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Description: How a roulette analogy helped this former Las Vegas resident become a Muslim. Part 1: Gathering the Initial Pieces of “the Purpose of Life Puzzle”.

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I once thought my upbringing offered an excellent way of life, especially since I felt satisfied both mentally and physically. As a young man, I lived the life of an average American who had a rather hedonistic lifestyle; I was fond of music, festive atmospheres, women, sports, travel, ethnic foods and foreign languages. I reached a point, however, where I felt ‘spiritually bankrupt’ and I asked myself, “now what?” and I thought, “there has to be more to life than this!” This realization was the impetus that led me to search for the truth through diverse avenues.

I assumed the reason I felt spiritually unfulfilled had to do with my lifestyle in America, which was often tied to instant gratification and impulsive behavior. As a result, I speculated that the answer might lie in finding a better locale. Thus, I began looking for that perfect place. After traveling to numerous destinations, I discovered that it wasn’t so much a perfect location I was looking for, but a particular culture with the most suitable approach to life. When I found what I considered to be the most appealing culture, I recognized that it still had flaws. Thereafter, I surmised that we should learn about the different ways people live and then select the best from these practices. This was perhaps what set me on my journey to seek the truth.

Unable to really implement the life of a global citizen, I chose to read materials on metaphysics because the esoteric things in life always intrigued me. I quickly learned everything functions according to universal laws which can be used for one’s own benefit. After reading many books on this subject, I concluded that more important than these laws is the One Who created them, i.e., God. I also discovered metaphysics can be a precarious path to follow, in which case, I refrained from any further reading in this area.

On the suggestion of a good friend, we went on a three-month camping trip all over America and Western Canada with the intention of discovering the purpose of life. We witnessed the marvels of nature and realized this world could not have been created by mistake, and that it was clearly a wonderland of signs pointing to its Creator. Hence, this trip reinforced my belief in God.

After returning home, I felt distressed at the busy life of the city, so I turned to meditation for relief. I was able to find inner peace through meditation techniques. Nevertheless, this tranquil feeling was only temporary; once I stood up, I couldn't take that feeling with me. Likewise, being consistent with meditation became too much of a formidable task, so I slowly started losing interest.

Before long, I thought the truth might lie in self-improvement. Therefore I became a voracious reader of motivational materials and attended related seminars. In addition, I was striving to live up to the US Army's slogan on TV commercials, 'Be all you can be', through endeavors in fire-walking, skydiving and martial arts. Due to my reading and challenging exploits, I gained a keen sense of self-confidence, but in fact, I still hadn't discovered the truth.

Soon afterwards, I read numerous books on various philosophies. I found many interesting concepts and practices; yet, there wasn't any particular philosophy that I could totally agree with. Thus, I chose to consolidate what I thought was the best wisdom from among these doctrines. It became sort of a 'religion à la carte' which mainly emphasized good moral behavior. I eventually concluded that good morality was good, but it was not good enough to solve 'the purpose of life puzzle' which was a more spiritual approach to life.

Shortly thereafter, I obtained a job in a Muslim country where I had enough free time to read and reflect on life. While continuing my search for the truth, I found a recommendation in a book concerning the need for sincere repentance to God. I proceeded to do so and felt remorse for all the people I had wronged in my life, to the degree that tears started rolling down my face.

A few days later, I had a conversation with some Muslim friends. I mentioned to them that I was used to having a lot more freedom in America than that which was present in their country. One person said, "Well, it depends on what you mean by 'freedom'. In your part of the world, no matter how well parents teach morality to their children inside the home, as soon as they go outside, they generally encounter the society in contradiction to that morality. On the other hand, in most Muslim communities, the morals taught to the children at home are very similar to what they find away from home. So who really has the freedom here?" From this analogy, I inferred that the Islamic guidelines and restrictions partially sanctioning human behavior are not meant to curtail human freedom; rather, they served to define and dignify human freedom.

A further opportunity to learn about Islam arose when I was invited to sit with a group of Muslims over dinner. After mentioning to the group that I had been living in Las Vegas, Nevada before coming to the Middle East, a Muslim from America said, "You must make sure you die as a good Muslim." I immediately asked him to explain what he meant. He said, "If you die as a non-Muslim, it is like playing the game of roulette in which you put all of your chips (all of your life, including your deeds and your particular belief in God) on only one number, just hoping that perhaps by the Mercy of God, you will enter Paradise on Judgment Day. In contrast, if you die as a good Muslim, it is like

spreading your chips all over the roulette board, so that every number is covered in this way, no matter what number the ball falls on, you're safe. In other words, living and dying as a good Muslim is the best insurance you will not go to the Hell, and at the same time, it is the best investment that you'll go to Paradise." As a former resident of Las Vegas, I could directly relate to this poignant example with the game of roulette.

At this point, I understood I would not find the truth until I began to concentrate on those religions in which God had sent revelation to His prophets and messengers. Hence, I chose to continue my search for the truth through Christianity and Islam.

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