

Where does Islam stand on terrorism, mass killing and acts of violence? What should be the Muslim stance on such acts?

Introduction

Praise be to Allah and peace and blessings on the Prophet Muhammad and those who follow his way.

Due to the acts of terrorism and mass killings that seem to be occurring on an ever-increasing basis by Muslims, it is important that we take a deep look at what the Qur'an and Sunnah say about these matters. This is needed so that our community may be clear-headed on the issue. The texts are numerous but, in order to be clear and concise, I have quoted only a few.

There is a tiny strand of Muslims who seem to believe that all disbelievers are at war with them and so it is lawful to shed their blood at every opportunity. Based on their actions, some non-Muslims are coming to believe that Islam preaches violence and terrorism towards non-believers and while the majority of Muslims believe that Islam is peaceful, yet they, too, are fast becoming divided on this matter.

Some are making compromises on well-established teachings in order to prove that Islam is peaceful while others are rejecting all criticism from the media as inherently biased while yet others are extremely confused and fearful of identifying themselves as Muslims.

On the other side, there are non-Muslims who are showing increasing islamophobia and hostility to anything Islamic while it must be acknowledged that many have vociferously expressed defense of Islam and Muslims.

How do we begin to address the fears and misinformation about Islam? Most importantly, how do we prevent further radicalization of Muslims in our community? The aim of this article is to remove any excuse from those among us who would commit violence or terrorism in the name of Islam and remove any justification from those who would attack Islam.

What do the Qur'an and Sunnah say about terrorism, mass killing and killing of innocent people?

For those who do not know what the Qur'an and Sunnah are, the next paragraph explains them briefly. Nevertheless, I encourage you to contact me or other Muslims in your area in your area and ask for further details.

The Qur'an and the Sunnah are clear that terrorism, mass killing and killing of even one innocent soul is haraam (forbidden). Since these are the two primary and infallible sources of all Islamic teachings, any opinion or verdict that goes against them is to be rejected as false. I quote here some statements from them on the issue.

Qur'an, Surah al-An'am, v. 151

“Say, come let me recite to you what your Lord has forbidden unto you: that you do not associate anything with Him, kindness to parents, do not kill your children due to poverty for We shall feed you and them, do not come near to lewdness, whether it is open or hidden, and do not take a life that God has forbidden unless in the course of justice. This is what your Lord has enjoined upon you so that you may act sensibly.”

Al-Qurtubi, a famous Qur'an commentator, says:

“This verse prohibits the taking of a life that is forbidden, whether that of a believer or one who has entered into a pact with Muslims, except in the course of justice, i.e. if a crime has been committed for which the punishment is death.”

Qur'an, Surah al-Isra, verse 33

“Do not take a life that God has forbidden except in the course of justice. Whoever is killed unjustly, We have granted authority to his close inheritor so let him not commit an excess of retaliatory killing. He will be helped.”

Qur'an, Al-Furqan, V. 68-69

“(The true servants of the Beneficent One) are those who do not call on any other god besides Allah, nor take a life that God prohibited except in the course of justice, and they commit not adultery.”

Qur'an, Al-Ma'idah, verse 32

“On account of that (i.e. Cain's slaying of Abel), We decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever takes a life without a life or corruption in the land, it is as if he slayed all of mankind, and whoever saves a life, it is as if he saved all of mankind...”

Abu Hurayrah reported that the Prophet said:
“Avoid the seven deadly sins”. They asked “O messenger of Allah, and what are they?” he said: “Associating a partner with God, sorcery, taking a life that God has prohibited except in the course of justice, consuming interest, consuming the property of the orphan, desertion from battle and slandering chaste, innocent women.” **(Al-Bukhari)**

‘Uqbah Ibn ‘Amir reported that the Prophet said:
“Whoever meets his Lord not having associated partners with Him and not having shed blood unlawfully will enter paradise.” **(Al-Tirmidhi)**

The corollary of this is whoever associates partners with God and/or sheds blood unlawfully will not enter paradise.

‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Umar said that the Prophet said:
“whoever lifts a weapon against us is not one of us.” **(Al-Bukhari)**

In addition to the general prohibition of unlawful killing, whether of a believer or non-believer, Islam strongly condemns killing another Muslim, as can be seen in the last quotation.

I emphasize this point since Muslims are suffering most at the hands of Muslims. Killers should understand that there is no justification for murdering either a Muslim or a non-Muslim and that such an act will deprive them of paradise rather than enable them to enter it.

Islam and non-Muslims

Some extremists apparently believe that the blood of a disbeliever can be shed because they or their countries are at war with us. But it is wrong to think that all disbelievers are at war with Islam. On the contrary, most are not. Besides, many of them do defend Islam from its detractors and recognize its beautiful teachings.

The Qur’an (Ch. 60 V. 8-9) says:
“Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. Allah only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion - that you

make them allies. And whoever makes them allies, then it is those who are the wrongdoers.”

Even if a country is at war with some Muslims, this does not mean that its general population is. Not all Israelis or Jews agree with the repressive policies of their country towards the Palestinians.

We are not at war with America or Americans. The government may not have a fair and balanced policy regarding the Middle East, but many of its people are kind-hearted and sympathetic.

Besides, many Muslims are American citizens or permanent residents, or students & visitors with valid visas.

In a recent Imam’s conference, Shaikh Salah AlSawi said that a visa or certificate of citizenship is a pact or covenant (عهد) in which there is a mutual agreement to live in peace with and not harm one another. Muslims must fulfill their side of the pact.

The Qur’an says (Ch. 23, V. 8 and Ch. 70, V. 32)
“(The believers) are those who observe their trusts and covenants.”

Apart from the obvious meaning, these verses, moreover, imply that a Muslim cannot make a treaty with “the enemy” with the intention of deceiving him. If a treaty is made and Muslims see that it is not in their interest to maintain it, they should end it on mutual terms.

In the battlefield, Islam gives clear instructions not to harm any non-combatant, including elderly men, women, children and religious groups who keep to their monasteries and nunneries.

The Sunnah of the Ideal Prophet

We have a beautiful example in the Prophet when he went to Taif to present Islam to its people. They mocked him, kicked him out and set the street urchins upon him. Bleeding from head to toe, he was comforted by angels, who said “tell us, and we will crush these mountains on them.” His reply was, “Do not do so. I hope that from their loins will come people who worship Allah.”

And they did accept Islam a few years later.

How do Muslims react to provocation?

Muslims seem to have an anger management problem and their enemies are exploiting it by making highly incendiary and provocative statements. It is understandable if one feels provoked when the media accuses Islam and Muslims of what they are not guilty of and it is even more vexing when our friends and colleagues turn against us and say hurtful things. However, this does not justify violence.

Our scripture teaches us to respond to provocation in the following ways:

With Patience

Qur'an, Ch. 2, V. 155-156

“And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient.”

Qur'an, Ch. 3, V. 186

“You will surely be tested in your possessions and in yourselves. And you will surely hear from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah much abuse. But if you are patient and fear Allah - indeed, that is of the matters [worthy] of determination.”

Suhayb reports that the Prophet said:

“how wonderful is the affair of the believer. Indeed, all of his affairs are entirely good, and this is only for the believer. If goodness befalls him, he is grateful, so this is good for him. And if evil befalls him, he is patient and this is good for him.” (Muslim)

Qur'an, Chapter 103:1-3

“By time, Indeed, mankind is in loss, Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.”

The call to patience is repeated innumerable times in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

& Peace

Qur'an, Ch. 25, V. 63

“And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace.”

i.e. either they say “peace” and leave or they says words to promote peace.

With suppression of anger, pardoning & doing good.

Qur'an, Ch. 3, V. 134

“and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good.”

‘A’ishah, the Prophet’s wife, said this about him:

“He was neither abusive nor obscene, nor foul-mouthed in the markets, nor did he respond to evil by evil. Rather, he would pardon and turn away.”
(Ahmad & At-tirmidhi. There are similar descriptions in Al-Bukhari & Muslim.)

The Prophet said that Allah is patient with the insults of the disbelievers. They associate partners with Him and accuse him of having a son. But He does not destroy them. Muslims, too, must act with patience and self-restraint.

“Hold your tongue”

“Restrain this!” said the Prophet on a different occasion, holding on to his tongue.

“Be gentle!”

Some Jews came to the Prophet’s home and said “assaamu alaykum”. This is not the greeting of peace, common to both Judaism and Islam. It is rather a curse. On hearing this, his wife, ‘A’ishah, started to abuse them. But he advised her to only say “the same be with you.” He also advised her, “If gentleness is in a thing, it will beautify it. But if removed from it, that thing will become ugly and disfigured.”

We should not want our deeds to become ugly and disfigured.

Think of the consequences for yourself and Muslims.

We have a responsibility to protect our families and children as well as the Muslim community. We should do nothing that will cause them harm. The Prophet criticized those who made things difficult for other Muslims. He defined the true Muslim by saying:

“The Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands other Muslims are safe.”

Thus, whoever commits a violent act that results in a backlash against the Muslim community, or an attack on a woman with hijab, or desecration of a mosque is to blame.

Prevent your brother from becoming the oppressor

What is our responsibility when we see a Muslim about to commit an act of oppression? We cannot allow ourselves or any member of our community to commit violence against others. If we see someone who may be inclined to violent outbursts, stop him from committing an act of aggression.

Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri said that he heard the Prophet say:

“Whoever of you sees a wrong let him change it with his hand. If not, then with his tongue. If not, then let him hate it with his heart, and this is the weakest of faith.” (Muslim)

Anas reported that the Prophet said:

“Help your brother, whether he is the oppressor or the oppressed.” His companions reacted, just as he expected. They asked, “how can we help him if he is the oppressor?” This shows how much they disliked wrongdoing. He responded by saying “stop him from committing oppression.”

Conclusion

The Islamic texts are clear and teach uprightness in all matters. There is no need for reform or reinterpretation of them. However, there is need for Muslims to study them, understand them correctly and act upon them. May Allah guide us and enable us to guide others to the right way.