



## By The Sword Or Not By The Sword!

Among the most widely believed myths about Islam in the West today is the myth of forcible conversion to Islam.

Many Westerners do believe that Islam is so widespread in the world today simply because of a "holy campaign of terror" carried out by the early Muslims to convert non-Muslims to Islam. Non-Muslims were offered the freedom to choose either Islam or death.

The famous Jewish American convert to Islam, Maryam Jameelah, cited the Qur'an as the major factor of her conversion. After a deep study of both the Old Testament and the Qur'an, the contrast between the two scriptures became increasingly evident to her until she firmly believed that the Qur'an was indeed God's message to the human race.

Islam is so strong and so self-assured that it does not need to use force to attract others to it. The moral and intellectual superiority of Islam over all other religions has manifested itself so clearly throughout the history of Islam. Despite all of the ills of Muslims everywhere, Islam continues to be the fastest growing religion on earth. Professor Huston Smith of the MIT in his book, "The Religions of Man" says: "In some areas where Islam and Christianity are competing for converts, Islam is gaining at a rate of 10 to 1."

You will find many of the peoples of the Indian subcontinent and the Malay-speaking world. Convert to Islam, as a matter of fact the largest Muslim country (population wise) is Indonesia, where Islam spread through trades, where Muslims use to travel to purchase products and stay until the wind allow their ship to go back and during that time the natives notice the true religion of Islam.

In his article " Muhammad Sword", Uri Avnery is a journalist, peace activist, former member of the Knesset, and leader of Gush Shalom. He is a regular contributor to Media Monitors Network (MMN). States "The story about "spreading the faith by the sword" is an evil legend, one of the myths that grew up in Europe during the great wars against the Muslims - the reconquista of Spain by the Christians, the Crusades and the repulsion of the Turks, who almost conquered Vienna

Jesus said: "You will recognize them by their fruits." The treatment of other religions by Islam must be judged by a simple test: How did the Muslim rulers behave for more than a thousand years, when they had the power to "spread the faith by the sword"? Well, they just did not.

For many centuries, the Muslims ruled Greece. Did the Greeks become Muslims? Did anyone even try to Islamize them? On the contrary, Christian Greeks held the highest positions in the Ottoman administration. The Bulgarians, Serbs, Romanians, Hungarians and other European nations lived at one time or another under Ottoman rule and clung to their Christian faith. Nobody compelled them to become Muslims and all of them remained devoutly Christian. True, the Albanians did convert to Islam, and so did the Bosniaks. But nobody argues that they did this under duress. They adopted Islam in order to become favorites of the government and enjoy the fruits.

In 1099, the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem and massacred its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants indiscriminately, in the name of the gentle Jesus. At that time, 400 years into the occupation of Palestine by the Muslims, Christians were still the majority in the country. Throughout this long period, no effort was made to impose Islam on them. Only after the

expulsion of the Crusaders from the country, did the majority of the inhabitants start to adopt the Arabic language and the Muslim faith - and they were the forefathers of most of today's Palestinians.

There is no evidence whatsoever of any attempt to impose Islam on the Jews. As is well known, under Muslim rule the Jews of Spain enjoyed a bloom the like of which the Jews did not enjoy anywhere else until almost our time. Poets like Yehuda Halevy wrote in Arabic, as did the great Maimonides. In Muslim Spain, Jews were ministers, poets, scientists. In Muslim Toledo, Christian, Jewish and Muslim scholars worked together and translated the ancient Greek philosophical and scientific texts. That was, indeed, the Golden Age. How would this have been possible, had the Prophet decreed the "spreading of the faith by the sword"?

What happened afterwards is even more telling. When the Catholics re-conquered Spain from the Muslims, they instituted a reign of religious terror. The Jews and the Muslims were presented with a cruel choice: to become Christians, to be massacred or to leave. And where did the hundreds of thousand of Jews, who refused to abandon their faith, escape? Almost all of them were received with open arms in the Muslim countries. The Sephardi ("Spanish") Jews settled all over the Muslim world, from Morocco in the west to Iraq in the east, from Bulgaria (then part of the Ottoman Empire) in the north to Sudan in the south. Nowhere were they persecuted. They knew nothing like the tortures of the Inquisition, the flames of the auto-da-fe, the pogroms, the terrible mass-expulsions that took place in almost all Christian countries, up to the Holocaust.

Why? Because Islam expressly prohibited any persecution of the "peoples of the book". In Islamic society, a special place was reserved for Jews and Christians. They did not enjoy completely equal rights, but almost. They had to pay a special poll-tax, but were exempted from military service - a trade-off that was quite welcome to many Jews. It has been said that Muslim rulers frowned upon any attempt to convert Jews to Islam even by gentle persuasion - because it entailed the loss of taxes.

Every honest Jew who knows the history of his people cannot but feel a deep sense of gratitude to Islam, which has protected the Jews for fifty generations, while the Christian world persecuted the Jews and tried many times "by the sword" to get them to abandon their faith.

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Therefore, we should ask ourselves first, before we are asked by anyone else, what is the truth? Did Muslims really force others to convert to Islam? Is there any evidence for consistent forcible conversion throughout Islamic history? As a matter of fact, there is no such evidence anywhere in the history of Islam. Many distinguished Western historians have attested this fact-- foremost among whom is Sir Thomas W. Arnold in his book, "The Preaching of Islam". Also there is Marshall G. Hodgson in his book, "The Venture of Islam", Albert Hourani in his book, "A History of the Arab People", Ira Lapidus in his book, "History of Islamic Societies", L.S. Starorianos in his book, "A Global History, the Human Heritage" and many others.

In fact, there is substantial evidence to the contrary, that Muslims were often seen as liberators of the oppressed people everywhere.

First and foremost, Islam is an amazing blend of simplicity and rationality: a very simple religion yet very rational at the same time. Professor Hodgson explains: "Muslims made a personal appeal to people's religious consciousness. On the level of straight argument, they often put forward the populist intelligibility of Islam. Muslims commonly ridiculed, in the name of intellectual good sense, the more mythically convoluted teachings of older traditions. This could seem attractively straightforward to people dissatisfied with taking things on faith from a learned priest whose mysteries they could not comprehend.

A single Creator, to be worshipped by each person for himself, on the basis of revelation that had been given to a famous prophet whom millions already acknowledged. This was at once intelligible and plausible."

The unambiguous and uncompromising belief in the Unity, the Greatness, the Wisdom of God, the Creator of the universe, is unparalleled among other religions. The French professor Edouard Montet said:" The dogma of the unity of God...has always been proclaimed in the Qur'an with a grandeur, a majesty, an invariable purity and with a note of pure conviction which is hard to find surpassed outside the pale of Islam. A creed so precise, so stripped of all theological complexities and so accessible to the ordinary understanding might be expected to possess and does indeed possess a marvelous power of winning its way into the consciences of men."

Besides its simple and rational creed, Islam offers an impressive set of rituals, which has gained the admiration, and, subsequently, the conversion of many non-Muslims. The second pillar of Islam, Salah [prayer] has been described as follows by Sir Arnold: "The religion of the Muslim is continuously present with him and, in the daily prayer, manifests itself in a solemn and impressive ritual which cannot leave either the worshipper or the spectator unaffected."

Islam is the religion of the Truth. The Qur'an is the book of the Truth. **"We sent down the Qur'an in Truth and in Truth has it descended"** Qur'an 17:105, **"Put your trust in Allah for you are on the path of the manifest Truth"** Qur'an 27:79

The Quran teaches that people should not be converted by force: **"Let there be no compulsion in religion"** Qur'an 2:256a

Muslims do not use money, or economic pressure to force others to join Islam, **"Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance"** Qur'an 16:125.

In August 2006, about 60,000 Muslims in the United States and Canada elected the 43-year-old Kitchener native president of the largest Muslim organization on the continent, an educational and professional group called the Islamic Society of North America. She is ISNA's first woman president, the first non-immigrant and the first convert to Islam. Her election comes at a tumultuous time for the estimated 6 million Muslims in the United States and Canada, where impact of 9/11 felt by all Muslims. But she is example of many who converted to Islam even after 9/11. It is not by the sword, it is by the message of Islam, it by the rational and the code of life that Islam offers.



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