

introduction

Have you ever wondered why a nun can be covered from head to toe and she's respected for devoting herself to God, but when a Muslim woman covers, she's viewed as "oppressed"? Or why a Jew can grow a beard and he's just practising his faith, and when a Muslim does that, he's an "extremist"?

Many people in South Africa seem to have many misconceptions about Muslims and Islam. Many believe that the modern western way of life is advanced, enlightened and liberated, while Islam is just the opposite: primitive, ignorant and oppressed. Some even believe that it is religion for Indians, Middle Eastern and African migrants and that it has no place in South African religions and way of life. One reason for this belief is that the media has time and again portrayed the Muslims in a way contrary to Islamic teachings. The key to understanding Islam and Muslims is to resist stereotypes and examine each situation according to Islamic teachings, and NOT some Muslims' actions. For this reason, we have felt it our duty to address the most common misconceptions.

The Veil (Hijab) is oppressive MISCONCEPTION #1

So what exactly is hijab? To observe the hijab, Muslim women are required to cover their body with modest clothes that don't reveal their figure in front of male strangers. However, hijab is not just about outer appearances; it is also about noble speech, modesty, dignified and righteous conduct. It goes without saying that these manners are also required of men.

There is nothing in hijab that restricts a Muslim woman's freedom to express her views and opinion, to own property, to have an education and a career, or to choose a husband. The hijab is an act of honour and dignity, an empowerment, and a guarantee that a woman will be judged according to her inner spiritual beauty rather than her outer superficial appearance. The hijab liberates and raises a woman's status, and demands that she be judged according to her intellect rather than her sexuality.

The reason Muslim women observe hijab is simply because Allah (God) made it a compulsory act of worship for them, and Allah knows what is best for His creation.

The hijab gives women the freedom to be active members of society, while maintaining their modesty. The hijab is meant for the public as women do not have to observe hijab when they are at home with their family!

The hijab does not symbolize suppression, oppression or silence. Rather, it is a shield guarding against degrading remarks, unwanted advances and unfair discrimination. Of all converts to Islam, 75% are women! Would you enter a religion that oppresses you? So the next time you see a Muslim woman, know that she covers her physical appearance, not her mind or intellect!

"O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be chaste women) and not abused..."
Qur'an 33:59

- choose their spouse;
- keep their own surname when married;
- own property, operate a business, study, and receive equal pay for equal work;
- inherit property, and to have their marriage dissolved in the case of neglect or mistreatment;
- participate in all forms of worship that men participate in.

Islam guaranteed these rights, among many others, to women over 1400 years ago – rights that women in the West are still lacking.

"Whoever works righteousness whether male or female, while he (or she) is a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward (in the Hereafter) according to the best of what they used to do."
Qur'an 16:97

Without doubt, there are Muslim women who are oppressed and not given their rights. However, this is not the fault of Islam. The problem is that in many places in the world, culture and traditions have come to overshadow the teachings of Islam, either through ignorance or harmful cultural practices.

Islam oppresses women MISCONCEPTION #2

One of the most disturbing misconceptions is the negative portrayal of women in Islam – namely that Islam degrades and oppresses women. According to the teachings of Islam, the only thing that distinguishes people in the sight of God is their level of piety.

"Verily the most honourable of you in the sight of Allaah is the most God conscious"
Qur'an 49:13

This verse proves that real honour and status is not attained because a person is rich or poor, black or white, male or female but attained through piety and devoutness. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to learn that for every male convert to Islam, four females convert. Some reasons for this overwhelming female conversion rate are due to the following rights enshrined in Islam:

- total control of their wealth;

While Islam enshrines the rights of women, it also acknowledges the fact that men and women are **not identical**.

Allah says: "...and the male is not like the female..."
(Qur'an: 3:36)

Islam has therefore ordained different roles for men and women to reflect this undisputable fact. Women have been granted the honour and tremendous responsibility of caring for the family and the household. While Men have been given the responsibility of providing financial support, security and maintenance for the family and the household.

In conclusion, the noble position of women in Islam can be summarized by the following saying of the Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him):

"The world and all things in the world are precious, but the most precious thing in the world is a virtuous woman."

"Muslims worship a new God called Allah" MISCONCEPTION #3

Some non-Muslims incorrectly believe that Muslims worship a different God than Jews and Christians. This might be due to the fact that Muslims sometimes refer to God as "Allah". In actuality, Muslims worship the God of Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The word "Allah" is simply the Arabic word for Almighty God - an Arabic word of rich meaning, denoting the one and only God. Allah is also the same word that Arabic speaking Christians and Jews use to refer to God. If you pick up an Arabic translation of the Christian Bible, you will see the word "Allah" where "God" is used in English.

However, although Muslims, Jews and Christians believe in the same God (the Creator), their concepts regarding Him differ significantly. For example, Muslims reject the idea of God having any partners or being part of a 'trinity', and ascribe perfection only to The Almighty.

"Islam permits terrorism" MISCONCEPTION #4

This is perhaps the biggest misconception about Islam, especially given the constant stereotyping by the media. The media portrays as a terrorist any Muslim who fights regardless of whether they fight justly or unjustly, or whether they are oppressing others or being oppressed. So the question that comes to mind is: Does Islam encourage terrorism? **Certainly not!** Islam totally forbids and condemns the misguided acts of vigilantes that target innocent civilians.

Of course, Islam does not remain silent in the face of oppression, injustice and humiliation. Any religion or civilization that does, would never survive, but it certainly does not condone attacks against defenseless men, women and children.

"Fight in the cause of Allah against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. Allah does not love transgressors."
Qur'an 2:190

Allah says:

Even during times of war, Islam lays down strict rules. For example, a Muslim is not allowed to harm or kill those in a peace treaty with Muslims, non-combatants, women, minors, servants, the blind, monks, the elderly, those physically incapable of fighting, and the mentally ill. In fact, Muslims are not even allowed to damage crops and vegetation during times of war! These noble ethics were, and still remain, unheard of in any army.

The Qur'an clearly demonstrates the seriousness of killing an innocent person, and emphasises the value of human life. At the same time it also instructs muslims to treat people of other faiths with kindness.

"If anyone murders an (innocent) person, it will be as if he has murdered the whole of humanity. And if anyone saves a person it will be as if he has saved the whole of humanity."
Qur'an 5:32

"Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion, nor drove you out of your homes. Indeed, Allah loves those who deal with equity."
Qur'an 60:8

How, after reading these clear verses of the Qur'an, can Islam be blamed for what is done by terrorists?

Conclusion

So many attempts have been made to portray Islam as a religion that is both strange and foreign to people's normal instincts and values. In deciding upon what to make of Islam, remember this:

- Who stands to gain from perpetuating such misconceptions and untruths?
- Have you researched about Islam yourself, as opposed to what you have heard from others and the media?
- Would millions of people all over the world embrace Islam if it was a harsh and inhumane way of life?

"Allah has promised those who believe and do good deeds that for them there is forgiveness and a mighty reward." Qur'an 5:9

More information:

WayOfLifeSA +27 73 992 6943 info@wolfoundation.co.za

Donation details: All amounts donated will be used for dawah projects.
Bank Name: First National Bank Account: WOL Foundation
Account Number: 6276 4073 29 4 BC: 250655 Reference: Dawah Project

misconceptions about Islam



Serving mankind

What do you REALLY know?

learn the basics

WOLfoundation wolfoundation.co.za