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### No God But God Essay

In Reza Aslan's book, *No god but God: The Origins Evolution and Future of Islam*, Aslan explores the role that faith plays in modern society, and how that role can affect groups of people differently. Providing an interesting perspective on the history and culture of Islam, Aslan informs readers about Islamic history and culture in an attempt to dispel ignorance and negative cultural opinion towards Muslims, originating from the West. After extensively examining Aslan's *No god but God*, it is in my opinion that one of the most crucial aspects of Islam that needs to be understood in order to dispel this ignorance and negative cultural opinion is the Ka'ba. In pre-Islamic society the Ka'ba was a "small sanctuary made of mud and stone [that] had become the center of religious life in pre-Islamic Arabia" (Aslan, 2011, p.5). With the origin of Islam, the Ka'ba became the main worshipping grounds of the Islamic religion, known today as "the House of God" (Aslan, 2011, p.108). Understanding these two different time points in the history of the Ka'ba, in addition to the history in-between, an individual can then confidently form their own, hopefully more educated and accepting, opinion on the topic; becoming more understanding of the religion and assist in the integration of Muslim communities into our society.

Focusing on the pre-Islamic history of the Ka'ba, this paragraph will dive into the origins of the Ka'ba and how it was used before it became so closely associated with the Islamic religion. The Ka'ba, in its origins, was simply a "squat, roofless edifice made of unmortared stones and sunk into a valley of sand....[with walls] swathed in strips of heavy cloth dyed purple

Aslan, Reza. *No god but God: The Origins and Evolution of Islam*. Random House Trade, 2011.

and red,” with two small doors chilled into the stone, “allowing entry into the inner sanctum.”

(Aslan, 2011, p.1) It was inside of this inner sanctum that the numerous gods of pre-Islamic Arabia resided, including: Hubal, the Syrian god of the moon; al-Uzza, the powerful goddess also known to some as Isis and Aphrodite; al-Kutba, the Nabatean god of writing and divination; Jesus, the incarnate god of Christians, and Mary. (Aslan, 2011, p.1) It is commonly unknown that the Ka’ba was used in pre-Islamic society as a central point of worship for numerous different religions, and was considered to be a “universal shrine” claiming that every god in pre-Islamic Arabia resided in this single sanctuary. (Aslan, 2011, p.27) Knowing that the Ka’ba has not always been the central religious site for the Islamic religion, readers may be surprised to find out that the introduction of the Islamic religion began with the destruction of the idols within the Ka’ba.

Following the Battle of the Trench, where Muhammed took firm control of Medina, Muhammed then set his sights on taking over Mecca, not as the Messenger of God, but instead as a pilgrim. This pilgrimage to Mecca was absurd, as he “was in the middle of a bloody and protracted war with the Meccans”. (Aslan, 2011, p.105) However, this idea did not seem absurd to Muhammed, as he began the pilgrimage to Mecca with more than a thousand of his followers. Upon arriving to Mecca, Muhammed and his followers were met by the Quraysh with an offer of a cease-fire. This offer of a cease-fire was “so against Muhammed’s interests that it must have appeared to the Muslims to be a joke.” (Aslan, 2011, p.106) Instead, a treaty was proposed; the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, proposing that if Muhammed withdrew the “unconditional cessation of all caravan raids in the vicinity of Mecca,” (Aslan, 2011, p.106) he would be able to return the following pilgrimage season with his followers, where “the sanctuary would be evacuated for a brief time so that he and his followers could perform the pilgrimage rites undisturbed.” (Aslan, Aslan, Reza. No god but God: The Origins and Evolution of Islam. Random House Trade, 2011.

2011, p.106) Accepting the terms of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, Muhammed's followers were appalled. It is unknown why Muhammed accepted the terms of this treaty, but it is suspected that he may have been "observing the Quranic mandate to 'fight until oppression ends and God's law prevails. But if [the enemy] desists, then you must also cease hostilities.' (2:193)" (Aslan, 2011, p.107) However, only one year later Muhammed returned to Mecca with over ten thousand men behind him, only to discover the Meccans waiting to welcome Muhammed and his followers with open arms. Surrendering to Muhammed, Mecca was cleansed and amnesty was given to nearly all the inhabitants of Mecca. Muhammed then made his way to the Ka'ba where he "carried the idols out before an assembled crowd and, raising them over his head, smashed them to the ground...washed away with Zamzam water," except for a statue of Jesus and his mother Mary. Muhammed then brought out the idol representational of the Syrian god Hubal, when Muhammed "unsheathed his sword and hacked the idol into pieces"; this destruction was symbolic, as this meant that the worshiping of idols was forever ended. With the Ka'ba newly sanctified the sanctuary would there forth be known as "the House of God", bringing forth the beginning of the Islamic religion.

In conclusion, it seems apparent that understanding the origins and history of the Ka'ba is crucial to forming an educated and respectable opinion on the Islamic religion. Knowing that the Ka'ba was used as a central point of worship for many religions, and how Muhammed destroyed the numerous idols within the Ka'ba after overtaking Mecca makes it evident why the Ka'ba is strictly used in Islamic religion today. Publishing this book, Aslan had a goal of informing readers of the history of the Islamic religion, and furthermore, diminishing ignorance and negative cultural opinions among the West towards Muslims. In my opinion, Aslan's book successfully informs the reader and allows them to form their own opinion on the subject.