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3. A Seeker Of Truth Shamim H.M. Rajpar (U.S.A.)

Miss Roberta J. Hartar of the U.S.A was disenchanted with Christian inconsistency of believing in one God, who at the same time is three persons. In her search for truth she was attracted to Islam, because it is not simply a dogma, but a total way of life. In the following article she tells the story of her spiritual journey.

After conversion she took the name 'Shamim', and was married to Mr. Haidarali M. Rajpar. They have settled in the USA.

I Followed The Light Of Allah

Ms. Shamim H.M. Rajpar

Often certain phrases can make such an impression on our minds that they give us the necessary impetus to search for the deeper and greater meaning behind them. I was born in a Christian home where worship was a beautiful matter of love for God, Christ and what were regarded as the teachings of the church. Such love must never be scorned, especially when it serves as the guiding force in holding the family and community together. What better concept could act as the cement for holding such structures together?

Unfortunately, when one looks more closely at this guiding principle it is quickly discovered that much of it is based on emotion and a willingness (through faith) to overlook or accept certain inconsistencies which are inherent in the very basis of that principle. The most glaring of these especially to a Muslim, is the confirmation; on one hand God is one and eternal, then on the other He has divided himself into a trinity the parts of which are to be worshipped as though they were still "One God."

I began at a very early age to need an in-depth study of this concept. Even before much of a semblance of intellectual development had come to me, I began to explore the tenets of one Christian sect after

another. None of them satisfied my demands. After many years of searching, I finally came to the conclusion that organized religion was not necessary. All that a man needed was to have faith in God, love Him, and to try to lead a good life. At this point I chose as my "capsule of truth" and guiding principle a quotation I had read somewhere which had left a very deep impression on me:

"A man's daily life is his example and his religion."

Now, I was certain that I was all set with my own "religion". I was even certain that I had gone beyond the pale of agnosticism. I should lead what I thought was a good life. I would love God, love my fellowmen, and try to avoid any harm to them because of my actions.

It was not long before the central weakness of this system of thought became clear to me. How could I have the power to judge what the makeup of a good life would be? Most thinking men before me had tried and many of the great among them had been successful in discovering at least certain requisites of proper living. But none of them, to my way of thinking, had produced a complete code of behaviour which touched on each and every aspect of man's dealings with other men and with his God. Others, who truly believed in their "discoveries" established systems purely based on evil and motivated by their own base desires. The Maruquis de Sade is one notable example.

I realized that I needed some infallible guide to show me the right way and that if it was completely free from injustice and selfish motives, it could not be the sole product of men alone. It must come from an Eternal God who was Justice and Selflessness and who, because of his eternity of knowing past present and future, would be able to make pronouncements that would stand for all times, peoples, and places.

It was at this point that the study of the development of Islam was introduced into my history program. Admittedly, much of this study was prejudiced in favour of the West and to the detriment of Islam. And as a history course, greatest emphasis was put on political developments with religion being largely reduced to footnotes. But truth has a way of winning and again I was struck by another phrase which led me to search for its deeper meaning:

"Islam is not simply a religion, it is a total way of life."

I distinctly remember being bothered and made restless by these words. Something in the center of my being told me that they must not be ignored and that they demanded full attention. I began to read voraciously but didn't achieve any real understanding or the satisfaction. So I decided to live in a Muslim country and applied for a contract in North Africa where I would have the opportunity of living in a total Muslim atmosphere. Perhaps in the end, it was better for me that I was placed in East Africa where I could experience Islam as a living force in a larger community with other world religions. I was deeply moved when I witnessed the tolerance and respect which my new Muslim brothers accorded to these other groups. Here was a true example of teaching put into practice. My former church had also propounded such principles, but in practice fell far short of their achievement.

But my search for the true faith and the discovery of how God intended us to spend our lives still continued. I watched Muslims in their daily lives but since I believed that a religion must not be judged simply on the practices of its followers but rather on its teachings, I began to read again; this time on the various sects of Islam. I was now convinced that Islam was the proper way of life but sought to understand it fully.

My eventual decision to accept the Shia Ithna-'ashari belief as the true faith and as the right way of life was based primarily on two doctrines to which it ascribes:

The first of these was that God has given us free will. This beautiful yet awesome gift has made it incumbent upon us to accept true responsibility for all our thoughts and deeds. Without this framework of free will and the responsibility that attends it, the attempt to know God's will and to follow it would have little real meaning. I found it difficult to believe that a just God would arbitrarily damn individuals without first having given them a fair chance to prove themselves.

Since my whole search in finding the right faith was motivated by a desire to know better what God's intentions for our lives were, I examined very closely the way different groups had obtained their corpus of law on how we should guide our lives. Again, I turned to the Shia Ithna 'ashari faith as being the one to have arrived at this truth in the proper way. I had long ago decided against the possibility of man alone being capable of erecting a system for himself. My decision that such a system must be built on the guidance of God was not a new one. Even in the question of which men will lead us in religious matters in this world, the final decision must belong to God. It is impossible for us to choose a leader without considering how he will further our own interests; and it is impossible for us to know that our own interests will not be in serious conflict with those of others.

I accepted the Shia Ithna-'ashari faith because I firmly believe that God has sent us the Holy Prophet to reveal His will to us and that He further sent us our twelve precious Imams so that we should better understand and know His will as revealed in the Holy Qur'an. This is not the province of ordinary men to decide for themselves the agents of God. I accepted the Shia Ithna-'ashari faith so that I might finally begin my real search — to learn the true way God has intended us to lead our lives.

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