



Love and Hate for God's Sake: Revisiting the Doctrine of al-Wala' wal-Bara'

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In the name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful

Properly reconciling commitment to God and compassion for man is among the most pressing needs of today's world. It is no secret that Muslims' relationship with the "other" (including fellow believers of other theological orientations) has become such a major trial for many—particularly those hailing from the Western world¹—that it risks eroding the sweetness of their faith, or even pushing them away from it.

The Islamic doctrine of *al-wala' wal-bara'*, often translated as loyalty and disavowal, has the power to remedy this conflict—if and when accurately defined. The equilibrium it achieves between obedience to God and compassion to mankind attests to Islam's inherently balanced moral philosophy. This paper is the first in a series of papers that unpack the concept of *al-wala' wal-bara'*, beginning with an exposition of Islam's ethos of "love" and "hate" as established in its revealed scriptures and scholastic tradition. Subsequent papers will go on to explore, in detail, how this concept should inform our actions towards and understanding of "others" on an individual and global scale. I pray that this endeavor helps to illustrate the coherence of Islam's ethical framework, and the unique way it balances different virtues.

How should *al-wala' wal-bara'* be defined?

Wala' (or *al-wala'*) is commonly translated as loyalty or allegiance. At its core, *al-wala'* is about proximity (closeness) to something or someone. It connotes support, friendship, and love.² *Bara'* (or *al-bara'*) is commonly translated as disavowal or disassociation. It has the same root as *bari'* (being innocent of) and *bara'a* (to recover, as from an illness).³ This etymology helps us understand some of the term's meanings. Essentially, *al-bara'* is about disassociating oneself from

¹ The use of the terms "the West/Western/Occidental" and "the East/Eastern/Oriental" is problematic in several ways, including their geographical inaccuracy. However, I use them in this paper because Western is the most commonly used term to describe a certain civilization and it has an understandable referent in our times—known and understood to its patrons and adversaries alike. Although other terms like "Eurocentric" may be more politically correct in certain circles, they are not error proof either. For example, the patrons of the "Western" way of life do not see Russia as a Western nation, while the "Eurocentric" theorists sympathize with its Europeaness.

² Aḥmad ibn Fāris al-Qazwīnī, *Mu'jam maqāyīs al-lughā*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām M. Hārūn (Dār al-Fikr, 1979), 6:141. See also W. E. Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* (n.p., 1863–93).

³ Al-Qazwīnī, *Mu'jam maqāyīs al-lughā*, 1:236.

someone or something undesirable. It does not necessarily entail hostility or dislike. *Al-wala' wal-bara'* is sometimes (liberally) translated as “love and hate,” following from the idea that love and hate are the basis of loyalty and disavowal. In the context of Islam, the concept of *al-wala' wal-bara'* can be understood as both loyalty to what pleases Allah (loving for His sake) and disassociation from what displeases Him (hating for His sake). God is at the center of existence and our consciousness, and therefore it's natural to love what He loves and to hate what He hates—to seek that which reflects His divine qualities, and to eschew that which does not. An integral aspect of *tawhid* (Islamic monotheism) is the decentering of the ego. If God is the Ultimate Truth and Ultimate Good, then even our feelings should be mindful of Him and accord with His pleasure.

Different derivations of the term *al-wala' wal-bara'*—as well as the concept of loving and hating for God's sake—are established throughout the Qur'an.⁴ Two of the most well-known verses in this regard are,

You will not find a people who believe in Allah and the Last Day having affection for those who [viciously]⁵ oppose Allah and His Messenger, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred.⁶

O you who have believed, do not take as allies those who have taken your religion in ridicule and amusement among the ones who were given the Scripture before you, nor the disbelievers. And fear Allah, if you should [truly] be believers.⁷

Al-wala' wal-bara' is also suggested by the authenticated speech of the Prophet ﷺ. “Be kind to your [pagan] mother,”⁸ he ﷺ instructed, and in a different instance he affirmed, “There is a reward for serving any living being.”⁹ The Prophet ﷺ also said, “Whoever loves for Allah, hates for Allah, gives for Allah, and withholds for Allah has perfected their faith.”¹⁰

⁴ The next paper in this series will cover, in detail, the scriptural occasions that make up the constituent parts that constitute and elucidate *al-wala' wal-bara'*.

⁵ The reason behind this insertion will become apparent in the forthcoming section, “Can a Muslim truly love a non-Muslim?”

⁶ Qur'an 58:22.

⁷ Qur'an 5:57.

⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5979 (bk. 78, hadith 10).

⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 6009 (bk. 78, hadith 40), agreed upon.

¹⁰ *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 4681. Graded *ṣaḥīḥ* (rigorously authentic) by al-Albānī.

The concept of *al-wala' wal-bara'*, in its original iteration, makes piety the primary object of the believer's loyalty—not race, ethnicity, kinship, nationality, language, class, or politics. It proclaims goodness as the ultimate differentiator.

Allah says,

O humankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.¹¹

As for color and language, they are simply signs of the Lord's magnificence. Allah says, "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and colors. Indeed, in these are signs for those of knowledge."¹²

In essence, *al-wala' wal-bara'* weakens all tribal prejudices without invalidating other types of human affiliation—such as kinship or nationality—and seamlessly weaves them together into a harmonious worldview. It does this by establishing Islam as the most noble source of affiliation, but not one that operates outside the larger framework of God's pervasive mercy and the singular Adamic origins of the human family. That is why Muslims who prioritize religion are not as divided by other factors, such as ethnicity¹³ or political ideology, let alone matters as trivial as one's favorite sports team. The genocide in Gaza is a significant case in point. Not only has it sparked a revival of the Muslim *ummah's* collective consciousness, it has reoriented bloc voting habits across the US and UK around ummatic concerns.¹⁴ The doctrine of *al-wala' wal-bara'* even serves, as will be discussed

¹¹ Qur'an 49:13.

¹² Qur'an 30:22.

¹³ The Muslim American community is one of the most racially diverse religious groups in the US. See: Michael Lipka, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups," Pew Research Center, July 27, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/> and "Who Are American Muslims?," ISPU, <https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Who-Are-American-Muslims.pdf>.

¹⁴ For more on this topic, see: Osman Umarji, "Gaza's Rise: Inspiring the Muslim Ummah's Collective Consciousness and Religiosity," Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, January 8, 2024, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/post/gazas-rise-inspiring-the-muslim-ummahs-collective-consciousness-and-religiosity>; Osman Umarji and Youssef Chouhoud, "American Muslims and the 2024 Election: Why American Muslims Are Rethinking Political Alliances," Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, October 4, 2024, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/post/american-muslims-and-the-2024-election-why-american-muslims-are-rethinking-political-alliances>; and Youssef Chouhoud and Osman Umarji, "Just How Much Does Gaza Matter to American

later, to purge religious bigotry by treating human consciousness as both a transcendent ego and a bundle of intentional acts. It calls every Muslim to ally themselves with goodness, regardless of its agent, because our ultimate allegiance to God signifies an ultimate allegiance to goodness.

The terms *al-wala'* and *al-bara'* each have over twenty usages. Their polysemic nature, as well as the potential vastness of their applications across all areas of relational life, makes their disambiguation and contextualization exceedingly important. We need not be philosophers of language like Ludwig Wittgenstein to grasp that language derives much of its meaning from its contextual use, and thus using an expression in a “language game” where it does not belong necessitates its misinterpretation.¹⁵ If context is required to comprehend a word's intended meaning even within a single language, then context is evermore consequential when translating from one language, and indeed one worldview, to another. This not only complicates communicating the concept of *al-wala' wal-bara'* to non-Muslims, but even to Muslims, unless we make a conscious effort to engage with and reconstruct the worldview of the Prophet ﷺ and the righteous predecessors. Therefore, careful analysis of the pertinent scriptural and historical accounts is essential for a proper understanding of our tradition, even if it is vast and varied. Moreover, given the perpetual [renewal of *ijtihad*](#), we should expect that, unlike matters of creed, the rulings of proper conduct between people of different theological orientations and religious affiliations will vary across time and space.

Is the concept of *al-wala' wal-bara'* exclusive to Islam?

The notion of loving and hating for the sake of God is not alien to other religious traditions. For example, while some Christians claim that unconditional love is the ethos of their religion, Christian pastors of different backgrounds have amassed hundreds of Biblical verses that suggest otherwise. A simple online search for

Muslim Voters?,” Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, October 31, 2024, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/post/just-how-much-does-gaza-matter-to-american-muslim-voters>.

¹⁵ See Arif Ahmed, ed., *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*, Cambridge Critical Guides (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 24, Kindle; see also Michael A. Peters, “Language-Games Philosophy: Language-Games as Rationality and Method,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, September 21, 2020, <http://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1821190>.

“Does God love everyone?” is sufficient to demonstrate this point,¹⁶ but some examples include:

And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and *therefore I abhorred them*.¹⁷

The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou **hatest** all workers of iniquity.¹⁸

All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for *there I hated them*: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, **I will love them no more**: all their princes are revolvers.¹⁹

Many Christian pastors have exhorted their congregations to try to align their feelings with both God's pleasure *and* displeasure, with both His love *and* His hate. In an article that asks *Does God Love Everyone?*, Pastor Nick Bibile writes,

If we tell the unbelievers that God intimately loves them, repentance is not needed, as God loves them anyway! But they say, “God loves the sinners but hates the sin.” If Jesus died for every single individual, then why is it that many are going to hell? Why is that the death of Jesus cannot save everyone in hell? Did he fail his mission, or did he come to save his people from their sins? (Matt. 1:21)

John 3:36 [says:] He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him... Some say, God loves the sinner but hates the sin. It does not say that in scripture, but the scripture says just the opposite. Ps. 7:11 [says:] God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.²⁰

¹⁶ See Samuel Osborne, “‘Violence More Common’ in Bible than Quran, Text Analysis Reveals,” *Independent*, February 9, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/violence-more-common-bible-quran-text-analysis-reveals-a6863381.html>.

¹⁷ Lev. 20:23.

¹⁸ Ps. 5:5.

¹⁹ Hosea 9:15.

²⁰ Nick Bibile, “Does God Love Everyone, and Did Jesus Die for Everyone?,” Sounddoctrine.net, accessed April 23, 2021, http://www.sounddoctrine.net/Nick/Does_God_Loves_Everyone.htm. Reposted onto Facebook: Gary Ruff, “Does God Love Everyone, and Did Jesus Die for Everyone? By Nick Bibile,” Facebook, July 30, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheologyDiscussionGroup/posts/1209742179057943/>. The quote included in this paper was edited slightly for clarity.

Evidently, notwithstanding the appeal to differing scriptural sources, there is little semantic difference between the concepts presented by Pastor Bibile and those presented by many Muslim preachers.

Another tangible example of this similarity can be found in the acclaimed saying of Prophet Jesus (as): “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”²¹ This instruction strongly resonates with the Islamic ethic of forgiving our oppressors, as Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, “Reconcile with those who cut you off, give to those who deprive you, and forgive those who wrong you.”²² Neither prophet preached loving sinners unconditionally. Christians must look to how Jesus (as) “loved” the Pharisees and fraudulent money changers, and how he will “love them” in the Second Coming. The Greek word used by the Gospel writers, *agape* (love/goodwill), is distinct from other types of love like *eros* (romance) or *philia* (fraternity).²³ In other words, the kind of love reserved for sinners is one of goodwill and prayer rather than one of unconditional acceptance. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ epitomized this type of love when he prayed for the pagans of al-Ta'if after they set their children on him with taunts and stones, filling his shoes with blood and chasing him out of the city. He epitomized such love again when he prayed for the pagans of Quraysh after they had wounded him by Mount Uhud, broken his tooth, and killed his beloved uncle and companions.

However, some Christians fail to distinguish between the many dimensions of love and thus introduce tension between the God of the New Testament and the God of the Old Testament. Jesus (as), rather than being a great messenger of God who came to remind us of the spiritual and moral underpinnings of the law while upholding it, instead becomes a denier of the law. This mild version of Marcionism—which holds the “benevolent God” of the Gospel to be different from the “malevolent creator” God of the Old Testament—is offensive to the very concept of a monotheistic God, His divinity, and His Messenger. Marcionism errs in its inability to reconcile the rigor of the Old Testament with the beauty of the New Testament. Both emanate from the same divine source, which across history manifested itself in differing forms in accordance with the various dispositions and

²¹ As in Matt. 5:45.

²² *Musnad Ahmad*, no. 17452, graded *hasan* (fairly authentic) by al-Arnā'ūt.

²³ Carl L. W. Grimm, Joseph H. Thayer, and Christian G. Wilke, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (Harper, 1887), 4.

needs of different peoples at different times. In the final revelation, however, these qualities were brought into a perfect balance, fitting for all peoples and all times. The God of majesty who sent Moses is the same God of beauty who sent Jesus and the God of perfection who sent Muhammad.²⁴ Emphasizing one of God's divine attributes or just one of a prophet's noble traits does not negate the others. Proper reconciliation is a requirement of a balanced, unfragmented conception of the Divine—one offered by the Islamic understanding of God's attributes and His Messenger.

One may ask if setting “unconditional love”²⁵ as a cardinal moral value encourages people to be more compassionate. It seems highly unlikely. In the history of Christianity, the promotion of an ethic of absolute love did not yield a utopia of peace and plenty. Instead, it subdued the masses and emboldened the tyrants. It did not stop imperial, national, or religious wars. It did not stop the atrocities committed by the inquisitors, the Crusaders, and the colonizers.²⁶ To love all the children of Adam is a morally admirable principle expected of any believer in the Adamic origin of humanity. However, to claim that we must love both the good- and evil-doers indiscriminately, and love even the most criminal aggressors as they commit their acts of aggression, is dim, empty rhetoric that cannot be substantiated or concretized. Such rhetoric represents an inexcusable failure to provide a coherent and actionable strategy for cultivating human fraternity.

How can hate be sanctioned by a benevolent God?

The Arabic term *bughḍ*/*baghdā'*, used in scripture to convey the concept of disavowal, is often translated as “hate.” Although “dislike” may be a more politically correct term, given that in the modern West all “hate” is perceived as evil and immoral,²⁷ “hate” appears to be the best of the imperfect translations for *bughḍ*. This has been a source of consternation for some due to hate, befittingly,

²⁴ Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, 2nd ed. (Dār al-‘Āṣima, 1419/1999), 5:86.

²⁵ The term “unconditional love” has been recently widely used by Christians, although it is not found in the Bible nor has it ever been used by the church fathers. This is why it is still a controversial term.

²⁶ While there may have been some positive effects of imperial expansion, they do not wash away the inequities committed by the expansionists. All great civilizations had their shares of sin, to various degrees, and we must all own up to them.

²⁷ Carmen Merrick, “Hating Evil: Understanding the Role of Evil in Interpersonal Hate” (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2019), 1.

being a hated concept—it is not a psychological state that is inherently gratifying to possess. In fact, we often deem as evil the very act of hating.²⁸ Moreover, both Islamic and Christian scriptures, in many passages, seem to echo this disdain for “hate.” Given the apparent social and scriptural aversion to hate, how can it be sanctioned by the ultimate good; i.e., God?

It's important to consider from the outset that while some acts do have intrinsic qualities that render them either *hasan* (beautiful) or *qabih* (ugly), God acts and commands for wisdoms that we may not completely comprehend. This is the stronger, more centrist position within Sunni theology. God wills and commands what is good and wise in itself; in those instances where an otherwise intrinsically *qabih* act is ordained, a deeper wisdom, sometimes largely beyond our comprehension, must be contained within the command. Such was the case, for instance, when God commanded Abraham to slaughter his son (peace be upon them both) to test their submission.²⁹

Imam Ibn al-Qayyim wrote,

The Sharia is based on wisdom and the pursuit of the welfare of humanity, in both this fleeting life and in the life to come. It is entirely just, wise, beneficial, and merciful. Anything that veers from justice to injustice, from mercy to its opposite, from wisdom to foolishness, and from the welfare of humanity to its harm, is not part of the Sharia, even if it has been included therein by misinterpretation.³⁰

Whenever interpreting a command for what appears to be a *qabih* act, we as Muslims must try to align our feelings with God's will and pleasure. God may decree something that He hates for a wisdom only He can fully see, but we are obligated to accept both His chosen decree (creative will) and His command (legislative will). In the best of all possible worlds, hated commands exist for a divine wisdom of which we may only catch a glimpse.

From these glimpses we may come to appreciate hatred as a shield from evil and its doers. Research has shown that “hate is a protective emotional response to

²⁸ Merrick, “Hating Evil,” 1.

²⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 2nd ed., ed. ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Qāsim al-Najdī (Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, n.d.), 8:431.

³⁰ Ibn al-Qayyim, *I'lām al-muwaqqi'īn* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1991), 3:11.

perceived evil.”³¹ When we hate an evil, we immediately erect a barrier between ourselves and the evil in question—a barrier that deters us from engaging in it, possessing it, nearing it, or affiliating with it.

Imam Ibn Taymiyya said,

The performance of commandments arises from the power of will, desire, and love, and the avoidance of prohibitions arises from the power of hate, anger, and aversion. Ordaining good is based on love and inclination, and forbidding evil is based on hate and dislike. So is the encouragement of good and discouragement of evil. People get dissuaded from [carrying out] oppression by the deterring power of anger [of the oppressed]; thereby, justice and equity are established in order and distribution.³²

Ultimately, it is hate that will stimulate avoidance; in hating what God hates, we are more likely to keep distant from it. Given the superior wisdom of God as al-Hakim (the Most Wise) and our complete trust in Him, all that He hates is deemed evil or bad for humanity. As such, our hatred of evil not only signifies our love for Allah, but is itself an act of self-preservation. There is thus nothing more detrimental to the individual or society than maintaining a neutral, noncommittal attitude towards its evils and vices. Without the layer of protection that hatred of such things affords, the Muslim risks further exposure to the dangers of desire and temptation.

Should we hate the sin but love the sinner?

Developing our hatred of evil without slipping into its more destructive tendencies depends on two pillars: (1) the cultivation of virtue and (2) the exposition of proper and detailed answers to the what, why, and how questions about hate and its objects. It is the endeavor of this series to unpack the second pillar, beginning in this paper by exploring the proper objects of our divinely-motivated love and hate, and dismantling any biases that may exist in our understanding and application of it.

³¹ Merrick, “Hating Evil,” 1.

³² Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, 15:436.

Should the Muslim hate evil or its perpetrators? Sins or the sinners? Disbelief or the disbelievers? When we're told to forgive and pray for those who've wronged us, are we expected to love our transgressors?

For the most part, Qur'anic and Prophetic references to disavowal target the sin rather than the sinners themselves.

Our Messenger ﷺ was told by Allah,

And if they disobey you, then say, "Indeed, I am disassociated from what you are doing."³³

And if they deny you [O Muhammad], then say, "For me are my deeds and for you are your deeds. You are disassociated from what I do, and I am disassociated from what you do."³⁴

As Lot (as) told his people, "I am indeed of those who hate your conduct."³⁵ Abu Qilaba (ra) reported that Abu al-Darda' (ra) passed by a man who had committed a sin. [Some people] were insulting the man, so [Abu al-Darda'] said, "What if he fell into a well, would you have not brought him out?" They said, "Yes." He said, "Then, do not insult your brother and thank God who protected you [from sin]." They said, "Don't you hate him?" He said, "I only hate his action, so if he quits, he is my brother."³⁶

It was also reported by Abu Nu'aym in *Hilyat al-awliya'* that Ibrahim ibn Ad-ham (ra) said,

I was passing through some cities, and I saw two people among the ascetics who travel through the land. One of them said to the other, "O brother, what did the people who love Allah inherit from their Beloved?" The other said, "They inherited insight from the light of Allah the Exalted and empathy for those who disobey Him." I said, "How can he have empathy for people who oppose their beloved?" He looked at me and said, "He abhorred their [sinful] deeds and had empathy for them that through admonition they may abandon

³³ Qur'an 26:216.

³⁴ Qur'an 10:41.

³⁵ Qur'an 26:168.

³⁶ See the "Chapter on Insulting the Sinners" in Abū Bakr 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan'ānī, *Muṣannaf 'Abd al-Razzāq* (Dār al-Ta'ṣīl, 1437), 10:232. While Abu Qilāba did not meet Abu al-Dardā', he met his wife (*raḍiya Allāhu 'anhū*). The chain is still disconnected, but the report is widely accepted: its meaning is in harmony with the preceding verses, and it was at least approvingly relayed by a scholar from the second generation.

their [sinful] deeds, and he felt empathy that their bodies might be burned in Hellfire. **The believer is not truly a believer until he loves for people what he loves for himself.**”³⁷

A notable exception to the moral position articulated in these reports—the hatred of sin but not the sinner—is to be found in two Qur’anic verses. The first was revealed in the context of Hajj: “And [it is] an announcement from Allah and His Messenger to the people on the day of the greater pilgrimage that Allah is disassociated from the disbelievers, and [so is] His Messenger.”³⁸ The second records Ibrahim’s response to the tyranny and recalcitrant disbelief of his people: “Indeed, we are disassociated from you and from whatever you worship other than Allah.”³⁹

The nature of loving and hating for the sake of Allah is expectedly a very intricate endeavor, with some meaning and clarity lost (or distorted) in translation—not only from one language to another but, quite significantly, from one worldview to another. Consider, for example, how we define human consciousness, and the implications this definition has on the correct objects of our hate.

On the one hand, some hold that all human thought and perception stems from a transcendental and unitary ego. Demonstrating this, Abu Hurayra said, “The Prophet ﷺ came across me in one of the streets of Medina and at that time I was *junub* (in a state of major ritual impurity). So, I slipped away from him and went to take a [ritually purifying] bath. On my return, the Prophet ﷺ said, ‘O Abu Hurayra, where have you been?’ I replied, ‘I was *junub*, so I disliked sitting in your company.’ The Prophet ﷺ exclaimed, ‘**Subhan Allah! A believer never becomes impure.**’”⁴⁰ In other words, even if Abu Hurayra was, at that moment, in a state of ritual impurity, the Prophet ﷺ was pointing out to him that it is the state of the transcendental ego at the core of his being that truly matters.

On the other hand, some hold that we are a bundle or continuum of qualities that are renewed by every intentional act we do. As the Prophet ﷺ said, “The one

³⁷ Abu Nu‘aym Aḥmad ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Aṣbahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā’ wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’*, 2:271. Translation adapted from Abu Amina Elias, “Ibrahim on Love: Hate the Sin, Compassion for Sinners,” Daily Hadith Online, July 11, 2021, <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2012/07/08/love-sinner-hate-sin/>.

³⁸ Qur’an 9:3.

³⁹ Qur’an 60:4.

⁴⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 283 (bk. 5, hadith 35).

who commits an act of illegal sexual intercourse is not a believer at the time of committing illegal sexual intercourse, a thief is not a believer at the time of committing theft, and a drinker [of alcoholic drink] is not a believer at the time of drinking. Yet, [the gate of] repentance is open thereafter.”⁴¹

Both conceptions of human consciousness are true in their own way. There is clearly a difference between the action and the individual who performs it, and thus not everyone who practices an innovation, for instance, is called an innovator. Furthermore, an individual may be excused due to ignorance, error, or forgetfulness. Yet an act cannot be totally divorced from its doer. It cannot be said that a man should hate theft but love thieves.

As Muslims, we must wish salvation for everyone regardless of what they do. However, the unqualified and mutually exclusive use of the terms love and hate are incoherent and unattainable. Imam Ibn Taymiyya wrote that a man may be loved and hated simultaneously—loved in some respects and hated in others. We cannot demand that a father love the person who raped and then burnt his ten-year-old daughter, just as we cannot ask ourselves to love murderers, liars, or thieves, when such descriptions are the denominators. We may still love something else about an individual criminal, and we might still love for them repentance and guidance. However, to say that we love murderers and rapists is a moral anathema. If hate is meant to protect us from evil and the evil-doers,⁴² abstracting an act of evil from its perpetrator will not achieve that protection. After all, in reality, there is no evil that exists independently of those who (would) do that particular evil. Even a Platonic realist would not say that; to Plato, evil was a privation of good. As such, maintaining an absolute binary between who or what we should love and hate is fallacious. This extends to the identity of the sinner, for a Muslim cannot limit his disavowal to sins committed by non-Muslims. When Khalid ibn al-Walid committed an error, the Prophet ﷺ said, **“O Allah, I disavow before you what Khalid has done,”** and he repeated it twice.⁴³

So, why are we so uncomfortable about the possibility of hating a person? The answer is to be found in the contemporary conflation of hate with harm. When

⁴¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* no. 6810 (bk. 86, hadith 39).

⁴² Merrick, “Hating Evil,” 1.

⁴³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 7189 (bk. 93, hadith 51).

people hear the phrase “hate for the sake of God,” they typically interpret it as a command to harm other people. Hate, however, is as subtle and nuanced a concept as love, and must too be understood within its correct religious ecosystem.

The multidimensional nature of hatred becomes immediately evident when we consider the extensive discussions in Islamic literature about hating one's own self—an idea that exposes as unfounded the equation of hate with harm. The self-hatred prescribed by Allah is the hatred of lovers who want the best for themselves and humanity. In *Madārij al-sālikīn*, Ibn al-Qayyim quotes one of the righteous predecessors as saying, “You will not have proper understanding until you hate all people for Allah's sake, then turn to yourself and hate that the most.”⁴⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim explains that this hatred of both self and other flows from our recognition of the disparity between Allah's perfect graciousness and our human wickedness. In reminding ourselves of His vast all-encompassing mercy, we inspire ourselves to work for our own salvation and the salvation of others.

Similarly, (religious) hatred of sinners is simply the expression of lovers who want the best for humanity. Imagine a teenager who steals in order to purchase drugs. His mother, in her pain and anger, may truly hate his conduct and even hate him for harming himself and his family, but her hatred is fuelled by her love for him and her desire to see him safe, healthy, and free from harm. This mother's hatred for her sinning son, far from equating to harm, is the hatred of a lover who longs only for the well-being of her beloved child. As Imam Ibn Taymiyya (ra) wrote, “It is incumbent that the one who punishes people for their sins does that out of goodwill and mercy for them, like the parent when they discipline their child and the physician when they treat their patient, for the Prophet ﷺ said, ‘I am to you like a parent.’”⁴⁵ When the Prophet ﷺ supplicated for the destruction of certain Arab tribes that were killing and oppressing the believers, Allah revealed to him, “**Not for you, [O Muhammad, but for Allah,] is the decision whether He should [cut them down] or forgive them or punish them, for indeed, they are**

⁴⁴ Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, ed. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī (Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1416/1996), 1:437.

⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Jāmi‘at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd, 1406/1986), 5:237.

wrongdoers.”⁴⁶ The Prophet ﷺ stopped supplicating against the oppressors, but continued to supplicate for the oppressed.

Religious hatred in Islam is a nuanced concept that doesn't conform to the ideological binaries of secular morality and society. *Al-wala' wal-bara'* entails worshiping Allah by loving what He loves to varying, non-exclusive degrees, and hating what He hates to varying, non-exclusive degrees. It is a hatred of sinners, not in themselves because we continue to wish them guidance, but insofar as they represent and embody sin. It is also a hatred that allows space for love to coexist. A righteous person hates gossip and gossipers, but does he hate his gossiping mother, who treats him with the utmost kindness and compassion? Looking at the human being as a contradictory bundle of actions and convictions, the answer is not black and white. The son will hate his mother for her ugly habits, but he'll also love her for her beautiful virtues, and he'll continue to want the best for her. That is what is understood by the principle of “loving the Muslim in proportion to the good he exhibits and hating him in proportion to the evil he exhibits.”⁴⁷

Loyalty and disavowal are essentially about taking the side of good against evil and truth against falsehood. While severing the act from the actor is not always possible, our prioritization of either depends on the circumstances—such as the person's emotional or spiritual state, proximity to falsehood, and so forth. It's always wise to stress the dislike of the act, not the actor, to people who are unable to grasp the nuances of these distinctions. When urged to choose between a default of love or hate, the choice is clear: the default should be love of the human family.

Can a Muslim truly love a non-Muslim?

Given the hatred we should direct towards sins and sinners, as well as the clear Qur'anic exhortations to disassociate from those who revel in disbelief, one might come to the conclusion that although we may wish the best for non-Muslims, our love for them can never transcend mere goodwill to blossom into true friendship. However, when we look at the *sirah* of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and consider human nature, we find that such a conclusion is entirely unwarranted. In fact, loving non-Muslim family and friends is unavoidable and very often desirable.

⁴⁶ Qur'an 3:128.

⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 28:209.

There is no clearer manifestation of the Prophet's love for non-Muslims than in his love for his uncle, Abu Talib. Allah addressed His Messenger ﷺ and said, **"Indeed [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you love..."**⁴⁸ Most *tafsir* scholars hold that "whom you love" refers to Abu Talib. Even if not referencing Abu Talib in particular, the verse clearly indicates that there were those loved by the Prophet ﷺ whom had not been guided. In any case, the Prophet's love of Abu Talib was beyond doubt. Abu Talib cared for the Prophet ﷺ and supported him in ways that no one else did or could. He afforded him protection and assistance through his most difficult trials. As such, it is only natural that the Prophet ﷺ would have loved Abu Talib well beyond any mere desire for his well-being. So deep was his love for his uncle that he also loved whoever Abu Talib loved. The Prophet ﷺ said to Abu Talib's son, 'Aqil, who was late to accepting Islam, **"O Abu Yazid, I love you for two things: the kinship between us, and because of my uncle's [Abu Talib's] love of you."**⁴⁹

The Islamic conception of marriage, especially the legality of marriage to women from the People of the Book, further evinces the permissibility of loving non-Muslims. Allah says about marriage, **"And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates, that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy."**⁵⁰ It would be completely unrealistic to expect or demand that a man not love his compassionate wife because she is not Muslim. Moreover, it would contradict the very essence of marriage as portrayed in the aforementioned verse. So natural and likely is the development of deep love, affection, and mercy between spouses that Ibn 'Abbās prohibited marriage to women belonging to the abode of war (*dar al-ḥarb*), even if they were from the People of the Book.⁵¹

We could even go so far as to argue that loving benevolent people is irresistible. In al-Bustī's famous ode, *al-Nūnīya*, his first advice was,

أَحْسِنُ إِلَى النَّاسِ تَسْتَعْبِدُ قُلُوبَهُمْ فَطَالَمَا اسْتَعْبَدَ الْإِنْسَانُ إِحْسَانُ

⁴⁸ Qur'an 28:56.

⁴⁹ *Majma' al-zawā'id*. Al-Haythamī commented, "*Mursal* [a hadith where the *tābi'ī* narrating it has omitted the name of the *ṣaḥābī* from whom it was narrated], and its narrators are trustworthy." Al-Dhahabī noted, "Narrated from different routes as *mursal*. These routes corroborate each other to make the report acceptable."

⁵⁰ Qur'an 30:21.

⁵¹ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 3:69.

Be kind to people, and you'll find their heart's captivity has ensued. For with the shackles of kindness, humanity's spirit has always been subdued.⁵²

Such an intense kind of love cannot be condemned by a religion that burdens no soul beyond its capacity, let alone by a religion that teaches gratitude. Imam Ibn Taymiyya (ra) said, "Instinctual passion, which is natural love and hate, is blameworthy not in itself, but when acted upon [in defiance of divine guidance]."⁵³

What, then, when we consider loving groups of non-Muslims? For instance, can Muslims love Christians? The dilemma here is that the denominator by which we categorize this group of people, as with all other religious groups, is a creed or practice opposed to the very essence of Islamic belief. To say that Muslims love "Christians" in particular is to imply that we love them for their belief in, for example, the Trinity—something Muslims consider a betrayal of Christ's legacy—or for their disbelief in the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ, a disbelief that Muslims would, in fact, consider worthy of the religious hatred previously discussed.

Despite this, far from not loving individuals who identify as Christian, the more correct and semantically appropriate answer is that we love our human family, our neighbors, and our compatriots, including those of other faiths. We love and value the kindness of non-Muslims who support our cause and stand by us in solidarity. We love our non-Muslim neighbors who show nothing but care and consideration towards us. As we have seen, it is entirely permissible to foster a natural love of anyone with a good nature, so long as the manifestations of this love remain within the boundaries set by Allah.

How can human prejudices affect our interpretation of *al-wala' wal-bara'*?

Spinning the truth and telling lies for personal gain are among the many abominations which bruise our moral and spiritual integrity. The victims of self-serving lies are the transcendent truths and values we claim to espouse and, ultimately, the religion we claim to cherish. Islam is a religion of balance, and it

⁵² 'Ali ibn Muḥammad al-Bustī, *Qaṣīdat 'unwān al-ḥikam* (Maktab al-Maṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyya, 1984), 36.

⁵³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 28:132.

fully recognizes the competing values of this world and offers the most perfect equilibrium in response. Islam's balanced concern for truth, righteousness, and justice on one hand, and empathy, peace, and civility on the other, allows for movement in both directions. People who are focused on one value alone will tend to show an unwavering commitment to that particular value. In this vein, unfortunately, the notion of *al-wala' wal-bara'* is not spared from our flawed and biased interpretations.

On one side, there is warranted concern about the catastrophic consequences of a misconstrued and politicized conception of *al-wala' wal-bara'*. The existence of groups like ISIS serve as a stark reminder of the destruction caused by extreme human prejudices. Furthermore, while ISIS may be at the far end of the spectrum—using *al-wala' wal-bara'* to justify horrific violence—limiting discussion of the problem to a single group (particularly that one) is an easy way to avoid any introspection that might cause us discomfort. In fact, there are many ways in which *al-wala' wal-bara'* is misunderstood and misapplied, departing from a holistic understanding and practice of this concept. These distortions, driven by preconceived, unfounded conceptions of the self and others, are causing immeasurable harm.

Al-wala' wal-bara' has been implicitly and explicitly weaponized by many Muslims against the religious “other,” be they non-Muslims or Muslims of a different theological, ideological, or political persuasion. Chauvinistic self-righteousness and a severe lack of introspection have driven these misunderstandings. The religion that was sent as a mercy for all humanity is, ironically, being pressed into the service of insularity, intolerance, and, in some cases, hostility. This phenomenon is ubiquitous, far beyond the behavior of any one group. The very concept of a unified *ummah*—while firmly founded—has been misrepresented, reducing the religion of God to a political or ethnic identity.

This is the inverse relationship between fanaticism and rationality. The cultish zealotry of some adherents to sects, intellectual schools (*madhahib*), Sufi orders (*turuq*), and various movements continue to damage the Muslim mind and degrade civil discourse among the constituents of our *ummah*. Many intellectual endeavors have become ungodly pursuits of confirmation of bias, not discovery of truth. The mind is trained to ignore the evidence, subvert it, or circumvent it. It becomes

desensitized to some of the most known and obvious logical fallacies. We thus devastate our most prized mental faculties for the sake of vain victories.

Beyond Muslims themselves, another force that stifles open and objective discussion of this subject is the fear-mongering of mainstream media. Its propagandistic machinery has effectively framed *al-wala' wal-bara'* as the hallmark of Muslim terrorists. Consequently, the concept has been falsely restricted to one particular group.

Consider this excerpt from Tom Quiggin on the ideology of al-Qaeda:

Al-Wala' Wal Bara' (al-Qaeda's View): Al-Qaeda fosters an atmosphere of “us versus them” using the term *Al-Wala' Wal-Bara'*. *Al-Wala'* means “those to whom they are loyal” or simply, “their friends.” *Al-Bara'* refers to those whom they hate or their enemies. This concept becomes their tool to categorize people into friends and enemies. Those they hate are the enemy and those they like, or agree with, are their friends. Their enemies are non-Muslims and many Muslims as well.

Al-Wala' Wal Bara' (Islamic Scholars' View): There is not, nor should there be, an “us versus them” mentality in either [*sic*] Islam or in humanity. All human beings are creatures of God and we therefore must show respect to each other. This implies a multi-racial, multi-religious society. Islam must be seen as a *rahmah* (blessing) to the universe.⁵⁴

Quiggin is clearly not an Islamophobe. He is trying to demonstrate how deviant the views of al-Qaeda are from mainstream Islamic scholarship, the latter of which he fairly represents. Yet the dismissal of the concept of *al-wala' wal-bara'* by the scholar he quotes here is fraught with inconsistencies and omissions.

Some contemporary scholars hold that “the concept of *al-wala' wal-bara'* is relatively unknown outside the Salafi world,”⁵⁵ and is especially unfamiliar to “traditional” scholars. The thesis that *al-wala' wal-bara'* is a Salafi concoction⁵⁶ is

⁵⁴ Tom Quiggin, “Understanding Al-Qaeda’s Ideology for Counter-Narrative Work,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 3, no. 2 (August 2009): 22–23 (with minimal adaptation), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26298403>.

⁵⁵ Mohamed Bin Ali, “The Islamic Doctrine of Al-Wala' wal Bara' (Loyalty and Disavowal) in Modern Salafism” (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2012), 22.

⁵⁶ *Salafi* is the adjective of *salaf* (predecessor, forebear). In Islamic discourse, *al-salaf* usually refers to the pious predecessors: the earliest generations of the righteous followers of Islam. Today, people who call themselves Salafi proclaim by that attribution that the way of the *salaf* is the example to be followed in all religious matters.

supported by many researchers,⁵⁷ and while many of them mean well, such a claim is reductionist at best. There will be no attempt here to exonerate many Salafis from peddling an un-nuanced and sometimes perverted form of *al-wala' wal-bara'*. However, any suggestion that the concept is exclusive to or invented by them, or that all Salafis have some uniform understanding of it, is indefensible.⁵⁸ Ironically, it is the epistemic clarity that Salafis often have and their emphasis on scripture that may prove most effective in correcting misconceptions about this doctrine, once proper clarification and contextualization have been provided.

The erroneous attribution of *al-wala' wal-bara'* to extreme Salafis has cultivated a certain paranoia within the Muslim community. Even the mildest iteration of *al-wala' wal-bara'* is now seen as risking association with the most radical among us. Some scholars, motivated by a fear of offending non-Muslims or guilt by ideological association, seem to avoid engagement with *al-wala' wal-bara'* or dismiss it in its entirety. Furtherstill, due to their commendable interest in civility, national security, and world peace, some Muslims want to see the whole concept of *al-wala' wal-bara'* not just reformed, but abolished. The most impassioned members of our community, in turn, especially our youth, proceed to disregard the good counsel of many scholars whom they perceive as ashamed of traditional understandings of this doctrine. Ultimately, despite good intentions, quoting a few verses of the Qur'an or hadiths of the Prophet ﷺ about justice and kindness toward others will not make the other—more difficult to explain—texts disappear. Whenever we interpret some traditions to the exclusion of others, we weave a narrative that does not address potentially incongruent scriptural imports. Until we harmonize all the pertinent reports, we will not develop a coherent synthesis that authentically reflects the tradition, resonates with the preferred epistemic worldview of these youth, and most importantly, aligns with the truth.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf, Mira Menzfeld, and Yasmina Hedider, "Interpretations of Al-Wala' Wa-l-Bara' in Everyday Lives of Salafis in Germany," *Religions* 10, no. 2 (2019): 124, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10020124> and Uriya Shavit, "The Polemic on *al-wala' wa'l-bara'* (Loyalty and Disavowal): Crystallization and Refutation of an Islamic Concept," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 24–49, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsa.2013.0010>.

⁵⁸ At least, the Salafism of the late Sh. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, which had an extensive influence on contemporary Muslim discourse, did not support an extreme iteration of this concept, and was, in fact, more conciliatory with the religious "other" than were/are many other Salafi and non-Salafi persuasions. The same may be said about the late Salafism of the prominent Najdi Hanbali scholar Salman Alodeh (al-ʿAwda).

Given the pervasive human prejudices associated with *al-wala' wal-bara'*, one can hardly engage in a level-headed discussion about the subject. People are ready to categorize and condemn interlocutors on the flimsiest of bases, including just a preface to, or title of, their works on the topic. No matter where you fall on the spectrum, you can be accused of both laxity and extremism. Despite this, we cannot and should not avoid the discussion altogether, because not only are we obligated to convey the Truth candidly, we risk major damage by remaining silent. There is incalculable harm in repeating a phrase like *al-wala' wal-bara'* against the backdrop of a skewed interpretation, just as there is incalculable harm—in a classic case of the pendulum effect—in its denial as categorically un-Islamic. The loss of moderation in addressing this issue will lead many to extremism on one side or the other. Prioritizing religion, therefore, is not simply about rearranging our prejudices; it is about purging those prejudices and providing in their stead a coherent source of primal affiliation that accords with the will of God.

Finally, it may also be instructive to recognize that the phrase *al-wala' wal-bara'* was born of prejudice—first coined by the Kharijites and leveled against their fellow Muslims. Driven by their fanaticism and divisive persuasions, the Kharijites weaponized the concept to undermine the peace and order of the community. Hence, Sunni scholars had initially considered it a reprehensible innovation.

Salama ibn Kuhayl narrates:

I was once among a group of the *tabi'in* (*lit.* successors: second generation Muslims) which included Abu al-Bakhtari, Maysara, Abu Salih, Ḍaḥḥāk al-Mishraqī, and Bukayr al-Ṭā'ī, and they agreed that *irjā'* is an innovation, *walāya* is an innovation, *barā'a* is an innovation, and *shahāda*⁵⁹ is an innovation.⁶⁰

Similarly, Imam Ahmad (ra) is reported to have said, “*Walāya* is an innovation and *barā'a* is an innovation; those who say, ‘We ally with so-and-so and disavow so-and-so.’ Such a statement is an innovation, so beware of it.”⁶¹ These are

⁵⁹ *Irjā'* is a concept that makes belief in the truthfulness of the message the only requirement of faith; *walāya* is another morphological form of *walā'*; *barā'a* is another morphological form of *barā'*; *shahāda* is the practice of conclusively declaring someone's abode in the hereafter.

⁶⁰ ‘Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad al-Shaybānī, *al-Sunna*, ed. Muḥammad ibn Sa‘īd al-Qaṭṭānī (Dār Ibn al-Qayyim, 1986), 1:327.

⁶¹ Ibn al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiḍī (al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, n.d.), 1:35.

authentic reports from the *tabi'in* and the Imam of Ahl al-Sunnah, and similar statements can be traced with less certainty as far back as some companions, like Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (ra) and 'Ali (ra).⁶²

Given this, why then did Sunni scholars seek to rehabilitate this term rather than just discard it altogether? Overwhelmingly, it is because different derivations of *al-wala' wal-bara'*, as well as the concept of loving and hating for God's sake, are established throughout the Qur'an and the verbatim speech of the Prophet ﷺ. As such, they are deemed incontrovertible Islamic truths.⁶³

How have colonialism, conflict, and Zionism affected interfaith perceptions of the “other”?

The history of the Crusades and colonialism, alongside their modern-day legacies and manifestations across the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, plays an instrumental role in our emotive-intellectual conception of *al-wala' wal-bara'*. As discussed, we are all prone to prejudice. Some of us may not recognize the degree to which interfaith tensions stem from history and politics—from the showdown between the caliphate and Christendom, or even between Carthage and Rome—rather than scripture and theology. After all, Muslims were to rejoice in the Romans' victory over the pagan Persians, despite the major theological disagreements between Islam and Christianity (Qur'an 30:3–5),⁶⁴ because the Byzantines, as People of the Book, worship the same God of Abraham that Muslims do. Their worldview and values were closer to those of the Muslims than the Persians and, most importantly, more closely aligned with the Divine scheme, of which the original Gospel is a fundamental part.

An impartial reconsideration of these “ratios” may reveal that it was not primarily the adherence of others to their respective creeds, but their hostilities against Islam

⁶² Al-Shaybānī, *al-Sunna*, 1:318.

⁶³ Across the pre-modern Islamic literature—particularly in the disciplines of *fiqh* (especially in chapters on *mu'āmalāt*), *siyāsah shar'iyyah*, *aḥkām al-sulṭāniyyah*, *ḥisbah*, *qaḍā'*, and the regulations governing *ahl al-dhimmah*—one finds extensive discussions of practical *barā'* (disavowal or dissociation in conduct). May God have mercy on Imām al-Ghazālī, who said: “As for hatred of the unbelievers and the wicked, disapproval of them, and detesting them — the evidences for this in the Qur'an and the Prophetic reports are beyond enumeration.” (Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4, Dār al-Ma'rifāh [1982] p. 352.)

⁶⁴ Early Muslims referred to the Eastern Romans or Byzantines as “Romans.” Throughout this series of papers, this is the intended sense of “Roman,” unless otherwise mentioned or clear from the context.

and its people, that warranted some of the prejudice or hostility a person finds, and continues to find, in Muslim discourse about the “other.” Richard Bulliet, former director of the Middle East Institute at Columbia University, notes that “scarcely any of the unattractive strictures and intolerant attitudes manifested by some Muslim groups lack parallels among some Christian and Jewish groups, or among some post-religious Western secularists, for that matter.”⁶⁵

Contemporary conflicts across the Middle East have corroded interfaith relations that had historically been less tense than they were in the West. Muslims and Jews have not always gotten along, but their relationship has, for most of their shared history, been much better than that between Christians and Jews. Muslims never visited crusades, inquisitions, or holocausts on the Jewish people. In fact, it is well known that throughout the Middle Ages, Jews fared much better in Andalusia, Egypt, and Iraq than they did in Europe. After all, from a theological perspective, there is no religion on the face of the planet that is closer to Islam than Judaism.⁶⁶ However, many influential rabbis today conflate Zionism and Judaism when they teach would-be soldiers of the Israeli army that the genocide of Palestinians is among the Biblical commandments.⁶⁷

Shahak Israel, an Israeli Jew, writes,

I had personally witnessed an ultra-religious Jew refuse to allow his phone to be used on the Sabbath in order to call an ambulance for a non-Jew who happened to have collapsed in his Jerusalem neighborhood. Instead of simply publishing the incident in the press, I asked for a meeting with the members of the Rabbinical Court of Jerusalem, which is composed of rabbis nominated by the State of Israel. I asked them whether such behavior was consistent with their interpretation of the Jewish religion. They answered that the Jew in question had behaved correctly, indeed piously, and backed

⁶⁵ Richard Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 12, Kindle.

⁶⁶ The exception would be a truly unitarian Christian group that upholds the Mosaic law. For more on the historic relationship between Muslims and Jews, see “Is Islam Antisemitic? Analyzing the Hadith About Jews, the Dajjal and the End of Times Prophecy,” Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, March 28, 2017, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/is-islam-antisemitic-analyzing-the-hadith-about-jews-the-dajjal-and-the-end-of-times-prophecy> and Ovamir Anjum, “The ‘Constitution’ of Medina: Translation, Commentary, and Meaning Today,” Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, February 4, 2021, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-constitution-of-medina-translation-commentary-and-meaning-today>.

⁶⁷ Yossi Gurvitz, “Influential Rabbi Teaches Would-be Israeli Soldiers: Genocide Is a Mitzvah,” *Mondoweiss*, April 17, 2018, <https://mondoweiss.net/2018/04/influential-soldiers-genocide/>.

their statement by referring me to a passage in an authoritative compendium of Talmudic laws, written in this century.⁶⁸

Top rabbis cite the Talmud and claim that Muslims in Palestine, like all gentiles, were “born only... to serve the People of Israel.”⁶⁹ The same “revered halachic scholar” also says, “With gentiles, it will be like any person—they need to die, but [God] will give them longevity. Why? Imagine that one’s donkey would die, they’d lose their money.”⁷⁰ The late Rabbi Meir Kahane was not an exception among Israeli rabbis; in fact his ideology still thrives alongside many others of a similar nature.⁷¹ On the other side, the reactive language of Muslim extremists can at times be very aggressive, but rarely as arrogant, and the openness and courage of those Jewish and Muslim people who confront such extremism within their ranks must be honored.

The conflict in the Middle East has poisoned the relationship between Muslims and Jews not only in the region, but around the world. It has also subsumed Western Christians, particularly Christian Zionists, who use the most offensive and aggressive language against Islam, Muslims, and most hurtfully, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Although fanatical Christian groups like the Phineas Priests, Christian Identity, or Army of God may be committing fewer and lesser acts of physical aggression in the West, perhaps because they rely on their governments in Eastern lands to do so, their Islamophobic rhetoric is espoused by many mainstream churchgoers.

Consequently and inescapably, Muslim emotions towards and perceptions of the non-Muslim “other” are inflamed by never-ending military, political, and cultural incursions widely perceived as post-colonial pursuits of domination. Far from being limited to the painful collective memories and oppressive legacies of the Crusades and colonialism, Muslims in the East and West grapple with the reality that there are many radical non-Muslims who continue to wish and enact harm

⁶⁸ Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years* (Pluto Press, 2008), 1, Kindle.

⁶⁹ Lazar Berman et al., “5 of Ovadia Yosef’s Most Controversial Quotations,” *The Times of Israel*, October 9, 2013, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/5-of-ovadia-yosefs-most-controversial-quotations/>.

⁷⁰ Berman et al., “Ovadia Yosef’s Most Controversial Quotations.”

⁷¹ Josef Federman and Joseph Krauss, “Radical Rabbi’s Followers Rise in Israel Amid New Violence,” *AP News*, May 13, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-israel-violence-religion-476098be2dc365468c1f7a91237900df>.

against them simply by virtue of their faith. Among the most brazen examples is the West's blind support for the Israeli occupation and genocide of a predominantly Muslim nation. This is a major cause of grief among contemporary Muslims and a driving force of the anger and hatred they feel toward those perpetrating and supporting this genocide.⁷²

Adding to this increasing sense of danger are modern and postmodern secular ideologies that threaten the Islamic way of life. Post-colonial Muslims are thus caught trying to navigate their way across the bridge to modernity without losing their religion. Although the agitation that results from such a threat to traditional religion, whether real or perceived, is not limited to Muslims, our agitation is expectedly greater given both the drastic rise in Islamophobia (disguised as a global war on terror) and our exclusion from the levers of political, cultural, and social power as minorities in the West. Humans also possess multiple identities, with our religious identity being one of the most influential in our lives. When this identity is threatened, it often leads to its hypertrophy, sometimes at the expense of others.⁷³

Despite the clear and undeniable aggression faced by the Muslim community at large, it would be completely irrational to absolve Muslims of all guilt. Defeated nations often have many social and intellectual ills, as both the cause and effect of their defeat. We have Muslim preachers and activists who spread misguided beliefs about *al-wala' wal-bara'* and we have secular Muslims who, in order to avoid looking like sell-outs, chastise the West, sometimes unfairly, for its hegemony and imperialism. We have tyrannical regimes that justify their existence by claiming to be a buffer between the radical "Islamists"⁷⁴ and the West, keeping resentment of

⁷² See John Pilger, "Palestine Is Still the Issue," [johnpilger.com](http://johnpilger.com/videos/palestine-is-still-the-issue), accessed April 24, 2021, <http://johnpilger.com/videos/palestine-is-still-the-issue>.

⁷³ For a detailed exposition of this phenomenon, see Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, trans. Barbara Bray (Arcade, 2001).

⁷⁴ The term "Islamist" has been used and misused by many Muslims and non-Muslims, signifying different things in different contexts. Some intend by it a revivalist ideology seeking to reform Muslim communities through Islamic values. Others intend to "Islamize society" through exercise of state power, grassroots political activism, or military insurgency. All Islamists in the widest sense of the word believe that (1) Islam should be allowed to inform the collective conscience of Muslim communities and should not be eliminated from the public space; (2) Islam should be allowed to bring about more unity among Muslim communities, although there is no uniform understanding of the nature of that unity; and (3) Islam is a missionary religion, and it has something to offer the world, not only Muslim societies, as an alternative religion or at least as an inspiring (or challenging) thesis or worldview.

the West alive among Muslims and the fear of an Islamist swarm alive in the West. All of this occurs against the backdrop of a selective reading of our history and the history of other nations—a selectivity bias that may have been excusable during certain phases of the national struggles for independence, but not anymore.

Impassioned, hyperbolic speech becomes more prevalent during times of decline. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to condemn the practice of embellishing falsehood by resorting to rhetorical devices. He rebuked someone for this and said, “Do you rhyme like the rhymes of the [disbelieving] Bedouins?”⁷⁵

Little action and much talk have become emblematic of our contemporary reality, and speech and action are usually inversely related. The spiritual decline of our *ummah* after the passing of the righteous generations has made disingenuity and grandstanding rampant. In such an atmosphere, relations between different groups can be expected to suffer. A true Islamic renaissance will bring about reconciliation, not further inflammation. Projecting blame onto others incessantly is a psychological and social disorder, and a sign of intellectual timidity and incoherence. It is also the easiest way for people to avoid introspection and self-reckoning.

The Qur'an teaches us otherwise in many verses, including the following:

O you who have believed, upon you is [responsibility for] yourselves. Those who have gone astray will not harm you when you have been guided. To Allah is your return all together; then He will inform you of what you used to do.⁷⁶

And whatever strikes you of disaster—it is for what your hands have earned; but He pardons much.⁷⁷

When a cumulative intertextual reading of revelation is not applied; when scholarly statements are misperceived as infallible universal truths; when ideologues benefit from propagating half-truths to dehumanize their enemies; and when people seek to defend Islam without sufficient knowledge of it or the sociopolitical landscape within which they operate, the atmosphere is ripe for extreme interpretations of

⁷⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1682a (bk. 28, hadith 52).

⁷⁶ Qur'an 5:105.

⁷⁷ Qur'an 42:30.

al-wala' wal-bara'. An honest exposition of these concepts that is consistent with scripture, respectful of the tradition, and sensitive to contemporary realities is thus not only advisable, but absolutely necessary.