

Unit 9d: Islamic Texts--Societal Implications

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- Variety of Sharia composition throughout the Middle East
- "Reminders" as spurs to Muslim ethical behavior
- Great themes of Muslim ethics
- Necessity of obedience within Islam
- Creation as motive for environmental concern
- "In Sha Allah" applied to Islamic motivation
 - Perspectives on jihad, violence and religion

Identify

- Hadith, Sharia
- "Nominal"
- Umma and Dar al-Islam
- Usury, Sura
- Divine Decree, "reminders"
- Paradise
- Lesser and Greater Jihad
- Martyrs
- Religious terrorism
 - Verses of the Sword

Realize

- Muslim ethical view encompasses all of life
- Value of practice over belief within Islam
- Nominal, "in name only," religious practitioners
- Positive benefits of Islam applied to society
- Value of peace, mercy, compassion, and family within Muslim ethics
- Importance of martyrdom in battle as Islamic motivational tool
- Widespread influence of violence within religion

Unit 9d: Major Religious Texts-- Societal Implications

Scholar Seyyed Nasr relates that no area of life--be it social, political or economic--falls "outside ethical consideration."

-- Our Religions, p. 475.

1. Introduction The following introductory themes address foundational ethical and motivational concepts in Islam.

a. Practice over Belief Islam values practice over belief. Of the Five Pillars, four concern practice--intentions, acts, deeds, endeavors--which adherents must fulfill. Living correctly takes precedence over creeds and doctrines.

b. Internal Motivation
Intention is critical to practice. What is the underlying motive in reciting daily prayers? To what aim is the hajj made? For what purpose is the fast of Ramadan kept? In reciting the Qur'an, what does the reader intend to learn, heed, find?

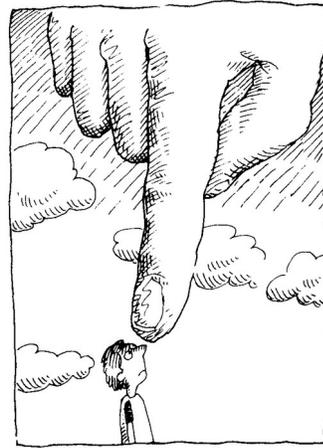


c. Nominal/Devout Dichotomy Like claimants of most religions, there are nominal and devout Muslims. The 8 Sep 96 New York Times Magazine described Ines, Nedim, and Emir, three people in their early 20's who live in Sarajevo. Theirs is a nominal faith.

Though Croat Catholic or Muslim, none experience smoking, drinking or dating restrictions. Sunday church or prayer five times per day receives little

emphasis in their day-to-day lives. (See "Bosnia's Last Best Hope," by Scott Anderson, p. 49.)

d. Reminders The emphasis on repeating phrases of the Qur'an or names of God serve as reminders to call the faithful back to original, foundational belief. Humankind is so hostile, inattentive, and negligent that it needs reminders to practice the faith correctly.



The faithful follow both personal and collective requirements. Puberty usually becomes the binding age for observance. Suras 16:151-153; 17; and 25:63-76 give broad summations of Islamic moral values.

2. Great Themes of Islamic Ethics

The following great topics address Islamic ethics and internal motivation.

a. Umma (OOM-muh, peoplehood) and Dar al-Islam (DAHR-ul-is-lam, abode of Islam)

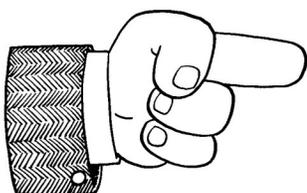
Individuals belong in community. The positive benefits of those who embrace Islam--social justice, solidarity and purpose, political stability--are enjoyed by all in areas guided by Islamic law.



b. Peace "O mankind!...we made you into nations and tribes that you may know and cooperate with one another" (Sura 49:13).

c. Obedience to Divine Law Muslims take the Sharia seriously. Their concern for its application to all of life--there being no sacred/secular distinction--is uppermost. Severe punishments--flogging, cutting off hands, death penalties and executions--though applied inconsistently across the world, bear witness to the high regard Islamic law places upon obedience.

d. Prohibitions Dr. Kamil Said, professor of Islamic studies at the Naval Postgraduate School, identifies the following list of prohibited actions which regulate duties and obligations among Muslims.



Prohibited actions include:

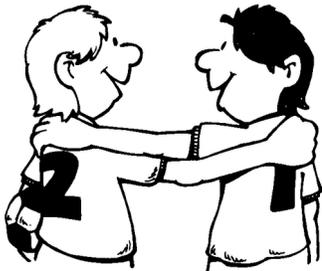
- To lie
- To rob or steal
- To commit adultery or sodomy
- To cheat or deceive anyone
- To bear false witness
- To bring false charges against anyone
- To backbite
- To abuse anybody or injure anyone's feelings
- Usury (lending money at excessively high interest)
- To kill a human being other than in self-defense or in defense of your country against aggression
- To run away from battle while you are defending sacred principles
- To be a traitor to your nation
- To be homosexual
- To use an orphan's fund or property in a way that is not in the orphan's interest
- To insult the parents
- To spread hatred among people by preaching prejudice

- To spy on others, except to protect your nation or yourself
- To conceal the truth when called for testimony in litigation
- To be a briber or accept bribery
- To convey to a person a bad word of another person about him [her]
- To envy people, wishing them ill
- To hinder a good cause deliberately
- To be a hypocrite
- To be extravagant
- To be profane
- To be arrogant, looking down upon others
- To be an oppressor or to aid an oppressor
- To be a deceiver
- To gamble
- To take intoxicants
- To violate a deceased's will deliberately
- To practice magic
 - To neglect any of the Islamic devotional duties such as prayer, fasting, paying alms and pilgrimage

e. Mercy and Compassion

"In the name of God the compassionate, the merciful" are words which begin every Sura of the Qur'an.

The merciful God (Sura 55) enjoins His followers to be merciful and compassionate. *"We...put compassion in the hearts of his followers"* (Sura 57:26-27). In an imitation of the golden rule, the Hadith enjoins:



"A Muslim should treat others as he would wish them to treat him...Like for others what he would like for himself."

f. Creation A constant theme in the Qur'an is creation--God's power in forming men, women, and the created order, and humankind's role in caring for that creation. This theme supports concern for environmental concerns and the conditions of all individuals.

g. Family



Loyalties and obligations to the family take precedence over requirement of job or friend. The extended family--cousins, aunts, uncles--is the focus.

3. Motivation

Inspiration to follow an ethical Muslim path derives from the following:

a. God's Will Since the divine decree (all is decided by God and in some sense comes from him) governs this world, God instills right ethical desire within his followers.



Reminders of His presence (Qur'an quotes in architecture and on household objects, calls to prayer, beautiful mosques and minarets) are still necessary.

b. Assurance of Paradise To attain heaven, a Muslim's good works must outweigh his/her bad actions. Many Muslim traditions believe at death the soul will undergo an interrogation by two angels...who will

examine a person's faith and weigh out the good and the bad.

c. Respect within Society Fear of punishment and esteem within society (achieved by ethical integrity), undoubtedly serve as internal/external stimuli to right action.



d. Genuine Obedience Many Muslims possess an earnest desire, with right intention, to follow God by living according to His decrees.

e. Achieve Higher Heavenly Rank In contrasting the way of a shirker with that of an enthusiast, the Qur'an states, *"those who fight for the cause of God with their goods and their persons...[achieve] a higher rank than those who stay at home. God has promised all a good reward; but far richer is the recompense of those who fight for Him."* (Sura 4:95-96).

f. Desire for Instant Paradise Martyrdom in battle (lesser jihad) can result in attainment of paradise. Sura 3:157 records, *"If you should die or be slain in the cause of God, His forgiveness and His mercy would surely be better than all the riches they amass. If you should die or be slain, before Him you shall all be gathered."*

4. Jihad

George Gawrych, instructor in the art of war in the Middle East at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, describes jihad in an article entitled "Jihad in the 20th Century" (Military Review, Sep 95, pp. 33-39.) *"Jihad (ji-HAD) comes from the verb jahada: to strive, struggle or fight. Muslim jurists have identified two types of Jihad in the religious sense."*

a. Greater Jihad



The Greater Jihad (al-jihad al-akbar) refers to the personal struggle of the heart, where the believer strives to overcome personal temptations and the carnal self. This inner struggle is Jihad's highest form.

During this Jihad, Muslims strive to internalize the Islamic message through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

b. Lesser Jihad

The Lesser Jihad (al-jihad al-asghar) is the outward struggle of Muslims against those attacking the faith and requires using the tongue, hands or sword. Only in the last instance, however, do Muslims engage in mortal combat by taking up arms against Islam's enemies" (p.34.)

5. Violence and Islam



The question of Muslims who engage in violence raises the larger issue of violence condoned in the name of religion in general.

a. Violence and Religion in General Mark

Juergensmeyer discusses this question in an article entitled "Violence and Religion" (HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion, pp. 1120 - 1123). Dr. Juergensmeyer's discussion mentions the following.

(1) **Symbolism** Whether cross, saber or sword, the symbolism of many religions evokes emotions--over time--which may promote violence and brutality. Warfare, sacrifice and martyrdom become part of the accumulated myths and rituals of religion. Underlying religious passions--stoked by political demagogues--can easily erupt into a fever of violence.

(2) **Religious Justification for Violence** Crusading spirit, zealotry and acts of assassins recall violent acts in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic history. For Islam, violence is only justified as punishment (see jihad above).

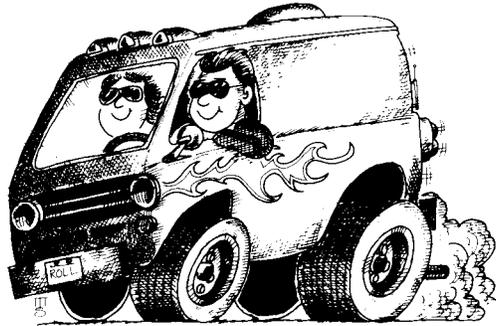


(3) **Politics of Religious Terrorism** Rigidly held perspectives on divine revelation--seeing all other religions as threats--can lead to legitimization of violence. Some doctrines readily divide the "ins from the outs." Throughout history, some practitioners of theocracy (the rule of a state by God or priest claiming God's divine authority) condone much bloodshed when disciplining wayward members. They enforce their legal codes on pain of fierce punishment or death.



For many religionists, life becomes a cosmic struggle. All activity becomes a great encounter between cosmic forces--an ultimate good and evil, a divine truth and falsehood. Violence thus becomes justified in pursuit of these cosmic, divinely ordained ends.

b. Aspects of the Qur'an and Violence Over 114 verses, spread throughout 54 Suras of the Qur'an, advocate living peacefully with neighbors within the Dar al-Islam. The two verses of the sword, which advocate warfare, often receive the most attention. For many outside the bounds of Islam, these verses seem to nullify themes of peace.



"Take a mystery drive."

