

# Our Response to Terror Must Be Reconciliation

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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**In the wake of terrorist incidents, societies and their political leaders must avoid the impulse to give in to hatred, focusing instead on reconciliation at the personal, community, and intercommunal levels.**

A vortex of hatred is sweeping across the globe, from a nightclub in Orlando to an airport in Istanbul to a restaurant in Dhaka. At its center are individuals who wrap their savagery in the cloak of Islam. But these terrorists -- perhaps 50,000 to 100,000 of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims -- are a perversion of the faith. They do not represent the Islam beloved by moderates like me.

The Islam that we moderates revere honors diversity, coexistence, tolerance, justice and peace. We believe that the central tenet of the Quran -- indeed the verse that is the very heart of the holy book -- is the proclamation that God (Allah) made his followers "ummattan wasatan," a "temperate" or "justly balanced" nation. Moderate Islam honors diversity, because the Quran says: "Had it been God's will, He could have made them (mankind) all of one religion."

In contrast to the severe laws enforced by some Islamic authorities, moderate Islam does not condemn individuals due to their sexual preference, because homosexuality is neither proscribed nor punished in the Quran. And moderate Islam is opposed to terrorism, because the Quran condemns the taking of innocent lives.

As a young man, I too was enamored of the path of extremism. Embittered by my family's 1948 experience in Palestine, I was a radical who believed that Jews could only be my enemies and that cooperation with them was treason.

As I matured, I revisited the Quran and discovered its core message of temperance and moderation. At the same time, I opened myself up to seeing the world through the eyes of "the other." I learned of the Jews' victimization in the ghettos of Europe and in the Nazi death camps, and I experienced unexpected moments of kindness and humanity from them. I

began to promote understanding, trust and mutual respect as an academic educator and peace activist. But after I brought a group of Palestinian students to the Auschwitz death camp, extremists from my own community repaid my work by forcing me to resign from my educational career and torching my car.

Undaunted, I remain committed to the path of moderation and reconciliation, ideals that are particularly important today. Reconciliation has three levels. First, there is the internal reconciliation in which the individual finds a sense of peace, wellbeing and acceptance in society. The path to terrorism begins with a disturbed individual who is not at peace with himself. Second, we must be reconciled within our communities, finding ways to achieve the common good, not just what is good for ourselves. Religious, political and economic triumphalism destroys the social fabric. Finally, we must become reconciled between communities, eschewing violence and pursuing peace. Muslims, Jews and Christians can lead the way.

Governments can play a role in promoting reconciliation by providing the tools necessary for individuals and communities to realize their highest potential. What they must not do is put roadblocks in the path of reconciliation.

In the wake of terrorist incidents, we must avoid the impulse to give in to hatred. Hatred is easy. It excites our survival instincts, our elemental desire to fight or flee, to retreat to our tribe. It is the recourse of the despot, the demagogue and the deranged. Those who foster intolerance promote a culture of fear and violence that moves history in the wrong direction.

Our response to terrorist bloodletting must be to resist the animosity trap. Religion and government, at their finest, require us to rise above our atavistic tendencies, to see the spark of humanity and divinity in one another, and to pursue moderation and reconciliation.

*Mohammed Dajani is the Weston Fellow at The Washington Institute and founder of the Wasatia movement of moderate Islam.*



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