

Nicholas Kristof's 12-Step Program (Revised Edition)

by Hugh Fitzgerald

Just a brief note from Nicholas Kristof, or a reasonable facsimile thereof:

As I am “the moral conscience of our generation of journalists,” the winner of two Pulitzer prizes, the first blogger on the New York Times’ website, a journalist of whom it has been said that “there is no one in journalism anywhere in the United States...who has done anything like the work he has done to figure out how poor people are actually living around the world,” who in 2007 [U.S. News & World Report](#) named as “one of “America’s Best Leaders,” and who in 2011 was named one of seven “Top American Leaders” by the Harvard Kennedy School and [the Washington Post](#), someone whose “writing has reshaped the field of opinion journalism,” in 2013 I was still impressing enough people to be awarded the Goldsmith Award for Career Excellence in Journalism by Harvard University. And I find it extremely humbling that Alex S. Jones, the Pulitzer Prize-winning director of Harvard Kennedy School of Government’s Shorenstein Center, declared in presenting the award to me that “the reporter who’s done more than any other to change the world is Nick Kristof.” In the same year, I was named “an International Freedom Conductor by the [National Underground Railroad Freedom Center](#), largely for my work exposing human trafficking and linking it to modern slavery.” And it may interest you to know that the last person named to receive the title before me, two years earlier, was the Dalai Lama. *Half the Sky*, a book I wrote with my wife Sheryl WuDunn on the condition of women around the world, was called by one reviewer “one of the most important books I have ever reviewed,” and another reviewer upped the ecstatic ante, calling it “the most significant book that I have ever

reviewed.” You can find out more about my accomplishments and the recognition I have received at my Wikipedia entry, which someone is constantly updating in great detail. Whoever said that his Wikipedia entry was “the lengthened shadow of a man” – or for that matter, woman – was surely onto something. And though some have suggested that I be given a Nobel Prize (I’m not sure whether they had in mind the prize for peace or that for literature), at this point I think that honor, the awarding of which, no matter what the category, I would accept in all humility, as of now might be somewhat premature.

Recent responses to [my 12-step program for those who want to fight back against the Age of Trump and the Darkness Descending](#) have suggested to me that I might expand on my proposals having to do with Islam. In the hope of spreading understanding of one of the world’s great religions and giving victimized Muslims reason to hope, I started a few days ago to do something I have long wanted to do, but what with one thing and another (I’ve visited 150 countries, I’ve pocketed dozens of awards) never did find the time. But now I hope that you, my more than 1.1 million followers of my Twitter account (who have made me the most followed journalist in the world), will choose to study Islam along with me.

So here’s my revised 12-step program, now devoted entirely to Islam, below:

1. I WILL not put off any longer my study of Islam. I am now in the midst of reading the Qur’an, an effort that [should take about 30 hours from start to finish](#). I pledge to reread it each month, in order to keep fresh my understanding of Islam’s central text. And I hope many of you among my 1.1 million followers on Twitter will join me in this effort. Our Muslim brothers deserve no less.

2. I WILL read a *tafsir* or commentary to the Qur’an, to help me make sense of difficult or obscure passages, of which there are many, and to understand more fully the relations of the

parts to the whole. I want to better grasp the interpretative doctrine of *naskh*, or abrogation, which I have just learned privileges the later, more militant passages that contradict earlier, milder passages, that is, the Medinan over the Meccan verses. I urge my readers to do the same. I have been told that [*Blogging the Qur'an by Robert Spencer*](#) is a particularly useful exegesis, but I am still reluctant to recommend his work, for I remain sure – though I am not exactly sure why I am sure, since I have refrained from reading a word of it – that there must be something very wrong with it. So say Reza Aslan, Cathy Young, the heads of CAIR and the Southern Poverty Law Center, and other grand panjandrums of compassion and diversity and outreach too numerous to mention. *Quod erat demonstrandum*. Still, I just might have a look. Perhaps it's time. You never know.

3. I WILL carefully note those Qur'anic passages that have to do with the treatment of women, which is only natural, given how much of my life as a journalist has been spent reporting on the mistreatment of women. I think we all ought to be aware that Muslim women inherit half as much as men (Qur'an 4:11); that their testimony is worth half that of a man (2:282); that polygamy is licit in Islam, and so are female slaves, "those whom your right hand possesses"; that a Muslim man is allowed to beat his disobedient wife, that a Muslim man need only pronounce the triple-*talaq* to divorce his wife; and that women are described in the Qur'an as inferior to men, for "the men are a degree above them" (2:228); and in one of the most respected compilations of Hadith, which are the stories about Muhammad's words and deeds, the Sahih Bukhari, "[Muhammad] said, 'Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man? They replied in the affirmative. He said, '**This [is because of] the deficiency in her intelligence.**'" (6.301)

As the "moral conscience of our generation of journalists" and the author, with my wife Sheryl WuDunn, of *Half the Sky*, about examples of misogyny around the world, I will prepare a plan

for ending the mistreatment of women under Islam. This means that I will devote at least one column every month to the condition of Muslim women. If for some reason results are not forthcoming from our State Department, or the United Nations, I'll devote *two* columns per month to the condition of women under Islam. Or even, quite possibly, *three*.

4. I WILL hold up for inspection those passages in the Qur'an that deal with Unbelievers, and how they are to be treated in a Muslim society. These will include, but not be limited to, the following:

Qur'an 2:191 "Slay the unbelievers wherever you find them"

Qur'an 3:21 "Muslims must not take the infidels as friends"

Qur'an 5:33 "Maim and crucify the infidels if they criticize Islam"

Qur'an 8:12 "Terrorize and behead those who believe in scriptures other than the Koran"

Qur'an 8:60 "Muslims must muster all weapons to terrorize the infidels"

Qur'an 8:65 "The unbelievers are stupid, urge all Muslims to fight them"

Qur'an 9:5 "When the opportunity arises, kill the infidels wherever you find them"

Quran 9:123 "Make war on the infidels living in your neighbourhood"

Qur'an 22:19 "Punish the unbelievers with garments of fire, hooked iron rods, boiling water, melt their skin and bellies"

Qur'an 47:4 "Do not hanker for peace with the infidels, behead them when you catch them".

I will invite readers of my column, and my 1.1 million followers on Twitter, to interpret the words and arrive at the real meaning of these passages.

5. I WILL describe for my readers the concept of the Dhimmi in Muslim jurisprudence, a word applied to those non-Muslims who, if they agree to a host of legal (economic, social, political)

disabilities, can continue to live, and even practice their faith (provided their faith is Christianity or Judaism, that of the Peoples of the Book) in a Muslim polity. In the hundreds of columns I have written that touched on Islam, I now realize I had overlooked the concept of the Dhimmi, and especially ignored the required payment of the capitation tax, or Jizyah, so I will be sure to discuss the legal status of non-Muslims under Muslim rule, and refer readers to Antoine Fattal's "**Le statut legal** des non-Musulmans en pays d'islam." And of course I hope that some of the 1.1 million followers I have on Twitter, if they know enough French, will take up my suggestion.

6. I WILL explain to my readers how, in Islam, the world is seen as divided between *Dar al-Islam*, the Domain of Islam, where Muslims rule, and *Dar al-Harb*, the Domain of War, where Muslims do not yet rule, and that between *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb* unending war is prescribed, until Islam everywhere dominates, and Muslims rule, everywhere.

7. I WILL read the most accessible works of at least a dozen scholars of Islam who wrote before the present Age of Inhibition, and include excerpts from them in my columns, so that those wishing to go deeper into their own study of Islam will have Recommended Readings available. I will also post those excerpts permanently at my website. These scholars will include Joseph Schacht, Snouck Hurgronje, Henri Lammens, K. S. Lal, Ignaz Goldziher, Sir William Muir, St. Clair Tisdall, Arthur Jeffrey, Samuel Zwemer, Georges Vajda, David Margoliouth, and Majid Khadduri. I will urge my 1.1 million followers on Twitter to emulate my example.

8. I WILL publicize the work of defectors from Islam who have found refuge in the West, including Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Nonie Darwish, Ibn Warraq, Wafa Sultan, and Magdi Allam, and include excerpts from each of them in my columns and at my website. I will explain why these defectors are as valuable to the Western world as were defectors from the K.G.B. during the

Cold War. I will explain why they are all under a permanent death threat from Muslims, requiring many of them to be attended by bodyguards. Therefore, it behooves us to pay careful attention to their testimonies of life under Islam.

9. I WILL discuss the description in the Qur'an of Unbelievers as "the most vile of created beings" (Qur'an 98.6) and of Muslims as "the best of peoples" (Qur'an 3.110). I will invite my 1.1 million Twitter followers to come up with their own interpretations of these phrases and what they could possibly mean. I will post both the most plausible replies – and the most implausible -- in my column and at my website.

10. I WILL discuss details of the life of Muhammad, who is regarded by Believers as the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) and the Model of Conduct (*uswa hasana*) for all time. I will explain the consequences of his marriage to little Aisha for Muslim marriages over the past 1400 years. I will discuss Muhammad's pleasure at learning of the murders of his mockers Asma bint Marwan and Abu 'Afak, and at witnessing the massacres of 600-900 bound prisoners of the Banu Qurayza. I will discuss the significance of the raid on the Jewish farmers of the Khaybar Oasis for subsequent Muslim behavior toward Infidels, and especially toward Jews.

11. I WILL explain the Islamic concepts of Taqiyya and Kitman, or religiously-sanctioned deception that is justified as protecting either the Faith of Islam, or the beliefs of some of its adherents.

12. I WILL examine the words "Islamophobia" and "racism" that, I now realize, may have been deployed, lazily or deliberately, as terms of abuse to silence all criticism of Islam. I hereby promise to stop using such terms, and urge my 1.1 million Twitter followers to do the same.

I WILL discuss what the leading Muslim intellectual and *poseur* in Europe, Tariq Ramadan, meant when he said that "**We are**

here. We are here to stay. It's over."

That is the baker's or faker's dozen which I offer as a revised edition of my previous 12-step program, so that others, especially journalists, may fulfill their role of being, in that most memorable of my latest phrases, "watchdogs, not lapdogs." In other words, emulate moi, and you too may someday be described, at your own Wikipedia entry, as "the moral conscience of our generation of journalist."

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