

# Muslim Tolerance

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**1. Saladin.** Saladin kept his word, and conquered the city according to the highest *Koranic* ideals. He did not take revenge for the 1099 massacre and now that hostilities had ceased he ended the killing (2:193, 194). Not a single Christian was killed and there was no plunder. The ransoms were deliberately very low, but still there were thousands of poor people who could not even afford them and who were therefore taken prisoner by the Muslims. There were so many prisoners that it was said that a Frankish slave could be purchased for a sandal in Damascus. But large numbers escaped this fate because Saladin was moved to tears by the plight of families who were rent asunder and he released many of them freely, to the despair of his long-suffering treasurers. His brother al-Adil was so distressed by the plight of the prisoners that he asked Saladin for a thousand of them for his own use and then released them on the spot. Karen Armstrong, former Roman Catholic Nun, *Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 258.

All the Muslim leaders were scandalized to see the rich Christians escaping with their wealth, which could have been used to ransom all the prisoners. When Imad ad-Din saw the Patriarch Heraclius leaving the city with chariots crammed with treasure, he urged Saladin to confiscate it. But-Saladin refused. The *Koran* said that oaths and treaties must be kept to the letter and it was essential that the Muslims should observe the legalities. "Christians everywhere will remember the kindness we have done them," he said. Heraclius paid his ten-dinar ransom like everybody else and was even provided with a special escort to keep his treasure safe during the journey to Tyre. Saladin was right that the Christian world was impressed with his clemency. Even though it was Saladin who deprived Christianity of Jerusalem, he has been venerated in the West. Legends grew up that he had received Christian baptism and had been dubbed a Christian knight.

<p>People must have been subliminally aware that Saladin had behaved in a far more "Christian" way than the Franks. Karen Armstrong, former Roman Catholic Nun, <i>Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 258-9.</p>	
<p>In this respect, Saladin had taken a leaf out of the Christians' book. When the First Crusaders conquered the Holy Land, no Jews or Muslims had been allowed inside Jerusalem: mosques and synagogues had either been destroyed or profaned or converted into churches. Now, after Saladin's victory, the Franks were no longer considered People of the Book: notices were fixed above the doors of former churches stating that Saladin had conquered the building from the polytheists. But this new exclusiveness did not apply to the Jews, the other People of the Book. Saladin invited them back to their Holy City, to live there side by side with the Muslims. Karen Armstrong, former Roman Catholic Nun, <i>Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 260.</p>	
<p>Throughout the Jewish world Saladin was hailed as the new Cyrus and there was a new enthusiasm for <i>aliyah</i>: huge bands of Jews emigrated from the diaspora to Palestine, convinced that the messianic age was at hand. Jews like Judah Halevi had been urging the Jews to return to the Holy Land for years but now that the ban on Jerusalem had been lifted the idea of a return to the Promised Land took root and there was a new wave of Jewish settlement in the country. Karen Armstrong, former Roman Catholic Nun, <i>Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 260.</p>	
<p><b>2. People of the Book.</b> Muhammad accepted the teachings of the Jewish and Christian scriptures as God's word. He called Jews and Christians "People of the Book" because they followed God's teachings in the <i>Bible</i>. The "People of the Book" had a special status as protected people, and Muslims were required to treat them with tolerance. Iftikhar Ahmad, Herbert Brodsky, Marylee Susan Crofts, and Elisabeth Gaynor Ellis, a historian, <i>World Cultures: A Global Mosaic</i> (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), 571.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>
<p>Though Islam was the supreme revelation, the <i>Koran</i> taught Muslims that they must respect Jews and Christians, the People of the Book: "Be courteous when</p>	

<p>you argue with the People of the Book, except with those who do evil. Say we believe in that which is revealed to us and that which is revealed to you. Our God and your God is one" (<i>Koran</i> 29:46). Indeed one of the greatest Islamic values is liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, to which every individual has an inalienable right. Karen Armstrong, 31.</p>	
<p>Because Islam regarded the two older Peoples of the Book as faiths, which had partially revealed truth but which had been superseded in favor of Islam, she found them less threatening. Western Christians, on the other hand, could only reject Islam as a false religion because there could be no subsequent revelation after Christ. Karen Armstrong, 379.</p>	
<p>Islam had a policy of coexistence: Jews and Christians, the People of the Book, were allowed full religious liberty in the Islamic empire. It is true that they were second-class citizens but as the orientalist Bernard Lewis insistently points out, this was not the unacceptable state of affairs that it would be today. At that time in the Middle East, one's first loyalty was to one's religious grouping; the secondary loyalty was to the state or the ruling dynasty. There was as yet no idea of a nation-state with equal rights for all citizens in either Islam or Christendom. Karen Armstrong, 379.</p>	
<p>The Crusades were making life intolerable for Jews in Europe. But we must remember that in the Middle Ages the vast majority of Jews lived in Muslim countries: in Spain, in North Africa and in the Middle East. European Jewry did not become a majority in the Jewish world until the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, while the Ashkenazic Jews of Europe were quite understandably regarding Gentiles with fear and distrust, the Crusades had made no real impression on the majority of Jews, who were Sephardim living peacefully in the House of Islam. Karen Armstrong, 380.</p>	
<p><b>3. Toleration.</b> The Muslim system was that the Christians, Jews and other religious groups were allowed to practice their religion freely but they had to accept that Islam was the state religion and supreme in the land. These groups were called the <i>dhimmi</i>s or protected minorities. They paid a tax in return for Muslim military protection-a common enough measure at this time. They were not allowed to bear arms themselves and there were rules that emphasized their subjection to Islam: <i>dhimmi</i>s had to wear</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>

<p>distinctive dress; they had to bow to the Muslims when they paid their tax, the <i>jizya</i>; no church, synagogue or temple building was permitted to be higher than the mosque. But scholars point out that these rules were not rigidly enforced and sound more humiliating than they actually were in practice. There was no tradition of religious persecution in the Islamic empire. Occasionally prohibitive measures and even massacres occurred but these usually followed a Jewish or Christian revolt against the Muslim rule. The Muslims were putting down an uprising, not refusing to accept the existence of a rival religion. Within the Islamic empire, there was never any persecution that matched the Christian treatment of the Jews in Europe, for example. Karen Armstrong, 43-4.</p>	
<p>Muslims had less complex, tortured feelings about other religions than Western Christianity. The Middle East had always been an area of religious pluralism. The Dar al-Islam, the House of Islam, the official term for Muslim polity, contained people of many different races and many different religions: there were Arabs, Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Syrians, Phoenicians, Berbers, Turks and Kurds; there were also Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Hindus as well as Muslims. This was seen as a normal state of affairs, and by contrast the uniformity of faith and belief for which Western Christendom increasingly yearned would have seemed alien and monotonous to a Muslim. Karen Armstrong, 379.</p>	
<p>One of the precautions that Mohammad took was to establish friendly relations with neighboring tribes. There was no attempt to force conversion upon them, for that would have meant that the Muslims were denying others the freedom of belief that they had been denied in Mecca. Karen Armstrong, 33.</p>	
<p>On the whole, Islam was a tolerant religion in practice, despite its warlike theology. It encouraged a peaceful coexistence and found it quite possible to live side by side with other religions. Karen Armstrong, 44.</p>	
<p><b>4. Jews.</b> Islam also had a simpler approach to Judaism: Muslims, of course, did not see the Jews as God-slayers. In contrast, the developing Christian fantasies about Jews showed deep complexity: the horrible images of the Jews devouring little children have been seen, in the modern idiom of psychoanalysis, as oedipal fantasies about the parent faith, and this modern interpretation puts an interesting interpretation on the crusading pogroms.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>

<p>However that may be, Muslims had no such neurotic fantasies about Jews. When he conquered Jerusalem from the Christians Saladin invited the Jews to return to the city from which they had been excluded by the Crusaders. Karen Armstrong, 379-80.</p>	
<p>In the twelfth century Jews said public prayers for Islamic rulers. Jews were not unruly subjects: after the destruction of the Temple, survival was seen as an important Jewish duty, and that meant that inflammatory revolutionary activities were frowned upon. In their turn Muslims responded favorably to Jews, seeing them as exceptionally law-abiding and also, because of their financial ability, as wealth-producing citizens who were an asset to a city." Karen Armstrong, 380.</p>	
<p>Islam was an anti-elitist religion. The prayers and requirements were the same for everybody and there was to be no hierarchy, as there was in Christianity, which made people first- and second-class Christians. Eventually a clergy emerged, who led the prayers and were expert in Islamic law, but they were never priests like Christian priests, who intervened between God and man. Almsgiving was meant to iron out material inequalities and to ensure the even distribution of wealth. Even the fast of Ramadan was a realistic fast that was within everybody's scope. Indeed we shall see that realism is a hallmark of Islam. These years in Medina were hard years. Mohammad had to struggle against the hostility of the non-Muslim. Arab community in Medina, who had hoped to get the leadership, and of the Jews, who also fought against his rule. Karen Armstrong, 33.</p>	
<p><b>5. Mecca.</b> The Muslims and from the surrounding hills they watched with fascinated horror as Mohammad and his huge Muslim army solemnly circled the Kaaba according to the ancient ritual. But instead of venerating the idols in the Kaaba, the Muslim muezzin climbed onto the roof of the Kaaba and issued the call to prayer to Allah, the only God. Thus they had returned the shrine to the religion of Abraham and Ishmael. Their devotions completed, they marched peacefully back to Medina, while the awed Meccans crept back into the city. Karen Armstrong, 38.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis:</p>
<p>The Meccans once again sent envoys to try to make peace, in order to ward off a bloody attack. Mohammad promised that if they accepted him as their ruler there would be no bloodshed and no reprisals. No Meccan would be forced</p>	

<p>to convert to Islam. He would only smash the idols in the Kaaba. The Meccans agreed and the Muslims honored the conditions of the agreement. Mohammad went straight to the Ka'aba and smashed the idols himself and his army circled the shrine, which was now dedicated to the religion of Islam. He was now the ruler of the city. Not a drop of blood was shed and nobody was forced to convert. Mohammad had turned his peaceful pilgrimage into a conquest. He called the event al-Fatah, which is a familiar term to us because it is the name of Yasir Arafat's liberation movement. Fatah means "opening," "salvation," "conquest." Karen Armstrong, 38.</p>	
<p>In 632, two years after his conquest, Mohammad decided to Islamize the pagan shrines around Mecca, which made up the full pilgrimage known as the <i>hajj</i>. At each of the shrines he and his Muslims performed and reinterpreted all the old pagan, Arab rites. They threw pebbles at the pillars of Mina, as though they were fighting evil and immorality. They ran seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa, recalling the distress of Ishmael's mother Hagar when she had run desperately seeking water during her first days of exile in the desert. They drank from the spring that God showed to Hagar, in answer to her prayer. Karen Armstrong, 38.</p>	
<p>When the Muslims conquered a people, they did not attempt to force conversion on their new subjects. Mohammad had given an eloquent example of the Islamic principle of the sanctity of the individual conscience when he conquered Mecca without bloodshed and put no pressure on the Meccans to convert. The <i>Koran</i> taught that the People of the Book were to be respected, and within the Islamic empire Jews and Christians were allowed full religious liberty, as were the Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Hindus. This policy was not only the result of religious ideology; it also made sound political sense. When the Muslims first conquered a country, they were naturally only a tiny minority and in no position to enforce conversion, even if they had wished to do so. The Arabs long remained a minority group: the caliphs did not permit the Muslim soldiers and generals to colonize the countries they conquered. Instead of settling down to enjoy the fruit of their labors in a comfortable life, the army set off to conquer new territory, leaving behind just enough soldiers to enforce Muslim rule and to run the administration. In these circumstances, it would have been madness for them to force their religion on the majority. Further, the Middle</p>	

<p>East had long been an area of religious pluralism and the Arabs were used to religions existing alongside one another. When the Byzantines or the Zoroastrians of Persia had attempted to impose religious conformity on their subject peoples, the result had been politically disastrous for them. Karen Armstrong, 43.</p>	
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