



## My View of Islam

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The undisputed definition of Islam by all her adherents is "submission to the will of Allah." This divine will is outlined in the Koran and in the teachings and deeds of Muhammad, as recorded in the Hadith or Sunna.

While the Koran is considered to be the true, undiluted word of God revealed to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel, the Sunna carry less weight and have always been a cause for disagreement amongst Muslim scholars. Theologians of Islam have, however, reached consensus on the authority of a set of six volumes from the Sunna called the Sahih Sita, or authentic six.

On the issues of holy war (jihad), apostasy and the treatment of women, the Koran and Sunna are clear. It is the obligation of every Muslim to spread Islam to unbelievers first through *dawa*, or proselytizing, then through jihad, if the unbelievers refuse to convert. It is the obligation of the unbelievers to accept Islam. Exempted from this edict of conversion are the people of the book: Christians and Jews. Both peoples have a choice. They may adopt Islam and enjoy the same rights as other Muslims, or they may stick to their book and lead the life of a *dhimmi* (lower citizen). Legally, the rights of the *dhimmi* are not equal to those of a Muslim. For instance, a Muslim man may take a Jewish or Christian wife, but Jews and Christians are not allowed to marry Muslim women. If a Christian or a Jew kills a Muslim man, they should be killed immediately. In contrast, the blood of a Muslim should never be shed in recompense for the blood of Christians or Jews.

It is also the obligation of every Muslim to command virtue and forbid vice. Apostasy, the worst possible vice a Muslim can commit, should be punished by death. The punishment need not be carried out by a state, but can easily be enforced by civilians. When it is a question of Islamic law, justice is in the hands of every Muslim.

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As for the treatment of women, in the Koran and more elaborately in the Sunna, Islam assigns to girls a position in the family that requires them to be docile, makes them dependent on their male relatives for money and gives dominion over their bodies to these same male kin.

In Islam there is a strict hierarchy of subservience. First and foremost, all humans are required to be the slaves of Allah. In Muslim societies, all children must obey their parents. Beyond this, women and girls must obey and serve without question their male guardians and especially their husbands. This decree of marital obedience is not in any way reciprocal.

A woman in Islam is not competent and must always have a guardian. The responsibility of guardianship may pass from father to brother to uncle before a girl is married off, at which point she must answer to her husband. Marriage is typically arranged, with no choice given to the girl, and there is often an exchange of money in the process. Thus, under the religious rule of Islam, it is still common today that a woman's rights are essentially sold to a man she may not know, and most likely does not love.

As for education of girls under Islam, there is a clear program of indoctrination of inequality. Under Islam, education is the passing on of the rules of submission to the will of Allah. Intrinsic in this "education" is the dictation of gender roles. Girls are instructed in subservience first to God, then to the family and finally to the husband. There is strict emphasis on modesty, defined by virginity. A Muslim girl is taught to guard fiercely her virginity as an expression of loyalty to her creator and to her family and husband.

This form of education hampers her chances of ever becoming self-reliant or financially independent. A woman's lack of social equality and freedom is a direct consequence of the teachings of Islam. Under Islam, a wife must always ask her husband for permission and she must obey indefinitely. This stricture is lifted in the unique event that he asks her to forsake God, wherein she is allowed the right of disobedience. While it is true that in Islam, technically speaking, women have the right to trade and own property, the condition of total obedience to guardians makes this "freedom" hypothetical, at best.

The goal of education given to girls under Islam is the achievement of control over female sexuality. The result of this indoctrination is that Muslim girls believe legitimate and often vocally defend their position of subordination. The lengths a

Muslim society will go to in the pursuit of sexual control often cross into the territory of the absurd and, by western standards, criminal. In Islam the minimum age of marriage for a girl is after her first menstruation. Muhammad was engaged to his wife Aisha when she was six years old, and he married her (had intercourse with her) when she turned nine. Millions of Muslim men across the world follow Muhammad in this deed, one of the most prominent examples being the late Ayatollah Khomeini.

Under *sharia* law (Islamic law), such as governs in Saudi Arabia, Iran and parts of Nigeria, the civil rights of women are dramatically reduced. Threat of violent punishment in the form of whipping and stoning makes the prospect of financial independence and sexual freedom for women all but impossible. Miraculously, even in such harsh circumstances you will find women who are relatively well educated, have some say in choosing a husband and manage to earn a living. Let us be clear that these exceptions are due to the compassion and progressiveness of families who have been influenced by the West, and not to rules derived from Islam.

In the quest for reconciliation between Muslim and western societies, it is important to recognize that Muslims are as diverse as Islam is monolithic. Islam attempts to unify more than a billion people of different geographical origins, languages, ethnicities, and cultural and educational backgrounds into one religious tribe. And while I acknowledge that generally stereotyping believers is difficult since belief is subjective, for the sake of discussion I would like to distinguish between five types of Muslims.

The first group includes those Muslims who leave the faith because they cannot reconcile it with their conscience or with modernity. This group is important for the evolution of the Islamic world because they ask the urgent and critical questions believers usually avoid. Ex-Muslims living in the west are just beginning to find their voice and to take advantage of the spiritual and social freedoms available to them.

The second group is comprised of genuine Muslim reformers, such as Irshad Manji, who acknowledge the theological outdatedness of the Koranic commands and the immorality of the prophet. They tend to emphasize the early chapters in the *Koran* urging goodness, generosity and spirituality. They argue that the latter chapters wherein Islam is politicized and the concepts of *sharia*, jihad and martyrdom are introduced should be read in the context in which they were written, some 1,400 years ago.

The third group is made up of those Muslims who support the gradual perpetuation and domination of Islam throughout the world. They use the freedoms offered in democracy to undermine social modernity and, though initially opposed to the use of violence, foresee that once the number of believers reaches a critical mass the last remnants of unbelievers may then be dealt with in violence, and *sharia* law may be universally implemented. Ayatollah Khomeini used this method successfully in Iran. Erdogan of Turkey is following in his footsteps. Tariq Ramadan, deeply rooted in his Muslim Brotherhood heritage, is devoted to such a program among European Muslims.

The fourth group is the most obvious and immediately threatening. In this group we find a growing number of hard-line Muslims who have defined martyrdom as their only goal. This is an army of young men whipped into a frenzy of suicidal violence by power hungry clergy. These clergy have public platforms and work with impunity from institutions untouched and often funded by national authorities.

The fifth group is largely ineffective and only threatening in their refusal to acknowledge the truth. Here we find the elite clergy who make a show of trying to reconcile Islam with modernity. They are motivated by self-preservation and have no interest in true reform. They take selective passages from the holy books to make a case for a peaceful Islam, ignoring the many passages inciting violence, such as those verses which command the death of apostates.

It is through the first two of these five groups that progress and reform will come. As for the rest, the western world would be wise to recognize the realities of Islam, a religion laid down in writing over a millennium ago with violence and oppression at its heart.

*Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a resident fellow at AEI.*

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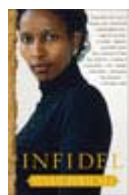
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