

## CHAPTER 2: THE STORY OF MY QURAN

I am a Muslim. I didn't and don't consider myself very religious, but I am a true believer in a creator, the prophets, the holy books, and the Quran. I have faith and consider myself very spiritual; I have always done my daily prayers as a Muslim, and I have fasted during the month of Ramadan since I was 15 years old.

I don't believe much in religious orthodoxy because I have come to learn that religions are often interpretations by men over the centuries, and are often

deeply impacted by politics and power. However, I also understand that believing in God and having faith does not necessarily mean following the religion. God has been among the most important parts of my spiritual life from a very young age.

In Iran, during a wedding ceremony, the bride and groom sit down next to each other, reading or looking at a copy of the Quran while their families rub two pieces of sugar cones above their heads over a piece of white net-shaped cloths. After the Imam finishes the ceremony, the couple closes the Quran and exchanges wedding rings and gifts. That particular copy of the Quran, from that moment on, becomes a part of their family and is often valued greatly. Growing up, I would often borrow my parents' wedding Quran if I needed a copy of the Quran for prayers or school homework, even though we had a few other copies of the Quran in the house. My parent's wedding Quran was getting old, even though my mother had always taken special care of it.

When I was moving to Canada, I asked my mom if she would let me take that Quran, so I'd have a part of my family with me, and she did. She actually wrote out

and then placed some prayers in the Quran and told me: “Make us proud, my son.” Family has always been the most important aspect of my life, and that Quran was a special part of my family that I had with me. It represented my family, my God, and my childhood, and it was my companion during a number of hard times.

My parents’ Quran was about 45 years old when I married Emily, so I had another, newer Quran that I would use for reading, as I did not want to further wear-down my parents’ fragile wedding Quran. Before my marriage to Emily, and while I was struggling with my options, I vowed that I would read the whole Quran in three languages – Arabic, Farsi, and English – with the hope that my marriage would work. After we got married, every night before going to bed, I read one or two pages of the Quran in all three languages, and it took me about a year or so until I finished reading the whole Quran. It was extremely important to me that the marriage work out.

Very early in my relationship with Emily, I told her the story of my copies of the Quran and explained to her how the Quran—both copies of it—was the most

valuable possession in my life. She knew very well what my parents' wedding Quran meant to me and what the Quran itself means to Muslims.

On October 31, 2010, we got into a fight. She would only do half of the dishes and insisted that I needed to do the other half. I explained to her that I had done dishes countless times, that I had long done lots of cooking and work in and around the house, and that I had never done only half of a job. I told her that if she only wanted to do half, then that was fine with me, and that she could just leave the other half there. One of the many challenges of our relationship was Emily's bullying personality. When she demanded something, it needed to be done; otherwise, she would try to hurt the person. That was the norm in our relationship, but I had no intention of bowing down to bullying that night.

She started by putting the dishes in my office upstairs, where I used to work whenever I was working from home, and each time she did it, I would put them back outside the office. She then spread the dishes in the office, and in retaliation, I spread some of her books in the master bedroom. She then grabbed my sister's

wedding photo that was on the wall and told me that she'd tear apart the photo if I didn't do the dishes. I told her that if she tore apart my sister's wedding picture, I would tear apart her family picture. She hesitated for a few seconds and realized that she could not win that way. She then grabbed the newer copy of the Quran, and started tearing apart its pages and spreading them around the living room. I was shocked and extremely upset. She had threatened to tear apart the copies of the Quran a few times in the past, but I never thought she would actually do such a horrendous thing. I still, however, refused to do the dishes, and instead put some of her books outside – yet I did not tear apart or damage any of them.

She then grabbed my parents' wedding Quran and put it next to the sink. She started filling up the sink with water and she threatened to put my parent's wedding Quran in the water, once the sink was full. I was beyond exasperated with her and so I still refused to do the dishes. She then put my parents' Quran in the sink full of water. I was in shock. She then grabbed the Quran and violently threw it in the backyard. That copy of the Quran was destroyed and all the pages were scattered in

the backyard. I was numb. I realized then that I had lost and did not want to continue the fight. I went to the backyard and started collecting the remains of my parents' wedding Quran. When I turned to come back inside, though, she quickly locked the door. I then ran quickly to the front entrance of the house and managed to get inside just before she locked the front door as well. I had lost my ability to speak. I feared that if I spoke, I would break down. I collected the scattered copies of the Quran, did not say a word, and sat on the couch and watched TV. She continued the fight by putting all the dirty dishes back in my office as a sign of her victory, and then she called her sister.

I regretted fighting and was extremely sad. My whole life passed in front of my eyes. My parents, my childhood, my coming to Canada, and how my life had come to that point – that copies of the Quran would get torn apart in front of my eyes. I felt that I had let my parents down. I spent that night wishing that the earth would open up and swallow me.

The next day, I did do the dishes. I cleaned up the kitchen and the office. I did not want to fight anymore,

but I knew that I would not be able to live with her for the rest of my life. I knew it was done. She wouldn't apologize and insisted that I deserved it. She insisted that I should have done the dishes.

A couple of months later, we went for counselling. The counselor saw us together, initially, and then wanted to see us each separately. During my one-on-one session with the counselor, I told him that I was scared. I didn't know how she was going to hurt me next. At the last session, the counselor suggested to her that she should apologize for tearing apart my two copies of the Quran. She refused. After the separation, I took all my precious possessions — the copies of the Quran and my family pictures — out of the house to keep in my office at work because I was worried that she'd destroy them.

During the four-day court trial, which started on January 26, 2016, she told the story of the destruction of the Quran herself. I guess that her lawyer had advised her to tell the story rather than have me relate the story and show evidence of what had happened. Trial is the

last stage of the litigation process, and you often don't know who the judge is going to be until one or two days beforehand. Our trial was with Justice Shern. At the beginning, he explained to us that there was a white canvas in front of him – implying his impartiality – and that we needed to paint this white canvas for him so he could understand what had happened. However, I believe this was the first time he was lying: I believe he knew exactly what he was going to do, and that metaphorical canvas was never blank.

In Ontario, all court sessions are recorded, and the audio recordings are publicly available. Media, the individual parties involved, or any other member of the public can request a copy of the audio recordings for a minimal fee. I requested a copy of the audio files, and they were ready for me to pick up in a few days. The audio is accompanied by some transcription that makes it easy to find specific parts of each session or discussion subjects. I listened to those audio recordings a few times while writing this book, to make sure that I remembered the events correctly and that my notes were accurate. It was deeply painful to go through the audio, and I could

usually only handle a few minutes at a time. Each listening session would take away my sleep for a few days. If I continued listening and writing for more than two or three days at a stretch, I would often become physically ill, and then I would have to take a day or two off work to regain my health.

To help me get through the process, I would set my favourite photo of my two daughters, and the remains of my parents' wedding Quran, next to me: my love for my children and my family gave me the strength to continue writing this book. I needed to fulfill my promises to my children and to make my mother proud.

When Emily recounted her act of tearing apart my copies of the Quran, she altered the story as much as she could; however, she did admit to most of the facts. She said that she tore apart the Quran because I didn't do the dishes and that she had racked up the dishes in a bin, insisting that I had to do them. She claimed that I did not help around the house, which was far from the truth. She then admitted that first she tore apart the pages of my personal Quran before going after my parents' wedding

Quran. Justice Shern checked with her that this was my family's sacred book, and she confirmed that it was.

Emily then explained that she took my parents' wedding Quran, put it in the sink and started pouring water on it, and then took it and threw it out in the backyard because she knew that I would run to go and get it. She then said that she locked the backdoor after I went outside and ran to the front door, but I got in through that door before she could lock it. She then explained that afterwards she went downstairs and called her sister because she regretted what she had done. And then she said she apologized to me, which is absolutely untrue – she in fact, continued the fight by putting the dishes back in my home office. She also consistently refused to apologize and always insisted that I deserved it. In fact, I did the dishes the next day, and cleaned up the kitchen as well as the office.

I don't believe I've ever heard as many lies in my life as during that four-day trial, but that didn't bother me. I'd decided to stay true to my heart and to not descend into nastiness. I avoided saying a lot of things that I believed would have embarrassed Emily and,

similarly, I do not disclose that information in this book. I avoided bringing up her past issues and did not attack her personally in any way.

When it was my turn to testify, I decided not to go over the story again. I didn't want to break down in court, so I only said: "The fight with regards to the dishes and the incident with the Qurans, I am not going to add anything to the story. I'm not holding any grudges." I told her that I accepted her apology.

As for Justice Shern's white canvas, there was only one version of the story with regard to the dishes and the Quran. Emily had admitted what she had done and why she had done it, while everything was being recorded and Justice Shern himself was also taking notes. However, this is what the judge wrote in his judgment:

*In the fall of 2010, the parties were arguing again. The respondent [Ali] threw a book that the applicant [Emily] was reading down on the floor and poured water on the books. He then took the books outside. In retaliation, the applicant took the respondent's parents' Koran and submerged*

*it in a sink full of water. She then threw it into the backyard. The respondent ran out to retrieve the Koran. The respondent never forgave the applicant for this conduct. (Paragraph 37.c)*

She wasn't reading any books. She never mentioned anything about reading any books. She had specified that she had racked up the dishes in a bin and told me I had to do the dishes right then. Justice Shern also censors the fact that there were two copies of the Quran and that she first tore apart my personal Quran. Then, when I didn't do the dishes, she went after my parents' 45-year-old wedding Quran. What would be the difference between destroying one Quran and two?

First, it clearly shows that she intended to do these things and she wasn't scared of me. Second, if I had been abusive or if I had used force, I could have stopped her. I could have grabbed my Quran from her hands. The whole thing had happened in slow motion for me. After Emily ripped up my Quran, she gave me time to do the dishes; when I didn't do the dishes, she grabbed my parents' Quran and put it next to the sink. She then

filled up the sink with water and gave me time to do the dishes. When I didn't submit to her bullying at that point, she then put my parents' Quran in the sink and then after sometime, she threw it into the backyard. Third, I did not retaliate. Obviously, I went to get my parents' sacred wedding Quran from the snow in the backyard. She then tried to lock me outside on a cold November night. Once I managed to get in the front door, I did not say a word. I was unable to talk – I was just numb. I turned on the TV and sat on the couch. I wished I had not come to Canada. I wished I had not asked my mother for their sacred Quran. I wished I had never met Emily. In court, she said that after I came in, she went downstairs and called her sister. I explained these three facts to Justice Shern in my defense, trying to paint his white canvas.

Why did he invent a new story regarding the Quran to actually make me look like I deserved the abuse I had experienced?

Tearing apart someone's religious text is an abusive act in any culture. My parents' wedding Quran was the most valuable possession I had. What culture does not consider that abusive?

Would the judge acknowledge the abuse if I was a Christian and Emily had torn apart two of my Bibles? Why did he create a different story? Was he not concerned that everything was being recorded in the courtroom?