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#### INTRODUCTION OF IIE

The Institute of Islamic Information & Education (IIE) is established for the sole purpose of disseminating true and correct information about Islam and taking corrective action for the removal of misinformation and false perceptions which exist in the American society about Islam and Muslims. This brochure is a contribution to achieve the stated goal.

The Institute has published numerous brochures and articles on basic tenets of Islam and Islamic practices. Anyone wishing to have a complete set or a selection thereof should write to the Institute and request a complete set of its publications. In addition, the Institute provides learned Muslims as speakers to schools, churches, community organizations and talk shows. The Institute operates an Islamic Reading Room in Chicago and holds classes for non- and new Muslims who may be interested in advancing their knowledge in Islamic beliefs and practices.



# Choosing Islam

One Man's Tale

## CHOOSING ISLAM — ONE MAN'S TALE

I became a Muslim when it seemed I had already accepted Islam in my bones, as if beyond choice, and I only had to make a leap to embrace it formally. Outwardly I was content; inwardly I was coasting. My three-year-old theatre company was disbanded after a hilariously chaotic production for a Tim Leary Benefit at the Family Dog in San Francisco, circa '68—naturally the orange juice everyone had passed around was spiked, so that chorus members were doing the final scene in the first ten minutes—and for six months I had been methodically typing out poetry manuscripts in my attic in Berkeley preparatory to a big publishing push.

I considered myself a Zen Buddhist. But I was other things as well. My normal routine was to get up, sit zazen, smoke a joint, do half an hour of yoga, then read the *Mathnawi* of Rumi, the long mystical poem of that great Persian Sufi of the thirteenth century.

Then I met the man who was to be my guide to our teacher in Morocco, Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib, may Allah be pleased with him. At first the meeting was simply remarkable, and my guide simply a remarkable man. But soon our encounter was to become extraordinary, leading to a revolution in my life from which I have never recovered and never hope to.

The man looked like an eccentric Englishman. He too had only recently come out of the English version of the Hippie Wave. He was older, refined in his manners, spectacularly witty and intellectual, but of that kind prevalent then who had hobnobbed with the

Beatles and knew the Tantric Art collection of Brian Jones firsthand. He had been on all the classic drug quests—peyote in the Yucatan, mescaline with Laura Huxley—but with the kif quest in Morocco he had stumbled on Islam, and then the Sufis, and the game was up. A profound change had taken place in his life that went far beyond the psychedelic experience.

For the three days following our meeting, two other Americans and I listened in awe as this magnificent story teller unfolded the picture of Islam, of the perfection of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, of the Sufis of Morocco, and of the 100-year-old plus Shaykh, sitting under a great fig tree in a garden with his disciples singing praises of Allah. It was everything I'd always dreamed of. It was poetry come alive. It was the visionary experience made part of daily life, with the Prophet a perfectly balanced master of wisdom and simplicity, an historically accessible Buddha, with a mixture of the earthiness of Moses, the otherworldliness of Jesus, and a light all his own.

The prophetic knowledge our guide talked about was a kind of spiritual existentialism. It was a matter of how you enter a room, which foot you entered with, that you sipped water but gulped milk, that you said, "Bismillah" (In the Name of Allah) before eating or drinking, and "Al-hamdulillah" (Praise be to Allah) afterwards, and so on. But rather than seeing this as a burden of hundreds of "how-to's," it was more like what the LSD experience taught us, that there is a "right" way to do things that has, if you will, a cosmic resonance. It is a constant awareness of courtesy to the Creator and His creation that in itself ensures and almost visionary intensity.

It is hard to put forward any kind of explanation of Islam, to try to suggest the beauty of its totality, through the medium of words. The

light of Islam, since it is transformational and alchemical in nature, almost always comes via a human messenger who is a transmitter of the picture by his very being.

Face to face with our guide, what struck us most was his impeccable, noble behavior. He seemed to be living what he was saying. Finally the moment came, as a surprise, when he confronted me with my life. "Well," he said one morning after three full days of rapturous agreement that what he was bringing us was the best thing we'd ever heard. "What do you think? Do you want to become a Muslim?"

I hedged. "It's the most beautiful thing I've heard about so far. After all my Zen Buddhism, all my yoga, Tibetan Buddhism and Hindu gurus, this is certainly it! But I think I would like to travel a little, see the world, go to Afghanistan (then unoccupied), maybe meet my Shaykh in a mountain village far off somewhere."

"That's not good enough. You have to decide now. Yes or no. If it's yes, then we start on a great adventure. If it's no, then no blame, I've done my duty. I'll just say goodbye and go on my way. But you have to decide now. I'll go downstairs and read a magazine and wait. Take your time."

When he had left the room I saw there was no choice. My whole being had already acquiesced. All my years up to that moment simply rolled away. I was face-to-face with worship of Allah, wholly and purely, with the Path before me well-trodden, heavily signposted, with a guide to a Master plunk in front of me. Or I could reject all of this for a totally self-invented and uncertain future.

It was the day of my birthday, just to make it that much more dramatic. I chose Islam.

Abd al-Hayy Moore