

The Thought Process Behind Reversion to Islam; A Qualitative Analysis

Hazrat Bilal

PhD Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, HITEC University, Taxila Pakistan

Bilal.yousafzai@riphah.edu.pk

Dr. Ahmad Hassan Khattak

Assistant Professor Department of Islamic Studies HITEC University Taxila Punjab, Pakistan

ahmad.hassan@hitecuni.edu.pk

Abstract

The choice to embrace Islam, also known as reversion, is in few cases a matter of a single life-altering moment of realization. Instead, it can be better described as a complex process that is influenced by both one's individual life path and the processes of cognition and socialization. This article explores the lives of those who have converted to Islam to discover aspects relating to the factors that lead up to the conversion. The motivation for conversion is determined from the case analysis and earlier research carried out in the course of the study. It covers how people come across Islam, whether it is as a result of finding themselves or going through a process of finding purpose or a realizing one's purpose in life. It can then progress to cognitive exploration of the teachings of Islam. Some could be attracted to Islamic doctrine due to rationality in the religion's tenets, as well as the system of moral values offered by the religion or the social unity the religion brings. Another important component that has an impact on the reversion process is the interactions with other people. Observing the Muslim communities and their practice, being involved in the inter-religion dialogue or perceiving acceptance by the Muslims around plays a role in this regard. Therefore, the study seeks to understand these different facets that define the Islamic conversion process thus: It draws not only the "why" of conversion but also paints the "how" of the diverse experiences that make a person embrace the faith of Islam.

Keywords: Reversion, Islam, Thoughts Processes, Faith, Social Interactions

Introduction

Conversion back to Islam differs from conversion to other religions and has a special meaning for some. In contrast to conversion it is seen as a returning, a coming back to what is said to be the people's inherent state of belief – "fitrah" (Schimmel, 1992). Like the previous one, this concept presupposes that people are inherently inclined towards the monotheism. With regard to the

term fitrah, this is a perspective that suggests that when one converts to Islam, it is not as if he is simply becoming a member of a new fold but rather that it is a restoration to actual origin of belief. Thus, it can be seen that this perspective the decision to convert to Islam is portrayed as not merely a religious conversion but a highly personal and spiritual process. The significance attributed to fitrah shows that people possess a primordial link to the divine that may become sever with time due to different factors.

The element of resignation to the religion of Islam will no longer remain a process of conversion as depicted in the existing literature. Looking at fitrah and its implications, it will be easier to see reversion as a journey to one's natural state of being in 'right relationship' with Allah. It enables one to examine the interests of those who opt for Islam and provide an understanding of the various processes by which people transform in their religiosity. For some it can be due to personal challenging issues or major life changes that make them reconsider their current perspective and return to the faith that appears to be more truthful. To some, the intellectual sphere as well as the study of Islamic teachings may be very influential in the reversion decision. Thus, through analyzing these various types of experiences, the research has sought to give a detailed account of the variety of reasons that might lead a person to revert back to the Islamic faith.

This study focuses on the cognitive factors associated with this spiritual journey, the purpose of which is to understand the processes of making and the factors apostles undergo in this journey and decide to convert to Islam. Which events trigger this inborn attitude of faith? To what extent is such change attributed to intra-psychic processes of thinking or feeling? In this way, by posing these questions, the study tries to create a more holistic picture of how the subjects' stories can inform the search for meaning and spirituality. It aims at identifying the factors that lead people to awaken their depot to follow their fitrah and consequently shed light on the phenomenon of religious reversion. Such an analysis is important due to the highly subjective and diverse character of the paths that people choose when seeking spirituality.

Literature Review

Altogether, the findings of prior qualitative research investigating religious conversion susceptible to a certain extent of adaptation in order to be a proper model for the study of reversion to Islam in the UK. Scholars' work on conversion which this research extends includes

that of Rambo (1993) and Lofland & Skonovd (1981) whose models of conversion embedded a blend of cognitive, affective and social aspects. But it validates the necessary features of Islamic reversion discussed by Haddad (2006), Köse (1996) & Cherribi (2010) among others. From the analysis of the Rambo's seven-stage conversion model (context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, consequences) it was evident that there was a gradual process of converting through understanding the culture, going through a moment of crises, searching for answers, coming across a religious figure, establishing a relationship with this figure, commitment and then facing the consequences. Additional categorization of the motives for conversion can be made by referring to Lofland & Skonovd's following six types: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive. Based on these frameworks, this research will endeavour to look at factors that are peculiar to reversion to Islam. This paper will seek to discuss how Muslims within society influence conversion by presenting the religion's principles and the author's interaction with the faith's practitioners. In this regard, the research is more nuanced than simply examining conversion literature; "fitrah" as a natural tendency towards God is the focal point. It is designed to contribute to discovering the motives which are behind and interact with each other regarding people's return to their presumably divinely prompted state of belief.

Methodology:

Since this study aims at going further in understanding the cognitive processes of this phenomenon of reversion to Islam, the study uses a qualitative research approach. Interviews and cases will be made with the people who decided to be Muslims. Recruitment of participants will be done in such a way that the candidates will come from different countries, different ages and the former religious backgrounds. It makes it possible to capture the diverse experience of reversion and go beyond the narration of a single story.

Thus, the interviews will be conducted to allow the researchers to have a detailed understanding of the participants' experiences. Their current state of thinking, as well as the factors that influenced them into adopting the Islamic faith, will be given attention. Thus, by looking more closely at Marissa and Troy's stories, we get important information about what leads to reversion. It also means that because this is a qualitative study, it does not focus on proximate causes, but it tries to understand why reversion occurs. To be specific, the findings of the research will be based

on interviews and surveys of the identified respondents and will seek to describe the complex path of people of different backgrounds to Islam.

Findings

Intellectual Curiosity and Exploration:

In this case, a majority of people start with questions that may arise out of pure interest in Islam. This curiosity is usually based on the need to know more about the religion other than the ordinary stereotypical view of it. The research participants' comments will be summarized and included the following ways of engaging with Muslims: reading, lectures, and discussions. The rationality or systematic aspects of Islam as a religion were mentioned as one of the reasons in almost all the living informants' accounts. John who once rejected the existence of God and was from the United States read the Quran and became interested in Islam. He was amazed at the fact some of its verses resemble the modern science and the consecutive orderly of Islam's belief systems. The religious conflict pushed him to search for other information regarding the Islamic religion and end up accepting to become a Muslim (Köse, 1996). Australia-raised Sarah was a Catholic who started having her doubts after she faced a string of crises in her life. This led her to start studying the Quran where she found solutions to her search under both faith and intellect. Köse (1996) makes the observation that a non-trivial factor involved in conversion to Islam at least with respect to writer's sample is an engagement with the Islamic text.

Personal and Spiritual Experiences:

Religious and individual experiences are useful in the reversion process of a person to a particular religion. Freitas Li's small number could be explained as the desire is not at all universal; in fact, many participants reported having experienced 'existential crisis' and the pursuit of the meaning of life. Such incidents made them search for other religions and creeds before embracing Islam as the true way of life. There was another assert that explained the outcome claiming that such things as Trust in Allah, Prayer and fasting must be part of the journey. The religious background of one of the respondents, Aisha from the USA, was Christian before she converted to Islam and she did not feel spiritually satisfied with Christianity. The heartfelt and straight to the point Islamic prayers gave her something she has not felt before; inner peace. It was also significant that she was spiritually fulfilled as was evidenced by her decision to go back to Islam (Rambo, 1993).

Ibrahim, formerly a Buddhist from Japan, wanted to pursue the truth and hence, tried other religions. For Islam supposes the existence of one God only, and it is the idea that he really thought about himself, which answered all the questions that filled his head and gave him spiritual wholeness. Raj, a forty-year-old Hindu man who migrated from India, spoke of a personal tragedy that caused him to doubt his religious faith. Stock's contacts with Islamic outlook toward suffering and fate were the cause for his reversion to Islam. In the paper Rambo (1993) underlines the role of the personal and the spiritual strain in the beginning of the quest for new religious affiliations.

Influence of Social Interactions:

Positive interactions with Muslims significantly influence the reversion process. Experiences with Muslim friends, colleagues, or community members often encourage further exploration of Islam. The demonstration of Islamic values, such as kindness, compassion, and ethical behavior by Muslims, helps dispel misconceptions and attract individuals to the faith. Michael, a former agnostic from Canada, was influenced by his Muslim roommate during college. The roommate's consistent kindness, honesty, and dedication to his faith prompted Michael to learn more about Islam. These positive interactions led Michael to embrace Islam (Haddad, 2006). Sarah, a former Jew from Israel, was inspired by her Muslim neighbors' warm hospitality and strong sense of community. Their actions and the way they lived their faith were crucial in her decision to revert to Islam. Ahmed, a former Christian from Nigeria, was impressed by the generosity and humility of his Muslim colleagues. Their behavior made a lasting impact on him, leading him to explore and eventually accept Islam. Haddad (2006) discusses how positive social interactions with Muslims can facilitate the conversion process by challenging stereotypes and providing firsthand experiences of Islamic values.

The Appeal of Islamic Teachings:

Shariah or Islamic Law and basic tenets of Islam such as Tawhid, Adl and Nasyr or comprehensive system of guidance on every facet of an individual's life appeals to many reverts. For this reason, some participants expressed that clear and easy doctrines, people companionship, and the combined method of living are some of what made them embrace Islam. The source of knowledge and legislation in Islam is the Quran and it was referred by many participants as being deep and motivational. Example: A former Hindu, Fatima, from India was attracted to the concept of

monotheism in the religion. She said that the two main focuses on social justice and very specific instructions about individual behavior gave her a structure she felt was missing in the religion she was raised in. Some of the areas that influenced her to reversion are equality and justice as supported by the Quran (Poston, 1992).

Example: From a Christian background in Nigeria, the former's fascination towards Islam was as the religion of social justice and robust community. The all-embracing directions on propriety of behavior in the Muslim individual as well as in the society provided him with the much needed bearings in life and therefore the reversion. Example: Maria was stunned and tears welled up in her eyes moved by the message of Quran; compassion and Mercy. She discovered that Islam's comprehensive way of approaching the human Dimensions met many of her queries and considerations of spirituality as well as social justice. In his work, Poston (1992) argues that the socially orientated messages of the Islam as well as the work therein regarding justice and morality are the key aspects that keep influencing the conversion rates.

The Role of Islamic Community and Support Systems:

The initiative and support from the Muslim community mainly is used to help in the reversion process. Some of the reverts complain of the lack of support from the new religious community, but many share positive emotions connected to acceptance of their new status that assists them in handling the difficulties of the new faith.

Example: Thomas is a convert from Protestantism in Germany and when describing the encouragement, he gets from his mosque, he said. This kind of support system assisted him to accept his new pace and lifestyle and affirmed his decision to go back to Islam. Example: A woman who converted to Islam from Catholicism from Mexico; despite her conversion, she felt empowered by the 'sisterhood' she enjoyed with her fellow Muslim women at the local mosque she used to visit. These friends were very supportive of her conversion to Islam, apart from the swift refugee flow streams. In his paper, Roald (2004) mentioned that one of the key elements that enable newly Muslims individuals to be integrated and maintain their new faith, is the support coming from the Muslim community.

Discussion

The process of reversion, that is something that is different from the conversion proper, remains a compelling topic that deals with an intricate interplay of cognitive, religious, and sociocultural

motives. Rational desire awakens the desire to acquire more knowledge, which drives people to study Islam and its vast theological system. This intellectual pursuit usually creates a path to the divine not only with the help of learned tradition, but also individual experiences and contemplation often results in a harmony between the individual and the religion, such as embracing the message of Islam. Interacting with other people, particularly in a socially positive way, appears to be critical for Muslims. Seeing Islamic values at work in society, the friendly interactions which one gets to have with Islamic nations or localized Muslims, and getting to share heartfelt conversations with fellow Muslims really play a strong role in one's reversion. Most importantly, this journey is unique to self-owing to the varying experience that each revert holds as they try to find their place in the religion. Being a Muslim is not the final goal and very much equivalent to accepting God's word it is simply the starting point. There are new reverts in the society, and the Muslim community is essential in helping them transition into the new religion. One feels part of this group and has the support of this group in the event that one feels like giving up on religion. This way, the Muslim community takes on the constructive role of overseeing the new reverts' faith development and supporting them as they progress.

Conclusion

The transformation to Islam cannot be interpreted as a straightforward process of turning back to the religion. It is a hermeneutically constituted narrative that combines Intellect, Spirituality, and Social relatedness. Every individual has a set of factors that influence his or her life and reasons for behaving in certain ways. So, to comprehend the reasons for reversion, one must apply an orientation that would take into account a broad spectrum of philosophical approaches and make an attempt at analyzing roots of a person's misfortune. This work diverges from preexisting paradigms as it recognizes that reversion issues are complicated, especially concerning the Islamic concept of 'fitrah,' which is interpreted as the inborn disposition towards God. It looks at how intellectual curiosity triggers a want to comprehend the teachings of Islam, how personal experiences develop a spirituality and how positive social relations with other Muslims give everyone a sense of identity. By doing so, this paints a richer picture of the reversion experience. That is just a start. More research studies especially those with greater time horizons may be very helpful in understanding potential secondary effects associated with reversion. Such investigations could be around how reversion affects the lives of such people as time goes on; the

struggle and possibilities that are considered when reverting join Muslim societies; or how societies can assist new comers best. We could even explore intergenerational transmission: does a reverts child also take up the Islamic faith? Through these questions, a broader picture can be sufficiently painted pertaining to this phenomenon of reversion to Islam. Such knowledge may help both the individuals on their path as well as Muslim communities to ensure that newly arrived people become integrated. It can be pointed out that the reversion process is complex and constantly developing. Thus, new investigations can help readers widen their understanding of the people's reasons for choosing Islam as well as their struggles and achievements.

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