

# بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## TOP TEN MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM

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### MISCONCEPTION #1:

Muslims are violent, terrorists and/or extremists.

This is the biggest misconception in Islam, no doubt resulting from the constant stereotyping and bashing the media gives Islam. When a gunman attacks a mosque in the name of Judaism, a Catholic IRA guerrilla sets off a bomb in an urban area, or Serbian Orthodox militiamen rape and kill innocent Muslim civilians, these acts are not used to stereotype an entire faith. Never are these acts attributed to the religion of the perpetrators. Yet how many times have we heard the words 'Islamic, Muslim fundamentalist, etc.' linked with violence.

Politics in so called "Muslim countries" may or may not have any Islamic basis. Often dictators and politicians will use the name of Islam for their own purposes. One should remember to go to the source of Islam and separate what the true religion of Islam says from what is portrayed in the media. Islam literally means 'submission to God' and is derived from a root word meaning 'peace'.

Islam may seem exotic or even extreme in the modern world. Perhaps this is because religion doesn't dominate everyday life in the West, whereas Islam is considered a 'way of life' for Muslims and they make no division between secular and sacred in their lives. Like Christianity, Islam permits fighting in self-defense, in defense of religion, or on the part of those who have been expelled forcibly from their homes. It lays down strict rules of combat which include prohibitions against harming civilians and against destroying crops, trees and livestock.

NOWHERE DOES ISLAM ENJOIN THE KILLING OF INNOCENTS....The Quran says:

"Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. God does not love transgressors." (Quran 2:190) "If they seek peace, then seek you peace. And trust in God for He is the One that heareth and knoweth all things." (Quran 8:61)

War, therefore, is the last resort, and is subject to the rigorous conditions laid down by the sacred law. The term 'jihad' literally means 'struggle'. Muslims

believe that there are two kinds of jihad. The other 'jihad' is the inner struggle of the soul which everyone wages against egotistic desires for the sake of attaining inner peace.

### **MISCONCEPTION #2:**

**Islam oppresses women.**

The image of the typical Muslim woman wearing the veil and forced to stay home and forbidden to drive is all too common in most peoples thoughts. Although some Muslim countries may have laws that oppress women, this should not be seen as coming from Islam. Many of these countries do not rule by any kind of Shari'ah (Islamic law) and introduce their own cultural standpoints on the issue of gender equity.

Islam on the other hand gives men and women different roles and equity between the two is laid down in the Quran and the example of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Islam sees a woman, whether single or married, as an individual in her own right, with the right to own and dispose of her property and earnings. A marriage gift is given by the groom to the bride for her own personal use, and she keeps her own family name rather than taking her husband's. Both men and women are expected to dress in a way that is modest and dignified. The Messenger of God (peace be upon him) said: "The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he who is best in manner and kindest to his wife."

Violence of any kind towards women and forcing them against their will for anything is not allowed. A Muslim marriage is a simple, legal agreement in which either partner is free to include conditions. Marriage customs thus vary widely from country to country. Divorce is not common, although it is acceptable as a last resort. According to Islam, a Muslim girl cannot be forced to marry against her will: her parents simply suggest young men they think may be suitable.

### **MISCONCEPTION #3:**

**Muslims worship a different God.**

Allah is simply the Arabic word for God. Allah for Muslims is the greatest and most inclusive of the Names of God, it is an Arabic word of rich meaning, denoting the one and only God and ascribing no partners to Him. It is exactly the same word which the Jews, in Hebrew, use for God (eloh), the word which Jesus Christ used in Aramaic when he prayed to God. God has an identical name in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Allah is the same God worshiped by Muslims, Christians and Jews. Muslims believe that Allah's sovereignty is to be acknowledged in worship and in the pledge to obey His teaching and commandments, conveyed through His messengers and prophets who were sent

at various times and in many places throughout history. However, it should be noted that God in Islam is One and Only. He, the Exalted, does not get tired, does not have a son (i.e. Jesus) or have associates, nor does He have human-like attributions as found in other faiths.

#### **MISCONCEPTION #4:**

**Islam was spread by the sword and intolerant of other faiths.**

Many social studies textbooks for students show the image of an Arab horseman carrying a sword in one hand and the Quran in the other conquering and forcibly converting. This, though, is not a correct portrayal of history. Islam has always given respect and freedom of religion to all faiths. The Quran says: "God forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for [your] faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them; for God loveth those who are just." (Qur'an 60:8)

Freedom of religion is laid down in the Quran itself: "There is no compulsion (or coercion) in the religion (Islam). The right direction is distinctly clear from error." (Qur'an 2:256)

Christian missionary, T.W. Arnold had this opinion on his study of the question of the spread of Islam: "...of any organized attempt to force the acceptance of Islam on the non-Muslim population, or of any systematic persecution intended to stamp out the Christian religion, we hear nothing. Had the caliphs chosen to adopt either course of action, they might have swept away Christianity as easily as Ferdinand and Isabella drove Islam out of Spain, or Louis XIV made Protestantism..."

It is a function of Islamic law to protect the privileged status of minorities, and this is why non-Muslim places of worship have flourished all over the Islamic world. History provides many examples of Muslim tolerance towards other faiths: when the caliph Omar entered Jerusalem in the year 634, Islam granted freedom of worship to all religious communities in the city. Proclaiming to the inhabitants that their lives, and property were safe, and that their places of worship would never be taken from them, he asked the Christian patriarch Sophronius to accompany him on a visit to all the holy places. Islamic law also permits non-Muslim minorities to set up their own courts, which implement family laws drawn up by the minorities themselves. The life and property of all citizens in an Islamic state are considered sacred whether the person is Muslim or not.

Racism is not a part of Islam, the Quran speaks only of human equality and how all peoples are equal in the sight of God. "O mankind! We created you from a

single soul, male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. Truly, the most honored of you in God's sight is the greatest of you in piety. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware." (Qur'an 49:13)

#### **MISCONCEPTION #5:**

##### **All Muslims are Arabs**

The Muslim population of the world is around 1,2 billion. One out of five people in the world is a Muslim. They are a vast range of races, nationalities, and cultures from around the globe--from the Phillipines to Nigeria--they are united by their common Islamic faith. Only about 18% live in the Arab world and the largest Muslim community is in Indonesia. Most Muslims live east of Pakistan. Thirty percent of Muslims live in the Indian subcontinent, 20% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 17% in Southeast Asia, 18% in the Arab world, and 10% in the Soviet Union and China. Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan make up 10% of the non-Arab Middle East. Although there are Muslim minorities in almost every area, including Latin America and Australia, they are most numerous in Russia and its newly independent states, India and central Africa. There are about 6 million Muslims in the United States.

#### **MISCONCEPTION #6:**

##### **The Nation of Islam is a Muslim group.**

Islam and the so called "Nation of Islam (NOI)" are two different religions. NOI is more of a political organization since its members are not limited to a single faith. Muslims consider this group to be just one of many cults using the name of Islam for their own gain. The only thing common between them is the jargon, the language used by both. "The Nation of Islam" is a misnomer; this religion should be called Farrakhanism, after the name of its propagator, Louis Farrakhan.

Islam and Farrakhanism differ in many fundamental ways. For example, Farrakhan followers believe in racism and that the 'black man' was the original man and therefore superior, while in Islam there is no racism and everyone is considered equal in the sight of God, the only difference being in one's piety. There are many other theological examples that show the NOI's teachings have little to do with true Islam. There are many groups in America who claim to represent Islam and call their adherents Muslims.

Any serious student of Islam has a duty to investigate and find the true Islam. The only two authentic sources which bind every Muslim are 1) the Quran and 2) authentic or sound Hadith. Any teachings under the label of "Islam" which contradict or at variance with the direct understanding of fundamental beliefs

and practices of Islam form the Quran and authentic Hadith should be rejected and such a religion should be considered a Pseudo-Islamic Cult. In America there are many pseudo-Islamic cults, Farrakhanism being one of them. An honest attitude on the part of such cults should be not to call themselves Muslims and their religion Islam, such an example of honesty is Bahaism which is an off-shoot of Islam but Bahais do not call themselves Muslims nor their religion, Islam. In fact Bahaism is not Islam just as Farrakhanism is not Islam. Read about Malcolm X in relation to this misconception, where he found the true Islam, realizing that it is much different than NOI.

### **MISCONCEPTION #7:**

#### **All Muslim men marry four wives.**

The religion of Islam was revealed for all societies and all times and so accommodates widely differing social requirements. Circumstances may warrant the taking of another wife but the right is granted, according to the Quran, only on condition that the husband is scrupulously fair. No woman can be forced into this kind of marriage if they do not wish it, and they also have the right to exclude it in their marriage contract.

Polygamy is neither mandatory, nor encouraged, but merely permitted. Images of "sheikhs with harems" are not consistent with Islam, as a man is only allowed at most four wives only if he can fulfill the stringent conditions of treating each fairly and providing each with separate housing etc. Permission to practice polygamy is not associated with mere satisfaction of passion. It is rather associated with compassion toward widows and orphans. It was the Quran that limited and put conditions on the practice of polygamy among the Arabs, who had as many as ten or more wives and considered them "property".

It is both honest and accurate to say that it is Islam that regulated this practice, limited it, made it more humane, and instituted equal rights and status for all wives. What the Qur'anic decrees amount to, taken together is discouragement of polygamy unless necessity for it exists. It is also evident that the general rule in Islam is monogamy and not polygamy. It is a very tiny percentage of Muslims that practice it over the world. However, permission to practice limited polygamy is only consistent with Islam's realistic view of the nature of man and woman and of various social needs, problems and cultural variations.

The question is, however far more than the inherent flexibility of Islam; it also is the frank and straightforward approach of Islam in dealing with practical problems. Rather than requiring hypocritical and superficial compliance, Islam delves deeper into the problems of individuals and societies, and provides for

legitimate and clean solutions which are far more beneficial than would be the case if they were ignored. There is no doubt that the second wife legally married and treated kindly is better off than a mistress without any legal rights or permanance.

#### **MISCONCEPTION #8:**

**Muslims are a barbaric, backward people.**

Among the reasons for the rapid and peaceful spread of Islam was the simplicity of its doctrine-Islam calls for faith in only one God worthy of worship. It also repeatedly instructs man to use his powers of intelligence and observation. Within a few years, great civilizations and universities were flourishing, for according to the Prophet (pbuh), 'seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman'.

The synthesis of Eastern and Western ideas and of new thought with old, brought about great advances in medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geography, architecture, art, literature, and history. Many crucial systems such as algebra, the Arabic numerals, and also the concept of the zero (vital to the advancement of mathematics), were transmitted to medieval Europe from Islam. Sophisticated instruments which were to make possible the European voyages of discovery were developed, including the astrolabe, the quadrant and good navigational maps.

#### **MISCONCEPTION #9:**

**Muhammad was the founder of Islam and Muslims worship him.**

Muhammad (pbuh) was born in Mecca in the year 570. Since his father died before his birth, and his mother shortly afterwards, he was raised by his uncle from the respected tribe of Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes. The historians describe him as calm and meditative. Muhammad (pbuh) was of a deeply religious nature, and had long detested the decadence of his society.

It became his habit to meditate from time to time in the Cave of Hira near Mecca. At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad (pbuh) received his first revelation from God through the Angel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for 23 years is known as the Quran. As soon as he began to recite the words he heard from Gabriel, and to preach the truth which God had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered bitter persecution, which grew so fierce that in the year 622 God gave them the command to emigrate.

This event, the Hijrah or 'migration', in which they left Mecca for the city of Medina, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. After several years, the Prophet and his followers were able to return to Mecca, where they forgave their enemies and established Islam definitively. Before the death of Prophet (saw) at the age of 63, the greater part of Arabia was Muslim, and within a century of his death Islam had spread to Spain in the West and as far East as China. He died with less than 5 possessions to his name.

While Muhammad (pbuh) was chosen to deliver the message, he is not considered the "founder" of Islam, since Muslims consider Islam to be the same Divine guidance sent to all peoples before. Muslims believe all the prophets from Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus etc. were all sent with divine guidance for their peoples. Every prophet was sent to his own people, but Muhammad (pbuh) was sent to all of mankind. Muhammad is the last and final messenger sent to deliver the message of Islam. Muslims revere and honor him (pbuh) for all he went through and his dedication, but they do not worship him. "O Prophet, verily We have sent you as a witness and a bearer of glad tidings and a warner and as one who invites unto God by His leave and as an illuminating lamp." (Qur'an 33:45-46)

#### **MISCONCEPTION #10:**

**Muslims don't believe in Jesus or any other prophets.**

Muslims respect and revere Jesus, upon him be peace, and await his Second Coming. They consider him one of the greatest of God's messengers to mankind. A Muslim never refers to him simply as 'Jesus', but always adds the phrase 'upon him be peace' (abbreviated as (u) here). The Qur'an confirms his virgin birth (a chapter of the Quran is entitled 'Mary'), and Mary is considered the purest woman in all creation. The Quran describes the Annunciation as follows:

"Behold!" the Angel said, "God has chosen you, and purified you, and chosen you above the women of all nations. O Mary, God gives you good news of a word from Him whose name shall be the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, honored in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near to God. He shall speak to the people from his cradle and in maturity, and shall be of the righteous." She said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?" He said: "Even so; God creates what He wills. When He decrees a thing, He says to it, "Be!" and it is." (Qur'an 3:42-47)

Jesus (u) was born miraculously through the same power, which had brought Adam (u) into being without a father: "Truly, the likeness of Jesus with God is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, and then said to him, 'Be!' and he was." (Qur'an 3:59) During his prophetic mission Jesus (u) performed many miracles. The Qur'an tells us that he said: "I have come to you with a sign from

your Lord: I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breath into it and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal the blind, and the lepers, and I raise the dead by God's leave." (Qur'an 3:49) Neither Muhammad (pbuh) nor Jesus (u) came to change the basic doctrine of the belief in One God brought by earlier prophets, but to confirm and renew it.

In the Qur'an Jesus (u) is reported as saying that he came: "And I have come confirming that which was before me of the Taurat (Torah), and to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden to you; and I have come to you with a proof from your Lord, so fear Allah and obey me." (Qur'an 3:50) The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "Whoever believes there is no god but God, alone without partner, that Muhammad (pbuh) is His messenger, that Jesus is the servant and messenger of God, His word breathed into Mary and a spirit emanating from Him, and that Paradise and Hell are true, shall be received by God into Heaven." (Hadith related by Bukhari)

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