

Statement of purpose

I am committed to achieving peace in the Middle East. While many share my mission, I believe that my approach is unique and that its prospects for success will be significantly improved by my earning a Ph.D. in Religious Studies.

Born and reared in a Sunni Muslim family in Giza, Egypt, at 19 I immigrated to California, earned a B.S. at University of California/Berkeley, and for the subsequent 20 years worked in business and industry.

For decades, I have closely followed and felt frustrated by the conflict over what Muslims and Jews claim to be their Holy Land. Wanting to explore Judaism, Christianity and Islam in depth, I have studied them on my own and with teachers, mentors, sheikhs, rabbi and priests.

In the early 90s, I sought a church that holds a balance between teachings in the Torah and the Gospel. Impressed with the professional ethics of a man with whom I had business dealings, I began attending the church of which he was a member. For seven years, I studied the Old Testament, New Testament, and Book of Mormon.

I was pressured by Muslim friends and family members who thought that my attending a church or synagogue, befriending a non-Muslim or even reading a holy book other than the Koran is wrong. When I was identified as one befriending people they regard as arch enemies of Islam, I realized that among some Muslims there is the perception that Jews and Muslims and Christians must be each other's existential enemies. It seemed to me that all three religions, which teach the Ten Commandments and the unity of God and the sanctity of human life, have seemingly sincere followers who hate the other religions more than they love their own.

To me, this issue was worthy of study. The core message in the Hebrew Torah, Christian Greek Gospel, and Arabic Koran is the same: Love your neighbor as yourself and do unto others as you would have them do unto you. To me, it seems possible for people who speak different tongues to coexist amicably as long as their holy books are translated and interpreted in a way that promotes such coexistence.

When I sought an Islamic school of thought that is practical, non-violent, and apolitical, I was led to the Tablighi Jamat of India. I spent seven years traveling to the Indian subcontinent and visiting numerous mosques in cities, towns, and villages; taking copious notes; and learning the Tablighi brand of Islam. During this period, I supported my family by selling assets I had accumulated as a mortgage banker. I needed, however, to give up my lucrative banking business and change careers because I wanted to respect prohibitions in the Torah ("Take thou no interest of him or increase; but fear thy God," Leviticus 25:36) and the Koran ("Allah will deprive usury of all blessing, but will give increase for deeds of charity," Qur'an 2:276).

While doing all this, I maintained a close association with a rabbi in Palo Alto, CA, where I now reside. I frequently consulted with him about Judaic perspectives, and I studied *Jewish Literacy* by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, which impressed me with its literary style, humor, and simple way of conveying the author's point of view.

In November 2008, just before the Gaza war, I formed a small think tank that includes members of all three faiths who share the desire for peace in the Holy Land. The International Organization for Peace ("IOP") conducted many meetings, workshops, and seminars and issued the Mellata Ibrahim Initiative, which seeks a diplomatic and religious solution to the Middle East conflict and has won support from religious and civil society leaders in America and the Middle East.

Armed with my knowledge of the three monotheistic religions, I came to Al Azhar University in Egypt, my home country, in 2008, hoping to engage political and religious leaders in seeking a diplomatic, religion-based, non-violent solution to the Middle East conflict. After meeting with several professors, I chose to work closely with Professor Nady El Attar, whose specialty is comparative studies of religion.

Over the past two years, our work together has opened my eyes to the existence of intentional mistranslations in the books of Koranic tafseer (Muslim commentary on the Qur'an), which had—and still have--the effect of inflaming Muslims against the West, Judaism, and Christianity. Dr. El Attar and I found a surprisingly large number of verses in the Koran that are explained and commented on in a misleading, evasive, and deceitful way, as a means of perpetuating the Mid-east conflict. We also found the cause of such intentional misrepresentations and how to re-interpret them in a scholarly way that will then provide the textual basis for extinguishing unnecessary conflict.

Dr. El Attar recommended that our findings be part of a Ph.D. dissertation. I seek admission to your doctoral program in order to equip myself for this undertaking. I recognize that reinterpreting certain Koranic verses is unlikely to alter the ideas of some people, including influential imams, who seek to prolong the conflict. I also believe that reinterpretation will give support to others of all faiths whose wish for peace is genuine. Achieving peace in the Middle East will require the concerted efforts of many players. The best way for me to advance a cause to which I am devoted is to offer Koranic support for it as a credentialed scholar. While some scholars share my view, they fear speaking out. My intention in gaining a Ph.D. from Yale is to enhance my ability to be heard.