

Reflections

The best of Islam

SIXTEEN years ago I was a student of philosophy studying world religions and Islam was my second favourite subject after Christianity.

With a quarter of the global population spread all over the world, and a majority in 50 countries, Islam has more similarities with Christianity than differences. I was particularly touched by the references made to Adam, Noah (Nuh), Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Isa) in Islam.

The five pillars of faith: The Shahadah (Declaration of faith), Prayer (Salat), Fasting during the month of Ramadan (Sawm), Charity or alms-giving (Zakat) and Hajj

(Pilgrimage to Mecca) convey the noble message of the need to lead a virtuous life, which is a basic requirement for humans' successful and joyous cohabitation. Most Muslims are devout and maintain these pillars of faith.

There are many good Muslims who are loyal and trustworthy, with the extraordinary gift of helping people in dire need, irrespective of race, religion or language. I have personally experienced their enviable adherence to demands of faith. I want to mention Mr A R Tajudeen, a middle-class driver who owns his own fleet of cars and helps me get around when I visit India. I have heard from several people how virtu-

ous and noble he is to all his customers, like many good Muslims. This is contrary to some non-Muslims, including some of my friends and relatives in the same business, who behave differently according to each customer, depending upon their level of vulnerability or ignorance. I find this unjust and unprofessional. Sadly, this happens not only in India but also in Britain, sometimes justifying this behaviour as part of professional marketing.

There is so much goodness in Islam and a lot to learn from Muslims. The universal call to brotherhood with honesty, loyalty and trustworthiness is a gift not only to Muslims but also for the entire humanity.

Sadly, the negative attention, and the disproportionate exaggeration given to terrorism and its forceful association with Islam — especially in recent times — doesn't help the general public to understand the pearls of wisdom that are hidden beneath the sea of Islamic teachings. It is a complicated religio-political situation and a fact that there are some who want us to use the term Muslims when they engage in acts of terror. We in turn buy into their ideology and tar all Muslims with the same bad brush. Regrettably, this attitude generates anti-Islamic sentiments both in the press and the public, muddling our thoughts, feelings and relationship with the entire

Muslim community.

There are some Muslim families who live around Okehampton and if you socialise with them you will find lots of enriching goodness in them. This was confirmed in the words of Barack Obama who said: 'The United States has been enriched by Muslim Americans. Many other Americans have Muslims in their families or have lived in a Muslim-majority country — I know, because I am one of them.'

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