

**ON
ISLAM
AND
INDOCTRINATION**



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Introduction

The iron grip of Islam on many of its adherents is one of the inescapable realities of the modern world. It seems that many Muslims are willing to continue to believe and even to make great sacrifices for their faith, in spite of the fact that so many elements of that faith can be easily disproved. The purpose of this essay is to ask why this is the case. By being aware of some of the reasons behind the uncritical acceptance of the tenets of their faith we as non-Muslims can be more effective in helping Muslims come to a place where they will be willing to critically examine Islam.

Why is this important? As I argue in my book, *Questioning Islam*, many of the aspects of Islam most troubling to unbelievers and possibly most damaging to world peace can be regarded as absolutely fundamental to orthodox Islam. It is, therefore, a massive delusion to think that Western culture can co-exist indefinitely with Islam as an ideology. Whether we like it or not, we will have to come to the conclusion that the problems created by the current worldwide Islamic resurgence cannot merely be ascribed to the 'radicals', 'fundamentalists' or whatever other term is used to get Islam as a whole off the hook. Deep and probing questions about Islam itself will have to be asked and answered. Muslims will have to be encouraged to think deeply about their attachment to their faith and why this could perhaps be due to factors other than its truth. The purpose of this document is to analyze some of these factors.

The specific questions that can be asked about the truth of Islam are discussed in much more detail in my new book '*Questioning Islam: Tough Questions and Honest Answers About the Muslim Religion*'. I want to strongly encourage all readers who are concerned about the impact of Islam on the world to educate and equip themselves by reading '*Questioning Islam*'. Muslims who are ready to ask some hard questions about their faith will also benefit greatly from carefully considering the issues raised in this book.

Questioning Islam can be found here:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00LBQ32SE>

A Key Question...

Whenever a belief system is discussed the issue of indoctrination will at some stage come into the discussion. So it was recently when I suggested to a Muslim that I was debating with that he may have been indoctrinated. His response was as quick as a flash: *"Why aren't you the indoctrinated one?"* That is a fantastic question and I am happy to answer it.

Listed below you will find ten reasons (in the form of an extended answer to the person who asked the initial question) why I believe that the worldwide strength of Islam is based on an extensive regime of indoctrination.

Each section is introduced by citing a characteristic method of indoctrination used by oppressive ideologies. I then go on to discuss how I believe it is being utilized in Islamic societies:

1. Memorization and repetition of key phrases and concepts: When Mao Zedong wanted to indoctrinate the Chinese population he wrote his '*Little Red Book*' and made sure that everybody memorized it and constantly repeated key phrases from it. It was a very effective way of shutting down critical thought and of making sure that the majority of the population thought in exactly the same way. In Islam you are commanded to memorize the Qur'an and to repeat certain key phrases (most notably the *shahada* where Muhammad's 'prophethood' is affirmed) several times a day. The impact of this on a psychological and emotional level cannot be overstated and it will in most cases cause you to simply revert to what you have learnt rather than to think freely. I am not required to do this in any way. No memorization, no repetition. My thoughts can wander where they will.

2. Emphasis that adherents have 'seen the light': Where indoctrination occurs the message is often presented as the final truth. Those who accept the message are told that they have 'arrived' and that no further critical enquiry would be necessary. They can therefore simply close their minds and get on with believing the final truth to which they have committed themselves. You already assured me that our conversations will not lead you out of Islam. Thereby you told me that your mind has been made up and nothing can change it. I, on the other hand, would be willing to follow the evidence wherever it leads. If the evidence pointed to the truth of Islam I can categorically state that I'd be willing to convert to it. Refute the points I made in detailing the errors, absurdities and contradictions in the Qur'an. In other words, show me where I'm wrong on all of them, and I would be more than willing to change my mind.

3. Denigration of other sources of knowledge: When indoctrination occurs access to sources of knowledge that conflict with the message are kept out as much as possible. This is done through restricting access to it or through denigrating it to such an extent that the devotees will not touch it. This process allows the indoctrination to occur within a 'closed information loop' where new or challenging ideas are kept outside. Your religion tells you that all other revelations are false (even those sent earlier by Allah are now regarded as corrupted) and that you therefore cannot trust them. In Islamic societies strenuous efforts are also made to keep information critical of Islam outside. You have experienced this yourself when you could not access material that I sent you because it was kept out by a web filter. I on the other hand can read what I want and range where I want in my intellectual pursuits.

4. Regarding those who disagree as the 'enemy': Oppressive systems thrive on 'in group/out group' dynamics. Those on the inside are the chosen people while those outside are the worst of the worst, to be avoided at all costs (unless there is a realistic chance of getting them to join the 'in group'). Your religion is deeply insulting towards those who do not follow Islam and paints them in the worst possible terms. Here are just a few examples of how the Qur'an describes people like me: Eat like beasts 47:12 * Are apes 7:166, 5:60, 2:65 * Are pigs 5:60 * Are asses 74:50 * The vilest of animals in Allah's sight 8:55 * Losers 2:27, 2:121, 3:85 * Have a disease in their hearts 2:10, 5:52, 24:50 8 * Are hard-hearted 39:22, 57:16 * Impure of hearts 5:41 * Are deaf 2:171, 6:25 * Are blind 2:171, 6:25 * Are dumb 2:171, 6:35, 11:29 * Are niggardly 4:37, 70:21 * Works shall be rendered ineffective 2:217, 47:1, 47:8 * Are impure 8:37 * Are scum 13:17 * Are inordinate 5:68, 78:22 * Are transgressors 2:26, 9:8, 46:20 * Are unjust 29:49 * Make mischief 16:88 * Are the worst of men 98:6 * Are in a state of confusion 50:5 * Are the lowest of the low 95:5 * Focus only on outward appearance 19:73-74 * Are guilty 30:12, 77:46 * Sinful liars 45:7 * Follow falsehood 47:3 * Deeds are like the mirage in a desert 24:39 * Allah does not love them 3:32, 22:38 * Allah forsakes them 32:14, 45:34 * Allah brought down destruction upon them 47:10 * Allah has cursed them 2:88, 48:6 * Allah despises them 17:18 * Allah abases them 22:18. The cumulative effect of all these insults is that you begin to see yourself as a special but beleaguered group who should avoid dangerous outsiders as much as possible. I, on the other hand, am free to befriend and learn from anybody and everybody, all the way from Atheists

to Buddhists.

5. Strenuous efforts to keep the 'faithful' inside: In intellectually and emotionally oppressive systems great care is taken to ensure that those who have 'seen the light' do not leave. This can happen through the practice of 'shunning', threats of violence and even death. Islam is like the 'Hotel California' you can 'check in any time but you can never leave'. Dire threats are made against potential apostates, to the point of warning them that they will be killed (Sahih Bukhari Volume 9, Book 84, Number 57). You are probably very aware of what will happen to you should you verbalize a wish to leave Islam. All hell will break loose, not only from official bodies but also from your family and friends. I, on the other hand, am free to pursue my convictions wherever they lead. I can have no faith if I wish. Yes I can even become a Muslim if I so wished and absolutely nothing will happen to me. If however I would want to leave that again...

6. Attempts to filter all knowledge through a single intellectual grid:

Systems that indoctrinate proposes 'theories of everything'. This means that you only have to go to 'the book' to learn everything that you need to know. I can respond to the implications of new knowledge wherever that may take me. You, however, must first filter that knowledge through the Qur'an. So when the Qur'an is contradicted by scientific experimentation and observation, as it most certainly is, you have to go with the Qur'an. This approach is exactly the wrong way round. In science we don't start with fully formed theories and then try to prove them. We start with a blank slate and then, through the process of experimentation and observation, eventually move to the formulation of theories. The result of the Qur'anic straightjacket on scientific inquiry means that the Muslim world has become an intellectual wasteland. The Arab world produces about 7000 peer reviewed scientific articles per year. This is about the same as a single small European country (Sweden). These papers are generally also of a very low quality with 'citation rates' below 1 (in other words each paper is only cited once on average, for the US the rate is 3.62%). Rates of invention and patent registration in the Muslim world are also pitiful. The warning about not being a 'person of one book' is particularly relevant here. It leads to ossification and a lack of free intellectual and scientific exploration. I can read and interact with any book. You, on the other hand, have to harmonize everything you read with the Qur'an.

7. Appeals to 'special knowledge': A feature of the 'in group/out group' nature of repressive ideologies is the fact that outsiders are portrayed as people who cannot (repeat cannot) understand the glories of the system unless they have been initiated. In the case of Islam this sentiment is often couched in statements about the Arabic language. Muslims insist that a book based on about 2000 distinct root words cannot be translated into a language (English) with a documented vocabulary of about a quarter of a million distinct words! This is a patently ridiculous notion. Their position is further undermined by the fact that they are quite happy to quote the Qur'an in English when trying to convert people; only switching to 'You need perfect Arabic' the moment Islam is questioned. You constantly tried this tactic, insisting on 'retreating into Arabic' even though I have constantly showed you that my arguments are based on a careful study of the Arabic text. Another category of 'special knowledge' comes in the form of threats about what will happen after death. You are quick to threaten those who disagree with eternal damnation, as if you had some kind of inside line as to what exactly will happen after death. Just a pity (from your perspective at least) that the book upon which this 'inside knowledge' is based is riddled with errors, contradictions and absurdities.

8. Overblown appeals to beauty or and appeals to titles: One of the features of oppressive systems is that their supposed authority is entrenched with appeals to beauty and the use of titles. Think of the 'Dear Leader' of North Korea. The fact that you are constantly told that a system is so beautiful and that its leaders/books deserve the highest possible titles causes people to be reluctant to question it. This is certainly the case in Islam. One of the most important tests for the Qur'an is to produce a 'Sura like it'. This is an entirely subjective test based on people's perception of aesthetics. Who is to say that there are not many 'suras like it'? (In fact there are. Check out: www.suralikeit.com) Muhammad and the Qur'an are also elevated to untouchable and unquestionable positions. You are supposed to refer to the Qur'an as 'Glorious' or 'Noble' and to place it higher than all other books in your home. You are taught not to mention Muhammad's name without saying 'Peace be Upon Him'. It is not difficult to see how these practices will create an environment where you will be very reluctant to question such supposedly beautiful and exalted documents and persons. I, on the other hand, regard nothing as sacrosanct and do not give out overblown titles to shore up the authority of my beliefs.

9. Denial of reality: Those who have been indoctrinated will always experience a certain level of cognitive dissonance. Where the world is not as you have been taught it would be. Citizens of the former Soviet Union were told that they lived in the best country in the world. The level of shock that some of these citizens observed when they had the chance to observe the free and affluent West for the first time was so severe that it led, in some cases, to complete mental and emotional breakdown. Now let's apply this to Islam. Muslims are taught that Islam is perfect. That it is the best way to run your life and society. Following on from this one would think that societies where the Qur'an is read and believed would be the most just, prosperous, healthy and desirable places to live on earth. That there would be huge immigration queues in countries where the Qur'an is not widely read and believed of people wanting to move to places where the majority of the population follows Islam. What we are, in fact, seeing is exactly the opposite. Millions of people are voting with their feet, preferring to move to places where the majority of people do not read and believe the Qur'an. The fact is that Muslim countries fare dismally at just about any test of human development that you would care to mention (if it was not for oil the situation would have been even direr). You have to find excuses for why Islam leads to such terrible outcomes in the modern world. I, on the other hand, do not follow a Utopian ideology and can merely observe that some societies are more just and 'livable' than others and that a large Muslim population seems to be an accurate predictor of societal strife and underdevelopment.

10. Appeal to the Masses (*Argumentum ad Populum*): One way that oppressive systems silence objections and doubts is to showcase how many people follow their ideology. The 'mass games' and military parades of Fascist and Communist societies fulfilled this function to perfection. People observing them were bound to ask: "If so many thousands follow this ideology my doubts must be unfounded". The obvious problem, however, is that no one can really see into the hearts of all those individuals. It is, furthermore, possible for a huge group of people to be totally misguided. *Argumentum ad Populum* is therefore seen as a classic logical fallacy. How is this employed by Islam? Well, we constantly hear statements like 'Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world' (When independent proof is demanded the claims suddenly cease by the way) or 'Look at how many Westerners are converting to Islam (Despite the fact that this is far from a mass movement and that the majority leave Islam again within a few years). Besides we can also use this argument against Islam: Only about 20% of the world's population follows Islam. The majority therefore reject it! You live in a system that constantly make appeals like the ones made above. I, on the other hand, refuse to measure the truth of what I believe by constantly checking how many people agree with me.

Conclusion

It is one thing to claim that the current (and ancient for that matter) strength of Islam is based on an extensive regime of indoctrination. It is quite another to propose ways in which Muslims can be helped to move beyond 'what they've always been told'. I want to suggest that helping more and more Muslims to do exactly this will be vital if we seek to live in a world where the myriad conflicts sparked by literal readings of the Qur'an will become a thing of the past.

One of the ways in which the ideological struggle with Islam as a political ideology can be resolved is to ask the hard questions about the 'truth claims' of Islam that are so often swept under the carpet by those who insist on claiming that 'Our struggle is not with Islam'. I want to suggest that it is, not with individual Muslims, but certainly with Islam as a belief system. Non-Muslims will, therefore have to equip themselves to ask critical questions of Islam in firm yet respectful ways.

The hard questions that Muslims will have to ask about the truth of their faith are all discussed in my new book '*Questioning Islam - Tough Questions and Honest Answers About the Muslim Faith*'. The following topics are investigated in its pages:

- Can the traditional Islamic historical accounts be trusted?
- Is the Qur'an a 'Perfect Book, Perfectly Preserved'?

- Was Muhammad indeed a 'Beautiful Pattern of Conduct'?

The answers to these questions will not be sought from modern commentaries on Islam. Instead *Questioning Islam* goes straight to the classic sources of Islam namely the Qur'an, hadiths (traditions) and biographies of Muhammad.

Questioning Islam is not an attempt to promote any other belief system or ideology. Its focus is simply on asking the questions about the truth of Islam that are all too often ignored or swept under the carpet. Simply put, if you have ever wondered whether the truth-claims of Islam can withstand critical scrutiny then this book is for you! The arguments presented in its pages will also have to be heard more and more in discussions about Islam if we are to have any success in checking the threat that political Islam poses to world peace.

Questioning Islam can be found here:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00LBQ32SE>

I want to sincerely thank you for taking the time to read 'On Islam and Indoctrination'. If you would like to keep up-to-date with my work you can follow me on Twitter ([@petertownsend7](https://twitter.com/petertownsend7)) or Facebook (www.facebook.com/questioningislam). You are also more than welcome to sign up for the 'Questioning Islam Newsletter'. You can do so at:

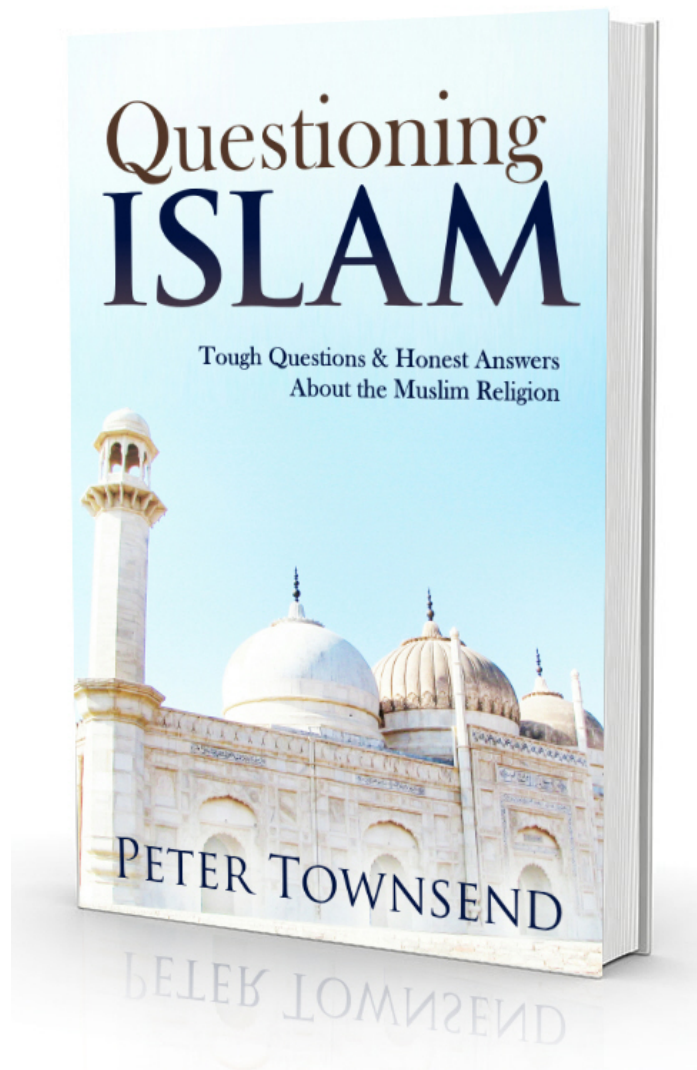
<http://bit.ly/qinewsletter>.

Thanks again!

Peter Townsend

Sydney, July 2014

Effectively responding to the truth-claims of Islam will be the biggest challenge of the 21st century. Equip yourself for this task by reading '*Questioning Islam*' by Peter Townsend.



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