

# The Demand for Purity: The Nature of Islamist Symbolism, Protest, and Violence

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The apparent universality of the cultural concept<sup>(1)</sup> would tend to suggest that purity is an inherent quality of the sacred. From René Girard's anthropological perspective, the desire for purity and the fear of impurity have roots in the violent rituals of the scapegoat mechanism, and are at bottom motivated by a deeply learned fear of the contagion of imitative violence.<sup>(2)</sup> In Generative Anthropology, purity is surely a quality of the inviolable center established by the sign, and impurity thus an attribute of any human being who dared arrogate that center to him or herself. As this could in principle be any desiring human being whose attention was attracted by that center, one might imagine impurity becoming established as the prevailing attribute of the "profane" periphery, and purity a quality aspired to by all those—again, in principle everyone—who sought to partake of the peace and other rewards apparently proffered by the center. Western psychology, meanwhile, might strip such concerns of their religious and socially functional aspects and diagnose the demand for purity as a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). In any case, purification rituals are found in all known cultures and religions, are expressed in a wide variety of forms, and function to remove specifically defined uncleanness especially prior to the worship of a deity. This essay will survey the concepts and practices related to purity in Islam, arguing that this universal religious impulse, particularly strong in Islam, has been skillfully exploited by Islamists. In brief, Islamists make use of a visceral shaming code to try to prevent any form of religious moderation or cultural assimilation, to evoke primal fear and dread of deviating from Islamic law and to prompt violence when the sacred is being threatened. Islamists seek to achieve this by continually designating others as filthy unbelievers who contaminate the purity of Islamic true believers, their sacred objects, holy personages and hallowed spaces.

## Purity in Islam

As in other cultures, including those of the West in various historical eras, purity in

Islam is both a psychological and physical state of being that functions to instill and enforce the traditions and taboos of its culture. Purity is equated to honor, is considered a moral virtue and more than any other attribute regulates every aspect of individual and group conduct. It is achieved by following strict rituals such as ablutions/ritual washing, prayer and observing dietary rules, sexual conventions and social customs. Purity is intrinsically related to and defined by impurity. Often referred to as ritual uncleanness, impurity is an inherent quality of taboo things and manifested in defilement of a person and desecration of the sacred. Impurity is typically associated with enemies, corpses, bodily functions, corruption, social upheaval, violence, illness, strange, anomalous or inexplicable phenomena and contact with “others.” Impurity is experienced as a form of contagion because it is believed that it may spread from one individual or object to other members of society. Impurity is also experienced as dishonor particularly when manifested in sexual violations, enemy occupation and acts of desecration. Taboos surrounding hygiene, food, sexual and other customs are intrinsically associated with impurity. Significantly, impurity is what gives taboos their efficacy; violation of taboos, customs and tradition results in ritual uncleanness that requires purification rites. Like purity, impurity is both a psychological and physical state of being. True believers experience ritual uncleanness as an impurity of the soul as much as of the body, and for this reason it cannot be washed away with water and soap. The ritually unclean person must be cleansed through strong rites. Additionally, places and objects can be designated as unclean or desecrated requiring purification rites.

The essence of the Islamic symbolic code is found in Islamic rites of purity that function as ritualization, a form of repetitive symbolic conditioning. Ritualization through strict rules on diet, hygiene, sex and daily ablutions (ritual washing) reinforces distinctions between believers and unbelievers, deeply embeds visceral responses that can make it difficult or even unbearable to assimilate to other traditions, and strengthens allegiance to Islam. In psychological terms rites of purity serve to instill feelings of fear and shame when a devout believer deviates from sharia law. Symbolically, purification rituals are magical rites that remove uncleanness, purge taints, nullify pollution, prevent contagion and restore purity. Socially, rites of purity are a method of preventing Muslims from conforming to the customs of other cultures, including those of the West. This is reinforced by strict religious obligations and images, language, and rituals that implicitly demarcate specific things as unclean, particularly unbelievers.

## **Islamic Purification Rites: Ritualizing Bodily Functions**

*Taharah*, translated as purity, is an intrinsic element of Islam and has both physical and spiritual aspects. Physical purity requires Muslims to observe cleanliness of their body, clothes and surroundings by avoiding contact with designated impure

things, necessitating the process of ritual purification. Spiritual purity, referred to as *Tazkiyatun nafs*, purification of the soul, is observed through righteous living, is obligatory for closeness to God and a prerequisite for entering Paradise. The spiritual struggle for self-purification is described as the greater jihad, an internal effort to lead a pure good life. Self-purification as the sole definition of jihad is the meaning that Islamist apologists choose to focus on, as opposed to holy war, the physical outer struggle of jihad, a purification of Islam through violence. The two aspects of jihad are intrinsically intertwined, however, because the Islamic demand for purity encompasses both the personal and the political. Personal jihad purifies through water. Political jihad purifies through blood.

Rites of purity are derived from Islamic theology mandated in the Quran that prescribe a large number of purity related rules inclusive of physical hygiene, ritual ablutions, dietary laws and customs such as removing shoes when entering homes or mosques. Spiritual and physical purity are interrelated and not viewed as two different and opposing things, hence, all purification rites, even ritual washing, are considered acts of worship. Physical and spiritual purity is maintained through strict adherence to sharia law. Islamic purification rituals are primarily centered on the preparation for ritual prayer and take the form of ablution (ritual cleansing), in a lesser form, and greater form, depending on the circumstance.<sup>(3)</sup> Ablution is required because when you are ritually unclean, you are impure to God and prohibited from performing acts of worship such as prayer. Ablution is also required for handling or reading of the Quran. Since one of the five Pillars of Islam, *Salat*, requires prayer five times a day, purification rituals occur at least five times a day and sometimes more often if the ablution has been nullified or additional rituals are required. There are two primary forms of ablution: the partial ablution referred to as *wudu* and the complete ablution referred to as *ghusl*. In addition, there is a symbolic or dry ablution referred to as *tayammum* that is used when no water is available or a person cannot use water because of reasons of health.<sup>(4)</sup> Every ritual act including ablution requires intention in one's heart to perform the ritual for the sake of Allah. Before every ritual act, one must declare that one's intention, referred to as *Niyyah*, is worship and purity. Without sincerity of heart, ablutions are devoid of faith and do not differ from ordinary washing. *Wudu* which is performed at least five times each day before prayer involves very detailed ritualized activities inclusive of washing the hands, face, arms, ears, neck, feet, rinsing out the mouth and cleansing the nostrils. These acts are done in very specific order, and many of the specific acts have to be repeated three times. *Ghusl*, the full ablution is a complete ritual bath that in addition to performing all of the acts required in *wudu* also includes ritually washing private parts and hair also in specific order and for a prescribed number of times for each action.

Repetitive rituals function to inculcate a symbolic code, but it is the actions that

invalidate the purified state that provide particularly unique insights into the nature of true believers. Commonly referred to as “breaking *wudu*”, actions that invalidate the purified state include defecation, urination, passing gas, emission of semen, sleep, passing blood, vomiting, loss of senses, intoxication and other specified conditions. The following circumstances also nullify *wudu* and require the full ablution: sexual intercourse, wet dreams, the expiration of a women’s menstrual period and childbirth.<sup>(5)</sup> Essentially, all natural bodily functions are designated as impure and require further ablutions in addition to the five ritual washings before prayer each day. Anthropologist Fuad I. Khuri confirms that

According to Islamic *shari’a*, washing for purification should be carried out after reaching orgasm through intercourse, masturbation or wet dreams; after menstruation and parturition; after death or touching the dead. In other situations such as touching dogs or pigs, or any other polluted objects, washing is commended, but not compulsory.... In general, Islam requires the faithful to pray five times a day, and every prayer is preceded by ablution which entails washing the face, the hands and the feet. The body should also be purified whenever it comes in contact with pollutants either through secretions—urine, semen, solid waste, menstrual blood, and the like; or by contagion, such as touching the dead, dogs or pigs. Obviously, the intensity of prayer and the purification rituals that follow continuously urge the faithful to seek personal spiritual fulfillment. This ritualistic approach to spirituality is reinforced by the popular usage of interjections that invoke God’s name and which punctuate all sorts of actions and exchanges.... In brief, the faithful are in constant search for spirituality through rituals of physical purification and/or continuous invocation of God’s name.<sup>(6)</sup> Sharia purification laws also include specific rules for hygiene and behavior that concern the body. These include covering the body, using the right and left hands for specific actions and everything from instructions on maintaining pubic hair to beards. Purification rules are a form of moral hygiene that far exceeds health issues: every gesture, action and decision concerning the body is a spiritual act. There are lengthy treatises on what is designated as impure, types of purifying agents and detailed rituals on how to remove the impurity.

Questions of purity also involve topics that would not have been considered in Muhammad’s time. For example, it is disputed whether nail polish, hair dye, and hair extensions hinder ablution. Since nail polish is a material that forms a layer over nails and prevents water from soaking through, some Islamic scholars advise women to remove their nail polish before each ablution. This is just one of many mundane concerns on how to maintain purity without violating sharia law. There are so many questions that purification rules are the subject of numerous websites that provide advice on Islamic living. One popular site, translated into twelve languages, is called “Islam QA Question and Answer,” and is hosted by Shaykh Muhammad’s al-

Munajjid. It posts hundreds of questions regarding purity rules.<sup>(7)</sup> Questions reflect specific concerns such as the proper way to wipe oneself, rules for washing and plucking body hair, conditions for wiping over socks, and dozens of questions regarding menstrual and other vaginal discharges. The large number of detailed personal inquiries demonstrates how serious purification is in the lives of the Muslim faithful.

The result of Islamic purification rites is that both the body and natural bodily functions are experienced as a source of shame. Khuri continues:

The body as a source of shame applies to both men and women alike. Though in varying degrees, both are urged to be modest, keep clean and protect their chastity... Intercourse or even touching women, like sickness and travel, generates a polluted state to be purified before prayer. The discrepancy between men's and women's bodies becomes more apparent in the conditions Islam stipulates for prayer, which include, among other things, a state of purity, clarity of intent, facing Mecca, and covering the body. These conditions are equally required from men and women; the difference lies in what constitutes shamefulness for men as opposed to women. While men's source of shamefulness refers to that part of the body that lies between the navel and the knee, women's shamefulness refers to the whole body. The body is a source of shame and its secretions —urine, blood, semen, infected blood, and vomit, are all pollutants that need to be purified before prayer.<sup>(8)</sup> The negative effects of shame have been well documented in Western behavioral science. Numerous studies have shown that deep-seated shame results in feelings of inferiority, worthlessness, inadequacy, self-disgust and alienation that give rise to a strong desire to alleviate those harmful emotions.<sup>(9)</sup> Islamic purification rituals function precisely to instill shame as a means to urge believers to follow sharia law. When a believer adheres to sharia law, feelings of shame are replaced with feelings of honor and self-respect. Follow the rules and you feel good, deviate from tradition and you feel worthless. Islamic purification rites condition the faithful through a process of ritualization, a form of repetitive symbolic conditioning, whose result is to instill a shaming code that evokes fear and dread of violating sharia law. Designating natural bodily functions as producing impurity that requires repetitive ritual washing is how the symbolic code becomes visceral. "How the human body is viewed ideologically has a considerable impact upon behavior and interaction. If the body is a source of shame and impurities, it should then be covered, concealed and continuously purified"<sup>(10)</sup> Khuri adds. The compulsory ritual washings involved in Islamic ablutions are one of the most effective methods of symbolic conditioning, continual reminders that the body and its natural functions are dirty and purity and cleanness are only achieved by observing sharia law.

The focus on the body in Islam cannot be underestimated. Khuri reminds us:

Body symbolism in Arab-Islamic culture permeates every area of social intercourse, including faith and religion, social and cultural norms, patterns of behavior and various modes of communication. The condition of the body reflects the depth of a person's religious faith, his status, manners, morality, up-bringing and reputation in society. ....to seek purity through ablution, which involves washing different parts of the body, is not simply an act of cleanliness, it is divine cleanliness imposed by religious law, nor is pollution simply a form of defilement; the avoidance of polluted objects is religiously sanctioned. Purity and pollution represent two ends of a continuum derived from religious texts....Cleanliness and decorum express purity, and purity is an act of faith. In brief, the purity of the soul is derived from physical purity which, if defiled, must be purified by "absolute water".[\(11\)](#)Connecting impurity to bodily functions makes perfection unattainable in this life, which is why believers are taught that purity is one of the many rewards of paradise. Islamic writings describe how paradise is free from all the impurities of this world including the need for excretion, menstruation and childbirth. Alcohol, however, one of the essential earthly impurities, is permitted in Paradise. In a popular treatise titled *The Pleasures of Paradise*, in the section called "Free From All Impurities," M. Abdulsalam writes,

Paradise is free from all the impurities of this world. Eating and drinking in this life results in the need for excretion and its associated unpleasant odors. If a person drinks wine in this world, he loses his mind. Women in this world menstruate and give birth, which are sources of pain and hurt. Paradise is free from all of these discomforts: its people will not urinate, defecate, spit or suffer from catarrh. The wine of Paradise, as described by its Creator, is: "Crystal-white, delicious to those who drink (thereof), free from intoxication, nor will they suffer intoxication therefrom" (Quran 37:46-47).... The women of Paradise are pure and free from menstruation, postnatal bleeding and all the other impurities suffered by women in this world, and all are free from stool and feces. God says:"...and they shall have therein purified mates..." (Quran 2:25) The prophet answered a person when they asked how the people of Paradise will relieve themselves: "They relieve themselves by perspiring through their skins, and its fragrance will be that of musk, and all stomachs will have become lean" (ibn Hibbaan).[\(12\)](#)In Paradise the Muslim faithful are not just free from all impurities but are also released from all ritual obligations including performing ritual washing and prayer five times a day. Shaykh Muhammad's al-Munajjid responds to a question regarding prayer in Paradise, "There is no difference of opinion among the scholars that Paradise is not a place of obligations, rather it is the place of reward, so there will be no obligation to pray there at all.... acts of worship will be waived in Paradise and there will be nothing left but worship by saying tasbeeh and dhikr (remembering Allah).[\(13\)](#) The psychological reward of paradise is that a lifetime of mandatory compulsive washing, praying, abstaining from alcohol and designated foods is finally over. More

significantly, feelings of self-disgust every time you defecate, urinate, vomit, spit, pass gas, ejaculate or menstruate are replaced by a pure body devoid of all excretions and shame free drinking and sex.

The concept of ritual impurity also provides insights into other Islamic beliefs. For example, one of the miracles of the martyrs is the belief that martyrs' bodies upon death remain intact and blood is instantly transformed into a perfumed fragrance. Since Martyrs go directly to paradise their bodies upon death are immediately removed of all impurities. Hence, instead of the smell of decomposition the body exudes the scent of musk. This unusual phenomenon has been reported by clerics and allegedly witnessed in 2011 and 2013 amongst mujahideen fighters in Syria and the Afghan Taliban.[\(14\)](#) The concept of purity in Islam also explains the extraordinary attributes of the 72 beautiful women that holy martyrs receive in paradise. The women of Paradise are described as pure which is often misinterpreted in the West to mean that the women are virgins. However, what is lost in translation is that pure is not simply defined as virginal; pure refers to the fact that these perfect women do not defecate, urinate or menstruate,[\(15\)](#) and hence martyrs are rewarded with shame free sex without fear of being polluted and women are no longer ashamed of their bodies. Once in paradise true believers are finally free from the impurities of the body and the corresponding revulsion and shame.

## **Body Shame in the West**

Of course, body shame is also an issue in the West but for entirely different reasons. While Islam and other religions induce body shame as a method to regulate morality, Western secularists have aspired to have no shame associated with the body. It is flagrantly evident in Western clothing, advertisements, media and attitudes that there is no shame in exposing the body or publicly speaking of and often making fun of bodily functions. Islamic purity is the reason the West's permissiveness is so highly offensive to Islamist true believers who are systematically conditioned to be disgusted by unbelievers. Interestingly, the very freedoms that were intended to eliminate the shame of nakedness, bodily functions and human sexuality in Western culture have had unintended consequences. Although positively resulting in women's liberation and sexual freedoms, body shame is more prevalent than ever in the West, eliciting feelings of self-disgust very similar to those found in Islamic culture. Shame is now associated with issues of negative body image, particularly complexes about weight, the result of cultural conditioning through mass media. People are bombarded with advertisements of unnaturally thin women and altered images of the ideal perfect body that is unattainable in reality. Instead of religious conditioning, secular Americans are programed by Hollywood and Madison Avenue.



Western psychology has come to believe that it is not healthy to have shame linked to natural bodily functions. This has resulted in theories of toilet training and sexual education in which the objective is to detach feelings of shame from the body. This is sharply at odds with the tendency of Islamic purity rites, which continue to inculcate the view that the body is a source of shame. The Western disassociation of shame from the natural body has of course also been accompanied by a shift in moral values regarding sex, nudity and other previously restricted behaviors. Customs, etiquette, manners and even toilet training all reflect a culture's morality. Twenty-first century Western freedoms are manifested in a shamelessness that is experienced as a constant insult to the Islamic way of life. Each image of women displaying their hair and bodies, films and television depicting graphic sex and basically the entire Western way of life is perceived as impure and contagious. The Western lack of shame is a primary reason that among the essential impurities in Islam are unbelievers, commonly referred to as infidels. Purification rites function to instill shame so that when an Islamic believer comes in contact with things and people that are felt to be impure, a visceral response may signal the danger of the "other," whose impurity signifies a highly contagious threat.

## **Contagion: The Nature of Impurity**

Impurity is symbolically contagious in many cultural contexts, including that of Islam. Impurity signifies the "other" and is experienced both physically and spiritually as a mysterious and harmful substance of the outside world that keeps attacking, contaminating, defiling and desacralizing the sacred world of true believers. True believers have to protect themselves and their communities against this threat of defilement and to get rid of it once the contamination has taken place. Individuals have to cleanse themselves by means of various purification rites and cathartic practices, while communities cleanse themselves by excluding, expelling, or proscribing the things and people whose presence defiles the community.[\(16\)](#) Impure things are the designated taboos of a community, those things that are prohibited in society: violations of social customs and transgressions of the sacred. Taboos are expressed in dietary restrictions, sexual conventions, customs, laws, etiquette and religious laws. The concept of taboo is intrinsically intertwined with the idea of impurity, particularly the notion that breaking a taboo results in corruption, evil or illness. Many rituals, customs, social conventions and even superstitions evolved specifically to mitigate taboos. Anthropologist Mary Douglas described the function of taboo in her classic text *Purity and Danger*: "Taboo is a spontaneous coding practice which sets up a vocabulary of spatial limits and physical and verbal signals to hedge around vulnerable relations. It threatens specific dangers if the code is not respected."[\(17\)](#) Islamic purification rules function to protect true believers from both physical and spiritual contamination by designating specific things as taboo and impure. These impure taboo things are



referred to as *najis*. There are two kinds of *najis*: inherent, which cannot be cleansed, and acquired, which become unclean through contact with an inherently impure thing. When a true believer comes in contact with something *najis* he enters into a state of ritual impurity (*najasat*), which requires undergoing ablutions, Islamic cleansing rituals. Things that are inherently *najis* and cannot be purified include: alcohol, dogs, swine, dead animals that were not ritually slaughtered, blood, urine, semen, feces, milk of animals whose meat is forbidden, dead bodies and unbelievers.[\(18\)](#) The contagious nature of impurity is evident in detailed descriptions found in the Qur'an and hadith and numerous present-day interpretations by Islamic scholars of how a *Pak* (pure) thing becomes impure. For example the Grand Ayatollah Al-Uzma Seyyid Ali al-Sistani, the senior Iraqi Shia cleric and the prime *marja*, or spiritual reference, for Shia Muslims has written extensively on Islamic laws regarding purity. On his website Ayatollah Sistani describes the rules for everything from use of the lavatory to use of utensils. He also describes precisely how a *Pak* (pure) thing becomes *Najis* (impure):

If a *Pak* thing touches a *najis* thing and if either or both of them are so wet that the wetness of one reaches the other, the *Pak* thing will become *najis*. Similarly, if the wetness of the thing which has become *najis*, touches a third thing, that third thing will also become *najis*. It is commonly held by the scholars, that a thing which has become *najis* transmits its *najasat*, but indefinite number of transmissions is improbable. In fact, after certain stage it is *Pak*. For example, if the right hand of a person becomes *najis* with urine, and then, while still wet, it touches his left hand, the left hand will also become *najis*. Now, if the left hand after having dried up, touches a wet cloth, that cloth will also become *najis*, but, if that cloth touches another wet thing, it cannot be said to be *najis*...If a *Pak* thing touches a *najis* thing and one doubts whether either or both of them were wet or not, the *Pak* thing does not become *najis*... If a fly or an insect sits on wet, *najis* thing, and later sits on wet, *Pak* thing, the *Pak* thing will become *najis*, if one is sure that the insect was carrying *najasat* with it, and if one is not sure, then it remains *Pak*. If a part of one's body which is perspiring becomes *najis*, all those parts to which the sweat reaches, will become *najis*. Where it does not reach will remain *Pak*.[\(19\)](#) The hundreds of detailed rules for mitigating impurity are mindboggling. The details and concern of how pollution is transferred from one thing to another reveals how fear of contagion is intrinsic to the nature of impurity.

In both sacred and mundane activities true believers in religions with highly codified notions of purity, including Islam, must work continually to avoid dangerous contagion. A classic example of the significance of contagion beliefs and the deeply ingrained aversion to impurities is the complex of Islamic rules and customs pertaining to shoes. Shoes are not inherently *najis* unless they are made from leather products that are from impure animals or from the hide of an animal not

slaughtered according to Islamic laws. However, shoes are the definitive symbol of impurity because they continually come in direct contact with inherently unclean things such as urine, feces and other designated *najis*. For this reason, shoes are not worn in mosques, shrines, temples, or peoples' homes and are frequently used in demonstrations and thrown in protests as a highly symbolic insult. The fact that each and every thing an individual eats, wears, touches and excretes is subjected to purity rules creates a situation in which life is a constant negotiation of avoiding contagion.

Purity rituals tend to program moral values into believers, acting to preserve tradition and fend off assimilation by other cultures. Therefore it is not surprising that one of the intrinsically impure things in Islam are *Kafirs*, a term that is used to describe non-Muslims, and apostates from Islam; it is translated into English as infidel or unbeliever. As unbelievers are ritually impure, there are specific rules regarding physical contact with them and things or places that they have touched. "The entire body of a *Kafir*, including his hair and nails, and all liquid substances of his body, are *najis*." [\(20\)](#) Unbelievers are not just viewed as the "other" but are experienced as untouchable and contagious, and threaten both a spiritual and physical infection. Khuri notes, "The conclusion that impurity, defilement, uncleanness, or pollution is a quality of those who lie outside the mother group to which they should belong, 'the imperfect members of their class', is well documented in the Qur'an." [\(21\)](#) Islamic purity reinforces the tribal aspect of Islamic culture, providing specific criteria for us-versus-them. If a person does not engage in Islamic purification rites he is easily recognized as the polluted other, an impure unbeliever. Islam's designated unclean things function to divide the world into believers and unbelievers, the sacred and profane, the pure and impure, the good and the evil. This is consistent with psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton's concept of the "demand for purity," developed in his classic 1961 book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*:

In the thought reform milieu, as in all situations of ideological totalism, the experiential world is sharply divided into the pure and the impure, into the absolutely good and the absolutely evil. The good and the pure are of course those ideas, feelings, and actions which are consistent with the totalist ideology and policy; anything else is apt to be relegated to the bad and the impure. Nothing human is immune from the flood of stern moral judgments. All "taints" and "poisons" which contribute to the existing state of impurity must be searched out and eliminated.... The individual thus comes to apply the same totalist polarization of good and evil to his judgments of his own character: he tends to imbue certain aspects of himself with excessive virtue, and condemn even more excessively other personal qualities—all according to their ideological standing. He must also look upon his impurities as originating from outside influences—that is, from the ever-

threatening world beyond the closed, totalist ken. Therefore, one of his best ways to relieve himself of some of his burden of guilt is to denounce, continuously and hostilely, these same outside influences. The more guilty he feels, the greater his hatred, and the more threatening they seem. In this manner, the universal psychological tendency toward “projection” is nourished and institutionalized, leading to mass hatreds, purges of heretics, and to political and religious holy wars.[\(22\)](#) The Islamic demand for purity inculcates shame-based purification rules that can foster Islamist mass hatreds of others and recruit true believers to fight in the global jihad, holy war. The “other” is not simply impure; he symbolizes contagious evil.

## **Desecration: The Phenomenology of Defilement**

The sacred is manifested in symbols, objects, times, places, people and ideas to which a community of believers have assigned special meaning or reverence. Due to Muslim Iconoclasm, an aniconic tradition that prohibits depictions of Allah, Muhammad, and the portrayal of living creatures, especially human beings, there are few representations of the sacred in Islam. For this reason, their defilement and insult is experienced as a serious violation. The sacred in Islam is symbolized in holy texts such as the Quran, the sacred personages of Allah and Muhammad, sacred places such as mosques and shrines and holy cities such as Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, whose mosques have special status.

Violation of the sacred is the ultimate taboo. In Islam desecration of sacred artifacts and irreverent behavior toward holy personages, customs or beliefs is designated as blasphemy. The concept of blasphemy refers to speaking evil of sacred matters and exists in every culture. It is a profanation of the sacred, an affront to the deep-seated beliefs of worshipers and the basic values that a community shares. Blasphemy pollutes the purity of the community and requires punishment to set an example to others. Punishment propitiates the offended deity by avenging his honor, thereby averting divine wrath. Violation of the sacred in Islam is not just a personal affront; it is also experienced as an insult to the honor of the Prophet Muhammad. Hence, the impurity of an act of blasphemy or desecration elicits a natural urge to vengeance to restore the Prophet’s honor and the dignity of true believers. Desecration of the sacred, particularly by unbelievers, is symbolic of unclean contact, a tarnishing of Islamic purity and the source of every Muslim controversy from Quran burning to Anti-Islam films. When the sacred is polluted by the impurity of unbelievers, it is experienced as defilement, dishonor and disrespect. Since Islamic purification rites inculcate a hypersensitivity to any disrespect of Islam, the faithful experience blasphemy as debilitating shame.

This hypersensitivity is the reason there are such disproportionately violent

reactions to ostensibly nonthreatening things such as cartoons and films of Muhammad and Quran burning. The Quran, one of the few sacred objects permitted, has been the subject of several desecration controversies that have resulted in worldwide violent protests and deaths. The first highly publicized Quran incident occurred in 2005 when Newsweek published a report alleging that American military personnel at Guantanamo Bay detention camp deliberately desecrated the Quran by placing it in the toilet. The Quran cannot be touched without performing ritual ablutions, and urine is one of the inherently impure substances; therefore, from the Muslim perspective the Quran, which is both a holy object and a symbol of Islam, was both physically and symbolically defiled. Reports of the Muslim holy book being placed in a toilet triggered feelings of revulsion and violation. The physical and spiritual uncleanness of the act elicited righteous outrage resulting in worldwide protests and riots.

Subsequent incidents involved burning the Quran, which is also considered an intentional act of desecration and regarded as blasphemy. Christian pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center, a church in Gainesville, Florida, publicized his plans to burn a Quran in 2010 on the ninth anniversary of the September 11, attacks which he named "International Burn a Quran Day." Just announcing his intention to desecrate the Quran triggered protests in the Middle East and Asia in which 20 people were killed. After international criticism Jones cancelled the event. However, on March 20, 2011, he proceeded with burning the Muslim holy book. This intentional desecration caused the deaths of over 30 people in Afghanistan, including seven United Nations workers, two of whom were beheaded. Less than one year later in February 2012 another Quran burning incident triggered five days of protests throughout Afghanistan and even more deaths, another 30 people including six US soldiers. In this incident U.S. soldiers at Bagram Air base in Afghanistan improperly disposed of Qurans that had been used by Taliban prisoners to write messages to each other. In September 29, 2012, just the posting of a picture depicting the desecration of a Quran on a Buddhist man's Facebook profile caused Islamist mobs to destroy and burn Buddhist temples, shrines, and houses in Bangladesh. Depictions of Muhammad in cartoons and film also provoked international demonstrations, protests, riots and violence. On September 30, 2005, a Danish newspaper published a set of editorial cartoons, many of which depicted Muhammad, that led to over 200 deaths, attacks on diplomatic missions, churches, Christians and an international boycott of Denmark. In September 2013 a 14-minute video clip on YouTube titled "Innocence of Muslims" led to attacks on American and other embassies, worldwide violent protests and the deaths of over 75 people.

Islamist rites of purity establish special physical and spatial limits surrounding the sacred. Violation of sacred boundaries threatens specific dangers to the community of true believers. In *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas warned, "some of the dangers

which follow on taboo-breaking spread harm indiscriminately on contact. Feared contagion extends the danger of a broken taboo to the whole community.”(23) The phenomenon of the fear of contagious impurity provides an explanation for desecration controversies. Taboos surrounding the sacred were broken, and the Muslim faithful were disrespected, evoking a deep seated fear of contagious impurity provoking an eruption of violence. The Muhammad cartoons and the anti-Islam video trailer represent an epidemic of impurity similar to an infectious disease because each and every time they were viewed on YouTube or republished, their uncleanness became more contagious, touching more people, multiplying the insult, increasing the revulsion, escalating the affront and spreading the dishonor. This can be likened to Ayatollah Sistani’s descriptions of how impurity is transmitted from one thing to another In his classic text *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard described the contagious nature of ritual impurity: “In many religious communities—among the ancient Greeks, for instance—when a man has hanged himself, his body becomes impure. So too does the rope from which he dangles, the tree to which the rope is attached, and the field where the tree stands. The taint of impurity diminishes, however, as one draws away from the body. It is as if the scene of a violent act, and the objects with which the violence has been committed, send out emanations that penetrate everything in the immediate area, growing gradually weaker through time and space.”(24) Girard could not have foreseen the ease of uploading, publishing, copying and downloading blasphemous and violent images on the internet where the image never gets diluted and remains highly contagious and impure. Blasphemous videos viewed on the internet in the personal space of your home can be likened to another description of contagion by Girard: “When a town has undergone a terrible bloodletting, and emissaries from that town are sent to another community, they are considered impure. Every effort is made to avoid touching them, talking to them, remaining in their presence any longer than necessary. After their departure rites of purification are undertaken: sacrifices offered, lustral water sprinkled about.”(25) The internet is the modern-day emissary spreading impurity from one community to another, emanating dishonor and significantly never diminishing nor growing weaker, immune to purification rites.

Mocking the sacred is not just an insult to Islam per se; it is experienced as an existential threat to the entire belief system. As philosopher Paul Ricoeur suggests,

Dread of the impure and rites of purification are in the background of all our feelings and all our behavior relating to fault. ...We define defilement as “an act that evolves an evil, an impurity, a fluid, a mysterious and harmful something that acts dynamically—that is to say, magically.” What resists reflection is the idea of a quasi-material something that infects as a sort of filth, that harms by invisible properties, and that nevertheless works in the manner of a force in the field of our undividedly psychic and corporeal existence.... With defilement we enter into the

reign of Terror.(26) One cannot underestimate the power of impurity; it equates to the impact of evil. Unbelievers are not only impure but more significantly, they symbolize evil in the form of contagious pollution. Rites of purity are intertwined in fears of eternal punishment and connect taboo to terror. Defiling sacred objects is a violation of purity that unleashes spiritual pollution that disrupts the sacred order. Mary Douglas explains that “these are pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone.”(27) The cartoonists, film makers and other producers of blasphemous media have crossed the Islamic structural lines, transgressing purity, violating sharia law and breaking taboos that unleash spiritual pollution that poses a danger to all Muslims believers.

The disproportionately violent response to seemingly innocuous acts such as cartoons and films needs to be understood in terms of magical thinking. As with the burning of effigies, there is a belief that harming the symbol will bring actual harms. Ricoeur continues, “Defilement infects symbolically.... Dread of the impure is, in fact, no more a physical fear than defilement is a stain or spot. Dread of the impure is like fear, but already it faces a threat which, beyond the threat of suffering and death, aims at a diminution of existence, a loss of the personal core of one’s being.”(28) Defilement of the sacred represents an apparently existential threat to the Muslim faithful. True believers sense that impurity is highly contagious and symbolic of unbridled evil. For this reason they experience desecration of sacred symbols not just as offense but as a source of dread.

## **The Islamist Deployment**

We move now from a consideration of Islamic rites of purity more generally to their exploitation by Islamists. “Islamist” has replaced the more controversial terms “Islamic extremist” and “Islamic fundamentalist” and is often used to differentiate radical from moderate Westernized Muslims. Islamist ideology, described as “Islamism,” is sometimes referred to as political Islam, an ideology that has a pan-Islamic political agenda that advocates the unity of Muslims from different cultures, nations, and ethnicities under one Islamic government /state, the Caliphate. Islamism emphasizes the enforcement of Sharia (Islamic law) that advocates the elimination of non-Muslim, particularly Western, military, economic, political, social, and cultural influences in the Muslim world. Militant Islamism, often referred to as “Jihadism,” promotes a global agenda to expand the territories ruled by Muslims

with the eventual goal of achieving Muslim dominion over all countries through both overt and covert Jihad, or holy war. Islamists include individuals who are both affiliated and unaffiliated with terrorist groups.

Islamists have exploited Islamic purification rites as a method to instill shame, induce primal fear of “others” and to justify violence as ridding Islam of Western impurities. Many of the features discussed above are conducive to exploitation by Islamists. From a secular perspective, as noted above, ritual ablutions are often interpreted by Western behavioral scientists as a form of institutionalized OCD. Regardless of their function as secular rituals or religious rites, obsessive, chronic behaviors performed to ward off feelings of uncleanness, degradation and/or shame are fertile ground for the fomenting of violence, intolerance and fear. Systematic repetitive rituals and a demand for purity are also standard indoctrination techniques often used by cult and totalitarian groups. Psychiatrist Lifton identifies the demand for purity as one of eight criteria for thought reform in *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, where he characterizes the demand for purity as a method to motivate members to conform to the ideology of the group, to strive for unattainable perfection and to induce guilt and/or shame as a method of control. Lifton writes,

The philosophical assumption underlying this demand is that absolute purity is attainable, and that anything done to anyone in the name of this purity is ultimately moral. In actual practice, however, no one is really expected to achieve such perfection. Nor can this paradox be dismissed as merely a means of establishing a high standard to which all can aspire. Thought reform bears witness to its more malignant consequences: for by defining and manipulating the criteria of purity, and then by conducting an all-out war upon impurity, the ideological totalists create a narrow world of guilt and shame. This is perpetuated by an ethos of continuous reform, a demand that one strive permanently and painfully for something which not only does not exist but is in fact alien to the human condition. At the level of the relationship between individual and environment, the demand for purity creates what we may term a guilty milieu and a shaming milieu. Since each man's impurities are deemed sinful and potentially harmful to himself and to others, he is, so to speak, expected to expect punishment which results in a relationship of guilt and his environment. Similarly, when he fails to meet the prevailing standards in casting out such impurities, he is expected to expect humiliation and ostracism – thus establishing a relationship of shame with his milieu. Islamists are brilliant at exploiting shame based purity customs and taboos for propaganda and recruitment. Islamists understand that defilement of sacred objects incites strong emotions of uncleanness, hatred, humiliation and vengeance that resonate with both moderate Muslims and Islamists. This strategy of evocation and incitement succeeds because purity rites are inculcated in childhood and aroused by the impurity of the act of



blasphemy and desecration which elicits a natural urge to vengeance, to restore the Prophet's honor and the dignity of true believers. Islamists exploit controversies that involve insults to Muhammad and Quran desecration to recruit sympathizers, instigate protests, recruit moderate Muslims into radical Islamists and incite Jihadists to action.

## **Symbolic Warfare: The Propaganda of Purity**

Islamists understand the fear of impurity. For this reason symbols of Islamic impurity and the symbolism of contagion are found throughout Islamist propaganda in both overt and subliminal images and language. The concept of unbelievers as impure hence contagious is evident in videos, sermons, posters, protest signs, music and other media specifically designed to evoke visceral emotions of disgust, revulsion and hatred. Images of blood, pigs and dogs, all inherently impure things, are often used by Islamists and frequently misinterpreted by Western journalists. The symbolism of blood in Islamist media often appears in political cartoons, posters and in television programs as part of the classic blood libel myth that alleges that Jews murder and drink the blood of children for ritual purposes. Since human blood is intrinsically *najis*, blood libel represents the epitome of impurity. Overt images of blood drinking reinforce myths, allegations and conspiracy theories while subliminal images of blood evoke fear of uncleanness and dread of contamination. Depictions of blood libels are no longer specific to Jews but also include many political figures in the West. Dozens of cartoons portray politicians drinking blood, cannibalizing flesh and killing children. In addition to cartoons there have been placards, posters and billboards depicting President Obama, Pope Benedict XVI, President Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other political leaders with fangs and blood on their mouths. Western media misinterprets these images to represent a vampire creature of western mythology, when in fact the imagery primarily denotes impurity, blood libel and is suggestive of demons in the Muslim occult tradition of Jinn. A similar misreading of Islamist symbology occurred in February 2012 when Afghan protesters burned an effigy of President Obama that had a sign attached to it that read "Black Dog Obama." This was misconstrued in the West as being symbolic of American racism because it was interpreted in the historical and cultural context of U.S. history. Although it was an insult to the American President, in Islamic symbolism it was a reference to dogs as one of the essential *najis* (impurities). In addition to being ritually unclean animals, black dogs are considered to be demonic and often are viewed as possessed by evil Jinn spirits.<sup>(29)</sup> Islamists often ascribe and/or depict attributes of impure animals to political leaders in cartoons, caricatures, commentaries and sermons. Dogs, pigs and apes are common symbols of Muslim insults and are often used in Islamist language and images.

Dogs, pigs and blood are overt symbols of the “impure other.” A more insidious form of propaganda involves stigmatizing the “other” as infectious disease as a calculated tactic to evoke fears of contagion, death and annihilation. Islamists adopted many Nazi themes and symbols in their propaganda including the strategy of depicting Jews as agents of disease and corruption. In his book *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life*, Robert Jay Lifton describes one of Hitler’s greatest rhetorical talents as portraying the Jew as an impure, life-threatening force to the German people: “The Jew was the embodiment of moral decay—of physical and sexual perversion, spiritual petrification, and cultural degeneracy. The images are closely linked to death and deterioration—the Jews as carriers of filth and disease, of plague and syphilis and ‘racial tuberculosis,’ as spreaders of every kind of ‘poison,’ and as parasites, vampires, bloodsuckers, and racial contaminators.”<sup>(30)</sup> Nazi ideology was also based on a doctrine of purity; however, stigmatizing Jews as disease has been even more effective with Islamists because Islamic purity rules inculcate a particularly potent version of the near-universal moral revulsion against the impure other. Islamist propaganda characterizes the other as both physically and spiritually impure. Contemporary infection libels are found in Palestinian television, cartoons and news reports that characterize Jews and Israel as a disease and a cancer. In 2009, the symbolic warfare campaign to stigmatize Jews as infectious disease intensified when Muslim and Arab media exploited the swine flu epidemic. Symbolically the swine flu was the perfect disease, a combination of an inherently impure animal and an infectious illness. Anti-Israel swine flu cartoons appeared in Arab and Muslim newspapers in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom. A prominent theme of the cartoons was depicting Israeli leaders with faces of pigs. The incident was characterized by the media as classic anti-Semitic insults but the subliminal message evokes fear of impurity from diseased others. The fear of infectious impurity corresponds with several full-blown Muslim conspiracy theories claiming that the West infected Muslims with diseases. Allegations include Jews deliberately infecting Palestinians with AIDS and drug addictions, Americans lacing polio vaccines with anti-fertility agents to sterilize Muslims, that Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel resulted in increased instances of hepatitis, cancer and kidney infections and that America infected Africans with AIDS through Christian missionary groups by putting the virus in medicine used to inoculate people. The conspiracy theory that Americans were lacing polio vaccines to sterilize Muslims resulted in an epidemic of polio in sixteen Muslim countries in Africa and Asia where polio had been eradicated. Daniel Pipes writes:

Local imams repeated and spread the sterilization theory, which won wide acceptance despite vocal assurances to the contrary from the WHO, the Nigerian government, and many Nigerian doctors and scientists. Ibrahim Shekarau, governor of Kano, one of the three Nigerian states that refused the polio vaccine, justified the

decision not to vaccinate on the grounds that “it is a lesser of two evils to sacrifice two, three, four, five, even ten children than allow hundreds of thousands or possibly millions of girl-children likely to be rendered infertile.”(31)

Villagers saw the vaccination program as a threat and on occasion “chased, threatened and assaulted vaccinators. Frustrated, some vaccination teams dumped thousands of doses of the vaccine rather than face angry villagers.” With rumors unchecked, “By mid-2004 the conspiracy theory had jumped to India, where a health worker noted that in one slum, ‘many poor and ignorant women regard the anti-polio drops as a deceptive strategy to control the birth rate.’” As Pipes notes, “scientists hypothesize, the polio infection traveled from Nigeria in a uniquely Muslim way—via the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, which took place in January 2005. Testing confirms that all three Asian strains of the disease originated in northern Nigeria.”(32)

Propaganda has real consequences, particularly when the message is directed at people who have been deeply inculcated with fears of impurity and contagion. The symbolic meaning is clear: the impurity of unbelievers is a life-threatening danger to all Muslims. Islamists exploit the fears that they inculcated. Allegations of being infected with disease as well as images of blood, dogs and pigs are all acts of “symbolic warfare” intended to evoke terror, dread and hatred of the “other.”

## **The Dirty Language of Jihad**

“Loaded language,” also known as “emotive language,” “high-inference language” or “language persuasive techniques,” is utilized to elicit an emotional response, either positive or negative, beyond the literal meaning of the word or phrase.(33) Loaded words are often employed by politicians, newscasters and advertisers with the goal of persuading particular audiences to adopt a specific point of view. Islamists, like all propagandists, are experts at loading the language; they know how to use words and images that elicit sympathy, empathy, instigate protests and incite violence. Influence is most successful when evoking deep-seated feelings of humiliation and arousing fears of contagious impurity. This is accomplished by loading the language with references to what is held sacred and taboo, depicting overt and subliminal images of impurity, persistently leveling accusations of insult and blasphemy and exploiting desecration incidents. Islamists encode loaded words, symbols and images in order to prompt emotional responses that are triggered by the media. Lifton describes loading the language as one of the eight psychological themes which are predominant within the social field of the thought reform milieu: “The language of the totalist environment is characterized by the thought-terminating cliché. The most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily

memorized and easily expressed .... In addition to their function as interpretive shortcuts, these clichés become what Richard Weaver has called ‘ultimate terms’: either ‘god terms,’ representative of ultimate good; or ‘devil terms,’ representative of ultimate evil.”(34) Islamist positive / god terms connote purity and negative /devil terms signify impurity. Particular words and phrases are calculated to trigger specific responses. Negative words evoke uncleanness and often include adjectives such as “dirty” and “filthy” or evoke fear of contagion by using words such as “disease” and “infection.” Negative terms used to incite protests and violence include words indicative of sacred violation such as “desecration,” “defilement” and “occupation.” For example, in many of bin Laden’s communiqués he referred to the Crusaders and Zionists (Jews) occupying the holy lands of Islam. Bin Laden’s 1996 fatwa is titled “Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places”. The land of the two holy places is a reference to Islam’s most holy sites, Mecca and Medina. On October 7, 2001, Osama bin Laden justified the 9/11 attacks as a response to humiliation and defilement of sacred places: “Our umma (nation) has been tasting this humiliation and contempt for over 80 years. Its sons have been slain, its blood has been shed and its sacred places have been defiled ..... Thus did Allah Most High bestow success upon a convoy of Muslims—the vanguard of Islam—allowing them to devastate America utterly.”(35) In May 2012, Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri urged Muslims to avenge the burning of copies of the Quran on a U.S. base in Afghanistan referring to violation of holy text and personal honor, “Once again, the crusaders burned the holy Quran, in Kabul .... Kill those aggressors who occupied your country, stole your wealth, violated your honour and attacked your Quran and your Prophet”(36) Positive purity terms use cathartic words such as cleansed, washed and purged. In a 2007 video Al-Zawahiri advocates violence as an act of purification: “Let the Pakistani army know that the killing of Abdul Rashid Ghazi and his male and female students ... has soaked the history of the Pakistan army in shame and despicableness which can only be washed away by retaliation.”(37) Osama bin Laden frequently used purification language. In a December 16, 2004, audio tape he said, “Do not relent in purifying and cleansing the Arabian Peninsula of polytheists, heretics, and apostates.”(38) In a 1998 interview bin Laden said, “Allah ordered us in this religion to purify Muslim land of all non-believers, and especially the Arabian Peninsula where the Ke’ba is.”(39) These symbolic words used individually and in conjunction with common phrases are consistent with the Islamist demand for purity and incitement of a tribal imperative of us-versus-them.

One of the more prevalent Islamist expressions is “dirty infidel.” An Arabic language Google search of the phrase produces over four hundred results often in combination with other popular slurs such as “filthy” and “dog”. (40) The phrase “Dirty Jew” produced over ten thousand results in Arabic and over fifty-nine thousand results in English.(41) The large number of search results in English is due

to the fact that “dirty infidel” is specific to Islamists while the phrase “dirty Jew” encompasses all anti-Semitic groups throughout history and across cultures. In both cases the adjective “dirty” is more than just an insult; it signifies disease, corruption and a moral taint. These and other symbolic words and phrases are thought terminating clichés that Islamists seek to encode in the minds of believers to overwhelm rational thinking with primal fears of impurity and contagion.

Words and phrases that signify impurity, contagion and desecration comprise what I will call the “Dirty language of jihad.” “Dirty” words are found in almost every reference to unbelievers and are used in media, music, sermons, political speeches and more. A classic example is the 2004 rap music video titled “Dirty Kuffar.” Kuffar, as we noted above, means unbeliever, one of Islam’s intrinsically impure things. This jihad rap song is not titled “brutal, sadistic, vicious unbeliever” but specifically “dirty unbeliever” to signify the Islamist demand for purity. Islamist children’s television shows repeatedly emphasize the ideas of others as impure. Quotes from various characters in the popular Hamas program, *The Pioneers of Tomorrow*, reinforce the idea that the enemy is impure and that they have polluted sacred land and the holy Al-Aqsa mosque. For example, Farfour, the Hamas version of Mickey Mouse declares; “I don’t know how to liberate this land from the filth of the criminal, plundering Jews...” (42) while Nahoul the Bee promises, “We will take revenge upon the enemies of Allah...until we liberate the Al-Aqsa Mosque from their impurity.” (43) Nor are Jews the only type of dirt. In a March 2008 episode of the “Exceptionals,” a puppet stabs George Bush to death with a sword while proclaiming “you are impure, Bush, so you are not allowed inside the White House.... because it has been turned into a great mosque for the nation of Islam.” (44) The words “filth,” “impure” and “impurity” are continually repeated in such shows to equate the hated “others” with the concept of impurity.

Adult television programming continues the symbolization process except cartoon characters are replaced with loaded language in news reports and sermons that perpetuate dirty words and symbols. In November 2011 a program on Palestinian Authority Television, “Sights of Jerusalem,” reported that the weekend rain in Jerusalem, and in particular on the Temple Mount, “cleans[ed] the steps of the foreigners [Jews] so that the feet [of Muslims] in prayer will not step on impurity [...] in August the same program referred to Jews praying at the Western Wall as ‘sin and filth’ contaminating what should be a wholly Islamic city.” (45) Hamas’ Al-Aqsa TV often airs sermons that employ the dirty language of jihad. On July 26, 2010, a Friday sermon in Gaza was filled with loaded words:

‘Dearly beloved, the Al-Aqsa Mosque is subjected to a vicious campaign of Judaization and defilement, at the hands of the filthiest creatures made by Allah – the Jews. [...]

“Today, we see the brothers of apes and pigs destroying homes with their occupants still in them, uprooting trees from their land, and killing women, children, and the elderly. [...]

“A levy of blood will be paid for the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Our people will never relinquish the Al-Aqsa Mosque or Palestine. We will redeem it with our souls, with our blood, with our sons, with what is most dear to us—regardless of the sacrifices we will have to make—until it is liberated, with the grace of Allah, and until this holy land is purified from the filth of the Jews. [...]

‘Brothers in faith, the Al-Aqsa Mosque remains under oppressive occupation. The Jews continue to defile it with their filth. The only way to liberate it is through Jihad for the sake of Allah.’ [all ellipses in the original “Special Dispatch”](46)

This sermon is a classic example of the use of symbolic language filled with the negative words—filth, defilement, apes, pigs, creatures, occupation—and positive words—holy land, liberated, grace, and purified.

The dirty language of jihad is not just perpetuated on television, but is also used by Islamist professors, political leaders and clerics. Iran’s late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed that “‘every aspect of a non-Muslim is unclean’ ...He [Ayatollah Khomeini] explained that non-Muslims rank between ‘feces’ and ‘the sweat of a camel that has consumed impure food.’ Other prominent ayatollahs, including Ahmad Jannati, the current chairman of the Guardian Council, have made similar utterances.”(47) Another example of Muslim clerics employing the language and symbols of impurity is Sheikh Abdul Rahman al-Sudais, the imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca and Islamic Personality of the Year in 2005. al-Sudais described Jews as “the scum of humanity, the rats of the world, prophet killers and pigs and monkeys”.(48) He also referred to Christians as “cross-worshipers” and Hindus as “idol worshipers”.(49) Although the controversial cleric was banned from conferences in the U.S. and Canada in 2009, he toured the United Kingdom and delivered a sermon at the East London Mosque. In August 2006, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s senior advisor Mohammad Ali Ramin told students during a visit at the town of Rasht that “Jews are filthy people, and that is why they have been accused throughout history of spreading deadly disease and plagues.” Ramin, a historian, continued, “historically, there are many accusations against the Jews. For example it was said that they were the source for such deadly disease as the plague and typhus. This is because the Jews are very filthy people.”(50)

The use of the incendiary dirty language of jihad is not specific to Muslim countries; there are numerous examples in the United States, Britain and Australia of Muslim



preachers and professors perpetuating Islamist propaganda. Siraj Wahhaj, a powerful African-American imam of the Al-Taqwa mosque in Brooklyn, New York, told his congregation, "You know what this country is? It's a garbage can. It's filthy, filthy, and sick."[\(51\)](#) Referring to America as filthy is a reference to unbelievers. It is not surprising that Wahhaj, an unindicted co-conspirator in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing known for preaching violence and insurrection against the U.S., wants to replace the Constitution with sharia law, and has said he hopes all Americans eventually become Muslim.[\(52\)](#) There have been several incidents in Britain where university students complained about invited speakers and professors characterizing non-Muslims and gays as filth, dogs and pigs. In April 2006 at the Hawza Ilmiyya of London, a religious college that offers a BA in Islamic Studies, Muslim students studying to become imams "complained that they are being taught fundamentalist doctrines which describe non-Muslims as "filth".[\(53\)](#) The University of Reading in Reading, Berkshire UK, had to withdraw their invitation to Islamic preacher Abu Usamah at-Thahabi scheduled to speak on February 28, 2013 at its Discover Islam Week due to protests from a student's rights group who claimed that Abu Usamah is anti-gay. The students' claims were based on a video of Thahabi addressing worshipers at the Green Lane Mosque in Birmingham in which he characterized homosexuals as "perverted, dirty, filthy dogs who should be murdered".[\(54\)](#) In Australia in 2011, Sheikh Haron, a Shia cleric originally from Iran, sent letters to politicians and members of the Jewish community in which he describes a Jewish soldier as a dirty animal who is a thousand times worse than a pig. Haron wrote, "A Jewish man who kills innocent Muslims, civilians is not a pig. He's a thousand times worse. Some people don't eat the meat of pig but they are dirtier than pig. What's the point when some people don't eat pork while their behavior is worse than dirty animals?"[\(55\)](#) These are just a few examples of the propaganda of impurity that are taught to students and perpetuated by Islamist clerics around the world. This language is often literally lost in translation when loaded words are replaced with less highly charged synonyms.

Dirty words and symbols are also frequently employed in protest signs and effigies. Examples include an effigy of President Obama labeled "black dog," his portrait attached to a stuffed monkey, placards of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu as a pig and protest signs depicting Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice drinking the blood of infants. Shoes, the quintessential symbol of impurity, are often used in Islamist protests; held in the air, attached to, thrown at and standing on images of politicians. Placing your shoes on the face of a politician is a common gesture in many such protests. The language of impurity is used to incite protests. On June 3, 2010 the Islamist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir in Bangladesh issued a press release on their website in English and Bengali, organizing a demonstration to protest against Israel's Gaza flotilla military operation that read, "O Muslim Armies! Teach the Jews a lesson after which they will need no further lessons. March forth to fight



them, eradicate their entity and purify the earth of their filth.”(56) The September 2012 protests against the anti-Islam video that prompted a wave of demonstrations throughout the world also included words and symbols of impurity. In one protest several Muslim women were holding up a sign with the photo of a monkey sticking its tongue out pasted over the American flag. One sign had the name Obama written on the tongue of the monkey.(57) Monkeys, dogs and shoes are all frequently used symbols of impurity. In North Africa the Islamist group Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb “urged Muslims to pull down and burn American flags at embassies, and kill or expel American diplomats to “purge our land of their filth in revenge for the honor of the Prophet.”(58) The message that the impurity of the filthy “other” must be removed from sacred land is a common theme in Islamist rhetoric.

For Islamists dirty words are often meant as curse words in the traditional meaning of the term, specifically the belief that cursing someone will bring actual harms. Curse words are a classic form of magical thinking; taboo speech that is a form of magical thinking might be termed “word magic,” the concept that the very act of uttering a word directly affects the person or thing that the word refers to.(59) Word magic is most commonly found in religious practices such as intercessory prayer, blessings, oaths, incantations, ritual formulae used in liturgies and curses.(60) Sociologist Jack Katz describes the significance of cursing for offenders in his book *Seductions of Crime*, saying that attackers

curse, not in the superficial sense of throwing “dirty” words in the vicinity of their victims (for example, by ejecting the asides that seem natural to people when irritated), but in the more profound, ancient sense of casting a spell or invoking magical forces to effect degrading transformations in a polluting offender. Such cursing is at best an indirect way of venting anger and is often useless or even counterproductive in removing the irritant. But it is a direct and effective way of doing just what it appears to do: symbolically transforming the offending party into an ontologically lower status . . . . A person who a moment ago was a friend with a recognizably human name now has become fecal material... Cursing is an eminently sensible way of making a subsequent attack into a service honoring the sacred. Now the attack will be against some morally lower, polluted, corrupted, profanized form of life, and hence in honor of a morally higher, more sacred, and-this bears special emphasis-an eternally respectable realm of being. Guttural cries are idiosyncratic, but curses draw on the communal language and its primordial sensibility about the relationship between the sacred and the profane. If the other is shit, attacking him becomes a community service-a form of moral garbage collection performed on behalf of all decent people. Who, after all, wants to touch shit or scum or a bitch or a dirty whore? Cursing at once makes the accursed repulsive and conjures up an altruistic overlay for an attack on him or her. Now the

attack will honor not just the attacker but the Good, in a presumptively primordial sense. In the terms in which cursing defines the battle, who would take the side of bitches against human beings, of fecal material against the sanctity of human life? Cursing sets up violence to be a sacrifice to honor the attacker as a priest representing the collective moral being. If the priest is stained by the blood of the sacrifice, by contact with the polluting profane material, that is a measure of the priest's devotion to society. (61) In Islam, the concept of cursing is referred to by the Arabic word *La'nat* which means deprivation, signifying being deprived of God's blessing. In Islam it is permissible to pray to Allah to curse unbelievers but cursing fellow Muslims is discouraged. Islamic texts regarding cursing clearly describe it as a form of word magic:

Muslims should neither curse nor imprecate each other with words such as, "May the Curse of Allah be upon you," or "I wish you to burn in Hell-fire," etc. . . . Allah's Messenger . . . said, "Do not curse one another, invoking curse of Allah or Wrath of Allah or the fire of Hell." . . . To curse a Muslim is akin to killing him. Allah's Messenger . . . said, "Cursing a believer is like murdering him." . . . The act of cursing is such that one who does it can himself become a recipient of it. . . . Allah's Messenger . . . said, "When a person curses (*La'nah*; to ask that something be deprived of Allah's Mercy) somebody or something, the curse goes up to the heaven and the gates of the heaven are closed. Then it comes down to the earth and its gates are closed. Then it turns right and left, and if it does not find an entrance to go anywhere, it returns to the person or thing that was cursed, if he or it deserves to be cursed; otherwise, it returns to the person, who uttered it." (62) The act of cursing has magical qualities, which is why it is forbidden to curse fellow Muslims. However, cursing non-believers is perfectly acceptable. Fatwa 36674 states that "Cursing the *kuffaar* and sin in general terms, such as saying 'May Allaah curse the Jews and Christians,' or 'May Allaah curse the kaafirs, evildoers and wrongdoers,' or 'May Allaah curse the wine-drinker and thief.' This kind of curse is permissible and there is nothing wrong with it. 'It is permissible to curse the *kuffaar* in general'." (63) Referring to non-believers as dirty, filthy, dogs and other derogatory curse words is more than just an insult. It is a form of word magic that transforms the person into a lower status of "less than human," an impurity that must be eradicated. If it were simply an insult, the name-calling could take the form of more mundane expressions such as "stupid" or "ignorant infidel." In magical thinking words have power, and the Islamist use of dirty words marks the unbeliever as the polluted other.

Combined with the fundamental belief that impurity must be cleansed, relegating the other to dirt and disease makes it easier to commit violence. Symbolically, instead of harming a person you are just removing dirt, taking out the garbage. Many violent attacks perpetrated by Muslims were accompanied by specific name-

calling. On June 2, 2012, over a dozen Muslim youths brutally assaulted three 18-year-old Jewish men in Villeurbaine near Lyons, France. The attackers yelled “dirty Jew,” and cursed and spat on the victims while beating them with hammers and iron bars.(64) In Belgium in November 2011, five Muslim Moroccan girls assaulted Oceane Sluizer, a 13-year-old classmate. While grabbing her hair and slamming her head against their knees they called her a “dirty Jew” and told her to “return to your country.”(65) Prior to the assault the Muslim girls continually cursed and insulted her until it eventually escalated to violence. Oceane said, “I got used to being called a dirty Jew. It wasn’t unusual, although I was burning up inside.””(66) Name-calling prior to and during attacks symbolically functions as a method of transforming violence into a sacred cleansing ritual. In both incidents the phrase “dirty Jew” demonized the victims and legitimized the cruelty. This form of cursing transforms any potential feelings of remorse into righteousness.

The dirty language of Islamist jihad functions as “cursing,” marking unbelievers as impure pollution that must be purified through violence. It is the authentic meaning of the term “ethnic cleansing.” Cleansing Islam of its impurities and expelling unbelievers from Muslim holy lands is the ideological goal of Islamism.

## **Purity and Violence: The Nature of Islamist Terrorism**

Islamist leaders from different movements, countries, sects and factions all emphasize the need to cleanse Islam of its impurities. They proclaim that the threat to true believers is that the purity of Islam has been polluted by Western ideas and influences. Sayyid Qutb, one of the most influential contemporary Islamists whose ideals inspired many terrorists groups including al Qaeda, “emphasized the need to cleanse Islam from impurities resulting from its exposure to Western and capitalist influence.”(67) Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranian Shiite cleric and founder of Iran’s Islamic Republic, was determined to rid Iran of what he saw as Western corruption and to restore the purity of Islam. Al Qaeda’s ideological program is the purification of Islam through violent struggle.(68) Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have continually called on supporters to purify Muslim holy lands of infidels, un-Islamic beliefs and practices.

For Islamists, cleansing Islam is a function of jihad, holy war, and a justification for violence and terrorism. Islamist leaders continually emphasize how purifying Islam of Western influences will restore respect, honor and dignity to true believers who have been humiliated by the occupation of their sacred lands and defilement of their holy places. Many politicians and terrorism scholars attribute the root causes of terrorism to societal issues such as poverty, oppression, alienation and unresolved grievances. In her book *Terror in The Name of God, Why Religious Militants Kill*, terrorism expert Jessica Stern writes.

“Over the last quarter century, standards of living have either fallen or remained steady for most Muslim-majority states. In some, extremist groups step in to offer the social services the state is failing to provide. Poor governance and inadequate protection of civil liberties have allowed extremist groups to thrive and to spread the message that the West is responsible for their plight. Weak or authoritarian governments, extremist religious groups, poverty, rage, and alienation work in concert to create a population that is furious with America, which is viewed-often rightly-as a supporter of the status quo in the Arab and Islamic world.”[\(69\)](#)In the introduction to his book *What Makes A Terrorist*, Alan B. Krueger cited some of the arguments for economics and lack of education as the root causes of terrorism:

In short, what makes a terrorist? Although the answer to this question is complex and surely varies from case to case, many turned to a simple explanation: economic deprivation and a lack of education cause people to adopt extreme views and turn to terrorism. This explanation appealed to a wide range of people, from President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair to religious figures of all faiths to public intellectuals. The alleged connection between poverty, lack of education, political extremism, and terrorism continues to resonate with top government officials, even those who leave office and are no longer obliged to toe the party line. For example, Richard Armitage, the deputy secretary of state from 2001 to 2005, published an op-ed piece in the New York Times on Pakistan’s problems with terrorism that claimed, “General Musharraf has shown that he understands the seriousness of dealing with the root causes of extremism, making real efforts to improve economic and educational opportunities” (Armitage and Bue, 2006, p. 11). Within the Muslim community, a distinguished group of thirty-nine imams and ulama (religious leaders and scholars) signed a statement that claimed, “The tragedy of 7th July 2005 demands that all of us, both in public life and in civil and religious society, confront together the problems of Islamophobia, racism, unemployment, economic deprivation and social exclusion-factors that may be alienating some of our children and driving them towards the path of anger and desperation” (Muslim Council of Britain, 2005, p. 2). Rowan Williams, the archbishop of Canterbury, chalked up terrorism to “economic powerlessness” (Williams, 2006). And in his acceptance speech upon being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his work on micro loans, the economist Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh said that it was essential to put “resources into improving the lives of the poor people” to end the root cause of terrorism (Yunus, 2006).[\(70\)](#)Krueger argues against these positions in his book suggesting that terrorism is motivated by political goals not poverty. The Obama administration also views the cause of terrorism as an economic and social issue. In a September 19, 2001 statement on the attacks of 9/11 Barack Obama, then an Illinois state senator, issued a statement to his local newspaper the *Hyde Park Herald*: “It [terrorism] may find expression in a particular brand of violence, and may be channeled by particular demagogues or

fanatics. Most often, though, it grows out of a climate of poverty and ignorance, helplessness and despair.”(71) President Obama’s position that poverty is a root cause of terrorism has been consistent throughout his administration and held by both Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry. A 2011 article in *Foreign Affairs* reported that “In 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama argued in favor of sending more development aid to poor countries, because ‘extremely poor societies’ are ‘optimal breeding grounds for disease, terrorism, and conflict.’ The same year, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton concurred, declaring economic development an ‘integral part of America’s national security policy’.”(72) When Secretary of State John Kerry met with his counterpart Pietro Parolin at the Vatican in Rome on January 13, 2014 he linked poverty to terrorism in remarks following the meeting: “And so we have a huge common interest in dealing with this issue of poverty, which in many cases is the root cause of terrorism or even the root cause of the disenfranchisement of millions of people on this planet.”(73)

These theories habitually underestimate the ideological influence of purity rites, and the resulting hypersensitivity to humiliation and thus vulnerability to Islamist messaging. Such politicians and scholars apparently fail to recognize that shame is embodied in Islam and frustrations may be the result of an unattainable demand for purity. It is the dread of impurity, not poverty, that is the direct cause of Islamist terrorism. While it is impossible to predict the cultural effects of long-term economic development, for the moment this is an important reality. Islamist propaganda that is calculated to incite violence focuses on religion and holy war almost entirely ignoring economic conditions. For this reason Islamist messaging continually emphasizes occupation of holy land, defilement of the sacred and offenses to Islam, rather than economic disadvantages and material privations.

The call to jihad is presented by Islamists as an opportunity to restore dignity, honor and respect and alleviate feelings of humiliation and shame. This is to be accomplished by sanctioning violence in the cause of holy war, which transforms violence into an act of purification. Terrorism justified as sacred violence is a cleansing ritual that functions as expiation of individual shame and as a method to cleanse Islam of the impurity of the West. Islamist messaging that continually tells the Muslim community that they are being humiliated by Western infidels is a proven strategy for inciting violence. Killing in the cause of Islam, Islamist propaganda promises, restores respect and feels moral and good. This is a psychologically plausible strategy. In his book *Preventing Violence*, prison psychiatrist Dr. James Gilligan posits,

the basic psychological motive, or cause, of violent behavior is the wish to ward off or eliminate the feeling of shame and humiliation-a feeling that is painful, and can even be intolerable and overwhelming- and replace it with its opposite, the feeling

of pride.... The degree to which a person experiences feelings of shame depends on two variables: the way other people are treating him (with admiration and respect or with contempt and disdain) and the degree to which he himself already feels proud or ashamed. The more a person is shamed by others, from childhood by parents or peers who ridicule or reject him, the more he is likely to feel chronically shamed, and hypersensitive to feelings and experiences of being shamed, sometimes to the point of feeling that others are treating him with contempt or disdain even when they are not. For such people, and they are the rule among the violent, even a minor sign of real or imagined disrespect can trigger a homicidal reaction. The purpose of violence is to force respect from other people.<sup>(74)</sup> The Islamist demand for purity chronically shames true believers through purification rites that make them hypersensitive to humiliation, increasing their potential for violence.

As I have said elsewhere,

Islamist propaganda is designed to convince believers that their honor has been disrespected, their prophet has been insulted, their territory has been occupied, their holy book has been defiled and they have lost face. Symbols and loaded language are all calculated to trigger feelings of humiliation that can only be assuaged through violence. Exploitation of perceived desecration incidents is emphasized so that violence can be morally sanctioned as a defense of Islamic purity, which has been defiled, transforming murder into a sacred act. Purification through violence is a sacrificial ritual. Shedding blood, including one's own, restores honor and washes away shame.<sup>(75)</sup> Suicide attacks, referred to by Islamists as "martyrdom operations," are purification rituals, sacrificial acts that cleanse the land of impurities and the individual of sin. In his article "Why Does Religion Turn Violent? A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Religious Terrorism," James W. Jones writes, "In many religions the theme of purification is linked with the theme of sacrifice. The Latin root 'sacri-ficium' means to 'make holy.' Sacrifice is a way of making something holy, of purifying it. Sacrifices are offerings to the divine and to the community. But they are a special kind of offering in that what is given is destroyed. But something is not only destroyed, it (or something related to it, like the religious community) is also transformed. Something is offered; something is made holy."<sup>(76)</sup> Killing and dying for Islam are considered sacred, and sacred violence is always justified. However, the violence must be ritualized into a sacred rite to distinguish it from profane barbarism. This is what Girard refers to as the difference between sacrificial violence and nonsacrificial violence, between blood spilt for ritual or criminal purposes: "Beneficial violence must be carefully distinguished from harmful violence and the former continually promoted at the expense of the latter. Ritual is nothing more than the regular exercise of 'good' violence.... Sacrificial violence can, in the proper circumstances, serve as an agent



of purification.”(77) For this reason, jihadists in Syria, Nigeria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries take the time to slit the throats of many of and behead their enemies instead of just shooting them. Enemies are ritually slaughtered in the same manner and for the same reasons as unclean animals: to maintain ritual purity in Islam. According to the rules of Dhabīḥah, the prescribed method of ritual animal slaughter in Islamic law consists of cutting a fully conscious animal’s throat while praising Allah and then letting it bleed to death.(78) Specifically, the prescribed method entails a swift deep incision made with a sharp knife on the throat, cutting the carotid arteries in the neck along with the esophagus and vertebrate trachea with one swipe of a non-serrated blade. Exsanguination should take place before the animal dies because the animal should not be handled while the blood is draining. It is mandatory to invoke the name of Allah during the time of slaughter or the sacrifice is rendered void. Jihadists yell “Allahu Akbar!” during beheadings as part of their ritual human slaughter. After beheading British soldier Lee Rigby on a London street on May 22, 2013, Michael Adebolajo told police that he and Michael Adebowale cut his throat with a knife because “‘this is how we kill our animals in Islam’.”(79) Adebolajo claimed that “‘The most humane way to kill any creature is to cut the jugular. This is what I believe... He may be my enemy but he is a man...so I struck at the neck and attempted to remove his head’.”(80) Dozens of honor killings also entailed cutting the victims throats and are often described as an act of purification by the offenders. Just a few examples of honor murders in Jordan exemplify how honor killing is similar to animal ritual slaughter. On April 29, 2013 a Jordanian man slit his sister’s throat and stabbed her 20 times in the face and chest “‘to cleanse the family honor’.”(81) In November 2011, when an 18 year old man from the southern city of Tafilah, killed his sister in public by slitting her throat, he told police he killed her “to cleanse the family honour.”(82) In July 2011 a Jordanian man confessed to stabbing his twenty two year old wife to death claiming that “ he wanted to cleanse his honor after he suspected his wife of bad behavior.”(83) On April 14, 2013 the burned body of a pregnant woman in her twenties was found in a dumpster in Ruseifeh (east of Amman). Her throat was slit and her womb was cut open displaying her murdered four-month-old fetus. The two men seen dumping her body in the garbage container and setting it ablaze were taking out what they considered trash.(84) The symbolism of impurity evident in the chosen dump site and the act of setting her on fire, a common method of purification, demonstrates the strong visceral nature of feelings of uncleanness. The demand for purity and its manifestation in emotions of shame and honor are particularly evident in honor killings.

Girard explains the necessity of sacrificial violence for mitigating impurity: “The taint of impurity cannot always be avoided; even the most careful precautions are no security against it. And the least contact with the infection can contaminate the entire community. How can one cleanse the infected members of all trace of



pollution? Does there exist some miraculous substance potent enough not only to resist infection but also to purify, if need be, the contaminated blood? Only blood itself, blood whose purity has been guaranteed by the performance of appropriate rites -the blood, in short, of sacrificial victims —can accomplish this feat.” (85) Fathers, brothers, mothers kill their beloved daughters and sisters to purify their alleged contaminated blood in defense of the purity and honor of the family. Jihadists cut the throats of their enemies as righteous slaughter in defense of the purity and honor of Islam. Enemies and tainted daughters become unclean animals. Murder is a purification ritual that restores honor to the community and cleanses personal shame. Rites of purity are the secret weapon in propaganda, recruitment and indoctrination, a brilliant method to prevent Islamists from being assimilated to other cultures, to demonize the enemy, to guard the family bloodline, to demarcate territory as sacred land and to incite violence against the impure other. Purification rites constitute a form of symbolic warfare that is so successful that an army of true believers has arisen willing to kill and die to protect the purity of Islam.

## Notes

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24. Girard, cited above , 29. [\(back\)](#)

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26. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1967), 25, 26. Ricoeur attributes this phrasing to Raffaele Pettazzoni, *La confession des péchés* (Bologna, 1929-36, 3 vols.) French translation, Vol. I (1931), 184. [\(back\)](#)

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29. In general, evil Jinn are characteristically similar to the Western concept of demons and ghosts, while good Jinn have attributes similar to the Western concept of guardian angels. Many Muslims believe that evil Jinn are spiritual entities that can enter and possess people and exercise supernatural influence over them. Evil Jinn are also often believed to haunt people and places while good jinn can protect,

empower and assist humans in many ways. For millions of Muslims around the world, both illiterate and educated, jinn exist and are experienced as real. The Quranic message itself is addressed to both humans and jinn. Although there is a recurrent presence of jinn in legends, myths, poetry and literature, for Muslims jinn are not solely relegated to myths or superstitious beliefs, they are described in the Quran and are an integral part of Islamic theology. According to the Quran, God created humans from clay, angels from light and Jinn from smokeless fire. The Quran describes Jinn as actual, intelligent life forms, beings that, though different from humans, share some attributes with them. Jinn are complex, multifarious intermediary beings that, similar to humans, have free will and can embrace goodness or evil. There are different tribes, clans and classes of jinn each with their own attributes and powers. Jinn often appear humanoid or even human but possess amazing powers that humans lack. They can change their shapes, fly through the air and can even render themselves invisible. They can take any form they want human, beast or animal, often as dogs, snakes and scorpions. Interestingly, many of the fears associated with Islamic purification rites are expressed in the symbolic attributes of the Jinn. For example, in Islam dogs, urine, feces, and blood are intrinsically impure and Jinn are known to shape shift to dogs, accept impure animal sacrifice and dwell in bathrooms, garbage dumps, sewers, graveyards and other unclean places. This reinforces the deeply embedded concept of evil as contagious pollution in Islamic rites of purity and intensifies the inherent primal fear of jinn. Women are considered to be more vulnerable to Jinn because they are thought to be weaker in their faith and impure several days of the month which coincides with the idea that impurity wields a strong magnetic influence on jinn. Belief in Jinn directly corresponds to Islamic rites of purity, the origin of local customs, ritual practices and superstitions. [\(back\)](#)

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