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### There are Two Sides to Every Coin

A man wearing a black ski mask holding a person hostage shouts threats and curses in Arabic to the Western world. This is what most news channels show to be Islam. People in western developed nations whose only sources of information are limited to news stations like Fox News, CNN, and the BBC, just to name a few, may have a limited view of what the Arab and Muslim worlds are like. People may see the Muslim world as a violent and dangerous place where no freedom prevails and where women are oppressed. However, this is not entirely true; every nation since the beginning of time has had its difficulties. The side that the media shows is a small minority of the worst-imaginable people, the rock bottom of the Muslim and Arab worlds. From this negative image, people may generalize about what a Muslim is and how they act. Having been a Muslim my entire life and having lived in the Muslim world for almost half a decade, I can declare without a doubt that the Muslim world has its cons, but its pros outweigh the cons tenfold. In fact, most places in the Arab and Muslim worlds are not violent and dangerous; women are respected; prayer is made to God; and most people in the Muslim world respect the West. It is imperative that I shatter any stereotypes about Islam and that I clarify any assumptions people may have about the religion.

Western news outlets often show the Muslim world as a violent and dangerous place, where masked Arabs fight each other and blow themselves up. However, this is the equivalent of

calling all gun owners in the US violent. Both generalizations are false and based on what the media chooses to show. The tiny minority that the media reflects to the world is the negative one. In fact, almost all Muslim countries are some of the safest in the world. When I lived in Saudi Arabia for three years, I could do something that I was never able to do in the US without worrying: Walking in the middle of the night with my pockets lined with cash. In the US, there is always the potential threat of robbery, but in Saudi Arabia, that was the last thing on my mind. I would walk down dark, dimly lit alleyways and not worry about any suspicious figures coming up to me. Even if someone came up to me, they would greet me in the middle of the night by saying As-salamu Alayikum (may God's peace be upon you). Sometimes people leave their cars unlocked because they know that their belongings are safe. In Saudi Arabia and in most Muslim countries, people know that any crime they commit in this life they will pay for in front of God. That is why people do not commonly commit robbery and murder. This fear and respect for God creates a sense of unity among society where no matter what the race or ethnicity all are equal in front of God. The unity that I felt is indescribable since every person I've met used to call me their brother in Islam and the one thing we had in common was fear of God. This is the side that most western news stations shift away from. Although there are some dangerous sides, that is the case with every civilization.

The burqa, hijab, and niqab which are coverings that Muslim women wear. Each differs in the style they are worn in. The hijab covers everything on the head except the face. The niqab and burqa cover the whole face except the eyes. These coverings are usually portrayed as symbols of oppression for women. That women are forced by their husbands and fathers to cover

themselves. However, while this occurs in some instances, the vast majority of women choose to wear it because it is their religious duty to do so. All the Muslim women I know wear hijab because it is their choice and their freedom. Most Muslim women wear it because God commanded them to do so and not because their family members forced them. The word Islam means to submit your will to God. Islam is a way of life that dictates how to live righteously, and most Muslim women do this by wearing the hijab, niqab, and burqa. Wearing any of these coverings is a rite of passage. For example, one of my aunts was reluctant to wear it at first, but over time she decided that the hijab is what shaped her identity and is what pleases God. When I was younger, I also did not understand the purpose of these coverings until I heard someone say that when something is valuable, you protect it.

Furthermore, in Arab countries, women are treated with the utmost respect; for example, in Saudi Arabia, there are express queues for women only. If there are no express lines available, women could immediately go to the front of the line. When I used to get food with my mom, we would send her to get food because it would so much quicker than if I stood in line. It is also a requirement for Muslim men to not stare at women and to shift their gaze out of respect. While I understand that many people may view the hijab as oppressive and restrictive, it is how our religion works. Islam is a way of life that you must dedicate time and effort to. People may also argue that covering up Women restricts their freedom. This is a baseless assumption. My cousins who live in France are not allowed to wear the Hijab in school. The way my cousins try to bypass this is by wearing hats that cover their hair. This prevention is a restriction of freedom. Being able to wear the Hijab is a freedom that many Muslim women find honor through. If a woman doesn't want to wear it, then that is between her and God.

Prayer in Islam may seem like just a bunch of movements made five times a day, but it is more than that. Prayer is what defines a Muslim; without prayer, a person is not Muslim. When I pray, I face in the direction of Mecca, the holiest city in Islam. I make sure that I am in a state of cleanliness by performing (Wudu) or ablution a ritualistic washing of my hands, mouth, nose, face arms, hair and lastly my feet. Then I raise both my hands up to my ears and say Allahu Akbar, then drop my hands to my sides and then place them across my lower chest. The phrase Allahu Akbar has built a negative connotation, especially since the media shows it is used only when someone is blowing themselves up. However, the true meaning of Allahu Akbar is that God is the greatest. In the moment of prayer, nothing matters more than God; all thoughts, worries, and desires are to be ignored. Full concentration is put on the creator of the heavens and the earth. During these moments, I recite the words of God (The Quran) and bow to my creator. I ask God to forgive me for my shortcomings and to guide and support me. The five minutes that the prayer lasts allows my mind to enter a deep meditative state where nothing matters more than God. Muslims do this five times a day; it reinforces the idea that God is all-seeing and all-knowing. The prayers are done at specific time periods throughout the day and must be completed before the next time period starts. The first prayer begins in the last hour of the night and ends when the sun rises. The second prayer begins when the sun passes its highest point in the sky and ends when it reaches a point where everything has a shadow equal to its length. From the time everything has a shadow until sunset the third prayer lasts. The fourth prayer begins at sunset and ends when the sun disappears. The last and final prayer of the day happens one hour after sunset and its time ends at midnight. The five compulsory prayers are usually done in a mosque. A mosque is a place of worship for Muslims like a church or synagogue. Whenever I walk into a mosque a sense of peace washes over me. Usually there is Quran (The literal words

of God) written all over the walls in the form of Arabic calligraphy. The carpets have abstract designs all over them, and the mosques always smell of musk or perfume. All these aspects come together to create a sense of peace and contemplation. Prayer isn't just a bunch of movements, but a reminder that the only thing promised in life is death and that we should always be the best people before our time expires.

Furthermore, the media makes it seem that the Arab world despises the West when, in fact, that is not the case. Most Arabs dream of going to the West. Whenever I tell anyone in Arab countries, whether in Morocco, Qatar, or Saudi Arabia, that I am from the US, they begin to treat me in a very respectful manner. They view the conversation as an opportunity to correct the media's narrative of what the Arab and Muslim worlds are represented as. In the school that I went to in Saudi Arabia, when people would find out I'm from the US, a big smile would appear on their faces, and they would begin to ask why I left such a beautiful country. They'd ask about all the big cities, like LA and New York, and what it is like to live there. I have experienced this same scenario in nearly every interaction. Most Muslims respect and would love to move to the West. What the media portrays is the small minority that does not represent that majority.

Overall, the Arab and Muslim worlds are safe and respectful places where women are valued, and the West is revered. I hope that one day the media shows the positive side of the Muslim world and not just the negative side, because for every nation, country, and creed there is a grim side and a virtuous side. The next time you see the media portraying the Muslim world as a war zone, remember that all coins have two sides.

