

# A Time for Introspection

by Shaykh Hamza Yusuf

*On September 11th our lives changed forever. We witnessed an act of aggression that in many ways does not have a parallel in past or present times. There are several elements that make this act unique, from the use of civilian planes as weapons of mass destruction to the attack on the most widely recognised skyscrapers in the world. Nor have we ever witnessed the terrible indictment of Islam as having a part to play in such a heinous crime, writes **Hamza Yusuf**.*

**Muslims were seen rejoicing in some parts of the world** in a display of what can only be called *shamaatatul 'aadai'*, which is rejoicing at the calamities of ones' enemies. This is something explicitly prohibited in Islam and was never practiced by the Prophet of Mercy, upon him be prayers and peace. We have seen images since of American flags burning to further arouse the wrath of a nation filled with grief, confusion and anger. Again, Islam prohibits the burning of flags according to the explicit verse, "Do not curse [the idols] of those who call on other than Allah, thus causing them to curse Allah out of animosity [toward you] and without knowledge." This verse prohibits even the cursing of false gods because of the consequences. We have also seen image after image of Muslims with beards and turbans, who by all outward means look religious and pious - but are they really?

Unfortunately, the West does not know what every Muslim scholar knows; that the worst enemies of Islam are from within. The worst of these are the *khawaarij* who delude others by the deeply dyed religious exterior that they project. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said about them, "When you see them pray you will consider your own prayers insignificant. They recite the Quran but it does not exceed the limits of their throat." In other words, they don't understand the true meanings. The outward religious appearance and character of the *khawaarij* deluded thousands in the past, and continues to delude people today. The Muslims should be aware that despite the *khawaarij* adherence to certain aspects of Islam, they are extremists of the worst type.

Our Prophet said, peace be upon him, "Beware of extremism in your religion." Islam is the middle way between excess and neglect. Zealots are a plague upon religion. These extremists come in two types. The first is a reactionary extremist who falls far right of a centre-point. Reactionary extremists do not want any pluralism; they view the world in melodramatic, black and white, good and evil terms. They are good and anyone who opposes them is evil. From among the Muslims these are people who 'excommunicate' any Muslim who fails to share their interpretations of the Quran. They use *takfir* and character assassination as a tool for marginalising any criticism directed at them. They

are used often by the Western media in order to scare simple people and cause them to believe that Muslims are insane. Unfortunately, our communities provide them with much fuel to fire their incendiary flames.

The second group are radical extremists, who while they are almost identical with the former group, differ in that they will use violence to further their cause. They are actually worse than the first. They believe like every nefarious secret society before them that 'the end justifies the means.' They see any act as acceptable if it will further their 'cause.' This is blatantly anti-Islamic for a number of reasons.

Firstly, Islam's means must reflect its noble ends. Any means that does not embody the core truths and ethics of Islam is not from Islam and thus denounced as aberration. Secondly, Islam is not a secret society of conspirators who no one knows what they are planning. Islam declares openly its aims and objectives and these are recognised by good people everywhere as pure and congruent with their own wisdom and traditions. In the case of many of these extremists even the non-Muslims recognise that no religion of any weight could sanction the taking of innocent lives. The Quran says that the Torah and the Gospel have guidance and light and that the Quran came to fulfil these prior dispensations. Good Christians and Jews who believe in God and live ethically upright lives have no frame of reference for such acts, so how could these acts be from Islam, which confirms what has come before it?

Thirdly, they are invariably people who have never taken a true spiritual path to God and nor have they studied the humanities. I can almost guarantee that you will not find a scholar of poetry among the whole vile lot of these people. They have no true knowledge of Arabian culture, which is centred in the idea of *futuwwa*; a word akin to the western word chivalry. The terrorists posing as journalists who killed Ahmad Shah Masuud were cowards of the worst type. Killing themselves was not bravery but stupidity, but killing one's enemy in such a way is the worst form of treachery and the Arabs have many poems denouncing such type of people.

Our real situation is this: we Muslims have lost theologically sound understanding of our teaching. Islam has been hijacked by a discourse of anger and the rhetoric of rage. We have allowed for too long our mimbars to become bully pulpits in which people with often recognisable psychopathology use anger - a very powerful emotion - to rile Muslims up, only to leave them feeling bitter and spiteful towards people who in the most part are completely unaware of the conditions in the Muslim world, or the oppressive assaults of some Western countries on Muslim peoples. We have lost our bearings because we have lost our theology. We have almost no theologians in the entire Muslim world. The study of *kalaam*, once the hallmark of our intellectual tradition, has been reduced to memorizing 144 lines of al-Jawhara and a good commentary to study it, at best.

The reality is we are an Umma that no longer realises that Allah is the power behind all power; that it is Allah who subjugates one people to another; that He gives dominion to whom He pleases and He takes it away from whom He pleases. Our understanding of *tawhid* has fallen into such disarray that we can no longer introspect when afflictions befall us and then wonder in amazement at why the Americans seem incapable of introspection. Indeed, I personally attended a memorial service in San Francisco with

over 30,000 people and the Reverend Amos Brown said in no uncertain terms that America must ask herself what she has done either wittingly or unwittingly to incur the wrath and hate of people around the world. Muslims on the other hand, generally prefer to attack the West as the sole reason for their problems when the truth is we are bankrupt as a religious community and our spiritual bankruptcy has led to our inability to even deliver the message of Islam to Westerners in a time when they were giving us platforms to do so.

It is ironic that the Western media while producing many vile programs on Islam has also produced and aired material of the highest quality with a high level of accuracy only to be vilified by Muslims because it was not good enough. Where is our media? Where are our spokespeople? Where are our scholars? Where are our literary figures? The truth is we don't have any - and so instead of looking inward and asking painful questions such as why we don't have such things and such people, we take the simple way out by attacking people whom Allah tells us will do mean things, say bad things and plot against us. And always when we are warned we are told to be patient, to work for the good, to trust in Allah, to return to Allah, to implement our *deen*.

Conspiracy or not, we are to blame for the terrible backlash against Muslims. The simple reason is that when a crazy Christian does something terrible, everyone in the West knows it is the actions of a mad man because they have some knowledge of the core beliefs and ethics of Christianity. When a mad Muslim does something evil or foolish they assume it is from the religion of Islam, not because they hate us but because they have never been told by a Muslim what the teachings of Islam are all about.