

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM

A Faith Resource Pack

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This pack is one of a series giving a clear and straight forward insight into the Faiths of those who live in our community. You are welcome to download any or all of the packs for individual or classroom use.

MUSLIMS

IMAGINE YOU ARE A MUSLIM

You believe in the absolute Oneness of Allah (the God).

You believe in a long line of prophets
from Adam to Muhammad,
among whom are Abraham, Moses and Jesus PBUT
(Peace be upon them).

You believe in a final Day of Judgement.

Your holy book, the Qur'an, is written in Arabic.

It was revealed by Allah to Muhammad
through the Angel Gabriel in 610 CE.

Everything you need to know as a basis for life
is embedded in the Qur'an
and the Sunna (traditions from the life of the Prophet).

Friday is your special day and your place of worship,
sanctuary and study is the Mosque.

You base your life on the five pillars of Islam:

Shahadah (declaration of the faith);

Salah (prayer five times a day facing Mecca);

Zakah (giving of charity);

Sawm (fasting during the month of Ramadan);

Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

You are Muslim because you submit your will to Allah,
"the Compassionate, the Merciful".

THE SYMMBOL OF ISLAM



The crescent moon and star is an internationally recognised symbol of the Muslim faith, with ancient Middle Eastern roots. It serves as a reminder to Muslims that God created the heavenly bodies. "As the caravans were guided by night by the cool light of moon and stars, so the Qur'an gives guidance on the journey through life."

Taken from the Muslim Faith Card in the SIFRE Diversity Game

A GUIDE TO ISLAMIC SECTS

The world's second-largest faith, Islam is not monolithic. Schisms, focusing first on disagreements over who should lead the new faith and later on matters of doctrine, began developing soon after the prophet Muhammad's death in the year 632. Here are some of the major sects within Islam, which has 1.3 billion followers:

Sunni:

Accounting for at least 85 percent of the Islamic world, the Sunni claim to be the direct continuation of the faith as defined by Muhammad. For many years they acknowledged the religious authority of a ruling caliph, the major point of contention with the breakaway Shiite movement. The Sunni derive their name through reliance on the "Sunnah" or the observed sayings, lifestyle and practices of Muhammad as recorded in a collection of writings called the Hadith. The Sunni accept the "Sunnah" as a source of spiritual wisdom, while the Shiite insist on the primacy of the Koran.

Shiite:

The smaller of the two principal branches of Islam, the Shiite account for at least 10 percent of all Muslims. They originally were followers of the fourth caliph, Ali, who was Muhammad's son-in-law through his marriage to the prophet's daughter Fatima. Ali claimed that Muhammad on his deathbed selected Ali as leader of the faith, but Ali was murdered during the fifth year of his reign. The Shiite formally broke away from Muslim leaders recognized by the

Sunni around 680. A principal belief of the Shiite is that no caliph since Ali has been legitimate. The movement became popular among disaffected non-Arab Muslims who feared they were held in lower esteem within the faith.

Kharijis:

Accounting for less than 1 percent of all Muslims, the Kharijis were the first major schism within Islam. They broke away in 658 when they rejected the use of arbitrators empowered to decide major issues within the faith.

Druze:

A secretive Islamic breakaway group concentrated in Lebanon around Mt. Hermon and in the mountains near Beirut and Sidon. They refer to themselves as the Mowahhidoon. Most Muslims consider the sect blasphemous since it declared that God was manifested in human form as the Egyptian caliph al Hakim Bi-amr Allah 1,000 years ago. They number at least 250,000. The Druze do not accept new members, virtually never discuss their faith and often pose as members of the dominant religion where they live.

Alawi:

A small branch of Islam that broke away from the Shiite in the Ninth Century under the leadership of Ibn Nucair Namin Abdi. Almost exclusively found on the Syrian coast plains, the Alawi have 1.5 million members including Syrian President Assad.

Ismali:

A Shiite sect that believes the succession of spiritual leadership should have continued through the sons of Muhammad Ibn Isma'il. The Ismali believe that Islam has never been without a living Imam, even though clearly recognized spiritual authority became increasingly rare as Islam matured.

Ahmadiyyah:

Founded in Qadian, India, by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who died in 1908. Ahmadis believe their founder was a renovator of Islam, a position most of the world's Muslims consider to be heretical. The group has many enthusiastic missionaries.

Sufi:

These are the mystics within the Muslim faith, a religious order that follows mystical interpretations of Islamic doctrines and practices.

Salafi:

These take their practices from as-salaf us-salih (meaning the pious predecessors); Rasoolullah (saw) and the sahaba, from the first three generations. They do not follow the teachings of a specific venerated imam, although they do refer to their teachings. Salafiyyah strives to be free from biddah and cultural misguidance.

Wahhabi Movement:

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab began a campaign of spiritual renewal in the smaller city states of Arabia in the mid- 1700s. His extremely traditional group opposed all innovations within Islam, often using violence to enforce its views. The group threatened to become the first nation state in Arabia, prompting a crackdown by the Egyptian army in 1818. Today, Wahhabism is quite strong in Saudi Arabia. It demands punishment for those who enjoy any form of music except the drum and severe punishment up to death for drinking or sexual transgressions. It condemns as unbelievers those who do not pray, a view that never previously existed in mainstream Islam. Wahhabism was an inspiration to Osama bin Laden.

FAITH IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE –

For Muslims the word 'faith' includes believing in some things that are unseen e.g., God, an Afterlife, angels and the soul. However, faith is supported by reason, the evidence of creation, a logical process and natural human instinct or perception. Underpinning faith in Islam is a deeply held conviction in human dignity due to humanity's possession of intellect. To have faith does not necessitate that every such person must understand the theology of that faith. Islam requires Muslims to use reason to try and understand life, its purpose, goals and suitable behaviour. Ultimately it is about an ethical approach to life as encapsulated by the Prophetic statement, "I have not been sent but to complete the generous and beautiful behaviour."

The scholars have said that Islam's view of freedom is rooted in the postulate that the individual enjoys liberty in all things provided that this does not violate the rights of others and the collective interest of the community.

The term 'secular' was invented by George Holyoake in 1846 to describe the promotion of a social order separate from religion, without actively dismissing or criticising religious belief. This type of secular public sphere is desirable where many faiths inherently contend for followers.

The public sphere is where contests take place over the definition of the 'common good', and also of the virtues, obligations and rights that members of society require for the common good to be realized. Everyone has the right to try to persuade the other to his or her viewpoint including that of beliefs.

One of the preconditions for civil society is the 'existence of a relatively independent public sphere' in which debate takes place that 'influences' political decision-making. Jurgen Habermas, whose name is closely associated with the idea of the public sphere, sees as its essential element the historical emergence in Europe of 'rational-critical' discourse among the 'reasoning public' of eighteenth century bourgeois society (Calhoun 1992:7).

It is a space of critical discussion, debate and dialogue, open to all, where private people came together to form a public whose "public reason" would work as a check on state power.

Ideally it is an intermediate space in which ideas are presented on their own merits rather than as emanating from such authorities as preachers, judges and rulers. Authority is vested in the public sphere itself. In it, all participants have in principle an equal opportunity to persuade others.

In Islam anyone can be decent, upright, ethically sound and moral. The discussion is rather in consideration of authority. Faith has to have a legitimate place in the public sphere. If a religion is isolated from the surrounding culture then it breeds all sorts of atrophied and deviant streams of ideas and practices which will be ill-adjusted to society at large. Societies do play a powerful role in shaping and constraining religions into a formal and acceptable paradigm of what a religion should be. Religious movements and representations in public life can institute a sense of legitimacy through congregational forms of deliberation and cannot be neglected as being part of the process through which norms are produced.

Islam's objectives are the preservation of 5 universal matters:

Religion

Life

Intellect/Reason

Progeny

Wealth/Property

Anything that preserves these five goals is deemed good and beneficial whereas anything that undermines them is deemed bad and removing this bad is considered to be good. Even if something is perceived to be good but does not protect any of these objectives then it is deemed harmful.

If we could classify an item as either absolutely essential or simply needed or as a luxury then generally all luxuries can be forgone for needs, and all 'needs' can be given up for what is absolutely essential.

If we don't know or don't understand something then we should admit that. Muslims are obliged to seek knowledge and it is the process which is reckoned more important than arriving at an answer.

Matters shall be judged by their objectives."

"Certainty shall not be removed by doubt" which includes the precept that innocence is to be assumed until guilt is proven.

"Hardship shall bring alleviation" which means that the law cannot validly require anything which people are incapable of fulfilling without undue difficulty. In fact, necessity makes the prohibited permissible.

"Harm or difficulty shall be removed" which invalidates

rulings that lead to harm, even if technically valid. Anything that leads to harm or difficulty is always undesirable. The precedence is always removal of harm over and above attainment of something positive or good, starting with greater harm over lesser harm. In addition the general good is given precedence over specific good. Freedom in Islam finds its meaning in "belonging to the community and participating with the people". It is egalitarian in that freedom is not enjoyed at the expense of causing harm to others, and it is communitarian because in the event of a conflict between individual freedom and social good, the latter is often given priority over the former.

"Cultural usage shall have the weight of law" which means that cultural usage is definitive implying that customary usage has authority similar to fundamental textual precepts of the law.

Faith for many people has energies and vitalities that cannot be safely or beneficially excluded. Organised religion does have a right to claim a stake in the public sphere, because although there are cases where they may speak for a minority, the majority of the people do identify with some faith and religion. In the case of Muslims, the overwhelming majority are believers with varying degrees of practice.

However, although religious groups should be consulted by local or national government, one should be acutely aware of self-seeking and incapable "leaders", who are invariably unelected and unaccountable to the public or even to their own sub-community. There is no need for gross generalisation of Muslims as forming a monolithic block

neither to drive at an essential Islam. Both harms unity and co-operation in universal values.

Islam as understood and practised by its adherents must constantly seek to be contextually correct against the global and national backdrops, i.e., Muslims must continue in earnest to develop and maintain sound hermeneutics to interpret religion in contemporary terms and the contemporary modern world in religious terms.

Are there common patterns for integrating the personal practice of religion into public life?

Who are the actors in this integration and what impact do they have on public policies?

What do we mean by religion in the public sphere? Does it require a theological reform or just a recasting of religiosity?

How are the changes and challenges in Western societies reflected in Muslim understanding and practices of Islam?

How do national norms of citizenship and national norms regarding the relationship between religion and the state shape the adoption of different approaches to this issue?

What is the relationship between Islam and culture? How does this relationship vary across the major religious traditions? What is distinctive about religion as a discourse of identity?

When people of faith enter the public sphere, they would do well to a) be respectfully tolerant and lenient in pressing their points across and b) beneficially contribute as equals among many which makes clear what they stand for.

Islam has a clear fundamental ethic for engaging in the Public Sphere. This ethic has everything to do with

fulfilling trust through service to humanity and creation, through love and respect. The Muslim's duty is to live a life of stewardship, upholding the trust to care for, protect, preserve and serve humanity, the environment and creation in general. Islam teaches that the way a person treats God's creation, God will treat them in the same manner in this life and the Next.

Abu Dhar, states, 'I asked the Messenger of God about how the worshipper is saved from the Hell-fire,' and he answered, 'By faith in God.'

'O Messenger of God, is there no deed with faith?'

He said, 'Then let him enjoin justice and forbid wrongdoing.'

'And what if he is unable to enjoin justice and forbid wrongdoing?' 'Then let him assist some simple person.'

'O Messenger of God, what if he were too weak and unable to help someone who has been wronged?'

'Do you not wish to leave your friend any good? Then let him restrain himself from harming others.'

'O Messenger of God, do you mean someone will enter heaven for doing thus?'

He replied, "Anyone who manages but one of these things I have described will be taken by the hand into Paradise."

Talk by M. Manwar Ali, CEO of JIMAS , January 2011

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A GOOD CITIZEN?

Some fourteen hundred years ago, the Prophet Muhammad followed three simple principles to become a great and humane being—to be truthful, trustworthy and a peacemaker; indeed he was called Al-Amin, a summation of the three qualities. He was trusted by all the tribes; even those at odds with each other; they could count on him to always be truthful. Much before the advent of Islam, the sacred black corner stone fell off the wall of the Kaba, the revered centre of Mecca. The infighting among the tribes began as to who would be privileged to place the stone back in its place. As the conflict grew, they called upon Muhammad (the truthful and just) to find the solution.

Muhammad was inherently a peace maker, and strove for peace among the communities. He laid out a sheet long enough on its perimeter for each one of the tribal leaders to place a hand on the sheet to lift the stone. He placed the stone in the middle of the sheet and had every one participate in lifting the stone up, to set it in the wall. Thus he was a model of inclusiveness and co-existence.

When Umar received the keys to Jerusalem from the Orthodox Christian Patriarch Sophronius, he was in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during his tour, and the time for prayer came. Courteously the Patriarch invited him to pray where he was, but Umar as courteously refused. "If I had prayed in your sanctuary," Umar explained, "my followers and those who come here in the future would take over this building and turn it into a mosque. They would destroy your place of worship. To avoid these difficulties and allow your church to continue as it is, I prayed outside."

The bishop was impressed by his justice. "Today, because of your justice, faith, wisdom, and truth, you have received the key to the Holy City. But for how long will this remain in your hands? When will this sacred place come back into our possession?" Umar then replied, "As long as these four exist in Islam, as long as the Muslims have all four in their hands, they will retain the city." .

Compassion and peace goes hand in hand with truth, honesty, conscience and justice.

We say we want to bring peace to others, but in order to do that we must first find it within our own lives. How can anyone who has not found peace within himself hope to bring peace to others? The Messenger of God, Jesus, met a man and asked him, "What are you doing?" "I am devoting myself to God," the man replied. Christ Jesus asked, "Who is caring for you?" "My brother," replied the man. Prophet Jesus said, "Your brother is more devoted to God than you are."

Islam is submission to God in peace. Through that submission we find peace in ourselves which in turn produces peace, mercy and charity towards His creation. While all creatures merit respect and just treatment, humanity is accorded paramount place in creation.

We believe that the Muslim who has not strengthened his own faith in God cannot strengthen the humanity of others. How can a person who carries a water flask full of holes hope to quench the thirst of others? Peace can only be found in the heart. The Prophet Jesus said, "Blessed is he who sees with his heart but whose heart is not in what he sees." The Prophet Muhammad said, "The richness is not with

abundance of wealth, but richness is richness of the soul."

"There exists in human nature a strong propensity to depreciate the advantages and to magnify the evils of the present time"

E. Gibbon in "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire"

This is how Edward Gibbon expressed the common human misconception of the good old days. It makes memory pleasurable.

There are three aspects of our society that most of us take for granted:

the means that are available for a person to realise ambitions

the diversity of communities and subcultures

the freedom to create and to be creative

These measures are essential in order for civilisation to flourish. They are necessary conditions for success of a people. Virtually all Muslim communities anywhere in the world lack one or more of those three conditions, but all of us enjoy and benefit from them in our country.

There are pressures working against us and these all too often give rise to too much of a group solidarity, narrow focus and hankering after self-interests. Two of the most important of these pressures are:

prominence of ethnic identity

predominance of Muslim immigrant understanding and reflection of Islam not fully adapted to our context in this country

"Culture is not just an ornament; it is the expression of a nation's character"

W. Somerset Maugham

If you see a stranger being raped you will do something about it unless you have a compelling and specific reason not to. Thus we have a clear conception that we have some kind of duty not just to behave decently ourselves but to prevent others from doing things to fellow humans which are wrong. Yet in our society we lack a name for the duty still less a doctrine regarding it. Islam provides both a name and a doctrine for a broad moral duty of this kind: al-amr bil ma'ruf wan-nahi 'an al-munkar.

This conjunction of commanding right and forbidding evil is found in seven places in the Quran, firmly establishing it as a duty. There is nothing in Islam to narrow this concept of duty. The verses demonstrate that people who carry out this duty hasten in all good works, regretful of their previous misconduct and laziness, prayerful, charitable, and patient in all suffering.

Loyalty to one's country and community is recommended, and so is self-exertion and sacrifice for a good cause, but not if these mean compromising on impartial justice.

Someone asked the Prophet Muhammad if he could summarise Islam in a few words for him. He responded with the Qur'anic passage:

Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition.

The Quran, Chapter 16 verse 90

In both Islamic and Western thought, justice is also understood as a moral virtue and an attribute of personality within or outside the social context. Ancient Greek thought conceived of justice as an aspect of the character of the individual. Plato thus characterized justice as the right alignment of the individual soul, and Aristotle considered it one of the virtues needed to lead an excellent life.

Justice is a collective obligation and stands next in order of priority to belief in the Oneness of God (Tawhid) and the truth of the Prophethood of Muhammad. Any path that leads to justice is deemed to be in harmony with the Shari'ah or God's Law. And this law does not signify judicial norms but the route or the way. Barely a thirtieth of the Qur'anic verses have a legal aspect. Its principal object is moral in nature.

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and do not let the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to Piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do.

The Quran, Chapter 5 verse 8

The Messenger of Allah said, "The merciful people will be treated with mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those who are on the earth and He who is above the heavens will be merciful to you."

Islam teaches that the way people treat God's creation, God will treat them in the same manner in this life and the Hereafter.

How we live with one another in pursuit of virtue is a test of our humanity and servitude before God.

The Quran states:

“To each is a goal to which God turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good. Wheresoever you are, God will bring you together. For God has power over all things.”

The Quran, Chapter 2 verse 148

Religious contexts still influences the local culture. The young, either not matured or mellowed through life, view the fact that all the countries, most organizations and most individuals that are being targeted by the US-led 'war against terrorism' are Muslims, and consequently become angry.

Exposed to secular and Western ways of political thinking as well as urban living, detachment from cultural roots and history, some of them succumb to radicalism due to lack of proper instruction and training in the faith, rather than due to a sinister cultivation of aimless enmity.

The growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the UK has a lot to do with religiosity which is more important than religion – a religiosity driven by political awareness and fuelled by irrepressible feelings – a religiosity that could not calm the spirit and seek virtue in sound moral character, civic engagement and humble worship.

The BBC reported that in November 2005 a 12-year old Palestinian boy, Ahmed Ismail Khatib, was shot and killed in Jenin by Israeli troops. The Israeli army expressed regret over his shooting, who had mistaken his toy gun for a real one. His organs were transplanted into five Israeli children and an Israeli woman aged 58. His father Ismail said, saving lives was more important than religion. Preservation and saving of life is the highest of the five aims of God's Law according to Islam. He said, "I feel that my son has entered the heart of every Israeli." "I have taken this decision because I have a message for the world: that the Palestinian people want peace -for everyone," he told the AFP news agency. "We have no problem whether it is an Israeli or a Palestinian [who receives his organs] because it will give them life," added the boy's mother, *Ablah Khatib*.

Mercy and its practical consequence, forgiveness, is the key to breaking the link in the chain. The chain that forms when violence begets violence.

Enmity cannot be overcome with enmity.

Vengeance cannot be defeated by vengeance.

Jealousy cannot be overcome by jealousy.

Hatred cannot be overcome by hatred, nor anger by anger.

Let us not forget that community, family structure, a connection to deeper historical roots, and answers to 'authentic' values are essential for the psychological health of people as vital means to cohesion in society.

From - One Community In Conversation(Friday 23rd November 2007)

ISLAM AND ITS PEACEFUL TREATMENT OF PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS

In the Name of God the Most Compassionate the Most Merciful

The Arabic word "Islam" means "submission" The very name Islam comes from the Arabic root word 'salama' which means peace. Thus, by this very simple linguistic definition, one can ascertain as to what the nature of this religion is

Islam is a religion which is based upon achieving peace through the submission to the will of Allah. In a religious context it means attainment of peace, inward and outward, through voluntary submission to the will of God

"Allah" is an Arabic word means The God, which is used by all Muslims, particularly Arab Muslims and Christians alike.

Islam is a religion of peace, mercy, justice, forgiveness, virtue, inclusiveness and human dignity for all

Every Muslim starts any new beginning "In the name of God, the Most Compassionate the Most Merciful". This is a constant reminder to compassion and mercy in our day to day dealings

Every Muslim greets another by saying:

As salaamu alaikum - Peace be upon you

The holy Qur'an is the record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. The 114 chapters of the Qur'an have remained unchanged through the centuries and are still memorized and read by Muslims all over the world

Muslims believe in One, Unique, and Incomparable God. They believe in the Day of Judgment and individual

accountability for their actions. Muslims believe in a chain of prophets beginning with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, David, Solomon, and Jesus (peace be upon them all). God's eternal message was reaffirmed and finalized by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). One becomes a Muslim by affirming, "There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God"

Quran defines The mission of the prophet as:

"We have sent you forth as a blessing and mercy to mankind."(21:107)

When Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) was asked:

"What is Islam?" His reply took less than a minute, showing the simplicity of the religion and its accessibility by all. He said:

"Obedience to God, and kindness and compassion to humanity."

Islam is not a new religion, message of Islam is the same truth that God revealed to all His prophets throughout history

In addition to believing in the holy Qur'an, Muslims also believe in the holy Torah and the holy Gospel.

"It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the criterion (of judgment between right and wrong)."(3:3)

The holy Qur'an affirms our belief in all of God's Prophets without distinguishing among them. The faith of a Muslim

is not acceptable unless he believes in all of the Prophets who preceded prophet Mohammad (PBUH). This is such an integral part of the faith. .

“Say ye: "We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to the God.

Q.21:136

People of the Scripture are further granted a special consideration in Islam.

“those who believe, and the Jews, the Christians and the Sabians, whoever believe in God and the Last Day and does good, they shall have the rewards from their lord and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.”

The holy Qur'an talks about the mankind in the following Way:

“O mankind! We created you male and female and set you up as a nations and tribes so that you may know one another. The noblest among you in the sight of God are the most pious and righteous of you.”

Q.3:64

If Islam is based on the notion of peace, then how is it that some acts are done under the name of Islam are contrary to peace? The answer is simple. Such actions, if not sanctioned by the religion, have no place with it. They are absolutely not Islamic and should not be thought of as Islamic.

The foundation of Islam is base on oneness, Therefore the holy book needs to be read and understood in its entirety.

The background to each sura should be fully understood and one cannot take a verse revealed for a particular battle and conveniently leave out verses and insist it is for the daily affairs of Muslims. These actions undermine The spiritual values of message of the holy Quran and the image and sanctity of the Prophet of Islam. Doing so aids those who have hijacked Islam for their misguided cause. Neither the Quran nor the tradition in Islam justifies violence.

Ones who persecute innocent people because of their faith are not welcomed to the House of Islam, their use of Islam as a scapegoat does not make Islam what they portray it to be. The holy Quran categorically prohibits coercion in matter of religion by sheer of force. Islam teaches divine justice. Individual is responsible for his own decision and acts. No one as far as Islam is concerned, is held responsible for another's decision actions.

Islam continuously reassures man of his rights to freedom of choice and freedom to use that God-given faculty of thought and reason. therefore man is expected to reason things out objectively and systematically for himself. To question and to reflect. No one should press other to make a hasty decision to accept any of the teachings of Islam. Every man has that individual will. No one else can take that away that will and force him to surrender to the will of God. One needs to find out and make that decision himself. The faith is only acceptable when one comes to it with its mind and heart.

The holy Quran and Hadith vehemently insist on religious tolerance and the idea of "no compulsion in religion."

The Holy Quran explicitly says "There is no compulsion in religion". At another place the Heavenly Book says, "Don't create chaos and dissension on earth". It is an established fact that Islam is basically and essentially the religion of peace, moderation and toleration, having no place at all for any extremism or violence

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God have he has taken grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks, for God is All Hearing and Knowing”

Q. 2:256

Islam commands the Muslims to be just with people of other faiths, whether they be Jews, Christians, or pagans. Islam calls us to treat them kindly and try to win their hearts.

“And tell my servants that they should speak in a most kindly manner (unto those who do not share their beliefs). Verily, Satan is always ready to stir up discord between men; for verily; Satan is mans foe Hence, We have not sent you (Unto men O Prophet) with power to determine their Faith.”

Q. 17:53,54

Allah commands Muslims to respect their non-Muslim parents and to accompany them in this world in a good manner

"Argue with the People of the Scripture in the best manner except those among them who act oppressively. Say: We believe in the revelation that 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 submit ourselves as Muslims."

Q.29:46

Here are some verses from the Holy Quran in relation to the message of the prophet which show how Islam at its core and at its source is a religion of peace.

“O Prophet 'We have not sent you except to be a mercy to all mankind:" Declare, "Verily, what is revealed to me is this, your God is the only One God, so is it not up to you to bow down to Him?' But if they turn away then say, "I have delivered the Truth in a manner clear to one and all, and I know not whether the promised hour (of Judgment) is near or far.”

Q. 21 107-10

“Assuredly, We have sent down the Book to you in right form for the good of man. Who so guided himself by it does so to his own advantage, and whoso turns away from it does so at his own loss. You certainly are not their keeper.”

Q. 39:41

“Obey God then and obey the Messenger, but if you turn away (no blame shall attach to our Messenger), for the duty of Our Messenger is just to deliver the message.”

Q. 64:12

“But if they turn away from you, (O Prophet remember that) your only duty is a clear delivery of the Message entrusted to you.”

Q. 16:82

“Oh Prophet exhort; you cannot compel them to believe.”

Q. 88:21-22

“And whoso takes for patrons others besides God, over them does God keep a watch. you are not a keeper over them. But if they turn aside from you (do not get disheartened), for We have not sent you to be a keeper over them; your task is but to preach.”

Q. 42:6,48

Say to them 'Whatever good betides you is from God and whatever evil betides you is from your own self and that We have (O Prophet) sent you to mankind only as a messenger and all sufficing is God as witness. Whoso obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys God. And for those who turn away. We have not sent you as a keeper.'

Q. 4:79,80

And they ask, "When shall the promise be fulfilled if you speak the Truth?" Say, "The knowledge of it is verily with God alone, and verily I am but a plain warner."

Q. 67:25-26

(Noah to his people) He (Noah) said "O my people! think over it! If I act upon a clear direction from my Lord who has bestowed on me from Himself the Merciful talent of seeing the right way, a way which you cannot see for yourself, does it follow that we can force you to take the right path when you definitely decline to take it?"

Q. 11:28

(Three Messengers to their people) Said (the Messengers), "Our Sustainer knows that we have indeed been sent unto you, but we are not bound to more than clearly deliver the Message entrusted to us."

Q. 36: 16-17

To every people have We appointed ceremonial rites (of prayer) which they observe; therefore, let them not wrangle over this matter with you, but bid them to turn to your Lord (since that is the main objective of religion). You indeed are rightly guided. But if they still dispute you in this matter, (then say,) 'God best knows (the value of) what you do.'

Q. 22:67

Here are some sayings of the Prophet on how Muslims should treat their Non-Muslim neighbours on a day to day basis as well as how governments should treat a Non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim state

"He who believes in God and the Last Day should honour his guest, should not harm his neighbour, should speak good or keep quiet."

Bukhari, Muslim

"Whoever hurts a Non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim state hurts me, and he who hurts me annoys God."

Bukhari

"Beware on the Day of Judgment; I shall myself be complainant against him who wrongs a Non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim state or lays on him a responsibility greater than he can bear or deprives him of anything that belongs to him."

Al-Mawardi

I cannot complete this work without remembering the wisdom of scholarship of Amir Al-Momenin Imam Ali (Blessing of Allah upon him) on being a noble human being. He taught us:

One hour of deep and sober contemplation is better than a life prayer without understanding. He taught us to attach due importance to sincerity of purpose of life. Live in purity and work with nobility of purpose is form of prayers. Man is recommended to dislike and abhor vices and wrong doing.

We are taught that who acts with pity gives rest to his soul. We are encouraged to learn from nobility of life Moses, Jesus and Mohammad and all other prophets (Peace be upon them all)

In a letter to his son on treatment of others Imam Ali wrote:

‘My dear son, Do unto others as you wish others to do unto you. Whatever you dislike to happen to you, spare others from such happening’ At another place he advises: Do not make yourself slaves of anybody. God has created you free man, do not sell this freedom in return for anything. Remember that to oppress a weak or helpless person is the

worst form of tyranny. Do good to your brother when he is doing harm to you. Be friend to him when he ignores you. Be generous to him if he is not to you. Be kind to him when he is harsh and cruel to you.’

I hope this reflection of mercy and compassion that I have learned from my faith, in my journey of life to be an encouragement to fellow travellers of other faiths to help them to look inwardly to their hearts and find the compassion to understand Islam the way that Islam deserves to be understood. Remember always That in the teaching of the holy Quran people are constantly guided to prefer Peace. Sanctity of life is underlined in the following Qur’anic verses:

”whoever saved a human life should be regarded as though he has saved all mankind.”

Q..5:32

A positive step for people of other faiths is to reflect on the their own history and traditions too, and see fanatics and extremist exist in every nation and in the “followers” of every religion and usually their cause is related to non-religious factors. The extremists who misuse and exploit Scriptures to justify their wrong deeds are totally misguided. It is necessary to have a unified stance in facing unjust, extremism and fanaticism. It is really a public duty where all of us have to co-operate and participate. Moderates however are those who can bring dialogue and mutual understanding into the future and accept with dignity what we differ in. Diversity is a blessing and as a sign of God abundant generosity .

We only need to create concrete and positive outcomes of better understanding. It is an insight that we desperately need to share. It can take quite a while for everyone involved to grasp the ethos of dialogue. Our dialogue and cooperation hopefully will be guided by the spiritual and ethical wisdom that are contained in our holy scriptures.

“The True servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk gently on the earth”

Q. 25:63

I would like to sum up with the words of whom that is a ‘Bridge’ between people of all faiths, Jesus(PBUH), the one who is deeply loved and respected by all. Words that are the two greatest foundation on which Christianity has been based.

“Love the lord with your heart, all your soul and all your Mind.”

“Love your neighbour as you love yourself.”

Matthews XXXIII : 37,39,40

An Islamic Prayer :

Oh God, You are Peace, from you come peace, to you return peace, revive us with a salutation of peace and lead us to your abode of peace.

I Will close by Islamic traditional blessing:

‘May God’s Love and Blessing be upon you’

Wa-s-Salamu Alaykum wa Rahatu-Lllah wa Barakatuh.

Elahe Mojdehi May 2005

ISLAMOPHOBIA

“Fear of, or prejudice against, Muslims and Islam” has existed since the time of the prophet Muhammad. The term itself dates from the late 1980s and has come into general use after the destruction of the Twin Towers and associated attacks on the USA (2001), the London bombings (2005) and other acts of terrorism attributed to Muslims in recent years.

“The rise of Islam from the early 7th century onwards was seen in the Christian world and particularly in the West as the greatest challenge it had ever faced. Islam was seen as not just a heresy, but as worse than a heresy. It was seen as a false religion, worshipping a false god and essentially as the work of the devil. Some people still see it that way and cite events like ”9/11” as evidence. The bitter opposition to a Muslim community centre in New York, a couple of blocks away from Ground Zero, might be seen as exemplifying this attitude.

Christian fundamentalists and hard-line secularists alike unite in their hostility to Islam and Muslims because, they say, of the activities of Al-Qaida and its ilk.”

Rev. Cliff Reed, President of SIFRE, 25th Sept. 2011

However, in an article in the Guardian on 10th Feb. 2012, Daisy Khan claimed that the hysterical campaign to stigmatise US Muslims poses a far greater threat to America’s civic union than radicalisation does. She says that there is an increasingly organised campaign to portray all Muslims as potential terrorists and traitors. Similarly, in the UK, the majority of Muslims, who denounce terrorism in all its forms and totally dissociate themselves from acts of

violence, can feel that they are viewed with suspicion and are in danger of abuse and attacks.

There are a minority of Muslims who have become militant and pose a danger to society, sometimes because of a hatred of the West and its values; sometimes because they have misunderstood the basic principles of Islam. Unable to read the Qur'an in its original language and not having engaged with the faith in depth they are vulnerable to the influence of extremists.

All religions have had shameful times in their history. Christians need to acknowledge past atrocities committed in their name and they need to be aware that these events will have an impact on present relationships and actions. Words have to be carefully chosen especially in times of crisis. President Bush's unfortunate pronouncement that he would wage a "crusade against terrorism" in response to the events of 9/11 were seen by some as inflammatory by recalling brutal aggression by Christians in the Middle Ages. Later he spoke more sensitively: "The face of terror is not the true face of Islam.....a faith that brings comfort to a billion people around the world."

It is unfortunate that the true meaning of the word "Jihad" (striving) is not generally understood. It embraces studying and working hard, being a good parent, discharging one's duties as a citizen or neighbour. In the last resort it can include a "Holy War" but this cannot be by an act of aggression. It is similar to the "Just War" concept within the Christian tradition, which is hemmed about by many qualifications to limit damage and to protect the innocent. In the Qur'an it is clearly stated that to kill one innocent person

is the same as to kill everyone (Qur'an 5.32).

Throughout the Qur'an, Allah (God) is described as the Compassionate, the Merciful. He places compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who follow Him (Qur'an 57.27).

The word "Islam" comes from the same root as Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace. It also carries the meaning of submission. Therefore a true Muslim is one who freely submits his will and heart to Allah and is thus able to live at peace, with believers and non-Muslims alike.

"Terrorists are not on our side – they are in fact our opponents. They are an obstacle to our cause which is to be a force for good, to spread peace among our people – all the people of this country".

(Dilwar Hussain, President of the Islamic Society of Britain)

Muslims, Jews and Christians are known as Children of Abraham, and as People of the Book. There are many texts honouring Jesus and Mary in the Qur'an and all three faiths have much teaching in common. Jews, Christians and Muslims have many opportunities to meet each other and members of other faiths. Fear and prejudice can be replaced by greater knowledge and mutual understanding. The world needs this leaven"! (Mt. 13 v33)

"Guide our religious communities and those set over them,
That they may not only proclaim the message of peace
But also show it in their lives."

(from A Prayer for the Abrahamic faiths, by Hans Kung.)

Assalamu Alaikum – Peace to you!

Cynthia Capey Facing the Issues (Kevin Mayhew, 2012)

