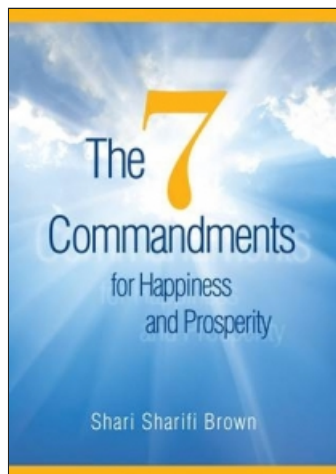


THE GOD QUESTION REVISITED

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The 7 Commandments for Happiness and Prosperity, by Shari Sharifi Brown (Shari Sharifi Brown, 2017, Los Angeles, CA, 215 pages).

[Book Review by Dennis Moore](#)

October 24, 2017 (San Diego) - Shari Sharifi Brown, born and raised in Iran, has written a provocative book on Theology and Religion, *The 7 Commandments for Happiness and Prosperity*, that on th

e surface, might also appear controversial. It has been an accepted fact that The Ten Commandments were given to Moses by God on Mount Sinai. Therein lies the rub, seemingly a contradiction to an accepted fact or notion.

Faith and religion is a deeply personal experience, certainly open to individual interpretation, and in this instance and the author's book, I give all deference to her views and how she came to her conclusions.

With that in mind, and having written more than 200 book reviews of basically every conceivable genre, several of which of a religious or theological tone, such as Debra M. Pratt's *The Tempting*, Vincent Bugliosi's *Divinity of Doubt: The God Question*, Sam Warren's *The Bible: The Greatest Fraud Ever Told*, Cortina Jackson's *On Earth as it is in Hell* and Shaunte' Garrett's *Speak to My Life*, I vowed to never again write a review with a Biblical or religious theme. Obviously, I feel compelled to change that stance with Shari Sharifi Brown's book, and for a variety of reasons.



In 1967, the author came to America from Iran to study. After exploring different universities in the United States, she obtained her Bachelor of Science in engineering from California State University, Los Angeles. She would later return to Iran in 1975/1976, working as a structural engineer for the Iranian government's ministry of war with Hughes Aircraft on a project they had with the Shah of Iran, until the revolution happened, and the project was stopped.



It is very revealing that the author starts her book off by recalling her early life in Iran, and as she states; "What the Iranian Revolution Taught Me." She specifically stated: "I'm a Christian. I was raised in Iran as a Shiite Muslim. And I am married to an American Jewish man. Back in 1979 my world totally collapsed. All I had worked for and enjoyed in my life was threatened.

Religious fanatics had taken over my country, upending everything for me and millions of other Iranians. It was enough to turn anyone against religion."

As a backdrop to this book, it is important to note and reveal the author's initial upbringing in Iran, as she states: "The shah of Iran had been king of my country since he returned to the throne in 1953 as a friend of America. Many people in Iran, including my family, enjoyed numerous freedoms and privileges under his reign. We could dress the way we wanted to, run our businesses, be religious or not according to our wishes. It is true that there were many poor people in Iran and the shah's security services tortured some political opponents who sought to overthrow him. The shah was constantly on the lookout for religious fanatics who wanted to take over the country and impose their religious views and practices on everyone. And that was exactly what happened in the end."

Perhaps what also shaped the author's current viewpoint, and in a poignant passage in this book, is when she states additionally: "Every day people were being executed, with bodies hanging from cranes in the middle of the street. My father-in-law at the time, a leading industrialist and a member of

the shah's parliament, was imprisoned. Daily life became a nightmare as the fanaticism of the new rulers was imposed on everyone in the cruelest ways, and when you least expected it." This was after the shah was replaced by what the author describes as a "fearsome man", a religious dictator by the name of Ayatollah Khomeini, who she also says he started calling America the great Satan.

The author describes *The 7 Commandments* as taking the reader on a journey through the history of religion to discover the key principles for achieving happiness and prosperity.

Her journey begins in prehistoric times when she says men worshipped multiple false idols, and sacrificed animals, humans and even children to please these gods. She further indicates that while the great *Commandments* of Moses were a revolutionary act of liberation, the Israelites did not always follow them and suffered the consequences.

Sharifi Brown states in this book that **The simplified Commandments** of Jesus made them easier to follow, but wickedness in the name of Christianity by the clergy and average Christians supervened, further stating that the Arabs were still worshipping multiple gods when they came in contact with Jews and Christians, and that Muhammad learned of their sole God and brought these Commandments to his people but many Muslims went astray.

Sharifi Brown further states that **The Seven Commandments** illustrates the fortunes of those who decide to be inspired by grace to follow the *Commandments* and achieve inner and outer peace ... or the misfortunes of those who flout the law and suffer the consequences.

In a recent interview with the author at her beautiful home in Malibu, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, which she shares with her husband of over twenty-five years, Ed Brown, one of Hollywood's most successful music producers and today a financial leader of international renown, the obvious question had to be asked by me. I felt compelled, and actually asked the author twice; "why 7 Commandments as opposed to the 10 Commandments that Moses received from God on Mount Sinai?" I further asked if somehow the



10 Commandments were deficient, and she indicated that they did not address a particular Commandment of the Prophet Mohammad, that of "Ward the Evil", or further explained by the author: "Remember the more you stay away from evil, the farther away evil gets from you. Anger, jealousy and animosity only show the existence of evil. Don't catch the virus, ignore it and pass it by."

During the course of my interview with the author at her home, we covered a range of subjects related to her book and religion. As the Prophet Mohammad seemed to have been one of the central theme in her book, and the author had her initial experience as a practicing Muslim in Iran, I inquired about Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*. The author demonstrated her knowledge on the subject by indicating that Mohammad was alleged to have consorted with a prostitute in the book by Rushdie, which raised the ire of Ayatollah Khomeini, which resulted in a *fatwa* (religious/legal judgement) dictated by Ayatollah Khomeini.

The author points out as follows her 7 Commandments:

1. **Believe in the one God.** Have total obedience to the Supreme Power and pray to Him every day. Know that He is the Creator of the seen and the unseen.
2. **Ward the evil.** Remember the more you stay away from evil, the farther away evil gets from you. Where there is anger, jealousy, animosity, there evil exists. Don't catch the virus. Ignore and pass it by.
3. **Believe in the hereafter.** Know that because of the flow of energy in the universe, everything has to balance in the end.
4. **Don't steal.** Someone else's money is not yours. Someone else's spouse is not yours.
5. **Be a charitable giver.** If you don't have the money, be charitable with your time – inconvenience yourself (go visit the sick, go visit the grandfather you never have time to visit).
6. **Honor your parents.** I cannot tell you the importance of this commandment. It is not up to you to judge if they are worthy or not of your honor. Do it because you are in the mode of a sixty-six-day practice, and this is part of fulfilling your commandment.
7. **Pray continuously.** Be always in a prayer mode. The Qur'an says that only if you don't observe the Sabbath, do five daily prayers. At the end of the Qur'an, 73 says that if the days are long and you are working during a long day, then you do your prayers at night. Thus, between the three prophets, the message is to pray morning, noon and night, or to be always in prayer mode.

In reading the author's 7 Commandments, and despite my face to face interview with her at her home, and phone and email communications, I remain puzzled as to if she is writing these 7 Commandments as a Muslim or Christian. She professes to now being a Christian, but these 7 Commandments conflicts and contradicts those Christian beliefs, as well as my own. The author further explains and clarifies her thoughts and position in a radio interview [here](#).



Ironically, the author's husband, Ed Brown, would indicate in his foreword to *The 7 Commandments*, "The very famous prosecutor, Vincent Bugliosi came to my home for dinner", the same home in where I conducted the interview with the author. The irony is that many years ago I interviewed Vincent Bugliosi and wrote a review of his book *Divinity of Doubt: The God Question* for the East County Magazine in San Diego.

It is also interesting to note that in my interview of Bugliosi many years ago, he tried hard to sway me to his way of thinking about God, that of an agnostic. He was unsuccessful!

Ed Brown stated in his foreword to his wife's book: "Little did I know that he, too, was a scholar of the Bible, and so Shari and Bugliosi began to debate what was (to me) more than the New Testament but rather how the New Testament was written (i.e., the words of Paul and Peter and others, such as the Roman architect and warrior, Constantine). Constantine, as she explained, finally felt "if you can't fight them because they outnumber you too much, join them and take control."

Ed Brown further stated in his foreword to the author's book: "Bugliosi argued and argued that this was not the case, so together they researched and, sure enough, Shari was right."

The author indicates in her book, that she is a Christian, but that she was raised in Iran as a Shiite Muslim, and that she married an American Jewish man. Obviously, she has a broad range of religious experience and insight. She also has a wealth of knowledge in history, as demonstrated in this book.

Sharifi Brown, the author, states in regard to "The Three Religions of Abraham"; "I've condensed the three religions of Abraham to their core: the combined commandments of Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad, arguably history's most vital men. They walked this earth centuries, even a millennia ago, but they still profoundly impact our lives. Following their three scriptures simple combined commandments can lead to a better, healthier life here and in the hereafter. I emphasize *in this life* because these are extremely practical commandments that are easy to understand and easy to follow – if you have faith."

For the most part, this book by Sharifi Brown takes us on a rich historical journey through many civilizations over the years, which I am sure readers of this book would be appreciative of, whether or not they might agree with the theological and religious premise given. Also, if we are open minded, it should teach us tolerance in others and their faith and beliefs, without having to sacrifice or compromise our own.

The author has relied on history in an attempt to get her point across in *The 7 Commandments for Happiness and Prosperity*, which compelled this writer to delve into history also. In a book by J. Kenneth Kuntz, *The People of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Old Testament Literature, History, and Thought* (Harper & Row, New York, NY, 1974, puts this book by Sharifi Brown in perspective.

The People of Ancient Israel specifically states: "This book is an introduction to an ancient literature that has played a crucial role in the development of three great religions of the Western world - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It seeks especially to acquaint the reader, who more often than not will be an undergraduate college or university student, with the people who gave birth to that literature, and it portrays their origins, growth, demise, and renewal in some detail."

J. Kenneth Kuntz, in his book *The People of Ancient Israel*, further states and puts in perfect perspective this book by Sharifi Brown: "The need for secondary texts in the field of biblical studies is therefore authentic. Although it is largely answered by numerous Old Testament surveys that are presently available, the need for another is not a fiction. Certainly the accumulating findings based on contemporary scholarly research deserve to be passed on in an uncomplicated manner to the interested layman. But the question of how the biblical traditions are best communicated to inquiring nonspecialists has never been fully resolved." That would apply to *The 7 Commandments*.

In one particular chapter, "The Failure of Christianity", the author Sharifi Brown states: "While Jesus's life is most important, Christians seem to focus more on his death. A core Christian belief is that Jesus's crucifixion was a blood sacrifice that cleansed all sin in history: he took all sin onto himself, which was destroyed with his death." As a Christian, I feel uncomfortable debating that point with the author. I can only say and acknowledge what Jesus has done for me in my life.

In another chapter, "How the Jews Went Astray", the author states: "King Solomon was much less wise in his personal life, however. With so much money and power at hand, he succumbed to a weakness for women. Many women. The book of 1 Kings says he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Many of these women were not Israelites. They were Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. And what religion did these women follow? The religion we outlined in the beginning of this book: idolatry, polytheism, and human sacrifice." To amplify the point, the author includes at the beginning of this chapter, a picture of King Solomon meeting the Queen of Sheba.

Brown, the author, provides a very profound statement and passage in this book, which bears analyzing: "What you can never do is impose your theology, customs, or beliefs on someone else. If you do, we've got a problem. A big problem. To follow the commandments of this book, we have to put our religion aside. We can privately believe what we want. We can worship wherever we want. But this should take second place to the universal principles discussed in this book: the seven commandments. Remember, religion divides people. God unites people." I am all for religious tolerance, but I am struggling with this concept!

The 7 Commandments begs the question, if the foundation of the Christian faith and religion is the 10 Commandments, how can we as Christians settle for less, or the 7 Commandments? I do not believe that it is or was the author's intent to marginalize God or His 10 Commandments for her to write this book called *The 7 Commandments for Happiness and Prosperity*.



For focus and perspective, it is noteworthy to reference in the Bible the 2nd Chapter of Philippians, verses 10-11, which states: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This book is food for thought, as it either strengthens your faith and convictions, and/or it broadens your understanding and appreciation of history. This food for thought is best demonstrated and understood in the context of Deuteronomy 4:2, which states: "You shall not add to the word I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." New American Standard Bible (NASB).



Dennis Moore has been the Associate Editor of the East County Magazine in San Diego and the book review editor of SDWriteway, an online newsletter for writers in San Diego that has partnered with the East County Magazine, as well as having been a freelance contributor to EURweb based out of Los Angeles. Mr. Moore can be contacted at contractsagency@gmail.com or you can follow him on Twitter at: [@DennisMoore8](https://twitter.com/DennisMoore8).

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