

## Introduction

Life always amazes me; things happen that you would never expect. I know that I never expected to become a Muslim until one stormy night sailing on the ocean in a 57-foot schooner I realized I needed to do more than just read the Quran that a friend gave me. You will find that night's story and how I became an "official Muslim" in Chapter 1.

That night in 1976 started me on a wonderful journey, one I am still on and enjoying more every day. Of course, an enormous amount has happened in the world since the journey began, and some of the change affects many Muslim women.

However, the changes do not eradicate the issues Muslim women often face. For most of us in the West, their lives are veiled from us. We cannot imagine what these women face on a daily basis. Thus this book—I decided to attempt to share my experience of becoming a Muslim many years ago and how that changed my life.

Initially, I followed what I believed was the only form of Islam. When I became more familiar with the Quran, I began to see that the culture and traditions of the Arabs and other Muslims hid Quranic Islam. I pray this book will lift that veil for you along with the more general veil covering the lives of Muslim women, God willing.

I intended the first writing of this material for other Muslims, and that book, entitled *My Heart's Surprise* and published by BSM Press in 2001, had limited success as a niche book for Muslims.

In 2002 I published again with BSM Press the second version of the book, then entitled *Women's Rights, The Quran and Islam*. In that version I changed my focus to make the book more accessible to the general reader of the time shortly after the infamous 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and other targets. Suddenly people wanted to learn about Islam and needed to do so.

I will never forget that terrible morning—waking up and getting ready for work as if it were just another morning. Then my best friend Lydia telephoned. "Turn on the TV. Something terrible is happening in New York."

Half dressed my husband and I ran into the dark living room. Without turning on the lights we turned on the TV to the horror of the World Trade Center collapsing.

I never brought myself to watch the videos again, or the coverage of earlier events where people jumped from windows and died on the streets below. Nor can I bring myself to listen to the frantic phone calls from those caught in the towers as they spoke to their loved ones in those last minutes, knowing their lives would soon end.

I don't remember much more about that morning, probably because like most Americans and a huge portion of the world, shock took over my brain. However I do remember walking into work and encountering Maria, an older woman of Native American descent, her normally cheerful face a grey mask, almost as grey as her shoulder-length hair. We talked earlier about our various faiths, so she knew mine.

When she caught sight of me her whole face stiffened with emotion, pointing at me, “You did this!” she screamed. And she pivoted around on her heel and walked in the opposite direction down the asphalt-tiled main hallway of our office building.

Already in shock, she stunned me further. My eyes, still red from crying immediately filled again and I ended up in the women’s bathroom sobbing until I could pull myself together enough to work, or rather attempt to. I suspect not much work got done that day in most places in the United States.

None of our lives have ever been the same since then. Worldwide we became aware of the terror under which millions had lived for years. Now that terror stalks us in this country too. This country—having never seen such a terrorist attack on our soil—will never recover totally from 9/11.

I believe it will always haunt us, triggered again and again by current events, for such horrifying terror attacks continue throughout the world today. Thankfully at least some of the major “Muslim” terrorist groups ended up defeated and all but eradicated. Sometimes more audacious “Muslim” terrorist organizations replaced them. I put quotes around Muslim for these groups because no true Muslim would participate in such horrifying acts that go so totally against the Quran and any true teachings of the God all humans share. As you will find more than once in this book, the Quran condemns such hideous violence.

“But what does this have to do with Muslim women’s rights?” you might ask. It has a great deal to do with them. Terrorism affects all people, but it especially affects women and their children. For though men fight, ultimately it is the women, children, and elderly who survive and have to pick up the pieces after the fighting ends.

In multiple areas in recent years, the decimation of the male Muslim population forced women to take over more and more masculine duties, even to the extent of becoming soldiers and fighting terrorists like ISIS and its so-called Islamic State. This book includes Chapter 24, in honor of those amazing women who not only fought but won against their terrorist enemies and the enemies of democracy and freedom.

Throughout the Muslim world, change has come for women in recent years, though not always for the good. In some places like Turkey, the first Muslim country to really make great strides in women’s rights, there have been some reversals to those rights. However, the general trend continues to be more positive than negative, by God’s grace.

You may wonder exactly what you will find in this book. It tells the story of my coming to terms with what I thought Islam meant for women when I first began practicing the religion and how the Quran resolved the issues I found. As I write about each issue I encountered I also share from other sources, especially from the Bible and the stories of other women.

I begin with the issues I thought would make it difficult for me to live as a modern Western woman. However, as I studied the Quran I found that of all the scriptures the Quran acts as the torchbearer for women’s rights. Probably not what most readers expect. Why? Because what most of us know as Islam does not follow the Quran, rather it follows traditions and culture, especially that of the Arabs who initially received

the Quran but then chose to follow the *Hadith* and *Sunna* instead. Hadith and Sunna<sup>1</sup> are what tradition says the prophet Muhammad said and did. Like all religious congregations, Muslims inter-mix their culture with their scripture.

Why does this happen? We all see everything through the lens of our culture, including divine revelation. And so we interpret the revelation—be it the Vedas, Torah, Gospels, Quran, etc.—through that lens. In part, this explains the inevitable spread of denominations, sects, and other groupings in all religions. Humans divide and then want to impose *their* understandings on others. I believe this causes all the religious and other conflicts humanity sees and has probably seen its entire history.

I am not an unbiased source because for most of my life I have accepted the Quran as God’s word. However, I pray, God willing, whatever your views you will find some value and enjoyment in this exploration into my journey to become a scriptural Muslim—one who now follows only the scripture in my religious practice.

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<sup>1</sup> For a longer discussion of my response to Hadith and Sunnah please see my story “Why Not Hadith and Sunnah?” on Medium (<https://medium.com/the-heart-of-quran/why-reject-hadith-and-sunnah-15d203c59a37> - last accessed 11/27/2020.)