

The Fruitful Salad

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For some time now, a question that I have been asking myself is “who am I?”. I have always been the one to think that it was important to fit into society’s definition of who I should be and whom I should embody. However, after much-needed self-reflection and some hard life experiences, I have been able to find that identity is what you choose to make of it and whom you think you are.

Something that has affected my identity significantly is being Muslim in America. From before I could remember, I was taught the meaning of being Muslim as a child and taught to own who I was. One of the things I remembered the most was one of the pillars of Islam which was fasting the month of Ramadan. Ramadan was always a very celebrated holiday in my family. For as long as I can remember my mother would prepare a huge dinner to celebrate the first night of fasting, and we would pray throughout the day paying thanks and gratitude to all that we had and being able to live another year. However, aside from all of the great things Ramadan has taught me when I was younger, it slowly began looking different as I grew older and eventually of age too fast. When I began fasting at school at around 12 years old, all I heard was negative and distorted depictions of what the month of Ramadan meant and was like which were all far from the truth. Eventually, this led me to believe that no matter what I could’ve said, nobody wanted to be educated or learn, which is where I fell short.

One day, I decided to join a gardening club at school with my friends which would teach us how to care for and tend the plants in our school garden. When the club began we were given time to work with the plants outdoors and learn how the gardening season usually went over. After a few weeks of the plants growing, our science teacher came up with the idea to make a salad made up of all of the plants we helped grow. To my luck, the day we made the salad fell on a day of Ramadan, which meant I was fasting that day. I was so nervous to tell my teacher that I couldn’t eat and grew to feel like an outsider. Soon after, two of the other students inform the teacher that they are fasting and can’t eat the salad right now. I was so relieved that they told her, and I wasn’t so scared after learning that two of the other students were Muslim too. After the teacher made the salad and split it among all the students, she packed some up for me and the two other students who were fasting.

“Here is some salad for you and your families after you break your fast”, she said, handing us each container of salad with a beaming smile.

“Thanks”, we all said smiling.

“So, I wanted to learn more about the month of Ramadan because a lot of students celebrate it in our school but I don’t know much about it”, she said as we sat on one of the benches.

I was a little taken back at her reaction because it was not like any of the other conversations I’ve had about my religion and Ramadan.

“Yeah so Ramadan is celebrating the passing of the Quran or holy book to the last prophet Mohamad”, I explained

“That is so interesting!” she said with a bright smile

“Muslims fast every day from sunrise to sunset because it is meant to humble Muslims and allow them to realize how much they have had over the year”, I continued.

“That is good to know”, she commented

“Yeah, I am really happy that I have had the opportunity to educate you about this topic”, I explained.

This was truly how I felt about this encounter because it was so different from other experiences I have had. Every time I have tried to explain something from my religion to someone, they have had this narrative about Islam being a strict and limited religion when “Islam” in Arabic is a direct translation to “religion of peace”. This was the main reason as to why it hurt me when people would tell me their perception of Islam without being Muslim or even asking a Muslim how Islam was.

Later that night, my family and I ate the salad that the teacher prepared and I told them about the encounter. They began telling me that everyone had their biases and that Islam is a very controversial thing for some people, but it doesn’t hurt to teach others about our identities and who we are. From that day, the one thing I took away from this experience was that sometimes to grow into our identities we need to take the time to educate others about important parts of our identities and not jump to the conclusion that it is that persons intending to hate on our religion or identity. Now, I have realized that being Muslim not only impacts my daily life but has taught me many things about the world around me and it is something that I should be proud of. I have learned now to appreciate the little things including things as simple as a salad because it bought me encouragement, validation, and an experience that shaped much of who I am today.

ARTIST STATEMENT-

In my vignette, I wanted to capture the main ideas and values of my religion and how those values have shaped my identity and who I am today. I have realized from my experience with the salad that some people are willing to learn new things about the world around them, but the resources to do so haven’t always been available to them. Additionally, if the salad taught me one thing, it would have to be to appreciate the little blessings and pockets of peace that make up our everyday lives. Being Muslim is something that I never realized the weight of on my identity and who I am. I have realized though that this little small moment from my busy everyday life has taught me values that I can’t help but share with others. It is always important to look at the bigger picture and not take small things for granted, especially opportunities for more growth and knowledge. I decided to pick a few things from Noah’s memoir and I decided to write about a encounter that I didn’t realize the worth of until after it like he has with his experience with the camera. Noah used a lot of humor in his memoir which I didn’t think was the way I wanted it to go however I did include a lot of my thoughts and reactions at different points as he did when he wrote about his experiences.