

## PROPHET MUHAMMAD

(peace be upon him) said :

“Help your brother,  
whether he is an oppressor  
or he is an oppressed one.”

People asked,  
“It is all right to help him  
if he is oppressed,  
but how should we help him  
if he is an oppressor?”

The Prophet replied,  
“By preventing him  
from oppressing others.”

“Injustice  
anywhere is a  
threat to Justice  
Everywhere.”

- MARTIN LUTHER KING

“How can you have a  
War on Terrorism  
When War itself is  
Terrorism ?”

- HOWARD ZINN

UNITED AGAINST EXTREMISM  
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SALAAM CENTRE

# 65, 1st main, S.R.K. Garden, Jayanagar, Bangalore – 560041

Tel.: +91 99011 29956 +919945177477 / 080 - 2663 9007

[salaamcentrebangalore@gmail.com](mailto:salaamcentrebangalore@gmail.com) - [www.salaamcentre.in](http://www.salaamcentre.in)

## WHY THIS HANDBOOK?

Salaam Centre, Bangalore has identified the need to understand and evaluate the nature, origin, causes and impact of extremist messages on Indian youth. These messages are coming from both Muslim extremists mainly through the Web and from Islamophobes. Muslim extremists twist, abuse and misrepresent Quranic verses and the Prophetic traditions to support, justify and rationalize their hateful messages of violence and terrorism. Islamophobes also reinforce hatred against Muslims and demonize Islam using the same cut-and-paste approach to the Quran to argue that Islam condones terrorism.

Within these two extremes lie the overwhelming majority of Indian Muslims and non-Muslims alike whose voices of reason, compassion, mutual respect and pluralism are being drowned-out by loud-mouthed hate-mongers and sensational media headlines. The work of the latter is creating discord which must be resolved in a constructive manner.

This handbook also deals with questions that arose about law enforcement and intelligence, and provides advice on what to do if you suspect that a youth is being radicalized to violence, as well as a list of web sites that provide information on how to protect oneself and family from online threats. This book also gives information on the rights of citizens along with their responsibilities to keep our country and people safe, and how and what to do when you feel your rights have been violated.

The real issues and tensions in this modern world are not between Muslims and non-Muslims but between the moderates and extremists of all religions, be it Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism or Buddhism. We must choose moderation over extremism. We must choose negotiations over confrontation. We must choose to work together and not against each other.

February 20, 2016

Syed Hamid Mohsin,  
Chairman, Salaam Centre, Bangalore.



## ISLAM CONDEMNS EXTREMISM

Extremism is problematic when opinions and principles go against the legal system, especially the laws that are created to protect society from harm and promote the overall well-being of the society.

One of the manifestations of extremism is an obsessive pursuit of finding faults in others and making exacting demands on them. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has condemned this, when he urged the Muslims to :

‘Avoid extremism for people before you were led to destruction because of their extremism in religion.’

He also condemned the extremists when he said:

“Perished are the hair-splitters.”

and he repeated this phrase three times.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared;

“Bigot (an extremist with hatred and intolerance) who calls for bigotry (intolerance and extremism towards those who hold different opinions from oneself) is not of us, one who fights on the basis of bigotry does not belong to us and one who dies on bigotry is not related to us.”

## INJUSTICE BREEDS EXTREMISM and TERRORISM

According to Oxford Dictionary terror means “extreme fear” and the terrorism is “the unofficial or unauthorized use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims”.

Terrorism is also practical extremism, be it local, national, or international, in peacetime or War, consisting mainly of acts of terror and violence including bombing and use of explosive devices that kill innocent people and cause destruction.

Everyone would agree that political violence in any society is undesirable. Terrorism is a form of political violence. The Muslim world has a high proportion of despotic regimes, many supported by the West for decades. They are skilled at suppressing political opposition through multiple means, including violence and imprisonment. Consequently what we see is, the more repressive is the regime, the more extreme is the opposition.

The Extremism that spreads like a cancer in failed states, are among the previously unknown manifestations of extremism we are witnessing in increasing proportions.

Religion, its terminology, language, idioms and symbols come to be used by the people resisting the oppression. It is not merely because they wish to opt for any religious ideology in place of the ideology of their oppressors. It is because Religion is the most original philosophy of imagining an organized life in

a society. It happens with people of all religious pursuits. It is common in India to refer to Mahabharat or Dharamyuddha to describe any kind of conflict between two political groups who are in no way bringing religion to the centre stage. American President George Bush used Crusades in his speech after the 9/11 attack. He later retracted the word. It is also common for Muslims to use term Jihad for battle and Shaheed for martyrdom to describe the struggle and laying down life for a cause. Even Jawans of the Indian Army who die while fighting against infiltrators from across the borders are widely referred to as Shaheed, although they do not belong to an Islamic army.

Islam became the language of opposition and the extremists because it was a language that was widely acceptable, could not be shut down or censored. Religion will always be invoked wherever it can to galvanize the masses and to justify major campaigns, battles, and wars, especially in monotheistic cultures. But the causes, campaigns, battles, and wars are not about religion. Take away the religion, and there are still causes, campaigns, battles, and wars.

Injustice and oppression have not vanished from the earth with the advent of democracy, human rights, technology and modernity. It has assumed new forms. If the rulers oppressed the subjects earlier, today it is the rich who are usurping the resources of the poor. People who inhabited the forests are being deprived of their land and trees for construction of dams, cities and industries, all said to be symbols of development. Media owned by the corporate, highlights only the point of view of the industrial lobby from where it gets its revenue. Arms manufacturers in the United States and the West fund the political campaigns of those who will promote war, not peace. We need to understand these modern threats to peace.

The countries that have been devastated by the recent wars or occupied by foreign troops or whose mineral wealth is being siphoned off, are ideal grounds for radicalization of the youth who see dispossession of their wealth. Deaths in their families, orphaning of children and widowing of women have left them in deep anguish, debts and destruction. They get attracted to extremist ideologies, anyone who can promise them peace, dignity and prosperity. This is not unique to Islamic theology alone. The causes have to be found in the global economic order that perpetuates war, misery, injustice and deprivation. No wonder then why northern territories in Iraq and Syria have become the ideal ground for extremists to gather.

Nearly all the countries in the Middle East have failed in ensuring equality, justice, dignity and participation of their people in governance. Some of them are worst kind of despotic monarchies where people are still 'subjects', not 'citizens'. They have no Constitution worth the name. They have been convenient handmaidens to the Western powers and subjecting their own people to extreme misery and injustice. They are close to being 'Failed States' as no institutions command the people's confidence. It is rather strange that they have survived thus far into the 21st century.

Islam is being used by both, the rulers and the fighters, to shield their interests. But Islamic values of justice, peace, equality and involvement of people in the affairs of the State, are missing.

Those who commit cowardly murder behind a mask of 'Islam' and imagine they are taking revenge and waging jihad are in fact, in the eyes of the true Islam, murderers. It is despicable to hunt down defenseless people and shoot them in a vicious act of terror simply because they think wrongly, or insult or are hostile to Islam.'



THE QURAN COMMANDS: Protection of life (hifz al-nafs) of all human life is one of the overriding goals and purposes of Islam. Human life must be safeguarded as a matter of priority. “One who saves the life of another,” says the Quran, “It would be as if he saves the life of the whole of humankind.” (5:35)

The text also declares in the same verse:

“And one who kills a human being without the latter being guilty of murder or corruption in the land, it would be as if he has killed the whole of humankind.” Elsewhere the Quran enjoins:

“Do not kill any person whom Allah has forbidden to kill, unless it be in the cause of justice.” (17:33)

The Prophet added his voice to this when he said,

“One who raises arms against us is not one among of us.”

He also said:

“Near the Doomsday, unaccounted murders will be common, where the killer will not know his victim and the victim will not know why he was killed or who killed him.”

Fourteen hundred years ago, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had predicted the tragic situation we are facing today: Innocents are being killed, they do not know who killed them, and why? And the killers do not know their victims and likewise the people being killed through such means may have no personal enmity with their killers.

## INDIANNES OR INDIAN NATIONALISM

Nationalism and Nation worship have been two distinct trends in the world since long. These have excesses and exaggerations through all ages, primitive, modern and the post-modern. Racism and Nation worship led to a lot of bloodshed in Europe and creation of several smaller states. it is rather lamentable that today we are trying to hang to the coattail of the same nationalism and nation worship in India. With the advent of the present government in the saddle of power, the race for the ascendancy of Hindu Nationalism has intensified. The question is what to be followed: Indianness or Indian Nationalism. Should the citizens of India need to furnish the proof of their love for the nation repeatedly and should some people belonging to a particular community need to be put in the docks on this score. What should be the yardsticks for measuring one's love for nation? What should be the mode of expression for the same and how frequently it needs to be furnished? who would determine these, the Constitution of India or a group with a particular ideology with the penchant for a holier than through attitude.

### Nation and Nation Worship

India is a democratic state and our Constitution provides the framework for the law. The current debate is centred along the axis of what should prevail, the Constitution or the non-state actors who want to press their own mode of nationalism down the throats of the people. The Muslims are snared into political debates rather than the core legal issues. Some of the Muslim leaders too become pawns in the hands of some invisible forces and complicate the matters. No one is asking as to who conferred the right on some people to question the nationalism of some other individual or group. Political leaders, political parties and votebank politics are real culprit in this regard.

## MUSLIMS CONDEMNNS ISIS

ISIS (*Da'esh* in Arabic) has been carrying on a murderous campaign in the territory it has occupied in trouble-torn Syria and Iraq. The satanic force has been torturing hostages, pushing women out of public sight and killing prisoners in its custody, expelling members of minorities like Yazidis from their areas of occupation and conducting suicide bombings in the cities of the West. It has for the first time that an absolutely terroristic force has occupied a territory and declared itself to be a State.

The Western media has been misleadingly linking ISIS to religion of Islam and attributing all its barbaric activities to Islam, merely because ISIS claims itself to be a representative of Islam. The image of Islam has suffered considerably due to this campaign.

It is useful to be reminded that the United States and the Western powers were behind the Afghan fighters engaged in repulsing the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The US funded Afghan madrassas that radicalized two generations of Afghans. It were they who funded and armed the '*Mujabideen*' and Taliban against the Soviet Union. It was only after the 9/11 terrorist attack on World Trade Centre that the US started dubbing them terrorists.

It is suspected that the US is pursuing a grand strategy of radicalizing the youth in several Middle Eastern Muslim nations in order to fan Islamophobia around the world and keep the oil-rich Middle East in a constant state of war thereby

eliminating the threat to the state of Israel. Creation of Al-Qaeda and ISIS seem to be product of this strategy. The arms manufacturing lobby within the US too has been exerting pressure to promote war around the world to keep their cash registers ringing.

The issue before us is whether anyone doing anything in the name of Islam be considered Islamic. How far it would be right to accuse Islam and Muslims for the excesses of the ISIS?

Islam does not sanction violence. But it is quite possible that some Muslims might use Islamic terminology / symbols to wreak vengeance when their areas are occupied, when big chunk of people are displaced due to war, or when their resources are exploited leaving no avenue for them to use them for their own benefit. There could be scores of social, economic, political reasons for which they would indulge in violence.

Since they are Muslims, their terminology may take a religious or theological colour just as Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the United States used violence against the Catholics and the immigrants by quoting the Bible. Or the case of the IRA is not old. Its lingo, phraseology and motifs were coloured in Catholicism. But neither the KKK nor the IRA represented Christianity. This is how ISIS' use of Islamic terms has to be understood. It does not represent Islam in any measure.

Similarly, Hindus or Hinduism are not and should not be maligned for intolerant behavior of a few fringe groups who indulge in moral policing or vandalizing places of worship of other religions.

Just as Buddhism is not responsible for atrocities against the Tamils in Sri Lanka or against Rohingyas in Myanmar, Islam cannot be accused for ISIS' acts of terror in the Middle East.

As for the denouncement of the ISIS, Muslims have minced no words in condemning ISIS. In fact the primary target of its atrocities and persecution have been Muslims alone

who are leaving its territory and migrating as refugees to the Western countries.

Muslim scholars (*Ulema*) from India and around the world have held hundreds of conclaves and issued *fatwas* against the mischievous designs of the ISIS.

Log on to : <http://lettertobaghdadi.com/>

But since denials and denunciations do not increase TRP ratings while killings and defilements of archaeological sites bring in a lot of corporate revenue, the Western media has been in the forefront of maligning campaign.

It is for us not to be carried away by the propaganda of the Western media and its hirelings in other parts of the world. Islam, just as other faiths, stands for pluralism, tolerance of other and respect of all religions. It is time we demolished the walls of ignorance and built bridges of understanding and peace.

## RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

The Quran is very clear in advocating for Muslims to be just in all situations.

Almighty God says in the Quran :

“O you, who believe stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even against yourselves or your parents or your kith and kin and whether it is against rich or poor; for Allah can protect both. Follow not your lust lest you swerve, and if you distort justice or decline to do justice, verily Allah is acquainted with all that you do.” (Quran 4:135)

Clearly, in Islam, responsible citizenship is advocated and violence is condemned.

## SUICIDE BOMBING

Life is sacred; but it is not ours. It does not belong to us. It is not our property or possession. The formula 'my life, my death, my choice!' paraded in Western societies, is wrong on all three counts. It is not your life. Rather, it is an amana, a trust, from God. We are merely trustees of our own lives. We have the responsibility of looking after this trust, to make sure that we maintain the trust and live the best possible life; We cannot take our own life, simply because it is not ours to take. We have no choice. To commit suicide would be to violate the trust. It would be an act of monumental ungratefulness. It would be taking something that belongs to God. It would not just be killing oneself but like killing all of humanity. Hence, the unambiguous, categorical instruction in the Quran: 'Do not contribute to your destruction with your own hands' (2:195).

This brings us to a contemporary phenomenon that has gained currency in certain Muslim circles: 'suicide bombing'. It is quite astonishing that such an abhorrent act is accepted and practised by those who, loudly and frequently, declare their love for Islam. This position undermines virtually every teaching of the Quran.

First, 'suicide bombing' involves a suicide, which is strictly forbidden. There are always other victims of a suicide, with or without the bomb, than the individuals who kill themselves. These include their family, who suffer the effects of the suicide and have to live with its emotional, religious and

other consequences for many years. Second, killing innocent civilians is nothing but mass murder; and, according to the Quranic formulation, even if a single person is killed it is in fact like killing all of humankind (5:32). So a suicide bomber simultaneously commits two cardinal sins. The notion that the bomber is heading straight for paradise is perverse, to say the least. Third, if the actual act of suicide bombing is an act of despair, then it signifies rejection of God's mercy and abandonment of hope. In other words, it undermines the very *raison d'être* of Islam: 'to be mindful of God'. Even in despair, the Qur'an asks the believers 'to do good in this world' and 'persevere patiently': 'God's earth is wide' (39:10). Finally, if suicide killing was a viable weapon of a just war, however conceived, then the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself would have used it. He had ample opportunity to do so. During his days in Mecca, where he was severely persecuted and his life constantly threatened and his followers were tortured, murdered and driven out of the city, the Prophet remained steadfast. Even when he had to fight his enemies in Medina, he did not engage in suicide missions; his battles were well-planned and based on strategies designed to preserve life. Moreover, he forbade the taking of innocent lives, killing of non-combatants, civilians, women and children, and destroying plants and animals. During one of his battles, children of the enemy were killed by mistake. The Prophet was visibly pained and started to cry. One of his followers tried to console him; 'they were only the children of unbelievers', he said. The Prophet replied angrily: 'Even children of unbelievers are better than you. Beware! Do not kill children. Beware! Do not kill Children. Every soul is born in the nature of God.'

To consider suicide bombing as a military tactic, or as a way of fighting, is to violate everything that the Quran and Islam stand for. Life is sacred; that is why 'no human being can die except with God's permission at an appointed time.' (3:145). Our humanity is most tested at times of severe despair and

desperation, acute pain and agony, when life itself becomes horrendous. But it is precisely at these moments that respect for life needs to be reinforced.

Some misguided Muslims should stop being so ignorant about the rules of war in Islam. You cannot think that something that has been Haraam would suddenly become Halal, this is not Islam. Suicide is forbidden not only by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), but by Almighty God. Seek knowledge from the people of knowledge, and not from Muslims who have little or no knowledge and come up with their own rulings. Many of these attacks are only done for political reasons and not for religious reasons, but no one should be fooled that you will gain the status of a martyr when doing something that is a great sin.

Almighty God says in the Quran:

“Destroy not yourselves. Surely Allah is ever merciful to you.” (Quran 4:29)

“And do not throw yourselves in destruction.”  
(Quran 2:195)

There is also a Hadith about suicide; the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“Indeed, whoever (intentionally) kills himself, and then certainly he will be punished in the Fire of Hell, wherein he shall dwell forever.”

The verses from the Quran and this Hadith makes it quite clear that taking one's own life is forbidden, the hadith even says that Allah forbade the man from entering paradise.

In this regard Egyptian scholar, Hasan al-Banna said :

‘Dying in the way of God is difficult, but living in the way of God is still more difficult’.



## IS JIHAD THE SAME AS TERRORISM ?

### ABSOLUTELY NOT !

Jihad should be seen in the light of Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The word Jihad in Arabic means, 'to Struggle' or 'I will make an effort, do my best in the path of good'. This struggle can be intellectual, spiritual, social, economic, and political, of course, quite physical too and can take a number of forms, such as:

#### GREATER JIHAD

While, returning from the Hunayn expedition, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) had declared:

“We are back from the lesser Jihad [efforts, resistance, and struggle for reform] to the greater Jihad.”

A Companion asked: “What is the greater Jihad , Messenger of God?”

Prophet Muhammad answered: “It is fighting the self [the ego]; to overcome temptations towards evil.”

Thus, Prophet Muhammad gave top precedence to the greater Jihad, humanity's spiritual struggle against evil. For the Muslims, or Non-Muslim as for all human beings, this inner struggle is the most difficult. It is also the most noble and the one that required the most understanding, forgiveness, and, of course, sincerity to oneself.

Jihad is aimed at attaining peace in the collective life by fighting all kinds of aggressions, excesses and injustice and establishing virtues, justice and peace in the society. If Islam is peace, Jihad is the method to achieve it.

## LESSER JIHAD

Lesser Jihad as defined originally by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), refers to military efforts in a context of military struggle in which the key obligations were defence and preservation of Islam and the justice.

But Lesser Jihad cannot be a war of aggression, or a war for territorial gain. It is a defensive war which places certain responsibilities on those who are called to engage in it. As a moral exercise, Jihad must be performed strictly under the Islamic rules of engagement. This means that innocent individuals, women, children and unarmed civilians cannot be harmed, property and environment cannot be destroyed, and places of worship of other faiths cannot be demolished. As such, kidnapping, hostage-taking, indiscriminate shooting of civilians, placing bombs in areas and buildings where people work are evil deeds that Islam totally condemns. These fall in the category of terrorism and senseless killings.

Moreover, Jihad cannot be declared by anybody on everybody. Jihad requires consensus of the whole Muslim community and a clear identification of the enemy as the aggressor or the oppressor of helpless victims.

Similarly, the so-called 'Islamic Jihad' groups have no right to take this authority to themselves. In addition, their extremist methods that involve violence against the innocent have no basis in Islamic law. It is completely unfair to judge Islam by the wrongdoings of some misguided or ignorant Muslims, or by the deteriorating condition of Muslims and the blatant corruption that pervades the world.

Former Pop Singer Cat Stevens, now known as Yusuf Islam, observed: 'It is wrong to judge Islam in the light of the behaviour of some deviant Muslims who are always shown in the media. It is like judging a car to be bad if the driver is drunk and he crashes it into a wall'.

## DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

### What to do if called 'Terrorist' ?

It is normal to be upset or angry if you are insulted. In all situations, it is important to remain calm. Depending on the circumstances, you have different avenues of response:

1. If this comment is made in your workplace (by a client or co-worker), you should notify the person responsible for the workplace (supervisor, site manager, human resources representative) about what happened and how it affected you. Ask them to get back to you with any action they have taken to address the situation. They are required to provide a work environment free from harassment.
2. If you are a student and this comment is made by other students, you should report it to a teacher, principal or guidance counselor.
3. If this comment is made to you by a member of the public, you have several options:
  - (a) Walk away as you are not required to respond to such a comment.
  - (b) If you feel threatened or fearful, you should walk away and notify the police.
  - (c) If you feel comfortable engaging in a discussion, you may wish to ask the individual why they feel this way and calmly respond.

## How do we act pro-actively to avoid crisis?

The Muslim community has faced its most serious challenges in India in the aftermath of terrorist violence associated with Islam. Indian Muslims can do a lot to help avert future crisis:

1. Immediately report to law enforcement suspicions about criminal activity;
2. Show others what Muslims are really about by being involved in their communities, reaching out to neighbors, participating in neighborhood and community organizations, school parent committees and volunteering;
3. Challenging inaccurate portrayals of Muslims and Islam in the public discourse including the media and political arenas.
4. Supporting organizations that help promote the civil liberties of Indian Muslims and provide them with a professional voice.
5. Collaborate and cooperate on projects with interfaith and multi-cultural groups that are a benefit to society.
6. Volunteer as a family in various capacities.
7. Increase your presence in public dialogue and discourse.
8. Engage in the political process.
9. Become well informed about Islam so you are in a position to recognize and debunk extremist messaging.

## How do we deal with the aggression that is going on right now against Muslims around the world?

Every situation must be contextualized so that we have a balanced world view. There is no justification for oppression, aggression and occupation of any people, country or state. There are laws and treaties to protect against illegal acts either by individuals, groups or countries.

We should also avoid over-generalization or universalizing victimization of Muslims by the “West”. Each Muslim country that is in conflict, either imposed or self inflicted is unique in its nature and cause. The narrative of the victimization of the Muslim community by some countries as promoted by terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and ISIS is strategic. They play upon our anguish over the suffering of our co-religionists and offer an over simplified world view of good and evil. The questions to be posed are: How did this situation come to be? Is there a lesson to be learned and how can we address and correct this injustice in a just and peaceful way? Resorting to terrorism and violence in retaliation to a real or perceived injustice will in itself not bring about justice or relief from violence.

“Goodness and evil are not equal. Repel evil with what is better. So that the person with whom there was hatred, may become your intimate friend! And no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint, none but people of the greatest good fortune.” (Quran 41:34-35)

Prophet Muhammad advises us: “Do not be people without minds of your own, saying that if others treat you well you will treat them well, and that if they do wrong you will do wrong to them. Instead, accustom yourselves to do good if people do

good and not to do wrong (even) if they do evil.” (Al-Tirmidhi)  
 What does Islam say about citizenship especially about citizenship in a Non-Muslim majority country?

The underlying and overriding principle of Islamic Law is that Muslims must obey the law of the land they live in, regardless of it being a Muslim majority state or non-Muslim majority state. This principle has guided Muslims through centuries to abide in peace and harmony as religious minorities. This principle has only one caveat as long as the law of the land does not forbid or actively restrict Muslims' right to practice the fundamental requirements of their faith. If any such restrictions exist, Muslims must try and remove them within the legal means available to citizens. We remain loyal to the core values of justice, peace, egalitarianism and service to humanity, our loyalties will not lead to any moral conflict, because the guiding principle is justice.

“O ye who believe, remain steadfast for Allah, bearing witness to justice. Do not allow your hatred for others make you swerve to wrongdoing and turn you away from justice. Be just; that is closer to true piety.” (Quran 5:8)

## Beauty of Indian Constitution and Culture

Indian Constitution was drafted by great minds who had imbibed the values of liberal humanism. The vast and glorious history of Indian civilization stretching back to nearly 5,000 years had endowed the country with great cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. Tasked with welding them into a modern nation, they chose to tread cautiously and decided to forge unity among the various social components through common national credos of democracy, secularism, equality before law and equal opportunity for everyone.

## How do we get youth and parents engaged in a more scholastic understanding of Islam?

Learning to understand Islam, in a more scholastic manner, is a family effort. It requires that you:

- Increase the time you spend as a family in prayer and play.
- Seek out and do research on qualified, legitimate and recognized scholars, read up on their works and listen to their lectures as a family. Attend conferences where these scholars will be speaking. Always make time to de-brief with your family on what was heard and how it was processed.
- We share the core values of human rights, freedom of religion, justice and rule of law. Educate children about Indian Constitution some knowledge about panel code and sedition.
- Be a critical and informed internet user and teach your children to be the same. You should monitor what your child is accessing on the internet. Be cautious of web based sites that seem Islamic oriented but can be either Islamophobic or extremist sites.
- Islamophobic websites are known to de-contextualize Quranic passages and apply a cut and paste approach to scripture, assign lies to the Prophet Muhammad and belittle his character, and blame Islam for all of the world's problems. They are attractively set up and seem legitimate but they misquote, manufacture information and assert outright lies.
- Note that even though extremist use religious language to justify their violence and hate, their agenda is driven by political, economic and social self interest.
- Extremist Muslim websites are equally dangerous and

manipulate Islamic teachings and history to impress their political and ideological agenda. They also take verses of the Quran out of context and use the prism of their self interest to paint a picture that is misleading and erroneous of and about political, religious and social realities. Be aware that extremist websites use names of scholars that are not legitimate or assign misinformation to legitimate scholars. These sites are known for their hateful messaging, litany of wrongs done to Muslims and expressing hatred for non-Muslims, the “west” and of Muslims who teach peace and justice and have spoken up against terrorism. They are slick and visually impressive and glorify violence.

- The Quran must be studied in the historical context of its time, place and event, while relying on the examples of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and teachings of qualified and recognized scholars, who have the expertise to interpret the Quran.
- Rely on the core values of Islam of justice, fair play, human rights and human dignity stated in the Quran to filter out un-Islamic and hateful extremist messaging coming from the media and the cyber world.
- Encourage your children to be critical thinkers and not blind followers. Peer intimidation can make children uneasy to share what they have heard. Ease their apprehension by staying calm and encouraging them to talk to you and to ask questions.
- Parents are encouraged to take active roles in their children's online activities. For example, parents may want to stay engaged, explore different software controls, monitor downloads, keep the computer in an open area when possible and consult website reviews.



What are signs that parents should look for if they fear that their children are influenced by extremists, especially online?

Be aware of the following signs:

- Sudden onset of anti-social behaviour.
- Spending excessive amount of time online, especially at night when most of the family is asleep.
- At risk youth may exhibit excessive secrecy regarding what sites they are visiting online, where they are going, who they are meeting.
- They may also be easily irritable when challenged on their political and religious views.
- Extremely suspicious and judgmental towards society in general.
- Uncommunicative towards their parents and siblings.
- There may be a sudden change in their circle of friends.
- External and overt expression of hyper-religiosity that is uncharacteristic of family culture.
- They start speaking about the world in extreme terms of good and evil with no room for compromise.
- Over-saturated in foreign news.
- Lack of interest in their regular friends.
- Disrespect of women and anti-women rhetoric.
- Disrespect of scholars that teach peace and harmony.
- Advocating isolation from society.

## BEWARE...!

What is wrong with Indian youth going overseas to fight with fellow Muslims against dictators?

Foreign conflicts are never as simple as just fighting against dictators. These are complex situations with multiple overlapping political agendas at play. Many groups opposing dictators are themselves engaged in acts of terrorism, killing of civilians, and other forms of indiscriminate violence. Like the authority they are fighting against, they may lack legitimate authority and be engaged in unspeakable acts of brutality. Most people outside of the conflict zones (and many within them) including Indian youth are ill-equipped to navigate the intricacies of foreign conflicts and risk becoming involved in violent extremist acts.

Youth travelling abroad to fight in foreign conflicts:

1. Risk their lives, health, freedom and reputation of their family.
2. Risk becoming involved in or perpetrating acts of indiscriminate violence against civilians and will have to face the moral and ethical consequences of their actions in addition to legal consequences.
3. Are in violation of Indian law and may be subject to prosecution in India before they leave or upon their return.

## EXTREMISM IN SPEECH

Extremism often begins with the use of excessive language that violates the truth and the essence of morality and justice. Islam's conception of justice is therefore inclusive of justice in one's speeches in the following verse:

“And when you speak then do so with justice” (Quran, 6:152)

It follows, then, that the essence of moderation and justice in the use of Words and concepts is to employ them for their true and fair meanings.

The Quran also declares that;

“God loves not the public utterance of evil /  
hurtful speech...” (Quran, 4:148)

Broadcasting of evil and hurtful speech is thus forbidden; we know, of course, that distortion and misuse of jihad is by no means confined to the Western media, as Muslims themselves have become a party to this distortion. What needs to be emphasized is the power of words and how it can be used, now more pervasively than ever before, such that they can influence public opinion for divisive and partisan purposes over contentious issues. Whereas reasoned and constructive speech, attempted in the true spirit of good advice (*nasihah*) and reasoned disagreement (*ikhtilaf*), can generate spirited and honest discourse in a quest to find solutions to issues, our media, especially the social media, often play on people's insecurities and generate unease and tension. It is trite perhaps to repeat that bad news make good media stories, ones that sensationalise public sentiment and exacerbate a divisive climate of understanding among religions, communities, and nations.

The media users and operators should pay heed to the measured and moderate approach in the use of words that Islam, indeed all great religious traditions, strongly advise and advocate.

## BLASPHEMY :

### Weapon of Freedom of Expression

In the contemporary world, freedom of expression works as a one-way street: it works for Western writers, thinkers, intellectuals and journalists to say what they wish about the Quran, the Prophet, Islam and Muslims and to promote their agenda on a global level. Only one kind of expression has the full freedom to express itself. Indeed, the notion of freedom of expression sometimes becomes an instrument of power to frame Islam and Muslims in images of violence, depravity, ignorance, stupidity and horror. The notion of freedom of expression, it seems to me, has become the twenty-first-century equivalent of a civilizing mission.

Often the visual images of the Prophet raise storms of protest. In recent years there were massive protests when cartoons depicting Prophet were made by a Dutch cartoonist and published by Dutch newspaper Jylland Posten. Muslims view these acts as deliberately provocative and would like such actions to be covered under laws of blasphemy just as showing disrespect to holy figures such as Jesus Christ is prohibited in the West. The West has maintained double standards in such issues. Several dramas making fun of Jesus Christ have been banned in the Western countries. This, in their knowledge, does not constitute any restriction on freedom of expression.

The freedom to expression does not and should not include freedom to commit sacrilege. In fact freedom of expression does not give right to depiction of obscene images, indecency, produce libelous writings and sedition. All nations

have enacted laws to respect privacy and dignity of individuals. How could a Dutch cartoonist indulge in producing sacrilegious cartoons of the holy Prophet?

Holy men and sacred symbols of religion are to be respected.

In the Muslim world, nobody can even draw pictures of any of the Prophets, let alone ridiculing them. Islam accords highest respect to Mary, holy mother of Jesus Christ even though he was born without a father. The holy Quran forbids its followers from reviling, abusing and showing disrespect to others' gods, deities and religion, lest they also return the same and the situation becomes worse than before.

Needless to say, those who offend in the name of freedom of expression and do more of the same in the wake of painful incidents of provocation and violence as in the case of the humorous Charlie Hebdo publishers printing millions of additional copies with offending depictions of Prophet Muhammad are certainly not helping the cause of peace or freedom. For if that is what freedom of expression must mean, then whoever advocates it is putting his credibility in question, and with it also the peace and tranquility of his own society and people. To do otherwise benefits probably no one, but if one were to name a beneficiary, then it would most likely be the terrorists.

The Quran's general advice to Muslims is to ignore the opinions of those who hurl abuse at them, demonise them in their fiction, films and television shows, mock their Prophet in cartoons, and scorn and stereotype them in their media. Rather, Muslims are asked to concentrate on their own shortcomings and tackle their own problems.

'Now if you paid attention to the majority on earth, they would lead you away from the path of God. They follow nothing but speculation; they themselves do nothing but guess.' (Quran 6:116). I guess that sums it up!

## MEDIA MISUSE

Indian media enjoys considerable freedom in matters of information, education, and entertainment. Freedom of expression has allowed the media to comment and criticize upon issues and events and educate the public at large. But of late, there have been cases of gross misuse of this freedom in tarring communities with a black brush, demonizing certain faiths, twisting issues out of context and even misleading the innocent masses. This is mainly seen in context of the regional language media which has been monopolized by parties, people and corporate interests pursuing profits. In order to increase their circulation or TRP ratings of the TV channels, they indulge in targeting communities in sync with certain global media corporations and think tanks engaged in ideological warfare.

During the Cold War days, the Soviet Union was the favourite target of the Western media. Much of the criticism was directed against the Communist ideology and their war technology. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Western Think Tanks found Islam to be the new and favourite enemy. This became a necessity for the West arms manufacturers as they looked for new markets. The Mujahideen and the Talibans who were earlier funded and fuelled by the West, were developed as the new bugbear and now became the object of the West's attack. The idea was to spread fear of a militant Islam and keep selling arms for defence against the imagined enemy. It is interesting to note that while share prices of all American companies fell in the wake of 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York but share prices of Raytheon, Boeing and Lockheed Martin, three major arms manufacturers went up on NASDAQ. A strong nexus has

come about between military, media, bureaucracy and the political parties in the West, principally in the US. This nexus propels the media to manufacture fear of Islam and Muslims, although the Islamic world does not have any worthwhile capacity to attack other countries, let alone wage war against the West.

The book *The Terror Factory* by Trevor Aaronson has brought to light as to how the FBI catches Muslim youth (who may be staying illegally in the US) and uses them to plant bombs at sensitive locations and then catches them at the spur of the moment and publicises the event. This is done to justify the \$3 billion it gets from the Federal Fund annually. What is clear is that security is a good business across the world, and peace and harmony is a casualty in the process.

## MEDIA TRIAL

It is now common knowledge that terrorism has become a ploy to harass and terrorise Muslims in India. In umpteen cases, the youths picked up on the charges of terrorism, have been found totally innocent after years of incarceration, torture and harassment of the families concerned. The arrests are widely publicized by the media with photos of Muslim youth in shackles splashing on the first page. The TV channels organize debates and they are linked with dreaded organization from across the border. In some cases, lawyers organization having affiliation with the saffron bodies declare not to take up their defence. In some cases, those who defended such cases (and even won them, securing release of the innocents) were murdered e.g., Sayeed Azmi in Mumbai, Naushad Kasimji in Mangaluru etc) were killed by unknown assailants. This media campaign is like trial by the media with disparaging remarks about the accused and their family and in some cases social

boycott. These put them to extreme hardship. But after years of judicial trial, harassment and detention, when they are found innocent by the courts, no one in the media takes notice of the judgment. This attitude of the media taints and stigmatizes individuals and families. It is time the national conscience should feel the pain and prick at the harassment campaign of innocent people who were in no way connected to any anti-social act, let alone anti-national activities.

Some of such cases have been highlighted by Prof. Manisha Sethi of the Jamia Teachers Solidarity Association of Jamia Millia Islamia in a report. The book titled Operation Aksharadham by Rajeev Yadav and Shahnawaz Alam (published by Pharos Media, New Delhi, 2015) has documented the arrests of six persons from Ahmedabad in connection with the attack on Aksharadham Temple in the Gujarat capital. They were acquitted by the Supreme Court on May 26, 2014, the day Mr. Narendra Modi was sworn in Prime Minister of India. They had been taken into custody for attack on the temple in September 2002. They bore no connection with the two alleged attackers on the temple. The identity of the two attackers was never established. The 230-page book details the confessions secured under coercion, false witnesses and farcical nature of evidences presented by the Police. In the words of Mr. Gautam Naulakha, who has penned the foreword, the book lifts curtains from what happens under the 'internal security'. It is time the nation takes notice of such media trial, harassment campaign and the security personnel who continue to enjoy impunity for actions that are responsible for running of lives of people, families and causing damage to the reputation of the communities. Similarly, the media trial of the accused needs to be subjected to some law. It also brings into question the judicial procedure under which the lower courts had passed death sentences against two of the accused and life term for the remaining four.



## What can I do when I see ‘Islamophobia’ propagated in the media?

Islamophobia, properly defined as a hatred or fear of Islam, is often the result of ignorance. While it is not possible to challenge every negative or inaccurate portrayal of Islam and Muslims, we can go a long way in changing the overall tone of discussion in the mainstream media. Here are some simple suggestions:

### 1. Write a Letter to the Editor

Write a letter to the editor when you disagree with an opinion or article or to express your appreciation for a well-written and thought-provoking piece.

Writing a letter to the editor need not be time-consuming. Letters should be no longer than 200 words in length and highlight one key message or argument. Keep in mind that you should write regularly because many letters are submitted to the editors of newspapers and it may take some time before you see one of yours in print.

### 2. Contact TV and Radio Program Producers

You can call or write letters to producers of TV programs and point out any inaccurate or bigoted portrayals of Muslims. You should be polite and specifically reference the material in question (date, time, name of program). Explain why the information or message is inaccurate and potentially harmful, suggest alternatives and ask the producer to follow-up with you about your concerns. Do not forget to also send positive feedback about accurate and positive portrayals.

### 3. Identify the source

If the news item with damaging implications is from a news agency, there is no use only talking to the editor of the newspaper. Try to reach the news agency which may be PTI, UNI or ANI or Reuters. Identify the writer and the Agency and find out their contact and approach them for the correct understanding.

### 4: Provide the Positive Material

Provide positive material on Islam, Muslims, the Prophet, the Muslim Personal Law or other affairs related to the community to the Newspaper offices for references. If you have any Islamic Encyclopedia, Director of Muslim organizations etc, do not forget to send a copy to the newspapers and media in your town. Train a few people in writing on Muslim festivals or Islamic events. Arrange to bring out supplements on special Islamic occasions like the Eidul Fitr, Ramazan and Meeladun Nabi. Provide access to a few advertisers for these occasions.

### 5. Build up Documentation, Research and Reference Library

It is often seen that Muslims have no documentation, research and reference library. All that they do is believe in hearsay. They should have a library where data and documents are filed and preserved. They should have paid people who study National and State Budgets, have read Sachar Committee Report, Ranganatha Mishra Commission, Mandal Commission Report; know the GOs regarding reservation for Muslims; collect Census Report of the Registrar General of India; preserve the Reports of the National Commission on

Minorities; keep records of election manifestos, speeches of important leaders, election data, constituency demography etc; have data about the Linguistic communities; keep files of reports on people arrested under cases of terrorism or riots; know the local history, language and administration; keep reading important books on Muslims, Islam and their issues; etc etc. Newspapers accept rejoinders or stories based on hard data and fact, not the hearsay accounts and should be logically argued.

## 6. Send them Greeting Cards on festivals

Develop the contact with the reporters, writers or editor in the media organization, send them greeting cards on festivals (whatever they may be Holi, Deepawali, Christmas, Makara Sankranti). This will be a humane approach to being in touch with them.

## 7. Invite them on Festive occasions or for such Gatherings

Develop the contact with the reporters, writers or editor in the media organizations, invite them to your homes or community centres where you have gatherings on festive occasions. Arrange vegetarian meals for those who follow vegetarian diet. Know their preferences beforehand. It will not be out of place if you present them the translations of the Holy Quran, FOLLOW ME, a biography of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), ISLAM : Facts vs Fictions, a book to remove the misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, in English, Hindi, Kannada or other Indian languages.

## ISLAMOPHOBIC WEB SITES

There are literally hundreds of web sites, radio programs, and TV networks that specialize in anti-Islam propaganda. The Twitter hash-tag #Killall-Moslem has been around since 2011. While this abundance of offensiveness may comfort those concerned about freedom of expression, “it does not give any comfort to Muslims.”

Islamophobia, properly defined as a hatred or fear of Islam; Islamophobic web sites are known to de-contextualize Quranic passages and apply a cut and paste approach to scripture, assign lies to the Prophet Muhammad and belittle his character, and blame Islam for all of the world’s problems. They are attractively set up and seem legitimate but they misquote, manufacture information and assert outright lies.

Extremist Muslim web sites are equally dangerous and manipulate Islamic teachings and history to impress their political and ideological agenda. They also take verses of the Quran out of context and use the prism of their self interest to paint a picture that is misleading and erroneous of and about political, religious and social realities. Be aware that extremist web sites use names of scholars that are not legitimate or assign misinformation to legitimate scholars. These sites are known for their hateful messaging, litany of wrongs done to Muslims and expressing hatred for non-Muslims, the “west” and of Muslims who teach peace and justice and have spoken up against terrorism. They are slick and visually impressive and glorify violence.

The Quran must be studied in the historical context of its time, place and event, while relying on the examples of Prophet Muhammad and teachings of qualified and recognized scholars, who have the expertise to interpret the Quran. Rely on the core values of Islam of justice, fair play, human rights and human dignity stated in the Quran to filter out un-Islamic and hateful extremist messaging coming from the media and the cyber world.

## ALERT !

- Islam prohibits aggression without a just cause and all acts that strike terror into the hearts and minds of innocent people, whose lives are immune and protected. Any hostility of this kind falls under the prohibited terrorism. It is also sheer injustice and a form of intellectual terrorism to confuse Islam with terrorism. Nay, it is a religion of moderation and balance.
- By equating terrorism with Jihad and by calling terrorist “Jihadis,” the media, law enforcement, intelligence agencies and politicians have confused the discourse, and this has been counterproductive in challenging the extremist narrative in the minds of the young and vulnerable
- By uncritically applying the noble concept of Jihad to terrorism and using labeling terrorist as ‘Jihadis’, we are playing into the hands of violent extremists.
- Application of these terms and titles has inadvertently emboldened the terrorist giving them bragging rights to nobility
- As stated earlier, Jihad is not terrorism; terrorists are criminals, not martyrs.
- Clear and accurate use of the Islamic lexicon (dictionary), terminologies and concepts is the surest way to deconstruct the extremist violent narrative, and to de-program already radicalized youth.
- A core group should be formed comprising human rights organizations working in terror case, civil society groups and community organizations. Every such case should be referred to the panel. This core group would work as a watchdog. Only this will help establish mutual harmony, contact and cooperation between police and public and will shut the door of Misunderstandings.

## INTERNET SAFETY

### 1. What is defined as problematic social media?

The real issue is not problematic social media, but rather people's problematic USE of social media. The scope of cyber-crime is expanding daily as Indians become more dependent on technology in all facets of their lives, exposing them to increasing threats.

The Police intelligence works closely with the Indians and international law enforcement community to develop tools and solutions to combat cyber crime. The Police intelligence's strategic goal is ensuring a safe and secure India, and that includes protecting Indians from cyber crime and other forms of online exploitation.

As for cyber security, this falls under the purview of Public Safety of India.

### 2. What age is recommended for parental control and monitoring?

For more information on common parenting skills, methods of encouraging young people to act safely and respectfully, for items to look out for as well as the various laws and additional useful resources, please visit :

Tips for Parents at:

<http://bc.rcmp.ca/ViewPage.action?siteNodeId=87&languageId=1&contentId=21690>

Communicating with young people and having rules on sharing and viewing information on social media web-sites are important conversations to have regarding internet safety.

## MONITORING BY POLICE

What is being monitored by the police (e.g., phone, internet, etc.)?

The Intelligence Department only monitors when evidence and reasonable and probable grounds of a criminal offence has/is being committed.

Are there things that get triggered on the web for the police to notice?

Within national security, tips on suspicious activity on the Web are only reported by the public.

How do the police recognize if a person has been 'brainwashed' to be a terrorist?

The Intelligence Department does not target individuals or groups, but criminal activity. As such, members of the community (families, friends, neighbours, etc.) need to report suspicious behaviour to their local police of jurisdiction.

Radicalization to violence is a very complex issue. It's an intricate process and the persons that are most likely to notice changes in someone's behaviour or mindset are their families, friends, and community members. The earlier the police can be informed of suspicious behaviour, the better.

Can law enforcement officials treat Muslims differently?

Everyone in India has the same rights and responsibilities regardless of their religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race and gender. The Right to Freedom of Religion and to Freedom from Discrimination based on religion is contained under the Fundamental Right

enshrined in the Indian Constitution, the highest law of the land. It applies to all actions taken by governments.

The job of law enforcement officials is to protect everyone in India including you and you owe them both respect and gratitude for this. Law enforcement officials are human beings and may have their own biases. Unless they express those biases in an outward way by something they say or do, you should assume that they are performing their duties objectively. If you suspect a law enforcement official is treating you in a biased manner, you have a right to file a complaint against them. You must still treat them respectfully and understand that acting aggressively towards a police officer can be a crime.

### Sensitizing of Police :

The law enforcement officials are required to educate about Islam and Muslims. Lack of understanding of faith, its symbols, rites and rituals, beliefs and practices will hinder the performance of cops and officials particularly those who are involved in gathering Intelligence. There are many organisations who can help the police force including Salaam Centre.

### Protect potential youth from becoming Terrorist

It would be wise idea to counsel those youth who are falling prey to stratagems of terrorist network as soon as they get trapped. Police in collaboration with community elders and family members can do this. It is observed that whenever a youth is arrested police give a statement saying “He was under surveillance for five years.” Why to wait for five years, he would commit a crime anytime and why to waste our human resource by arresting him after five years, humane approach will increase the confidence in the community.



## How do we bridge the gap between Law Enforcement and Muslims ?

The gap can be bridged by:

- Encouraging more interaction between community and law enforcement socially and re-creationally.
- Holding information sessions to educate the community and the law enforcement about each other.
- Build relationships between the community and law enforcement.
- Encourage law enforcement as a career choice for youth and showcasing Muslims in law enforcement as positive role models.
- INVITE POLICE OFFICIALS TO MOSQUES AND MADRASA : Several police officials believe that all mosques have cellars and anything could be hidden there. In order to remove their fear, invite them to the mosque for festive celebrations. Whenever a new Police Commissioner is appointed, invite him to the Juma gathering and ask him to speak to the congregation in the local language for 10 minutes after the prayer. Garland him, present him the Translation of the Quran and ISLAM : Facts vs Fictions, a book to remove misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, to those, his advisers, assistants and even to the driver of the official vehicle.
- Send them Greeting Cards on festivals, to say Happy Diwali to Hindus or Happy Christmas for Christians. Invite them on Festive occasions of Ramadan and Bakrid at community centres or at mosques, arrange veg. and non-veg foods. And also present them the books on Islam and offer some sweet box for their families.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### for Intelligence and Law Enforcement Officials

Indian Muslims continues to make important positive contributions to all aspects of Indian society. They are, as all Indians, committed to ensuring the safety of India and its inhabitants. In order to maintain and continue to develop trust and positive cooperation between the Indian Muslim community and intelligence and law enforcement officials, the following important recommendations should be considered:

1. Do not conflate religiosity with radicalization or conflate religious devotion with a propensity to commit acts of violence.
2. Abandon public terminology that creates false linkages between Islam and terrorism in favor of consistent language that contextualizes threats and accurately identifies the perpetrators of violent extremism. Avoid terms such as “Islamist terrorism”, “Islamicism”, and “Islamic extremism” in favor of more accurate terms such as “Al-Qaeda inspired extremism or ISIS inspired terrorism”.
3. Discontinue any inappropriate information gathering techniques including (but not limited to) showing up at workplaces, intimidating newcomers, questioning individuals religiosity and discouraging legal representation.
4. Ensure all operations strictly adhere to the spirit and letter of laws and regulations pertaining to the limits on surveillance and information gathering activities.
5. Collect and publicly report disaggregated data based on the racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds of individuals

interviewed and/or investigated in order to substantiate statements about the objectivity of investigations and that racial/religious profiling is not practiced.

6. There is difference between suspicion and conspiracy; Even if anyone is arrested on suspicion, efforts should not be made to brand him as terrorist but should be dealt with judiciously and without any discrimination and prejudices.

7. Do not refer to terrorist as “Jihadis”. This only emboldens them and gives them a legitimate status in the eyes of the vulnerable. Terrorism is not jihad. Jihad is a noble concept in Islam.

8. Muslims are very diverse culturally, in religious observance and ethnicity. Do not brush them as one monolithic group and assign guilt by association.

9. Build relationships with Muslim community that is based on mutual respect and is not crisis driven

10. Make extra effort to inspire youth from Muslim community to see law enforcement as a viable career option.

11. Develop your literacy in Islam and in Muslim cultures.

12. Attend community events and visit mosques.

13. It will be in order to urge a serious review of the entire procedure of arresting and detaining people under the charges of terrorism. Could something be done to save their personality from being maligned in public by the media? Will the authorities subject the security personnel to some regulations whereby they are made accountable for the excesses (torture in custody, confessions under coercion) and excesses and highhandedness could be curbed?

## AN APPEAL TO THE GOVERNMENT

It is the basic duty of the government in a democracy to maintain law and order and provide equal protection of law to every citizen regardless of his affiliation to any faith, caste and creed. There is a difference between a political party and a government. The Government cannot follow the path of a political party. They cannot indulge in hate-mongering and cannot and should not discriminate between two citizens on the basis of faith, caste and creed.

But it is a matter of extreme regret that government/s engage themselves—overtly or covertly—in dividing people on the basis of caste, community and faith without any regard for the law that bars them from doing any such act. Heads of parties in power, who ought to be respectful of the Constitution, issue statements that violate the spirit of the Constitution. Recent months have witnessed several such incidents. Akhlaq Hussain, a resident of the Dadri village in the outskirts of Delhi, was lynched by a Hindu mob following a rumour issued from the local temple that he stored beef, although what came out later from his house was mutton. A myth called ‘Love Jihad’ was spread by the media and interfaith marriages came under the scanner. ‘Ghar Wapasi’ (return to the ancestral faith) was staged in several places across the country to counter the fabricated incidents of religious conversions. Minority character of several institutions is sought to be revoked ‘to rollback acts of minority appeasement’ by previous governments. Culprits accused of murder of individuals from minority community have been cleared of charges and being anointed at the leadership positions of the party. These actions bespeak of the state of secularism in the country and as to how the atmosphere of tolerance and harmony is being vitiated.

Never before the hallowed principles of the Constitution and guarantees to the protection of minorities were trampled upon so brazenly. These are dangerous precedents and are sounding the alarm bells against the atmosphere of peace and the social stability.

Peace is inevitable for progress. Peace and justice are integral to each other. Justice demands an infrastructure in which 'rule of the law' is one among the basic ingredients. Where the 'rule of the law' takes a backseat, the peace becomes a mirage. Anarchy takes hold of nations where rule of law is given a go by. Such nations lose their political and social stability and economic efficiency. They neither attract any foreign investment, nor the foreign tourists, students and businessmen flock there. The darkness that grips them thereafter creates ideal condition for germination of all kinds of anti-social forces. We need to take lessons from Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan. Our Prime Minister has been the Chief Minister of Gujarat for long many years and he must have realized the difficulties in securing visa for some of the important countries in the West following the record of Gujarat Government in dealing with the fallout of the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in that State.

The world is turning into a global village and we need to treat every single individual around us as equal to us and deserving the same respect and dignity that we owe to ourselves. Similarly, a nation should include all citizens, without any discrimination on any basis, in its plan for welfare and development. The political parties follow ideologies and comprise people who share that ideology. But Governments represent the collective will of the entire people, not sections of them. Hence, we need to give up all those policies that divide people on the basis of faith, caste, colour, origin, creed and language.

## WHAT MUSLIMS SHOULD DO ?

How can I respond when I see Islam being linked to terrorism?

It can be hurtful and disturbing to hear Islam being linked to terrorism. As individuals, it is important that we are involved in our communities. This means consistently reaching out to your neighbours, participating in neighbourhood and community organizations, school parent committees and volunteering. Through this participation, which is a way for us to live our faith, people will have an opportunity to know us better and it will dispel any extremist messages they may have heard. Over the years studies have shown that the more interaction people have with Muslims, the more likely they are to have an accurate and positive view of Islam and Muslims. At the same time, Muslims should not shy away from correcting misunderstandings and challenging stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in an educated and civilized manner, when it is appropriate to do so.

At a community level, we need to support organizations that are challenging Islamophobia and bigotry and providing a professional voice for Indian Muslims on issues of importance to them.

How do we spread the word that Extremists do not represent the Muslims?

The best way to show people that Islam teaches moderation and justice and peace is to embody those characteristics. Do not shy away from having a conversation or answering

questions about Islam. Make sure that you have enough knowledge about what extremists are claiming and how they are twisting the message of Islam for their political and economic agenda so that you can respond effectively, accurately and sincerely.

“Invite all to the way of your God with wisdom and beautiful preaching.....” (Quran 16:125-128)

## THE TOOL WE PROVIDE

Salaam Centre, Bangalore has been working in this direction since 2008. If any Muslim is interested in reaching out to non-Muslims, to educate them about Islam and Muslims or would like to debunk misconceptions about Islam, they can seek help of Salaam Centre .

Salaam Centre has published following books apart from Quran in various Indian languages.

1. The HOLY QURAN, translations in English and other Indian languages.
2. FOLLOW ME, God Will Love You : A book on life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).
3. ISLAM For You : A book on Beliefs and teachings of Islam.
4. ISLAM : Facts vs Fictions : A book meant for removing misconceptions about Islam and Muslims.

Those who are interested in reading these books or would like to gift them to their friends, Muslims and non-Muslims can contact them at +91 99011 29956. These books are available in: English, Kannada, Marathi, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu languages.

## WITH OUR COUNTRYMEN

Islam stands for justice and equality. Muslims and Hindus (and followers of all other faiths, and even those following no religion) share the same space, same ambience, the history and culture that we are proud of as Indians. Difference of religion should not be a reason for mutual suspicion, divisions, enmity, discrimination and aversion of each other. The Muslims would not have been a minority, had they been interested only in proselytisation. Similarly, the Muslim rule would not have spanned over 600 years of the past millennium, had the Hindus been intolerant. It is therefore imperative for us to have a profound study of history and discover and strengthen the mutual bonds.

The Indian secularism is not anti-religion. It only means the State does not promote a particular faith but helps people cherish their beliefs, live according to them and practice its rites and rituals. We owe a common commitment to our Constitution that promises equal rights, equal treatment by law, and justice. Any attempt to undermine the Constitution would weaken the nation. Let us remove the mistrust by studying our faiths, developing a vision for coexistence, free our ties from communal strain, reach out to each other with love and compassion, shun bias and prejudice, and avoid all religious supremacist slogans that create fear psychosis in the fellow citizens.

Policy of forget and forgive and compensate wherever possible, would take us forward. Revenge and reprisals would mar our progress. Choice is ours.