

# Valley Muslims faced test of faith

How Valley Muslims view the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and the tumultuous decade that followed.

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On 9/11, I did not want to sit at home weeping and watching the news, so I spent that day volunteering in the high-school office to help out the overwhelmed administrative staff handle scared and sometimes hysterical parents calling or coming in to take their children home.

When I got home that day, I received my very first of many phone calls from concerned friends.

It was from a Jewish friend, Stacy, and she was checking to make sure we were OK.

A few days later I got another call from a Christian friend, Kerry. She left me a voicemail message saying that if we felt unsafe in our home that we were to move into her house and stay with her and not to even consider arguing about it.

Their pure hearts reached out to comfort and protect a friend, neighbor and fellow human.

In the past 10 years this nation has seen all sorts of hate rhetoric, but those who wish to divide and destroy this nation of pure hearts will be the only losers.

There are more people like Stacy and Kerry in the "land of the free and the home of the brave" than there are hate-mongers.

**Anas Hlayhel**  
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The terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, changed all of us forever. In the days following the tragic event, Muslims, like all other Americans, mourned the tragic loss of innocent lives. After all, 9/11 happened to all of us and did not spare any religion or ethnicity (there were approximately 32 Muslims who died on 9/11).

Still, Muslims became suspects in the eyes of many fellow Americans. Many Muslim schools and mosques received threats of retaliation. That was the immediate challenge. But the years that ensued brought greater challenges. Islam entered the national debate arena and the place of Muslims in America was under question.

Islam-hate literature was on the rise and self-acclaimed so-called experts on Islam were spewing misconceptions about the faith. In the past couple of years, several new mosques were protested and lawmakers in more than 20 states introduced legislation that could result in discrimination against Muslims.

And now 10 years after 9/11, the national debate about Islam has not ceased. At its core, this debate is about our will as a nation to preserve religious freedom in the face of terrorist threats. It's a difficult test. I'm all hopes that Americans will keep choosing principle over fear.

**“Our greatest weapon in this fight is the strength that comes from our foundational principles of universal religious freedom, a weapon our enemy cannot use.”**

**M. ZUHDI JASSER**  
President of American Islamic Forum for Democracy

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As an African-American who happens to be Muslim, I have personally not experienced any change resulting from the events of 9/11.

Yet, as a board member of the Arizona Interfaith Movement, monthly columnist for the *Muslim Voice* newspaper and facilitator of diversity and cultural-competency workshops, I have met Muslims whose Middle Eastern appearance has resulted in their desire to remain anonymous, if not invisible, so as not to bring unsolicited attention to themselves.

I admit to being saddened each time I hear or read of a Valley Muslim apologizing for some heinous act performed by a Muslim, such as the Foot Hood shooting, Underwear Bomber, Shoe Bomber, etc.

This is usually hastily followed by a press release and a Muslim professing the "non-violent nature of Islam."

My recommendations: fewer interfaith dinners, curtailing of meaningless apologies and the initiating of a series of non-threatening, non-blaming, experiential workshops in which political correctness is left at the door and the hard questions are asked and answered.

The absence of disingenuous niceties and the removal of shielding masks would be of great benefit to all and could very well be the start of genuine interfaith relations and community bonding.

**M. Zuhdi Jasser**  
Scottsdale  
Physician  
President, American  
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As we commemorate the events of 9/11, many of us will turn to our faith and our connection to God to pray for those who were lost, for those that remain and to pray for the security against all those who seek to harm us. Despite Mayor Bloomberg's myopia in keeping faith from the official ceremony at Ground Zero, faith has been integral to the events of 9/11.

Faith was the impetus for the attack, faith was the instrument for healing and faith is the only hope we have to defeat the ideology that attacked us 10 years ago.

Yet, today we remain paralyzed from dissecting faith from threat because of a pathological fear of offending someone in our divisive American political dynamic. Faith has become a window dressing while our Islamist enemies embrace it. We flounder in political correctness to the detriment of our national security.

Sept. 11 was the most crippling enemy salvo in that ideological war. Make no mistake. It, however, was one of merely thousands. Our security will not triumph until Muslims can decouple the faith of Islam from the theo-political threat that is Islamism (political Islam). We are not at war with Islam, but we are at war with Islamism. Ten years later we have yet to even muster an offense against that ideology.

We must step beyond political correctness and empower reform-oriented, liberty-minded Muslims whose identity is tied to Americanism and our Establishment Clause rather than Islamism, sharia and victimhood. Our greatest weapon in this fight is the strength that comes from our foundational principles of universal religious freedom, a weapon our enemy cannot use.