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mind  body  
spirit  
by Carmen Siering



## What I Really Learned Writing Our Cover Story About Islam

While writing the cover story for this issue of *Bloom*, “To Be Muslim in Bloomington” (page 94), I visited the local mosque and the homes of many Muslim families. Everyone I met offered me insight into their lives and into Islam and answered my questions with great equanimity and care. To a person, they were open and generous and, above all, kind.

It took months to conduct the interviews, and as they drew to a close, I experienced a sense of loss. As we got to know one another, I began to feel a connection with the individuals I met, and with the Muslim community as a whole. Over the years, I’ve learned that the stories I write often lead me to discover a lot about myself, and that was never more true than with this story.

I identify as Quaker but I haven’t been to a meeting in years. As I learned about Islam, it stirred in me a desire to revisit my own religious tradition. It created a feeling of, “I want what they have.”

At a mosque open house, Yusuf Ahmed Nur said something that made me realize there are many others seeking a similar connection. He pointed out that prayer comes in different forms and, in fact, many people in our secular society are actively seeking ways to pray. When people meditate, it is a form of prayer. When people talk about mindfulness, they are really talking about prayer.

One person I interviewed talked about the importance of putting God first in everything. “Of course, you can certainly only think of God on Fridays or during prayers, but I think every little decision is important,” he said. “And it is the accumulation of every little decision you make every day that makes you who you are.” This is the very essence of being mindful—the idea

that each moment is worthy of notice and every action is worthy of care.

Whether one is Christian, Jewish, Muslim, practices another faith—or practices no faith at all—I believe we can all agree that establishing a moral code, a set of values that defines who we are, and then setting a daily intention to act in accord with those values, is a wise course of action.

I talked to a young Muslim wife and mother, a student at the university, who said we are all so much more alike than we are different: “We’re all trying to be good, we’re all trying to protect our families, we’re all trying to make a better world. At least a lot of people are. And I think we can always find them.”

There is a quote about religious tradition by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama: “I always tell my Western friends that it is best to keep your own tradition. Changing religion is not easy and sometimes causes confusion. You must value your tradition and honor your own religion.”

Although I believe Islam is a beautiful religion, I have no intention of converting. However, I feel a deep sense of gratitude to everyone who welcomed me into their homes and into their place of worship, who shared food with me, who laughed with me, who explained their beliefs and traditions to me. I am especially grateful because they helped me feel I am part of something greater than myself, and because they stirred in me the desire to once again attend to my own religious tradition. ✨

*Carmen Siering is Bloom’s managing editor. A wife, mother, and grandmother, she has a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition and is a professional writer and editor. Contact her at [carmen@magbloom.com](mailto:carmen@magbloom.com).*