual respect, and human dignity.

If we are going to accept the president’s challenge, this means we must reject hateful ideology and speak out against misinterpretations of Islam within our own community first. We must start with our inner circles and even ourselves.

We may also need to examine possible causes of these ideologies. It is impossible to fully understand the reasons that individuals are pulled towards terrorism and violence, and any justification is inexcusable. However, radicalization and extremism can be based on certain perceptions of history and events which morph into a warped ideology.

We know that for many Muslims there is a shared narrative that Muslims throughout modern history and all over the world have been dealt with great injustice and that the oppression is ongoing for many groups. Look at the plight of the Palestinians, the Rohingya, and now the Syrians. Many Muslims think the end of the injustice is nowhere in sight. The field of post-colonial studies attests to the facts and this perspective of history.

There is another part of this collective consciousness that sees everything as a conspiracy against Muslims; leaders in Muslim majority countries are Western puppets and even that the West is at war with Islam itself. We know not many Muslims believe in the conspiracy theories. As American Muslims, and likely Muslims elsewhere, we feel we have power and privilege to be able to constructively contribute to the future, for Muslims and for the world.

Yet, in the current crisis, there is a thin sector in our communities who are fear struck and see that Muslims face only insurmountable injustice. This fear can turn into anger and then extreme ideology, and lead to violence. This path to radicalization is not the answer to Islam’s future.

For those of us looking for a better future for Muslims, we realize that we, the American Muslims, are part of the solution and we can reach out. It is in our hands to prevent extremist thinking by tackling the problems straight on.

Here are ten actions I believe American Muslims can take to reach out to their wider communities in solidarity with peace and justice for all American.

1) Start talking to your older aunt or uncle or relative who may have simple views of the world and sees things as black and white, Muslim or non-Muslim, halal or haram. You know who I mean; there are many such people around us. Engage them in a discussion about how the ummah, the worldwide Muslim community, has a responsibility to be engaged and to give back. Who knows? Perhaps together you might redefine the idea of the ummah to mean all of humanity!

2) Look around for those in our communities who are alienating themselves and starting to move away. Perhaps their ideas have started to become rigid and you are a bit uncomfortable. Instead of letting them go, engage them more. If you find them in the mosque, spend time talking after prayer. Ask them what they are reading and where they are getting information about Islam. Engagement and dialogue can go far in making things clearer.
3) If some of your Facebook friends are posting exclusively about how Islam is under attack from the West, or if they are not empathetic in acknowledging how others are feeling about the violent acts, don't unfriend them! Keep them connected. Share your views and ask them to explain theirs. Keep engaged in positive ways. For that matter don't unfriend your social media contacts who are Muslim bashing. If you continue to show kindness you may get them to realize they are being small-minded bullies.

4) Reach out to people in the Muslim community who are in need, especially those struggling to educate their children. We know there are many families struggling, not only with making a living, but with moving through the maze of our educational system. There are families who do not have access to the Internet that most school work requires. Volunteer and help them set it up. Teach their children how. Mentor their child who is struggling to understand not only homework, but what papers his parents need to sign and how to communicate what happens in American schools. Ask parents if you can talk to their child's teachers and set up meetings where you can be the liaison. That young Muslim student may be feeling alienated in school and your outreach to them can keep her on track.

5) Teach English to our Muslim brothers and sisters. We all know there are many illiterate adults in our communities. It's amazing how you may find people who have memorized the Qur'an, interpret it, but cannot read a word of Arabic, or any language. Stop pitying or patronizing those who don't have an education! It's usually not their fault. If you can't volunteer yourself, connect the learner -- and this usually means making the call -- with the amazing adult literacy programs in American communities.

6) Reach out to Muslim youth who do not identify as Muslims. These young people may not be interested in religion and religious knowledge at this time in their lives, but they generally have some kind of affiliation with Islam -- perhaps their name? They too may be feeling the heat of Muslim-bashing and may need some guidance or just a friend. Fareed Zakaria, CNN media personality who explains that his views on faith are complicated -- "somewhere between deism and agnosticism," recently identified himself as a Muslim in a Washington Post essay, because he is appalled by Donald Trump.

7) There are all kinds of other Muslims you can reach to. They are many reverts to Islam (among them single women), new to the Muslim community who do not have families of their own. I have heard many say they are alone in learning Islam and are excluded because of ethnocentric groupings that our communities sometimes tend to create. There is danger for people who can become disenfranchised and tune into all kinds of misinterpretations of Islam. Invite them to coffee. They are usually interesting people with an amazing story and sometimes their knowledge of Islam is of great depth.

8) Become a public speaker. Among the greatest gifts is your voice. We are looking for spokeswomen, writers -- Muslims who can talk to the rest of the American public. If you are not an expert on religion, then focus on one area and become knowledgeable in that. Of course, Islam is vast, but we don't need scholars now. Media outlets, especially in small communities in the U.S. are desperately looking for Muslims to speak and there is a void. If you have any experience presenting or teaching in your work or school, you can speak as a representative of the American Muslim community. Perhaps you can change the story and dispel the myths. Wouldn't it be great if we stopped talking about Arabs and Muslims in the same breath? Arabs are only 20% of the Muslims and many of our Arab brothers and sisters are Christians. Let's stop being Arab-centric! Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him (PBUH), said:

There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor for a non-Arab over an Arab. Neither is the white superior over the black, nor is the black superior over the white -- except by piety.
See how easy it can be? Lay people like me can quote from the hadith, the sayings of the Prophet, to make a point! For that matter, wouldn't it be wonderful if we referred to the terrorists as TIIS, the Terrorists in Iraq and Syria, since they are neither Islamic nor a state. And if you can get the media to stop talking nonsense of the existence of caliphate, it would be miraculous! Please, you are needed!

An excellent resource is Islamic Network Group, whose mission is "educating for cultural literacy and mutual respect." ING has a speaker's training program. How about becoming a volunteer at the mosque. You know the 20% of the volunteers that are doing 80% of the work? Join them.

9) Outreach to other Americans. Support your local community, go to rallies, vigils, interfaith prayer meetings, and support gun control advocates. There are a million things Muslim Americans need to do to reach out to other U.S. citizens. Right now we are looking for warm bodies. Too often there are interfaith events which churches, synagogues and community groups organize in solidarity with Muslims, and only a few Muslims, if any, show up. The organizers of these events are gracious, giving people who are in need of our help.

10) Our American Muslim organizations need to add diversity and that can be you. These groups are doing their best in these circumstances but there is room for improvement. Let's start with: #NoMoreAllMalePanels! #NoMoreOnlyMaleSpeakers! We need women of all kinds, including those homemakers who may think they do not have much to offer. We need new faces and the leaders of these organizations need to make room and mentor young people. Push your organization to do that - call them! Let us all take on President Obama's call. Just do it.

Source: Huffington Post:

Sahar Taman was awarded the 2010 National Award for Citizen Diplomacy from the U.S. Center for Citizen Diplomacy and was Project Director for the Religion and Society Dialogue Program at the National Peace Foundation with its partner on the program; the Islamic Society of North America. She currently enjoys mentoring youth around the world through her work on the Kennedy-Lugar YES Program.
Faced With Fear, A Muslim Woman Makes a Stand

The conversation was edifying and rewarding, Haydar says — but the doughnuts weren’t bad, either.

Courtesy of Mona Haydar

NPR Interview

Mona Haydar is a Muslim — and she wants to talk about it.

So much so, in fact, that she set up a stand outside a library in Cambridge, Mass., with a big sign reading "Ask a Muslim." Along with a free cup of coffee and a doughnut, Haydar offered passersby an opportunity for conversation.

She says the idea occurred to her husband, Sebastian, and her over dinner one evening. As they were eating, she says, Sebastian remarked: "What if we did something kind of crazy?"

"He had seen this segment on This American Life, where a young Iraqi man had done 'Ask an Iraqi,' " Haydar tells NPR’s Carrie Kahn. "And so [Sebastian] was like, 'Why haven't we thought of this before? Why don't we get out and talk to people?'

"So, we did it," Haydar says.
After the day was done, she posted a summary to Facebook — a post which has now garnered more than 11,000 likes and the attention of several different media organizations.

"We weren't out there that long today but the take away was clear: Keep your heads held high, dear Muslim family," she wrote in that post. "There is an overwhelming amount of love and so remember this post when you are faced with bigotry and hatred towards you or your faith.

"Remember that you have supporters too."

Interview Highlights

On the reactions of those she met
Honestly, most of the people didn't ask questions. To be totally frank with you, people just wanted to say hey and connect and say, "Hey, I really love what you're doing" and "Thank you for doing this" and a lot of folks were apologizing for things that are happening in the world right now, for all the discrimination that Muslims are facing in the world, especially in America.

On what she expected going into it
Initially, I thought I was going to get a lot of negativity, we were going to face a lot of Islamophobia. And I was going into it with that mindset.

Then I decided, you know what, I really can't do this if I'm expecting people to be negative. Because I'm not a negative person. I'm a super bubbly, happy person. I'm really friendly, I'm really nice, I'm really smiley; why should I expect anything less from other folks? ...

People expect me to be some kind of boogeyman — so, I was like, I can't go into it with that kind of mindset. So I didn't prepare, I didn't have expectations of what people would bring. Honestly, I was really happily surprised with what happened. Because I went in with a super open heart, with a super open mind, and just let happen what was going to happen.

On whether she'll do it again
I really hope so. We're planning to do it again soon, and we look forward to it. You know, we just had such great encounters with folks.

Specifically, there was this one gay couple that came up, and we ended up just talking about what any two couples talk about. They've been married 22 years. Me and my husband, we've only been together four. ...They just had a lot of advice for us.

I just really look forward to more encounters like that. Actually, one of the men ended up being Muslim. That was just a really funny and amazing experience. And I want more of that in my life — so yeah, I'm going to do it again.

Engineer Turned Cabbie Helps New Refugees Find Their Way

Shekhey helps a child with homework at the after-school program. Shekhey says he and his staff aim to help refugees feel at home. "We are like soldiers," he says. "We go do whatever's needed. No time sheets, no nothing. Just go."

NPR

This story is part of an occasional series about individuals who don't have much money or power but do have a big impact on their communities.

Almost 70,000 refugees — victims of war, hardship and persecution — are allowed into the U.S. each year. But settling into their new homes can be a challenge, from learning English to figuring out how to turn on the dishwasher.

Omar Shekhey says he's there to help. The Somali-American drives a cab at night, but during the day, he runs the nonprofit Somali American Community Center, based in Clarkston, GA.

Clarkston, a small town outside of Atlanta, is sometimes called the "Ellis Island of the South." Several thousand refugees live there, resettled by the U.S. government from Somalia, Burma, Bhutan, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo and other hot spots around the world.

Shekhey and his small staff pick up where the resettlement agencies leave off, he says, helping refugees feel at home. "We are like soldiers. We go do whatever's needed. No time sheets, no nothing. Just go." And Shekhey, 55, seems to go nonstop, taking phone calls about potential jobs for refugees, helping people with government forms or organizing a community dinner between refugees and local Jewish
teens. There's a steady stream of people seeking help at the center, a small office tucked in a strip mall with shops like Al Muhajaba Clothing Store and Halal Pizza and Cafe.

When he's not behind his desk, Shekhey is behind the steering wheel of his taxicab. He drives the yellow minivan at night and on weekends to earn extra money, which he often gives to refugees to help them with food, clothing or paying a bill.

During the day, he uses the cab almost like a company car. He ferries about refugees who have no other transportation, or picks up a boy from school to help out his working mother. Shekhey also makes frequent house calls, checking up on refugee families to see if they need any help.

Shekhey says many of the refugees are single mothers. Their husbands were killed in wars or other violence. Most of the families spent years, even decades, in refugee camps before coming to America and have lost everything. Shekhey says they're now trying to build new lives, working at nearby chicken-processing plants and factories.

"It's a tough life, but at the end of day they are better off [than] where they were," he says. "They were in a camp where they didn't have [a] future for their kids. So, this is the American dream. You have to work for everything, and communities have to help each other. That's the way we build dreams."

Shekhey's dream was to be an engineer. He came to the U.S. from Somalia in the early 1980s to earn a degree at Georgia Tech. He then became a U.S. citizen. But when the Somali civil war broke out in the 1990s, his focus changed, he says, and he brought his parents to the United States to live with him. His mother told him that she and his father were terrified every time he left the house, because they were helpless without him.

"That kind of touched me," he says. "I knew that there were families like mine who didn't have a son like me."

So Shekhey gave up his engineering career and started the community center. First he used up all his savings; now he gets some government grants.

"Omar and his staff and what they've accomplished is just very inspiring," says Lexie Linger, community engagement coordinator at New American Pathways, a nonprofit refugee resettlement agency in Georgia.

Shekhey is a tall, gentle man, who often seems to be on the edge of exhaustion. He says many of the refugees get discouraged. Some think that he should just be writing checks to them from the grants he receives, he says. He has to explain that's not how things work in America.

The biggest obstacle refugees face isn't language or poverty, he says, but their own unrealistic expectations. "Expectation that America is a perfect nation," he says. "But ... it's not heaven. It's a [bumpy] road. Everything, you have to work for it."

Shekhey sees it as his job to help them over the bumps.

Every day, Shekhey picks up refugee children at their apartments to take them to the center's after-school program. At one stop, a worried-looking father approaches the taxi with some papers in his hand; people are constantly stopping Shekhey to ask for help.
The man speaks Somali and is confused by a letter he just received. Shekhey explains that it's about food stamps, and that the government needs more information or the family's benefits will be cut off.

Shekhey says it's the adults who have the hardest time adjusting, not the kids. The children in his cab arrived from Africa less than a year ago. The little girls wear brightly colored head scarves, or hijabs. One boy has plastic sandals on, even though it's freezing outside. But when they start singing "Let It Go" from the Disney movie Frozen, they sound like kids in the backseat of any American car.

Shekhey says he's very proud of these kids. He and his staff will spend the next two hours helping them with their English-language homework, something their parents aren't able to do.

"This is beautiful. This is what it's all about. Helping these kids," says Shekhey. "They're going to finish high school before you know it."

Another Helping Hand In Clarkston

Omar Shekhey is not the only Somali immigrant helping refugees in Clarkston. Amina Osman, known around town as "Mama Amina," can be found almost daily outside a local grocery store. She calls the spot her "office," and offers advice to the many refugees who come by.
"I love to do community, to listen and understand," says Osman, 64. "Many people are new in America and they are confused. They don't know English."

So she helps them navigate their new surroundings, connecting them with clothes, jobs or transportation. The day we met, she took an Ethiopian family of three to a job orientation session at the local community center. The family had recently arrived from a refugee camp in Kenya. Osman says they didn't even have a blanket to keep them warm when they came — so she got them one.

Osman knows how difficult it can be for refugees. She came to the U.S. in 2009 after 17 years in Kenya and Burundi. She went there from Somalia after her entire family — including her 10 children — was killed during that country's civil war.

Osman was also shot, stabbed and left for dead, but says she was saved by a humanitarian worker who noticed she had a pulse when her body was brought to the morgue.

She says she helps others now, because she can't help her own family. "All my neighbors, they're like my children," she says. "I could live for my family, but today, I don't have them."

Linger says groups like hers rely on people like Shekhey to help refugees integrate into the community. Sometimes refugees prefer getting help from someone who speaks their language or knows firsthand how difficult it can be to feel at home in a new country, she says.

Source: National Public Radio (NPR):
http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/04/01/392767067/engineer-turned-cabbie-helps-new-refugees-find-their-way
As Muslim women, we actually ask you not to wear the hijab in the name of interfaith solidarity

By Asra Q. Nomani and Hala Arafa

Last week, three female religious leaders — a Jewish rabbi, an Episcopal vicar and a Unitarian reverend — and a male imam, or Muslim prayer leader, walked into the sacred space in front of the ornately-tiled minbar, or pulpit, at the Khadeeja Islamic Center in West Valley City, Utah. The women were smiling widely, their hair covered with swaths of bright scarves, to support “Wear a Hijab” day.

The Salt Lake Tribune published a photo of fresh-faced teenage girls, who were not Muslim, in the audience at the mosque, their hair covered with long scarves. KSL TV later reported: “The hijab — or headscarf — is a symbol of modesty and dignity. When Muslim women wear headscarves, they are readily identified as followers of Islam.”

[Do Muslims and Christians worship the same god? College suspends professor who said yes.]

For us, as mainstream Muslim women, born in Egypt and India, the spectacle at the mosque was a painful reminder of the well-financed effort by conservative Muslims to dominate modern Muslim societies. This modern-day movement spreads an ideology of political Islam, called “Islamism,” enlisting well-intentioned interfaith do-gooders and the media into promoting the idea that “hijab” is a virtual
“sixth pillar” of Islam, after the traditional “five pillars” of the shahada (or proclamation of faith), prayer, fasting, charity and pilgrimage.

We reject this interpretation that the “hijab” is merely a symbol of modesty and dignity adopted by faithful female followers of Islam.

This modern-day movement, codified by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Taliban Afghanistan and the Islamic State, has erroneously made the Arabic word hijab synonymous with “headscarf.” This conflation of hijab with the secular word headscarf is misleading. “Hijab” literally means “curtain” in Arabic. It also means “hiding,” “obstructing” and “isolating” someone or something. It is never used in the Koran to mean headscarf.

In colloquial Arabic, the word for “headscarf” is tarha. In classical Arabic, “head” is al-ra’as and cover is gheta’a. No matter what formula you use, “hijab” never means headscarf. The media must stop spreading this misleading interpretation.

Born in the 1960s into conservative but open-minded families (Hala in Egypt and Asra in India), we grew up without an edict that we had to cover our hair. But, starting in the 1980s, following the 1979 Iranian revolution of the minority Shiite sect and the rise of well-funded Saudi clerics from the majority Sunni sect, we have been bullied in an attempt to get us to cover our hair from men and boys. Women and girls, who are sometimes called “enforce-hers” and “Muslim mean girls,” take it a step further by even making fun of women whom they perceive as wearing the hijab inappropriately, referring to “hijabis” in skinny jeans as “ho-jabis,” using the indelicate term for “whores.”

But in interpretations from the 7th century to today, theologians, from the late Moroccan scholar Fatima Mernissi to UCLA’s Khaled Abou El Fadl, and Harvard’s Leila Ahmed, Egypt’s Zaki Badawi, Iraq’s Abdullah al Judai and Pakistan’s Javaid Ghamidi, have clearly established that Muslim women are not required to cover their hair.

Challenging the hijab
To us, the “hijab” is a symbol of an interpretation of Islam we reject that believes that women are a sexual distraction to men, who are weak, and thus must not be tempted by the sight of our hair. We don’t buy it. This ideology promotes a social attitude that absolves men of sexually harassing women and puts the onus on the victim to protect herself by covering up.

The new Muslim Reform Movement, a global network of leaders, advocating for human rights, peace and secular governance, supports the right of Muslim women to wear — or not wear — the headscarf. Unfortunately, the idea of “hijab” as a mandatory headscarf is promulgated by naïve efforts such as “World Hijab Day,” started in 2013 by Nazma Khan, the Bangladeshi American owner of a Brooklyn-based headscarf company, and Ahlul Bayt, a Shiite-proselytizing TV station, that the University of Calgary, in southwest Canada, promotes as a resource for its participation in “World Hijab Day.” The TV station argues that wearing a “hijab” is necessary for women to avoid “unwanted attention.” World Hijab Day, Ahlul Bayt and the University of Calgary didn’t respond to requests for comment.

In its “resources,” Ahlul Bayt includes a link to the notion that “the woman is awrah,” or forbidden, an idea that leads to the confinement, subordination, silencing and subjugation of women’s voices and presence in public society. It also includes an article, “The top 10 excuses of Muslim women who don’t
wear hijab and their obvious weaknesses,” with the argument, “Get on the train of repentance, my sister, before it passes by your station.”

The rush to cover women’s hair has reached a fever pitch with ultraconservative Muslim websites and organizations pushing this interpretation, such as VirtualMosque.com and Al-Islam.org, which even published a feature, “Hijab Jokes,” mocking Muslim women who don’t cover their hair “Islamically.” Last week, high school girls at Vernon Hills High School, outside Chicago, wore headscarves for an activity, “Walk a Mile in Her Hijab,” sponsored by the school’s conservative Muslim Students Association. It disturbed us to see the image of the girls in scarves.

Furthermore, Muslim special-interest groups are feeding articles about “Muslim women in hijab” under siege. Staff members at the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which has pressed legal and PR complaints against U.S. companies that have barred employees from wearing hijabs on the job, has even called their organization “the hijab legal defense fund.”

Today, in the 21st century, most mosques around the world, including in the United States, deny us, as Muslim women, our Islamic right to pray without a headscarf, discriminating against us by refusing us entry if we don’t cover our hair. Like the Catholic Church after the Vatican II reforms of 1965 removed a requirement that women enter churches with head covers, mosques should become headscarf-optional, if they truly want to make their places of worship “women-friendly.”

Fortunately, we have those courageous enough to challenge these edicts. In early May 2014, an Iranian journalist, Masih Alinejad, started a brave new campaign, #MyStealthyFreedom, to protest laws requiring women to wear hijabs that Iran’s theocracy put in place after it won control in 1979. The campaign’s slogan: “The right for individual Iranian women to choose whether they want hijab.”

Important interpretations of the Koran
The mandate that women cover their hair relies on misinterpretations of Koranic verses. In Arabic dictionaries, hijab refers to a “barrier,” not necessarily between men and women, but also between two men. Hijab appears in a Koranic verse (33:53), during the fifth year of the prophet Muhammad’s migration, or hijra, to Medina, when some wedding guests overstayed their welcome at the prophet’s home. It established some rules of etiquette for speaking to the wives of prophet Muhammad: “And when ye ask of them anything, ask it of them from behind a hijab. This is purer for your hearts and for their hearts.” Thus, hijab meant a partition.

The word hijab, or a derivative, appears only eight times in the Koran as an “obstacle” or “wall of separation” (7:46), a “curtain” (33:53), “hidden” (38:32), just a “wall of separation” (41:5, 42:52, 17:45), “hiding” (19:14) and “prevented” or “denied access to God” (83:15).

In the Koran, the word hijab never connotes any act of piety. Rather, it carries the negative connotation of being an actual or metaphorical obstacle separating the “non-believers” in a dark place, noting “our hearts are under hijab (41:5),” for example, a wall of separation between those in heaven and those in hell (7:46) or “Surely, they will be mahjaboon from seeing their Lord that day (83:15).” Mahjaboon is a derivate verb from hijab. The Saudi Koran translates it as “veiled.” Actually, in this usage, it means, “denied access.”

The most cited verse to defend the headscarf (33:59) states, “Oh, Prophet tell thy wives and thy daughters and the believer women to draw their jilbab close around them; this will be better so that they be recognized and not harmed and God is the most forgiving, most merciful.” According to Arabic dictionaries, jilbab means “long, overflowing gown” which was the traditional dress at the time. The verse
does not instruct them to add a new garment but rather adjust an existing one. It also does not mean headscarf.

Disturbingly, the government of Saudi Arabia twists its translation of the verse to impose face veils on women, allowing them even to see with just “one eye.” The government’s translation reads: “O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way). That will be better, that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed, and God is most forgiving, most merciful.”

Looked at in context, Islamic historians say this verse was revealed in the city of Medina, where the prophet Muhammad fled to escape persecution in Mecca, and was revealed to protect women from rampant sexual aggression they faced on the streets of Medina, where men often sexually harassed women, particularly slaves. Today, we have criminal codes that make such crimes illegal; countries that don’t have such laws need to pass them, rather than punishing women for the violent acts of others. Another verse (24:31) is also widely used to justify a headscarf, stating, “… and tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and do not reveal their adornment except what is already shown; and draw their khemar over their neck. . . .”

In old Arabic poetry, the khemar was a fancy silk scarf worn by affluent women. It was fixed on the middle of the head and thrown over their back, as a means of seducing men and flaunting their wealth. This verse was revealed at a time, too, when women faced harassment when they used open-air toilets. The verse also instructs how to wear an existing traditional garment. It doesn’t impose a new one.

Reclaiming our religion

Asra Nomani talks to audience members in 2009 after Doha Debate in which she argued for the right of Muslim women to marry anyone they choose. (Photo courtesy of the Doha Debates)
In 1919, Egyptian women marched on the streets demanding the right to vote; they took off their veils, imported as a cultural tradition from the Ottoman Empire, not a religious edict. The veil then became a relic of the past.

Later, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser said in a speech in the early 1960s that, when he sought reconciliation with members of the Muslim Brotherhood group for attempting to assassinate him in 1954, the Supreme Leader of the Brotherhood gave him a list of demands, including, “imposing hijab on Egyptian women.” The audience members didn’t understand what the word hijab meant. When Nasser explained that the Brotherhood wanted Egyptian women to wear a headscarf, the audience members burst out laughing.

As women who grew up in modern Muslim families with theologians, we are trying to reclaim our religion from the prongs of a strict interpretation. Like in our youth, we are witnessing attempts to make this strict ideology the one and only accepted face of Islam. We have seen what the resurgence of political Islam has done to our regions of origin and to our adoptive country.

As Americans, we believe in freedom of religion. But we need to clarify to those in universities, the media and discussion forums that in exploring the “hijab,” they are not exploring Islam, but rather the ideology of political Islam as practiced by the mullahs, or clerics, of Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamic State.

In the name of “interfaith,” these well-intentioned Americans are getting duped by the agenda of Muslims who argue that a woman’s honor lies in her “chastity” and unwittingly pushing a platform to put a hijab on every woman.

Please do this instead: Do not wear a headscarf in “solidarity” with the ideology that most silences us, equating our bodies with “honor.” Stand with us instead with moral courage against the ideology of Islamism that demands we cover our hair.

Asra Q. Nomani is a former Wall Street Journal reporter and the author of “Standing Alone: An American Woman’s Struggle for the Soul of Islam.” She is a co-founder of the Muslim Reform Movement, a new initiative of Muslims and their allies, advocating peace, human rights and secular governance. She can be reached at asra@asranomani.com. Hala Arafa is a retired journalist who worked for 25 years at the International Bureau of Broadcasting as a program review analyst. She was a news editor at the Arabic branch of the Voice of America.

Tips For Staying Positive During Turbulent Times

by Heidi Oran

While I've always made a conscious choice to limit my exposure to the news, from local to world - lately it seems that it has become impossible to do so. When I check my email, turn on the television, or visit a social media site I am immediately made aware of the latest happenings around the world. Right now it feels a bit overwhelming for many of us, and it feels like every time we turn around more bad is occurring. It can be difficult to remain positive during these turbulent times, but it's important to do so, as we are all individually responsible for the type of energy we put out into the world. I don't know about you, but I certainly hope to contribute positive rather than negative energy! Continue reading to learn five tips on how to stay positive during turbulent times.

Express Gratitude

Express Gratitude - I'm sure most of you are aware of the multitude of benefits derived from a regular practice of gratitude. For those who don't keep a gratitude journal, what you can do to immediately reset the positivity button is grab a piece of paper and pen and jot down 5 things you're grateful for right now. From the sunrise, to the smell of a fresh flower, these items will help to bring you into the present moment and give you some perspective.
Connect with Others Online

Connect with Others Online - Most of us are involved with social media in some capacity, and this is often a good place to gain support and some perspective from friends, acquaintances and family members. You can express your feelings/frustrations through this channel and just this act alone may help you to feel a bit more upbeat.

Head Outdoors

Head Outdoors - There is nothing more grounding that nature so get on your hiking or running shoes and get outdoors. From a spiritual perspective being surrounded by Mother Nature is a gentle reminder that despite all of the chaos, there is something greater than us.


Heidi Oran is the founder of The Conscious Perspective, a blog providing education and awareness about Personal Growth, Spirituality, and Humanitarian issues.
Islamophobia and the Media

5 Ways Journalists Can Avoid Islamophobia In Their Coverage
Gabriel Arana Senior Media Editor, The Huffington Post

It's the media's duty to be more informed than the general public about Islam and the diverse Muslim world.

It is the duty of journalists to inform and educate. But when it comes to Islam and the Muslim community -- in the U.S. and across the world -- news outlets have far too often served to spread misinformation and perpetuate prejudice. Whether it’s networks running segments asking if Islam is a violent religion or anchors demanding Muslim guests account for the acts of religious extremists, Islamophobia crops up in coverage whenever terrorism or the Middle East are in the news.

Some of the bad coverage is the result of willful prejudice and ignorance; it’s hard to imagine any amount of information getting the Sean Hannitys and Bill O’Reillys of the world to stop spreading hate. But a good portion of the problem simply stems from journalists not knowing enough, which leaves them ill-equipped to report on everything from the Syrian refugee crisis to the Paris attacks. While no sector of the profession is immune from Islamophobia, the problem tends to be particularly pronounced on television, where presenters are often tasked with filling in airtime in an information vacuum.

Here are five ways journalists -- particularly those who report on issues that touch on the Muslim community -- can make sure they're accurately representing a community made up of 1.6 billion people worldwide.

1. Visit A Mosque
The heart of the problem with the media’s coverage of Muslims is that most of us simply do not know enough about Islam. It is our duty to inform ourselves -- rather than Muslims’ duty to correct journalists’ misconceptions -- and Islamic leaders across the country have graciously opened their doors to help the
public better understand their faith. We must take these opportunities, and continuously seek to improve our understanding of Islam in all its diversity. That means formal instruction in the history and politics of the Middle East or, at the very least, checking out guides like “100 Questions and Answers About Muslim Americans,” a resource guide from Michigan State University School of Journalism’s series on cultural competence. (There’s also a guide on Arab Americans.)

A related point: Those of us in the media must cultivate personal relationships with the Muslim members of our communities -- the greatest antidote to prejudice there is. One of the primary reasons attitudes toward gay couples changed so precipitously over the last decade was that as more and more gays and lesbians came out of the closet, more Americans knew someone who was gay. The tenor of the coverage of Muslims and the Islamic world would be far better if each member of the media had a close friend who practiced the faith.

2. Be Careful Whose Views You Give A Platform To

Among the more harmful misconceptions about the role of media is that it’s our duty to provide “balance” and let the audience decide between opposing points of view. In some instances -- say, if lawmakers are debating between a cap-and-trade system and a carbon tax as ways to reduce air pollution -- this template for fair coverage makes sense.

But far too often, “balance” in news coverage has meant providing a platform for ideologues to spew racist garbage. Inviting Islamophobic activists like Pamela Geller, whose organization is classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, on your network to “balance out” the views of a Muslim scholar is not serving to inform the public. It implicitly communicates that these views should have equal weight, which they shouldn't, and gives Gellar access to millions of viewers.

When television producers are assembling the members of a panel, they are setting the terms of the debate -- and whom they include in the conversation matters. Years of producers inviting climate change skeptics to challenge the scientific consensus that human activity is changing the planet is why only 49 percent of Americans think humans are responsible for climate change. In short: Don’t give bigotry a platform.

3. Challenge Prejudice And Debunk Outright Lies

The reason it’s so important for journalists to arm themselves with information is not only so they themselves make sure not to perpetuate prejudice, it’s also so they can challenge it when they’re confronted with it.

One of the reasons it’s so compelling to watch religious scholar Reza Aslan parry with pundits and television anchors is that he’s unafraid to identify outright lies and misconception and challenge them with information. For instance, when confronted with the idea that Islam is inherently degrading to women, Aslan points out that Muslim-majority countries have elected female heads of state seven times. The U.S.? Zero.

As Donald Trump has become more extreme in his views, the media has started to call him on his lies -- Muslims did not, as the reality TV star claims despite all evidence to the contrary, celebrate in New Jersey following the 9/11 attacks. Journalists shouldn’t be afraid to simply say he’s lying.

4. Choose Your Words Carefully
When journalists use phrases like “Islamic terrorism,” they are implicitly conflating two concepts. While this term is in common use, it is the duty of those of us in the media to be more precise in our use of language than the general public. We should refer to violent radicals like the ones who carried out the attacks in Paris as what they are: religious extremists.

To that end, some outlets have argued for the use of the Arabic acronym "Daesh" instead of the Islamic State (also called ISIS). The idea is to avoid implying that what the terrorists have created in Syria and Iraq is an actual "state" or actually "Islamic." Another option is to use a qualifier like the "self-described" Islamic State.

Journalists must brush up on their vocabulary when it comes to Islam and terrorism. Here’s a reference guide from Muslim Americans on defining terrorism put out by the Department of Homeland Security.

5. Provide Context

In the age of the Internet -- with conduits for information like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube giving the public direct access to raw information -- the role of the media has changed. It’s no longer just to “report the facts,” which the public is bombarded with on a daily basis. We must contextualize what’s out there. Concretely, this means counteracting the impulse to flatten the distinctions between the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims.

The Syrian refugee crisis offers a prime example. The attacks in Paris had little to do with the exodus from the war-torn country, but the moment a Syrian passport was found among the evidence in the recent Paris attacks, the two issues became conflated.

Journalists at the time did a poor job of pointing out that terrorists are highly unlikely to infiltrate the U.S. via the country’s refugee system, which puts people in direct contact with the FBI. Had the media been more willing to stress that these are separate issues, perhaps more than half of the governors in U.S. states would not so easily have pledged not to accept some of the globe’s most desperate people.

For journalists whose work touches on the Muslim community, the overarching point is this: Rhetoric has consequences, especially when you're carrying a megaphone.
Islamophobic Media Coverage Is Out Of Control

Gabriel Arana Senior Media Editor, The Huffington Post

As journalists, it is our duty to dispel myths and counter misinformation -- not perpetuate them. Sometimes prejudice is subtle. On CNN Sunday (November 11, 2015), it was not. “Why is it that no one within the Muslim community there in France knew what these guys were up to?” CNN anchor John Vause asked Yasser Louati, a French anti-Islamophobia activist.

Louati responded graciously, saying the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims should not be held responsible for the actions of a few extremists. “Sir, the Muslim community has nothing to do with these guys -- nothing,” he said. “We cannot justify ourselves for the actions of someone who just claims to be Muslim.”

Vause dug in his heels, claiming he had “yet to hear the condemnation from the Muslim community on this, but we’ll wait and see.” All the CNN anchor would have had to do is search “Muslims condemn Paris attacks” on the Internet to find hundreds of instances of the Islamic community condemning last Friday's deadly terrorist attacks in the French capital, including the social-media campaign #notinmyname.

Media writers like The Washington Post’s Erik Wemple and Salon’s Jack Mirkinson condemned Vause’s astonishing display of ignorance. But far too often, journalists are able to pass off casual bigotry as journalistic inquiry.
It’s not just the fear-mongers at Fox News, who exploit terrorist attacks to fuel anti-Muslim hostility with such consistency it’s almost not worth commenting on. It’s the mainstream media, and while Islamophobia rears its head in print as well as online, it is most pronounced on television.

Make no mistake: When producers dream up panel discussions about whether Islam is a violent religion, they aren’t merely “asking the question”: they’re perpetuating prejudice. Yes, a good percentage of Americans hold this view, but the role of us in the media is to dispel such myths -- not legitimize them. Ultimately, presenting tolerance and bigotry as equally valid sides of a balanced debate only ends up fueling bigotry.

Islamophobia in media coverage follows a predictable cycle. When someone commits an act of random violence and information is scarce, first comes the warrantless speculation. “Journalists, especially TV journalists, love scoops,” says Nathan Lean, a scholar at Georgetown University’s Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. “So what happens is a lot of them ask leading questions -- they insinuate, infer, hypothesize: ‘Could it have been an attack carried out by Al-Qaeda?’ Then all of a sudden the conversation is dominated by Al-Qaeda.”

This is how NBC’s “Today” show ended up running a ludicrous segment on Monday about the possibility of the Islamic State group, also known as ISIS, using the PlayStation 4 to plot terrorist attacks. It’s how an image of a Sikh man in Canada was doctored using Photoshop, and landed on the front page of La Razón, one of Spain’s largest newspapers. It’s also how Time magazine falsely reported that Uber had charged
four times its normal rate during the Paris attacks.

In the unfortunate event that an attack is terrorism-related and the perpetrator is a radical Islamist, journalists invariably ask, “Why aren’t Muslims condemning this?” as CNN’s Vause did.

“We still see this expectation that Muslim institutions have to come out and condemn things that you wouldn’t expect other groups to condemn. There’s the assumption of collective responsibility,” says Corey Saylor, legislative director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Muslim advocacy group.

“The number one victims of ISIS are Muslims, the notion that somehow we’re not fully committed to combatting that twisted ideology is difficult to wrap your mind around,” he adds.

In fact, CAIR, like countless other Muslim organizations, strongly condemns terrorism whenever incidents occur -- it has done so more than 100 times. In 2014, the group even signed on to an open letter to ISIS, which was penned by 120 Muslim scholars, that meticulously deconstructed the group’s theology. The vast majority of citizens in Muslim countries hate ISIS as much as any of the flag-waving patriots on Fox News. A recent survey from the Pew Center of 11 countries with substantial Muslim populations shows widespread negative attitudes toward the terrorist group -- in no country did support for ISIS rise above 15 percent. That’s a smaller percentage than Americans who believe in UFOs (21 percent), think there’s a link between vaccines and autism (20 percent) and deny climate change (37 percent). Strong majorities in most of these countries also support the recent airstrikes against ISIS.
There are many differences within the diverse global community of Muslims, which includes Saudi Arabia -- a U.S. ally and possibly one of the most extremist Islamic regimes on the planet -- as well as secular-progressive Turkey and Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladesh, all of which have elected female heads of state. The same prejudice that flattens the nuances that exist within the Muslim community blinds journalists when they are faced with the good Muslims do, and blames them for the monstrous acts of a dangerous minority.

“All the good things Muslims are doing get ignored while the barbaric subset of the Muslim world that claims our faith become our spokespeople,” Saylor says. The open letter to ISIS was largely ignored by the media, but “if you have one crazy guy in a cave in Afghanistan waving a sword, you can guarantee him several news cycles.”

The media’s default of erasing distinctions between terrorists and non-terrorists, and between attackers and victims in the Muslim world is why we are currently in the midst of an insane discussion (if you can call it that) about allowing Syrian refugees into the country.

Nearly all of the half-dozen or so suspects involved in the Paris attacks were born and raised in Europe. And yet, based on the discovery of a single Syrian passport found near the body of one of the suicide
bombers, our current discourse is revolving around whether we should turn away tens of thousands of innocent, suffering people because one of them might be a terrorist.

Instead of relying on credible sources of expertise on the matter, the mainstream media more often gives pundits, who have limited information but a lot of opinions, a platform to disseminate misinformation. Instead of giving anti-Muslim activist Pam Geller a means of reaching millions of people with her racist rhetoric, why not talk to someone from the Migration Policy Institute, the country’s most-authoritative think tank on migration issues?

MPI found in a 2015 report that “the refugee resettlement program is the least likely avenue for a terrorist to choose” to infiltrate the country. The reason is pretty obvious once you get to know even a little about the program: The process of gaining refugee status puts applicants in direct contact with the FBI, and they have to undergo a “painstaking, many-layered review” that takes several years.

**It’s not like news organization ask the dumb questions and get them out of the way. We don’t get smarter, better, more informed. When terrorism strikes, the campaign of misinformation repeats itself, time and again.**

Amplifying ignorance isn’t harmless. It’s the reason 29 Republican governors and one Democrat have pledged not to accept Syrian refugees, despite the fact that the Constitution they love to brandish forbids them from doing so.

Whether it’s CNN’s Don Lemon asking a respected Muslim lawyer if he supports ISIS or News Corp. Executive Chairman Rupert Murdoch suggesting we should give Christian refugees from Syria first dibs on coming in, the most frustrating thing about media coverage of terrorist attacks is that it doesn’t get any better over time. It’s not like news organizations ask the dumb questions and get them out of the way. We don’t get smarter, better, more informed. When terrorism strikes, the campaign of misinformation repeats itself, time and again.

As journalists, it’s our job to know better, and do better.

Source: Huffington Post

Gabriel Arana is senior media editor at The Huffington Post.
Yassmin Abdel-Magied: ‘People are doing things in the name of Islam and Islamic State, but it’s neither Islamic nor are they a state.’

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAxIOC8Zisc

The Active Change Foundation, based in East London, is a community based organisation set up to protect and safeguard young people and families from unrest and violence in all its forms.

#NotInMyName: Young British Muslims at Active Change Foundation show their solidarity against ISIS and their actions. See how a simple message can be shared to show how ISIS is misrepresenting Islam. Join the movement by tweeting why ISIS does not represent you with the hashtag #NotInMyName. Source: Active Change Foundation
Campaign in which Muslims state their opposition to Isis is refocused on Australians uniting against racism and bigotry. Read more:

We Stand With Paris (India)

After ISIS claimed responsibility for the Friday terror attacks in Paris that killed more than 120 people, Muslims around the world are speaking out against Islamic extremists. In Mumbai, India, Muslims gathered Monday to protest the violence, displaying signs that read, "We hate ISIS terrorism" and "We stand with Paris." Protesters also trampled on an effigy of a member of ISIS.

Online, a post about a conversation between a Muslim Uber driver and an Australian singer went viral after the singer, Darren Hanlon, recounted it on his Facebook page. "I'm a Muslim,' he said almost as a confession, 'and this is not what I was taught as a child,'" Hanlon recounted.

Meanwhile, Muslims and others are revitalizing the "Not in My Name" campaign that seeks to show how ISIS misrepresents Islam. The campaign was started in Sept. 2014 by The Active Change Foundation, a British organization dedicated to reaching out to youth who are at-risk of joining violent extremist groups.

"The ISIS does not represent Islam or any Muslim," young Muslims explain in the campaign video. "It's totally un-Islamic." In the wake of the attacks, the foundation was again vocal against terrorism committed by ISIS. Critics of the campaign say that it should not be necessary for Muslims to clarify that ISIS does not represent their religion.

ABC News and the Associated Press contributed to this report.
70,000 Muslim Clerics Issue Fatwa Condemning Terrorism (India)

Every year in northern India, Muslims gather in Ajmer for the Urs festival to remember the death of Moinuddin Chishti, a Sufi Islamic cleric and scholar. This year, around 70,000 clerics who attended issued a fatwa condemning terrorism, but you’ll never hear about this from the conservative media or politicians who are trying to whip up hatred toward Muslims.

Sufi Muslims have suffered greatly at the hands of Muslim extremists around the world, especially in Pakistan. ISIS/Daesh is probably the most extreme, warped interpretation of Islam, and has had no problem killing anyone, Muslim or not, who fails to go along with their suicide cult. They’re hated in nearly every country with significant Muslim populations, as a recent Pew Research poll has shown.

It shouldn't be any surprise then that clerics who attended the Urs festival would issue this condemnation and ask the media to stop referring to these terrorist organizations as Muslims.

Via The Times of India:

_Mufti Mohammed Saleem Noori, one of the clerics who passed the fatwa told TOI on Tuesday, “From Sunday onwards, when the annual Urs began, members of Dargah Aala Hazrat have been distributing forms among followers seeking signatures to show that those signing stand against terrorism. Nearly 15 lakh Muslims have recorded their protest. Around 70,000 clerics from across the world, who were part of the event, passed the fatwa.”_

_Noori said he would like to request the media to stop calling terrorist groups “Muslim organizations”._

_Hazrat Subhan Raza Khan, chairperson of the influential Dargah Aala Hazrat, said that following the Paris attacks, it was decided that a fatwa should be passed at the Urs this year, so the message went out loud and clear that the Muslim community condemns terrorism. (Source)_

I’m not sure what it will take for Islamophobes around the world to understand that the Muslim community as a whole is not responsible for the acts of terrorism committed by individuals who claim to follow Islam. I’m an atheist; I think all religions have been used over the past few thousand years to subjugate the masses, rationalize greed and hatred, and convince billions of human beings to trade their happiness in this life for the promise of everlasting joy in an afterlife that nobody has proven to exist.

Consider the fact that the Christian Bible is full of commandments to kill unbelievers, and even though Christians argue that those are the old laws that Jesus nullified, they still cite the Old Testament to justify their bigotry toward a variety of people. There are plenty of passages in the Koran that have been used to rationalize extremism, and they really aren’t that distinguishable from the texts of the early Bible.

The point is that throughout history, religion has been used to defend all sorts of horrific acts, and not just by radical outsider groups either, but as state-sponsored subjugation and genocide. The Inquisition that was sponsored by the Catholic Church killed, tortured, exiled or forced conversion on hundreds of thousands of Jews and Muslims for centuries, and wasn’t completely abolished until almost 200 years ago.
Christianity has also been used in modern America, a country that was supposed to be founded on freedom of religion, to justify slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, lynchings by the KKK, homophobia and even shooting up Planned Parenthood clinics.

Conservative shock jock pundits like Ann Coulter have made a successful career out of bashing Muslims, minorities and other people their followers have been taught to hate. Fox News regularly allows her on their channel as a contributor, and other right-wing media sources habitually use fear-mongering to promote traffic to their false stories that vilify Muslims.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims today reject ISIS and various terrorist groups. Asking a Muslim in Detroit or Berlin to speak out against the actions of ISIS/Daesh is both useless, and insulting, because the terrorist group couldn’t care less if most Muslims approve of their actions. We don’t go around demanding Christians reject the violent passages in the Bible, or lump them all in with David Duke or Kevin Swanson, so there’s no need to do that with everyone who follows Islam.

Read more at:
Looking back at the last twelve months, it can initially appear that Islamophobia was pretty bad in 2015. And indeed it was. Attacks against Muslims in the United States and their institutions have occurred in rapid succession. Meanwhile, leading politicians and the voting public have expressed increasingly anti-Muslim views.

Even though FBI hate crime statistics for this year won’t be released for some time, the current climate of hostility towards Muslims in the United States indicates that 2015 could be America’s most Islamophobic year since 9/11.

Despite the bleak picture, 2015 also witnessed some positive shifts in the way the media and the public dealt with and responded to Islamophobia. As prejudice towards and discrimination against Muslims intensified and gained more media attention, many journalists, activists, and ordinary Americans felt compelled to do something about it.
What Went Wrong This Year

In the wake of the attacks across Paris and in San Bernardino, the country witnessed a surge of mosque vandalisms, physical attacks against those perceived to be Muslim, and death threats against entire Muslim communities. Desecrated Qur’ans and pig heads were left outside some mosques, while others were targeted with bullets and fire-bombs. A Muslim cab driver was shot, as was a store clerk who now remains in critical condition. A Muslim teenager died after falling off a roof in Seattle, an incident many in his community fear was a hate crime. Some women who wear headscarves reconsidered their hijab after numerous women reported verbal and violent harassment.

But incidents like these didn’t only occur after high-profile attacks like those in Paris and San Bernardino. Muslims were targeted — and in several cases, murdered — throughout 2015. The shooting of three Muslim students in Chapel Hill, North Carolina is the most prominent example.

According to data collected by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Islamophobic incidents at mosques jumped in 2015. As of December 17, there were 71 incidents across the country, including vandalism, threats, harassment, and biased zoning proceedings for communities seeking to build mosques. This number is the highest CAIR has recorded since it started counting in 2009, and is three times higher than the total number of mosque incidents last year.

All of this occurred against the backdrop of national conversations that asked, “How Islamic is ISIS?” and within the context of broader public debates over the Syrian refugee crisis and national security. On the Internet and networks like Fox News, dubious polls claiming to report high levels of ISIS support among Muslims spread like wildfire. Long before Donald Trump cited one of these polls in calling for a temporary
ban on Muslim immigration to the US, he and other presidential candidates made troubling statements about Islam and its followers, and attended events held by some of the country’s most active anti-Muslim groups.

Polling data from 2015 revealed that Americans had complicated views about Islam and Muslims. While 51 percent said they viewed “Muslims living in the United States the same as any other community,” 56 percent also thought “the values of Islam are at odds with American values and way of life.” Many survey results showed a stark division across party lines, with Republicans’ expressing concern about Muslims more frequently than Democrats.

A majority of GOP voters, for instance, expressed approval for the Islamophobic positions and policies put forward by candidates Donald Trump and his rival Ben Carson, who said in September that a Muslim should not be president. Two-thirds of likely Republican voters agreed with Trump’s proposed ban on Muslims. Both Carson and Trump saw significant increases in support in primary states following their respective comments.

Then there were the armed demonstrations outside mosques across the country, and business owners that declared their stores “Muslim-free zones.” These populist movements mirrored the activities of similar groups in Canada, Australia, and Europe. When organizing his mosque protests in the U.S., militiaman Jon Ritzheimer claimed he had contacts in these places, where groups like PEGIDA and Reclaim Australia have orchestrated large demonstrations.

What Went Right

The severity of this year’s Islamophobia brought with it a silver lining of sorts: greater awareness and concern about the prejudice and discrimination facing Muslims. According to Public Religion Research Institute, “no religious, social, or racial and ethnic group [was] perceived as facing greater discrimination in the U.S. than Muslims.”

Google searches of the term “Islamophobia” peaked in 2015. An initial jump occurred in January in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks and then again in September when the arrest of 14-year-old Muslim student Ahmed Mohamed (whose clock invention was mistaken for a bomb) shed light on Muslims’ treatment in the U.S. But the major spike in “Islamophobia” searches occurred in November and December, as anti-Muslim rhetoric and attacks escalated in the wake of Paris and San Bernardino. This heightened attention might suggest that the public is more concerned or curious about prejudice towards Muslims, and is using the word “Islamophobia” to describe it.
Some mainstream news outlets, which rarely used the term in the past, seemed more comfortable with the term, too. Chuck Todd, the host of NBC’s Meet the Press, was one of the most prominent journalists to embrace the term, using it in a post-Charlie Hebdo interview with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and often in the wake of the attacks in Paris. Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Martin O’Malley also called out the “Islamophobia” plaguing the political climate, with O’Malley even acknowledging that a “shadowy network” of activists and groups promotes fear and misinformation about Muslims. And it wasn’t just the term “Islamophobia” that got more play in the media. Mosque vandalisms and other attacks against Muslims received more coverage by national media than they did in years past. So did Muslims’ condemnations of groups like ISIS.

The year 2015 also saw many high-profile acts of solidarity with the Muslim community, with both Democratic and Republican leaders spending time in mosques. Interfaith events at the local level also popped up around the country, especially in response to planned anti-Muslim rallies.

Moving Forward
Though Islamophobia in America was at its worst this year, there have also been significant signs of positive change. In the wake of Trump’s call for a “total ban on all Muslims” entering the United States, more people, on the right and left, are beginning to recognize that Islamophobia is a problem, and are naming it. Many have noted the similarities between contemporary Islamophobia and other prejudices — like anti-Semitism and anti-Catholic prejudice — that ran rampant in America in earlier eras. These comparisons to prejudice towards Jews and Catholics, for example, are a helpful reminder of what progress can be made. Though acts of discrimination against these groups may never disappear completely, society no longer deems them acceptable; Jews and Catholics are now largely viewed as part of “America.”
As 2015 draws to a close, an important step is being taken as more American voices across the political spectrum are condemning and rejecting Islamophobia in all its forms. Moving into 2016, there is undoubtedly much to improve. But there is also hope that we are turning a corner.

Source: Huffington Post:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/journalists-islamophobia-coverage_566ec22ae4b0e292150e60db
An Unusual Christmas Event (United Kingdom)

By Don de Silva, CEO at Changeways International

At a time when extremists are tearing the world apart, the powerful force of world faiths was celebrated at an unusual Christmas event, organised by the League of British Muslims.

The event, which was held on 17 December at Ilford brought together community and national leaders and representatives from the UK armed forces to celebrate Christmas, together with Eid ul Fitr, Vesak, Chanukah, and Diwali. It is an annual event that has been held over the past 14 years.

The League of British Muslims aims to strengthen Muslim and non-Muslim voluntary and community organisations, improve inter-faith understanding and tolerance. The theme of this year’s event was: “The role of Muslim communities in Reducing Extremism”.

Welcoming the audience, chairman of the league, Bashir Chaudhry said:

“We are all human beings, it doesn’t matter how we pray.”

Mr Chaudhry said some from Ilford had gone to join IS, but that the league was working with young people in the community.

“If you don’t speak to each other, there is the fear of the unknown. We have gone in with a heavy hand and peace has not been achieved in any of these countries,” he said.
Mayor of Redbridge, Cllr Barbara White, spoke of how the concept of light features in many religious festivals. “You think of light, you think of seeing the light. If you see it, you see peace,” she said. “We are all the same – look for the similarities, they are there. This is togetherness. This is what we need.”

UK Defence Minister, Julian Brazier MP, commended the work done by League of British Muslims and Muslim Hands and called for support to such work. He said: “My own two sons, who are now in the British army, would not have been alive for if not for the brilliance of a Muslim physician.”
Pointing out to representatives of the armed forces present at the event, he reminded the audience that during the Second World War, “the Indian sub-continent produced the largest volunteer force this planet had ever seen to fight oppression”.

Jonathan Arkush, President of The Board of Deputies of British Jews, said:

“We also encountered challenges and hardships when there was Jewish emigration to Britain over 100 years ago and finding our place in Britain’s society. This is an extraordinary event and a testimony to the fact that we can work together, despite our differences. We should not be talking about whether a community is a guest community or a host community. We are all one community.

“In a society where securalism is strong, we share a strong concerns with the Muslim community about the positive role that faith plays in our communities,” he added.

Maqsood Ahmed, Director of Community Development, Muslim Hands UK, said that his organisation was working hard to assist recently arrived refugees and setting up partnerships with Food Share and other charities to alleviate poverty among all communities in the UK. In addition, he informed that Muslim Hands in the UK was tackling drug abuse, the under-achievement of Muslim school children, rehabilitating and resettling prisoners and empowering marginalised women.

The Bishop of Brentwood, Right Reverend Alan Williams, said: “We celebrate this year as the year of mercy. Faith is about mercy.”

Redbridge Council leader, Cllr Jas Athwal said that the east London borough was the “shining beacon” of diversity for others to follow and recalled the story of the first Muslim winner of the Victoria Cross, Khudadad Khan.

Don de Silva, Commissioner for the Environment, The Buddhist Society, which represents all relevant Buddhist traditions, said: “Extremism is not the prerogative of the Muslim community, particularly when you examine world history. Some 2,600 years ago, The Buddha dealt with extremism, terrorism, unrest, hatred and division. He offered a radical counter narrative to extremism: changing society, but beginning with oneself. The Buddha also urged rulers, in his day, to deal with the root causes of poverty, justice and unrest through governance with integrity.”
Many who attended the event urged religious leaders to move out of religious segregation and hold similar events throughout the year in different parts of the UK on a regular basis to counter disintegration.

Photos: courtesy: Naveed Akbar
Anti-Muslim Bigotry

The Current Reality by Roqayah

Roqayah has been updating a thread which documents attacks on Muslims, mosques, and people of color perceived to be Muslim, since the attacks on Paris. The thread has been growing at an alarming rate and she has decided that while she will continue to publish updates on Twitter that it would be easier to share and parse through if she created a one-page entry on her website. Please contact her at: https://www.roqchams.com/2015/12/06/anti-muslim-bigotry-since-november-2015/

The Anti-Defamation League

ADL's Role in Fighting Anti-Muslim Bigotry

ADL plays a leading role in exposing and combating anti-Muslim bigotry. As levels of anti-Muslim bigotry continue to surface in a variety of public forms and fora, ADL has produced reports and resources on several groups and individuals whose public campaigns have both sheltered and fueled such bigotry. The threat of the infiltration of Sharia, or Islamic law, into the American court system is one of the more pernicious conspiracy theories to gain traction in our country in recent years. The notion that Islam is insidiously making inroads in the United States through the application of religious law is seeping into the mainstream, with even some presidential candidates voicing fears about the supposed threat of Sharia to our way of life and several states are considering or having already passed bills that would prohibit the application of Sharia law. ADL’s anti-Muslim bigotry has extended to actively oppose anti-Sharia laws introduced around the country.

The Challenging Racism Project

School of Social Sciences and Psychology--Western Sydney University

Professor Kevin Dunn is leading a team of researchers to explore the outcomes, enablers and constraints of bystander anti-racism. The project is supported by Australian Research Council, The Australian Human Rights Commission, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and VicHealth. The research team includes Professor Yin Paradies (Deakin University), Dr Anne Pedersen (Murdoch University), Dr Scott Sharpe (UNSW), Dr Maria Hynes (ANU) and Dr Jacqueline Nelson (UTS).

Did you know that almost 40% of racist incidents occur in public spaces, including on public transport?

The Project

Bystander anti-racism is action taken by 'ordinary' people in response to incidents of interpersonal or systemic racism. This project produced a strong empirical understanding of bystander anti-racism (its nature, potential, merits, benefits and constraints) as a means of countering racism in Australia. This was achieved through four specific aims:

1. Identify outcomes, including personal and social cost/benefits, of bystander anti-racism in response to racism for targets, perpetrators, other bystanders, organisations and wider society.
2. Identify the enablers and obstacles to bystander anti-racism
3. Identify how the setting and function of racism both influence the form and outcomes of bystander anti-racism
4. Develop and disseminate the resulting evidence-based in order to inform policy and practice aimed at increasing effective bystander anti-racism among ordinary Australians.
This project (LP110200495) "An exploration of the outcomes, enablers and constraints of bystander anti-racism" was funded by the Australian Research Council. The Australian Human Rights Commission, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and VicHealth were also sponsors of this project.

**Methodology**

In March 2014, 3,920 individuals who were members of an online panel were invited to participate in a study about bystander anti-racism. The survey included a screening question asking whether recipients had witnessed an incident that they believed involved racism in the past 12 months. 1,068 (27 per cent) of the participants indicated they had. These participants then went on to complete an 'incident report form' about the real life event or racist incident they had witnessed. Participants were asked to describe the incident, providing details about where it took place, who was involved, their considered and actual response to the incident and any negative and positive outcomes from their response. 860 of these responses were found to be bystander incidents; that is, they were incidents perceived to involve racism that the participants had witnessed as a third party not otherwise involved in the event.

**What type of action do people take?**

Confronting or disagreeing with the perpetrator
- Calling it "racism" or "discrimination" (if it is safe or productive to do so)
- Interrupting or distracting perpetrator
- Comforting the person(s) targeted
- Expressing upset feelings
- Seeking assistance from friend, teacher, manager, coach etc.
- Reporting the incident to authorities

What helps people to intervene when they witness racism?
- Knowledge of what constitutes racism
- Awareness of harm caused by racism
- Perception of responsibility to intervene
- Perceived ability to intervene
- Desire to educate a perpetrator
- Emotional responses to racism: empathy, expressing anger, disapproval etc.
- Self-affirmation
- Anti-racist social norms

**What stops people from intervening when they witness racism?**

"There’s two reasons why people don’t speak up or speak out, our research shows. One is afraid of becoming a target themselves the second is because they say they didn’t know what to say or do...."

- Seeing the target of racism as belonging to a different group that you are not responsible for (exclusive group identity)
- Fear of violence or vilification, being targeted by perpetrator
- Perception that action would be ineffective
- Lack of knowledge about how to intervene
Concern that confrontation would be seen as aggressive or not 'feminine' (gender role prescriptions)

- Impression management
- A desire to preserve positive interpersonal relations
- A desire to avoid conflict
- Freedom of speech/anti-political correctness
- Social norms that are tolerant of racism

Obstacles to bystander anti-racism include fear of becoming a target themselves and a lack of knowledge about what to do and how to do it. People lack a sense of what tactics, rhetoric and tenor are likely to be effective. Research in this area is underdeveloped, particularly on the enablers and barriers to organisational readiness of bystander anti-racism. This project will advance the theory of pro-social action by producing knowledge of the contextual variables affecting the likelihood of bystander action against racism.

**The resilience and ordinariness of Australian Muslim**

A new Western Sydney University report: The resilience and ordinariness of Australian Muslims (opens in new window) [PDF, 3607.6 KB] has found Muslims in Sydney face high rates of racism, but the vast majority list relations with non-Muslims as positive, and believe education and employment are more important than international affairs.

Anti-Prejudice Tools

Unchallenged, Islamophobia will continue to increase. For this guide, CAIR is directing their recommendations to the Muslim community in the United States. While all of society should and must be involved in eradicating all forms of bigotry from our nation, Muslims must be willing to take the lead when it comes to pushing back against Islamophobia.

There are many recommendations in the guide, but the key point is this: Put your faith into action. Do something positive, however small, on a consistent basis.

“It should not be one percent of our attention or one percent of our time or one percent of our wealth,” said CAIR Executive Director Nihad Awad. “We should be generous, as if we are giving to ourselves.”

Source: CAIR: http://www.islamophobia.org/anti-prejudice-tools.html

Know your rights pocket guide
This guide informs American Muslims of our legal rights. These are the same rights all Americans enjoy, but the guide focuses on issues Muslims commonly face. The guide gives information about:

- Your rights as an employee
- Your rights as a student
- Your rights if stopped by the police
- Your rights if federal law enforcement contacts you
- Your rights if the Department of Homeland Security contacts you
- Your rights as an airline passenger
- How to tell if you might be on the no-fly list or a selectee list
- What to do if faced with job discrimination
- How to react to anti-Muslim hate crimes
- Recommendations for activism including local involvement, contacting your elected representatives, and media advocacy
View the guide. (The content of this guide is available in non-PDF format here.)

**Islamophobia pocket guide**
This guide defines Islamophobia and explains its features, then offers steps we can all take to help challenge Islamophobia.

View the guide

**Community safety kit**
This toolkit was developed to help Muslim communities protect against acts of discrimination or physical attacks and to secure their basic legal rights. It includes recommendations for safety and security measures and how to respond in the event of an incident.

View the safety kit

**Securing religious liberty handbook**
This toolkit was developed to help Muslim communities protect against state-level efforts to legislate against Islam and to preserve religious liberty for all. It includes lessons learned from efforts in several states as well as suggestions on what to do before such legislation is introduced, once it has been introduced, and if it is passed.

View the handbook
Compassionate Action Steps for Non-Muslims

The range can be from a simple act such as:

1. Joining Muslims in press releases and press conferences
2. When you directly or overhear an Islamophobic comment, respond with patience and tolerance and ask, “Do you know a Muslim personally?” Then, and/or invite them to join you on a visit to a mosque or to have tea with a muslim friend so they can explore their fear or opinions with personal experience.
3. Speaking with media and having different voices heard.
4. Be active on social media and provide support which includes sharing positive stories,
5. Joining a muslim friend and going to a mosque or inviting them to speak at other places of worship.
6. Call or Walk into a mosque and ask the Imam or office staff if you could sit down and talk, showing your support
7. Smiling at Muslims
8. Calling Muslim friends and family and letting know one cares

More Involved:

1. Convene a community dialogue with a facilitator (includes circle principles and rules for dialogue)
   ● Contact the local mosque, synagogue, church, interfaith group (s) Human Relations Commission, University Student Affairs Dept.
   ● Arrange a follow up service community-wide project
2. Host a dinner party inviting a Muslim (be sure to inquire about dietary sensitivities) and invite friends who may not necessarily seek out a Muslim.
3. Host a screening of a documentary that promotes interfaith peace (On Common Grounds etc)
4. Find out what service project the local mosque supports and show your support
Resources for fostering religious tolerance
This community-building toolkit helps neighbors connect with each other around issues of diversity, immigration, and religious difference.

Source: American Friends Service Committee:
https://afsc.org/resource/resources-fostering-religious-tolerance-quaker-meetings-and-churches

After San Bernardino
If we as adults who work for a social justice organization need inspiration right now, we imagine that teachers and young people in classrooms do too. Take the time to study past moments of crisis, and ask your students who or what inspires them when challenges feel insurmountable. Pin this poster to your classroom wall or schedule time for an inspiring documentary. But, most importantly, if you feel yourself or your students sinking into despair for a world that seems to be rotating wildly out of orbit, don’t be afraid to ask the question, “How are we going to get out of here?” Because if we never ask the question, we’ll never find an answer.

Source: Teaching Tolerance:
http://www.tolerance.org/blog/after-san-bernardino

Debunking Stereotypes About Muslims and Islam
Many religions have things in common. At the same time, each is unique. In the shared category, Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, descends from the first five books of the Bible. That’s why some people refer to members of all three religions as “followers of the Book.” Some people also call the three religions “Abrahamic” because they all descended from Abraham. In the unique category, Jews were the first to
believe that there was one God; Muslims believe that Muhammad was God’s messenger and Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

In the same way that religions are both alike and unique, so, too are the members of those religions. In this activity, students learn more about Muslims in the United States and practice graph-reading skills.

Source: Teaching Tolerance:
http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/debunking-stereotypes-about-muslims-and-islam

Confronting Students’ Islamophobia

How do you address Islamophobia in your classroom? What do you do when you see that prejudice and stereotypes are linked to in-the-moment fears?

Source: Teaching Tolerance
http://www.tolerance.org/blog/confronting-students-islamophobia

The Alwaleed Centre at the University of Edinburgh

All guides listed are published by the Alwaleed Centre and can be accessed at:
http://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/alwaleed/resources/classroom

Faith Guide to Islam

Although produced with higher education establishments in mind, this guide produced by the Higher Education Academy is an excellent introduction to Islam and explores a number of challenges facing Muslim students

Brief guidance for handling Muslim parental concern

A very useful guide produced by British Muslims for a Secular Democracy exploring potential points of concern for Muslim parents. A worthwhile read for any teachers teaching Muslim pupils.

Guidelines for educators on countering intolerance and discrimination against Muslims

These guidelines, produced by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, aim to assist educators in identifying manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in schools and to provide suggestions on how to prevent and respond to this phenomenon.

1001 Interventions

1001 Inventions is an extraordinary organisation promoting the many contributions Islamic scientists have made throughout the centuries. 1001 Inventions have produced a range of teaching resources, including a supplement for Scottish teachers, exploring a wide variety of subjects from the camera obscura to man’s first attempt at flight. A great way to give pupils a glimpse at the extraordinary achievements of the Islamic world.

Source: http://www.1001inventions.com/media/teachers-pack-download
**Interfaith Explorers (Charter Partner)**

Interfaith Explorers is a free, UNESCO supported, online learning resource. The program helps pupils explore cultural diversity, understand and respect differences and embrace similarities. The Learning Unit at the heart of the Interfaith Explorers is designed to give teachers everything they need to plan a comprehensive programme of learning. It fulfills the need for a trustworthy bank of resources for pupils to explore different faiths and cultures in the world around them. Interfaith Explorers is a project of the Maimonides Interfaith Foundation (www.maimonides-foundation.org), an international charity, supported by UNESCO, which brings people together through art, culture and education.

Founded by UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Professor Nasser David Khalili the Foundation recognises that tensions existing in the world today are the result of ignorance and lack of understanding. If ignorance is the problem, then education must be the answer.


**Islamic Network (ING.org)**

Supplementing the academic study of religion, ING offers a rich array of curricula that can be downloaded free of charge by educators in middle and high schools and universities. ING’s curricula cover diverse topics and include digital presentations, discussion questions, activities, and links to films or film clips with accompanying questions. Curriculum includes:

- Getting to Know American Muslims and Their Faith
- A History of Muslims in America
- Muslim Contributions to Civilization
- Muslim Women Beyond the Stereotypes
- Multifaith Curriculum: Shared Values
- Multifaith Curriculum: Living the Faith

Source: [https://ing.org/educators-academic-administrators/](https://ing.org/educators-academic-administrators/)

**Islamophobia Education Pack**

A useful teaching resource created by Show Racism the Red Card. This pack contains activities which have been designed to help young people challenge stereotypes and prejudice towards Muslims and gain a greater historical and political awareness of the climate which has enable Islamophobia to flourish in recent times. A Scottish supplement can also be downloaded to make the pack relevant to the Scottish curriculum.

This pack is free to download but is meant to be used in conjunction with a DVD which must be purchased. Follow the link below if you wish to purchase the DVD for your school.


**Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)**

A series of lesson plans that can help guide and inspire classroom teaching and learning. Activities
range from analyzing political cartoons to creating maps, modeling a peace summit, and exploring interpretations of the Quran. Each lesson provides links to necessary resources.

Source: PBS Global Connections:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/educators/lessons.html#women
Organizations

Adventist Peace Fellowship
The Adventist Peace Fellowship (APF) emerged out of informal discussions begun in October 2001 about the meaning of the Adventist commitment to "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ" for peacemaking in a world rent by violence. Their mission is to offer resources for exploring the significance of Adventist beliefs and heritage for peacemaking in a violent world; provide a forum for interchange and advocacy on how Adventist faith speaks to current issues of peace and peacemaking; and connect Adventists with other peacemaking resources and organizations.
http://www.adventistpeace.org/

Buddhist Peace Fellowship
The Buddhist Peace Fellowship works for peace from diverse Buddhist perspectives.

- Buddhist Peace Fellowship embraces a triple treasure of compassionate action -- learning, speaking, and doing.
- Speaking/ Communication: Our public voice brings Buddhist teachings into conversation with situations in the world, inspiring and informing action for peace.
- Learning/ Community: Our trainings strengthen Buddhist leadership for peace, and build socially engaged Buddhist communities.
- Doing/ Collaboration: As part of the mandala of social change, we act in collaboration with other organizations and individuals, working together to cultivate the conditions for peace.
http://www.bpf.org/

The Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST) is an international security affairs research institute based at the University of Chicago. Founded in 2004 by Robert Pape, Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, CPOST is best known for creating and maintaining the most comprehensive and transparent suicide attack database available. Since its creation, it has expanded beyond terrorism research, to now include the study of U.S.-China relations and
humanitarian intervention policy, with the goal of creating new knowledge and policy initiatives to inform decision-makers on the limits of intervention in certain cases. Our goal is to produce peer-reviewed scholarship that bridges the gap between scholars and policymakers via conferences and media engagement.

The CPOST Suicide Attack Database, the foundation upon which the institute was built, comprises the most complete list of suicide attacks since 1982 currently available. All data is freely available to the public. This allows users to review and analyze the complete set of suicide attacks independent of CPOST's analysis and findings.

**Christian Peacemaker Teams**
Partnering with nonviolent movements around the world, CPT seeks to embody an inclusive, ecumenical and diverse community of God's love. We believe we can transform war and occupation, our own lives, and the wider Christian world through: the nonviolent power of God's truth, partnership with local peacemakers and bold action.  
http://www.cpt.org/

#CompassionConvos evolved from a friendship that developed between Louisa Hext, who is a white, Jewish woman from the UK and Marie Roker-Jones, an African-American, Christian wife and mother. As they began to share their life experiences, they discussed invisible privilege, assumptions, denials, and forgiveness. Louisa and Marie recognized the need for creating safe spaces to have these ongoing, honest, and difficult conversations. They also realized how these conversations are the building blocks to awareness of implicit bias and taking compassionate action.

#CompassionConvos is a compassion movement challenging our biases. It's a call to action bringing people together to create individual and systemic change and an initiative of the Charter for Compassion. Our goal: to enable people to see others through a different lens and inspire compassionate action.  
https://www.facebook.com/groups/compassionconvos/.

Marie can be reached via twitter at:  
https://twitter.com/RaisingGreatMen

Louisa at be reached by twitter at:  
https://twitter.com/schmoopielou

**Disciples Peace Fellowship**
Disciples Peace Fellowship is dedicated to the elimination of war and the Biblical principles of peace and justice. We serve as a voice for members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who long for peace and justice to be at the forefront of our teachings and learnings. http://dpfweb.org/home

**Episcopal Peace Fellowship**
The Episcopal Peace Fellowship (EPF) is a national organization connecting all who seek a deliberate response to injustice and violence and want to pray, study and take action for justice and peace in our communities, our church, and the world. We are called to do justice, dismantle violence, and strive to be peacemakers. www.epfnational.org/
**Fellowship of Reconciliation**
The Fellowship of Reconciliation is composed of women and men who recognize the essential unity of all creation and have joined together to explore the power of love and truth for resolving human conflict. While it has always been vigorous in its opposition to war, FOR has insisted equally that this effort must be based on a commitment to the achieving of a just and peaceful world community, with full dignity and freedom for every human being. [http://forusa.org/](http://forusa.org/)

**Global Peace Initiatives**
Global Peace Initiatives mission is to create transformational opportunities for individuals and communities through food growing and service initiatives that promote sustainability and peace. [http://www.globalpeaceinitiatives.net/](http://www.globalpeaceinitiatives.net/)

#GiveRefugeesRest ([https://www.giverefugeesrest.com](https://www.giverefugeesrest.com)) is a campaign by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR-USA) to end Islamophobia & welcome refugees. The U.S. has responded to the Syrian and Muslim refugee crisis with fear. Thirty-one governors have advocated against receiving refugees within their state borders. Presidential front-runner Donald Trump, with much political backing, has threatened to ban all Muslim immigration if elected. Join FOR-USA in telling our government that this is unacceptable, and that it goes against the best spirit of the United States of America. Learn more about the campaign at Yes Magazine: [http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/the-brilliance-of-using-pillowcases-to-giverefugeesrest-20160115?utm_source=YTW&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=20160115](http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/the-brilliance-of-using-pillowcases-to-giverefugeesrest-20160115?utm_source=YTW&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=20160115)

**Interfaith Encounter Association, Israel**
The Interfaith Encounter Association is dedicated to promoting peace in the Middle East through interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural study. We believe that, rather than being a cause of the problem, religion can and should be a source of the solution for conflicts that exist in the region and beyond. [http://interfaithencounter.wordpress.com/](http://interfaithencounter.wordpress.com/)

**The Interfaith Center For Sustainable Development**
The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (ICSD) accesses the collective wisdom of the world's religions to promote co-existence, peace, and sustainability through education and activism. [http://www.interfaithsustain.com/](http://www.interfaithsustain.com/)

**Islamic Network** ([ING: https://ing.org](https://ing.org)) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to counter prejudice and discrimination against American Muslims by teaching about their traditions and contributions in the context of America’s history and cultural diversity, while building relations between American Muslims and other groups. Founded in 1993, ING achieves its mission through education and community engagement. We work through regional volunteers and affiliated organizations across the country who provide thousands of presentations, training seminars and workshops, and panel discussions annually in schools, colleges and universities, law enforcement agencies, corporations, healthcare facilities, and community organizations as part of cultural diversity curricula and programs. Reaching hundreds of groups and tens of thousands of individuals a year at the grassroots level, ING is building bridges among people of all backgrounds.
Islamic Speakers Bureau of Arizona (ISBA: https://www.isb-az.org)

The Islamic Speakers Bureau of Arizona (ISBA) is a non-profit, apolitical, educational organization founded in 1999. ISBA is an outreach institution that provides education about Islam and Muslims, promotes interfaith dialogue and is a local affiliate of Islamic Networks Group (ING).

Upon request, ISBA is pleased to provide trained, local American Muslims to conduct presentations tailored for a variety of educational, religious and business settings. ISBA speakers are certified after a rigorous process of training, testing, and observation in a live setting by veteran trainers. ISBA speakers serve the entire state of Arizona and adhere to the guidelines provided by the First Amendment Center. Please see their publication A Teacher’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools for more information.

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) opposes anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, and anti-Arab bigotry and oppression. JVP seeks an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem; security and self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians; a just solution for Palestinian refugees based on principles established in international law; an end to violence against civilians; and peace and justice for all peoples of the Middle East: https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org. JVP has a special project devoted to challenging Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism.

Mennonite Central Committee

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation. http://www.mcc.org/

Muslim Peace Coalition USA

Muslim Peace Coalition is composed of Muslim Americans in 15 states who are committed to the principle of standing up and speaking for justice (Quran 4:135) not only because of their desire to uphold the principles of their faith, but also out of deep concern and commitment to our country. http://muslimpeacecoalition.org/

On Earth Peace

On Earth Peace answers Jesus Christ's call for peace and justice through its ministries; builds thriving families, congregations, and communities; and provides the skills, support, and spiritual foundation to face violence with active nonviolence. http://www.onearthpeace.org/

OneVoice To End The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

OneVoice is an international grassroots movement that amplifies the voice of mainstream Israelis and Palestinians, empowering them to propel their elected representatives toward the two-state solution. The movement works to forge consensus for conflict resolution and build a human infrastructure capable of mobilizing the people toward a negotiated, comprehensive and permanent agreement between Israel and Palestine that ends the occupation, ensures security and peace for both sides, and solves all final-status issues in accordance with international law and previous bilateral agreements. The 1967 borders form the basis for the establishment of an independent, viable Palestinian state, with permanent borders and any modifications to be agreed upon by both parties. The movement recognizes that violence by either side will never be a means to end the conflict. http://www.onevoicemovement.org/
Orthodox Peace Fellowship
The Orthodox Peace Fellowship of the Protection of the Mother of God is an association of Orthodox Christian believers seeking to bear witness to the peace of Christ by applying the principles of the Gospel to situations of division and conflict, whether in the home, the parish, the community we live, the work place, within our particular nations, and between nations. We work for the conservation of God’s creation and especially of human life. We are not a political association and support no political parties or candidates. http://www.incommunion.org/

Pax Christi International
Pax Christi International is a non-profit, non-governmental Catholic peace movement working on a global scale on a wide variety of issues in the fields of human rights, human security, disarmament and demilitarisation, just world order and religion and violent conflict. http://www.paxchristi.net/international/eng/index.php

Pentecostals And Charismatics For Peace And Justice
We work within our own traditions and heritages to promote the peace and justice of Christ while also cooperating with fellow believers from other parts of the body and concerned folks from other (and no) faith(s). http://www.pcpj.org/

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is all about taking action to reduce violence in the world. The people who get involved in our work need to be ready to follow Jesus into the same kind of risk, daring, and potentially life-threatening work that got his earliest followers into so much trouble. We're about a positive, gospel-centered vision of peace. When genuine peace seems distant, we're called to increase our faithfulness. When weariness seems to overtake us, we're called to lift one another up and to continue our quest for the elusive reign of God. http://presbypeacefellowship.org/

Under the umbrella and financial support of Sound Vision Foundation, RadioIslam.com launched its first show December 14, 1999 with the goal of providing cyberspace a high quality, informative and creative Internet radio broadcast. Many have followed the lead of RadioIslam.com, but we remain the original Muslim broadcast to offer more than Quran and khutbas, but also daily programs, nasheed programs, stories, interviews and more.

Religions for Peace
Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world’s great religions dedicated to promoting peace. Respecting religious differences while celebrating our common humanity, Religions for Peace is active on every continent and in some of the most troubled areas of the world, creating multi-religious partnerships to confront our most dire issues: stopping war, ending poverty, and protecting the earth. http://www.religionsforpeace.org/

Sound Vision: Building Bridges to Understanding (http://www.soundvision.com)
Sound Vision Foundation is a not for profit tax exempt 501 (C) 3 organization.
Attitude and behavior of men and women today is shaped and molded by mass communications whose ideals and images by and large are non-Islamic. Sound Vision would like to produce content with Islamic ideals and images for all current and future media. Sound Vision would like to lead the Ummah in the field of communication.

Sound Vision aims to produce content that helps build bridges of understanding among neighbors with emphasis on youth. Sound Vision would like to see our children achieve their full potential as dynamic and creative individuals who are comfortable with themselves and their environment. By absorbing the noble virtues of Islam in their formative years, our children will, Insha Allah, not only be better Muslims and better citizens, they would also strive to achieve the best of this world and the best of the world to come.

For years Muslims in the West were content to be consumers and even targets of the media. Then came North America’s first Islamic multimedia company, Sound Vision.

Rather than see our identities and those of our children taken away from us, Sound Vision chose to defy the status quo and develop Islamic media that would inform, educate and entertain our families. Using the media to introduce non-Muslims to Islam was also being virtually ignored. With these thoughts in mind, Sound Vision was born in 1988.

**The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community**

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is a dynamic, international revival movement within Islam. Founded in 1889, the Community spans over 200 countries with its USA chapter, established in 1920, being among the first and oldest American-Muslim organizations. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was created with the objective to rejuvenate Islamic moral and spiritual values. It encourages interfaith dialogue and diligently tries to correct misunderstandings about Islam in the West. It advocates peace, tolerance, love and understanding among followers of all faiths. Recognizing a state of disharmony, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community launched a grassroots education initiative called Muslims for Peace ([www.MuslimsForPeace.org](http://www.MuslimsForPeace.org)), which aims to spread the message of peace and tolerance. The Muslims for Peace initiative seeks to debunk the myth that Muslims do not stand up against terrorism or that Islam promotes violence instead of peace. It is the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community’s simple way to spread the message of peace one person at a time. We believe that peace and respect can only be established through mutual understanding and knowledge. [www.alislam.org](http://www.alislam.org)

**The Catholic Worker Movement**

The aim of the Catholic Worker movement is to live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ. Our sources are the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures as handed down in the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, with our inspiration coming from the lives of the saints, “men and women outstanding in holiness, living witnesses to Your unchanging love.” [www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org)

**The Parliament of World Religions** ([http://www.parliamentofreligions.org](http://www.parliamentofreligions.org)) was created to cultivate harmony among the world’s religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world.

The Parliament maintains a number of resources which are related to issues of Islamophobia: [http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/search/node/islamophobia](http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/search/node/islamophobia).
The Pluralism Project at Harvard University:
http://pluralism.org/publications/new-religious-america. The mission of the Pluralism Project is to help Americans engage with the realities of religious diversity through research, outreach, and the active dissemination of resources. The Pluralism Project: World Religions in America is a two decade-long research project with current funding from the Lilly Endowment and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation to engage students in studying the new religious diversity in the United States. The Project explores particularly the communities and religious traditions of Asia and the Middle East that have become woven into the religious fabric of the United States in the past twenty-five years.

The Religious Society of Friends
Religious witnesses for peace since 1660. www.quaker.org

The World Peace Prayer Society
To spread the Universal Peace Message and Prayer, May Peace Prevail On Earth, far and wide to embrace the lands and people of this Earth. http://www.worldpeace.org/

United Religions Initiative (URI) is a global grassroots interfaith network that cultivates peace and justice by engaging people to bridge religious and cultural differences and work together for the good of their communities and the world.

URI implements its mission through local and global initiatives that build the capacity of our more than 600 member groups and organizations, called Cooperation Circles, to engage in community action such as conflict resolution and reconciliation, environmental sustainability, education, women’s and youth programs, and advocacy for human rights. URI has a rich archive of materials on Islamophobia, including a Tool Kit for dealing with responses to hostility against faith communities: https://www.uri.org/files/resource_files/URI%20TOOLKIT%20Interfaith%20Responses%20to%20Islamophobia.pdf

Source: Partially adapted from Huffington Post:
Articles and Sources for Reflection

The Curse and the Promise: Religion and Violence

Abdal Hakim Murad

*A lecture given at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, on 2 November 2015*

One of my favourite novels is called *Death and the Dervish*. It’s the major work of the mid-20th century Bosnian novelist Mesa Selimović. He’s been turned into something of an icon in post-independence Bosnia, with boulevards, high schools and various public libraries now carrying his name. In the contested, competitively-loved city of Sarajevo, which sometimes calls itself the Balkan Jerusalem, where religious faultlines only a generation ago collapsed into catastrophe, he’s taken as a helpful icon of Bosnian togetherness, a Muslim anxious about religious divides — Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim — which under Tito had been forcibly subsumed under the slogan of Brotherhood and Unity, in a new secular world in which class, and not religion, would henceforth be the criterion of worth and identity.

Selimović, child of a city both divided and united by its Abrahamic plurality, was not a happy man, nor did he write happy books. *Death and the Dervish*, a dark tale in which all the action seems to happen at night, tells us the story of the head of a dervish retreat prominent in the city during the eighteenth century. He is a respectable, literate preacher who presides competently over his order’s serene and
complex Sufi ceremonies. His comfort-zone is invaded, however, when he learns that his brother has been arrested and sent to prison on a serious but frustratingly vague and misty charge: the city police and bureaucracy are willing to offer no clear idea of what the offence might have been. In this Kafkaesque darkness the imam prevaricates, hesitant to act, intervene or speak up on his brother’s behalf, until, some days later, the news arrives of his brother’s execution.

His agony and shock are described in the title of Chapter Six, which bears a Koranic quotation: *My God, I have no-one besides You and my brother*. This is, of course, from the story of Cain and Abel; and he feels the parallel spreading like a stain of dark ink across his soul. In a way he is like Hamlet, whose indecision, apparently peaceable and benign, allows moral darkness to prevail in his family, leading to a terrible guilt and his own destruction.

Shattered by the news, Selimović’s dervish stands up before his mosque congregation, in the dim candlelight. They all already know what has happened. And he says this:

*Sons of Adam! I will not give a sermon. I could not, even if I wanted to. But I believe that you would hold it against me, if I did not speak about myself now, at this moment, the darkest in my life. What I have to say has never been more important to me, but I am not trying to gain anything. Nothing, except to see compassion in your eyes. I did not call you my brothers, although you are that more than ever, but rather sons of Adam, invoking that which we all have in common. This crime concerns you as well, since you know the scripture: whoever kills an innocent man, it is as if he has killed all men. They have killed all of us countless times, my murdered brothers, but we are horrified when they strike our most beloved. Maybe I should hate them, but I cannot; I do not have two hearts, one for hatred and one for love. The heart that I have knows only grief now.*

*I am like Cain, to whom God sent a crow that dug up the soil, to teach him how to bury the body of his dead brother. I, the unfortunate Cain, more unfortunate than a black crow. I did not save him while he was alive; I did not see him after he died. Now I have no one except myself, my Lord, and my sorrow. Give me strength, so that I will not despair from brotherly and humanly grief, or poison myself with hatred. I repeat the words of Noah: Separate me from them, and judge us.*

*And now go home, and leave me alone with my misfortune. It is easier to endure, now that I have shared it with you.*

This is, as you may have guessed, the beginning, not the end of the book, which then charts his agonising descent into doubt and amorality. But in this tragic soliloquy, contemplating the claustrophobic darkness that now surrounds him, the dervish is trying to voice several painful insights about our human condition. All revolve around what his language calls *malodušnost*, which means, roughly, to have a diminished soul. When we fail the absolute duty and challenge of fraternity we become smaller and frailer; and the experience of that shrivelling of the soul can be as painful as the memory of our original dereliction.

Selimović tells us that how we discharge our duty to our brother, which in the rather thinly-populated world of Adam’s time essentially meant to everyone, is going to make or break our spirit. Nothing agitates and abrades the human consciousness quite like the remembering of violence, weakness,
vulnerability, and our own reluctance to do something about those afflictions. Complicity causes us to rot; for the rest of our lives we relive the moment when we seemed to hold in our hands the miracle of free will, an actual fork in the road open before us; now, although we can look back, we cannot turn back. Put to the test, we were not our brother’s keeper.

There is a tragic depth here, but it is not the tragic depth of he who would simply counsel a peaceable response. The dervish’s homily asks for forgiveness for the bearer of false witness who has destroyed his brother. Could I do the same in his shoes? Probably not. Yet it cannot end here. Forgiveness and passivity are unnatural bedfellows. Forgiveness is more whole and healing when we know that we might, just, become instruments of some just resolution. Because we are made in God’s image, inertness is foreign to our constitution. In the prospect of restitution, even of some form of justice, there is a healing. We are not to sentence ourselves or others to permanent guilt and distress at the memory of our own inaction, or that of others. It is monstrous to impose or to expect such corrosion.

‘There is life for you in restorative justice, O possessors of souls’, says the Muslim scripture. To forgive a murderer may be a miraculous sign of forbearance and trust in God’s creation, of transcending the certainly heathen impulse of revenge. Restorative justice, however, is something else; it is not tied to revenge. It can bring a certain lightening of the burden. The relatives of crime victims sometimes speak of what they call ‘closure’ when a due sentence has been passed, say on a murderer or a child molester. In the United States, families traditionally have the right to witness the murderer’s execution. In our soft Europe we wince at what we dismiss as trans-Atlantic crudeness, and perhaps there is a sort of absent mindedness here, rather as we happily eat chicken sandwiches but have no desire to see how the chicken’s life ended. But what are called the right-to-view laws only endure because families do often report a certain strange peacefulness once they have witnessed the execution. Again, this is not simply the acceptable face of revenge.

Brooks Douglas, who wrote Oklahoma’s new right-to-view statute a decade after his parents were murdered, said this: ‘It is not retaliation or retribution that I seek in witnessing the execution of the man who killed my parents. It is closure. Closure on an era of my life which I never chose to enter. Closure of years of anger and hate.’

Justice does not normally remedy a crime, but we are reassured when we recall that it may help to preserve the order of the world; despite our squeamishness we know that when justice is rightly administered some sort of holiness fills the air, a presence of the mysterium tremendum, the deep, solemn mystery of God and His will for equity and safety among His servants. Even St Paul, sometimes read as an abolisher of the Jewish law, at least, also writes in Romans that ‘the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.’ He is telling us that it is not only useful, but holy.

Whether or not we support the death penalty, which I cite only as an example, we are likely to recognise that despite our anxieties the Queen’s peace will always depend on punishment. If convicted, Cain ought to be punished. And to fail to punish will not only endanger the good order of the world, but is likely to purify our souls. It is not justice or forgiveness, but, we may ideally hope, justice and forgiveness.

This is, a few radical pacifists excepted, a pretty normal understanding in our three monotheisms. But as so often in our chaotic human world the matter does not stop with crime and punishment. What if there is no constable and no magistrate? What if one is a refugee, or stateless, or living in a failed
state? What if there is no human arbiter who might re-establish a settled pattern of life and bring offenders to book? If one is, say, in a Croydon riot, and the police are nowhere in sight, what is the right course of action? May one defend one’s shop and family against looters and thieves?

This is not, of course, a matter only for theologians. Section 76 of the 2008 Criminal Justice Act sets out our common law understanding of legitimate self-defence. Turning its pages I find that subsection 5a even makes it legal for me to use disproportionate, but not grossly disproportionate, force when defending myself against an intruder who has broken into my house. The courts will generally consider any violent action which I honestly and instinctively think is necessary for a legitimate purpose to fall within the purpose of legitimate self-defence, as defined in English law; in fact, this subsection, introduced as recently as 2013, significantly expands my right to use violence to defend my property, family and home. The same applies in a public place if I witness, for instance, a mugging on the Piccadilly Line, and become involved in the defence of the victim. In some cases I may even be prosecuted for inaction. I am very much my brother’s keeper.

Again, on the issue of self-defence where the police are not to hand, we are likely to be united. Who respects the bystander who just passes by on the other side when a woman is being molested, or seeks to intervene only with words of pious exhortation? But what if we enlarge our compass again, and zoom out, to view great collective issues of war and peace? Clearly, unless we are convinced pacifists, even on this macro scale we will allow human communities, and not just individuals, the use of force in self-defence. If Israeli soldiers or settlers try to demolish Palestinian homes, to take one topical example, it is hard to deny their victims, as individuals and communities, the right to raise their hands in self-defence. And this surely applies on the national level as well. To remain with Palestine, since it has been cited so emphatically by a previous speaker in this series, there would seem to be no ground in our English legal precedent and historical norms to deny the Palestinians the right to defend themselves. To propose a simple thought-experiment, if what befell Palestine in 1948 had happened to us here in England, we would presumably have fought; neighbouring states would have come to our aid, and probably many of us would still be fighting.

Are we now feeling a little less comfortable? Perhaps fidgeting ever so slightly, and wondering where tonight’s speaker is likely to go? You are right to fidget. I do so as well. But if we are morally serious we ought to look this one in the eye. Should self-defence apply only to our own British selves, while on others we wish an interminable Peace Process while the lands of the victims are steadily curetted away, as a whole country is subjected to a kind of death by a thousand cuts? At the end of October I read on the website of the human rights activist Philip Weiss, that, quote, “Israeli forces have killed 65 Palestinians this month, including 14 children.’ The Palestinians in their weakness are trying to resist the progressive confiscation of their land. I suppose that we would do the same, if England and our own suburbs were facing the bulldozers. So why do we find their resistance so morally difficult? If I fight back when my house in Croydon is vandalised by intruders, and would fight back if my country was occupied, why should this not introduce a universal principle, available to other races, peoples, and faith groups?

As the poet Rumi says:

‘Knowledge and wealth and office and rank and fortune are a mischief in the hands of the evil-natured.'
Therefore the Jihad was made obligatory on true believers for this purpose, namely, that they might take the spear-point from the hand of the madman.’

So far our argument has been, I think, roughly consensual. I have given a topical example, but the rule seems to be rather simple and universal. Of course, if someone stabs my wife, I should fight back; if my country is invaded and occupied, I should defend it. The law is holy precisely when it prevents or punishes aggression. The three monotheisms largely concur on this. So why, at this point of the argument, do we feel a certain agitation?

I think the reason is not, in fact, located in an assumption that non-Europeans ought not to have a right which we would claim for ourselves. It is more disturbing and challenging. It is to do with unease over the due boundaries of our resistance. Does subsection 5a explain the dividing line between excessive and grossly excessive force? It does not. Can religion do so? On the face of it, it seems to insist that it does. Here, for instance, is the Qur’an:

*And if one has responded to injustice to no greater extent than the injury he received, and is again tyrannized, God will help him; for God is Pardoning and Forgiving.* (22.60)

The medieval commentator Razi here gives the sense: the believer who fights proportionately, but is thereafter still the victim of aggression, will certainly be given victory by God; but he adds: ‘even though God gives you this guarantee of victory, he offers you something which is better: forgiveness and pardon.’

This is the principle of proportionality, which as the American scholar John Kelsay has shown is a key principle in both Islamic and Christian theories of just war. And the option of forgiveness is provided as well.

This sounds easy. But how easy is it for religious scholars to explain proportionality in practice? Probably, if we are honest, not very easy at all. Every human situation has its own logic; the boundary between legitimate and transgressive violence will fluctuate wildly from encounter to encounter. In a life-or-death situation, emotions can flare, and under such circumstances we find ourselves doing things which posterity may or may not find it possible to forgive.

And yet everyone asks religion to furnish guidance, and to keep it as clear as possible. What must we, and what must we not do, to protect Abel, or to prevent a repeat offence? General injunctions to act morally and proportionately can abound in a generously gaseous profusion; but what combatants and victims would really like to hear is clear and practical instructions. Nowadays some might urge the setting-aside of religious talk in favour of an allegedly neutral and objective secular theory of the right conduct of war and international affairs. Leave Hebron, or Kabul, or Srinagar, to the diplomats! But this turns out not to help very much. Just as subsection 5a cannot really tell me when I should use a kitchen knife on a burglar, so also the brave declarations of the United Nations, in themselves so precious, seem only to offer limited guidance. It is fine that we have the Convention on Cluster Munitions, for instance, and I find it a source of pride that the United Kingdom is a signatory. But we all know how blunt an instrument the law is in practice. Whatever the law might be, the ultimate decision in the real world is likely to stay in the hands of the combatants; it is they who decide what might be a legitimate use of force under the circumstances.
In our literature perhaps the best-known recital of this fear is Shakespeare's Henry the Fifth, as the king warns the people of a besieged town that when his soldiers' blood is up, neither he nor any moral law can answer for the consequences. These are his great and sobering lines:

*I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur
Till in her ashes she lie buried.
The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
And the flesh'd soldier, rough and hard of heart,
In liberty of bloody hand shall range
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
Your fresh-fair virgins and your flowering infants.
What is it then to me, if impious war,
Array'd in flames like to the prince of fiends,
Do, with his smirch'd complexion, all fell feats
Enlink'd to waste and desolation?
What is't to me, when you yourselves are cause,
If your pure maidens fall into the hand
Of hot and forcing violation?
What rein can hold licentious wickedness
When down the hill he holds his fierce career?
We may as bootless spend our vain command
Upon the enraged soldiers in their spoil
As send precepts to the leviathan
To come ashore.*

In our modern scenarios, not enough has changed. Generals and politicians will still shrug, and blame the chaos of war itself and the passions which it perhaps uniquely enflames. Conventions and rules for armed conflict are right and proper, but the boundary between necessary and grossly-excessive force cannot be successfully policed by the instructions of anxious bureaucrats at the United Nations. All too often the men in blue helmets appear after the last shot has been fired, to investigate atrocities, and to file reports.

Above all, religion must surely step in here to define, in a world of white-hot hasty passions in which deliberative judgement is often difficult or swept completely away, the limits of self-defence. What is the use of religion, I ask myself, if it cannot help me to discern my own spirit, and know the difference between justice and vengeance? Between proportionate and excessive self-defence? Between protecting myself from a subsequent lifetime of guilt at my own inaction, and a no less ravaging guilt at my own excessive and vicious action?

We religionists will need to be honest about this. Have all rabbis spoken out against what has happened to the Palestinians? Did all Anglican bishops condemn Bomber Harris during the Second World War? And what precisely were the Slovak bishops doing? And in the modern Islamic world, exactly how many are condemning suicide bombings against random Israelis and others? Some do, but we are haunted by the fact that some do not. Here, surely, there is a shameful *trahison des clercs.*

There is a kind of excuse for which we reach. In 1943 we might have thought that the Reich would surrender if her beautiful cities were reduced to smoking rubble. It was a partial, ill-informed
judgement of its time; and six hundred thousand civilians died. Today, some might imagine that the fate of the Palestinians will be improved rather than exacerbated by suicide bombing, a practice unknown to Muslims until some twenty years ago. That too is surely the consequence of emotion, excitement, and even a kind of fear and despair driven by current events and relentless media frenzy. Yet surely we find such excuses underwhelming and distressing at best.

I myself once stayed in a refugee camp near Jerusalem, where I found that some still defended terrorism because they felt they had no other weapon. But most, I found, felt shamed and humiliated. Their claim to be on a pristine moral high ground, the weak and poor victims of Israel’s military Goliath, a noble sense of self which sustained them and in some measure healed them in their exile, was now obscurely besmirched. Justice is a healing, to be sure; but ugly disproportion adds to the soul’s distress, heaping on our wounds the desperate feeling of shame.

Here we ought to stand, I feel sure. How terrible that religion, whose rich resources for helping us with anger management and self-control seem so much deeper than any international convention could ever be, should sometimes seem to act as a magnifying glass for our rage and desperation, and find through a disastrous casuistry some theology of the moment which allows us to defend the indefensible in the name of faith. Read an al-Qaeda justification of suicide bombing, and one will be struck by the vast effort made to reconfigure ancient texts and values to deliver what is taken to be a strategically-useful weapon. This is what we might call the Guantanamo school of scriptural interpretation: treat the text badly enough and it will end up saying whatever we want to hear. And who is there who will intervene, to rescue the texts from this kind of torture?

My talk this evening must certainly not be a mere commentary on current events. But Muslims still need to explicate this present and very new crisis, not least because of the disgrace which it brings. One needs to make the point again and again to a dismayed world that classical Sunni Islam has nothing to do with the new zealotries, the phenomenon of Tanfir, as we call it: that which is so vehement that in the name of the One God it ironically repels humanity from the monotheistic principle itself. Why does the Nigerian group Boko Haram not only attack churches, but also explode massive suicide bombs in Sunni mosques? Because its theology is not recognised as Sunni. Boko Haram’s founder Muhammad Yusuf, who established the Ibn Taymiyya mosque in the northern city of Maiduguri, studied with a certain Shaykh Ja’far Muhammad Adam, a graduate not of a mainstream Sunni university but of the Saudi Islamic University in Madina. Shaykh Ja’far came to distance himself from Muhammad Yusuf’s extremism, but the genealogy is noted by many Nigerians to this day. In Indonesia, the religious scholars have noted the strong convergence between Saudi types of Puritanism recently exported to the country, and the doctrinal ideologies of some of the country’s most intransigent radical groups, including the best-known, Lasykar Jihad.

In Iraq, during the years of sanctions, some Saudi agencies were working hard to create a network of fundamentalist colleges; some of their graduates eventually joined the complex sea of radical factions which emerged after the 2003 invasion.

The determination evident in some Saudi institutions to push the Islamic world in the direction of a puritanical literalism, lubricated by oil wealth and excellent relations with America, has over the past few years placed traditional Sunni Islam on the defensive. At a time when the Muslim world most needs to marshal its resources for dealing with the philosophical, moral and spiritual crises and challenges of our age, these institutions have issued a siren call to a desert Puritanism hostile to
philosophical theology, mysticism, and the classical formulations of Islamic jurisprudence. Instead of the careful wisdom of ages directing our reading of the scriptures, there are only our own fallible convictions about how the earliest Muslims might have behaved, had they been in our situation.

The timing has been disastrous. For most of the twentieth century Muslim scholars strove to interpret and reinterpret their ancient and hallowed legislation in ways that could allow Muslims some workable accommodation, if not agreement, with the emerging global consensus. The Sharia, which Muslim scholars agree is not a single body of statutes but a rich and diverse legal tradition, turned out to lend itself admirably well to such a project. In particular, the practice known as *tanqih al-manat*—identifying the context for laws in order to determine their current form and application; and *maslaha mursala*, taking due account of public interest and utility, moved the jurists of the great seats of Muslim learning in the direction of accommodation, which was taken to be an authentic, not a compromised, jurisprudential strategy in a time of complex challenges. This eirenic tendency saw itself as profoundly rooted in the assurance that God’s law exists to instantiate mercy, not hardship; far from representing a concession to a secular age, as the fundamentalists thought, it maintained a prudential option for gentleness which long predated the impact of the modern world. Even in the sixteenth century the great Ottoman jurist Birgivi was urging this: ‘In our time, it is impossible, I repeat, impossible, I repeat, impossible, to take the more stringent interpretation in any legal matter.’ This wisdom permitted the flourishing of an Ottoman and Levantine cosmopolitanism in which different denominations were able to thrive and interact for centuries. Thus was monotheism defended from weakness and discredit.

By contrast, we have the new Puritanism, intolerant of internal Muslim difference and maximally suspicious of non-Muslim intent. Let me cite just one example. Most Muslims are disturbed by the verdict of the leading Saudi scholar, the late Muhammad bin Salih al-Uthaimin, who wrote this:

> Today, why should we not wage war on America, Russia, France and England? What is the reason? It is because we lack the power and weaponry which they have developed in this age. What is in our hands resembles kitchen knives by comparison, opposing rockets.

What precise message is this sending to Muslims in the West? That the only reason why they are not at war with the host countries is because of a disparity in military hardware? That seems to be the implication of the shaykh’s dictum. But this view is eccentric, regarded with abhorrence by more mainstream Sunni scholarship. The more normal view is articulated by the Mauritanian jurist Abdullah Bin Bayyah, who tells us this:

> The Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, says: ‘Not one of you has faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself. … Brother here does not only mean your brother Muslim, but it refers to the greater and broader brotherhood of our Adamic nature. It is a brotherhood in the sense that we are all from Adam, that Adam is the father of us all. … We have to be good citizens because an excellent Muslim is also an excellent citizen in the society that he lives in. … In addition, we have to recognize that creation itself is a creation of diversity. It is a creation in which you see variations of colours. God did not make all the trees one, and He did not make all the animals one. He diversified His creation. He diversified even our colours and our languages, and He did all this for a wisdom. Not only that, Allah made us on different religions and different paths, and He did that intentionally because … there is a divine wisdom in the differences that we have.'
The new fundamentalisms, sometimes fuelled by petrodollars, treat this ancient wisdom with suspicion and contempt. And so the story of contemporary Islamic extremism is so often that each movement is succeeded by one more extreme still, as we saw with the splintering of radical movements in Algeria, and as currently we see al-Qaida giving way to movements that are even more radical and outrageous, which turn on it and attack it. Under such wildly anarchic and furious circumstances the only option for traditional Sunni scholarship is often to flee or face execution.

In areas controlled by extremists, Sunni scholars may be persecuted or killed. In other places, however, they may face a different fate: brutal co-option by secular regimes. In an increasing number of countries they are forbidden to preach their own sermons, having to read out a state sermon instead. Criticism of governmental abuse and corruption is savagely punished. They have hence found themselves caught between two fires, with the result that everywhere their authority and reach is being eroded. Still, we find that they remain unanimous in their condemnation of al-Qaeda, Isis, and the other new Tanfiri movements.

Where mainstream voices are silenced or repressed it becomes easier for the extremists to step in. But here Muslims need to grapple with a painful question. One can comprehend the new fundamentalism’s rejection of classical forms of religious authority. But can one so easily account for the fact that so many young people do not only reject the classical Sunni rules, but seem to reach for disturbingly brutal new interpretations? The existence of a possible extreme has always been known in the Islamic world, although it has very seldom won favour. In fact the Prophet spoke against ghuluww, which translates very well as ‘extremism’, saying that some people go into religion so hard that they come out the other side, as an arrow passes through its target. And he also warned:

*On the Day of Judgement there shall be two people for whom I will not intercede: an unjust, arbitrary ruler, and an extremist, who departs from religion by his way of entering it.*

It is clear that the Prophet despised the type of the fanatic. So why is that extreme end of the spectrum being populated now? Is it enough to blame Saudi largesse?

Clearly it is not a sufficient explanation. The Saudis have, in fact, manfully struggled to ride the tiger of fundamentalism, supporting it in general but dealing firmly and sometimes brutally with its most political and extreme manifestations at home. And to be fair, those who in various corners of the world are now defending the Saudi theology, often find themselves the targets of the new radicals. Last year the prominent Nigerian Salafi cleric Muhammad Awal Adam was assassinated after criticising them in a sermon.

So doctrinal novelty has been a factor, but not the only one. We need a further interpretation, of a more numinous kind. How to diagnose the iron in the soul, which causes young people to reach for the most extreme available interpretation?

Let us step back and try to find some parallels. Take the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. One explanation for them points to the extreme humiliation the population had suffered under the previous administration, intensified by American aerial bombing that according to some estimates claimed a hundred thousand civilian lives. In fact, three times as many bombs were dropped on Cambodia than had landed on Japan during the entirety of the Second World War. The countryside
was torn apart or incinerated with napalm. As one Western journalist observed: ‘it is difficult to imagine the intensity of their hatred towards those who are destroying their villages and property.’ The monster called Pol Pot crawled out of this cauldron, determined to shatter traditional society, and to rebuild a new, Maoist order which would restore his people’s self-respect and heal their humiliation.

Another case, perhaps more familiar. This time it is Hitler in 1940, arriving for the signing of France’s capitulation in the famous railway carriage at Compiègne. The American correspondent William Shirer saw his face, writing: ‘his expression, a sort of scornful, inner joy at being present at this great reversal of fate. ... It is a magnificent gesture of defiance, or burning contempt for this place now and all that it has stood for in the twenty-two years since it witnessed the humbling of the German Empire.’

In those two decades that produced Hitler, Germany had been subjected to the extreme humiliations of the Treaty of Versailles. The crippling war reparations were described by John Meynard Keynes as a ‘Carthaginian peace’ which would destroy Germany. In that world of unemployment, hyperinflation and debt, the madness of Nazism took root easily, even in the land of Goethe and Schubert.

The disproportionate, almost cultic and ritual violence, of Kampuchea and the Third Reich, thus seems to be explicable, at least in part, as the result of years of extreme humiliation and a thirst for a vengeance that would re-establish a lost self-esteem. Nothing could be allowed to stand in the way of that project. In the case of both Maoism and Nazism, the ideology was secular, taking the form essentially of a kind of totalitarian Darwinism.

In the contemporary Middle East, decades of economic and social mismanagement by desperately corrupt regimes, which themselves replaced the humiliating years of colonial rule, produced a weakness which then enabled the Western invasion of Iraq. The exact motivations and circumstances for that may or may not be unveiled when we finally see the Chilcot Report. However even Tony Blair, not a man given to undue self-criticism, has conceded that the 2003 invasion was a factor in the rise of tafiri extremism.

But before the invasion there were the sanctions. Who now remembers the harrowing letter sent by the Iraqi Medical Association to the British Medical Journal in 2001, which said: ‘Thousands of Iraqis are still dying from malnutrition, infectious diseases, and the effects of shortages or unavailability of essential drugs. More and more children are dying from cancer, probably related to contamination of the environment with depleted uranium.’ UNICEF calculated that around half a million children died as a result of the sanctions. Most notoriously, Madeleine Albright was asked on live television: ‘We have heard that half a million children have died. I mean, that’s more children than died in Hiroshima. And, you know, is the price worth it?’ Albright replied: ‘We think the price is worth it.’

Into this apocalyptic situation came the invasion, bringing yet another experience of humiliation. It was probably in the detention camps, whereas at Guantanamo, culturally-specific types of interrogation procedures were adopted, such as nudity, the use of dogs, and religious abuse, all designed to break the resistance of Arab prisoners, that the new extremist factions were born.

It is often said that the original sin in the West’s relationship with the Middle East was its refusal to deal equally with Israelis and Palestinians. Certainly that is the final proof, for many sermonisers, of
the Anglo-Saxon world’s indifference to Arab and Muslim rights. Robin Cook, in his moving farewell speech to Parliament, also highlighted the foundational centrality of the Palestine issue to current Muslim grievances.

But although America’s closeness to Israel certainly added to Iraqi humiliation, and made collaboration with occupation psychologically more hard, this explanation is not nearly sufficient. Sometimes, too, it is invoked as the solitary master-explanation of all the region’s woes.

The loss of Palestine, and the ongoing loss of the remaining Palestinian lands, have clearly made it harder for the Islamic world to love the West. There will not be a resolution of this any time soon. But this must never be deployed as an excuse for breaking moral boundaries. To say that all Hamas can do to hit back at Israeli violence is to fire missiles at random civilian targets is to adopt a utilitarian calculus, driven by humiliation and a longing for revenge. And yet we find that the Prophet of Islam, who once found a woman’s body on a battlefield, forbade the killing of women and children. This is a scripture narrated by Imam Muslim, on unimpeachable authority. Proportionality is a rule in just war theory; so also is what is called discrimination. Again John Kelsay has shown in great detail that Islamic law respects the principle of discrimination, and opposes the targeting of noncombatants.

Just as Jews must condemn Jewish extremists, and Christians must condemn Christian extremists, including many on the US evangelical right who have supported violent policies towards the Arab world, so too must Muslims take risks and adopt controversial positions, opposing the logic of rage-driven revenge and tribal solidarity.

What are the prospects? It may be that the current escalation, whereby every extremism generates one still more extreme, will eventually collapse when the society and economy it seeks to produce turns out to be impossible. The Ottoman scholar we cited earlier explained that the jurist must always seek the lighter and easier interpretation because of the weakness of the people of the age. He was writing in the early sixteenth century, in an age of faith! Today, with hedonism, atheism, and a myriad of alternatives snapping at the heels of religion, all of them only a couple of clicks away, we are clearly weaker still. It seems unlikely that a fanatic religious utopia could last long before collapsing into disillusionment. It is interesting that on Fridays, those who cross the border from Turkey into Iran leave behind them a land where the mosques are full, and enter an Islamic Republic where the mosques seem almost deserted.

The Cain and Abel story, a kind of primordial parable of the human tragedy, needs to be read carefully by those who would build holy dictatorships in our time. Religious witness needs to protect our brothers, not only from physical harm, but also from the spiritual assassination that comes through any thoughtless and brutal coercion directed at their innermost convictions. Capitalism’s entertainment culture may finally serve as the crow which disposes of the decomposing body of a brother slain by the wrong kind of religious politics. In a few years we may see many such bodies littering the streets of the Islamic world. Some will be still teaching, working, loving, or parenting; but their souls will be dead to religion.

Ultimately some religious scholars themselves may share this fate. What is the end of Selimović’s Bosnian novel? He does not have his protagonist collapsing into public immorality. On the contrary, he is appointed the chief religious judge of his city. But his guilt at his abandonment of his brother has eaten away at his soul, and he is a hollow man; outwardly punctilious but inwardly a ruin. After such a
crime, even the man of religion’s religion can be no more than a shell, eventually replaced, one
guesses, by something else. Every Cain becomes his own Abel in the end.

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2010 he was voted Britain’s most influential Muslim thinker by Jordan’s Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre.
He has translated a number of books from the Arabic, including several sections of Imam al-Ghazali’s *Ihya’ Ulum
al-Din*.
Recommended Articles

“America’s embrace of Islamophobia is new – but not surprising” by Rula Jebreal:
http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/16/america-islamophobia-republicans-politics-trump-carson

“Business Ethics in Islam” by Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi:
http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_1101_1150/business_ethics_in_islam.htm

“Freedom of Speech v. Freedom of Religion?: How American Muslims Are Countering Hate and Getting It Right”:

“Islam, Commerce, and Business Ethics” by Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad:
http://www.minaret.org/islamcommercebusinessethics.pdf

“Islam in the Workplace” for Kwintessential:
http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/cultural-services/articles/islam-in-the-workplace.html

“Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West” by Gallup:

“Muhammad Ali to Trump: You Don’t Know Islam” by Martin Rogers, Sojourners
https://sojo.net/articles/muhammad-ali-trump-you-dont-know-islam

“The Muslim Drill” by Wajahat Ali, New York Times:
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/09/opinion/the-muslim-drill.html?_r=1
Wajahat Ali, a writer and the author of the play “The Domestic Crusaders,” is a journalist at Al Jazeera America.

“New Religious America” by Diana L. Eck on Frontline:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/faith/neighbors/excerpt.html

“Next Door Neighbors, Muslims and Methods” by Diana L. Eck on BeliefNet:

“Top Ten Ways Islamic Law forbids Terrorism” by Juan Cole in informed Comment:
http://www.juancole.com/2013/04/islamic-forbids-terrorism.html
Recommended Books


In these times of rising geopolitical chaos, the need for mutual understanding between cultures has never been more urgent. Religious differences are seen as fuel for violence and warfare. In these pages, one of our greatest writers on religion, Karen Armstrong, amasses a sweeping history of humankind to explore the perceived connection between war and the world’s great creeds—and to issue a passionate defense of the peaceful nature of faith.

With unprecedented scope, Armstrong looks at the whole history of each tradition—not only Christianity and Islam, but also Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Judaism. Religions, in their earliest days, endowed every aspect of life with meaning, and warfare became bound up with observances of the sacred. Modernity has ushered in an epoch of spectacular violence, although, as Armstrong shows, little of it can be ascribed directly to religion. Nevertheless, she shows us how and in what measure religions came to absorb modern belligerence—and what hope there might be for peace among believers of different faiths in our time. New Postscript in paperback deals with IS and the events in Paris January 2015.


Muhammad presents a fascinating portrait of the founder of a religion that continues to change the course of world history. Muhammad’s story is more relevant than ever because it offers crucial insight into the true origins of an increasingly radicalized Islam. Countering those who dismiss Islam as fanatical and violent, Armstrong offers a clear, accessible, and balanced portrait of the central figure of one of the world’s great religions.


No religion in the modern world is as feared and misunderstood as Islam. It haunts the popular imagination as an extreme faith that promotes terrorism, authoritarian government, female oppression, and civil war. In a vital revision of this narrow view of Islam and a distillation of years of thinking and writing about the subject, Karen Armstrong’s short history demonstrates that the world’s fastest-growing faith is a much more complex phenomenon than its modern fundamentalist strain might suggest.
Aslan, Reza. *No god, but God* (Ember 2012).

*For teens and young adults.* An invaluable introduction for young readers to a faith that for much of the West remains shrouded in ignorance and fear. Written by Reza Aslan, an internationally acclaimed scholar of comparative religion, *No god but God* examines Islam: its rituals and traditions, the revelation of Muhammad as Prophet and the subsequent uprising against him, and the emergence of his successors.

Engaging, accessible, and thought-provoking, *No god but God* is sure to stimulate discussion and encourage understanding of the Islamic faith and the people who follow it.


In *No god but God,* internationally acclaimed scholar Reza Aslan explains Islam—the origins and evolution of the faith—in all its beauty and complexity. This updated edition addresses the events of the past decade, analyzing how they have influenced Islam’s position in modern culture. Aslan explores what the popular demonstrations pushing for democracy in the Middle East mean for the future of Islam in the region, how the Internet and social media have affected Islam’s evolution, and how the war on terror has altered the geopolitical balance of power in the Middle East. He also provides an update on the contemporary Muslim women’s movement, a discussion of the controversy over veiling in Europe, an in-depth history of Jihadism, and a look at how Muslims living in North America and Europe are changing the face of Islam. Timely and persuasive, *No god but God* is an elegantly written account that explains this magnificent yet misunderstood faith.


The wars in the Middle East have become religious wars in which God is believed to be directly engaged on behalf of one side against the other. The hijackers who attacked America on September 11, 2001, thought they were fighting in the name of God. According to award-winning writer and scholar of religions Reza Aslan, the United States, by infusing the War on Terror with its own religiously polarizing rhetoric, is fighting a similar war—a war that can’t be won.

*Beyond Fundamentalism* is both an in-depth study of the ideology fueling al-Qa’ida, the Taliban, and like-minded militants throughout the Muslim world and an exploration of religious violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. At a time when religion and politics increasingly share the same
vocabulary and function in the same sphere, Aslan writes that we must strip the conflicts of our world of their religious connotations and address the earthly grievances that always lie at its root.

How do you win a religious war? By refusing to fight in one.

Esposito, John L. *Islam and Democracy After the Arab Spring* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

The landscape of the Middle East has changed dramatically since 2011, as have the political arena and the discourse around democracy. In *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, John L. Esposito, John Voll, and Tamara Sonn examine the state of democracy in Muslim-majority societies today. Applying a twenty-first century perspective to the question of whether Islam is “compatible” with democracy, they redirect the conversation toward a new politics of democracy that transcends both secular authoritarianism and Political Islam.

While the opposition movements of the Arab Spring vary from country to country, each has raised questions regarding equality, economic justice, democratic participation, and the relationship between Islam and democracy in their respective countries. Does democracy require a secular political regime? Are religious movements the most effective opponents of authoritarian secularist regimes? Esposito, Voll, and Sonn examine these questions and shed light on how these opposition movements reflect the new global realities of media communication and sources of influence and power. Positioned for a broad readership of scholars and students, policy-makers, and media experts, *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring* will quickly become a go-to for all who watch the Middle East, inside and outside of academia.


John L. Esposito is one of America's leading authorities on Islam. Now, in this brilliant portrait of Islam today--and tomorrow--he draws on a lifetime of thought and research to sweep away the negative stereotypes and provide an accurate, richly nuanced, and revelatory account of the fastest growing religion in the world.

Here Esposito explores the major questions and issues that face Islam in the 21st century and that will deeply affect global politics. Are Islam and the West locked in a deadly clash of civilizations? Is Islam
compatible with democracy and human rights? Will religious fundamentalism block the development of modern societies in the Islamic world? Will Islam overwhelm the Western societies in which so many Muslim immigrants now reside? Will Europe become Eurabia or will the Muslims assimilate? Which Muslim thinkers will be most influential in the years to come? To answer this last question he introduces the reader to a new generation of Muslim thinkers--Tariq Ramadan, Timothy Winter, Mustafa Ceric, Amina Wadud, and others--a diverse collection of Muslim men and women, both the "Martin Luthers" and the "Billy Grahams" of Islam. We meet religious leaders who condemn suicide bombing and who see the killing of unarmed men, women, and children as "worse than murder," who preach toleration and pluralism, who advocate for women's rights. The book often underscores the unexpected similarities between the Islamic world and the West and at times turns the mirror on the Us, revealing how we appear to Muslims, all to highlight the crucial point that there is nothing exceptional about the Muslim faith.

Recent decades have brought extraordinary changes in the Muslim world, and in addressing all of these issues, Esposito paints a complex picture of Islam in all its diversity--a picture of urgent importance as we face the challenges of the coming century.

**Foreword to the Future of Islam by Karen Armstrong**

This is an important book. Those of us who have been on the front line of the effort, since the atrocities of September 11, 2001, to explain Islam in the Western world soon became aware not simply of the widespread ignorance of Muslim religion in both Europe and the United States but also of an entrenched reluctance to see Islam in a more favorable light. People often look balked and vaguely mutinous when, for example, you explain that the Qur'an does not in fact advocate the indiscriminate slaughter of the infidel or the propagation of the faith by the sword, and that even though there is still much to be done to promote gender equality in Muslim countries, the message of the Qur'an was initially friendly to the emancipation of women.

One of the most frequently asked questions is: "Why has Islam not had a reformation?" The query betrays an ignorance of both Islamic and Western history. It assumes that there was something special and unique about the reform movement initiated by Martin Luther (1483–1556) and John Calvin (1509–64) that points to the inherent superiority and progressive nature of our Western culture. In fact, Luther's was a typical pre-modern reformation, similar to many of the movements of islah (''reform'') and tajdid (''renewal'') that have regularly punctuated Muslim history. They all, Muslim or Christian, follow a similar agenda: they attempt to return to the wellsprings of tradition and cast aside the piety of the immediate past. Thus Luther and Calvin sought to return to the "pure" Christianity of the Bible and the Fathers of the Church, in exactly the same way as Ahmed ibn Taymiyyah of Damascus (1263–1328) advocated a return to the Qur'an and the sunnah (''customal practice'') of the Prophet Muhammad. In his desire to get back to basics, Ibn Taymiyyah also overturned much revered medieval jurisprudence and philosophy, just as Luther and Calvin attacked the medieval scholastic theologians; like any Muslim reformation, therefore, their movement was both reactionary and revolutionary.

Reform movements usually occur during a period of cultural change or in the wake of a great political disaster, when the old answers no longer suffice and reformers seek to bring the tradition up to date so that it can meet the contemporary challenge. The Protestant
Reformation took place during the profound societal changes of the early modern period, when people found that they could no longer practice their faith in the same way as their medieval ancestors. It was, therefore, the product rather than a cause of modernization, and instead of being regarded as the instigator of change, Luther should rather be seen as the spokesman of a current trend. A similar process is now under way in the Muslim world, where the modernization process has been even more problematic than that of sixteenth-century Europe, because it has been complicated by the colonial disruption and continued Western influence in the internal affairs of the former colonies.

Again, Western people are often skeptical about the ability of Islam to reform itself and doubt the presence and effectiveness of Muslim reformers, in part because these creative thinkers get little coverage in the Western press. Thanks to this much-needed book, there is no longer any excuse for such ignorance. Professor Esposito has given a clear and informative introduction to the work of such reformers as Tariq Ramadan, Amr Khalid, Shaykh Ali Goma’a, Mustafa Ceric, Tim Winter, and Heba Raouf. Like Luther, these individuals articulate an important trend in Muslim thinking that challenges the common Western view of Islam. This trend clearly does not regard a literal interpretation of scripture as normative; it is well aware that laws and customs have been conditioned by the historical circumstances in which they developed and must be interpreted in the light of this understanding; it regards self-criticism as creative, necessary, and a religious imperative; it abhors terrorism and violence; and it is anxious to initiate a “gender jihad.”

Most important, Professor Esposito makes it clear that Western people simply cannot afford to remain uninformed about these developments in the Muslim world. He shows how the failure of Western foreign policy has been one of the causes of the current malaise in the region and that, for example, ignorance about the Sunni/Shia rift in Iraq made it impossible for the United States to identify friends and foes. We now live in one world and share a common predicament. What happens in Gaza or Afghanistan today is likely to have repercussions tomorrow in London or Washington, D.C. To persist in the belief that all Muslims support terrorism, oppose democracy, and are atavistically opposed to freedom is not only counterproductive to Western interests but, as we see in these pages, flies in the face of the evidence, such as that provided in the recent Gallup Poll. Westerners cannot expect Muslims to adopt a more positive view of their cultural values if they themselves persist in cultivating a stereotypical view of Islam that in some significant respects dates back to the Middle Ages. Unless we can learn to live together in a more just and rational way, we are unlikely to have a viable world to hand on to the next generation.

One comes away from this book convinced that the future of Islam does not simply depend on the effectiveness of a few Muslim reformers but that the United States and Europe also have a major role to play. If short-sighted Western policies have helped to create the current impasse, they will, if not corrected, continue to have a negative effect upon the region, will weaken the cause of reform, and play into the hands of extremists. In the Qur’an, God calls all men and women to appreciate the unity and equality of the human race: “O people! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another” (49:13). One of the major tasks of our generation is to build a global community, where people of all persuasions can live together in harmony and mutual respect. In writing this book, which will help many
Western readers to achieve a more balanced, informed, and nuanced appreciation of the Muslim world, Professor Esposito has made a major contribution.


Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, there has been an overwhelming demand for information about Islam, and recent events - the war in Iraq, terrorist attacks both failed and successful, debates throughout Europe over Islamic dress, and many others - have raised new questions in the minds of policymakers and the general public. This newly updated edition of *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* is the best single source for clearly presented, objective information about these new developments, and for answers to questions about the origin and traditions of Islam.

Editor of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islam* and *The Oxford History of Islam*, and author of *The Future of Islam* and many other acclaimed works, John L. Esposito is one of America's leading authorities on Islam. This brief and readable book remains the first place to look for up-to-date information on the faith, customs, and political beliefs of the more than one billion people who call themselves Muslims.


In a post-9/11 world, many Americans conflate the mainstream Muslim majority with the beliefs and actions of an extremist minority. But what do the world’s Muslims think about the West, or about democracy, or about extremism itself? *Who Speaks for Islam?* spotlights this silenced majority. The book is the product of a mammoth six-year study in which the Gallup Organization conducted tens of thousands of hour-long, face-to-face interviews with residents of more than 35 predominantly Muslim nations — urban and rural, young and old, men and women, educated and illiterate. It asks the questions everyone is curious about: Why is the Muslim world so anti-American? Who are the extremists? Is democracy something Muslims really want? What do Muslim women want? The answers to these and other pertinent, provocative questions are provided not by experts, extremists, or talking heads, but by empirical evidence — the voices of a billion Muslims.


In *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam*, leading Islamic law expert Mohammad Hashim Kamali examines the concept of *wasatiyyah*, or moderation, arguing that scholars, religious communities, and policy circles alike must have access to this governing principle that drives the silent majority of Muslims, rather than focusing on the extremist fringe. Kamali explores *wasatiyyah* in both historical/conceptual terms and in contemporary/practical terms. Tracing the definition and scope of the concept from the foundational sources of Islam, the Qu’ran and Hadith, he demonstrates that *wasatiyyah* has a long and well-developed history in Islamic law and applies the concept to contemporary issues of global policy, such as justice, women’s rights, environmental and financial balance, and globalization.
Framing his work as an open dialogue against a now-decades long formulation of the arguably destructive Huntingtonian "clash of civilizations" thesis as well as the public rhetoric of fear of Muslim extremism since the attacks of September 11, 2001, Kamali connects historical conceptions of wasatiyyah to the themes of state and international law, governance, and cultural maladies in the Muslim world and beyond. Both a descriptive and prescriptive meditation on a key but often neglected principle of Islam, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam* provides insight into an idea that is in the strategic interest of the West both to show and practice for themselves and to recognize in Muslim countries.


Join interfaith commentator Eboo Patel as he explores what it means to be "literate" about other faiths, how interfaith cooperation "works" and why, the skills needed for interfaith cooperation and the significant role that our institutions, including colleges and faith communities, can play in this process. This resources contains all the material needed by class participants and the group facilitator.

SOLD SEPARATELY. Embracing Interfaith Cooperation DVD. This resource features five 10-15 minute presentations by Eboo Patel, each of which is followed by video of Patel interacting with a small, diverse group of adults and young adults as they respond and discuss interfaith issues.

Eboo Patel believes religion is a bridge of cooperation rather than a barrier of division. Inspired by his faith as a Muslim, his Indian heritage and his American citizenship, he speaks to his vision of interfaith harmony at places like the Clinton Global Initiative, The Nobel Peace Prize Forum, as well as college and university campuses across the country. He is a regular contributor to the *Washington Post*, *USA Today* and he *Huffington Post*.


*There is no better time to stand up for your values than when they are under attack.*

In the decade following the attacks of 9/11, suspicion and animosity toward American Muslims has increased rather than subsided. Alarmist, hateful rhetoric once relegated to the fringes of political discourse has now become frighteningly mainstream, with pundits and politicians routinely invoking the specter of Islam as a menacing, deeply anti-American force.

In Sacred Ground, author and renowned interfaith leader Eboo Patel says this prejudice is not just a problem for Muslims but a challenge to the very idea of America. Patel shows us that Americans from
George Washington to Martin Luther King Jr. have been “interfaith leaders,” illustrating how the forces of pluralism in America have time and again defeated the forces of prejudice. And now a new generation needs to rise up and confront the anti-Muslim prejudice of our era. To this end, Patel offers a primer in the art and science of interfaith work, bringing to life the growing body of research on how faith can be a bridge of cooperation rather than a barrier of division and sharing stories from the frontlines of interfaith activism.

Patel asks us to share in his vision of a better America—a robustly pluralistic country in which our commonalities are more important than our differences, and in which difference enriches, rather than threatens, our religious traditions. Pluralism, Patel boldly argues, is at the heart of the American project, and this visionary book will inspire Americans of all faiths to make this country a place where diverse traditions can thrive side by side.


*Acts of Faith* is a remarkable account of growing up Muslim in America and coming to believe in religious pluralism, from one of the most prominent faith leaders in the United States. Eboo Patel’s story is a hopeful and moving testament to the power and passion of young people—and of the world-changing potential of an interfaith youth movement.


The concept of ‘ethics’ involves the choice between what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’, but no exact equivalent of the word ‘ethics’ exists in the Arabic language. Instead, the Arabic terms used to describe ethics cover a whole range of complimentary teachings with regard to concepts such as dignity, justice, and equality, about which Islamic legal scholars, thinkers and mystics have by no means always agreed.

In this *Very Short Introduction* Tariq Ramadan examines the traditional contents of Islamic ethics and the dominant objectives of Islamic teachings. Analysing new approaches which are currently making their appearance, he shows how the ethical considerations of Islamic ethics are not far removed from those central to the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and even Buddhist traditions.

**Ramadan, Tariq. *To Be a European Muslim* (The Islamic Foundation, 2015).**
To Be a European Muslim addresses some of the fundamental issues born of the several million strong Muslim presence in Europe in our times. Based on a thorough study of Islamic sources, it seeks to answer basic questions about European Muslims' social, political, cultural, and legal integration. Tariq Ramadan is recognized worldwide for his original scholarship. He is a professor of Islamic studies at the University of Oxford and was named by Time magazine as one of the one hundred innovators of the twenty-first century.


One of the most important developments in the modern history of the Middle East, the so-called Arab Spring began in Tunisia in December 2010, bringing down dictators, sparking a civil war in Libya, and igniting a bloody uprising in Syria. Its long-term repercussions in Egypt and elsewhere remain unclear. Now one of the world's leading Islamic thinkers examines and explains it, in this searching, provocative, and necessary book.

Time Magazine named Tariq Ramadan one of the most important innovators of the twenty-first century. A Muslim intellectual and prolific author, he has won global renown for his reflections on Islam and the contemporary challenges in both the Muslim majority societies and the West. In Islam and the Arab Awakening, he explores the uprisings, offering rare insight into their origin, significance, and possible futures. As early as 2003, he writes, there had been talk of democratization in the Middle East and North Africa. The U.S. government and private organizations set up networks and provided training for young leaders, especially in the use of the Internet and social media, and the West abandoned its unconditional support of authoritarian governments. But the West did not create the uprisings. Indeed, one lesson Ramadan presents is that these mass movements and their consequences cannot be totally controlled. Something irreversible has taken place: dictators have been overthrown without weapons. But, he writes, democratic processes are only beginning to emerge, and unanswered questions remain. What role will religion play? How should Islamic principles and goals be rethought? Can a sterile, polarizing debate between Islamism and secularism be avoided?

Avoiding both naive confidence and conspiratorial paranoia, Ramadan voices a tentative optimism. If a true civil society can be established, he argues, this moment's fragile hope will live.


Named by Time magazine as one of the 100 most important innovators of the century, Tariq Ramadan is a leading Muslim scholar, with a large following especially among young European and American Muslims. Now, in his first book written for a wide audience, he offers a marvelous biography of the Prophet Muhammad, one that highlights the spiritual and ethical teachings of one of the most influential figures in human history.

In the Footsteps of the Prophet is a fresh and perceptive look at Muhammad, capturing a life that was often eventful, gripping, and highly charged. Ramadan provides both an intimate portrait of a man who was shy, kind, but determined, as well as a dramatic chronicle of a leader who launched a great religion and inspired a vast empire. More important, Ramadan presents the main events of the Prophet's life in a way that highlights his spiritual and ethical teachings. The book underscores the
significance of the Prophet’s example for some of today's most controversial issues, such as the
treatment of the poor, the role of women, Islamic criminal punishments, war, racism, and relations
with other religions. Selecting those facts and stories from which we can draw a profound and vivid
spiritual picture, the author asks how can the Prophet’s life remain -- or become again -- an example, a
model, and an inspiration? And how can Muslims move from formalism -- a fixation on ritual --
toward a committed spiritual and social presence?

In this thoughtful and engaging biography, Ramadan offers Muslims a new understanding of
Muhammad's life and he introduces non-Muslims not just to the story of the Prophet, but to the
spiritual and ethical riches of Islam.

Ramadan, Tariq. *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity* (The Islamic
Foundation, 2009).

Tariq Ramadan attempts to demonstrate, using sources which draw upon Islamic thought and
civilization, that Muslims can respond to contemporary challenges of modernity without betraying
their identity. The book argues that Muslims, nourished by their own points of reference, can
approach the modern epoch by adopting a specific social, political, and economic model that is linked
to ethical values, a sense of finalities and spirituality. Rather than a modernism that tends to impose
Westernization, it is a modernity that admits to the pluralism of civilizations, religions, and cultures.

University Press, 2008).

This series of critical reflections on the evolution and major themes of pre-modern Muslim theology
begins with the revelation of the Koran, and extends to the beginnings of modernity in the eighteenth
century. The significance of Islamic theology reflects the immense importance of Islam in the history
of monotheism, to which it has brought a unique approach and style, and a range of solutions which
are of abiding interest. Devoting especial attention to questions of rationality, scriptural fidelity, and
the construction of ‘orthodoxy’, this volume introduces key Muslim theories of revelation, creation,
ethics, scriptural interpretation, law, mysticism, and eschatology. Throughout the treatment is firmly
set in the historical, social and political context in which Islam’s distinctive understanding of God
evolved. Despite its importance, Islamic theology has been neglected in recent scholarship, and this book provides a unique, scholarly but accessible introduction.


The Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) constitutes the most serious threat Islam has ever faced. To justify its horrible crimes and appeal to Muslims around the world, ISIS has based its ideology on a superficial and literalist approach to the Sacred Texts of Islam - the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition. ISIS manipulates religion to brainwash angry young Muslims, who have little knowledge of Islamic theology and jurisprudence. Therefore, the Muslim scholars are obliged to respond with a counter-narrative that elucidates the reality of Islam and its commitment to tolerance. There exists a plethora of proofs that demonstrates ISIS’ actions do not represent Sunni Islam and its claims are based on clear fallacies. The author, Shaykh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi, a renowned scholar and one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world today, presents in this invaluable book a thorough refutation of ISIS’ beliefs and crimes. Providing authentic quotes that destroy the allegations of ISIS, Shaykh Al-Yaqoubi reaches the conclusion that this group does not represent Islam, its declaration of a caliphate is invalid, and fighting it is an obligation upon Muslims.
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Marilyn Turkovich, Director
Charter for Compassion International

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