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Contemporary Issues of a Creedal Nature

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Introduction

The struggle new Muslims face upon entering into their new religion of choice, Islam, are many and varied. Often, new Muslims are subject to pressures ranging from financial to familial, and at times, psychological due to this new choice. This is in addition to the bombardment of new information, rituals and processes they must now learn and in which they must immerse themselves.

Thus, the need to address the issues which confront them are of paramount importance so that their transition to Islam is well-founded. One of the most dangerous issues new Muslims face, especially in modern times, is the influence of extreme and heretical understandings, cults and groups. A new Muslim, in the vulnerable stage of recently finding Islam and being unsure of what Islam entails, is more susceptible to this influence and learning and practising Islam incorrectly. The process of then deconstructing this ideology and replacing it with sound and correct Islamic beliefs is one of critical importance.

After identifying the potential dangers that exist, this paper will look at two issues vis-à-vis the particular area of research. Firstly, the need and methods of preventing such ideologies becoming imbedded in the first place. Secondly, if they do become imbedded, how to deconstruct such ideology and replace it with sound beliefs. The paper will conclude by presenting a number of recommendations to the American Muslim Jurists Assembly Imams Conference.

The papers remit is to look at how to protect new Muslims from all heretical and extremely deviant ideologies. However, for the sake of clarity and focus, it will take terrorism and violent extremism as a case study. Many of the dangers and solutions can be copied and pasted to suit other forms of extremism, and the readers of this paper can extrapolate from what is mentioned herein.

Defining Extremism

There is not a single agreed upon definition for the word 'extremism'. In fact, it is often defined in the context in which it is used. For example, the UK government defines it as, 'vocal or active opposition to British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs...'⁽¹⁾ The problem with this definition is that the term 'British values' is fluid and not comprehensively agreed upon. Who determines these values and must we accept each one?

Another definition is, '...a process involving an individual or group whereby they are indoctrinated to a set of beliefs that support acts of terrorism, that can be manifested in one's behaviour and attitudes.'⁽²⁾ A third definition says, 'It is the ideological or behavioural move to the extreme right or left.'⁽³⁾

Dr Salah al-Sawy in his work on religious extremism defines it as, "going to excess in acts of worship, or conflicting with the opinions of others in issues of ijtihād or exceeding the shar'ī boundaries in dealing with opponents...'⁽⁴⁾ Thus, Islam is a religion of balance in all affairs and extremism is much wider and more comprehensive in Islam than violent terrorism. However, for the purposes of this paper, the case study is of

(1) Tackling Extremism in the UK; HM Government, Dec 2013.

(2) Riyad Rahimullah et al; Understanding Violent Radicalization amongst Muslims in Journal of Psychology and Behavioural Science; Vol, 1, No. 1, Dec 2013.

(3) Sa'id al-Wādi'i; Countering the Rise of Extremism Leading to Terrorism; Riyadh; 2012.

(4) Salah al-Sawy; Religious Extremism: The Other View; Awqāf al-Duwaliyyah lil-'Īlām.

violent extremism. The International Fiqh Council defines this as, "Unjust aggression towards individuals, groups and states..."⁽¹⁾

The Ruling of Fighting Extremism

It is an obligation upon Muslims to enjoin goodness and prevent harm. The Prophet (ﷺ) gave the example in this regard of the occupants of a ship. Those on the lower decks decide to make holes in the hull of the vessel rather than climb to the upper decks to seek water. If those on the upper deck do not stop them they will all drown. If, however, they stop their harm, they will all be saved.⁽²⁾ Ibn Ḥazm declared *ijmā'* or consensus of the scholars on the obligation of enjoining goodness and preventing harm.⁽³⁾

In addition to this, there are numerous narrations which warn us of the evils and harms of extremism. One such example is the narration of Ibn 'Abbās wherein the Prophet (ﷺ) was asking for pebbles to stone the pillars in Minā, he commented, "Yes, like this size. Beware of extremism in the religion, for indeed those who came before you were only destroyed due to extremism in the religion."⁽⁴⁾

Identifying Potential Dangers

It is undoubtedly the case that there is a small yet existent group amongst Muslim communities in the West that have veered towards the path of extremism. For example, in the UK, 1,792 people were arrested under the UK Terrorism Act 2000. 656 of these people were prosecuted, and 542 were convicted at a conviction rate of 83%.⁽⁵⁾ It is true that this is a very small percentage of the millions of Muslims residing in the UK, but efforts must be made to protect our communities further from this dangerous ideology.

While reverts are not the biggest segment of the Muslim community, some research suggests that they are considerably overrepresented when it comes to extremism.⁽⁶⁾ Therefore, we must first attempt to identify these dangers before we discuss how to tackle them. The below are general dangers which have been identified in numerous researches on this topic. Although they may not all be specific to extremism vis-à-vis new Muslims initially, revert Muslims may encounter them gradually.

Awareness of these dangers will help mosques, Islamic centres and their imams and leaders to be better equipped to tackle them. Until and unless the leaders of the Muslim community can understand some of the root causes of where these extreme ideas emanate from, they will be unable to effectively tackle them. Below, three of the main dangers that have been identified by researchers are mentioned.

1- Religious Knowledge and Information

A number of researchers identified religion as playing a central motivating role in Muslims falling into extremism and terrorism.⁽⁷⁾ This means that such Muslims believed it to be their religious duty to carry out and perpetrate acts of extremism and encourage others to do likewise. Islam does not cause terrorism; even non-Muslim researchers acknowledge this fact, and clearly the statistics show that the vast Muslim

(1) International Fiqh Council, 16th Session, Makkah, 2002.

(2) Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī; no. 2493.

(3) Ibn Ḥazm, Al-Muḥallā, Dār al-Fikr, vol. 9, p. 361.

(4) Muhammad Nasir al-Albani; Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah, no. 2473.

(5) Benjamin Politowski; Terrorism in Great Britain: The Statistics; House of Commons Library; 9 June 2016.

(6) Bart Schuurman et al; Converts and Islamist Terrorism; International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, June 2016.

(7) Ibrahim S; Egypt's Islamic Activism in the 1980s in Third World Quarterly, 1988. Thackrah J; Dictionary of Terrorism, 2nd edition, London, Routledge, 2004.

majority the world over are not terrorists.⁽¹⁾ As Muslims, we know that there is no correct religious basis for these beliefs and acts, yet we also cannot deny, that there are others who espouse such teachings.

One of the major dangers therefore for a new Muslim is their lack of Islamic knowledge.⁽²⁾ New Muslims are in effect a blank canvas, and may be more willing to accept any and all information that seems 'Islamic'. They have yet to understand core principles of the religion such as where and how divine knowledge is taken, and how to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic knowledge.

Another significant danger which then follows on from the first is the exposure to incorrect Islamic knowledge and information. The pitfalls of YouTube, social media and other online platforms in this regard are well known.⁽³⁾ The thirst of new Muslims for knowledge about their newfound religion may lead them to unwittingly access dangerous and incorrect information. Overzealousness can then lead such people to believe that this is Islam and no other interpretation is acceptable or valid.

Linked closely to this, is the influence of newfound friends that a revert may make; the people who will take this individual under their wing. Often such people simply give them the 'Islam' which they were taught, whether cultural or otherwise.⁽⁴⁾ Yet at times, reverts may be targeted as recruits to extreme views and ideologies.

2- Social Influences

A number of researchers identify social influences as the cause of extremism.⁽⁵⁾ The pre-existing issues one may have about their own self-identity and the society in which they live may be a cause for radicalisation.⁽⁶⁾ We are all products of our societies and cultures and they inevitably shape the way we think and behave. This is true also of new Muslims.

New Muslims not only deal with baggage that they may have from before Islam in terms of issues that all people deal with, they must now also face the challenge of reframing their identity and the way others see and perceive them. Thus, a potent danger in this regard is being alienated or marginalised. The psychological need to belong to groups may lead such people to accept extremism simply because of the need to 'belong'.⁽⁷⁾

One of the biggest challenges new Muslims face is how their family, friends and colleagues may respond. Will they be viewed with suspicion or resentment? New Muslims are then also immediately expected to become spokespeople for every global event involving Muslims and having justify Islam to others. Their parents and families may respond in an adverse or even confrontational manner.⁽⁸⁾ There are stories and incidents of new Muslims being expelled from home or abandoned by their spouses and families.⁽⁹⁾

(1) Githens-Mazer J, Causes of Jihadi Terrorism in Criminal Justice Matters, 73, 2008, pp. 26-28.

(2) M Uhlmann; European Converts to Terrorism in Middle East Quarterly 15. 2007.

(3) Ines von Behr, Anais Reding et al; Radicalisation in the Digital Era, RAND Europe, 2013.

(4) Yasir Suleiman; Narratives of Conversion to Islam in Britain Female Perspectives, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge, 2013.

(5) Sageman M, Understanding Terror Networks, 2004, University of Philadelphia. Stern J, Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill, New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 2003.

(6) Monika Bartoszewicz; Controversies of Conversions: The Potential Terrorist Threat of European Converts to Islam; PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2013.

(7) Randy Borum; Psychology of Terrorism, University of South Florida, Jan 2004.

(8) Suleiman, 2013.

(9) Islamwise Centre for New Muslims, Birmingham, UK, December 2016.

Discrimination can also become a cause of frustration. If the marginalised feel discriminated against, they may be more receptive to radical ideologies.⁽¹⁾ Muslims are often alienated and attacked within the media and by some politicians.⁽²⁾ According to statistics in the UK, the second largest defined ethnic group to be stopped and searched under the Terrorism Act 2000 were British Asian, referring to people from the Indian subcontinent.⁽³⁾

All of the above may lead a revert to joining a group based on the sole important factor to them; their new identity.⁽⁴⁾ The process of befriending the wrong people may then lead them wanting to become part of a wider group or fraternity. Often, radicalised members undergo a period of intense social interaction with a small group of people with whom they develop a strong bond and friendship.⁽⁵⁾

3- The Need to Make a Difference

The concept of unity and the 'ummah' are important Islamic principles. Yet the correct understanding of these principles, and especially in terms of the oppression and hurt suffered by many parts of the 'ummah' are not always known. How to balance helplessness with the hurt we feel for other Muslims? How to understand the concepts of al-walā wal-barā and Western citizenship? This is true of the majority of Muslims and not just reverts.

Thus, as the new Muslim becomes introduced to these concepts, they must be correctly taught or else they are at risk of misunderstanding true Islam and being susceptible to incorrect ideologies. Extremism will often take the above sentiments and use them as a means for political revenge.⁽⁶⁾ This feeling can be compounded if someone suffers from low self-esteem, or has low social and economic prospects, leading to a sense of apathy.

The prospect then of being able to make a difference and do 'good', change the world and at the same time be rewarded can be attractive.

Preventing Extremist Ideologies

The proverb, 'prevention is better than cure' or 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' is relevant to the discussion at hand. To prevent our new Muslim brothers and sisters from becoming imbedded with extreme ideologies and views, is far easier than curing them after the fact. This is something every Muslim centre should be focusing upon for their community in general, but particular attention should also be paid to revert Muslims and their particular circumstances.

Below are listed a number of important and practical preventative measures that should be adopted by mosques and Islamic centres in the West.

1- The need for a dedicated revert Muslim care service

Too often new Muslims are left to their own devices. The image is a familiar one. We have a new Muslim in the mosque, the community rejoices, s/he take their shahādah on the microphone and then they are often forgotten. Perhaps they are given literature,

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- (1) Silke A, Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalisation, in European Journal of Criminology, 2008, pp. 99-123.
 - (2) Spalek B, Muslim communities, Counter-terrorism and Deradicalisation in International Journal of Law, 2008, pp. 257-270.
 - (3) UK Home office, 2011.
 - (4) Juergenmeyer M, Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence, 2nd edition, London, University of California Press, 2003.
 - (5) Husain E, The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I saw & Why I Left, London, Penguin Books, 2007. Silke, 2008.
 - (6) Schmind A, Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Databases and Literature, Amsterdam, 1988.

or told how to pray or pointed towards some YouTube videos, but there is no dedicated aftercare for them. Yet this service in every mosque, or in a community spread amongst a number of mosques, would do much to provide a new Muslim with the sense of welcome, belonging and correct information dispensed in a wise manner that they need.

Resources and specialists are available to help in this regard. A number of well-known revert Muslims and organisations can be contacted and their help sought. New Muslim Academy is one such example with an online platform.⁽¹⁾ This initiative requires resolve from the Muslim community and its leadership, and the willingness to invest money, resources and people into this area.

2- A holistic approach

Helping the revert community is not only about teaching them and giving them knowledge. Many new Muslims face a range of issues and challenges from family issues, to health problems and financial difficulties. Thus, the approach to new Muslims and the help offered to them must be as holistic and comprehensive as possible. Many of the dangers identified above in the social influences section can be mitigated by implementing this point and the one before.

3- Providing authentic knowledge

New Muslims need to learn their religion, but they need to do so in a structured and wise manner, which simplifies for them the information. The need to focus is not only upon the basics of Islam such as wuḍū' and prayer, but also issues of imān and strengthening their spiritual relationship with Allah. They need to learn and understand the beauty of Islam and how it is a force for positive good.

Having a dedicated and structured program for reverts is a vital service. Teaching them the importance of authentic knowledge, and the correct sources from which to find this knowledge is imperative. The face to face contact between the imam and the revert community will build a relationship of trust and confidence. Reverts must be guided to qualified and balanced speakers on YouTube, and warned against those who hold extreme views.

Additionally, imams and the people who run such services and programs must be trained in dealing with the needs of the revert community.

4- A mentorship program

One of the dangers listed above was that of bad influences and friendships. Having a mentorship program where revert Muslims are surrounded by good and grounded Muslims counters this threat. It also gives a revert one to one contact with someone who can help with the individual issues with which they are dealing. Sometimes, it may be as simple as having an ear willing to listen, and at other times, it may require the mentor enlisting the help of others such as the imam.

Additionally, reverts may benefit from the experience of other reverts who went through similar challenges. Holding regular revert gatherings and retreats, especially around Eid when everyone is busy with their families, will help to lift some of the isolation they may feel.

5- Being open about extremism and its threat

New Muslims need to be openly told and warned about the extremist views out there. They need to understand that they may be targeted by others. Solutions to this must be presented to them. When they have doubts or fail to understand something,

(1) <http://newmuslimacademy.org/>

they must be given the confidence and told it is ok to approach their local imam with such queries and questions.

6- Patience and perseverance

The process of helping someone progress from a new Muslim who knows next to nothing about their religion to a confident and grounded Muslim requires time and effort, and therefore requires patience. This is not a service or process which is completed in days or weeks, but rather one which takes months if not years.

Removing Extreme Ideology

Changing a person's deep and long held beliefs requires time, expertise and perseverance. Often this requires dismantling the existing false ideology, rebutting it and then replacing it with the correct and sound ideology. Amongst researchers there is a debate as to the merits of disengagement vis-à-vis deradicalisation. Deradicalisation is the process of moderating one's beliefs whereas disengagement is the process of changing one's behaviour by refraining from violence, whilst the underlying beliefs may still remain.⁽¹⁾

From an Islamic legal perspective, the only option is deradicalisation as disengagement is maintaining the same beliefs but choosing not to act on them. If the beliefs are in and of themselves incorrect from a sharī point of view, then these views must be rebutted and replaced. The issue of a Muslim's 'aqidah and creed is of paramount importance, especially when the creed may lead them to committing ḥarām.

Below are listed a number of important and practical preventative measures that should be adopted by mosques and Islamic centres in the West.

1- The need for specialists

In order to effectively counter and combat the ideology of extremism, there is a need for specialists who understand the theological arguments used by the ideologues of these views and how to rebut them. It is naïve to assume that every imam or student of knowledge can sufficiently respond to these arguments without specialised study. Furthermore, this paper recommends that such specialists hold high qualifications and impeccable scholarly pedigree as extremists often dismiss their opponents as unqualified.

2- Answering the theological doubts

The proponents of extremist views often use the Qur'an and Sunnah as their sources. They will use quotes of famous scholars of the past and will frequently reference from their works. They will use verses of the Qur'an and justifying them with ambiguity, such as the statement of Allah, "And if they seek help of you for the religion, then you must help, except against a people between yourselves and whom is a treaty. And Allah is Seeing of what you do."⁽²⁾ They will make statements such as, "As Muslims, we should be happy with the actions of ISIS, even if we do not agree with them. To be unhappy or oppose them is a sign of hypocrisy."

These doubts and use of spiritual texts require one to understand them correctly and in their proper context. The correct understanding must then be clarified to someone who already holds preconceived views. In the case of some reverts as with born Muslims, this may be more difficult as they will have little to no sharī background with which to judge between these contrary opinions. In addition to this, the means of attaining correct and authentic knowledge should also be highlighted.

(1) Angel Rabasa et al; Deradicalizing Islamic Extremists; RAND Europe, 2010.

(2) Qur'an 8:72.

Thus, this process is one which is lengthy and requires patience. However, just the simple process of planting the idea in the minds and hearts of such people, that perhaps their ideas are incorrect, and moreover, displeasing to Allah is a big step in the right direction.

3- Offering an alternative

Many Muslims, including reverts who hold extreme ideas must be given a correct alternative to replace their existing beliefs. Using the same Qur'anic verses with their correct interpretations from works of tafsīr, showing example from the Sunnah and sirah of how the Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) dealt with similar challenges to those which we face, examples of how the Companions lived with and co-existed with peoples of other faiths, the correct context for the views of past scholars; all help in offering a real alternative which is correct.

4- Other means of support

As identified in the first two parts of this research paper, some of the external factors which may lead a person to extremism, and particularly reverts, include social factors or feelings of isolation and discrimination. Thus, the Muslim community and mosques must also look to see if there are other factors which need addressing. This support may be in the form of finding employment, counselling and so on. In addition, if the individual is surrounded by people of a similar mindset, an alternative group of friends need to be available for them.

5- Doing good in the community

People with extreme views may justify it to themselves as doing good or being a moral force of change. These same emotions and desires can be channelled in an alternate positive way. Helping people of the local community, from the elderly to the youth, the poor and orphans are all accessible avenues of doing good and making a difference. Food banks, social care programs, youth initiatives and educational support are just some examples of what can be offered. Political activism is a way of promoting change within the confines of the law.

6- Offering a balanced world view

Muslims the world over feel for the plight suffered by their brothers in sisters in places like Syria, Myanmar, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine and other countries. We see the rise of the far right movements in the West and the increasing attacks, physical and otherwise that Muslims in the West are also suffering. Therefore, a balanced view must be presented. Rejection of terrorism does not mean that there are not alternative, legal and permissible means in which to try to bring about change and raise awareness.

7- Teaching them the beauty of Islam

Reverts will often accept Islam due to their desire to come closer to Allah and because they realise that they will be resurrected and held to account for their deeds in this world. These basic issues must be reiterated to them as they need constant reminders. They need to be reminded of the struggle involved in worshipping Allah and the traps of Satan and the whisperings of our souls. Many people engaged in extremism are not generally known for their piety or religiosity. Indeed, some of them have had their misdeeds documented. For them, they believe this is a shortcut to Paradise. This notion must be corrected. The ideals of struggle, fluctuating imān, repentance and fighting Satan must all be restated.

Examples of Deconstructing False Arguments

In this section of the paper, I will give three brief examples of commonly used justifications by extreme ideologues and the response to them.

ONE: TAKFİR (CASTING SOMEONE OUTSIDE OF ISLAM) & KILLING

One of the main justifications that extremists use in perpetrating killings and massacres is that the people they kill are non-Muslims or Muslims who are now apostates and thus killing them is permissible. They will consider certain actions to be sufficient as causes of apostasy, and then wholesale label segments of the Muslim community as apostates. They may even assert that for Muslims to be displeased with their actions and killings is a sign of hypocrisy and disbelief.

The response to this is to understand a few issues when it comes to takfīr:

1. The shari'ah differentiates between acts of disbelief and labelling individuals as disbelievers. The application of the ruling upon individuals is a matter for scholars or Muslim judges, and must be done via a due process.
2. In order for the application of this ruling to take place, the person accused of disbelief must be spoken to and his actions understood in their proper context. It is also not allowed to apply the ruling in actions where there is a difference of opinion amongst Muslim scholars. For example, it is reported that the Companion Qudāmah ibn Maẓ'ūn used to drink alcohol during the time of 'Umar because he misunderstood the verse, "There is not upon those who believe and do righteousness [any] blame concerning what they have eaten if they fear Allah and believe and do righteous deeds..."⁽¹⁾ He was therefore punished by 'Umar.⁽²⁾ Thus, although this Companion drank alcohol believing it to be permissible, he was punished for 'Umar but not cast outside of Islam because of his misunderstanding.
3. A person who commits a sin in Islam is still a Muslim, even if it is a major sin, and the default position is that we advise and help him or her overcome this weakness. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam) said concerning a Companion who had consumed alcohol and who was belittled by some others, "Do not help Satan overpower your brother, but say, 'O Allah, forgive him and have mercy upon him.'"⁽³⁾
4. Killing is a major sin and forbidden unless for a due right and with due process by a legal system.

TWO: JIHĀD

Jihād is the legitimate concept which means to struggle and strive for the sake of Allah.⁽⁴⁾ It is a comprehensive term through which the Muslim must first learn to struggle against one's own desires and bad characteristics, as well as temptations and the whisperings of Satan.⁽⁵⁾ It also includes the physical form of Jihād which is what is often meant when the term is used.⁽⁶⁾ This concept is widely misunderstood and misused by proponents of extreme ideologies.

The following are common mistakes made in the understanding of Jihād:

1. Jihād is not the goal in and of itself. The goal of Islam is to spread the true message of Islam and for Muslims to achieve happiness in both this life and the next by following the commandments of Allah.

(1) Qur'an, 5:93.

(2) Muṣannaf 'Abdur-Razzāq, no. 16558.

(3) Ṣaḥīḥ Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ, no. 3548.

(4) Muḥammad ibn Rushd, Al-Muqaddimāt al-Mumhidāt, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1408 AH, vol. 1, p. 341.

(5) Muḥammad ibn 'Isā al-Qurṭubī, known as Ibn Manāṣif, Al-Ittiḥād fi Abwāb al-Jihād, edited by Mashūr Ḥasan, 1425 AH, vol. 1, p. 10.

(6) 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Kāsānī, Badā'ī al-Ṣanā'ī, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1402 AH, vol. 7, p. 97.

2. Physical Jihād is called for by Muslim leaders and governments, and not individuals or groups. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said, “The leader is a barrier. Fighting is under his leadership.”⁽¹⁾
3. The pretence often employed that what they do is to help the weak and oppressed Muslims around the world. They will use verses such as, “And if they seek your help for the religion, then you must help, except against a people between yourselves and whom is a treaty...”⁽²⁾ However, their use of this verse is incorrect as this verse pertains to the rulers, and their people must follow them in this regard. The proof for this is the incident of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah. Once the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) had signed the treaty, he refused to help Abu Jandal despite his apparent weakness and oppressed state.⁽³⁾
4. Jihād has many rulings and conditions attached to it. For example, the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) forbade the killing of women and children.⁽⁴⁾

THREE: AL-WALĀ’ WAL-BARĀ’

This concept is often loosely translated as loving and hating for the sake of Allah. Once again it is misinterpreted and then used to advance the agenda of extreme groups.

1. Al-walā’ wal-barā’ is a concept which refers to religious issues. It means that Muslims cannot hold the religions of others to be superior to their own. Thus, the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) is the best of Prophets, the Qur’an is the best of the Holy Books and Islam is the best of religions. Allah says, “Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam.”⁽⁵⁾
2. This concept does not mean all non-Muslims should be treated unjustly, unkindly or without respect. Rather, Allah commands the opposite, “Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.”⁽⁶⁾
3. In fact, sometimes Allah commands us to honour non-Muslims. For example when one has non-Muslim parents, “But if they endeavour to make you associate with Me that of which you have knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in this world with kindness...”⁽⁷⁾
4. Therefore, to love your non-Muslim parents is natural, and therefore allowed in Islam.
5. Perhaps one of the greatest ḥadīth which helps to understand this issue in perspective is the story of Ḥaṭīb ibn Abī Balta’ah. Before the Conquest of Makkah, Ḥaṭīb sent a secret letter to the Makkans forewarning them of the impending conquest. The letter was discovered by the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam). When Ḥaṭīb was asked to justify his actions which could be considered as high treason, he replied that he only did so as he hoped they would protect his relatives there, and not out of disbelief. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) pardoned him citing his attendance at the Battle of Badr.⁽⁸⁾
6. Thus, this concept must also be understood correctly and within its proper context.

(1) Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 1841.

(2) Qur’an, 8:72.

(3) Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Abū Dāwūd, no. 2765.

(4) Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 3014.

(5) Qur’an, 3:19.

(6) Qur’an, 60:8.

(7) Qur’an, 31:15.

(8) Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 3007 and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 2494.

It is not a justification for acts of mass and indiscriminate killing.

Conclusion

Islam is a religion of balance. It discusses the ideal way to live a life which is fulfilling spiritually by worship of Allah and worldly productive and constructive. Thus, as Muslims we should not be ashamed or apologetic for any aspect of our religion which is established. We must be and instil within our communities, amongst reverts and others the need to be proud Muslims who are also positive citizens and role models within their societies. We should not be defined nor allow others to define us by the acts of a few wayward Muslims.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims do not agree with extremist views or engage in any form of terrorism. However, at the same time, we must acknowledge the threat posed by such views and beliefs. In particular, revert Muslims are susceptible to such views due to their lack of knowledge and understandable inability to differentiate between authentic and weak information. Inauthentic and disreputable information, social influences and psychological attitudes may all be potential pitfalls.

Preventing these ideas from imbedding themselves within the minds and hearts of reverts is easier than replacing them. Muslim communities across the West must make a determined effort to provide the revert community with essential care and support when they enter into Islam. A holistic service with dedicated resources and people is needed. This can then be the springboard for authentic knowledge, mentorship programs, and balanced and structured study of Islam, which provides reverts with a strong and trustful relationship with their imams and the support of their local community.

Replacing extreme ideologies is significantly harder. It requires more time and patience. It requires specialists who can answer and refute the theological doubts such ideologies hold, and replace them with the correct understandings. Alternatives include other forms of support for these reverts as well as alternate outlets for their passions and desire to make a change. A correct and balanced world view, a strong Muslim identity and understanding the beauty of Islam are all integral.

Our revert brothers and sisters have an immense right upon us, and we, as the community will be collectively held responsible for this in front of Allah. And Allah knows best.

Recommendations

1. The need to establish dedicated revert services which provide a holistic approach to supporting the revert community.
2. Training people who focus on revert support and giving them the resources and money to do this effectively.
3. Sharing best practice in how to support the revert community and care for their specific needs.
4. The need to build a relationship of trust and confidence between reverts and respected imams who can then be their point of reference.
5. Running awareness courses and workshops on the dangers of extremism, and in particular, vis-à-vis the revert community.
6. Training specialists who focus on deradicalisation and deconstruction of false ideologies and their main arguments.
7. Having a written manual on extreme ideologies and how to refute them which is then distributed amongst mosques and Islamic centres in the West.
8. Having structured and recognised courses on teaching Islam, which also

- safeguard the revert community from false ideologies.
9. Having a mentorship program where the community supports the new Muslims in their midst and offers them good company and positive role models.
 10. Developing social projects and community outreach programs for those who wish to make a difference in their societies.