

# The place of tolerance islam essay sample

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Khaled El Fadl's article is a clear reminder that Islam, despite its image in the West, is fundamentally a tolerant religion that urges its followers to treat people of other faiths with fairness and acceptance, to meet peace with peace. It also assumes that the Qur'an's readers will interpret its passages with justice and morality. However, he argues, puritanical extremists within Islam have ignored both morality and history, interpreting scripture narrowly and twisting its messages for hateful, immoral ends.

The puritans El Fadl describes include the followers of Osama Bin Laden, members of the Taliban, the Jihad groups, and the Wahhabi sect, all of whom oppose Western power and culture. Their world view, he claims, is based on Islam as the only true path, and, he says, they "display an intolerant exclusiveness, and a belligerent sense of supremacy vis-à-vis the other."

Their beliefs preclude "any moral considerations or ethical values that are not fully codified in the law," meaning that their interpretations ignore gray areas in the Qur'an and assume that anyone not on their side is the enemy and must be destroyed or fully subjugated. As he claims, "puritan groups are able to claim a self-righteous perfectionism that easily slips into a pretense of supremacy." In addition, they use Islam as a means of promoting a nationalistic agenda. This approach is dangerous, El Fadl maintains, not simply because of the human toll but because it undercuts the faith's tolerant, peaceful message and presents an ugly, violent front to the rest of the world.

Muslim puritans base their intolerant ideas on several key passages in the Qur'an that, on the surface, rally Muslims to fight anyone of other faiths.

One example calls upon Muslims to fight Jews and Christians, claiming, “ They are allies of each other, and he amongst you who becomes their ally is one of them.” Another passage states that “ whomsoever follows a religion other than Islam this will not be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers.”

Basically, these present a black-and-white world view in which believers of other faiths are inferior and may be justly persecuted, and in which extremists are basically blinded by their arrogance to the historical and cultural contexts in which the Qur’an was created. As El Fadl says, the puritans lack the ability to comprehend “ the implications of a commitment to human diversity and mutual knowledge under contemporary conditions;” in other words, they basically read around the passages that mandate acceptance of others.

To counter the problematic passages, he offers the following: “. . . God has created you from male and female and made you into diverse nations and tribes so that you may come to know each other.” In addition, the scripture says” “ To each of you God has prescribed a Law and a Way.

If God has willed, He would have made you a single people.” He claims that while early Muslim scholars did not fully explore the idea of diversity as modern peoples understand it, diversity is nonetheless accepted in the scriptures and the fact that early scholars did not fully account for diversity did not necessarily mean that tolerance was unimportant, or that Islam itself was immune from the contexts of either time or place.

El Fadl asserts that the Qur'an is intended to be read with a high regard for morality, mercy, and justice – elements clearly missing from the extremists' conduct. In addition to their failure to practice tolerance, he says, Muslim puritans also fail to understand the notion of reciprocity and the proper use of force. In particular, they misinterpret *jihad*, which is meant not to justify ongoing holy war against the West but as an internal struggle against sin and temptation; “Islamic tradition does not have a notion of holy war,” he says explicitly.

Efforts to force “infidels” to adopt Islam against their will are forbidden; as the Qur'an says, “There is no compulsion in matter of faith.” Besides, Islam itself does not glorify or encourage war, but instead distinguishes between just and unjust wars (and only those killed in just causes may become martyrs). Extremists have erased these boundaries and consider any war claimed to be fought on behalf of Islam both holy and just – another tendency El Fadl considers dangerous and detrimental. Also, he makes clear that “Non-Muslims may not be fought unless they pose a physical threat to Muslims. If non-Muslims seek peace, Muslims should make an effort to achieve such a peace.” Such behavior, he says, does not figure in extremists' plans.

Instead of reading according to historical context and taking the Qur'an's urgings to behave peacefully and justly, Muslim puritans interpret the scriptures as a justification for their politically-motivated warfare against the United States, Israel, and other Western nations.

Puritans read the Qur'an selectively, ignoring its calls for tolerance and acceptance of peaceful non-Muslims; also, they do not filter its messages through a moral lens or see the teachings as the product of a certain time and places. As El Fadl remarks, ". . . the reader must take responsibility for the normative values he or she brings to the text. . . . [The] meaning of the text is often only as moral as its reader." In the case of Muslim extremists, morality is missing and meaning is distorted.

Instead of accounting for changing historical and cultural contexts (which El Fadl says the reader must do), Muslim extremists place their belligerence foremost in their world view, twisting Islamic scripture in order to justify ongoing, often-unprovoked attacks against the perceived enemies of Islam.

This is unfortunate because, as El Fadl points out, Islam is fundamentally a religion which promotes peace and tolerance (and has embraced both through much of its history). He is optimistic though, because several previous intolerant movements in Islam grew moderate and peaceful over time, but he cautions that Muslims themselves must uphold those tolerant values and maintain a more humane tradition.