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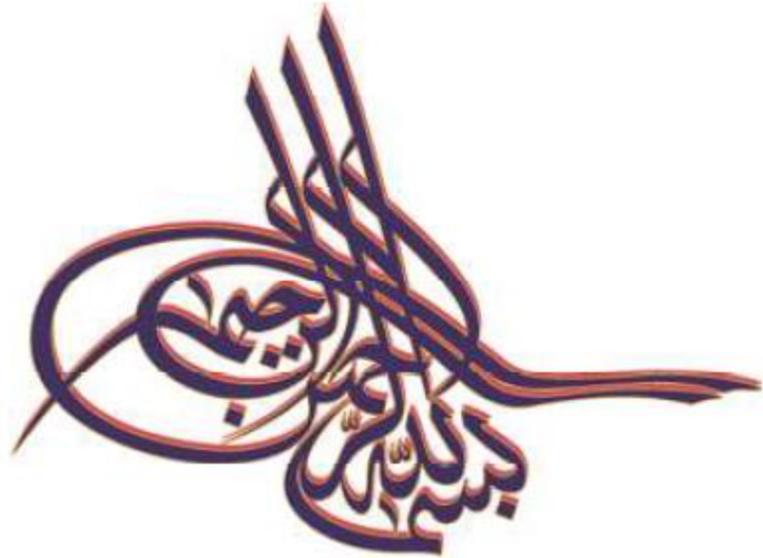
EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL CONTRIBUTORS TO ATHEISM

The Psychology of Conviction

Dr. Mohammed Sadiq

is a clinical psychologist based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and has been practicing in North America for over 40 years. His practice has covered a wide range of areas including, forensic psychology, psychiatric hospitals, community mental health clinics, residential youth institutes, community agencies such as group homes for youth and sexual assault survivors, etc. He has worked with people of all ages suffering from various emotional, mental, behavioral and family problems. He worked with various Muslim communities in North America and around the world providing individual, marital, family and youth counseling. Presently, his practice is exclusively devoted to Muslim families around the world. His focus is to help save marriages and guide youth who have been suffering from identity and faith crises.

"الأراء في هذا البحث تعبر عن رأي الباحث وليس بالضرورة عن رأي أمجا"
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You may ask a child a million times, "stay away from the stove, you may get burnt," he does not pay any attention. But, out of curiosity or attraction of the glowing red element of the stove, he touches it and feels the pain of burning fingers, he would never have to be told again to stay away from the stove.

You may ask your son not to speed and obey the traffic laws; he may just ignore you or reassure you, "don't worry dad, I will be OK." In his enthusiasm and eagerness to try out his newly acquired car, or to impress his friends, he drives through a red light at a high speed and ends up with a \$800 traffic ticket. He will now be very careful to obey the traffic lights and laws.

ESSENTIALLY, THIS IS THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONVICTION. Convictions are shaped from whatever we perceive and experience personally in our life through our successes and failures, our family and social life.

A 21-year old young man, completely disenchanted with Islam and having gone through a number of years of psychiatric treatment, has found his peace in following a Hindu Guru on the website and in practicing Yoga and Hindu Meditation techniques. Despite many efforts made to help him find the peace in his own faith, he insists upon continuing to believe and practice what brings him a feeling of peace within. He does not even wish to talk about Islam, which he believes is an unfair religion only about punishing people and burning them in hellfire forever if they don't submit.

A highly educated Muslim man, educated in worldly as well as Islamic knowledge, who used to debate with people of other faith about the truth of Islam, now worships shaitan. He now believes that God created mankind in His image and put His soul in him thereby imparting a part of His divinity in mankind. Iblis did not prostrate before Adam because he had realized his divine nature as well. If we submit ourselves totally to one god, we would never realize the divinity within us.

Such cases are no longer unique. A good number of our young and old are walking out of Islam because what they grew up believing were merely mental beliefs not convictions.

An article published in "The Economist", Arlington, Virginia on Mar 15th, 2018, after giving a harrowing example of a young Muslim man who had left Islam, stated, "According to the Pew Research Centre, 23% of Americans raised as Muslims no longer identify with the faith. Most of them are young second-generation immigrants who have come to reject the religion of their parents.... The vast majority, whether young or old, are silent about their faithlessness." ¹

1. <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2018/03/15/the-number-of-ex-muslims-in-america-is-rising>

This survey was conducted by Besheer Mohamed and Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac at the Pew Research Centre in 2017 and published in January of 2018 – “The Share of Americans who leave Islam is offset by those who become Muslims”.²

Among those who were raised Muslims and left their faith, 55% said that they had no religion, not a believer, or had become atheist or agnostic. 22% converted to Christianity, and 21% to other religions.

Common reasons given for leaving Islam were ‘issues with religion in general (25%)’, ‘issues with Islam (19%)’, ‘preference for other religion(s), spirituality (16%)’, ‘personal growth (14%)’, ‘family reasons (2%)’, and ‘unclear or other (13%)’

Interestingly, the reasons given for accepting Islam by those who converted to Islam included, ‘preferred the beliefs, teachings of Islam/find more meaning in Islam (24%)’, ‘read/studies religious text of Islam (21%)’, ‘wanted to belong to a community (10%)’, ‘marriage to a Muslim (9%)’, ‘family (8%)’, ‘searching for answers/exploring personal spirituality (8%)’, ‘found truth in Islam (5%)’, ‘preferred practices of Islam (2%)’, and ‘unclear/other (3%)’.

Adding the percentages of reasons given by the converts to Islam, that reflect a good understanding and conviction of Islamic beliefs and its teaching, comes to 60%. On the other hand, adding the percentages of reasons Muslims gave that reflect a lack of true understanding of Islam and conviction in their beliefs, also comes to over 80%.

1. Beliefs are not Convictions

A mere verbal or mental belief has much less meaning and value in a person’s life than a conviction in the heart. Dhi`lib al-Yamani asked Ali (RA) whether he had seen Allah, He replied, "Do I worship one whom I have not seen?" Then he enquired, "How have you seen Him?" He replied, "Eyes do not see Him face to face, but hearts perceive Him through the realities of belief."³ Understanding the realities of beliefs leads to convictions.

2. Why are so many of our young and old losing their faith?

The following sayings of Ali (RA) provides some insightful answers.

“There are four causes of infidelity and loss of belief in Allah: hankering after whims, a passion to dispute every argument, deviation from truth; and dissension, because whoever hankers after

2. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/26/the-share-of-americans-who-leave-islam-is-offset-by-those-who-become-muslim/>

3. Sermon 178, Nahjul Balagah

whims does not incline towards truth; whoever keeps on disputing every argument on account of his ignorance, will always remain blind to truth, whoever deviates from truth because of ignorance, will always take good for evil and evil for good and he will always remain intoxicated with misguidance. And whoever makes a breach (with Allah and His Messenger) his path becomes difficult; his affairs will become complicated and his way to salvation will be uncertain.”

“Similarly, doubt has also four aspects absurd reasoning; fear; vacillation and hesitation; and unreasonable surrender to infidelity, because one who has accustomed himself to unreasonable and absurd discussions will never see the Light of Truth and will always live in the darkness of ignorance. One who is afraid to face facts (of life, death and the life after death) will always turn away from ultimate reality, one who allows doubts and uncertainties to vacillate him will always be under the control of Satan and one who surrenders himself to infidelity accepts damnation in both the worlds.”⁴

3. What is contributing to the significant abandoning of the faith?

As reflected in the pewresearch.org survey, a large number of reasons given for leaving Islam indicate a lack of proper understanding of the faith. A lack of meaningful understanding of Islamic doctrine, and inconsistent and ritualistic practice of faith in Muslim families and communities, I believe, are major factors leading to misunderstandings, confusions, doubts, and questioning of the entire faith.

Our children are growing up in an environment where everything is open to questioning including the faith. Nothing is sacred anymore. Here are some examples of questions and doubts often raised.

- There may or may not be a God – it can’t be proven either way (Agnosticism). If a creator is assumed for everything that exists then who created God?
- In Islam, God is someone to be always afraid of. This has been mentioned over and over again in the Qur’an – fear Allah. Hell, Heaven and the Day of Judgment are all concepts created to control people through fear.
- You only need to be a good person and all religions teach good morals. Religion only complicates your life unnecessarily. Why would good people put in hell for ever and ever just because they are not Muslims?

4. Nahjul Balagah

- Islam treats women unjustly. It enables and condones the abuse of women by their husbands.
- Islam is intolerant. It restricts human freedom. Why will God punish and damned to hell someone who He created different than others, like the LGBTQ persons?

These are but a few examples of the prevailing questions and doubts.

Some other factors that contribute to questioning Islam and giving up the faith are domestic emotional and physical abuse, over protection by parents, environmental influence, and boyfriend-girlfriend issues.

Although, these youth who have denounced Islam, but most of them continue to suffer from doubts, guilt, fear and anxiety.

4. Why have we been unable to stop this exodus?

It is because a large number of Muslim communities, leaders, scholars and parents have not taken this matter seriously. Even today there are those who are in total denial. Parents, community leaders, and Imams in the masaajid are unprepared, and sometimes even afraid, of tackling these issues. Even when such an incident becomes public, we are quick to blame others – the parents, the media, the evil environment, etc., rather than admitting the issues, understanding the causes, taking personal and collectively responsibility to find workable solutions, not quick fixes like leave this country and go back to where we came from.

5. What needs to be done urgently?

1. Admitting and recognizing that we have a serious and a very dangerous problem at hand. If we will not deal with it wisely, we risk losing our generations to come to faithlessness, we will weaken even further as an Ummah, and we will be doomed to fail in this life and the one hereafter.
2. Our scholars would have to put their heads together to prepare convincing rational answers for these questions and doubts. A committee of scholars, Imams, leaders of community and national organizations should be formed to share, examine and pull together any and all the work being done in this regard; as well as to determine what more needs to be done.
3. The result of this effort should be published in print and digitally for wide distribution to each and every Muslim community around North America.

4. A concise training program needs to be devised to train Imams in every community to actively deal with such issues in their community,
5. A revised syllabus of teaching Islam to our young and old should be devised which is not based only on teaching the rituals, fiqh and shari'ah, but which focuses more on understanding the wisdom in Islamic beliefs and doctrine.
6. In Islamic schools and local madrassahs, the Islamic education curriculum should be revised to include this new syllabus.
7. Regular community education seminars and workshops should be held to educate the parents and to guide and support them to effectively deal with these issues in their families.
8. Counseling support services should be established in every community to provide support to the families who are struggling with these issues.

Hopefully, these efforts will eventually lead to full conviction in what we believe and how we practice our faith.