

A dialogue between a Muslim man and an American Christian woman

Part 6

Jennifer embraced Islam

By

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After the end of his visit to America, Omar returned back to Egypt and resumed military work in his military base. From the letters he received from Walker and Jennifer he was happy to know that they got married and that Jennifer was pregnant.

After five years from his return to Egypt the Egyptian government appointed him as a military attaché in the Egyptian embassy in Washington DC.

In his office at the embassy Omar received a telephone call from Walker and Jennifer offering to show him Washington DC attractions. Omar considered their offer a rare opportunity to reunite with his two dear American friends. The next morning Walker and Jennifer picked up Omar and toured the city covering Lincoln, Jefferson, and Washington memorials; Smithsonian museums and the national gallery; the Capitol and the library of the Congress where they had lunch at its cafeteria. At nighttime they cruised for an hour on the Potomac River going past all the monuments. The scenery was exceptionally beautiful.

At 9 p.m. the three of them dined in a Middle Eastern restaurant. They dined in the courtyard-like dining room, where oriental music played and the walls were hung with prayer rugs. They enjoyed eating a variety of oriental food; demi mezze with pita for dipping, hummus, tabouleh, baba ghanoush, pastry-wrapped spinach pies, and char-grilled kebabs of chicken and shrimp.

The diners chatted about old times and their latest news:

Omar: "You still work for the Defense Department Walker?"

Walker: "I work now for the CIA. I am the Director of the Office of Military Affairs of the United States Central intelligence Agency."

Omar: "Congratulations. This is surely an important and sensitive post. So you are the man who calls the shots regarding support of American plans and operations."

Walker: “Precisely. We also conduct functions related to national security as directed by the President, as well as facing the issues of the post-Cold War World, such as terrorism and international organized crime.”

Omar said to Jennifer laughing while pointing at Walker, “And you Jennifer, what happened to you with this guy since I last saw you?”

Jennifer sighed deeply. Signs of concern were drawn on her face. She said in a serious tone, “We have two children, 2 years-old boy and his twin sister. I am trying hard to raise them decently. But how can I do that in a society opened to deviation and abuse? In it the prohibited is allowed and the unlawful is permitted. I still remember your preaches about moral beliefs, about right and wrong. Your utopian ideas are hard to adapt to our present society.”

Omar: “Just do your best Jennifer and leave the rest to Allah. He will invest your efforts to the wellbeing of the kids.”

Jennifer: “People are becoming more and more materialistic. I want to stick to the remaining traces of my humanity by abiding to Allah’s law. I want to live by Allah’s words so He might erase my past sins. I want to raise my children in chastity, in a pure environment.”

Omar: “Don’t fear about past sins. Allah’s Messenger peace be upon him said,

“By Him in Whose hands is my life, if you were not to commit sin, Allah would sweep you out of existence and He would replace you by those people who would commit sin and seek forgiveness from Allah, and He would have pardoned them.”

The Prophet also said:

“If anyone continually asks pardon, Allah will appoint for him a way out of every distress, and a relief from every anxiety, and will provide for him from where he did not reckon.”

Walker said annoyed: “You see what you have done to her Omar? You corrupted her mind. Your words were of great influence on her. She became captivated by the instructions of Islam since you preached her with your conservative ideas. I don’t know what happened exactly to her. She became meticulously concerned about the most ideal way to raise the children, and to guarantee a healthy moral life for them. Could you ever believe that she is trying to protect them from our society; the most progressed in the world. I just can’t understand why she is doing this? ”

Jennifer: “Walker is a wonderful husband. He has been patient with me so far. But after I got my babies I became obsessed with the idea of protecting them from the infatuations of life. I don’t want them to live as I lived. The most progressed society you are talking about Walker is an illusion, a big lie. Today our children’s heroes are basketball players, fashion models, singers and movie stars-people who do nothing important. They are nothing but entertainers. They teach nothing good in a real sense, they contribute nothing to society, and all they do is present an example of a wild and wealthy lifestyle, which makes our children want to duplicate it.

As the years passed by, I became increasingly concerned about the loss of religiousness in American society at large. Religiousness is a living, breathing spirituality and morality within individuals, and should not be confused with religiosity, which is concerned with the rites, rituals, and formalized creeds of some organized entity, e.g. the church. American culture increasingly appeared to have lost its moral and religious compass. Two out of every three marriages ended in divorce; violence was becoming an increasingly inherent part of our schools and our roads; self-responsibility was on the wane; self-discipline was being submerged by a “if it feels good, do it”; various Christian leaders and churches were being swamped by sexual and financial scandals; and emotions justified behavior, however odious it might be. American culture was becoming a morally bankrupt institution, and I was feeling quite alone in my personal religious vigil. Omar: “Yes, corruption has appeared in the land. The Koran says:

Corruption has appeared in the land and sea, for what the hands of the people have earned, that He may let them taste some of what which they have done, that haply so they may return (Ar Rum, 41).

Jennifer: “Your words to me Omar about your religion and the virtuous life Muslims were living made me read a lot about Islam.

Before reading in Islam, I gave little thought to modesty and what it meant to me and to society in general. The majority of people in the United States follow no type of dress code whatsoever. Both Allah-fearing and non-religious people of this country have erred in their arrogance; believers in deciding that the human being’s intellect and reason make them a better guard of morality and non-believers in thinking that modesty is a moot issue or that immodesty causes no harm.

Anywhere you look in American society, there is a reminder that the female body should be flattered, displayed, and used to attract men. Mode of dress and sexuality are inextricably linked, and this link is recognized universally,

especially by the fashion industry, which strives to bring us ever more attractive clothing designs, manipulating American vanity and egoism. Unfortunately, in the midst of all this babble about fashion, modesty has fallen by the wayside, with a steady and intentional push toward immodesty over time. Of course, non-religious people including atheists, agnostics, and others must create their own set of standards without reference to Allah. Our society makes up the rules as it goes along, so the norms on modesty, like those on sexuality, charity, prayer and marriage, are continually evolving and subject to change.”

Walker: “Jennifer dear, who cares about modesty in a world where the human body has become a piece of meat consumed in every imaginable form?”

Jennifer: “Muslims are appalled at mainstream American dress.”

Walker: “Muslim women are exhausted mothers chained to the stove, victims suppressed in a life of indoctrination. They are covered from head to toe, and are not allowed any freedom or rights. The veil is an obstacle clouding their mind. Female converts are either brainwashed, stupid or traitors to their sex.”

Jennifer: “I reject such accusations. I am surprised that you have accepted these deliberately distorted ideas about Muslim women. Why is it that so many women who have been born and brought in the so-called civilized societies of Europe and America are willing to reject their liberty to embrace a religion that supposedly oppresses them? At a time when Islam is faced with hostile media coverage particularly where the status of women in Islam is concerned, it may be quite surprising to learn that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, and even more ironic to discover that the majority of converts to Islam are women.

In my youth, when I started to meet people in bars and dancing halls in order to socialize in the so-called “society of equal rights” I realized that this equality was not so true in practice as it was in theory. When I went out with my friends to those places of entertainment, I found everybody interested to talk to me and I thought that was normal. But it was only later that I realized how naïve I was, and recognized what these people were really looking for. I soon began to feel uncomfortable, as if I was not myself. I had to dress in a certain way so that people would like me, and had to talk in a certain way to please them. Everybody was saying they were enjoying themselves, but I don’t call this enjoying.

In our society everybody thinks that he lives according to what he believes. If having sex is someone’s belief, they do everything to achieve this. If they believe drinking is one way to enjoy life then they do it. If making money is

someone's belief they do this. But this leads to nowhere; no one is truly satisfied. In the society of equal rights you are expected to have a boyfriend and to not be a virgin or you are weird. This is a form of oppression even though women do not realize it. The respect women are looking for is diminishing this way. Inwardly I wasn't satisfied with my own status as a woman in this society.

It seemed to me that society would define such terms as liberty and freedom and then these definitions were accepted by women without even attempting to question or challenge them. There was clearly a great contradiction between what women were told in theory and what actually happens in practice. The more I pondered the greater emptiness I felt within. I was slowly beginning to reach a stage where my dissatisfaction with my status as a woman in this society, was really a reflection of my greater dissatisfaction with society itself. Everything seemed to be degenerating backwards. Something vital seemed to be missing from my life and nothing would fill this void.

Christianity changes, like the way some have said pre-marital sex is okay if it's with the person you are going to marry. Islam was constant about sex, about praying five times a day. The prayer makes you conscious of Allah all the time. You're continually touching base.

I reject the freedom that American women claim to have. Women in our society are portrayed as very sexy, lady like, independent enough so that men have no real responsibility toward us or the children they help create, but dependent enough that we are continually in search of a new man. The average woman in the street is honked at, whistled at, has had her butt or breasts pinched, slapped, rubbed, or ogled by some strange woman. I never agreed with any of that and never found a "come on" flattering.

In Christianity I was taught that as a woman I should not teach in church or question the authority of any man in public. The picture painted of women in Christianity was one of inferiority. We were supposed to be chaste and silent with children about our feet.

In Islam I found a voice, a system that gave me the ultimate respect for being a mother and acknowledged the fact that I was equal to man in every way except one; physical strength. The hadith (sayings of the Prophet) is littered with stories of women who spoke publicly, and Islamic history is full of women who were leaders. It was a theology that I could respect because it respected me.

Who was not free, who was getting no respect, who was really oppressed? A girl acting as a society's whore by wearing skin tight jeans, getting cat calls from boys and rolling by in cars, or a Muslim girl wearing hijab (veil)

covering the hair, arms and legs? Hijab is shielding the woman from harm and corruption. It doesn't restrict the freedom of the woman to move about and to carry out all her normal duties.

It would seem that a western woman's happiness hinges largely upon her access to nightclubs, alcohol and revealing clothes; and the absence of such apparent freedom and luxuries in Islamic societies is seen as an infringement of her basic rights. However, as we all know, such superficialities have very little to do with true happiness. Besides, without in any way wishing to disparage the culture of the western world, into which I was born, I am more than willing to forgo the transient pleasures derived from alcohol and nightclubs. As for the clothes I will be wearing, I find the traditional hijab worn by most Muslim women far more elegant and feminine than anything in my wardrobe does."

Walker: "Most American women would see the head covering as degrading because hair is tied to identity and a sense of beauty in American culture."

Jennifer: "Quite often Muslim women are asked why they are covered from head to toe, and are told that this is oppression. It is not. Those who convert say they feel more valued. The head covering hides them from the lustful stares of other men. In Islam marriage is an important part of life, the making of the society. Therefore, a woman should not go around showing herself to everybody, only for her husband. Even the man is not allowed to show certain parts of his body to none but his wife. Allah has commanded Muslim women to cover themselves for their modesty. If we look around at any other society, we found that in the majority of cases women are attacked and molested because of how they are dressed.

Islam does not oppress women, but rather liberates them and gives them the respect they deserve. Islam offers women reign over their money and names. Islam is the religion Allah has chosen for the whole mankind whose ruling and legislating lead to oppression of one group by another and the exploitation of one sex by the other. This is not the case in Islam, which truly liberated women and gave them individuality not given by any other authority."

Walker: "The appeal of Islam to liberated western women is difficult for many to understand, largely because of the widespread perception in the west that it treats women badly. I wonder why a beautiful American-born woman like you Jennifer would embrace a religion that not only supposedly oppress women, but takes all her freedom and independence and treats her as a second class citizen."

Omar: "I am afraid what you have picked up Walker about Islam came from media representations of a stern and unforgiving Allah, fanatical followers, terrorists, subjugated women, and all the usual negative and untrue images."

Jennifer: "Just because a Muslim wife must obey her husband and cooperate with him it does not mean she is oppressed. Women who turn to Islam are aware of the widespread western perception that they are oppressed and discriminated against, but insist that the depiction is a false image. For many it is a spiritual journey, which, far from repressing them, improves their social status and gives them new rights. They feel that because they cover themselves up they are not seen as a sex symbol, and because people cannot judge them on their appearance, they have to judge them as a human being. That's quite liberating. Under Islam your aim is not for this life, your aim is for the afterlife. To some people that sounds pretty horrific. They can't think about death, but in Islam belief in the afterlife is one of its main features, because if you are doing the right thing you've got a better life to come. So why go for all the material things? I sincerely hope that my thoughts about Islam have dispelled some common myths that almost everyone has about Islam. Islam is not a religion of terror, blood or hatred of its women, but a thoughtful, peaceful, modest religion that gets you closer to our Creator, Allah."

Omar: "Western converts are coming to Islam with fresh eyes, without all the habits of the east, avoiding what is culturally wrong. The purest tradition is finding itself strongest in the west. Westerners despairing from their own society have come to admire the discipline and security of Islam."

Jennifer: "I have never been a religious person adhering to rules of the church and attending services. For a period of time, eight years ago, I wished to escape from such emptiness and confusion in my life. During those years I found a church with a pastor that I could accept as a decent human. There were hard questions that etched my mind though. For instance, my whole life I have known there is "Allah" and have felt at ease to speak with Him. In the Christian religion of course, Allah is a human man, Jesus Christ. I have never been comfortable in witnessing humans worshipping Jesus. He was just a man. There is no way I could accept such an idea. For some reason, as gently as my spirituality became strong, it faded away. Being a Christian did not do anything for me, and I began to question the validity of only remembering Allah one day a week. As with many other Christians too I had become disillusioned with the hypocrisy of the Church and was becoming increasingly unhappy with the concept of trinity and the deification of Jesus.

Omar: "The Koran says here:

They are unbelievers who say, "Allah is the third of three" No Allah is there but one Allah. If they refrain not from what they say, there shall afflict those of them that disbelieve a painful chastisement (Al Maida, 73).

Most certainly they blaspheme who say, "Allah is the Messiah the son of Mary." But the Messiah said, "O children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord, whoever ascribes partners with Allah, Allah will forbid him entrance to paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire, and wrongdoers shall have no helpers." (Al Maida, 72).

Jennifer: "I have watched Pat Robertson on the 700 Club, and I listened to televangelist Rev. Jimmy Swaggart. I watched programs on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. All the while hoping that one of the ministers would say something that would click in my mind, and I would finally know, "Yes, there really is a Allah!" None of them ever said anything that caused that connection to happen, though many said things that confused me even more. Earlier this year I began to listen to the apocalyptic ramblings of Christian radio's "prophecy experts." Their paranoid espousal of various conspiracy theories, rabid support of Israel and religious Zionism, and fiery preaching about the "Islamic threat" held for me a strange fascination. Why? Well, I suppose it was simply the need I was feeling to fill the void within me. In any case I soon found that the beliefs these evangelists held, such as infallibility of "Allah's word" and Original Sin was not in agreement with my theological ideas. I couldn't understand how babies could be born with original sin? I began to look for something else to hold onto."

Omar: "Under Islam, the sins of the fathers aren't visited to the sons. The idea that Allah is not always forgiving is blasphemous to Muslims. The concept of original sin is a myth. When Adam and Eve listened to Satan and ate from the tree, Allah forgave them before He descended them to earth. People will only be punished if they don't follow the right guidance Allah sent with the Prophets throughout the ages. Adam himself was the first Prophet Allah sent to earth. The Koran clearly explained this:

And We said, "O Adam, live with your wife in the Garden, and eat from it freely as you please, but do not come near this Tree lest you become wrongdoers."

But Satan tempted them with that Tree and caused them to fall from grace, so We said, "Descend all of you from here, you are enemies of one another,

there shall be for you on earth a habitation and provision for a prescribed term.”

Then Adam received certain words from his Lord and repented, and his Lord accepted his repentance, indeed He is The Relenting, The most Merciful.

We said, “Descend all of you from here, and when there comes to you guidance from Me, whoever follows My guidance, they shall suffer no fear nor grief.”

And those who disbelieve and reject our signs, they shall be the dwellers of the Fire, in it to dwell forever (Al Baqara, 34-39).

Walker: “Jennifer, why don’t you go with the flow? You will be trapped in a prison of morals. You will be like a nun, lonely and dull; all you could do is pray. You will live an empty life. Fun is not allowed. How can you abandon Jesus?”

Jennifer: “I love Jesus. Islam abandons nobody. In fact it is only now that I can read and understand the true significance of Jesus, Abraham and Mohamed.”

Omar: “Let me interfere here by adding what Allah said in this regard:

Say, “We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us, and what has been revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes. And in what was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord, we make no distinction between any of them and to Him we submit (Al Imran, 84).

Jennifer: “I was raised as a Roman Catholic. My mother made me go to church every Sunday. I never liked church very much; it always seemed to me like a place for a fashion show. You had to wear your very best outfit and sit and check out everybody else. I would see people nudging each other and gossiping about people as they came through the door, or looking at them with their noses in the air. I never liked that atmosphere. Then it came time for the preacher to show out. He would start slow and easy with the preaching and it would build up as he went along. Soon he would grab the Bible and start preaching and jumping up and down, and running everywhere.

The people would get happy with him and start shouting. And it never failed when the people became excited like that, that they would pass around the money container, and out of being so fired up they would give all they had

without even thinking about it. I never could understand why when the preacher got excited, so did they. It never hit me like that, and I used to wonder why. All that I saw in church was people trying to make themselves feel good about their own pathetic shortcomings. The preaching lacked sophistication. The preacher kept claiming that he possessed all types of powers due to Jesus Christ. He kept trying to convince the congregation, and himself, that what he was saying was true. I thought, 'what a pity.' The best message in the world can never reach its intended target if the messenger's approach is inadequate.

I wondered why all of those people at the church picked up the hymnbooks and open up their Bibles to the pages that the minister instructed them to read. How was it that he got away with making so many comments without being questioned? How come everyone was following what he was saying and not looking at other parts of the Bible that clearly contradicted what he was saying?

They accepted what they were fed, and because their beliefs taught them that despite their poor qualities and severely deficient characters they were still loved by Allah, they never looked elsewhere? If you believe that Allah loves you as a wretch the same way that he loves you as a pious person, then why would you stop sinning? I concluded that those people were content with suspending their intellect and reasoning ability.

I read the Bible cover to cover, and marked along the way all of the things that were contradictory or ungodly. By the time I got to revelations I had a large segment of the Bible marked as invalid. So, thinking maybe I needed to look at it in a historic perspective, there I found even more hypocrisy, blasphemy, and human tampering with Holy Scriptures. What shocked me was the story of the council of Nice where human men "divinely guided" decided which text would be in the Bible and which ones needed editing! The Bible was so rambling and devoid of a coherent thread that it was difficult to think of a way to base one's life upon it. I learned how Christians solve the difficulty in practice; Protestants by creating sectarian theologies, each emphasizing the texts of their sect and downplaying the rest; Catholics by downplaying it all, except the snippets mentioned in their liturgy. Something seemed lacking in a sacred book that could not be read as an integral whole. The book was not very well put together. Moreover, I found that the authenticity of the book, especially the New Testament, had come into considerable doubt as a result of modern hermeneutic studies by Christians themselves.

I also had to ask myself how Christians could believe in one God and the trinity at the same time! No one in the history of the world, either priests or

layman had been able to explain in a convincing way the doctrine of the Trinity. Trinity shared between Allah the father, who ruled the world from heaven; His son Jesus Christ, who saved humanity on earth; and the Holy Ghost, who was pictured as a white dove and appeared to have a considerably minor role! I was once told that trinity was part of the essence of Allah and that since the breadth and scope of Allah is beyond my understanding I should simply believe. There were just too many things left to faith, things that had no proof other than one's faith. It's been always hard for me to believe something simply because someone said it was so. I couldn't worship a Allah I couldn't understand. I finally decided that Allah the father must be in charge of the other two, and this put the most formidable obstacle in the way of my Catholicism. About the divinity of Christ, reflection made it plain that the nature of man contradicted the nature of Allah in every particular, the limitary and finite on the one hand, the absolute and infinite on the other hand. That Jesus was Allah was something I cannot remember having ever really believed, in childhood or later.

I didn't understand why Jesus had to die for my sins, and if he is Allah, how could he be killed? What happens to a good man like Ghandy when he dies without Jesus? Does Hitler get to go to heaven if he accepts Christ as his lord and savior? What about those who have never been exposed to Christianity? The church failed to answer all of my life's most pressing questions; whom am I, who and what is Allah, why I am here, and what should be my relationship with this Superior Being who created the universe? How I am supposed to live my life? Who is my role model, and how should I follow him or her? Why does Allah need to have a son now, when he was alone in the creation of all that is, and need no partner or intercessor before? My priest was unable to answer my questions, beyond stating that I should have faith, and that it did not all have to make sense as long as my faith was strong enough!

There have been frequent changes in Catholic liturgy and ritual in the wake of the Second Vatican Council of 1963, suggesting to laymen that the church had no firm standards. To one another, the clergy spoke about flexibility and liturgical relevance, but to ordinary Catholics they seemed to be groping in the dark. Allah does not change, nor the needs of the human soul, and there was no new revelation from heaven. Yet we rang in the changes, week after week, year after year; adding, subtracting, changing the language from Latin to English, and finally bringing in guitars and folk music. Priests explained and explained as laymen shook their heads. The search for relevance left large numbers convinced that there had not been much in the first place. It was like they just opened up a can of cold illogical confusion and tried to

feed it to me. It didn't feel right. What I read in the Bible does not seem at all like what the Creator of the universe would choose to tell His creations. One of my other concerns with Christianity was why I had to pray through a Middle- Man? Why did I have to pray to a man? I believe in Allah Almighty. I also didn't know how to pray to Allah. For Muslims, it's between you and Allah. With Jews and Christians, you have formal rituals." Omar: "The authentic Torah and Gospel were standard laws to be followed but they were not. I will recite some of the Koranic verses stating this fact:

And when Allah took Covenant with those who were given earlier scripture, "You shall certainly make it known to all people, and you shall not conceal it."

But they flung it behind their backs and bartered it away for a miserable price, how evil was that they purchased! (Al Imran, 187).

And certainly We gave the Scripture to Moses, and there arose disputes regarding it, and had it not been for a decree that preceded from your Lord, it would have been decided between them, and they are in grave doubt about it (Hood, 110).

Do you (Muslims) expect that they (Jews) will be believers, while some of them (Rabbis) used to listen to the revelations of Allah (Torah), then intentionally perverted and tampered with it, while they knew it was the Truth? (Al Baqara, 75).

And for those who say, "We are Christians" We took their covenant, but they forgot a portion of what they were given, so We stirred up enmity and hatred between them until the day of Resurrection. And Allah will tell them of what they have been contriving (Al Maidah 14).

So woe to those who write the scripture with their hands, then say, "This is from Allah," to trade with it for a pitiful price! So woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn from it (Al Baqara, 79).

Surely those who conceal what Allah has revealed of the Book, and sells it for a miserable price, eat nothing in their bellies but fire, and Allah will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them, and for them there will be a painful chastisement (Al Baqara, 174).

Those are they who buy error for guidance, and torment in place of forgiveness, how will they be able to bear the fire? (Al Baqara, 175).

O you who have been given earlier Scripture! Believe in what We have revealed (Koran), affirming what you have been given, before We obliterate faces and turn them upon their backs, or curse them as We cursed the violators of the Sabbath, and Allah's command is surely carried into effect (An Nisa, 47).

Jennifer: "I didn't believe in Jesus as God or the son of God, it all seemed false, but at school they told us this was the only right way, all other religions were wrong, so I was very confused. When you are a small child you assume adults are always right with no exceptions, what they say, goes. Since I was a child I always believed in a Supreme Being, and that the universe had a creator. So I quite wisely decided to keep my belief in only one Allah private. I felt guilty for believing something that was wrong! I felt ashamed and I hoped and prayed that I would stop being a heretic soon. I had always prayed for Allah to show me the right way, I always turned to Allah for help, there was no doubt in my mind that Allah existed. In high school I began to realize that perhaps my belief in one Allah wasn't wrong. We were actually taught in school that Islam was a violent religion that was spread by the sword and treated women like dirt. We were taught in school that women in Islam were chattels symbolized by their dress, and that Muslims worship Mohamed. They did teach us one true thing though, that Muslims believe in only one Allah, which was something I honestly did not know before then.

Christianity had its good points to be sure, but they seemed mixed with confusions. The Christian Bible, and especially the writings of the apostle Paul, had confounded me with contradictions. I found myself accordingly, more and more inclined to look at Islam for its fullest and most perfect expression. The first question I had memorized from my early catechism had been why were you created? To which the correct answer was to know, love, and serve Allah. When I reflected on those around me, I realized that Islam seemed to furnish the most comprehensive and understandable way to practice this on daily basis.

When I first met Omar I was looking for an escape route from the isolating terms of a materialistic culture. I wanted access to a spiritual dimension. I was looking for a framework I could live with, a vocabulary of spiritual concepts applicable to the life I was living now. I did not want to "trade in" my culture. I wanted access to new meanings. When Omar answered my

questions about Islam, it was as if he touched a sensitive cord in my heart. Since then, I read a lot about Islam. Much to my surprise, I found myself agreeing with what I was reading rather than arguing against it. The superiority of the Muslim scripture over the Bible was evident in every line, as if the reality of divine revelation, dimly heard of all my life, had now been placed before my eyes. In its exalted style, its power, its inexorable finality, its uncanny way of anticipating the arguments of the atheistic heart in advance and answering them; it was a clear exposition of Allah as Allah and man as man, the revelation of the awe-inspiring Divine Unity being the identical revelation of social and economic justice among men.

By the time I have finished reading the Koran I was convinced that I had found something valuable and very meaningful, and was embarrassed by my earlier prejudices. What impressed me the most was how practical Islam is. How it compasses a rule and a lesson for almost every facet of living. And by the sheer grace of Allah, I at last understood the faults of the Christian theology and of the concepts I had previously accepted unquestioningly. I was stunned at how wrong my previous conception had been and became particularly overwhelmed at the tremendous entitlements, equality and acknowledgement Islam provided for women. I realized the reality of the Islamic lifestyle and the truth concerning that feeble American innovation termed "Islamic fundamentalism".

It was obvious that I had finally found permanent security for myself. It is a religion, a belief that was so complete and clear in every aspect of life. I discovered that Islam fit my personal theology and intellect as well as basic human logic. Islam presents Allah not as an anthropomorphic being but as an entity beyond human comprehension, transcendent of man, independent and undivided. Islam has a Holy Book that is comprehensible to a layman, and there is no papacy or priesthood that is considered infallible in matters of interpretation. All Muslims are free to reflect and interpret the book given a sufficient education. Islam does not believe that all men are doomed to Hell unless they simply accept that Allah magnanimously allowed Himself to be tortured on a cross to enable Him to forgive all human beings who just believe that He allowed Himself to be tortured on a cross. Islam does not believe in a chosen race.

As I began reading English translations of the Koran, I became more and more convinced of the truth and authenticity of Allah's teachings contained in those 114 chapters. Having been around Muslims in my formative years and in my work, I knew well that they were not the bloodthirsty, barbaric terrorists that the news media and the televangelists paint them to be.

Perhaps this knowledge led me to continue my personal research further than any other person would have.

Reading the Koran offered a believable way to understand Allah and an account of how to live as a Muslim. I was absolutely astounded by what I read, it was contrary to what I had been taught about Islam and women, and better than anything else I have ever heard of. I didn't doubt what I read, I knew it was true, I knew deep in my heart that all of my prayers had been answered. Islam was the truth that I had been searching for all of my life. The book spoke of the One Allah, the Creator of the universe. It described the beautiful way in which Allah had organized the world. This wondrous Koran had all the answers. Allah is the Loving, Allah is the source of peace, Allah is the Protector, Allah is the forgiver, Allah is the Provider, Allah is the Maintainer, Allah is the Generous One, Allah is the responsive, Allah is the protecting friend, Allah is the Expander. I learned that the Allah Muslims worship is the same Allah of the Christians and Jews, the Allah of Abraham and Moses. I found that Islam doesn't promote or condone hatred of non-Muslims, nor does it condone the killing of innocent people. In the Koran you see a formula for success in this life and the next. The Koran explained what Allah is and how we are supposed to relate to Him.

Reading the Koran answered my questions of faith in a logical manner. Islam did not require me to make leaps of faith, such as accepting Jesus as the Son of Allah and path to salvation. In Islam there is no way to earn your way to heaven without Allah's mercy, but there is more responsibility on the shoulders of the person. That was important to me. In addition to an emphasis on personal responsibility, Islamic teachings on the importance of the family and morality also appealed to me.

By studying Islam I found the answers that the media wasn't telling us and I came to know that Islam is the true religion.

In fact, women in Islam are given more rights, since the descend of the Koran more than 1440 years ago compared to the only recently rights given to non-Muslim women in some western and some other societies.

What I read and learned about Islam taught me a lot about myself as a woman, and also about where the real oppression of women lays in every other system and way of life outside of Islam. Muslim women had been given their rights in every aspect of the religion with clear definitions of their role in society -as had men- with no injustice against either of them. As Allah says:

“Whoever does deeds of righteousness, be they male or female, and have

faith, they will enter paradise and not the least injustice will be done to them (Al-Nisa', 124).

Muslim women have the right to inheritance. They have the right to run their own trade and business. They have the full right to ownership, property, disposal over their wealth to which the husband has no right. They have the right to education, a right to refuse marriage as long as this refusal is according to reasonable and justifiable grounds. The Koran contains many verses commanding men to be kind to their wives and stressing the rights of women. Islam gives the right set of rules, because men do not make them, but made by Allah; hence it is a perfect religion.

Most of the educated Westerners regarded any strong religious climate with suspicion. They classified religion as political manipulation, or they dismissed it as a medieval concept, projecting upon it notions from their European past.

Regardless of church affiliation, secular humanism is the air westerner breath, the lens we gaze through. Like any worldview, this outlook is pervasive and transparent. It forms the basis of our broad identification with democracy and with the pursuit of freedom in all its countless forms. Europeans and Americans, including many, who are free of racist notions, automatically class people racially. As I read in several Islamic books, Muslims classified people by their faith and their actions. I found this transcendent and refreshing.”

Omar: “Islam believes in the unity of the human race, Islam says that all mankind are the creatures of One Allah, they are all equal. Division of color, class, race, or territory is sheer illusions; and ideologies, which are based on such distinctions, are the greatest menace on earth. Humanity is one single family of Allah, there can be no sanction for these barriers. Men are one and not White or Black, Aryan or non-Aryan, occidental or Oriental. The importance of this concept is of great value as it is the only solution to national and international problems. This is said to be the age of freedom and restoring unto every man his dignity and despite all the phenomenal changes in the political stage of the world, our age is still unable to think in terms of human dignity, and this is the dark specter of social concern of our time. For despite man’s conquest of space and mastery over the forces of nature, man has not been able to rid himself of the primeval prejudice of race and color. The stark reality of our time has brought in its trail a great desolation and frustration as we find ourselves face to face with chaos, wars, the miserable conditions of living of the masses of mankind and the exploitation of one nation by another, and this leads to selfishness, fear,

hatred; class, tribe and race discrimination; and subsequently the division of man against man is the order of the day.

Islam's greatest contribution to mankind was the abolition and extinction of distinction based on race and color. The Holy Koran declared:

“Mankind were one community, then they differed among themselves, so Allah raised Prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners... (Al Baqara, 213).

“O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female; and made you into nations and tribes, that you might get to know one another. The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is he who is the most righteous. Allah is All-Knowing and All-Aware.” (Al Hujurat, 13).

These verses clearly indicate that the whole of humanity from its diverse races, was originally one, deriving its existence from One Creator and that all barriers that separate humanity by race and color must vanish and the superiority of a person be judged by his conduct only. A good Muslim considers himself a fusion of all races. Anyone who enters into the fold of Islam becomes part and parcel of this fraternity, forgetting all pride and prejudice. On the basis of this principle, Islam seeks to build an intellectual, moral, ideological and international society, as against the existing tribal, racial, linguistic and national societies, which have turned the world into a race-color holocaust.”

Jennifer: “I think America needs to understand Islam because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. African-American converts frequently say that by becoming Muslims they are discovering their African roots. Historians say that many of the slaves brought to America were Muslims. The African-Americans think that they were robbed of their language, culture and religion. They want to understand the religion their ancestors had. It's happening on a large scale.”

Omar: “There is one point I would like to emphasize here. Muslims often refrain from using the word convert because they believe everyone is born a Muslim. Instead they prefer the word “reversion” to describe non-Muslims who embrace Islam.”

Jennifer: “National Islamic groups estimate that there are more than 6 million Muslims in the United States, placing the religion's membership ahead of several of the nation's mainline denominations.”

Walker: “It's ridiculous that in order for man to be righteous, he must believe in legends of the past and in decaying religions unable to match the requirements of a modern world. It is technology and power that count here.

With its high sophisticated technology and immense military power, America now rules the world. Power and science are the tools for success not religion.”

Omar: “It has always amazed me that any intelligent person could study the incredible complexity of everything we know in the universe from atom to supernovae without concluding that there had to be intelligence behind its creation. In Islam, advance in technology is not a distinguishing trait that gives a nation an advantage over another. As I said before, the most honorable of people in the sight of Allah is the most pious.

Scientists may believe in scientific evidences, but Muslims understand that all of those sciences are just man’s attempt to comprehend what Allah creates. An astronomer can try to calculate the earth’s orbit around the sun, but no matter how close he comes to accuracy, all he can discover is what Allah already established.

In that sense, there is no such thing as new knowledge. All knowledge is with Allah, and the only knowledge that we have is what Allah chooses to endow us with. For example, a physician studies anatomy, physiology, epidemiology, etc. in order to gain a better understanding of the way that a human body operates. However, all of that knowledge and training can never change a matter once Allah has ordained it. When someone’s heart stops and doctors revive the person, they credit medical technology with a miracle, but if those same doctors, using that same technology failed to revive the heart, then they would recognize that technology and knowledge has limits. The limit is the extent to which Allah endows us with his own knowledge. That determines our ultimate aptitude.”

Walker: “If Islam is a true religion, then why most of the Muslim countries are undeveloped?”

Omar: “As for the inglorious political fortunes of the Muslims today, I do not feel these to be a reproach against Islam, or to relegate it to an inferior position in a natural order of world ideologies, but rather see them as a low phase in a larger cycle of history. Foreign hegemony over Muslim lands had been witnessed before in the thorough going destruction of Islamic civilization in the thirteen century by the Mongol horde, who razed cities and built pyramids of human heads from the steppes of Central Asia to the Muslim heartland, after which the fullness of destiny brought forth the Ottoman empire to raise the word of Allah and make it a vibrant political reality that endured for centuries. This was followed however by western occupation of the Muslim’s countries. The occupiers exploited and drained the natural resources of the Muslim countries for decades, thus causing the spread of poverty and backwardness. Now it is the turn of contemporary

Muslims to strive for a new historic crystallization of Islam, something one might well aspire to share in.”

Omar meditated Jennifer for long. Her words about Islam whirled in his mind. O Allah Almighty! You chose an American woman living far away from the nations of Islam to become a Muslim! Why Jennifer in particular? Your grace has deeply touched her heart and now she is seeking the pleasure of worshipping you alone. Jennifer must have had a good natural disposition that made her reject living in darkness. Jennifer is trying to free her mind from the confusion caused by not following the Islamic belief. The ones who believe in Islam do not fall victim to psychological complexes or confusion. Islam builds a direct and strong relationship between Allah and His servants. The believer accepts Allah as the Lord, as the Legislator, as the King. His heart is pleased with the following of Islam and he would not exchange this pleasure for anything else. Dear poor Jennifer, you are struggling hard to reach happiness in this life and in the Hereafter by following the right path to salvation. Allah has conferred upon you the blessing of joining Islam.

Omar’s heart melted and tears twinkled in his eyes.

Jennifer: “I want to hear your opinion Omar about my Islamic views. I have to take important decisions in my life if I am to embrace the new religion.”

“Embracing the new religion! Are you crazy Jennifer? You are ruining our marriage, our life together. What would happen to the kids if our marriage were ruined? A Muslim woman should marry only a Muslim man, and I am not going to convert to Islam.” Walker shouted in Jennifer’s face.

Walker looked at Omar and said, “Omar put some sense in her head please.”

Omar: “I hope one day Allah will also illuminate your heart with Islam so you can understand the beauty Jennifer is now going through. Allah the All Merciful has delighted her heart by filling it with His light - the light of true knowledge. He wants her to worship Him alone because He is the one and the only. It’s a favor from Allah to choose her as one of His devoted servants. It’s a divine will Walker, a divine will. No one would ever dare interfere in Allah’s divine will. Allah says in this regard:

“Surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guide whom He pleases, and He knows best those who would be guided.” (Al qassas, 56).

“And those who believe and do righteous deeds, We shall surely blot out their evil deeds, and We shall reward them for the best of their deeds.” (Al Ankabout, 7).

Walker argued, “What the word Islam means? What is exactly the message of Islam?”

Omar: “ The Arabic word Islam means the submission or surrender of one’s will to the only true Allah worthy of worship “Allah” and anyone who does so is termed a “Muslim”, the word Islam also implies peace which is the natural consequence of total submission to the will of Allah.

The religion of Islam is not named after a person as in the case of Christianity, which was named after Jesus Christ, Buddhism after Gotama Buddha, Confucianism after Confucius and Marxism after Karl Marx. Nor was it named after a tribe like Judaism after the tribe of Judah and Hinduism after the Hindus. Islam is the true religion of Allah since He first created man and descended him to earth. Islam represents the central principle of Allah’s religion. Hence, it was not a new religion brought by prophet Mohamed in Arabia in the seventh century, but only the true religion of Allah re-expressed in its final form. Islam is not the name of some unique faith presented for the first time by Mohamed peace be upon him, who should on that account be called the founder of Islam. The Koran makes it abundantly clear that Islam is the one and only faith consistently revealed by Allah to mankind from the very beginning. Islam is the religion, which was given to Adam, the first man and the first Prophet of Allah, and it was the religion of all the prophets sent after him by Allah to mankind. Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ were prophets who appeared at different times and places; all propagated the same faith. They were not founders of faiths to be named after them. They were each reiterating the faith of their predecessors.

The first fundamental creed of Islam is to believe in one God, Allah - not that the conviction that He exists or that He is one-but that he alone is the Creator, Master, Ruler, and Administrator of all that exists. The universe exists because Allah wills it to exist, it functions because Allah wills it to function, and Allah provides the sustenance and the energy, which everything in the universe requires for its existence and growth. All the attributes of sovereignty reside in Allah alone, and no one else has a share in them in the slightest degree. He alone possesses all the attributes of Divinity, and no one other than Allah possesses any of those attributes. He views the whole universe, and all that it contains, in a single instantaneous glance. He has direct knowledge of the universe, and all that is there in it. He knows not

only its present, but also its past and present as well. This omnipresence and omniscience is an attribute of Allah alone and of no other. There was no 'before' Him and there is no 'after' Him. He had been there always and will be there always eternal and abiding. All else is transient. He alone is eternally living and present. He is no one progeny and He has no progeny. Whatever exists, besides His self, is His own creation, and no other can identify himself in any manner with the Lord of the universe, or claim to be his son or daughter. He is man's single Deity. To associate anyone in His worship is as great a sin as it is an act of infidelity. He responds to man's prayers and He alone has the power to accept or reject them. Not to ask of him is a senseless arrogance, and to turn to others is sheer arrogance. To seek of him and also of others, is to associate equals with him." (12). Walker: "But Christianity believes that Jesus Christ is God and the Son of God."

Omar: "Jesus was only a Prophet sent to the children of Israel. He did not tell his followers to worship him but to worship Allah. As the Koran states:

"And behold Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary did you say to men, worship me and my mother as Allahs besides Allah?" He will say-"Glory to you I could never say what I had no right to say."(Almaidah, 5:116).

Nor did Jesus worship himself when he worshipped but rather he worshipped Allah. This basic principle is enshrined in the opening chapter of the Koran:

"You alone do we worship and from you alone do we seek help." (Al-Fatihah, 4).

The message of Islam as brought by all the prophets of Allah is to worship only Allah and to avoid the worship of his creation either directly or indirectly. In the Koran Allah clearly states:

"For we assuredly sent amongst every people a prophet, (with the command) worship me and avoid false Allahs." (Al-Nahl,136).

When the idol worshipper is questioned as to why he or she bows down to idols created by men, the invariable reply is that they are not actually worshipping the stone image, but Allah who is present within it. One who has accepted the concept of presence of Allah's being in his creation in any way will be obliged to accept this argument of idolatry. Whereas, one who

understands the basic message of Islam and its implications would never concede to idolatry no matter how it is rationalized. Those who have claimed divinity for themselves down through the ages have often based their claims on the mistaken belief that Allah is present in man. They merely had to assert that although Allah according to their false beliefs is in all of us; He is more present in them than in the rest of us. Hence, they claim that they should submit their will to them and worship them as they were either Allah in person or Allah concentrated within the person (12).

Similarly, those who have asserted the Allahhood of others after their passing have found fertile ground among those who accept the false belief of Allah's presence in man. One who has grasped the basic message of Islam and its implication could never agree to worship another human being under any circumstances. Allah's religion in essence is a clear call to the worship of the creator and the rejection of creation-worship in any form.

The Prophet of Islam is reported to have said,

“Any one who says: There is no god but Allah and dies holding that belief will enter paradise.”

Walker: “There are so many sects, cults, religions, philosophies, and movements in the world, all of which claim to be the right way or the only true path to Allah. How can one determine which one is correct?”

Omar: “The basic message of false religion is that Allah may be worshipped in the form of His creation. False religion invites man to the worship of creation by calling the creation or some aspect of it Allah. For example, Prophet Jesus invited his followers to worship Allah but those who claim to be his followers today call people to worship Jesus, claiming that he was Allah! Buddha was a reformer who introduced a number of humanistic principles to the religion of India. He did not claim to be Allah nor did he suggest to his followers that he be an object of worship. Yet, today most Buddhists who are to be found outside of India considered him as Allah and prostrate to idols made in their perception of his likeness.

Allah said in the Koran:

“That which you worship besides Him are only names you and your forefathers have invented for which Allah has sent down no authority: The command belongs only to Allah: He has commanded that you only worship Him; that is the right religion, but most men do not understand.” (Yusof, 40).

Walker: “All religions teach good things so why should it matter which one we follow?”

Omar: “All false religions teach the greatest evil, the worship of creation. Creation-worship is the greatest sin that man can commit because it contradicts the very purpose of his creation. Man was created to worship Allah alone as Allah has explicitly stated in the Koran:

“I have only created jinn and men, that they may worship me.” (Zaareeaat, 56).

Consequently, the worship of creation, which is the essence of idolatry, is the only unforgivable sin. One who dies in this state of idolatry has sealed his fate in the next life. This is not an opinion, but a revealed fact stated by Allah in his final revelation to man:

“Verily Allah will not forgive the joining of partners with Him, but He may forgive (sins) less than that for whom so ever He wishes.” (An-Nissa 48 and 116).

The sovereignty of Allah in Islam is not just a supernatural phenomenon. It covers all aspects of political and legal sovereignty also, and in these too no one other than Allah has any share. In Allah alone vests the rightful authority to exercise power on this earth, and over those whom Allah has created in it. No monarch, no royal family, no elite class, no leader of any religious group, no democracy established on the basis of the sovereignty of the people, can participate in Allah’s sovereignty. Whoever claims such sovereignty is a rebel, as are those who leave Allah and turn to other people in obedience. Similarly, any institution or individual attempting to assume political and legal sovereignty and restrict the jurisdiction of Allah to spheres of personal law or religious duties is really a usurper and a rebel. The truth is that no one can claim to be a lawgiver on Allah’s earth, and no one can challenge the supreme authority of Allah Almighty in any sphere. Allah alone is the real Deity and no one other than Allah has any right to be worshipped by man. Allah alone has authority over the forces of the universe, and he alone can fulfill or frustrate man’s hopes. Man should turn to Him alone in prayer. He should never imagine that prayers could be addressed to anyone but Allah. Allah is the master of man destiny and no one else can interfere with the fate of others or with his own fate. Man’s hopes and fears must therefore, be directed only to Allah. No one else should be an object of fear or source of favor.

Allah is the creator of the world and He alone has complete and direct knowledge of the reality of man and of the world. Only He can guide man through the complicated course of life and instruct him regarding good and evil. Since Allah alone is the Creator and the Master He has exclusive authority over the universe and man. It is an act of blasphemy for man to become independent or claim authority over other men. For man to become his own lawgiver to accept the authority of any other individual or institution as such is equally blasphemous. The ultimate Lawgiver and Master of His creation on this earth is no other than Allah, and His law has the status of the supreme law. Man can legislate subject to his Supreme law. Beyond that he has no legislative authority.

The second most important Islamic creed is to believe in Mohamed's prophet hood. Allah conveyed His message to man through Mohamed. This took two forms: 1) Allah revealed the Koran to the Prophet in his own language. The acts and sayings (Sunnah) of the Prophet, which is an unerring guide to man in respect of all that, is permissible and all that is prohibited in the eyes of Allah. Without this belief in the Prophet, belief in Allah would become a mere theoretical proposition. It is the example of practical leadership, and the ideological guidance provided by the Prophet, which transforms belief in Allah into a culture and civilization, and enables man to evolve a way of life. We get through the Prophet not only rules of guidance, but a complete scheme of values and a practical code of conduct. No one can be a practicing Muslim unless he believes in the Prophet as he believes in Allah.

The Koran stated in this respect,

“It is not befitting for a believing man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger, to have any option about their decision.” (Al-Ahzab, 36).

The position of the Prophet Mohamed has been so clearly defined in Islam that we can know what he was and what he was not. The Prophet is no more than a servant of Allah. He was to make people servants of Allah and not servants of himself. At least seventeen times a day Muslims recite in their prayers: “I bear witness that Mohamed is a servant of Allah and is His prophet.” The Koran leaves no doubt that the Prophet is but a human being and has no share whatever Divinity. The Prophet is neither superhuman nor is he free of human weakness. He owns no treasure from Allah, nor does he possess knowledge of the unknown that he should become all knowing like

Allah Almighty. Let alone being able to benefit others or cause them harm, the Prophet cannot do so even in respect of himself. The precise task of the Prophet is to communicate the message of Allah. He has no power to make people righteous and faithful. Nor can he call to account those who refuse to believe, and he certainly has no power to punish them for their disbelief. Should the Prophet himself choose to defy Allah or fabricate things on behalf of Allah or make any change in the message revealed to him, he will incur divine displeasure and punishment.

Mohamed is one of the prophets of Allah, and above that he has no status. He cannot by himself prohibit or permit anything. Without a mandate from Allah he cannot legislate for people. He has to strictly conform to divine commandments.

Islam ensured that the believers should not turn the Prophet into demi-Allah. Some of the earlier prophets suffered this fate at the hands of their followers. They attributed all kinds of supernatural powers to their leaders and made them in Allah's equals or progeny or incarnation. The Prophet confirmed this when he said,

“I am a mortal like you. In matters revealed to me by Allah, you must obey my instructions. But you know more about your worldly affairs than I do so my advice in these matters is not binding.”

The Sunnah of Mohamed is in fact, an exposition of the purpose of the Koran, and Allah Himself, as the author of the Koran also conveyed this exposition to the Prophet. The Prophet's explanation of the Koran enjoys divine sanction, and no one else can interpret Koran which may be in conflict with or repugnant to the explanation given by the Prophet. Allah declared the life of Mohamed as a model life. No one can be a true believer unless he accepts the decision of the Prophet. Muslims have not an independent position in a matter determined by the Prophet. Before deciding any matter Muslims must first ascertain whether Allah and his Prophet decided any analogous matter earlier, and if a precedent exists they must follow it.

Allah conveyed through the Prophet to mankind not only a supreme law but also a permanent scheme of values. That, which is good, according to the Koran and the Sunnah, is good for all times, and that, which is evil, shall remain evil forever. That which is enjoined as duty, in the Koran and the Sunnah, shall always be a duty. What is declared permissible is permissible forever, and what is prohibited is prohibited for all times. In this law no amendment, deletion, addition, or abrogation, is possible unless some person

or community decides to renounce Islam. So long as Muslims remain Muslims, it is impossible in their social and legal system that something, which was evil yesterday, turns into good today, and reverts to evil tomorrow.

The third fundamental creed of Islam is belief in the Hereafter. Denial of the Hereafter is the denial of Islam even though one may believe in Allah, in the Prophet and in the Koran.

Man has not been unleashed on the earth as an irresponsible savage. He is accountable to Allah for his actions. Today's life is only a test and an examination. At the end we will all be called upon to render a complete account of our acts of commission and omission to Allah. Allah fixes the time of accountability. The time allotted to mankind, on this earth, shall terminate on the doom's day, when the present order will be annihilated and replaced by another. The whole human race will rise once again in the New World. That will be the time when they will appear before Allah Almighty, and everyone will face the consequences of his acts in his individual capacity.

The judgment will rest not on Allah's knowledge alone. A complete record of the actions of every individual, without the slightest alternation, will be put in the open court, and evidence, of different categories, will be presented to prove what was done by man in private or in public, and the motives which inspired his conduct. There will be no undue intercession. Neither bribery, nor advocacy against the truth will be tolerated. No one will be able to shift his burden to another. Even the closest relations, friends, leaders, religious guides, or self-styled deities, will not be able to offer any help to anyone. Man will stand by himself helpless and alone and render his account, and await the pronouncement of the judgment, which shall be in the power of Allah alone.

The judge will rest on one question. Did man conduct himself, in submission to Allah, in strict conformity with the truth revealed to the Prophets, and with the conviction that he will be held responsible for his conduct in life on the Day of Judgment? If the answer is in affirmative, the reward will be Paradise, and if in the negative, Hell will be the punishment.

Belief in the Hereafter divides people into three distinct categories. First, there are those who do not believe in the Hereafter and regard life on this earth as the only life. Naturally, they judge good and evil by the results, which manifest themselves in this world. If an action produces beneficial results, it is good, and if it brings about harmful results, it is evil. Second,

those people who do not deny the Hereafter, but who depend on the intercession or atonement of someone to absolve them of their sins. Among them there are some who regard themselves as Allah's chosen people, who will receive only nominal punishment however grave their sins are. This deprives them of the moral advantage, which they could have derived from their belief in the Hereafter. As a result they also become very much like the people who deny the Hereafter. Third, are those people who believe in the Hereafter in the form in which Islam presents it. They do not delude themselves that they have any special relationship with Allah, or that anyone can intercede on their behalf. They know that they alone are responsible for their actions. For them the belief in the Hereafter becomes a great moral force. A person who has the conviction that he is fully accountable for all his actions finds a permanent guard, stationed within him, who cautions him and admonishes him whenever he deviates from the right path. There may be no court to summon him, no policemen to apprehend him, no witnesses to accuse him, and no public opinion to press him, but the guard within him is ever on the alert, ready to seize him whenever he transgresses. The consciousness of this inner presence makes man fear Allah even when he is all by himself. He discharges his duties honestly, and refrains from doing anything, which is prohibited. Should he succumb to temptation, and violate the law of Allah, he is ever ready to offer sincere regrets, and to enter into a firm contract with the future that he will not repeat the mistake. There can be neither greater instrument of moral reformation nor any better method to help man to develop a sound and stable character. It is the Hereafter, which helps men, under all circumstances, to conform to Allah's scheme of permanent values. It is for this reason that Islam attaches great importance to the belief in the Hereafter, and without it even the belief in Allah and the Prophet is not sufficient for man's guidance.

Islam represents a whole civilization, a complete culture, and a comprehensive world order. It provides moral guidance in all walks of life. That is why Islamic values are not for the ascetic who renounces the world, but for him who actively participates in different spheres of life, and works with them. Islam presents the moral values which people look for in convents, monasteries, and cloisters, right in the current of life. There is no distinction in Islam between private and public conduct. The same moral code, which one observes at home, applies to one's conduct in public. Politics must be based on truth and justice. Nations should deal with one another, on the basis of mutual recognition of rights, and due discharge of obligations. Even if there has to be war, those engaged in it should conduct themselves not as barbarians but as civilized human beings. When man

decides to submit to the will of Allah, and accepts His law as the supreme law, and organizes his life in accordance with the revealed moral code, and on the principle of accountability to Allah, the quality and character of his life cannot be limited to the precincts of prayer halls. It must extend itself to every sphere of his work as a man of Allah.

This briefly is what Islam stands for. This is no dream or utopia. The Prophet of Islam, and his companions, developed and established a complete model of Islam on this earth for mankind to follow.”

Jennifer: “Is Islam universal?”

Omar: “The Koran always calls upon the “progeny of Adam” or “the mankind” to accept Islam. The specific instructions and injunctions are meant for those who have come to believe in Islam, and they are always addressed as “those who believe.” That the message of Islam was universal in character is proved by the fact that those who accepted the message acquired equal rights and status as believers, regardless of all differences of origin. The Koran says:

“The believers are all like brothers.”

The Prophet said:

“Those who subscribe to our belief, and adopt the Islamic way of life, have the same rights and the same obligations as we have.”

The Prophet announced:

“Listen! You have one Allah as you have one father (Adam). There is no distinction between an Arab and a non-Arab. There is no preference for the black over the fair or the fair over the black. There is distinction only in submission to Allah. The most virtuous among you is the most honorable in the eyes of Allah.”

The universality of Islam is expressed in the Koran in several verses among which are:

And We have sent you to the entire mankind as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner, but most people do not understand (Sabaa, 28).

Allah is the One who has sent His messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all religion. And Allah is sufficient for witness (Al Fath, 28).

O you who have been given earlier scripture! Believe in what We have revealed, affirming of what you have been given, before We obliterate faces and turn them upon their backs, or curse them as We cursed the violators of the Sabbath, and Allah's command is surely carried into effect (An Nisa, 47).

O people of earlier Scripture! There has come to you Our Messenger, revealing to you much of that which you used to hide of the Book, and pardoning much. Indeed there has come to you from Allah a Light and a manifest Book (The Koran).

With it Allah guides to the way of peace and safety whoever seeks His good pleasure, and by His Grace, brings them out of the depths of darkness into Light, and guides them to the Straight Path (Al-Maidah 15, 16).

O people of earlier Scripture! Our Messenger has come to you, guiding you, after a period of time since previous Messengers, lest you should say, "There has not come to us any bearer of glad tidings nor any warner." So now there has come to you a bearer of glad tidings and a warner, Allah has power over all things (Al-Maidah, 19).

Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel, bidding them honor, and forbidding them dishonor, making lawful to them the good things, and making unlawful to them the corrupt things, and relieving them of their loads, and the fetters that were upon them. Those who believe in him, and support and help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him, they are the prosperous;

Say, "O people, I am the Messenger of Allah to you all, to whom belongs the Dominion of the heavens and the earth, there is no Allah but He, He bestows life and ordains death, so believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believes in Allah and His words, follow him that you may be guided (Al-A'raf 157, 158).

Blessed is Allah the One Who has revealed the Criterion to His servant; that he may be a Warner to the worlds (Al Furqan, 1).

Walker: “How can all people be expected to believe in Allah given their varying backgrounds, societies and cultures?”

Omar: “For people to be responsible for worshipping Allah they all have to have access to knowledge of Allah. The Koran teaches that all mankind have the recognition of Allah imprinted on their souls, a part of their very nature with which they are created. Allah explained that when he created Adam, he caused of Adam’s descendants to come into existence and took a pledge for them saying, Am I not your Lord? To which they all replied, “Yes, we testify to it.” Allah then explained why He had all of mankind bear witness that He is their creator and the only true Allah worthy of worship. He said,

“That was in case you (mankind) should say on the day of Resurrection, “Verily we were unaware of all this.”

That is to say, we had no idea that you Allah, was our Allah. No one told us that we were only supposed to worship you alone. Allah went on to explain that it was also in case you should say,

When your Lord created the offspring of the children of Adam, generation after generation, and made them bear witness about themselves, “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes indeed we bear witness.” In case you would say on the Day of resurrection. “Surely we were unaware of this.”

Or lest you say, “Our fathers before us ascribed partners to Allah, and we were only descendants after them, will you destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?”

And so We expound the Signs that they may return (Al A’raf 172-174).

Thus, every child is born with a natural belief in Allah and an inborn inclination to worship Him alone. The inborn inclination to worship Allah is called in Arabic “Fitrah.”

So if the children were left alone, they would worship Allah in their own way, but those things around them, seen or unseen affect them.

The Prophet reported that Allah said,

“I created my servants in the right religion but the devils made them go astray.”

The Prophet also said,

“Every child is born with a disposition towards the natural religion of obedience (i.e. Islam); it is the parents who make him a Jew, a Christian or a Magan.”

So, just as the child submits to the physical laws, which Allah has put in nature, his soul also submits naturally to the fact that Allah is his Lord and Creator. But his parents try to make him follow their own way, and the child is not strong in the early stages of his life to resist or oppose the will of his parents. The religion, which the child follows at this stage, is one of custom and upbringing and Allah does not hold him to account or punish him for this religion.

Throughout people’s lives from childhood until the time they die, signs are shown to them in all regions of the earth and in their own souls, until it become clear that there is only one true Allah (Allah). If people are honest with themselves, reject their false gods and seek Allah, the way will be made easy for them, but if they continually reject Allah’s signs and continue to worship creation, the more difficult it will be for them to escape.

Prophets were sent to every nation and tribe to support man’s natural belief in Allah and man’s inborn inclination to worship Him as well as to reinforce the divine truth in the daily signs revealed by Allah. Although in most cases much of the Prophets’ teachings became distorted, portions remained pointing out right and wrong. For example, the Ten Commandments of the Torah, their confirmation in the Gospels and the existence of laws against murder, stealing and adultery in most societies. Consequently, every soul will be held to account for its belief in Allah and its acceptance of the religion of Islam; the total submission to the will of Allah.”

Walker: “Has Allah described himself in the Koran?”

Omar: “He described Himself in several verses of the Koran, I will recite to you only some:

*“He is Allah; there is no Allah but He. He is the Knower of the unseen and the seen. He is the most gracious, the most Merciful,
He is Allah, there is no Allah but He. He is the King, the All-Holy, the All-Peaceable, the All-Faithful, the overall Controller, the All-Mighty, the All-Compeller, the All-sublime. Glory be to Allah above that they associate,
He is Allah the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper. To him belongs the Names Most Beautiful. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him. He is the All-mighty, the All-Wise (Al Hashr 22-24).*

All that in the heavens and the earth magnifies Allah; He is the Almighty, the All-wise

To Him belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth;

He gives life, and He makes to die, and He is powerful over everything.

It is He that created the heavens and the earth in six days then seated Himself upon the throne. He knows what penetrates into the earth and what comes forth from it, what comes down from heaven, and what goes up unto it. He is with you wherever you are; and Allah sees the things you do.

To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; and unto him all matters returned.

He makes the night to enter into the day, and makes the day enter into the night. He knows the thoughts within the breasts (Al Hadid 1-6).

Walker: "I must admit that your words are touching but they only represent God from a pure Islamic perspective. We Christians believe however in trinity and that the only true Allah is Jesus Christ who willingly crucified himself to save all mankind."

Omar: "Mohamed is the last of the Prophets, and was sent to all mankind with the Koran, the last of the sacred books. With the end of Mohamed's mission on earth, Allah has perfected His religion by choosing Islam as the final and true belief for all man kinds. This fact has been mentioned in the Koran:

O people of earlier Scripture! There has come to you our Messenger, revealing to you much of that which you used to hide of the Book, and pardoning much. Indeed there has come to you from Allah a Light and a manifest Book (The Koran).

With it Allah guides to the way of peace and safety whoever seeks His good pleasure, and by His Grace, brings them out of the depths of darkness into Light, and guide them to the Straight Path (al Maidah 15,16).

O people of earlier Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion, nor say of Allah anything but the Truth, most surely the Messiah Jesus the son of Mary was no more than a Messenger of Allah, and a word from Him, which was pronounced upon Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His Messengers and do not say "Trinity", desist! It is better for you. Most surely Allah is one Allah, Glory be to Him! High Exalted is He above having a son. Whatever is in the heavens and on the earth belongs to Allah. And Allah suffices for a Trustee,

The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of Allah, nor the angels who are nearest to Allah. And whoever disdains to worship Allah, and is proud, He will gather them all to Him, As for those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, He will pay them in full reward, and He will give them more from His bounty, but those who disdain and are proud, He will chastise them with a painful chastisement, and they will not find any to protect or help them from Allah (An Nissa 171-173).

Walker: “The Jews and the Christians are the sons of God and His beloved ones.”

Omar: “You know what Allah said about this pretense?”

And the Jews and the Christians say, “We are the sons of Allah and His beloved ones.” Say “Why then does Allah chastise you for your sins?” But you are mortals from among those Allah has created. Allah forgives whom He pleases and He chastises whom He pleases, and to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them. And to Allah is the final destiny (Al Maidah 18).

Have you seen those (Jews) who have been given a portion of the Book being called to the Book of Allah that it may judge between them, some of them turn away and decline- That, because they claim, “The Fire shall not touch us except for a number of days.” Such self-invented beliefs have deluded them- So how will it be for them when We gather them on a Day about which there is no doubt, and every soul shall be fully paid for what it has earned without injustice (Al Iman, 23-25).

Jennifer: “I was beguiled by the devil for a long while, but by reading in Islam I feel now that I have really made an escape, or have been rescued by Allah. To me Islam is like a medicine. It changes deviant behavior and soothes the sobbing soul. Islam is the religion of truth and the Koran is the guide for all aspects of life. The Koran gave me all of the answers to my questions. It alleviated my confusion and turned it into clarity and understanding. Never did I know that there is a religion that is absolute truth in its purest form. The Prophet who brought all this knowledge to the world must have been a great man. Can you describe his manner and appearance to me Omar?”

Omar: “Mohamed peace be upon him was of average height or a little above the average. His chest and shoulders were broad, and altogether he was of sturdy build. His arms were long, and his hands and feet rough. His forehead was large and prominent, and he had a hooked nose and large black eyes with a touch of brown. The hair of his head was long and thick, straight or slightly curled. His beard also was thick, and he had a thin line of fine hair on his neck and chest. His cheeks were spare, his mouth large, and he had a pleasant smile. In complexion he was fair. He always walked as if he was rushing downhill, and others had difficulty in keeping up with him. When he turned in any direction, he did so with his whole body. He was given to sadness, and there were long periods of silence when he was deep in thought; yet he never rested but was always busy with something. He never spoke unnecessarily. What he said was always to the point and sufficient to make his point clear, but there was no padding. From the first to last he spoke rapidly. Over his feelings he had a firm control. When he was annoyed he would turn aside; when he was pleased, he lowered his eyes. His time was carefully apportioned according to the various demands on him. In his dealings with people he was above all tactful. In the main he was not rough but gentle. His laugh was mostly a smile.”

His house was but a hut with walls of unbaked clay and a thatched roof of palm leaves covered by camel skin. His room contained a rope cot, a pillow stuffed with palm leaves, the skin of some animal spread on the floor and a water bag of leather and some weapons. These were all his earthly belongings, besides a camel, a horse, and an ass and some land, which he acquired, in the later part of his life. He was not fastidious about his bed; sometimes he slept on his cot, sometimes on a skin or ordinary mattress, and sometimes on the ground. Once dew disciples, noticing the imprint of his mattress on his body, wished to give him a softer bed but he politely declined the offer saying,

“What have I to do with worldly things? My connection with the world is like that of a traveler resting for a while underneath the shade of a tree then goes off and leaves it.”

Once Omar Ibn al-khattab entered Mohamed’s house. Tears came into his eyes. Mohamed asked the reason for his tears. He replied, “O Allah’s Messenger! Why shouldn’t I cry! The strings of the bed have left marks on your body. This is a small room with all your furniture; I can see what there is. The Byzantine Emperor and the Persian Emperor enjoy luxurious living

while you, the Messenger of Allah and the Chosen One, live like this.” The Prophet said,

Ibn al-Khattab! Don't you like that they choose this world and we choose the Hereafter?”

The Prophet also said,

“Every religion has a character and the character of Islam is modesty.”

The Prophet lived a simple and modest life, both in Makkah as a trader and the Messenger of Allah, and in Madinah as the head of the state and Messenger of Allah. Omar Ibn al-Khattab reported the Prophet as saying,

“Do not exalt me as the Christians have exalted Jesus son of Mary. I am just his servant, so call me Allah's servant and Messenger.”

When the Prophet died, he did not leave a cent, a slave man or woman, or any property except his white mule, his weapons, and a piece of land, which he had dedicated for the good of the community. He advised the people to live simple lives and he practiced great austerities. Even when he had become the virtual king of Arabia, he lived an austere life bordering on privation. There was hardly a day in his life when he had two square meals. When he died there was no food in his house except a few seeds of barley left from a mound of grain obtained from a Jew by pawning his armor. About himself the Prophet said,

“Allah has sent me as an apostle so that I may demonstrate perfection of character, refinement of manners and loftiness of deportment.”

By nature he was gentle and kind hearted, always inclined to be gracious and to overlook the faults of others. Politeness and courtesy, compassion and tenderness, simplicity and humility, sympathy and sincerity were some of the keynotes of his character. In the cause of right and justice he could be resolute and severe but more often than not, his severity was tempered with generosity. He had charming manners, which won him the affection of his followers and secured their devotion. Though virtual king of Arabia and an apostle of Allah, he never assumed an air of superiority. Sincere humility was ingrained in his heart. He used to say,

“I am a Prophet of Allah but I do not know what will be my end.”

In one of his sermons calculated to instill the fear of Allah and the day of reckoning in the hearts of men, he said,

“O people of Quraish (his tribe) be prepared for the hereafter, I cannot save you from the punishment of Allah; O Bani Abd Manaf (another tribe), I cannot save you from Allah; O Abbas, son of Abdul Mutalib (his uncle), I cannot protect you either; O Fatima, daughter of Mohamed, even you I cannot save.”

He used to pray,

“O Allah! I am but a man. If I hurt any one in any manner, then forgive me and do not punish me.”

“O Allah, I seek refuge in You for Your Pleasure and against your wrath, and in Your Forgiveness, and against Your Punishment and in You from You, I cannot praise You as You have Praised yourself.”

“I have surrendered myself to you, I have directed my face to you, I have entrusted my affairs to You, I have compelled my back to refuge in You, in want and in fright of You, there is no resort nor survival from You except (in turning) to You. I have faith in Your book (the Koran) which You brought down and in the Prophet Mohamed You have sent.”

He always received people with courtesy and showed respect to older people, he said,

“To honor an old man is to show respect to Allah.”

He was always the first to greet another and would not withdraw his handshake till the other man withdrew his. If one wanted to say something in his ears, he would not turn away till one had finished. He did not like people to get up for him and used to say,

Let him, who likes people to stand up in his honor, he should seek a place in hell.”

He would himself, however, stand up when any dignitary came to him. He had stood up to receive the wet nurse that had reared him in infancy and had spread his own sheet for her. His foster brother was given similar treatment. He avoided sitting at a prominent place in a gathering, so much so that people coming in had difficulty in spotting him and had to ask which was the Prophet. Quite frequently uncouth Bedouins accosted him in their own gruff and impolite manner but he never took offence.

He used to visit the poorest of ailing persons and exhorted all Muslims to do likewise. He would sit with the humblest of persons saying that righteousness alone was the criterion of one's superiority over another. He invariably invited people be they slaves, servants, or the poorest believers, to partake with him of his scanty meals.

Whenever he visited a person he would first greet him and then take his permission to enter the house. He advised the people to follow this etiquette and not to get annoyed if anyone declined to give permission, for it was quite likely the person concerned was busy otherwise and did not mean any disrespect.

There was no type of household work too low or too undignified for him. He always joined in household work and would at times mend his clothes, repair his shoes and sweep the floor. He would milk, tether, and feed his animals and do the household shopping.

He would not hesitate to do the menial work of others, particularly of orphans and widows. Once when there was no male member in the house of the companion Kabab Bin Arat who had gone to the battlefield, he used to go to his house daily and milk his cattle for the inhabitants.

He was especially fond of children and used to get into the spirit of childish games in their company. He would have fun with the children who had come back from Abyssinia and tried to speak in Abyssinian with them. It was his practice to give lifts on his camel to children when he returned from journeys. He would pick up children in his arms, play with them, and kiss them. A companion, recalling his childhood, said,

“In my childhood I used to drop dates down by throwing stones at palm trees. Somebody took me to the prophet who advised me to pick up the dates lying on the ground but not to throw them with stones. He then patted me and blessed me.”

His grandson Hussein, still a child, came to him tumbling while he was delivering a sermon. He got down from the pulpit and took him in his lap and then continued the sermon.

The Prophet was traveling on his camel over hilly terrain with a disciple, Uqba Bin Aamir. After going some distance, he asked Uqba to ride the camel, but Uqba thought this would be showing disrespect to the Prophet. But the prophet insisted and he had to comply. The prophet walked on foot, as he did not want to put too many loads on the animal (14).

During a halt on a journey, the companions apportioned work among themselves for preparing food. The prophet took upon himself the task of collecting firewood. His companions pleaded that they would do it and that he need not take the trouble, but he replied,

“It is true, but I do not like to attribute any distinction to myself. Allah does not like the man who considers himself superior to his companions.”

The Prophet not only preached to the people to show kindness to each other, but also to all living souls. He forbade the practice of cutting tails and manes of horses, of branding animals at any soft spot, and of keeping horses saddled unnecessarily. If he saw any animal overloaded or ill-fed he would pull up the owner and say,

“Fear Allah in your treatment of animals.”

As his army marched towards Makkah to conquer it, they passed a female dog with puppies. The Prophet not only gave orders that they should not be disturbed, but posted a man to see that this was done. He stated,

“Verily, there is heavenly reward for every act of kindness done to a living animal.”

The Prophet enjoined upon Muslims to treat the poor kindly and to help them with alms and in other ways. He said:

“He is not a perfect Muslim who eats his fill and lets his neighbor go hungry.”

He asked,

“Do you love your creator? Then love your fellow beings first.”

Monopoly is unlawful in Islam and he preached that,

“Pay the wages of a laborer before his sweat dries up.”

He did not encourage beggary either and stated that,

“Allah is gracious to him who earns his living by his own labor, and that if a man begs to increase his property, Allah will diminish it, and whoever has food for the day, it is prohibited for him to beg.”

To his wife he said,

“O Aysha, love the poor and let them come to you and Allah will draw you near to Himself.”

A Madinan, Ibad Bin Sharjil, was once starving. He entered an orchard and picked some fruit. The owner of the orchard gave him a sound beating and stripped him off his clothes. The poor man appealed to the Prophet who remonstrated the owner thus:

“This man was ignorant, you have dispelled his ignorance; he was hungry, you should have fed him.”

The Madinan restored his clothes, and in addition, some grain was given to him.

A debtor, Jabber Bin Abdullah, was being harassed by his creditor, as he could not clear his debt owing to the failure of his date crop. The Prophet went with Jabber to the house of the creditor and pleaded with him to give jabber some more time but the creditor was not prepared to oblige. The Prophet then went to the oasis and having seen for himself that the crop was really poor, he again approached the creditor with no better result. He then rested for some time and approached the creditor for a third time but the latter was adamant. The Prophet went again to the orchard and asked jabber to pluck the dates. As Allah would have it, the collection not only sufficed to clear the dues but also left something to spare (14).

His love for the poor was so deep that he used to pray:

“O Allah, keep me poor in my life and at my death and raise me at resurrection among those who are poor.”

In spite of his being a prophet Mohamed was a very pleasant light-hearted person. His company was full of pleasant and delightful humor.

An old woman came to see the Prophet and asked him to pray for her that she might go to paradise. He replied,

“No old woman will enter paradise.”

The old woman was very grieved and began crying. The Prophet told his companions to tell her that the old woman would go to paradise but as a young girl.

Allah’s Messenger was the kindest of men just as he excelled all others in courage and valor. He was so kindhearted that his eyes brimmed with tears at the slightest sign of inhumanity.

The Prophet forbade his companions to keep the dumb creatures hungry or thirsty, or to disturb or overburden them. He commended kindness to animals and putting them at ease as meritorious acts tending to bring man nearer to Allah. The companion Abu Hurayrah reported the Prophet as saying,

“A traveler who was thirsty saw a well on the way. He got inside the well and when he came out he saw a dog licking mud because of thirst. The man realized that the dog should be as thirsty as he was and so he got into the well again, filled his leather sock with water and carried it out holding it with his teeth. And thus he quenched the dog’s thirst. Allah was pleased with the act of kindness and pardoned his sins.”

The companions asked, “O Messenger of Allah is there recompense in the matter of beasts and wild animals also?”

The Prophet replied,

“There is recompense in regard to every creature that has a living heart.”

The Prophet also said,

“A woman was doomed to enter the Fire because of a cat. She imprisoned it and neither fed it nor set it free to eat the rodents of the earth.”

It was also narrated that once the Prophet entered the enclosure of a young man in Madinah where there was a camel that started groaning on catching sight of the Prophet, tears running down its eyes. The Prophet approached it and patted its hump and face, which set it at ease. Then the Prophet asked who its owner was. The young man came and said: “O Messenger of Allah, it belongs to me.”

The Prophet said to him,

“Do you not fear Allah in the matter of this beast although He has made you his owner? It complained to me that you are hard upon it and always kept it at work.”

The Prophet strongly enjoined kindness towards the slaves, servants and labor engaged for manual work. He said,

“Feed them with the food that you eat, clothe them with such clothing as you wear and do not cause trouble to Allah’s creatures.”

The Prophet also said,

“Those whom Allah has made your dependents are your brothers, servants and helpmates. Anybody whose brother has been made subservient to him ought to feed him with the food he eats and clothe him with the clothes he wears. Command him not to do that which he is unable to do, and if it becomes necessary to do so, then he should help him in doing the job.”

Another great quality of Mohamed was that he never took revenge on anyone for personal reasons and always forgave even his firm enemies. The people of his tribe Quraysh rebuked him, taunted and mocked him, beat him and abused him. They tried to kill him and when he escaped to Madinah, they waged many wars against him. Yet when he entered Makkah victorious with an army of 10,000, he did not take revenge on anyone. He forgave all. Even his deadliest enemy, Abu Sufian, who had fought so many battles against him, was forgiven, as was anyone who stayed in his house. Mohamed also pardoned the leaders of Ta’if, who had engaged ruffians to pelt him with stones when he visited that town to invite them to Islam.

Abdullah ibn Ubay, the leader of the hypocrites of Madinah, worked all his life against Mohamed and Islam. He withdrew his three hundred supporters in the battle of Uhud, which led to the defeat of Muslims in this battle. He engaged in intrigues and acts of hostilities against Muslims and the Prophet of Islam. He tried to discredit Allah's Messenger by spreading slander about his wife A'ishah. About this slander Allah Almighty says,

“Lo! They who spread the slander are a gang among you; nay, it is good for you. Unto every man of them will be paid that which he has earned of the sin; and as for him among them who had the greater share therein, his will be an awful doom.” (An-nur, 11).

Yet Mohamed forgave him, and in Abdullah's funeral Mohamed prayed Allah to forgive him. But afterwards, Allah revealed,

“And never (O Mohamed) pray for one of them who dies, nor stand by his grave. Lo! They disbelieve in Allah and His Messenger, and they died while they were evil doers.” (At-Tawbah, 84).

An Abyssinian slave who had killed Mohamed's beloved uncle Hamzah in the battle of Uhud was also forgiven when he embraced Islam after the victory of Makkah.

The wife of Abu Sufian, hend bint Otba who had cut open Hamzah's chest after his death and torn his liver and heart into pieces in the battle of Uhud, quietly came to the Prophet and accepted Islam. He recognized her but did not say anything. She was so impressed by his magnanimity and stature that she said, “O Allah's Messenger, no tent was more deserted in my eyes than yours; but today no tent is lovelier in my eyes than yours.”

Habar ibn al-Aswad was another vicious enemy of Mohamed and of Islam. He had inflicted a grievous injury to Zaynab, daughter of the Prophet. She was pregnant when she emigrated from Makkah to Madinah. The polytheists of Makkah obstructed her and Habat ibn al-Aswad intentionally threw her down from the camel. She was badly hurt and miscarried as a result. Habar committed many other crimes as well. He wanted to run away to Persia but then he came to Mohamed, who forgave him.

Mohamed was all for forgiveness and no amount of crime or aggression against him were too great to be forgiven by him. He overcame the ignorance of the people with the knowledge of Islam, and the folly and evil of the people with his kind and forgiving treatment. With his forgiveness, he freed people from the bondage of sin and crime, and made them friends of

Islam. He was an exact image of the following verses of the Koran:

“Keep forgiveness (O Mohamed), and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant.” (Al-A’raf, 199).

“Good and evil are not alike. Repel evil with what is better. Then he, between whom and you there was hatred, will become as though he was a bosom friend.” (Fussilat, 34).

Mohamed always kept his promises and contracts at all costs, even with his enemies, and never broke his word.

One of the terms of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah was that if any Muslim came to Madinah from Makkah, he would be returned on demand. While the treaty was being written, a Muslim called Abu Jandal escaped from the prison of the Makkans in chains. All the Muslims were shocked to see him in this condition, but the Prophet said to him, “O Abu Jandal! Be patient, we cannot break the promise. Allah will very soon find a way for you.” Abu Jandal was returned to the people of Makkah.

Mohamed as the Messenger of Allah, decided all cases on merit of justice and equity, irrespective of the color, creed, or race of the defendants. Once a woman from Quraysh was found guilty of stealing. Her people wanted to save her from punishment in order to protect the honor of the family. They wanted to hush up the whole affair. They asked Usamah ibn Zayd, who was very dear to the Prophet, to intercede on her behalf. He requested the Prophet to forgive her. The Prophet furiously said,

“The Children of Israel were ruined because of this. They applied the law to the poor and forgave the rich.”

Abdullah ibn Sahl went to Khaybar for the division of dates, accompanied by his cousin Muhayyisah. There was no one else living in Khaybar except the Jews. While walking in the street, someone murdered Abdullah and his body was thrown in the ditch. Muhayyisah complained to the Prophet who asked him if he could swear that the Jews killed him. Muhayyisah replied that he had not seen with his own eyes. The Prophet said that the Jews should be asked to take an oath. Muhayyisah said, “How can we trust their oath? They will take false oaths a hundred times.” But as there was no eye-witness, the Prophet did not ask anything of the Jews and paid one hundred camels as blood-money from the state treasury.

The Prophet was so well known for his justice that even the Jews, who were his deadly enemies, brought their suits to him and he decided cases in accordance with their law. Justice demands that it should be upheld in all circumstances, even if it goes against one's own self or one's family or relations.

Allah's Messenger proved by his own example that no one could be firmer for justice than he was, even if it was against his own interest or the interest of those who were near or dear to him. He decided every case brought to him by friend or foe with justice, favoring neither the rich nor the poor. The Prophet as head of the Muslim State of Madinah, always treated his enemies, including Jews and disbelievers, with justice and equity.

Ta'ima ibn Ubayraq was nominally a Muslim but really a hypocrite, and given to all sorts of wicked deeds. He was suspected of having stolen a set of armor, and when the trail was hot, he planted the stolen property in the house of a Jew, where it was found. The Jew denied the charge and accused Ta'ima, but the sympathies of the Muslim community were with Ta'ima on account of his nominal profession of Islam. The case was brought to the Prophet, who acquitted the Jew according to the strict principle of justice as guided by Allah. Attempts were made to prejudice him and deceive him into using his authority to favor Ta'ima. When Ta'ima realized that his punishment was imminent he fled and turned apostate (15).

The Prophet very strictly followed the commands of Allah:

“O you who believe! Stand up firmly for justice, as witnesses for Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your near of kin, whether it be against rich or poor, Allah can best protect them. So do not follow your lusts, lest you deviate, for if you twist or turn, then surely Allah is All-Aware of what you do. ” (An-Nisa, 135).

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah has witnesses to justice, and let not the enmity of others incite you to act contrary to justice. Be always just, that is next to piety. Be mindful of your duty to Allah.” (Al-Maidah, 8)

“We have revealed to you the Book in truth, that you may judge between the people as Allah has shown you, so be not an advocate for the treacherous people.” (An Nisa, 105).

After the fall of Mecca and the establishment of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, more than one million square miles of land lay at Mohamed's feet and the Arabs considered him as the Lord of Arabia. But Mohamed did not change in victory or defeat, in power or adversity, in affluence or in

indigence, he is the same man, disclosed the same character. He mended his own shoes and coarse woolen garments, milked the goats, swept the hearth, kindled the fire and attended the other menial offices of the family. The entire town of Medina where he lived grew wealthy in the later days of his life. Everywhere there were gold and silver in plenty and yet in those days of prosperity many weeks would elapse without a fire being kindled in the hearth of the king of Arabia. His food being date and water. His family would go hungry many nights because they could not get anything to eat. He slept on no soften bed, but on a palm mat, after a long busy day to spend most of his night in prayer, often bursting with tears before his creator to grant him strength to discharge his duties. On the very day of his death his only assets were few coins a part of which went to satisfy a debt and the rest was given to a needy person who came to his house for charity. The clothes in which he breathed his last had many patches. The house from where light had spread to the world was in darkness because there was no oil in the lamp.”

Walker rose from his seat and went to the cashier to pay the bill.

“Do you realize that by entering into Islam you are going to offer a lot of sacrifices especially in a society like yours?” Omar said to Jennifer feeling pity for her.

Jennifer: “When you explained Islam to me, it was like watching a rose open –petal by petal, until it reached its full glory. You have created within me a desire to belong to this religion, which so enriches its followers, from the simplest hearts to the most magisterial intellects. Islam became a powerful force like a magnet drawing me closer and closer to it. Islam appealed to my intellect as well as my heart. I knew Islam was for life, that there was no turning back. I will abide by my new religion no matter what.”

Omar: “This is your wakeup call from the Most Merciful. It is not through an act of the mind or will that anyone becomes a Muslim, but rather through the mercy of Allah. Remember always that I will stand by you under all circumstances.”

Jennifer: “It’s strange, but I feel that you are going to be my guidance and guardian in the United States.”

Omar: “I am your brother in Islam. I’ll do my best to encourage your first steps on the road to the true faith. Accepting Islam means to accept that Allah alone deserves worship, has no partners, is unlike any of His creations, and towers high above all things, and also believe that Mohamed is Allah’s Messenger. That is the most important step, but it is also the first. In no way

should merely accepting the faith make one believe that he has become a believer or even a good Muslim for that matter. Improving oneself and one's devotion to his Creator is a lifelong endeavor, but only those who are smart enough to understand and mature enough to accept the truth will ever experience this felicity. Allah, the High and Exalted, guides whomever He chooses, and He has chosen you to be one of His servants. It's a blessing from Allah you must be thankful for. Allah will always be there for you. For every step you take toward Him, He takes ten toward you. Allah has said about those who strive hard in his cause:

Those who strive hard in our cause, We shall guide them to our paths, and indeed Allah is always with the righteous (Al Ankaboot 69).

After you embrace Islam, celebrate the praise of your Lord, and seek His forgiveness, for He is ever relenting. During your struggle to acquire the true faith of Allah in a society carrying enmity to Islam, remember the following Koranic verses:

“Is it not time that the hearts of those who believe should be humbled to the Remembrance of Allah and the Truth which He has sent down, and that they should not be as those to whom the Book was given aforetime, and the term seemed over long to them, so that their hearts have become hard, and many of them are unAllahly? Know that Allah revives the earth after it was dead. We have indeed made clear to you the signs that you may understand.” (Al Hadid 16-17).

“Whatever Mercy Allah may grant to mankind, none can withhold it, and whatever He withholds, none can grant after Him. He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.” (Fatir 2).

Embracing Islam necessitates the practicing of its five pillars. Declaring one's faith, prayer, charity, and fasting are activities pursued repeatedly throughout one's life. Conditions permitting, each Muslim is additionally charged with undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime. The Arabic term for this fifth rite is Hadj (pilgrimage). Scholars relate the word to the concept of Kasd (aspiration) and to the notion of men and women as travelers on earth. In western religions pilgrimage is a vestigial tradition, a quaint, folkloric concept commonly reduced to metaphor. Among Muslims, on the other hand, the Hadj embodies a vital experience for millions of new pilgrims every year. In spite of the modern contents of their lives, it remains

an act of obedience, a profession of belief, and the visible expression of a spiritual community. For a majority of Muslims the Hadj is an ultimate goal, the trip of a lifetime.

Our purpose of existence on earth is more meaningful than being slaves to worldly gains. There can be no meaningful life better than that prescribed by our Creator Allah. Every act done according to Allah's way is an act of worship. Man is the beneficiary and Allah is no need:

“O mankind! It is you who stand in need of Allah, and Allah is the All-sufficient, Worthy of All Praise.” (Fatir 15).”

Silence reigned over Jennifer and Omar for a while. He prayed for her in an audible voice:

“I pray to Allah, the Exalted, to keep you on the right path to which He has guided you, and to bestow on you a blessing from Him, He is indeed Most Merciful. Praise and gratitude be to Allah, The Lord of the worlds, and peace and blessings be on Prophet Mohamed, his family, his companions, and those who rightly follow them. Ameen.”

As Jennifer accepted in her heart that Islam was the true religion, the only thing left to do was to profess her faith. She went to the nearest Islamic center and uttered the words of *Shahada*, “Ashhado Anna La Elaha Ella Lah Wa Anna Mohamed Rasoul Allah.” Which simply means, there is only one Allah and Mohamed is His Messenger? When she said the words, it was like a big burden she had been carrying on her shoulders had been removed. She felt like a new - born baby. She had since come to realize that on that day, the greatest event of her life occurred. She had always thought that the most wonderful thing to ever happen to her was the day that she married Walker. But she now knew it wasn't. The most important day of her life was the day she professed her faith and made her *Shahada* and accepted Islam as the way of life Allah intended her to live. It was the day she acknowledged Islam was the way to salvation, to Heaven, and she made a choice to practice it. The *shahada* was indeed a solid footing on the ladder to spiritual knowledge and closeness to Allah.

Jennifer's inner peace had continued to increase with her knowledge and confidence in the Wisdom of Allah. She knew that Allah was not only her Creator, but also her dearest friend. She knew that Allah will always be there and will never reject her. For every step she took toward Allah, He took ten toward her.

Now she had found direction and purpose for her life. She found the meaning of her existence. She had come to realize that she really was here only for a short time and that what comes afterwards was far better than the fleeting pleasures that this world had to offer her.

Embracing Islam however, was not without price. Months before professing her faith, Jennifer started having a few problems with Walker. She was changing, just in little ways but enough to bother him. They used to go to the bar every Friday and Saturday, or to a party, and she no longer wanted to go. She became quieter and more distant. Walker was outraged when he realized that Jennifer's odd behavior was due to her deep involvement in learning the teachings of Islam. On the other hand, Jennifer knew that if she became Muslim, she will have to divorce Walker, and her family would die. Walker was adamant that he was not going to be a Muslim, so Jennifer had to choose between the man she loved and married, and doing what she knew in her heart was right. She knew that if she truly believed in Allah and His Messenger, Allah will test her, and this was her test. Despite the great amount of pain it caused her at the time, Jennifer did choose Islam over Walker.

Jennifer and Walker ended up in an ugly divorce. The court determined that the unorthodox religion would be detrimental to the development of her children, so they were removed from her custody. During the divorce they told her to renounce Islam and live with her children, or renounce her children and live with her religion. She was in terrible shock. To her this was not a possible choice. If she renounced Islam she would be teaching her children how to be deceptive. For there was no way to deny what was in her heart. She could not deny Allah, not then, not ever. If she denied Him, there would be no way in the future to show her children the wonders of being with Allah. She told the court that she would leave her children in the hands of Allah. This from her view was not a rejection of her children.

She prayed like she had never prayed before. She knew that there was no safer place for her children to be than in the hands of Allah. On Judgment Day, as much as she loved her children, they won't be there for her.

Jennifer left the court knowing that life without her babies would be intolerable. Her heart bled, even though she knew, inside, she had done the right thing. She found solace in the Koranic verses:

“Allah, There is no Allah but He, the living, the Everlasting, Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who is there that shall intercede in His presence save by his leave? He knows what lies before them and what is after them, and they

comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He wills. His throne comprises the heavens and earth; and He feels no fatigue in preserving them, and He is the all High, the All Glorious (Al Baqara, 255).

“Glorify the Name of your Lord the Most High, who created and shaped, who determined and guided, who brought forth the pasturage then made it withered grass. We shall make you recite so you shall not forget save what Allah wills. Surely He knows what is spoken aloud and what is hidden. And We will make it easy for you to follow the simple path. Therefore remind, if the Reminder profits, and he who fears shall remember, but the most wretched will turn away from it, the one who shall roast in the greatest Fire, then he shall neither die therein, nor live. Prosperous is he who purifies himself and mentions the Name of his Lord, and then prays, yet you prefer the present life, and the Hereafter is better and everlasting. Surely this is in the earlier Scriptures, the Scriptures of Abraham and Moses.” (Al-A’la 87:1-19).

Child custody and divorce were not the only problems Jennifer had to face. The rest of her family was not very accepting of her choice either. Most of the family refused to have anything to do with her. All hell broke loose. Her mother was of the belief that it was just a phase and she would grow out of it. Her sister was sure she had simply lost her mind and should be institutionalized. Her father believed she should be killed before placing herself deeper in Hell. He called her to say, “You were born Catholic and so help me God I will make sure you die Catholic.” The whole family was enraged and totally disowned her. Jennifer however made repeated attempts to contact her family but still they refused her and went so far as to have their phone numbers changed. Some have even had legal bans put on her so that she cannot go near their homes. She kept trying to reach them but it has now been over two months since she had heard from them. All of this was destroying to Jennifer, as she loved her family with all her heart. Most of her friends drifted away. She was no fun anymore. She did not want to go to parties or bars. She was not interested in finding a boyfriend. All she ever did was read the Koran and the talk about Islam. Her job was next to go. The day she put on Hijab, was the end of her job. Now she was without a family, without friends and without a job. Jennifer successfully stood the test, and thanked Allah that her faith stood strong against injustice and prejudice.

Jennifer felt a persistent need to see Omar. His words to her about Allah and the prophet delighted her heart and led her to Islam. He was her teacher, he was her mentor.

Jennifer called Omar at the embassy and asked to see him. Dressed in white, Jennifer entered Omar's office floating through the ether, thrilled. She was wearing the traditional Islamic Hijab, including a headscarf, covering her hair and neck, and a gown with long sleeves. She was brightening with the joy of being Muslim. She looked beautiful on the outside, as well as on the inside - a combination that was hard to get. Omar saw the beauty deep within her soul. He saw the path to Heaven. She was like a fair stream flowing through the desert. Omar stood in awe of the miracle, admiring the light of her face. He felt the presence of inspiration filling each corner of the room.

They sat opposite to each other, and talked, and talked:

Jennifer: "I only wanted to be loved, to feel comfort, to feel safe. I came to see you because you are special, you ease the pain." Her voice trembled and tears filled her eyes.

Omar: "You seem to make it through when others have fallen. To change one's life is difficult. Heaven's blessings will come to you; all you have to do is pray and ask."

Jennifer: "I came to thank you for showing me the path to Heaven. How you caused the sun to rise; I was surrounded by the darkness but you guided me to light. How do I ever repay you?"

Omar: "Don't ever let yourself discouraged. There will be no battle you can't defeat. Even when you felt so forsaken, Allah has never left your side. Continue your quest for knowledge about Islam in its truest form untainted by cultural practices and racial divides. Learn about Islam as clearly and beautifully detailed in the Koran and Hadith (narration of the Prophet).

Jennifer: "I will show people how life is worth living. I will spread the Lord's words of wisdom. I will let His light shines on others."

Omar: "We live in Allah's graces. He is inspiring us in everything we do. Don't be afraid to use the gifts He gave you."

Jennifer: "My struggle is far from over. Western culture is not accepting Islam, and it is mostly out of ignorance that this is so. They think that we are fundamentalists or terrorists, or some other sort of monster willing to destroy the peaceful Christian world. The way in which I combat the unkind comments is through kindness and understanding."

Omar: "Muslims must have patience and compassion for those who do not understand our way of life. Eventually Allah reveals Himself to those who

seek true knowledge and understanding.”

Jennifer: “I feel truly grateful that Allah has guided me to where I am today. I truly feel blessed. It seems that all of the pieces of my life fit together in a pattern – a path to Islam.”

Omar: “Know that Islam is life, not a way of life but life itself. Muslims are not what Islam has to offer. Islam cannot be judged by the actions of Muslims, Muslims can only be judged by Islam.”

Jennifer: “I spent thirty years of my life without knowing the beauty and peace that I now have. I hope I can help someone else to find what I found – tranquility and peace. Islam is the blood that courses through my veins. Islam is my life so wonderful and beautiful. Without Islam, I am nothing and should Allah ever turn His magnificent Face from me I could not survive.”

Omar: “Islam deserves to be looked at because it is misconceived by many, mainly because of the media and the lack of true knowledge about it in western society. It is seen as an oppressive religion – it is not. There is millions of Muslims content with life, and millions reverted to the religion to which they were born and now lead a better life and will be successful in the Hereafter. Look at the American society that we live in today. Murders, violence, under-age sex, sexual relations before marriage, a high rate of divorce, single parenthood, abuse of children, and this list goes on and on to just mention a few of the evils of society. These are unfortunately all too common occurrences. It is frightening to see how society is changing. It is a vicious circle that has to stop because millions of people are suffering every minute of the day unnecessarily.”

Jennifer: “Islam is attractive to westerners because of its universal message. The faithful believe that everyone is born Muslim and thus call the transformation reversion, not conversion – and because its teachings incorporate other traditions, honoring Jesus Christ as a Prophet, Abraham the father of Prophets, and other Biblical figures as Prophets. There is no class. There isn’t really a formalized requirement; you don’t have to be tested.”

Omar: “Unprecedented numbers of British people, nearly all of them women, are converting to Islam at a time of deep divisions within the Anglican and Catholic churches. The surge in conversions to Islam has taken place despite the negative image of the faith in the western press. The pace of conversion has accelerated since publicity over the Salman Rushdie affair, the Gulf war and the plight of the Muslims in Bosnia and Cosovo. It is even more ironic that most British converts should be women, given the widespread view in the west that Islam treats women poorly. In Britain 10,000 to 20,000 converts enter Islam daily, forming part of a Muslim

community of 1 to 1.5 million.”

Jennifer: “Islam is also spreading fast in America. Women converts outnumber men by 3 to one. 25,000 people a year become Muslims in this country. With some 6 million adherents in the United States, Islam is said to be the nation’s fastest-growing religion, fueled by immigration, high birth rates and widespread conversion. The vast majority of converts are African-Americans, who make up about a third of Muslims in the United States. Thousands find Allah while in jail, or in recovery from drug or alcohol addiction.”

The moral support Omar gave Jennifer made her leave with satisfaction in her heart. It did not take Jennifer long to start being aware of Allah’s blessings. She learned how important it was for her to share the truth of Islam with everyone. It did not matter if people, Muslim or not, agreed with her or even liked her. The only approval and love she needed was from Allah. Yet, she discovered more and more people, who for no apparent reason loved her. Friends who loved her came out of nowhere. She rejoiced, for she remembered reading that if Allah loves you, He causes others to love you. She endeavored to, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

When possible Jennifer worked for Islam in schools, Islamic publishing houses and websites, as well as non-governmental organizations. She also gave classes at the American Open University for Islamic studies, but she had always wanted to work for relief organizations and helping people. Omar helped her work for Global Relief Foundation. It’s where she had been for four months now.