

# A Perspective

## MUSLIMS' RESPONSIBILITY in COUNTERING VIOLENCE

M. Fethullah Gülen

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Muslims' Responsibility in Countering  
Violence

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## Foreword

This book is a selection of some of Fethullah Gülen's more important essays on violence, just war, terrorism and Muslims' responsibility.

Fethullah Gülen is a Turkish-Muslim scholar, opinion leader and education activist. He is a preacher by profession and worked as a state-licensed preacher in Turkey between 1959 and 1981. He is regarded as the initiator and inspirer of the transnational faith-inspired civil society movement generally referred to as the "Hizmet Movement" or the "Gülen Movement." He is an influential preacher and an opinion leader who inspires millions to engage in public and social life. In July 2008, he was selected as the top public intellectual from among a hundred candidates by Foreign Policy and Prospect magazines. He has had over sixty books published, most of which have been translated into many other languages.

Fethullah Gülen was among the first Muslim scholars who publicly condemned the 9/11 attacks in a statement published in the New York Times and the Washington Post on September 12 and September 21, 2001 respectively. He was again the first Muslim scholar who rebuked the Beslan massacres by Chechen rebels in 2004. He has given interviews to many newspapers in which he has categorically condemned the use of political, ideological and religious reasons to justify acts of terror. He has appeared on a great many national television programs publicly condemning such acts. He also helped publish a scholarly book on the Islamic perspective on terror and suicide attacks, condemning such attacks on humanitarian and religious grounds.

Gülen has not expressed his views on terrorism only to Western readers but has voiced them in mosque sermons with congregations of thousands of Muslims. Some of his anti-terror statements were made long before the 9/11 tragedy. He denounced conflicts and violent activities committed in the name of Islam, and he rejected suicide attacks. In later years, he has also made statements against ISIS and against Boko Haram's cruelty, saying, "Any form of violence against innocent civilians or persecution of minorities contradicts the principles of the Qur'an and the tradition of our Prophet. ISIS members are either completely ignorant about the faith they proclaim, or their actions are designed to serve individual interests or those of their political masters. Regardless, their actions represent those of a terrorist group and, as such, they should be brought to justice and compelled to answer for their horrific crimes."

Gülen calls his audience to reconsider their Islamic understanding of religious violence and jihad. When he treats the Islamic concepts of jihad, martyrdom and just war, he places emphasis on the moral teachings of Islam and the practice of virtue.

Gülen reiterates in his speeches and sermons that peace, justice and stability are of the utmost significance to Islam. He opposes the use of violence to achieve political ends. Gülen sees terror as a crime against humanity, and he affirms the Qur'anic view that killing one person is like massacring all humanity. Unlike those who seek religious justification for terrorist methods and suicide bombings, Fethullah Gülen boldly declares that "it is hard for a person to remain a Muslim if he becomes involved in terrorism. Islam does not approve of killing people in order to attain a goal. One cannot achieve Heaven by murdering another person."

As tragic and violent events have occurred in different parts of the world, questions about jihad and Muslim terrorists have arisen and persist at the heart of the public debate on Muslims and Islam. In everyday and academic discourse it is now almost impossible to ignore the preoccupation with different religious facets of conflict in various parts of the globe. Yet it is also clear that there is confusion on the substance of jihad, radicalization, extremism, and terrorism, about their scope, their relations and their implications. In this environment there is a need to rethink the meaning of jihad and violence. This work therefore aims to clarify the terminological confusion on violence, terror, and jihad through critical examination. This is an attempt to extract a heuristic analysis from Fethullah Gülen's writings and speech. It is significant to examine his works because of his consistent stance against the use of violence with religious justification and his experience of living peacefully through a period of history in Turkey in which the use of violence for political ends was all too common.

The extracts in this booklet have been selected according to the current volume's theme from among Gülen's books already published in Turkish. Some of them have been translated into English before but most of the extracts have been translated into English and arranged into different chapters in the present volume. Some of the texts are revised and altered by Fethullah Gülen himself.

Since the early years of his preaching, Fethullah Gülen's sermons and speeches have been recorded on audiotape for public distribution. These recorded sermons have been enthusiastically embraced, extending the reach of his ideas, message and vision. Through his highly celebrated sermons and public speeches on education, social justice, charity and morality, he encourages a great number of people to pursue the ideals of service, morality, virtue, justice and peace.

Most of his series of sermons, talks and conversations are also transliterated into text format and published as books. In addition, he contributes to a number of journals and magazines. His writings and speeches do not focus exclusively on religious texts but include a broad array of topics such as science, history, modern philosophy, social justice, human rights, moral values and education. He has also expanded the teaching function of the mosque by launching a question and answer series in which he responds to people's concerns and inquiries, including those about the challenges of modern life.

Some of his most important books are compilations of these writings and recorded speeches, conversations, or sermons. Most books published in Gülen's name have not been written directly as books but go back either to sermons and talks or to written pieces, such as his magazine articles. For example, two of the most popular series of Gülen's books, *Çağ ve Nesil* (The Contemporary Age and Generation) and *Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri* (The Emerald Hills of the Heart), were compiled from articles published in a Turkish magazine, *Sızıntı*. The *Çağ ve Nesil* series comprises nine books in which Gülen's essays on religion, morality, civilization, faith and spirituality are collected. *Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri* comprises five volumes that treat the concepts and ideas of Sufism (tasawwuf). The *Kırık Testi* (Broken Vessel) and *Prizma* book series are two more popular and major collections. The *Kırık Testi* series also derives from oral materials such as the talks and conversations of Fethullah Gülen, and contains fourteen books. The *Prizma* series consists of six books.

Excerpts from these series are among the representative pieces of Gülen's work used in this publication on the theme of violence, terrorism, extremism and jihad, as they have been discussed in Gülen's writings, speeches and interviews. At the end, we have included extracts from interviews with Gülen by different journalists which relate to the book's themes.

In assembling a volume such as this one we have inevitably accumulated many debts to the colleagues and friends who made this volume possible.

We hope that you enjoy your read.

Dr. Ergun Çapan



## ON VIOLENCE and WAR

In fact, from yesterday to today, no religion pleasing to God, whether represented by the blessed Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad, peace be upon them all, was ever founded on the basis of conflict. Far from resting on conflict, these religions, and especially Islam, have waged war on disorder, clash, conflict, and oppression.

Islam means peace, safety, and well being. Consequently, in a religion in which accord, security and world peace are of the essence, phenomena like wars and conflicts are seen as incidental, outside the norm. In fact, in a religion where security and world peace is the principle, war and discord are sure to be secondary; this is identical to the struggle of a healthy body that fights against the germs that have attacked it. Islamic teaching has always favored peace and righteousness. Islam has taken war as an incidental outcome of human nature, and in order to maintain the balance, it has set some regulations and limited it. For instance, because of the command, “Your hatred for a group of people should not keep you away from justice and fairness” (al-Maedah 5:8), Islam established the principles of justice and peace in the world; it has constructed a principled defense of religion, life, property, reproduction, and the mind—the basic rights also accepted by modern legal systems.<sup>1</sup>

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However, if circumstances so require, and another state declares war on your state, you may be obliged to act in self-defense. For instance, if in some small way, your humble efforts and intention in the opposite direction could not prevent war, then you may act in accord with the principles of warfare as determined by your religion, or rather you must do so. This is an obligation brought about by that situation. However, it must not be forgotten that war is not a matter to be decided by individuals or institutions, but by the state(s).<sup>2</sup>

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1 F. Gülen, *Prizma III*, İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 2012 (first edition 1999), pp. 231-232.

2 F. Gülen, *Gurbet Ufukları*, İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 2012, p.73. (First published as *Hosgörü Sürecinin Tahlili*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/hosgoru-surecinin-tahlili/>, access date 03.03.2016)

Unfortunately, a Machiavellian understanding is spreading like a virus in our time. People are resorting to all kinds of oppression, injustice, and evil acts.

Firstly, no matter what the conditions are, constructive action must be our essential principle. Reacting to negative treatment in the same negative way will only make the misfortune grow worse. You may be subject to occasional physical or verbal attacks. Some may wish to fall upon you. However, no matter what kind of problems are faced, if it is possible to ward them off by diplomacy, then diplomatic means must be employed first. That is, before the troubles that are arising can cause any more grudges or hatred to take root between the different segments of society, they must be solved by combining reason, logic, sound judgment, and a holistic perspective.

Those who have gained power by exploiting such hatred and grudges may wish to use the power in their hands to bring different segments into line and crush and destroy anybody who opposes them. But even in the face of such thuggish treatment, sound reason and sensibility must never be given up.

As history shows, neglecting what can be done through diplomacy and attempting to solve issues solely through brute force and coercion will engender grudges and hatred, and these will be inherited by the following generations.

As believers, to face such problems, we need to follow the ways and methods adopted by the blessed Prophet, just as we do in worship. It is for this reason that constructive action, refraining from brute force, and tackling problems without crushing people are always essential. However, if, in spite of all the mild manners and behavior they meet, some obstinately insist, “we are going to invade your country”, then the people already know what to do. They put on their military uniforms, they confront the enemy, and they answer every bullet with many more. But this is the last resort. Until the issue comes to this point, if there are issues that can be solved with diplomacy, it is absolutely necessary to use diplomacy.

Certainly, diplomacy is not easy; it takes intellectual exertion, patience, and level-headedness. Diplomacy requires having a holistic perspective on events, considering all the possible outcomes of every step to be taken, and coming up with various alternative solutions for every outcome. However, hard and troublesome though it may be, as diplomacy is the method that yields lasting solutions in the shortest way, it is also the most humane and peaceful way.

## ON JIHAD

Jihad is an Arabic word with meanings such as “striving against all odds, making efforts, and endeavoring.”...

Before all for a Muslim, on the one hand jihad basically means to find oneself spiritually. This is only part of the truth. On the other, jihad is to help another to find himself or herself in a spiritual manner. For this very reason jihad is of ultimate significance in Allah’s perspective.

Jihad means eliminating the obstacles between people’s hearts and God to let them meet Him once more and enduring every kind of hardship and trouble for this sake.<sup>3</sup>

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Jihad is striving to attain one’s essence by exerting oneself and resisting adversities that go against the flow of life; we term this ‘the greater jihad’. There is also the version of jihad made for the sake of letting others meet their essence; and we term this ‘the lesser jihad’.<sup>4</sup>

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Al-jihad al-asghar (lit. ‘the lesser jihad’) is not only fighting in battle. This kind of understanding would narrow the scope of jihad unjustly. The scope of jihad — without any exaggeration at all — is as great as the distance from the East to the West. Sometimes even a word or a silence, a grimace or a smile can be regarded as jihad if these deeds are carried out sincerely for Allah. Likewise, any kind of endeavor — even the lesser one to transform the condition of the community into a better one as far as possible — must be considered as jihad.

Efforts for family, relatives, neighbors, and finally the whole of humanity are basically the lesser jihad. This jihad is in some respect mundane.

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3 F. Gülen, *Yol Mülahazaları*, Işık Yayınları, İzmir, 2012 (first edition 2007), p. 24; F. Gülen, *Ümit Burcu*, Işık Yayınları, İzmir, 2012 (first edition 2005), p.130, first published as *En Önemli Vazife*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/en-onemli-vazife/>, access date 03.03.2016.

4 F. Gülen, *Fatihâ Üzerine Mülahazalar*, Işık Yayınları, İzmir, 2012 (first publication 2002), p.83; F. Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur*, Işık Yayınları, İzmir, 2012 (first publication 1994); F. Gülen, *Işığın Görüldüğü Ufuk*, Işık Yayınları, İzmir, 2012 (first publication 2000), s.57. This part was first published as an article in *Sızıntı*, August 1999, V 21, n. 247.

The spiritual aspect of jihad, which is known as ‘al-jihad al-akbar’, is about fighting against one’s own nafs (evil-commanding self) and Satan. Without these two, jihad lacks its validity and balance. Our knowledge and understanding of jihad is — like every religious practice — from the Prophet Muhammad. ....

Basically the lesser jihad is to perform established religious duties while the greater one is to do them in a sincere and conscious manner. It is difficult to refrain (which is called al-jihad al-akbar) from immoral human qualities such as hate, enmity, jealousy, egoism, arrogance and so on, which are the deadly enemies in our spiritual development.<sup>5</sup>

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The Qur’an provides various ways of thinking about jihad in terms of its essential idea: there is a jihad of stimulating people to recognize themselves; a jihad of maintaining a bond with the entire existence; a jihad of standing up to animal desires; a jihad of letting the people we address realize self-conquest: taking a stance against all evil feelings and passions that debase a person such as enmity, grudge, hatred, lust, rancor, worldly passions, and jealousy... [There is] a jihad of letting everybody adopt a lofty ideal; a jihad of overcoming all fears and expectations; a jihad of accepting this world as a waiting lounge for the afterlife and thus living in this world in accordance with the next; and many more jihads...<sup>6</sup>

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5 F. Gülen, *Asrın Getirdiği Tereddütler*, v.3, İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 2012, p.194 (first edition 1992)

6 F. Gülen, *Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru*, İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 2012, pp. 113-114. (First published as ‘Dar bir Zaviyeden Düşünce Sistemimiz’, *Yeni Ümit*, v. 7, n. 49, 2000)

## ON MURDER, SUICIDE ATTACKS AND THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

No matter who murders whom, it is murder, and every kind of murder is condemned. No matter what the crime is, individuals cannot apply punishments; the state does. Governments have law courts at their disposal. Punishment is their duty. Therefore, a believer cannot condone any murder whatsoever. He cannot adopt a soft attitude against any murder. The person murdered may have uttered words that go against Islamic teaching; he may have gone too far with invective, attacked this or that person, and may have committed evils. None of this justifies the murder committed. Success among the civilized is by persuasion. Silencing such people is possible by suing them. Therefore, let alone attempting such assassinations, it is unthinkable for a Muslim to approve of them in his or her heart. Nobody has the right to say, “such and such an enemy of religion, Islam and the Qur’an has been killed. He deserved it anyway. It serves him right,” and such an attitude against a murderer does not become a believer. If there is anything to be said against such enmities, it will be said in the Hereafter; God Almighty will put enemies of religion in Hell, and He will reward the religious with Paradise. Only then will it be possible to remark about those who insist on unbelief that “they received their just deserts.”...

I have said this so many times: In my lifetime, I have never, deliberately and knowingly, stepped on even an ant. I ceased seeing and speaking to a friend of mine for months because he broke the backbone of a snake. I have always believed in the right of every living being, that all of them have a place in the ecosystem. I have stated that we are not authorized to kill any living being of our own volition. The human being in particular is the most honorable and sacred of all creatures. I have said many times that those who kill people with terrorist intent cannot enter Paradise and cannot be genuine Muslims. This is not solely an expression of my personal opinion, but of our general thought as Muslims; this belief is an ingrained character in us. Others also know well this characteristic thought of ours and confess it. They say, “Real Muslims do not act this way; they consider murder to be equal to unbelief.” Muslims who know genuine Islam, who know its spirit and essence, think this way. However, murderers sometimes wish to smear Muslims as well with the blood on their hands. With an intention to defame, they might mention the names of some Muslims in relation to certain murders. Such claims might mislead some naive people.<sup>7</sup>

7 F. Gülen, *Ümit Burcu*, İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 2012, s.184-185. (First published as *Faili Meçbul*

Murdering an innocent human being is tantamount to murdering the whole of humanity. For such murder takes away the freedom to live, which is a pure blessing from Allah to humanity, and the murderer opens up a way for his or her fellow humans to do the same. Additionally, when someone kills another, this clearly shows us their violence of character, and especially their boldness about murdering. Essentially, when someone commits murder once, this gives us a clue that he or she has the capacity and is dangerous enough to murder the whole of humanity. After the first commission of the act, murdering another fellow human becomes a little easier. Particularly if this happens twice or more, murder may become a trivial act for him or her.

“He who kills a soul unless it be (in legal punishment) for murder, or for causing disorder and corruption on the earth will be as if he had killed all humankind; and he who saves a life will be as if he had saved the lives of all mankind” (al-Maedah 5:32). In conclusion, it is impossible to consider Islam with terrorism in any sense. An ordinary Muslim, whose aim is basically the pleasure of Allah, can never kill anyone....

“Whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense (in the Hereafter) is Hell, therein to abide; and God has utterly condemned him, excluded him from His mercy, and prepared for him a tremendous punishment” (an-Nisa 4:93). Based on this verse, personages such as Ibn Abbas and some prominent imams of the Tabiun (the generation succeeding the Companions) stated that a person who commits murder will be condemned to eternal punishment. Some interpreters of the Qur’an made a different comment: Just as a murderer deserves to be executed in return for the crime he committed, the same punishment must be given to one who has killed all of mankind. Likewise, as the punishment of the murderer of a single person is eternal Hell, the punishment of one who has murdered all of mankind is also the same. In this respect, the murderer of a single person resembles a murderer who killed all of humanity.

In fact, another Divine statement draws the frame of meaning for the previous one: “Assuredly, God does not forgive that partners be associated with Him; less than that He forgives to whomever He wills (whomever He has guided to repentance and righteousness, either out of His pure grace or as a result of the person’s choosing repentance and righteousness by his free will)” (an-Nisa 4:48). However, a holistic perspective on the issue will reveal that although every killer may not remain eternally in Hell, there is a kind of murder that condemns the murderer to an endless punishment.

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*Cinayetler ve Ortadoğu Projesi*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/faili-mechul-cinayetler-ve-otadogu-projesi/>, access date 03.03.2016).

Then, as there are different levels of gravity concerning sins like backbiting and incitement, the same goes for murder depending on the identity and position of the victim, along with possible consequences of the murder. No matter who the victim is, a murder is a murder. On the other hand, killing an army commander or state leader is not the same as killing an ordinary citizen in terms of its ramifications. Likewise, a murder committed in an ordinary place cannot be held equal with committing murder in the sacred area in the vicinity of Mecca.

In order to refrain from such a grave sin, one must avoid even the pettiest seeming murder. Similar dangers and the same judgment hold true for today's people as well. When Muslims asked the blessed personage Hasan al-Basri whether the judgment of the Torah on the seriousness of murder (as reported in the Qur'an Maedah 5:32, see above) was also true for Muslims, he replied: "By God Almighty other than whom no other deity exists, yes it is."<sup>8</sup>

To conclude, every kind of unjust killing is a grave sin, but it is possible to talk about different levels of gravity for this sin, depending on factors such as the time and place of the murder, and identity and status of the victim. Acting against the Divine prohibition of murder, breaking the law, paving the way for more murder, encouraging other people to commit this sin, and thus causing the social order to be upset, a person who commits murder in a way can be counted as having killed all of humanity. Similarly, in terms of incurring divine wrath and curses as well as deserving punishment in Hell, murdering one person is the same as murdering everybody. On the other hand, a person who saves another's life—by forgiving, deciding not to kill, or preventing that person from falling into disaster—is like one who saved all people.<sup>9</sup>

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Before the topic of suicide attacks, as they are interrelated, firstly I would like to briefly cover the issue of a Muslim's committing suicide for any reason.

Even though no explicit statement is found in the Qur'an about suicide, we can say that the prohibition against taking life is also true for a person's taking his or her own life. Just as killing another person is murder, the same holds true for killing oneself. God Almighty considers taking one life as equal to killing all of humanity: "He who kills a soul unless it be (in legal punishment) for murder or for causing disorder and corruption on the earth will be as if he had killed all humankind"

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8 al-Tabari, 10/239; Ibn-Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, (Tahk., Sami Muhammed b. Sellame), Dar-ı Taybe, 1999, 3/93.

9 F. Gülen, *Diriliş Çağrısı*, İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 2012, s.182-184. (First published as *Ne Korkunc Bir Cinayet*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/ne-korkunc-bir-cinayet/>; access date 03.03.2016).

(al-Maedah 5:32). In addition, so many sayings of the Prophet refer to the hellfire to be suffered by those who commit suicide.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, human life is among the five essentials that people are responsible for protecting. It can even be said—as Shatibi systematically expounds in his *Muwafaqat*<sup>11</sup>—all of Islamic law is based upon protecting these five essentials: a person’s life, religion, property, mental health, and offspring. Protection of life is the foremost among these essentials. In this respect, as a person protects his faith, country, family, and property, he is also responsible for protecting his life. It is so important to protect one’s life that someone under attack is allowed to harm the assailant in self-defense.

In addition, life is an important trust from God. In other words, just as faith is a God-granted trust in the name of serving the religion, the blessing of life, which makes all of this possible, is such a trust as well. Without life, it is not possible to realize the rest. For this reason, a person’s willfully taking his or her own life means ruining this Divine bestowal through which people are commissioned to fulfill certain responsibilities.

People come to this world like recruits to an army, to undertake a responsibility. In this respect, what is required of people is to wait patiently until the appointed time when they will be summoned to the Divine presence. Just as a soldier that leaves his regiment without leave signed by his commander is considered a fugitive, a person who leaves the duty of life without a Divine command is similarly considered a fugitive deserving punishment. All of the good deeds a person did in their lifetime will be wasted. In fact, even wishing that God would end one’s life due to certain suffering is a sin; making such a wish means rebelling against the fate ordained by God Almighty. For this reason, somebody who utters such words of rebellion by mistake needs to seek Divine forgiveness in prostration as if they committed a grave sin. Given that such wishes—much less severe in comparison to taking one’s life—are so wrong, then it is a much worse disrespect toward God Almighty to commit suicide, because it is an attempt to interfere with the time of dismissal from duty without waiting for the command of God, the rightful authority. Just as He is the one who sends people into the world, He is the one to send them to the next. No human is given the right to self-determined intervention.

A person can die in the lawful defense of their life, religion, or property. Even though there may seem to be an outward human intervention, this is actually a form of passing to the next world within the command of God Almighty. The Messenger of God stated that “one who is killed in defense

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10 al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Tibb*, 56 ; at-Tirmidhi, *Tibb*, 7; al-Nasai, *Jana’iz*, 68.

11 Al-Shatibi, *al-Muwafaqat*, (Tahk.Abdullah Diraz) Daru’l-marife, Beirut, 1/38, 2/10.

*Al-Muwafaqat fi Usool al-Sharia* is one of Imam Shatibi’s best known books. It is on the topic of Usul al-fiqh, and Islamic jurisprudence and Maqasid Al-Sharia (higher objectives). It is translated and published into English as *The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law*.



of their property, religion, life, or family is a martyr.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, dying in such situations is a form of taking leave from service with Divine permission.

Some scholars of Islamic jurisprudence made the judgment that a person who commits suicide is like a person who renounced faith and therefore is not eligible for an Islamic Funeral Prayer. However, there is also the consideration that a person might have committed suicide during a temporary state of insanity. People in such a state are not responsible for their actions. For this reason, since we do not definitely know the motive behind a suicide and the thorough background of what happened, Islamic scholars have seen nothing wrong in our thinking positively about these people and observing their funeral services.

Sometimes, intolerable suffering might lead one to suicide. Indeed, such an incident took place during the time of the noble Prophet as well. A person named Quzman was wounded during the Battle of Uhud. To end his suffering, he committed suicide by leaning his body weight on the tip of his sword. Seeing this, the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, stated that the man was “a dweller of Hell.”<sup>13</sup> Imagine that he fought near the beloved Prophet for the defense of Medina and received a fatal wound that would make him a martyr, but this unfortunate man was completely defeated while on the winning side for not enduring his suffering. Without waiting for the Divine decree, he made the judgment for himself and thus came to deserve to be a dweller in Hell.

What is fitting for a believer, however, is to show patience in such times of trouble. People are supposed to remain patient in the face of all hardship, until they are summoned by the Divine will. In other words, one must seek what God wills even while dying. The verse, “O you who believe! Keep from disobedience to God in reverent piety, with all the reverence that is due to Him, and see that you do not die save as Muslims (submitted to Him exclusively)” (Al Imran 3:102) also implies that people should not end their own life. Suicide is a consequence of not submitting to God, whereas the verse warns that one should not die in any other state than submission to God. In addition, just as killing oneself means ruining one’s entire past, suicide means putting a very ominous end to one’s life.

There is another form of suicide called a “suicide attack” that started in the West first and is unfortunately seen in some Muslim countries as well. Those who commit this act try to justify it by asserting that it is a “meaningful suicide”. In other words, with these attacks that they undertake for the sake of their ideologies, they are attempting to ascribe a positive meaning and value to suicide, as if it were possible to protect

<sup>12</sup> at-Tirmidhi, *Diyat*, 22; al-Nasai, *Tahrim ad-Dam*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, 2/73.

their religion with it. However, when we look into the truth of the matter, we see that such suicide bombings are not different from the suicide we previously mentioned. Suicide attacks can even be seen as a form of multiple murder, because as those heedless murderers who have nothing to do with humanity and no idea about the true spirit of Islam go to Hell headfirst by killing themselves, they kill so many other people as well. Therefore, just as they will be called to account on the Day of Judgment for taking their own lives, they will have the same summons for the people they killed—for every child, woman, man, Muslim, and non-Muslim victim, one by one. In Islam, laws and disciplines explicitly define the acts that are permissible during peace and wartime. Not only no one can declare war by himself during peacetime, but also no one has the right to kill children, women, and the elderly during war.

This being the case, suicide attacks or other similar acts of terrorism can never be compatible with Islam. The noble Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, stated that a person “does not commit adultery as a believer, does not drink wine as a believer, does not steal as a believer, and does not commit murder as a believer.”<sup>14</sup> We understand from this hadith that a murderer is not a believer while committing murder. In other words, a person committing these sins cannot be called a “Muslim” in terms of their state, intentions, and plans while committing them. When you study their character during these moments, what appears before you is not the portrait of a Muslim; indeed, such a character cannot fit within the Islamic frame. For this reason, let us emphasize once more that when a person acts as a suicide bomber and kills innocent people, no matter what country or religious group they are from, the murder they commit has absolutely nothing to do with being a Muslim. A person taking so many lives cannot be saved in the next world. Of course, it is always possible for a person who commits grave sins to repent and ask forgiveness from God, and the Almighty One can forgive their sins. In that case, God knows how they will be treated in the Hereafter.

On the other hand, it is a reality that such murders smear the beautiful face of Islam. The crimes, which are committed by those appearing to be Muslim and pretending to commit murder for the sake of religion, are attributed to Islam in the view of people who do not know the original teachings of Islam. Therefore, it becomes exceedingly difficult for believers to change this mistaken image. Clearing people’s minds of this negative image will take intensive effort for many years. For this reason, no matter who commits those suicide attacks, they can be defined as a form of murder which is two times as bad, or even many times worse than a single murder or suicide. A few people who were not very knowledgeable about the genuine teachings of Islam asked me once, “Is it the

<sup>14</sup> al-Nasa’i, *Kasame*, 48, 49; al-Nasa’i, *Kat’u ’s-sarik*, 1; Abdurrezzak, *el-Musannef* 7/415; İbn Ebî Şeybe, *el-Musannef* 6/169.

love of going to Paradise that leads Muslims to become suicide bombers?” I answered them saying, “If those people are acting on such a motive, then they are mistaken, for a person who makes such an attempt does not go to Paradise but nosedives into Hell.”<sup>15</sup>

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15 F. Gülen, *Yenilenme Cebdi*, İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 2012, s.263-268 (First published as *İntihar*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/intihar/>; access date 03.03.2016)

## ON TERROR

Actually, there is no place for terrorism in Islam. To reiterate, a terrorist cannot be a Muslim and a Muslim cannot be a terrorist. A real Muslim has a single purpose on earth. In the life of this world, he weaves all of his thoughts and deeds by orienting them to that purpose. He makes his plans and projects for the sake of reaching it. What is that purpose? Only the good pleasure of God.

If a Muslim did understand Islam, then he should not think about anything but gaining God's good pleasure. He must remain closed to everything else other than that, and to some extent, even to Paradise and its blessings. To use the brilliant point made by Junayd al-Baghdadi, those who worship for the sake of Paradise and otherworldly blessings are "servants of pleasure" and of Paradise. With the philosophy of Yunus Emre, an exemplary believer, they say, "They yearn so much for 'Paradise'", so "A few mansions and heavenly wives... Give them whatever they desire! It is You I need, it's You!" and live in a different dimension.

Now, while walking toward such a blessed and noble goal, a Muslim has to care that the means be legitimate. For such a lofty end can only be attained through legitimate means. It is not possible to attain this end by shouting on the streets, no matter who they are. Within this framework, it is not possible to reconcile acts like murder, robbery, kidnapping, and so on, with Islamic teaching. Namely, it is not possible to walk on this path by murdering people. This is why we said at the beginning, "A terrorist cannot be a Muslim and a Muslim cannot be a terrorist."

As we previously pointed out, according to Ibn Abbas, homicide is to be considered of the same gravity as associating partners with God. According to some scholars from the Tabiun (the generation succeeding the Companions) of the classical period, someone who unjustly murders another will stay eternally in Hell. That person's repentance will never be accepted. Even so, nowadays, innocent people are regularly killed by terrorist acts. This is a major trouble that plagues us. Homes are ruined, and left behind are widowed women and orphaned children. It is impossible to justify these events within Islamic teaching.<sup>16</sup>

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16 F. Gülen, *Prizma*, İzmir: Nil Yayınları, v.1, 2012, pp.236-237 (First published 1995)

Let me express at the very beginning, I have never believed that all those incidents were planned and carried out by an organization formed by real Muslims. I believe that any person who has sound judgment and evaluates happenings as a whole with their beginning, end, inward, and outward dimensions fairly and without prejudice will share my belief. If we look at the pawns in the incidents that take place in different regions of the world, and which are often made to appear to be related to Muslims, then we can see that although those pawns have Muslim names, they are either bloody killers hired by certain powers or secret services that wish to shape the world in accordance with their own mentality, or diseased souls they control by psychoactive drugs.

As for how this relates to Islam, it must be known that Islamic essentials never allow such acts from the very beginning. Truly, even a person who has a superficial and middling knowledge of Islam will know that no Muslim can declare war on his own because his country has been invaded or his freedom has been usurped; one cannot target innocent people with assertions of fighting for freedom. It is not possible to reconcile such an understanding with Muslim reasoning. In our religion, warfare can only be realized countrywide, by mobilizing an entire nation and only within certain rules. No one can come up with a form of struggle they fancy by contradicting the fundamental teachings of religion. In this respect, I will reiterate, with your permission, one point I have mentioned many times before: A terrorist cannot be a true Muslim and a true Muslim cannot be a terrorist. In accordance with the principle “indefinite mention refers to the prime example,” by saying “a Muslim,” we are trying to convey that a person who is open to the essence and spirit of Islam cannot commit such an act.

If a person claiming to be a Muslim still commits such violence, then it means that they have a deficiency and gap in their understanding of religion, incompatible with the essentials of Islam. To clarify my point, let me relate a saying of the noble Prophet that pertains to this issue. The Pride of Humanity, peace and blessings be upon him, stated, “A fornicator is not a believer at the moment when he is committing fornication. A drinker is not a believer at the moment when he is drinking wine, a thief is not a believer at the moment when he is stealing, a robber is not a believer at the moment when he is robbing and people are looking on”.<sup>17</sup> This saying tells us that a believer will not fornicate, steal, or drink while conscious of faith. In other words, it points out that a fornicator, thief, or drinker is not a real Muslim, at least while committing these sins.

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<sup>17</sup> al-Bukhari, *Mezâlim* 30; *Eşyibe* 1, *hudûd* 1, 6, 20; Muslim, *îmân* 100.

I believe that we can elucidate the matter in this way: people who believe in God in an appropriate way, who believe that they will account for their sins in the Hereafter, who accept that Paradise, Hell, and the resurrection are real, cannot commit those sins as far they are guided by these feelings. So in this sense, a terrorist is not a believer while committing a terrorist act. People neither will nor can ever become terrorists as long as they are sincere believers in the ideal sense. Therefore, I have never believed that terroristic acts committed in this or that part of the world are realized by an organization of conscious Muslims.<sup>18</sup>

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18 F. Gülen, *Yaşatma İdeali*, İzmir: Nil Yayınları, 2012, pp.211-213. (First published as *Kirli Oyunlar ve Mümin Firaseti*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/kirli-oyunlar-ve-mu-min-firaseti/>; access date 03.03.2016)

## ON MUSLIMS' RESPONSIBILITY

Some people who appear to be Muslims massacre innocent people unaware of anything and similarly attack places of worship; it is impossible to justify these atrocities with reference to the Qur'an, Sunnah, or Islam. But unfortunately there does exist such a picture, which is truly grievous to sincere Muslims and puts us in a shameful position. Together with there being sly and organized manipulations of external powers in this issue, it can be said that these terrorist acts, which also stem from misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Islam, are worse and cause more harm to the Muslim world than the attacks of crusaders and Mongols in the past. Such atrocities and murders mean besmirching the face of Islam.

In my humble opinion, one of the prime reasons for the misunderstandings and misinterpretations that cause such happenings is that the concepts of courage and bravery, which constitute absolutely immense depths of wisdom, are misunderstood in our time. In other words, the feelings with which God endowed human nature are not understood and used correctly. There should naturally be the feelings of courage and bravery in a believer's heart. Besides these two feelings, however, believers must have a share of wisdom and insight as well. It is necessary to hold a genuine stance to inspire trust in those around us, to act in adherence with essential principles of religion in the face of all difficulties, and never forget that lawful ends are only to be attained through lawful means. In other words, real courage and bravery mean Muslims' maintaining an upright stance in defending their own values, being steadfast on issues they believe to be right, and putting up with every trouble they are subjected to in this way.

In this respect, when we consider the period of the blessed Prophet, we see that the Pride of Humanity and those who sided with him endured for thirteen years a great many things that a normal person cannot bear.

This was so much so that the honorable Companions most of the time looked with tearful eyes at the infinite power of God Almighty, His beloved Messenger He sent for saving humanity, and the mistreatment done to those who believed him, and then before this picture, whose wisdom they could not thoroughly discern, they said, "How Clement You are, O our Lord! (You show no haste to punish the errors of Your servants.)" As is known, when the noble Prophet prostrated himself before the Ka'ba one day, the persecutors, fixed on denial and ignorance, dropped a camel's guts onto his head.<sup>19</sup> Those oppressors, who themselves deserved to have stones

<sup>19</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Vudū'* 69; Müslim, *Jihād* 107

rained upon them, stoned him many times.<sup>20</sup> However, he never said, “May stones be cast at you as well!” On the contrary, even in the face of those who threw stones at him, broke his tooth, wounded his cheek, and caused his head to be covered in blood, he raised his hands and said, “My God! Grant my people guidance, for they do not know!”<sup>21</sup> It is possible to paraphrase it as follows: “If they knew my mission and how I actually care for them, they would not do so,” for the Qur’an describes the state of the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, when he saw the wrong path taken by those who do not believe: “Yet, it may be that you (O Muhammad) will torment yourself to death with grief, following after them, if they do not believe in this Message” (al-Kahf 18:6).

The Pride of Humanity who conquered and softened hearts, who guided everybody to being human in the true sense and realizing the very potential in their essence did not react to the rage of his adversaries with rage, and particularly he never resorted to any of the atrocities and contemptible acts of our time. Even to Abu Jahl, who had been such an antagonist to him for fifteen years, he did not say something such as “May God cast you down.” Since he did not say that, a day came and Abu Jahl’s daughter Juwayriya and his son Ikrima embraced Islam; they led dizzyingly exemplary lives afterwards.

Had the Messenger of God made the slightest gesture towards it, those brave and heroic first Muslims would have relentlessly fought heart and soul until death. However, they preferred the path of patience; although they were shackled and faced terrible tortures, they did not show any personal, reactionary, or emotional misconduct that could harm their trustworthiness, and particularly never resorted to the atrocities we see today. The way of the Prophet of Compassion is the way of conquering hearts and convincing minds for the sake of letting them attain eternal bliss; and this requires treating people with compassion and leniency. To reiterate, it is not possible to reconcile such a monstrous course of action as terrorism with the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and the Pride of Humanity’s manners, strategy, and way of thinking.

... We have a good example from the time of the Prophet’s companions. For instance Umar ibn al-Khattab left Madinah, travelling alone with one donkey and one servant. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he was greeted by Sophronius, who must have been amazed that the caliph of the Muslims, one of the most powerful people in the world at that point, was dressed in no more than simple robes and was indistinguishable from his servant. When it was time to pray and Umar wanted them to show him a place to perform his religious duty. Patriarch Sophronius said, “You can pray in our holy temple.” Wisely Umar replied, “No, I cannot pray here because if I pray

<sup>20</sup> al-Bukhârî, *Bed’ül’l-halk* 7; Müslim, *Jihâd* 111

<sup>21</sup> Said b. Mansur, *as-Sunan* (Tahk. Habiburrahman el-A’zami), Daru’s-selefiyye, India, 1982, 2/353; Kad-ı Iyaz, *eş-Şifâ*, 1/105.



here as the Caliph, the Muslims will make this temple their mosque, and this is obviously against your freedom of belief.” Then Umar went out and performed his prayer in a suitable rocky place. This is the Caliph and his wise attitude towards religious fellow men. It is time to consider the great difference between Umar’s wisdom and the one who on behalf of Islam carries out terrible bomb attacks on innocent citizens.

We have another good example like this. When a small group gathered in Harura against the Caliph Ali ibn Abu Talib, one of his soldiers came to him and said, “O, Imam of the believers, the Kharijites have gathered in such a place and plan to fight against you. It would be reasonable to attack them before they attack you.”

Ali’s reply was immediate: “How do you know they will attack us?”

Considering this example Abu Hanifa, the great master and pioneer of Muslim schools of law, reached the conclusion that it is not legal to attack a group gathered somewhere if we are not sure about their intention (whether they plan to fight against us or not).<sup>22</sup>

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Unfortunately, it is a reality that not all of the individuals who live in Islamic regions today are sensible people with balanced thinking who are knowledgeable about their own sources. As for those who wish to build public opinion in the world to suit their advantage by triggering the feeling of paranoia, they have perceived these weaknesses in us that stem from poverty and ignorance; they have prepared certain schemes, and then used suitable people as pawns in these schemes by deceiving them or robotizing them through psychoactive drugs. By using the neglected generations condemned to ignorance, they have deceived the masses. Not being deceived depends on keeping our immune system strong. If your immune system is strong, you can overcome all of the viruses and germs that enter your body. But when the immune system is weak, you cannot resist all the viruses introduced into your body by those who want to infect your body and destroy your health.

In this respect, in the shrinking world of our time, Muslims who follow the path of the Prophet need to act much more wisely, give thought to every step they take, and reckon very well before they say anything and consider the possible consequences of their words and what kind of feeling they will evoke in the other person. Gains and losses must be reckoned well before speaking, and not a single word must be uttered without thinking it over at least ten times, particularly by those in a position to represent a collective need to act with further care. An entire collective will have to pay the

22 F. Gülen, *Din Adına İşlenen Cinayetlerin Vebali*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/din-adina-islenen-cinayetlerin-vebali/>; access date 03.03.2016.

price for any mistake they make. For example, when an ordinary person says, "Such and such people committed disrespect against your mosque. You also go and harm them," nobody cares about it. But when a heedless person who is seen as an opinion leader makes such a statement, it is taken seriously and causes destruction that is very difficult to remedy.

If they are not accompanied by knowledge, wisdom, insight, and prudence, then courage and bravery on their own lead people to such insanity that the consequences are irreparable. In this respect, it is not right for Muslims to blame the other side alone in the disasters we face. Actually, since the earliest periods of Islam there have been adversaries who do not wish the beauties of Islam to be practiced and recognized and who wished to enact such traps and tricks. However, the Rightly Guided Caliphs, may God be pleased with them, and the insightful leaders in their footsteps did not give their adversaries the opportunity. Unfortunately, particularly for the last few centuries, external elements have managed to use people who are easily manipulated, and unfortunately they have darkened the brilliant face of Islam. It can be said that in no previous period of Islam have atrocities like those in our time ever been committed and claimed to be in the name of religion. Monstrosities were committed at certain times by the Muwahhidin, then by the Karmatis, and by some people deluded by Batinism. But even they did not become suicide bombers and did not commit acts of suicide to cause massacres without sparing children, women, and the elderly.

I would like to relate a memory. A certain guest who came to visit me talked about Islamophobia and stated that Westerners view Muslims as monsters and that they are producing caricatures and media coverage against Islam. I told him that when they issue something against Islam, unfortunately some people among us who act upon impulse engage in retaliation that is irreconcilable with Islam, and thus it is not right for us to exonerate ourselves completely. Although it was a completely unexpected answer for him, it was an undeniable reality. While responding to the evils done to us, we should have behaved in a way that befits us, and presented a form of struggle that becomes believers.

Otherwise, the mistakes such people make put all Muslims on earth in a difficult situation; these acts provide certain circles with something they can use against Muslims. As for the right conduct to be followed, it is to take our manner as our honor and to ward off the attacks in compliance with the essentials of religion.

Is it ever possible to make people love religion by means of harshness, brute force, violence, and anger, and in that way make people feel warmer toward Islam? As is known, Islamic scholars defined religion as "Such a divinely revealed body of systems that it directs those who possess intelligence to goodness by their own free will." In my opinion, such a definition

of religion excels even the highest forms of democracy. This is because it takes human free will as its basis, and leaves the person alone with his or her free will.<sup>23</sup> According to Islam, humanity is honorable and appreciative by creation. If religion can be represented correctly, and the beauties it promises for a person's future can be pointed out, people will immediately opt for it.

If you present the beauties of religion, make people love it and evoke eagerness toward it, people choose it by their free will. Nobody can say anything against it. Everybody is free to choose whichever religion they wish. What matters is representing the religion's teaching beautifully. As is known, the practical representation of religious teaching by the Pride of Humanity never fell below the admirable way he conveyed the message. He very scrupulously practiced everything he taught and thus set up a throne in people's hearts.

Actually, this was how Muslims used to be, when they followed in his footsteps. For the last two centuries, however, some have virtually spoiled our genetic composition. Unfortunately, some have committed so many atrocities, even while claiming them in the name of religion. Actually, those who commit brutalities have no share of Islamic teaching. Even if a terrorist appears from among Muslims, this person will have lost the attributes that make him Muslim. It is definitely impossible to accept such a person as a sound Muslim. How can it be? Even war has certain rules. As the noble Prophet stated while seeing off an army, our religion forbids mistreating women, children, and people who have taken refuge in places of worship. Therefore, it is not possible to reconcile these murders committed in the name of religion and the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, because imposing your own system on others contradicts the spirit of religion.

In short, what falls to us, along with representing the religion correctly, is to be respectful toward everyone and meet every understanding with respect. Assaulting people furiously with weapons, declaring a so-called war on your own, storming shopping centers and taking innocent people hostage have nothing to do with Islam whatsoever. We, followers of a religion of peace and goodness, view retaliation as cruel and unworthy and prefer humane behavior to wild behavior in all circumstances. What is more, a person with genuine belief does not stoop to commit such lowly acts.<sup>24</sup>

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In our time, for example, if religion has to be mentioned alongside terrorism, if suicide attacks are darkening the brilliant face of Islam—may God cast down their perpetrators—if religion is introduced in the shadow

<sup>23</sup> Abdulaziz Al-Bukhari, *Kashfu'l-Asrar*, 1/13

<sup>24</sup> F. Gülen, *Din Adına İşlenen Cinayetlerin Vebali-2*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/din-adina-islenen-cinayetlerin-vebali-2/>, access date 03.03.2016.

of bombs and murders and thus is identified with terrorism, then in such a period, telling the truth in the correct manner and by lawful means almost becomes a personal obligation for all.<sup>25</sup>

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Whether you call it tolerance, dialogue, or respect for others as they are, each of these is a means. The actual objective is to earn God's good pleasure and approval. If we are to expand on this, then the ends that we seek to reach through these means is to enable Islam, which has been misunderstood and misrepresented for several centuries and in which regard mistakes still continue to be made, to be correctly understood. It is, in other words, to make the reality felt in the hearts of others that this religion rests upon principles of peace and security and that it possesses the necessary dynamics to establish a universal security, safety and peace. Consequently, it is to be able to articulate the fact that no one can wage war in this religion according to their own whims and fancies, that anarchy and terror can never be seen as a vehicle of struggle, that innocent people cannot be killed by suicide bombers, and that, in short, the real Islam has nothing whatsoever to do with terror and anarchy. If we are able to impart the true face and true nature of Islam to others by availing ourselves of different platforms and means, this will be no small feat in the name of our religion and the peace of humanity.<sup>26</sup>

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Those in our time who treat people with grudge and hatred, who are antagonistic toward everybody—Muslim, Jewish, or Christian—except for themselves, and condemn everyone as “heathens,” are using a discourse that does not belong to Islam. Islam is a religion of love and clemency, and Muslims are guardians of love who have thrown out every kind of grudge and hatred from their hearts.

First of all, Islam is an inflected form of the words “silm” (safety) and “salamah” (deliverance), and has meanings including submission, attaining deliverance, being safe and sound, and establishing mutual security and peace.

Islam is a religion of security and peace. These essentials are so prevalent in Muslims lives that they greet everybody they know or do not know. When they stand in Prayer, they cut their relations with the world and turn to their Lord to worship Him in devout obedience. While finishing the

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25 F. Gülen, *Ümit Burcu*, 2012, p. 136 (first published as *En Önemli Vazife*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/en-onemli-vazife/>, access date 03.03.2016).

26 F. Gülen, *Cemre Beklentisi*, Işık Yayınları, İzmir, 2012, p. 80. (first published as *Vesileperestlik Afeti ve Hakkın Hoşnutluğu*, <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/vesileperestlik-afeti-ve-hakk-in-hosnutlugu/>, access date 03.03.2016).

Prayer, almost like returning to the world, they give peace greetings to the angels on their right and left, and return to society with a wish for well being, security, and peace.

Greeting and wishing security and well being to others is regarded in Islamic teaching as being among the best deeds. One day, when they asked the Messenger of God, "Which deed is more meritorious in Islam?", he answered, "Offering meals to others, and greeting everyone you know or you do not know."

It is so bitter that Islam, which is based on this understanding and principle in essence, is made to appear identical with terrorism by some circles. This is such a gross historical mistake; as we pointed out above, associating terrorism with a belief system that is essentially based on security and trust is first of all an indication of not knowing the spirit of Islam and the inability to grasp it with its own spirit. It is necessary to seek Islam not in the attitude and deeds of some abject individuals of the most marginal kind who misrepresent it, but in its own sources, history, and true representatives. The truth of the issue is that there is no brutality, antagonism, and bigotry in Islam. In every way, it is a religion of forgiveness, magnanimity, and tolerance. So many heroes of love and tolerance, such as Jalaladdin Rumi, Yunus Emre, Ahmad Yasawi, and Bediüzzaman, have expressed and represented this aspect of Islam very beautifully, and they became monuments of love and tolerance by always emanating these qualities throughout their lives.<sup>27</sup>

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27 F. Gülen, *İnsanın Özündeki Sevgi*, Ufuk Kitapları, İstanbul, 2003, pp.44-45.

## INTERVIEWS

## **Interview with Nuriye Akman**

Zaman Daily, March 22, 2004.

*The Islamic sector of society had been saying for years, “Islam does not accord with terror.” However, the incidents of September 11 occurred. Afterwards, bombings took place in many countries, including Turkey. It turned out that the perpetrators came from among us Muslims. Before everything else, it is it not necessary for us to resist this?*

You are so right. Today, Islam is misunderstood at best. It was necessary for Muslims to come out and say, “In real Islam, terror does not exist” because in Islam, killing a human is equal to kufr [not believing in Allah]. You cannot kill a human being. You cannot touch the innocent, even in war. No one can give fatwa (a legal pronouncement in Islam, issued by a religious law specialist, on a specific issue) on this subject. No one can be a suicide bomber. No one can rush into crowds with bombs tied to their body. Regardless of the religion of these crowds, it is not religiously permissible. Even in the event of war—in which balances are not easy to keep—this is not permitted. We are told, “Do not touch children, or people who worship at churches.” It is not only once that this was said, but over and over again. What Our Master [the Prophet Muhammad] said, Abu Bakr said, and what Abu Bakr said, Umar said, and what he said, in later times, Salahaddin Ayyubi, Alparslan, Kilicarslan also said. Mehmet the Conqueror said the same. Thus Constantinople, which had been a disorderly place to live, became Istanbul, where neither Greek did anything bad to Armenian, nor Armenian did anything bad to Greek. Muslims too did not do anything to them. After the conquest of Istanbul, there was a huge portrait of the Mehmet the Conqueror in the Patriarchate. It was made at that time. Sultan Mehmet summoned the Patriarch then and gave him the key to the city. They [the Patriarchate] remember him with respect. Now, Islam has always been respectful of other ways of thinking, but these days as in everything else, the understanding of Islam is just as faulty as everything else.

Let me say with sadness that in the Muslim World, some religious teachers and immature Muslims have no other weapon. Islam is a true religion, and it must be lived right. It is definitely not right either to use an invalid means on the way. As the aim is required to be right, all the means to reach that aim should be right as well. From this angle, one cannot go to heaven by killing another. A Muslim cannot say, “I will kill a man and then go to heaven.” One cannot win Allah’s good pleasure by killing men. One of the most important goals of a Muslim is to please God, and the other is to make the Almighty name of Allah known to the universe.

*Is this how their logic works: War used to be fought on the fronts, but now everywhere is a battleground? So, do they view this as a war as well? Do they think that a gate will be opened for them to go to heaven from this angle?*

The rules of Islam are clear. Individuals cannot declare war. Neither a group nor an organization can declare a war. War is declared by the state. You cannot declare a war without a president or an army saying that it is war. Otherwise, everyone goes to war on subjective grounds. One forms a war front by gathering a few looters around him. Another leads another group. Think about Turkey. There are strong-minded people. A war front could be formed just because of their differences. Someone could say, "I declare war against such and such a group." It could be said of a person tolerant of Christianity, "He helps Christianity and weakens Islam. A war should be declared against him and he must be killed"; then a war is declared. If the state does not declare a war, one cannot wage war. It is just not so easy. If anyone were to issue this type of declaration, even if it were a scholar I otherwise liked a lot, it would not be a just war because it is against the spirit of Islam. The rules of peace and war in Islam are determined.

*If it is against the spirit of Islam, then why is the Islamic world like this?*

In my opinion, there is really no such world as the Islamic world. There are places where Muslims live. They are many in some places and few in others. That is Islamic culture. There are Muslims who have restructured Islam in accordance with their thoughts. I don't just mean radicalism or extremist Muslims here. What people believe, they must believe truly. What they believe they must put into practice truly; Islam must be conserved. It cannot be said that such societies exist with this concept and philosophy in the regions that we call "the Islamic world." If we say otherwise, then we slander Islam. If we say Islam does not exist, then we slander humans.

I do not see Muslims as contributing much to the world's equilibrium. I do not see that thinking in our administrators. Despite an obvious measure of enlightenment nowadays, the Islamic world is very ignorant. You can observe this on Hajj. Insofar as you are knowledgeable, you can see this in their conferences and panels. If you are well informed, you can see this in television broadcasts of their parliaments. The question is a serious lack of quality. They cannot solve the problems of the world. Perhaps, it may be achieved in the future.

*You mean then, that the term "Islamic world" should not be used?*

No such world exists. There is individual Islam. There are some Muslims in different places around the world— piece by piece, scattered. I personally do not see Muslims thriving. If Muslims do not exist in it who can be in relationship with others and constitute a union, solve common prob-



lems, interpret the universe, read it really well, consider the universe carefully through the Qur'an, read the future very well, generate projects for the future, determine their place in it in the future, then I do not call it the Islamic World. Since there is no such Islamic World, everyone does whatever they want. It can no longer be said that there is an Islamic consciousness that has been reached by mutual agreement, that has been proven by the consensus of scholars, that is tied to a reliable Qur'anic viewpoint and that has been tested over and over again. What can be said is only that an Islamic culture is dominant.

*It appears that the al-Qaeda network has a cell in Turkey. You explained about the religious side of the matter. Does it have different meanings as well?*

One of the people in the world I hate the most is [Osama] Bin Laden, because he spoiled the bright appearance of Islam. He created a dirty image. Even if we try to fix that terrible damage with all our best, it would take years.

We will talk of it everywhere on different platforms. We will write books about it. We will say, "This is not Islam." Bin Laden replaced Islamic logic with his feelings and desires. He is a monster, as are the men around him. If there is any one similar to them, they too are nothing more than monsters.

We condemn their mentality. However, preventing it is not possible in a world that only appears to be Islamic—and I stated earlier that I do not accept that there is an Islamic world. There are only countries in which Muslims live, Muslims solving their problems.

It becomes a question of whether they will think differently when they elect their leaders, whether they will make reforms. To bring up the next generations well, Muslims must solve their problems. Not only in the terror issue, which is a great tribulation from God, but also drugs and cigarettes, which are another of God's tribulations. Discord is another calamity.

Furious disputes between people and the inability to defeat poverty are yet another trial. To be led by those who despise us, bent under their leadership, to be crushed are others.

As [Mehmet] Akif [Ersoy] said: slavery, various troubles, addiction, accepting things out of habit and derision are commonplace. All of these are God's anathemas placed primarily on our nation. Overcoming them, in my opinion, depends on being a just human being and that is to be a servant of Allah. These pro-terror people grew up before our eyes in Muslim families. We thought they were Muslims. What kind of process have they undergone that they turned out to be terrorists? Aren't we all guilty? Our guilt is the guilt of a nation. It is the guilt of education. A real Muslim who has understood Islam in every aspect cannot be a terrorist. It is hard for people to

stay Muslim if they become involved in terror. Religion does not approve of killing a man to reach a goal.

But of course, what kind of efforts did we make for them to be raised in an excellent way? With what kind of limits did we raise them? With what kind of responsibility did we raise them that we now expect them not to engage in terror?

We have not brought forth in them the required sensitivity of being bound to Islamic values, of fearing God, of having a promise of an afterlife or just of the fact that they would be opposing the rules of the religion, so these have not stopped them from engaging in terror. Even now, there are perhaps some methods to deal with this matter. We are trying to block up the routes to terror.

We say it should not be like this. That is, this cannot just be limited to one lesson a week on the school curriculum called “culture and morality.” [The inclination towards a life of terror] must be eradicated in institutions of education. We say that every requirement of life should be given to one at school. Information on health should also be given. Physicians should teach that class, I say. Classes related to life and home life must be taught there.

People should be instructed in how to get along with their future spouses, and how to raise their children. But the issues do not stop here. Both Turkey and other countries that have a large Muslim population suffer from drug abuse, gambling, and corruption. There is almost no one left in Turkey whose name has not been involved in some type of scandal. There are some goals that were supposed to be reached that have been reached. Yet, there are many objectives that still cannot be reached. You cannot question anyone concerning this. You cannot call the people in charge to account. They are protected, sheltered, and thus they have been left to themselves.

All these are people who grew up among us. All of them are our children. How come some were raised as tough guys? How come some were raised as thugs? How come some rebelled against human values? How come they came to their own nation and blew themselves up as a bomb?

All these people were raised among us. That is, there was something wrong with their education. That is, the system has some deficiencies, some points to be questioned. These need to be removed. This means raising a human was not the first priority. Meanwhile, some generations were lost, destroyed, wasted.

The unsatisfied youth became the ones with no spirituality. Some gave them a couple of liras or made them robots. They drugged them. Nowadays, this has been talked about. It is in the magazines. They were deliber-

ately incapacitated so they were unable to use their minds. They were used as murderers with the excuses of ideals or goals and made to kill. They wanted to achieve certain goals by using them.

A friend of ours went to Israel. He stayed in Palestine for a while. He told me a very interesting thing. He is a very bright person, doing his doctorate there. "I stayed in Israel five or six months. They made an offer to me to be involved in an executive committee," he said.

*Who made the offer?*

"I was offered it by Israelis," he said. "A Palestinian prevented me. I realized that the Palestinian was a weapons merchant. He has some business in it. He wishes the business to go on. Perhaps, some other very close ones think the same." So, some want to make a living by keeping these kinds of incidents fresh.

These people are turned into robots. It could be said that the same thing occurs in Istanbul in my humble opinion. Perpetrators of terrorist attacks are not sane, believing people who come straight out of the mosque to do that work. Their religious knowledge is weak. They must have a master or a teacher, and maybe he says, "so and so should be killed." It is not a small number of people that have been killed in Turkey. That group killed this person; the other killed that person. On March 12, everyone was in a bloody fight. The military came and intervened. On September 12, once again people were out for each other's blood. Everyone was killing one another.

They were trying to get somewhere by killing one another. All were terrorists. That side was terrorists; this side was terrorists. But they were labeling it. One was saying, "I am doing this in the name of Islam." The other was saying, "I do it for my land and people." A third was saying, "I am fighting against capitalism and exploitation." Those were all just words, expressions. The Koran calls them "sayings." They were things of no value. But people just kept on killing. Everyone was killing in the name of an ideal.

In the name of those "ideals" many were killed. Someone at the top would say, "Remove this one," and it was done. That was an expression as well, "remove it". Perhaps, there were such directives about you and me; however, fate did not allow it. There was a note that came to my attention that clearly said of me, "He should be removed as well." Those things were all terror. Not only Muslims, but everyone was doing the same. Since everyone did it, one after another, it turned into a "doable" thing. It was made into habit. Everyone began to get used to it. Killing a person is an evil action.

One of my dearest friends once broke the spine of a snake. My friend was a theology graduate and a preacher. I did not talk to him for a month. I said, "That snake had the right to live in nature. What right did you have to break its spine?" Now the situation is such that in some place if ten people are killed or twenty and if the numbers were not as high as expected, we say, "That is good; not many died." This barbarity was becoming accepted by the people. "We were saved by the death of twenty to thirty," we say. They have reduced society to this state.

The thing that can prevent this is education, and the rules and regulations which the state can issue. Now, some sectors of society are showing reactions, are willing to intervene in tiny little things. Some circles exaggerate tiny little issues and make large ones seem small; perhaps it's a way of protecting their own interests from interference.

There is a remedy for this. The remedy is to teach the truth. It should be explained that Muslims cannot be terrorists. Why should it be explained? If you did something evil, even if it is tiny as an atom, you will pay for that. Yes, killing a man is very big. The Qur'an says that killing one is the same as killing all. Ibn Abbas says a killer of a human being will stay in hell for eternity. This judgment is also true for unbelievers. This means that believers are subject to the same rule as unbelievers in this matter. That is, a murderer is equivalent to an atheist and one who does not accept Allah and The Prophet. Now, if this is a fundamental of the religion, then it should be taught through education. They do not teach it.

*Since September 11, we see that Muslims tend to be more prone to conspiracy theories. Does it always have to be the "others" who are guilty? Does it always have to be that they want us to be the bad ones? Why is there no culture of self-criticism in the Islamic sector of society?*

Now, it is necessary to correct any statement that "Islam does not have a culture of self-criticism." There is self-criticism in Islam. Everything is questioned by Muslims, except for holy messages (revelation).

I do not think such self-criticism exists in others. For example, Caliph Umar represents Islam. When he was delivering a sermon from the pulpit of the mosque, a woman objected, saying, "What you said is wrong. This is what should have been said." [The Caliph accepted her correction immediately.]

On another occasion, an army officer was complaining about the way he had been treated. An unknown foot soldier leaned on his sword and said, "Sir, what you are doing is rebellious. Be careful or we may do the same to you."

Controversies and altercations on various topics have flown back and forth between scholars and theologians and have been so widespread that they fill volumes. In Islam everyone criticized each other. These critiques were met with tolerance. For example, Ghazali wrote his *tahafut* (a critique of the incoherence of philosophers). Then, someone else wrote a very rough response to it. And there was an Islamic state at that time. They could have punished the writer for that response. But they said nothing. That man lived. There are many different kinds of thought.

### **Interview with Zeki Sarıtoprak**

The Muslim World, Special Issue, July 2005, Vol. 95 Issue 3 Page 325–471

*In our modern day, the relationship between Islam and terrorism is greatly debated. Can terrorism be considered a way of struggle for freedom? What is the Islamic alternative to terrorism and struggle?*

As I said in an interview with Nuriye Akman for Zaman, today, the best we can say is that Islam is not known at all. Muslims should say, “In true Islam, terror does not exist.” No person should kill another human being. No one can touch an innocent person, even in time of war. No one can give a fatwa (a legal pronouncement) commending this matter. No one should be a suicide bomber. No one can rush into crowds with bombs tied to his or her body. Regardless of the religion of these crowds, this is not religiously permissible. Even in the event of war — during which it is difficult to maintain balances — this is not permitted in Islam. Islam states, “Do not touch children or people who worship in churches.” This has not only been said once, but has been repeated over and over throughout history. What Our Master Prophet Muhammad said, what Abu Bakr said, and what Umar said is the same as what, at later dates, Salahaddin Ayyubi, Alparslan, and Kiliarslan also said. Later on, Sultan Mehmet II, the Conqueror, also said the same. Thus, the city of Constantinople, in which a disorderly hullabaloo reigned, became Istanbul. In this city the Greeks did not harm the Armenians, nor did the Armenians harm the Greeks. Nor did the Muslims harm any other people. A short time after the conquest of Constantinople, the people of the city voluntarily hung a huge portrait of the Conqueror on the wall in the place of that of the Patriarch. It is amazing that such behaviour was displayed at that time. Then, history relates that the Sultan summoned the Patriarch and gave him the key to the city. Even today, Islam is not understood properly. Islam has always respected different ideas and this must be understood for it to be appreciated properly.

I regret to say that in the countries Muslims live, some religious leaders and immature Muslims have no other weapon on hand than their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam; they use this to engage people in

struggles that serve their own purposes. In fact, Islam is a true faith, and it should be lived truly. On the way to attaining faith one can never use untrue methods. In Islam, just as a goal must be legitimate, so must be all the means employed to reach that goal. From this perspective, one cannot achieve Heaven by murdering another person. A Muslim cannot say, "I will kill a person and then go to Heaven." God's approval cannot be won by killing people. One of the most important goals for a Muslim is to win the pleasure of God; another is making the name of Almighty God known to the universe.

Dissatisfied youth has lost its spirituality. Some people take advantage of such people, giving them a couple of dollars, or turning them into robots. They have drugged them. This has become a topic on the agenda these days that can be read about in the popular press. These young people were abused to an extent that they could be manipulated. They have been used as murderers on the pretext of some crazy ideals or goals and they have been made to kill people. Some evil-minded people have wanted to achieve certain goals by exploiting these young people. Yes, killing a human is a truly awful thing. The Qur'an says that killing one person is the same as killing all people. Ibn Abbas said that a murderer will stay in Hell for eternity. This is the same punishment that is assigned to deniers of God. This means that a murderer is subjected to the same punishment as a disbeliever. If this is a fundamental principle of religion, then it should be taught in education.

An individual who accepts Islam from the heart will never knowingly take part in terrorism. The acts of terrorism associated with Islam may have been perpetrated by some Muslims who had not internalized the depth of Islam. Terrorism, as the name itself indicates, is a complicated issue. Analysing terrorism is not something that is easy to do. Despite this, because it is so ugly in its nature and because many Muslims are charged with it, terrorism must be addressed with a great deal of consideration. Administrators and intelligence agents have to try to find the originators and the motivating factors of terrorist activities. This will help develop international strategies to stop it.

Otherwise, as a result of false analysis and some possible intelligence services, the issue may be so complicated that some civilizations, nations and civic organizations will be always under threat. After September 11th, the issue has developed in this direction. The fear of terrorism has become paranoia in our society. At an increasing tempo, general feelings and fears of society were exploited. Terrorist organizations were used by some as instruments of terror to reach their goals through terrorist activities against innocent society. To my understanding, true Muslims will never involve themselves in such vulgar and cheap activities, even if they are behind in science and technology. The real factors behind terrorism are worldly advantages and self-interests. These factors have been the main reasons behind "the great games" on earth. While the main reasons are ignored, all fingers pointed to Islam.

On the other hand, there are many conflicting interests in the Islamic regions, as well as many competing and clashing groups. Problems such as anti-democratic practices and human rights violations have resulted in the foundation of various disaffected and disenfranchised groups. Being ignorant and inexperienced, many of these groups can easily be manipulated and used by some. Some, manipulating these groups, have worked to reach their goals step by step. Moreover, there are multi-national covert or open organizations that have based all of their efforts on destruction and the creation of fear in society. To extend the borders of their activities, they agitate the unhappy segments of society by stirring up trouble and fomenting violence. Even though, through painstaking and intelligent effort, the superficial reasons for terrorism may be eliminated, without the above-mentioned considerations, it would be impossible to end terrorism once and for all. This cursed behaviour will emerge under another name.

## **OP-ED ARTICLES**



## **Violence is not in the tradition of the Prophet**

*Financial Times, September 27, 2012*

Muslims pray each day: "O Lord! Keep us on the straight path." It is a prayer to help us move away from the extremes and maintain balance in our lives. We must neither be hostage to our reactionary instincts, nor must we remain completely silent in the face of the systematic defamation of our values and beliefs. This balance has been upset by the violent response to the insults targeting the legacy of the beloved Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). The violent response was wrong and strayed from the straight path.

Muslims should not be indifferent with respect to the attacks on the Prophet (pbuh). On the contrary, they must show the utmost sensitivity and caution. Those insulting Islam might be seeking to depict a negative image of Muslims, and hence justify discrimination, isolation, persecution or deportation. The deliberate instigation and creation of turmoil in the Muslim world is not new. Our sacred values were attacked in the past through cartoons, today it is done through a movie and cartoons in a French magazine, and tomorrow other means may be used. Muslims must not be beguiled or enticed but instead must speak out to prevent those who are more easily provoked from resorting to violence.

When any negative comment is made about the Prophet, however slight it may be, a Muslim should feel deep sorrow. Yet expressing that sorrow is a different matter. Irresponsible actions by individuals damage the image of Islam and destroy the very tradition they are claiming to defend.

Since the rights of every Muslim, as well as God, the Qur'an and the Prophet are at stake in such a circumstance, one cannot act recklessly. One should scrutinise the possible ramifications of each and every action, and seek the wisdom of the collective judgment.

The question that we should ask ourselves as Muslims is whether we have introduced Islam and its Prophet properly to the world. Have we followed his example in such a way as to instil admiration? We must do so, not with words, but with our actions.

If suicide bombers are the first things that come to people's minds, how could they have a positive opinion of Islam? How is killing innocent civilians indiscriminately different from the barbarity suffered by Muslims in history? What is the rationale behind attacking an American consulate in Libya, killing an ambassador and consulate officers, who have nothing to do with this wretched movie? If it is Muslims who are carrying out these

attacks, it means that they are entirely unaware of what Islam is all about and are committing the biggest crime in the name of Islam.

A Muslim must always be straightforward and consistent in his actions and words. He should respect the sacred values of Christians, Jews, Buddhists and others as he expects his own religion and values to be respected. In reacting, a Muslim should not sway from the proper middle path. Many correct forms of response can be found by appealing to the collective conscience of society and to the international community.

Hate speech designed to incite violence is an abuse of the freedom of expression. It violates the rights, dignity and freedoms of others while pushing humanity towards conflict in an age of horrifying weapons. Instead of falling victim to the instigation of others, we should appeal to the relevant international institutions, such as the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation or the UN, to intervene, expose and condemn instances of hate speech. We can do whatever it takes within the law to prevent any disrespect to all revered religious figure, not only to the Prophet Mohammed.

The attacks on the Prophet we have repeatedly experienced are to be condemned, but the correct response is not violence. Instead, we must pursue a relentless campaign to promote respect for the sacred values of all religions.

### **Muslims Must Combat the Extremist Cancer**

*The Wall Street Journal, August 27, 2015*

As the group that calls itself Islamic State, known as ISIS, continues to produce carnage in the Middle East, Muslims must confront the totalitarian ideology that animates it and other terrorist groups. Every terrorist act carried out in the name of Islam profoundly affects all Muslims, alienating them from fellow citizens and deepening the misperceptions about their faith's ethos.

It isn't fair to blame Islam for the atrocities of violent radicals. But when terrorists claim the Muslim mantle, then they bear this identity, if only nominally. Thus members of the faith must do whatever possible to prevent this cancer from metastasizing in our communities. If we don't, we'll be partly responsible for the smeared image of our faith.

First, we must denounce violence and not fall prey to victimhood. Having suffered oppression is no excuse for causing it or for failing to condemn terrorism. That the terrorists are committing grave sins in the name of Islam is not merely my opinion; it is the inevitable conclusion of an honest reading of primary sources: the Qur'an and the accounts of the life of Prophet

Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. The core principles of these sources—relayed over the centuries by scholars who devoted themselves to studying the Prophet’s sayings and practices, and to the “author’s intent” in the Holy Book—dispels any claims terrorists make of religious justification.

Second, it is important to promote a holistic understanding of Islam, as the flexibility to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of its adherents can sometimes be abused. Islam’s core ethics, however, are not left to interpretation. One such principle is that taking the life of a single innocent is a crime against all humanity (al-Maedah 5:32). Even in an act of defence in war, violence against any non-combatants, especially women, children and clergy, is specifically prohibited by the Prophet’s teachings.

We must demonstrate these values by showing solidarity with people who seek peace around the world. Given the nature of human psychology and the dynamics of the news, it’s obvious that mainstream voices are less likely to capture headlines than extremist ones. But instead of blaming the media, we should find innovative ways to ensure our voices are heard.

Third, Muslims must publicly promote human rights—dignity, life and liberty. These are the most basic of Islamic values and no individual, nor any political or religious leader, has the authority to snatch them away. Living the essence of our faith means respecting diversity—cultural, social, religious and political. God identifies learning from one another as the primary goal of diversity (al-Hujurat 49:13). Respecting each human being as a creation of God (al-Isra 17:70) is respecting God.

Fourth, Muslims must provide educational opportunities to every member of their communities, where the study of sciences, humanities and arts is embedded in a culture of respect for every living being. Governments in the Muslim world must design school curricula that nurture democratic values. Civil society has a role in promoting respect and acceptance. This is the reason participants of the Hizmet movement have set up more than 1,000 schools, tutoring centres and dialogue institutions in more than 150 countries.

Fifth, providing religious education to Muslims is critical to depriving extremists of a tool that they use to spread their twisted ideologies. When religious freedom is denied, as it has been for decades in parts of the Muslim world, faith grows in the shadows, leaving it to be interpreted by unqualified and radical figures.

Finally, it is imperative that Muslims support equal rights for women and men. Women should be given opportunity and be free from social pressures that deny their equality. Muslims have a great example in the blessed Prophet’s wife Aisha, may God be pleased with her, a highly educated scholar, teacher and prominent community leader of her time.

Terrorism is a multifaceted problem, so the solutions should address the political, economic, social and religious layers. Approaches that reduce the problem to religion do a disservice to at-risk youth and the world at large. The international community would do well to realize that Muslims are the primary victims of terrorism—both literally and symbolically—and they can help marginalize terrorists and prevent recruitment. That's why governments should avoid statements and actions that result in the alienation of Muslims.

Violent extremism has no religion; there will always be people who manipulate faith texts. Just as Christians do not endorse Qur'an burnings or the actions of the Ku Klux Klan, and Buddhists do not endorse atrocities against Rohingya Muslims, mainstream Muslims do not endorse violence.

Muslims have historically added much to the flourishing of human civilization. Our greatest contributions were made in eras when the faith cherished mutual respect, freedom and justice. It may be immensely difficult to restore the blotted image of Islam, but Muslims can be beacons of peace and tranquillity in their societies.

### **Muslims, we have to critically review our understanding of Islam**

*Le Monde, Dec. 17, 2015*

Words fall short to truly express my deep sadness and revolt in the face of the carnage perpetrated by terrorist groups such as the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

I share profound frustration with a billion-and-a-half Muslims around the world at the fact that such groups commit terrorism while dressing up their perverted ideologies as religion. We Muslims have a special responsibility to not only join hands with fellow human beings to save our world from the scourge of terrorism and violent extremism, but also to help repair the tarnished image of our faith.

It is easy to proclaim a certain identity in the abstract with words and symbols. The sincerity of such claims, however, can only be measured by comparing our actions with the core values of our self-proclaimed identities. The true test of belief is not slogans or dressing up in a certain way; the true test of our beliefs is in living up to core principles shared by all major world faiths such as upholding the sanctity of life and respecting the dignity of all humans.

We must categorically condemn the ideology propagated by terrorists and instead promote a pluralistic mind-set with clarity and confidence. After all, before our ethnic, national or religious identity comes our common humanity, which suffers a setback each time a barbaric act is committed. French citizens who lost their lives in Paris, Shiite Muslim Lebanese citizens who lost their lives in Beirut a day earlier and scores of Sunni Muslims in Iraq who lost their lives at the hands of the same terrorists are first and foremost human beings. Our civilization will not progress until we treat the suffering of humans regardless of their religious or ethnic identity as equally tragic in our empathy and respond with the same determination.

Muslims must also reject and avoid conspiracy theories, which have so far only helped us avoid facing our social problems. Instead, we must tackle the real questions: Do our communities provide recruitment grounds for groups with totalitarian mind-sets due to unrecognized authoritarianism within ourselves, domestic physical abuse, neglect of youth and lack of balanced education? Did our failure to establish basic human rights and freedoms, supremacy of the rule of law and pluralist mind-sets in our communities lead those who are struggling to seek alternative paths?

The recent tragedy in Paris is yet another reminder for both theologians and ordinary Muslims to strongly reject and condemn barbaric acts perpetrated in the name of our religion. However, at this juncture, rejection and condemnation are not enough; terrorist recruitment within Muslim communities must be fought and countered by an effective collaboration of state authorities, religious leaders and civil society actors. We must organize community-wide efforts to address all factors that aid terrorist recruitment.

We need to work with our community to set up the necessary framework for identifying at-risk youth, preventing them from seeking self-destructive paths, assisting families with counselling and other support services. We must promote a proactive, positive government engagement so that engaged Muslim citizens can sit at the table where counterterrorism measures are planned and share their ideas. Our youth should be taught ways of expressing support and dissent within democratic means. Incorporating democratic values into school curricula early on is crucial for inculcating a culture of democracy in young minds.

In the aftermath of such tragedies, historically strong reactions have surfaced. Anti-Muslim and anti-religious sentiment as well as security-driven treatment of Muslim citizens by governments would be counter-productive. The Muslim citizens of Europe want to live in peace and tranquillity. Despite the negative climate, they should strive to engage more with their local and national governments to help work toward more inclusive policies that better integrate their community into the larger society.

It is also important for us Muslims to critically review our understanding and practice of Islam in light of the conditions and requirements of our age and the clarifications provided by our collective historic experiences. This does not mean a rupture from the cumulative Islamic tradition but rather, an intelligent questioning so we can confirm the true teachings of the Quran and the Prophetic tradition that our Muslim predecessors attempted to reveal.

We must proactively marginalize decontextualized reading of our religious sources that have been employed in the service of perverted ideologies. Muslim thinkers and intellectuals should encourage a holistic approach and reconsider jurisprudential verdicts of the Middle Ages that were issued under perpetual conflict where religious affiliation often coincided with political affiliation. Having core beliefs should be distinguished from dogmatism. It is possible, indeed absolutely necessary, to revive the spirit of freedom of thought that gave birth to a renaissance of Islam while staying true to the ethos of the religion. Only in such an atmosphere can Muslims effectively combat incivility and violent extremism.

In the aftermath of the recent events I am witnessing, with chagrin, the revival of the thesis of the clash of civilizations. I do not know whether those who first put out such a hypothesis did so out of vision or desire. What is certain is that today, the revival of this rhetoric simply serves the recruitment efforts of the terrorist networks. I want to state clearly that what we are witnessing is not a clash of civilizations but rather the clash of humanity with barbarity in our common civilization.

Our responsibility as Muslim citizens is to be part of the solution despite our grievances. If we want to defend the life and civil liberties of Muslims around the world and the peace and tranquillity of every human regardless of their faith, we must act now to tackle the violent extremism problem in all its dimensions: political, economic, social and religious. By setting virtuous examples through our lives, by discrediting and marginalizing the extremist interpretations of religious sources, by staying vigilant toward their impact on our youth, and by incorporating democratic values early in education, we can counter violence and terrorism as well as totalitarian ideologies that lead to them.









