

## Why Are Women Turning to Islam

The status of women in society is neither a new issue nor is it a fully settled one, and where Islam is mentioned, for many the term 'Muslim Women' prompts images of exhausted mothers chained to the stove, 'victims' suppressed in a life of indoctrination, frantic to be westernised and so on. Others will go to great lengths to explain how the hijab (Islamic veil) is an obstacle, clouding the mind, and comment that female converts are either brainwashed, stupid or traitors to their sex. I reject such accusations and pose to them the following question: why is it that so many women who have been born and brought up in the so called 'civilized' societies of Europe and America are willing to reject their 'liberty' and 'independence' to embrace a religion that supposedly oppresses them and is widely assumed to be prejudicial to them?

As a Christian convert to Islam, I can only present my personal experience and reasons for rejecting the 'freedom' that women claim to have in this society in favour of the only Religion that truly liberates women by giving us a status and position which is completely unique when compared with that of non-Muslim counterparts.

Before coming to Islam, I had strong feminist tendencies and recognized that where the women were concerned, a lot of shuffling around had been going on, yet without being able to pin her on the social map. The problem was ongoing: new 'women's issues' being raised without the previous ones being satisfactorily resolved. Like the many women who shared my background, I would accuse Islam of being a sexist religion, discriminating, oppressing and giving men the greater privileges. All this coming from a person who did not even know Islam, one who had been blinded due to ignorance and had accepted this deliberately distorted definition of Islam.

However, despite my criticisms of Islam, inwardly I wasn't satisfied with my own status as a woman in this society. It seemed to me that society would define such terms as 'liberty' and 'freedom' and then these definitions were accepted by women without us even attempting to question or challenge them. There was clearly a great contradiction between what women were told in theory and what actually happens in practice.

The more I pondered the greater emptiness I felt within. I was slowly beginning to reach a stage where my dissatisfaction with my status as a woman in this society, was really a reflection of my greater dissatisfaction with society

itself. Everything seemed to be degenerating backwards, despite the claims that the 1990's was going to be the decade of success and prosperity. Something vital seemed to be missing from my life and nothing would fill this vacuum. Being a Christian did not do anything for me, and I began to question the validity of only remembering God one day a week - Sundays! As with many other Christians too, I had become disillusioned with the hypocrisy of the Church and was becoming increasingly unhappy with the concept of Trinity and the deification of Jesus. Eventually, I began to look into Islam. At first, I was only interested in looking at those issues which specifically dealt with women. I was surprised. What I read and learned taught me a lot about myself as a woman, and also about where the real oppression of women lies: in every other system and way of life outside of Islam. Muslim women have been given their rights in every aspect of the religion with clear definitions of their role in society - as had men - with no injustice against either of them. As Allah says:

**“Whoever does deeds of righteousness, be they male or female, and have faith, they will enter paradise and not the least injustice will be done to them.” (Quran 4:124)**

So having amended my misconceptions about the true status of women in Islam, I was now looking further. I wanted to find that thing which was going to fill the vacuum in my life. My attention was drawn towards the beliefs and practices of Islam. It was only through establishing the fundamentals that I would understand where to turn and what to prioritise. These are often the areas which receive little attention or controversy in society, and when studying the Islamic Creed, it becomes clear why this is the case: such concise, faultless and wholly comprehensive details cannot be found elsewhere.