

Conclusion

Looking back at those first days and months and years when I read the Quran, certain that I could not become a Muslim because I *knew* Islam was unfair to women, I am reminded of my favorite Nasrudin story. Nasrudin is a folk hero known throughout the Muslim world. He is known by many names. He is called Mullah Nasrudin, Nasreddin Hodja or just Hodja, among others. The tales of his hilarious adventures brighten the days of countless people.

This story is one of the Turkish versions, told by a wonderful Turkish brother in one of his *khutbahs* (or short talks given during the Friday congregational prayer). I hope my retelling will be as enjoyable as his was.

One evening after dinner, Hodja told his wife, "Tomorrow I will work in the wheat field, unless it is raining. If it is raining, I will go gather firewood in the woods."

She replied, "Say '*In Shā Allah*' ('God willing'), as the Quran tells us to do."

"Look," he answered, "it is not a question of whether or not God is willing. I have decided what I will do. Either it will rain or not. In either case I know what I will do."

She continued to argue with him for a short while, and then just gave up and went to bed.

The next morning was bright and sunny. Hodja headed for the wheat field. He was in such a hurry that he did not even stop to eat any breakfast.

On the road he met a group of soldiers. "Hey, old man, how do we get to the next village?" they asked him.

He really did not have time for such things, so he lied, "I do not know."

"Maybe this will help you remember," they said as they began to beat him with their sticks.

"Oh, now I remember," he screamed, but it was too late. He had made them angry, and they forced him to lead them to the next village.

It was a long way off, and the trail was rough and steep. On the way it began to rain. By the time they got to the next village Hodja was thoroughly soaked, muddy and very sore. Finally they let him turn around and head for home.

He finally got home about midnight. He banged on the door, hoping to wake his wife. Sleepily she called out, "Who is it?"

"It's me, Hodja...*In Shā Allah!*"

Like Hodja, I was certain of what I knew. I knew that Islam was unfair to women, and that I could never be a Muslim. I did not say "*In Shā Allah,*" And God mercifully proved me wrong, and guided me.

I hope the previous chapters have demonstrated how wrong I was. Islam, as practiced from the Quran, is totally fair to women, and to everyone else. It is a religion of tolerance, justice and freedom.

Now I say I am Muslim, "*In Shā Allah.*" As I have slowly and consciously handed my life more and more over to God, I have become more and more contented. It did not happen immediately, as God explains in this verse:

We will certainly put you to the test, in order to distinguish those among you who strive, and steadfastly persevere.

We must expose your true qualities.

(Quran: The Final Testament 47:31)

Yes, we will be tested, not to show God who we really are, but to show ourselves. God already knows. If we continue to "*strive and steadfastly persevere,*" truly trying to submit our will to God's will, there comes a point where certainty of who He really is enters our heart. I believe that as that happens, heaven begins here:

Those who proclaim: "Our Lord is God," then lead a righteous life, the angels descend upon them: "You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve. Rejoice in the good news that Paradise has been reserved for you. "We are your allies in this life, and in the Hereafter. You will have in it anything you wish for; you will have anything you want."

(Quran: The Final Testament 41:30-31)

Rashad Khalifa puts the subtitle "*Perfect Happiness: Now and Forever*" above these verses.

I have seen the truth of these verses manifesting in the lives of others. I see it happening in my own life, praise God. I hope it is happening in yours, whether or not you call yourself Muslim.

