

## Comments on the play “Disgraced”

BS Foad, MD September 2016

This play portrays **several characters** and their **interaction with each other**, as well as **their views, prejudices and deficiencies**

**Amir** is born to a Pakistani family, a Muslim by birth, but he **denounced his Islam** and changed his name. **He wants to fit in** and married a white woman and he **drinks alcohol**. He is a **corporate lawyer** and hopes to be a partner in a **Jewish law firm in New York**. He **always looks at Islam from a negative point of view**, and has bought into accusations about the Qur’an and the Prophet as being true. **He does not believe that Islam is a relevant religion anymore or has any value**. He has no problem in attacking its concepts or repeating stereotypes. Amir mentions that having denounced his religion he can be killed according to the Qur’an. This is not true. The Qur’an never mentions killing an apostate, rather it states that their judgment is in the Hereafter. The Prophet also did not kill an apostate during his life. He also falsely accuses the Qur’an of giving permission to the husband in beating his wife. The Qur’an in a particular verse was referring to treatment of certain types of women who are stubborn and do not listen to reason, and states that it is important to talk to them first in a good way and to remind them of their duty to serve God. If that step fails, then the next step is to avoid sharing their bed of sleep. If these two steps fail, then permission is given to beat the wife. The prophet denounced such beating by stating how can a man beat his wife then seeks intimacy with her? This verse must be understood in the context of the time. Such behavior is not accepted in America and there is no place for wife-beating in our society.

His **wife Emily is an artist**. She **found inspiration in Islamic art**, and defends Islam against its critics including her husband. She is fascinated by Velazquez painting of his assistant, Juan de pareiaj. Her husband keeps reminding her that he was the slave to the painter. She said he gave him his freedom, and that he was a painter in his own right.

Emily apparently had a brief encounter of infidelity with her colleague Isaac, but regretted her action. When her husband finds out he is enraged and beats her. He is doing what he criticized of Islam in a moment of anger.

**Isaac** is apparently an art dealer and a Jew. He **tries to defend the religion of Islam** against the criticism of Amir, by pointing that it is the action of Muslims, not necessarily the fault of the religion, and that other religions including his own can be blamed as well. But when he learns that Amir cheered bad news about Israel he calls him a bigot and a racist, though he describes himself as critical of Israel policy.

**Jori**, is a lawyer and the wife of Isaac. She was angry when she found out that her husband had an affair with Emily. She did not tell Amir that she was offered a partnership in the law firm for a whole week.

**Abe**, the nephew of Amir, changed his name trying to fit in, but when the Imam whom he admires was jailed on suspicion of terrorism comes to his uncle, seeking his help in defending the Imam. Amir does not want to be associated with Muslims, but reluctantly tries to help because his wife insisted. His boss, Steven, the Jewish lawyer is upset and fires Amir, and chooses a younger lawyer, Jori, the wife of Isaac to be a partner in the law firm instead of Amir.

Abe believes that one can hide his faith and that this is allowed in the Qur'an under Toqqeyya. This is not true. The verse in chapter 3 tells Muslims not to take unbelievers as guardians and protectors, unless they are forced under duress, but says nothing about hiding or denouncing their Islam. Doing so is hypocrisy and this is forbidden in Islam.

#### **This play raises several questions:**

**1-American Muslims reaction in difficult times vary.** Some would hide their faith, or even denounce it trying to fit in their new environment. Both Amir and Abe changed their names trying to hide their Muslim background because they felt it may impair their efforts at success. Amir even rejected his faith, and rationalized this change that to him Islam made no sense. He wanted to live his life with no restrictions. We see this attitude in some Muslims living in America. Others go far right, and refuse to associate with anyone except those who share their faith, heritage and culture. They live here in America physically, but emotionally and spiritually they still live where they came from. Others hold on to their belief and culture, but engage with non-Muslims in their community. They patiently persevere despite difficulty and facing bigotry and prejudice. Others understand that it is their job to explain the true teachings of Islam and to answer accusations and false charges about the Qur'an and prophet Muhammad.

**2-There are many misconceptions and false accusations labelled against Islam, the Qur'an and prophet Muhammad**, by people who may not have read the Qur'an or have any knowledge of the life or character of Muhammad or his teachings. How should we respond? The Qur'an explains: not by doing something wrong, but by patient perseverance and by explaining the truth realizing that these false charges will occur and that the road is long and requires resolve: "You will be tested and tried in your possessions and in yourselves, by those who were given divine revelation before you, and by those who worship multiple gods; but if you guard against evil, and patiently persevere that requires resolve and determination" Al-Imran (The Family of Imran) 3: 186.

Examples of these misconceptions in the play are:

-Islam wants to conquer the world: wrong. The Qur'an tells us to only fight those who fight us, but not commit aggression (chapter 2: verse 190

-Islam wants to force non-Muslims to believe against their will: wrong. The Qur'an forbids Muslims from forcing anyone to believe against his will, and safeguards the right of man to choose for himself (Chapter 2: 256; Chapter 18: 29; Chapter 10: 99).

-You cannot hide your faith and pretend that you believe in something else: this is hypocrisy and is forbidden in Islam

-Islam has no regard for other people's faith: wrong. The Qur'an tells us to respect the faith and belief of others, especially Jews & Christians because they too received divine revelation before the Qur'an came to Prophet Muhammad.

**3-There is a difference between religion that is inspired by God which is perfect and useful, and human beings who fall short and have many deficiencies, preconceived ideas and prejudices.** We should not blame the religion for mistakes committed by those who claim to represent that religion. The goal of all religions is to make us better human beings and improve our character and behavior. Therefore, blaming Islam for the behavior of fanatics like ISIS is wrong. What they do is against the teachings of the Qur'an and wrong understanding of the teachings of the Prophet.

4-It is important **to understand the diversity in any society, and that such diversity is good and enriches our life, and accept this diversity, rather than being opposed to it,** or having prejudice against other people who are different from us. There is also significant diversity among the followers of any given faith or religion. Therefore, we cannot generalize and stereotype the followers of any given faith. Muslims are as diverse as Jews or Christians are in their views, character and behavior. Some are good, others are bad. American Muslims come from different ethnic backgrounds and speak different languages, and express diverse opinions and ways of thinking as expected in any community.

**5-Our interpretation of the Qur'an and teachings of Prophet Muhammad is undergoing change.** This is healthy and expected because we live in a different time and face different challenges. The opinions of Muslim scholars of the past should be respected, but understood in the context of their time, culture and environment. They did not face our current problems or challenges. If they did they would offer new answers and prospective, different from their previous opinions. Some Muslims fear this change and feel more comfortable following established rules and accepted opinions, while others are looking for new answers in areas like banking, inheritance and science. Some want to follow the literal word, others want to follow the concept and spirit of the Qur'an and Hadeeth. In the Jewish faith new ideas and opinions in the Talmud caused a revitalization and new interpretation of the Torah, but Islam has been slow in adopting new ideas or opinions different from time-honored interpretation. An example is that it took years for American Muslims to accept scientific calculation regarding the start and end of Ramadan (the month of fasting). Muslims should have accepted the scientific approach much sooner rather than relying on eye witness account.

**6-As humans we make mistakes and our judgment and behavior can be deficient, but we can learn and evolve and correct our behavior.** This is the beauty of human experience and how we gain wisdom. God created us and knows our faults, but also understands our potential to learn from our mistakes, evolve and become better human beings. Therefore, he accepts our repentance and forgives our sins. It is sad that the play ends with no closure. WE do not know what lessons these characters learned or how they modified their outlook and behavior.