

Why Islam Is In Shambles

By: Amil Imani

Islam is in shambles for a variety of reasons. A major problem with Islam is that there are as many different versions of Islam as there are Islamic pundits and there are legions of them.

Another reason why Islam is in shambles is that it is all things to all people. Even a cursory study of the Qur'an, the immutable word of God, as Muslims see it; the Hadith, the authoritative sayings of the Prophet; and, the Sunna, the Prophet's life conduct, present a body of contradictory and even outright erroneous information. This body of Islamic doctrine enables a person to pick and choose the parts he likes and ignore those he doesn't like. This feature explains why some of the good as well as the most beastly people are Muslims. Amazingly enough, both types justify themselves and their behavior by selectively citing from the Qur'an, the Hadith and the Sunna.

Here is only one example of taking an Islamic teaching as you prefer it. The Qur'an admonishes the believers: *Jahedoo fee sabeel-u-llah*—make jihad for the cause of God. Literally translated, this phrase directs the believers to exert themselves in service to the cause of God. The catch is in the word “exert.” Some Muslims understand it as spiritual exertion. Other Muslims take it as a commandment to exert themselves by the sword. And both can be right because the rest of the Qur'an not only fails to clarify the statement, but adds further substance to each position. It is in cases like this that the pronouncements of the Islamic high divines can sway the balance in favor of one or the other. Unfortunately, not many voices of Islamic authorities are raised on the side of tolerance, peacefulness and other positive teachings of Islam. The most one hears from Islamic apologists are time-worn and banal pronouncements such as “Islam is a religion of peace.”

It is a sad fact that generation after generation of Sunni Moftis—highest ranking Sunni clerics—and Ayatollahs—highest ranking Shiite clerics, over the years have indoctrinated their underling clergy as well as the masses with selective teachings that promote intolerance, exclusion and hostility toward non-Muslims—people labeled as heathens, infidels, unbelievers and apostates. Selective choice of the scripture, combined with a siege mentality endemic to the cradle of Islam, the Middle East, generate a fury of hatred that has the potential of devouring the world. If only Muslims could purge the negative aspects of its scripture and practice its positive teachings, the world would

become a diverse community of humanity at peace with one another. The question is: Is that possible or are we headed for the clash of the civilizations?

There are some wonderful statements in the Qur'an. One, for instance, says: The most beloved amongst you in the sight of God is the one who is the most virtuous. Not the rich, not the powerful and not the hateful. The most virtuous is most beloved, it says. Yet the radical Islamists have come to interpret killing and maiming the infidels as great acts of virtue, acts that would make them most beloved by God.

Reforming Islam is unfortunately not a realistic possibility. About the only universal agreement that exists among Islamic authorities is that every word of the Qur'an is the word of God and is not subject to human modification, ever. The 'Hadith' also enjoys a similar sacrosanct standing. And of course, the faithful Muhammad's conduct as recorded in the Sunna is the model to be emulated. Hence, one can pick and choose, but one can not discard or revise any part of the scripture. For this reason a Martin Luther type reformation has not happened and will not likely ever happen within Islam.

Islam's detractors point out numerous absurdities in the Islamic scripture. In fairness to Islam, we can find just as many perceived absurdities in other religious scriptures. Many of the scriptures' absurdities may, in fact, be allegories, metaphors, similes and symbols. Islamic scripture, for instance, records that Muhammad split the moon in half with his sword. Clearly, splitting the moon must be taken symbolically. Some claim that in this case "moon" stood for high ranking religious divines of the time and Muhammad destroyed them by the sword of his new faith. It was the material sword that sallied forth out of the Arabian desert and forced Islam on people far and wide.

The fact that Islam is a splintered house complicates matters greatly. The faith is divided into Sunni and Shiites sects with numerous sub-sects. The divisions and contentiousness are so profound that members of one sect consider the other Muslims as apostates worthy of death. The division goes back to the time of the Prophet himself. Shiites believe that the enemies of true faith subverted its chain of authority at Muhammad's death. They claim that the Prophet, while on his deathbed, asked for a parchment to dictate his will and to appoint Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, as his successor. The Shiites claim that Omar, an influential disciple and commander of the faith, declined the request saying to the Prophet: *hasbena ketab-ul-llah*—sufficient unto us is the book of God. Before long, division and infighting started in earnest and continues to this day. Oppression of Shiite minorities in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are only two glaring instances of this longstanding and irreconcilable intra-faith hostility. The Shiite majorities in other lands return the favor to the Sunni minorities, as is the case in Iran. The recent horrific sectarian killings in Iraq represent glaring instances of irreconcilable differences among the various claimants to the mantle of true Islam.

The Bible says, “By their fruits shall ye know them.” The fruits of Islam are there for everyone to see for himself. Islam may have given the world some choice fruits. It has assuredly given the world many poisonous fruits as well.

Some claim that Islam is inherently good, the majority of Muslims are good and only a small minority has hijacked the good faith of Muhammad by engaging in acts of intolerance, hatred and violence. The question is: why is it that the good Islam is not ruling in the world and the bad Islam is engulfing it in fire? Human nature is the culprit, in part. We humans are attracted to hate like flies are to honey. Hate is an easy sell. It is appealing and little effort is required to hate. Hate gathers up the person's or the group's frustrations, anxieties, fears, paranoia and many other negative emotions in one handy bundle and hurls it at a convenient target. History is replete with instances of hate energizing the masses into commitment of small and large scale atrocities.

Sell hate and people queue several blocks to buy. Sell love and you will be mostly by your lonely self. Is this a cynical view? No, it is a realistic one. It describes human's lower and primitive nature which must be painstakingly overcome through persistent education and awakening of man's higher nature.

Religious high authorities play a critical role in steering the masses toward or away from hate. The late Pope's public pronouncement, for instance, absolving the Jews as the Christ killers has reduced anti-Semitism among the rank and file Christians. Fatwas—religious decrees—by Islamic Moftis and Ayatollahs carry considerable weight with their respective followers. Sadly, most decrees and adjudications of these high Islamic authorities are exclusionary and even hostile toward the out-groups. These high divines are the suppliers of opinions as well as the teachers of the rank and file clergy who take the same ideas to the masses in villages and cities. Madresehs in Pakistan, schools in Saudi Arabia and Maktabas—religious schools—in Iran, as well as numberless mosques serve as places where the disease of hate can be transmitted with considerable success to the just too willing believers.

This virulent disease of hate of “others,” is now leaving its traditional Muslim lands and infecting cities, towns and villages of the larger world. Muslims believe that the earth is Allah's and all of it rightfully belongs to the Muslims. Non-Muslims in any land are simply usurpers and occupiers who must either convert to Islam or give way to the legitimate people—the Muslims.

In Islam's theocracy, religious authority is conferred by an informal consensus of the peer group. One becomes an Ayatollah, for instance, by demonstrating to other ayatollahs his undeviating devotion to the dogma they hold. If one deviates from the accepted line, he is

not likely to make a village mullah, much less an Ayatollah. This is a systemic problem that is not amenable to change. It is a pathological theological inbreeding.

Islam or religions in general are sources of energy. The energy can achieve magnificent things or destroy anything. It is up to us to put religion to good use, as people have done for millennia, and to avoid using it as a weapon of death and destruction—again, as people have done so for millennia.

In the Islamic theocracies, everyone pretends publicly his undeviating belief in the faith, as preached and promoted in his locality. If there are any unbelievers, doubters or atheists, they have to hide, not in closets, but in deep subterranean holes. Pressure to be religious is so great that pretending piety is an art form. Yet, much of religious ado is *per forma* rituals. Admittedly, things are hardly any better in the non-Islamic lands. People, once a week, go to a religious service, repent of their sin, pay up and go back to a life of sin for the next six days in a sinful world.

Perhaps there is a way out of the present impasse with Islam. Iran's President Ahmadinejad has invited President George W. Bush, albeit in a convoluted eighteen page epistle, to embrace Islam. Ahmadinejad seems to think that Bush is the most powerful man in the world. He must have concluded that if Bush were to embrace Islam, the masses of infidels would follow his example.

Let us for a moment accept Ahmadinejad's summon. Question: Which sect of Islam and which one of its numberless sub-sects should we join? Beside the two major branches of Sunnis and Shiite, there are dozens and dozens of sub-sects, and schools, each of which is mortally convinced they represent the only true Islam. Ahmadinejad's own brand of Islam is alien to the majority of even the Shiites. He is reportedly a devout member of a remodeled and secretive hate-based *Hojjatieh* which is presently operating under the guise of the *Haghani* sect under the leadership of a most close-minded fanatical leader—Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi.

Further complications present themselves. Space limitation does not allow presenting all of them here. Only one should suffice for now. One of the issues Muslims, worldwide, are in general agreement on is the status of women. It places women squarely under the thumb of men. It says in the Quran: *Alrejaalo qawaamoon al-alnesa*—men are rulers over women. Women of non-Islamic world have valiantly worked to attain a degree of equality with men. They are not likely to barter their hard-earned rights for the privilege of becoming head-to-toe covered second class citizens, deprived of education and opportunities. We, non-Muslim men, are not going to leave our emancipated, fully participating and contributing members of our society behind and subjugate ourselves to a barbaric set of *Shriah* laws which were enacted by stone-age mentality.

In conclusion, Islam is not only divided, it is shattered. It is in shambles, long past fixing itself, much less ruling the rest of the world. It is time that Muslims, those who consider themselves good and peaceful, as well as those who want us to accept their ideology of barbarism at the point of the sword, to take the fateful step and join the free and emancipated family of humanity. There is no going back. Barbarism is in our past.

Amil Imani is an Iranian born, pro-democracy activist who resides in the United States of America. Imani is a poet, writer, literary translator, novelist and an essayist who has been writing and speaking out for the struggling people of his native land, Iran. He maintains a website at www.amilimani.com.

درفش کاویانی



<http://derafsh-kaviyani.com/english/>

derafsh-kaviyani.com