

SAM, EX-AGNOSTIC, UK

Rating: 4.7

Description: How the good manners of Muslims and the wisdom in the teachings of Islam attracted Sam to Islam.

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I think I first became aware of Islam through watching Spike Lee's film Malcolm X. Though America's Nation of Islam is more a political movement Malcolm X did convert to orthodox Islam after going for Hajj. I was impressed even back then when I was 15, how a lowlife hoodlum could completely rewire his upbringing and instinct to be an ambassador for freedom and spirituality. Even though at the time, I was more concerned with worldly pursuits; Drinking, substance abuse and women were my top priorities, and seemed to be everyone else's as well. Though my parents brought me up well, I couldn't resist the temptations surrounding me, and as a boy from a poor family, I began to steal to attain these habits. I disrespected myself, my girlfriends and worst of all my parents. It was an incredibly selfish and destructive path to follow. I became a better person when a Muslim family befriended me and invited me to live with them. The wife and mother of the family taught me many aspects of Islam, and that I should respect and honour my parents and myself, and that I should eat *halal* and not ingest poisons. They taught me to be loving, kind and charitable and also to be humble. I saw the wisdom in this and gained happiness briefly by following her example. At that point in time, I was 19. Unfortunately, this good woman's husband was not a very good Muslim, and was a thief and a drug dealer, and I began to follow his example as well, which was conflicting.

When we parted ways I was a better person with better morals. I believed in God now, would only eat *halal*, and was respectful of my parents, charitable and humble, and didn't steal, but I was not yet a Muslim. Being a night owl, I thought it would be impossible for me to commit to the *Fajr* prayer. I also didn't believe I could master the Arabic prayers and commit to giving up alcohol and women. I was also unsure as to which religion was the right one as I had met many wonderful Hindu friends as well. But it was a start.

For the next 16 years I worked, and studied and gradually elevated myself to a respectable place in society, I earned a good degree in animation and became a successful animator/illustrator. I married a wonderful woman and fathered a girl and boy (along with a girl from my wife's previous marriage). I had met many British Muslims along the way, and felt an affinity with them and respect for their ways, always

defending them in discussions and looking up to them. We visited Turkey in 2010 and it opened my eyes to see how family-orientated, friendly and unmaterialistic the Muslim Turkish people were. But it wasn't until August 2011, the month of Ramadan, when we as a family visited Luxor in Egypt on holiday. My wife and I were dumbfounded by Muslim Egyptian people's hospitality and generosity, even though they were very poor. The fact that they would fast for 15 hours a day in the scorching heat and still be utterly kind and loving, especially to our children. Here were a people that prioritized charity and brotherhood and sisterhood over material possessions and wealth. Our family was welcomed into the family of a poor horse and carriage driver who took us into their very humble home and lavished us with feasts. At the end of each day we would be invited to dine by the side of the road by complete strangers in celebration of breaking the fast.

I began to look again closely at the beauty of Islam, the science of Islam, and the life of Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him. I began looking at all the fundamentals of Islamic Faith and marvelled at each one. The way that Muslims prayed and humbled themselves before Allah 5 times per day, served as a constant reminder that they were mortal and following a higher power. The fasting served as a reminder that one was to take care of those less fortunate and be thankful to God for what blessings they received. The way that Muslims followed the example of Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was indeed something to marvel.

Things that had originally put me off the religion through "the Western eye" now made perfect sense to me. When we returned from Egypt I could not find peace. I wanted to convert to Islam but didn't want to if my loving wife didn't as well. I read about the scientific research that had been completed regarding the Quran from all over the world, such as the description of the developing stages of a foetus, and that a man living 1500 years ago could not have possibly known of such things, and that it was proof that the Quran was the Divine word of God, and this was the catalyst for me. Here was scientific proof for something otherwise deemed as faith alone. I decided to convert and prayed that my wife would follow after seeing the change it brought about in me. I was apprehensive about learning the Arabic prayers, but within a month had easily memorized them to an advanced level. I am now utterly at peace with myself and Allah. Though my wonderful wife has not converted, she believes in God and is a good person, and is very supportive of my choice and is raising our 2 infants as Muslims.

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