

## BOOK CLUB NEWS

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RICHARD BASS, COORDINATOR

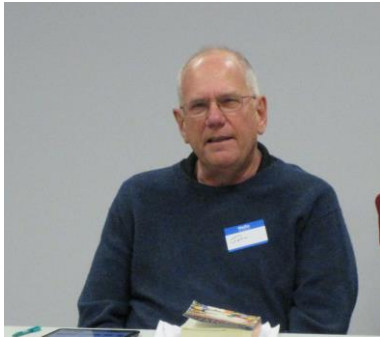
Cell: 323-533-3550 [rbass9210@yahoo.com](mailto:rbass9210@yahoo.com)

*Destiny Disrupted*, by Tamin Ansary

### Discussion Leader: John Wacker

John began with a short YouTube video of a lecture given by the author:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7cSYBDmZ7Y>. Once on the YouTube site, you will find his entire lecture as well as other talks. Ansary stresses that Islam is a social project as well as a religious one, an attempt to create a community on earth whose members will live in harmony by following certain instructions handed down by God. John first questioned readers what we thought of the book. Several readers found the book helpful in understanding how Islam is today, especially how World War II decided on borders according to ethnic differences. Also, readers found the book eminently readable. Some offered that the book corroborated what they already read about Islam; fundamentally, Islam is a life style, a



way of life as well as a religion.

John asked us what stood out for us. Three “little things” catapulted Muslims to progress: the horse and plow, irrigation, rotation of crops. Islam did not experience the same reformation as did Christianity. John told us that in Cairo families live in compounds. As more families arrived, residents would build another story to their house to accommodate the newcomers. Family and community are priorities. Readers expressed that this book helped them understand the difference among the Muslim sects, such as Sunni, Shiite. Also, we learned that Jihad means striving. Religious conflicts caused pilgrimage routes to the Holy Land to be insecure, resulting in the Crusades. It was trade with the West that contributed to the decline of the Ottoman Empire. It was the treacherous trade routes to India and the East that caused the West to explore water routes to the East, leading to the inadvertent discovery of the New World. The Industrial Revolution conflicted with religious belief; prayer is on a sun schedule, not the clock. The role of women in the three monotheistic religions claimed a significant part of the discussion, particularly on some Muslim countries that require women to be completely covered except for their eyes. Is this the result of political and progeny control by men over women? Discussion continued on how disturbing it is to contemplate the cruelty against and punishment of women. Kathy proposed our reading *Orphan's Inheritance* by Aline Ohanesian on the Armenian genocide.

Readers wondered whether this book is an accurate representation of the history of Islam. Ansary, a learned historian, chose to tell the 1500 history of Islam in 350 pages, and in conversational style. Most critics say that it is accurate; others say it is sugarcoated. Ansary claims in the Afterword that the attacks of 9/11 were not against freedom and democracy but rather against Western decadence. Readers suggested several additional books: *The Physician* by Noah Gordan (made into a movie in 2013), *Because They Hate* by Brigitte Gabriel, *Nine Parts of Desire* by Geraldine Brooks. Nancy passed around the beautiful and illuminating book,

*The Art of the Qur'an: A Rare Peak at Islam's Holy Text.* One of our readers, author Ruth Lindemann, told us about her novel published in 2016, *To Survive is Not Enough*, that chronicles a young woman's journey from the Holocaust to Israel.

Jack offered a bit of the author's biography. Born in Afghanistan in 1948, he moved to the United States in 1964. For ten years he wrote a monthly column for Encarta.com, and has published essays and commentary in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Salon*, *Alternet*, *TomPaine.com*, *Edutopia*, *Parade*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and elsewhere. He lives in San Francisco, where he is director of the San Francisco Writers Workshop.

The go-around brought considerable reflection. We don't consider the Middle World of Islam as much as we do the Judeo/Christian World. We must be careful not to consider all Muslims terrorists. Most readers came away with a new understanding and appreciation for Islam, although one reader couldn't engage in the book's content. Some readers were not able to finish the book; it is recommended to read chapters 10 and 11. One reader felt regret at not having learned about Islam. Another mused that separation of Church and State resulted in not learning that Islam is both a life style and a religion. Reading this book helped one reader be more compassionate; reading it expanded the mind.

Thank you, John, for your expert leadership and offering to lead discussion on a book you did not nominate. Also, thank you, Judith, for bringing us dates, the sweet symbol of the desert. Join us next month for a discussion on *Death in Venice*, by Thomas Mann led by Judi Hollis. Happy reading!

