



**ISLAM AND
TRUTH**

Many people find themselves very confused about the doctrine and practices of Islam. It seems to be a faith so full of contradictions. What one Muslim says may be the complete opposite of what another Muslim says, even if they follow the same version of Islam. More confusing still, what a Muslim says one day to one audience may be the complete opposite of what the same person says another day to another audience. Why is this particular religion so hard to pin down?

The puzzling duplicity of Islam
There are two doctrines within Islam that explain why it seems to non-Muslims that there are so many discrepancies and differences in what Muslims believe, say and do. Understanding these two doctrines solves the conundrum of the apparent self-contradictions within Islam. We shall return later to these two doctrines – *taqiyya* and abrogation – but first we shall look at what Islam says about truth and lies.

Truth and lying
One of the 99 names of Allah is “al-Haqq” meaning “the reality, the supreme truth”. The concept of truth is important within Islam, and the word occurs hundreds of times in the Qur’an and the *hadith* (traditions recording what Muhammad said and did). Like Christianity, Islam is a faith that rejects relativism and believes its own teachings to be the absolute truth. The Qur’an in Arabic is considered to be the very

word of God, exactly as engraved on a stone tablet in heaven. Muhammad is considered to be the final infallible prophet to whom the Angel Gabriel gradually revealed the Qur’an and whose life is a model for Muslims to imitate in every detail.

That God may reward the men of Truth for their Truth and punish the Hypocrites if that be His Will, or turn to them in Mercy: for God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Q 33:24)¹

Just as truth is commended, so also lying is condemned.

Truly God guides not one who transgresses and lies! (Q 40:28)

Yet, despite these clear teachings, another doctrine has developed within Islam that permits Muslims to lie in certain specific circumstances.

The doctrine of *taqiyya*
The doctrine of *taqiyya* (dissimulation) was first developed for dealing with situations of religious persecution where Muslims could save their lives by concealing their true beliefs. It was extended to allow such deception in order to save not just their life but also their honor or their property. Eventually what had originally been meant only for emergencies became effectively normal. As Hamid Enayat, a Muslim historian

¹ Quotations are taken from *The Holy Qur’an: Text Translation and Commentary* by A. Yusuf Ali (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1975). Please note that the verse numbering varies slightly between different translations of the Qur’an so it may be necessary to look in the verses just before or just after the reference given to find the same text in another translation.

who was a Fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford, states:

[Taqiyya has] in practice become the norm of public behavior among all Muslims – both Sunni and Shi'a – whenever there is a conflict between faith and expediency.

The Qur'anic basis is Q 16:106, which absolves Muslims from Allah's wrath if they are forced into outward disbelief while in their hearts they remain true Muslims.

Anyone who, after accepting faith in God, utters Unbelief, – except under compulsion, Whoever disbelieved in Allah after his belief, his heart remaining firm in Faith – but such as open their breast to Unbelief, – on them is Wrath from God, and theirs will be a dreadful Penalty. (Q 16:106)

Another Qur'anic text often used to justify taqiyya runs:

And make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction but do good. (Q 2:195)

It is interpreted as laying a duty on all Muslims to save life, honor and property from danger and unlawful destruction by any means possible.

A Qur'anic warning against friendship with non-Muslims is also seen as lending support to the doctrine of taqiyya because of the phrase "by way of precaution", which can be interpreted as **pretended** friendship.

Let not the Believers take for friends or helpers Unbelievers rather than Believers; if any do that, in nothing

will there be help from God: except by way of precaution, that ye may guard yourselves from them. (Q 3:28)

Various *hadith* provide details of other situations when lying is permissible. For example:

Allah's Messenger said, "Lying is allowed in only three cases: falsehood spoken by a man to his wife to please her, falsehood in war, and falsehood to put things right between people." (Al-Tirmidhi Number 5033: Narrated by Asma', daughter of Yazid.)

The second of the situations where taqiyya is allowed – in war – is often interpreted very broadly as any kind of defense of Islam. That means many Muslims feel themselves completely justified in lying to non-Muslims about the nature of their faith. They sincerely believe that they are doing right by presenting an edited, sanitized version of Islam and Islamic history to non-Muslims, because by glossing over all the faults of their faith they are defending it against criticism.

Shi'a taqiyya

Shi'as, a minority amongst Muslims who have faced prolonged persecution by the majority Sunnis, were especially involved in the development of the doctrine of taqiyya. In order to protect themselves from harm, Shi'as often passed themselves off as Sunnis, while secretly maintaining their Shi'a beliefs.

The Shi'a imams repeatedly affirmed the doctrine of taqiyya. The sixth imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq (699-765), said, "He who has no taqiyya has no religion,"

and "The taqiyya is [a mark of] my religion, and that of my forefathers."

Modern Shi'a scholarship defines four distinct types of taqiyya:

- **Enforced:** Yielding to the instruction of an oppressor to save one's life.
- **Precautionary:** Shi'a Muslims performing acts and rituals authorized by Sunni religious leaders.
- **Arcane:** Concealing one's beliefs as well as the number and strength of co-religionists. Clandestine activity to achieve religious goals e.g. propagation of one's faith.
- **Symbiotic:** Coexistence with the Sunni majority. Participating with them in order to maintain Islamic unity and establish a powerful state comprising all Muslims.

Recognizing taqiyya

Once it is realized that even the most senior, the most sincere and the most devout Muslim could be engaging in taqiyya, many apparent contradictions are explained. Taqiyya in the defence of Islam allows Muslims to make contradictory statements depending upon whom they are addressing. Much of what is said by Muslims about Islam to non-Muslims is likely to be untrue. Occasionally they will even admit this.²

What is said in English to Christians one day might be totally contradicted

² "We have one vocabulary in private and we have another vocabulary for the public domain and that's why you don't hear it because you're the public domain."

Dr Taj Hargey, (Chairman of the Muslim Education Centre, Oxford), *A Question of Leadership*, BBC1, 21 August 2005.

the next day by the same leaders speaking to their own people, perhaps in Urdu or Arabic. For example, Hamid Ali, spiritual leader of Al-Madina mosque in Beeston, West Yorkshire, UK, publicly condemned the London bombings of July 7th 2005. But in a secretly taped conversation with a Bangladeshi-origin undercover reporter from the *Sunday Times* he said the 7/7 bombings were a "good" act and praised the bombers.

There are even certain translations of the Qur'an in English that are specially designed to appeal to Westerners and to dispel all their anxieties about Islam. These translations soften the more aggressive verses by wandering further from the original text and its traditional Islamic interpretation.

The Islamization of knowledge

Some Muslims have embarked on a deliberate process they are calling the "Islamization of knowledge". The plan appears to be to enlarge and elevate the place of Islam within every academic discipline by grounding all arts and sciences in the Islamic doctrine of the unity of God based on Qur'an and *hadith*. Their method includes a massive publication program and the establishment of Islamic universities and research institutions. They also engage in revising text books in the West by introducing Islam and the "Islamic legacy", thus disseminating "Islamized knowledge" to students, scholars and intellectuals. Other methods of disseminating information are also used. The purpose is both to

revive the faith of Muslims and to be an Islamic witness to non-Muslims.

However, the changes made are not just to introduce factual information about Islam to the text books. There are also false or exaggerated statements introduced in order to make Islam appear in a better light, while the negative aspects of Islamic teaching or Islamic history are cut out. One of the erroneous take-home messages is that Islam should be given the credit for all that is best in European civilization, having been the original source from which Europeans derived their learning and skills.

Some of the “Islamized knowledge” is easy to spot as many of the newer assertions still appear ridiculous to most non-Muslims. For example:

- Napoleon Bonaparte converted to Islam.
- Muslim explorers reached America before Christopher Columbus did.
- Islam arrived in Australia in the ninth century.
- Offa, the eighth century Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia (in the British midlands) was a Muslim.³

But other examples have been around a long time and have become widely believed. Here is a selection.

- **There was interfaith harmony in Islamic Spain.** For some of the time Christians and Jews were tolerated so long as they submitted to various humiliating rules. But in some periods they suffered severe persecutions e.g.

- **Muslims led the field in science and medicine during the Middle Ages.** While much of the learning of the time was written down in Arabic, many of the scholars were Christians and Jews. This is often not apparent because their names may be Islamized and some became Muslims for various reasons. The first Arabic medical book was written by a Christian priest and translated into Arabic by a Jewish doctor in 683 AD. Furthermore, the scholars’ work was usually no more than to translate into Arabic the work of earlier Greek scholars, with very little in the way of new additions. This applied to medicine, philosophy,



This gold coin from the reign of Anglo-Saxon King Offa (died 796) is the only piece of evidence to back the claim that he was a Muslim. The argument is based on the fact that it has an Arabic text around the edge, resembling the Islamic creed. But one of the Arabic words has been written incorrectly, indicating that neither Offa nor his officials could read Arabic. Before Offa there had been no gold coins in England. In order to make his new gold coinage acceptable to Arab traders, Offa would have wanted to make his coins resemble theirs, a normal numismatic practice, hence the copying of what would have been to him unintelligible squiggles around the edge. Offa built many churches and was a great benefactor of monasteries. He anointed his son as his heir in a strongly Christian ceremony.

mathematics, astronomy, zoology, chemistry, geography and technology. “The crossing of the language barrier left the contents almost completely unchanged,” says Professor Manfred Ullman of Tübingen University. What medieval Islam did in effect was to absorb the learning of other cultures, to re-name everything in Arabic and then to claim it all for Islam.

- **Muslims founded the first hospital.** The first hospital was founded in Baghdad when this city was the capital of the ruling Muslim Abbasid caliphate. However it was started not by a Muslim but by an Assyrian Christian called Jabrail ibn Bakhishu.
- **Muslims invented the Arabic numerals used in the West today as well as the useful mathematical concept of zero.** The numerals 1,2,3,4 etc, came to the West via the Arabs but were originally derived from the Syriac alphabet. The Syriacs are a Christian people. The numerals now used in the Arab world (٠, ١, ٢, ٣, ٤ etc.) were introduced from Hindu India in the seventh century by a Syriac mathematician. The idea of using a symbol for the quantity zero also came from India.
- **Muslims invented a beautiful new kind of architecture.** The domes and arches that are typical of mosques were copied from the architecture of medieval Middle Eastern churches. The minarets resemble the stand-alone bell towers that many churches at that time had. The famous Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem was built by Byzantine (Christian) craftsmen.
- **Islam spread peacefully in the early years.** The Muslims conquered non-Muslim countries and imposed Islamic rule by force with non-Muslims placed in a subjugated position. Some non-Muslims converted to Islam by choice and could have continued in their old faith with an inferior status. Others were offered a choice of death or conversion to Islam.
- **Women are equal to men in Islam.** This is not true according to the normal Western understanding of “equal”. According to *shari‘a* (Islamic law) women receive a smaller inheritance and less compensation for injuries compared with men. Also their value as a witness in a trial is less than that of a male witness, and the rules for divorce are biased against women. In most Muslim countries, women continue to suffer from second rate status, illiteracy, unfair treatment in cases of divorce and maintenance, and other legal handicaps.
- **The Crusades were an unprovoked European assault on the peaceful Muslims of the Holy Land.** The First Crusade was a delayed Christian reaction to the initial Muslim *jihād* of the seventh and eighth centuries, which had overrun many Christian provinces including Palestine, Syria, Egypt, North Africa and Spain. The loss of the Holy Land to Muslim armies in the initial Islamic *jihād* of the seventh century was deeply mourned across the Christian world but no action was taken by the Christians at the time. The Crusades were also a response to

³ <http://www.answering-islam.de/main/hoaxes/offa.html>, accessed 15 March 2007.

ongoing Muslim attacks against the Christians of the Byzantine Empire, which continued after the first *jihad*. Two Byzantine emperors appealed to the Pope for help (in 1074 and 1095) and eventually, more than 300 years after the initial Muslim conquest, the European Christians came to the aid of their beleaguered fellow-Christians in the Middle East. Later Crusades degenerated in many ways; they had a mixture of motives and were conducted in a brutal manner without any Christian ideals.

- **“Islam” means “peace” and *jihad* is nothing to do with war.** Islam means “submission” and *jihad* in classical Islam is used mainly of military warfare to defend and extend the Islamic state.
- **The Qur’an says: “If you kill one soul it is as if you killed all mankind.”** These or similar words, often cited to prove that Islam is only peaceable, are a misquote. The actual Qur’anic text runs:

If any one slew a person – unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it would be as if he slew the whole people. (Q 5:35)

The meaning of the verse depends on what is understood by the part which is usually deliberately omitted – “murder” and “spreading mischief in the land” – i.e. what would justify killing. Some Muslims interpret “mischief in the land” as meaning secularism, democracy and other non-Islamic values in a land. Some consider that “murder” includes the

killing of Muslims in Iraq by coalition forces. This verse would then justify killing them in retaliation for the “murder” they have committed. When the whole verse is read, it is actually a justification for killing certain people.

Abrogation

Another important doctrine within Islam which causes it to appear contradictory is known as abrogation.

We have already seen that the Qur’an is regarded by Muslims as the perfect and unchanged word of Allah. They believe it was revealed piecemeal to Muhammad over a period of some 20 years. But the text of the Qur’an is full of internal contradictions. Muslims deal with that problem by the doctrine of abrogation which, in its commonest form, says that whenever two verses containing rulings contradict each other, the later-revealed verse abrogates (cancels) the earlier one. So long as a Muslim knows the relative dates of the two contradictory verses, he or she will be able to tell which one to ignore (the earlier one) and which one to obey (the later one).

In fact, dating the verses is no easy matter, because the Qur’an is not arranged in chronological order, and even the scholars disagree about the relative dates of some sections. But there is some agreement on which chapters date from Muhammad’s early years in Mecca and which from after his move to Medina.

One of the sad consequences of the doctrine of abrogation is the violently

The first ten letters of the Syriac alphabet



The numerals used today in the West are derived from the Syriac alphabet

hostile attitude of Islam to those of other faiths. The reason is that most if not all of the peaceable verses in the Qur’an date from when Muhammad lived in Mecca. At that time he was very friendly towards those of other faiths. Later, when he fled persecution to set up his own Islamic state in Medina, his attitude to other faiths changed completely, and verses dating from his time in Medina are full of aggression and commands to fight against non-Muslims. In accordance with the standard rules of abrogation, the Medinan verses abrogate the Meccan verses i.e. the aggressive verses cancel out the peaceable verses.

But the peaceable verses are still there in the Qur’anic text. This explains why Muslims can quote peaceful-sounding verses to support the claim that “Islam is peace”, while Islamic history shows us a faith that has set out to conquer territory by military might, killing or forcibly converting non-Muslims.

Making and breaking agreements

We cannot end this brief look at the subject of Islam and truth without considering why Muslims so often break the agreements they make with non-Muslims. Amongst Islam’s detailed rules for conducting wars, are rules about making peace treaties. Muslims are allowed to make **temporary** peace treaties with non-Muslims but only if this is advantageous for the Muslims. Such treaties should preferably not last more than ten years. When circumstances change so that it becomes advantageous to the Muslims to break the treaty, they **must** do so (having given due notice of their intention).

There are modern liberal Muslims who would like to see a change to the classical Islamic doctrine in the form of the possibility of making **permanent** peace treaties with non-Muslims. Some of these however say that permanent peace should be conditional on non-Muslims submitting to the Islamic state, which is really no different from the



This beautiful mosque in Jerusalem, known as the Dome of the Rock, was built by Christian craftsmen

view of classical Islam. Others hold that the only condition necessary is that Islam may be propagated without hindrance in the other state.

Like *taqiyya*, the doctrine of breaking treaties has developed despite there being verses in the Qur'an to support the keeping of treaties and promises.

(But the treaties are) not dissolved with those pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in aught; nor aided any one against you. So fulfil your engagements with them to the end of their term: for God loveth the righteous. (Q 9:4)

... break not your oaths after ye have confirmed them; (Q 16:91)

Prolonging the Middle East conflict
According to Sheikh 'Abdul Rahman 'Abdul Khaliq, a Saudi Salafi scholar, peace treaties with Jews are made to be broken. In response to a question about the duty of a Muslim with regard to peace treaties with Jews he writes:

The first duty is to firmly believe in their invalidity and that because they contain invalid conditions they were born dead the very day they were given birth to...

The second duty of the Muslim is to believe that these treaties do not bind him and that it is not lawful for him to give effect to any of their contents except under compulsion and necessity...

The third duty is to work towards overthrowing these treaties...

Saudi Arabia's former Grand Mufti, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz, also made it clear that any cessation of hostilities with Israel could never be other than a temporary measure, pending the time that Muslims became strong enough to gain possession of the whole land for themselves.

The peace between the leader of the Muslims in Palestine and the Jews does not mean that the Jews will permanently own the lands which they now possess. Rather it only means that they would be in possession of it for a period of time until either the truce comes to an end, or until the Muslims become strong enough to force them out of the Muslim lands – in the case of an unrestricted peace.

With teaching like this being promoted, it is easy to see why peace in the Middle East is proving so elusive.

Conclusion

While many Muslims are honest and open in their dealings with non-Muslims, the possibility of *taqiyya* always exists. This makes it very difficult for non-Muslims to assess the reliability of statements made by Muslims to them. It is easier to be sure of what Muslims think by checking what they say to each other and what they do.

Further reading

Gilbert T. Sewall, *Islam and Textbooks*, A Report of the American Textbook Council (New York, NY: American Textbook Council, 2003), <http://www.historytextbooks.org/islamreport.pdf> (accessed 14 May 2007).

Diana Mukalled, "The World is Closely Watching", *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (30 August 2005), <http://aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=2&id=1465> (accessed 6 September 2005).

"A question of leadership", transcript, BBC Panorama (21 August 2005), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/4171950.stm> (accessed 22 August 2005).

"Egyptian Progressive Criticizes Muslim Intellectual Doublespeak", MEMRI Special Dispatch Series, No. 847, 14 January 2005, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP84705>.

A good Christian website on Islam is Answering Islam, <http://answering-islam.org/index.html>.

This series of booklets is intended to provide background information for Christians seeking to understand the nature of Islam and its contemporary expression. One aspect of this relates to understanding the reason for the oppression and persecution of Christians in various Islamic parts of the world, and another to the growing challenge which Islam poses to Western society, culture and Church.

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