

Was Islam spread by sword?

by Dr Zakir Naik

[Even today some people blindly claim that Islam was spread by sword! There may have some cases that I don't deny; however, I personally think that this generalization is NOT true. This is either a gross misconception or simply hatred and prejudice. Here are some genuine reasons, why. - Raihan]

It is a common complaint among some non-Muslims that Islam would not have millions of adherents all over the world, if it had not been spread by the use of force. The following points will make it clear, that far from being spread by the sword, it was the inherent force of truth, reason and logic that was responsible for the rapid spread of Islam.

1. Islam means peace. Islam comes from the root word 'salaam', which means peace. It also means submitting one's will to Allah (swt). Thus Islam is a religion of peace, which is acquired by submitting one's will to the will of the Supreme Creator, Allah (swt).

2. The best reply to the misconception that Islam was spread by the sword is given by the noted historian De Lacy O'Leary in the book "Islam at the cross road" (Page 8):

"History makes it clear however, that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of the sword upon conquered races is one of the most fantastically absurd myth that historians have ever repeated."

3. Muslims ruled Spain for 800 years. Muslims ruled Spain for about 800 years. The Muslims in Spain never used the sword to force the people to convert. Later the Christian Crusaders came to Spain and wiped out the Muslims. There was not a single Muslim in Spain who could openly give the adhan, that is the call for prayers.

4. 14 million Arabs are Coptic Christians. Muslims were the lords of Arabia for 1400 years. For a few years the British ruled, and for a few years the French ruled. Overall, the Muslims ruled Arabia for 1400 years. Yet today, there are 14 million Arabs who are Coptic Christians i.e. Christians since generations. **If the Muslims had used the sword there would not have been a single Arab who would have remained a Christian.**

5. More than 85% non-Muslims in India. The Muslims ruled India for about a thousand years. If they wanted, they had the power of converting each and every non-Muslim of India to Islam. Today more than 85% of the population of India are non-Muslims. **All these non-Muslim Indians are bearing witness today that Islam was not spread by the sword.**

6. Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesia is a country that has the maximum number of Muslims in the world. The majority of people in Malaysia are Muslims. **May one ask, "Which Muslim army went to Indonesia and Malaysia?"**

7. East Coast of Africa. Similarly, Islam has spread rapidly on the East Coast of Africa. **One may again ask, if Islam was spread by the sword, "Which Muslim army went to the East Coast of Africa?"**

8. The famous historian, Thomas Carlyle, in his book "Heroes and Hero worship", refers to this misconception about the spread of Islam:

"The sword indeed, but where will you get your sword? Every new opinion, at its starting is precisely in a minority of one. In one man's head alone. There it dwells as yet. One man alone of the whole world believes it, there is one man against all men. That he takes a sword and try to propagate with that, will do little for him. You must get your sword! On the whole, a thing will propagate itself as it can."

9. No compulsion in religion. With which sword was Islam spread? Even if Muslims had it they could not use it to spread Islam because the Qur'an says in the following verse: "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error" [Al-Qur'an 2:256]

10. Sword of the Intellect. It is the sword of intellect. The sword that conquers the hearts and minds of people. The Qur'an says in Surah Nahl, chapter 16 verse 125: "Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious." [Al-Qur'an 16:125]

11. Increase in the world religions from 1934 to 1984. An article in Reader's Digest 'Almanac', year book 1986, gave the statistics of the increase of percentage of the major religions of the world in half a century from 1934 to 1984. This article also appeared in 'The Plain Truth' magazine. At the top was Islam, which increased by 235%, and Christianity had increased only by 47%. **May one ask, which war took place in this century which converted millions of people to Islam?**

12. Islam is the fastest growing religion in America and Europe. Today the fastest growing religion in America is Islam. The fastest growing religion in Europe is Islam. **Which sword is forcing people in the West to accept Islam in such large numbers?**

13. Dr. Joseph Adam Pearson rightly says, "People who worry that nuclear weaponry will one day fall in the hands of the Arabs, fail to realize that the Islamic bomb has been dropped already, it fell the day MUHAMMED (pbuh) was born".

14. Sometimes force has to be used to maintain peace. Each and every human being in this world is not in favor of maintaining peace and harmony. There are many, who would

disrupt it for their own vested interests. Sometimes force has to be used to maintain peace. It is precisely for this reason that we have the police who use force against criminals and anti-social elements to maintain peace in the country. Islam promotes peace. At the same time, Islam exhorts its followers to fight where there is oppression. The fight against oppression may, at times, require the use of force. In Islam force can only be used to promote peace and justice.

Some more quotations from other personalities:

1. "Those who believe that Islam was spread by force are fools who neither know the ways of Islam nor the ways of the world." (**Balbir Singh** - Navan Hindustan, 1947)
2. "The critics are blind. They cannot see that the only sword Mohammad ever wielded was the sword of mercy, compassion and forgiveness." (**Pundit Jai Anand** - My Religion, Hinduism)
3. "The more I study, the more I discover that the strength of Islam does not lie in the sword." (**M.K. Gandhi**, 1869-1948 - Young India)
4. "The critics are blind. They cannot see that the only 'sword' Muhammad wielded was the sword of mercy, compassion, friendship and forgiveness - the sword that conquers enemies and purifies their hearts. His sword was sharper than the sword of steel ...

But the biased critics of Islam are prejudicial and partisan, who are narrow minded and whose eyes are covered by a veil of ignorance. They see fire instead of light, ugliness instead of beauty and evil instead of good. They distort and present every good quality as a great vice. It reflects their own depravity." - **Pandit Gyanandra Dev Sharma Shastri**

5. "Some people say that Islam was preached by the sword, but we cannot agree with this view. What is forced on people is soon rejected. Had Islam been imposed on people through oppression, there would have been no Islam today. Why? Because the Prophet of Islam had spiritual power, he loved humanity and he was guided by the ideal of ultimate good." - **A Hindu Editor of Sat Updaish, 7 July 1915.**
6. "In the beginning the Prophet's enemies made life difficult for him and his followers. So the Prophet asked his followers to leave their homes and migrate to Medina. He preferred migration to fighting his own people, but when oppression went beyond the pale of tolerance he took up his sword in self-defense. Those who believe religion can be spread by force are fools who neither know the ways of religion nor the ways of the world. They are proud of this belief because they are a long, long way away from the Truth." - **Sikh Journalist, Nawan Hindustan, 17 November 1947.**