

I am a Muslim. Although I am not as excellent as a true Muslim should be, I continue to work on myself to be as good as Islam wants me to be -- fair, equitable and magnanimous in all my dealings, forgiving those who do wrong to me, giving to those who keep from me, caring for those who need attention, sharing with those who need help, working for peace and tranquility in the society, standing up for the weak and voicing my concerns for justice in the society, etc.

I have learnt Islam, reflected on its teachings and compared it with other religions, ways and philosophies of life. I discovered that Islam is the only religion that, if understood and practised properly, is capable of helping people to be the best a human being can be. It is the only way of life that can help the world establish a just, peaceful, balanced and moderate society where every human being (regardless of geography of origin, skin or hair colour, language, gender or religion) lives with dignity, is treated equally and enjoys respect and protection of life, property, honour and freedom.

I have studied the Qur-aan intently and reflected on its verses deeply. I witnessed that it is the most beautiful gift that God has given to humanity, especially for those who want to see human society become the way I have just described.

In fact, my weekends are devoted to conducting lectures, giving presentations and writing articles to remind Muslims that Prophet Muhammad was sent as a benefactor to humanity to help people excel in their ethics, dealings, kindness, grace, and generosity. For the record, these activities are not new ones in response to societal pressures and current circumstances; in fact, I have been doing this for some time because I owe this obligation to Islam, Muslims and mankind.

That brings me to the recent events and circumstances.

Muslims these days have been put on the defensive by a barrage of propaganda and an onslaught of anti-Islamic spin on the events in the world. They have been subjected to an enormous collective guilt. They are frightened and feel insecure and vulnerable. They are being apologetic and tripping over one another trying to prove that they are not monsters.

While the Fatwa or religious edicts issued by the imams was a good step, the apologetic, guilty attitude many people are adopting is not healthy at all. The Fatwa was important to warn any young Muslims who happened to think about endangering the lives of innocent people that there is no justification for such an illegal and immoral act. However, the Muslim community must refuse to accept any collective guilt for the actions of a few unknown perpetrators of criminal activity. And our fellow countrymen must stop expecting us to be apologetic for the actions of others.

If every Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh or anyone else is not expected to apologize or is not put to shame for crimes committed by Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, etc. why is it that everyone expect Muslims to apologize whenever a criminal happens to carry a Muslim name?

Every community and every religion has its share of good people and bad, civilized and violent, charming and vicious, meek and atrocious. Muslims are no exception; neither are Christians, Jews, or anyone else.

One may ask, if Islam is so good, Muslims should be better than every other community. True, but the majority of Muslims today neither understand Islam nor practice it. The current Muslim population is perhaps at about the lowest ebb from the perspective of having the “Islamic personality”. Even in this worst position, they are still better than other communities. There are more than one billion Muslims in the world – greater in number than any other religious community. In terms of proportion or percentage, Muslims in aggregate have the least percentage of violent people compared to any other religious or non-religious community. If the war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Kashmir and Chechnya is excluded where the residents have every right to fight against the invading army or a brutal occupation, the percentage becomes minimal. On the other hand, if the news media starts publishing the religion of all those who perpetrate crimes and violence in all parts of the world, as they do to Muslims, the statistics will become loud and clear to everyone.

Even in national terms, Muslims are not occupying any other nation in the world. They did not send armies to invade any place like Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir or Chechnya. They did not kill hundreds of thousands of helpless victims (including children and women), demolish their homes, burn their schools, bomb their hospitals and ambulances, pollute their environments with lethal radioactive and carcinogenic materials, devastate their infrastructure to kill even more with diseases and lack of basic necessities of life, annex their lands, uproot their trees, destroy their livelihood, abuse their prisoners and violate every international law in that respect, desecrate their religious books and their houses of worship, demolish their houses of worship, steal their natural resources (oil from Iraq, high quality uranium and precious stones from Afghanistan), train and equip terrorists in their midst (such as Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan, Saddam Hussain in Iraq, Altaf Husain in Pakistan) and install vicious dictators on their heads like the Shah of Iran, Saddam of Iraq, kings and sheikhs of Middle East, Musharraf of Pakistan, and thus deny them democracy, etc.

So those who are trying to put collective guilt on the shoulders of Muslims, must own up to the crimes and terrorism of their own.

As for Muslims, they should walk with pride. They have the best system of life and the most beautiful gift from God. They must sincerely practice it and show the world its beauty through the excellence Islam teaches them.