

Misconceptions about Islam and Muslims

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Pocatello sunsets can be breathtaking. One such evening we were driving home when, overawed by the beauty of the sunset I cried out Allah Akbar. One of my sons said, it was a good thing no one was close by or I would be taken for a terrorist getting ready to strike. He was joking of course but let us face it. There are a lot of misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. Some of which seem to stem from a cultivated hatred and some from, a “Who cares” attitude.

No one would care about these attitudes if the means of communications were scant, but today what an American politician says can well nigh be heard all over the globe, in his/her own voice. On top of that, some American politicians have aspirations for making America the leader of the world. As far as material requirements are concerned our nation is already a leader of the world. We lead the world in every sense of the word, except that we are finding it very hard to get other peoples to listen to what we have to say.

I have given it some thought. There are two ways of getting people to follow you. One is to beat the heck out of them and dictate and the other is to show them that you care. Beating the heck out of them is sure to leave scars and hence a lot of bad blood and we have seen the results of beating the heck out of them in Afghanistan and in Iraq. It is time that we try the “we care” approach. For this we would have to be a thoughtful nation who cares about others’ feelings.

It appears that for some odd reason, it is a lot of Muslims all over the world who do not like the US for one reason or another. They admire Americans. (I am a Muslim and I have lived and worked in some Muslim countries, before coming to the US.) They want to be friends with Americans but there are always some problems. I intend to indicate a few of these problems but before I do that it seems that a little motivation might help. It is not very hard to imagine a President of the United States of America saying that he wants all the Muslim nations to prosper. But if to the audience he sounds as saying, “I want all the ‘Muzlim’ nations to prosper” there may be a problem. This indicates an uncaring attitude. What is worse, we can pronounce “s” as in case, as in prosper, as in Istanbul, and as in muscovite but as soon as it comes to Islam or Muslim the “s” changes to “z”, miraculously. This is an example of carelessness that can be avoided. Of course there are letters in Arabic that are hard to pronounce but mangling a pronounceable sound can only arouse suspicion.

In the following I plan to present some areas where we can appear to be less hostile by showing respect for Muslim names and Muslim culture. I have roughly divided this article into three unequal parts. The first part deals with problems the Americans and the Western folks appear to have about Islam. In this part I address six problems and answer them:

Problem #1, Who/What are these Muslims?

Problem #2: Fine, Muslims worship the same God as we do. So what?

Problem # 3: The Muslims are so backward, they treat their women like animals, they cut the hands of thieves, they stone adulterers, and have death penalty for murder; they are barbaric people.

Problem # 4: The Muslims are insatiable killers and murderers. Throughout the history they have done nothing but kill innocent people. Recently, they killed 3000 Americans for no reason at all.

Problem # 5: The Muslims are so different! It is hard to get to know them, and their girls are so uncommunicative.

Problem # 6: Why should we be responsible for improving the lot of the Muslims? Then there are some **dos and don'ts** and finally I mention some of the **misconceptions**.

(PROBLEMS)

Problem #1, Who/What are these Muslims?

Muslims are strictly monotheistic people and they believe in, and worship, the God of Abraham and Moses and of Jesus and Mary of course. They believe in the prophet hood of Muhammad who was a descendent of Ishmael son of Abraham. They believe in the Quran as the word of God and try to follow it as best as they can, in conjunction with the teachings of Muhammad. According to the Quran, to be a Muslim one has to believe in all the earlier true prophets, who are called Muslims in the Quran. (The word Muslim signifies one who submits to the will of his/her Creator, and of course all the true believers in God were and are Muslims according to the Quran.)

The Muslims prefer to use the word Allah for God. This word Allah is derived from "ilah" or "elah", which means "lord" or "one worthy of worship". Allah is short for Al-elah, which means "the elah" the (only) God. Now call to mind, "Eli Eli lamma sabaktani" Here "Eli" sounds like "elahi" which in Arabic means "My Lord" or "My God". Quran is written in Arabic, which like Hebrew is an offshoot of Aramaic, the language spoken by Abraham. So, Arabic, like Hebrew, is a language of prophets. The Quran makes a lot of reference to earlier scriptures, so much so that some folks think that after reading all those scriptures Muhammad fabricated the Quran. The trouble with that is that Muhammad did not know how to read. (He was called "Ummi" which roughly means illiterate.)

Now, before getting into what a Muslim is supposed to do in life, it seems fair to establish the authenticity of Muhammad's relationship with Abraham, so that everyone knows that he was not too far removed from Jews and from Christians. Let us start with Ishmael. Was he really a son of Abraham? Here are some citations from Genesis.

(Genesis 16: 10-12): And the angel of the Lord said unto her (to Hagar), I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said unto her. Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord had heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of his brethren.

Another reference: (Genesis 17: 9-11): And God said unto Abraham, thou shalt keep my covenant therefore thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee. Every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.

Yet another: (Genesis 17: 20-22): And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee (refers to Abraham's prayer (Genesis 17: 18): "O that Ishmael might live before thee"): Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve

princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah will bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. And he left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

Again about Ishmael: (Genesis 21:20-21): And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer; and he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

Now if you want to know where Paran was, read (Isaiah 21:13-17). The Arabic for Paran is Faran. "Mount Paran" has often been "mistaken" for Mount Sinai. But remember according to Genesis, that is where Ishmael lived with his brethren. So Moses would have run into the children of Ishmael when he went to Mount Sinai. Instead he met the Midianites there, who were the children of another son of Abraham.

Now let us get to circa 620 BC. The believers were in a terrible shape; they had started asking questions about God and apparently no answers were coming forth. Then came (Habakkuk 3: 3-7): "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran, Selah. His glory covered the heavens and the earth was full of his praise and his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hands; and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth; he beheld and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow; his ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble."

Now, one can question this prophesy from many angles. I would take them one by one. Indeed Paran is mentioned here but it is all in the past tense. It is accepted by scholars of the scriptures, that often statements made in the past tense portend events to come. Besides there was no "Holy One" in the past and near future at the time of the prophesy who could fit the picture. Moses? He died searching for the Promised Land. Jesus? He is supposed to have died a cursed death. One may also say that Habakkuk was a Jewish prophet, and so the promised "Holy One" must be Jewish. Well, J. Hampton Keathley, a scholar of Habakkuk has this to say about it, in light of Habakkuk: "This points us to another principle we can learn from Habakkuk. **God doesn't always give us the answers we want or expect. We usually have it in our mind how we want God to answer our prayers. When He does it differently, how do you respond?"**

[<http://www.bible.org/docs/ot/books/minorp/hab.htm>]

Now the point is that Habakkuk is unhappy about the way the Jewish Society is ignoring the Law, he is promised that they will be punished (at the hands of nonbelievers), but he asks for something to look forward to. The above prophecy was something to look forward to, but the Hebrews had lost the capacity to have someone to fit the description of the "Holy One"; we have not seen one yet among the Hebrews nor among the Christians, but someone from the progeny of Ishmael did come at his time, whose (ways are eternal) message is eternal and who actually did move nations asunder.

Here is another reference that indicates that the Promised one would have an appeal for all nations of the earth. Look up Isaiah (5: 26-30): And he shall lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly: None shall be weary nor stumble among them; nor shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: whose arrows are sharp and all their bows bent, their horses hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind...." Notice here that in both

Habakkuk and Isaiah the “Holy One” would have an appeal for all the nations, while none of the Hebrew prophets ever showed any interest in a message for all of humanity. Now before I close this section on “Who are these Muslims” It seems fair to point out that Hebrew prophets had sung praises of the one to come. Solomon (Psalms of Solomon 5: 10-16) calls him “Mahammadim” (altogether lovely!). (If you are worried about “Mahammadim” being plural, note that in the Old Testament the name for God is “Elohim”.)

Now, there were so many prophecies about the “Holy One” with a universal appeal that people were actually waiting for one. If you do not believe, read in John (1: 20-21) that people went to John the Baptist, and asked him if he were the Christ of the prophecy and he said, No. Then they “asked him, what then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not” (1:21). Then they asked him: “Art thou that prophet?” And he answered, No (1:21). And then they said: “Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?” (1:25).

For those who like to sneer at the children of the Bondwoman here’s something that Jesus said, Mathew (21:42): “Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.” If anyone thinks Jesus thought that he was that corner stone, he/she should read Mathew Chapter 21 again. There he talks about “other husbandmen” and other nations.

Now what is the point in all this? The point is: Muhammad comes with good credentials from a family of prophets and he comes recommended. You may not have fully got his message and I grant you it is not easy to get the message when there are so many distractions and so many to distort it. So, you have every right to be unsure, but being disrespectful to Muhammad or calling him a terrorist you would do well to avoid. If you do not mend your ways I read to you Mathew (21:44): And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Now this Muhammad did claim to be a prophet of God and lived to be an old man, and according to scriptures false claimants of prophet hood are cut down, yet he was not. The followers of this “Holy One” are Muslims, in spirit not very far from the People of the Book. Looking at the modern day Muslims, they do not seem to be very far from the People of the Book in character as well.

Now, what Muslims are supposed to do in life? Worship their Maker, live righteous lives according to the teachings of the Quran following the examples set by Muhammad. Now worship does not simply mean the standard form of prayer. The standard Salat is just a form of prayer, for which God Almighty is not very particular about the direction in which to offer your prayer. Let me quote from the Quran (**2:178**): It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the East or the West, but truly righteous is he who believes in Allah and the last day and the angels and the books and the prophets, and spends his money out of love for Him, on the kindred and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and those who ask for charity, and for ransoming the captives; and observes prayer and pays Zakat; and those who fulfill their promise when they have made one, and the patient in poverty and afflictions and the steadfast in time of war; it is these who have proved truthful and it is these who are truly God-fearing. (Zakat is a self-calculated tax for accumulated wealth.) Pondering over the creation, pondering over history, discovering new facts are all different forms of worship. War is also mentioned above.

Yes, Muslims are told to fight if their way of life is threatened, under certain conditions fighting becomes obligatory.

Problem #2: Fine, Muslims worship the same God as we do. So what?

Honestly, I have no reply for this "So what?". What I have is a suggestion. Be scientific. Believe what you see. And you see that the Muslims are humans too; some of them are bad and some of them are good. Do not pull Abughraibs on them; do not conspire to kill them for vote. If you also believe in God then know this: Due to Islamic custom relating to marriages, Children of Ishmael (and of Isaac) are everywhere among Muslims. God does not change His ways and God does not forget His promises. If He cared about the Bondwoman so much that He promised to make her seed an uncountable nation then He must care about that nation now. If your lust for blood does overpower you do not bring religion into it, as the base of most of the monotheistic religions is the same, God Almighty. If you do not believe in God, I can only pray that you see the light. But you know that if you play with fire there is a chance that you would get burnt. For instance, Bush 41, under the influence of some mischief mongers, thought it useful to have a permanent military base in Saudi Arabia. The idea was not well received among Muslims and so some Muslim mischief mongers caused 9/11. In the end the base had to be moved.

Problem # 3: The Muslims are so backward, they treat their women like animals, they cut the hands of thieves, they stone adulterers, and have death penalty for murder; they are barbaric people.

This is indeed a big problem. One, hotheaded, answer to these accusations could be: Who appointed you their guardians? But a proper logical response would probably win the critics over. Islam provides a complete code of conduct a complete way of life. The basic ingredients are fear and hope. Fear has two forms: Fear of punishment from the society, and fear of an All Seeing All Knowing Omnipotent God who promises hell if you get away with your crimes, unpunished. Hope has two forms too: Good deeds will bring prosperity and respect in this life and will get you to Paradise. If you lived a proper, chaste, life in poverty, you would at least be rewarded with a good place in the afterlife. Some laws were made to ensure that the ills of the society remain in check. One hand of a thief would be cut (to implement: Thou shalt not steal). But there were rules governing that. If you stole food because you were hungry, you may be warned or let go with minor punishment, at times with some more food. To have your hands cut you would have to steal a substantial amount and the burden of proof will be on the society. Cut a few hands this way, there would be very few thieves left. Now, for those who think it is a barbaric punishment here is a scenario: A man has put aside some money for the treatment of his sick child, a thief makes off with it and the child dies for the lack of treatment, the thief gets caught, admits it and is sent to jail for a few months. That is not punishment enough for murder; cutting a hand would not sound too barbaric in this scenario. If those responsible for fraudulently squandering away the pensions and savings of Enron employees were to lose their hands for it, corporate fraud would vanish overnight. Where I come from, there is a saying that goes like: Woman, money and land are the three main causes of trouble. These three have been the source of trouble and strife all through the history. To make the woman factor go away Islam offers rules that make sure that a man can see only those women to whom he is related by blood or by marriage, the same of course for women. To minimize chance encounter or chance sighting there are express rules about how to enter your own house, a room in the house and someone else's

house. In that environ, women were free to talk to people, conduct/run businesses, own property, oversee household, read, learn and teach. Islam was the first religion ever to rule about the women's shares in inheritance. Islamic history does mention women playing roles in politics, medicine and education. There is of course, yet another way sex can cause trouble. Physically, mentally, or status-wise incompatible couples were allowed divorce. A complete set of rules is there to govern divorce and its aftermath. (My usual crack about divorce is: If Henry the 8th had the divorce option he would probably not kill so many women.)

In the early days of Islam, women had much more freedom but with time the customs pushed them more and more into the recesses of their houses. Today they may not appear to have too many rights but look at it this way. A Muslim man would give his life to save the honor of his mother, sister or wife. In fact, as we know from the very recent history, the Iraqis were grateful to the Americans for freeing them from Saddam, but then suddenly the good will evaporated. The reason, they would not directly admit it, as they are proud people, but would say: The Americans come to search our homes at night. I believe that some folks thought they had guns and they had power, so they could do what was done in Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Those folks have cost more than eight hundred Americans their lives.

The other cause of trouble is money; Islam has provided a code of conduct in that area as well, introducing the idea of witnessing the transactions and making out written receipts for sale or barter. With rules about inheritance Islam made sure that wealth could not be accumulated in a few hands. By introducing the notion of self calculated tax (Zakat) and by introducing the notion of state treasury (baitul mal) that is responsible for the welfare of the citizens, Islam produced the notion of a welfare state.

Now let us take care of stoning/caning of the adulterers. This is essentially in view of: "The wages of sin is death". The old law says it and sits silently, and the miscreants sin to their death, polluting the society with them. History tells us that such societies, being over indulgent, grow weak. The reason seems to be the following: When it is free for all, there is comparison and there is choice. The females would want to go for males who they think are most satisfying and males would want to go for prettier females. As a result there would be a lot of very unsatisfied males and females, who would then go look for perverse ways of getting satisfaction, and what should be an occasional pleasant outlet of excess energy would turn into a full time job. That would ultimately tell upon health and productivity. Of course with promiscuity also come various diseases. This seems to be how earlier civilizations were destroyed. It seems that Islamic "barbaric" punishment was a way to stem the tide of such onslaughts. Apparently the Lawgiver understands that because we humans are still governed by our hormones and urges some illicit encounters are unavoidable, but so that it should not become a common sight, harsh punishments were prescribed. This appears from the rules governing the proof of adultery or fornication: Four reputable persons should see the couple engaged in the act. Now it is unthinkable that respectable people would go around in four's to see a man and a woman in action. However if the activity is so frequent and open that four persons can report it's sighting, then it becomes a problem, which an active Islamic society would need to take action about. In Islamic tradition there is mention of a woman who confessed having illicit sex and asked for punishment. The Prophet ignored her, indicating that he did not want to hear about it. But when she insisted that she be punished, the Prophet ordered that

she be taken to a field and stoned. After a couple of stones the lady ran away. People came back and related this to the Prophet. He smiled! This was the Prophet's attitude. No proof, no punishment. But the fear of punishment keeps it from spreading and fear of God keeps it from recurring.

Now it is usually the fear of God and tradition that has worked to keep Muslim societies, all over the world, less promiscuous. Consequently there are fewer cases of STD's. So, being less advanced in sexual matters seems to have worked in favor of Muslims in the days of Aids and other rampant sexually transmitted diseases. Nowadays there is talk of abstinence. You would still find it in a lot of Islamic cultures, due to fear of God or due a culture built around the fear of God.

Let me surprise you a little about the death penalty for manslaughter. In Islamic tradition, the relatives of the deceased had a say. If the relatives of the deceased agreed, without coercion, the killer would pay a handsome amount and be spared the death penalty. (For crimes of passion there was the choice of the bereaved family forgiving the killer.)

Compare it with the modern day justice. A family loses the only earning member, the murderer is caught and put in jail or executed, but there is no way of compensating the bereaved family.

Problem # 4: The Muslims are insatiable killers and murderers. Throughout the history they have done nothing but kill innocent people. Recently, they killed 3000 Americans for no reason at all.

Let me be blunt. Muslims have done no more killing of innocents than any of the more accepted nations of modern times. In the older days, it appears, wars were the only means to settle disputes among monarchs/nations, though it does not seem to have changed much. If on the winning side there was a Muslim monarch, some innocent folks would have got killed on the losing side. A Jewish friend of mine once wrote to me about Berber North Africa, saying that the Muslims captured the place and told the Berbers to convert or die. Now, my trouble is that Berbers were a proud people and fierce fighters who could not be subdued by the Romans and Carthaginians, would not only succumb to such threats but also join the oppressive army. My response to him was: And after all that killing and murdering, the Berbers fought for Islam! I did not give the following reference to my Jewish friend, but here's what a German had to say:

"The Muslim conquest of North Africa and Spain was, to the larger extent, accomplished by frontier peoples recently converted to Islam. As they were not paid for their efforts, their reward would come out of the partition of confiscated, conquered lands. So, soon after Tariq's victory over Roderic, Muslims – both Berbers and Arabs-began to settle on the peninsula, and the Muslim community settled there proved too strong to uproot by an evacuation order from Damascus."

<http://www.zum.de/whkmla/region/spain/arabconquest.html>]

My reason for quoting this is to say that Muslims must have had some magic. They murdered a whole lot of Berbers then made an army of them to conquer Spain, for Islam! What I really see in history is that, in the early days there was a continuous pattern of Muslims conquering cities with small armies without a lot of resistance. The magic there was the proclamation: Join our religion and be our brethren, or agree to pay for Dhimma (covenant); your safety would be our responsibility, or fight if you can. In the face of the atrocities of rulers of their own faith the people found these terms very attractive, in view of the fact that the terms of the covenant were hardly ever enforced. Later, as it happened

in Spain, some local zealots, on instigation from outside powers, would stir up trouble, get beaten or killed causing their otherwise lenient rulers to consider enforcing the letter of the law. If the Muslims killed hundreds of thousands of Berbers, as that Jewish friend of mine suggested, the Spaniards would be an easy job! They could have 'cleaned' the whole of Spain in no time. Similar statements can be made about India.

But there is a somewhat dark period of Islamic history. It starts in the 14th century, after the end of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Muslim rulers, in other parts of the world, who had become virtually independent, became actually independent. Most of these rulers, were Muslim in name alone, rather than uphold the Islamic values they were more interested in their personal glorification. The result was that they were oppressive even to their Muslim subjects, let alone the non-Muslims. This period is marked by conquests, which often meant quelling some uprising or annexing another Muslim/ non-Muslim kingdom, and buildings all so beautiful and all so removed from their surroundings. The Turkish Empire, the Indian Mughal Empire and the Turks and Khan's of Asia could be cited as examples. Of course there were some specks of light here and there and around those specks of light flourished some of true Muslim activities, commerce, industry, search of knowledge that usually was in the areas of Medicine, Astronomy, Physics and Mathematics. So, if we look closer there is a history of oppression in the period since the 14th century until the 20th. Compare all of the "Muslim Atrocities", now with the fact that Moses had given the command to Joshua and Joshua thought it was his duty to clear the Promised Land of all Philistine! Compare the massacre of Armenians at the hands of the Turks, in World War I, with what Hitler did to the Jews. Compared to what Hulegu Khan did and compared to what Bush Khan is doing to Baghdad, the "Muslim atrocities" all over the globe are less than a bag of peanuts.

So please do not bank on old history to condemn all Muslims as terrorists, if the Muslims start talking back, you would find more skeletons, such as Hiroshima and Nagasaki in your own closet. **Some (members) are and some have been cruel and that is true of "purest of the pure" of nations**. About the 9/11, I read in the news that even the Afghans, who got bombed for it, cried at the loss of life; as did I and many other God-loving Muslims. About 9/11 again, conceivably, everyone knew that in those towers there would also be some Muslims and it is well known that a Muslim's life is sacred for another Muslim. Yet those killers carried out that destruction as if they were programmed to do it. It appears to me that they had no religion but murder. Those Muslim leaders who try to capitalize on this heinous crime by praising those killers are as bad in my opinion.

Problem # 5: The Muslims are so different! It is hard to get to know them, and their girls are so uncommunicative.

Well if you keep on looking at Muslims as different, they will keep looking different. Take interest in them and their customs, not critically but by way of getting to know them they would open up. There is a lot of appreciation of Buddha's teachings in the West. You would not learn anything about him or about his teachings if you kept on thinking of him as a freak that left his home and settled in the wilderness because he could not take it. About the girls, yeah that is a delicate subject. Practicing Muslim girls do not believe in dating etc., but if you get to know some you would find them, otherwise, pleasant company, same for the boys of course. But first you have to be kindly oriented.

Let us start with thinking that Muslims live their lives according to a code of conduct, like most of the social codes it has some good points and some possibly bad points. Some things are easy to understand and some may be hard to understand or hard to swallow. But we have no right to judge them and we have no right to change them by force. Nor do we have any right to call them backward for it. If they lack education we can provide them and if they resist we can tell them: Look your prophet told you to seek knowledge even if you have to go to China! When he said China he did not have Arabic, Quran or Hadith in mind. What he was apparently thinking of was the knowledge of the worldly pursuits, commerce, medicine, and industry etc. (This is what some Muslims did, they went to China, learned how to make paper and how to make gun-powder etc. and later spread that knowledge all over the world.)

Education can bring them out of poverty and away from the clutches of terrorists. Once they are prosperous, some might want to emulate their benefactors and some might want to continue in their own way of life. But even those who continue in their own way of life would, being prosperous, not be a danger to their fellow humans. According to Prophet Muhammad, poverty can be detrimental to faith. Killing or conspiring to kill noncombatants is not an act of faith by any Islamic law.

There is of course another approach: Subdue all Muslims; make it binding for them to bring out their females in immodest clothing, force them to appear modern like the Europeans. (Remove the scarf as they are trying to do (have done) in France!) The result would be that there would be scars left and one day there would be an uprising. You cannot repeat Spain everywhere, and not all people have the Jewish adaptability. Besides, we have seen in recent history, after Afghanistan was subdued, an Afghan female represented Afghanistan at a beauty pageant, in revealing attire. Fine. Did that make Afghanistan more modern? Ordinary Afghan women are still walking around in those tent-like veils, living in abject poverty. OK there are some new girls' schools in Afghanistan, but there are young Afghan boys, helping their fathers make a living, too poor to go to schools. I can see similar problems arising in Iraq. From this effort at "freeing women" by preparing showpiece examples of some females doing well as a result of "Freedom" some could construe that the sole purpose of this "Liberation" is to coerce/encourage Muslims into adopting those ways of the West, which are considered immoral according to Islamic teachings. (I note that the Islamic teachings offer a moral code not too different from the Scriptures.)

Problem # 6: Why should we be responsible for improving the lot of the Muslims?

No one wants you to be responsible for Muslims. But then stop playing the policemen of the world. Stop the preemptive strikes. Stop trying to promote your system of government, stop exploiting their resources. Keep off, stop interfering, stop ridiculing their way of life, stop forcing them to stay non-nuclear even in the face of dwindling energy sources. But this is a bit too late. Two Muslim countries have been reduced to rubble as the result of a war that was not of their choosing. By rights the aggressor should pay for the damage. Now the only viable approach is a conciliatory and helpful approach. Adopt it and make the world a livable place shun it and keep on fighting and let time decide the winner.

(DOS AND DON'TS)

Now I know that we Americans are sensible people and sooner or later we will come round to a live and let live stance. If there is such a tendency I recommend that we look into Islamic way of life from a critical, yet friendly, point of view. See what we can use to our advantage. Here are some things to do in this regard.

1. Watch what you say, and how you say it, about Islam and Muslims.
 - a. **Try not to criticize** : I have never heard any criticism of the way Buddhists live or the way Hindus live then why should there be a criticism of the way Muslims live? Interestingly enough I have read some material about Sati, a ritual in which a Hindu woman is burnt alive with her deceased husband, in some cases against her wishes. But no one seems to call Hinduism a faulty religion/ism for that. A big chunk of population of India lives in poverty, but this is never considered a fault of Hindu society or religion or culture for that matter. I see a lot of help pouring in from all directions, but no one tells Hindu women to stop wearing Saree because it is cumbersome attire and it can affect their productivity at work! On the other hand if Muslim women choose to stay indoor or wear modest clothes they are criticized, or their religion is criticized. If I can make these observations, others can too. They may not all be Americans and they may not all be very peaceful.
 - b. **Try to pronounce it right**: If you are talking about Islam or mentioning a Muslim name, try to pronounce it right or at least make a remark about being unable to pronounce it right. Otherwise people will observe that we go out of our way to pronounce French and other European names right and forget the courtesy when it comes to pronounce Muslim names. This may be taken as a slight.
 - c. **Do research**: Try to do some research before you talk about Islam and about what it stands for. For instance, it looks very bad to hear one of our generals say that the Muslims worship a stone, whereas Muslims are fiercely monotheists and worship the same unseen God Abraham worshipped. Statements like this are tantamount to slurs that can hurt religious feelings and can play in the hands of terrorists. Of course there are also people, like myself, who can write back. I can use the bible to show that Christianity is based on the statements of St. Peter who lied three times over a short period of time. If you lie once you may lie again. If you lie about your connection with your Master (Matthew 26:58-75; Mark 14:54-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-27) then you can lie about your “vision” about the gentile foods. The list can go on. By the way the Quran, mentions the Disciples as righteous people who offered to be the “helpers of God”. So I cannot call St. Peter a liar but I can always quote the Bible to shut up a Christian blaspheming about Muhammad or about my God.
 - d. **Keep an open mind**: while commenting on the atrocities of the terrorists try to keep Islam or any other religion out of it. My reason is that proper Islam does stress on holding life sacred, especially of noncombatants. Yet,

as in the case of any other religion, it does not have checks against some folks going mad and harming their actual or imagined foes. Besides, some of the terrorist acts committed by people, Muslim or not, result directly from some form of injustice and persecution. For instance the Russians are mourning the loss of their children and my heart goes out for them, but has anyone given any thought to Chechen men, women and children killed during the past ten years? Children are dear to everyone, to everyone! When Mr. Putin calls the Chechen rebels murderers he should also put Russian soldiers and himself in the same category. It was his decisions and his soldiers that were responsible for the killing of thousands of Chechens. The latest news is that there are some Chechen women who have taken up “terrorism”. Women generally are kindhearted and tender, but not when their children are endangered or killed. This tendency for violence, for the sake of the young is found in the whole of the animal kingdom and sadly we have not broken away from it, yet. (Of course I do not have to explain why some Palestinians choose to blow themselves up. Before calling them “homicide bombers” and before blaming Islam for it, look at the condition they are made to live in.)

2. Read about Islam by way of finding contradictions

I usually call it “destructive study” which means studying with a view to find faults, inconsistencies, and errors. (If Islam is a true religion, then in trying to find fault with it you will be snared by its truth and beauty and if it is not your comments would serve as a beacon of light for generations to come.) I recommend, however, that you read what Muslims have written, because the material written by a non-Muslim scholar may well be biased or written to promote confusion about Islam (Example: Challenging Quran, Newsweek July 28, 2003. The author “proves” that the original Quran was in Aramaic, indicating that there was no Arabic present at the time of revelation of the Quran. The trouble with the “proof” is that there is considerable amount of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry which is known to be some of the best literature.) It is the rendering of Islam by non-Muslim scholars that, in my opinion, is responsible for the gulf between Islam and the other religions today. One source of information on Islam is the Quran. It is in Arabic, but there are good and reliable English translations available at various Muslim websites. Addresses of some of these websites are given below:

- a. <http://www.al-islam.org/quran/>
- b. <http://www.alislam.org/quran/>
- c. <http://www.al-bukhari.org/>

There are quite a few such websites; you would find a whole lot of them if you search for Islam, Qur’an, (Quran). Reason for the above selection is that their addresses end in “org”. Some of these sites also entertain questions. If you have any, just write to one or more of them. If you browse some of them you might come across derogatory remarks about other sects of Islam. Do not let it worry you, the Prophet of Islam regarded differences of opinion as a sign of health. The way I see it, there is one God but everyone has his/her own (notion of) God. If you are a Christian you will find a chapter on Mary in the Quran and a lot of mention of Jesus and if you are a Jew you would find a Chapter on

Joseph and a lot of mention of Moses and of the children of Jacob. The Quran vehemently opposes idol worship in any form and gives reasons against it. A lot of the translations are written to follow the text closely, so the sentences and phrases may sound a bit odd, but it works. That is if you want to get to the message with some effort you will get there.

(MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM)

This much about the general problems and misconceptions, let us look at some of the curious misconceptions that came to light in the wake of 9/11. (Highlighted are the misconceptions)

- i. Thanks to some writings on preparations for suicide bombing, a.k.a. martyrdom, there is a general misconception that **if a Muslim has shaved parts of his body (under arms and pubic hair) he is up to no good**. The trouble is that every now and then every Muslim adult shaves that hair, because beyond a certain length they are considered unclean. This practice has gone on since the early days of Islam when the most civilized nations of the world did not know what clean meant. Shaving the pubic hair, keeps you clean, free of pubic lice and free of bad odors.
- j. **“Allah Akbar” is the Muslim war cry**. Depending upon the context “Allah Akbar” means a lot of things. It could be used to praise God Almighty for His creation. That is what I did under the spell of that devastatingly beautiful sunset. It could also be used as an expression of defiance, meaning “you cannot intimidate me because my God, my keeper, is Greater than all there is apart”. I was in Libya in the early eighties; Mr. Gaddafi had a tiff with the US. Out came posters saying, ”Allah Akbar min Amrekiyya”, meaning Allah is greater than America. He was not declaring a war on America, he was just making his defiance known. (The only thing wrong with that slogan, in my opinion, was that it compared Allah and America, while there is no comparison.) Allah Akbar has also been used as a war cry and replaced for Muslims the drumbeat; the horns or the Roman style beat of the shields. Allah Akbar can be used as a heart warmer at Muslim gatherings. The Muslim call to prayers begins with Allah Akbar and ends with “there is no one worthy of worship but Allah”. My recommendation: Be alert when you hear “Allah Akbar” but do not read too much into it.
- k. **Jihad (or Jehad) means holy war against the infidel**. In some uneducated war mongering Mullah’s terminology, Jihad could only mean holy war, but anyone who knows Arabic and Quran a little, knows that jihad primarily means, “Struggle”. It could be a “holy war” against yourself if you are trying to get rid of a bad habit. Controlling your anger is also jihad. Trying very hard to learn a new subject is jihad. There are some very specific circumstances under which jihad, as a holy war becomes a duty of a Muslim. One of the main conditions is: If an occupying force tries to change your religion by force. Now jihad does not always mean killing or getting killed. It could mean raising your voice against the oppressive ruler. Removing misconceptions that led some folks to treat you or your brethren like animals. So, writing can well become a jihad. But nothing beats telling the truth in front of a despotic ruler... that is a bigger jihad!
- l. **Anyone who looks Middle Eastern is an Arab terrorist**. There were a number of instances where some good white folks refused to travel with Middle Eastern

looking folks in the plane. In some cases those “Middle Eastern looking folks” turned out to be just nonwhite; a couple of them were Hindus from India. First off, not all people from the Middle East are Muslims; in fact there are a lot of Arabic speaking Christians and Jews. I think this is not a misconception; it is those folk’s mistrust or hatred of the non-whites.

- m. **The Muslims are jealous of our success and want to destroy us.** A true Muslim relies on his/her God for prosperity and keeps on using direct and positive means to achieve it. The Arabs are notorious for their happy go lucky attitude. In an effort to get my Arab students to study harder I told them to be prepared for the time when the oil runs out. The reply: When the oil runs out we will go back to our sheep! That is the Arab attitude, which is not too far from the general Muslim attitude. So if some Muslims went crazy and targeted some financial buildings they must be mad about some other things. One of those “other things” is the way the Muslims and Islam are portrayed in the West. There have always been misunderstandings about Muslims and Islam in the West; the crusades can testify to that. After the fall of the Turkish Empire the skepticism about Islam and Muslims has taken a new meaning especially after the advent of new technology. On the other hand, if we look closely, the Western nations have done a great deal to make sure that Muslims do not become a “threat”. The countries, like Pakistan, Iran, Egypt and Turkey, with a potential for Science and Industry have always been politically unstable for some very odd reasons. When, in spite of all the problems, it became apparent that Pakistan was on its way to building nuclear devices there was talk of Israeli planes taking out Pakistani installations. Luckily, India made its atomic bomb and Pakistan had some support from China, otherwise the preservers of humanity would have attacked Pakistan in the same way they did Iraq. Now, Iraq has been devastated because of some false rumors that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and our president Bush and/or his administration were responsible for it. So, my question is, would you blame them if some Muslims thought that their salvation was linked with the destruction of the US? This question becomes much more potent in view of the fact that Israel has (unofficial) nuclear capability, North Korea does too but everyone wants Iran to desist from its nuclear program; that Iran protests is peaceful.

There is much more that can be said and I can talk about many more misconceptions, but it is not very easy for me being a Muslim American. After all I love my country and if need be I would give my life to preserve it, yet I have to criticize some of the prevalent attitudes in my country.

While I have said a lot, this article may still be incomplete. If you the readers find any flaw in my presentation, do please write to me at: Zafrullah@lohar.com I would be happy to see if I can accommodate your suggestions.

(REFERENCE)

Finally, if you wonder about my knowledge of the Holy Bible, I got most of my bible references from the following book, which I mention as recommended reading, for anyone who wants a quick glance at Islam and its Holy Book..

Introduction to the Study of the Holy Qur’an, Mirza Bashir-ud-din Mahmood Ahmad, Islam International Publications limited, UK.

