**Islam: A Religion of Harm or Peace?**Jason Lyons

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Islam literally means ‘peace’ in Arabic, yet too often we are shown inhumane and heartless acts of Islam on the news. Are we being lied to by the media or do these actions truly make up what Islam is? Does Islam believe against these actions that we are shown or are these acts an actual side of the second most populated religion in the world? Often, people become much too quick to come to conclusions about the previous questions and they either conclude that Islam is evil, or Islam is truly peaceful and the malicious actions go against the true religion. Islam holds great similarities to the other Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity); however, there are discrete examples that show how Islam is different to these religions. The most important difference is the idea that the Qur’an shows that Muhammed confirms that both evil and good deeds (in the eyes of Western morality) can be good for humanity; this is the main idea in Islam to look at when determining if Islam is a peaceful or harmful religion. Islam as a religion is not peaceful nor destructive, but instead has the means of being either for any of its followers.

Islam is a peaceful religion due to how it’s been portrayed since its very creation. It is hard to understand that Islam can be a fundamentally peaceful religion since the west, especially the US, is extremely against Islam (Hilali, 1997); however, Islam was truly designed for peace, and was made as a means to better the world. Islam was created so that a new era of brotherhood, a community of support as well as true justice for humanity could exist for all (Miguel 2003). This shows that the past of Islam revolved around looking at the world with new eyes; revolutionizing the world to revolve around peace and prosperity. When looking at the peace inside of Islam, the Qur’an helps people accept of a peaceful way of life because there are “a number of Qur’anic verses which admonish violence and advocate peace, tolerance and compromise” (Bukay 2007).

The next advocate for peace in Islam is how Islamic men will act for the greater impact of the Islamic people and countries. When Islam was first created, it was the main religious catalyst in the creation of cities, which can be seen in the creation of many Middle Eastern cities such as Cairo and Baghdad (Miguel 2003). When these cities were first created, the peace inside of them was apparent. People were living inside of a society living to support each other and this all revolved around Islam. As time went on, the idea of cities was still important to the followers, and now Islamic followers are responding very powerfully to the illiteracy, high unemployment and weak economies that are making up the modern Islamic cities and countries (Hilali, 1997). Whether they are responding in the correct way will be important to think about later, but for now we must understand that the “secular, nationalists and Islamists are united in the common cause of popular democracy. They are demanding the right to gain legitimate power … [while they] topple monarchies, military dictators and authoritarian governments” (Hilali, 1997). These Muslims are fighting for the right of all the Islamic people inside of the countries and cities that cannot speak up for themselves due to the oppressing nature of the governments they are living under. To speak out against oppressing governments is to advocate for peace because living in fear of the body that governs you and oppresses you holds the people back from peace; this is the main problem is inside of modern Islamic cities. Finally, when looking at the actions made by Islamic men for the rest of their society, they are simply sacrificing themselves for others as Abraham sacrificed Isaac; they are doing it for God and to promote great peace and unity for the future (Rosenthal, 2006). This may be an odd reason to think that Islam is promoting peace, but the Islamic Jihadists truly believe that they are doing it for God and that their actions will result in peace for the future. Islam quite clearly has the means of being a peaceful religion, but it also has the means of creating some of the most malicious people in the world.

Many people might be quick to jump to the conclusion that Islam is a harmful religion to its very core, and the reason behind this is the idea that Islam is living in the past; there is a great deal of inability for the religion to modernize as the times change. The first example of this inability is the idea of Jihad. Above, Jihadists were argued to be fighting for a good cause, but when it is stated in the Qur’an to kill all people who oppose Islam, this shows a great deal of harm to humanity. No matter what you are living for, it is very important to know that other people live life for things that may be different to the reason you live yours. Jihadists don’t understand this. Instead, they simply think that they have been ‘hurt’ –whether by western ideology, gays, different Muslim beliefs etc.—and then they feel that they must retaliate from this (Rosenthal 2006). This mindset simply leads to them reciprocating their “indignity and pain” to those that they feel had given it to them (Rosenthal 2006). Gandhi once said “an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.” Instead of rising above the people that they believe have wronged them—as most modern people would think to do—they have the vindictive mindset to go out and kill to raise the praise for their God through this “struggle to better themselves” (Bukay 2007). Jihad is quite clearly the main thing that Islam has not been able to let go from the past, but Islam is also still a very strictly patriarchal and heterosexual society.

This leads to the next evidence of the harmful inability to modernize: the story of the Australian Gang Rapes. Many people have determined that this story is a microcosm of how Islamic immigrants will act in society, due to the long and hard road that Muslims have had at assimilating into the Australian culture. First, it’s important to understand some background. Before this crime, Australia had been trying very diligently to help incorporate the Islamic culture into their own, they allow the building of mosques as well as they have negotiated for nearly all the Islamic Law to be in place (Humphries 2007). “If the level of legal or cultural conflict over Islamic religious practice is taken as a measure then it is hard to argue Muslims have not successfully integrated,” yet for some reason it is still seen that the Muslim community in Australia is included in high crime rates, low income and low education level (Humphries 2007). In 2000 there was a story of 14 Muslim men that pre-meditatively coordinated the rape of multiple white teenage girls while using degrading racist language to humiliate them (Humphries 2007). The accused heartlessly used their culture as the defense to excuse as well as justify their behavior: “they did not know the culture of this culture.” Their father also went on to state that the court was “culturally biased” and he stated “You are the enemy of the Muslim ... they [his sons] are not rapists" (Humphries 2007). They also stated that the crime could have been worse, completely going against the thought that gang rape is one of the most inhumane crimes that a group of people could do to a girl. This in many ways can prove that there are Muslims out there – whether in great number or not—that are sexist and racist and that they believe their religion can defend the actions of violence against women. Now is where it gets very odd because this story is not unique to Australia, gang rape has also been on an increase by Muslim immigrants in Western Europe (especially France), Norway and Sweden (Humphries 2007). The fact that in court they defended their action by their culture makes it almost seem as if gang rape is a part of their ethnic beliefs. When looking at this story in Australia, it leaves a person dumbfounded to think that these things could have happened, and that someone could have used their culture and ethical identity to back up such an inhumane occurrence.

Finally, the last reason why Islam is harmful is because of how they treat gay men. Parvez Sharma is a gay Muslim, and he has lived for a long time without telling the Muslim society that he travels through that he is gay due to him knowing he would be looked down upon (Parvez 2016). Parvez talks about the Orlando shooting at the gay bar, and how before he was told the name of the person he simply *knew* that he would be Muslim; he knew that he was racially profiling his own community but he also knew he was right. He goes on to say “Saying ‘gay Muslim’ seems like a reason for damnation” which is a terrible thing that such a ‘peaceful’ religion could do to such an innocent person who was born the way he was (Parvez 2016). “Muslims like me have fought hard not to become casualties. We have always had our Omar Mateens. In the U.S., they manifest as lone crazed gunmen. But in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, they are on the royal payroll” (Parvez 2016). Therefore, Muslim is harmful to the gays because in the Qur’an, when you kill a man that opposes God, it is one of the most noble things you can do; people truly believe that killing homosexual men is a key to heaven. After looking through all this information however, I noticed something; this religion backs up these incredibly ‘harmful’ acts, but it also obviously backs the ‘good’ acts by its followers.

As stated above, the most interesting thing about this religion is how in Islam seemingly inhumane and horrible actions can be seen by God to be just as good as treating your neighbor with serenity. This idea to me is more powerful than either peace or harm: that any follower can have either idea and be close with God. Firstly, this is true because “jihad rests on and accelerates the disintegration of Islam's political and religious sources of authority” which states that Jihad is simply to gain power for their culture, which can easily be a harmful attribute (Rosenthal 2006). This goes on to talk about how followers also believe that “jihad refers only to an internal, peaceful struggle to better oneself” stating that it is both for power as well as for bettering yourself. The thing is though, the Qur’an also “teaches not just tolerance among religions, but tolerance among religions on the terms of Islam.” (Bukay 2007). So how can there be so many different ideas inside of one religion? It states: show peace, or do Jihad to better yourself and gain power? This paradoxical idea comes from the doctrine of abrogation, where during the Qur’an the “later pronouncements of the Prophet declare null and void his earlier pronouncements” (Bukay 2007). “It is important to acknowledge that what university scholars believe, and what most Muslims--or more extreme Muslims--believe are two different things. For many Islamists and radical Muslims, abrogation is real and what the West calls terror is, indeed, just.” (Bukay 2007). This quite literally means that if Muhammad talks about being peaceful it does not matter if you believe in the abrogation because it is completely void! Reading this is where the understanding of such a polarized religion comes to fruition. Therefore, not only does Islam *truly* put forth the idea of peace for its followers but it also *truly* puts forth the idea of destruction and Jihad as well, how confusing! Therefore, Islam is not harmful or peaceful, but instead to its most innate features Islam is *both.*

Look around in the world today and you will be given so many opinions of what Islam is, “It’s the religion of peace!” someone yells as the news of Aleppo shows on the television. It is hard to ever believe in either of these opinions, as both seem to live hand in hand with each other. After research, the answer of what Islam truly is has finally surfaced: Islam is both peaceful and harmful, to the exact same extent.

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