Peace Through Love

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There are legalized wine bars, sleazy nightclubs, steamy pole dancing, strip joints, unisex nude beaches, open gambling, pork dishes, living together, escort services, and every other matter that is banned and discouraged in Islam available in countries such as the USA, Canada, the UK, France, Netherlands, Germany, you name it.

Those are not Muslim countries, but there are large numbers of adherents of the Abrahamic religion, who believe in the *shahadah*, residing in those countries; dare I say happily.

The Muslims in those non-Muslim countries are very respectful to the civil and criminal laws of those countries; in most cases their adopted country by choice, or birth, and in some circumstances embraced as an asylum following political persecutions at home, their Muslim land of birth.

As in every corner of the world, the devout Muslims in those non-Muslim countries are practising their religion, building masjids, collecting funds for humanitarian charity, running *madrashahs* (religious schools), preaching Islam individually and through missions, giving *dawat* (inviting non-Muslims to Islam), publishing Islamic books and pamphlets... legally and almost without any obstacles, barring the occasional harassment unleashed by radical groups and persons, and the controversial restrictions on face-covering in some countries. The radical groups and persons are not spared by the law of those countries.

There are no calls for hartal, parades with sticks, brick-batting, hyped congregations, provocative statements, threats to upset civil order, ultimatum to remove an elected government, or religious demands to establish Islamic tenets in those non-Muslim countries. And YET, Islam is the fastest growing religion in those non-Muslim countries due to popular conversion to the Ummah of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

If Wikipedia is to be believed, as recent as last March, a former member of the anti-Islamist Dutch politician Geert Wilders' Freedom Party and his personal friend, Arnoud van Doorn, declared his conversion to Islam. He tweeted so on his account @ArnoudvDoorn.

There are also the more well-known converts, African-American civil rights leader, philanthropist and social activist Malcom X, basketball legend Kareem Abdul Jabar, world heavyweight boxing champion Mohammad Ali (born Cassius Marcellus Clay) , and countless other notables in the field of the Sciences and academia, who have converted to Islam not because of any aggravation.

Last year, Irish actor Liam Neeson, a Roman Catholic, said he was thinking about becoming a Muslim after undergoing a spiritual awakening in Turkey, not by any threat from any quarters, but because he was impressed by the religious atmosphere in Istanbul while filming a movie in the city.

The first Muslim to be elected Representative to the United States Congress, Keith Ellison from Minnesota's 5th congressional district was raised a Catholic. He accepted Islam by his right to choose.

British author Saida Miller Khalifa was originally called Sonya Miller. She recited the *kalema* by her intelligence to decide.

Inter-faith conversion is not uncommon worldwide, most often due to marriage, but there are other causes too.

Noted Bollywood actress, politician, social worker and a Muslim by birth, Nargis, mother of actor Sanjay Dutt, converted to Hinduism and took the name of Nirmala Dutt on her marriage to actor Sunil Dutt.

There are those who have been Muslims part of their lives, but left Islam for another religion or a non-religious worldview. Afghan Abdul Rahman, who escaped the death penalty because of foreign pressure, converted to Christianity.

Former Muslim and Dutch politician Ehsan Jami is one of the two founders of the Central Committee for Ex-Muslims, almost unbelievable that there can be such an organisation.

Famed American actress Julia Roberts converted from Christianity to Hinduism, as did Beatles member George Harrison, and Job Charnock, the British trade agent who has been controversially described as the founder of Kolkata.

Actor and activist for Tibetan causes Richard Gere converted to Buddhism, as did Tina Turner, the American singer-songwriter, dancer, and actress who has won eight Grammy Awards.

Entertainer Sammy Davis, Jr., converted to Judaism during recovery from an automobile accident. Avraham Sinai, Lebanese member of Hezbollah, had an Orthodox conversion and lives life as a Jew.

Notable converts to Christianity from Sikhism include Nimrata Nikki Randhawa Haley, the Governor of South Carolina, not in the least by any means of coercion.

Religion is not to be enforced by violent means. Obstruction or restriction to its practice is to be resisted. Religion thrives on peaceful coexistence, it spreads by example. ■