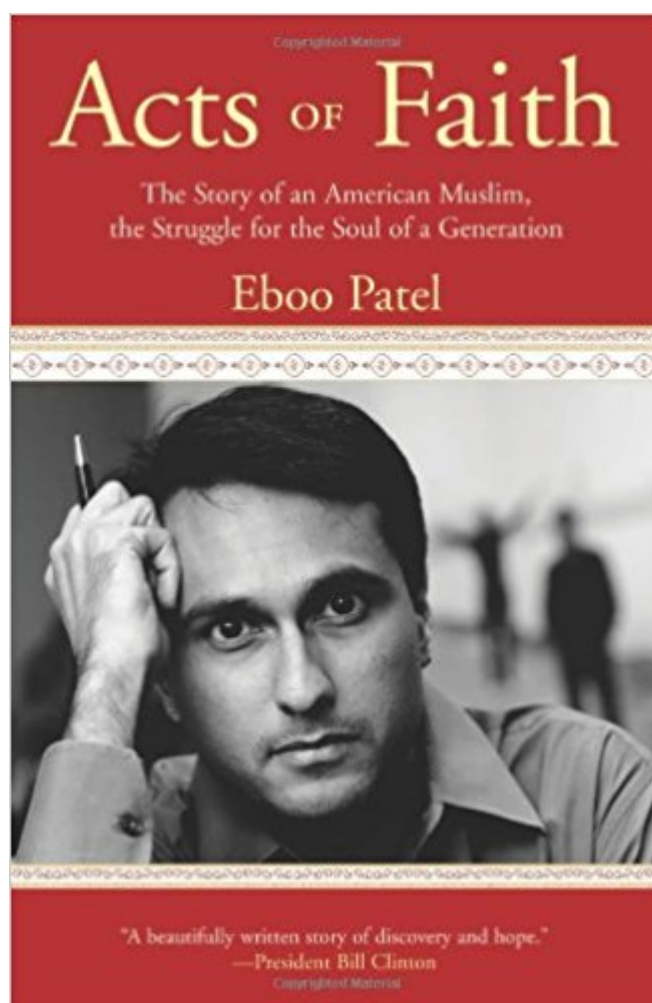




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Acts Of Faith: The Story Of An American Muslim, In The Struggle For The Soul Of A Generation



Synopsis

With a new afterword *Acts of Faith* is a remarkable account of growing up Muslim in America and coming to believe in religious pluralism, from one of the most prominent faith leaders in the United States. Eboo Patel's story is a hopeful and moving testament to the power and passion of young people and of the world-changing potential of an interfaith youth movement.

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Customer Reviews

I finished this book the week before CNN began to air their three night special entitled "God's Warriors." If you haven't made time to watch God's Warriors for the 6 hour duration, you should. If you haven't read Eboo Patel's book, *Acts of Faith - The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*, you must. Religious fundamentalism continues to be the spawning grounds for extremism that continues to ravage the soul of mankind. It is through the efforts of Eboo Patel and the InterFaith Youth Core [...] that young adults from all faith persuasions are challenged to learn to live with one another, in collaborative harmony. The book recounts Patel's personal struggle with forging and cherishing his Muslim identity and faith, as an American, and then launching the InterFaith Youth Core as his vehicle for creating pluralistic understanding within the next generation of young adults who will become the leaders of our world. This book is about how one man decided to become part of the international interfaith youth movement. As Patel says, "In a world where the forces that seek to divide us are strong, I came to one conclusion: We have to save each other. It's the only way to save ourselves." P. 180 This book chronicles how Eboo Patel came

to participate in the movement of religious pluralism. In his own words, "Movements re-create the world. A movement is a growing group of people who believe so deeply in a new possibility that they participate in making it a reality. They won't all meet. They won't even know everybody else's names. But somehow, they all have the feeling that people on the other side of the city or country or the world believe in the same idea, burn with the same passion, and are taking risks for the same dream." P.

This book changed my life. Patel, who studied religion and society as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford and founded the Interfaith Youth Corps, writes about his own religious formation (or lack thereof) and how he views pluralism and interreligious dialogue and service. Patel, the son of Indian Muslim immigrants, grew up in Chicago with little sense of religious identity. It was simply never discussed either in higher school or college. It was only after becoming a part of the Catholic Worker movement and meeting Brother Wayne Teasdale that Patel began to quest after his own religious identity. After all, as even the Dalai Lama told him, you should stick with your heritage and your roots. Patel went back to Islam not in a mosque, but through contacts with people from other traditions. In other words, his "faith formation had occurred in the midst of religious diversity" (73). While sitting in Buddhist meditation, Islamic prayers he had learned in childhood came up in his mind, spontaneously working their way out. This led to another realization, one which the IYC is based on: interreligious learning and contact does not weaken religious identity into a kind of bland syncretism. It strengthens religious identity by helping one see how their tradition is unique and bringing them into the position of speaking for their tradition. The IYC is founded on Patel's impatience with the way ecumenical counsels had nice banquets with lots of speeches that never seeped down into the actual parishes and religious adherents. Drawing youth into interfaith service is doubly important, as the youth are the future of the world. My religious formation also happened in the context of pluralism. Even as I was in RCIA, I was sitting at the local zendo. At first this posed no problem.

Eboo Patel is very smart and is a former Rhodes scholar. He has doctorate in the sociology of religion from Oxford and is the founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, "an organization that unites young people of different religions to perform community service and explore their common values." He tells two stories in this book. He tells his own personal story, one of growing up Muslim in America, being bullied by other kids because he was brown and Muslim, and his rejection of and later return to the Muslim religion that he was raised in. The other story that he tells is how

impressionable teenagers are brought into extremist youth groups because their religions have failed to engage them in positive ways. He gives examples of Christian, Jewish and Hindu extremist groups as well as those that are Muslim. Eboo's personal story is interesting and I learned things about the Muslim religion that I did not know. He is an Ismaili Muslim, part of the Shia group that follows an Imam who is a supreme leader to them rather like the Pope is to the Catholics. Their current Imam is known as the Aga Kahn. Eboo's parents wanted him to learn service and charity to others and so they made him participate in a YMCA youth service group, which he feels helped to give him identity and kept him from possibly falling prey to extremist Muslim groups. Eboo feels that extremist groups are more political than religious and that none of them really represent their religions as their religions are meant to be practiced. He recognizes that extremist groups give huge amounts of money to create youth indoctrination groups, which certainly is true of the Muslim extremist groups.

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