

UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

A conversation
between a student
and an Imām about
the Muslim faith



Student: "Peace be upon you."

Imām: "And peace be upon you and God's mercy."

Student: "What is Islām? And what is a Muslim?"

Imām: "Islām is the religion which was revealed to all of the prophets of God. Islām is to submit to God by worshipping Him alone without partners, to obey His commandments and to keep away from all forms of polytheism. A Muslim is a person who follows the Islamic faith."

Student: "What are the sources of the Islamic religion?"

Imām: "The sources of Islām are two: 1. The Qur'ān, which is the book that was revealed to Prophet Muḥammad (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him). It is considered by all Muslims to be the actual spoken word of God which he communicated to mankind by revelation to his chosen Prophet, Muḥammad. 2. The Sunnah, which is the Prophetic tradition or path. This refers to the Prophet's speech, actions, silent approvals, outward appearance and character that was observed by his companions, written down and passed on generation after generation in written form and oral tradition. This body of literature is often referred to as Ḥādith. Muslims do not worship Prophet Muḥammad in any form whatsoever."

Student: "Who is Allāh?"

Imām: "Allāh is God Almighty. It is an Arabic word that means: The God who alone is deserving of being worshipped."

Student: "Who are the prophets of Islām?"

Imām: "The prophets of Islām are the same as the prophets of the Jews and the Christians whom we refer to as 'The People of the Book'. The Muslims also believe in a final prophet that was born in Mecca in 570CE, whose name was Muḥammad. So Muslims believe in all of the prophets of God such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon them all). Muslims believe they were all sent to instruct the people to worship God alone, to obey Him, to do righteous deeds and to shun idolatry. So there is a shared tradition between these three religions in that they believe in many of the same prophets and in the revealed scriptures."

Student: "How should a Muslim behave around non-Muslims?"

Imām: "God and His prophet have instructed the believers to treat people with kindness and with the best of manners. God said: "God does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who did not fight against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, God loves those who deal with equity." (Qur'ān 60:8) A disciple of the Prophet Muḥammad called Ibn 'Abbās said: "Respond to the greeting of peace from a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian because God has said: "And when you are greeted with a salutation of peace, then greet in response with one better than it or at least the same as it." Another disciple, Ibn Mas'ūd, would greet the non-Muslims by waving at them. (Ref: 'Adab al-Mufrad of Bukhārī). Muslims must be truthful, honest, caring, charitable and neighbourly towards Muslims and non-Muslims alike. A disciple of the Prophet, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr cooked a goat and said to his servant: "Have you sent some to our Jewish neighbour yet? I heard God's Messenger say: 'Angel Gabriel did not cease to exhort me

concerning the neighbour until I began to think he would inherit from me!" (Ref: Bukhārī). When the Prophet and his disciples were in Mecca being oppressed and treated badly by the pagan tribes, he made mention of a Christian Abyssinian King about whom he said: "If only you were to leave out and go to the land of Abyssinia, for indeed there is a king there who does not oppress anyone" (Ref: Biography of the Prophet by Ibn Hishām). So this type of friendly interaction between the Muslims and non-Muslims leads to people having good thoughts about God, Islām, the Prophet Muḥammad and his disciples, which in turn leads to a greater understanding of the Muslim faith. The great Muslim scholar, Ibn 'Uthaymīn, said: "Look how many people there are who first entered into Islām because of the fine conduct of the Muslims, their truthfulness and honesty in their transactions."

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"Jihād in Islām is of various types. It is to strive in God's cause, and this begins with striving against one's soul in obedience to God; to learn Islām correctly from the right sources; to act upon what you have learned; and to teach that to others with patience, even if you suffer hardship in that path. So this is Jihād as the great scholar of the middle-ages Ibn al-Qayyim (died AH 752) stated."

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Student: "We see Islām and terrorism often mentioned together these days. So what does Islām say about terrorism?"

Imām: "Islām forbids all forms of terrorist activity. There are however some extreme factions of people who, in the name of Islām, terrorise both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The most well-known of these militant groups are al-Qaeda and ISIS in Syria and Iraq. These terrorist groups are called Khawārij in Islamic terminology because the term refers to those who rebel against Islām and the Muslims. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) foretold their appearance and instructed the Muslims to stay away from them, and to defend themselves if they attack them. They first rebelled against the Prophet's disciples in the time of the fourth Caliph, 'Alī, killing some of the finest companions of the Prophet Muḥammad."

Student: "So why do these militant Khawārij look upon the rest of humankind and see them as worthless who can be killed without mercy and compassion?"

Imām: "Because they believe they are the only ones left with any true faith in God, and everyone else besides them is an infidel, or an apostate whose life has no value. They see themselves as God's chosen people who must punish all the "enemies of God", cleanse the earth by the mass killing of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. That is why they can stroll down a street and open fire on every man, woman and child in sight without a second thought or any compassion. One of their leaders openly claimed: "Today the whole of the world is a land of unbelievers, even Mecca and Madinah." These Khawārij are merciless killers who have no compassion; they kill innocent, unarmed civilians without any regard for life. They do not judge by God's Laws; they are a law unto themselves and they have no religion except that which they have invented for themselves; they murder Muslims and non-Muslims indiscriminately. They burn Muslims alive in cages, and then claim piety for themselves! And you have heard this yourself from the actions of ISIS. The Prophet said: "No one punishes with fire except the Lord of the fire" (Ref: Abū Dāwūd). The Khawārij are people who have no mercy, so they will not be shown mercy, just as the Prophet Muḥammad said: "Whoever does not show mercy to people, Allāh will not show mercy to him" (Ref: Muslim).

Student: "What are the signs of radicalisation that I can spot in others so I can avoid it and advise them?"

Imām: "There are certain signs and signals that you can see in someone who's trying to radicalize others. Let me list a few of the clearest signs of an extremist: 1) He will constantly focus upon the political situation of the Muslim regimes in the Middle East, and make that the centre-point of his discussion as if it is the most important affair in Islām. 2) He will abuse the Muslim rulers declaring them to be unbelievers and apostates and then justify violent revolution in Muslim countries under the banner of "judgement is for Allāh!" A phrase misappropriated by the extremists and misused. 3) He will praise the leaders of extremist ideologies such as Sayyid Quṭb (died 1966). Quṭb is revered by extremists all around the world from Ibn Laden to Anwar al-Awlaki. He was a prominent leader of the Egyptian group, The Muslim Brotherhood. His writings are widespread and translated into dozens of languages including English. The US-born Yemeni terrorist, Anwar al-Awlaki once boasted that he was so immersed in the writings of Sayyid Quṭb that he felt the presence of Quṭb with him in his prison cell! 4) He will declare all Muslims who contradict his political world-view as unbelievers. 5) He will quite often glorify the acts of violence perpetrated by terrorists whether it be suicide bombings, beheading of hostages, killing of non-Muslims, kidnappings, etc. You will not hear condemnation of violent extremism or its figureheads from him."

Student: "If I see Muslim women in ḥijāb or men with beards who pray, should I be worried? Will they try and recruit me?"

Imām: "Not at all. Muslims are commanded to dress modestly and pray five times a day, spend in charity, fast in Ramaḍan and do righteous deeds. So when you see Muslim women in ḥijāb, men wearing long shirts and growing beards, do not take these as signs of

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“There are no people amongst whom sins are committed and they are stronger than those who commit them, yet they do not prevent them except that God will punish all of them”

Prophet Muḥammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)

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extremism. You should never confuse orthodox Islām with extremism. Many learned practising Muslims are the most vocal in opposing terrorism. Eating ḥalāl meat, praying five times a day, growing a beard and wearing a ḥijāb are not signs of extremism! We need to beware of the methods the extremists employ to try and recruit Muslim teenagers, both boys and girls. I am sure you've heard of cases where teenagers have run away from home to join ISIS, leaving their families behind. They were groomed on the internet by extremists who convinced them to hide their true intentions and their radical beliefs; to lie to their parents, relatives and teachers, and eventually run away from home. This is ḥarām (forbidden) in Islām because it involves deception, causes heart-ache to loved ones - and of course joining a militant group opposes the Islamic faith. The Prophet would not allow people to run away and leave their parents behind in tears. You must not be deceived by the videos and speeches of ISIS because they are very skilful manipulators of the truth who can easily convince people by their misinterpretation of Islām. That is why many young people who fell into their web of deceit and left their homes fell into regret later on and are now stuck thousands of miles away in a war zone where people are killing each other daily."

Student: "What can I do if I know someone is trying to invite me to join ISIS or other extremist groups, or even planning a terrorist attack?"

Imām: "You must tell someone you trust; tell a parent and a teacher, or the police. It is a duty in Islām to stamp out terrorism. The Prophet (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him) said: "There are no people amongst whom sins are committed and they are stronger than those who commit them, yet they do not prevent them except that God will punish all of them" So when you know someone is about to commit a crime, you cannot stand by and let that happen. Allāh and His Prophet have instructed us to help stop criminal acts.

Student: "So what does Islām say about Jihād?"


Imām: "Jihād in Islām is of various types. It is to strive in God's cause, and this begins with striving against one's soul in obedience to God; to learn Islām correctly from the right sources; to act upon what you have learned; and to teach that to others with patience, even if you suffer hardship in that path. So this is Jihād as the great scholar of

the middle-ages Ibn al-Qayyim (died AH 752) stated. And from the types of Jihād is war upon the battlefield in a conventional and strictly legitimate war. An example of a legitimate declaration of war was the first Gulf War in 1990-91 after Kuwait was invaded by the Iraqi army under the leadership of Saddam Hussein. So Saudi Arabia defended its borders by the use of its recruited army in an alliance with other countries. The following are some of the important principles and guidelines of Jihād, as agreed upon by the Muslim scholars: A) War is declared by leaders who have legitimate governments and not by individual citizens, or terrorists, or insurgents, or preachers, or through social media! B) This war must be for a just cause, in obedience to God, and for His worship. C) Civilians cannot be killed or harmed in conflict and war. This includes securing the safety of all civilians: women, children, monks, emissaries, teachers, nurses, doctors, aid workers and so on. The claim of terrorists that all non-Muslims [and even Muslims who disagree with them] are legitimate targets goes against Islamic teachings. D) One does not fight for personal gain, or tribalism, or to steal wealth, or for political partisanship, or to rape and pillage, or for repute, fame and adventure. The terrorists obligate what they call Jihād in any situation and have thus hijacked the term. They fight without a legitimate rulership; they kill those whom it is not permitted to kill, Muslims and non-Muslims alike; they plant bombs in civilian areas; they kill themselves in suicide bombings, which is forbidden. They murder those whom the rulers have invited into Muslim countries under the guarantee of security and safety. So what they partake in cannot be considered as Jihād in any sense of the word."

Student: "Thank you Imām for your time and may God's peace be upon you."

Imām: "It has been my pleasure - and may the peace of God and His Mercy be upon you."

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