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Muhammad: A Cult Leader

From *Understanding Muhammad: A Psychobiography of Allāh's Prophet*

We are often taken aback by the level of fanaticism of Muslims. Millions of them riot, burn churches, and kill completely innocent people because a newspaper has published a few cartoons of Muhammad or because the Pope has quoted a medieval emperor saying that violence is not compatible with the nature of God.

People generally are biased towards a belief system that has this many followers. They believe that the sheer size of Islam qualifies it as a religion. But is Islam really a religion?

Some say all religions start as a cult until, with the passage of time, they gradually gain acceptance and the status of religion. However, there are certain characteristics that distinguish cults from religions. Dr. Janja Lalich and Dr. Michael D. Langone have created a list that describes cults fairly well.^[1] The more a group or a doctrine has these characteristics the more it follows that it should be defined and labeled as a cult. The following is that list, which I have compared Islam to point by point.

1. The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.

Muslims are extremely zealous about their faith and have an unquestioning commitment to their prophet, whose book, the Qur'an, for them is Truth and Law.

2. Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.

Muslims are forbidden to question and doubt the basic tenets of their faith, and dissent is punishable by death.

3. Mind-altering practices (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues, denunciation sessions, and debilitating work routines) are used in excess and serve to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).

Five times during the day Muslims stop whatever they are doing and stand for a repetitive and ritualistic prayer and chant the Qur'an. In addition, for one whole month in the year they must fast and abstain from drinking or eating, from dawn to dusk, a practice that can be particularly taxing in summertime.

4. The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel. For example, members must get permission to date, change jobs, marry—or leaders prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, whether or not to have children, how to discipline children, and so forth.

Every detail of the life of a Muslim is prescribed. He is told what is forbidden (*haram*) and what is permitted (*halal*), what food to eat, how to dress, and what rituals to follow in order to pray. A Muslim is not allowed to date, and marriages are arranged. Corporal punishment, including torture for disobedience to the authorities, is enjoined, both for children and adults.

5. The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s) and members. For example, the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar—or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity.

Muslims claim special status for their prophet, while they vilify all other religions. They can become extremely violent if their prophet is slighted. They regard themselves as superior to all others, and when in a non-Muslim country, they constantly lobby for concessions and preferential treatments like the special privilege of having a special room set aside in publicly funded schools so that Muslim students can pray there. They are frequently granted exceptions unavailable to members of other religions. Recently in Ontario, Canada, they tried to make Islamic law (Sharia) recognized and binding, so they could bypass Canadian law. They were defeated, thanks largely to the tireless opposition of ex-Muslims.

6. The group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society.

Muslims have a very strong us-versus-them mentality. They call all non-Muslims, regardless of faith, *kafir*, an expressly derogatory term, which means one who blasphemes God. For them, the world is forever divided into Dar al Salam (House of Peace) and Dar al Harb (House of War). The non-Muslim countries are the House of War. It is the duty of every Muslim to wage jihad on the House of War, to fight, kill and subdue non-Muslims and convert that land into the House of Peace. Peace, according to Islam can only be attained by subduing non-Muslims and making them subordinate to Islamic rule. The idea is not so much to convert everyone to Islam, but to make Islam dominant. The non-Muslims can continue practicing their religion, but only as dhimmis, a term which means protected and is only applied to Christians and Jews. The Christians and the Jews (the people of the Book) will be protected, provided they pay the protection tax, known as the *jizyah* and feel themselves humiliated and subdued, as stated in the Qur'an.^[2] If they fail to pay the jizyah, they can be exiled or put to death. This is how the Mafia operates. If you own a business, you could be harassed or even killed, unless you pay them a protection fee to be left alone. As for those unbelievers who are not protected, i.e. the pagans, the atheist, the animists, etc., they have either to convert or be killed.

7. The leader is not accountable to any authorities.

For Muslims, all actions of Muhammad constitute law. He cannot be held accountable for his actions. He was entitled to marry or have sex out of marriage with as many women as he wished. He could raid civilians, kill unarmed men, loot their properties and take their women and children as slaves and even rape them. He could assassinate his critics and torture them to make them reveal where they had hidden their treasures. He could have sex with children. He could lie and deceive his opponents. He could massacre his prisoners of war in cold-blood. None of that bothers his followers. At first they deny all of the above charges vehemently, accusing you of maligning their prophet, but once the evidence is presented, they suddenly change tactic and defend him, justifying his evil deeds, the very deeds they outrageously denied. For Muslims, Muhammad's actions are not measured by what we humans know as right and wrong. Rather he is the standard, the measure of right and wrong. As the result, if a crime was committed by Muhammad, that crime becomes a holy deed and is emulated by his followers unquestioningly. Muslims are capable of committing the most atrocious acts of indecency and savagery with clear conscience, because it is *sunnah* (performed by Muhammad).

8. The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted ends justify whatever means it deems necessary. This may result in members' participating in behaviors or activities they would have considered reprehensible or unethical before joining the group (for example, lying to family or friends, or collecting money for bogus charities).

In Islam, the ends always justify the means. For example, killing is bad, but if it is done to promote Islam, it is good. Suicide is prohibited, but suicide bombing that will cause the death of non-Muslims is a holy act. Stealing from fellow Muslims is prohibited and the thief's hand will be chopped, but looting non-believers was practiced by Muhammad and so is considered acceptable by Muslims. Sexual intercourse out of marriage is taboo, but rape of the women of unbelievers is okay. The goal, which is the establishment of the reign of Allāh on Earth, is regarded to be so lofty that everything else becomes secondary.

In the history of Islam, we read that people murdered their own fathers or waged war against them. Such actions are praised as the sign of faith and devotion of the believer. Lying in Islam is prohibited, except when it is said to deceive the non-Muslims and advance the interests of Islam.

9. The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and/or control members. Often, this is done through peer pressure and subtle forms of persuasion.

Muslims' thoughts tend to be overridden with guilt. If a Muslim does something contrary to what is permitted, other Muslims are required to remind him or her of the Sharia law and demand compliance. In most Islamic countries, particularly in Iran and Saudi Arabia, it is the state that makes sure the individuals follow the religious law. In March 2002 Saudi Arabia's religious police stopped schoolgirls from leaving a blazing building because they were not wearing correct Islamic dress.^[3] As a result fifteen girls were burned alive.

10. Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before joining the group.

Muslim converts are encouraged to cut their ties with family and friends if they are not Muslims. I have received countless heart-rending stories from non-Muslim parents whose children converted to Islam with whom they have lost touch completely. Occasionally, they may receive a call or a cold visit, but the visit may be so restricted, so bereft of any love from their children and their Muslim spouses that the outcome further saddens the already heartbroken parents. The purpose of these visits is usually to ask the parents to convert to Islam. They leave, as soon resistance is encountered.

11. The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.

Muslims' main goal is to promote Islam. This practice of promoting Islam is called *da'wa*. It is the duty of every Muslim to bring new converts, starting with their own family and friends. Expanding Islam is the main obsession of every Muslim.

12. The group is preoccupied with making money.

Raising funds for jihad is one of the main objectives of all Muslims. Today this is done through what are known as Islamic "charities." However, during the time of Muhammad, and throughout the course of Islam, raising money for jihad was done principally by looting. Islam's main goal is to establish itself as the pre-eminent earthly power.

13. Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities.

Muslims' main preoccupation is Islam. They are required to regularly go to the mosque, attend obligatory prayers five times a day, listen to the sermons, etc. So unwrapped do they become in their thinking about how to perform their religious duties, what to wear, what to eat, how to perform their prayers, etc. that they are left with very little time for thinking of anything else. In fact, they are even told what to think and what not to think.

14. Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.

Muslims are taught to shun kafirs and are encouraged to socialize only with fellow Muslims. The Qur'an prohibits taking friends from among unbelievers (Q.3:28), calls them *najis* (filthy, impure) (Q.9:28), and orders harshness towards them (Q.9:123). According to Muhammad, the unbelievers are the vilest animals in the sight of God. (Q.8:55)

15. The most loyal members (the "true believers") feel there can be no life outside the context of the group. They believe there is no other way to be, and often fear reprisals to themselves or others if they leave (or even consider leaving) the group.

The thought of leaving Islam is something so unbearable for true Muslims they can't even entertain it. Despite the fact that millions of Muslims have left Islam in recent years, hardcore Muslims remain adamant in believing nobody ever really leaves Islam, that such claims are all fabrications and part of the conspiracy to shake the faith of believers.

Claims I have received from Muslims share one common theme. They all warn me of hellfire in the afterlife. Between the fear of hell and fear of reprisal, Muslims are trapped in a web of terror of their own making.

Islam was not created to teach humans spirituality, nor make them enlightened. The spiritual message in Islam is secondary or virtually nonexistent. Piety in Islam means emulating Muhammad, a man who was far from pious. Rituals like prayers and fasting are mere window dressings to lure the foolhardy inside, to give Islam the appearance of sacredness and spirituality.

This subject is explained in more detail in my book *Understanding Muhammad: A Psychobiography of Allāh's Prophet*

^[1] www.csj.org/infoserv_cult101/checklis.htm

^[2] Qur'an 9:29 "Fight those who believe not in Allāh nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allāh and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.

^[3] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1874471.stm

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