



# Editors' Page

## Authentic Islam & Terrorism

Some of our Muslim friends and colleagues have contacted us to express their unhappiness about references made frequently in media coverage of terrorist activities. Such references have made many Muslims feel that they are regarded as “suspects and security risks” and that the religion of Islam is seen a “breeding place of terrorism”. They reject such references, and insist that the great majority of Muslims agree with them.

Their views deserve attention. The following is a brief summary.

In their lives, Muslims focus on the five pillars of Islam: belief in one God and Muhammad as His Messenger, prayer five times a day, charity, observance of the holy month of Ramadan, and pilgrimage to Mecca. Following these principles enthusiastically in a spirit of peace and harmony is what is expected of the followers of Islam.

Islam means *peace*; peace with God through homage to His oneness and peace on earth with one's neighbors. Islam recognizes the plurality of ways of life. Qur'an says,

*“Unto every one of you, we have appointed different ways of life. And if God so willed, He could surely have made you all a single community; (but he*

*willed it otherwise) in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you; vie, then, with one another in doing good works.” (5.48).*

Prophets have appeared in all nations. The Holy Qur'an proclaims, “For every nation, there is a messenger.” (10.4.7).

In the Qur'an, it is stated that if you are good and kind to your fellow beings on earth, Allah will be gracious to you on the Day of Judgment. And the prophet Muhammad has declared, “He who digs a pit for another will fall into it himself.”

All human beings are equal in the sight of God. The Qur'an (2.21.3) says it most clearly: “Humankind is a single nation.” All people therefore are challenged to live not only *with* one another, but also *for* one another. The Quranic injunction is striking: “And help one another in righteousness and piety, and help not one another in sin and aggression.” (5.2)

Moreover, the term *jihad* is not properly translated as “holy war”. Rather, it refers primarily to the internal struggle for holiness. It means striving for God's cause, conquering the evil tendencies in one's own heart. There is, Islam teaches, warrant for the use of force in resisting force; but such

actions must be preceded by purification and fasting. The Qur'an says,

*"Whoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter and corruption on the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoever saveth the life of one, shall be as if he had saved all humankind." (5. 32).*

In the light of such teachings, it is hard to justify terrorist activities in the name of Islam. Terrorists indulge in the worst kind of crimes against humanity. Innocent persons, women and children are their victims. The atrocities they commit bring serious consequences to their own and other religionists. The hatred and revenge of the terrorists proceed from a narrow, self-centered outlook on life. They do not recognize the full consequences of their actions. They also destroy the material resources, so much needed by others.

Terrorists identify themselves with superficial aspects of their religion, ignoring its deeper moral, spiritual and human qualities. Unfortunately, they cling to past understandings of religious relations, stereotyping and denigrating other religions and sects. They lose sight of the fact that Islam insists that "there is no compulsion in religion".

As a consequence, terrorists function as a tragically divisive force in society. No living religious tradition can be stagnant. The rivers must flow and religious and spiritual principles must be refreshed as society grows and changes. Adherents of every faith should rethink medieval interpretations of their scriptures, with a view to modern realities.

The emerging global order has no boundaries. The common humanity of all cultures and religions must be affirmed. Faith communities should work for the good of the larger global community.

The insights and values of Islam and other religions can contribute immensely to that effort, for the truly Islamic approach relates not only to the Muslim community, but to humanity and to God.

Seshagiri Rao

#### CORRECTION

The Editors regret their failure to mention that the Review Article by B. Alan Wallace (reflecting on Sam Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation*) first appeared in the *Shambhala Sun*. Readers interested in learning more about that wonderful publication should visit their web site:

[www.shambhalasun.com](http://www.shambhalasun.com).