



- ▶ HOME
- ▶ CURRENT STORIES

[Cover Story](#)
[Perspectives](#)
[Feature](#)
[Headlines](#)

ARTICLE FINDER

Keyword Search



- [About This Site](#)
- [Dedication](#)
- [Browse](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Create](#)

- ▼ FOR TEACHERS**
- [Overview](#)
 - [Lesson Plan List](#)
 - [Tips](#)
 - [Teacher Resources](#)

- ▼ RESOURCES**
- [Viewer's Guides](#)
 - [Outreach](#)
 - [Begin a Dialogue](#)
 - [Videotapes](#)
 - [Web Sites](#)
 - [Books](#)

- ▼ FEEDBACK**
- [Contact Us](#)
 - [Story Suggestions](#)
 - [Questionnaire](#)

INTERVIEW:
Imama Yahya Hendi
 September 13, 2002 Episode no. 602

Read more of Kim Lawton's interview with Imam Yahya Hendi, the Muslim chaplain at Georgetown University:



On the challenges facing Muslims after 9/11:

[There are] two challenges. Number one [is] the challenge of integrating within the American system and being a part of it, despite all the anger, frustration, and rejection, in certain cases, of Muslims being active in the public square. The other challenge is our ability to be honest with ourselves. Within the Muslim community, there are things that need to be changed in terms of how we have conducted ourselves, how we have spoken publicly, how we have led our Islamic institutions. Both challenges have been very demanding.

Our focus before September 11 was issues of concern to Muslims overseas -- the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq, Kashmir, issues of that sort. Muslims need to be also part of America. We are a part of the American fabric, and if that is the case, there are issues in America, that Americans care about, that we need to be a part of -- issues of domestic violence, inner city violence, domestic abuse, issues of environment. Issues like that Muslims need to be aware of and be a part of having a solution for.

On reasons for Muslim reluctance to become involved in American life:

Number one, the fear of the other. Number two, the fear of assimilation. Number three, the fear of losing your identity. Muslims may have been afraid that the more integration, the more assimilation, the more we lose our identity. Some of it is because about 45 percent of the Muslim community in America is made of immigrants -- people who come from overseas and, therefore, they want one day to go back home. So America did not become their home, unfortunately, and only recently, their children pushed them to see America as their home.

Muslims in America are frustrated with the way Islam has been portrayed in the public media and in the private media, in the public square. Muslims do not see themselves as inherently violent. Muslims do not see Islam as a religion of violence. On the contrary, Muslims see Islam is a religion of peace that teaches forgiveness and love. However, we are misunderstood, and therefore the challenge has been how we can reintroduce ourselves in a language that is familiar [to] our fellow American neighbors.

READ THIS WEEK'S

On criticism of Islam:

Unfortunately, in the last two months (and maybe even more in the last two or three weeks than ever before after September 11), there have been more articles written against Islam, more interviews on TV and radio against the person and the morality of Prophet Muhammad and the holy book Qur'an, and the question is, why now are people doing that? People very often just speak against the Qur'an, against Prophet Muhammad, without any reference that Muslims would even acknowledge to be [about] Islam. To me these are hate-driven statements or actions. That is not what we need to see in America. What I need to see in America is a united nation under God, a united country with all its diversity under God, and we can do that.

Tools:

Many people are seeking to understand Islam. Many people are seeking to know the truth of Islam, and some are unhappy with that. Since September 11, thousands of people have converted to Islam and have become Muslim, have chosen Islam on their own. Some are unhappy with that, and the only [thing to do] is to give Islam a bad name.

Some [Muslims] are afraid, some are really afraid that because of these statements, they will be attacked in person, or their institutions will be attacked -- more stereotyping, more discrimination, and we don't want that to happen. Why should 1.2 billion people be accused of being violent and bad because of the actions of some? I believe that violence has no religion, terrorism has no faith; terrorism is terrorism, whether it is done by a Christian, a Jew, or a Muslim, and it should be condemned.

Many Muslims are afraid of what might happen to them and are saying to themselves, "Now wait a minute, should we really stay in America, or should we go elsewhere?" I know many students who have chosen not to come back to American universities to continue with their Ph.D.s or their master's degrees or their bachelor's degrees because they are afraid.

Many people feel that they are not as welcomed as they have always expected. They believe that maybe America does not want us; maybe we need to go somewhere else and study and work and live. However, my answer is no, do not leave. We are part of America; we will educate America about who we are. We will be patient, we will persevere, and one day we will get there.

On the lessons of 9/11 for Muslims:

Some went as far as questioning our loyalty to America and how we identify ourselves. We are fully Muslims, we are very proud of Islam; however, we are also fully Americans, and we are very proud to be Americans. I believe many Muslims in America believe that we can be both; we can be fully Americans and fellow Muslims.

On whether Muslims have spoken out against terror since 9/11:

I believe moderate Muslims have been speaking out. I have in my home hundreds of books written by moderate Muslims [about] their views of Islam, their views of America, of the West and of the relationships between the East and the West. However, most of the focus has been given to the minority view, not the majority view, and therefore, many people believe and think that the majority view is really the minority [view], and the minority is the majority, and that is not the case. What I would challenge on the [television] screen here [is for] moderate Muslims to speak up more than ever before; even if they have been, we need to be more active. I believe because of September 11, many moderate Muslims started the 1,000-mile road of education. We need to educate our fellow neighbors about the truth of Islam, but we also need to educate about Islam our fellow Muslims, who might not understand what the religion is all about. I believe there is enough ignorance about Islam among Muslims and also among non-Muslims, and therefore education should focus on non-Muslims and Muslims as well.

On the practice of Islam at home and abroad:

There are practices in Muslim countries that are perceived by many to be Islamic. However, when [Muslims] come to America and see these things not being done or being done in a different way, they start questioning their identity, the "Islamicity," if you will, of these activities. That forces them to go back and search and look [again] and reevaluate their practices, and I have known many people who have given up on the practices that [they] have believed for years to be absolutely from the Qur'an, and when they came to America, they realized that it is not from the Qur'an -- the practice of dealing with women, [for example]. In many Muslim nations, some people do believe that women should not be educated. Coming to America, looking [again at] the Qur'an, looking [again at] the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, who spoke very positively about the need to educate women, people changed.


America is built on the freedom of religion and the freedom of expression. People have the right to question things, will have the right to reevaluate things without being afraid of what might happen to them from the government. In many governments, in many countries, people do not have that privilege, and because we have that privilege in America, we are free to argue and reargue about issues that we have believed to be sacred and [that we] discovered just recently are of no sacredness or holiness.

Do not sit in your closet at home and think that America will change its image of Islam on its own. America needs to be educated; our fellow neighbors need to be taught the truth of Islam and the truth of who we are and what we stand for. The only way for that to happen is by being active, by integrating within the system, and by assimilating.

I would hope that non-Muslim Americans have come to realize that their fellow Muslim neighbors are a part of their fabric and their society. We suffered because of September 11 as much as any of our fellow neighbors. I would hope that our fellow American neighbors have learned that Muslims also care about America, that Islam has a lot to contribute to America, especially on family values issues, and that America cannot make it on its own. Americans cannot fight terrorism and extremism on their own. Muslims need to be on board in the fight [against] terrorism. Rejecting Muslims, alienating Muslims -- that will hurt America and the world.

Some Muslims in some countries do believe that we are compromising on certain values that they believe to be completely Islamic and important to Muslims. Our problem is really strange. We are not accepted in our countries back home, if you will. And we are not accepted here in America. Our loyalty to Islam is questioned in the Muslim world, and our loyalty to America is questioned in America by our fellow Americans.

However, I do believe that American Muslims have a very important role to play, and that is to bridge the gap between America and the Muslim world. We know what America is all about, what America stands for, what those values are that we hold dear, but we also know about how Muslims think in the Muslim world [and] in many Arab countries as well. We could bridge the gap and bring both communities together in a very peaceful fashion. We hope that America uses us, and we hope that the Arab and Muslim world make use of us to do that.

Did you like this story?
How can we improve our program or Web site?
 [Let us know](#)

