

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM

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ALLAH IS THE GOD ONLY FOR MUSLIMS

Background: Some think that the word "Allah" refers to a special God for use by Muslims only.

Arabic like Aramaic and Hebrew, is a Semitic language. The word that described God in Aramaic was pronounced "AaLaH" or "AaLoH", in Hebrew it was "Eloah" or "Elohim", and in Arabic (the largest living member of the Semitic language family) is "Allah", which is considered a conjunction of "Al-ilah", which is Arabic for "The-God" in English. The English word "God" describes the same entity, and The Quran clearly invites all people to unite under one God:

"Say: "Call upon Allah, or call upon Rahman: by whatever name you call upon Him, (it is well): for to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Neither speak thy Prayer aloud, nor speak it in a low tone, but seek a middle course between." Quran 17 – 110

NO COMPULSION IN RELIGION

Background: Some think that in Islam there is no freedom of religion allowed. For example, residents of a Muslim country or under Islamic law are not allowed to practice their own faith.

The Quran states, in no uncertain terms, that there is no compulsion in religion:

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most sure hand-hold, that never breaks. And God is Hearing, Knowing. [2:256]

Each to their own way:

***"Nor will I serve what you serve,
Nor will you serve what I serve,
To you is your Religion, and to me is my Religion."* [109:4-6]**

The Quran states that God could have made all those on earth believe, thus asks who is man to enforce such a thing if God did not:

And if your Lord had pleased, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them; will you then force men till they become believers? [10:99]

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM GUARANTEED

" ..Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure .." [Q 22 -40]

Again, reminding us not to compel but simply warn by means of The Quran, with wisdom and kind words:

We know best what they say, and you are not one to compel them; therefore remind by means of The Quran who fears My warning. [50:45]

You shall invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kind words, and discuss with them in the best possible manner. Your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path, and He knows best who are the guided ones. [16:125]

ALL MUSLIMS ARE ARABS OR ISLAM IS AN ARAB RELIGION

Background: Some think that all Muslims are Arabs, or think most are Arabs, or Muslims are only from the Middle East.

While Islam is often associated with **Arabs**, they **make up only 15%** of the world's Muslim population. The country with the largest population of Muslims is Indonesia (which is a non-Arab country). Muslims make up about 1/5 of the world's population (about 1.2 billion), with large numbers found in Asia (~69%), Africa (~27%), Europe/USA (~4%) and other parts of the world.

ISLAM WAS SPREAD BY THE SWORD

Background: Some think that the main reason the message of Islam spread so far and wide was that it was enforced upon others by way of the sword and war.

It is a proven fact that according to The Quran there is no compulsion in religion:

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most sure hand-hold, that never breaks. And God is Hearing, Knowing. [2:256]

According to The Quran, this is how to invite others to Islam:

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and discuss with them in a way that is best.” [16:125]

While it is true that in many places where Muslim armies went to liberate people or the land, they did carry the sword as that was the weapon used at that time. However, Islam did not spread by the sword because in many places where there are Muslims now, for example, in Indonesia (the country with the largest Muslims population!), Malaysia, China, and many parts of Africa, there are no records of any Muslim armies going there. The following are some other examples to consider:

Most of India was ruled by successive Muslim empires for about 700 years but Muslims always remained in the minority.

Muslims ruled Spain (Al-Andalus) for about 800 years. During this period the Christians and Jews enjoyed freedom to practice their respective religions, and this is a documented historical fact.

Christian and Jewish minorities have survived in the Muslim lands of the Middle East for centuries. Countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan all have significant Christian and Jewish populations.

In the U.S.A. and Europe, it is said that Islam is the fastest growing religion and this is without the use of a sword.

The historian De Lacy O’Leary wrote: “History makes it clear however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and

forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most **fantastically absurd myths** that historians have ever repeated.”

IS 'JIHAD' A 'HOLY WAR'

Background: Some think that the term "jihad" means "holy war" and it is a requirement which all Muslims must engage in.

'jihad' is a common Arabic word meaning to strive/struggle or exert effort, and is used in different ways depending on context in The Quran eg striving to seek knowledge is called "jihad" – going daily to work to earn an honest living is a "jihad". We learn from The Quran that believers must be willing to exert effort in the cause of God, using their wealth and themselves. This effort/jihad may or may not include fighting. It does not have an exclusive meaning of 'holy war' or 'fighting', as shown above.

MUHAMMAD [P] DID NOT COME WITH A NEW RELIGION

Background: Some think that a man named Muhammad from Arabia was the first to introduce Islam or it came into existence with him and The Quran.

The word "Islam" can be translated as "surrender/submission" (to God). A "muslim" can be translated as "one who surrenders/submits" (to God).

According to The Quran, everything in the universe, willingly or unwillingly has ultimately surrendered / submitted to God, thus the basic concept of islam/surrender/submission is as old as the universe itself:

Do they seek other than the system of God, when all things in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly have **surrendered to Him, and to Him they will be returned.** [3:83]

The Quran clearly states that Muhammad [P] was a messenger and inspired just as the Prophets before him:

"We have inspired you as We have inspired Noah and the prophets after him. And We inspired Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the Tribes, and Jesus, and Job, and Jonah, and Aaron, and Solomon; and We have given David the Zaboor / Psalms. [4:163]

Say: "We believe in God and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit. [3:84]"

Also, The Quran specifically mentions the term "Muslim" for those before prophet Muhammad, including: Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Jacob, and the companions of Jesus. [see 2:128, 2:131, 3:67, 3:52, 5:111, 10:72]. Thus, the prophet Muhammad was not the founder of islam/submission, but simply continued this universal message as one of many messengers of God.

ISLAM AND THE QURAN PROMOTES FIGHTING, WAR AND TERRORISM

Background: Some think that Islam, Muslims and The Quran promote fighting, killing, war and terrorism, especially for reasons of differing faith or in order to establish Muslim rule.

The idea of fighting people only because of a difference in faith does not exist in The Quran. In fact, it warns about accusing other people of being misguided in order to seek worldly gains:

The Quran clearly states fight those who fight you, not non-combatants or civilians:

The sanctity of all human life:

For this reason did We prescribe to the children of Israel that whoever kills even ONE person, unless it be for murder or for corruption in the land, it is as though he killed all of mankind; and whoever saves ONE life, it is as though he saved all of mankind; [5:32]"

Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God loves not aggressors. [2:190]"

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 loveth those who are just. [60:8]

O believers! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses for the sake of justice, and let not the hatred of a people cause you to turn away from justice. Do justice, for that is akin to piety...[5:8]

Emphasis on opting for forgiveness, peace and that which is good/righteous:

But if the enemy incline towards peace, then you also incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is One that hears and knows (all things). [8:61]

DOES ISLAM AND THE QURAN PROMOTES SLAVERY?

Background: Some think that when Muslims conquered territory, slaves were often taken or that slavery is allowed in Islam.

When the Quran was revealed, slavery was **already** in wide practice throughout the Arab World, thus, it would have been impractical and detrimental to place an immediate ban on the slave trade, forcing all slaves into unemployment/poverty. The Quran uses a better psychological approach to win people's hearts in the struggle against slavery and all forms of discrimination by placing a strong emphasis on human dignity and equality and encouraging the freeing of slaves:

Did we not show him the two paths? He should choose the difficult path. Which one is the difficult path? **The freeing of slaves. Feeding, during the time of hardship... [90:10-14]**

Righteousness is not turning your faces towards the east or the west. Righteous are those who believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the scripture, and the prophets; and they give the money, cheerfully, to the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the traveller, the beggars, and **to free the slaves... [2:177]**

The Quran lists the penalty for various misdemeanours as freeing of slaves, see 4:92, 5:89, 58:3. It also implies distribution of

community/collective charities would contribute towards freeing of slaves:

The charities are to go to the poor, and the needy, and those who work to collect them, and those whose hearts have been united, and to free the slaves, and those in debt, and in the cause of God, and the traveller. A duty from God, and God is Knowledgeable, Wise. [9:60]

As can clearly be seen, taking all of the above verses of The Quran into account, it would lead to a gradual reduction in slave numbers and eventually abolish slavery

DOES ISLAM PROMOTES RACISM AND NATIONALISM?

Background: Some think that Islam promotes racism because it is pro-Arab due to promotion of things Arabic or Arab customs. Also, some think Islam is pro-black and anti-white due to groups such as the Nation of Islam.

The Quran makes it very clear that the most important differentiator when it comes to people, is that who is most righteous:

O mankind, We created you from a male and female, and We made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another(not discriminate against one another). Surely, the most honorable among you in the sight of God is the most righteous. God is Knowledgeable, Expert. [49:13]

And from His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and your colors. In that are signs for the knowledgeable beings. [30:22]

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM ?

Background: It is commonly thought, even amongst Muslims, that the system of democracy or democratic principles are not compatible with The Quran or islam.

The Quran has examples of leaders with authority (e.g. Solomon, Joseph), however this would be conducted by group consultation and representation:

...and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs... [3:159]

And those who have responded to their Lord, and they establish the bond, and their affairs are conducted by mutual consultation among themselves, and from Our provisions to them they give. [42:38]

Elected leaders would have to lead by example:

Do you order the people to do goodness, but forget to practice it yourselves, while you are reciting the book? Do you not reason? [2:44]

Corruption prohibited:

Do not devour the wealth and property of one another in a wrongful manner, nor bribe the officials/judges so that you may consume a part of the other people's belongings sinfully while you know! [2:188]

Such a system would have to promote the following social order for the benefit of everyone:

...you are the best suited community that has been raised up for the good of mankind. You shall enjoin the Right and discourage the Wrong... [3:110]

...help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity; and remain conscious of God: for, behold, God's punishment is severe. [5:2]

O believers! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses for the sake of justice, and let not the enmity of a people cause you to turn away from justice. Do justice, for that is akin to piety...[5:8]

And lastly, people in a community are reminded that they should 'be the

change they wish to see in the world':

...God is not to change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves... [13:11]

RELIGION AND SCIENCE/REASON/KNOWLEDGE ARE NOT COMPATIBLE

Background: It is commonly thought that religion in general, including Islam, is simply not compatible with science/reason/knowledge.

The Quran repeatedly emphasises the importance of seeking knowledge, verifying information, use of logic/reason, evidence, consultation, reflection/thinking, study of biology/creation/archaeology/history/sciences. Some of the many examples are shown below.

The Quran clearly states signs of the truth it promotes exist in the whole universe, thus surely all of it is worthy of study:

We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth. Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things? [41:53]

Say: Travel in the earth and see how He originated the creation, then God creates the latter creation; surely God has power over all things. [29:20]

Many ways of life have passed away before your time. Go, then, about the earth and behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth. [3:137]

In the creation of heavens and Earth, and the alternation between night and day, are signs for those with understanding. Those who remember God while standing, and sitting, and on their sides, and they ponder over the creation of the heavens and the Earth: "Our Lord you did not create this without purpose..." [3:190-191]

DOES ISLAM SAY THAT AN APOSTATE MUST BE PUT TO DEATH

Background: Some think that once you are a "muslim" if you decide to change your beliefs you are considered an apostate, an act punishable by death!

The Quran clearly states there are those who believe then disbelieve, then believe again, then disbelieve again. This proves death for apostasy simply did not exist, because if it did, it would be impossible to believe again after unbelief, as they would have been put to death after the first unbelief:

Surely (as for) those who believe then disbelieve, again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, God will not forgive them nor guide them in the (right) path. [4:137]

This is further proven by the following verse:

How can God guide a people who have rejected after believing, and they witnessed that the messenger is true, and the clarity had come to them? God does not guide the wicked people.[3:86]

The Quran states, in no uncertain terms, that there is no compulsion in religion:

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most sure hand-hold, that never breaks. And God is Hearing, Knowing. [2:256]

The Quran states that God could have made all those on earth believe, thus asks who is man to enforce such a thing if God did not:

And if your Lord had pleased, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them; will you then force men till they become believers? [10:99]

The Quran states there were those who believed part of the time, then disbelieved part of the time in order to confuse and sow discord amongst the believers of the time. If death for apostasy existed, no sane minded person would attempt to do this as they would be killed the very first time they tried it:

A section of the People of the Book say: "Believe in the morning

what is revealed to the believers, but reject it at the end of the day; perchance they may (themselves) Turn back. [3:72]

To conclude, it is clear that 'death for apostasy' does not exist in The Quran. People are free to believe and live their lives accordingly or not. If a community or system or any structure deprives its members of this basic freedom, it will produce hypocrites and suppressed people who have no strength of belief or goals to work for and will likely result in a weak system or community. Freedom of belief is the air that healthy and just communities breathe.

IS STONING TO DEATH ALLOWED (E.G. FOR ADULTERY) IN ISLAM

Background: Some think that 'stoning to death' is a punishment laid out in The Quran or promoted by Islam for acts such as adultery.

The Quran never sanctions stoning to death as a punishment for anyone. The Quran never sanctions stoning to death as a punishment for anyone. In fact, the only times it is mentioned in The Quran is as a threat to believers from non-believers:

11:91, 18:20, 19:46, 36:18, 44:20, 26:116

Also, the misconception of 'stoning to death' as punishment for adultery is disproved by The Quran as the punishment for proven adultery are lashes [24:2]. Furthermore, this punishment is halved for formerly slave woman due to their past circumstance [4:25]. Since half 'stoning to death' is not possible, this indicates 'stoning to death' for adultery is not permitted.

IS FORCED MARRIAGE IS ALLOWED IN ISLAM

Background: Some think that consent of the bride and/or groom is not needed in marriage or as long as the parents of the female agree to the proposal then it is allowed .

Forced marriages are clearly not acceptable according to The Quran:

O you who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit the women by forcibly/unwillingly... [4:19]

Marriage is done by mutual agreement:

And if you divorce the women, and they have reached their required interim period, then do not prevent/hinder them that they marry their partners if they mutually agree between themselves in a kind/equitable manner... [2:232]

In the following verse, it is also made clear that a couple undergoing divorce can only get back together if they both wish to:

And the divorced women shall wait for three menstruation periods; and it is not lawful for them to conceal what God has created in their wombs, if they believe in God and the Last Day. And their husbands would then have just cause to return together, if they both wish to reconcile... [2:228]

HUSBAND WIFE RELATIONSHIP IN ISLAM

All examples in The Quran involving RELATIONSHIP between marriage partners are in the reciprocal Arabic word form, e.g. "taraadaa" [2:232-233, 4:24], "tashaawar" [2:233], which means they are mutual.

The relationship between a husband and wife is discussed in affectionate terms in The Quran, not of one enforcing decisions on the other:

And among His signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily in that are signs for those who reflect. [30:21]

...They are a garment for you and you are a garment for them.... [2:187]

And they say, "Our Lord, let our spouses and children be a source of joy for us, and let us be the foremost among the righteous." [25:74]

In The Quran, there is a pre-marriage requirement for a male to give the female a dower, see the following examples in which the female is involved in the decision making process:

And give the women their due dowries willingly, and if they remit any of it to you of their own will, then you may take it with good feelings. [4:4]

...And unto those with whom you desire to enjoy marriage, you shall give the dowers due to them; but you will incur no sin if, after [having agreed upon] this lawful due, you freely agree with one another upon anything else... [4:24]

Lastly, The Quran reminds us that believers are those who conduct their matters by mutual consultation/counsel [42:38].