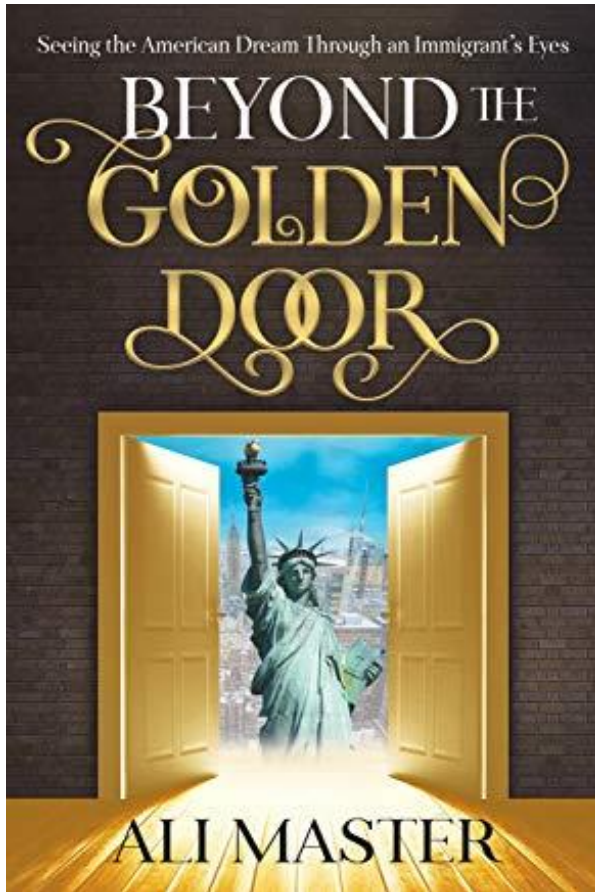


Making America Great Again – Through the Eyes of an American Immigrant & Former Muslim



“Americans need a fresh reminder of the amazing nation they have and the power of liberties I see so often taken for granted,” asserts Ali Master.

He should know about the American Dream. He’s lived it for over 30 years, coming to the United States as a college student from Pakistan, rising to become a successful high-level executive at Ernst & Young, wed an American and raised four children, and embraced Christianity over his birth faith as a Muslim. He cherishes the freedoms found in the United States and has written a book, *Beyond the Golden Door*, to inspire and empower all Americans to fall back in love with their country.

“I have witnessed a decline in the very values that make America a great and free nation,” he adds. “Lady Liberty’s torch still burns, but her light has dimmed. Few in America appreciate the powerful slogan, ‘freedom isn’t free.’ Fewer still comprehend the full impact of those freedoms, having never lived

without them.”

He believes that those who embody the American Dream begin with courage and the willingness to do what it takes to preserve freedom, not only on our own soil – but also beyond it.

“The fruits of freedom are not harvested without risk,” writes Master. “Which is riskier, to accept an arranged marriage or to seek out one true love, knowing you risk rejection? Is it riskier to hold onto a status-quo job you don’t enjoy or start your own business knowing more than 50% fail? Is it safer to blindly follow your parents’ faith or walk into a new place of worship where that faith may be challenged? Risk and the American Dream go hand in hand.”

His book outlines the five freedoms he believes are the most precious, including:

Freedom to Fail – everyone deserves a second chance after failing.

Freedom to Love – our culture encourages us to choose the one we want to love for life.

Freedom of Religion – we can embrace our faith free of persecution.

Freedom to Build – anyone can pursue being an entrepreneur or an intrapreneur.

Freedom to Self-Govern – we all should vote and participate in our governance.

“Those who make the most of these freedoms and achieve their American Dream are the ones who are willing to pursue that dream with unabashed passion perseverance, hard work, and individual responsibility,” writes Master. “They don’t wait around for the government to lend a hand. Instead, appreciating the good soil in which they find themselves, they seize the opportunity, not only for themselves but also their families and their communities. They become true Americans, respecting and celebrating its traditions and values.”

He hopes his journey inspires others to safeguard these precious freedoms. And what a journey he has had. *Beyond the Golden Door* is a memoir that reveals the many obstacles Master had to overcome on his road to finding happiness, prosperity, and peace here. Coming from 1986 Pakistan, a Muslim nation with arranged marriages, widespread corruption, bribe-based businesses, and severe limits on free speech, Master endured culture shock. He measured all of America by his limited view of the world that came from watching TV shows like *Dallas*, and from reading *Archie Comics*.

His first few years here were challenging. In debt while attending a college thousands of miles from his family and friends, he worked at McDonald’s. He started to date white women out of his faith and one relationship with a co-dependent woman led him to slash his wrist. But he rebounded and learned to assimilate and eventually fell in love with a woman who turned him onto pursuing a relationship with Christianity. She would become his wife.

In his book, Master poignantly shares with us:

- What it was like to be a former Muslim living in America on 9/11.
- Some dark secrets that he learned of his birth mom’s tragic death caused from labor -- and an uncle (who turned out to be his dad) who died in a tragic motorcycle accident when he was a teen.
- How he overcame the challenges of thriving as an immigrant to live the American Dream.
- Which freedoms we should all cherish and embrace.
- The close connection between our free government and religion.

“It’s easy to talk about freedom” says Master. “But unless someone has lived in a world that suffocates freedom it’s difficult to appreciate the liberty found in America.”

Beyond the Golden Door is an engaging story of a Muslim immigrant who discovers five transformational freedoms. He shows how these freedoms stand in stark contrast to the third-world life he left behind. Master infuses readers, through personal stories and an insightful perspective, with what it means to be an entrepreneur, a patriot, and a passionate risk-taker. His positive, empowering message comes across as genuinely heartfelt and authentic.

Master has a timely message as our nation debates the limits of immigration, the opportunities of capitalism, and the role of faith in our society. *Beyond the Golden Door* illuminates readers to show them how they can preserve their precious freedoms and contribute to the nation’s legacy – as well as meet the deeper challenge of considering their own life journey.

Publication Data: *Beyond the Golden Door: Seeing the American Dream Through an Immigrant’s Eyes* (Morgan James Publishing, July 2019, Trade Paper, 212 pages, ISBN: 9781642792850, \$17.95) by Ali Master.

Contact Information: MEDIA CONNECT

Brian Feinblum 212-583-2718 brian.feinblum@finnpartners.com

Ali Master Biography



Ali Master's perspective on the American dream is unique. He has personally experienced the freedoms he touts in his first book, ***Beyond the Golden Door*** (Morgan James Publishing). Because he is a former Shia Muslim, some of these, such as the freedom of religion, came at a great personal risk.

He is a highly successful managing partner with the global firm of Ernst & Young (EY) and is a serial intrapreneur—having founded several large businesses inside EY. He has advised hundreds of Fortune 1000 companies in his area of specialty—economic incentives, workforce solutions, Affordable Care Act, and tax credits. He has been at EY for the past 24 years and presently leads a global team of over 300 professionals. Prior to EY, Ali had been involved in several other entrepreneurial ventures starting new businesses.

Ali is a licensed CPA, a Certified Credits & Incentives Professional (CCIP) and holds an undergraduate degree in accounting from the University of Texas, Dallas. He is also a graduate of leadership programs from both the Kellogg School of Management and Harvard University. He is a member of the American Institute of CPAs, the Texas Society of CPAs, and a certified member of the Institute for Professionals in Taxation (IPT). Ali has advised many major brands throughout his career including: Gap, Macy's, UPS, Citigroup, Walgreens, Darden Restaurants, Sodexo, Best Buy, Allegis Group, Robert Half, and Ross Stores. He's been featured or quoted in numerous publications including *Accounting Today*, *CFO*

Magazine, Bloomberg BNA, Plan Sponsor, BenefitsPro, Area Development, DiversityInc, and The Tax Advisor.

He has served as a member of EY's award winning Diversity & Inclusiveness Council and is a frequent speaker on a range of topics from business, to inclusion, to leadership, to Islam. His bi-cultural background uniquely qualifies him to contrast American freedoms and values to those found in Muslim countries

Ali has served on the Board of Harvest Field Corners, a ministry focused on providing microfinance to Christians in Pakistan. Ali is deeply involved in his church, Lake Cities Community, based in Rowlett, Texas, and is presently serving as Chairman of the Elder Board. He lives near Dallas with his wife and four children but travels frequently across the U.S. and internationally. For more information, please consult www.alimaster.com and www.beyondthegoldendoor.com.

Selected Excerpts ***Beyond the Golden Door***

A New Day

I knew the odds were against me, but I had an uncanny feeling that I was destined to go to the United States of America. Something was drawing me toward this adventure. I felt that it was a time for new beginnings, a turning of a fresh page in life; a new birth.

Succeed By Failing

Over my three decades of living in America, this pattern of men and women experiencing colossal failure, yet rising from the ashes to experience unparalleled success still lives on. While their secret to success is almost always the ability to persevere, the American willingness to offer a second chance, and the receptive freedom found in her systems, be it politics, business, academics, entertainment, or sports, serves as a powerful and unique catalyst for success. This desire, even eagerness, of Americans to root for the underdog is singularly special and demands further examination.

Suicide Attempt

I couldn't take it anymore. This was not the life I'd dreamed of. Nor was this the American college experience I expected. At some point during our fourth or fifth argument that night, I snapped. I wanted the pain and conflict to end, and I most definitely wanted Lindsey to feel guilty for wrecking my life. I had seen a set of knives in the kitchen. I pushed Lindsey back with my right hand and opened the knife drawer as Lindsey screamed, begging me to stop. Seconds later, I was bleeding profusely from my left wrist. Dizziness overcame me, and I fell.

Before I lost consciousness, I overheard Lindsey trying to explain to the 911 operator that there had been an accident. She was crying, which felt good. The next thing I knew, paramedics were taping my

wrist shut and asking me whether I wanted to pay the hundred and fifty dollars to ride in the ambulance or if I could make my way to the hospital on my own.

Choosing A New Faith

“I can’t see you anymore.” Her voice was now quivering.

“But why? I’m sorry for being late to the concert,” I pleaded.

“It’s not the concert. It’s us. We can’t do this. You are a Muslim and I am a Christian, and relationships have to go somewhere.” She was now crying as she spoke.

I blurted out, “Okay, okay, I was going to tell you this at Christmas as a gift, but I’ll tell you now: I have decided to become a Christian.”

Silence hung in the air while what I had just uttered sunk in. I had never dreamed of saying that up to this point. It was like an out-of-body experience for me. I wanted to step outside myself and say. “You are gonna do *what*? Did you say what I just heard you say?”

In hindsight, I clearly didn’t understand what I was saying. Looking back, there was an irony to it. I offered my conversation as Christmas gift to her when it was I who would receive the greatest gift to be bestowed on mankind – salvation.

A Novelty

I noticed another change in how people related to me. Everywhere I went in Christian circles, I was a novelty. People wanted to hear my testimony as a former Muslim. It inspired them, and I believe it reaffirmed their own faith. I became adept at telling my story. Bible churches in North Texas operated like well-oiled machines, so often I had only four to six minutes between the last worship song and the sermon to share my story. I much preferred the Sunday school question-and-answer format that followed my testimony, where I could interact directly with the audience. It felt natural and right, and I loved it. Here I was, a mere thirty-six months removed from living a life surrounded by the rites and rituals of Shia Islam, and now I was speaking in front of hundreds of mostly-Caucasian audiences in churches across Texas, answering questions about my conversion to Christianity. It was surreal.

Returning Home

Now that I was learning that converting to Christianity entailed a whole lot more than pats on the back and potluck lunches in affluent North Texas churches. God and I had to have a serious conversation about how I was to handle the realities of being a Muslim convert and facing what was likely to be a hostile environment.

The Pakistan Way

I was devastated to learn that both my parents were facing persecution and insults from the entire family. They had failed to raise me to follow the “right path.” The fact that I was adopted was cited as a reason, I was told. Town gossips gleefully whispered juicy details about my misdeeds and my parents’ equally horrific failure to raise their only son to be a good Shia Muslim. The fact that my dear parents were being judged and persecuted felt worse than anything anyone could have done to me personally. It was second only to their desperate pleas with me to label my decisions as mere “crimes of passion,”

Dangers Back Home

The law allowed for wide latitude for anyone, usually a member of the majority community, to accuse someone of uttering something against the Quran or the Prophet. Very little evidence was needed with

the local police to jail the accused. And the courts, it seemed to me, were obliged to combine *Sharia* law with traditional jurisprudence when dealing with such matters. And in some cases, especially in rural areas, the issue never made it to court. The tribal or village *jirga* (council) served as a judge, jury, and executioner. The penalty could even be death. According to the article, the law had become a convenient vehicle to settle personal vendettas. This made me both sad and concerned as I could see how a simple difference of opinion about faith matters could erupt into a false accusation.

Freedom To Build

I concluded that America was unique when it came to freedom of entrepreneurship because of its justice system. I loved the symbolism behind the blindfold worn by the lady holding the scales of justice. In many countries in the world. Including my country of birth, it is impossible to achieve business success without bribery. They go hand in hand. Yet what good is such ill-gotten success if one must live with the guilt of it? The laws in America discouraging corruption give entrepreneurs the confidence that their ideas and property will be protected, and their bids to prospects will be judged on merit. Such confidence fuels the entrepreneurial spirit. Any man or woman could put their hand to the plow – to grow, seek, build, invent and innovate. In my view, such freedom was unique. And I could not wait to have my shot at this dimension of the American Dream.

A True Path

Freedom to pursue happiness simply means that the very real barriers that exist in culture and organizations – barriers created by human nature and bias – are removed or at the very least reduced, so one can run his race with an equal chance to cross the finish line based on his skills, talent, and performance. To me, that's what the American Dream is all about. I am truly thankful to the many men and women who helped clear a path for me to run my race. What about you? Whose path are you clearing? Over the years, as I became more experienced in dealing with governments, I found this to be a consistent theme. America was unique and more transparent, by far, than Pakistan. And just as the electoral process has its imperfections, so does our legislative process, particularly at the federal level, as our nation and Washington continue to become more polarized. But I will take gridlock over oligarchy any day.

9/11

I remember thinking that this was going to be a complete game-changer when it came to the West relating to the Islamic world. How was America going to react? How were brown-skinned people like me, who looked much like Mohamed Atta, the pilot of the first plane, going to be treated? 9/11 was a test for many in the American majority community. The fundamental principle of judging people based on their individual actions and not as a collective group was tested and, in this author's view, prevailed. I believe that most of the Muslim world does not subscribe to the terrorist brand of *jihad*. That said, whether Al Qaeda and its terrorists were following the true teachings of the Quran bears further examination. Was it possible that most of the god-fearing and peaceful Muslims like my parents were following a completely different version of the faith than that of Osama Bin Laden? I found it very difficult to reconcile the two, but that's a topic for another book.

For a few weeks after 9/11, I lived in fear as I heard stories of beatings and harassment of "Middle Eastern-looking" people in New York City and other places. I chose not to go to the airports and drove to client meetings as far away as San Antonio, a five-hour drive. But considering the magnitude of the tragedy, these incidents of persecution were isolated. Overall, most hurting Americans showed amazing restraint. Eventually, I resolved to trust that Americans were going to hear the words of President Bush: "In our anger and emotion, our fellow Americans must treat each other with respect."

Church and State

Finally, because these Judea-Christian values arguably serve as vital underpinnings for the founding principles upon which America stands, I believe it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to transplant American democracy into countries that do not share such values. Unless a nation's values are inextricably linked to biblical values, a nation doesn't achieve true democracy, because if the people don't believe that liberties come from their Divine Maker, then freedoms are offered selectively, based on man-made criteria. And off we go down the slippery slope.

Conclusion

The fabric of American culture is changing rapidly, often being shaped by fear. Fear is a powerful force. It drives us toward our natural inclination: self-preservation. I am concerned that the political turmoil we are witnessing could lead America to a circle-the-wagons mentality and even to the curtailments of certain rights for select people-groups. I believe that such actions could be like releasing the proverbial genie from the bottle and would be impossible to recapture.

On the other hand, the terror events, the constant hate rhetoric we hear against America, the past defections to ISIS by Westerners, and the apologies and appeasements made to other nations by some of our political leaders might cause some to wonder whether those who hate us are right. Maybe America isn't such a special nation after all. Maybe others do have the right to hate us.

In this book I share why I believe those thoughts are incorrect. I want Americans to understand that not everyone who comes from a Muslim country hates the USA. Hopefully my story and the freedoms I outline will motivate you to share the same American values and truths with other immigrants coming into the United States that I discovered many years ago.

Praise for *Beyond the Golden Door*

"Beyond the Golden Door by Ali Master is a fascinating study of the American dream, God's great redemption, and the beauty of freedom. In it you will experience the immigrant's journey, a love story inaugurated by fast food, and the ache of longing for a parent's approval. This an encouraging and interesting read."

—Mary DeMuth, Author of *Thin Places a Memoir*

"Beyond the Golden Door is well written and captivating and provides a frank and revealing look at Ali Master's personal experiences and challenges. This world could use a better understanding of the individuality of life experiences. The assumption that religion follows birthplace and ethnicity is an unconscious bias that many of us fall prey to. This is well worth reading!"

—Katherine Hammack, former United States Assistant Secretary of the Army

*"Read this book if you want to be inspired (or re-inspired) about the promise of America. Sometimes we need a reminder from an unexpected source to direct our attention to the treasures that lie right under our noses. *Beyond the Golden Door* does exactly that."*

—David Alexander, ex-Vice Chair, Big 4 Firm

“We celebrate the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, but few appreciate the freedoms that are the fabric of our culture. Ali Master reveals them through his journey to embrace them, reflecting upon the events and influences that guided his discovery. He engages us with good storytelling, humor, generous thanks for God’s gracious providence – and offers us tested wisdom to better understand ourselves and our world.”

—Dr. Tim Ralston, Professor of Pastoral Ministries, Dallas Theological Seminary

“Ali Master shares with us the very personal, inner journey of leaving one world and making his way to a heart-felt, albeit hard-wrung, commitment to his new world. His is an example of how engaging with diversity can transform us if we accept the implicit invitation to transcend the limitations of our own cultural conditioning. Most importantly, it is his sharing with us and taking ownership of the freedoms to fail, love, seek, believe, build, and self-govern that he creates his golden door. Ali invites us to celebrate with him, and to cherish and safeguard the essential qualities and conditions that enable everyone to thrive.”

—Jorg Schmitz, Business Anthropologist and Managing Partner, ThomasLeland, Author of the *Cultural Orientations Guide*, Co-Author of *Doing Business Internationally*

“Whether you are curious about God, intrigued by the draw of the American dream, inspired by those who have overcome great challenges or just enjoy a compelling read, I heartily recommend *Beyond the Golden Door* by Ali Master. Having only known Ali as the successful businessman and deeply committed follower of Christ that he is today, I have been inspired beyond description by the journey that led him to not only discover, but also embrace the American freedoms so easily taken for granted. Through these words, I have found myself challenged to live with a deeper appreciation for my faith and my freedoms.”

—Ann E. Bradshaw, Partner, Big 4 Firm

“Into America’s debate on immigration and religious liberty, Ali Master’s journey is more than one man’s story, but a tutorial for all of us on what it means to be truly free. Be ready to be inspired.”

—Dr. Craig Schill, Senior Pastor, Lake Cities Community Church and Adjunct Professor, Dallas Theological Seminary

“As an American citizen, I am eager to remind myself of the benefits and blessings I possess as a citizen of this great country. Finally, I am interested to learn why a Muslim college student would make the costly decision to become a Christian. I am hopeful that these reasons may also motivate you to read this book.”

—Bob Deffinbaugh, Ministry Coordinator, Bible.org