



Interpretations

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A newsletter about Islam from a progressive
and sometimes interfaith perspective.

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God, Help Us!

EDITORIAL by Stephanie Roy [Ottawa, Canada]

Tragedies continue to strike the world over “for” religion or “against” it but “religion” never loses: people do. I find it baffling to hear people wage wars in the name of an abstract concept when a very real one, people, are the ultimate losers. They lose life, they lose friends, they lose family and when they are lucky enough not to lose anything else: they lose hope.

Hope is a funny thing, it slips away from you at a moment's notice and leaves you without a hand to hold. Somehow, in the midst of all tragedies, we all find hope, light, in the darkest of places. For some, it brings us to the brink of discouragement and in the ultimate darkness of humanity, we lose sight of God's plan for us.

A friend recently asked “If God is so merciful, why doesn't He help those in needs?” I thought deeply on that question and thought: what if He asked us the same question! We each have a number of opportunities to alleviate others' pain and most of us pass them by. How can we expect an abstract being to help us, while we ourselves will not.

Let us remember: God helps those who help themselves.

This piece was translated from French into English by Open Interpretation's Editor-in-chief with the authors' permission

On the Right Path

By Aymen Ben Cheikh [Tunis, Tunisia]

Ahmed could not believe his eyes, he got the job! The job of his dreams! He was so happy. He met with his new boss who introduced him to the team. He was welcomed and integrated the team easily; everything seemed perfect. Ahmed was grateful for this opportunity God had granted him. His salary allowed him to take care of his parents who once upon a time sacrificed all they had to take care of him. He was gifted for his work, learned quickly, was a perfectionist. He began to increase in knowledge in his professional life, to go to dinners that would open doors to a world that was not accessible to people who like him were from poor neighborhoods.

In this new life, Ahmed lost his points of reference: he stopped praying, no longer read the Qu'ran, drank at parties and lied on a daily basis for his work. He no longer visited his parents and was content with sending them money, less and less over time.

His life was a dream, but he was not happy living it. He had a hard time sleeping at night and felt alone.

He lived in constant fear of failure: fear of losing his work, of missing a promotion, of being rejected by his

girlfriend who saw in him a future CEO.

Before, even in the hardest of times, he would feel God's presence and knew that He would never fail him. Now, everything seemed blurry. He felt that God may have abandoned him, he was no longer sure God even existed. He would hear the *Adhan* from the neighborhood's mosque, but he was now numb to it.

One day, leaving his apartment, he heard someone call onto him. He saw a young man smiling at him, with a long beard. The man's face seemed familiar but he could not quite rememb...—no! It was Jacques, his friend from school! It had been so long and he was so happy to see him. They spoke of the memories they shared and their

current lives. Jacques had converted to Islam 4 years ago; while in school he was atheist, but was curious about Ahmed's devotion, who prayed regularly, who would fast the days of Ramadan and who was of sound characters. After school, he began to read up on Islam, decided to convert and was now happy to see Ahmed and thank him for introducing him to Islam.

Ahmed, tears in his eyes, took Jacques in his arms and said: "No, thanks to you my friend. You have opened my eyes."

Everything seemed clear now; God had never abandoned him, he had chosen to walk away from Him. Allah was waiting for him, nearby, on the right path.

In the Middle of the Night

By Kristin-Ameera Crowther [Vancouver, Canada]

I'm lying on an uncomfortable hospital bed in a brightly-lit hallway, surrounded by life and yet so completely alone. I am cold, tired, hungry, and hurting. What time is it? Last I saw it was 2 am, but I can't see a clock where I am now and my phone has been dead since 12:30. I close my eyes, holding back tears. Haven't I cried enough tonight? I beg for sleep or death, whichever comes first and puts me out of my misery.

I think back to the hours before I came to the hospital. It is 5 pm; I'm just home from my last class. This life has been crushing my feeble being for so very long, but his text was the last straw. I can't anymore, I just can't. I thought Allah did not burden a soul beyond what it could handle? I have been burdened for my entire life, so much so that I cannot remember a time when I felt truly happy. Every glimpse of light in my suffocating world of darkness has always been so swiftly stomped out. I'm in my room now, sitting on my bed, and I just released all of my agony. After holding it all in until I returned to my makeshift sanctuary, I let it all out. I just can't do it

anymore, I want to die. But isn't that forbidden in Islam?

I don't care. My life has been nothing but suffering; what sort of problem would an extra eternity of torment really be to me? All of the abuse, the verbal and psychological torment by family and peers, the thousands of times my trust has been shattered by people who claimed to care and the robbery of my innocence. Why Allah? Why me? What did I do to deserve this wretched existence? Are you angry? Do you hate me? Are you even there? Do you care? I proclaimed my belief in you not even 3 weeks ago, yet you allow all of my pain and all of my scars to be completely exposed in the space of 3 days?! Why?!

I continue to sob when my phone rings; my mom is calling. She tries to console me, tries to talk me down. I find no comfort in her voice, no comfort in her words. Wouldn't she be better off without me? Wouldn't everyone? I'm nothing but a parasite and a burden to everyone I know and love. I am the absolute worst of creation. But I love my mum, I could never hurt her. I will

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get help for her sake.

Two of my good friends take me to the hospital. They try to comfort me; they tell me stories of their pain and scars. They ask kindly if I consider my pain greater than theirs or anyone else's. I do not, people suffer more than me every day and they always carry on with unimaginable strength. But I feel so broken and weak, with no strength left to bear the weight of my agony. But they continue to support me, they teach me du'as for hardship and my sister in faith tells me to just recite any Qur'an that I can remember. I try, but I just don't have the energy or the desire.

My sister in faith stays with me in the hospital, from 7:00 pm to 12:30 pm. She didn't have to stay; she could have left at any time. I'm sure she must be very busy as a graduate student and it is the middle of the school week. But she stayed, and she held me close. She told me I would never hurt myself because Allah had blessed me so much; Allah only wanted to elevate me. I smile in my hospital bed thinking about her, a perpetually happy soul with never a care in the world. I admire her so much.

The click of high heels brings me back to the cold white hallway. I'm back to the present moment, surrounded by medical professionals and patients yet still so completely alone. "So, what are you in for?" sings a voice beside me. I look up to see an older woman in blue hospital pyjamas smiling back at me. "Suicide watch," I reply weakly. "Suicide? Sweet girl like you? No way, you'd never hurt yourself. I'm in for the other end of the spectrum, I'm manic!" Her grin widens. "At least that's what they're telling me, I don't believe a word of it. I'm just more aware of the world around us, the spiritual dimension, and that

makes people uncomfortable. That's why my daughter put me here." Her face grows grim, obviously hurt by her daughter's actions. I'm mostly



"Sadness" by Kristin-Ameera Crowther

perplexed by her; she's strange but harmless I decide, a lot like the hippies on Baker Street back home.

"You're spiritual aren't you?" she asks, her smile returning. I point to my hijab and reply, "yes." She continues, "See, we're all part of one big plan, right? You and me and everyone, we make up the whole of reality and creation! But you know if you took yourself out of the plan, out of reality before it was your time to go, you would break apart a little

piece of the creation. All of this as it is cannot exist without you.” She gives me one last grin before walking off. I smile at that comment; she’s certainly right in her own way. Allah has a plan for me here, I don’t know what yet but I know it’s not over. I’m still alive and I still have so much more to do. As I lay back down in my little bed I think back to all of our Prophets, to the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the Ahlul Bayt (PBUT). I think of their struggles and their hardship, about how many of them suffered more than any human should; yet they always held strong in their faith. Allah was always

with them, and Allah will always be with me. I am not alone. I recite Al-Fatiha and finally fall asleep.

It has been five weeks since that night. My soul is still fragile from the pain of my past but I am working to improve my mental health. Allah has never abandoned me, and that experience helped to teach me more about myself and the nature of Allah. I am on the road to recovery with the help of my brothers and sisters in faith, my family and the kind doctors who want to see me in a happier state of being. Alhumdulillah for my life.

Can the Qu’ran Accommodate Crises of Life

by Farouk A. Peru [London, United Kingdom]

I had forgotten how it felt like to be Jihadi-anxious. I remember the 7/7 bombings in London 8 years ago and how I prayed that it wasn’t a bunch of Jihadi evildoers. When it emerged that it was and the media was rubbing it in our Muslim faces, I had a sinking feeling. Almost like nausea. I remember reading about Muslims who had crises of faith after this event. I didn’t blame them for it either. It’s a very testing time to be Muslim. When it emerged yesterday that the Chechen bombers were Muslims and followers of the lunatic Shiekh Feiz, I had the same sinking nauseating feeling. I was hoping and praying for a few days that it wouldn’t be (a selfish prayer indeed, I’m sorry to say). When I found that it was, I felt sure that there would be more Muslims distancing themselves from Islam. It is sad that these Jihadi evildoers actually push people away from the

beauty of Islam. So ironic.

A crisis of faith sounds bad. Extremely bad. After all, how can one after discovering the truth turn one’s back on it? It simply sounds very traitorous. However, as human beings, our connectivity with Allah isn’t like a simple one-off process. Like the weather, we don’t always get sunshine. Sometimes we get cloudy days, other times it may drizzle and still other days, it may even storm on us. As human beings we can only do our best to cope with the weather.

Faith is like this. Fortunately for us though, Quran does not seem to be as judgemental as Conservative Traditional Islam. It does not seek to persecute, let alone execute such people. Rather, it gives us a method through which we can see why we have chosen this path. Of course this requires a deep

introspection and lots of work. It should also be stated that Quran does not appear to see faith in the same way as Conservative Traditional Islam. Quran does not have a set checklist of items of faith which one needs to confess to in order to be a believer. Rather it is about a process of living our lives consciously and acquiring an existential experience of faith.

The first passage relevant to this begins with Chapter 2, verse 21. It is very interesting that a passage addressing a crisis of faith occurs very early on in the text. More interestingly, this is the first passage in which there is a call to mankind. This call tells us to serve our Lord who evolved us so that we may be preserved. Here, the evolution of the self and its preservation becomes the open ideas. Faith does not come blindly, it comes with a certain process. The next verse, 2:22, tells us about basic existential facts – the skies above us and the earth below and how we are nourished and sustained. Then comes the famous verse 2:23 which challenges the doubtful reader to bring a discourse like what he has just read

– which is the evolution of the self and our existential reality. My understanding is that there is nothing like this discourse. We cannot find anything comparable to our being in the world. We exist as human beings and through this existence, we can find truth. Sometimes we may lose sight of this but once we remember, we can easily return to it.

Very interestingly, after this, 2:24 asserts that we wouldn't be able to find this truth (although we need to verify this for ourselves possibly through reason). We would then face the tests of life (symbolised by the fire) which comes from the people around us and the various immovable objects in our lives. However, the good news is that when we believe in this and act to actualise it, we would be in the garden both in this life and the next as per 2:25.

The passage of this flow shows us that doubt is not a bad thing. Rather, it is simply part of the verification process. If we follow this carefully, we would achieve the self-actualisation necessary to repair our faith and at the same time, our lives themselves.

Challenges in the Deen

by Jenece Gerber [Buffalo, Canada]

My sisters and brothers, I come to the writing of this essay not from a place of true clarity about my religion but, rather, I come to you with doubts, hesitations, and failures. When I converted to Islam exactly two years ago Alhamdulillah it was simple. It was simple to say "yes" to God and to say "yes" to our Beloved Prophet and to the holy Qur'an. What was not simple was what followed: holding to this

simple love and submission in daily life.

It is humanity that complicates my devotion. It is well-meaning non-Muslim friends who see me without hijab and sigh relief, who tell me I'm much more "myself" without it – what does that mean? It's misguided Muslims who want to teach me the truth about nail polish and menses and the evils of musical instruments and the injunction against women

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singing in earshot of non-mahram males – what?? – but who leave me to celebrate Eid alone. It's segregated masjids and lurking about trying to make myself unnoticed because that's what the mainstream Islamic culture tells me is correct but in trying to fit in, my pale skin and light eyes and abysmal Arabic give me away and infantilize me even more than a brown-skinned Muslima. It's having to defend my religion in every conversation with parents, to be continually put on trial to affirm and prove that Allah is God. My faith is also challenged by being a worker bee at a job that crushes my passions, by relationship tensions, by health and financial concerns, by loneliness, by city neuroses of lights and noise and smog, and by my fears and illusions.

When my faith is stretched to the limits, when I am tempted and taunted by Shaitan and even prayer seems impossible, I remember that moment in which I first absolutely *knew* Islam was correct. In that moment, sitting alone at my computer, I realized that the fundamentals of Islam were the things I already believed. Through significant crises of faith I return to that first moment of truth where everything coalesced into one Truth. The mountains and rivers and trees and rocks and sunshine and moonlight and Islam. When I feel overwhelmed by all the rest of it, I return to this. Smiling and nodding at the well-meaning busybodies becomes so much easier – even sometimes funny – when I return to this space. Alhamdulillah!

Want to write for

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