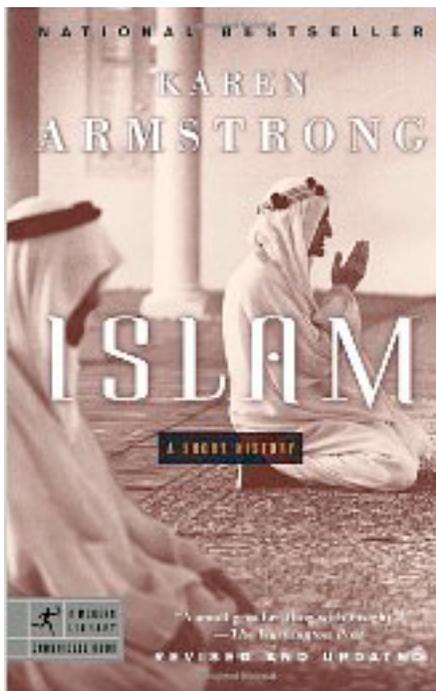


Empathy, Compassion and Passion...

9:17 PM PDT, June 10, 2009

For the past week since President Obama spoke at Cairo University, [I have watched his speech again and again](#), listening to his words and basking in the wisdom and the power of his message in this time of great tension. Having known Islam on three continents before Cairo, he conveyed an understanding of Muslim perspectives and sought new beginnings around the world based on justice, progress, tolerance and dignity. He shared his hopes with the rest of the world, be they [Arab, Israeli, Palestinian, Iranian or any of the other cultures or countries in the region](#). Our President is a wonderful human being; a unique man who has stepped up to the tasks at hand with much grace and much dignity. *May God protect him...*

As he spoke of the three great faiths peacefully mingling together in the Holy Land, he reminded me of another lecturer that I had only recently rediscovered, one named [Karen Armstrong](#). She is a former Catholic nun and a recognized expert on the history of religion, who now describes herself as a '*freelance monotheist*' and as she clearly points out to us, "*religion is not the problem.*" She easily tracks 'the Golden Rule' throughout all the monotheisms and demonstrates to us all what our shared religions have in common. "*The cause of our present woes are political,*" she affirms, but she also notes, "*that a lot of religious people prefer to be right, rather than compassionate.*"



Her 2002 book, [Islam: A Short History \(Modern Library Chronicles\)](#), helped me

to understand the fundamentals of the Middle East religions as I embarked upon my earlier research for [*The Last Transition...*](#) I hope that things will begin to turn around for the Iranians and that their coming election can be as groundbreaking for them as ours has been for us.

However, today I heard about [Izzeldin Abuelaish, a well-known Palestinian doctor](#), whose story brought real meaning to the Middle East's future for me on NPR's Morning Edition, as tears filled my eyes. This Harvard-educated physician epitomized the tragedy of the January Gaza Offensive as he described how Israeli tank units killed three of his daughters by mistake through excessive force when he believed they were protecting him. Still he preaches tolerance, "*love each other, help each other, respect each other*" he pleaded. "*We need to act... human beings are dying.*" The Israeli government has accepted responsibility for the deaths of his children and he will open a foundation for girl's and woman's education and health in their memory there. He says that he will never leave Gaza.