

Why People Accept Islam?

The topic 'The Necessities of Da'wah in the Light of Current Conditions' is extremely vast in its scope. People are accepting Islam in the West (USA, Canada, UK, France and Germany), in the Middle Eastern countries (Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Jordan), in Africa and the Far East (Malaysia, Philippines, Hong Kong, etc.). Each region has its own peculiar characteristics and the reasons for conversion vary accordingly. Furthermore, in each of these areas, the reasons for conversion differ depending on the point of contact with Islam. In fact, the numbers of reasons are probably as many as the number of people who have accepted Islam, as each person has his or her own special reasons why they decide to accept Islam. However, if the subject is considered from the general perspective of the shared characteristics of human beings, the reasons may be narrowed down to a few general groups of reasons.

If one assumes, as Islam proposes, that the nature of human beings has not changed since the time the first human being was first created, then the reasons for conversion in the time of the Prophet (pbuh) should essentially be the same reasons as found in the present age. According to Islam, there is only one revealed religion which has been repeatedly revealed from the time of Adam until the last of the prophets, Muhammad (pbuh). Consequently, the essential message of all the prophets was one and the same:

"Verily, We have sent to every nation a messenger (saying), 'Worship Allaah and avoid false gods.'"¹

There was no difference in their basic messages also because the purpose of creation has only been one; to worship Allah.

"I did not create the jinn and mankind except for My worship."²

This message addressed a fundamental need in human beings to worship. That primordial need was created in all human beings at the time of Adam's creation. Allah addressed this need saying:

"When your Lord drew forth from the loins of the children of Adam their descendant and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): 'Am I not your Lord?' they said, 'Yes, we testify to it.' (This) in case you say should say on the Day of Judgement, 'We were unaware of this.'" Or in case you should say, 'It was our ancestors who made partners (with Allaah) and we are only their descendants. Will you then destroy us for what those liars did?'"³

Man's Natural Disposition : the Fitrah

Since Allaah made all human beings swear to His Godhood when He created Adam, this oath is printed on the human soul even before it enters the fetus in the fifth month of pregnancy. So when a child is born, it has with it a natural belief in Allaah. This natural belief is called in Arabic the fitrah.⁴ If the child were left alone, it would grow up aware of Allaah in His unity, but all children are affected by the pressures of their environment, whether directly or indirectly. The Prophet (pbuh) reported that Allaah said,

*"I created My servants in the right religion but the devils made them go astray."*⁵

The Prophet (pbuh) also said,

*"Each child is born in a state of 'fitrah', but his parents make him a Jew or a Christian. It is like the way an animal gives birth to a normal offspring. Have you noticed any (young animal) born mutilated before you mutilate them?"*⁶

So just as the child's body submits to the physical laws which Allaah has put in nature, its soul also submits naturally to the fact that Allaah is its Lord and Creator. However, its parents try to make it follow their own way and the child is not strong enough in the early stages of its life to resist or oppose its parents.

The religion which the child follows at this stage is one of custom and upbringing, and Allaah does not hold it to account or punish it for this religion. When the child matures in youth and clear proofs of the falsehood of its religion are brought to it, the adult must now follow the religion of knowledge and reason.⁷ At this point the devils try their best to encourage him to stay as he is or to go further astray. Evils are made pleasing to him and he must now live in the midst of a struggle between his fitrah and his desires in order to find the right road. If he chooses his fitrah, Allaah will help him overcome his desires, even though it may take most of his life to do so; for many people enter Islam in their old age, although most tend to do so before that.

THE ERA OF THE PROPHET

During the Prophet's era, as in the modern era, people may be divided into two main groups with respect to their preparedness to receive the message:

1. Those searching for the truth who are dissatisfied with the religion followed by their contemporaries, and

2. Those not searching. This second group may be further divided into those not searching because they are content with their religion and those not searching because they have rejected belief in God. The second group has been a minority throughout history.

The first group also consistently represented a minority as the majority of people tend to accept the cultural norms of society without question. In the Prophet's time, that minority was called the *hunafaa'*. Most of them converted to Islam as soon as the message reached them. A few, due to tribal jealousies rejected the message. Thus, the first group responded to the clear truth of revelation. On the other hand, the second group based their response on their trust in the Prophet's (pbuh) character. They knew him to be truthful and honest throughout his life, therefore, there was not reason to doubt his claim to Prophethood.

1. The Role Model

The first converts were from the Prophet's household

Khadijah bint Khuwaylid

'Ali ibn Abi Talib

Zayd ibn Harithah

They were followed by the Prophet's close friend and confidant, Abu Bakr.

Their conversion was due to their intimate contact with the Prophet (pbuh) and their unquestioned belief in him his truthfulness due their personal experience with him. This reason for conversion may be called the "role model."

2. Da'wah to Islamic Monotheism (Tawheed)

The next five converts embraced Islam as a result of Abu Bakr's invitation.

'Uthman ibn 'Affan

Az-Zubayr ibn al- 'Awwam

'Abdur-Rahmaan ibn 'Awf

Sa 'ad ibn Abi Waqqas

Talhah ibn 'Ubaydullah

Their conversion was a result of the message being taken to them.⁸ This reason may be generally called the "Da'wah"

3. Truth Seekers

Among the converts was 'Amr ibn 'Absah who had rejected the idolatry of his people and sought the truth. Like him was Salman al-Farisi who journeyed

from Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity to Islam. The reason for the conversion of these companions and others like them may be called “truth seekers”

4. Reading the Qur'an

'Umar ibn al-Khattab's conversion is authentically narrated as a result of his hearing the Prophet (pbuh) recite Surah al-Haaqqah.⁹ The Najashi's was due to his hearing Surah Maryam. These and others like them may be referred under the general reason of “Reading the Qur'an”.

5. Marriage

Abu Talhah al-Ansari was offered a dowry of accepting Islam by Umm Sulaym (Mother of Anas ibn Maalik). She also gave him logical da'wah concerning his idol worship.

Abul-'Aas who was married to the Prophet's daughter, Zaynab, was separated from her by the Prophet (pbuh) and was later ransomed from among the prisoners of Badr by Zaynab. In both of these cases, marriage to a Muslim woman was a factor in their conversions.

The following eleven surveys of reasons for conversion were done in April, 2001, in different parts of the world. From the surveys, it is evident that the above-mentioned factors continue to be the main reasons for people accepting Islam in the 21st century.

It should be noted that in the Middle East, one of the biggest factors in conversion is the religious example of employers. This is especially the case of Far and Near-Eastern women working as domestic helpers in Arab homes. This is the role model reason which constituted the first major reason for converts in the Prophet's era. See surveys 2 and 3 of Discover Islam / Bahrain and QCPI of Qatar. In the West, living with Muslims is a minor factor because contact with Muslims is much less frequent and Westerners do not usually work as domestic helpers in Arab homes. However, the role model reason is still significant in so far as it comes from contact with Muslims on the job, in universities, in the neighborhood, etc. See survey 6 of the convert community in Detroit, Michigan, USA, where the majority of converts were introduced to Islam by someone trusted.

From the survey results it appears that the most critical conversion factor in the West seems to be the availability of information.

In India, where the caste system is dominant, the oppressed classes find in Islam social justice and respect. Consequently, as indicated in survey 7 Islamic justice and equality is among the biggest attractions.

DA'WAH STRATEGIES

Having understood many of the reasons why people accept Islam in this century and the way they differ relative to the environment, it is necessary to develop some methods of effectively dealing with giving da'wah to them.

1. The Role Model

First, the factors shared by the Prophet's time and the modern era should be looked at to determine what efforts are needed to make them most effective. The first method is the "role model" method. In the Middle East, those families having servants should be informed through the media, tapes and pamphlets about the importance of setting a good example for those who work for them. Too often cases of abuse of maids are reported in the local newspapers. Such adverse publicity will decrease the effectiveness of the family role in da'wah. On the other hand, in the Western context, Muslims have to develop a stronger outreach program for the communities to meet the Muslims. This can be achieved by regular open house days at the local mosque or Islamic center, during which non-Muslim neighbors are invited to visit and to share some "Eastern cuisine". Free exotic food is always a good attraction for non-Muslims. Islamic weeks at universities in West have become some of the most vibrant means to reach the student body.

2. The Da'wah to Monotheism

The essential message of Islam needs to reach the masses of Westerners. The majority of Westerners today do not have the slightest inkling of what Islam teaches. The vast majority of converts in the West are a product of family da'wah based on Allaah's instruction to the Prophet (pbuh):

*"And warn your close family members."*¹⁰

When a person converts, he or she immediately attempts to invite all of their family members to Islam. In this way, the numbers of converts increase exponentially. However great this individual effort may be, it cannot supplant the basic need for da'wah materials in sufficiently large numbers to reach the general masses. Likewise the impact of TV and Radio da'wah cannot be underestimated. There are already a number of Islamic programs in Arabic being broadcast on satellite, however, very little in the way of English da'wah is taking

place. More useful da'wah tracts need to be developed. The Deedat approach has become outmoded with its harsh rhetoric. Alternative materials need to be introduced internationally.

3. Truth Seekers

As in the Prophet's era there are people in our times seeking the truth. In many cases it is due to dissatisfaction with the dogmas of their religions. These seekers find that their questions are unanswered in their inherited religion and blind faith is insisted upon by its priests. This conversion factor is very prominent among Westerners as indicated in surveys 5 - 12 as well as QCPI and Discover Islam - Bahrain surveys among their Western converts. The Detroit survey gives 86% of Americans who converted from Christianity while having difficulties in their belief system. Consequently, more literature, tapes and programs which present the Islamic solutions to religious mysteries needs to be developed. Literature which demonstrates that Prophet Jesus was in fact a prophet of Islam and that his message was Islam needs to be widely distributed.

4. Reading the Qur'an

A large number of Western converts embraced Islam due to reading translations of the Qur'an. This mirrors those who converted in the Prophet's time due to hearing readings from the Qur'an. The two most wide-spread translations of the Qur'an's meanings are those of Yusuf Ali and Muhsin Khan. However, both have serious problems with regard to getting the message across. Yusuf Ali's translation is in old-English and his footnotes contain much mis-information. Muhsin Khan's translation, on the other hand, while accurate has so much explanatory material between brackets that the average reader loses track of the verse. There needs to be a good clear translation in modern English with sufficient footnotes to explain unclear passages and references.

5. Marriage

Many Western converts in Muslim countries convert for marriage purposes as is quite evident in the surveys. In a number of cases, the conversion is not genuine, but merely a ritual conversion. Although this situation is abhorrent, one cannot refuse to convert others due to suspicions. The solution is to develop programs of study, which prospective converts must go through before conversion, to insure that the basic teaching have been learned. This approach was taken by the Muslim Convert's Association in Singapore, where they were faced with the majority of its converts being for marriage purposes.

CONCLUSION: FOLLOW-UP

The factors leading to conversion are basically the same the world over. They are not limited to time periods, but can be found from the earliest of times until the present. Those involved in propagating the religion and inviting others to Islam, must familiarize themselves with these and other factors in order to develop the correct strategies to deal with them. Furthermore, Islamic organizations need to keep more accurate information concerning conversion so that researchers can analyze the material and benefit those in the field. Most organizations internationally do not have proper records. Some only have names and while others have little more than that. Follow-up programs cannot be effectively implemented without proper records. Perhaps the greatest problem facing converts is the lack of follow-up. In the Prophet's time, converts were integrated into the Muslim community and way of life with the full support of the community. Today, converts are congratulated and left to fend for themselves. As a result, when many are faced with difficulties, they revert to their former faiths, if they do not find support from the Muslim community. In the West, there is a big need for institutions and Muslim social workers to cater to the needs of the new converts. Many who accept Islam in the prisons end up in their destructive life-styles and back in prison like their non-Muslim counterparts. Although their numbers are fewer, they are too many for the community to ignore.

The other major problem facing convert Muslims, especially in the West, is that without a Muslim community to support their families, their children often leave Islam by the time they graduate from high school. Consequently, among the da'wah strategies necessary is the development of Muslim schools to preserve the identity of Muslim children of the converts. Those children did not choose Islam, and they lack strong cultural ties to Muslim culture. As a result, every decade or two, a new wave of Westerners convert and during the same period, most of their children leave Islam. Those children sometimes go on to become major stars in sports like Shaquille O'Neal (Basketball), or Rocket Raghbir (American Football), who have no allegiance to Islam what so ever.

Survey 1. Discover Islam [Dubai]

Survey 2. Discover Islam [Bahrain]

Survey 3. QCPI [Qatar]

Survey 4. IRF [India]

Survey 5. Denmark

Survey 6. London [England]

Survey 7. ICQ [Canada]

Survey 8. Karachi [Pakistan]

Survey 9. Detroit [USA]

Survey 10. Internet Western Converts

Survey 11. Islam Our Choice

FOOTNOTES

1. Surah an-Nahl, (16): 36.
2. Surah adh-Dhaariyaat, (51): 56.
3. Surah al-A'raaf, (7): 172-3.
4. Al-'Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah, (8th ed., 1984), p. 245.
5. Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol. 4, p. 1488, no. 6853.
6. Collected by Muslim, (Sahih Muslim (English Trans.), vol. 4, p. 1398, no. 6423) and al-Bukhaari (Sahih Al-Bukhari (Arabic-English), vol. 8, pp. 389-90, no. 597).
7. Al-'Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah, (5th ed., 1972), p. 273.
8. Makkan Crucible, pp. 124-6, Ar-Raheeq al-Makhtum, p. 77.
9. Collected in Musnad Ahmad, vol. 1, pp. 17-8.
10. Surah ash-Shu'araa, (26): 214.