

# The Magic of Islam

by [Nikos Akritas](#) (October 2024)



Non-Muslim Prisoners of War, 8th Century

“There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet.”  
Uttering these words, three times, is all that is required to submit to Islam, to become Muslim. No baptism, no initiation

rite, just these few words. Because there is no compulsion; there is a choice. This is borne out in the Koran, "To you your religion and to me mine (surah 109, verse 6)."

Therefore, when fulfilling Allah's demand to subdue infidels (surah 9, verse 29), conquest does not usually demand conversion, that is a choice. When offered a chance to convert, accepting or declining is a choice. Should one accept, they are welcomed into the family of the true faith. Should one decline, the repercussions are to live as an inferior. But it is a choice.

And so it was, for centuries: surah 9, then surah 109, in that order—first conquest (or threat of it), then a choice. For the survivors: peace. The reality of that peace depended on your choice. For those rejecting the conquerors' religion, their new way of life was to live as *dhimmi*—people of inferior status, sanctioned not just by religious edict but by government institutions and by social mores.

It meant no redress in a court of law if your assailant, robber, or perpetrator of any other kind of crime against you, was Muslim. If you were struck, it was forbidden to retaliate. If you did, and were lucky enough to survive, you were the guilty party in the eyes of the law. You had to wear special clothes, identifying you as an infidel; you had to live in certain areas set aside for your kind; [\*] you had to cross the street so as not to pollute a believer's space if passing them by; if females of the family were raped or kidnapped you had no redress; you could not repair your places of worship without permission; no infidel buildings could be taller than prominent Muslim ones, the mosque especially. Choosing to convert changed all this.

Under the Ottomans, if Muslims entered your home during winter, you were obliged to feed them and take care of their needs without payment of any kind for as long as they wanted. In addition to exorbitant taxes and periodic violent

persecution, non-Muslims were also liable for the blood tax (otherwise known as the *devshirme* or *païdomazoma*). This was a practice where the state would take your children, chosen for their strength, intelligence or beauty, to be brought up Muslim; lost to you forever—girls to bear the sultan's Muslim children, who would potentially rule the state that suppressed you. And so your grandchild or nephew (unknown to you) would be enforcing a system which kept you in your place as an inferior. Your unknown relatives would persecute you and your unknown sons would be sent, as part of the Empire's crack corps, to make war upon your kind. Conversion freed you of these burdens.

This was the reality of life for infidels within the Ottoman Empire; an empire which lasted far longer than any modern European one, by centuries. The reality for non-Muslims was a way of life something like a cross between being black in pre-civil rights America and being Jewish in Nazi Germany.

The Ottoman Empire lasted 600 years. It only ended in the 20th century; the same century that saw the end of the European empires. It was part of that balance of power system, for which the legacy of European empire is vehemently blamed for all the world's ills today. But not Ottoman suppression and atrocities, for they are not identified as Western.

The end of this empire saw intolerance reach a crescendo. Indigenous peoples demanding rights to self-governance, independence even, were a threat to Ottoman imperialism. They had to go. If the land were ethnically cleansed of these people, there was no threat to the Empire's borders, no more loss of territory to upstarts not wanting to live under Muslim dominance. And so, the great cleansing and the genocides began.

From the late 19th to early 20th century, millions of Christians (over 20% of the population) were either killed outright, many under the most vile, sadistic conditions, or

removed from Ottoman controlled territory. This process is in part celebrated today in modern Turkey as a war of independence. By removing these people from their ancestral lands and successfully staving off 'foreign' armies attempting to liberate them, 'Turkey' was 'saved.' The reality of that 'saving' was the ending, once and for all, of non-Muslims making any claim to the lands their ancestors had lived on millennia before Islam had even existed. If they had made the right choice they could have avoided this loss.

Turks today celebrate, as Muslims, the conquest of Rome (Constantinople); taking pride in the knowledge their 'ancestors' conquered the lands of infidels. Yet, they deny the descendants of these infidels any claim to their ancestral lands. It is Turkish land. It is Turkey. Anyone else laying claim to it is an imperialist (because it is not Turkish imperialism they represent) or a traitor (if they happen to live within Turkey's borders). Alternative narratives are not tolerated. Those espousing them have a choice.

This latter accusation was levelled against the whole of the Armenian population of the Empire, in response to groups clamouring for independence. Turks today are taught all Armenians are traitorous because some wanted independence, rather than to continue living under a system that persecuted them for their sub-human status as non-believers. But, as Salman Rushdie poignantly highlighted, "To be a traitor, one has to belong to the community one intends to betray." Which community one belongs to is, in theory, a choice.

Turkey's successful War of Independence (or war of preserving what was left of the Empire) put an end to infidel demands for equality and/or liberation. The problem was solved by removing its source—non-Muslim peoples. Genocide and ethnic cleansing were seen as tools towards this goal. The exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey (not of Greeks and Turks but Christians and Muslims) was part of this ethnic cleansing; a model for the later partition of India and Pakistan. As for



the Assyrians, well, who today remembers them?

But, unlike for blacks in pre-civil rights America or Jews in Nazi Germany, within all this persecution there was a choice—become Muslim. This choice remains today, in theory, for Christians and Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh; Christians in Indonesia; Christians and Jews across the Middle East and north and west Africa; and non-Muslims in the West.

Where sharia is imposed, non-believers bear the full brunt of their chosen inferiority. That is their choice. Where sharia is not imposed but Muslims form the majority of the population (as in Egypt and Turkey), non-believers may not be officially discriminated against but they are discriminated against nonetheless.[\[†\]](#) That is their choice. Where there are sizeable Muslim minorities, as in the West, the majority population are a potential source of pollution. They are impure, dissolute, inferior. But that is their choice.

The religious dichotomy outlined in Islam legitimises discrimination. To choose to remain an infidel is viewed within the Muslim world, in the present as it was in the past, to choose your fate. All repercussions for doing so are Allah's will. For by uttering a few words, one could, in theory, end the discrimination, the persecution, the hate. This is the benign magic of Islam.

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[\[\\*\]](#) Candace Owens take note.

[\[†\]](#) In some Muslim countries officialdom implements a schizophrenic form of discrimination. For example, in the UAE all persons are equal before the law but only Islam (its history and beliefs) can be taught in schools. To teach about other religions is illegal. Written references to Jews and Judaism are proscribed. The constitution claims there is no discrimination between citizens on grounds of religious belief but defines all citizens as Muslims.

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Nikos Akritas has worked as a teacher in the Middle East, Central Asia and the UK.

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