

Why Islam is Not the Answer

It was one of the most important moments of her life; the fate of her people rested upon her shoulders. Away from the comforts of her home and stuck in a foreign land, she faced two choices: Accept change, or remain loyal to the customs and ideals that defined her kingdom.

As the Queen examined the foreign country she was visiting, she saw a powerful nation where people lived in prosperity and happiness. She saw a cultural explosion, a strong economy, a healthy and organized society, and feats of engineering and architecture that were simply unimaginable. And with such accomplishments in site, she could not help but appreciate the driving force behind these achievements. She could not help but admire the idea; the idea that was powerful enough to cause such positive change; an idea that everyone must surely seek to aspire to.

Walking into King Suleiman's Palace (Solomon), she witnessed a marvel of engineering that simply astonished her, and with that final display of power and accomplishment, the Queen made her decision: she would worship the Sun no longer. Instead, she would embrace Suleiman's faith of the one true god.

The story of the Queen of "Sabaa" is among the most prominent in the Quran. Its importance cannot be understated because it shows a critical element of the human psyche that we should all be aware of.

The Queen did not convert because of any ideological argument. She was never persuaded by words or by the principles of the religion preached by Suleiman. What led her to convert was witnessing the accomplishments and the benefits brought to Suleiman and his people by adopting this new faith. In addition, it was the character, kindness and justice displayed by Suleiman and his followers that made the religion appealing. It was a religion that not only enabled the country to prosper, but healed society and made its inhabitants better off in all aspects of life.

Whether we like it or not, ideas, religions, or concepts are never assessed based on their content, but by the results they acquire and by the character, virtues and values displayed by its followers. From Hegel to Marx, from Judaism to Christianity, all ideas, having succeeded or failed in earning the appreciation of fellow man, ultimately depend on their success in elevating societies and individuals, whether it be through material gains or spiritual gains. Islam is no different.

Contrary to western perception, Islam was not spread by the sword but by pure conviction. The mass of Arabs converted to Islam during the truce period between Medina and Mecca. Similarly, the Arab conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries did not force Islam on the conquered populace of Persia and North Africa. In fact, the Arab empire at that time was the most tolerant of its age. Yet Islam as a religion spread like wildfire across the empire and more critically, in Asian countries under non-islamic rule. Why did it do so? Why did Islam become the fastest growing religion in the world? What was the secret behind its success? The answer, as I have already explained, is the benefit that Islam brought to its people:

It took a bunch of Arab nomads, who were despised by the world and deemed not even worthy of conquest by men such as Alexander the Great, and turned them into leaders in all fields of life. From science to the military, from living standards to human rights, Islamic countries prospered in an unimaginable short period of time. Furthermore, this religion brought its inhabitants a sense of spirituality that helped them accomplish everything they ever wanted to. It instilled values, virtues and morals that were the envy of humanity.

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But if an idea is assessed by its accomplishments and the people that follow it, what say you of Islam in this current day and age? I myself am entranced by the beauty of the message, yet if I were to look around as the Queen of Sabaa did at our countries and the followers of this faith, I will simply be appalled:

While the Queen saw power and prosperity, I see poverty, hunger, and foreign occupation. While she saw unity and cohesion, I see strife, anger, and corruption. While she saw scientific accomplishment and engineering and technological feats that astonished the world, I see lack of innovation, research, and a society that is utterly reliant on foreign labor, products, and ideas. While she saw mercy and tolerance, I see intolerable cruelty and bigotry.

What brought us here? I hear many opinions, one of which claims that we have strayed from the teachings of the Quran. But this is not the subject of this article, nor does it matter as the why is not as important as the so what - what is the impact of all this on us and on Islam?

Surveying the carnage that is the Islamic world and the people that inhabit it, I cannot help but understand why Islam is seen as a violent and backward religion. It is a religion that, to an outsider, seems to inspire hatred, backwardness, and negative change. Are people who hold such opinions bigots? They most likely are, I do agree... but if one were to be honest with one self, one can at least see the logic behind such a conclusion.

We are a people bereft of morals, devoid of respect, utterly corrupt and nothing more than a liability to this world. Harsh words I am sure you would agree, but none the less, are sadly true. To the people out there who believe in the wonderful message of Islam, myself included, I say Islam is not the answer... for a religion is not judged based on its ideas, but based on its people.

For the people who are fed up with the negative image connoted to Islam. For the people who are sometimes ashamed to be identified as Muslim. If you would like to change this impression, if you want to show people the true beauty of this faith, if you want to hold your head up high and be proud of the values and ideas you cherish, the road to salvation does not lie in telling people, but in showing them. They say actions speak louder than words; if you want to do your part in showing that Islam has a place in this world, remember that it is your actions and accomplishments that are the key to earning back the respect and admiration that was once attributed to this great religion.

It is a time of change in the middle east, perhaps the time has come for Arabs and Muslims alike to stop talking and start showing.

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