

ABDUL QADR

I had a friend,
Abdul Qadr Al Zahrani,
A Saudi man,
A religious man,
An imam,
A mutawa, some said jokingly,
A bag man
Who toted the loot regularly given by average Saudis
over the mountains to the mujahideen in Afghanistan.

He was about my age, he guessed.
Saudis didn't record births - that wasn't important to them.
His dad was an imam ...
A local doctor ...
herbal cures ...
Which required periodic re-supply
Via 2-week round-trip donkey treks to the closest city, Medina.

You see, growing up, he said, no one had a job.
They lived by barter and trade
There were no roads, No cars,
No telephones or TVs
A simple, rugged life
Close to nature, To neighbors, To each other and God.

Then came oil.
Westerners ...
and cars, roads, TVs and telephones.
He would drive across the Kingdom in his new white Chevy,
Pick up his mom and sisters
Haul them down the mountain to Jeddah
An afternoon of shopping,
Home by nightfall ...
No more 2-week treks
No more barter and trade
No more ...

No more ...
Being an Al Zahrani
As the Al Zahrani knew themselves to be
For – for ever.

Abdul Qadr was sad and angry.
He hated Westerners.
Hated Christians.

Not because they were Christian.
- We are all people of the book, he used to say -
More because the Westerners
who erased his history,
Jazzed and souped up his future,
happened to be ...

But he taught me much.

Mary's full name: Miriam Al Imran.
The birth story of Jesus,
not in a stable
under a date palm
with the miracle of a clear, cool spring rising from its roots.
The meaning of gold, frankincense and myrrh

He taught me about hunger, and thirst – Ramadan,
and Zakat – alms giving – two of the pillars.

I broke fast with him
Ate in his home
Sipped tea with him
Gathered among his friends
Traded our hopes and dreams.

Which all gave me pause,
And cause
To say
In full sincerity
SAlla-u-Akbar.