



In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Submitters Perspective

Monthly Bulletin of International
Community of Submitters



Published by Masjid Tucson
Zil Qada 1423

Submission: *The Next American Religion?*

[This article consists of excerpts taken from "*Islam: The Next American Religion?*" which appeared on beliefnet.com. The web address of the original article is provided at the end, below author's name.]

The U.S. began as a haven for Christian outcasts. But what religion fits our current zeitgeist [spirit of the time]? The answer may be Islam.

Americans tend to think of their country as, at the very least, a nominally Christian nation. Didn't the Pilgrims come here for freedom to practice their Christian religion? Don't Christian values of righteousness under God, and freedom, reinforce America's

democratic, capitalist ideals? True enough. But there's a new religion on the block now, one that fits the current zeitgeist nicely. It's Islam. Islam is the third-largest and fastest growing religious community in the United States. This is not just because of immigration. More than 50% of America's six million Muslims were born here. Statistics like these imply some basic agreement between core American values and the beliefs that Muslims hold. Americans who make the effort to look beyond popular stereotypes to learn the truth of Islam are surprised to find themselves on familiar ground. Is America a Muslim nation? Here

are seven reasons the answer may be yes.

Islam is monotheistic. Muslims worship the same God as Jews and Christians. They also revere the same prophets as Judaism and Christianity, from Abraham, the first monotheist, to Moses, the law giver and messenger of God, to Jesus—not leaving out Noah, Job, or Isaiah along the way. The concept of a Judeo-Christian tradition only came to the fore in the 1940s in America. Now, as a nation, we may be transcending it, turning to a more inclusive "Abrahamic" view....

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Islam is democratic in spirit. Islam advocates the right to vote and educate yourself and pursue a profession. The Qur'an, on which Islamic law is based, enjoins Muslims to govern themselves by discussion and consensus. In mosques, there is no particular priestly hierarchy. With Islam, each individual is responsible for the condition of her or his own soul. Everyone stands equal before God.

Americans, who mostly associate Islamic government with a handful of tyrants, may find this independent spirit surprising, supposing that Muslims are somehow predisposed to passive submission. Nothing could be further from the truth. The dictators reigning today in the Middle East are not the result of Islamic principles. They are more a result of global economics and the aftermath of European colonialism. Meanwhile, like everyone else, average Muslims the world over want a larger say in what goes on in the countries where they live. Those in America may actually succeed in it. In this way, America is closer in spirit to Islam than many Arab countries.

Islam contains an attractive mystical tradition. Mysticism is grounded in the individual search for God. Where better to do that than in America, land of individualists and spiritual seekers? And who might better benefit than Americans from the centuries-long tradition of teachers and students that characterize Islam.

Islam is egalitarian. From New York to California, the only houses of worship that are routinely in-

tegrated today are the approximately 4,000 Muslim mosques. That is because Islam is predicated on a level playing field, especially when it comes to standing before God. The Pledge of Allegiance (one nation, "under God") and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (all people are "created equal") express themes that are also basic to Islam.

Islam is often viewed as an aggressive faith because of the concept of jihad, but this is actually a misunderstood term. Because Muslims believe that God wants a just world, they tend to be activists, and they emphasize that people are equal before God. These are two reasons why African Americans have been drawn in such large numbers to Islam. They now comprise about one-third of all Muslims in America.

Meanwhile, this egalitarian streak also plays itself out in relations between the sexes. Muhammad, Islam's prophet, actually was a reformer in his day. Following the Qur'an, he limited the number of wives a man could have and strongly recommended against polygamy. The Qur'an laid out a set of marriage laws that guarantees married women their family names, their own possessions and capital, the right to agree upon whom they will marry, and the right to initiate divorce. In Islam's early period, women were professionals and property owners, as increasingly they are today. None of this may seem obvious to most Americans because of cultural overlays that at times make Islam appear to be a repressive faith toward women—but if you look more closely, you can see the egalitarian streak preserved in the Qur'an finding expression in contemporary terms....

Islam shares America's new interest in food purity and diet. Muslims conduct a monthlong fast during the holy month of Ramadan, a practice that many Americans admire and even seek to emulate. I happened to spend quite a bit of time with a non-Muslim friend during Ramadan this year. After a month of being exposed to a practice that brings some annual control to human consumption, my friend let me know, in January, that he was "doing a little Ramadan" of his own. I asked what he meant. "Well, I'm not drinking anything or smoking anything for at least a month, and I'm going off coffee." Given this friend's normal intake of coffee, I could not believe my ears....

Islam is tolerant of other faiths. Like America, Islam has a history of respecting other religions. In Muhammad's day, Christians, Sabians, and Jews in Muslim lands retained their own courts and enjoyed considerable autonomy. As Islam spread east toward India and China, it came to view Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism as valid paths to salvation. As Islam spread north and west, Judaism especially benefited. The return of the Jews to Jerusalem, after centuries as outcasts, only came about after Muslims took the city in 638. The first thing the Muslims did there was to rescue the Temple Mount, which by then had been turned into a garbage heap. Today, of course, the long discord between Israel and Palestine has acquired harsh religious overtones.

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THIS MONTH'S BIT OF WISDOM AND REFLECTION: "Kindness has converted more sinners than zeal, eloquence or learning." – F. W. Faber

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Tucson, AZ

ISSN 1089-053X

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Yet the fact remains that this is a battle for real estate, not a war between two faiths. Islam and Judaism revere the same prophetic lineage, back to Abraham, and no amount of bullets or barbed wire can change that....

Islam encourages the pursuit of religious freedom. The Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock is not the world's first story of religious emigration. Muhammad and his little band of 100 followers fled religious persecution, too, from Mecca in the year 622. They only survived by going to Madinah, an oasis a few hundred miles north, where they established a new community based on a religion they could only practice secretly back home....

All in all, there seems to be a deep resonance between Islam and the United States. Although one is a world religion and the other is a sovereign nation, both are traditionally very strong on individual responsibility....

Who knows? Perhaps it won't be long now before words like salat (Muslim prayer) and Ramadan join karma and Nirvana in Webster's

Dictionary, and Muslims take their place in America's mainstream.

Michael Wolfe

www.beliefnet.com/index/index_40110.html

Ed's note: It is a Quranic prophecy that "Submission" is destined to prevail.

[9:33, 61:9] He is the One who sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, and will make it dominate all religions, in spite of the idol worshippers.

Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd;
I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me to water in places of repose;
He renews my life;
He guides me in right paths as befits His name.
Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness;
I fear no harm, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff— they comfort me.

You spread a table for me in full view of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my drink is abundant.
Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me
all the days of my life
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for many long years

Reader Comments

As-salaamu Alaikum

My brothers and sisters, just a short notation to say thanks for your faithful and complimentary issues of Submitters Perspective. Please give my salutations to your community Masjid Tucson.

...I have been practicing Islam just since 1997, but MashaAllah, [God] has blessed me to have taken my [true] Shahadah...: To come to understand the truth as the practice of Islam based on the Quran, not *Hadithism*.

I place my trust in Allah that He keep me on the straight path, guide me to live up to my Muslim name, and all praise to Him for bringing me out of the stages of darkness, deaf, dumb, and blind.

I find your articles illuminating: It helps my growth and understanding; clears up or illuminates the truth to religion "Islam" and other religions and innovations and traditions that mere mortals have imposed.

You have given me the understanding and a guide to practice Islam, the truth, and enabled me to advise on the truth as Allah has given us....

May Allah reward you all, and admit you to Paradise for your faithful devotion in spreading His true faith: And please continue, inshaAllah.

May Allah's protection be with you....

Garry S. *[an incarcerated brother]*