

Misconceptions About Islam - Part 2

Would you send your car to a butcher for repair, or a sick child to a florist? Of course not. A butcher is not qualified to repair a car, nor a florist qualified to treat the sick. Likewise, people without Islamic knowledge are not qualified to inform others about Islam. So why is it that people are willing to accept information about Islam from those that do not have the required knowledge?

Islam, one of the world's largest religions, is, without doubt, gravely misunderstood. For various reasons, numerous false rumours have been spread about Islam, which have led many people to hold misconceptions about its true teachings.

#1 - "All Muslims are Arabs"

In contradiction to this misconception, only about 15% to 20% of Muslims in the world are Arabs, meaning that up to 85% of Muslims are not Arabs! There are more Indian Muslims than Arab Muslims, and more Indonesian Muslims than Indian Muslims. This mistaken assumption is possibly based on the fact that most of the first generation of Muslims were Arabs, that the Qur'an is in Arabic, and that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was an Arab. The final message may have initiated in a particular region and a particular language, but it was revealed for all mankind.

"It [the Qur'an] is not except a reminder to the worlds." Qur'an 12:104

Islam is a message for all mankind, and no race is superior to another:

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, **"An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor has a non-Arab any superiority over an Arab; also a black has no superiority over white, nor has a white any superiority over black, except by piety and good action."** While it is true that not all Muslims are Arabs, not all Arabs are Muslim either. Some Arabs are Christian, Jewish or even atheist.

#2 - "Islam Permits Forced Marriages"

Arranged marriages are cultural practices which are predominant in certain countries throughout the world. Although not restricted to Muslims, forced marriages have become incorrectly associated with Islam. In fact, some Muslims mistakenly believe that this practice has an Islamic origin. The reality is quite the opposite.

In Islam, both males and females have the right to choose or reject their potential spouse, and a marriage is considered null and void if a woman's approval is not granted prior to the marriage. This was illustrated in an incident in which a woman told the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), that she had been forced into marriage. He advised that it was entirely up to her to either continue with, or end the marriage.

Since an Islamic marriage is a voluntary agreement between both the male and the female, forced marriages are not only invalid, but completely forbidden.

#3 - "Muslims Worship the Moon God"

A common misconception about Islam is that Muslims worship a 'Moon God'. Muslims actually worship the Creator, whose personal name in Arabic is 'Allah'. This name is also used by Arab Christians and Jews to refer to God. Worshipping the moon, or anything other than Allah, is strictly prohibited in Islam:

“And from among Allah’s signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostrate to Allah Who created them, if you really worship Him.” Qur’an 41:37

#4 - “Fundamentalist Muslims are a Threat to Society”

The word “fundamentalist” actually does not mean anything bad, nor is it specific to Islam. In fact, the term was first used to describe Christian groups.

One of the more illogical and sinister rumours recently spread about Islam and Muslims is that “fundamentalist” Muslims are a danger to society. To understand this issue correctly, we must firstly understand the true meaning of the word “fundamentalist”. A fundamentalist is one who strictly adheres to the original teachings of the doctrine or theory they are following. For example, in order for a person to be a good economist, they must know, follow and practise the fundamentals of economics; i.e. they must be a “fundamentalist” in the field of economics. Likewise, for a person to be a good Muslim, they must know, follow and practise the fundamentals of Islam; i.e. they must be a “fundamentalist” Muslim.

Based on the above definition, society has nothing to fear from fundamentalist Muslims, as they bring benefit, not harm to society. A fundamentalist Muslim who follows the correct teachings of Islam cannot be a drug addict, an alcoholic, a thief, a rapist, a murderer or a liar, as these are all grave sins. Rather, the fundamentalist Muslim is required to be pious, just and sincere in all of their actions and dealings with others.

Many people fear fundamentalist Muslims because they confuse them with extremists.

From an Islamic perspective, a fundamentalist Muslim simply adheres to the original teachings of Islam, making them balanced in all of their actions, while an extremist exceeds the bounds set by Islam, harming themselves and others. The media at times depicts both of these as one. Even the word “extremist” has been thrown around without definition by governments and the media, so we should not always take this to be true on face value either.

Being a fundamentalist Muslim prevents an individual from harming others, which in return shields society from harmful acts. However, for those who do not obey God nor have high morals, there is nothing preventing them from committing any such crimes. Therefore, it is these people, and not the fundamentalist Muslim, that threaten society.

#5 - “Muslims Worship Muhammad”

Yet another misconception is that Muslims worship the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This is entirely untrue, and is easily refuted by the actual saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him): **“Do not over-praise me as the Christians over-praised Jesus, the son of Mary. I am His slave, so refer to me as ‘God’s slave and Messenger.’**” Worshipping God alone is the basis of Islamic teachings, as mentioned in the Qur’an in numerous places:

“And worship Allah and do not join anyone with Him in worship.” Qur’an 4:36

Islam teaches Muslims to respect all of God’s Prophets and Messengers - but respecting and loving them does not mean worshipping them.

#6 - “Muslims Do Not Share Good & Noble Values With non-Muslims”

It is often claimed by many non-Muslims that Muslims do not share the same refined values as themselves, and that, perhaps, they dislike anyone with different values. These same people use such lies to allege that Islamic values are somehow incompatible with decent Western values. Such claims could not be further from the truth.

Muslims cherish universal values such as:

- being honest and upright
- keeping one's word
- allowing freedom of religion
- respecting parents, relatives, and the elderly
- being charitable
- caring for one's neighbour
- looking after the poor and needy, and
- contributing to society.

In fact, it is compulsory for Muslims to display these values at all times, not only if they feel like it. Muslims are required to contribute positively towards society and to always conduct themselves with the highest of morals and best of actions.

Reflect on some of these noble values in Islam.

From the words of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

"The best among you are those who have the best manners and character."

"Allah is not kind to him who is not kind to people."

"Removing something harmful from the road is charity."

"None of you can be a believer unless he loves for his brother (in faith) what he loves for himself."

"He will not enter Paradise if his neighbour is not safe from his harm."

From the words of Allah, the Creator of all things:

"And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour. And lower unto them the wing of submission and humility through mercy, and say: 'My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they nurtured me when I was small.' "Qur'an 17:23-24

#7 - "The Qur'an is Just Another History or Poetry Book"

Some people mistakenly believe that the Qur'an, Islam's Holy Book of Scripture and God's final revelation, is just another history book or a book of poetry. The Qur'an is actually the divine literal word of God Almighty, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), through the angel Gabriel. It is a criterion for the truth, containing rules and guidelines for humanity to live by. The Qur'an also cites lessons from preceding generations and the history of the Prophets in order that we may learn from their experiences, and learn the correct narrations of the past. It

further teaches us about ourselves and our Creator, as well as the purpose of our existence.

This revelation is a miracle from God, and contains within it many miracles, so that we can have no doubt about its authenticity.

The best way to discover what the Qur'an is actually about is to read it for yourself.

Conclusion

Sending your sick child to a florist is illogical and harmful. Likewise, learning about Islam from unqualified sources without verification is also damaging and leads to misunderstandings. Therefore, before you accept everything you hear as fact, verify it through an Islamic scholar or other reputable sources. After all, the decision to accept false and misleading information about Islam, the belief shared by a quarter of mankind, lies solely in your hands. Does not the guidance for all humanity, the message of Islam, deserve to be carefully pondered over and reflected on?