



Reading Group Gold

The Trouble with Islam Today

by Irshad Manji

Introduction to *The Trouble with Islam Today*

"I have to be honest with you. Islam is on very thin ice with me....Through our screaming self-pity and our conspicuous silences, we Muslims are conspiring against ourselves. We're in crisis and we're dragging the rest of the world with us. If ever there was a moment for an Islamic reformation, it's now. For the love of God, what are we doing about it?"

In this open letter, Irshad Manji unearths the troubling cornerstones of mainstream Islam today: tribal insularity, deep-seated anti-Semitism, and an uncritical acceptance of the Koran as the final, and therefore superior, manifesto of God's will. But her message is ultimately positive. She offers a practical vision of how Islam can undergo a reformation that empowers women, promotes respect for religious minorities, and fosters a competition of ideas. Her vision revives "ijtihad," Islam's lost tradition of independent thinking. In that spirit, Irshad has a refreshing challenge for both Muslims and non-Muslims: Don't silence yourselves. Ask questions---out loud. *The Trouble with Islam Today* is a clarion call for a fatwa-free future.

Praise for *The Trouble with Islam Today*

"...feels like a revelation...a raw nerve ending for the West - shocking, raw, but mercifully, joyously, still alive." - Andrew Sullivan, *New York Times Book Review*, 1/25/2004

"Irshad Manji is a fresh, new and intriguing voice of Islamic reform. This wonderfully written book will surprise you, educate you, even entertain you." - Alan Dershowitz, author of *The Case for Israel*

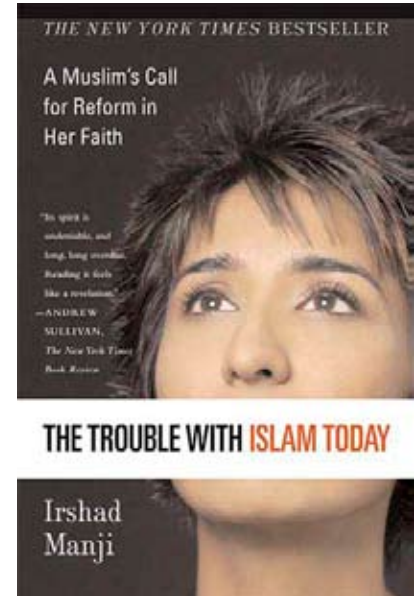
"[Manji's] ideas have already set off a searching debate." - Clifford Krauss, *The New York Times*

"Tightly reasoned and packed with knockout punches." - Pat Donnelly, *Montreal Gazette*

"Manji is blazingly articulate." - Margaret Wente, *The Globe and Mail* (Canada)

"The Trouble with Islam is beyond controversial. It may ignite a firestorm of protest...her easy conversational style, addressed to 'my fellow Muslims,' makes it accessible to a wide range of readers."

- Leslie Scrivener, *The Toronto Star*



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Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Irshad Manji writes her book in the form of an open letter. Do you like this approach? In what ways do you find this style successful or unsuccessful?
2. One of the biggest debates about this book is its title. Irshad has responded to the controversy by clarifying that the trouble is with Islam “today.” Does this change add balance to her argument?
3. Did you check Irshad’s sources on her Web site? If so, what did you think about this tactic? Did it engage you to go beyond the book?
4. Irshad has been criticized for challenging her fellow Muslims at a time when fear of Islam is rampant. Is there ever a good time to write a book like this?
5. Irshad defines herself as a Muslim refusenik. What does she mean by this statement and do you feel it is valid?
6. Irshad shows that the Koran contains passages that are both hostile and friendly toward women. So why does the public focus on the Koran’s negative verses? Is it the media, the mullahs, or the silent moderates who should take responsibility for Islam’s antifemale image?
7. Throughout the book, Irshad emphasizes ijtiḥad, Islam’s lost tradition of independent thinking. Why, according to her, did ijtiḥad die in much of the Muslim world?
8. Historically, Irshad claims, the rift between Muslims and Jews started well before the state of Israel existed. What does she see as the source of the rift?
9. Irshad distinguishes between religion and culture, saying that Arab culture places too strong a hold on the way Islam is practiced. What are her examples and do you agree with them?
10. Irshad’s campaign to revive ijtiḥad starts by economically empowering women in the Islamic world. Does this sound like a realistic solution? What can you do to support it?
11. Irshad quotes Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who said that every society needs people to create nonviolent tension and jolt others out of moral complacency. Is Islamic reform the new global civil rights movement? If so, what role does Irshad envision non-Muslims playing in this movement?
12. Do you share Irshad’s suspicions about interfaith dialogue?
13. What value does Irshad find in religion? Are dissidents like her entitled to “keep the faith” or is religion meant to be a set of rules by which you have to play if you’re going to stay?



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14. At the end of the book, Irshad tells us that a friend felt her tough love approach to Muslims needs more love. Does it?

15. In her acknowledgments, Irshad says that “despite being an observant Muslim, [my mother] never asked me not to write this book. She has, however, cautioned me not to anger God.” If your child were to write a controversial critique of your religion, what would you advise him or her?

About the Author

Irshad Manji is an acclaimed journalist, lecturer, and human rights advocate based in Toronto. Recognizing Irshad’s leadership, Oprah Winfrey honored her with a Chutzpah Award for “audacity, nerve, boldness, and conviction.” Ms. magazine has named Irshad a “Feminist for the 21st Century.” She is also a recipient of the Simon Wiesenthal Award for Valor.