# ISLAM

## A RELIGION OF PEACE

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# Islam is a Religion of Peace

Allah says:
*"...Whosoever takes a life – unless as a punisment for murder or mischief in the land – it will be as if they killed all of humanity; and whosoever saves a life, it will be as if they saved all of humanity..."*

*The Clear Quran 5:32*

# Is Islam an Extreme Religion?

*"Islamic terrorists!" "Muslim fundamentalists!" "Extremists!" "Radical Islamists!"* These are just some labels that have been wrongly applied to Muslims and certain Muslim groups in recent years.

The media's portrayal of Islam often misleads those whose knowledge of the religion is limited, into making negative assumptions about this very peaceful and tolerant way of life.

Peter Manning, a journalist of over 30 years, states in his book, *Us and Them, "My experience tells me there's a vast gulf between the realities of the daily lives of Arabs and Muslims and how they are represented in our media.*

*In more than 60 percent of cases [from the coverage of 2 major newspapers), the words 'violent,' 'death,' 'attack,' 'kill,' 'suicide or gunmen' were in close proximity to the words 'Arab', 'Palestinian,' 'Muslim' or 'Islam.'"*

Is it then, any wonder that most people associate Islam with terrorism? The problem of ignorance is highlighted by a survey which revealed that more than one in three people admit to knowing nothing about Islam and its followers.

*"Those with the least knowledge and personal contact with Muslims were the most likely to feel threatened by Islam,"* said Dr. Dunn, who was commissioned to carry out the study.

The prevalence of media bias and ignorance regarding Islam can be countered by understanding Islam through its proper teachings. That means referring to the Quran (which Muslims believe to be the word of God) and the authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Through the proper understanding of these teachings, one will discover Islam to be completely against any form of extremism.

# How the Quran can be misunderstood

When reading through the Quran or the sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him), one must understand the context in which the wording applies. The following verse of the Quran is a favorite amongst those seeking to mislead people about Islam:

*"Kill them wherever you come upon them and drive them out of the places from which they have driven you out. For persecution is far worse than killing. And do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they attack you there. If they do so, then fight them –That is the reward of the disbelievers."*

*The Clear Quran 2:191*

On occasions, this verse has been dangerously trimmed down to the following

*"Kill them wherever you come upon them..."*

*The Clear Quran 2:191*

The obvious question is, "Kill who?" To answer this question, one should read the verses before and after verse 2:191.

*"Fight in the cause of God 'only' against those who wage war against you, but do not exceed the limits." God does not like transgressors.*

*The Clear Quran 2:190*

The above verse mentions fighting as a means of self defense (i.e. with those who fight you). The verse after 2:191 is:

*"But if they cease, then surely God is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful."*

*The Clear Quran 2:192*

These verses were revealed at a time when the Muslims had been expelled from their homes on account of their faith. They endured more than ten years of persecution and eventually had to flee to a safe land.

The above verses were referring to the Arab pagans of Mecca during the Prophet's time, who oppressed the Muslims and planned to attack them where the Muslims sought refuge.

***Hence, the above verse can only be applied in such circumstances.***

This example demonstrates that verses in the Quran should be understood in their proper context since verses were revealed in stages in relation to particular situations, over a period of 23 years. It is also important to note that the Quran was revealed in Arabic. Therefore, translations into different languages may be misleading and/or inaccurate.

# Permissible Warfare/Fighting

There can be no doubt that Muslims (like anybody else) have a legitimate right to fight against aggression or when oppressed.

Islam teaches that warfare is permitted in order to preserve the well-being of the community or to prevent oppression from spreading – this may be in the context of defensive or offensive warfare depending on the particular situation. Islam, just like any 'way of life' that wants to ensure its survival, has the right to defend itself when war is declared against it. In the *Quran (22:39)* we read:

*"To those against whom war is made, permission is given to fight, because they are wronged."*

However, when the enemy ceases its hostility, Muslims are commanded to cease fighting.

*"If the enemy is inclined towards peace, make peace with them. And put your trust in God. Indeed, He 'alone' is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing."*

*The Clear Quran 8:61*

Abu Bakr (may God be pleased with him), Prophet Mohammad's closest friend and first successor, spoke of the Islamic approach to war by highlighting the following.

In the battlefield, one should not:

- commit treachery
- mutilate the dead
- deviate from the right path
- kill a woman, child or aged man
- harm or burn trees, especially the fruitful
- slay the enemy's flock, except for food
- harm those who devote their life to worship

As we read in verse 2:190, Allah commands Muslims not to go to extremes by saying, *"Do not transgress the limits."* A situation of war is no excuse to go beyond boundaries. Islam teaches the avoidance of blind retaliation.

> *"Do not let the hatred of a people lead you to injustice. Be just! That is closer to righteousness."*
>
> *The Clear Quran 5:8*

## Terrorism in Perspective

The problem with putting terrorism into perspective is that there is no agreed-upon definition of what constitutes "terrorism." Also, terrorism takes many forms, as the following examples illustrate.

Robert Fisk, from The Independent, writes: *"Israel and Israel's militia allies (on 16 September 1982) started their three-day orgy of rape, knifing and murder in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila that cost 1,800 lives. It followed an Israeli invasion of Lebanon designed to drive the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) out of the country and given the green light [by the United States] which cost the lives of 17,500 Lebanese and Palestinians, almost all of them civilians."*

According to Professor Noam Chomsky, *"It's uncontroversial that the United States is a leading terrorist state. In fact, it's the only state that was condemned for international terrorism by the highest bodies: the International Court of Justice in 1986."*

Similarly, *"The horrific massacre of 8,000 Muslims – some unarmed – at Srebrenica in 1995 never led to a stream of pieces about the violence and repressive tendencies of Christianity."* – William Dalrymple, The Independent UK.

*"The carnage wrought by Western, ostensibly Christian, leaders over the last six decades – including a world war and a cold war, a Holocaust, two atomic bombs, repression of wars of independence, the fueling of proxy wars, nuclear brinksmanship, and the support of dictators and state and non-state terrorists – makes it spurious to view Islam as a more inherently violent religion or civilization."* – Rama Mani (Geneva Center for Security Policy)

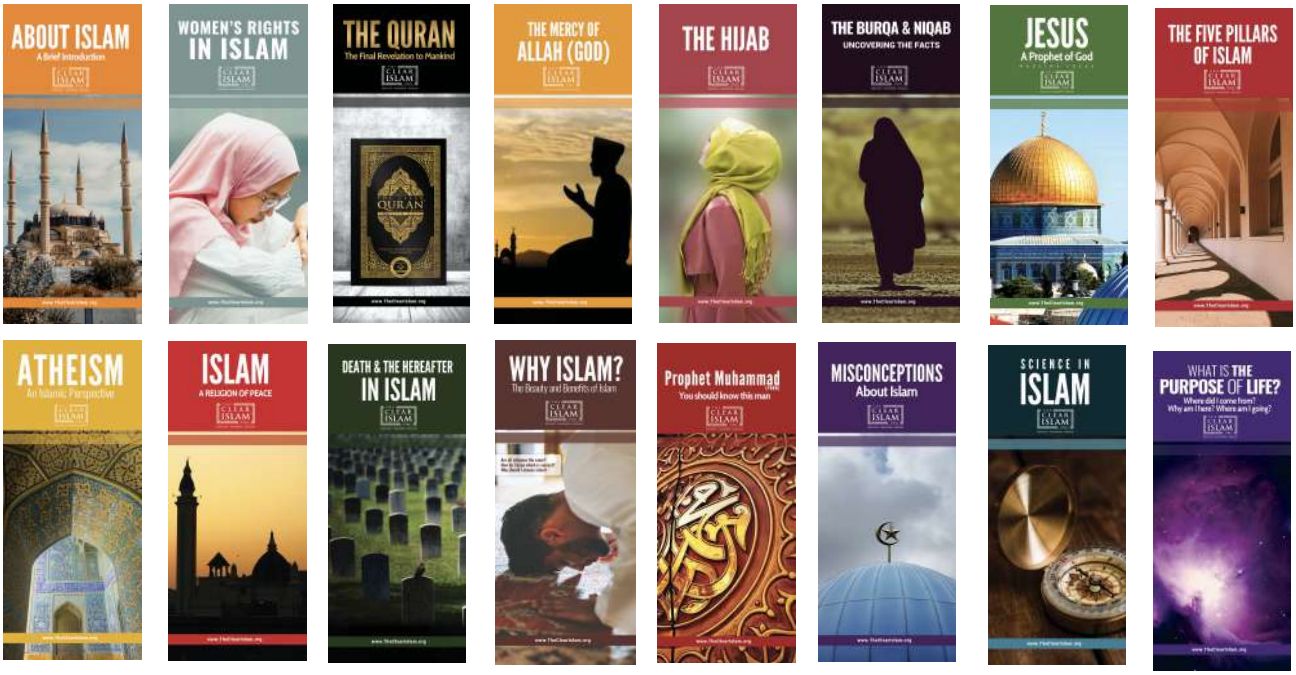
There are many other examples of both Jewish and Christian terrorism, however, we must never generalize and call all Christians and Jews terrorists. Similarly, we should not put all Muslims on trial but only those that committed the crime should be judged.

## Islam Denounces Terrorism

The act of inciting terror in the hearts of defenseless civilians, the wholesale destruction of buildings and properties, the bombing and maiming of innocent men, women and children are all forbidden and detestable acts according to Islam and the Muslims. This is regardless of any type of terrorism, including western state-sponsored terrorism which has killed, injured and displaced infinitely more people than all other types of terrorism.

If an individual Muslim were to commit an act of terrorism, this person would be guilty of violating the laws of the very religion they claim to follow – Islam. Would it be fair to condemn all Muslims as a result, when the religion itself is against such acts? Muslims follow a religion of submission to God, peace, mercy, and forgiveness. The vast majority have nothing to do with the violent events some – notably the media – have associated with Muslims. Islam is not a religion of extremism.

> *"God does not forbid you from dealing kindly and fairly with those who have neither fought nor driven you out of your homes. Surely God loves those who are fair."*
>
> *The Clear Quran 60:8*

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