

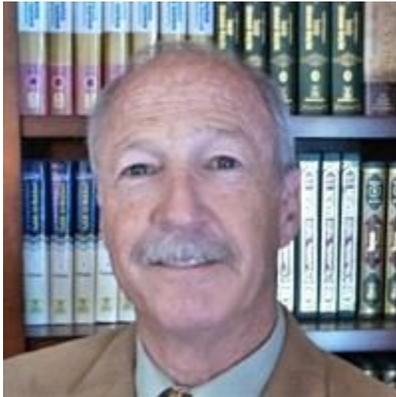
# Suicide or Paradise?

The truth is right there in Islamic writings. It's not about suicide, it's about Islam.

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A Muslim straps on a bomb, or drives an explosives-laden vehicle and blows him-or-herself up. Within seconds it seems that news headlines are proclaiming another "suicide bomber" has struck. Perhaps one or two Muslims take up weapons and then engage armed police in a battle to the death; this is "suicide by cop." And once labelled as "suicide," both types of incidents seem to be quickly followed by statements that since Islam prohibits suicide, these are plainly folks who claim to be Muslims, but have obviously misunderstood that religion; in other words, the individual was disturbed and/or misguided and the incident has nothing to do with Islam.

Let's take a closer look.

## **Suicide**

Islamic Doctrine is based on the commands of Allah found in the Koran and the teachings and example of Muhammad. So what does Islamic Doctrine say about suicide?

Islam does indeed condemn suicide. Chapter 4, Verse 29 of the Koran is specific:

*O you who believe...do not kill yourselves (nor kill one another)...*

And Muhammad would not pray for someone who had committed suicide:

*...(The dead body) of a person who had killed himself with a broad-headed arrow was brought before the Apostle of Allah (SAW), but he did not pray for him.[1]*

One also finds numerous *hadiths* in which Muhammad said that those who committed suicide would go to Hell, e.g.:

*...Allah's Messenger said, "Amongst the nations before you there was a man who got a wound, and growing impatient (with its pain), he took a knife and cut his hand with it and the blood did not stop till he died. Allah said, 'My slave hurried to bring death upon himself so I have forbidden him (to enter) Paradise.'"[2]*

And

*...The Prophet said, "He who commits suicide by throttling shall keep on throttling himself in the Hell-fire (forever), and he who commits suicide by stabbing himself shall keep on stabbing himself in the Hell-fire."[3]*

It would appear that the Islamic understanding and condemnation of suicide is similar to the understanding and condemnation of suicide among many non-Muslims.

### **The Importance of Intentions**

But Muhammad also emphasized the importance of "intentions":

*Narrated 'Umar bin Al-Khattab: I heard Allah's Messenger saying, "The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended..."[4]*

And in the following *hadith*, Muhammad applied this idea of "intentions" to fighting and being killed:

*It was reported from 'Abdullah bin 'Amr...who said: "O Messenger of Allah! Inform me about Al-Jihad and military expeditions." He said: "O 'Abdullah bin 'Amr! If you fight with endurance seeking from Allah your reward, Allah will resurrect you showing endurance and seeking your reward from Allah...with whatever intention you fight or are killed, Allah will resurrect you in that condition."[5]*

So intentions are fundamental! And Muhammad is talking about being rewarded by Allah for fighting in the Cause of Allah. What is meant by the "Cause of Allah"?

*Narrated Abu Musa: A man came to the Prophet and asked, "O Allah's Messenger! What kind of fighting is in Allah's Cause?...The Prophet raised his head...and said, "He who fights that Allah's Word (i.e. Allah's Religion of Islamic Monotheism) should be superior, fights in Allah's Cause."*[6]

And Muhammad said that someone who died fighting in the Cause of Allah would have the reward of a martyr:

*It was reported from Mu'adh bin Jabal that he heard the Messenger of Allah say: "Whoever fights in the cause of Allah as long as the time between two milkings of a she-camel, Paradise is guaranteed for him. And whoever asks Allah with sincerity in his soul to be killed, [while fighting in the Cause of Allah] and then dies, or is killed, he will have the reward of a martyr."*[7]

In the Koran Allah promises the reward of Paradise for such a martyr:

Chapter 9, Verse 111

*Verily, Allah has purchased of the believers their lives and their properties for (the price) that theirs shall be Paradise. They fight in Allah's Cause, so they kill (others) and are killed...*

And Muhammad said that among the rewards for such a martyr would be seventy-two of the very fair female virgins of Paradise (*Al-Huril-'Ayn*):

*...the Messenger of Allah said: "There are six things with Allah for the martyr:...he is married to seventy-two wives among Al-Huril-'Ayn of Paradise, and he may intercede for seventy of his close relatives."*[8]

So there is one guaranteed way for a Muslim to get to Paradise: become a martyr by dying while fighting in Allah's Cause. And Muhammad said this way of dying was so honorable that he would have been willing to leave Paradise itself to repeat the experience:

*Narrated Abu Hurairah: The Prophet said, "Allah assigns for a person who participates in (holy battles) in Allah's Cause and nothing causes him to do so except belief in Allah and in His Messengers, that he will be recompensed by Allah either with a reward, or booty (if he survives) or will be admitted to Paradise (if he is killed in the battle as a martyr)." The Prophet added: "Had I not found it difficult for my followers, then I would not remain behind any Sariya (an army-unit) going for Jihad and I would have loved to be martyred in Allah's Cause and then made alive, and then martyred and then made alive, and then again martyred in His Cause."*[9]

Fighting in the Cause of Allah and the reward of martyrdom exerted a strong influence on the Muslim warriors during Muhammad's life time. Here are some examples:

*The tradition has been narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah b. Qais. He heard it from his father who, while facing the enemy, reported that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: Surely, the gates of Paradise are under the shadows of the swords. A man in a shabby condition got up and said: Abu Musa, did you hear the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) say this? He said: Yes. (The narrator said): He returned to his friends and said: I greet you (A farewell greeting). Then he broke the sheath of his sword, threw it away, advanced with his (naked) sword towards the enemy and fought (them) with it until he was slain.[10]*

And at the Battle of Badr, in order to please Allah, a Muslim warrior actually took off his armor before he attacked the enemy:

*'Auf b. Harith...said 'O apostle of God, what makes the Lord laugh with joy at His servant?' He answered, 'When he plunges into the midst of the enemy without mail.' 'Auf drew off the mail-coat that was on him and threw it away; then he seized his sword and fought the enemy till he was slain.[11]*

Here is another incident that occurred during that same battle:

*Then the apostle went forth to the people and incited them saying, 'By God in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, no man will be slain this day fighting against them with steadfast courage advancing not retreating but God will cause him to enter Paradise.' 'Umayr b. al-Humam...was eating some dates which he had in his hand. 'Fine, Fine!' said he, 'is there nothing between me and my entering Paradise save to be killed by these men?' He flung the dates from his hand, seized his sword, and fought against them till he was slain...[12]*

So we can see from these examples the significance of intentions. Even though these Muslim warriors intentionally sought death, the fact that they did so by fighting in Allah's Cause guaranteed their entrance into Paradise. Because of their intentions, these were not acts of suicide, but were rather acts of martyrdom.

### **Islamic Martyrdom in the Modern Age**

Are Islamic teachings about martyrdom still relevant today? Consider these examples:

#### **Omar Ahmad (CAIR)**

On November 25, 1999, in Chicago, Illinois, Omar Ahmad, then-Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), said this when speaking to a youth session at a conference of the Islamic Association for Palestine:

*Someone in Islam is allowed to fight...Fighting for freedom, fighting for Islam - that is not suicide. They kill themselves for Islam.[13]*

## **Osama Bin Laden**

In mid-November 2001 Osama Bin Laden said this about the 9-11 attack on the United States:

*The brothers, who conducted the operation, all they knew was that they have a martyrdom operation and we asked each of them to go to America...[14]*

## **The “Underwear Bomber”**

In 2009 Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (the “Underwear Bomber”), a Nigerian Muslim, tried unsuccessfully to blow up an airplane while wearing explosive underwear. In 2012 he was sentenced to life in prison. During the sentencing hearing he shouted *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is greatest) five times and said that Muslims were *proud to kill in the name of God, and that is what God told us to do in the Koran.[15]*

## **Fusilier Lee Rigby**

On May 22, 2013, a British Army soldier, Fusilier Lee Rigby, was attacked and killed in southeast London by two British Muslim converts: Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale. When armed police arrived, the two Muslims charged at them with a meat cleaver and an unloaded handgun, and the police shot and wounded both of them. At the crime scene Adebolajo had earlier handed a witness a handwritten note that included the following:

*To my beloved children, know that to fight Allah's enemies is an obligation...Seek Shaheed Ala [martyrdom for Allah] oh my sons, so that you might be raised together and if it is Allah's decree that you're not to be in the hearts of green birds then be ready for to enter the university of Joosuf Sijn [prison] ...[16]*

The reference to “the hearts of green birds” refers to a statement by Muhammad about the martyrs in Paradise. Muhammad said:

*The souls of the martyrs live in the bodies of green birds who have their nests in chandeliers hung from the throne of the Almighty.[17]*

Both men considered themselves “soldiers of Allah.” And they attacked the police with an unloaded handgun knowing this would cause the police to shoot them so they could achieve “martyrdom.”[18] But Adebolajo had also written that they needed to be prepared to be sent to prison if they weren’t martyred.

## **Charlie Hebdo**

*Charlie Hebdo* is a French satirical magazine, and for years Islam's prophet Muhammad had been included among the subjects of satirical cartoons.

On January 7, 2015 two Muslim brothers, Said and Cherif Kouachi, went into the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* and gunned down eleven people, including a police officer. The brothers then killed another police officer outside the offices. The brothers were yelling *Allahu Akbar*, and were heard shouting in French, "We have killed Charlie Hebdo. We have avenged the Prophet Mohammad." [19]

The idea of avenging criticism or satire of Muhammad is found in 33:57 of the Koran where Allah curses anyone annoying Muhammad. The method of such vengeance was provided by Muhammad, who had personally ordered the killing of four individuals whose only crime was that they had criticized him and/or Islam. And Muhammad had even given retroactive approval to the separate killings by Muslims of three individuals who had criticized him and/or Islam. That the brothers had learned from Muhammad's example was shown in Cherif's January 9th statement to Igor Sahiri, a journalist for France's BFMTV:

*We defend the prophet. If someone offends the prophet then there is no problem, we can kill him.* [20]

In December 2007, it had been reported that Cherif had stated in a court deposition that

*"the wise leaders in Islam told him and his friends that if they die as martyrs in jihad they would go to heaven" and "that martyrs would be greeted by more than 60 virgins in a big palace in heaven."* [21]

Two days after the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, both brothers were located and killed by French security forces.

## **Ohio State University**

On November 28, 2016 Somali-born Muslim Abdul Razak Ali Artan drove his car into a crowd of students on the Ohio State University campus. He then got out of his car and started slashing at students with an eight-inch knife, wounding 13. Still armed with only a knife, he then attacked an arriving police officer who shot and killed Artan.

Artan had left a note behind criticizing his family for being "moderate" Muslims and said he would intercede for them on the Day of Judgement. The family was "baffled" by the note. [22]

Perhaps they were “baffled” because they were only “moderate” Muslims. As we saw above, Muhammad said that martyrs could intercede for 70 of their family members. Artan apparently considered himself to be a martyr who would be able to help his “moderate” Muslim family get into paradise.

## **Manchester**

On May 23, 2017, Salman Abedi blew himself up outside an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England, killing 22 and injuring numerous others.

*Neighbours in Elsmore Road told how Abedi had become increasingly devout and withdrawn.*

*Lina Ahmed, 21, said: “They are a Libyan family and they have been acting strangely. A couple of months ago he [Salman] was chanting the first kalma [Islamic prayer] really loudly in the street. He was chanting in Arabic.*

*“He was saying ‘There is only one God and the prophet Mohammed is his messenger.’”*

*A family friend, who described the Abedis as “very religious”, said most of the family had returned to Libya, leaving only Salman and his older brother Ismail behind.[23]*

Salman Abedi had learned the Koran by heart,[24] and his sister later claimed that he *launched his suicide attack out of ‘a love of Islam’ and in twisted revenge for US airstrikes on Syria...[25]*

Abedi was a devout Muslim who knew his Koran.

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen, Islamic Doctrine condemns suicide while rewarding martyrdom in the Cause of Allah. The examples above show Muslims who intended their acts to be acts of martyrdom.

Claiming that these actions involved “suicide” appears to be done mainly by those who ignore, or are unaware of, the commands of Allah and the teachings of Muhammad. Labelling these actions as such is largely a Western construct attempting to not only separate the religion of Islam from acts done in its name, but also to provide an element of comfort for non-Muslims. After all, if these acts are done by disturbed, misguided individuals then the problem can be addressed through such things as more social programs or counseling opportunities, instead of turning the focus to one of the world’s “great religions.”[26]

So to understand attacks such as these we need to ask two questions:

*Were such attackers seeking to die because they were uncomfortable or in pain, and therefore committing suicide? Or were they following the commands of the Koran and the teachings of Muhammad, and seeking death in order to become martyrs in Allah's Cause?*

As we saw with the above examples, the goal was not suicide, but rather martyrdom in Allah's Cause. It's not about suicide, it's about Islam.

*Then when the Sacred Months have passed, then kill the Mushrikun wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every ambush...* (Koran 9:5)

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