

## Violence and Religious Texts: Introduction to the Qur'an\* (MK 1/16/16)

(\*Unless otherwise noted, text is from www.muslim.com)

*“Our view of Islam – or indeed of any faith – can be distorted in two opposite ways: we can use an interpretive grid or suspicion, so that we are all too willing to believe the worst of Islam. Or we can distort Islam by using a grid of obligatory respect, being determined to think the best, whatever the evidence. Both attitudes are widely held in the present time, and each brings its own risks.” – Mark Durie*

### I.) Setting

Two extreme views: Islam as a religion of peace or a religion of terrorism.

Both views are represented in America today.

[Tim Tennant]

→ Only a Muslim can identify something as “True Islam.”

But we can (and should) ask questions about the historic practice of Islam and the connection between its religion text(s).

I suggest that these questions can lead to a rational approach:

Questions:

- What role does religion play in shaping human behavior?
- (Follow up) What role does religion play in shaping violent behavior?
- (Timely question) What role does Islam play in shaping violence and terrorism?

Observations:

- Many factors shape a person. These include their social, political, economic and religious contexts.
- We have some knowledge – but not full knowledge – of the things that shape their behavior. (The same is true for our own behavior.)
- Muslims throughout the world are shaped by a variety of factors and contexts.
- Muslims throughout the world have a range of beliefs about religious violence.
- Terrorists groups such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS or I.S.) are likely shaped by a variety of factors. However, they believe that their religious belief is their primary motivation and this needs to be taken seriously. (Appendix D)
- Historically Islam regards their sacred text, the Qur'an, as their primary source of religious truth.
- Therefore it can be profitable to look at the Qur'an and explore its relationship to the religious violence.

*Our goal for this (brief) presentation is to give a cursory acquaintance with Islam and in particular with the Qur'an. It is my hope that listeners would feel better equipped to investigate the religious claims of the Qur'an and in particular to more knowledgeably consider the connection between the Qur'an and religious violence.*

## II.) Background on Islam

### Key Dates

- 570 – birth of Muhammad
- 610 – first revelation
- 622 – Hegira (flight from Mecca to Medina)
- 630 – Return to Mecca
- 632 – Death of Muhammad

### Historic Islamic Practice

Islam means – “to submit” (to God)

#### 5 pillars

- 1.) Verbal confession that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet.
- 2.) Prayer (5x a day) – ritualized
- 3.) Give alms to the poor/ money to support Islam
- 4.) Fasting (particularly during Ramadan)
- 5.) Pilgrimage to Mecca

Jihad – “to struggle” for the kingdom of God. Can have a militaristic connotation.

Sunni and Shia – two main branches (historic conflict)

Sunni – most common = 85% of all Muslims

Shia – mostly in Iran and southern Iraq (Ba’ath party was Sunni though)

Shia’s have great reverence for Ali and Fatima

Argument has to do with succession of spiritual authority after Muhammad

### Qur’an

#### Details

Surah – “step” towards God

Qur’an contains 114 Surahs. Except for the first, there are 114.

Ayah – “sign” towards God (like a verse)

Relationship between the words “God” and “Allah”

#### Muslim beliefs regarding its origin

All of the Qur’an is believed to have been given through the Muhammad by “dictation.”

Muslims believe that the Qur’an cannot be translated, and that there are no errors of transmission.

#### Comparison to the Bible

Muhammad was exposed to biblical ideas through Jews, heretics and Christian traders.

Simplicity of the doctrine

(Compare to: Trinity, Doctrine of Christ, sovereignty/free will, grace/works and church/state)

Historic narratives differ (See Appendix A)

## Key Christian Doctrines Rejected

### - Surah 19:22-33

19:22	<i>Then she conceived him; and withdrew with him to a remote place.</i>
19:23	<i>And the throes of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree. She said: Oh, would that I had died before this, and had been a thing quite forgotten!</i>
19:24	<i>So a voice came to her from beneath her: Grieve not, surely thy Lord has provided a stream beneath thee.</i>
19:25	<i>And shake towards thee the trunk of the palm-tree, it will drop on thee fresh ripe dates.</i>
19:26	<i>So eat and drink and cool the eye. Then if thou seest any mortal, say: Surely I have vowed a fast to the Beneficent, so I will not speak to any man today.</i>
19:27	<i>Then she came to her people with him, carrying him. They said: O Mary, thou hast indeed brought a strange thing!</i>
19:28	<i>O sister of Aaron, thy father was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother an unchaste woman!</i>
19:29	<i>But she pointed to him. They said: How should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle?</i>
19:30	<i>He said: I am indeed a servant of Allah. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet:</i>
19:31	<i>And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and poor-rate so long as I live:</i>
19:32	<i>And to be kind to my mother; and He has not made me insolent, unblest.</i>
19:33	<i>And peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised to life.</i>
19:34	<i>Such is Jesus son of Mary — a statement of truth about which they dispute.</i>
19:35	<i><u>It beseems not Allah that He should take to Himself ("beget") a son.</u> Glory be to Him! When He decrees a matter He only says to it, Be, and it is.</i>

Surah 4:157 - *And for their saying: We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah, and they killed him not, nor did they cause his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them as such. And certainly those who differ therein are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for certain:*

Surah 5:17 - *O People of the Book, exceed not the limits in your religion nor speak anything about Allah, but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only a messenger of Allah and His word which He communicated to Mary and a mercy from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you. Allah is only one God. Far be it from His glory to have a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And sufficient is Allah as having charge of affairs*

Hadith – accounts of the actions and sayings of Muhammad

Sharia Law is comprised of both the Qur'an and the Hadith.

The hadith is necessary for the formation of Islamic practice.

## II.) Relevant Ideas in the Qur'an

### General Emphasis

There is great emphasis on themes of:

- God as creator and judge (but not "father")
- Rejection of idolatry
- Unity of Arab peoples in opposition to idolaters
- Striving for purity ("jihad")

### Surah 1

	<i>In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.</i>
1:1	<i>Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,</i>
1:2	<i>The Beneficent, the Merciful,</i>
1:3	<i>Master of the day of Requital.</i>
1:4	<i>Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.</i>
1:5	<i>Guide us on the right path,</i>
1:6	<i>The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours,</i>
1:7	<i>Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.</i>

### Emphasis on Fighting (not necessarily unjust)

Surah 2:16 - *Fighting is enjoined on you, though it is disliked by you; and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you; and Allah knows while you know not.*

Surah 3:142 - *Do you think that you will enter the Garden while Allah has not yet known those from among you who strive hard (nor) known the steadfast? (A.Y. Ali = "fought hard")*

Surah 57:10 - *And what reason have you that you spend not in Allah's way? And Allah's is the inheritance of the heavens and the earth. Those of you who spent before the Victory and fought are not on a level (with others). They are greater in rank than those who spent and fought afterwards. And Allah has promised good to all. And Allah is Aware of what you do.*

Surah 61:4 *Surely Allah loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid wall.*

### Connection between religion and the political state

Islam emphasizes the unity of life and does not conceptualize a separation of religion from political life.

### Interactions with non-believers

Da'wah (the call)

Surah 16:125 *Call to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner. Surely thy Lord knows best him who strays from His path, and He knows best those who go aright*

Also:

Surah 2:256 *There is no compulsion in religion — the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error.*

#### Warfare with Non-believers

Surah 8:38-39 - *Say to those who disbelieve, if they desist, that which is past will be forgiven them; and if they return, then the example of those of old has already gone. And fight with them until there is no more persecution, and all religions are for Allah. But if they desist, then surely Allah is Seer of what they do.*

Surah 9:29 - *Fight those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor follow the Religion of Truth, out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgement of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.*

Surah 47:4\* - *So when you meet in battle those who disbelieve, smite the necks; then, when you have overcome them, make (them) prisoners, and afterwards (set them free) as a favour or for ransom till the war lay down its burdens. That (shall be so). And if Allah please, He would certainly exact retribution from them, but that He may try some of you by means of others. And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He will never allow their deeds to perish.*

\*A.Y. Ali Translation of Surah 47:4 - *Therefore, when you meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks, at length, when you have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) generosity or ransom: until the war lays down its burdens. Thus (are you commanded): but if it had been Allah's Will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others...*

\*Muhammad Asad Translation of Surah 47:4 – *Now when you meet [in war] those who are bent on denying the truth, smite their necks until you overcome them fully, and then tighten their bonds; but thereafter [set them free] either by an act of grace or against ransom, so that the burden of war may be lifted...*

#### How to reconcile?

Warfare is later and abrogates the earlier peaceful passages.

(or) They represent responses to different situations.

(or)... other options...

## Interactions with apostates

Surah 2:217 - ... And they will not cease fighting you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can. And whoever of you turns back from his religion, then he dies while an unbeliever — these it is whose works go for nothing in this world and the Hereafter. And they are the companions of the Fire: therein they will abide.

Surah 4:89\* - *They long that you should disbelieve as they have disbelieved so that you might be on the same level; so take not from among them friends until they flee (their homes) in Allah's way. Then if they turn back (to hostility), seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no friend nor helper from among them,*

\*A. Y. Ali Translation of Surah 4:89 – *They but wish that you should reject Faith, as they do, and thus be on the same footing (as they); but do not take friends from their ranks until they flee in the way of Allah (from what is forbidden). But if they turn renegades seize them and slay them wherever you find them...*

- According to the Hadith (Sanii al-Bukhari 9.84.57) Muhammad said, “*Whoever changed his Islamic religion then kill him.*”  
[Note: It is harder to access the Hadith.]

Here it is key to evaluate actual Muslim practice.

**Violence towards a women** (See also Appendix E)  
(4:34) - Discipline for a wife (See Appendix C)

## III.) Practical observations

### Diversity of Muslim Views and the Great Commission

Many Muslims enjoy the benefits of western society.

Many Muslims do not engage their faith very actively.

Muslims are the greatest number of victims of terror attacks worldwide (from other Muslims).

Displaced Muslims are open to the gospel witness in new ways.

Some believe we are seeing a door open into Muslim evangelization.

### There is an impulse towards Islamic influence on Government (Sharia Law)

*“Although it does include personal faith and devotion with its scope, for the Sharia to be followed consistently and comprehensively – and this is most important – it requires an Islamized society. This has been the general consensus of scholars for centuries, and it remains a view widely held by most, if not all, Muslims today. Thus there are very few majority Muslim nations that have not embedded Sharia into their national constitutions, often by a reference which names the Sharia as the source of all lawful authority.” - Durie*

(Turkey as an Exception)

Where Sharia Law has been most fully imposed (recently) it has not gone well.

### **Radicalization of Western Muslims**

## Appendix A: Joseph in Egypt (Surah 12:21-35)

- 12:21 And the Egyptian who bought him said to his wife: Make his stay honourable. Maybe he  
12:22 will be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son. And thus We established Joseph in  
the land, and that We might teach him the interpretation of sayings. And Allah has full  
control over His affair, but most people know not.  
And when he attained his maturity, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. And thus do  
We reward the doers of good.
- 12:23 And she in whose house he was, sought to seduce him, and made fast the doors and  
said: Come. He said: Allah forbid! Surely my Lord made good my abode. The  
wrongdoers never prosper.
- 12:24 And certainly she desired him, and he would have desired her, were it not that he had  
seen the manifest evidence of his Lord. Thus (it was) that We might turn away from him  
evil and indecency. Surely he was one of Our chosen servants.
- 12:25 And they raced with one another to the door, and she rent his shirt from behind, and  
they met her husband at the door. She said: What is the punishment for one who  
intends evil to thy wife, except imprisonment or a painful chastisement?
- 12:26 He said: She sought to seduce me. And a witness of her own family bore witness: If his  
shirt is rent in front, she speaks the truth and he is of the liars.
- 12:27 And if his shirt is rent behind, she tells a lie and he is of the truthful.
- 12:28 So when he saw his shirt rent behind, he said: Surely it is a device of you women. Your  
device is indeed great!
- 12:29 O Joseph, turn aside from this. And (O my wife), ask forgiveness for thy sin. Surely thou  
art one of the sinful.
- 12:30 And women in the city said: The chief's wife seeks to seduce her slave. He has indeed  
affected her deeply with (his) love. Truly we see her in manifest error.
- 12:31 So when she heard of their device, she sent for them and prepared for them a repast,  
and gave each of them a knife, and said (to Joseph): Come out to them. So when they  
saw him, they deemed him great, and cut their hands (in amazement), and said: Holy  
Allah! This is not a mortal! This is but a noble angel.
- 12:32 She said: This is he about whom you blamed me. And certainly I sought to seduce him,  
but he was firm in continence. And if he do not what I bid him, he shall certainly be  
imprisoned, and he shall certainly be of the abject.
- 12:33 He said: My Lord, the prison is dearer to me than that to which they invite me. And if  
Thou turn not away their device from me, I shall yearn towards them and be of the  
ignorant.
- 12:34 So his Lord accepted his prayer and turned away their device from him. Surely He is the  
Hearer, the Knower.
- 12:35 Then it occurred to them after they had seen the signs that they should imprison him till



a time.

## Appendix B: The Sacrifice of Ishmael

- 37:101        So We gave him the good news of a forbearing son.
- 37:102        But when he became of age to work with him, he said: O my son, I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice thee: so consider what thou seest. He said: O my father, do as thou art commanded; if Allah please, thou wilt find me patient.
- 37:103        So when they both submitted and he had thrown him down upon his forehead,
- 37:104        And We called out to him saying, O Abraham,
- 37:105        Thou hast indeed fulfilled the vision. Thus do We reward the doers of good.
- 37:106        Surely this is a manifest trial.
- 37:107        And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.
- 37:108        And We granted him among the later generations (the salutation),
- 37:109        Peace be to Abraham!
- 37:110        Thus do We reward the doers of good.
- 37:111        Surely he was one of Our believing servants.
- 37:112        And We gave him the good news of Isaac, a prophet, a righteous one.

### The Wikipedia Entry on the Sacrifice of Ishmael:

In Islam it is believed that Abraham is told to sacrifice his son Ishmael, though the Quran does not name the son, simply referring to him as Abraham's first-born. The multiple versions suggest that the dhabih was originally an oral story that had been circulating before being written as it is in the Quran and in additional commentaries.<sup>[7]:92-95</sup> Norman Calder explains, "...oral narrative is marked by instability of form and detail from version to version, and by an appropriate creative flexibility which makes of every rendering a unique work of art."<sup>[7]:92-93</sup> Each version is indeed a "unique work of art," differing from another in various ways to present certain ideas, such as the importance of Ishmael over Isaac because he was the first child.

Abraham sacrificing his son, Ishmael; Abraham cast into fire by Nimrod

The general narrative pertaining to Ishmael in Islamic literature describes the sacrifice either as a test or as part of a vow. Some versions tell of the devil trying to stop God's command from being obeyed by visiting Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham. Every time the devil says Abraham is going to sacrifice Ishmael, each person answers that if God commanded it, they should obey. Eventually, Abraham tells Ishmael about the order and Ishmael is willing to be sacrificed and encourages Abraham to listen to God. Often, Ishmael is portrayed as telling Abraham some combination of instructions to bring his shirt back to Hagar, bind him tightly, sharpen the knife, and place him face down, all so that there will be no wavering in the resolve to obey God.

As Abraham attempts to kill Ishmael, either the knife is turned over in his hand or copper appears on Ishmael to prevent the death and God tells Abraham that he has fulfilled the command. Unlike the Bible, there is no mention in the Qur'an of an animal (ram) replacing the boy, rather he is replaced with a 'great sacrifice' (Zibhin azeem).<sup>[8]</sup> Since the sacrifice of a ram cannot be greater than that of Abraham's son (and a prophet in Islam at that), this replacement seems to point to either the religious institutionalisation of sacrifice itself, or to the future self-sacrifices of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his companions (who were destined to emerge from the progeny of Ishmael) in the cause of their faith. From that day onward, every Eid al-Adha once a year Muslims around the

world slaughter an animal to commemorate Abraham's sacrifice and to remind themselves of self-abnegation in the way of Allah.<sup>[9]</sup> Later, Historiographical literature, however incorporates the Biblical narrative in which a ram is provided which is killed instead of Ishmael.<sup>[2][6]</sup>

The actions of Ishmael in this narrative have led him to become a prominent model of hospitality and obedience. This story in the Quran is unique when compared to that in the Bible because Abraham talks with his son, whichever it is to be believed to be, and the son is thus aware of the plan to become a sacrifice and approves of it. As noted above, in some versions, Ishmael makes sure in different ways that neither he nor his father hesitate in their obedience to God. In this way, Ishmael is a model of surrendering one's will to God, an essential characteristic in Islam.<sup>[10]</sup>

Though it is generally believed by Muslims that Ishmael was the son who was almost sacrificed, among scholars and historiographers of early Islam, there is much debate. There are such persuasive arguments for both, that in fact, it is estimated that 130 traditions say Isaac was the son, while 133 say Ishmael.<sup>[2]:135</sup> Such dispute over which son suggests that the story, and where and to whom it happens, is extremely important.<sup>[2]:144</sup> It is argued that the story originated from rabbinic texts and was adapted to Islam over time in order to give Mecca religious importance and connect the story with the pilgrimage, which is how Isaac in Jewish versions was changed to Ishmael.<sup>[7]:87</sup> Arguments by early Muslim scholars for Ishmael as the intended sacrifice include that Jews claim it is Isaac only because they are jealous that it was actually the ancestor of Arabs, Ishmael, and that the horns of the ram that was sacrificed instead hung in the Kaaba at one time.<sup>[6]:88-90</sup> In looking solely at the text of the Quran to determine which son was to be sacrificed, there still are various views. Tabari argues that in the Quran, it is only Isaac who is indicated by birth announcements and that the announcement at the start of the sacrifice narrative means that the story is about Isaac.<sup>[2]:135-136[6]:89</sup> The strongest case for Ishmael in the Quran is that directly after the sacrifice narrative, Abraham is told of the coming of Isaac's birth, therefore, it must be Ishmael who was about to be sacrificed if Isaac had not been born yet.<sup>[6]:88</sup>

### **Appendix C: Discipline for a Wife – Surah 4:34**

Translation by Maulana Muhammad Ali = “Men are the maintainers of women, with what Allah has made some of them to excel others and with what they spend out of their wealth. So the good women are obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded. And (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the beds and chastise them. So if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely Allah is ever Exalted, Great.” ([www.muslim.org](http://www.muslim.org))

Translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali = “...beat them (lightly)...”

Translation by Muhammad Asad = “...beat them...” (An explanatory footnote shows a great deal of consternation concerning this command and Muhammad’s reported reluctance to write it down. In the source Manar V, 74 he apparently said, “I wanted one thing, but God has willed another thing – and what God has willed must be best.”

### **Appendix D:**

**Saudis arrest sister of blogger lashed for insulting the kingdom** - *Published January 13, 2016, Associated Press.*

Human rights groups and activists say one of Saudi Arabia's most prominent human rights advocates has been arrested. Samar Badawi is the sister of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, who was lashed 50 times last year and is serving a 10-year prison sentence for insulting the kingdom's influential religious establishment. She is also the wife of

human rights lawyer Waleed Abulkhair, who is serving a 15-year prison sentence on charges related to his work, which included defending Raif Badawi. Amnesty International and the Center for Inquiry say the arrest on Tuesday of Samar Badawi is believed to be linked to her alleged role in managing a Twitter account campaigning for the release of her husband.

**10 bodies found in Burkina Faso cafe after al-Qaida attack** -*Published January 15, 2016, Associated Press*

**ISIS in Syria paid for Jakarta attack, new sign of its massive reach** - *Published January 15, 2016, Associated Press*

**Turkey: IS suspects held after Istanbul suicide bombing** – *Published January 13, 2016, BBC News*

**Pakistan has said it has arrested several militants from Jaish-e-Mohammad, the group India believes was behind the recent deadly assault on the Pathankot air base.** – *Published January 13, 2016, BBC News*

**Gunman shoots Philadelphia police officer 'in the name of Islam'** - *Published Saturday, 9 Jan 9, 2016, by Reuters*

## **Appendix E:**

### **Islamic State puts out ruling on sex with female slaves**

Published Tuesday, 29 Dec 2015, Reuters

ISIS has issued detailed rules for owners of female slaves. The rulings make it clearer on how the terrorist group is attempting to revise centuries of teachings in order to justify the rape and slavery of women in areas of Syria and Iraq. Islamic State theologians have issued an extremely detailed ruling on when "owners" of women enslaved by the extremist group can have sex with them, in an apparent bid to curb what they called violations in the treatment of captured females. The ruling or fatwa has the force of law and appears to go beyond the Islamic State's previous known utterances on slavery, a leading Islamic State scholar said. It sheds new light on how the group is trying to reinterpret centuries-old teachings to justify the rape of women in the swaths of Syria and Iraq it controls.

The fatwa was among a huge trove of documents captured by U.S. Special Operations Forces during a raid targeting a top Islamic State official in Syria in May. Reuters has reviewed the document, which has not been previously published, but couldn't independently confirm its authenticity. Among the fatwa's injunctions are bans on a father and son having sex with the same female slave; and the owner of a mother and daughter having sex with both. Joint owners of a female captive are similarly enjoined from intercourse because she is viewed as "part of a joint ownership." The United Nations and human rights groups have accused the Islamic State of the systematic abduction and rape of thousands of women and girls as young as 12, especially members of the Yazidi minority in northern Iraq. Many have been given to fighters as a reward or sold as sex slaves.

Far from trying to conceal the practice, Islamic State has boasted about it and established a department of "war spoils" to manage slavery. Reuters reported on the existence of the department on Monday. In an April report, Human Rights Watch interviewed 20 female escapees who recounted how Islamic State fighters separated young women and girls from men and boys and older women. They were

moved "in an organized and methodical fashion to various places in Iraq and Syria." They were then sold or given as gifts and repeatedly raped or subjected to sexual violence...

Professor Abdel Fattah Alawari, dean of Islamic Theology at Al-Azhar University, a 1,000-year-old Egyptian center for Islamic learning, said Islamic State "has nothing to do with Islam" and was deliberately misreading centuries-old verses and sayings that were originally designed to end, rather than encourage, slavery. "Islam preaches freedom to slaves, not slavery. Slavery was the status quo when Islam came around," he said. "Judaism, Christianity, Greek, Roman, and Persian civilizations all practiced it and took the females of their enemies as sex slaves. So Islam found this abhorrent practice and worked to gradually remove it."

In September 2014, more than 120 Islamic scholars from around the world issued an open letter to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi refuting the group's religious arguments to justify many of its actions. The scholars noted that the "reintroduction of slavery is forbidden in Islam."