



Albert de Booij meets...

## Sheikh Hisham K a b b a n i

“God has created all of us equal.”

### **I**s the message of Islam universal?

My message is about love and peace and is in my opinion different from other messages, because I am a Sufi. Most Muslims were Sufis at the time the prophet Mohammed lived. They were living very modestly. Their scriptures have survived many centuries. Among them we find poets, islamic artists, philosophers: their works are only to be found in university libraries. They have deep roots in islam. We understand the message of the prophet Mohammed through their works. But there are many people against us, against the poetry of Rumi, Allaudin Attar and other Sufis and against traditional Muslims who have travelled all over the world. Nowadays there are people who use Saudi-Arabian oil money to promote and distribute literature. They want to spread the Word and lead large numbers of Muslims. Those people, who want to speak for all Muslims, don't believe in democracy but still expect to be considered equal negotiation partners by democratic governments.

I know there are many Muslims of Turkish and Moroccan descent in The Netherlands. Not long ago I attended a conference in Marrakesh, Morocco. The government there has problems with the Salafistic movement (an extremist Wahabistic sect) and tries to improve and strengthen the position of the Sufis. because they are the key to stop war and extremism. You need Sufis to maintain the balance. They are able to repair social, economic and physical well-being. Moderate guides or masters are appointed to lead the community and help everybody. This we don't find with Salafistic, Wahabistic or extremist sects, that turn up all over the world. This is the difference between their and our message. Sufis have a crystal clear and transparant message, which is good and works for everybody. All peoples have to live together. Integration as opposed to segregation.

### **Sufi-Islam tells us that we have to follow the rules and values of the country we live in?**

Of course, that is the message the prophet Mohammed conveyed to us. According to one of the prophet's hadiths (traditions) one has to obey and respect the authority and the rules of the country he is going to. That's why God said in the Koran (or Quran): 'Obey God and obey the messenger and all those among you who have authority'. When I live in the United States for example I have to obey the rules of that country. When I live in The Netherlands I must respect the legislation made by the Dutch government. The same applies to Germany and the Arab countries. I cannot break the rules of a country, even if they don't suit me. Being a Sufi I like everything. If the views of extremists are not in line with local laws, they should go back where they came from.

### **Even when they offend the Koran, Mohammed or God?**

When Abu Dhahil accused his nephew Mohammed of witchcraft and therefore wanted to kill him, the prophet did not resist. When you move to the West or to Europe you will become a part of a democracy. You will have to accept that political system from the moment you arrive, or return to your motherland immediately. Within the democratic system there is freedom of speech for everybody, you can't force your personal opinion upon others. Find a judge, go to the media or organise a demonstration if you have a problem. In a democratic country like The Netherlands you have the right to express your opinion, not to kill. Extremists may think they take revenge in behalf all Muslims, but the opposite is true and revenge has nothing to do with Islam.

### **Still, they refer to the Koran, which says that non-believers and enemies of Islam have to be destroyed.**

That is the problem exactly. I will address this issue at a conference in Indonesia shortly. It is a technical matter. You can't just take a fragment of the Koran out of its context and use it whenever it is convenient for you. God never said non-believers should be destroyed. God has said religion cannot be forced upon people. You can not force believers to kill non-believers. It is a total misrepresentation, a technical matter, only to be explained properly by a scribe. It would take a very long article and a longlasting discussion to give the answer. There are Muslims, like Wahabists, who consider other Muslims, traditional Muslims, Sufis and followers of Maliki, Hanafim and Shafi'i as non-believers. They only think of themselves as believers. Those people are crazy.

### **Do you respect followers of other religions?**

That is what God says in the Koran, but not everybody reads or understands the Koran well. According to Islam God has sent the Torah as light to its followers and Moses, the Bible as light to Jesus and his followers and the Koran as light to Mohammed

and His followers. Of course we have to respect other religions. I do not only respect Christians and Jews, but also Buddhists, Hindus, even atheists. I have to respect them. God created us all equal. We are all the children of Adam, that's why we have to respect everybody's beliefs. He has given everybody the freedom to follow his own path. If somebody wants to be an atheist, that's his choice. If somebody else wants to follow the Jewish teachings, I will have to respect that, because it's what that person wants. The same applies to Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or any other belief or religion in the world.

In Mohammed's time there were also Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians in Medina, but the prophet did not fight them. He didn't have a problem with them and they not with him. The prophet stood up for all people who were threatened or tortured. They defended themselves. The prophet has spent 13 years in Mecca where He was teaching Islam and preaching His gospel.

He never used the sword.

So of course we respect the religions of other people. We are Sufi Muslims and open our hearts to everybody. Rumi once said (we are his pupils): 'I don't know whether I am Muslim, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist or Zoroastrian, because I feel them all inside me. I feel I am one of God's creations. He has created them as well as me. They are one with me and I am one with them.' Faith is something between yourself and the Lord and not between yourself and other people. It is something special you share with the Lord and not with anybody else. That's why we respect everybody.

'God has created this Earth for all people to live in peace. If God would not have wanted that, he would have put the Muslims on Mars, the Jews on the moon, the Hindus on Bermuda and the Zoroastrians on another planet to keep their ideas apart. God wants everybody to live in peace and happiness and to be loyal to each other'.

### **How do you think Islam will develop in Europe and how should we approach fundamentalists?**

That's a political issue, which has nothing to do with a technical explanation of Islam, moderate Muslims or Sufis. Besides, the kind of development depends on who we are talking about and the organisations they represent. Are they members of the Muslim community? Are they Wahabists, Salafists or do they belong to groups like Hizbul-Tarir? Are they traditional Sufi-Muslims? In that case the development will be loving, peaceful and without any violence. There will be an integrated community, where people are living side by side, without any distinction. The Muslim Brotherhood is another story. The Brotherhood makes its own laws and is hostile towards everybody. Followers of the Brotherhood start saying they are peaceful and cooperative, but actually they want to change the system. They want to establish an Islamic state. Just like the Hizbul Tarir, another Wahabistic/Salafistic movement. If the Sufis are the dominant Muslims on radio or television the message will be peaceful. If the other groups are dominant, nobody knows. Please accept that the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful. They want to pray and go home. But many Muslims don't visit the Mosque anymore. They are afraid of the radical and extremist views expressed by their leaders. What are their convictions? If they have extreme views, society has a problem. If they are Sufi's there is no problem at all. Put Sufis in charge in the Western world. That's the best way to eradicate extremism.

**Do Muslim leaders want to integrate into European society, in different political systems?**

Of course, but you have to wonder why. Some have their own agenda, others don't. There are leaders who really want to integrate. They want to be a part of the system, to be able to change the future and to demand certain solutions they can later use against the democratic system or existing legislation. Others want to integrate because they want to be a part of the country and the system to be able to contribute to society. That's why both parties want to integrate. On the hand there are the moderate, peaceful Sufis who want lead a quiet and happy life in Dutch or European society, because they are suppressed and tyrannized in their own country. Here they enjoy freedom of speech. They are not persecuted because of their origin and faith. On the other hand there are extremist leaders who want to integrate to change the rules. They are the real threat.

Could moderate Muslims join different political parties and become full members of Dutch society?

Of course. When you decide to relocate to Holland for example, you trade a dictatorial system for a place that's open, free and welcoming. It's obvious you want to be part of that political system. Express your opinion, take part in elections, raise your voice and be yourself. You cannot say: 'Because I am a Muslim, I can't be part of the system'.

**Should there be anti-terrorist Muslim councils all over the world?**

That is obvious. Sincere Muslims know their community and are aware of the dangers of extremism. They know who pose a threat to Dutch society. There should be a Muslim council in The Netherlands, like there is one already in the United States.

**Do you believe in a peaceful solution for the Middle East?**

Of course peace has a chance. The death of Yassir Arafat has cleared the way to bring different parties together. But I say it once again: It is impossible for the Palestinians to sign a peace treaty without the support of other important Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia). Otherwise it will be very difficult to reach an agreement. If they talk and negotiate, Palestinians and Israelis could sign an agreement and end the conflict.



Hisham Kabbani is a prominent American Sufi Muslim. Kabbani advocates an understanding of Islam described by his supporters as fundamentally based on peace, tolerance, respect and love. Kabbani descended from a long line of scholars and was born in Beirut, Lebanon. For more than fifty years he has been a disciple of Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Qubrusi al-Haqqani. On the order of al-Qubrusi, Sheikh Hisham relocated to the United States in 1991, where he has opened thirteen Sufi outreach centers, focused on spreading Sufism. He has lectured at many universities, including the University of Chicago, Columbia University and the University of California, Berkeley, as well as at many spiritual and religious centers throughout North America, Europe, the Far East, and the Middle East. Kabbani has supported relief efforts in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, his native Lebanon, and Somalia, and peace initiatives in the Middle East, Bosnia, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Kosovo. For further information: [hishamkabbani@speakersacademy.eu](mailto:hishamkabbani@speakersacademy.eu)

**Could your organisation be the bridge between Israel and the Palestinians?**

If asked, we will try to come up with ideas and proposals. If asked officially, we will do what we can to end bloodshed on both sides.

**What is your message to young people of all nations and religions?**

Don't listen to the Wahabistic sect, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizbul-Tahrir or similar organisations. Don't accept extremist or radical points of view. God has created this Earth for everybody to live in peace. If God would not have wanted that, he would have put the Muslims on Mars, the Jews on the moon, the Hindus on Bermuda and the Zoroastrians on another planet to keep their ideas apart. God wants everybody to live in peace and happiness and to be loyal to each other. Don't let your emotions get in the way of logic, don't listen to those who try to brainwash you. You are young and have the future. You are the new generation. Go study and become doctors, lawyers or politicians, become a part of the system, integrate, marry somebody from your country of origin or the country you live in. Build up a social life, a social circle and live happily on this God-given planet Earth.

**Do you have a personal message to the Dutch government? How should they approach the Muslim community?**

Of course I know how. If the government invites me officially, I will contribute with ideas, thoughts and guidelines. If they agree, fine. If not, we could try to modify those ideas in accordance with the practical needs in your country.

**You have advised the American administration on how imams should be educated in the US and not in the countries of origin?**

I meant very important imams, or imams who have been incarcerated. They studied in prison and became imams after being released. Muslims should not follow that kind of leaders. Muslim leaders should be trained in the country they live in. The Dutch government could introduce Islamic studies at different universities. Students should only be allowed to act as an imam in a mosque after graduation. Otherwise you're asking for trouble. This is not the only thing. I've got many other ideas and topics to talk about.



**We do not walk on our legs, but on our will.**  
—Sufi proverb—