

happened & were happening again, many of the players alive still, with not even the excuse of oblivion. Warning signs flashing from way back & the last several decades a supermarket shelf of cruelty, mayhem & confusion.

But Bosnia was the catalyst, fusing somehow all the distress, the lost systemic trust that had been rising for longer than you cared to remember. I once traveled on a Yugoslav freighter ship, in 1964. Met a lady from Zagreb, sailors from Split & Dubrovnik. Spent a night in Belgrade. These were “normal” people, who laughed & sought friendship. What could have turned people “like me” into targets & killers? Was it living in a world where credibility was cheap, humanity cheaper, and **truth & intrinsic morality the cheapest of all?**

Then – by the grace of Allah – I met Islam.

Home: Islam walked into my life, really. Circuitously: a professional contact, this very magazine (The Message), books & the quiet patience, example of several good Muslims. Islam was an enigma, then. I was not unfamiliar with some aspects of it, its outward expressions. In Morocco, where I grew up (nominally Jewish), the muezzin for Fajr cradling the dawns, near the port, in a sleeping city. We (non-Muslims) would half awaken, and turn over in sleep, but somehow lulled and soothed. Sunburnt pelicans commuting over the narrow straight to al-Andalus, not bad people, any of us, just living the good life, here and now... I knew the origins of Islam, the greatness, the decline. I knew the Muslim stereotypes: some even seemed apt. But I did **not** know Islam, and its real glory.

It was Islam, of course, that made me do it, seek admittance to the Ummah of the Mumineen. Islam by way of unarguable logic & the blaze of truth. Islam as the right way to thank Allah again, again and again for all His creation. Allah Sublime, & Allah All-Merciful offering us Islam the practical and Islam the exhilarating.

Islam had the only real answer, held the only possible solution. The Islamic code, if allowed to work, seemed based on **cooperation** rather than **competition**. Demanding **not** the virulent ethics of survival of the fittest, though Allah recognizes natural leaders & followers, but a whole of everything in its place and a place for everything. Order. Honour. Justice. Inclusion. Dignity for the beggar & the king. Self-restraint & self-discipline:

Chaos tamed.

Here was tolerance, endurance, reasonableness, real charity. **Not** superimposed: built-in. **Not** ideals: facts. Islam was this or it was not. The books spoke of decency for human beings, and the **striving for excellence in every task**. Of nature & Ibadah, a worship supreme, innate & indisputable, with the wisdom known only to One Who creates & knows His creatures through & through. Examples of Iman & Ibadah were put before me, real enough to touch. **It was as if a great light had come up in a pelting rainstorm.**

The Seerah of the Messenger (p) astonished me. I sat up; began to pay attention, to take notice, to want to honour & follow this man who had lived so, and spoken so, and taught so. It was shattering. By this I mean, to every question, the clear & perfect answer. At the first encounter with the Quran, a hush fell. This surely was the voice of Allah. It could **not** be otherwise. So pure & pristine, knowing & fair. A guide that took us into account, knew us to be volatile things, & feckless, & pleasure-seeking, & willful. Knew our defects & would still forgive. We were imperfect, **but allowed to reach for perfection**. For the first time I felt what Divine Mercy is, to aid the sincere, the hopeful, the good, the wannabe-goods, those who strive to worship Allah as He wishes. **For the first time, I felt God.**

Islam is exacting on individuals, and easy on mankind; demanding, and accommodating; concrete, and uplifting. It is the code of unselfishness which does **not** deny the self. It is nothing if **not** the most natural and self-evident of paths. Allah has marked it out, and the Creator knows. **“When there comes the Help of Allah & the victory, and you see people entering the religion of Allah in companies, then celebrate the praise of your Lord, and ask His forgiveness; surely He is oft-returning to mercy.”** (Surah 110).

It may be said, I spent a lifetime preparing for Islam. But when it came, Islam came upon me as a flash of shock & recognition. **All else fading into irrelevance, all at once.** That was the way it went. In the Name of God, Most Compassionate & Merciful.

So she did. She wrote. From a soul swept away in divine love & a heart whose every beat moved to the rhythm of Allahu, Allahu. To truly live one must find the rhythm of God to feed your thirsty soul & hungry heart. May this **electrifying story be the stepping stone to finding your own transcendent music.**

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It was as if a great light...
CRASHING
INTO
GOD'S INFINITY
...had come up in a pelting rainstorm

Learn. Transcend the narrow.
Reach beyond self.
You are a witness now.
Average as it is, this story holds a sameness to all others, and in that sameness, a universal witness for the truth of Islam. This is a story of walking toward Islam slowly, unintentionally, **unaware** of the grace of destination.
Not looking for God:
Crashing into His infinity.
And then:
Vision after **blindness**.
Peace after **turbulence**.
Shelter after being **lost**.
Islam, Alhamdulillah.
There came a time when I deeply needed Allah. And in that time, Allah was Merciful, and Allah was there. Here. Write, they had said.
So I did. *Lydia Griffin*
Islam came upon me...
...as a flash of shock & recognition.

Her. Lydia Griffin: a Jewess. Him. Shamal Zamaluddin: a Muslim. It's the early 1990s. Those who keep diaries would nail down the specific season, the date & time when life-changing events occur. Unknown at the time but clear as crystal with hindsight. I just have memories to rely on but what's known it's the early 90s. Sitting at my desk working on The Message magazine in New York. The phone rings. Me: **Salaam Alaikum, The Message, how can I help?** And Vicky answers. She: **I love your magazine but you do know there are errors in its pages.** I sighed. **Yes I know but a lot of the writers are from the sub-continent and English is their third or fourth language.** She: **Hey, I can help do your editing.** Me: **That would be wonderful but...** She: **For free.** Oh, there is nothing Muslims love more than "free." Welcome on board. For a few months Vicky edited & what an excellent job she did. Then she had to leave & here's where the real "excitement" began. An excitement unbeknownst to any of us at the Center at the time. Vicky: My cousin Lydia needs a job and is willing to work fulltime for a salary. She's a Jewess. No problem, I said, provided she's as good as you. Wranglings began at the Islamic Center as my insistence for hiring a Jewess (who knows the job) didn't waver. My editor, a Kashmiri brother, was also on my side. Finally, you hire her or I quit. They hired her. Her editing, her writing were mind-blowing. Persons within the Clinton administration called her "The brightest mind in America." And with good reason. She knew about 20 languages written & spoken. Travelled to many countries of the world doing social documentaries like "The Street Children of Brazil," "Police Brutality in South American Countries," & "The Cocaine War."

From this Jewess, this Muslim re-rooted his faith. Her devotion to excellence, her brilliance, I have never seen in any Muslim man...or woman. The moral: Keep your eyes open throughout your life for you never know from where good comes.

Tighten your seat-belt and get ready for an intellectual rollercoaster ride that will leave you spiritually breathless.

Here is her story...

Write, they said. It is what you do, they said. How you came from so far away to find Allah, to fear & to love Him, to worship Him.

Write.

I cannot. It is of little interest to any other. I cannot find the words for the awakening, when the light came. I know so little *still*. I cannot.

Just write of the journey that led to Islam, they said. Please write, **it could help one soul.**

But each private road that takes an adult to Islam is the same. Only the details vary, the final instrument, the person or the text that crystallize the joyful, grateful surrender. **Behind each Shahadah**, there really is only this, the recognition of Islam-as-necessity; the pacified heart that also beats faster in Islam, the delighted mind that yields to the seamless all-pervading reason of Islam.

Now the road which led to Islam is distant, remote, though it is close in time. Now the journey in Islam is all that matters. Growth-in progress: Islam takes hold & irradiates. Islam is multi-dimensional in essence & in practice. **The Shahadah is a door opening onto a place of expansion.** Islam may have a beginning in a life in progress, **but it has no end.** Islam does **not** so much make you grow as it re-roots you in growth. With each prayer, it deepens. Islam: submit & surrender. Iman: believe. Ihsan: be just, be more than just. Simplifications of cardinal Islam, but then, Islam is simple, in the simplicity of evident things.

Far Away: Science made me do it; Islam, by the far way of science, the first steps on the road. By natural inclination an analyzer, a critic, a skeptic: "we require proof, please." Open-minded, but enveloped in self-absorption. Fairly typical, really, of a certain culture. Where the independent-minded hold out on principle: when the fashions of the culture and times, Western times, went up, you went down. When they headed south, you turned north. Standing alone, self-sufficient. I know my rights, I know my priorities: no follower, I. The rights of mankind through the rights of Allah mere abstractions reserved for lofty discourses. It was imperative to protect the right of self, **locking the barricades of survival with a self-crafted key.**

In this worldly, "sophisticated" life (by circumstance if **not** by choice) rattled a familiar saber, that well-known **sense of futility in the reality** they were

handing out, the one the French liked to call "existentialist." There you stood, your well-meaning, **often befuddled, so-called Western intellectual** ...Out there, you knew, shined a very real universe of wondrous things, of creations ceaseless & numberless, of beauty thoughts could **not** encompass & a mechanism so perfectly, so exactly calibrated that the jigsaw became ever more **unexplainable** the more it was explained.

Explained, it was: to you, the journalist on a chosen beat of science stories, a steady diet of astronomy, ethology (animal behaviour), human cultures, and yes, evolution & Mr. Darwin. The missing link? Always missing; when you closed the book & shut the light, and you were in the dark.

And if the times were bad, you began to pray, in your language, in your words, pray hard. You, the atheist.

And if the times were good, you allowed yourself some idle considerations (that always turned perplexing), you turned in circles. The "how" of things was comfortable enough. Big Bang and cellular chains, double helixes unfolding in sequence, logic itself. It was the "why" that was puzzling. **The more it seemed you opened your eyes, the more they felt closed.**

Bosnia made me do it. Islam by the flat way of inhumanity, flat like an electrocardiogram line going, going, gone: dead straight. A journalist reads and writes what is "hot," what sells. Bosnia was selling. Trying to make sense of something utterly senseless. One day, you could not deny it any longer: you were sickened. Fed up. You faced it, **that this mighty West was a sham**, all its charter freedoms and brotherhoods and equalities spoon-fed to soft-hearted kids, and all **worthless**. Incapable of feeding its hungry, of housing its poor, unwilling to protect the battered. This could be no great ideology, could hold no great truth, if it could not even look itself in the mirror every morning. If it knew what it was doing and then did it. If all its lovely literature – and lovely, some of it, I still think – of compassion and justice knew no pity off the written page. If hypocrisy and hate built ghettos & then blasted them. If World War I, II, (III) had