

Mustafa Akyol, Disingenuous And Dangerous

[Here](#) he offers the soothing views of a putative brave critic of how Islam's rules on blasphemy are currently understood, and he calls for Muslim clerics to speak out against the enforcement of blasphemy rules by Muslims through violence. All very comforting and, for some, cause for complacency: Islam Can Reform Itself. But Akyol feigns ignorance about the most relevant matters. First, he appears to have no idea – “for some reason” is the vague phrase he uses, as he does not know, and has no authorities he could consult who might enlighten him – why, if there are many prophets in Islam, only the Prophet Muhammad receives the special solicitedness of Muslims.

But more deceptive is the way that he tries to make unwary readers believe that it would be possible to somehow undo the murderous violence with which Muslims enforce their blasphemy rules, or in some cases exploit them for other reasons (as the Muslims who accuse Christians of blasphemy in Pakistan in order to take their property, or their women), because, Mustafa Akyol says, nowhere in the Qur'an is the sin or crime of blasphemy defined or, he seems to say, even implied. Now Mustafa Akyol comes from a Sunni country; he knows perfectly well that the Sunnah – that is the behavior, the acts and words, of Muhammad and the earliest Muslims – is an essential guide, in Sunni Islam, for understanding what is in the Qur'an and making sense of it. The Sunnah itself is derived from two written sources. The first are the stories of what Muhammad said and did, as set down in what are called the Hadith, stories that were long ago winnowed by scholars called muhaddithin, who through the study of the isnad-chain, or transmission from source to source, back as far as those muhaddithin could go, would offer some assurance of the likely

authenticity of this or that Hadith. The second is the Sira, or biography of Muhammad, the first example of which, by Ibn Ishaq, appeared 150 years after Muhammad's death. Together, Hadith and Sira make up the Sunnah.

Now Mustafa Akyol knows perfectly well how important the Sunnah is, knows that some Muslim scholars believe the Sunnah to be even more important, in guiding the behavior, and forming the attitudes, of Muslims, than the Qur'an. And so it is deliberately deceptive of Mustafa Akyol to talk about blasphemy and the Qur'an, but not about blasphemy – that is, mocking Muhammad – in Hadith and Sira. Mustafa Akyol knows where Muslims take their cue on punishing blasphemy – that is, the blasphemy that is mockery of the Prophet. They take it from several examples in the life of Muhammad, of people who mocked him, and were murdered by one or more of his followers, to his great satisfaction. The three examples are the female poet Asma bint Marwan, Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf, and Abu 'Akaf, a Jewish poet who was supposedly 120-years-old. All were murdered because they mocked the Prophet. If Mustafa Akyol thinks he can write an article, supposedly demonstrating reassuringly that he is one of the good "moderate" Muslims, one of those bright young reformers, like Irshad Manji (she's been dining out, with grants galore and now her very own little institute at NYU, where she has turned her act into a permanent sinecure, for more than a decade on her non-existent attempts –all hat and no cattle – to "reform Islam") but he knows that if he gives the sources in the Hadith, and if he explains further that Muhammad's behavior cannot be ignored, but must be taken as a guide, for he is the Model of Conduct ("uswa hasana"), the Perfect Man ("al-insan al-kamil"), this whole business of changing Muslim behavior about blasphemy would be seen as impossible, an absurd hope that is dangerous, because it makes non-Muslims think that all they have to do is hold on, and Islam – with a little help from the mustafa-akyols and irshad-manjis of this world – can be reformed and fit right in, and there's no need for the West to

take severe measures, because Muslims themselves will handle everything, and do what needs to be done. Just be patient, and don't get too excited.

Akyol's deception is surely deliberate. He cannot conceivably be that ignorant of Islam. And if it is deliberate, then he is a sweetly-sinister and dangerous guide for unwary Infidels, like the readers and editors of *The New York Times*..