

## **How to deal with misinformation about Islam and the Muslims?**

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Muslims in America must contend with a lot of misinformation about Islam. Every day we see our religion wrongly being portrayed as a hateful religion, not suitable for our times and not compatible with a Western progressive democratic society. And we see the views of extremists who call themselves Muslims depicted as representing the views of Islam. We work hard for years to build bridges and develop good relations with our neighbors and friends, only to find our efforts destroyed within minutes by propaganda and by violent acts. So what can we do to deal with this problem of prejudice, bias, misinformation and stereotyping of Muslims and of Islam?

The Qur'an gave us warning 1430 years ago that this problem will occur and also charted for us a way to deal with this problem:

**Ye shall certainly be tried and tested in your possessions and in your personal selves; and ye shall certainly hear much that will grieve you, from those who received the Book before you and from those who worship many gods. But if ye persevere patiently, and guard against evil, then that will be a determining factor in all affairs.**

**Al-Imran 3: 186**

To be tested and tried is to be expected. To hear a lot that will grieve us from other people is going to happen, so we should expect this and we should prepare for it and be ready for action. The Qur'an gives us three basic guidelines in dealing with this problem of misinformation:

- 1-Patiently persevere and never give up
- 2-Be conscious of Allah and do good, and not return a wrong act with another Wrong act, rather show the truth and work hard to explain the facts
- 3-It is a long difficult road that requires resolve, determination and commitment

### **Patiently persevering and reacting in the right way**

It is easy to blame the news media and find excuses. What is more important is to carefully examine our actions and work systematically to change a wrong situation into something better. This process requires careful study and analysis and finding out what can be done to deal with the news media.

How can we develop good relationship with those who influence the news and how can we get our point of view across? The only way is to cultivate personal contacts and develop a relationship based on trust and respect. Those in the news media should feel that we are objective and provide correct answers, based on facts, not emotional response or wishful thinking. We must admit our mistakes and shoulder

the blame if we are to blame. We cannot hide from the facts. This objective approach will result in trust as we become a resource for correct information.

There is a lot of information that we can share with the news media from the Qur'an and from the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to explain the correct position of Islam on many of the issues that are being discussed. I will highlight some of the misconceptions and how to deal with them:

### **Islam safeguards human life and considers it to be sacred**

One of the criticisms labeled against Islam is that terrorist acts and suicidal bombings show that Islam has no regard for human life or its sanctity. Muslims kill others and blow themselves up, so life means very little to them; and they do not cherish this gift from God. Their values, therefore, are different from Judo-Christian teachings and they are different people with strange ideas and morals!

It is not difficult to answer these charges if we act rationally and use the information in the Qur'an correctly and explain that Islam has the highest regard for human life and that human life is sacred:

**Nor take life - which Allah has made sacred - except for just cause.**  
Al-Isra'a 17: 33

### **Human life is precious, if we save one life; it is as if we saved all of mankind:**

**That if anyone slew a person - unless it is for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.**

Al-Maeda 5: 32

### **To kill another human being is a major sin and is severely punished:**

**If a man kills a Believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein (forever): and the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a dreadful penalty is prepared for him.**

An-Nesa'a 4: 93

**Suicide is also a sin, and the Qur'an warns Muslims not to kill themselves.** If a Muslim commits suicide knowingly and in premeditation, then Heel is his abode:

O ye who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves in vanities: but let there be amongst you traffic and trade by mutual good-will: nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily Allah hath been to you Most Merciful!

An-Nesa'a 4: 29

If any do that in rancor and injustice, soon shall We cast them into the fire: and easy it is for Allah.

An-Nesa'a 4: 30

To engage the enemy in war and to kill and get killed defending your country is allowed in Islam, and fighting to defend a country against aggression is a form of Jihad. The reward of martyrs is paradise if they are true martyrs fighting for the sake of Allah in a just war and not for personal reasons:

Allah hath purchased of the Believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): they fight in His Cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur-an: and who is more faithful to his Covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme.

At-Tawba 9: 111

Fighting, however, does not involve killing innocent bystanders, or killing women, children or the elderly or those in retreat, and it does not involve burning crops or destroying buildings. This was the advice of the Prophet and the righteous Caliphs to Muslim soldiers. Therefore, we cannot justify these suicide murders committed by so called Muslims. On the contrary, such acts must be condemned as un-Islamic and cowardly.

**Muslims are not intent on fighting the whole world or forcing others to become Muslims against their will, and there is no war or clash of civilization between Islam and the Western world**

The idea that Muslims must fight the whole world and force everyone to become a Muslim is ridiculous and illogical and has no bearing in the teachings of Islam. Some ignorant people take one saying of the Prophet out of historical context and wrongly misunderstand its meaning and implication. Ibn Omar related that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: (I have been commanded to fight An-Nas until they bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that I am Allah's messenger; if they do that they protect their persons and possessions from me according to what is right) narrated by Muslim

This Hadeeth (saying of the Prophet PBUH) relates to the tribe of Quraish that were fierce enemies to the Muslims and were intent on destroying the Muslim state in Madina. It does not apply to all mankind. The Qur'an refers to An-Nas to mean Quraish in chapter 3:

Men said to them: "A great army is gathering against you, so fear them": but it (only) increased their Faith; they said: "For us Allah suffices, and He is the best disposer of affairs."

Al-Imran 3: 173

**Also from a logical point of view: how can Muslims fight all of mankind? And why should they fight them? The normal relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is based on kindness, justice, talking to each other in a good way, working together and cooperating and respecting each other's faith and right to their own convictions:**

Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just.

Al-Mumtahina 60: 8

And

And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury); but say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)."

Al-Ankabut 29: 46

And

and let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of the Sacred Mosque leads you to transgression (and hostility on your part). Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancor: fear Allah: for Allah is strict in punishment.

Al-Maeda 5: 2

**Also the idea that Muslims force others to accept Islam against their will is wrong and contradicts the teachings of the Qur'an, which safeguards the rights of every person to make a choice whether to accept faith or reject it. Unless we have a free will and make a choice without being forced then we are not responsible, nor accountable**

**Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error**

**Al-Baqara 2: 256**

**And**

**Say, "The Truth is from your Lord": Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it**

**Al-Kahf 18: 29**

**And**

**If it had been thy Lord's Will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!**

**Yunus 10: 99**

**When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is attacked we should explain his mission and noble character, rather than behave emotionally and show anger and violence**

Three instances occurred when the Prophet's character and integrity were attacked and misinformation was disseminated. Muslims masses reacted angrily and demonstrated and threats were issued against those who attacked the Prophet. This reaction was wrong and showed no respect for the right of others to express their views. The threat on the lives of those responsible for the attacks on the Prophet were also wrong for it showed lack of respect for human rights and liberties.

Salman Rushdie published his book "Satanic verses" in which he implied that Prophet Muhammad did not get divine revelation and alleged that the scribes who wrote the Qur'an took liberties and changed some of the verses. A reward was placed on his head and he had to live secretly and under guard protection. This was not appropriate and a better course of action would have been to explain how the Qur'an was preserved both in written and oral forms, and the gradual revelation of the Qur'an and what is the message of the Qur'an and how it guides the life of Muslims.

When the Danish Cartoons were published the same angry mob reaction occurred. What was more appropriate is an explanation of the noble character of Prophet Muhammad. His caring and kindness; his truthfulness and honesty; his eloquence, knowledge and wisdom; his ability to teach

and groom the next generation of Muslim leaders and scholars; His prayer and devotion to God; His focus, determination and patient perseverance; His simple life and not caring for the material things in life. Showing his life story and true kind gentle noble character is more compelling than angry mobs demonstrating.

When the Pope made remarks implying that Muhammad was worrier intent on spreading Islam by force, again the reaction was wrong. The setting in which the Pope made these remarks was academic. Therefore, the response should have been an academic recitation of the Prophet's battles showing that all these battles were defensive in nature and that there is a code and ethics for fighting in Islam, and that Muslims do not fight to force others become Muslims against their will. The Qur'an is clear about the concept of fighting:

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

**Al-Baqara 2: 190**

We learn from this verse:

**-Fighting is done only for the cause of Allah, not for personal reasons,** or to

occupy land or gain more power or oppress people

**-Fighting is allowed against those who fight us**

**-No transgression is allowed:** women, children, the elderly or those in retreat, or those not engaged in the fighting are not killed

**To combat misinformation, bias, prejudice and stereotyping is a long difficult process that requires resolve and determination.**

We will encounter many set backs, but we should not give up. We should learn from our mistakes, develop better methods of communication and coordinate our efforts. We have two great resources : the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH). We rely on the truth and the truth shines and dispels the darkness of ignorance. **What is useful will stay and benefits mankind, what is false and useless will disappear:**

**For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth. Thus doth Allah set forth parables.**

**Ar-Ra'd 13: 17**

And

**Seest thou not how Allah sets forth a parable? A goodly Word like a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens,**

Ibrahim 14: 24

It brings forth its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So Allah sets forth parables for men, in order that they may receive admonition.

Ibrahim 14: 25

And the parable of an evil Word is that of any evil tree: it is torn up by the root, from the surface of the earth: it has no stability.

Ibrahim 14: 26

Allah will establish in strength those who believe, with the Word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter; but Allah will leave, to stray, those who do wrong: Allah doeth what He willeth.

Ibrahim 14: 27

I was recently talking in a church about how Extremists corrupt the teachings of Islam and answering questions. There were few in the audience who did not accept any answer and kept asking questions in a provocative manner, and had an agenda. I asked myself: what is the best course of action: should I cut them off and proceed to other questions and cover new information, or should I be patient and tolerant and let them hang themselves? I decided to exhibit patience and make sure that I was polite and keep cool. This worked as everyone in the audience realized that these individuals were monopolizing the session and were stubborn and did not listen to reason. Some of the audience began to lean on them and they were silenced. Should I have reacted negatively or angrily, it would have given the appearance that Muslims did not tolerate opposing points of view and cannot talk in a logical calm way.

We should understand that:

**-We are representing the truth** and confirming God's orders. This can only occur if we behave as the Qur'an tells us: with God-conscience and with patient perseverance and not act in a wrong way or disseminate wrong information

**-We have both the Qur'an and the Sunnah to fall back on;** both are divine revelations and a resource that can answer any question

**-Our job is to be sincere and honest and explain the truth to the best of our ability**

**-Our job too is to learn as much as we can,** digest the information, critically think about the issues and present answers based on knowledge, proper understanding, experience and wisdom

**-Show that we do this out of love and based on appreciation and acknowledgment of God's blessings**

We can only do what we are capable of. **If we make a mistake, we should correct that mistake and seek God's forgiveness for our shortcoming. If we do not know the answer, we should say that we do not know,** but are willing to search for the answer. We should never give an answer out of ignorance or to cover up our deficiency.